

Vale Barry Johnson

This week a number of us Gecko “old timers” sadly farewelled one of the founders of Gecko.

Barry Johnson, representing the Gold Coast branch of the Wildlife Preservation Society (WPSQ), was one of six people who established Gecko in 1989.

Barry was a quintessential good Aussie bloke with a dry sense of humour, a forthright, but caring nature who was passionate about the Australian bush and its creatures.

Barry was an active supporter of Gecko in addition to his responsibilities to WPSQ and frequently helped with his encyclopaedic knowledge of Gold Coast flora and fauna in making submissions to Government and development applications.

I recall the great pleasure I had in accompanying Barry on a walk through the heath lands, which once thrived where now the Tugun Bypass is situated. It was such a beautiful place with a myriad of plants, tiny flowers and hosts of birds, and Barry took many photos to add to his magnificent collection. Unfortunately we could not convince the population or the Governments that this was an exceptional place worthy of national park status and Barry had a few forthright comments to make about that.

Barry served on the now defunct Gold Coast City Council Environment Advisory Committee and several others and his knowledge was keenly sought by Council Officers even if they didn't fancy his no nonsense approach.

He single handedly saved the woody knoll in the centre of the Merrimac Floodplain and it was his photographs of the wildlife and birds that convinced the bureaucrats. It is true that a picture says a thousand words. His passion for the floodplain and the wetlands there resulted in him being a powerful advocate for the Gold Coast

Greenspace and he worked alongside Gecko's Brian Talbot in providing valuable input in to the plans for this essential breathing space for our growing city.

Barry is also responsible for ensuring that Gecko House is still standing today, but that is another story. I will sorely miss Barry, his caring nature, his humour, his knowledge, his uncompromising love of Australian plants and animals and his unceasing advocacy for their protection. To his lovely wife Maureen, we say, he was a man to be proud of and a giver of so many wonderful memories.