

Day 1
Wednesday, 11th February
Territory Wildlife Park & Riyala

Our group of 20 safarists met John Sinclair at the Darwin Transit Centre at 8 am this morning. As we drove to Riyala, John told us a bit about Ian Morris, our environmental guide. Ian who is an authority on birds, frogs and lizards, also knows a great deal about flora and mammals too. Ian's parents were missionaries and he spent time with his aunt and uncle who were missionaries on Elcho Island. This is Ian's 34th wet season in the Top End. From 1970 he spent about seven years teaching on Elcho Island. He speaks the Yolgnu language and has been made part of the Aboriginal community there. He went on to become a ranger at Kakadu and trained the Aboriginal rangers there. For the past seven years or so he has been a freelance consultant, choosing projects which involve Aboriginal people, the environment of the Territory, and education.

Ian's name is listed on the credits of many Australian wildlife documentaries, and he has just finished a book on frogs and lizards. We called at Riyala, a property Ian shares with his friends, about 45 kilometre south of Darwin, where we left our bags because we are staying the night here. .

This 20 acre property is set up as a field studies centre, used by school, church and other groups. The Elizabeth River flows through it on the way to Darwin. The people of the Elizabeth Valley have 20 acre farms and many grow mangoes. They are surrounded by 320-acre cattle properties which fatten cattle for the live export industry to South-east Asia.



White - bellied Sea-eagle — Janet Hassall

We spent most of the day at the Territory Wildlife Park at Berry Springs. 400 hectares (1000 acres) of bushland have been developed into a variety of habitats for a diverse range of fauna. At about 10 am we watched raptors perform for food rewards from 2 guides. A White-breasted sea-eagle, a black breasted buzzard and a barking owl swooped into the arena. The buzzard impressed us by fetching a

stone to crack open a hollow plaster egg for a meat reward. This tool-using behaviour is innate.

Later the guides exhibited various birds for us to photograph. These included rufous owl, brahminy kite, wedge tailed eagle, baza, and osprey. After that Ian took us for a walk past various macropods, which included red wallabies suffering ear irritation from the humidity (I know how they feel). We also saw black walleroos, agile and antilopine walleroos.

Aboard a little train, we passed exotic animals such as buffaloes, banteng cattle and deer. We also spotted some dingoes, whose status as an animal introduced 3000 to 6000 years ago, places them somewhere between the "foreign invaders" and the native animals.

We left the train at the aquarium and spent a cool happy time looking at fish, turtles, fresh and saltwater crocodiles and stingrays. The cool tunnel wound past glass enclosures set up as various ecosystems, complete with the right plants, logs and imitation rocks, to resemble rockholes, freshwater streams, salty rivers and mangrove estuaries. I was thrilled by the tunnel above which you could watch the tiny mouth and eyes of a huge stingray swishing a few feet above your head. The saltwater croc lay very still, but Ian told us the keepers regularly play games with it, hiding its food to force it to exercise its body and brain. Perhaps Fearless Leader will hide our happy hour snacks if we get a bit listless.

The next thrill was the aviaries, which were set up in a similar way, with netted enclosures resembling different habitats such as woodland, monsoon forest, mangrove swamp, and so on. The birdwatchers were thrilled to see a large variety of birds which they could never see elsewhere. Birds seen included forest kingfisher, chestnut breasted mannikin, green pygmy geese, buff banded rail, gouldian finch, little curlew, blackwinged stilt, rose crowned fruit dove, star finches, pictorella mannikin, rainbow pitta, hooded parrots, channel billed cuckoo, and pheasant coucal. The last aviary was huge with enough room for birds to fly. We observed them at various height levels.

After lunch Ian took us through the displays of Arthropods and reptiles. Glass fronted enclosures showed wonders such as the Oenpelli python, chameleon dragon, king brown snake, water python, children's python, taipan, northern death adder, and common tree snake. A head keeper, Grant Husband took us into the back room which smelt like fish but Grant said it was probably snake poo. He showed us snakes, frogs, and a giant cave gecko with a tail like velcro.

Our final treat was the nocturnal house where we saw Top End and Desert enclosures with mammals, and birds. I was thrilled to see rare mammals such as the Carpenterian rock rat, which is only found on some islands in the Gulf of Carpentaria. I also loved little creatures such as the common planigale, the tiniest carnivorous marsupial which catches and eats creatures larger than itself. Part of the fun was spotting animals in the dark. One saw nothing and then suddenly there would be a dangling tail or a pair of quivering ears.

On the way back to Riyala Ian talked to us about the seemingly insoluble cane toad problem. Before dinner he took us for a walk to the Elizabeth River and told us how a saltwater crocodile came up the river one wet season. Ian picked it up and held it for a teacher to photograph. The croc hated being held and took off downstream, never to be seen again, and so Ian lost a valuable teaching aid.



Basking — Janet Hassall

Day 2
Thursday, 12th February
Litchfield National Park

We left Riyala at 9.am heading for Batchelor, home of the TAFE for Aboriginal learning. Along the way Ian told us about fire management practices of the Aboriginal people, at present not being followed as efficiently as in Kakadu. He spoke of using mosaic burning (small non-adjacent areas), and cool burning which occurred when burning was done regularly and at the right

time of the year, ie the wet season. Bad burning involved hot burns conducted in the dry season and when there was too much undergrowth such that burning could be unchecked in the absence of water. This means the intense heat kills many of the trees and fauna. Ian also talked of the life cycle of the native sorghum (speargrass).

We passed the turn off to Rum Jungle and learnt of the mistakes made in its operation and the effect on the Finnis River. Ian felt that the mining industry in the NT will be more enlightened in future operations because of this.

We stopped for morning tea at the Termite Mounds Display and boardwalk. We were impressed by the Cathedral termite mounds (arising deep in the clay below) and Magnetic termite mounds (approx. 12deg off magnetic N).

At Florence Falls most of the group had a swim. Ian spotted a Short-eared Rock Wallaby and Bill saw a Black Palmed Monitor. Next stop was Wangi Falls .and lunch. The falls were in full flow - no swimming allowed. An awesome sight! The spray from the falls made for a comfortable roost in the trees nearby for a Black Fruit Bat colony. (The largest bats in Australia.)

On to the bus again to Tolmer Falls past the Silver Cycads and then a walk along the top of the escarpment to the viewing platform. Swimming is no longer allowed in the pool below the falls as the rare Orange Horseshoe Bat and Ghost Bats have been found to use the cave behind the falls as a nursery. It was a relief to everybody that the walk back to the bus was easier than the walk to the Falls.

Buley Rock Holes offered us all another lovely dip (and only a 50m walk). After this full steam to Batchelor, the pub closed at 5.00pm but a year ago so no whisky for the hopeful. Filled the tank at Adelaide River and discovered the brakes of the trailer were smoking. (but the pub was open and whisky was bought), so all was well.

Straight ahead then to Pine Creek while Ian talked about the advance of the Cane Toad. It seems we are witnessing an advancing catastrophe for our native fauna because of the toxicity of adult toads, their eggs and the tadpoles. Only metamorphs are non-toxic. Any native creature which ingests the Toad in its toxic stages seems to die quite quickly.

Other interesting info – the lowest temperature recorded at Riyala was 4.5deg. The two most common trees seen over the last 2 days are the Woolly Butt *Eucalyptus minneata* (the half bark tree), and *E tetradonta* the Stringy Bark.





Earl Gano panning for gold — Janet Hassall

Day 3
Friday, 13th February
Pine Creek – Edith Falls

Another overcast Territory morning, but all starters seemed cheery at a leisurely breakfast. Kay's enthusiastic wanderings produced an acacia dunnii quite appropriately near the toilets (dunnies!) This plant was like a big wattle flower with elephant ear leaves (Janet will do a sketch for us later)

A latish departure as our Intrepid Guide struggled through the solid porridge leftovers, then off we went to Gun Alley for Earl Gano's wonderful explanation of the history of gold finds and mining in the local area. His story telling was gripping enough and then he would break into his own rhyming tales, one of our favourites being the Digger's Woes. He then demonstrated his steam-driven stamper and explained the gold extraction procedures using this ancient machine. We then all had a go with the sluices and pans and were thrilled to find our own tiny specks of gold.

We reluctantly left our generous host and travelled on, following the railway line as Ian regaled us with further tales from Earl's colourful life. Arriving at Nitmuluk National Park some of us cooled off with a quick plunge near Edith Falls then lunch for the energy to tackle the optional hike up into the sandstone country and a further plunge in the back eddies of the upper reaches of the falls. A timely 'monsoon event' cooled us down even further for the return hike, cup of tea (for Glad) and then onto the bus for the trip home.

Great excitement! A pair of Hooded Parrots were spotted and we slowed abruptly to observe further. Now for the tickers-off – all we now need to see are some Gouldian Finches whose precarious existence has us all worried for their future.

Back at camp, Happy Hour inspired Ian to lure us off to an old mine adit with the promise of catching the departure of the ghost bats for their nightly forage. Intrepid Guide then disappeared into the gloom to find the resident (fictitious?) olive python and chase out the bats. Some time later, as we waited with bated breath and mozzie bites, he returned snake-less, but happy, as he was sure the bat numbers were stable and assured us that the bats would follow him soon after. By now it was dark so we felt rather than saw the ghostly shapes zip past us. Luckily Ian recorded the bats conversations in the cave and will edit them for our later enjoyment. We hurried back down the hillside for a wonderful John's special evening meal.



Jim at Edith Falls — Janet Hassall

Day 4
Saturday, 14 February
Pine Creek to Coinda

The day started with recognition of Janet and Cecilia's birthdays on St Valentine's Day. We experienced some monsoonal moments of increasing intensity and duration. Wet loading of the trailer was carried out with speed and alacrity, with departure at 9.00 am.

On the lookout for Hooded Parrots, we stopped at the racecourse (Pussy Cat Flats) and observed these and three finch species, Beeeaters and Peaceful Doves. This confirmed local knowledge regarding the whereabouts of the parrots.

Ian pointed out a small group of the most endangered cycad *Cycas conferta*.

Ian amused us with his tale about the AdRail dams providing deluxe accommodation every 500 metres for toads travelling to Darwin. Other stories were

the Denver zookeepers' snake and bandicoot encounters, the museum field trip to find water buffalo, Ollie and the buffalo, and the Agile wallaby/dingo/tour group/crocodile incident.

We walked a kilometre through basalt clay to Moline Rockhole where safarists enjoyed a cool swim in aerated waters. We proceeded to the park entrance and lunch at the Mary River Ranger Station. Another monsoon moment ensued.

Leaving the trailer behind, we bowled along a gravel road, coming to a watery causeway on Kambolgie Creek. After much deliberation, Fearless Leader drove through on to Yurmikmik. We walked up Boulder Creek where some swam and all returned on one side or the other.

An hour and a half later, after retrieving the trailer, we arrived at Cooinda for the night. The bus was VERY dirty, much to the consternation of the cleaning gang.

Other exciting sightings at various times during the day included: a frill-necked lizard, a keelback snake (unfortunately demolished by the bus), and partridge pigeons.



Janet Hassall



Day 5
Sunday, 15 February
Cooinda to Jabiru

An account in verse of another day in Paradise.

In generous mood did Sinclair, John
A pleasurable jaunt decree
Where Alligator river ran
Through National Park, our guiding man,
The fabled Longnose he.

At 5.00 am in Gagadju
As ankle-deep we sought the loo.
Wild horses snorted like crocodiles,
And raindrops drummed upon the tiles
Then pink-tinged skies turned blue.

Afloat, we found the Crocs had fled
The flood, were hidden now, widespread,
But still the wondrous birds and flowers
Kept us enchanted there for hours
'til back to land we sped.

A Lotus Bird held all in awe
Walking on water with each toe
Spread wide upon a Lilly floor,
O how could any ask for more?
A magic moment on the flow.

We stopped for lunch at Nourlangie
Under the spreading toothache tree
Then struggled up the sweaty track
And heard about a yam attack,
At the "Rock-Art" gallery.

In Jabiru by ten past four
The Supermarket's close-barred door
Confounds Ef El, he tells us then
No food, no wine 'til who knows when
Oh what a bloody bore.

But still the day ends up on song,
Ef el can really do no wrong
We ate our fill, we drank the lot
About tomorrow we forgot
And finished with Ambrosia.

Tomorrow, will we take to flight?
Don't really know, we think we might.
We could soar over Jim Jim Falls,
Or Oenpelli's far-flung halls.
Let's hope the weather's bright.

With humble apologies to Samuel Taylor Coleridge. May he turn but gently.

Day 6
Monday, 16 February
Around Jabiru

We started the day with all safarists in the bus, with our packed lunches, on time as instructed except for our Intrepid Guide who was still in the shower. Immediately all the ladies offered to go in and get him out! He finally clambered on board to our cheering and we began our scenic drive to the airport where upon arrival we all sat around pondering what to do next. It was found that we could not get a permit to Kunbarllanjja (Oenpelli) as our contact was he himself on holidays. So onto Plan B where the Kunbarllanjja trip is now scheduled for Wednesday and today, at 5 minutes notice, we embarked on our keenly anticipated flight over Jim Jim Falls and Twin Falls. This meant we could save 4 Kakadu Air pilots from a morning of tedium and boredom with the paperwork.

We were all weighed and a number of us were quite surprised at how heavy our cameras were. A young pilot gave us a briefing of our planned route and one of our number (who shall remain nameless, as our Fearless Leader says) demanded to know if he was old enough. Four planes took off in single file in excellent weather conditions with only patchy cloud. The magnificent vista opened up for us of the escarpment, Death Adder Valley and numerous small falls with the climax being the circuits around the spectacular Jim Jim Falls and Twin Falls. We flew back over the Ranger uranium mine and could see the huge open pit, part filled with water and the other water management ponds. Apart from some potential buffalo glimpsed by one of us, the only wildlife seen was on the runway - one scrofulous dingo known as a "leatherback". Ian later told us that such animals when appropriately treated with a miracle drug by a vet can miraculously return to a healthy looking specimen within a week.

We returned to our base at Jabiru for morning tea & to attend to the removal of Janet's stitches. Even though Robert and I-Yu, two vets on our safari, volunteered to perform the necessary operation, Fearless Leader took her to the Medical Centre.



With Janet all newly patched up, we headed for our afternoon's exercise at Gubara. Not wasting our packed lunches, we ate them at the point of departure of our walk. Our Intrepid Leader immediately disappeared in search of Leichhardt's grasshopper and was not to be seen again until we all returned to the bus after our swim. With the words of Ian ringing in our ears about a 1.6 kilometre walk into the Gubara pools, we set off. Three kilometres later, we arrived. This hour or so on the track was one of the sunniest of our entire trip, so we were all very relieved to finally see the sign Gubara Pools 250m. And they were worth the effort of getting there. Much fun was had with the massaging cascades. Even more fun was had at the second pool higher up on a tributary. Those who reached this relaxed in a very warm spa waterfall. Eventually, the All Aboard call rang out, bringing us out of the cooling water and into the sprinkling rain. Thunder rumbled around us on the walk back and another "monsoon event" was upon us before we had reached the bus.

Moving onto Nawurlandja just down the road we all opted for the short walk up to the lookout, forgoing the 750m walk to the Rock Wallaby ??? hole for another swim. The gentle rain continued and we had a view out over Anbangbang Billabong right across the flood plain that was covered in a misty cloud of monsoonal rain. By this time most of us were sheltering in the lee of a large rock just like the elusive rock wallabies. Some were content to stay here, others wished to go on to higher things and view the rock art further up the Nawurlandja rock. After a scramble thru' a rocky area we found a long gallery, shallow overhung roof, with many stick and line figures quite different to most of those previously seen. Ian said there were new sites being found all the time.

Happy hour now beckoned so we returned to Jabiru, our evening meal and a frog walk with our Intrepid Guide. Eight of us (either dedicated or insane!) drove to the Magela Creek crossing which was flooded as usual at this time and after a few minutes Ian found not just one but two file snakes, the larger about five feet long. The first was a little restless while held, presumably due to having just swallowed a fish but the second was extremely docile and allowed Jill to hold it in a coiled-up shape on her hands while we felt its raspy skin and Ian took photos. Ian drove back along the Pine Creek road, pausing to listen for golfball frogs (while the rest of us tried to stay awake with varying success) until eventually finding a swampy area of promise. Ian soon found one but in spite of all our efforts at mimicry, he remained silent and deflated from the golfball shape to a rather flat and wobbly jelly-like form. Their calls are a quite haunting sound

which Ian described as stunning and eerie when surrounded by a group of competing frogs. These frogs exude a sticky substance from their backs which is being researched for medical uses including cementing of bone fractures. More frog searching went on with several being identified and some of us being stuck in the mud. A weary lot drove home about 11 pm.



Robin Hood and Friar Tuck — FL

Day 7
Tuesday, 17 February
Around Jabiru

This morning we visited the Bowali Visitor Centre which is the park HQ. Sylvia at the desk greeted Ian Morris warmly and wished him a happy birthday which embarrassed us as we were not supposed to let on that we knew. We were entranced by a relief model under perspex set into the floor showing the whole of Kakadu in relief.

The visitor centre is arranged in a circular indoor walk showing the different habitats of the park. These are the Stone Country, Savannah Woodlands, Billabongs, Southern Ridges, Floodplains, Lowland Monsoon Forests, and Tidal Flats.

The Stone Country was once a sea cliff stretching for 500 kilometre. It is 30 to 300 metres high but is eroding by up to one metre every 100 years, leaving outliers such as Ubirr and Nourlangie Rock. Its scattered rock overhangs and caves were home to the Gukburlerri Aboriginal people for hundreds of generations. This scarp is home to the black wallaroo, chestnut quilled rock pigeon, and Leichhardt grasshopper. Also there are many art sites. The *allosyncarpia ternata*, which we saw at Riyala and Gubara, provides shade for other monsoon forest plants in crevices in the rock. This large tree of Gondwanan origin is endemic to Kakadu.

Savannah woodlands make up 80% of Kakadu, and mainly feature eucalypts and tall grasses. There are many flowering plants which are helped by cool patchy burns. These also

enable seed eating ground birds to feed. Termite mounds, and green ant nests also feature.

The **Billabong** country includes floodplains, billabongs, rivers and coastal swamps. These enduring bodies of water are vital in the dry season. They are home to file snakes, fish such as barramundi and herring, turtles, and lily roots, all used as food by Aboriginal people. In recent times salvinia infestations have posed a massive threat, but the CSIRO and ANCA are working to control it.

The **Southern Ridges** contain a diversity of habitats and many endemic plants and animals. This is also where the sickness country is found, with radioactive rocks, and other toxic minerals. There was a geiger counter sitting on a rock, ticking away, to demonstrate the danger. Aboriginal people who frequented hot spots developed skin lesions, the first symptom of radioactive poisoning.

The **Floodplains** which are dry and cracked in the dry seasons, transform into lush wetlands in the wet. Millions of the world's waterbirds feed and breed here. The floodplains also provide Aboriginal people with the richest food sources for yams, aquatic foods, and meats. Saltwater crocodiles live here and the floodplains are a Ramsar site for migratory birds.

The **Lowland Monsoon Forests** grow in small isolated patches. Many of the trees are deciduous in dry seasons to conserve moisture.

The **Tidal Flat** section explained that although the beaches look idyllic, they contain dangers such as crocodiles, box jellyfish, and sharks.

After this interesting display, some of us thrashed the plastic in the gift shop while others enjoyed cappuccinos.

At about 10.30 am we boarded a flat bottomed tin boat and travelled through Magela Creek to reach the art site at Ubirr. This is because the road is under water at this time of year. Our Aboriginal guide Don only gained his boating license two days ago and did a skilful job of navigating us through the tricky floodwaters. We passed through an underwater paperbark forest. We also saw water pandanus and freshwater mangrove with its golfball sized, four-sided fruit and occasional reddish flowers. Aboriginal people use the silver paperbarks in ground ovens to steam cook and flavour their meat. Saponin from the paperbarks is used by women and children for catching fish by stunning them. It is quieter and safer than the dynamite used by some whites. Traditionally Aboriginal men used paperbark rafts to spear fish, and the women gathered lily roots.

I was astonished by the lack of mosquitoes. One would think a flooded paperbark swamp in the wet would be ideal for mossies. Bill Bygott said it is because the water is too fast moving.

We entered a wide billabong edged with buffalo grass which is able to rise and fall with the water levels. It is called Hymenacne (spelling?). To remember it, we thought of a virgin with bad pimples. On a high dead branch we saw a whitebellied sea eagle. Ian told us how in the early days of the park, he surveyed this and other billabongs for crocodiles. While sitting in a 12 foot metal punt, he saw a big old male 20 foot. This was very scary.

At 11.30 am we transferred from the boat to a bus, driven by the man whose voice we heard on the plane CDs yesterday. Ian told us how the ancestor spirit Mabuyu came here in a paperbark raft. He pointed out a sloping slab of rock on top of a ridge which is said to be Mabuyu's raft. Ian explained that there is a northern outlier of the escarpment which is a radioactive anomaly. The proposed Jabiluka mine, in this area, is currently owned by Rio Tinto, who won't mine it for a number of reasons.

Archaeologists who studied this area in the 1960s dated occupation to 20,000 year but they cannot measure earlier occupation. The ancient footwalk highways (walking trails) are now overgrown. Aboriginal geographical taxonomy is very detailed here, with a name and a story for every rock outcrop. A split in the rock was made by a female white cockatoo. However as the old people from traditional times die, it will be hard to keep this traditional of knowledge a living one.

At 11.55 am we stopped for lunch at the Ubirr art site. Usually there are about 250 people here at a time, but because the road is cut there are only three buses here today. At the art sites we saw a rock face with a red ochre painting of Mabuyu who came in the paperbark raft. This famous image is about 5,000 years old. Then we spent time looking at the great barramundi frieze, high on the wall of a large rock overhang. Large fish of several species, along with turtles and other images are painted, mainly in red and yellow ochre. Some people looked at them through binoculars to see the very fine detail of this X-ray style art.

We looked at other art sites, mostly under low overhangs, fenced off so one needs to lie on the ground by the fence to see them.



X-ray style paintings at Ubirr main gallery

Around the corner from the barramundi gallery we were thrilled to see pretty little short-eared rock wallabies. They know they are safe behind the fence and were perfectly relaxed in our presence. People with good zoom lenses got some lovely shots of their characteristic shoulder stripes of black, white and tan. There were lots of rock wallaby droppings near the fence in front of the barramundi art site, and the fence seems to have been chewed, presumably by the rock wallabies, perhaps to sharpen their teeth since their food is high in silica.

We climbed up to the lookout above the art galleries, and enjoyed the 360° views of the floodplain and the rocky ridges. Some people saw lizards, and on his way down **Bill Bygott was excited to see an alleged keelback snake.** (Editor, please don't unbold this startling fact)

On the boat trip back, our Aboriginal boat driver Don demonstrated spearthrowing and didgeridu playing. In the submerged paperbark forest, the light through the pinky cream paperbarks and eau-de-nil green freshwater mangroves forced us to take more photos. Just before the end of the boat trip we saw some large bony bream leaping, then some Aboriginal children swimming where the water met the dry road.

Before the second boat journey, Ian told us that it is thought that Kakadu used to have a much higher Aboriginal population. Leichhardt's journals support this. White vices and diseases greatly reduced their numbers. The huge number of art sites suggest that in the past, the area provided people with the nutrition and leisure needed to develop the very fine art which we saw today.

In the evening, we had a party for Ian's 53rd birthday, and his old colleague and friend Greg Miles told us fascinating stories about their past in Kakadu. Rodney Kennett told us about the threat cane toads pose to the northern quoll, which provided a troubling ending to a jolly party.



Twin Falls



Edith Falls — Janet Hassall

Day 8
Wednesday, 18th February
Injalak Art etc.

8.45am start for early flight from Jabiru airport to Oenpelli using four planes. All went well but for one plane which had a problem with its nose wheel when coming in to land. We learnt that three clunks mean all wheels are down but this one only made two no matter how many times the pilot repeated the exercise. Robert was asked to use his considerable strength to operate the system manually but this made no difference. A pen knife was applied by the pilot to sort the wiring but to no avail.

For a while we were heading for Darwin but in the end it was Jabiru and full instructions in the brace position etc. All ended well with pilot Lindsay bringing us in smoothly....a wiring problem afterall. We then took another plane to catch up with the others at Oenpelli.

The air route was along margins of the Arnhemland escarpment and the East Alligator River floodplain system. There were some deep gorges into the escarpment with large green trees presumably *Allosyncarpia turnata*.

The Injalak Art Centre an Aboriginal owned and operated, non-profit community organisation was of interest to all with art on exhibition and sale at reasonable prices and similarly woven items. It was interesting to see pandanus being stripped and prepared for weaving and also painting.

Ian found out more about the stories of Oenpelli. There are three rocky hills round the town – Arrguluk the goose nest, Inyalak which is the story place for the fresh water Long Tom, and Nimpapirr the mountain with the story of the leech, a long hill to the NE.

Some Kunwinjku words:

- Whistling Kite – Marram
- Willie Wag Tail – Djigididjigidi
- Leech – Balatj or Wurrgalbal
- Frog – Gotbolbok

While we were watching a local artist was painting the story of the echidna and the turtle – Ngarrbek and Almangiyi. The echidna was one day minding the young of Almangiyi the Long Neck Turtle, got hungry and ate him. In retaliation Almangiyi threw spears at Ngarrbek the echidna and these are seen today as the echidna's spines.

The Art Centre stands beside a long grey rock about 2.5m long where the Centre vehicles drive. It is Manmakawarre Rock – the Salmon Catfish.

Some went to the billabong nearby where one species of frog was seen and heard in abundance. - *Littoria dahli*. Dahl's Aquatic Frog. It has been about 6 years since Ian has heard these frogs and he got a recording of them.

We arrived in batches at Jabiru for return to our base and a rather late lunch. The return trip followed the Magela Creek floodplain system which was a sea of green aquatic vegetation. We had had a perfect day for flying up to this point, but when most decided to go for a swim a thunderstorm brought rain - a heavy tropical downpour.

Happy Hour saw many industrious souls honing their party pieces for our final night concert when the depth of talent within our group was revealed.

Rockhole — Janet Hassall





Day 9
Thursday, 19th February
Jabiru to Darwin

This last day of our Safari has come around only too quickly!

Despite a later than usual departure at nine o'clock, it seemed that most safarists were up early; packing bags, and gathering and chatting for the last time around the breakfast table. It was noted that our much-loved *Intrepid Guide*, was also up and about earlier than usual, finishing a perfectly cooked porridge before eight o'clock! Maybe it was the glorious day that woke him, maybe it was "*Riyala Dreaming*".

Fearless Leader's "*All Aboard*" came just before nine o'clock and the bus started moving at nine sharp. The ex-pat Swiss is finding this new punctuality a somewhat worrying trend in a country where perpetual delays in the public transport system of a certain city may mean, not missing the train or bus. Lateness does have certain advantages.

Heading west on the *Arnhem Highway*, across the *South and East Alligator River*, our *Intrepid Guide* – also known as *Uncle Longnose*, the story and origin of this title still a mystery to some of us – continued to present most interesting facts about *Kakadu*, and the delicate balance needed to sustain wildlife in this area, stressing the importance of correct burning, and the disastrous consequences of wide firebreak corridors between habitats around privately owned properties.

Colourful stories of our *Intrepid Guide's* challenging and often hair-raising encounters with local four-legged characters, in the middle of nowhere and in the middle of the night, kept us in suspense and amused.

We stopped at the prominent big Banyan tree west of Kakadu Resort, where, after morning tea, we embarked on the *Gu-ngarre Walk*, which led us on soft ground deeper into the monsoon forest and woodlands. We listened to a diversity of birds calling against the constant background

sound of insects. We also noted and observed the vegetation in the monsoon forest, which would provide an abundance of bush tucker to the local Aboriginal people.

As is usual in a monsoon forest, the mozzies were just waiting for tourists. These little pests seem to be very persistent, having a complete disregard for sophisticated products such as *Aeroguard* and *Rid*, even the *Tropical Strength* variety. Buzzing around, they had a feast, ensuring that bare legs and arms ended up with a few more spots and swellings, accompanied by the inevitable itch that keeps one awake at night. Nevertheless, the walk was very enjoyable, especially when the canopy of the vegetation was closing in, providing shelter from the hot sun, together with the occasional cooler breeze.

We stopped for lunch at *Windows on the Wetlands*, an interesting-looking observation and exhibition platform building, allowing excellent views of the surrounding areas. Magnificent cloud formations in a blue sky completed a spectacular scenery.

Continuing on, we traveled to *Fogg Dam*, a former, and failed, rice growing experiment, which now provides an ideal habitat to birds and reptiles, and waters covered with water lilies. We observed Goannas and birds, to this somewhat ignorant layperson "things with wings", however by now recognizing with confidence at least Jabirus and magpie geese ☺. Not much, but it's a start! Two Jabirus were most obliging, posing patiently and with poise for photographers, before flying off to another appointment.

Later on, we stopped just one more time for a monsoon vine forest walk, which led us on a noisy gravel path and then a board walk to a clearing and billabong. Glad certainly had the most fun. Lamenting her clean sneakers were getting wet and dirty, gallant Knight Robert came to the rescue: He piggybacked Glad through the deepest and muddiest parts, and the event was duly recorded on candid camera, as well as a still camera.

Again, we listened to birds' calls, watched them, took photos of fungi and things, fought off another army of mozzies, but allowed a few leeches to hitch a ride - although *Fearless Leader* was adamant he did not want any of them on board!

Driving towards Darwin, a storm was brewing up; but apparently *Gudjewg* is not the right time for spectacular electric storms: Must come back some other time for this!

Much later than planned we dropped off *Intrepid Guide* – who assured *Fearless Leader*, that it was only about a half-hour drive from *Riyala* to

town, with only a few traffic lights always on green – at his home.

Well, “*about half an hour*” and “*a few traffic lights always on green*” may be open to interpretation. Still, we had enough time to have a Sydney-Water-Restriction-Regulation shower of 1 _ minutes, before being picked up right on time by *Fearless Leader* for our farewell dinner at the Darwin wharf. And there, our safari concluded with many hugs and kisses and some teary eyes...

Kakadu in the Wet was a unique experience!

Thank you, *Fearless Leader* and *Intrepid Guide* for organizing and leading this wonderful safari! It has been a privilege indeed to be accompanied by such enthusiastic, knowledgeable and entertaining leaders.

(This safarist will certainly be back one day with a pair of binoculars and may be spending a bit less time on daydreaming – may be...).



IMPRESSIONS OF KAKADU

Jill Slatter

At the wheel our fearless leader
On his left intrepid guide
Down the highway
For Gudjewg in Kakadu.
Travelled over limestone country
Wondrous aquifer below
Learnt ways of sorghum
And of cool mosaic fire.

Land of waterfall and swimming
Hatchling dragon, silver cycad
Flowing water over
Reeds and rocks and tree roots,
Shelter for the life below
Swamp bloodwood in red flower
Spray-cooled bats by Edith Falls
Abundant frogs give me joy
Golf ball frogs
Gentle file snake.

Ancient people with a culture
Of singing, story and rock face artwork
That gives us insight
Not understanding.
The land fared better under their care
Than the settler of recent past.

Diverse species, lots endemic
Make for wonder.
And “modern” people with love of “new”
Could take pause to ponder
At the oldness and persistence
Of the things in Kakadu.

Jo's Kakadu Diary

Jo Benyon

In the wet we went to Kakadu,
In all we number twenty two.
Our friends all said, “*How mad you are,
You'll melt, they'll send you home in a jar*”.
So here we are, we've had a ball,
And now I have to entertain you all.
Our leader is John, also known as FL,
By the end of the trip you know him well.
Our fantastic guide is Long-nose Ian,
He has an eye that is all seein',
He knows all about people, plants and birds,
And he's hardly ever lost for words.

Day 1

On day one we went to the Wildlife Park.
We saw an owl that has a dog-like bark.
Who breaks eggs with rocks? The black-breasted buzzard,
Its just amazing how he does it!
In the nocturnal house some didn't seem to know
They were supposed to put on a show.
Competing for the best display, who do you think won it?
Well, we gave the prize to the fat-tailed Dunnart.
You got the chance to have a shiny python
All around your body writhin'.
At Riyala, near the camp are bogs,
And we were kept awake by frogs.

Day 2

On day 2 we went to Litchfield Park,
Where lots of termites make their mark.
Termites design their mounds to keep them cool,
We humans have to jump into a pool.
When John says “*Be back at two*”, don't let it faze you,
Just go on and see sights that will amaze you.
Gamba grass has now gone feral
And put the native grass in peril.
Against the cane toads' army-like advance
The native animals don't stand a chance.
We had a little drama with the brakes,
Just for a minute we got the shakes,
But all was well, we soon got away
And were at Pine Creek late in the day.

Day 3

As a poet I can't compete with Earle,
But what the heck, I give it a birl.
We saw an example of a miner's dream,
An old, old engine powered by steam.
In goes rock in a great big lump,
Out comes dust after thump, thump, thump.
Armed with pans, Earle taught us to puddle.
Some people got into quite a muddle,
But with Earle's help, all had some success,
And flourished test tubes of gold, some more,
some less.

At Edith Falls, a sign said 'closed' but "*Bugger that*" said Doug
"*Do they take me for a mug?*
There's no danger here, I want a swim",
Soon all the rest had followed him.
"At dusk", said Ian, "bats come out and you have to see".
We went – the mozzies had a feast, and we were late for tea.

Day 4

My brain just wouldn't work today
So I haven't got very much to say.
Rain kept the temperature much more cool,
The mob went swimming in Moline Pool,
The afternoon went by quick, quick,
With a trip to Yurmikmik.

Day 5

At the lodge called Gagadju
You wade through mud to reach the loo.
Saw some birds on Yellow Water
Doing all the things they oughta.
Saw the nest of a whistling kite
In the dry the young took flight.
Another nest contained a darter,
Not the mutter but the vater.
Had our lunch at Nourlangie
Under the spreading toothache tree.
Then went the reverse of helter skelter
To the aboriginal rock shelter.

Day 6

On Monday morning the weather was bright
Making it possible to do our flight.
Four Cessnas took our motley crew
And over the Arnhem escarpment flew.
Over the Twins and Falls of Jim Jim
Where masses of water plunge over the rim rim.
And we were able to have a peep
At dark green trees in gorges deep.
Allosyncarpia ternata –
I put that in to sound much smarter!
On the track to Gabara saw lots of flowers,
The beauty of pools continues to wow us.
Ian was up to his clever tricks,
Making 3 kilometres turn into six.
It rained again, incessant damp
As the Wet Season tightens its clamp.
We've all learned what it's like to be
In 100% humidity.

Day 7

Bound for the visitors' centre to see an old canoe
Late for the bus was YOU KNOW WHO!
Young Don steered the boat on Magela Creek,
About all the old ways he did speak.
We studied the sandstones with paintings galore,
And of the marsupials, saw 3 out of 4.
Coming back, Don gave us a tune on his didgeridoo,
Pete tried blowing, but it sounded like "*Phoo*"!

Day 8

On the flight to Oenpelli
Poor Doug's stomach turned to jelly.
A problem with the landing wheels,
Doug's whole life before him unreels.
The rest of us went on to see
The art of Aborigine.
Barramundi or Broлга, I can't decide,
'Til goanna on bark becomes my pride.
That's enough arty,
Lets get on with the party!

Day 9

An imposing building on a hilltop stands,
Turns out to be Window on the Wetlands.
A young lady Ranger with reverence clear,
Was overheard saying "*Ian Morris is here!*"
At Humptydoo they tried to grow rice,
Thousands of geese said "*Isn't this nice,*
Tons of food, we've never had it so good,
Let's stay here forever and bring up a brood".
A meal at the wharf made our trip complete,
And I'd just like to add, "*Good luck, Sue and Pete!*"



Yurmikmik — Boulder Creek