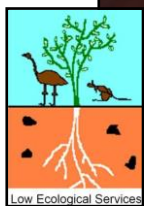
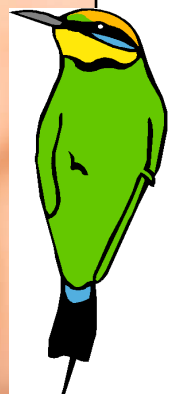


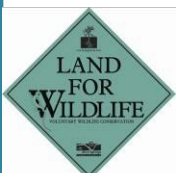


GARDEN FOR WILDLIFE

Pie Dish Beetle (*Helea* sp.)



Newsletter, February 2011



GARDEN FOR WILDLIFE NEWS

On our cover this month...

This is the extraordinary Pie-dish or Cardinal Beetle, *Helea sp.* These beetles are commonly found in gardens throughout arid Australia and are mostly flightless, and vegetarian. They feed on decomposing plant matter and shelter under dense shrubs or the bark of some eucalypts. When attacked by ants or other predators they will tilt their body and dig the flange of the carapace into the ground to present the attacker with an impenetrable shield. It has been suggested that the *dish* shape of the flange may also aid in water collecting in arid zones, where some species have extraordinarily wide flanges.

Feral Spotted Turtle-dove Update...

A big thank you to everyone who responded to our call for Feral Spotted Turtle-dove surveys through February. The responses are well-spread over the whole town and have given us some clear ideas about where the worst infestations exist.

Please keep us up to date with your trapping successes and remember to keep filling in surveys. We need to maintain the monitoring to see how our traps are affecting the population around town.

Every dove makes a difference.

ARTICLES

MEXICAN POPPY SPREADS!

Regular readers will be familiar with this topic. The Mexican Poppy has really enjoyed the climatic conditions of the past 12 months, with infestations of the weed occurring along several river systems of the area, including the Todd and Finke Rivers. Recently, new populations of the weed have been noticed in other parts of town. The likely cause – the use of sand from the Todd River for concreting and landscaping projects. The seed of Mexican Poppy is spread by floods down the river course. It lies dormant in the sand, until suitable climatic conditions occur for germination. By taking this sand and transporting it around town, we are inadvertently helping to spread this potentially harmful weed. When importing soil and sand onto your property, it's important to use 'clean' material that has not come from a potential source of pests or diseases. Sand from the Todd River is not 'clean'. It is likely to contain the seeds of not only Mexican Poppy, but also other weeds that may be a pest in your garden or natural areas should they be given the opportunity to spread.



1. New Weeds on the March

The arid environment that surrounds Alice Springs for many kilometres in any direction creates a natural barrier for the spread of both animals and plants. Some of the changes

we've made to the landscape however, and the way we move things from one side of the country to the other, can help to break these barriers.

For example, the provision of artificial water sources in the desert allows plants and animals that are not suited to arid conditions to survive where they would otherwise perish. Good examples of this are birds like the introduced house sparrow, a European finch well established in coastal eastern and southern Australia. These birds now inhabit towns like Oodnadatta and Coober Pedy, where human habitation and the food and water resources that this provides make one of the most arid parts of inland Australia habitable for the species.

In the Northern Territory, House Sparrows are periodically found at Tennant Creek, where they've crossed vast unsuitable areas by hitching a ride on road trains from Queensland or leap frogging from pastoral homesteads across the Barklys.



House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*). Male left, Female right. If you see this introduced bird in Alice Springs, you should contact National Parks and Wildlife (8951 8250) or Land for Wildlife (89 555 222). Also report any seen in Tennant Creek so the birds can be controlled there before they hitchhike to Alice Springs. Photo: Kookaburra

Parks and Wildlife periodically remove them from Tennant Creek by using Alphachlorolose in drinking water to put the birds to sleep, then protecting the native birds until they wake up and fly away and removing the House Sparrows from the ecosystem.

Plants can also be spread unwittingly by people moving things like soil and garden mulch from one part of Australia to another. Even if these plants are not conditioned to an arid climate, they can sometimes survive in people's backyards or watered areas of public land.

In years of extreme weather events, such as the high rainfall experienced since the beginning of 2010, weeds that have become established in people's gardens can spread beyond backyard boundaries and into the bush. The Mexican Poppy (see Garden for Wildlife Newsletter, July 2010 www.lowecol.com.au) is an example of a weed that may have arrived as seed transported in soil or stock feed, or the transport of building sand and has since spread throughout the Todd and other river systems during periods of favourable weather. Hikers and 4WDers also aid in spread of seed if they do not clean their boots or vehicles after hiking or driving in infested locations.

Recently, two new weed species were recorded in an Alice Springs garden (see photographs below). The weeds were photographed and identified by Tim Collins of

Alice Springs Landcare. It is thought that these weeds, already established in other parts of Australia, arrived in Alice Springs as seeds, inadvertently transported in garden mulch. It is a reminder that accidental introductions of potentially troublesome or damaging weed species can turn up any time, and that we should keep a close eye out for any strange, unknown plants in our garden.

If you need help identifying a plant, take a photograph and send it to Garden for Wildlife/Land for Wildlife, <mailto:lfw@lowecol.com.au>. We'll either identify it for you or get the picture to someone who can. Remember, not all plants that germinate in your garden are necessarily introduced. You may have some germination of natives too, particularly if you live close to a seed source, such as crown land or a reserve. However, if you're at all unsure, play it safe and "if in doubt, pull it out!" This way, you'll help to prevent new weeds from becoming pest species in Central Australia.



**Two new weeds
for Alice Springs.**

***Kickxia elatine ssp
crinita*** (above left
and right).

***Vicia sativa, a
vetch or pea,***
(bottom left and
right). Photos: Tim
Collins, Alice
Springs Landcare.



2. Wildlife Corridors

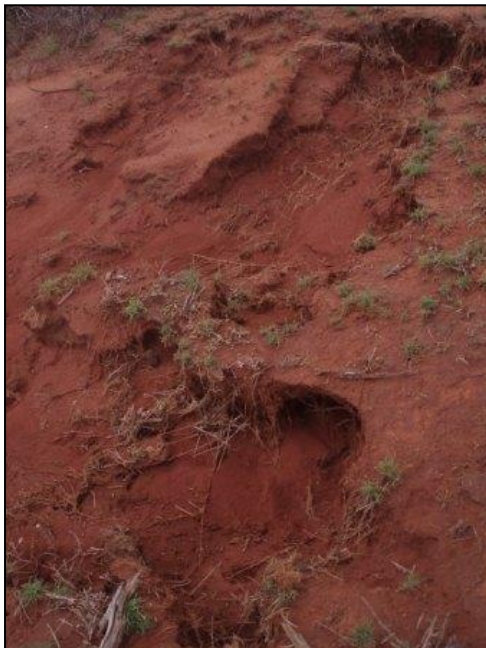
The Gardens for Wildlife program has been running for 4 years in Alice Springs. This is a fantastic effort, and wildlife around town is no doubt reaping the benefits of all the extra native plants and suitable habitats that you have all helped to create.

The program is about to enter into an exciting new phase that has been in the planning stage for many months. We will be looking at our maps and trying to construct a series of wildlife corridors through the residential area of Alice Springs.

These corridors assist integration of the good works done by Gardens for Wildlife members with the habitats created out on the rural fringes of Alice Springs by our sister program, Land for Wildlife. The project will also aim to create buffer zones of protected habitat along existing wildlife corridors through town.

The corridors project will initially focus on properties along the Charles and Todd Rivers, in the Sadadeen area beside Olive Pink Botanic Gardens, and the suburbs of Ciccone and Braitling. If you're a member in these areas and you have neighbours who you think might like to join in the effort to make these corridors a reality then put them in touch with the Garden for Wildlife team at the usual email address.

3. Erosion Protection For Your Garden



After the fantastic rainfall we've had so far this season, a few people might be wondering whether their garden might be at risk of washing away altogether! While this is (we hope) unlikely, many gardens will certainly be suffering from some level of accelerated erosion.

Erosion is one of those problems where prevention is better than cure. What can start as a few patches of exposed soil surface can end up as gullies. Left unchecked, erosion will deplete soil quality and accelerate out of control.

Happily, there are steps you can take to minimise the acceleration of erosion and its effects on your garden.

1 Steep gully erosion on a Land for Wildlife member property

- 1. Ground Cover** – is the most effective protection against erosion. Having a good covering of leaf litter or mulch is the number one way to protect your soil from wind and water erosion and to encourage *cryptogams* – soil crusting agents.
- 2. Vegetation** – having a good covering of native grasses and low shrubs also lessens the impact of heavy rainfall and wind on the soil surface. On slopes, vegetation removes moisture from the soil through transpiration which prevents soil from becoming overly heavy and slipping.
- 3. Construct erosion barriers** – in areas where exposed ground is unavoidable (walking and vehicle tracks) the construction of some simple diversion banks will slow the speed of runoff and reduce the impact of water flow on these areas.

For more information about reducing the impact of erosion on your garden, including instructions for the correct building of run-off barriers, check the NT Government website at: www.nreta.nt.gov.au/advis/land/soils.htm

4. Feral House Mice

Feral House Mice are running rampant in Central Australia including at Yulara and the Tanami. There has been an excellent run of wet weather and abundant seeds have seen rodent populations increase dramatically.

As with most feral species, house mice compete for food and shelter and often outbreed our native rodents. Around town you may find some of our native species but they are usually vastly outnumbered by the ferals.

Some of the most likely native small mammals that you may encounter around Alice Springs are shown here, just in case you are lucky enough to spot them.

✓ **NATIVE** ✓

Sandy Inland Mouse

Pseudomys hermannsburgensis



Desert Mouse
Pseudomys desertor



Stripe-faced Dunnart



Sminthopsis macroura

FERAL

Feral House Mouse

Mus musculus



image: George Shuklin 1

As you can see from these photographs the differences between the native species and the feral are not always obvious. There are a couple of important things you can note though;

1. Feral house mice stink. If you're familiar with the smell they leave around your home, then check to see if the mouse you're looking at has a similar smell.
2. Feral house mice are hyperactive. They are jittery – native mice are not in such a hurry all the time.
3. Feral house mice have a notch at the back of their two front teeth which you will be able to check with your thumbnail – even on a live animal if you're careful.

If you live in one of the rockier areas of town, you may be lucky enough to have a population of Stimson's Pythons nearby which might make a dent in the local house mouse population. Other native predators of rodents are our Boobook and Barn Owls and Tawny Frogmouths.

However, the most effective way to eradicate these pests from your home is with mouse traps. The simple fact is that you are quite unlikely to find the native species around your home and the risk of perhaps trapping a native mouse is offset by the benefit to the ecosystem of removing the ferals.

WORKSHOPS/ANNOUNCEMENTS

A Blog is Born !

A new website has been under construction this month to complement the Facebook page and it is now open for the use of members. It comes in the form of a Blog (or Weblog if you prefer) at this address:

www.gardenforwildlifealicesprings.blogspot.com

We hope that this will become a useful tool in keeping you up to date with the very latest news from the Garden For Wildlife team.

It will behave as an online repository for relevant information and factsheets, and be a place where we can publicly address questions from members that might be helpful or interesting to other members. It will also provide you with links to a host of useful websites from around the country. If you have, or know of, an interesting website that we could include then feel free to share your thoughts. You can expect it to grow in the coming months, but please have an explore and let us know what you think.

Noogoora Burr

This weed has been found by Jane Addison out at Trepkina Gorge. This is another weed which is spread along watercourses and can be harmful to livestock. For more information and photos check the GfW blog –

www.gardenforwildlifealicesprings.blogspot.com

Surveys

Biodiversity Surveys were conducted during the first weeks of December in the Racecourse/Winery region of town. The report of our findings will be released in the next month or so. Thanks to all those involved.

YOUR LETTERS

Thanks Jesse

We have enough spray for 10 years so I am happy to donate at least $\frac{3}{4}$ of it. It's meant to be diluted 15mL to one litre (check this mix???) water so if I'm diluting in a 250mL bottle I only need 3.75mL.

Let me know when you'll be in town, or if I can drop it off somewhere.

The Fountain grass looks gently dying, and some of the couch, but it will require more effort. I'll start pulling it with my hands next weekend which is 3 weeks after spraying.

To my delight I saw a big ctenotus lizard – must have been 1.5cm body thickness. I note there are dozens of ctenotus so too hard to identify precisely (although the size was impressive). It feels like a reward for getting rid of some of the weeds.

Cheers, Rosalie

WEBSITES WORTH A LOOK

<http://www.weeds.org.au/WoNS/> - Weeds of National Significance. An easy to use website, packed with information on the biggest botanical threats to our ecosystems, and the best strategies for dealing with them.

www.feral.org.au - An excellent resource, packed with useful information on the history, status, distribution, and control of introduced animals in Australia.

www.ala.org.au - A huge collaborative effort between CSIRO, Museums and herbariums around the country to produce an Atlas of Living Australia. A great opportunity to get involved in some citizen science.

www.xeno-canto.org - A worldwide database of bird calls. Upload your own or browse and download from the existing collection of 7251 bird species - and it's all free.

www.treehugger.com - Green news from around the globe. Everything from stunning photography, to tips on greening your home. Highly addictive!

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

The Secret Lives of Wombats - James Woodward

This is a great read by a seasoned Australian natural history writer. It takes an in-depth look at the evolution of the most endearing of our native fauna. It also includes the stunning tale of the teenage school boy who single-handedly revolutionised the study of these animals, and the extraordinary prehistory of Australian fauna told through the fossils at Riversleigh.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

5/3/2011 - 7am Waterbird survey at Alice Springs Sewage Ponds. Volunteers needed as scribes and expert birders needed to help with the count.

6/3/2011 - Alice Springs Landcare, Clean Up Australia Day Event. Starting at 8.30am visit www.alicespringslandcare.com for details

12th - 27th of March - Newhaven Sanctuary are conducting bird surveys and require volunteers. Email richardandroz@wirefree.net.au to register your interest in helping out.

19/3/2011 - Miss Pink's birthday plant sale in the morning at Olive Pink Botanic Garden.

19/3/2011 - Alice Field Nats trip planned to look for Spotted Nightjars out at Ellery Creek Big Hole. Depart Flynn's Grave at 3.30 pm and driving back after dark.