

'A live body with headquarters at Cairns': the North Queensland Naturalists Club, 1932–1950

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Abstract

The North Queensland Naturalists Club was formed in Cairns in 1932, with noted radiologist Dr Hugo Flecker as founding President and Joseph (Joe) Wyer, an executive in the powerful Harbour Board, as Secretary. It aimed to “preserve the natural beauties of the district for all time” and inform residents and authorities about the region’s natural history features, which were not well-known or protected. From 1932–1950 there were almost 400 members in Far North Queensland (north of Cardwell, 18°16'S) from a wide range of occupations. About half the members joined in their 30s or 40s and a third were female. The club developed close networks in the region through cross-memberships of committee and ordinary members with local councils, businesses, the press and numerous other community associations. Through these networks and its expert and energetic leadership the club achieved a prominent profile in the region. It raised public awareness of the north’s special natural attributes locally, nationally and to an extent internationally, through lectures, excursions, nature shows, a popular newspaper column, a quarterly journal (the *North Queensland Naturalist*) and the creation of a significant herbarium of northern plants. Cooperation between the Club and other regional organisations on conservation and tourism may represent one of Australia’s earliest eco-tourism partnerships. We focus on the club’s membership, achievements and conservation initiatives in three periods: the formative years (1932–1939) during the Great Depression; WWII (1939–1945), when despite many challenges the club engaged with military naturalists; and post-war (1946–1950), with new members adding different areas of expertise to the club’s activities.

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Introduction

In June 1932, new Cairns resident Dr Hugo Flecker confronted a meeting of the Cairns Tableland Publicity Association with “home truths” on recognition and preservation of “the wonders of the far north” (Francis 1932). The Association had been formed in 1928 by Cairns City Council, the Cairns Harbour Board and businesses including the *Cairns Post* newspaper, to promote the region to national and international tourists, investors and

new settlers (Anon. 1928a). There was strong local pride, as in other Queensland regions developing behind port cities (Bottoms 2016), but the north’s natural history ‘treasures’ were not well-known or protected (Francis 1932; Sanderson 2005).

Flecker (Fig. 1) was soon working closely with Joseph (Joe) Wyer (Fig. 2), Assistant Secretary (later Secretary, i.e. CEO) of the powerful Harbour Board (Anon. 1932a; Ryle 2006). In July 1932



Figure 1. Major Dr Hugo Flecker (1884–1957). Q116264 Australian Army Medical Corps, c. 1942, age 58. Club President 1932–44, 1950; Patron 1951–57. Photographer unknown. North Queensland Photographic Collection NQID14015, James Cook University Library Special Collections.

Flecker presented a comprehensive list of proposals to an Association meeting. These were: action on weeds; a botanical garden and museum; a Naturalists Club, to be formed from a public meeting convened by the mayor; native plantings; a press column for nature notes; natural history instruction in schools, with a local focus; and public lectures by visiting scientists (Anon. 1932a). In August the mayor called a public meeting as Flecker had proposed and the North Queensland Naturalists Club ('the Club') was formed, "to preserve the natural beauties of the district for all time" (Anon. 1932a,b). There were 38 founding members (this study) with Flecker as President and Wyer as Secretary; the first issue of the journal *North Queensland Naturalist* (NQN) was published in October, edited by writer (Martin) Victor Kennedy (Anon. 1932b,c). Wyer served the Club as Secretary and Patron for over 30 years, but



Figure 2. Joseph (Joe) Wyer (1892–1982) c. 1935, age 43. Club Secretary 1932–56; Patron 1957–65. From a group portrait of the Cairns Harbour Board, Chargois Studios, P14791 Cairns Historical Society.

admitted he was "definitely not an active naturalist" (Anon. 1950a). To achieve the Association's goals he "came in contact with Dr H Flecker and 'Doc's' enthusiasm regarding the possibilities of a Naturalists Club inspired him to become associated with the venture" (Anon. 1951a). The Club's area ('North Queensland') covered most of tropical Queensland (Fig. 3), defined as Queensland north of 22°S, District No. 3 (Northern) gazetted for the *Animals and Birds Acts 1921–1924* (Queensland Government 1921–1924; Flecker 1933, 1947a; Clarkson 1990).

The Club met with the Cairns City Council and others to promote proposals for a museum and botanical gardens (Wyer 1932) and received specimens donated for the proposed museum. However, unlike the North Queensland Herbarium ('the herbarium', established in 1933), these were not Club projects (Auricchio 1935a) and are not further considered here. Flecker hoped that "the activities of this Club in Cairns will be second to none in Australia, as there is no part of Australia which offers as much scope as this part of north Queensland" (Anon. 1932b). Clarkson (1990) presented a biography of Flecker and details of the history and holdings of the herbarium, while Valentine (2016) reviewed significant authors and

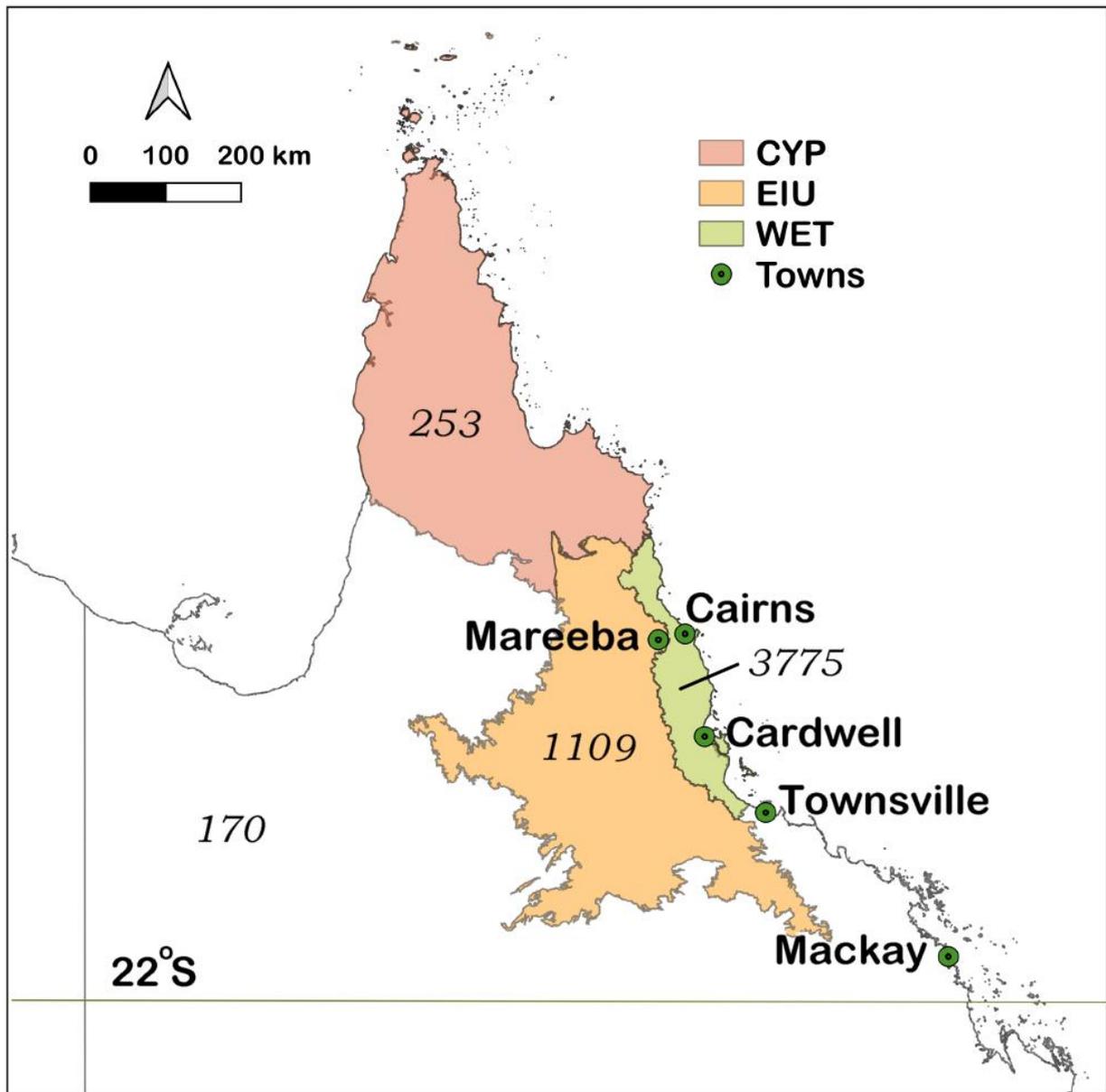


Figure 3. Focal area of the North Queensland Naturalists Club and numbers of herbarium specimens collected by Dr Hugo Flecker and Club members in North Queensland, 1932–1950.

Source: Flecker (1947a); ALA (2021). Bioregions: CYP=Cape York Peninsula; EIU=Einasleigh Uplands; WET=Wet Tropics; grey area=other North Queensland bioregions. Most members lived on the coast and immediate hinterland north of Cardwell, concentrated in or near Cairns.

content of the NQN from 1933–2002. In this paper we explore the Club’s membership, achievements and relationships with the North Queensland community from 1932–1950, when Flecker, Wyer and others steered the Club through its developing years in the 1930s, the difficult times of WWII and the post-war recovery of Cairns into the 1950s.

Methods

This study covers the Club’s activities in North Queensland (Fig. 3) from 1932 to September 1950,

including WWII (1 September 1939–2 September 1945). The only known membership list was published in 1950 (Anon. 1950b), although in some years the President’s annual report in the NQN or press commented on recruitment or membership. We compiled a membership register (‘the Register’) in Microsoft Excel 2016 for all years 1932–1950 from nominations and elections to membership reported in the NQN or newspapers (via Trove: National Library of Australia), but excluding honorary members. ‘Membership’

included military personnel who joined while serving in FNQ and persons performing tasks confined to members, e.g. nominating others and serving on Committees. Details of Committee members and their roles were also compiled. The Club year commenced with the AGM each September, to August of the following year (taken as the year of joining); however for this study we defined 1932 ('founding') members as those joining to 31 December 1932, and 1933 members were defined as those joining between 1 January 1933 and the 1933 AGM in September. Data fields in the Register are shown in Table S1. Details of members' age, gender, addresses, occupations and activities, war service and natural history interests were sought from the NQN, archived newspapers via Trove, Ancestry (2020), the National Archives (NAA), Australian Dictionary of Biography and literature. Searches were also conducted for Club activities, and from several hundred documents we selected a range to illustrate the Club's work.

To examine the geographic range of the membership in Queensland, members' addresses were allocated to Local Government Areas (LGAs) based on boundaries at their time of joining the Club. 'Greater Cairns' denotes an area equivalent to the modern City of Cairns, comprising the City (a central area of some 20 km²: Queensland Government Survey Office 1946), plus the surrounding Shire of Cairns (later Mulgrave), which stretched 28 km north along the coast to Cairns' northern beaches and some 60 km south to ~17°30'S. Most members were located in Far North Queensland (FNQ: see Results), north of approximately Cardwell (18°16'S; Fig. 3). For this majority (FNQ) portion of the membership, their age at first joining the Club and sex were compared with data for the relevant regional population in the 1933 and 1947 Australian censuses (ABS 2021a,b), excluding children under ten years of age. The single Club member aged under ten years was grouped with age class 10–19. Chi-squared goodness-of-fit tests were used to compare these cohorts with the 'expected' data drawn from the censuses. The census data from the broader population was transformed by simply dividing the figure in each age category by a constant (349 for 1933, 354 for 1947) to reduce total sample size to the same magnitude as the membership. The ratios between age groups were thus preserved for comparison with the membership data. A chi-squared goodness-of-fit

test was also used to compare the number of Committee members by sex with proportions in the membership from 1932–1950. In this case the general membership was used as the 'expected' data and due to the small count (N=41) and 1 degree of freedom, Yates' continuity correction was applied. For reference, regional census data by sex and age in decades are shown in Section S1A.

Occupations of Club members in FNQ from 1932–1950 were classified using the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO 2013). The Standard groups farmers with 'managers', and trainees and apprentices with their professions; 'students' are primary or secondary. As there were no Committee members in the category 'Community and personal services' (e.g. ambulance bearers and religious occupations), these members were allocated to other categories (see Register for details) to test chi-squared goodness-of-fit of the number of Committee members by occupational category, compared with the general membership (excluding those with 'unknown' occupation). Some women described their occupation on electoral rolls as 'home duties' even if engaged in paid employment or a family business (see also Scott 1995). Thus we did not equate 'home duties' to the ANZSCO (2013) category of 'Unpaid domestic work', but applied women's actual occupations where possible or retained 'home duties'. There was insufficient information to compare occupations of Club members with census data.

The herbarium collection was given to the CSIRO in 1971 (Clarkson 1990) and is now in Cairns at the Australian Tropical Herbarium, James Cook University (Anon. 2021). Details of specimens collected by Club members in the study area from 1933–1950 and held in Australian collections were obtained from the Atlas of Living Australia (ALA 2021). Some plants were sent to overseas institutions and members also collected other biota, but those are not considered here. The apostrophe is omitted from 'Naturalists Club' (Club usage varied over time) and 'anonymous' articles attributed to Flecker (Clarkson 1990) are cited as by him (but see Discussion). Unattributed statements about members and their activities are sourced from the membership Register and references therein. Quotations are verbatim except where ellipses indicate omitted text and square brackets indicate our additions.

Results

Membership

The Register with details of Club membership from 1932–1950 will be held by the Cairns Historical Society. Members' natural history interests were mostly plants, marine life and birds but even those with specialist expertise had varied interests (Register). An extract showing the 38 founding members and Committee, their natural history interests and status during WWII is in Table S2.

We identified 448 people who joined the Club between 1932 and 1950. Most (408: 91%) lived in North Queensland, of whom 393 (88% of members) lived in FNQ (north of Cardwell, see Methods). Six lived in southern Queensland, 26 interstate and eight overseas. An additional 66 persons attended 1–3 meetings and others sent specimens for identification, but it is unknown if they became members. Of the 393 confirmed FNQ members, 329 (~84%) lived in Greater Cairns (Table 1) and most members in Woothakata Shire, west of Cairns, lived in the townships of Kuranda and Mareeba. Committee meetings were held in central Cairns in the first week of the month (Anon. 1935a); all Committee members lived in or very close to Cairns City.

There were 38 founding members in 1932 (in Table S2) and estimated annual recruitment ranged from

zero in 1943 during WWII to 47 (or possibly more: see Discussion) in 1947 (average = 21). The 1935 annual report noted "30 very active members out of a membership of 70" (Anon. 1935b): we identified 96 individuals who joined before the 1935 AGM and who were still living in the district, so there was some attrition. At the outbreak of WWII in September 1939, 185 of the 202 FNQ members we detected from 1932–1939 were still living in the area but the extent of continuing membership is unknown. Some former members still contributed, e.g. Martin Joseph Manski "retired [from the Club] well before 1940" (Flecker 1940) but continued to collect specimens for the herbarium.

Of the 393 members in FNQ, 389 could be identified by sex (Table 2; Fig. 4). Results of tests for chi-squared goodness of fit are shown in Section S1B. From 1932–1939 the male membership was significantly higher and the female membership significantly lower than expected, compared with proportions in the populations of FNQ and Greater Cairns. However, recruitment 1946–1950 was similar to the proportions of the sexes in the region even though the proportion of female residents increased after the war (Section 1A,B), and in 1950 (Anon. 1950b) the disparity was less significant. Ten women and 31 men served on the Committee during the study period, which was consistent with the proportions of the sexes in the membership. There were 42 couples among the members but partners did not necessarily join at the same time or pursue identical natural history interests.

Table 1. Domicile of members of the North Queensland Naturalists Club in FNQ, 1932–1950.

LGA=Local Government Area. 'Greater Cairns'=City plus Cairns (Mulgrave) Shire.

LGA	Members (N=393)	%
Greater Cairns	329	83.7
Woothakata (Mareeba)	23	5.9
FNQ, LGA unknown	8	2.0
Cook	6	1.5
Eacham	6	1.5
Johnstone	5	1.3
Tinaroo (Atherton)	5	1.3
Cardwell	4	1.0
Douglas	3	0.8
Etheridge	2	0.5
Herberton	2	0.5

Table 2. Members of the North Queensland Naturalists Club in FNQ 1932–1950, by sex.

Four were of unknown sex, including three on 1/09/1950.

Period	No. joined	M	%	F	%
<i>Recruits (estimated)</i>					
1932–39	202	156	77.2	46	22.8
1940–45	42	32	76.2	10	23.8
1946–50	145	89	61.4	56	38.6
Total	389	277	71.2	112	28.8
<i>Actual membership</i>					
1/09/1950	143	100	69.9	43	30.1

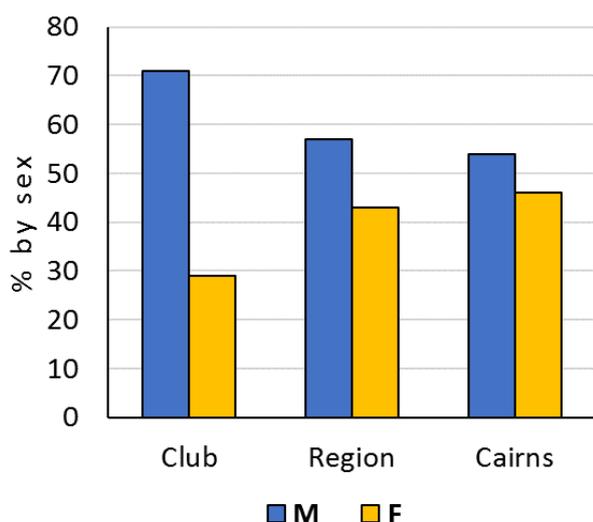


Figure 4. Percentage of male and female members of the North Queensland Naturalists Club in FNQ 1932–1950, compared with percentage of males and females in FNQ and Greater Cairns.

Regional population data are averaged from the 1933 and 1947 Australian censuses, excluding ages 0–9. (Source: ABS 2021a,b; Section S1A).

Of 364 FNQ members with known birthdates, the age of joining ranged from nine to 81 years. Half the membership joined in their 30s or 40s (Table 3). Comparisons across age cohorts showed the age composition of the membership to be significantly different from that of the regional population (Fig. 5, Section 1B): there were relatively few recruits in their teens, and the 30s and 40s age categories were more strongly represented than expected. After WWII there was some increase in recruits in their 20s, but even stronger representation than previously of members in their 40s.

Professionals, managers and technicians made up almost half the 368 FNQ members identified by occupation (Fig. 6). For the 61 persons (55% of female members) listed under ‘home duties’ we lacked sufficient information to attribute an alternative occupation, but as above, they may not have been undertaking unpaid domestic work wholly or in part. Examples of ‘home duties’ we referred to an actual occupation included the housekeeper of a large Cairns hotel (Anon. 1950c), a clerk in the Harbour Board (Anon. 1941a), a widow supporting her family by working in a bicycle shop (Kelly 1991) and grazier Elizabeth Henry (Anon. 1961), an important contributor to the herbarium.

There was a very significant difference between the compositions of the Committee and the general membership when compared by occupations (Table 4: $\chi^2 = 281.63$, critical value = 16.92). An overview suggests that labourers and tradespersons were under-represented on the Committee whereas professionals were more likely to act in that role.

Herbarium specimens

Over 3,700 herbarium specimens collected in the study area from 1932–1950 are registered in Flecker’s name (ALA 2021; Fig. 3), mostly (96%) plants with some fungi, seaweeds and algae, but some specimens in Flecker’s name were collected by unknown members of the public (Clarkson 1990). Donations arrived “by post, by road, by rail”, even during WWII, and were stored in a room next to Flecker’s Abbott Street surgery (Devanny 1945, p. 89) and in the temporary Edge Hill Museum shed (Anon. 1937). Flecker worked in the shed for hours

Table 3. Members of the North Queensland Naturalists Club in FNQ 1932–1950, by age at first joining (N=364).

29 were of unknown age, including seven on 1/09/1950.

The single member aged <10 was grouped with age class 10–19.

Period	10–19	20s	30s	40s	50s	60s	70+	Total
<i>Recruits (estimated)</i>								
1932–39	16	32	47	46	30	13	4	188
1940–45	3	3	13	11	8	1	1	40
1946–50	17	27	30	33	16	8	5	136
Total	36	62	90	90	54	22	10	364
<i>Actual membership</i>								
1/09/1950	14	22	31	39	19	9	5	139

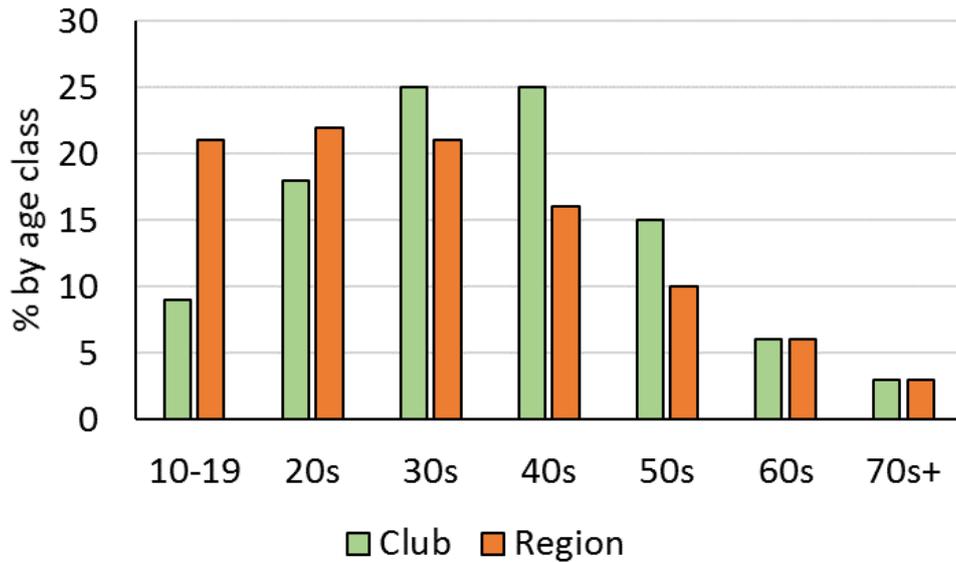


Figure 5. Percentage of the Club membership in FNQ 1932–1950 by age class, compared with the regional population.

Regional population data are averaged from the 1933 and 1947 censuses, excluding ages 0–9. The single member aged <10 was grouped with age class 10–19. (ABS 2021a,b; Section 1A).

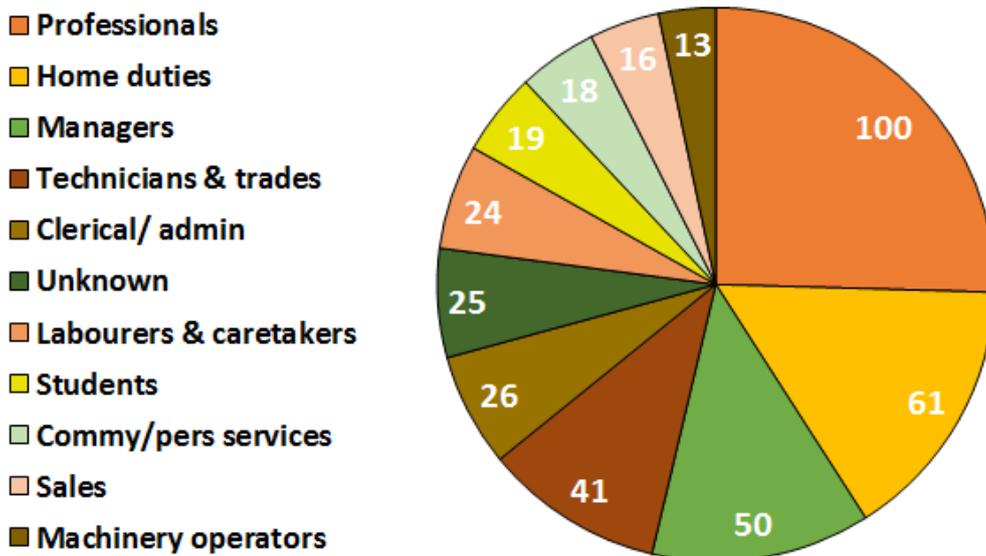


Figure 6. Numbers of members of the North Queensland Naturalists Club in FNQ 1932–1950 (N=393), by occupation. Labels run clockwise from top right.

Categories based on ANZSCO (2013) (see Methods).

on weekends to classify and mount specimens (Wright 1943). Another 49 Club members supplied ~1,600 herbarium specimens in the study period, giving a total of over 5,300. Most were country members in outdoor occupations or Cairns residents travelling for work or to visit family. Those contributing more than 100 were: Harold Reginald Thurston, railway fireman of Mareeba

(510); M. J. Manski, postal official of Cairns (194); Stephen Ernest Stephens, agriculture instructor of Cairns (147); Barbara Sparvell née Henry, ‘home duties’ of Cardwell (139); Thomas Carr, timber cutter of Mt Molloy (115); and E. Henry, ‘home duties’ (grazier) of Tully (107). Most specimens were collected in the Wet Tropics (71%) and the Einasleigh Uplands (21%), with a few hundred from

Table 4. Numbers of members and Committee members of the North Queensland Naturalists Club in FNQ 1932–1950, by occupation (adjusted, N=368).

'Expected' = the number of Committee positions expected by occupation based on occupational proportions in the membership (excluding 25 members with 'Unknown' occupation and with 'Community and personal services' reallocated to other categories).

Category	Members (N=368)	%	Committee members (N=41)	%	Expected (Committee)
Professionals	109	29.6	17	41.5	11
Home duties	61	16.6	5	12.2	7
Managers	51	13.9	2	4.9	6
Technicians & trades	42	11.4	7	17.1	5
Clerical/ admin	29	7.9	4	9.8	3
Labourers & caretakers	28	7.6	1	2.4	3
Students	19	5.2	1	2.4	2
Sales	16	4.3	3	7.3	2
Machinery operators	13	3.5	1	2.4	1

Cape York and other North Queensland regions (Fig. 3). Others donated specimens and corresponded with Flecker, e.g. Albert de Lestang of Adel's Grove, north-west Queensland (Flecker 1944a; ALA 2021), but we found no membership records for them and their specimens are not included here.

The 1930s: emergence and community engagement

During the 1930s depression there were unemployment and poverty in Cairns (Bottoms 2016) and drought and other problems periodically affected the pastoral hinterland (May 1984). However, the region benefited from the strength of the sugar industry, supported by various Federal and State Government interventions (Costar 1981; Griggs 2011). The depression probably influenced Flecker's decision to move from Melbourne in 1932 to establish the first radiology practice in Cairns (Clarkson 1990), and founding members Mario and Gertrude Auricchio had relocated to Cairns in 1931 after their business failed in Adelaide (ECS unpublished data). Other 'founders' were longer-term FNQ residents (Table S2). Those joining from 1933-1939 included several who made significant contributions to the Club, such as (John) George Brooks, dentist and entomologist; S. E. Stephens; and Frank Roland Morris, Cairns City engineer. The school leaving age was fourteen (Logan & Clarke 1984) but the Club defined Junior Members as under twenty, with a half-price subscription of 5/- (Anon. 1932c).

The Club held monthly meetings in the centre of Cairns with lectures by members or visiting experts. Members, including country members who rarely attended meetings, were encouraged to bring or send specimens for 'show and tell' sessions and to submit natural history observations to the NQN, which Flecker edited after Kennedy moved to Brisbane in late 1933. Sixty issues were produced from 1932–1939. The Club was keen to run field trips but Cairns was a city of bicycles (Bottoms 2016). Excursions were arranged by rail motor (Anon. 1933a), by pooling cars owned by members (Anon. 1933b), or in private or commercial boats, e.g. to Second Beach and Michaelmas Cay (Anon. 1933c, 1934a). The Club set up a library of natural history publications for loan to members (Anon. 1933d).

The Club advertised for (paid) guides to give accurate natural history information to tourists, especially on Green Island and the reef (Anon. 1933d; Wyer 1933). This initiative was promoted by the Association (retitled the 'Cairns and District Tourist and Development Association') but apparently failed due to difficulties with commercial tour companies (Anon. 1934b) and the State Government Tourist Board (Flecker 1937). It is unclear whether these organisations, or individual tourists, would have reimbursed the Club for the guides' fees. The Club invited the public to monthly meetings and also presented public lectures, e.g. geographer Dr J. P. Thomson spoke on coral formation and the Great Barrier

Reef at a civic function at the Council Chambers, which was "very fascinating to the large audience present" (Anon. 1933e,f). From 1933–1938 the Club held annual 'Wild Nature Shows' with live animals and plants, specimens and demonstrations (Fig. 7), attended by hundreds of visitors (Anon. 1933g). At meetings and Nature Shows, the Club pioneered the use of new technology in Cairns such as the episcopes or epidiascopes, an early form of projector (Anon. 1935c; Aleksandersen 2019). Both Flecker (contrary to Pearn 1994) and his assistant Bruce Cummings produced X-rays showing the structure of fishes and reptiles (e.g. Anon. 1933h, 1950d).

Club members were connected through family ties and work (e.g. the Harbour Board) but the most significant community connections were cross-memberships (including committee roles) and joint meetings and excursions with other societies. In addition to the Association, these included the Alpine (climbing) Club; Boy Scouts; fishers' associations; and the Orchid, Photographic, Art, Philatelic, and Amateur Operatic societies. Members promoted the Club's views, for example on leaving Cairns for a new post, regional Lands Commissioner Samuel Dunn used his official farewell speech to commend native tree plantings along Mulgrave Road and to urge the establishment of a botanical garden in Cairns

(Anon. 1938). Although few members lived beyond FNQ, Flecker had voluminous contacts with scientists and others (Clarkson 1990) and local members such as Brooks (Britton 1975) and Arthur John Moran (Anon. 1950e) had interstate and international contacts in their fields of interest. The NQN exchanged with organisations in Australia and overseas (Valentine 2016).

The regional press was closely engaged with the Club. *Cairns Post* editor J. H. McVilly was a member and Marion Willey ('Rosemary'), editor of the women's and children's pages, looked forward to the new Club's "material assistance in the preservation of our birdlife" (Willey 1932). Her successor in the children's column, Jean Draper Whittick (known as 'Jeanette' to her young readers), told them she was a member of the Club, promoted the Nature Shows and answered natural history questions accurately, albeit in the sentimental style of children's journalism of the time (e.g. Whittick 1934). She served on the Committee from 1941-1944. The *Post* reached Tumoulin on the Evelyn Tablelands daily (Monday to Saturday) by train (Toohey 1991), but readers in outlying areas such as Einasleigh, 200 km west of Cardwell, relied on its weekly companion paper the *Northern Herald* (Willey 1929). In 1939 the *Herald* ceased publication, but distribution of the *Post* had improved (Ryan 1981).

NORTH QUEENSLAND NATURALISTS' CLUB.
WILD NATURE SHOW,
Hibernian Hall, Lake-street, Cairns.

FRIDAY AND SATURDAY,
30th and 31st August, 1935.

OFFICIAL OPENING 30th AUGUST, 3 P.M.

Native Animals, a live Crocodile, Rock Python, etc., Live Fish, Birds, Reptiles, etc.

Specimens from Great Barrier Reef, including Corals, Sea Snakes, with Special Crab and Shell display, featuring the Conus family which caused recent fatality.

NATIVE PLANTS, NATIVE ORCHIDS, NATIVE FERNS.
 Views of Living Organisms through Microscopes.

Episcopes Display, Minerals, Aboriginal Handicraft, Beautiful Display
 Moths, Butterflies, Beetles.

ADMISSION 1/-. Groups of Children under charge of
 CHILDREN, 6d. teacher, 3d per head.

M. AURICCHIO, Hon. Sec. (Show),
 21 Spence-street, Cairns.

Figure 7. Advertisement for the Club's third Wild Nature Show (Auricchio 1935b).

On behalf of the Club, Flecker wrote a regular column, *Current Nature Topics*, published in both papers: some 230 *Topics* appeared from March 1935 to the outbreak of WWII in September 1939. Nature Shows and payments for the columns were major sources of revenue, enabling the 'luxury' of the printed NQN (Flecker 1937). Secretary Wyer acted as publicity officer and wrote letters and articles promoting Club campaigns and activities (e.g. Wyer 1932, 1934). Flecker used *Topics* and the NQN to campaign for newspapers, magazines and books to use scientific and 'correct' popular names for species (e.g. Flecker 1938a). However the Committee at times found this too narrow a focus: in 1937 they persuaded Flecker to rewrite his annual address to cover activities, achievements and aims of the Club rather than the single issue of nomenclature (Flecker 1937).

Through Flecker's influence, the Association added to its rules that it "will endeavour to protect in every way [the regions'] natural features" (Anon. 1933i). Other conservation highlights of the 1930s included a ban by Cairns City Council on the use of harpoons and spears on Green Island (Flecker 1936) and native tree plantings on Mulgrave Road, the southern approach to Cairns (Anon. 1934c):

Tree guards for the work were provided by the Main Roads Board, the trees by the Forestry Department, the [unemployment] relief labour by the Government, the City Council supervising the work and providing the soil, but chief praise is due to the Naturalists Club which...finally succeeded in obtaining the consent of the various departments to put the work in operation.

The war years: community upheaval and engagement with military naturalists

Australia entered WWII on 3 September 1939. By the time the Club held its AGM on 11 September, the Harbour Board had closed its wharves to the public and militia guards had been posted as sentries on fuel stores and other sensitive sites (Bottoms 2016). The Board's workload increased (Ryle 2006), which affected Club Secretary Wyer (by then Secretary of the Harbour Board) and Committee member Robert John Gorton. Flecker (President) and Brooks (Vice-President, 'VP') were part-time members of the militia (NAA 2020, 2021a) and subject to call-up. Others volunteered with the Red Cross or as Air

Raid wardens, or for full time war service. Founding members Mario and Gertrude Auricchio left Cairns: a naturalised Italian-Australian, Mario was interned in South Australia as an 'enemy alien' for four years and Gertrude and their young son moved to southern Queensland (NAA 2021b). Member George Sibley, a young marine engineer of Gordonvale, was killed by enemy action (Anon. 1941b) and others lost family members. At the 1941 AGM it was decided to hold meetings quarterly instead of monthly, because "so many members are engaged in war work or away on military service, and because lecturers do not visit Cairns as frequently" (Anon. 1941c).

On 7 December 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbour. Australia declared war with Japan and Japanese advances increased concern for the defence of North Queensland. Schools in coastal Queensland, including Cairns, did not resume in 1942 after the summer holiday (Anon. 1942a). Some 5,000-7,000 residents, 40% of the population including 78% of the children, evacuated (Greater) Cairns (Bradley 1995; Bottoms 2016, p. 474). Many houses and shops were left vacant (Bradley 1995). In April, Flecker was posted as full-time radiologist to Army General Hospital 116 at Charters Towers west of Townsville (NAA 2020) and in May, Brooks closed his dental practice to serve full time in the Dental Corps (Brooks 1942). Treasurer Richard Boyd Williams (aged twenty) joined the RAAF: his oath of allegiance was witnessed by "H. Flecker, J.P., 52 Abbott St. Cairns, N.Q." (NAA 2021c). Wyer acted as Treasurer for the rest of the war. Elizabeth Margaret Hooper, joint VP of the Club and principal of the (closed) Cairns Girls' and Infants' School, worked in the Red Cross and other organisations (e.g. Anon. 1942b). The Club went into recess: there was apparently no AGM in 1942. *Topics* ceased from 10 April 1942 until February 1943, when Flecker returned to his Cairns private practice and part-time militia service (NAA 2020). NQN ceased publication from March 1942 to September 1943. Meetings increased to bi-monthly from September 1944 (Flecker 1944b), but excursions did not resume until late 1945 and annual subscription reminders were not issued until 1946 (Anon. 1945, 1946a).

In 1943 and 1944, thousands of Australian, American and other Allied troops and support personnel were pouring into Cairns and the Tablelands. They occupied hotels, buildings left

empty by evacuations and new encampments built by support units (Dunn 2015; Richmond 2015; Bottoms 2016). Some new arrivals were naturalists, and the Club found a new community of interest. The 1943 AGM was held in late September with military visitors and until 1946 Club advertisements appealed to and attracted the new wartime population:

After a lengthy recess the North Queensland Naturalists Club has been revived and an annual meeting was held on Tuesday night at the Girls' School. There were many visitors, including personnel of the Australian and American armies as well as members, and a very interesting meeting was held...Dr Flecker, who has been president of the club since its inception, was unanimously [re]elected (Anon. 1943).

The meetings of the North Qld Naturalists Club in normal times is [sic] held monthly, but are now held quarterly...The attendance of all who are interested in Natural History, especially those in the services, whether Australian or Allied, likewise those employed by the Allied Works Council [construction groups] and other civilians are especially welcomed (Flecker 1943a).

Access to natural areas was better than ever, with new and improved roads and railways (Wilson 1988; Richmond 2015), but petrol was rationed, boats and motorbikes were among the vehicles impressed or grounded by authorities (Bradley 1995) and there were severe restrictions on civilian movements. Possession and use of cameras and binoculars were limited: ornithologist and writer Keith Hindwood gave up seabird surveys in Sydney after he was arrested twice for using binoculars near a secure area (Ian A.W. McAllan personal communication). Conversely, troops and support personnel operated in all environments – beaches, woodlands and tropical rainforest to the highest altitudes – and some juggled field work with military training. Natural history contributions by military naturalists and key Club members during WWII will be discussed elsewhere: in brief, military personnel gave talks and wrote articles for the NQN and a number joined the Club. In turn, Club members supported the naturalists' field work, including amateur ornithologists Corporal Patrick Albert (Pat) Bourke and Captain A. Frank Austin who were collaborating to write about northern

birds. Flecker ("a remarkable old boy and wonderful botanist", wrote Austin) wrote an introduction on vegetation of different habitats for their paper on avifauna of the Atherton Tablelands (A. F. Austin, unpublished letters; Bourke & Austin 1947a). Seeking information about Macleay's (Double-eyed) Fig-Parrot (*Cyclopsitta diophthalma macleayana*), they were grateful for assistance from the Club, "a live body with headquarters at Cairns" (Bourke & Austin 1947b, p. 289).

The environmental impact of so many troops, training operations and works in the region has not been studied. Restrictions on firearms, ammunition and boating during the war relieved Pied Imperial-Pigeons (*Ducula bicolor*) and other birds from hunting pressure (Flecker 1943b) and the Club achieved agreement from authorities to improve military practices on bushfires and wildlife protection (Anon. 1944). However, Flecker was appalled by a reckless signal fire lit by troops on the summit of Mt Bartle Frere in late 1945 (Flecker 1945); it is unknown if disciplinary action was taken. The Club's work on conservation of reef islands was commended by the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union: "In the far north the Cairns [sic] Naturalists Club is doing good work and our thanks are extended for their efforts in bird protection" (Bryant 1941). Nine members were appointed as volunteer rangers to protect wildlife under Queensland fauna acts (Anon. 1944).

Post-war, 1946 to 1950: new members, branching out

During WWII, a number of members had left the area or died and others had not renewed, but the 1950 membership (Anon. 1950b; Register) shows a major infusion of new recruits. Of 143 (FNQ) members in 1950, 102 (71%) joined after the war. Of 29 pre-war members, four were original 1932 'founders': Flecker, President again after a four-year term as VP; Wyer, still Secretary; Bruce Cummings, VP; and Gorton, former Treasurer. A post-war innovation was the appointment of 'Section Leaders' to assist the Committee and members in areas of expertise such as entomology, botany and ornithology (Anon. 1948). One leader was Alfred ('Alf') Arthur Read (1894–1970), who joined during WWII and was later President for fourteen years and a life member of the Club (Orrell 1970). He and his wife Alison (who joined the Committee in 1950) were expert conchologists

(Wilson & Gillett 1971). They supplied specimens to collectors and museums and operated a tourist shell display in Grove Street, 'House of 10,000 Shells' (Fig. 8).

Monthly meetings continued in central Cairns. Monthly excursions attended by up to 30 people ranged more widely than before the war, although transport was still difficult (Flecker 1950). A major trip by 47 members and visitors was made to Chillagoe and Mungana in mid-1946: they travelled from Cairns by rail motor and at Chillagoe, vehicles were provided by the local Progress Association. S. E. Stephens showed colour film of the caves at the 1946 AGM (Anon. 1946c). Members car-pooled to transport 'Junior Nature Lovers' and teachers from Parramatta State School for a bird-spotting 'ramble' on the Barron River at Kamerunga (Flecker 1947b) and the Club sponsored junior essay competitions with natural history books as prizes (Anon. 1947a). The Club held joint activities with the new Queensland Board of Adult Education (Wyer 1947), which built on the success of WWII army education programs and used 16 mm projectors bought from army surplus (Crocombe 2011). Reviving the Wild Nature Show was discussed (Anon. 1947b) but it was apparently held only once post-war (Anon. 1951b): the Club participated in other events such as the Timber Uses Exhibition (Anon. 1947c). In 1946, Flecker spoke on the Club's work at a Victorian Naturalists Club meeting in Melbourne (Anon. 1946b) and showed *Birds of Michaelmas Cay*, a 1933 documentary by members Bruce and Frances Cummings (NFSA 2021).

Some 180 issues of *Topics* appeared in the *Cairns Post* from early 1946 to late 1949, when publication shifted to the *Sunday Australian*,

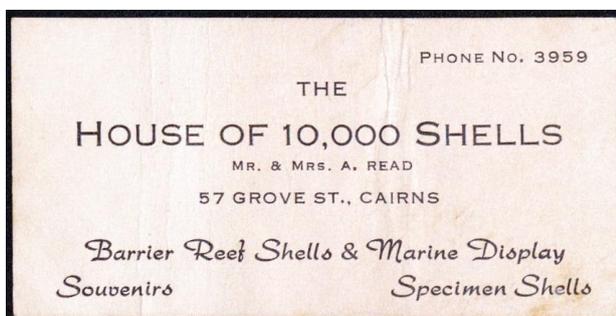


Figure 8. Business card of Alf and Alison Read, Grove Street, Cairns.
Fryer Library, University of Queensland: Ephemera relating to tourism FV705, Item 81.

a weekly paper founded in Cairns in 1939 (Flecker 1950; Kirkpatrick 2007). Some columns were also published in the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* (e.g. Flecker 1953). A total of 1036 *Topics* appeared from 1935 up to Flecker's death in 1957 (Clarkson 1990). As above, members south of Cardwell had rarely participated in Club activities and in 1947 a separate Naturalists Club was formed in Townsville "under the aegis of the Board of Adult Education" (Stephens 1947). Flecker spoke at the first meeting and led an excursion to the Townsville Town Common (Anon. 1947d); the Townsville club published articles in the NQN until late 1957. In 1945 the North Queensland Naturalists Club (NQNC) had published two expert booklets (price 1/- each) on North Queensland topics. The first was on orchids (NQNC 1945) and the second aimed to clarify common and scientific names for marketable fish of the Cairns area (NQNC & Chief Inspector of Fisheries 1945). The series continued after the war, based in part on articles from the NQN and assisted by Club or external experts. The post-war volumes covered ferns (Smith & NQNC 1946), edible plants (Flecker *et al.* 1948), birds (Whittell & NQNC 1949) and water beetles (Dryopidae: Brooks & NQNC 1951).

Bushfire damage and weed invasion on Cairns hillslopes remained a recurrent conservation problem (Stephens 1946; Valentine 2016). In 1949 the Club welcomed the extent of northern National Parks, while noting the need for protected areas at Mungana near Chillagoe and on Cape York Peninsula (Flecker 1949a). Six members were appointed as honorary rangers, but the Club considered this was not enough: "...money flowed into North Queensland during the war years. We can well afford to pay rangers to patrol our forests and reefs" (Devanny 1946; Flecker 1948a). The Club supported moves to form a national wildlife conservation council (Flecker 1949b) and welcomed an Order-in-Council prohibiting the taking of coral from reefs under the Queensland *Fish and Oyster Act 1914–1935*: "...all reefs within close proximity to Cairns are now protected" (Flecker 1946).

Discussion

Achievements

Major achievements of the Club between 1932 and 1950 survive: the herbarium and the archives of the NQN and *Topics*. From press reports, the NQN

and the extensive network of cross-memberships of its Committee and ordinary members (this study), it is clear the Club had a prominent profile in the community. As Shield (2017) has shown for the early development of Rockhampton in Central Queensland, such networks enabled leaders in regional non-government organisations to become agents for change and gather support for community projects. The Club willingly confronted differences with public and official opinion, e.g. on the planting of exotics on public land (Sanderson 2005; Valentine 2016), but also achieved cooperation. The Club attracted direct participation by hundreds of non-members at Nature Shows and lectures and through donations to the herbarium and proposed museum. We cannot estimate how many of FNQ's more than 50,000 residents read the *Topics*, but 'nature writing' was a popular feature in all northern newspapers of the period (Ryan 1981) and the column generated regular correspondence (e.g. Flecker 1938b). Significantly, during the privations of WWII the public continued to send specimens and *Topics* was published despite paper shortages reducing the Friday *Cairns Post* from fourteen pages to six or four.

It is difficult to assess the Club's impact on issues which were the responsibility of other bodies. An example of limited success was the 1932 goal of 'natural history instruction in schools, with a local focus'. Although some Cairns teachers sought help from the Club for natural history activities, an attempt to collaborate with eighteen schools in the Cairns area to form a branch of the Gould League of Bird Lovers (Anon. 1939) failed, for unknown reasons. According to Flecker, "an attempt to do so...was frustrated by the teachers themselves!" (Flecker 1944c: his emphasis). Nature study was part of the Queensland primary curriculum, with field observation a key focus (Logan & Clarke 1984) but the text book (Gillies & Hall 1903) mostly covered species from south-eastern Australia. Some Queensland content was introduced in the 1920s when the Nature Lovers' League (=Gould League, a branch of the Queensland Naturalists Club) conducted 'nature walks' and camps near Brisbane for State School teachers and trainees, including some from North Queensland (Anon. 1926, 1927). Perhaps Cairns schools felt the local Club did not have sufficient resources to introduce North

Queensland content and support the conservation aims of the League.

Membership

Cairns was the region's professional and business centre (Bottoms 2016) so the high proportion of members in those fields is not surprising. Even so, the Club attracted members from a very wide cross-section of the community, given that the annual fee of 10/- was about half a week's wage for unskilled labourers (e.g. Anon. 1935d) and that the public could attend meetings and excursions without subscribing. Recruitment figures estimated from documentary sources were similar to those reported (in some years) by the Club except in 1947, when the AGM reported 61 new members for the year (Anon. 1947b) but we found only 47. 'Missing' members may have been persons who attended meetings but for whom we found no record of membership. Those attending more than one meeting were likely to be local residents so we may have underestimated the proportion of FNQ residents in the total membership, although any still involved in 1950 (Anon. 1950b) are included in our totals. The Committee considered the number of members was small but realistic (Anon. 1933d):

Compared with the population of the district the membership is indeed high, even if the number of naturalists is small for the time being. Naturalists cannot be made to order, and the power of observation...can only be slowly acquired.

Ability to attend meetings and other events presumably explains the high concentration of members close to Cairns, but it is unclear why only five people from the Johnstone Shire south of Cairns joined over nineteen years as compared with 23 in Woothakata (Mareeba Shire), with half as many residents. Johnstone Shire councillors were impressed with the Nature Show and in 1941 the School of Arts in the Shire's main town of Innisfail formed a naturalists' club based on the 'Cairns' model, but it does not seem to have survived the war (Anon. 1935e, 1941d).

The proportion of women in the Club (~30%) was similar to that in the Cairns Aquatic Club, with an adult membership of 450 in 1935 including 150 women (and an unspecified number of juniors: Kelly 1997). The small but very active Alpine Club involved both sexes in mountain and hill climbs: women formed most of a group who hiked

18 miles up the Gillies Range Road (by moonlight) in December 1931 (Anon. 1931). As well as unpaid domestic work, women in regional Queensland in the 1930s did paid work including in the home (such as washing for others) and were sometimes employers (Scott 1995). In the mid-1920s, Cilento (1926a,b) found that most of 123 houses randomly surveyed in Cairns had water connected, but almost all laundries were inadequate, kitchens were unshaded and hot and less than half had ice chests. Rents were high, houses sheltered multiple families and on average women in their 30s and 40s had, or cared for, four children. Even with electricity supplied to Cairns homes in the 1940s there were no fans to relieve summer heat (Bottoms 2016). In this context it seems remarkable that voluntary clubs in the region attracted so many women (see also Scott 1995) and that some 44% of the Club's 112 female members joined in their 30s or 40s.

Attitudes, science and conservation

Some attitudes of the Club in its early years were very different from those of conservationists in the 1960s–1970s detailed by Frazer (2003) in his study of conservation and farming in North Queensland. The Club promoted suitable clothing and tour timetables so tourists could walk on reefs at low tide to view the outstanding marine life of FNQ (Flecker 1935), an activity deprecated by later activists (Daley & Griggs 2008). Changed attitudes and regulations also ended the extensive collecting of marine specimens as practised by the Reads, by Flecker (primarily for the planned museum) and by Jean Devanny. Devanny, an impecunious author and Committee member from 1944–1946, was paid to collect shells by Flecker (Taylor 2004) and probably by the Reads, and also collected on her own account “until conservation became an issue” some time before her death in 1962 (Devanny & Ferrier 1986 p. 316). A *Topics* column in February 1948 seems to mark a dramatic change in Flecker's attitude to collecting. The author praised Bourke and Austin's (1947a) declaration that they took very few birds for identification purposes while in FNQ during WWII (Flecker 1948b) and continued:

Too frequently we find birds and animals being slaughtered...on the plea of 'specimens for scientific purposes.' And too often such destruction is only to satisfy some minor point of identity which does not matter anyway, or

else is quite wantonly carried out with the hope of finding something new by which the finder may gain personal glorification in having his name attached to it in unpronounceable Latin.

However, both before and after the above post Flecker (1947c, 1948c) passionately defended naturalists against accusations of 'highbrow elitism', 'wasting time' and 'obsession with scientific jargon' and 'superfluous details of structure and function' (as compared with 'mere nature lovers' who appreciated nature in general or its aesthetics). Given Flecker's dedication to scientific practice, correct scientific names (e.g. Flecker 1944c) and the proposed museum, it seems very unlikely (*contra* Clarkson 1990) that he wrote this whole column. Strangely, the same article presents new information (for shell collectors!) on unusual morphs of some species.

The Club does not easily fit models suggested for early 20th century natural history organisations in Australia. Although Frazer (2003) noted Flecker's role and influence as an educator, he depicted such clubs as advocating conservation based on "rather randomly chosen tokens of nature", from a "sense of custodianship developed during field studies". This suggests the label of 'mere nature lovers' as strongly rejected by Flecker (1948c) and – as stressed by Valentine (2016) – the Club focussed not on tokens but on the need for both conservation and knowledge about major habitats such as the Great Barrier Reef (e.g. Kennedy 1933a,b). Hutton and Connors (1999) considered that early 20th century natural history clubs lacked understanding of the total environment, instead focussing on single issues in isolation: 'nature study', conservation for utility (e.g. 'useful birds') or as a social duty, scientific collecting, bushwalking, national parks, and community education. From its foundation however, the Club integrated all these activities, either directly or by supporting ventures by others. The Club probably benefitted from starting some 30 years after natural history groups further south, enabling rapid, simultaneous implementation of a range of activities in FNQ.

Frost (2002) queried the stereotyped perception dividing early 20th century 'uncaring farmers' (whose livelihoods depended on clearing rainforest and 'hated trees') from 'concerned urbanites' (who supported conservation), and gave examples of farmers who engaged with their natural

surroundings and supported naturalist and scientific studies. Two Club members – both pioneers in rainforest tourism and protection – illustrate Frost’s ‘blurring’ of this division. Mrs Ghyn (‘Minnie’) Dick of ‘Fairyland’ at Kuranda was originally a professional photographer and artist in Sydney (Anon. 1928b) before travelling north, but George Curry, who founded the Lake Barrine Tea House, was a timber cutter before his appointment as a ranger by the Lakes Trust in 1923 (Queensland Government 2014; Ancestry 2020). Of the 368 Club members in FNQ with known occupations, 57 (18%) were farmers or involved in ‘settler’ extractive industries (timber and mining).

The enterprises of the Dicks at Kuranda and the Currys at Lake Barrine had elements of 19th century notions of ‘romantic wilderness’ (Hutton & Connors 1999) but the cooperation between the Club and the Cairns Tableland Publicity Association introduced a new stage of tourism in North Queensland. The Association incorporated conservation in its objectives; the Club promoted well-informed tourism and believed this would be a force for conservation. We suggest that, together with the long-term successful collaboration between Flecker and Wyer, this can be seen as one of Australia’s earliest eco-tourism partnerships between conservation and tourism interests (Buckley 2004). Bottoms (2016 p. 569) saw post-war Cairns as embracing “the quiet pre-war life of tourism, sugar and fishing, although with a greater awareness of a world that had quickly lost interest in them”. This was not so for the Club, with a broader outlook through its widespread contacts, Flecker’s breadth of vision and exchanges of the NQN.

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Supplementary file

A supplementary pdf file accompanies this paper on its web-page. It contains:

- Table S1: nominal membership register;
- Section S1A,B: analysis of membership; and
- Table S2: founding members and committee.

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