

RAINFOREST PIGEONS AND DEAD PARROTS

Alan Briggs from Birdlife Capricornia delivered an engaging presentation on Birds as indicators of environmental health and also of a changing environment. The title of his presentation was a reference to times past when canaries were used by miners to indicate whether the mine was becoming unsafe. Alan's current analogy was that changes in bird numbers and movements may be able to give an indication of whether an ecosystem or area is "healthy", or is becoming "unhealthy".

Alan also spoke of how a shift in seasonal weather may push birds out of sync with the ecosystems and the communities of which they are a part. If the birds are unable to adapt to changes in the surrounding ecosystem, it may be detrimental for the bird species and for other species within the ecosystem. Alan highlighted the considerable global evidence that birds have changed migration patterns, migration timing and in some cases stopped migrating altogether. This is an indication that something is amiss – perhaps it's a response to a change in climate.

Another potential problem associated with climate change was that a timing mismatch between predator and prey could also cause a significant decline in species for both predator and prey. Because of the delicate complexity of food webs it is likely that more and more problems among species will arise as climate changes worsen.

Byfield identities Bob Black and Lorelle Campbell then spoke about the role of fruit eating doves and pigeons in maintaining the health of the rainforests of Byfield, on the Capricorn Coast north of Yeppoon. The Byfield rainforests are an isolated remnant in an otherwise drier bio-region between the SE Qld rainforests and the rainforests that occur around the Mackay Highlands and Airlie Beach.

Byfield rainforests contain some species from both southern and northern rainforests, but more species are common with rainforests to the north. This may be explained by migrating fruit pigeons and fruit doves coming down from the north each year. Though all three areas had many plant species in common they noted that trees bearing very large fruit were conspicuously absent from the Byfield rainforest, Bob and Lorelle believe this is due to the absence of large fruit eating animals such as Cassowaries.

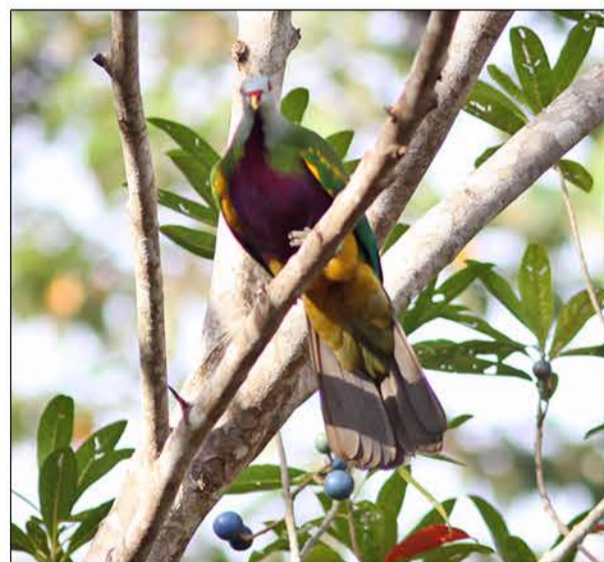
Bob and Lorelle further explored the symbiotic partnership between plants and birds by examining more closely their inter-relationship in the Byfield rainforest, that is; plants as a food source for birds, and birds as a seed vector for plants.

The Byfield rainforests contain a high diversity and density of Lauraceae species – a genus which have fruit spread by rainforest pigeons, in fact many of the species at Byfield are dependent on fruit pigeons and other frugivores for seed dispersal. Bob and Lorelle suggest that the birds are responsible for the establishment and continued health of the rainforest in the area. Without the birds many patches of forest wouldn't have established and without those patches of forest there may not be as many fruit pigeons such as wompoo pigeons and rose crown fruit doves in the area.

BYFIELD FRUIT DOVES



ROSE-CROWNED FRUIT-DOVE



WOMPOO FRUIT-DOVE



ANDREW DINWOODIE INTRODUCING BOB AND LARELLE