

Feather Fascination!

with local Birdwatcher, Jim Butler

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CATS OFF THE RAILS

For the last two years my friend had a pair of Buff-banded Rails living in her backyard where they raised their chicks. Her property in Kenmore Hills is opposite a park adjacent to Moggill Creek and the house next door is vacant with long grass, so the Rails had enough area to live comfortably. These Rails are very widespread and common in Brisbane near waterways and they feed on snails, insects and seeds at the water's edge and on the banks and surrounds. They mostly forage out of sight under low dense vegetation; they run fast when frightened and usually fly only at night. However, when they feel safe they can become remarkably tame, which is what happened at my friend's house where they often came out of the long grass onto the back lawn. They breed in Spring raising five to eight fluffy black chicks.

Recently, when a cat took one adult and a chick, both my friend and the neighbour who owned the cat became aware of the

event. The neighbour decided to restrict the cat's movement outside the house with a 'cat yard' so that it could get enough exercise without being able to prey on the wildlife. The remaining Rail has now begun to re-appear in my friend's yard and hopefully it will find another mate amongst the other Rails living along Moggill Creek where it can fly to at night.

Unrestrained cats are obvious predators of ground-birds like Rails. On average, a domestic cat kills 16 mammals, 8 birds and 8 reptiles a year according to an Australia-wide survey. Dr Gillespie, NT Government Director of Terrestrial Ecosystems, says that 'Across the continent it's estimated that there are 15 million feral cats killing 75 million native animals every night', a large number of which will be birds.

Keep the native birds safe!

~ Jim

Image: Buff-banded Rail by Ed Frazer ©