

Sunshine Coast Ecological Park – Maleny

"A place of cherished nature and ecological wonder for generations to discover and enjoy."

Project summary

The Sunshine Coast Ecological Park (SCEP) is being established on 65 hectares of land adjoining Mary Cairncross Scenic Reserve on Jinibara Country, Maleny. This once-in-a-generation project will balance ecological restoration with community recreation, creating a place of connection, culture, education and environmental stewardship.

Delivered in phases over several decades, the park will continue to grow with the support and involvement of our community.

Explore the vision and view the master plan on Council's [website](#).

Project update: What's been happening?

The project's early site investigation and design planning phase (2024-2029) continues, focusing on:

- site investigations and research
- early revegetation activities
- design development for elements of the Master Plan
- exploring potential partnerships and funding
- identifying ways for our community to stay involved now and into the future.



Nature's champions: 500 trees planted for a thriving future

These first steps are vital in understanding the site and ensuring the successful long-term delivery of the environmental and recreational precinct.

Since our [last update](#), restoration and research efforts have expanded, planning work has progressed, and collaboration with a range of stakeholders has continued as we work towards the delivery of this significant legacy project.

Restoring the landscape

Community tree planting

As part of the [Seven Years to Grow](#) initiative marking the countdown to the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games, 500 native trees were planted by the Friends of Mary Cairncross Association (FoMCA) members, Brisbane 2032 representatives, Council and volunteers.

Key species included:

- white booyong (*Argyrodendron trifoliolatum*)
- blue quandong (*Elaeocarpus grandis*)
- strangler fig (*Ficus watkinsiana*)
- white beech (*Gmelina leichhardtii*)
- red cedar (*Toona ciliata*)
- black bean (*Castanospermum australe*)
- yellow carabeen (*Sloanea woollsii*).

This initiative was made possible through the FoMCA's valued financial and hands-on support, strengthening the natural buffer around Mary Cairncross Scenic Reserve and advancing the park's ecological restoration. Thank you, FoMCA, for helping create a more resilient future.

Did you know? The Sunshine Coast will host a range of Olympic and Paralympic events as part of Brisbane 2032. Learn more on [Council's website](#).

Community working bees

Monthly revegetation and weed management efforts continue at Burgess Avenue, attended by volunteers and Jinibara freshwater rangers and trainees, helping care for the site and planting 70 new native plants this year.

Saving the Southern Pink Underwing Moth

Barung Landcare and Council are working together to restore habitat for the endangered southern pink underwing moth. Supported by a Saving Native Species Grant through Healthy Land and Water and the Commonwealth Government, this initiative will establish 1.5 hectares of subtropical rainforest at the park.

This month, 3,750 native trees and shrubs were planted, with an additional 100 Carronia vines, the moth's host plant, to be planted next year.

This work supports the park's long-term vision to restore and protect the regions' unique biodiversity.

Did you know? *This rare rainforest moth hides its bright pink wings until it takes flight to surprise predators!*

Layla living her best life at SCEP

After being found injured and nursed back to health by wildlife carers, Layla the Red-Legged Pademelon (*Thylogale stigmatica*) is now living her best life at the park. The ecological park provided an ideal release site, with natural shelter, food sources and nearby pademelons at Mary Cairncross Scenic Reserve.

Did you know? *Pademelons are among the smallest macropods in Australia, standing just half a metre tall.*

Understanding the site

Site and environmental assessments are continuing at the park. These studies are helping build a clearer picture of the site's ecological values, informing design planning, guiding restoration, and supporting long term management.

Terrestrial mammal, bat and reptile surveys

Seasonal surveys in autumn and spring have monitored mammals, bats and reptiles using camera traps, acoustic monitors, spotlighting and live-trapping methods.

Across both seasons, 30 mammal and 13 reptile species were recorded, including platypus, short-beaked echidna, red-legged pademelon, fawn-footed melomys, eastern forest bat, lace monitor, coastal carpet python, southern angle-headed dragon and rough-scaled snake.

New skink discovery! *A cryptic skink species, the short-limbed snake-skink (*Ophioscincus truncatus*), not previously recorded at SCEP, was among the most exciting finds from the recent surveys.*



Rare beauty takes flight: southern pink underwing moth



From rescue to rainforest, Layla's new beginning

Photo Credit: Rachel Connolly



Meet the fawn-footed melomys, a tiny rainforest explorer

Photo credit: Future Plus Environmental



Say hello to *Lophosaurus spinipes*, our forest dragon
Photo Credit: Future Plus Environmental

Bird (avifauna) surveys

Bird monitoring has taken flight at the park with a combination of expert and community-led surveys. Together, these efforts are helping to record species diversity and population trends across seasons.

Formal seasonal bird surveys by specialist ecologists have recorded over 100 bird species, including the vulnerable latham's snipe and marbled frogmouth, as well as iconic rainforest birds such as regent bowerbird, rose-crowned fruit-dove and paradise riflebird. A warm season survey is planned for this month. These results provide a valuable baseline to guide future park management and restoration.

Community surveys have also broadened local involvement. The Maroochy Wetlands Bird Observers logged 49 species during their organised visit in June, including the wompoo fruit-dove and topknot pigeon.

As part of the 2025 Aussie Bird Count, BushCare volunteers joined Council staff for bird identification training and recorded 49 species across the site. Highlights included raptors like the grey goshawk, songbirds such as the black-faced monarch, rainforest specialists like the green catbird and waterbirds including the Australasian grebe.

The data collected adds to the growing understanding of the park's birdlife and will help inform ongoing conservation and restoration actions.

Did you know? The Wompoo Fruit-Dove is named for its deep "wom-poo" call, often heard echoing through subtropical rainforests.

Soils

Recent studies have helped unearth insights on the park's soils and geology. Geotechnical investigations showed that much of the site sits on stable basalt rock from the Maleny-Mapleton plateau, while the low-lying drainage basin contains softer alluvial soils. Understanding these variations will help guide future design, construction and restoration works.

Did you know? Basalt is formed from cooled lava, creating fertile soils that support diverse plant life.

Water monitoring and research

Water monitoring continues across the park, investigating how surface and groundwater systems interact. This data will guide future water and land management decisions.

Griffith University is also leading research comparing water at the park and nearby Mary Cairncross Scenic Reserve, helping to deepen the understanding of local ecosystems while strengthening collaboration between Council and the research community.

Funding and Partnerships

The ecological park continues to evolve through collaboration and shared learning. Recent activities such as the FoMCA planting, southern pink underwing moth habitat project, Griffith University research and continued engagement with Jinibara Peoples reflect the growing connections helping to shape the park's future. Council continues to explore opportunities with government, research, business and the community to support this regionally significant project.



Bird's-eye view of collaboration in action, FoMCA planting

In the SCEP Spotlight

Each edition shines a spotlight on the many hands and minds helping to shape the future of the park. This edition, meet Adjunct Research Fellow Agustin Cabrera from the Australian Rivers Institute at Griffith University.

"When people look for life, out in the universe, the thing they're looking for is water," Dr Cabrera said.

"That's how basic, how essential water is to life."

Dr Cabrera is leading a pioneering study to map the characteristics of both surface and groundwater across the Ecological Park site and Mary Cairncross Scenic Reserve.

His work, which uses environmental tracers and isotopes, is the first of its kind in the area, providing local baseline data never seen before.

Chemical and biological clues define each area, from healthy rainforest to farmland and areas under restoration, such as the ecological park. These characteristics make up a "signature" that allows water to be traced, even through changes along its journey, as it moves through new landscapes and collects minerals or organisms.

Water can provide the first indication of change coming. For example, testing can reveal pesticides or other compounds, either by detecting them directly or finding organisms that feed on them.



*Every drop counts: Dr Cabrera collects samples for testing
Photo credit: Agustin Cabrera*

Dr Cabrera hopes to also sample water from various points all the way to Baroon Pocket Dam. By doing this, he can trace its unique story, how it is shaped by the environments it passes through and shapes them in turn.

These findings will help guide the restoration of the Ecological Park, uncovering the profile of its water now and what it could become as a healthy rainforest.

It will also demonstrate how restoring the Ecological Park could benefit ecosystems and people downstream, far beyond the borders of the site.

"The care that we take consciously when we live in these environments – because whatever we do, it does affect the air and definitely the water – will eventually come back to us," Dr Cabrera said.

Stay Connected

As the park continues to evolve, Council is committed to keeping the community informed in a sustainable way. To reduce environmental impact, project updates will be shared through the **project webpage** and **email updates** for registered subscribers.

We encourage you to share this news with family, friends and business connections. To stay informed and hear about future opportunities to get involved, please visit the [project webpage](#) to:

- [subscribe for email updates](#)
- [view the latest news and announcements](#)

Find Out More

For more information about the Sunshine Coast Ecological Park project, visit: sunshinecoast.qld.gov.au

To contact Council's project team please email scep@sunshinecoast.qld.gov.au

Or contact Council's customer service via the details below (please quote Sunshine Coast Ecological Park).

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