

Long range weather forecaster tested: The first two months

By David Dowling

In the February–March issue of *The Australian Cottongrower*, we put long range weather forecaster Ken Ring to the test. Ken has a solid following in the cotton industry for his forecasts based on lunar cycles.

Towards the end of January, Ken provided daily rain forecasts for the following 12 months for Moree. In each issue of *The Australian Cottongrower*, we will review the accuracy of the forecast for the previous two months and give the new forecast for the next two months. But remember, these forecasts had already been provided by Ken back in January.

At the end of the 12 months, we will

take the results to a statistician for an opinion of whether the forecast had merit or not — whether it is any more accurate than a random guess or whether farmers could use the forecast rather than historical averages for their farm planning.

ACID TEST

So, how did he go in February and March. Well, on a day-by-day basis, not that well to the naked eye (Figures 1 and 2). On the face of it, the actual daily rainfall bore very little resemblance to the forecasted rain days.

But if you accumulate his forecasts into monthly totals, an entirely different story emerges.

In February, Ken forecast a monthly rainfall total significantly higher than the average or the median, which is probably a better figure to use (see Figure 3). He was right. The actual rainfall for February at Moree was well above average and Ken's forecast proved to be an underestimate.

In March, Ken forecast a very dry month, with almost no rain. Up until this story was written (March 21), he was almost spot-on (Figure 4).

So, when Ken made his forecasts in January, he predicted a very wet February and a very dry March — both of which

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FIGURE 1: February daily predicted vs actual

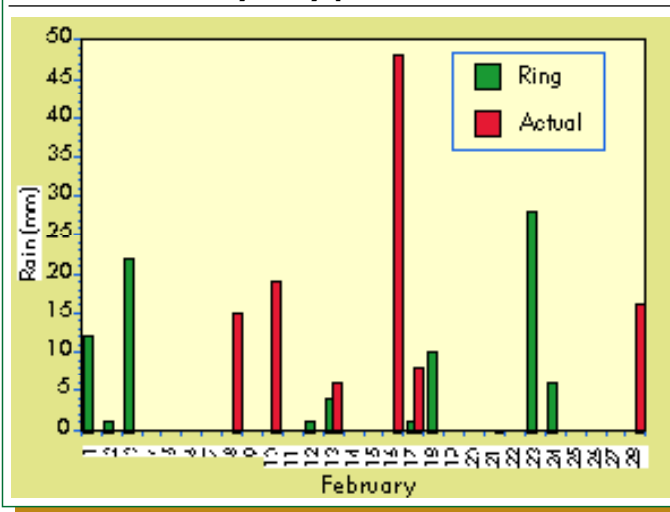


FIGURE 2: March daily predicted vs actual

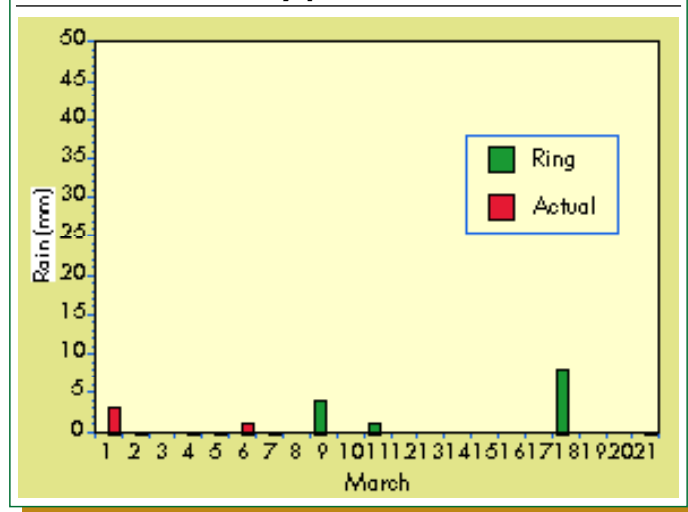


FIGURE 3: February totals

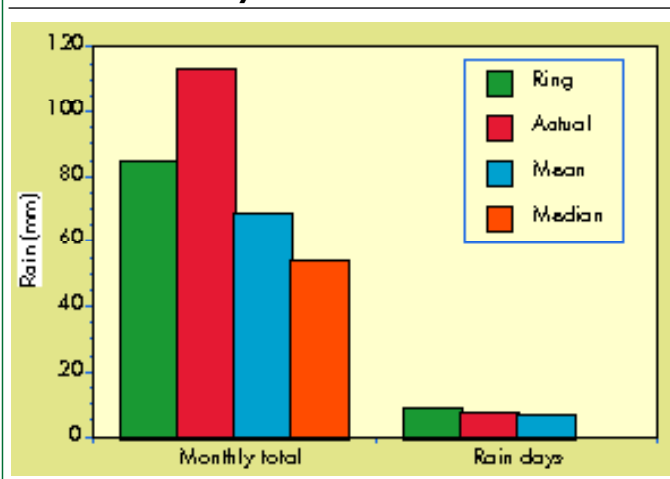
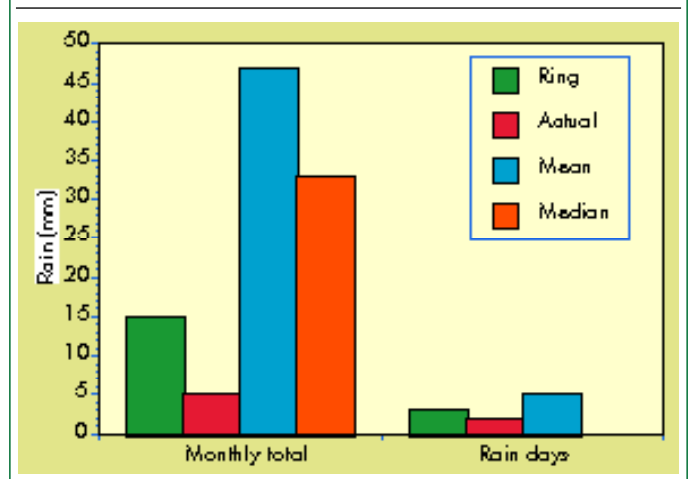


FIGURE 4: March totals



eventuated. That's a pretty good batting average so far, and I would guess a lot more accurate than official seasonal forecasts which tend to congregate towards the average.

WHAT'S AHEAD?

There's a long way to go to convince this skeptic, so let's see how Ken goes in April and May (Figure 5). After some good falls in the middle of April, the forecast is for very dry conditions through till the end of May, with beautiful weather forecast for the Australian Cotton Trade Show on May 24-25.



Blue skies are forecast for May.

FIGURE 5: Daily rainfall forecast for Moree for April-May 2006

