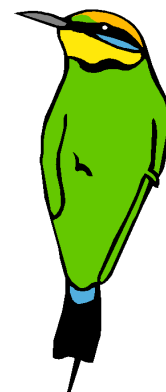


GARDEN FOR WILDLIFE



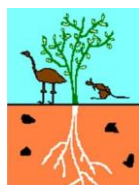
Spencers Burrowing Frog caught during LfW biodiversity surveys.



NEWSLETTER

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Low Ecological Services



Alice Springs Municipality | October 2010



Garden for Wildlife News

On the Cover – The photograph on this month's cover shows a Spencer's burrowing frog (*Limnodynastes spenceri*). The frog was found by Land for Wildlife coordinators in a pit trap during a recent survey of a member's property.

New Members – Welcome to new Garden for Wildlife members Bronwyn Grieve and Alcoota School. Alcoota School is a small primary school of 40 students in Engawala community, north of Alice Springs on the Plenty Highway. The students are studying units on conservation and land management and have joined the program to help facilitate this. Garden for Wildlife coordinators will be conducting workshops with the students. We'll let you know how it goes in future newsletters.

Articles

As Dead as a Dunnart

Recently, land for wildlife coordinators went to assess Uwe Path's property near the racecourse. Previous to our visit, we were forwarded a photograph (seen below) by Uwe of a dead animal he found in his garden. We identified the animal as possibly a stripe faced dunnart.

Dunnarts are small, mouse sized marsupials. At first glance, they may appear to be rodents, but on closer inspection, it soon becomes clear that they are quite different animals.



Look closely at the photograph. You can see that the dunnart has tiny, needle-sharp teeth in its pointed snout. Dunnarts are fierce predators and will tackle anything from insects and spiders to small geckos and skinks.

There are several different species of dunnart that you may encounter in the Alice Springs area. The most common are the fat-tailed and stripe faced species. As its name suggests, the fat tailed dunnart

has a fat tail, equal to the body length of the animal. The tail holds fat reserves that enable the animal to survive through lean times.

The Stripe faced dunnart has a slimmer tail greater than its body length. It has a characteristic dark stripe from the tip of its nose to between its ears.

Some dunnart species are extremely difficult to identify, with distinguishing features being as indistinct as the arrangement of the pads on the soles of the animal's feet. If you do find any on your property or in your garden, try and take good pictures of the underside of the feet and all aspects of the animal's head, as these can lead to more precise identification.

Dunnarts are active at night, mainly during the warmer months of the year. In winter when food is scarce, the animals find shelter in burrows, fallen timber or under rocks and enter a state of torpor (deep sleep), conserving their energy. Females generally outlive males, who expend vast amounts of energy fighting over and mating with females, often leading to their death from exhaustion during the breeding season. We theorise that this may be what killed the fellow in the photograph!

Some species of dunnart have become increasingly rare since European settlement and some have been recorded on so few occasions that not enough is known to accurately estimate their status and distributions. Even the common species are animals that are not often observed, due to their small size and nocturnal habits, which makes any sightings or dead animals you might find in your backyard worth reporting to us, just as Uwe has done.

Life After Buffel

Buffel grass is probably one of the most talked about weeds in Alice Springs amongst land owners and managers. Past newsletters have contained articles about how to control buffel and there's certainly plenty of other information out there to cover the topic.

Recently, while out surveying members properties and assessing new member's blocks, we came across a couple of examples of what can happen if you do manage to get the weed under some control. Both cases are two completely different types of properties and different control methods have been used in each.

Case 1: Heenan Rd

For our annual Land for Wildlife biodiversity survey, we have been working on properties in the Ross Highway area on the outskirts of Alice. Most of our members in this area participate actively in controlling the weed on their properties, but one block in particular was noticeable in that the buffel in a control area was showing no real signs of regenerating.



A few years ago, the owners, together with the fire department, carried out a burn-off in a small portion of their 42 hectare property. The area, a floodout plain carrying mulga woodland, was infested with buffel. The burn was a slow, cool burn that burnt down through the root mass of the buffel clumps.

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The photograph opposite shows the area in early October. There has been almost no regeneration of buffel either from existing rootstock or seed. The seed bank of native plants in the soil has presumably not been affected by the burn, with this year's rain producing a mass growth of annual grasses and flowering plants. Species such as oat grass (*Enneapogon avenaceus*), kerosene grass (*Aristida contorta*), white paper daisy (*Rhodanthe floribunda*), billy button (*Calocephalus platycephalus*) and bluebell (*Wahlenbergia* sp) were found here.

Isolated plants of buffel occur amongst the regrowth, with the owners simply pulling these by hand when they're found. The main source of buffel seed to recolonise the area seems to be at the entry point of water draining from neighbouring land, seeds presumably being washed downstream during rain. In the photograph, this area is on the extreme right hand of the frame where you can see the large mulga. The shaded area beneath this tree is still thick with buffel and is on a common drainage line between two properties.



Case 2: Kurrajong St

The second example of successful buffel control is on a new member Susan Grant's property on Kurrajong Drive, Eastside. When Susan moved into the house, the nature strip adjacent the footpath and the front garden were infested with buffel.

The control method used in this example was simple hand pulling of plants. Being a much smaller land area than the example above, this was a time effective and safe control method, not requiring the use of chemicals or other potentially harmful methods.

The results, however, have been similar, with buffel completely gone from the front of the house.



Nature strip on Kurrajong Dr. Witchetty bush in the foreground, with an understorey of native grasses

When Garden for Wildlife coordinators went to perform an assessment of the property, they were quite surprised at the diversity of native species growing on the nature strip. The vast majority of these plants have grown from natural regeneration after the buffel was removed and were not planted by the owner. They included grasses such as kerosene and oat grass, as well as the native lemon grass (*Cymbopogon ambiguous*) and even smaller shrubs including hop bush (*Dodonaea viscosa*) and silver cassia (*Senna artemisioides*). The area across the road

from the property is vacant crown land made up of rocky, gneiss hills. Remnant vegetation here includes the species that have germinated on the property and is the likely source of seed.

Buffel grass occurs in the crown land area and still pops up on the property from time to time, but the owners are ever vigilant and pull any plants they notice before they set seed. The result – a great garden for wildlife!

Spring Chickens

With Spring well and truly upon us, many of you may have noticed that all over Alice Springs the birds are already well into their breeding cycles. Migratory species like rainbow bee-eaters and sacred kingfishers have arrived and are busy pairing up and laying clutches, while other resident species already have chicks fledged and may be about to start rearing a second brood. With all the activity, it's a great time to be outside early and listen to the dawn chorus, as males of species like rufous whistler, rufous songlark and willie wagtail intimidate their rivals by soinging on the edges of territories.

Last month on our cover, we featured a crested pigeon on her nest, and this month we have some more great pictures of some 'spring chickens'.

Black-fronted Dotteril – Angela Stewart, from Low Ecological Services, snapped this picture of a

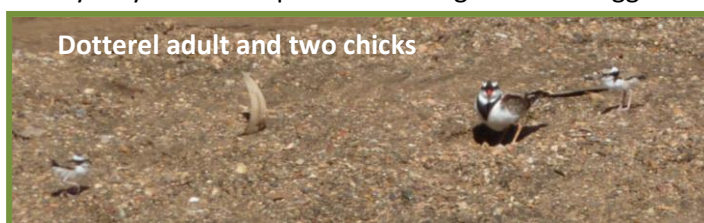


Black-fronted Dotterel chick

black-fronted dotteril chick at Trepina Gorge. Black-fronted dotterils are small shore birds that are quite common in wetter parts of the country, but in central Australia are found only around more permanent waterholes. Glen Helen on the Finke River is a good place to see them, and they have also been spotted feeding by the water pooling in the Todd River on Schwartz Crescent.

This year's rain has increased their habitat (albeit temporarily) in the area by filling up more ephemeral water holes and swamps and the birds can be found on both sandy and pebbly stretches of river bank. In these areas, they dart about the water's edge, picking up small insects as they go.

Dotterils nest on the ground, simply excavating a small depression amongst the sand or pebbles. They rely on the superb camouflage of both eggs and chicks to avoid predators. When approached while brooding eggs, the parent dotterils will act as a decoy for the predator, flapping about and feigning injury to lead the danger away from the nest.



Dotterel adult and two chicks



Photo: Matt Le Fevre

Tawny Frogmouth – This family of tawny frogmouths were happy spending a day in an Eremophila tree outside the Land for Wildlife office. The two upper birds in the picture are juveniles, while the lower bird is an adult. These chicks are at quite an advanced age, but are probably still dependant on their parent for food.

Tawny frogmouths are nocturnal birds that hunt mainly large insects, but will also take prey such as smaller reptiles and mammals. Their extremely wide gape and stiff bristles around their bills helps direct prey into their mouths when hunting in the dark.

Frogmouths build quite flimsy nests, usually a platform of sticks in the fork of a tree and, like the dotterels, rely on camouflage to avoid detection while sitting tightly on their eggs. Their plumage is remarkably patterned and they will sit during the day with nose pointed toward the sky in an attempt to resemble the broken stump of a branch. Quite common around Alice Springs, even in the suburban area, they are often not noticed due to their nocturnal habits and their remarkable camouflage.

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Letters to the Editor

More letters have been sent in this month regarding Turtle Doves. It's good to see that the community is aware of the problem and helping do something to control the pests. Remember that trapping the birds is an exercise that takes time and patience. It takes time for the birds to accept the trap as a food source and even then, they may enter the trap infrequently. However, with perseverance, you will catch some birds and make a difference, as Steve's example shows below.

Hi Bill

Following up from our conversation on Saturday - attached is my log - not a high success rate - about 1 per fortnight average - so patience I guess

Attached is a photo of the trap in it's current position in my front yard, "hidden" under a tree and behind a shrub. For the first few months was under a tree on the lawn in the backyard. I am using a native bird mix bought from Woolies (the container of it is on the right in the photo). The trap is bent up from 12 mm mesh and the side and top access doors are made using fencing and tie wire. The funnel is some gutter guard as per the workshop design, I did have to make the funnel end smaller as initially the birds were getting out. I put a hand full of seed at the entrance, throw a hand full "through" the entrance and a hand full inside on the floor. originally I had a container of it inside with the water one but don't bother now (mainly because of the rain regularly making it soggy). Hope this helps

Regards

Steve



Announcements

Botanical Illustration Workshops

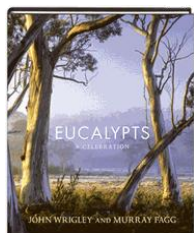
Jo Boniface is organising for Mali Moir, a highly qualified and regarded Botanical Illustrator from Melbourne, to come to Alice Springs in September 2011. If anyone is interested in doing Botanical Art and Botanical Illustration workshops in September next year please email a letter of support to Jo: redirt@octa4.net.au.

Mali Moir has been a Botanical and Scientific Artist for 20 years, and has been teaching Botanical Art and Botanical Illustration for 10 years. Mali teaches on a regular basis, her workshops can cater for general Botanical Art right thru to Scientific Plant Dissection Illustration for publication. Covering Beginners to Advanced. Mediums can include pencil drawing, pen&ink on drafting film, watercolour on paper and vellum, watercolour pencil for 'en plein air' nature journaling trips or scientific expeditions. <http://www.botanicart.com.au/members/mali-moir/page04.htm>

Mexican Poppy Alert!

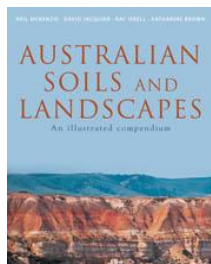
As like many plants in Central Australia, both native and invasive, Mexican Poppy is having a field day this bumper year. If anyone lives near a river system or sandy soils on their property watch out for this one. If you are unfamiliar with what it looks like there are unbelievable fields of it growing along the south Todd River banks; from individual plants to isolated groups, it has spread to dominate large sections of the south Todd among other river systems.

Recommended Books



Eucalypts: A Celebration, *By John Wrigley and Murray Fagg.*

A look at gum trees and their significance in Australian art and history. It also provides an in-depth examination of their evolution, biology and classification.



Australian Soils and Landscapes, *Neil McKenzie, David Jacquier, Ray Isbell, Katharine Brown.*

A unique compendium of the most important and widespread soils of Australia and their associated landscapes.



The Butterflies of Australia, *Albert Orr and Roger Kitching.*

A complete guide to Australian butterflies, with hundreds of beautiful illustrations in typical habitats.

Calendar of Events

Date	Time	Event	Venue	Contact
2 nd – 5 th Nov		Biodiversity Surveying	Land for Wildlife properties	Land for Wildlife, Ilse or Jesse, 8955 5222
Wed 3 rd Nov	7:30pm	Tim Leane will give a presentation on rainforests	Olive Pink Botanic Garden	Australian Plants Society, Connie Spencer 8952 4694
Sat 6 th Nov	6:00pm	BBQ tea followed by a hunt for reptiles and amphibians with Robbie Henderson	Simpsons Gap Schools camp ground	Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club, Barb Gilfedder 8955 5452
Sun 7 th Nov	3:00pm	Arid Lands Environment Centre AGM	ALEC office, Cnr Lindsay Ave & Warburton St	ALEC, 8952 2497
9 th – 12 th Nov		Biodiversity Surveying	Land for Wildlife properties	Land for Wildlife, Ilse or Jesse, 8955 5222
9 th – 11 th Nov		4th Desert Knowledge Symposium	Alice Springs Convention Centre	www.desertknowledgesymposium.com
Sat 13 th Nov	8:30am	buffel weeding and bush regeneration	Maynard Park – meet at Braitling Primary School carpark	Alice Springs Landcare, Andy Vinter, 0429 977 436 www.alicespringslandcare.com
Sat 20 th Nov		ALEC 30 years celebration	Witchetty's	More information soon

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20th-21st Nov		Overnight trip to Two Mile Waterhole at Glen Helen. Native Fish in the Finke River with Robbie Henderson	Glen Helen	Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club, Barb Gilfedder 8955 5452
Fri 26th Nov	3:30pm	Tom Newsome, PhD candidate and Low Ecological Services consultant, will present a seminar on dingoes in the Tanami Desert	Charles Darwin Uni, Lecture Theatre HE	Land for Wildlife, Ilse or Jesse, 8955 5222

Take care,
Ilse, Jesse & Bill



Garden for Wildlife Coordinators

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