

Scientist: Dr. Steve van Dyck -Senior Curator of Mammals and Birds (Biodiversity Program)

Topic: The Mahogany glider

My name's Steve Van Dyck. I'm Senior Curator of Mammals and Birds at the Queensland Museum and I'm just going to say a few things about the work that we did with the Mahogany Glider not so long ago.

In 1986, when the Queensland Museum was moving from the old site over at Gregory Terrace to here, we found three very old skins and here's one of them here that I haven't seen before. When we looked at these, we knew they were superficially similar to sugar glider but much, much bigger of course, with a very, very long thin tail.

When we looked at the labels associated with these three specimens, we found that they had the initials of a collector, "K.B", there was a locality there saying they were found at a place called Mt. Echu, and the date was about 1886. So for three or four years we did some research about these rather cryptic comments on the label. We found out the "K.B" was Kendall Broadbent, the museum collector at the time. We found out Mt. Echu was Mt. Echo which was a mountain probably 20 kilometres west of Ingham and because things hadn't changed too much since those days, those very early days, we decided to go and look for this animal to see if it was still there.

For four years we climbed up all the mountains around Mt. Echo and Cardwell and found nothing until finally, rather than look up the mountains, we went down to the steamy lowlands where all the time the animal still existed and we were able to find the animal alive and well in a very small range, but still, nevertheless, it still occurred alive in that area. We applied for an ARC grant from the Federal Government and got that for three years to study their status and their requirements and we found that this animal was indeed limited to a tiny strip of coastal lowland woodland, not rainforest, woodland, which was fast being decimated for sugar cane, pineapples, cattle and bananas. So this animal has been found but yet is critically endangered.

This is not the only story that's occurred in the Queensland Museum dealing with old specimens. We've just come back this week from looking out west for a very rare mouse that hasn't been seen since 1936 but we know from analysis of owl pellets, that it has been found in these owl pellets as late as 2001. So, there are still lots of very exciting discoveries to be made in Queensland.

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