

LAND FOR WILDLIFE NEWS



Newsletter of the Land for Wildlife Scheme in Alice Springs Municipality, NT

Vol.1 No.3 July 2003

Land for Wildlife Update

"We can heal the environment one yard at a time",
quote from Ola Edwards, Growing Wild Program, Seattle, Washington.

Future

The Natural Heritage Trust (Trust), which has provided funding for this pilot program, has approved an extension of time for expenditure of the Trust's funds until the end of September 2003. This gives the Alice Springs Town Council (ASTC) more time to compile their report to the Natural Heritage Trust. Currently the *Land for Wildlife (Lfw)* Coordinators are contracted to provide the pilot program on a full time bases. ASTC and W.A. Low Ecological Services have agreed to renegotiate the current contract to deliver *Lfw* on a part time bases for as long as the Trust funding allows.

An application for further funding has been submitted by W.A. Low Ecological Services on behalf of *Lfw* property holders to the Trust's replacement "Envirofund". As the *Lfw* signatory, ASTC is a sponsor. The results of this application is expected to be known during late September or early October. For the long term future of Land for Wildlife, a proposal is being formulated to be put to the NT Government for the provision of Land for Wildlife to the whole of the Territory. All avenues are being investigated so that this program may continue and expand.

The NT Government is currently developing policy to encourage "off-reserve" conservation. You can all display your *Lfw* signs with pride and in recognition of your contribution to "off-reserve" conservation.

The team at W.A. Low Ecological Services would like to thank all of the Landholders who have written letters of thanks and support, of this pilot program, to the Media and ASTC. Also, thank you to all of the brave souls who have spoken on Radio about *Lfw* and its various projects. Many thanks.

Information Exchange

During Property Assessments Landholders were asked what other organisations they were interested in or participated in already. One of the aims of this question is to assist people to connect into existing environmental networks. So if you expressed an interest in Wildcare or any other environmental group your contact details will soon be forwarded.

Devolved Grants

The majority of reports and acquittals for Nature Conservation Grant projects have been submitted to the ASTC. In the next few newsletters we will report any useful information derived from these projects. One of the projects that the Lilliecrapp Road *Lfw* Group applied for funding for is a booklet, "Reptiles and Amphibians of Alice Springs". It is now in the final draft stage. A limited number of copies will be commercially printed and available to *Lfw* Landholders.

The results of the "... Diet Analysis of Feral Cats" trapped in Ilparpa will be available in report form in November of this year. See page four for more details.

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Books Worth a Look

Local Plants for Central Australian gardens.

Concise and coded for a condensed format, the Australian Plants Society of Alice Springs have produced this publication based on 30 years of experience propagating, growing and tending of local Australian flora. Available from the Garden Café and Giftshop, Olive Pink Botanic Garden.

For those of you who enjoy reading from a computer screen:

<http://www.ea.gov.au>

This is the site of Environment Australia where you can access relatively up to date information in relation to many aspects of our environment. Links to a variety of sites of environmental interest can be made through this address, such as: Programs and funding; Greenhouse Issues; the Natural Heritage Trust; Meteorology; Parks & Reserves; Land Management and the list goes on. Media releases made by the Federal Minister are also posted here.



This newsletter has been produced with the assistance of the Alice Springs Town Council and the Commonwealth Government's Natural Heritage Trust.



Natural Heritage Trust
Helping Communities Helping Australia

The Burning Issues.

Fire is a dynamic tool that can be corralled within a prepared area to reduce fuel loads within sections of a property.



Although this element can be used as tool it can also quickly take on a life of its own, jumping breaks and escaping what appears to be a contained situation, becoming an uncontrolled wildfire.

Any person lighting fires without or contravening the conditions of a Permit can receive relatively large penalties from the Fire and Rescue Service. However, a potential financial penalty is negligible compared to the potential loss of property or life that could result from an uncontrolled wildfire.

This being the case, before you touch a flame to that tussock of Buffel, it is in your best interests (and legal requirements) to obtain a Permit and follow the conditions that apply to the issuing of that Permit. The Fire and Rescue Service have years of experience in handling fires in the safest possible manner and will be able to advise you of what preparation is required before a Permit would be issued.

Permits

To obtain a permit to light a fire, apply in person to the Fire and Rescue Service at the Alice Springs Fire Station on Telegraph Terrace. You'll need to supply the following information: the time, date and location of the intended fire (bon fires included).

All Station Officers, Acting Station Officers or the Captain of the Volunteer Unit can issue permits. Before they are issued, the Fire and Rescue Service will undertake a site inspection. This may result in further preparation for the burn and another inspection before the Fire and Rescue Service are satisfied that a fire could occur within the proposed area and be of minimal risk of becoming an uncontrolled wildfire.

Each permit will have conditions under which the fire can occur and will be specific to each fire applied for. Part of these conditions would include maximum wind, neighbours and authorities to notified, the time limits for burning as well as the place and date. Other conditions may be specified so read each Permit carefully.

Preparation

Creating firebreaks of four metre width around the area where the fire would be is a minimum requirement as well as ensuring that the property firebreaks are well maintained. Having identified the priority areas to protect as well as having thought through an evacuation plan, should a burn become an uncontrolled wildfire, can help

you identify possible hazards and reduce the risks of a fire burning beyond the desired area.

Thoroughly brief the people assisting you as to what will happen when and who is responsible for each task. Identifying who has First Aid knowledge and where the list of emergency contact numbers are would be useful.

Check your wardrobe! No I'm not being funny and yes, this may be an excuse to go shopping. Natural fibres have a lower flammability rate than synthetics. Leather gloves and boots may heat up but they're not going to melt onto your body. Same goes for cotton, ramie, jute, linen and wool. Natural fibre socks and sock protectors (gaiters) are worth mentioning. The final piece of protection is Sun block, this will assist in protecting your uncovered skin from the radiant heat of the fire.

Drink plenty of water prior to, during and following your burn.

Following the on site inspection with the Fire and Rescue Service, follow through on all of the recommendations that have been made.

Penalties

The Northern Territory of Australia Fire and Emergency Act and the Regulations clearly and simply state what the responsibilities and penalties are in relation fires. Copies of the Act and Regulations can be downloaded from the Internet or are available from the Alice Springs Town Council Public Library.

Here are some direct quotes from the Regulations of offences and penalties: ... fail to attempt to extinguish unlawful fire - \$100.00; light a fire on rural lot without permit - \$300.00; fail to install fire break - \$300.00; allow combustible material to accumulate on land - \$300.00 and under the Act, it is possible for the penalty: in the case of an individual - \$10,000 or imprisonment for 2 years.

A bit of thought before the match is struck can save money, homes and lives.



Ref:

The Northern Territory of Australia Fire and Emergency Act, 1 December 2000.

Pers. Comm. Training Officer, Alice Springs Fire Station.





Little Blue Butterfly or Double Spotted Lineblue

This is a very small and nationally common butterfly, *Nacaduba biocellata biocellata*, with a wingspan of up to 2cm.



Large populations of these tiny butterflies occasionally appear to erupt from the ground due to their ground hugging flight at the bases of Mulgas (*Acacia aneura*) and Witchetty Bushes (*Acacia kempeana*), which are food sources.

Although the yellow larvae feed on the buds of Mulgas and Witchettys it is uncertain whether the eggs are laid on the branches or in the leaf litter.

Compiled from notes supplied by
Parks & Wildlife Service NT



Winter Weed Rosy Dock

This is the time of year for the germination of introduced **Rosy Dock** (*Acetosa vesicaria*). It is also commonly referred to as: Ruby Dock, Wild Hops and Afghan Lettuce.

Rosy Dock is an erect, annual herb, usually under 1m in height. Stems are tough but hollow with succulent heart shaped leaves. The flowers/fruit are bright pink or red with an inflated appearance. Young seedlings can be identified by two or three large fleshy, heart shaped, dark green leaves poking out of the soil surface.

Native to dry regions of the eastern Mediterranean, the similar conditions in central Australia assist the plant to thrive here. Rosy Dock is most likely to be found on rocky hills and disturbed sites including around erosion gullies, house sites and gravel road verges. Rosy Dock has also successfully spread into sandy river systems such as the Todd River.

Acetosa vesicaria tends to germinate in the cooler months especially with the help of rain. If you have Rosy Dock on your property it is a good idea to get stuck into it before it becomes a mature plant and drops seed. It can easily be removed by hand pulling. Killing by spraying with glyphosphate is another alternative although an integrated approach to any weed management is recommended to reduce the development of poison resistant weeds.

The seeds are very light and easily transported by both wind and water so it is worth collecting the seed heads before spraying/weeding to reduce the amount of seed available to start the next generation. Rosy Dock can have a sparse distribution, so if you begin control early it can take a small effort to monitor and maintain a Rosy Dock free area.



Ref:

Albrecht D. & Rogers L. (1999) *Weeds of the Tanami*. For Normandy NFM Limited in cooperation with the Alice Springs Herbarium.

Auld B. & Medd R. (1987) *Weeds –An Illustrated Botanical Guide to the Weeds of Australia*. Inkata Press, Melbourne.

Smoke on the Horizon

A Fire Management Plan is being developed for the town of Alice Springs. The Plan concentrates on preventative action, in particular establishing and maintaining a network of firebreaks. You may have noticed some controlled burning just to the west of Larapinta, or some whipper-snipping activity behind houses which back onto inaccessible rocky country.

The Department of Infrastructure Planning and Environment, which manages Crown Land, is working with the Bushfires Council NT and the Alice Springs Town Fire Brigade to plan and create the firebreaks. Alice Springs Town Council, the Telegraph Station and The Alice Springs Desert Park are some of the other organisations involved with fire prevention and firebreaks around Alice Springs.

When completed, the plan will be publicly available for perusal.

Information Supplied by John Childs, Regional Coordinator, Conservation & Natural Resources, DIPE.

Echidnas

There are two species of Echidna in the world. The Long-beaked Echidna of New Guinea and the Short-beaked Echidna, *Tachyglossus aculeatus*, that occurs in both Australia and Papua New Guinea, in five subspecies.

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 through pores rather than teats.

Mature Echidnas have a diet that consists of ants and termites. Their strong beak and powerful forelimbs enable them to break into the nests while their long sticky tongues are employed to collect supper. A consequence of consuming this diet of insects is a large intake of soil and sand with meals that results in the cylindrical sandy scats, unique in shape and texture.

Although they are known to occasionally form the diet of Dingoes and Humans there appears to be no significant predators or threats. When disturbed, an Echidna can quickly bury itself in soil and



lodge itself in crevices and hollow logs as forms of protection.

Distribution of the Short-beaked Echidna is sparse across the continent and the time of the day when the species is active is dependent upon the season and the climate of the region within which it occurs. Within Central Australia they are mostly nocturnal, especially during the warmer months. Echidnas have been recorded on two of the Twenty-three *Land for Wildlife* properties both of which are within Ilparpa Valley and back onto rocky slopes.



So seeing an Echidna is rare photo opportunity and one that Lesley Reilly took advantage of during 1997.

Strahan, R. (Ed.) (1995) *The Australian Museum Complete Book of Australian Mammals*, Reed Books, NSW

Cat Trapping Progress

The Cat Trapping and Feral Cat Diet Analysis Project, funded by the Natural Heritage Trust through the Council's Nature Conservation Grants is proving successful in reducing the cat population of Ilparpa Valley. Sue Ripley has coordinated the placement of ten traps in which one domestic and fourteen feral cats have been caught since trapping the first trap was set on the 23rd of May 2002.

This makes an interesting comparison with a separate and much less intensive trapping program that took place in the Olive Pink Botanic Garden during 2002. Sporadic trapping in the Botanic Garden was instigated by: the sighting of a cat, fresh tracks or evidence of a kill. This ad hoc method of trapping resulted in the capture of twenty-three cats and twelve dogs over approximately six months. Sporadic trapping recommenced in June within the Botanic Garden and had resulted in three cat captures by late June.

Preliminary analysis of four scats has positively identified the remains of Skink and Rabbit. Rachel Paltridge, using the Parks and Wildlife Services microscopes, will identify a hair sample and the results of the scat analysis will be published.

The Weekend Australian Magazine, June 21 – 22 2003, carries a thought provoking article focusing on feral cat issues, titled "View to a kill" by Greg Callaghan. One point of hope that can be taken from the article is that there are people from all walks of life across Australia who are concerned for the future of our unique native fauna and doing what they are able to relieve the pressure from predation.

There are obviously more cats out there. We are fortunate in having **Sue Ripley** Coordinate the Cat Trapping Program and she can be contacted on **(08) 8952 5073**.



Workshops & Events

Vegetation Survey Volunteers

Volunteers are wanted to partake in vegetation survey work between July and September around Alice environs. The Threatened Species Network is looking for enthusiastic volunteers to help resample vegetation plots around the municipality to look at the impact of Buffel Grass invasion on plant diversity. There will be some training in plant identification skills and survey techniques. **Please contact Colleen O'Malley ph. 8952 1541 or email tsnt@ozemail.com.au**

Biodiversity Month & Threatened Species Day

TSN would like to hear from any group or school that would like to get involved in **September's Biodiversity Month** and Threatened Species Day activities. The theme for this year is freshwater environments, and the kind of activities you might like to organise are water sampling, claypan interpretative walks, bird watching at the sewerage ponds, building frog habitats, storytelling or making plays, cleaning up a local wetland area, or studying one of the critters that live in our desert wetlands. TSN can provide freshwater information kits to all participants and will help advertise events locally and nationally. **Please contact Colleen O'Malley ph: 8952 1541 to discuss your ideas.**

Silver Bullet Complex has RE-opened

This unique complex houses a café and art gallery as well as the Regional Office of Conservation Volunteers Australian. It is also a Land for Wildlife registered property and a registered Heritage Site at 4 Hele Crescent.

Bushfires Training

Contact **Alice Springs Bushfires Council** Headquarters, **ph: 8952 3066**, for when the next available training course will be conducted.