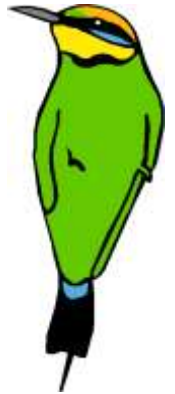


GARDEN FOR WILDLIFE



A Crested Pigeon sits on a flimsy nest built of twigs in the fork of a tree branch. Picture taken by LfW member Jon Raveney.

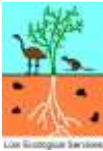


NEWSLETTER

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Northern Territory Government



PowerWater



NT LANDCARE AWARDS CATEGORY WINNER

Alice Springs Municipality | September 2010

Garden for Wildlife News

Land for Wildlife Biodiversity survey - In October, Land for Wildlife will be conducting biodiversity surveys of members' properties in the Ross Highway area. Dates are still being finalised, but volunteers will be needed, so if you are interested in helping us and learning some new skills in the process, then contact us and we'll keep you posted.

Australian Open Garden Scheme - In September, Garden for Wildlife member Tim Gardiner opened his gardens on Knuckey Avenue to the public as part of the Australian Open Garden Scheme. Tim has a range of animals using his landscaping as a home. Including a family of white plumed honeyeaters (nesting in a sapling mallee) and a western brown snake, seen under the pool decking! Proceeds from the event went to a local charity. Here's a couple of photos of Tim's garden.

DesertSmart EcoFair - It was lovely to see many of you at the EcoFair last weekend. It was a great day, and we held a successful Spotted Turtle-dove Trap-making demonstration with many more participants becoming involved in backyard trapping. A big welcome to new members who signed up at the EcoFair: Emily Webster & Ed Nicholson, also Susan Grant, Michelle Withers, Britt Puschak, Timothy Gardiner, and Glenis McBurnie .

Also welcome to Uwe Path and the Pathdorf Solar and Nature Bed & Breakfast to the Land for Wildlife program. Uwe has been landscaping and birdwatching on his property for about 3 1/2 years, with about 400 plants, bushes trees planted. As a keen birdwatcher he can proudly announce that the number of bird species on/around the property has jumped from the initial 35/40 to 70! Other animals on the property include Burton's Legless Lizards, Dunnarts, and Sand Goannas. Recently the property swapped over to complete solar, whose 10.5 kW solar power system generates all electricity needed! Congratulations Uwe!

Articles

1. Watch Out For Dragons in October

Dragons, lizards of the Agamidae family, are common, often conspicuous members of the reptile fauna of central Australia. They come in a variety of forms, are generally active during the day and at least some species have adapted well to urban areas and backyards around Alice Springs. Many colourful, unique and spectacular lizards belong to this family.

Shown here are some of the more common species you might encounter within the limits of Alice Springs. Certainly, none of these lizards are dangerous and the bright colours and spines that they often exhibit are more for bluff or used to display to rival lizards. If you see any of them in your garden, leave them where they lie, and they'll do you a favour by eating any cockroaches. Get more information by Googling the scientific name.



Long nosed dragon

Long nosed dragon, *Amphibolurus longirostris* – Common around watercourses where they can often be observed on tree limbs or atop bare rocks. Males establish small territories and signal to rivals by 'waving'. These dragons have an extremely long tail, up to 3 times their body length, and can grow up to a total length of 52cm

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Canegrass Dragon, *Diporiphora winneckeii* – These are one of the smaller members of the dragon family (total length, including a long tail, just over 20cm). They prefer sandy desert country with Spinifex and canegrass, where they live in a shallow burrow excavated beneath the vegetation. It's unlikely you'd see one in town, but if you travel into surrounding areas you may encounter them as they rush between sheltering clumps of spinifex



Canegrass Dragon



Central Netted Dragon

Central netted Dragon, *Ctenophorus nuchalis*

– So called because of the net pattern its back, these dragons are often obvious members of lizard fauna, often perching high on the top of a dead stump or fence post. When disturbed, they'll dash to the ground and into the burrow that's they've dug at the base of their favourite perch or clump of vegetation. Often quite trusting of people, they'll sometimes allow a close approach. During the breeding season, the male develops a deep orange colour over his head, identifying him from the female.

Central Bearded Dragon, *Pogona vitticeps* – Central bearded dragons are a large member of the family, growing up to ½ a metre long and are quite robust. Their distinguishing feature is a large spiny 'beard' of skin under the chin that can be inflated as a threat or mating display. The males beard is black during the breeding season. These lizards are often on the roads at the moment, warming themselves in the open and displaying to rivals and potential mates.



Central Bearded Dragon

2. Spring Cleaning Your Garden

October's a perfect time to carry out some garden maintenance. The rain this year has meant a mass germination of plants in the bush, and perhaps in your garden beds, as well as copious new growth on existing trees and shrubs in the backyard. Some areas of your garden may be looking decidedly over grown and untidy. However, this 'untidiness' may actually be providing some important habitat for some of the wildlife using your place - perhaps even attracting some species that ordinarily might not frequent your area.

Dense Grass and Weed Growth – This year's rains have produced a massive growth of grasses, including weeds, such as Buffel grass, and native species. Famed as a hiding place for venomous snakes, there are also a number of other animals that will utilise this kind of habitat. Reptiles such as blue tongue lizards will use grasses as both foraging and shelter areas, as will many of the Ctenotus skinks. Small birds can find a home in long grasses to. A number of times I have found fairy wrens nesting in tall, dense grasses and grain eaters like zebra finches use the grass as a food resource. Sometimes, weed species can offer some of the same resources as native alternatives. The fairy wrens I mentioned were nesting in thick Buffel grass for example. So before you clear any weed growth, carefully observe what animals might be using it. Maybe you might like to wait a few weeks while those wrens raise some chicks before you go crazy with the whipper snipper. Then, at the

Dense grass growth (*Themedia triandra*)

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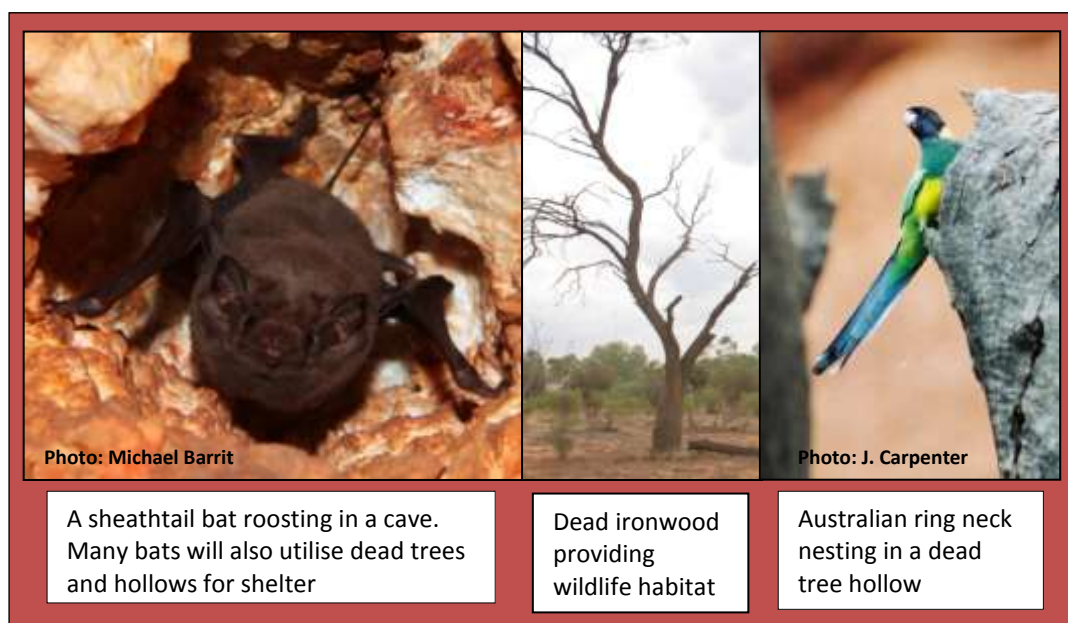
same time as removing the weed patch, establish an area of native grasses in your garden as an alternative for the birds next breeding season.

Dead Timber – Dead timber and tree hollows, either littering the ground, or standing as trees, is a valuable, often essential resource for many animals. It provides a refuge from predators and weather, safe sites for breeding and resource rich areas for foraging. Completely removing this resource from your garden will diminish the diversity of habitat you provide for wildlife, and therefore lessen the types of animals that frequent your property.

This is a resource that often takes many years to form in natural systems. Take tree hollows for example. Young trees, such as those that usually occur in revegetation areas or garden situations are generally strong and healthy and do not contain hollows. Old trees however, have been subjected to a wide range of elements such as fire, wind and attack by insects, fungi and disease. While the outer ‘skin’ of an old tree may be healthy, the dead timber inside the trunk can be eaten away due to these influences, leaving cavities behind. It is these resulting hollows that are used by wildlife.

Dead timber that may be lying on the ground is also an important resource for ground frequenting wildlife such as insects, reptiles (like those in the preceding article) and small mammals. This too is a resource that takes time to develop in a natural system and, particularly in the urban gardens, may not exist at all.

It may be tempting to clean up this kind of debris from your property and ‘clean up’, but instead of removing it completely, why not use it as a landscaping material in a garden bed?



Snakes - Both these elements of a backyard are often feared as a habitat for venomous snakes. Several dangerous snakes inhabit the Alice Springs area, including western brown and mulga snakes. It is quite true that these animals will shelter under dead timber, inside hollows and in long, thick vegetation. However, remember that these animals are also an important part of an ecosystem and, unless disturbed, will happily begin ridding your property of house mice with little impact on you.

3. Garden Weeds – Prickly Lettuce (*Lactuca serriola*)

History – Prickly lettuce (*Lactuca serriola*) is a biennial or annual plant, germinating throughout winter and flowering through spring into summer months. Originating in north Africa and Europe, it is thought that this plant is possibly the ancestor of cultivated lettuce varieties. Ancient Egyptians used the seeds of prickly lettuce to make cooking oil as long ago as 4500 years and paintings of bunches of the plant have been found in tombs dating to this period. It is unknown when the plant was introduced into Australia.

Description – A herb growing up to 2m tall with a deep taproot. The leaves are blue-green, the basal leaves forming a rosette and being up to 30cm long. Leaves on the upper part of the plant clasp the stem and are smaller. Both stems and leaves exude a milky latex sap when broken. Leaves generally have spines on their margins and lower mid-rib. The flowers are held in panicles and are pale yellow, being about 6 – 9mm long.

Occurance – Prickly lettuce is a weed of disturbed areas, crops and pastures. Usually germinating at the beginning of winter, plants grow a rosette over the cooler months, developing flowering stems in spring and summer.

Control – Small and isolated infestations, such as may be found in a normal garden situation, can easily be done by hand pulling individual plants. Ensure that you remove the entire plant, especially the taproot, as the plant may re-sprout. In early growth stages, the plant can be easily controlled by spraying the rosette with glyphosate. However, once the flowering stems have begun to emerge, this may have limited success.

Letters to the Editor

There have been quite a few emails in our mail box recently concerning spotted turtle doves around town. There's been a wide range of responses from people, some who've had no trouble with the birds on their properties, to those who've suddenly been inundated with the pests. Here's some of the news from around town on the issue.

Hi Ilse and Jesse

Luckily we don't have any Spotted Turtle-doves - or at least I have not seen one in the past year. We have around 30 plus resident Crested Pigeons who appear in small and large groups for our "bird bath" (and chook food! and are on the property daily. They have nested in our trees over the past year and really bred up in number. There are also a small group of around 10 diamond doves (I think - definitely tiny ones and not feral) that have recently moved in and are regular visitors.

Hope all is well. Have really been enjoying the flocks of budgies that are staying overnight in big numbers and the increased number of kites trying to surprise them in the mornings!!

Jon

Thanks Ilse for the identification information, amongst the ferals I've caught over time, I caught a native Peaceful Dove recently and thankfully I let it go....

Jayne McAlister

Jayne's letter emphasizes the importance of successfully being able to recognise the turtle doves from native birds they might be confused with. This is especially the case if you're trapping – native doves will quite happily enter traps intended for the feral pests.

If anyone needs help identifying doves, or would like further information about traps and the trapping program, contact us here and we'll give you a hand. Also, any unusual or particularly interesting bird observations you make on your place, let us know about them to (like Jon's Crested Pigeon pigeon nest on the cover).

Mexican poppies are still a hot topic in our in box, and it seems that this year has provided ideal conditions for this weed to establish itself in some of the creeks of the local area.

G'day all,

We've are now experiencing the largest germinations of mp in Roe creek in about ten years, and to a much lesser extent, some in Laura Ck,. Generally they are mostly against the banks, and disturbed areas, but the biggest worry are those up on the top of the banks in the buffel grass, something we haven't seen for a long time.

All plants are extremely healthy, a quite a few flowers now, occasional immature seed pods.

Plenty in the sand leases. (Sorry joy, I inadvertently left your address out the list fo a couple of emails.)

Denise, still getting lots against the boundary fence, both sides, and up on the islands.

Thanks & cheers

Rod Cramer

Announcements

Biodiversity Survey 2010

This year, Land for Wildlife will be conducting its annual biodiversity survey of members properties in the Ross Highway area of Alice Springs. The surveys will be carried out on several properties in the area and will take place in October (dates to be finalised).

This is a great opportunity for you to learn some new skills in survey techniques and identification of flora and fauna species. Anyone who's interested in volunteering to help, contact us and let us know.

Spotted Turtle-dove Survey

Following on from the letters above, Land for Wildlife is busy collecting observation data from members regarding spotted turtle doves. While any information is helpful, there is a prepared survey form available that allows you to easily record what you see and will give you an idea of the type of information we're looking for. Contact us if you'd like one of these forms sent to you. Already, we've had some great feedback from some of our members.

Websites Worth A Look

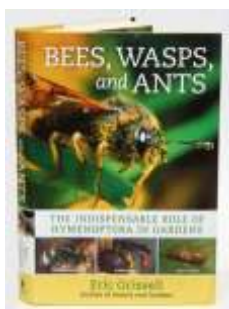
<http://www.ntinfont.org.au/>

Provides summaries of vegetation, soils and fire history (in the form of maps, graphs and statistics), and lists of all species relevant to any area of your choice. Results can be viewed online in the **Preview** tab or downloaded and saved in a PDF document. The site also provides management guidelines for threatened species, weeds and pest animals recorded in or near your selected area.

<http://www.landmanager.org.au/>

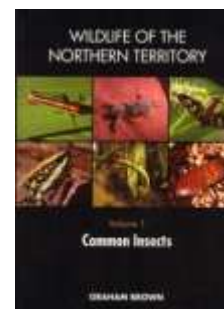
Enables people to make better land management decisions by providing information on the soils, pasture and plants and animals that need to be looked after, and on the problems land managers face. This site focuses on the regions north of Alice Springs, but still contains relevant information about many aspects of land management in the centre.

Recommended Books



Bees, Wasps and Ants: The Indispensable Role of Hymenoptera in Gardens, by Eric Grissell

These insects help to maintain the biological balance in a garden, fertilizing plants and recycling nutrients within the soil. This book explains the importance of Hymenoptera and how gardeners can encourage (or discourage) them in the garden.



Wildlife of the Northern Territory Vol 1: Common Insects

An introduction to common insects, spiders, scorpions, millipedes and centipedes in the NT. A simple but accurate introductory field guide to NT species.

Calendar of Events

October (dates to be finalised) – Land for Wildlife biodiversity survey. Contact us to volunteer your help or for more information.

Gardens For Food Workshops –

- 3 Oct – Composting, pests and predators
- 10 Oct – Growing bush tucker
- 17 Oct – Seed saving
- 24 Oct – Battling problems

Workshops cost \$10 - \$15, and places are limited. To book, email gardensforfood@gmail.com

Wed 20 Oct - Ride to Work Day, 6am – 9am on the council lawns at the civic centre join in for a Pancake Breakfast. Call Lucy Griffiths 89500563 for more information.

Oct 29 - Seminar: Improvements in fire management on Aboriginal lands. Rangelands Seminar at CDU HE lecture theatre, 3:30pm.

9-11 November - 4th Desert Knowledge Symposium - Alice Springs Convention Centre, see www.desertknowledgesymposium.com for more information.

Take care,
Ilse, Jesse & Bill



Garden for Wildlife Coordinators

Low Ecological Services P/L

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