

The Living Valley



Stepping into the rainforests of the Tweed is like stepping back in time:-

When you step into the subtropical rainforests of the Tweed Valley they give the impression of mystery and great antiquity. An astounding variety of colossal trees tower over layers of luxuriant understorey vegetation and a crescendo of bird and insect sounds emanate from this riot of greenery and flowers.

The grand structure these rainforests and diversity of animals and plants that inhabit them is not just a result of suitable soils but also a local climate of high rainfall, mild winters and warm summers. Tens of millions of years ago such a climate was widespread across Australia, even to the arid heart of the continent. As far afield as the salt pans of Lake Eyre and beyond, evidence of a 'golden age' in Australia's prehistory can be found in the form of fossils. Forty million year old fossil forests from the outback closely resemble the rainforests that survive in the Tweed today. Stepping into these rainforests is a reminder of a bygone epoch when a sea of deep green spread across the continent.

Over millions of years as Australia dried out, these lush forests retreated to a handful of locations that maintained the climate of the ancient past. Today less than 1% of the Australian continent now retains a suitable climate for these primordial forests. The Tweed Valley is one such place and as a consequence is like a window into the distant past through which we can view a semblance of ancient Australia's wildlife and wild places, a precious inheritance worthy of protection.

(Reports, sightings or stories about any of the species mentioned in this weekly column or comments on the articles can be posted on the Tweed Valley Weekly Facebook page).

Contributed by Earth Learning, a local not for profit group of volunteers who encourage conservation of habitat and understanding of the diversity of subtropical plants and animals that call the Tweed Valley and Border Ranges home.