

# GARDEN FOR WILDLIFE

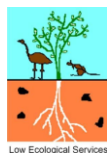
The Simpson blooms again. Wildflower species are Annual Yellowtop (yellow), Native Stock (white) and a few Poached Egg Daisies if you look closely.



## NEWSLETTER

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Low Ecological Services



Alice Springs Municipality | August 2010





## Garden for Wildlife News

Hi Wildlifers,

It is with great pleasure that I introduce to you Jesse Carpenter, a new member of the Garden for Wildlife/Land for Wildlife team! Jesse has come on board this month to work alongside me as the Garden for Wildlife/Land for Wildlife Co – coordinator. Jesse brings with him over 7 years of experience and knowledge about our arid Central Australian environment, as well as a friendly face, but I will allow him to introduce himself!



“Originally from Victor Harbor in South Australia, I’ve been in Central Australia, either in Alice Springs or down at Yulara, for most of the past 7 years. During that time, I’ve worked mainly as a tour operator, travelling about anywhere from Alice to the Musgrave Ranges area in northern SA and also as a horticulturalist at Ayres Rock Resort in Yulara.

I have a background in environmental management and before arriving in the centre, I worked with the South Australian Whale Centre (a museum and interpretive centre) and the SA National Parks and Wildlife Service. This work involved maintaining whale sighting data, developing museum displays and various field work activities as part of a national southern right whale population study. Travelling around Central Australia for work over the last few years has given me the opportunity to experience many of the different environments we have here and the seasonal variations that impact on our surroundings. I’ve been able to observe how our wildlife (and plants) responds to the natural hardships of an arid place and also how they respond to the land management decisions we make over our properties.

I’m particularly interested in birds and lizards, so I’m looking forward to the next couple of months as the weather warms and they all become more active. With all the growth and flowering after the rain, warmer weather should bring an abundance of insects – great bird and lizard food! So keep your eyes open and let me and Ilse know what you’re seeing around your backyards, and I’ll let you know what I’m seeing around the place to.

I’m looking forward to working with Ilse and Bill and all Garden & Land for Wildlifers, and perhaps meeting you all at some of our workshops coming up soon!  
Jesse.”

### **Making Windows Safe for Birds Competition winner!**

And the winner is.... Kay Hartley! With her entry:

*“For every 50 cm (approx.) of height of the window, attach a horizontal wire across the outside of the*



The dust print of a Crested Pigeon that impacted on a clean window.

*window. Attach small pieces of firm aluminium foil (such as recycled pie dishes from cheese cakes etc.) to short and long lengths of fishing line, then attach the fishing lines at about 15 cm intervals to the horizontal wires. The foil pieces will move in the breeze and scare the birds away from the window. The view through the window from inside will be blocked only slightly by the fluttering pieces of foil. It will be like a wind mobile, and even if the view is less than perfect, the result is preferable to the sickening thud of a bird in mid-flight having its neck broken.”*

Congratulations Kay! Kay's entry was chosen because the design is easy and economical to make at home, and it's an attractive solution that doesn't block the view through a window.

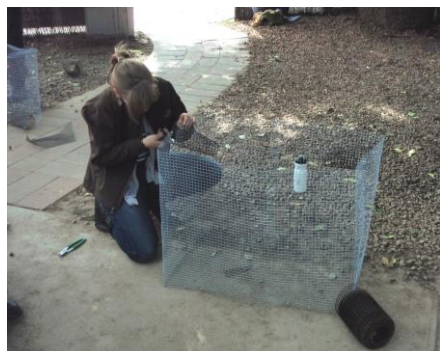
Kay has won a Level 1 Water Audit conducted by Water Services, Power and Water.



### Recent Workshop: Making a Spotted Turtle-dove trap

Last weekend Land for Wildlife hosted a Trap-making and Information workshop for the feral Spotted Turtle-dove in Alice Springs.

Eight new traps went home with residents, new participants in this backyard trapping program.



New GfW member Glenis designed a square trap to resemble her rabbit hatch which Turtle-doves are already familiar with.

It was great to see a few kids attend and have fun making their traps and learning about these feral pests. It was also a good opportunity to mingle with the participants and hear their personal experiences of turtle doves in their backyards.

Anyone who missed the workshop and would like more information on turtle doves, to make their own trap, or loan one from Land for Wildlife, let us know by email [lfw@lowecol.com.au](mailto:lfw@lowecol.com.au) or phone (8955 5222). Also, it would be great to hear of any observations of doves (both feral and native) you make on your properties.



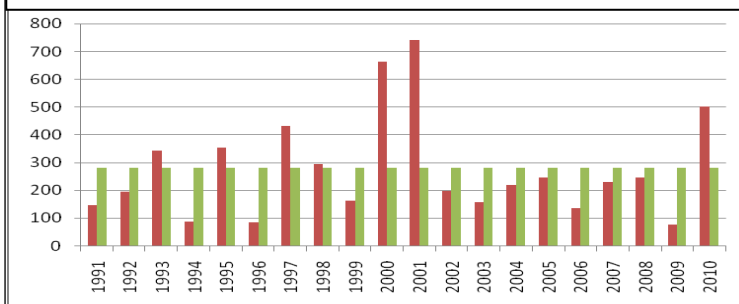
Max demonstrates how a funnel trap works.

## Articles

### Boom and Bust

Water is a crucial ingredient in any landscape or environment. Typically, arid central Australia experiences long periods with little rainfall, interspersed with infrequent events of high precipitation. Every desert inhabitant, plant or animal, is adapted to take advantage of these unusual wet periods in some way, with many experiencing the classic 'boom and bust' cycle in their populations. Simply put, animals and plants will experience a population increase in the good years, even moving into areas they may not have been seen for a long time, only to have a crash in numbers when rainfall cycles returns to 'normal'.

Rainfall for Alice Springs over the last 20 years. **Red** columns indicate rainfall (mm), and **green** the long term average rainfall (mm)



You can see these weather patterns illustrated in the graph opposite, showing the rainfall of Alice Springs over the past 20 years. Over the past few years, we have experienced below average falls, until 2010's high falls so far.

Right now, as the weather begins to warm, and plants that have grown since the rain are reaching maturity,

wildlife will be taking full advantage of the good conditions. Some of this may even be apparent in your own backyards. For example, perhaps you've seen flocks of budgerigars darting about in tight, fast flying formations?

Budgerigars are a perfect example of a species whose fortunes are tied to the seasons in a boom or bust cycle. During extended dry periods, you may see few, if any of these birds, but following the first rains and the accompanying germination of grasses, you'll begin to notice small groups of birds arriving from elsewhere to take advantage of the new food source. If conditions remain suitable, the birds will soon commence breeding in tree hollows, raising their chicks on abundant grass seeds. Thirty days after they hatch, the chicks fledge and 6 months later are capable of



Budgerigar

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breeding themselves. Within a few months, small flocks can increase their size to contain hundreds of individuals, and as previous broods reach maturity and reproduce themselves, numbers continue to grow. Already, budgies that hatched here after the first rains over summer are fledging chicks of their own.

As rainfall decreases, resources begin to diminish, until the population of budgies can no longer sustain themselves. Some birds will leave, and travel to other parts of the country, but many will die. Only a few will remain behind, waiting for the rains to return.

## Boom and Bust Weeds:

### Mt. Gillen blushes red with Ruby Dock

This is also a year when weed populations can thrive. Ruby or Rosy Dock (*Acetosa vesicaria*) is one weed that is experiencing a 'boom' period this spring. You can see its red flowers carpeting the slopes of Mt Gillen and other areas around town. Ruby Dock is an erect, annual herb, usually below 1m in height. Stems are tough but hollow with succulent heart shaped leaves. The flowers/fruit are bright pink or red with an inflated appearance.

Seedlings germinate in cooler weather and can be identified by two or three large, fleshy, heart shaped, dark green leaves.



Native to Africa and Asia, it is thought that the plant was introduced to Australia by cameleers, either intentionally as a vegetable or accidentally via contamination. In the town area, you'll most likely find it growing on rocky hill sides and disturbed soils around roadsides and house sites.

Seed is small and light weight and is spread extensively by wind. If you notice Ruby Dock on your property, it is a good idea to control it before seeds are set. Single plants and seedlings can easily be removed by hand, although for heavy infestations, you can spray using glyphosate. Initially, Ruby Dock can have a sparse germination. So if you begin control early, you may quickly overcome the problem.

Remember, native plants will be trying to take advantage of these great conditions too. Unfortunately, weeds like Ruby Dock compete with native plants for space, nutrients and water, often achieving dominance. So get on top of the weeds in your garden now, and allow our native plants and animals like budgies to enjoy the good year unhindered.

#### Reference:

Albrecht D. & Rogers L. (1999) *Weeds of the Tanami*. For Normandy NFM Limited in cooperation with the Alice Springs Herbarium.

Auld B. & Medd R. (1987) *Weeds –An Illustrated Botanical Guide to the Weeds of Australia*. Inkata Press, Melbourne.

## Soil Conservation Notes:

### Cryptogams (soil crusts)

Cryptogams are a specialised and diverse group that includes organisms as varied as single celled algae through to very large and complex colonies of lichens and fungi that may stretch over metres or even hectares. Cryptogams are the nonvascular plants that reproduce through the production of



spores rather than seeds (Scott *et al.* 1987). Cryptogams include algae, lichens, bryophytes, liverworts (pictured above) and fungi (Scott *et al.* 1987).

Cryptogams, along with other microbial organisms, form the underlying ecological 'fabric' on which the patterns of more visible components of ecosystems are arranged. The role of cryptogams in the healthy functioning of ecosystems is fundamental to the supply of ecosystem services on which all of society depends (Scott *et al.* 1987). In other words if your property has soil crusting, then your soils are in a healthy state. The *Land for Wildlife* Newsletter (November 2007) has more information on Cryptogams

<http://www.lowecol.com.au/lfw/lfwnews> .

A cryptogram: Liverwort helping to stabilise soil along a creek bed. These resurrection plants "regain" life and form after rain.



## Dying Desert Fish

Recently, you may have encountered many dead fish around local waterholes. There are numerous reasons why this may occur. Some pools may simply be too small when floods recede. Over population (a small waterhole such as the one at Simpsons Gap may contain several thousand perch!) depletes food reserves and oxygen levels and many fish will die. Water temperature is also important, with the cold temperatures we experience in winter impacting on fish in several ways:



Spangled Perch

cold water promotes the growth of parasitic fungi on the fish's gills, which causes suffocation; cold water holds less oxygen which in a crowded pool is in short supply; it also slows down the activity of other aquatic life, such as insects, which reduces food availability.

All is rectified in summer, however, when rising water temperatures trigger surviving fish to spawn. For example, Spangled Perch (or Spangled Grunter), a common species you may even see in the Todd River, will breed when water temperature reaches the mid 20s. Young fish then just have to wait for the rain and rivers to flood again, and they will disperse and repopulate areas from which they may have died out during previous years.

To find out more, look at the Australian Desert Fish Web Page  
<http://www.desertfishes.org/australia/index.html>

## Announcements

### National Threatened species day

National Threatened Species Day is held each year on the 7<sup>th</sup> September, the anniversary of the death of the last Tasmanian tiger at the Hobart Zoo in 1936.

The Alice Springs Desert Park is asking schools to get involved in the event by raising funds to donate to the Land for Wildlife program.

More information, including an application form and ideas for fund raising, can be found on the Desert Park's website [www.alicespringsdesertpark.com.au/plan/pdf/Threatened species day.pdf](http://www.alicespringsdesertpark.com.au/plan/pdf/Threatened_species_day.pdf)



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### Princess Parrot Sightings

Some members may have heard that there have been numerous sightings of Princess Parrots west of Alice Springs. These highly nomadic and little known birds have responded to this year's rain and the mass seeding of spinifex and other grasses, and nectar-producing flowering plants. They have been seen in desert oak woodlands west of Alice Springs. The exact sighting locations are within Aboriginal freehold land, and access permits must be obtained from the Central Land Council ([www.clc.org.au](http://www.clc.org.au)) by anyone wishing to travel into the area. However, Princess Parrots are highly nomadic, and

could turn up almost anywhere in central Australia. They have even been seen in Alice Springs and Hermannsburg in the past, using River Red Gums as nesting sites along the Todd and Finke Rivers. So if you're out and about in the bush somewhere, be observant and keep a lookout for strange parrots and you might be lucky enough to spot one of these rare visitors.

## Letters to the Editor

There has been a great response from Garden for Wildlife members regarding Mexican Poppy germinations (re: Letters to the Editor, July newsletter). It is interesting to hear some of the spots it turns up in! It generally establishes on disturbed ground, spreading along roadsides, riverbanks, sandy flats and the beds of intermittent streams. Many Garden for Wildlifers found it popping up in garden beds that had been created from transported river sand. In the NT Mexican Poppy is mainly confined to the ephemeral waterways of Central Australia. A few scattered plants have also been found on the road and rail corridors. The plant can be a troublesome competitor for our native plants. We are glad you've got your eye on it, and kick out the outliers to slow its spread!

**Correction: Mexican Poppy's species name is *Argemone ochroleuca*, it has been changed from *A. Mexicana*.**

Hi Ilse,

I have removed numerous Mexican Poppies (maybe up to a dozen or more) from our front yard (35 Standley Crescent) over the last couple of weeks – I note a couple more still there to be removed. All young & no flowering. Front yard is sandy. We have been there since mid-2007 and have never noted one before.

Hi

Just after reading the newsletter, thought I'd let you know that we had one Mexican poppy plant grow in our yard in Dalby Court. Might have come in with sand we used to build a tank stand in that spot, tucked away down the side of the house. Apart from that we haven't done any gardening there, and it does get a bit weedy sometimes – couch and thistles mostly.

Also reported:

- Massive germinations in the Todd near Heffernan Rd.
- 29 June - "There has been Mexican Poppy germinating in Jessie creek for about 3 weeks"
- Germinating and flowering plants in the Finke River, between Hermannsburg and Palm Valley.



Mexican Poppy

Photo: Vera Messias

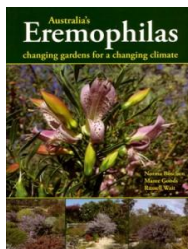
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*In regards to an article in July's newsletter:*

Hi Ilse,

We live on Milner Road and throughout May we also had a Crow feeding a Channel Billed Cuckoo (maybe the same one??) and interestingly enough, the Cuckoo was much much larger than the Crow. Not very bright the Crow!!!!

## Recommended Books



**Australia's Eremophilas: changing gardens for a changing climate** by Norma Boschen. This book contains a brief description, extensive cultivation and growing hints, additional notes and photographs for most of the 216 described species of *Eremophila*. It also includes many hybrids and cultivars and information on propagating from cuttings, seed, and grafts.

**Restoring Natural Areas in Australia** by Robin A Buchanan. This is a practical handbook for anyone managing their land as a natural area. It covers subject such as mapping, vegetation surveying as well as techniques for managing weeds, fire and responding to climate change. Available online at <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au>. You can also download the first 2 chapters of the book from the site.



## Websites Worth A Look

- For descriptions and photographs of invasive weeds (eg. Ruby Dock): [www.weeds.org.au](http://www.weeds.org.au)
- For recent sighting reports of rare birds like the Princess Parrot: [www.birdsaustralia.com.au](http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au)
- National Threatened Species Day at the Alice Springs Desert Park: [www.alicespringsdesertpark.com.au/plan/pdf/Threatened species day.pdf](http://www.alicespringsdesertpark.com.au/plan/pdf/Threatened_species_day.pdf)
- Alice Springs Landcare: [www.alicespringslandcare.com](http://www.alicespringslandcare.com)

## Calendar of Events

**Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> September** – Open Garden Scheme Event. Open Garden at Lot 3485 Greatorex Rd. Ilparpa, 10am to 4.30pm. Admission \$6 – free under 18. Proceeds to the Alice Springs Rural Volunteer Fire Brigade.

Alice Springs Landcare is holding a special event celebrating National Landcare week.

**Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> September** - National Threatened Species Day

**6 – 12 September** - Landcare Week

**Saturday 11th September from 7.30-10.30** – Landcare Week at Gosse Street Park:

- **7.30 -8.30 Buffel Busting.** Join in for an hour of buffel busting and help protect and restore the native species of the valley.
- **8.30-10.30 Pancake brekky stall by ALEC for coffee and pancakes!**  
**783 ABC radio outdoor broadcast of the Gardening Show with Geoff Miers and Stewart Brash.** Launch of the Alice Springs Landcare website and an overview of Alice Springs Landcare by Ken Johnson .
- **Followed by a walk and talk by Dick Kimber on the History and Cultural Heritage of the Spencer Valley.**

**Saturday 18 September** - DesertSmart EcoFair at Olive Pink Botanic Gardens. Volunteers needed.

**9-11 November** - 4th Desert Knowledge Symposium - Alice Springs Convention Centre, see [www.desertknowledgesymposium.com](http://www.desertknowledgesymposium.com) for more information.

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### CoolMob Gardens for Food Workshops:

Workshops are \$10 each. Places are limited, please email [gardensforfood@gmail.com](mailto:gardensforfood@gmail.com) for more information or to book your place.

29th August - Reticulation Options

5th September - Companion planting & What to plant when

12th September - Fruit tree planting

19th September - How to make a herb Spiral

26th September - Introduction to Biodynamic gardening & composting

3rd October - Composting, pests & predators

10th October - Growing bush tucker

17th October - Seed Saving

24th October - Battling problems

Take care,  
Ilse, Jesse & Bill



Garden for Wildlife Coordinators

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722

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Participate . Learn . Create

## desertSMART EcoFair 2010

cycle or walk to be in the draw for BIG prizes

**live music 11am - 2pm**

**huge native plants sale**

**food stalls**

**kid's activities**

**ABC Garden live show 8:30 .. 10**

**bush foods 10am...**

**solar oven !bake off! 9am - 1pm**

**workshops and presentations 9am - 2pm**

*Stalls and trade displays all day*

**8am to 2pm**  
**Saturday Sept 18**

Olive Pink Botanic Garden  
Tuncks Rd

Olive Pink Botanic Garden

[alec.org.au](http://alec.org.au)  
**8952 2497**

**PowerWater**

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