

Land for Wildlife

Conservation is in your hands



NEWSLETTER

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Land for Wildlife Update

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 new year. Thanks to all those involved.

Botanist Boyd Wright conducted seedbank surveys in the Ilparpa Rural region with the help of LfW/GfW members as part of his study. Surveys of seedbanks across properties in various stages of Buffel grass control were done to see how the native seedbank is affected. We look forward to hearing the results!

Garden for Wildlife/Land for Wildlife had a very successful display at the EcoFair this year, and would like to welcome new members Chris Howden and Kay Bailey who we met on the day. It was a great event and was wonderful to see all your smiling faces there! Warm welcomes are also extended to Rhondra Tomlinson who joined the Garden for Wildlife program this month.

As a result of downsizing of Parks and Wildlife programs, Land for Wildlife is looking to re-stimulate and coordinate the feral Spotted Turtle-dove eradication program (more information on this in 'Announcements'). We will coordinate distribution and circulation of traps, and are available to help with advice and disposal. The only problem is the severe shortage of traps!!! (See 'Workshops' below).

Workshops

Upcoming Workshop:

Making a Spotted Turtle-dove trap

Stay tuned for this workshop in the New Year (date and venue to be confirmed).



Articles

The importance of local provenance

Have you ever heard the term 'local provenance' when you have been buying plants?

A 'provenance' is a plant population containing a local genetic variation. Local provenance plants are grown from seed collected from healthy plants growing near to and in similar environmental conditions as the planting site, which gives new plants the best chance of survival.

Many native plant species in Alice Springs also occur naturally across large areas of Australia, such as the River Red Gum, *Eucalyptus camaldulensis*. However, plants growing in a specific area have adapted to local conditions over a long period of time. This is to say that the River Red Gums along the Todd River are different, genetically, from the Red Gums growing along the Murray River in Victoria. It is important to conserve these genetic variations as they ensure a plant is better adapted to its local environment. For example, local provenance plants are better suited to local soil conditions, temperatures, rainfall and wind conditions. They support a wider range of locally native animals and plants than introduced species, and will have a better chance of thriving in harsh desert conditions.

Preserving local provenance populations is an important way of protecting biodiversity. Planting local plants increases the success of revegetation projects and decreases the risk of disrupting the local flora gene pool, not to mention maintaining local character and conservation value. Bringing in plants from a different region, even if they are the same plant species, can through cross-pollination compromise a species' genetic integrity, weakening the population's ability to thrive in local conditions. Plant genes that have been naturally selected for over time (thousands of years of adaptation) will become diluted, reducing an ecosystem's long term ability to adapt and thrive.

When collecting local provenance seed, similarities in environmental conditions of the parent plant and planting site should be assessed through soil type, slope position, altitude and rainfall. Considering a plant's pollination and seed dispersal methods helps determine the size of a provenance range, and how far seed can be collected from the parent plant. For example, where the parent plant drops seed close by, provenance seed should be collected as close to the planting site as possible. If seed is dispersed by wind or water, provenance seed can be collected from

remnant vegetation with matching environmental conditions that were once connected to the planting site. If plants have fleshy fruits that are spread by birds, seed could be collected further afield. Pollination distance for many Eucalypts can be a few kilometres, whereas for Acacias the distance will generally be much smaller.



So before buying a native plant for your garden ask for local provenance at your local nurseries. There are many nurseries in Alice Springs that specialise in local provenance, such as Geoff Miers Garden Solutions, the Greening Australia Nursery (open Thursdays), Tangentyere Nursery and Australian Plants Society/Olive Pink Botanic Gardens plant sales, and the commercial nurseries are also participating in the program.

Channel-billed Cuckoos



This beautiful photograph was taken by Ethno-ornithologist Bob Gosford in his backyard last week. They have arrived! The first sightings of Channel-billed Cuckoos, *Scythrops novaehollandiae*, were in mid-November, and they can now be heard all over Eastside, in North side and along the Todd River at the Telegraph Station. They have travelled from the tropics of New Guinea and Indonesia and even tropical Queensland to sneak their eggs into crow's nests, which saves them the effort of raising their own chicks.

Channel-bills will also head to northern and eastern Australia to parasitize Kurrawong, Magpie, Buthcherbird and Crow's nests, and once these poor host birds run themselves thin trying to feed the massive chicks the Channel-bills will leave us and head north again around February or March. **Have you seen them?** Bob Gosford is recording sightings of Channel-bills this year in an attempt to know more about their breeding habits in the Centre. So keep your eyes out for juveniles in a crow's nest, or adults chasing crows around, or very irate crows trying to chase Channel-bills away! If you spot any or if they wake you up every morning with their banter or **let us know** where and when!

Weed Profile: Fountain Grass



Alternative Names: Tender fountain grass, African fountain grass

Family: Poaceae

Species: *Pennisetum setaceum*

Form: Grass

Origin: Native to east Africa

Fountain Grass is a densely tufted perennial that grows to 900mm. It lives for many years and the long feathery spike of the flowerhead makes it attractive for garden cultivation. It spreads by seed which is adapted to sticking to fur and clothing, but can also be transported by wind and water or carried in dumped garden waste or mud on vehicles.

Pat Hodgins, a Garden for Wildlife member, has spent many warm days removing the grass from his front yard, and has persuaded a neighbour to do the same. "When we bought our house in Old Eastside it was advertised with a 'beautiful native garden', but in fact there was only exotic Fountain Grass growing everywhere. I removed all of it using a crowbar, as it has a really thick root mass, and have removed as much of the top seed as possible. Since then we have planted native grasses, and the Fountain Grass has not returned. However we haven't had any rain since then, so we shall see what happens after a downpour." Pat would like people to be more aware of the grass, that it is not an ornamental plant, but in fact a weed.

"I have seen people *planting* Fountain Grass on their footpath." Several other Land and Garden for Wildlife members have had the same experience of Fountain grass taking over their blocks. It is as good or better than Buffel Grass at overdoing its welcome.



For more information on weeds around town and beyond, check out the new book launched by Greening Australia: '*Weeds of Central Australia: a field guide*' by Sunil Dhanji – a fantastic resource available from Red Kangaroo Books and Greening Australia.

Photo Credit: C. Martus, www.cal-ipc.org

Letters to the Editor

In response to the Desert Park enquiry about the occurrence of feral Spotted Turtle-dove trapping, and the lack of turtle-dove drop-offs at their disposal enclosure:

Wow Ilse,
No feral birds.!! Most interesting.
We use the trap that was made in the July workshops.
There were a range of suggestions discussed at the workshops for the use/disposal of the catch, amongst which was the drop point at the Desert Park.
At our place, after humanely dispatching them, we bury them as fertiliser capsules or include them in our chicken's diet. We value the trap and greatly appreciate the work of LandForWildlife&Garden for Wildlife.
Garden for Wildlife member

Hi Ilse,
It really is too far to drive out (to the Desert Park drop-off point) for some of us assuming we have cars and are not on shift work that makes it hard to get out there. We have been killing our captives ourselves as it's easier and perhaps others have been doing that too.
Sara Cox
Garden for Wildlife member.

Ed - Whilst the Desert Park does use turtle-doves that are delivered to the feral turtle-dove drop-off enclosure, their greater concern is that trapping is not taking place in the community, and that feral turtle-dove numbers may be on the increase. However if trapping is taking place and some people prefer to dispose of the turtle-doves themselves for

reasons such as mulching or convenience, and the birds are euthanized humanely then that is fine!

Hey Ilse,
I would love to get a trap- we have dozens at our place and apart from knocking their nests out I haven't been able to do anything- ta
Garden for Wildlife member

Hi Ilse,
I've had some strange requests in my time but this one is one of the best!
(In reference to the suggestion to 'get trapping' for Turtle-doves for the Desert Park!)
Trevor Shiells
Land for Wildlife Member

Hi Ilse,
Good work trying to get the trapping up and running again. Are there any spare traps? The turtle doves near our place have been busy breeding lately and I'd love to get rid of them.
Thanks!
Garden for Wildlife member

Photos from the Tanami

The photographs below were sent to us from the Tanami Desert and feature a Black-headed Monitor, *Varanus tristis*. *V. tristis* can be found in timber country, around hill country, and around houses around town that have walls that can be climbed. Olive Pink Botanic Garden had heaps of them a few years ago, and I recently saw one hanging from the wall of the office! The Black-headed Monitor is long and slender with a black tail and neck – but not nose! It is a good climber and likes to eat the geckos around the house. This fella is very old but it appears he gets a lot to eat! He has a chunk off the end of his tail, as the last part of the tail is smaller than the main part of the tail indicating possible regrowth, which may be due to a run-in with a Dingo.





Announcements

So what is the latest on feral Spotted Turtle-doves?!!

Spotted Turtle-Dove control is currently entirely in the hands of the community. There has been a recent enquiry as to whether Spotted Turtle-Dove trapping is still taking place within the community, and an email I sent out to all members reassured us that there are many of you putting in the effort to help eradicate this feral species from town (some evidence is shown in the 'Letters to the Editor!'). There was also an overwhelming request for traps which is fantastic! It's great to see the enthusiasm for this project especially because we as the public are the only active workers on the ground trapping. Unfortunately there is a shortage of traps, apologies to those in waiting. Land for Wildlife will be running a trap making workshop in the new year so stay tuned, but until then **can anyone who has a Parks & Wildlife or a home-made trap that is not currently using it and wouldn't mind lending it to other GfW/LFW members please let me know** on 8955 5222 or lfw@lowecol.com.au. Thanks!

Funding

We need your help to boost our visibility!

Land for Wildlife/Garden for Wildlife has recently been unsuccessful in obtaining funding through the Town Council. We would like to raise the profile of the program, to let the Council and wider community know that the landholders of Alice Springs are concerned about and active in conservation on their lands, and that the program plays a key role in providing landholders with support and advice. If you feel that you are gaining from the LFW and GFW programs please take any opportunity when in

discussion with town councillors or NT legislators to let them know the benefits of our program, so that we may better our chances to secure funding in the future to support the program.



Merry Christmas!

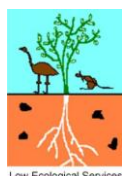
Enjoy the Christmas period, whether you're staying in Alice, or escaping the heat for awhile. Remember to make sure any irrigation you have is functioning properly, the timer is working, and the pipes aren't leaking, so your plants survive the summer! Ensure your garden mulch is topped up to retain moisture and repress weeds.

Have a wonderful break, and see you all next year!

Take care,

Ilse & Bill
Land for Wildlife Coordinators

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