

# Fauna on the Floodplains: Late Holocene Culture and Landscape on the Sub-coastal Plains of Northern Australia

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**ABSTRACT.** This paper describes the faunal record from a late Holocene archaeological site located on the freshwater wetlands of the South Alligator River and compares it with that from the Adelaide River, in the Northern Territory. The information characterizes freshwater wetland resources and their use by Aboriginal people, providing a snapshot of life on the floodplains immediately prior to European contact. Although the two wetland systems appear similar, and extractive technology in the form of bone points is also similar, the faunal assemblages show that Aboriginal hunting strategies differed between the two areas. These differences can be explained by variations in regional topography and seasonality of site use.

## Introduction

This paper compares two late Holocene faunal assemblages from different regions of the sub-coastal floodplains located in the Top End of the Northern Territory (Fig. 1). The information characterizes freshwater wetland resources and their use by Aboriginal people, providing a snapshot of life on the floodplains immediately prior to European contact. The paper presents new information about faunal remains and bone points recovered from the earth mound site of Kina on the South Alligator River, originally excavated in 1981 as part of the Kakadu Archaeological Project (Jones, 1985). The faunal assemblage was not analyzed in detail at the time; however, this has since been undertaken by Ken Aplin (2016). Aplin's results are compared with those of Brockwell (2009) from earth mounds on the Adelaide River. Although these two tropical freshwater wetland systems appear similar, their faunal assemblages show that Aboriginal hunting strategies differed between regions, although extractive technology in the form of bone points

is similar. Aplin's results demonstrate a dominance of fish in the Kina sequence, while Brockwell's study shows the upper levels of the Adelaide River sites are dominated by freshwater turtle. This paper seeks explanations for these differences and similarities.

## Climate

The climate of northern Australia consists of a long dry season from about April to November and a shorter but intense wet season from about December to March. This regime affects the seasonal availability of both flora and fauna.

## Geomorphology

The evolutionary history of the floodplains of the major river systems of the Top End of the Northern Territory is well understood from various geomorphic studies and is broadly similar between river systems (e.g., Clark & Guppy, 1988; Hope *et al.*, 1985; Woodroffe & Mulrennan, 1983; Woodroffe *et al.*, 1985, 1993). The floodplains were initiated

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