

Land for Wildlife *and* Garden for Wildlife Central Australia Newsletter DECEMBER 2023



Glen Marshall's Buffel free property

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WELCOME LETTER

Hello Wildlifers,

Welcome to the sun-soaked summer! It's that time of the year when the heat is on, but don't be surprised if the sky decides to throw in some unexpected rain showers – nature's way of keeping things interesting.

For those new to the heat, fret not; this season is a boon for wildlife. The local fauna is thriving in ways that might amaze you. In this newsletter, we've curated a collection of articles that not only highlight the beauty of our local fauna and flora but also provide valuable tips on how to support local wildlife during this hot season. We've got you covered! In essence, this edition is your guide to making the most of the hot season.

So, embrace the sun, enjoy the sporadic rain, and dig into how we can support local wildlife.

Very warmly and wildly yours,

The Land and Garden for Wildlife Coordinators
Jessie and Bill

**We welcome feedback from our
members – it's the best way to improve!**
Please get in touch with us at
lfw@lowecol.com.au with any feedback
you have.

20TH ANNIVERSARY RECAP!

Let's take a trip down the central Australian flora and fauna memory lane. On the 23rd of September, members gathered at Lillicrap Rd, Ilparpa, to raise a toast to Land for Wildlife's 20-year central Australian journey.

The day began with a welcome from the new coordinator Jessie and then a dive into LFW history from Bill Low, celebrating the hard work, dedication and conservation milestones achieved by members and coordinators over the last two decades.



Photo left: Bill Low and Rosalie Schultz identify plant species along a transect through Buffel free habitat.



Right: Denise Purdie and Rosalie Breen smiling along the transect.

Interestingly, the Land for Wildlife program began in Central Australia through the Alice Springs Town Council in 2002 with assistance from federal grant money. In 2005 Low Ecological Services jumped in to take over the remainder of the federal contract. When funding ended and grants were nowhere to be found, Low Ecological Services continued to privately fund the LFW and Garden for Wildlife programs. This history lesson led to a popcorn style acknowledgement of Bill Low's efforts in ensuring the sustainability of these programs and the upskilling of many coordinators and ecologists in the Alice Springs community. Go Bill!

After this compliment circle, it was a hands-on affair, Bill and Bronte demonstrated on Glen Marshall's Buffel free property how to undertake a transect survey to assist land managers in monitoring the success of their programs. We divided into two groups and undertook plant surveys.

Some of the plants identified included;

- *Acacia melleodora*
- *Hibiscus sturtii*
- *Paraneurachne muelleri*
- *Acacia aneura*
- Mulga's
- *Abutilon leucopetalum*
- *Triodia brizoides*
- *Cymbopogon ambiguus*
- *Acacia melliodora*
- *Eremophila freelingii*
- *Sida filiformis*
- *Tephrosia sp. Granite*
- *Sida sp. Excedentifolia*
- *Solanum quadriloculatum*
- Bloodwood



Photo: Volunteers recording plant species at Glen Marshall's Property.

20TH ANNIVERSARY RECAP CONT.



Photo: Group photo with a few 20th anniversary attendees

Thank-you David Albrecht, Bill Low, Bronte Stray and Rosalie Breen for your plant ID skills! After hard work and scrambling, it was time to kick back with cool drinks, snacks, informal chats and of course a birthday cake, because 20 years of supporting wildlife deserved a sweet celebration.

So there you have it – a snapshot of a day filled with history, plant adventures, ecological wisdom, and cake. Here's to Land for Wildlife, turning two decades into a thriving oasis in the heart of Alice Springs! Thank-you to all the members who joined us to celebrate this important day and a special thanks must go to Glen Marshall for hosting a lovely event on his and Jane's Buffel-free property. May Land for Wildlife and Garden for Wildlife continue to support members and their wildlife properties for many years to come. 🌿🎂

MEMBER'S MOMENT THE WOOLCOCK'S



Photo: Neil and Leigh Woolcock in front of their Garden for Wildlife

A journey through Neil and Leigh Woolcock's Garden for Wildlife in Larapinta unfolded as a delightful blend of engaging conversations and keen observations. As dedicated Garden for Wildlife members since 2011, the Woolcock's warmly guided me on a tour of their property.

Wandering through their garden, we encountered a plethora of plants such as Eremophilas, Acacias, a self-seeded Witchetty bush, a Minni Richi, Ghost gum, and a Cypress Pine. Numerous living things, including the Western Bowerbird, butterflies and a lizard, offered tangible evidence of their active commitment to supporting local wildlife through meticulous garden maintenance.

Continue reading on the next page...



Photo:
Native
vegetation
layers in the
Woolcock's
backyard

...Continued

Spending time with Leigh and Neil brought numerous highlights. Discovering how they use their property as an experimental hub was fascinating. Their approach, experimenting with the same plant in different locations, resulted in losses but also in thriving plants, cultivating optimal habitat and invaluable knowledge about local flora.

Witnessing the multitude of bird baths and a Spotted Dove trap resting on the ground was also wonderful. They have successfully caught and delivered 271 Spotted Doves to the Desert Park to date. Incredible!

Exiting through the back gate, they shared ongoing efforts over the last two years to eradicate Buffel grass from the hill behind their land. Continuous removal of Buffel has allowed native flora, including Indigo Species, Senna's, Oat Grass, a Corkwood, Daisies, and more, to successfully reclaim the landscape.



Photo:
Leigh the
Buffel boss!

Neil shared a compelling story about a Buffel fire charging through crown land towards their property. The cleared Buffel area acted as a fire barrier, flames moving around the perimeter, sparing not only their back fence but also preserving a beautiful Corkwood tree and surrounding vegetation. This story vividly underscores the immense impact of Buffel removal on property protection and habitat preservation.



Photo: Corkwood behind the Woolcock's property

The Woolcock's exemplify how passion, time, meticulous monitoring, and decisive action can enable an ecosystem to thrive. My heartfelt thanks to Neil and Leigh for the refreshing drink and the stroll through your flourishing garden. Stay tuned, as these lovely humans have offered to host a member's tour next year!

If you're eager to share your story and inspire both new and longtime members in our newsletter, don't hesitate to get in touch with us at lfw@lowecol.com.au. I'd be thrilled to personally connect with you and feature your moment!

THE POTENTIAL OF VERGES IN ALICE SPRINGS



Photo: Neil and Leigh Woolcock's native vegetation verge

As the scorching days of summer loom ahead, envision a transformative endeavor right at our doorstep—literally. Picture converting the often-dismissed roadside verges into vibrant ecosystems, combating escalating temperatures and fostering local wildlife. In the heart of Alice Springs, where the sun holds sway, our verges can transcend mere sandy patches to become thriving oases supporting diverse life forms.

Recently, the Alice Springs Town Council began collaborating with an architectural consultancy to craft a Greening Strategy, exploring innovative cooling techniques for the town. Among these, the incorporation of more tree coverage and the strategic planting of verges emerged as potent tools for effective temperature regulation.

These strips, akin to nature's air conditioners, absorb or reflect sunlight, release oxygen, and engage in transpiration, offering a natural and sustainable solution to impending heat. Beyond temperature regulation, they hold the potential to evolve into biodiverse microcosms, serving as havens for birds, insects, and other creatures that contribute to the ecological balance within our urban environment.

These overlooked strips aren't just incidental greenery; they can be intentional actions towards urban resilience. Imagine each resident contributing to the transformation of these sandy strips into genuine biodiversity corridors. This can allow safer movement for wildlife around and through the town, promoting ecological connectivity and preserving biodiversity.

Whether it's planting native flora, installing bird feeders, or crafting wildlife shelters, every endeavour matters. When planting a verge garden in Alice Springs, especially with Australian native plants, envisioning the mature versions of chosen species is crucial. Consider potential size and characteristics to prevent issues like obstructed views for drivers, blocking footpaths, interference with power lines or safety hazards in the future. Opt for plants harmonising with available space, ensuring both habitat for wildlife and long-term viability.

Here's the call to action: **have a go this summer at transforming your verge!** Send us before and after pictures of your verge. Let's celebrate successes, inspire others, and collectively make Alice Springs increasingly wildlife-friendly.

While dedicated groups and individuals work to control Buffel grass around Alice Springs, creating safe havens for wildlife is paramount. Verges offer a significant amount of unused space and untapped habitat potential! For more information on **Council requirements regarding verges**, visit the ASTC website. Join us in turning the overlooked into the extraordinary, one verge at a time.

FAUNA IN FOCUS

THE WESTERN BOWER BIRD

Chlamydera guttata,

By Jessie Longmuir

I have an exciting tale to share, one that celebrates the whimsical world of our local birdlife. As I settled into my new home in North Alice Springs, nestled amidst a fabulous Garden for Wildlife, I was in for a delightful surprise. Two Western Bowerbirds had taken up residence in my backyard, turning it into a hub of avian activity.

The Western Bowerbird, scientifically known as *Chlamydera guttata*, is a charming medium-sized brown patterned bird that stands out in its own unique way. What initially caught my eye was the distinct pink crest gracing the back of their heads, especially the male, a touch of striking colour amidst the green and brown vegetation. My second observation was their, bouncy behaviour. Wary yet not panicked, these birds cheekily bounced up and down the tree whenever their mission of bower creation was interrupted.



Photo: A Western Bowerbird- Caragh Heenan

When the coast was clear, these two Western Bowerbirds wasted no time in transforming my backyard into a bustling construction site.



Photo: The bower in Jessie's backyard

In addition to traditional nests, they embarked on the creation of intricate bowers to demonstrate their prowess in the process of mate selection. Crafted from an assortment of twigs, leaves, and other natural materials, these bowers became the focal point of their courtship display. It was like witnessing a backyard renovation project, avian-style!

The objects they've been collecting to decorate their bowers range from white, plastic rubbish to green objects, and even feathers! Each item seemed to be selected with great care, as if curating their very own outdoor art gallery. When the female is suitably impressed and agrees to a relationship, the nest is established in a well-hidden separate location where 4 or 5 eggs are laid.

I can't wait to see how their bower and lives progress. If you'd like to keep in the loop with their movements, I will share the happenings of these two feathered friends over summer through our social media account @lfwAlice.

FAUNA IN FOCUS CONT.

As we prepare for the scorching summer ahead, it's essential to ensure our newfound feathered neighbours and other local wildlife have the resources they need to thrive.

Here are some simple ways to support them during the hot months:

- **Native Vegetation:** Abundant multi-layered native vegetation in backyards provides an oasis for birds. From groundcover to canopy cover, it offers shelter and a source of insects and seeds for our avian friends. Consider planting native species to create a haven for local wildlife. Species like the Desert Bloodwood are a great place to start but be mindful of dimensions and space requirements for adult trees. Check out the next article to find local native plant propagators around Alice Springs who can also advise on what is suitable for the space you have available.
- **Water station:** With temperatures on the rise, a birdbath or small pond can be a lifesaver for thirsty birds. Ensure a shallow depth for safe bathing and drinking.



Photo: Pond amongst habitat layers at the Desert Park. Photo from the LFW/GFW website.

- **Respectful Observation:** While it's tempting to get up close to observe their fascinating behaviours, it's crucial to do so with care. Maintain a respectful distance to avoid causing stress to the birds.
- **Cat Safety:** To protect our feathered friends, it's essential to keep cats indoors, especially during the dawn and dusk hours when many birds are most active. Cat traps and more information about how to safely use these can be found at Land for Wildlife, ensuring the safety of both cats and wildlife.



Photo: A LFW cat trap

- **Reduce Pesticide Use:** Limit chemical pesticides in your garden to protect insects, which are essential food sources for many bird species.

By taking these steps, we can create a welcoming environment for our feathered neighbours, offering them the essential resources they need to survive the heat. So, let's take inspiration from the Western Bowerbirds' resourcefulness and transform our outdoor spaces into havens for biodiversity.

Happy bird watching!

FLORA IN FOCUS

WILD PASSIONFRUIT

Capparis spinosa subsp. nummularia

By Jasmin Brook



Photo: The Wild Passionfruit before bloom by Caragh Heenan

Wild Passionfruit, Caperbush, arrwerneng (Alyawarre), arrutnenge (E Arrernte), rratninge (W Arrernte), mingkilyananga (Warlpiri).

Beautiful, food producing, wildlife attracting, local. Caperbush ticks all the boxes.

A dense shrub to around 1.5m, *C.spinosa* ssp. *nummularia* has grey-green oval shaped leaves, short-lived night-blooming flowers in white and cream with a spray of showy anthers and a light fragrance, and fruit which ripen from green to a warm vibrant yellow, splitting to expose glossy black seeds and edible pulp.



Photo: The ripened Caperbush fruit by Kate Stevens

When you think about plant-insect symbiosis in Central Australian gardens, nothing illustrates the relationship quite like the Wild Passionfruit or Caperbush. You'll want to harvest some fruit for yourself by picking them green to ripen off the bush, because leave some there and the birds and ants who will flock to your bush for a treat. Spring time sees the migratory Caper White Butterfly (*Belenois java teutonia*) flying up from as far south as Tasmania to mate and lay its neat rows of bright yellow-orange eggs on the uppermost leaves of the caperbush. After hatching, young caterpillars will spend about three weeks stripping an entire bush of its leaves before pupating on the surviving spiny stems. The Caperbush doesn't mind, it'll spring back in no time.

Growing your own Caperbush is a matter of finding some fresh seed. If you don't have one, ask around and see if you can find one. Fruit ripen in the summer and it's best to harvest seed at this time. Wash pulp from the seed and sow straight into some light seed raising mix, no pre-treatment is needed! Seedlings can be prone to rot so make sure to keep damp but not too wet. If you're interested in buying a Caperbush, keep an eye out for stocklists and sale days by local growers featured in this edition of the newsletter.



Photo: The Caperbush flower by Caragh Heenan

BUFFLE BUSTERS

Meet Jacqui Arnold, a local Landcare legend who is reducing the Buffel grass load at Maynard Park in Dixon. Volunteers alongside Jacqui chip away at different sections of the park every week removing Buffel grass. This picture here shows a in the background a hill that is almost completely Buffel free from their efforts which has enabled space for so many natives to pop up through the rocks. I recommend a walk by if you haven't already!



Photo: Jacqui Arnold holding a mattock at Maynard Park

Buffel grass poses a significant threat in Alice Springs due to its invasive nature. This non-native grass outcompetes native vegetation, leading to biodiversity loss and more intense fire regimes. Its rapid spread in disturbed habitats such as drainage lines and road edges exacerbate wildfires, threatening ecosystems and increasing the risk to human communities in the region.

What can you do? Maintain a Buffel-free native garden and verge to bolster native seed reserves and provide habitat for local wildlife, complimenting the ongoing efforts of Buffel busters to control landscape-level Buffel invasion.

If you want to learn more or join community action, check out these local groups:

- Alice Springs Landcare
www.alicespringslandcare.com
- Arid Land Environment Centre
www.alec.org.au/stopbuffel
- Email the Buffel Action Network
buffelgrass.nt@gmail.com

SIGNIFICANT TREE REGISTER

What is the Significant tree register?

The NT Register of Significant Trees was conceived in 1982 to coincide with the Australian Year of the Tree. The aim of the register is to create awareness around protecting trees, which are a significant part of the heritage of the Northern Territory. Land for Wildlife has managed the register since 2011 and developed a digitalised platform for the register, which includes an interactive database.

This interactive map can be found here:



Interestingly an email to LFW from Meredith Lake, 8CCC presenter gives a great example of how this map can be used:

...When my family arrived in Mparntwe, one of the first things we did was walk around our new neighbourhood looking for some of the local trees on the register...

BEATING THE SUMMER HEAT PLANT GUIDE

By Jasmin Brook

Summer is here and your garden is going to be feeling it! Alice Springs is not an easy place for gardeners. Learning to enhance the arid landscape of Alice Springs can be a challenging task, given the nutrient-deficient soils, water scarcity, and the relentless sun. With so many of us moving to Alice from elsewhere it can be a real shock to realise how different arid gardening can be. A lot of things you can get away with on the coast or in the tropics are a death sentence for your plants here. Fret not, there are lots of things you can do to help your garden survive the season.

- **Choose Plants Wisely:** Set the stage for success by selecting plants that thrive in Alice Springs' challenging conditions. Local natives are your safest bet, as they've evolved to withstand or adapt to the arid heat. When purchasing plants, opt for species in season and suitable for your specific location.
- **Gradual Acclimatisation:** Before introducing tender seedlings to full sun exposure, employ the "harden off" technique. Gradually increase their sunlight exposure over a couple of weeks to ensure a smooth transition.
- **Mulching Mastery:** Shield your plants from the unforgiving sun with a layer of sugar cane mulch or pea straw. Remember to keep the mulch away from the plant's trunk to prevent rot and pest issues.
- **Strategic Watering:** Quench your plants' thirst early in the morning when they're most active in absorbing water, minimizing evaporation. Consistent watering is key, especially in an arid environment.

- **Nutrient Boost:** Nourish your plants with an appropriate fertilizer—opt for a low-phosphorus formula for native species. Maintain a consistent schedule, especially when using soluble fertilizers.
- **Timing Matters:** Resist the urge to apply pesticides or fertilizers when plants are stressed. Choose the morning hours for these tasks to prevent burning leaves.
- **Pamper Your Pots:** If you have potted plants, check or water them daily. Container plants can be particularly vulnerable to rapid drying out in the heat, so a daily check-in is essential.

Heading out of town for the holidays? Check Your Irrigation! Here are a few things to look over before you head off.

- **Power Up:** Check or replace any timer batteries to guarantee your irrigation system stays operational in your absence.
- **Seasonal Settings:** Check that the timer is set for summer, not winter, to ensure your plants receive the right amount of water for the warmer weather.
- **Walk and Assess:** Run your irrigation system for a while, then take a leisurely stroll around your garden. Keep an eye out for unexpected wet patches and listen for the subtle sound of running water.
- **Droplet Details:** If your system employs drippers, give each one a close examination. Should you find any dispensing too little water, unclog them by removing scale, dirt and debris. If the issue persists or if some are releasing excessive water, it might be time to replace them with fresh, efficient drippers.

Remember, successful gardening in Alice Springs is all about understanding and adapting to the unique challenges of the arid zone. Happy summer gardening!

Please continue reading on the next page...

...Continued.

Further information:

Alice Springs Veggie Gardening Companion: A handbook for growing food in Arid Australia: Explore tips on irrigation, pests, composting, and fruit and vegetable selections tailored to Central Australia. Available for download from www.alec.org.au

Community Gardens: East Side and West Side. Participate in regular working bees at the community gardens. Learn from experienced local gardeners. Contact them via Facebook.

Native Plants and Irrigation Support. For native plants you can have a chat with local growers at plant sales. You can also request an irrigation guide and send your questions to shootsnrootsnt@gmail.com who have over 25 years' experience growing plants in Alice.

Pot Plant Tip: Wicking System. Finally, a little tip for your pot plants. If you're going away, you can try a simple wicking system. Instructions can be found here: <https://scissorsandsage.com/2015/04/20/diy-self-watering-system-for-houseplants/>



Photo: A simple wicking system

IN THE LOOP

December 5th World soil day!

In November, I traveled to Victoria to pick up my dog, Bee, and move her to Alice Springs. On this journey home, I was awestruck by the diversity in ecosystems across this land. In honor of World Soil Day, I gathered small soil samples, capturing the diverse landscapes beneath our feet. Each sample tells a unique story, celebrating the rich tapestry of soils that sustain life across the journey. The diversity of this land is beautiful, isn't it?



Photo: Soil samples from Vic-NT

2024 Workshop Calendar

Exciting times ahead! We're gearing up for LFW 2024 and want YOUR input. Which workshops and presenters would you love to see? Share your ideas for unique sessions that spark curiosity and support you to support wildlife! From environmental conservation to DIY projects, let us know your dream lineup at lfw@lowecol.com.au

Desert Park

Addressing a recent letter to LFW highlighting challenges in bringing captured Spotted Doves to the Desert park we have found a solution. Angus from the Desert Park will kindly collect Spotted doves around town on Wednesdays (11-1 pm) starting December and subject to staff availability. If you are interested in more information, please contact Angus at: angus.newey@nt.gov.au

WHERE CAN YOU BUY NATIVE PLANTS?

LFW/GFW aims to encourage you to support local wildlife through actions such as planting native vegetation. Currently, in Alice Springs, the availability of commercial native plant propagators is limited. Although not a promotional platform, below, we've highlighted two notable plant sellers and are compiling a comprehensive list of other propagators behind the scenes. If you know any growers here in Alice, please share with us so we can add them to the resource list!

Centralian Seedlings

Meet Jorgen, the dedicated native plant grower behind Centralian Seedlings, a distinctive venture situated on an incredible Land for Wildlife property at 6 Hele Crescent, Ciccone. With knowledge and a passion for learning, Jorgen propagates over a hundred native arid zone species, including drought-resistant trees, bird-attracting shrubs, plants suitable for poor soils and unique plants like the snake vine. Embrace the arid zone ecosystem with these low-maintenance, waterwise, and climate-resilient gems. Explore planting tips and more at Centralian Seedlings

<https://www.centralianseedlings.com/plants> .



Photo: Jorgen from Centralian Seedlings. Taken from website.



Photo: Shoots n Roots propagation photo by Jasmine Brook

Shoots n Roots

Introducing Shoots n Roots, a horticulture pair in Alice Springs with a fervor for cultivating plants in their free time. Their objective is to provide reasonably priced, locally propagated, sun-hardened Central Australian and arid zone tubestock as well as some herbs, and veggies. Visitors can explore their Facebook page for the latest stock lists, showcasing a diverse range of 50mm-sized tubestock. For those preferring a more direct connection, reach out via text 0423 143 766 to arrange a visit. Shoots n Roots warmly welcomes inquiries regarding wish lists, propagation requests, or any gardening-related questions.

For those eager to cultivate native plants themselves, become a member of the **Alice Springs Plant Society**, your gateway to propagation knowledge. Alternatively, explore the thoughtful garden designs at **Olive Pink Botanical Gardens**, showcasing the diversity of local flora.

THE QUIZ

All questions in this quiz are based on information that can be found in this newsletter except for question 10. Goodluck!

1. What year did the Land for Wildlife program begin in Central Australia, and who initially started it before Bill Low and his team took over responsibility?
2. What is a recommended method to prevent potted plants from drying out during the summer, especially when going away?
3. Through which organization does Jacqui Arnold coordinate her efforts at Maynard Park to remove Buffel grass?
4. What is a Bower Bird's mating display site called?
5. What does the word 'striata' refer to in relation to Grevilleas?
6. What Land for Wildlife-related world event occurs every year on the 5th of December.
7. What are the business names of two native plant propagators active here in Alice Springs?
8. Which frequently overlooked stretch of land in Alice Springs has the potential to serve as essential habitat?

9. What edible plant is suggested to be planted in a pot so it can be moved into light shade on very hot days?

Bonus question!

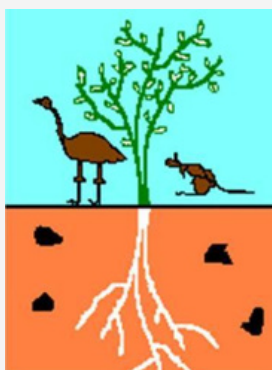
10. What global initiative aims to prevent, halt, and reverse the degradation of ecosystems worldwide, and it was launched by the United Nations in 2021?



See you next year!
... from the window chilling Gecko!

1. The Land for Wildlife program began in Central Australia in 2002 by the Alice Springs Town Council. 2. Use a simple wicking system with string! 3. Landcare 4. A bower! 5. The ridges and grooves (striations) found on the leaves' underside. 6. World Soil Day. 7. Centralian Seedlings and Shoots & Roots. 8. Verges. 9. Basil is recommended to be planted in a pot so it can be moved into light shade on very hot days. Bonus: UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. More information can be found here: www.decadeonrestoration.org

SPECIAL THANKS TO



Low Ecological Services



Do you have any stories, images or ideas to share? Get in touch! We are always looking for members to share their experiences via our social media and newsletter. Email us with your suggestions for articles, topics or workshops that you wish to hear more about at lfw@lowecol.com.au