

THE HISTORY

The name 'Bellingen' is a corrupted version of a Gumbaynggir word *Baali-jin*. Up until 1841, the Island was just one of several other patches of lowland rainforest strung along the Bellingen floodplain in the traditional country of the Gumbaynggirr people. Europeans first came to the Bellingen Valley in 1841, and began to take red cedar and run sheep and cattle later in the same decade. After the Crown Lands Act was passed in 1861, selection of farming land, particularly on the floodplain and terraces, followed quickly, and the Gumbaynggir were dispossessed.

Unlike the adjacent, and slightly higher floodplain, Bellingen Island remained under Crown tenure and was not cleared for farming during the major period of selection and settlement. Instead it was used as a collection point for red cedar logs floated down the river. A small public area on the downstream end of the Island was cleared in the 1880s. Low and subject to frequent flooding, it quickly suffered erosion. The upstream or western end of the Island was sold as freehold and also partly cleared. Because of its susceptibility to flooding, most of the Island was still unsold and uncleared in 1900. By this time the people of Bellingen recognised that it had become the last sizable remnant of the Bellingen Valley's floodplain rainforests and it was reserved for "public recreation and the preservation of native flora." From this period until the 1970s it was valued as a rainforest reserve as well as being a much used recreational area for swimming and picnicking.

After the 1974 flood, the Island became less frequented by people, camping flying foxes became a regular feature, and weed invasion and rainforest degradation became increasingly serious.



1943

The main channel of the Bellingen is on the northern side of the Island, and a chute overflow, used by floodwaters, runs along the southern side. Access to the Island is by a track leading to the western end from the southern side across the chute channel, and also by a foot bridge from the Red Ledge across the deep swimming hole to the northern edge of the rainforest.



2000

After the 1974 flood, the main course of the Bellingen moved to the old chute overflow on the southern side of the Island, and the channel became wider and more shallow. The deep northern channel silted up.

ON-GOING MANAGEMENT

Because The Island has a dynamic and unstable vegetation community, management has to be on-going, the particular problem being dealing with weeds re-introduced by flooding.

THE VEGETATION MANAGEMENT



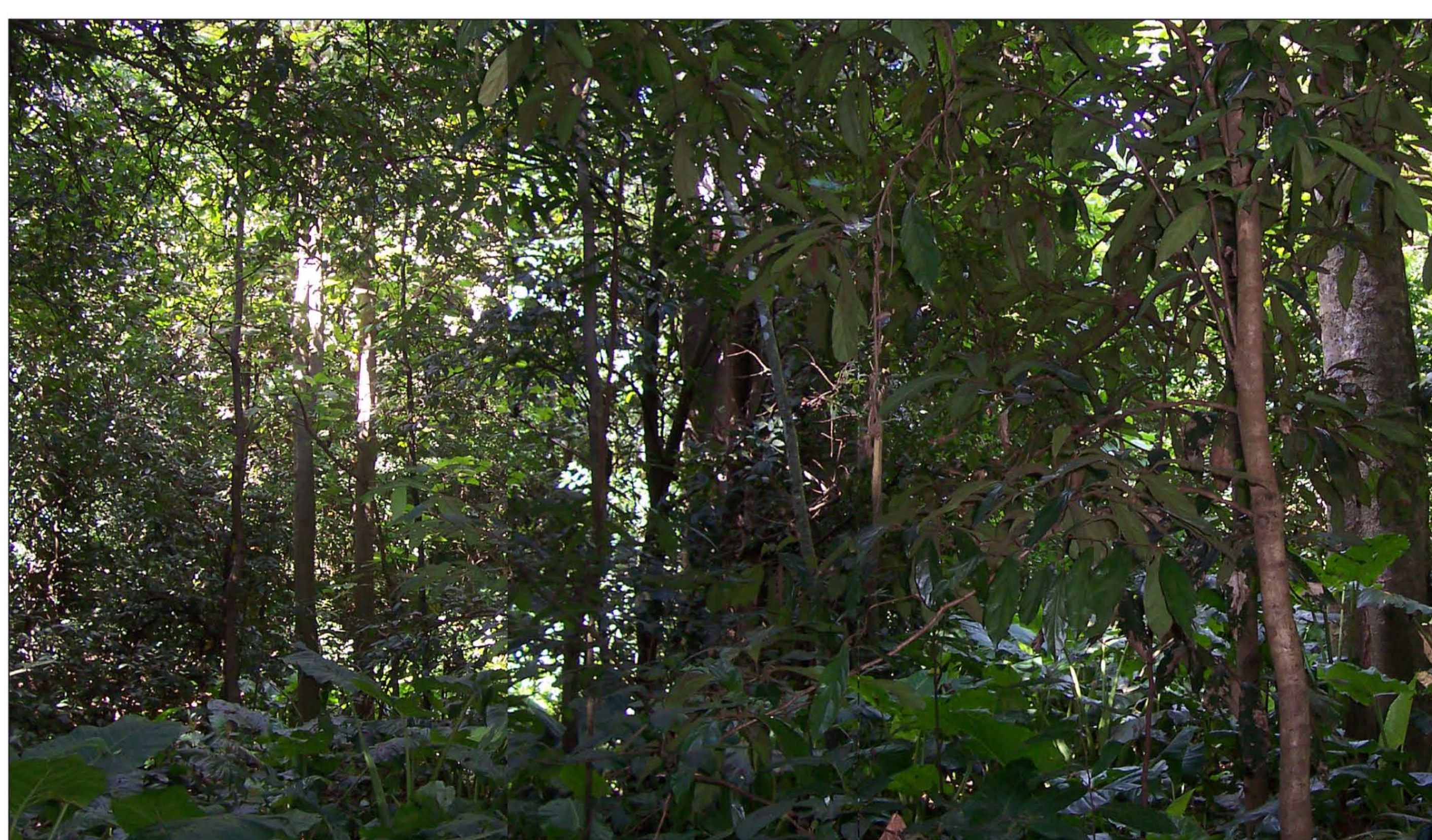
1984

Madeira vine is being cut from the isolated strangler fig and stinging trees in the gap and from the trees of the canopy in the background. The vines can be seen withering. It can take up to 2 years for the aerial tubers of a cut vine to fall to the ground. The weedy scrub in the gap consists of Madeira vine, Wandering Jew, castor oil, lantana, palm grass and the natives, cunjevoi and nettle.



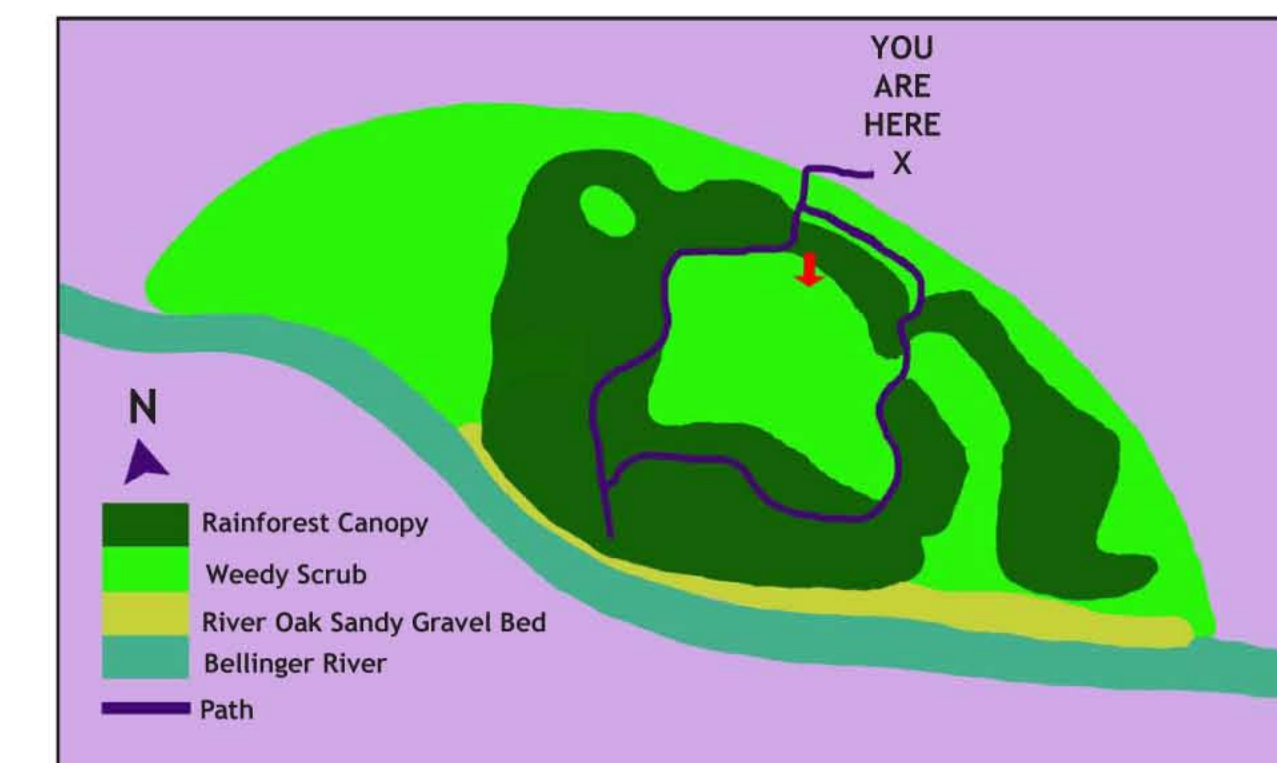
1991

Native tree canopy has recovered to some extent. The gap is being planted. Establishing trees can be seen in the middle ground. Madeira vine and Wandering Jew are being removed from the cunjevois in the foreground to allow natural regeneration of native seedlings.



2006

Regeneration of native trees and vines has now obscured the view of the former gap.



1984

The photos on the left (taken from the red arrow) show a view across the centre of the Island. In 1984 the canopy on the Island had shrunk to a ring around a centre gap occupied by a few scattered vine-covered poles. Restoration has proceeded as follows:

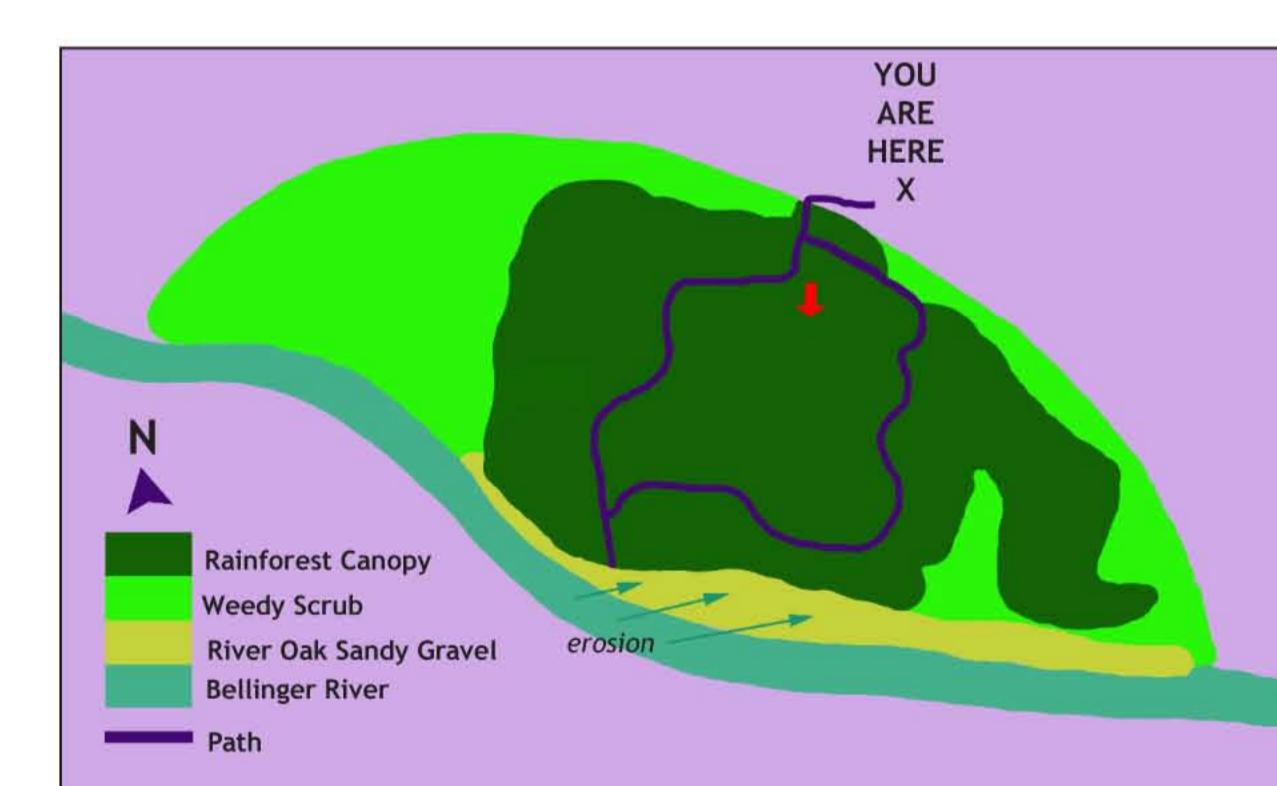
In areas of existing canopy:

- cutting and removing Madeira vine from all trees
- removing Madeira vine tubers and young vines, and Wandering Jew
- repeated follow-up - particularly after floods

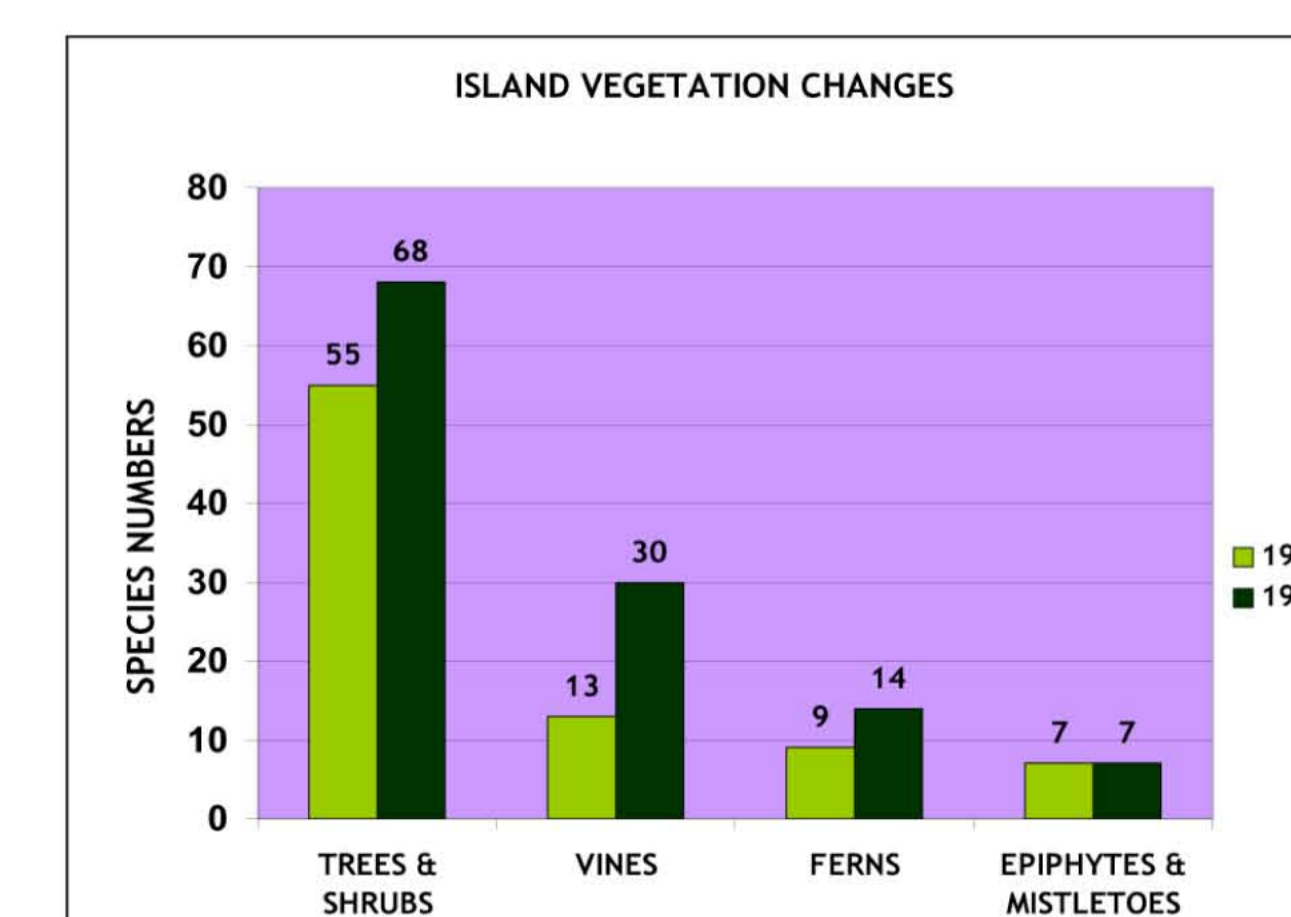
In gaps and on edges:

- cutting and removing Madeira vine from all trees
- planting seedlings propagated from on-site parent trees (commonly giant stinging tree, sandpaper fig, weeping lilly pilly, red cedar)
- removing Wandering Jew and Madeira vine tubers and young vines (greatly assisted by the establishment of planted canopy)
- repeated and ongoing follow-up weeding, particularly on edges and in small gaps.

By 2001 the gap had been closed and the edges of the rainforest slightly expanded to the north. Although all floodwaters re-introduce Madeira vine and Wandering Jew to the rainforest, two big floods in 2001 blanketed the Island in a 10cm layer of silt and drifts of debris. These and subsequent floods have reintroduced a significant and ongoing weed problem to the Island.



2006



There is also active monitoring of the bat colony as part of on-going research into their ecology and conservation.

Anyone interested in meeting with the volunteers, making inquiries about the Island or trying their hand as volunteers themselves should feel free to visit the Island on a Tuesday morning.

The best time to arrive is 10:30 am. Morning tea time.