The NORTH QUEENSLAND NATURALIST

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NORTH QUEENSLAND NATURALISTS CLUB
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OBJECTS: The furtherance of the study of the various branches of Natural History and the preservation of our heritage of indigenous fauna and flora.

MEETINGS: Second Tuesday of each month at Oddfellows Hall, Lake Street, 8.00 p.m.

FIELD DAYS: Sunday before meeting. Notice of place and time given in 'Cairns Post'.

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Each Author is responsible for the opinions and facts expressed in his or her article.

BUSH CURLEWS

An observation of breeding behaviour in Far North Queensland.
Joan M. Wright, M.A., B.Sc:

Round Lake Tinaroo on the Atherton Tableland are many acres of land in the process of reverting to natural bush. Previously farm land, their use has been changed by the flooding of the Barron Valley and its tributaries. One such spot is a former school reserve, now the territory of a pair of Bush Curlews.

Very frequently the pair of birds can be seen by day, although they are usually described as nocturnal. They only call at night and from these calls it seems that their territory far exceeds the five acre reserve and extends out into the paddocks beyond.

By day the fine, statuesque birds can often be seen on the short grass never far from longer cover, bushes and bladey grass. They appear never to go down to the lake shore although it is only a few yards away. When observed they are usually standing stock still, their necks projectly forward like the beam of a crane. Their mottled and streaked brown feathers provide very efficient camouflage but the big golden eyes can be clearly seen as, they,in their turn, watch the human intruders.

Although shy they do not fly away readily, but when disturbed they run a few yards, then a few more until after a little while they melt into the bladey grass and disappear.

Late in October 1974 this pair of birds laid two eggs. No nest of any kind was made, the eggs simply lying on a small patch of bare earth. As the 'nest' was only about ten yards from the house, it was easily observed. Both parent birds were in constant attendance and the female could only be distinguished by the fact that 'she' sat on the eggs. She was very easily disturbed and frequently left the eggs for periods of 30-60 minutes. This was probably early in the incubation period; usually hen birds will sit tight and will not leave the nest. Both male and female were never far from the nest but did not try to divert attention by any special behaviour. While they were standing near the nest they frequently bobbed their heads and raised and lowered their tails. This behaviour pattern seems to be associated with the breeding period only.

There were two eggs, light brown in colour with blotches of paler and darker colour. These were observed on two successive weekends, and then they disappeared, presumably because they were hatched. The parents were not seen for two months.

At the end of this time the parents re-appeared in the usual way and one day a fledgling was found lying on the short grass near the house. It lay completely flat with its legs folded under its body and its long neck stretched out on the ground. So still was it that it appeared to be dead; it even failed to react when touched. The feathers were fluffy and pale coloured and the little body was thin and bony. However, the golden eyes were bright and there was an almost imperceptible flutter of breathing about the back. Anyone could have picked the young bird up assuming that it had been deserted.

After about two hours the 'dead' bird moved about a foot from its position and a little later it had gone, leaving a normal looking dropping as evidence of its state of health. A week later, *three* curlews were seen running, stopping, looking and running again in the accustomed way. One of the eggs had evidently hatched and by 'playing possum' the young one had escaped the attention of the kites and eagles which patrol the reserve.

Incidently, although it has been stated that bush curlews are becoming rarer, they are tolerant of people, houses and traffic. They are sometimes heard at night in the city of Cairns where their weird calls echo through the suburban streets. They have even been seen running about the streets round the City Council Chambers.

(Nomenclature: - - - Bush Curlew (Cayley), Southern Stone-curlew (Slater), Burhinus magnirostris.)

'PERCY'

Saturday, 18th January, 1975, 9.00a.m.: A small boy brought to my caravan a little bundle of feathers which he had found on the road. It was a Dusky Honeyeater and had apparently been knocked out. It was breathing rapidly and its eyes seemed glazed, the eyelids blinking all the time, but I could see no other injury. With the bird on my finger, I settled back on my bunk where I had been unhappily nursing a very sore leg. After a few minutes it started to preen itself a little then tucked its head under the wing and went to sleep.

I decided to call my little friend Percy.

My wife made up some sugar water in a small container by my bed. When Percy woke up and looked around, I very gently put a spoonful of sugar water under his beak and in no time he was sucking some up through his tongue. After his drink he just looked at me as much as to say 'thank you', preened again for a minute or two, then tucked his head under the wing to sleep. This drinking, preening and sleeping every ten minutes or so went on for a couple of hours and I could see that Percy was recovering steadily. He appeared to have complete trust in me, never loosening his tight grip on my finger.

About 11.30a.m. Percy awoke from one of his naps, had his drink, turned his little head from side to side to give me a good looking over, then started to do a lot of preening and stretching and testing of his wings. After awhile he hopped off my finger onto my chest, had a good look around, then hopped back on my finger and was given another drink. The curtains had been removed from this part of the van for washing and the wires were hanging loose. Percy's first little flight to one of these wires was quite successful. He made a few little flights here and there, not attempting to go out through the open door, and came back to my finger to have a drink.

After dinner Percy went exploring along the bench beside my bed. He flew onto the fan (which had been turned off) and looked it all over, then to the radio and the desk lamp where he had a little trouble keeping his balance. He returned to me for a spell, then back to the bench again in amongst the books and pencils. Eventually he found the cup of sugar water and in just a few moments had sampled some for himself; from then on when he wanted a drink he knew where to get it. Now and again he would fly over to me and stay a little while, then be off again. This went on all the afternoon. Towards dusk I could see that Percy was getting restless, trying to get through the window to the trees outside to find a perch for the night. My wife broke a small branch off one of the trees and stood it on the bench. Percy went straight to it, all through it, and eventually got to the highest twig and settled down for the night.

I watched Percy wake the next morning. He gave a few little whistling calls while preening and stretching his wings. After he had his drink and had his photo taken (the flashlight did not worry him at all), we decided it was time to send Percy on his way. I took him outside on my finger. He looked around for a moment or two then flew to a small branch a few feet away, paused there for a few more seconds, then flew right up into the top of the trees and started to feed amongst the blossoms. I was left with a wonderful memory of a little friend who trusted me and kept me company for a day and a night.

W. G. Felton, Cairns.

Matschie (1903) described a new species of horseshoe bat with long, narrow, acutely pointed ears from a single female specimen collected at Cooktown on the Cape York Peninsula. He named this bat, with its peculiar club-shaped projections from the facial nose-leaf, *Hipposideros semoni* in honor of the famous German naturalist-collector, Richard Semon, who visited Australia in 1891-1892. The English version of Semon's fascinating book 'In the Australian Bush and on the Coast of the Coral Sea' was published in 1899. He wrote, 'in June 1892 I stayed for four weeks in the neighbourhood of Cooktown to get acquainted with tropical Queensland and to study its fauna'. While Semon does not specifically mention the acquisition of this small bat, there is no doubt that the bat was collected during this period. Troughton (1941) was the first to apply the common name, 'wart-nosed horseshoe-bat'. Hill (1963), in his excellent monograph on the genus *Hipposideros*, remarked on its close relation to the rarely collected *Hipposideros stenotis*, the lesser wart-nosed horseshoe-bat; in Queensland, this latter species is known only from Mt.Isa. Hill also commented, *Hipposideros semoni* is clearly quite distinct from *H. muscinus* (of New Guinea)'. Tate (1952) considered *semoni* a subspecies of *Hipposideros muscinus*.

On 16th April, 1948, G.H.H.Tate and H.M.VanDeusen, on their way by the ship 'Lochiel' to Red Island Point at the tip of Cape York, put into Cooktown to visit Dr.H.L. Kesteven, the famous Australian anatomist and friend of Dr.W.K.Gregory of the American Museum. Dr.Kesteven presented the members of the Archbold 1948 Cape York (Australia) Expedition with a female *Hipposideros semoni* (AMNH 154856) which he had found clinging to the door handle of his car in Cooktown in September 1947; this was the second known specimen of this species from Australia.

On June 24, while camped at the edge of the so-called Gordon Strip of the Iron Range airport, Van Deusen discovered a female *H. semoni* (AMNH 154707) in the oven of a stove in an old house! Then on August 2 while staying in a vacant house at The Bend, two miles up the river from the town of Coen, George Tate and Van Deusen found the first known male of *H. semoni* (AMNH 154709) in a clothes closet!

Before I left on this 1948 expedition Stanley O. Grierson, who was later to accompany me on the Seventh Archbold Expedition to New Guinea in 1964, gave me a piece of shad net he had picked up on the bank of the Hudson River near New York City. This was before mist nets were well known in America and became required equipment on my later collecting expeditions. Little did I realize at the time how important this net fragment would become while the expedition was camped near the headwaters of the upper Nesbit River in the so-called Rocky Scrub of the McIlwraith Range (see Brass, 1953). One night while jack-lighting for mammals on the broad, rain forest covered top of the Range I noticed small bats flitting by less than five feet above the ground in the almost tunnel-like trail through the forest. The next day I spent several hours closing-up the large squares of the shad net with fine black thread. That night I returned to the 'tunnel' and set up the net. The bats were flying as usual. Some attempted and succeeded in flying through the meshes of the net, others flew almost to the net, hovered and then flew back up the trail. Frustrated, I next cut several small, limber tree branches. When the bats again flew toward the net and hesitated, I switched the sticks rapidly up and down hoping to knock one to the ground. One female *H. semoni* (AMNH 154710) was collected on August 17. More thread was knotted into the net the next day, and that night practically all the trail-flying bats came to a brief halt near the net while I worked the limber switches. Three more individuals (AMNH 154711-154713) were collected on August 18 and 19, all females. All of these specimens were collected before 9:00p.m. Four specimens of *Rhinolophus megaphyllus* were also netted or switched in this same vegetation tunnel. George Tate measured and made up these eight study skins. The nights were clear, moonlit, and the minimum temperatures about 58° to 60°F. Brass collected few insects at the light trap during our stay at this camp.

On 28th June, 1960, Basil J. Marlow of The Australian Museum, Sydney, found a female *H. semoni* in an unoccupied house in Coen. This individual was hanging in plain sight from a picture rail in one of the rooms. She became very alert and flew around the room until Basil finally collected her using an old tennis racquet which he also found in the house (specimen no. M.8116).

On later expeditions to New Guinea I collected many specimens of several species of *Hipposideros*. However, these were always found in rain forest or in the lower montane forests. We have no record of the habitat of the bat collected by Semon in or near Cooktown in 1892. However, Kesteven's individual was collected in Cooktown which is situated in savanna woodland or open forest (Brass, 1953). The nearest rain forest is on Mt.Amos, some 16 miles south of Cooktown. Coen is also surrounded by savanna, but rain forest is present about five miles to the east. The Iron Range airport (Gordon Strip) is also in open forest country, but rain forest is found less than a mile to the east. In the McIlwraith Range our specimens of *H. semoni* were inhabiting the depths of the rain forest called the Rocky Scrub.

It is most interesting that the *H. semoni* found in savanna localities were collected in the period from June to September, the driest period of the year on Cape York. Perhaps when we know much more about the life history of this insectivorous bat we will have a clearer understanding of why certain individuals hunt in savanna forest during the dry season. Could this be tied to the flowering of certain species of open forest trees and the resultant attraction of insects to the blossoms? Or is the habitat of this species of bat less restricted on Cape York than that of other species of this genus in New Guinea? *H. semoni* has been recorded from Papua and the Territory of New Guinea (Hill, 1963), but next to nothing is known about its habitat.

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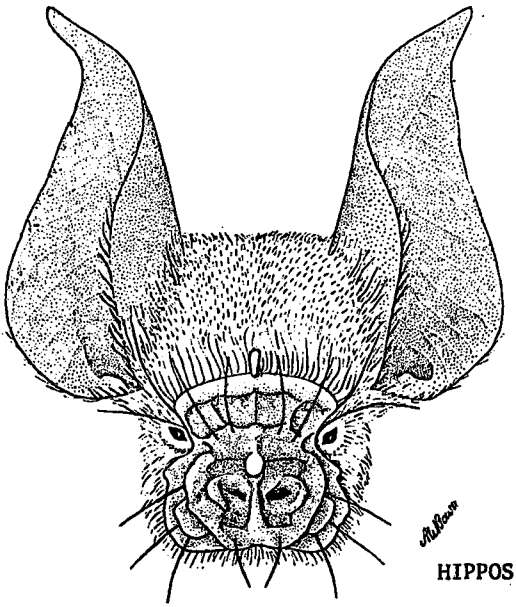
Hobart M. Van Deusen
Archbold Expeditions
American Museum of Natural History
New York City

27th January, 1975.



HIPPOSIDEROS SEMONI ♀ X3

OBSERVATIONS ON MARSUPIALS (MAMMALIA) AT ROSS RIVER DAM, TOWNSVILLE

by Marcus Stevens, Department of Zoology,
James Cook University of North Queensland.

Marsupials were studied by means of live trapping and direct observation in a small valley opening out onto the edge of the lake created by the newly constructed Ross River Dam. The valley is located 1.9 kilometers south southwest of the dam spillway. The newly completed Stage One of the Ross River Dam filled with water for the first time early in the 1973-1974 wet season creating a very large lake. Stage Two of Ross River Dam will inundate most of the valley portion of the present study area.

The dominant tree species in the open savannah woodland of the study area is Narrow-leaved iron bark (*Eucalyptus drepanophylla*). Bloodwood (*E. dichromophila*) and Cocky apple (*Planchonia careya*) are scattered among the iron bark trees. Tea trees (*Melaleuca sp.*) and some *Poplar* gums (*E. alba*) occur close to the lake's edge. Narrow-leaf beefwood (*Grevillea glauca*) is common on the hill tops along with a scattering of the Monsoon tree (*Cochlospermum gillivraei*) and the shrub, *Coelospermum reticulatum*. Kangaroo grass, *Themeda australis*, is the dominant grass with black spear grass (*Heteropogon contortus*) also occurring on the slopes.

A combination of small Sherman traps, Elliot traps, and wire cage traps were baited with sweet potato soaked in linseed oil plus a mixture of rolled oats, peanut paste, and honey. Traps were set in the late afternoon and picked up early on the next morning on the following nights: 17 to 18 August, 24 to 25 August, and 2 to 3 November, 1974. The total trap effort was 44 trap nights. One trap night equals one trap set for one night. A total of 7 marsupials, 3 brush-tailed possums (*Trichosurus vulpecula*) and 4 brindled bandicoots (*Isoodon macrourus*) were caught during this time. They were all caught with the large wire cage traps which were set for a total of 16 trap nights. The small sheet-metal Sherman and Elliott traps, set for a total of 28 trap nights did not catch any mammals. Most of the captures were made close to and along the margin of the lake whereas the hill slopes yielded a poor catch. It appeared that the bandicoots came to the edge of the lake to dig for food in the moist soft sandy soil. The possums may have been seeking water, although at least one, a young female caught on two occasions, apparently resided on the study area.

Two of the four brindled bandicoots caught were females, neither of which had pouch young. One did have an elongated teat indicating that she apparently had young previously. Two of the three brush-tailed possums were females, one of which had a partly furred male pouch young. The other female, a juvenile, had no pouch young.

The following macropod marsupials were observed while on foot or from a vehicle: Grey kangaroo (*Macropus giganteus*), Whiptail wallaby (*Macropus parryi*), Wallaroo (*Macropus robustus*), Agile wallaby (*Macropus agilis*) and Plain rock wallaby (*Petrogale inornata*). Whiptail wallabies were sighted more often and in larger groups than the other species. Several groups of from four to eight were seen during early morning and later afternoon hours. Grey kangaroos were seen in groups of from three to five throughout the day. Only one Wallaroo was sighted in the trapping area. One group of four Agile wallabies was seen early one morning crossing the access road after being disturbed while drinking.

One plain rock wallaby may have been sighted at about 5.30p.m. one day. Its small size and stocky build were noted as it hopped over the northern slope of the trapping area. Large rock outcrops in the area would certainly provide good shelter for rock wallabies. Dr. G. Heinsohn (personal communication) has observed rock wallabies in this area in previous years.

An inspection of the northern slope showed very distinct trails used by macropods. The steep slope of the valley sides makes movement along contours of the slope by far the most convenient for these animals. One high trail led from some large rock outcrops around to the waterfront side of the slope. About twenty metres lower was another similar trail and a third trail connected the first two. On the lower slopes the trails criss-cross and are far less distinct.

The use of these trails was admirably demonstrated one morning when a whiptail wallaby was disturbed near the water's edge. It hopped to cover above the highest water line on the shore, stopped and turned, and faced the observer. Not convinced of its safety it hopped up the grassy slope until it came upon one of the low contour trails, which it followed to shelter.

I wish to acknowledge the assistance of Dr. G. E. Heinsohn who critically read the manuscript and offered useful suggestions.

LENBRASSIA - A NEW GENUS OF GESNERIACEAE IN NORTH QUEENSLAND

The family Gesneriaceae has provided many of our most beautiful cultivated plants: Saintpaulia, Gloxinia, Streptocarpus, Columnea and Episcea, to name just a few. However, the family is not well represented in the Queensland Flora, with only five genera recorded (Clifford and Ludlow 1972) of which the best known is probably the lovely little *Bouea hygroscopica* (Oriental Streptocarpus), which deserves far more attention as a cultivated species than it has had so far.

The species *Corananthera australiana* G.T.White is the only representative of its genus in Australia, and was described originally without fruit. In 1973, Dr.George Gillett of the University of California, while visiting North Queensland, collected *Corananthera australiana* with flowers and fruits, and concluded that there was sufficient evidence to distinguish the species from the other genera of the family. He has since described it (Gillett 1974) as a new genus Lenbrassia, named to commemorate Leonard Brass who collected so much in the South West Pacific Area. The new species, *Lenbrassia australiana*, occurs as a small tree in the understorey of dense rainforest on the Dividing Range from Mt. Spurgeon to Mt. Lewis and on the Thornton Range. Thus, as far as is known, it has a very restricted distribution.

The description of a new genus in our area is of itself of considerable interest, and this is heightened by Dr.Gillett's pleasant gesture of naming it after a man well-known to Queensland botanists, and who made such a great contribution to our knowledge of the Pacific flora.

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J. F. Archibald
Mareeba, April 1975.

NOTES IN BRIEF

A few weeks ago a woman who lives along Upolo Esplanade at Clifton Beach near Cairns was busily mowing the grass outside her garden. As she passed a small low shrub, she noticed some activity underneath it and on investigation found that small turtles were emerging from a hole in the ground. Unfortunately there was no one around who could tell her what type of turtles they were. She called her neighbours to see the sight and they watched whilst about 100 small turtles dug their way out and headed straight for the sea. This might not be thought to be an unusual thing except that this was in a well built up area with plenty of traffic passing along the road.

Observation of Mrs. Geddes, Clifton Beach.
written by M.L.Cassels.

We would like to express our thanks to Mr. Thomas of Irymple and Mr. Baines of Melbourne for their donations to the Club. With money so scarce, these donations are most welcome.

Our thanks also to those members and friends who have responded to our appeal for Journal material. Further contributions, please!

CORAL COAST LITHOPRINT,HERBERTON.