

LAND FOR WILDLIFE NEWS



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

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Land for Wildlife Update

Hope you have all been enjoying the colourful display of wildflowers on your block. Glenn Marshall has as you can see in an article on page 5. If not, you are either like Peter Latz who prefers the desert like he does a woman, naked not dressed gaudily (see Alice Springs News, September) or you can't see them for the buffel.

Competition

ZOOM ON THE INVASIVES!

A photo competition organised by IUCN aiming to raise awareness of the impact of alien invasive species on the native animals and plants, ecosystems and people's livelihoods is currently open. Feral pigs, crazy ants, water hyacinths, zebra mussels, brushtail possums and other invaders will be in the spotlight of the competition. Professional and amateur photographers are invited to submit photos to the competition until the 22nd of October 2004. The prize is US \$1000 cash and the 10 best photos will be displayed at the upcoming 3rd IUCN World Conservation Congress, which will look in particular at ways of coping with alien invasive species through its "Biodiversity Loss and Species Extinction-Managing Risk in a Changing World". For further information check out the website <http://www.sur.iucn.org/competition/index.htm>

Workshops



LfW is running a workshop on Saturday October the 16th at the Silver Bullet Café from 8 am. It would be great to see all of you there. The workshop will provide information on those little critters, **Ants**. What ants you have on your property, what they do and how to they contribute to the native habitat of your block will be discussed. Also the problem of Big Headed Ants will be addressed. Look out for the article on ants in this issue to help you come a little prepared. Next workshop before Christmas, Tracks and Scats, whose are they?

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Books Worth a Look



Natural Resource Monitoring Guide - a practical guide to detecting changes occurring at the property or catchment level.

Monitoring changes that occur on your property is an important part of resource management. This publication covers a variety of NRM issues and builds the readers capacity to record and compare data over time to monitor change.

Copies are available from the Department of Natural Resources Queensland.

Spotlight On

A few ants to get you all excited!!!

Hope you are all coming to the workshop at the Silver Bullet on Saturday. Below are some images and information to help you arrive a little prepared if you like. Or bring some ants in and get help to ID them on the day.



Bull ant

Bull ants are greater than 8mm in length and construct mound nests in the soil which may be covered with small stones or fragments of plant material. Bull ants are most active during the day and forage either on the ground or on low vegetation.



Sugar ant

Sugar ants are 2.5-15mm in length. Are found nesting in a variety of sites ranging from holes in wood to the roots of plants, in twigs of trees and shrubs, between rocks or in the soil. They are mostly nocturnal and workers can often be seen heading out at dusk along marked trails to forage for food, and travelling back to the nest at dawn. Sugar ants can also be seen during the day however they are most active at night.

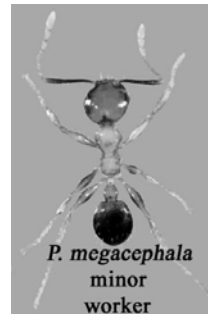


Meat ant

Meat ants are between 5-10mm in size. Nests are located in soil, with or without covering, and range in size from a few hundred to over 300,000 workers. The above-ground structure of nests varies from large flat mounds decorated

with small pebbles and having many entrances to single, cryptic holes just large enough for individual workers to squeeze through. Colonies of meat ants are often spread over wide areas with many individual nests connected by well defined paths.

And.....Watch out!!!!



Big Headed ants

Not all of them have big heads but these guys are causing major problems as mentioned in the previous newsletter. How do you spot them? They are 2.4-3.8mm long and Nest in soil or under stones, logs, wood, or debris. It is common for a colony to have multiple sub-nests which are difficult to control.

A little bit of bush medicine

If you are ever feeling a bit fluey or have a headache look no further than *Eremophilla freelingii*. A decoction of the leaves is either drunk for the relief of headaches and chest pains or as a wash for sores. The leaves may be placed up the nostril or used as a pillow if suffering a cold. The early Europeans even used it to make a medicinal tea.



Reference: Latz, P. 1995. Bushfires and Bushtucker, IAD press.

Mexican Poppy

Mexican Poppy *Argemone ochroleuca*

Mexican Poppy is a declared noxious weed which was recorded as being naturalised in NSW in 1845. It now occurs in all Australian states and territories. As the name suggests it is native to Mexico, it now occurs throughout the tropics and is considered one of the worlds worst weeds. Although this spiny, bluish -green herb growing up to 1 meter tall lives for less than one year it produces masses of seed with each seed capsule capable of producing 300 to 400 tiny seeds.

Most seed germination occurs with rains during the cooler months. Mexican Poppy occurs predominantly in creeks, drainage lines and disturbed sites such as road sides.

For more details refer to 'Weeds of the Tanami - A field guild to the environmental weeds of the Tanami region, Central Australia ' in your *LfW* folder.

Mexican Poppy has again been in the spotlight with both *LfW* members and the public. Messages have been received from *LfW* members concerned about Mexican Poppy growing in the creek bed and along the creek bank out at Honeymoon Gap.

Many of you may remember the clean up a few years ago along all the Bullen Road properties backing on Rowe Creek. The clean up involved 8 Toyotas and 30 people working hard over a month to rid the original infestation of very large plants. The weeds were removed by chipping and were incinerated.

Once again Mexican Poppy is being found in large stands within Rowe Creek and unfortunately along the creek bank, and no doubt many other creeks and water ways throughout Alice Springs.

Mexican Poppy is difficult to control once the plant has seeded. Using Glyphosate will only get a 50% kill on Mexican Poppy so it may not be a viable control method. A stronger mix of 2,4-D and Glyphosate or Picloram and Glyphosate or Fluroxypyr or Metsulfuron-methyl. However, most of these chemicals are not commonly held by your average citizen and some aren't the friendliest things to use. The last two listed have some residual properties. In all cases the chemicals are meant to be used in early growth stages for best effect as Mexican Poppy has some resistance as it get older and begins to flower.

IF YOU INTEND TO USE ANY OF THESE CHEMICALS PLEASE SEEK EXPERT CHEMICAL ADVICE. The Weeds department at DIPE should be able to provide some guidance and the Queensland Department of Planning and Infrastructure (DPI), can issue registered chemical advice.

Hand pulling or chipping, although is harder work may not be much slower than spraying.

Small flowering plants can usually be kicked out and there is no need to bag them. Pods that are very green generally don't need bagging either as the seed is not mature. Once seed pods start to change colour seed may or may not be ripening and its safest to bag and destroy.

The Northern Territory Department of Infrastructure Planning and the Environment website provides a variety of information on weeds within the NT, current NT noxious weeds (Mexican Poppy is a declared noxious weed), control methods and the landowners responsibilities. It also provides contact details for your regional weeds officer and links to the Weeds Act 2001.

There is currently no central data base of the locations of Mexican Poppy, however, one is to be established in the near future.

LfW members have been asked if they could help provide baseline information for this data base by providing information on location of infestations and brief notes on any control work undertaken. You can forward this information to LfW@lowecol.com.au or just call the LfW coordinator on 8955 5222.

Watch out For

The Rainbow Bee Eater

The Rainbow Bee Eater is making its way across the continent at the moment and you will often see them sitting like this with at least one other mate, never alone. You see they are very romantic and pair up for life.

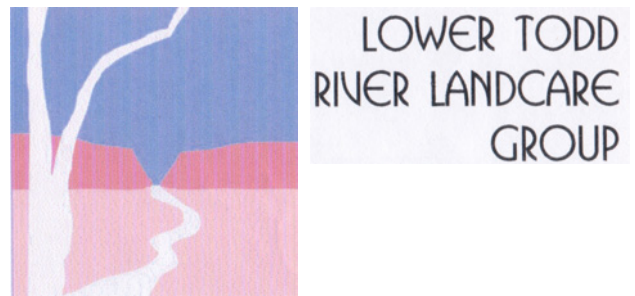
They like spending their time either in the savannah of the top end and beyond or from September to March living down south in open country, sand plains, woodland, paddocks and roadsides.



Apart from being one of the most gorgeous birds you will ever see. You can spot them having the following characteristics. The beak is long and slender for taking insects in flight. They are mainly green in colour with a golden crown and black stripe through the eye. The cheeks are blue, the throat black and gold and their rump bright blue. The tail has two central

tail feathers, elongated and spine like. The male feathers are longer than the females, probably for all the showing off they have to do. Their diet includes not only bees but wasps, dragonflies, moths and the majority of winged insects – and they can eat vast amounts each day. The strange thing is that they generally take prey only on the wing (known as “hawking”). They fly to a branch and subdue their prey by pounding it against the branch, reducing the potential intake of venom by rubbing the insect against the branch to remove its sting.

Reference: Slater, p. 1970. A Field Guide to Austrlain Birds, Rigby Ltd.



The Lower Todd Landcare Group Inc. has been on the move for the past year aiming to establish a core group of community members to actively care for the Lower Todd. The Lower Todd River Landcare Group has recently become incorporated, allowing them to access various funding grants to assist with the project. The Lower Todd Landcare group aims to

'protect, restore and promote the natural, cultural and historical values of the Lower Todd river by involving the community and other responsible parties'.

By putting in the hard yards the group aims to protect iconic River Red Gums from fire. Removing couch and Buffel from the bases of these trees reduces furl loads and helps to minimise the unnecessary lose of River Red Gums

during a fire and encourage biodiversity to increase.

The groups' main focus will continue to be the area south of John Blakeman Bridge They will be running regular field days, so if you want to get involved with this determined group of residents contact:

Michelle Smail
(08) 8953 0444
info@cameltours.com.au

or

Jo McKenzie
(08) 8952 5055
mackamob@bigpond.com

What's Happening At....

.....the Clarks Place

Dave's Idea Applauded

By Bryan Clark, Iparpa Ranges, Alice Springs.

Dave Leonard's ingenious means of vacuuming a "bizquillian" Buffel seed from his land inspired us to undertake a similar procedure and extend it even further.

After considering the project at length and in depth, we realised that in order to reach the limits of our property along the Iparpa Range, we would need to go into town to the hardware shop to purchase extensive lengths of electrical cords. This cost us roughly, \$150 or so.

As the project unfolded, and as I tugged the recalcitrant Electrolux around among the Buffel clumps, it suddenly occurred to me that we could also vacuum at the same time all the loose dust that was blowing through the house on windy days.

This incurred yet another 15 km trip into town to purchase more rubbish bags, costing an extra \$200 or so due to the excessive amounts of dust lying on the surface.

Nevertheless, we persevered with Mr Leonard's idea and effectively vacuumed 1.2 hectares of scrubby and rocky country. The exercise took us 5 working days and 80 man-woman hours.

Our project also occasioned a visit from a passing police vehicle, the occupants demonstrating a great curiosity in the eradication project, though they did seem to regard it as rather eccentric.

Having successfully Electroluxed the property, we were rather perplexed when viewing the 1, 835 bags of dust and seeds, wondering where we might safely dispose of them in an environmentally safe manner.

Finally, we solved our dilemma by tipping the lot over the neighbour's boundary fence, allowing vagrant breezes to democratically distribute it evenly over their un-vacuumed land.

Oh, by the way, all that dust buggered up our Electrolux and now we're up for a new one (approximate cost, \$385, less a senior's discount).

In retrospect, the exercise has been completely effective, even though our neighbour appears to be slightly offended, and it did prove to be slightly expensive and time consuming.

and.....Drain 7841 Lillecrapp Road.

Biodiversity vs. buffel – the story of a liberated drain!

*By Glenn Marshall
7 October 2004*

I got rid of buffel grass from my block in Lillecrapp Rd Iparpa starting in 1998. In March this year Dave Albrecht (botanist at Parks & Wildlife) identified 31 plant species in the roadside drain out the front of the block. Last week (October) he identified a

further 34 species that emerged after the May rains. That makes a total of 65 different plant species in my drain with an area of about 100 square metres. I'm wrapped. In comparison, my immediate neighbour's drain is virtually 100% buffel grass.

Dave said my species are a mixture of hill-slope species (our block is on the hill) and those that like wetter, sandier conditions (the drain holds water after rain) including groundcovers, shrubs and emerging trees (mulga). In March there were heaps of Yeperenye caterpillars feeding mainly on the Tar Vine whilst there have been at least eleven wildflower species in flower since July. Dave recorded a few individuals of nine introduced species including Kapok Bush, Rosy Dock, Milk Thistle, Prickly Lettuce, Asthma Plant and Pitted Lovegrass. I know most of them by sight and remove when spotted but it indicates ongoing vigilance is needed.

I started removing buffel from the drain in 2001, the last spot on my block after commencing de-buffeling in 1998. It was hard work early on, pulling out the mature clumps after rain, then spraying the first 'lawn-like' regrowth then hand-culling the new buffel from amongst the other plants. However, it now only takes me an hour to walk around the whole block after rain, pulling out stray tufts that have emerged from seeds. I have a diverse assortment of groundcovers, spinifex, shrubs and trees across the whole block, either well-established or re-emerging and have dramatically reduced the fire hazard. Recently I found echidna scats (poo) on my block, the first time I've done so, to go with the numerous euros and lizards that are regularly spotted by the kids and I. We often use our LfW 'Reptiles of Alice Springs' book and I just love the fact there is no buffel. I think Land for Wildlife is doing a great job.

Workshops and Events

Land for Wildlife will be hosting 'a morning with the ants' at the Silver Bullet Café this Saturday from 8 to 10.30am. Come along.....bring an ant from your block to have ID and enjoy the company (and coffee) of Mike Gillam and Craig James. Please contact *LfW* on 8955 5222 for further information and RSVP.

Calender of Events

Late October, Greening Australia will be holding a Weeds Awareness workshop. Contact GA for further details on 8953 2882.

30th October Sunday, Greening Australia Plant Sale. Native Plant Sale 9am-12 noon at Charles Darwin Uni. Contact Anna Murphy at Greening Australia on 8953 2882.

13th October, Wednesday - Alice Springs Field Naturalist Club. AGM followed by Garry Fry from the Alice Springs Desert Park talking about Mala populations. Meet 7:30pm. Ph Bob Read 8952 1935.

14th August Saturday. Alice Springs Field Naturalist Club. Afternoon walk to Temple Bar. Meet at 3.30pm at the tourist information bay near Old Timers. Contact Connie Spencer 89524694.

7th November, Sunday-Alice Springs Field Naturalist Club. 6km Walk to Flagon Hill from Flynn's Grave. Meet at 7.00am at Flynn's Grave. Contact Connie Spencer on 89524694.

3rd November, Wednesday. Australian Plants Society. Monthly meeting, followed by workshop 'demonstration of pricking out seedlings'. 7.30 pm Olive Pink Botanical Gardens Visitors Centre.

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