NT LANDCARE AWARDS 09 CATEGORY FINALIST

2010 Melaleuca Awards WINNER

Land for Wildlife

Conservation is in your hands

A camouflaged Tawny Frogmouth shelters her juvenile in a dead tree at the LfW office.

NEWSLETTER

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Land for Wildlife Update

Welcome to the first newsletter for the new year. Firstly, we would like to wish everyone all the best for the year ahead. Our thoughts go out to those of you who have friends and family affected by the floods across the country and hope everyone is safe and sound in anticipation for a great 2011.

It is with great pleasure we introduce to you the **new LfW/GfW coordinator**, Chris Watson. Chris has taken over Ilse's position and will be working alongside Jesse on both LfW and GfW programs. Some of you may already be familiar with Chris through his regular bird reports in the Centralian Advocate. Chris grew up in Melbourne and has been in Alice Springs for 6 years and comes to us from a diverse background. He has been a soldier, he studied Media & Communication at RMIT, and he spent four years as a high school music teacher down in Melbourne. More recently he has worked as a tour guide in many different parts of the country and at the Alice Springs Desert Park. His passion for wildlife goes back to early childhood and he is going back to university this year to complete a Bachelor of Zoology.

LfW is now on Facebook! – For those of you that are Facebook savvy Lowecol has created a profile **'Tawny Frogmouth'** (inspired by our newborn at the office!) from which operates the LfW group, the GfW group and the Spotted Turtle-dove Eradication Program. Regular program updates, discussions, and lots of photos of workshops, surveys and local wildlife are posted. Look us up and 'Like' our page or join the group. Got any critter queries or want a plant ID? Post a photo to the group's wall and we can help!

LfW has been awarded funding by the Natural Resource Management Board NT, Local Action Grants Program To help protect an iconic threatened species, the Black-footed Rock Wallaby, from predation by feral dogs. Read more about this initiative and how you can be involved below in *Articles.*

The **LfW 2010 Biodiversity Report** has been completed and will be posted on our website soon (www.lowecol.com.au) This year's survey will take place in the first ½ of the year. We'll keep you posted with the dates for those of you who are interested in lending a hand.

Feral Dove Month. February is feral dove month, a chance for us to kick our feral Spotted Turtle-dove monitoring into overdrive and try to get an accurate snap-shot of how the feral Spotted Turtle-dove population in town is changing.

In the past, control programs carried out by Parks & Wildlife, had the feral Turtle Dove population down to an estimated 400 birds. However, that population has risen to an estimated 8000. Alice Springs has experienced an extraordinary season of rainfall, creating ideal breeding conditions for feral doves not wholly adapted to arid climates. We need to take action to prevent this bird gaining a stronger foothold in Alice Springs and potentially spreading farther afield while the deserts are still green and full of water.

Feedback is vital to assess the effectiveness of the Land for Wildlife's own trapping program. We'd love all of our members to get involved in 4 weekly surveys over the month of February. All you need to do is set aside 10 minutes of each Saturday morning and count the feral doves around your property. Count the birds *on* your property, any birds you can see *within 10m of* your property and any birds you can hear *cooing* nearby.

This is a synchronised survey so your ten minute block has to be from 8am. The doves are typically more active in this cooler part of the morning so we should get optimum counts if everyone can manage to do this. Also worth remembering is that negative data is just as important – if you see no doves at all, this is important to our picture of how the population is distributed around town. So please make sure you still submit survey forms if you don't find any feral doves. This is good news that we need to hear!

We hope all these surveys can give us some useful data about the distribution and size of the population. The month will culminate with a trapping workshop, at Bloomin' Deserts Nursery on Hele Cres on Saturday the 26th of February starting at 10am. Having established the size and extent of the problem we'll help you build your own trap and you can start removing these highly invasive pests and hopefully see more of our native doves in your area.

If anyone would like to participate in trapping doves, call Chris or Jesse in the office (89 555 222) for more information. We do have traps for loan, but they are limited, so it would be great if people are able to use our information on making your own trap – an easy, cheap and fast alternative.

At the end of the month, Land for Wildlife will run a trap making workshop. See WORKSHOPS in this newsletter for more details.

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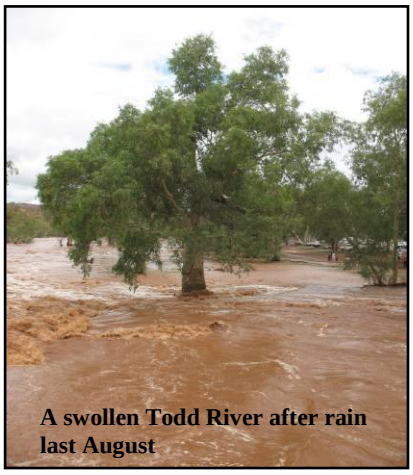
Articles

The Lasting Effects of Big Rains - What it all means to us, our gardens and wildlife

Rainfall in desert Australia is infrequent, unpredictable and highly variable. The nature of rainfall in the desert means that in a year less than half the annual average can fall, or the annual average can fall in a matter of days! Where we live long periods of drought can be followed by short but intense bursts of rain, causing a sudden boost in the regeneration of plants and animals like what we are experiencing now.



A swollen Todd River after rain last August

The high temperatures and dry climate in the desert result in high rates of evaporation. This makes it difficult for many land types to hold the water for a long period of time. This means plants and animals must react quickly to take advantage of any moisture while it's available.

Arid zone plants have many varied adaptations to the harsh desert conditions. Some plants are capable of storing large amounts of water in their roots, while others develop mechanisms to prevent seeds germinating during light insignificant showers that often occur during droughts, and will only seed during major rain events to prevent seedlings sizzling under a hot dry sun.

Arid zone plants can germinate and flower quickly after soaking rains.

The significant rainfall we have had in 2010 – just 32ml short of making a new record for annual rainfall, has soaked deep into the soil nourishing tree roots and triggering mass germination during both summer and winter. This is important because some plants typically flower during winter and others in summer, but 2010 saw significant rainfall across all seasons giving much of our native flora a chance to regenerate. The effects of these rains will be long-lasting for both plants and our wildlife. Wildlife has an abundance of food, and in turn helps to pollinate plants. It means you hopefully will not have to use a great deal of water on your gardens this year, and that the seedbank on your property will be replenished. With so much seed being produced currently, now is a good time to go seed collecting. See our website (www.lowecol.com.au) for a fact sheet on seed collecting. Make sure you are collecting from locally native species, not planted species that may have been imported from other states. This strengthens the gene pool of our locally adapted species.

In the garden, rain has the effect of flushing the soils of the salts that have built up over time. Salt accumulates in the soil from the tap water most people use on their gardens. Rain water will help to wash this salt from the system and help to induce vigour and growth in garden plants. In addition, it allows for water to soak to depth in the soil profile, softening the soil, and encouraging the development of deep root systems. This will then help your plants to survive long dry spells.

Other effects the rain will have had include range extension for invasive plants. For example, the spread of Mexican Poppy with water that flowed down the Todd River is evident the further south you travel along the river. Also there is an increased risk of soil erosion, or a worsening of current erosion problems which will need to be rehabilitated as soon as possible. See our website for fact sheets on weed control and soil erosion control and prevention (www.lowecol.com.au)

Threatened Species Profile: Black-footed Rock Wallaby

Once widespread in the central desert regions of the NT, South Australia and Western Australia, the Black-footed Rock Wallaby (*Petrogale lateralis lateralis*) can now only be found in a few locations, including rocky escarpments and gorges in sections of the East and West MacDonnell Ranges and what's locally known as the Blatherskite Range in areas where Land for Wildlife members reside.

Population decline is due to predation from fox and feral dogs particularly around the fringes of Alice Springs. Research undertaken by APY Lands Warru (Black-footed Rock Wallaby) Recovery Program shows that while mortality rates for adults is low, dogs likely target juveniles reducing the number of Black-footed Rock Wallabies to reach breeding age. In addition, cat predation is known on joeys and the establishment of invasive plants likely impacts adversely on native habitat. For example Buffel Grass is spreading up into the ranges and replacing native food plants and increasing the risk of fire.

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At only half a metre tall, Black-footed Rock Wallabies (BFRW) are a lot smaller than Euros, which we commonly see on the Ranges around town. Other distinguishing features of the BFRW include pale cheek stripes, a white or light brown dorsal stripe and bushy tip to their tail.

Occupying steep rocky terrain, BFRW rely on their bushy tail for balance, and textured foot pads to prevent slipping. They use narrow crevices and caves for shelter from the heat of the day and protection from predators, and like the Yellow-footed Rock Wallaby (SA & NSW) adults leave young in these sheltered places while they feed. Staying within the protection of the ranges BFRWs are highly active at dawn and dusk when they forage for native grasses, herbs, small shrubs and fruits. They obtain the majority of the water they need from food, and so can survive in areas without permanent water sources. BFRW can be readily seen at dawn and dusk at Simpsons Gap.

Help to Protect this Threatened Species' Stronghold

Alice Springs is the last stronghold for this iconic species in the NT. The NRM Board Local Action Grant has awarded Land for Wildlife with the funds to help reduce threats of dog predation to this threatened species. Feral dog management projects will be facilitated on selected Land for Wildlife properties containing Rock-Wallaby habitat and populations. Land holders will be working the Land for Wildlife team to trap feral dogs using cage traps, and monitor feral dog populations and BFRW populations on their properties. Dogs caught will be taken to the RSPCA. We encourage land holders to not let their dogs roam unsupervised through the ranges to avoid disturbance to this threatened species. During trapping periods land owners and neighbours will be informed of trapping activities, to minimise the chances of catching domestic dogs. Using cage traps means that in the unlikely event a domestic dog is caught it can be safely released and returned to its owners.

Have you seen Black-footed Rock Wallabies on your property? Let us know.

It is likely that BFRW habitat has become fragmented along the ranges around the township. We encourage members to manage invasive plant populations on their property to assist in rehabilitating habitat corridors for this species, and report feral dogs to LfW on 89 555 222 or the Alice Springs Town Council on 8950 0500.

References and for more information:

- Threatened Species Network Black-footed Rock Wallaby Fact Sheet
- APY Warru Recovery Program, http://www.anangu.com.au/land-management/threatened-species/warru-recovery-program.html. This page lists many other informative websites.

Ladybugs; Good for the Garden!

Yes! They are native! There several species of Ladybird beetles that are native to Australia, including the ones we see in Alice. And not only that, they help naturally control scale insects that may be attacking plants in your garden such as your Eremophilas or Eucalypts.

Ladybird beetle is the preferred name by scientists for these creatures as they are neither true bugs nor birds. They are of the Coccinellidae family of beetles, which can be found worldwide with over 5,000 species described. A few species are considered pests in North America and Europe, but they are generally a useful insect as many species feed on Hemiptera including pest species to gardens, orchards and agricultural fields such as aphids and scale insects.

Predatory ladybugs can be found on plants where aphids or scale insects are, and will lay their eggs near prey to increase the larvae's chance of easily finding prey. A larva uses its sharp jaws to crush an aphid's body and suck out the juices. There are a few species of ladybird beetles that are not predatory. Coccinellids are also known to eat larvae and eggs from their own species when alternative prey is scarce. In addition, Ladybird beetles also require pollen for food and are attracted to specific types of plants.

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Ladybirds are brightly coloured, their wing covers typically red, orange or yellow with black spots, to ward away potential predators. Wing covers help protect beetle's wings and they also act as a hard cover to protect their body from a predators' bite. There is a common myth that the number of spots a Ladybug has indicates its age. Many Coccinellids, including Ladybugs, are known to spray a toxin venomous to certain mammals and insects when threatened. A Ladybug has an average lifespan of 1-2yrs.

In temperate areas, Ladybird beetles enter diapause (a state of dormancy) during winter, and are often are among the first insects to appear in the as the weather warms. Ladybugs may respond more to rain than warm temperatures in the arid zone. Rain increases vegetation growth, which in turn increases the availability of the insect's prey species.

References and more information:
Wikipedia and the Brisbane Insects website http://www.brisbaneinsects.com/brisbane_ladybirds/index.html give more information on Ladybird beetle life cycle and some great pictures. Another interesting site, though Brisbane focused, is the Ladybird Field Guide: http://www.brisbaneinsects.com/brisbane_ladybirds/LadybirdFieldGuide.html.

Workshops

Workshops Planned for This Year

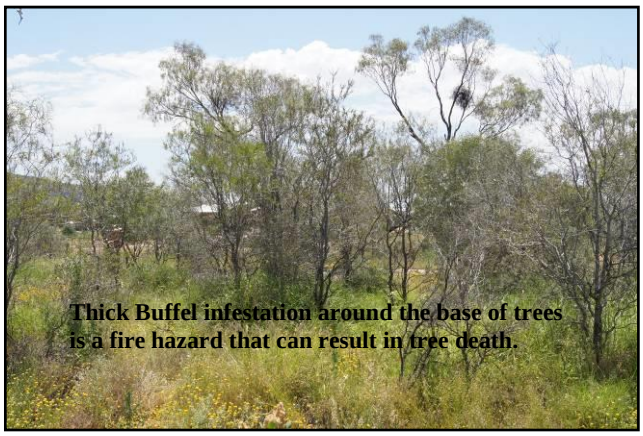
Spotted Turtle Dove Trap Making: A trap making workshop for feral spotted Turtle Doves will be held at Blooming Deserts Nursery on 26th Feb at 10:00am. The workshop will be conducted by Land for Wildlife staff in conjunction with the Alice Springs Desert Park.
If you'd like to attend, please RSVP to Chris Watson or Jesse Carpenter on 8955 5222,
mailto:lfw@lowecol.com.au

Workshops on the Garden for Wildlife agenda include Smart Gardens for Biodiversity; habitat requirements for local fauna, landscape planning and weed management. Stay tuned for more details. If you have any workshop requests, something you would like to know more about, please let us know. We can develop workshops on your specified topics.

Announcements

Rain can lead to big fires – Protect your Trees!

A wet year it may be, but as a result of this last week's heat wave we have started to see the heat's effects on vegetation. As vegetation dries out and temperatures rise, the risk of wildfire increases. Fuel load has increased after a year of significant rainfall with mass germination of vegetation, and in particular the spread of introduced Buffel Grass. Buffel Grass burns at higher temperatures to our natives plants, resulting in devastating wildfires. **Make sure your trees are protected!** Remove Buffel Grass from around the base of trees, and during the cooler months make sure you get on top of Buffel infestations on your property.



Calici virus

RHD (Calici virus) was released late last year in Alice Springs and some members have noticed its affects on rabbit populations on their block, particularly in the Ross, Airport and Gap areas of town.

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NRM Biosecurity in SA are collecting samples from RHD-killed rabbits from across Australia for genetic sequencing to help with the RHD Boost program. They are asking for our help. They have not obtained any recent samples from the NT.

RHD may still be active in Alice, and if you find a dead rabbit on your property check to determine the causes of death. RHD has no obvious symptoms, so an affected rabbit will appear perfectly healthy and case of death unobvious. Myxomatosis (another virus introduced into Australia in the 1950's to control rabbit populations) is probably doing quite nicely in places with all the water & mozzies around, and affected rabbits will have skin tumours (lumps or puffiness around the head or genitals) or conjunctivitis or blindness. Samples from these rabbits are not wanted.

To collect a sample either:

- contact us at LfW for assistance
- or collect part of the rabbit's liver, put it in a vial, label it, and keep it in the freezer. Call Peter Bird (contact details below) to arrange sample transport.

Peter Bird
Agricultural Officer
NRM Biosecurity
Biosecurity SA
GPO Box 1671 ADELAIDE SA 5001
Soil & Water Environs Centre Entry 4 Waite Rd
URRBRAE SA 5064
peter.bird@sa.gov.au
Ph: (08) 8303 9519 Fax: (08) 8303 9555

Let us know if you have noticed Rabbits affected on your block and we can determine how far the virus may have spread.

Soil Erosion

The Arid Lands Environment Centre (ALEC) has received funding to run soil erosion remediation works at the Ilparpa claypans. There is also the potential to spread the project to other areas and ALEC is looking for sites that require remediation works or can be used as sites for erosion workshops. We'll keep you up to date with this project as it advances.

In the meantime, anyone interested in further information or if you have erosion problems on your property that could potentially contribute to the ALEC project, contact Jimmy Cocking on 8952 2479 mailto:info@alec.org.au

Congratulations!

This month 25 Spotted Turtle-doves were reported caught. Thank you to all those participating in the Trapping program. If you would like to borrow a trap please contact Jesse Carpenter or Chris Watson on 89555 222/lfw@lowecol.com.au. Please be advised there is currently a waiting list. If you would like to construct your own trap we can provide instructions.

Letters

Although many members have been having a well earned holiday over the Christmas and New Year break, a few emails and letters have been making it to our desk. We love to hear of any interesting observations or events that are happening in your backyards and properties, so keep those emails coming.

Hi Jesse
Just back from holidays and yesterday morning saw 4 rabbits eating our camels' hay. So yes I am interested in rabbit control. I noted also the increase in rabbit pooh down near the camel yards. They are moving in!
See you
Julia Burke

A number of people have been asking us about rabbit control of late. The Alice Springs Airport, a Land for Wildlife member, has been generous enough to donate a quantity of unused Pindone poisoned oats. This has already been distributed amongst some members, but we still have a small amount left. Contact us if you'd like to know more.

Hi Bill et al,
Just a little note to share some observations.
1. Our Acacia Victoriae flowered well this year, but did not set seed.
Amazing.
2. There are many, many Ironwood seedlings coming up, but it is mainly in
an area where there is gravel mulch and on our labyrinth (a total of 6 that
I sadly sacrificed) ... not many on the undisturbed alluvial clay, but maybe
I can't see them because of the proliferation of drying wildflower stems.
David Woods

Bill Low replied;
Thanks for that David,
I'd like to have a look at your ironwood seedlings to see if they might be offshoots from roots or cleared trees.
If they are this seasons seedlings, it will be

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impressive. Finally after 36 years a rainfall/temperature event that resulted in Ironwoods germinating.
Interesting about the Acacia victorii. Did they seed vigorously the year before? It may be a lack of stored energy phenomenon which occurs in Mulga and is well recognised in citrus crops.
Hope you're coping with the heat stresses of late.
Cheers,
Bill

Has anyone else noticed germination of trees/shrubs? Let us know. For some species, this is a rare event and it would be interesting to know if last year's weather produced suitable conditions for these occurances.

Calendar of Events

Date	Time	Event	Venue	Contact
9 Feb 2011	7pm	Field Naturalists Club meeting	Lecture theatre, Higher Education Building, CDU	Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club, Barb Gilfedder **8955 5452**
13 Feb 2011	7am	Field Naturalists excursion	Alice Springs Sewage Ponds	Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club, Barb Gilfedder **8955 5452**
15 Feb 2011	5pm	Public information session, Flooding in the Todd River. A collection of rainfall and flood level data and the counter disaster plan will be presented	Andy McNeil Room, Alice Springs Council chambers	Department of Natural Resources, the Arts and Sports, **8951 9202**
26 Feb 2011	10am	Feral Spotted Turtle Dove trap making workshop	Bloomin' Desert Nursery	Land for Wildlife, Jesse Carpenter or Chris Watson, **89555222**mailto:lfw@lowecol.com.au

Take care,

Jesse, Chris & Bill
Land for Wildlife Coordinators

Don't forget to check out the LfW & GfW website at www.lowecol.com.au, you can download membership application forms, newsletters, vegetation type species lists, and find out about upcoming workshops!

This newsletter has been produced by
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