

Jim Bravery: Farming, birds and conservation on the Atherton Tablelands, Far North Queensland, 1919–1975

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Abstract

James Andrew Leslie ('Jim') Bravery (1896–1975) was an outstanding field ornithologist, who farmed on the Atherton Tablelands, Far North Queensland, for over 50 years. Bravery was the epitome of a farmer earning a livelihood from cleared land, but valuing rainforest for its beauty, vegetation and wildlife. He planted trees and practised soil conservation measures on the small family farm, and was closely connected with the local community through numerous volunteer activities. He engaged the support of high-profile naturalists and journalists in campaigns to protect bird habitat in Far North Queensland, and his diaries and letters give a unique personal insight into wildlife protection, habitat loss and community conservation concerns in northern Queensland in the mid-20th century.

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Introduction

James Andrew Leslie ('Jim') Bravery (1896–1975), an outstanding field naturalist, farmed on the Atherton Tablelands from 1919–1975 (Scambler 2025). He worked as a coal miner on the eastern Darling Downs before moving to the Tablelands as a soldier settler after WWI, where he immediately began exploring bushland and birdlife (Scambler 2025). He was a keen birdwatcher from boyhood, and was aware of bird conservation at age 16, pondering on the decline of the Australian Bustard (*Ardeotis australis*) on the Darling Downs (Bravery 1967). After 50 years on the Tablelands, he concluded in his signature paper on birds of the Atherton Shire that "tremendous changes" had resulted from clearing of rainforest, and that continued clearing of wet sclerophyll forest and drainage of swamp woodlands was forcing further changes in the region's avifauna (Bravery 1970; Scambler 2020). Orrell (1975) and Horton (2006) briefly noted Bravery's commitment to farm

revegetation, his (supposed) involvement in land clearing on the Tablelands, and his concerns about scientific collecting. Bravery was the first to record and deplore poisoning of Broilgas (*Grus rubicundus*) on the Tablelands because of crop damage he considered negligible (Scambler 2020). However, only fragments of his views on conservation appeared in articles he wrote for journals and newsletters from 1958–1974.

Queensland farmers have been portrayed as destructive "spoilers" of rainforest, unconcerned or resentful of conservation efforts (Bolton 1992; Hutton & Connors 1999). Frost (2002) challenged this narrative of farmers "hating trees" as oversimplistic, telling stories of notable Queensland farmers who cared for rainforest, including securing significant protected habitat. Conservation was a founding principle of the North Queensland Naturalists Club (NQNC) in 1932, and ~18% of members to 1950 were farmers, or worked in

extractive industries such as mining and timber cutting (Scambler & Grant 2022). Even so, the requirement to clear land to retain Government leasehold, and the need to earn a living, constrained farmers' ability to care for the environment. On the Atherton Tablelands the heavy workloads of maize and dairy farmers, burdensome government regulations, and difficult market conditions led to poverty and social isolation for many farming families, and the degradation of farmland (Gilmore 2005). Frazer (2003) thoughtfully explored connections and divisions between farmers and conservationists in coastal northern Queensland, and found that farmers practised stewardship of the land for utilitarian reasons, and "said little directly about their attitudes to nature ..." (Frazer 2003: 186). In this context, I explore Bravery's involvement with the Tablelands community from 1919–1975, his farming practices, and his views and experiences in bird and habitat conservation.

Methods

Bravery's comments on conservation of birds, habitats and farmland were obtained from numbered notebooks (referenced as Notebook 3, Notebook 17 etc. below) held in the Bravery Archive, James Cook University Library, and letters to naturalist-journalists Alec Chisholm (1890–1977) and Keith Hindwood (1904–1971). For details of dated notebooks and letters see Archives, below. Maps of properties leased by the Bravery family, and articles about farm and community activities from 1919–1975, were obtained from Queensland State Archives (QSA 2024) and Trove (NLA 2022). All land Portions cited were in the Parish of Barron, County of Nares. Bravery's bird and plant records for "his property" related mostly to two blocks totalling 62 ha (17°14'S, 145°29'E) on Mazlin Creek, Tolga, the earliest known date for leasing being 1949 (Anon. 1952a,b). I refer to these as 'the Bravery farm', although a third block of 23 ha nearby was also leased for a period. A map of the Atherton Tablelands with the location of the Bravery farm can be found in Scambler (2020). The original habitat was 'Mabi' rainforest, Complex Notophyll Vine Forest Type 5(b), now a Critically Endangered Ecological Community (Tracey 1982; Queensland Government 2024; Department of the Environment 2025).

Bird species that Bravery recorded on the Bravery farm (Bravery 1970; Bravery Archive) were classified

by their degree of dependency on rainforest (Williams 2006; Appendix 1). Birds in classes RF4–RF6 were defined as 'rainforest birds' and compared with those Bravery recorded from ~1954–1971 in Mabi forest on the property of farmer Jack Walton (1888–1970) at Wongabel (Bravery 1970; Bravery Archive). Walton's forest included an extinct cinder cone (17°18'S, 145°29'E; Whitehead *et al.* 2007). In 1967 tracks were bulldozed at Walton's and the neighbouring (Nasser) property for selective timber harvesting, "giving good access to interior of rainforest" (Notebook 3 1967). Vegetation in the Atherton-Tolga area in 1960–1975 was viewed in aerial photographs (QImagery 2025). Common and scientific names follow BirdLife Australia (2024) for birds, and for other species follow the Australian Faunal Directory (AFD 2023). Imperial measures are retained in direct quotations, and metric conversions in the text are approximate. 'Tablelands' refers to the Atherton Tablelands. Quotations are verbatim except where ellipses show omitted text, and square brackets indicate my additions.

Results and discussion

Farming and community engagement 1919–1949

Clearing near Atherton and Tolga began in the 1880s (Anon. 1891a,b). After WWI, a Soldier Settler Scheme granted leases to returned soldiers on freehold land formerly leased to Chinese farmers, and on land newly-opened up for clearing (Birtles 1997; Gilmore 2005). In September 1919 Bravery's older brother George was granted a lease under the Scheme, 23 ha of cleared land near Tolga (Portion 362, 17°14'S, 145°28'E; Anon. 1919a). Later that year Bravery moved north to join him, and in September 1920 was granted a lease of 25 ha in Bean Tree Road, Tolga (Portion 558, 17°14'S, 145°29'E; Anon. 1919b, 1920; Bravery 1967). The map of the Atherton-Tolga Soldier Settler Scheme after the 1920 ballots shows patches of 'standing scrub', including on about half of Bravery's land, while the blocks which became the Bravery farm from 1949 had already been cleared (Fig. 1). In 1922 George moved to New Zealand (Ancestry 2019). Despite restrictions on leasehold transfers (Dempster 1980) Bravery took over the lease of George's block (Anon. 1922), implying strong local support for Bravery's farming enterprise. Bravery never lived on either block (Ancestry 2019), and by

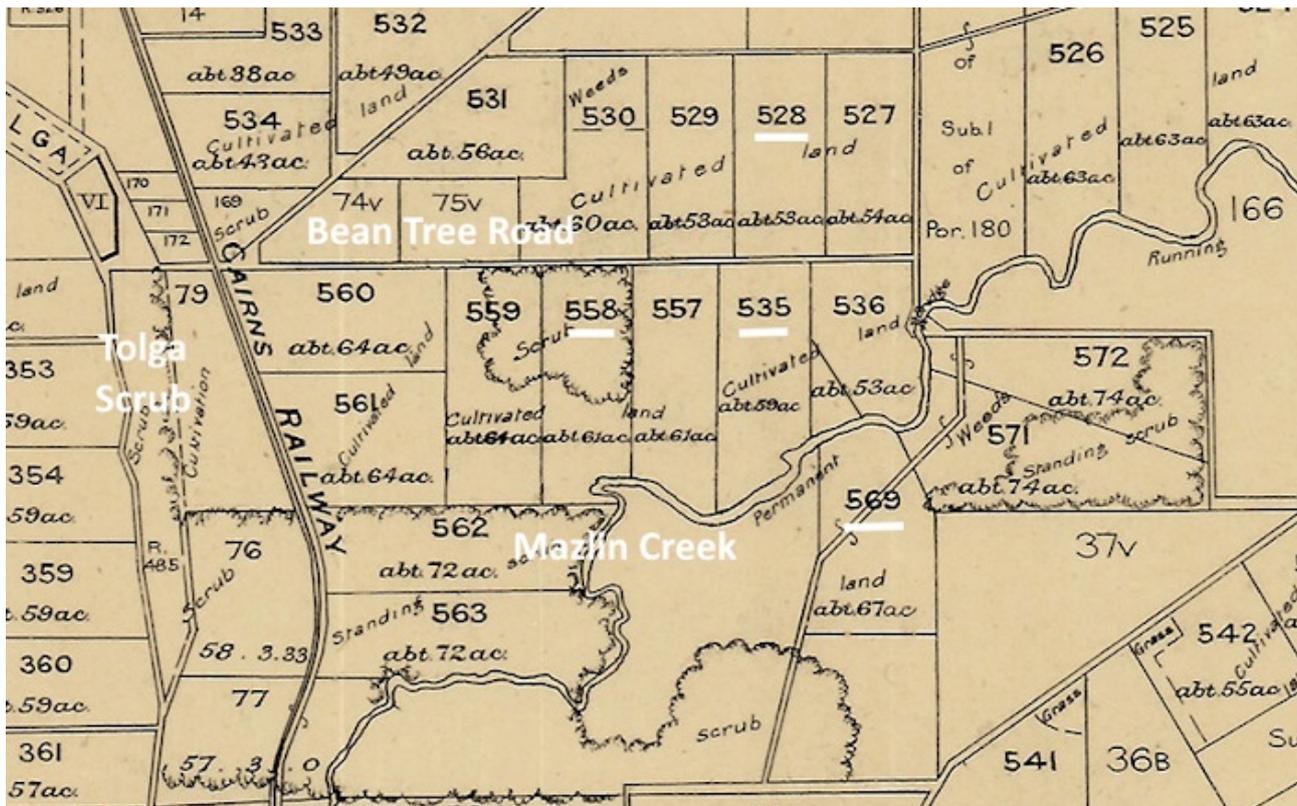


Figure 1. Land use in Bean Tree Road, Tolga, 1920–1921. Bravery’s Soldier Settler Scheme block was Portion 558. The Bravery farm on Mazlin Creek from 1949 comprised Portions 569 and 535 (reconfigured from the above, to include a substantial part of former Portion 536). Portion 528 was also leased for a period in the 1950s–1960s. Source: Queensland State Archives, ITM2796612 (out of copyright).

1925 he relinquished them both (Anon. 1925; QSA 2024, ITM626797), instead leasing land from the Marnane family, district pioneers with extensive land holdings (Atherton Centenary Committee 1985: 46; J. Leighton personal communication). The land was known locally as ‘Bravery’s paddock’ (~17°15’S, 145°28’E; Anon. 1928a, 1945a). William Marnane (1844–1934) promoted the Soldier Settler Scheme and the need for mixed cropping and livestock, not maize monoculture (Anon. 1921). Bravery married Mary Cecilia Healy in 1923 and they followed Marnane’s advice, dairy farming as well as growing various crops for the market. Orrell’s (1975) claim that Bravery farmed his original soldier settler block until his death was thus incorrect, but given the high rate of settler attrition (Gilmore 2005), Bravery may well have been the only veteran of the Scheme to remain farming in Tolga.

It seems unlikely that Bravery was directly involved in clearing rainforest, as claimed by Horton (2006). Felling, burning and clearing debris was gruelling work (Bryde 1920: 157; Frost 2002), but Bravery did

not mention it in his notes or letters and unlike other district pioneers, he never spoke of doing it (Atherton Centenary Committee 1985; Margaret Muoio personal communication). Horton’s (unnamed) informants did not know Bravery well: they believed he was unaware of birds and other wildlife before moving to the Tablelands, and that he was dairy farming on his soldier settler block. Bravery wrote that Plumed Whistling-Ducks (*Dendrocygna eytoni*) were common on Mazlin Creek “before clearing in 1921” (Notebook 17), but as his creek frontage was already cleared this evidently referred to other properties. It is probable that when he left Portion 558 the ‘scrub’ still remained. George’s departure had halved the available farm labour, and although clearing was a lease condition, settlers often missed clearing deadlines and were usually granted extensions, even up to 20 years (Frawley 1983: 10). Notably, in 1930, the lease of Portion 557 was extended westwards to include only the part of Portion 558 cleared before 1920 (QSA 2024, ITM626797).

As well as farming and birdwatching, Bravery was involved in veterans' affairs (Orrell 1975) and competed in athletics, soccer, cricket, golf and a state-wide road trial for the Whippet motor car (Anon. 1926, 1927, 1928b,c, 1929). Mary also played golf (Anon. 1934). In the 1930s they visited family in Brisbane and spent a few days in Port Douglas (Anon. 1933, 1938). Bravery served as a steward at the local agricultural show, and on committees of sporting clubs and the local branch of the Australian Labor Party (ALP): while volunteering at an election booth, he recorded a Banded Honeyeater (*Cissomela pectoralis*) probing the flowers of an exotic shrub (Anon. 1946, 1948; Notebook 17). In the early 1940s Bravery and Mary's only child 'Jimmy' (James Leslie Bravery 1924–1977) studied at Gatton Agricultural College (Anon. 1940). Bravery volunteered for army service, including over two years on Cape York Peninsula (1942–1944: NAA 2021). In 1945, Bravery proposed to a dairy farmers' meeting that the north needed its own agricultural college and locally-relevant scientific advice on soil fertility and erosion (Anon. 1945b).

The Bravery farm and the Tablelands community 1949–1975

Bravery and Jimmy leased the Bravery farm from 1949–1975 (Anon. 1952a,b). It bordered one side of Mazlin Creek for ~340 m, and both sides for ~460 m (QSpatial 2025; Portions 569 and 535 in Fig 1). Bravery and Mary built a house and dairy on Portion 569 ('Glenroy') (Anon. 1953a), while Jimmy and his family lived on Portion 535 ('Glenmore'). They rotated crops (peanuts, potatoes, legumes, sugar cane grown as stock food, sorghum and pasture grasses), and sometimes raised pigs (Anon. 1952b,

1954a). They were active in the Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation, and the Bravery farm was one of seven on the Tablelands granted funds to develop their dairy as a best practice demonstration site (Anon. 1950a,b; 1954b). Bravery supported the establishment of Junior Farmers' Clubs and (at a Royal Commission hearing) proposals for a sugar mill on the Tablelands (Anon. 1949a, 1950c).

Soil erosion was a major concern at state level (Gilmore 2005) and locally, the Barron River was "carrying rich soil away" (Anon. 1949b). *Glenroy* was heavily eroded when the Braverys took up the lease, and they lobbied the Shire Council to hire a grader to farmers for constructing contour banks, and promoted farm reforestation (Anon. 1949b). In 1950–1951 they built contour banks and other works to resolve major erosion, although a few small gullies remained on *Glenmore* (Anon. 1952b; M. Muoio personal communication). In 1952 a soil conservation field day at the farm was publicised by the Minister for Agriculture (H. H. Collins, member for Tablelands) (Anon. 1952c,d; Fig. 2). The Braverys demonstrated ploughing and maize harvesting on contour banks, while Departmental staff explained the farm's crop rotation system and built a new contour bank (Anon. 1952b).

Bravery was one of many soldier settlers with no previous farming experience (Gilmore 2005), but his transition from a hard-working young coal miner to a hard-working small farmer on the Tablelands was not as incongruous as it may seem. The mines where he worked before WWI were on the largely agricultural eastern Darling Downs, where the family had close community connections, and Bravery discussed birds with farmers around the



Figure 2. Advertisement for field day on the Bravery farm, July 1952 (Anon. 1952d).

district (Scambler 2025). His father was an official of the Queensland Colliery Employees' Union (Anon. 1910) and Bravery would undoubtedly have been a member, consistent with his ALP involvement on the Tablelands in an era of Labor support for small farmers. Beginning with the premiership of T. J. Ryan in 1915, successive Labor governments in Queensland had pursued policies to encourage and sustain a class of small 'yeoman' farmers, that they expected would be allies of the working class and form part of Labor's natural electoral constituency (Gilmore 2005). Described as 'agrarian socialism', these policies fuelled the grants and services from which the Bravery farm benefited. As well as the ALP committee, Bravery served on the local hospital board and continued to play golf (Anon. 1953b; Price 2003). He listened to Chisholm's radio broadcasts and read nature columns in newspapers and *Walkabout* magazine (which he swapped with others, including Jack Walton) and in the late 1950s, he joined the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union (RAOU), the Bird Observers Club (BOC) and the NQNC (Scambler 1925). Despite describing himself as 'semi-retired' at age 68 (letter to Hindwood 09/08/1964), Bravery shows in his notes that right to the end, he was mustering cows, working in the dairy and clearing weeds with a brush hook.

Vegetation and birds of the Bravery farm

Bravery sought advice on plant identification and farm forestry from government departments, and listed ~60 species of native trees and shrubs on the farm including "plentiful figs" (Moraceae) (Bravery 1970; Notebook 10 1973–74; Notebook 16; Fig. 3). He planted trees along farm roads and fencelines and in a "reserve of ten acres...near a permanent stream" (letters to Chisholm, e.g. 21/12/1959, 20/08/1967). The 'reserve' trees were widely spaced, as advised by forestry standards of the day (QImagery 2025; Notebook 16). Bravery described habitat on the farm:

...Approx five acres of mixed rain forest origin and some groves of mixed Eucalypts, several eucalypt avenues and the permanent creek Mazlin is densely lined with Callistemon viminalis [Weeping Bottlebrush] and many species of rain forest origin... (Notebook 10 1973–74)

After severe flooding in 1967 he wrote: "It was sad to see so many beautiful trees in the creek area destroyed and many others severely damaged..." (Notebook 3 1967). Part of the creek bank was still bare of vegetation in 1971 (QImagery 2025). Some of the reserve was fenced to exclude stock, with long grass slashed, and at age 79, two months

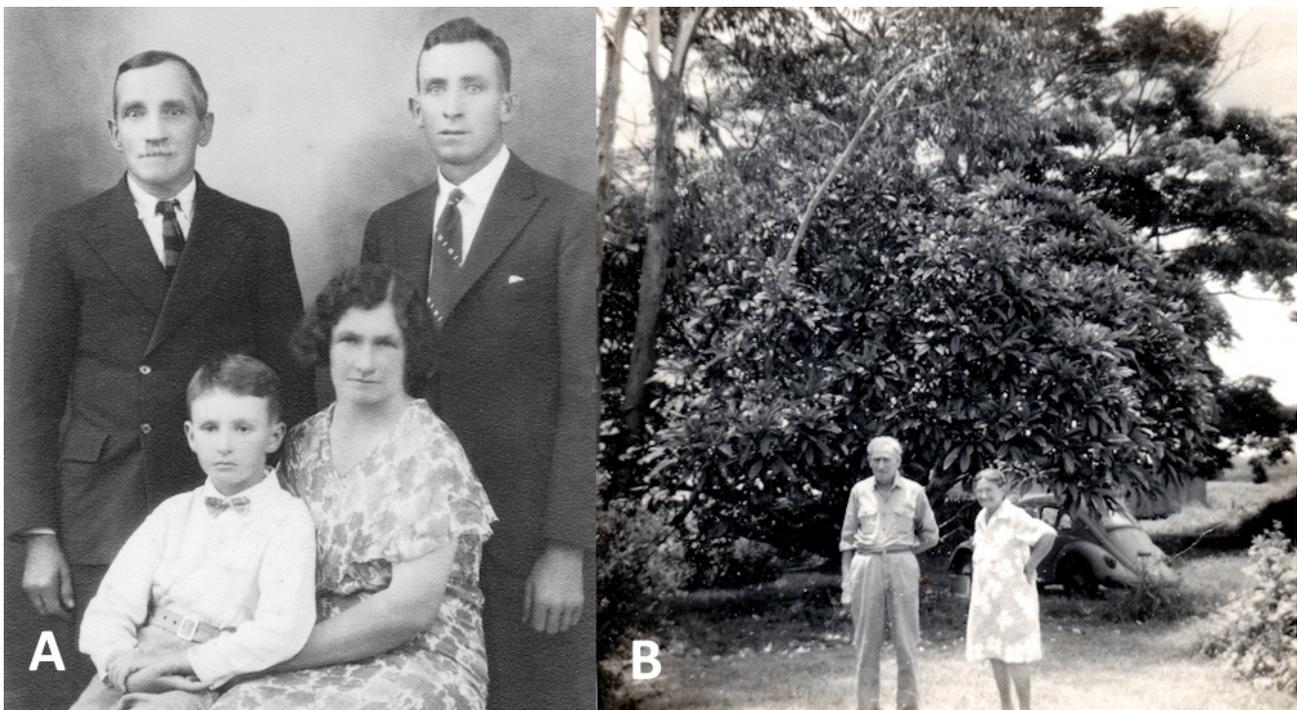


Figure 3. A. The family with Bravery's father George, 1933; B. Jim and Mary Bravery and trees near their house and dairy, ~1967. Sources: A. Studio of Beatrice ('Trissie') Deazley, Brisbane (out of copyright); B. Photographer unknown, courtesy Bravery family.

before his death, Bravery planted 45 more trees (Notebook 14). His plantings were unusual in the agricultural landscape (QImagery 2025) and featured in *The Northerner*, a Cairns-based weekly magazine:

... trees play a significant part in the layout of his property. On his farm he has planted them in great numbers, arranging them so that they will not interfere with the property's production, but always there to ensure that birds will continue to come (Wheatley 1968).

More than 2 km of cleared land separated the Bravery farm from the nearest Mabi forest remnant, the 38.6 ha 'Tolga Scrub', and it was only tenuously connected with forest near Atherton by (mostly cleared) Mazlin Creek. Thus, not surprisingly, only 27 (15%) of the 182 species Bravery recorded on the farm were rainforest birds (Fig. 4; Appendix 2), all relatively mobile and able to use linear habitat and 'stepping stones' of vegetation in the landscape (Crome *et al.* 1994; Hausmann 2004). Even so, Bravery described almost half (13/27), as 'regular' or 'common' on the farm, including Azure Kingfisher (*Ceyx azureus*), the only rainforest bird recorded breeding there (Bravery 1970; Bravery Archive). Several species were able to consume rainforest fruits and disperse undamaged seeds (Moran *et al.* 2004), potentially aiding natural recruitment of rainforest plants. At Walton's there were 54 rainforest birds including 11 Wet Tropics endemics, while at the Bravery farm there was one endemic,

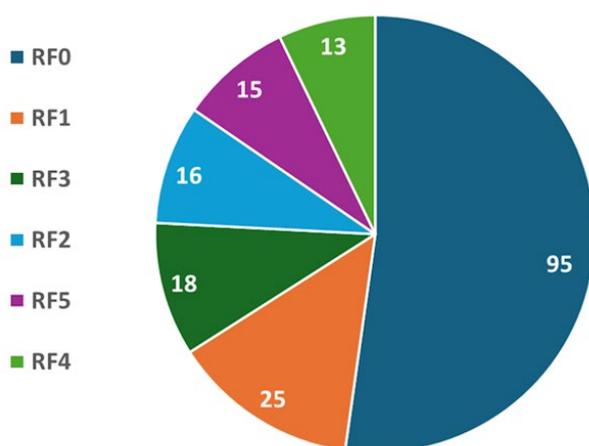


Figure 4. Number of bird species recorded on the Bravery farm by rainforest dependency class (N=182). Labels read clockwise from top right. For dependency classes (Williams 2006) see Appendix 1: RF0 species are not found in rainforest and classes RF4–RF5 are rainforest birds.

the Lesser Sooty Owl (*Tyto multipunctata*) (Notebook 3 1967). The Southern Cassowary (*Casuarius casuarius*) was rare at Walton's and by the 1980s was extinct in Mabi forest (Crome & Moore 1990).

Wildlife protection

In 1936, all shires on the Atherton Tablelands became sanctuaries under the *Queensland Animals and Birds Acts 1921–1924*, which proscribed hunting of wildlife, but some birds were not protected or protected for only part of the year (Pollard 1930; Anon. 1936). Landholders could also declare a sanctuary at the property level, prohibiting all shooting (e.g. Scambler & Austin 2021). Such a declaration cannot be found for the Bravery farm, but he referred to it repeatedly as 'the sanctuary' and permitted no shooting, or even fishing for food (Notebook 10 1973–74; letter to Chisholm 17/10/1956; M. Muoio personal communication). Wildlife protection outside National Parks was by honorary rangers, but despite almost daily field trips Bravery declared, "many Rangers are appointed but for many years I have not seen any on the job" (Notebook 10 1973–74). Like the NQNC (Scambler & Grant 2022), Bravery supported the appointment of paid, permanent rangers. He regularly removed illegal duck traps around Lake Tinaroo, heard locals boast of how many ducks they had shot, and recorded his own observations, and reports by others, of the shooting of Australian Bustards, Wompoo Fruit-Doves (*Megaloprepia magnifica*) and Brown Cuckoo-Doves (*Macropygia phasianella*) (Bravery 1970; Notebook 2 1963; Notebook 12).

Bravery was greatly respected in the Tablelands community for his knowledge of birds (Horton 2006; M. Cianelli, A. Leinster personal communications), and regularly visited a number of local residents, including farmers, to watch birds, advise on bird books, and discuss wildlife (Notebook 8 1971; letter to Chisholm 28/11/1962). The public (including a milk tanker driver) told him of unusual bird sightings (Notebook 9 1972), and he promoted bird conservation in the community: "I have a few more people interested in birds and conservation" (letter to Chisholm 02/12/1968). The family rehabilitated and released injured birds, including some brought by neighbours or forestry workers (Bravery 1967; Notebook 7 1970; Notebook 9 1972). The foods fed to recovering birds were appropriate to their diet, albeit including weed species for frugivores

(Notebook 5 1968). Jack Walton helped to monitor birds and nests, and another farmer kept secret the presence of many Squatter Pigeons (*Geophaps scripta*) on his property to protect them from shooters (Notebook 1 1962).

Bravery was not as explicit as his friend and mentor Alec Chisholm (e.g. McGregor 2021) about his emotional reactions to birds, but a Green Pygmy-goose (*Nettapus pulchellus*) visiting the farm dam for several days in 1958, “feeding delicately” on water-lilies, was “probably [his] biggest thrill of bird observation” (Notebook 17). Bravery’s notes often imply personal feelings – ‘fine’ or ‘gentle’ species, and ‘useful’ birds (to farmers). Concern for prey of raptors has a long cultural history (e.g. Bildstein 2001), and Bravery wished that goshawks would take more introduced Common Mynas (*Acridotheres tristis*) instead of native birds (Notebook 1 1962). He threw sticks at a Brown Goshawk (*Accipiter fasciatus*) perched on the nest of a Pied Butcherbird (*Cracticus nigrogularis*) in a paddock tree, but failed to prevent predation of the nestlings (the butcherbirds renested immediately: Notebook 13). Jimmy once ‘rescued’ a Blue-winged Kookaburra (*Dacelo leachii*) captured by a Brown Goshawk, but the prey died (Notebook 5 1968). Even so, Bravery felt that butcherbirds at Wongabel should not mob owls, which were “entitled to use” the forest. During Bravery’s lifetime feeding wild birds was seen as a connection with nature and part of animal welfare, not deprecated or penalised as it is today (McGregor 2024). At the dairy the Bravery family fed flocks of up to 100 Red-browed Finches (*Neochmia temporalis*) with maize meal, prepared as supplementary food for stock. This was also eaten by Buff-banded Rails (*Hypotaenidia philippensis*), Purple Swamphens (*Porphyrio porphyrio*), and several species of duck. Blue-winged Kookaburras and Pied Butcherbirds were fed chopped raw beef, and shallow water dishes were provided for birds (including rail chicks) to drink or bathe. Bravery often referred to birds on the property as friends or welcome visitors, and the family celebrated when rescued birds were able to return to the wild (Bravery 1967; Notebook 1 1962).

Museum collections – a quandary

The most conflicted conservation issue in Bravery’s mind was scientific collecting. He was never an egg collector (Mason & Pfitzner 2020) and chose not to use his banding permit: “banding should be left to

the experts, too much disturbance of birds I think and banding requires careful handlers” (letters to Chisholm 01/09/1964, 26/07/1969). He had no qualms about handling accidentally killed birds, and took careful notes of measurements, plumage, soft parts and stomach contents (Bravery 1970; Notebook 5 1968; Notebooks 16, 17). He appreciated that specimens could be necessary to define species, corresponded with taxonomists, and read their papers with interest (Bravery 1970; Scambler 2025; Notebook 12). In 1958 Allan McEvey (1919–1996, curator of ornithology at Museums Victoria), persuaded Bravery to collect specimens for a taxonomic review of the Horsfield’s Bushlark (*Mirafra javanica*). He took seven specimens near Atherton in January–March 1958, including the holotype of the Wet Tropics subspecies, *M. j. athertonensis* (Mayr & McEvey 1960; Schodde & Mason 1999; Scambler 1925). The NQNC assisted with transport to Melbourne, but some specimens were affected by inadequate refrigeration and Bravery had to collect replacements (Orrell 1957, 1975; A. Leinster personal communication):

A tightly timed operation involved road transport from the Tableland and re-packing of the specimens in dry-ice in Cairns for dispatch by air...The Museum, and Science, obtained their research material. Jim’s only comment was, “I’d never do it again” (Orrell 1975).

Bravery apparently felt differently about molluscs, as he allowed P. H. Colman to collect several species of snail from “deep under boulders” on the farm (Colman 1959). The Bravery family also collected introduced Cane Toads (*Bufo marinus*) and froze them (M. Muoio, M. Cianelli, personal communications), the first known record of this ‘control’ method on the Tablelands. In 1962, in a campaign by the BOC on nationalist and conservation grounds (McGregor 2024), Bravery lobbied politicians to oppose collecting by the British Museum (Natural History) Harold Hall Australian Expeditions (Notebook 1 1962; letter to Chisholm 12/07/1962). Bravery declined an invitation to join one of the expeditions: “I would like to do a trip with them but I would lose my reputation if I joined a collecting party” (letter to Hindwood, 10/01/1964). Yet he was enthusiastic about his trips with General Sir Gerald Lathbury (1906–1978: see next section), who was a member of the Harold Hall funding committee and had participated in the third expedition (Hall 1974). In the dry season of 1973, Bravery recorded fewer

than usual Sarus Cranes (*Grus antigone*) and speculated that the taking of several specimens by George Archibald in 1972 might have reduced the population (Notebook 10 1973–74). He described George Mack (1899–1963, Director of the Queensland Museum), as “a professional killer of wildlife” (Notebook 13). However, it is unclear if Bravery knew of the collecting scandal triggered at the 1935 RAOU campout, when Mack shot a sitting Scarlet Robin (*Petroica boodang*) from its nest in front of outraged campers, during breakfast (Robin 2001). At Iron Range in 1966 Bravery and Michael Sharland (1899–1987) stayed (as did many naturalists) at the shanty known as ‘Reg Cook’s hut’ (Moulds 2015). They were told that ‘museum collectors’ had recently stayed there, and Bravery’s comments were scathing:

...at our camp we made ourselves as comfortable as possible but the hut area had been occupied by museum collectors of filthy habits all the residue of their brutal slaughter being thrown just outside the door of the hut, however we managed to clean up within reason... (Notebook 4 1966)

...from my observations these people can be very ruthless indeed. In North Queensland they seem to collect almost everything in the name of ‘scientific study’...It would seem over the last few years enough birds and animals bats etc have been collected in North Queensland to keep all the biologists, professors etc going for many years. I am amazed that these people can get permits to collect the rarer species... (letter to Chisholm, 21/08/1966)

Conflicting attitudes to scientific collecting remain today, despite the major contributions of museum collections to knowledge of bird ecology and conservation (Joseph 2011; Rowher *et al.* 2022; McGregor 2024).

Habitat loss on the Tablelands, the Cairns coast and Cape York Peninsula

Bravery was devastated in December 1971, when Jack Walton’s Wongabel property was clear-felled after Jack died (Notebook 8 1971):

All Jack Walton’s old property now fallen and this includes steep mountain [the cinder cone]. It is a black day for conservation when such areas can be so ruthlessly fallen...Although a good area for wildlife for ages past a few days saw the end of this rainforest, and all the birds, animals such as

*rare marsupials, green possum [Green Ringtail Possum *Pseudocheirus archeri*], black-white opossums [Striped Possum *Dactylopsila trivirgata picata*], tree kangaroo [Lumholtz’s Tree-kangaroo *Dendrolagus lumholtzi*], rare gliders and very interesting vegetation. All gone with no thought of any area being left as a haven for all the wildlife. A rotten deal for our native flora and fauna and over 160 bird species have been recorded in this property including Bower-birds and Riflebirds...*

A camp of the Spectacled Flying-fox (*Pteropus conspicillatus*, now listed as Endangered) was also at Walton’s (Department of the Environment 2025; letter to Chisholm 03/10/1964). Visitors Bravery had guided to the site included Chisholm, Hindwood, filmmakers Heinz Seilmann (1917–2006) and Harold Pollock (1904–1990), ornithologist John Warham (1919–2010) and (birdwatcher) Queensland governor Sir Henry Abel-Smith (1900–1993). Before clearing (Fig. 5), Walton’s Mabi forest covered an estimated 54.6 ha and if it had survived, it would be the third largest remnant of this endangered forest type (Latch 2008).

In 1971, Bravery joined other residents and members of the NQNC in an unsuccessful protest against the Queensland Forestry Department’s clearing of rainforest around Lake Tinaroo for plantations of Caribbean Pine (*Pinus caribaea*), “pine vandalism” (Notebook 8 1971). Although greatly interested in the birds that colonised new aquatic habitat after the construction of Tinaroo Dam in 1958 (Bravery 1964), he wrote: “...large areas of open forest and much valuable scrub land was inundated or isolated and much confusion and destruction of wildlife must have occurred” (Notebook 12). He regretted the loss of low woodland with flowering shrubs, cleared for tobacco farms irrigated from Lake Tinaroo (Wheatley 1968; Notebook 13), and was “dismayed and appalled at the brutal way the lovely ‘oak forests’ [open forest with eucalypts, *Allocasuarinas* and Swamp Mahogany *Lophostemon suaveolens*] have been destroyed even on very steep hillsides” (Notebook 7 1970). In 1969 members of the NQNC, including Bravery, wrote to the *Cairns Post* protesting one of many proposals to ‘reclaim’ and develop significant wader habitat on the mudflats of Trinity Bay, adjoining the Cairns Esplanade (Milligan 2012). Bravery persuaded Hindwood to publish a letter: “...between the lot of us we have certainly

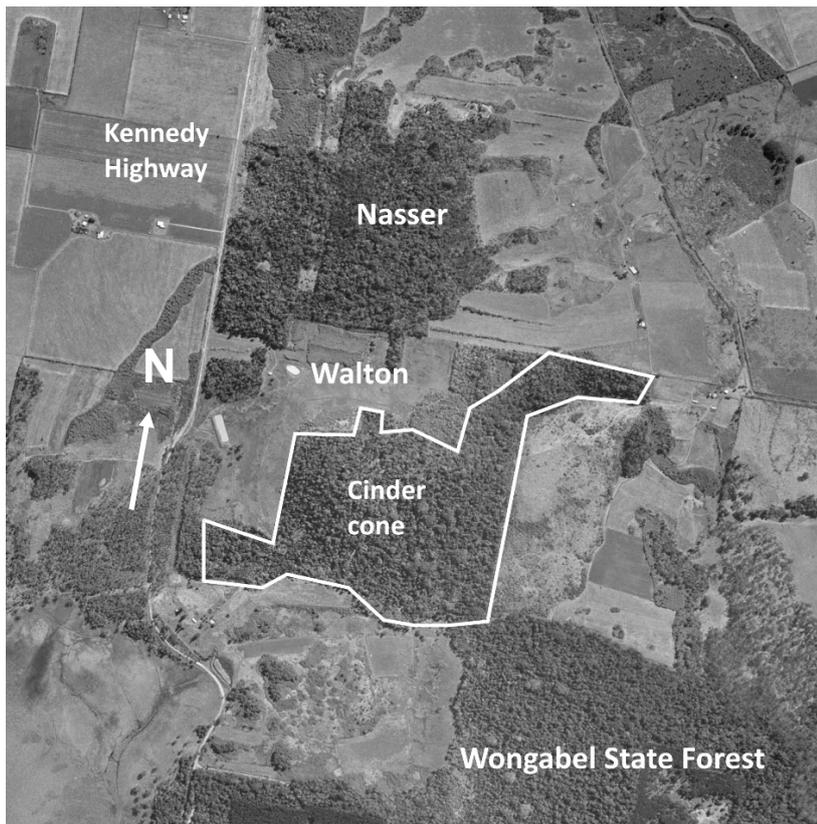


Figure 5. The Walton property in July 1971, before clearing. The white line shows the approximate boundary of the Mabi forest remnant. The Nasser remnant is now a Nature Refuge. Source: excerpt from QAP2369100 © State of Queensland, 1971 (used under a Creative Commons International licence CC-BY-4.0).

given it a lot of publicity” (letters to Hindwood, 23/03/1969, 09/04/1969). Overall, Bravery attributed habitat loss to greed, speculators clearing land “to dodge income tax”, and “a rotten government system falling over backwards to destroy our natural resources” (Notebook 8 1971).

Bravery’s most public protest was about habitat loss on Cape York Peninsula – ‘Operation Blowdown’. On 18 July 1963, 50 tonnes of TNT were detonated from a 43 m steel tower at the Iron Range Test Site, to test the effect of high explosive on rainforest (Dinnen 2013). The tower was torn apart and a fireball formed with a mushroom cloud to about 1200 m (NAA 1963; Fig. 6). Altogether 17,000 trees were affected across 8 ha, and near the centre were pulverised into a layer of fine debris 1 m thick (NAA 1963; Dinnen 2013). An Army spokesman claimed that the explosion would take place in a “barren and desolate area” and (afterwards) that it had “only killed Taipans” (Notebook 2 1963). Before the blast the *Cairns Post* published protest letters from readers, including Bravery. Chisholm (1963) used his high profile column in the *Sydney Morning Herald* to contradict the Army, declaring that “large quantities of valuable native flora and fauna were blasted out of existence”. His source was “an outspoken Atherton resident”– his regular correspondent and

friend, Jim Bravery. Bravery thanked Chisholm and sent him a magazine clipping which stated: “The lush Garden of Eden had vanished and all birds insects and animals were dead” (letters to Chisholm 22/10/1963, 21/08/1966). Bravery drove past the blast site on a birding trip with Sharland in July 1966, and saw “new vegetation forming in the devastated area” (Notebook 4 1966). Bravery and Sharland did “some preliminary work on Cape York conservation” (Notebook 4 1966) but the details are unknown.



Figure 6. Operation Blowdown explosion, Iron Range Test Site, Cape York Peninsula, 1963. National Archives of Australia D4994, 1337972 (public domain).

Bravery supported the declaration of new National Parks (Notebook 11 1975; letter to Lavery 18/03/1965). He criticised the small size of National Parks around “the lovely lakes”, Eacham and Barrine, pointing to risks for wildlife on park roads and erosion caused by motor boats and water-skis, at that time permitted on the lakes (Notebook 8 1971; Notebook 13). In contrast to the ‘playground’ use of reserves, he saw nature-based tourism as a force to advance conservation (Notebook 12):

...the far northern areas of Queensland have a prolific and interesting wildlife and vegetation and visitors from interstate and overseas speak with enthusiasm of the scenery and the interesting wild life and mention how necessary it is that this should be preserved for future generations.

One such overseas visitor was Lathbury, who Bravery found “a very interesting and keen ornithologist” – contrary to the views of Bravery’s friends, Chisholm and Hindwood (Notebook 13; McGregor 2019: 175). In 1965 Lathbury and Bravery spent four days on the Tablelands (including the Walton property), and four days as far north as Musgrave on Cape York Peninsula. On returning,

...we were the guests of the local Rotary club to dinner...the General was guest speaker, and spoke on conservation during which he didn’t mind treading on a few corns. He is a very good speaker and his address was of much value in letting the locals know the value of their wildlife heritage. He also did an ABC broadcast on the same subject and also gave a press interview (letter to Chisholm 20/05/1965).

Conclusion

Bravery was an experienced field naturalist with a deep commitment to wildlife – the epitome of an extraordinary farmer who earned a livelihood from cleared land, but valued rainforest for its beauty, vegetation and wildlife, akin to the farmers described by Frost (2002). He planted trees, practiced soil conservation measures on the small family farm, and was closely connected with the local community through farming organisations and numerous volunteer activities. Until age 60 in 1956, he concentrated on farming, family and community life, and personal bird watching. Then, from the late 1950s, he steadily expanded his naturalist activities and developed a wide circle of contacts (see discussion in Scambler, 2025). He corresponded

with high-profile naturalists, who became his friends, and he engaged their support in campaigns to protect bird habitats in northern Queensland. Some farming and golfing friends shared his wildlife interests, but at times Bravery felt isolated: “I often feel I am a lost soul calling out in the wilderness, however I will continue to do what I can” (letter to Chisholm, 26/04/1960). Although he participated in conservation actions, particularly through the NQNC, towards the end of his life he feared that “true conservationists are not strong enough to pressure the Government” to stem habitat destruction (Notebook 10 1973–74). Bravery’s diaries and letters give a unique personal insight into wildlife protection, habitat loss and community conservation concerns in northern Queensland in the mid-20th century.

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Appendix 1. Rainforest dependency classes of bird species (Williams 2006). ¹'Rainforest birds' (see Methods).

Dependency class	Relationship to rainforest habitat
RF0	Not found in rainforest
RF1	Occasionally found in rainforest
RF2	Uses rainforest as sub-optimal or marginal habitat
RF3	Commonly recorded in rainforest, but that is not the species' core habitat
RF4 ¹	Rainforest is the species' main habitat, but it is common in other forest types
RF5 ¹	Rainforest is the species' core habitat, but it also occurs in adjacent wet sclerophyll forest
RF6 ¹	Rainforest obligate

Appendix 2. Rainforest birds (classes RF4–RF6, Williams 2006) recorded on the Bravery farm and at Jack Walton's property, Wongabel.

Species are listed according to rainforest dependency (Appendix 1), and then alphabetically. # = present; E = Wet Tropics endemic species; ¹rare at Walton's; ²common or regular on Bravery farm; ³rare on Bravery farm. Sources: Bravery farm records 1949–1975 (Bravery 1970; Bravery Archive); Walton's property records from frequent visits by Bravery ~1954–1971 (Notebook 3 1967; Bravery Archive).

Common name	Scientific name	RF Class	Bravery farm (N=27)	Walton (N=54)
Atherton Scrubwren ^E	<i>Sericornis kerri</i>	RF6		#
Bower's Shrike-thrush ^E	<i>Colluricincla boweri</i>	RF6		#
Brown Gerygone	<i>Gerygone mouki</i>	RF6		#
Mountain Thornbill ^E	<i>Acanthiza katherina</i>	RF6		#
Southern Cassowary ¹	<i>Casuarius casuarius</i>	RF6		#
Tooth-billed Bowerbird ^E	<i>Scenopoeetes dentirostris</i>	RF6		#
Australian Swiftlet ²	<i>Aerodramus terraereginae</i>	RF5	#	#
Bassian Thrush	<i>Zoothera lunulata</i>	RF5		#
Black-eared Catbird	<i>Ailuroedus melanotis</i>	RF5		#
Black-faced Monarch	<i>Monarcha melanopsis</i>	RF5	#	#
Bridled Honeyeater ^E	<i>Bolemoreus frenatus</i>	RF5		#
Brown Cuckoo-Dove ²	<i>Macropygia phasianella</i>	RF5	#	#
Brown-capped Emerald Dove ³	<i>Chalcophaps longirostris</i>	RF5	#	#
Buff-breasted Paradise-Kingfisher ¹	<i>Tanysiptera sylvia</i>	RF5		#
Chowchilla ^E	<i>Orthonyx spaldingii</i>	RF5		#

continued on next page

Appendix 2 continued

Common name	Scientific name	RF Class	Bravery farm (N=27)	Walton (N=54)
Double-eyed Fig-Parrot	<i>Cyclopsitta diophthalma</i>	RF5		#
Eastern Whipbird ³	<i>Psophodes olivaceus</i>	RF5	#	#
Grey Goshawk ²	<i>Accipiter novaehollandiae</i>	RF5	#	#
Grey-headed Robin ^E	<i>Heteromyias cinereifrons</i>	RF5		#
Large-billed Scrubwren	<i>Sericornis magnirostra</i>	RF5		#
Lesser Sooty Owl ^F	<i>Tyto multipunctata</i>	RF5	#	#
Lewin's Honeyeater ²	<i>Meliphaga lewinii</i>	RF5	#	#
Macleay's Honeyeater ^E	<i>Xanthotis macleayanus</i>	RF5		#
Noisy Pitta ³	<i>Pitta versicolor</i>	RF5	#	#
Orange-footed Scrubfowl	<i>Megapodius reinwardt</i>	RF5	#	#
Pale-yellow Robin	<i>Tregellasia capito</i>	RF5		#
Pied Monarch ^E	<i>Arses kaupi</i>	RF5		#
Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove ²	<i>Ptilinopus regina</i>	RF5	#	#
Satin Bowerbird	<i>Ptilonorhynchus violaceus</i>	RF5		#
Spectacled Monarch	<i>Symposiachrus trivirgatus</i>	RF5	#	#
Superb Fruit-Dove ³	<i>Ptilinopus superbus</i>	RF5	#	#
Topknot Pigeon	<i>Lopholaimus antarcticus</i>	RF5		#
Victoria's Riflebird ^E	<i>Lophorina victoriae</i>	RF5		#
White-headed Pigeon	<i>Columba leucomela</i>	RF5		#
White-throated Treecreeper	<i>Cormobates leucophaea</i>	RF5	#	#
Wompoo Fruit-Dove	<i>Megaloprepia magnifica</i>	RF5	#	#
Yellow-breasted Boatbill	<i>Machaerirhynchus flaviventer</i>	RF5		#
Yellow-throated Scrubwren	<i>Sericornis citreogularis</i>	RF5		#
Australian Brush-turkey ³	<i>Alectura lathami</i>	RF4	#	#
Australian King-Parrot	<i>Alisterus scapularis</i>	RF4	#	#
Azure Kingfisher ²	<i>Ceyx azureus</i>	RF4	#	#
Barred Cuckoo-shrike ³	<i>Coracina lineata</i>	RF4	#	#
Chestnut-breasted Cuckoo ³	<i>Cacomantis castaneiventris</i>	RF4	#	#
Crimson Rosella	<i>Platycercus elegans</i>	RF4		#
Fan-tailed Cuckoo ²	<i>Cacomantis flabelliformis</i>	RF4	#	#
Golden Whistler	<i>Pachycephala pectoralis</i>	RF4		#
Shining Bronze-Cuckoo ²	<i>Chalcites lucidus</i>	R54	#	#
Little Shrike-thrush ²	<i>Colluricincla megarhyncha</i>	RF4	#	#
Metallic Starling	<i>Aplonis metallica</i>	RF4		#
Pied Currawong ²	<i>Strepera graculina</i>	RF4	#	#
Rainbow Lorikeet ²	<i>Trichoglossus moluccanus</i>	RF4	#	#
Rufous Fantail ²	<i>Rhipidura rufifrons</i>	RF4	#	#
Silvereye ²	<i>Zosterops lateralis</i>	RF4	#	#
White-eared Monarch	<i>Carterornis leucotis</i>	RF4		#