

## **Eungella – the land of clouds revisited**

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# EUNGELLA – THE LAND OF CLOUDS REVISITED

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The rainforests of the Eungella massif are well known as centres of endemism and species richness. The name Eungella was adopted from local indigenous languages by the first European residents. First visited by professional biologists in 1922, the region has attracted scientific attention ever since. The Eungella Biodiversity Study in 2012–2014 attempted to place the many endemics into their wider ecological context. This compilation presents many of the results of that survey plus selected other contributions on the biology and ecology of this important conservation area.

Keywords: Eungella, Queensland, biodiversity

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The Clarke Range looms, mist shrouded and challenging, about 60 kilometres west of Mackay up the valley of the Pioneer River and, beyond, the unimaginatively named Cattle Creek. It is not clear who were the first Europeans to actually set boots upon the ground in what are now the rainforested tracts of Eungella National Park. Certainly Captain John Mackay and his party must have seen the distant shadows of the forested hills to the north-west when they encountered the junction of what is now the Pioneer (originally the Mackay) and Cattle Creek on the 21st of May, 1860. The party continued on down the Pioneer to be the first to reach the Mackay District from the landward side. Several earlier maritime expeditions had at least seen the coastal country from the sea. The subsequent development of the region as cattle and sugar country was rapid, with the first settlers arriving just two years after Captain Mackay's discovery. By 1866 the town of Port Mackay had a network of streets and buildings including stores and pubs, of varying repute, as well as dwellings on the south bank of the Pioneer. David Hay Dalrymple (one of the many complexly related Dalrymples and Dalrymple-Hays in the early history of the region) was the first mayor of Mackay elected in 1870, just a year after the town council was proclaimed.

The Eungella massif sits inland from Mackay in the hinterland of the Pioneer River. An area of great contrasts, it contains a green jewel of moist rainforest surrounded by brigalow scrublands.

Eungella is generally supposed to mean 'Land of Clouds' in the now virtually extinct Birri (also known as Garingbal) or Wiri languages. According to the

Indigenous Languages Map hosted by the State Library of Queensland's *Indigenous Languages* website<sup>a</sup>, the area that is now Eungella National Park and its surrounds was the traditional home of the Birri and Wiri peoples. The area that is now the Mackay region on the coast was the home of the Yuwi people.

The lease on what became the Eungella Station was first taken up in 1880 by the Barker Brothers, and *The Queenslander* of 24 January 1880 records the arrival of a stud bull for "Mr Barker of Eungella". There is no mention in any newspaper archive of the word 'Eungella' before 1880. Presumably the local name was adopted by the Barkers when the station was established. The subsequent story of the station is recorded in a transcript of a local history recording of the current proprietor, Darryl McEvoy, made by Del Cunningham in 2009.<sup>b</sup> The transcript contains no mention of the indigenous people of the area. Subsequently, in or about 1887, gold was discovered in the area and a mini-goldrush ensued<sup>c</sup> in what was termed the 'Eungella Goldfield'. So the name 'Eungella' was clearly entrenched well before any biological interest was shown in the region.

The area first came to the attention of biologists when it was visited by the Assistant (Queensland)

<sup>a</sup> Accessed at <https://www.slq.qld.gov.au/discover/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-cultures-and-stories/languages> on 23 July 2019.

<sup>b</sup> Transcript available on <http://history.eungella.com.au/Personal%20Accounts/files/Beef%20-%20Droving%20and%20the%20Dam.pdf> (accessed 23 July 2019).

<sup>c</sup> <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/84113264> (accessed 23 July 2019).

Government Botanist, William D. Francis, in 1922 (Francis, 1927). On that look-and-see visit, Francis compiled a list of trees from the region, noting in particular the abundance of red cedars and the unique admixture of subtropical and tropical species. Francis marvelled at the rainforest of the area, which he had accessed first by rail up the Pioneer Valley and, thence, by foot (or horseback) up the range to the area 'above Netherdale'. He also collected material which led to the description of perhaps the first Eungella species – the tree *Cryptocarya corrugata* (White & Francis, 1926) – although its range has been shown subsequently to include some of the more northerly mountains as well.

Since Francis's visit the area has, over time, attracted the attention of biologists and became renowned as a centre for endemism. Since its first, partial, gazettal as a National Park in 1936, the area has been visited by ever increasing numbers of specialists attracted by the isolated nature of this large area of rainforest and the likelihood of hitherto undescribed endemic species being found there. Perhaps its best known endemic is the Eungella honeyeater, *Bolemoreus hindwoodi*, which was formally distinguished from the bridled honeyeater (*B. frenatus*) as recently as 1983 (originally described by Longmore & Boles, 1983, as *Meliphaga hindwoodi*). Perhaps more remarkable among vertebrate endemics was the Northern gastric brooding frog (*Rheobatrachus vitellinus*), described by Mahoney, Tyler & Davies in 1984, when its extraordinary brooding behaviour was recorded. The species is now classed as extinct, no individuals having been seen since 1985 – a mere 12 months after the species' formal description. A further local endemic frog, the Eungella day frog (*Taudactylus engellensis*) occurred in the same streams and, for a time, was thought to have disappeared at the same time as the *Rheobatrachus* species. More recently, small remnant populations have been found. An additional species of frog and a number

of species of reptile are also endemic to the area (Stuart-Fox *et al.*, 2001; Sadler *et al.*, 2005; Hoser, 2014).

These charismatic vertebrates, however, are but the tip of the iceberg. A whole genus of pselaphid beetles bears the name *Eungella*. In addition, no fewer than 23 invertebrates bear the specific name *eungella*, and a further 15 are designated *eungellae*. These range from mites to millipedes, stoneflies to moths and, with just five exceptions, all are recorded so far only from the Eungella area. There are probably many more unique species whose describers gave them a name other than the readily searched-for *eungella* or *eungellae*<sup>d</sup> eponyms.

As part of the successful Eungella Biodiversity Study carried out in 2012–14, many taxa were sampled systematically over an elevational gradient from 200 m to 1200 m above sea level (Ashton *et al.*, this volume). This survey was unique in many ways but perhaps most notably because a substantial proportion of the fauna and flora of the study sites were targeted (rather than only endemics). The detailed scientific results are presented in this special issue of the *Proceedings of The Royal Society of Queensland*. In addition to a general description of the survey (including the vegetation), this issue includes detailed results on the birds, ants, dragonflies, pyraloid moths and gastropod molluscs surveyed. In addition I have invited further contributions from researchers with special interests in Eungella, even though they were not participants in the Eungella Biodiversity Survey. Accordingly, we have a contribution summarizing the history of the National Park, two contributions on the frogs of the region plus a thoughtful essay on the dynamic effects of recent fire events on the integrity of the Park and its invaluable forests.

<sup>d</sup> Searches for *eungella* and *eungellae* carried out in the *Atlas of Living Australia* <https://www.ala.org.au/mapping-and-analysis/>. Accessed 23 July 2019.

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