# LAND FOR WILDLIFE NEWS

Newsletter of the Land for Wildlife Scheme in Alice Springs Municipality, NT *Vol.1 No.10 December 2004*

## *Land for Wildlife* Update

Another year is almost over, a big thanks to those who have attended the workshops held throughout the year and continued to develop or conserve their property for wildlife habitat. Also welcome to those new members of 2004. There are now 35 Land for Wildlife properties registered with several waiting to be assessed. A list of all the members to date is included in the Newsletter. Also, what was the coordinator team of Danae, Kim and Bill is now just Kim and Bill with Danae moving on to the CLC and Yuendemu. We have been advised of partial funding for next year by Envirofund and this is in the process of confirmation. We hope you all enjoy your Christmas and summer break and we look forward to another year of Land for Wildlife.

**Arid Lands Environment Centre** has reactivated with new Coordinator John Brisbin. Lots has happened in the last week down at ALEC with a threat to their commercial operations at the town tip, featuring the Bowerbird Tip Shop. ASTCouncil intend to remove salvage rights from the Bowerbird tip shop and hand them over to Wastemaster which would finish the Tip Shop operation. Two rallies were held with one humdinger on Monday Nov 29th preceding the council meeting with around 250 people in attendance. The council decision will be made before Xmas. ALEC AGM is on! Dec 8th, 5:30pm, @ ALEC offices.

**BIG (Buffel Interest Group)** has started up to discuss the pros and cons of the Buffel issue, next meeting is at 5.30 Tues 14th of Dec @ the ALEC **office.**

The **Lower Todd Land Care Group** is progressing well with incorporation, NHT funding, sacred site clearance and several productive work bees to control Buffel Grass around significant River Red Gums. Contact Michelle and Nick Smail at the Camel Farm.

## In this Issue



## Books Worth a Look

***Bush tracks: shortcuts to vegetation information for natural resource management***

This booklet provides a guide to the publications, internet sites and organisations which can be accessed to obtain vegetation information for natural resource management. It is available from the Greening Australia office in town.

**Olive Pink Botanical Gardens** have 2005 calendars for sale 1 for $6, 2 for $10 and 3 for $12 local artist Anne Marshall.

**Reptiles and Frogs of Alice Springs**
Most of you have a copy, but it is a great Xmas gift for only $20 from me on 89555222

Alice Springs TOWN COUNCIL
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Low Ecological Services

## Spotlight On

# Weeds Weeds Weeds

Now that it's summer time, the rains will be coming, that unfortunately means so are the grassy weeds. Just when you thought you were rid of them up they will come. Here is a rehash of some weed removal methods you can use around your block. It takes a whole swag of different methods to control weeds and what you do and when you do it is dependent upon the condition of the plant, the area that you are controlling and the weather, with the best time being after rain.

## Physical Removal

There is something really satisfying about chipping. Ask Doug Graham who is on his 2nd prospector's pick. The results are obvious and instantaneous. ***Keep in mind that unless you are prepared to continue you are making it worse by "cultivating the soil" and opening a space for more germination***. Besides the well practised method of pulling plants following rains, an adapted garden fork or sharpened shovel can work wonders and save the back. See LfWer Dave Leonard's adapted pitch fork below (as seen in April 2003 newsletter)

Once it rains wait for weeds to become green and healthy, (***Do Not*** allow seeds to mature) then pull and fork areas of high priority. Simply sharpening the edge of a long handle shovel (less body bending than with a short handle) can make cutting through the roots, below the stem base and butts, easier work. Some people prefer to chip out Buffel especially in rocky areas. When the soil moisture is exhausted, chipping, slashing, mowing and burning are the most commonly employed methods of control (discussed later).

For **Caltrop** manual removal before seeding is the only effective treatment. And like Buffel the process must be repeated several times because of successive germinations from seed stores in the ground.

## Spraying

Spraying weeds is good for broad areas which may not be high priority. However for most weeds there is only a small window of opportunity. Also don't make the concentration too high as it will kill off the plant without getting into the roots and killing them too!!!!!!!!

To effectively poison **Buffel Grass** use Glyphosphate. The best time to poison is when leaves are bright green, fully open and flat. You need a good area of fresh leaf to take in the poison. If you have recently mown, then you need to wait for enough leaf to regrow so that it can absorb enough poison to kill off the rootstock. Also, if you have just sprayed, don't mow or slash the Buffel until it is completely dead so that the plant can pump enough of the poison around its system for it to be effective. When poisoning has been unsuccessful it becomes more difficult to physically remove the tussocks.

To effectively poison **Caltrop** Ametryn is the most widely used herbicide; it is non-selective but can be used with care in built up areas' (Parsons & Cuthbertson,1992). Like Buffel spraying is most effective

when plants are green and healthy and especially on seedlings.

As mentioned in the last newsletter Glyphosphate will only get a 50% kill on **Mexican Poppy** so it may not be a viable control method. A stronger mix of 2,4-D and Glyphosphate or Picloram and Glyphosphate or Fluroxypyr or Metsulfuron-methyl. However, most of these chemicals are not commonly held by your average citizen and some aren't the friendliest things to use. The last two listed have some residual properties. In all cases the chemicals are meant to be used in early growth stages, before seeding for the best effect.

## Slashing/Mowing

This method is helpful in reducing both the seed bank and the fuel load for all weeds.

However mown **Buffel Grass** will regrow as a larger, denser tussock if not controlled to a low height and will continue to shade out native species. As mentioned above slashing to get rid of the bulk of the plant then spraying Buffel when green is a good way to kill off Buffel, getting right into the roots.

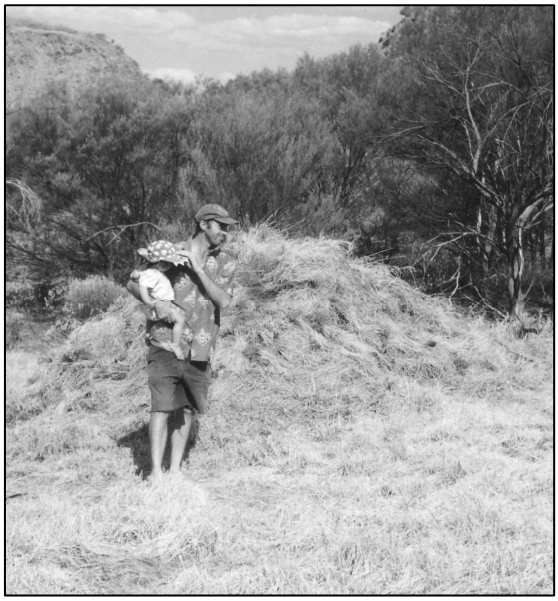
For all weeds it is preferable that slashing or mowing is undertaken before seed heads have appeared or become mature.

## Reducing Seed Bank

It is useful to prevent seeds from entering the system especially adjacent to areas that have been cleared of weeds. Hand picking of seed heads is preferable however slashing and mowing is also an alternative.

With **Buffel Grass**, if the seed heads have been hand harvested and the plant is not a fire threat it can be left standing until the next rains when it can be a priority plant for pulling/forking or spraying.

The light seeds of **Kapok Bush** are easily distributed by wind. The control method recommended is to firstly dead head (remove and bag flower heads), collect as much seed from around the base as is possible and then pull it up, roots and all!



**(Feb 2003) Glenn and Evie Marshall in front of some of the Buffel that the Marshall Mob has removed during the past four and a half years**

For **Mexican poppy** pods that are very green generally don't need bagging as the seed is not mature. Once seed pods start to change colour seed may or may not be ripening and it is safest to bag and destroy.

## Burning

It has been noted by Dave Albrecht that burning does kill a lot of **Buffel grass** seed so you only get one crop following rain instead of four or five crops of seedlings. Please note that permits are required before burning can take place.

In a nutshell the most effective removal of weeds is after a good soaking of rain when the ground is soft. Continued physical removal is the best way to get rid of weeds, however once green and healthy it is a good time to spray too.

# Land for Wildlife Members.

I am sure you have all spotted a blue sign or two, but here is an updated list of the **35** registered *LfW*ers for 2004. All together your properties total **1,777.815** hectares contributing to "off reserve' conservation

## Ilparpa Mob

Michael and Andrea Hewitt
Eric and Helen Fischer
Dave Albrecht and Sally Mumford
Sue Richter and Roger Thompson
Maria van der Krogt and Doug Graham
Rod Cramer
Basil and Lyn Zadow
Sue Ripley
Lesley Reilly
Cathy Pirrie
Glenn and Jane Marshall
Brian and Ursula Clark
Sarah Wren and Chris McIntyre
Geoff and Denise Purdie
David and Pauline Ross
Bevan and Tracey Garmeister
Jeff and Jenny Kenna

## Ross Highway/Emily Hills Mob

Margot Webster and Simon Holding
Mal and Marita Crowley
David and Sue Woods
Brian and Fran McGrath
David and Carmel Leonard
Debbie and Ken Page
Graeme Horne
Kaye Kessing, Eleanor Hooke, Bob Kessing and Ruth Jones

## Winery and Airport Mob

Bruce Simmons
Des and Pat Nelson
Tom Falzon
Bruce Hancock

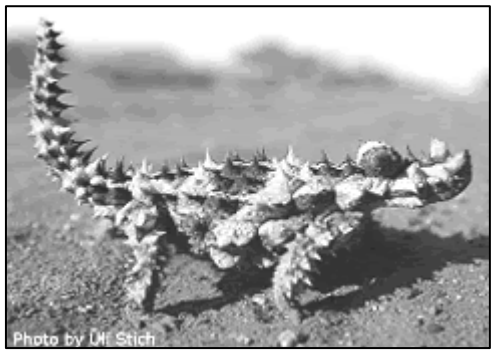
## And in the Townies Mob

Claire and Brendan Meney
Mike Gillam and Maria Giaicon
Larapinta School
OLSH

# Watch For

## Thorny Devils and Echidnas

After all the talk on ants I thought we could focus on two of the few critters found in central Australia which eat only ants (well nearly, Echidnas eat termites too).




### Where to find them

Those curious Thorny Devils are the only species in their genus and are diurnal, meaning they are more active in the day than the night where they retreat to shallow underground burrows dug by themselves. You can find them through most of arid inland Australia, particularly on sandy soils, but they seldom occur on stony soils. Thorny devils are found in two quite different habitats: spinifex-sandplain and sandridge deserts of the interior and the mallee belt of southern South Australia and southwestern Western Australia. The geographic distribution of thorny devils corresponds more closely to the distribution of sandy and sandy loam soils than to climate

### Eating

Thorny devils are ant specialists, eating virtually nothing else. They will consume several species of ants, but are especially partial to very small *Iridomyrmex* ants, especially *Iridomyrmex flavipes*. Feeding rates

have been estimated at from 24 to 45 ants per minute. Large numbers of ants are eaten per meal by an individual thorny devil (estimates range from 675 to 1000-1500 to 2500). They too are eaten by aborigines, bustards and large lizards like goannas.

## Scats

Faecal pellets of thorny devils are very distinctive: black, glossy with white urea tip and of course full of ants. These are often found in neat piles either in the open or amongst sparse vegetation. Tracks and accumulations of fecal matter indicate that thorny devils often return regularly to specific defecation sites.

## Drinking

Thorny devils have a system of grooves in their skin that lead to the corners of their mouth. Thorny devils take up water by means of capillary action via these grooves. Thorny devils use a gulping oral mechanism to move water along the grooves and into their mouths. Thorny devils can actually drink water from dew that falls on their backs and they can gain as much as a gram of water in a rainstorm

## Behaviour

Thorny devils walk slowly with a jerky motion, and they often freeze in place while walking. Thorny devils posses a curious knob-like spiny appendage on the backs of their necks, which looks a little bit like a second head. When threatened, the lizards tuck their real heads down between their forelegs leaving this false head in the position of their real head. A thorny devil caught by Eric Pianka had a damaged knob which looked as if a mammalian predator had chewed on it. When disturbed, thorny devils will also inflate themselves with air, puffing up like little puffer fish. This is presumably another anti-predator defence. Thorny devils can also change colour rapidly -- when warm and active, they are usually a pale yellow and red, but when alarmed or when they are cold, they are dark olive and drab.

Source: *http://uts.cc.utexas.edu/varanus/moloch.html*

If you are as lucky as the Zadows you might just catch the Short-beaked Echidna on your block. This unusual mammal has been classified in the Order of Monotremata, along with the Platypus, due to the combination of characteristics of egg laying, possessing a pouch and excreting milk though pores rather than teats

## Where to find them

The Short-beaked Echidna is found throughout most of Australia in a variety of habitats, from regions experiencing snow to the desert. In desert regions the short-beaked echidna seeks shelter in caves or crevices to avoid high temperatures and is active during the night.

## Eating

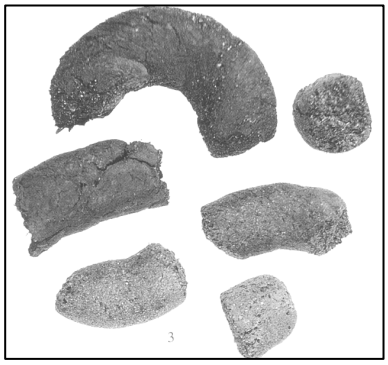
Like the thorny devil, the echidnas diet is purely ants and termites too. The echidna is toothless and breaks into termite nest with its strong claws or snout and uses its long sticky tongue to catch the termites. Termites are

preferred in arid areas, which is believed to reflect the higher water content found in termites than in ants.

## Scats and Tracks

Echidna tracks can be seen on the left and are easily distinguishable. The front feet turn inwards and the marks of the strong digging claws are usually clear. The hind toes are directed backwards and the tracks show a print of all the claws as the foot is moved forwards.

Echidna scats are long cylinders usually about 1cm in diameter. The scats are smooth and contain many fragments of insects as well as soil which has been ingested by the insects. The colour of the scats vary with the colour of the soil in the feeding area of the echidna.



## Behaviour

When disturbed or threatened echidnas roll into a ball of spines or dig itself below the ground surface. These spines, which reach 50 mm in length, are in fact modified hairs. Insulation is provided by fur between the spines which ranges in colour from honey to a dark reddish-brown and even black. The echidna is adapted for very rapid digging, having short limbs and powerful claws. The claws on the hind feet are elongated and curve backwards; to enable cleaning and grooming between the spines. However, despite this, they are infested with what is said to be the world's largest flea -- *Bradiopsylla echidnae*, which is about 4 mm long.

The Short-beaked Echidna is solitary for most of the year but at mating time several males may follow a female. In the breeding season the female will dig a burrow for her young. Pouch young are left in the burrow from three months of age whilst the mother hunts for food.

Source: Triggs, B (1996). Tracks, scats and other traces: a field Guide to Australian Mammals, Oxford University Press. and www.dpiwe.tas.gov.au

# Calender of Events

**11th of December Alice Springs Field Naturalist Club.** Walk and breakfast at the Olive Pink Botanical Gardens. Meet at 8am, bring a plate and drinks to share. Contact Bob Read 89521935

**13th of December Northern Territory Government.** Ministerial release of the Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan for the Northern Territory.

**11th of January Northern Territory Government.** Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan open public forum. Contact Libby Benson 08 89994464

**2nd of February 2005 Australian Plants Society** monthly meeting and BBQ picnic at Simpson Gap. Meet at 6pm.

This newsletter has been produced by *LfW* coordinators W.A. Low Ecological Services with the assistance of the Alice Springs Town Council and the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust EnviroFund. Kim is primary contact on 89555222 or LFW@LowEcol.com.au but Bill, Tim or Tom will happily field your queries.