

LAND FOR WILDLIFE NEWS



Newsletter of the Land for Wildlife Scheme in Alice Springs Municipality, NT

Vol.1 No.8 August 2004

Land for Wildlife Update

Thankyou to all those who made themselves available to sign the EnviroFund application. The application was successfully lodged and we hope once again it will be accepted. If this grant application is accepted, *LfW* will continue to run on a part time basis for an additional 12 months beginning in January 2005. The program continues to expand with ongoing interest and memberships.

Volunteer Small Equipment Grants 2004

The LfW group was given the opportunity to apply for grants of up to \$5000 to buy small equipment items that support the work of volunteers by making it easier, safer and/or more enjoyable. This funding has been made available through the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services - Volunteer Small Equipment Grants 2004.

After receiving feedback from *LfW* members an application was submitted asking for additional cat traps, rabbit traps, feral dove traps and a spray unit. We should hear within the next month or so whether this application was successful.

Workshops

LfW has run two workshops within the past few months. In May we met at Sue Richter and Rodger Thomson's home to run the 'Property Planning and Landscaping' field day. Col Stanton, Colleen O'Malley and Geoff Miers shared their knowledge and tips on how to plan and manage your property, aiming to conserve habitat and enhance biodiversity.

Also in late June a 'Soup and Slides' night was held with Nic Gambold and Greg Fyfe presenting an excellent slide show on local reptiles at the Marshall's home.

We look forward to continuing contact with members at the next workshop 'Tracks and Scats – Who's Are They?' which will be held in September. We will let you know the location when it has been negotiated.

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Books Worth a Look



As I was searching around for recent publications of interest I came across the Dept. Of Environment and Heritage Publications website. It houses publications covering a huge range of environmental topics, allowing you to electronically access brochures, posters, fact sheets, newsletters reports and guides. www.deh.gov.au (home page – about us – publications).

'*Reptiles and Frogs of Alice Springs*' by Nic Gambold and Deb Metters has been reprinted and is still available at ALEC, Olive Pink Coffee Shop, Big Kangaroo Book Shop, the Desert Park and Low Ecological Services.

Spotlight On

Wildflowers

With the good soaking of rain we had around Alice in May the place is beginning to bloom. Keep your eyes out for some of these wildflowers around your block or when you are out bush until late September



Polycalymma stuartii
Poached egg daisy

Is an annual which appears after good autumn or winter rain. As the name suggests flowers resemble a poached egg and the leaves are near the base of the plant. They are found in deep sand.

Senna artemisioides
Silver Cassia

A silvery shrub that is now starting to bloom with yellow flowers. Cassias are found everywhere in the local Alice area.



Ptilotus helipteroides
Hairy mulla mulla

Appearing after rain, it has a distinctive deep pink to lilac flower head (about 3 x 2cm) with a white tuft at the top.

Ptilotus obovatus
Silvertails

Have small light-pink flower heads and pale grey-green leaves due to a dense covering of star-shaped hairs.



Eremophila freelingii
Rock fuschia bush

Widespread in dry rocky places. The bush often looks more dead than alive, with droopy greyish-green leaves.

However after good rain the plant is transformed. The flower (on right) is usually lilac but can be pink, white or blue.



Calocephalus knappii
Yellow billy button

Small perennial with white woolly leaves and globular yellow flower heads.

Senecio magnificus
Tall yellow top

A tall perennial approximately 1m tall. The flower heads are in clusters and yellow in colour. It is found along roadsides, in floodout areas and on open plains.



Ptilotus exaltatus
Pink mulla mulla

A perennial growing up to 1.5m high. The leaves are large and fleshy and the flower heads deep pink in colour and approx 20x 4.5cm in size

Eremophila latrobei

Native fuschia

Flowering after rain this bush has bright-red flower bells, which curve downwards. The leaves vary, but are generally narrow and crowded.



Schoenia cassiniana

Pink everlasting

The Pink everlasting is an annual, having pink papery clustered flower heads.

Othonna gregorii
Annual Yellowtop

With good autumn or winter rains these yellow starry daisies carpet the countryside in spring. It is a fleshy hairless annual which grows about 30cm tall.



Bracteantha bracteata

Golden everlastings

This erect perennial daisy is widespread throughout Australia. The flower heads have a yellow centre and stiff golden petals. The leaves are soft and fleshy, about 4–12 cm

long.

Fire Break Tips

During the cooler months it is a good time to make sure that your firebreak is in tip top condition ready for the hot summer months. Here are a few tips to remember:

🔥 Understand the local environment around your property and be aware of the fire risks. Have a plan if fire does threaten.

🔥 A firebreak doesn't have to be bare earth.

🔥 It must be continuous around all external boundaries and a minimum of 4 meters wide.

🔥 Slashed or mowed breaks must be maintained regularly to limit the height of flammable materials to a height of 50mm.

Fire prevention and control are a landholder's responsibility.

To find out more about regulation and wildfire prevention contact Bushfires Council (Alice Springs West and East Regions) on 8952 3066 or Fire and Rescue Services on 8951 6611.

Research on how the Burrowing Frog Stays Toned.

Can a frog that is known to bury itself in mud for months on end hold the key both to avoiding muscle wastage in people AND provide natural ways of optimising muscle production from cattle, sheep pigs and goats?

Australia's Green-Striped Burrowing frog, (*Cyclorana alboguttata* previously known as *Litoria alboguttat* but on the basis of a sperm ultra structure paper was reclassified), commonly found across eastern Australia, is being closely looked at by Dr Nick Hudson and a collaborative team from CSIRO.

The Green-Striped Burrowing frog can remain buried in mud, entering a state of inactivity – called aestivation – for up to nine months. It seems they enter a state of reduced metabolic rate that allows them to deal with the suspension.

By understanding how it does this, scientist may be able to target specific genes, or develop new treatments to enhance muscle mass during growth of livestock species or to limit muscle loss during times of nutritional deprivation.

And since the structure of the frogs muscles are similar to ours, someone might be able to take this research and carry it over into human research in aim of reduce muscle loss for people who experience long-term physical inactivity

This one frog may have the answer to big questions...no wonder he's in hiding most of the year.

Source: CSIRO 'Talking Stock', June 2004.
UNQ Dept of Zoology and Entomology, 2004.

Watch out For



BIGHEADED ANTS INVADING BEHIND THE SCENES

In December 2001 an article appeared in the Alice Springs Advocate that warned of the potential threats that the feral Big Headed Ant, (*Pheidole megacephala*), poses on our backyards and the Central Australian environment.

Once again this little ant is in the spotlight and for good reason.

The Big headed ant is originally from South Africa, and most likely arrived here in Alice in a pot plant transported from Darwin or the east coast.

The Big Headed Ant is light brown to dark reddish brown. 'The ant is minuscule, and only a few in a colony will have the characteristic big head. It is more easily identified by its nest which are often found in 'exposed soil or under cover or in rotting wood. They form nests in soil with a low mound of loose dirt around the centre'. (CSIRO, 2004).

The Big Headed Ant poses a serious threat to local invertebrate communities as it reduces native insects. It is more aggressive

then local ant species and is incredibly invasive, reducing species diversity of ants from typically 20 to 30 species to just having the Big Headed Ant. This is likely to have a 'major impact on ecological services that native ants provide, which include soil aeration, pollination and seed dispersal' (CSIRO).

The big Headed ant needs moist conditions to survive and currently is found nesting in the soils around homes in many areas of Alice Springs. Currently it is confined to the town, however, this may not always be the case. There is a threat that the Big Headed ant could potentially spread to wetter environments within the region, environments that often also hold high biodiversity value.

'The Big Headed Ant is relatively easy to control: a granular bait, commercially available, sprinkled at the entrance to the nest, will get rid of the ant. If a concerted effort was made in town, the problem could be prevented from spreading.' (Advocate 2001).

CSIRO Centre for Arid Zone Research and the Northern Territory Threatened Species Network (TSN) have combined forces in a joint project to raise public awareness and gather information about the introduced Big Headed Ant in Alice Springs. The Big Headed Ant will be a focus at the upcoming 'Science Week' and Alice Festival.

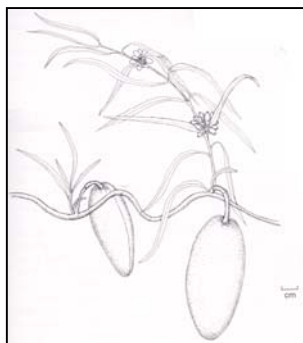
For further information on the Big Headed Ant contact CSIRO on 8950 7100.

Bush Tucker on Your Property

The Bush Banana, *Marsdenia australis*, is a woody, winding vine common throughout central Australia. It has cream coloured flowers and long thin green leaves. When mature, fruit open and release numerous seeds with light feathery plumes

attached to one end that can be carried by the wind.

The sweet flowers and young fruits are eaten raw (most favoured). When mature the fruits are cooked and eaten whole. The older leaves are eaten after being steamed and young leaves require no preparation. Bush bananas are fruiting at the moment so keep your eyes peeled.



Source: P.Latz, 1995. *Bushfires and Bush Tucker – Aboriginal Plant use in Central Australia.* IAD Press, Alice Springs.

What's Happening At....

.....the Zadow's place.

I suppose the most exciting bit of wildlife news on our block is the presence of echidnas. I often see evidence of their presence up the scree slope at the back of the block. There are those conical shaped holes and also (particularly after rain) soil disturbance where they work along the edges of fallen mulga in search of termites.

Late last year at about 1.30am one morning I was awakened by my dog carrying on more than usual. I finally decided I had better get up and have a look see and ventured out in my pyjamas and no shoes with just a small torch to light the way. I was feeling a bit apprehensive as it was summer time and was expecting to be confronted by a big mulga snake. Molly was near the back of her enclosure carrying on and as I peered around the corner I was met by an echidna strolling along not more than one metre from the dog enclosure fence and didn't appear to be taking much notice of the dog. The next day when I looked around in daylight I discovered several conical holes where it



had started to burrow down so it obviously was not its first visit down on the flat ground.

Other interesting wildlife includes tawny frogmouths and bowerbirds each of which have raised young in recent years.

In previous years we have had up to a dozen spinifex pigeons, some walking right on to the back verandah, but they have been completely absent in the last couple of years. There is evidence of feral cat kills along the slope so perhaps this is the reason. I suppose that ground dwelling birds are the most vulnerable.

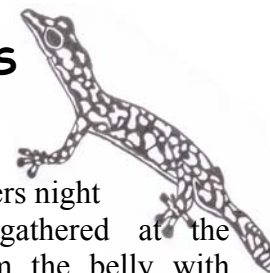
As a result of the rain in May we now have a profusion of wildflowers as we have very little buffel left now. The predominant species is *Senecio gregorii* as well as some *Helichrysum cassinianum* but there are a lot of others just starting to flower now. A lot of *Helichrysum bracteatum* (I think that name has been changed) have germinated so I am hoping for a bit more rain to carry them on. I had a bit of ruby dock germinate after the rain but have been able to hand weed it.

Written by Lyn & Basil Zadow.

(Just a few name changes to note: *Helichrysum bracteatum* is now called *Bracteantha bracteata*, *Helichrysum cassinianum* is now *Schoenia cassiniana* and *Senecio gregorii* is for now known as *Othonna gregorii*). More opportunity to put a name on a plant.

Workshops & Events

SOUP AND SLIDES NIGHT



Last month on a cold winters night a few friendly faces gathered at the Marshall's home to warm the belly with soup, the soul with wine and the mind with brilliant photos of those reptiles that call Alice Springs home.

Once again Nic Gambold chose a selection of his finest shots to present a slide show on the local reptiles that may inhabit your back yard.

With help from local herpetologists Greg Fyfe, key family characteristics and habitat preferences were pointed out with a few quirky stories being told.

The night not only drew ongoing 'aahhh's' from the audience, but also left us with a better understanding of how to identify a species by looking out for these key, easy to recognise characteristics.

Thankyou to the Marshall's for opening their home to *LfW* members and to Nic and Greg for the great pictures and valuable knowledge. Of course thanks to those *LfW* members who also supported the evening.

Calender of Events

11th August, Wednesday- Alice Springs Field Naturalist Club. AGM followed by members 'show and tell' and social. Meet 7:30pm. Ph Bob Read 8952 1935.

13th – 22nd August - National Science Week 2004. The week provides great entertainment and activities for both young and old. Most events are held at the Alice Springs Cultural Precinct with the exception to one, which will be held at the Alice Springs Desert Park.

For a program and more details on what's happening during National Science Week 2004, contact Ms Karen Eva-Stirk on 8950 7123.

14th August Saturday. Alice Springs Field Naturalist Club. Field trip to the James Ranges. Contact Kevin Boyle on 0422 006 140 for further details.

22nd August Sunday. Alice Springs Field Naturalist Club. WaterWatch at Wigleys Waterhole. Meet at Sargent St sign on North Stuart Hwy 8.30 am. Contact Rosalie Breen for further details, 8952 1935.

4th September Sunday. Greening Australia Plant Sale. Native Plant Sale 9am-12 noon at Charles Darwin Uni. Contact Anna Murphy at Greening Australia on 8953 2882

Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA) have the following trips lined up and are seeking volunteers.

Simpson Desert - *Acacia peuce* Fencing Project

3rd to 12th August and 16th to 22nd August

Newhaven Bird Sanctuary Environmental Management Plan.

3rd to 12th August, 17th to the 26th August, 31st August to 9th September, 14th to 23rd September.

Trephina Gorge Nature Park Maintenance Program

16th to the 27th August (2 days off in between)

Uluru - Kata Tjuta National Park (2 days off in between) weed and maintenance management plan.

30th August to 10th September

Illamurta Springs Conservation Reserve

19th to 25th September

To get involved or find out more about any of these projects please contact Conservation Volunteers Australia on 8953 6411 or email alicesprings@cva.org.au

The Mitre 10 Junior Landcare Grants Program is open to schools and other youth organisations around Australia. It provides funds to enable participation in a wide range of Landcare projects. Applications for up to \$500 are currently invited. Closing dates for the 2004 Grant applications Round Four - October 21. For application forms and guidelines visit: www.landcareaustralia.com.au

This newsletter has been produced by *LfW* coordinators W.A. Low Ecological Services with the assistance of the Alice Springs Town Council and the Australian Commonwealth Government's Natural Heritage Trust EnviroFund. Contact Danae or Kim 89555222

