

# Turkeys Attack Police in US Town

*Here is a recent story from our US correspondent*

A gang of marauding turkeys has been causing chaos in a small town in Massachusetts, harassing residents and police. The birds, which are native to the area, have been filmed chasing police cars and attacking residents in Bridgewater, about 30 miles (50km) south of Boston. Local officials say there is not much they can do as the turkeys are wildlife and, as a result, they do not come under their jurisdiction.

One of the victims, Bob Smith, filmed the animals as they came at him close to his home. He told ABC affiliate WCVB: 'They've been chasing me. They've imprinted on me (that I am) lower in the pecking order. They came from over a hill behind me. The first one in the flock pecked me in the calf. I was moving away from them. They figured 'we have more power over you. You're scared of us'. I'm facing off at them right up to the point that one came at me with his spurs.'

Bridgewater Police put out a warning on social media, with a video showing one of their patrol cars being pursued by a group of four of the birds. It said: 'Aggressive turkeys are a problem in town. State law doesn't allow the police or the Animal Control Office to remove them.'

Experts say the birds can be highly territorial and will make efforts to exert their dominance if allowed. Town authorities told anyone with serious concerns to contact the state society for the protection of animals for advice about how to act around the turkeys.

[Our resident garden expert, Alectura, says he understands the turkeys are trying to set up an overseas branch in Kuranda but are encountering opposition from our locals. We know who we will back if it comes to a showdown—Ed]



## When is a Turkey not a Turkey?

Although referred to as a 'turkey' Kuranda's much-maligned Brush Turkeys are not directly related to common turkeys, but do share a similar appearance. Brush Turkeys are very ancient birds and belong to a group of birds called Megapodes (Greek for mega big/great podfoot) found in the Australasia and Pacific region. The Djabugay name for this bird is Wawun and is important to their traditional culture for a number of reasons, including being a food source.

One of the most distinctive features of birds within the Megapode group is their incubation strategies for their eggs and level of care for their young. Megapodes don't build conventional nests, plus they use external heat sources to incubate the eggs rather than the body heat of the parent. In the case of Brush Turkeys, the heat source is provided by microbes in the fermenting vegetation that is scraped into large mounds by the male birds. Unlike normal eggs, the eggs of Megapodes don't need to be routinely rolled by the parent bird. The male bird is kept busy checking the mound temperature with his beak; adjusting it by removing or adding compost as required, attracting mates and continually increasing the size of his mound to make it more attractive to potential mates. The nesting mounds can be very large. Once the female lays the eggs she has no further commitment to the male or the offspring, which is typical for Megapodes, and the male must remain constantly vigilant to predators keen on stealing eggs

### Brush Turkeys spotted in the Rainforest near Barron Falls Station

Male birds with large mounds may successfully attract a number of females to mate with. Egg laying normally occurs in November prior to the wet season, when chicks hatch they benefit from the flush of new growth and fruit. After hatching, the chicks dig their way to the surface of the mound and run into the jungle. The young are fully independent and don't receive any care from either parent. They can even fly within a few minutes of hatching, as they hatch with grown wing feathers.

The role Brush Turkeys have in maintaining the rainforest is a very important one. They are primarily frugivores (fruit eaters) and spread seeds through the forest. By doing this they contribute to the diversity of the forest and influence the variety of animals that live there in the future due to the habitat they help create. They also help repair the forest after undergrowth has been affected by fire or cyclones as well as extending the rainforest edge into suitable habitat and lessening the effect of weed penetration.

### Brush Tukeys roam the rainforest near Skyrail's Smithfield Terminal

By clearing the forest floor to create their nesting mounds and scratching the leaf litter to find food, they have a great effect on influencing what plant species germinate and survive on the forest floor.

In the long run, this determines the composition of trees that form the canopy that in turn largely determine humidity, sunlight and temperature levels on the forest floor, and that has an effect on the whole forest. Brush Turkeys can also benefit plants, fungi and other organisms in a small area by concentrating the nutrients at the site of the mound.

Thanks to Lance Neville at Skyrail for text, and Helen Douglas for photograph.



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Caring for Kuranda's Environment

*"by standing on the shoulders of those who've gone before"*

Nursery: 284 Myola Road, Mon & Thur 9.00-1.00pm; Sat 10.00-noon; Phone: 4093 8989/4093 8393

## Threatened Species Commissioner Encounters Kuranda's Tree Frog

Gregory Andrews, on his last visit to Far North Queensland as Threatened Species Commissioner, took time out to come frogging at Warril Creek. We talked Kuranda Tree Frog, threats to its survival and what locals are doing to counter them. Gregory stressed the value of our monitoring program which provides a vital eye on the health of the Kuranda Tree Frog population and we spoke about other endangered frogs across Australia. We didn't ask, but he had the luck of the Irish that night, both a male and female *Litoria myola* starred on his facebook page. We've only seen a female three times over the past 4 years!

Envirocare is continuing to create rainforest habitat around creek mouths to enhance water quality and the frog's chances of survival. This work is generously funded by a grant from **Landcare Australia** via their Employee Giving program.

*Photo right: Litoria myola female ready to mate*



## Plant of the month – Cardwellia sublimis

A tree presently in flower in various places around Kuranda, a great example of seeds and flowers right now on Barron Falls Road, near the top of the Amphitheatre hill, on the right hand side when travelling from town. This is one of the most useful timber trees in North Queensland rainforests, a beautiful cabinet wood, easy to work,

cuts and polishes well to reveal a beautiful oak grain. Many homes in NQ were constructed of this species. Attempts to grow this species in plantations are not encouraging. The showy panicles of cream flowers are followed by distinctive large fruits with the unripe fruit eaten by Sulphur Crested Cockatoos.



## Speaker meeting –

**Thursday 2nd November**

### FOCUS ON BIRDS IN OUR BACKYARD

This year the Aussie bird count runs from 23 to 29th October.

Anyone who wants to go into their backyard and count the number of birds over a 20 min period can join in, there's even an app or you can record your count on line. Google "Aussie bird count". This year we'd love to have over 1000 records from the Cairns area. Let's even get Kuranda to show on the map. You can count as many times as you like over the week, just complete each count over a 20 minute period. The data collected assists BirdLife Australia in understanding more about the birds that live where people live. Google "Aussie bird count".



## Date Claimers

- 14th November: Yellow Crazy Ant monitoring – Volunteers welcome, training provided. Ring Sylvia on 0409 647 714 or email [yca@envirocare.org.au](mailto:yca@envirocare.org.au)
- Thursday 2nd November: Speaker Meeting, 7.00pm @ KRC, Fallon Road.
- Saturday 18th November: Yellow Crazy Ant Bait treatment. Volunteers needed. Ring Sylvia on 0409 647 714 or [yca@envirocare.org.au](mailto:yca@envirocare.org.au)
- Monday 20th to 26th November Frog Monitoring – Monitoring days vary. Check Kuranda's-Frog-Friendly-Neighbourhood FB page or text Sylvia 0409 647 714 or Cathy on 0419 624 940 Email [info@envirocare.org.au](mailto:info@envirocare.org.au)

**Become a member, borrow the Box Trailer: Ring Hans 4093 8393**

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