

Book reviews

The Ecograz Project: Developing Guidelines to Better Manage Grazing Country

By Andrew Ash, Jeff Corfiel and Taoufik Ksikisi
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This publication focuses on the long-term sustainability of the grazing industry in the tropical savannas of northern Australia. The major issue it addresses is getting the balance right between healthy productive pastures and stock numbers. The difficulty in managing the great diversity of land types and pastures with the huge variations in seasonal rainfall is highlighted well, with good use of photographs, graphs and historical rainfall records. The booklet is presented in five sections, which makes it easy to understand where the authors and researchers are starting from, their findings and where they think active land managers should be heading with on-the-ground management decisions. The study was undertaken over several years, which adds real weight to the findings in a sense that it was an accumulation of information over a medium time frame that specifically targeted an issue that is rapidly rising to the top of the pile.

I personally believe this publication is an excellent tool where grazing managers can obtain ideas, which can be adapted to their specific situations. The key finding of the research (on page 38) should be cut out and stuck on the fridge of every grazing enterprise in northern Australia.

Shane Watts, "Sonoma Station", COLLINSVILLE

Congratulations on a beautiful publication. The sections and sub-headings stand out really well and the main points summarised (blue rectangle) are an excellent means of keeping readers "on track". Brevity and simplicity are definite winners for this initial publication.

We particularly like the beautiful photos, clear graphs and diagrams. The contents and appendix for quick and easy reference were excellent also.

Another list of grasses and their common names will be helpful for grass identification on our Grass Check sites.

The overall results came as no surprise but the actual figures were of interest. Best wishes for a receptive "audience" out there!

*Bob and Annette McCullough, "Bruslee Station",
CHARTERS TOWERS*

This book is the culmination of an eight-year collaborative research project conducted within a 100km radius of Charters Towers. The three land types used as study sites were a representative cross-section of grazing land across most of the Dalrymple Shire, ranging from infertile red and yellow earths, through moderately fertile Goldfields country to fertile red basalt soils.

The document is a step-by-step presentation including what constitutes the basis of a healthy, well balanced pasture, the effect of climate variability and grazing on pasture production and the basics of pasture utilisation. It then documents the history of the ECOGRAZE study, the grazing regimens used, the results of these grazing regimens, how to maintain a healthy pasture, how to restore the vigour of degraded pastures through modifying grazing pressure and recommendations to resource managers on how to achieve these goals and the possible effects on their enterprises.

The most important message to come from this work is that *native resource condition is determined by grazing management (stocking rate), and not the climate*. Stocking rate or level of pasture utilisation is the most powerful management tool in determining the diversity and long-term health of a pasture and ultimately the state of the soil and all the benefits or disadvantages associated with food or bad resource use. The findings suggest that the grazing regimens for most effective pasture management are a conservative stocking rate to give 25% pasture utilisation, or early wet season spelling followed by a stocking rate to achieve 50% pasture utilisation. Early wet season spelling of pasture was found to be extremely important, allowing regeneration of pasture even in low rainfall years, and if incorporated into routine management practices, allowed a sustainable increase in overall pasture utilisation rates.

This work suggests that "less is more" and is a valuable aid in urging us as graziers to adopt more adaptive management techniques to promote the long-term health of our pastures, while maintaining or improving the economic viability of our enterprises. *The ECOGRAZE Project* is a user-friendly document well supported by photographs, and will be of great assistance to extension staff, property planners and consultants in improving use of pasture resource management techniques by the grazing community.

More work of this type needs to be done to convince graziers to implement change through the sheer weight of positive research evidence. I am hopeful that the need for more long-term funding will be recognised by industry and government to ensure a positive future for our native pasture resource.

*Eugene Matthews, "Blue Range Station",
GREENVALE, QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA*