

LAND FOR WILDLIFE NEWS



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

June 2006

Land for Wildlife Update

Welcome to the winter 2006 edition Land for Wildlife newsletter for Alice Springs.

Membership

We now have 39 properties registered with LfW! Welcome to the following new members: Adrian James & Alex Le Couteur, Chris & Annie Tangey, Harry Stubbins & family, Mitch Jones & Russ Thompson, and Bernie Nethery & Amanda Lucas. It's fantastic to have so many new members – and we're still looking for more! So please let your friends and neighbours know about LfW. Information is available at www.lowecol.com.au, or they can call us on 89 555 222.

Future

The good news is that we were successful in our application for funding through the NT Regional Investment Strategy (National Heritage Trust)! This means we can keep LfW going for the next two years, with a coordinator working half-time. We have since met with our Advisory Committee to plan the most effective use of this money. In addition, surveys were sent out to members, and those returned were also used in our planning session. If you haven't sent yours in yet, we'd still love to hear what you have to say, so please do.

Workshops

In February we spent a beautiful summer evening at the Marshall's place learning about Echidnas from Rebecca Freshwater, Ants and termites from Melinda Hillery and Big Headed Ants from Colleen O'Malley. We learnt all sorts of interesting things, including why some ants build those little turrets at their nest entrance – apparently it's to give them a better start when they fly off on their reproductive flights!

Next was a bird workshop in March with the Alice Springs Field Naturalists, at the Reilly's place. Thanks to Bob Read, Will Cormack and Rob Burgoyne, we had a fun morning and identified 31 bird species, including Spinifex Pigeons.

Advisory committee

Thanks very much to David Woods and Adrian James for offering to join the LfW advisory committee, and to the current committee (Sunil Dhanji, Dave Albrecht, Jenny Purdie and Michelle Rodrigo) for your help and advice.

Happy reading!

Cassie Wright and Bill Low
Land for Wildlife Coordinators

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Mel Hillery talking Termites at the Echidna & Ant workshop in February.

Photo: Glenn Marshall

Practicalities

ECO-FRIENDLY PLANTER TUBE

After hearing about Mal Crowley's fantastic cat traps made from old shopping trolleys in our last newsletter, here's another innovative invention from the Land for Wildlife family. Alex Nelson (son of Des & Pat, long time LfW'ers) works at the Olive Pink Botanic Garden, and also made an appearance on the 'New Inventors' TV show with his Eco-Friendly Planter Tubes. Here's what Alex has to say about his invention:

The late Frank McEllister, a highly-regarded horticulture expert in Central Australia, used to have a favourite saying: "Every successful garden in Alice Springs is 90 per cent failure".

He was referring to the extreme conditions that are a feature of our climate being the main cause of death of many plants in our gardens, and we often lose several for each one that is successfully grown.

One cause of mortality is a condition called "transplant shock", which is mainly due to root damage when plants are dug up, or removed from pots or trays, and transferred to new growing sites. The warmer and drier that conditions become (which is normal for our region), the greater the risk of loss due to transplant shock.

Minimising disturbance to roots is a key factor to reducing transplant shock, and one product designed to do this is the "eco-friendly planter tube". These are made from cardboard tubes that have been immersed in molten beeswax and then filled with soil or potting mix in which seeds or cuttings are grown.

The centres of toilet rolls are very good for this purpose, as are longer tubes from paper towel rolls, cling-wrap and wrapping paper (the longer tubes are cut into shorter lengths). Thin-walled cardboard tubes (which are easily crushed by hand) are best suited for this purpose; thicker tubes are not suitable.

The tubes are immersed in hot melted beeswax for about one minute, during which the wax expels the air from the cardboard. The saturated tubes are removed from the beeswax and allowed to stand and cool for a few minutes, after which they are ready for use. They can be stored indefinitely in dry conditions. Locally, beeswax is most readily obtainable from local art supplies stores.

The beeswax preserves the cardboard tubes from water damage; untreated tubes unravel very quickly after becoming damp. Beeswax-coated tubes deteriorate very slowly in moist conditions and will last for several months, providing ample time for plants to grow or to be re-used again in the event that a plant dies.

The tubes are open-ended but the bottom side does not require to be closed off to prevent the growing media from falling out. The procedure is to tamp down the growing media firmly as the tubes are being filled – this is sufficient to hold it in place. Later the plants' roots will also stabilise the soil or potting mix.

Moulds will appear on the sides of the tubes as the plants grow but this does not affect their health. However, it is advisable to apply liquid fertiliser occasionally to assist the plants' growth. Like all small pots or trays, the tubes can dry out quickly in hot weather; it is always best to locate them under shadecloth or in dappled light conditions.

When a young plant is ready to be planted out, the entire tube is simply buried in the soil where the plant is to grow; this avoids transplant shock. The tube simply decays in the soil as the plant commences to grow in its new home.



Photos: Alex Nelson

Weed profile - Wild turnip

Do you have any Wild Turnip growing on your block? Have a look at the photo – you just might recognise it.



Here's what Sunil Dhanji, Bushcare Facilitator at Greening Australia has to say about Wild Turnip
Description: Wild turnip is an annual forb, up to 60cm tall, with an erect, branching stem that is bristly at the base and has a stout tap root. Plants start as a rosette, and leaves are at the base of the plant and are lobed and bristly, 6-14cm long. Flowers are pale yellow fading to whitish with four petals 5-8mm long, and about 16 seeds are formed in small cylindrical pods.

While it may not be too obvious at the moment, it grows well after winter rain – so keep an eye out, especially around August/September. It's worth controlling Wild Turnip as it can fully dominate areas, and the total ground cover can then stop other plants from growing.

How does it spread? Seeds tend to fall at the base of the parent plant, leading to dense infestations, but may also be retained on the branches and as the whole plant degenerates it may be dislodged by the wind and blow around like a roly-poly, dispersing seed for many miles. It is commonly found in a range of locations, and does especially well in disturbed areas.

How do I control it? Glyphosate is effective on wild turnip in its early stages so spot spraying is the quickest method of control. Use 75mL per 15L for small plants (rosettes) and increase to 100mL per 15L as stem lengthens. Those averse to chemicals can still grub small plants out and this can be as easy as using the toe of your boot if plants are treated before the tap root thickens. As plants mature (have seed on) it is probably best to grub them out taking care to not spill too much seed. If you are keen you need to be ready each year we have some cool season rain to do a spot spray early. There is probably 7-10 years worth of seed in the ground I'm sad to say.

Problems with pests?

Rabbits

You may have noticed a few more rabbits around lately – I certainly have, and they are getting hungry with the dry conditions and shortage of tender green forage, so it seemed like a good idea to find out more about them.

Domesticated rabbits arrived in Australia with the First Fleet, and had covered most of Australia by 1910. Wild European Rabbits are Australia's most serious mammal pest, and cause environmental damage that is often irreparable. Wild rabbits kill vegetation and compete with native animals for food and shelter, and have thus contributed to the extinction of many native animal and plant species.

Biology

Rabbits breed best in winter after rain, as winter rains cause lots of green shoots to appear which provide plant estrogens to stimulate their breeding. They will produce young in shelters above ground, but have more success in underground warrens. They can breed 3-4 times a year, but in Central Australia usually breed 1-2 times a year, depending on how good a year it is.

What can be done about them?

Biological control has proven very effective in controlling rabbits in Central Australia. Myxomatosis is a disease that was released into wild rabbit populations in Australia in 1950. When it spreads through a population in Central Australia (this happens when there are lots of young rabbits around) it can kill up to 85% of rabbits, and tends to come through in the stressful hot periods (January-March). Rabbit calicivirus disease (RCD) has also had a large impact on rabbit populations since it was released in 1995. RCD comes through in cooler weather at the end of winter (August-September), and kills 90-95% of rabbits that come in contact with the virus.

Chemical control isn't of much use to most LfW members as most techniques (such as poisoning or fumigating warrens) aren't allowed in built up areas, and require users to have done the appropriate courses and have permits.

So what can you do?

The best way to minimise the impact of rabbits on your block is to remove places where they can hide, and protect plants from browsing. We recommend the following:

▶ Piles of debris such as roofing iron, timber, mounds of dead branches etc. provide a good place to hide and protection while digging holes – get rid of them and you may well get rid of the rabbits (why not scatter those dead branches around the place to provide habitat for lizards, small birds, etc.)

▶ Block holes underneath buildings to prevent rabbits from living there

▶ Look for warrens, and if you find one block the holes with newspaper they don't like digging through it) and then cover with dirt.

▶ You can also use cage traps over warren entrances (making sure you block all the other holes). These traps catch rabbits alive, which then need to be dealt with humanely. Hirex Services (10 Shirley Ct, (08) 8952 2353) can order in traps (which would need to be prepaid). They come in cartons of five, for \$95.



▶ Alternatively, if you are a LfW member and know you have active warrens on your property, give us a call on 89 555 222 and Bill (who has the appropriate permits) can come out and assess whether fumigation of the warren is an option

▶ Protect plants from rabbits and euros using mesh or plastic tree guards

▶ If you do use chicken wire for fencing, be aware that lizards (eg. bluetongues) get trapped in chicken wire and starve – so such fencing should be checked very regularly.

Reference:

Bill Low, personal communication

Williams C.K. et al, Managing Vertebrate Pests: Rabbits (1995). Bureau of Resource Sciences/CSIRO Division of Wildlife and Ecology, Aust Govt Publishing Service

Watch out for

Big Headed Ants in Ilparpa – update!

In the last newsletter we talked about some non-chemical alternatives to ant control in your house. I should have made it clear in that article that Land for Wildlife doesn't encourage killing native ants. The many species of native ants found around Alice all play an important role in our natural ecosystems, and removing them can help invasive ant species to move in.

On that note, here's an update on the Big Headed Ant invasion, especially in the Ilparpa area, from Linda McGuire, the new Threatened Species Network Coordinator:

The level of community action on the issue of big-headed ants in Alice Springs has been highly impressive, following an unprecedented expansion in the known range of big-headed ant infestations during the summer. Over 150 people have now become part of the project data-base, and many of these have been involved in both backyard and neighbourhood-scale eradication efforts.

With the shifting of the seasons, big-headed ants are becoming less active and therefore can appear to have reduced in numbers or even to have disappeared from areas. But even though the cold weather slows down nest activity, unfortunately this doesn't signify any change in numbers of ants in the colony. It's important not to let the ants spread further during the winter, or next summer may prove to be even worse than the last!



Linda McGuire, Threatened Species Network Coordinator

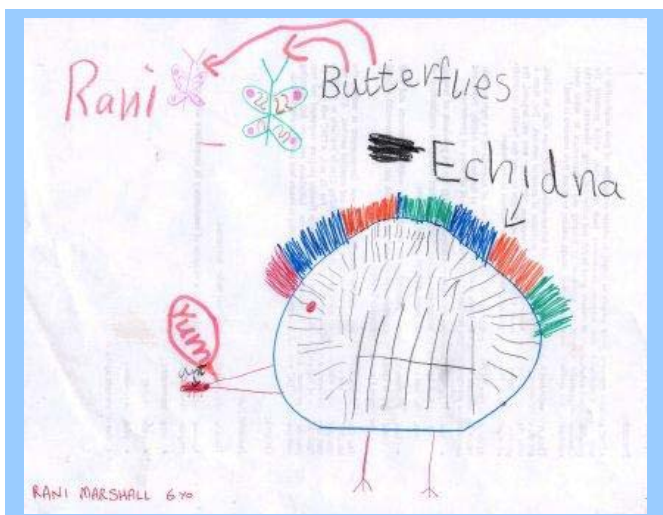
Unfortunately, big-headed ants have reached Iparpa, and have been recorded at a number of properties in the Iparpa Valley. Thanks to some rapid responses by land owners, most of the infestations have been successfully controlled. Stopping the spread of big-headed ants is a key aspect of eradication and control efforts. By checking all plant stock and new household items/ furniture for any signs of the feral ants, you can hopefully keep your property big-headed ant free.

It is critical that in a highly biodiverse area such as the Iparpa Valley, that these feral ants are not given the chance to get established. The potential effects on native invertebrate diversity are deeply concerning, given their effectiveness in out-competing and killing off native ants, as has been observed in nearby urban areas.

The Big-headed Ant Project was funded by a Northern Territory Government EnvironmeNT Grant. For any queries, for ant identification and advice please continue to contact Linda at the Threatened Species Network. Ph: 8952 1541.

Young Lfw'er

I was so excited to see some fantastic drawings come in for the kids competition, thank you to everyone who entered.



They were all great, but the one we liked the best was drawn by Rani Marshall who is 6 years old. Rani was inspired by the Echidna and Ant workshop we held at her place, as you can see above.

Thanks also to Ruby Marshall (8yo), Evie Marshall (4 yo) and Indigo Rajah (5 yo) for sending in some excellent drawings.

Here's a word search for you guys to do (and maybe some adults might want to have a go too).

Circle the words that make the names of the Land for Wildlife words below (including some animals you might have at your place!)

Do you know which ones are good, and which ones we don't want around?

Y A B I A H R F I B N R W E D Y A O I A A
 B I G E N N O H T Y P A M O W E R T L C O
 A T W G D E N A G F R R I G R L S I O A E
 L N B O I A T A E B A P C O O K R D R B I
 L A I R H A W W O B D A O K N C S A F L W
 A D R F C L C A B G T R C R I F G H B L N
 W E D G E T A I L E D E A G L E U R O B H
 K D W N S I T N A M G N I Y A R P I S P M
 C A A I S N H N D D G T A I O A W G W E S
 O E T W L N O S E F L I S S R L O I E A Y
 R H C O M L R L B T O E W C W C T G G R A
 D G H R R I I A E R Y R E E R A I L N A A
 E I I R A A H E K E B B W I T T W R W I A
 T B N U T W U G W F L D G I L A P C U A A
 O I G B E E B F E A B T B M L E L B D I O
 O E O A D D H M U L G A L R D D L A T F O
 F N G A F S E L L N H T U O C L L L R E G
 K R A N T D U T G E O Y A W E E D I N G T
 C L E D A W L H E D A W O I F E O S F T A
 A O E W E W G B I E K F A F L A S D A E A
 L D W N D D H R R B B I U L L M E I B L A
 B L O I H T H A L E D B L F A K L D G A N

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|---------------------------|----------------|
| ECHIDNA | WEEDING |
| LAND FOR WILDLIFE | WORKSHOPS |
| BUFFEL | BIRDWATCHING |
| FERAL CAT | SAND GOANNA |
| WEDGE TAILED EAGLE | MULGA |
| PARENTIE | HABITAT |
| PRAYING MANTIS | EURO |
| KNOB TAILED GECKO | BURROWING FROG |
| BIG HEADED ANT | WOMA PYTHON |
| RABBIT | WILLIE WAGTAIL |
| BLACK FOOTED ROCK WALLABY | |

Photo competition

Thanks very much to everyone who sent in photos. I used many of them in the talk I gave to the Alice Springs Field Naturalists earlier in the year, and they were appreciated by all!

It was wonderful to see such fantastic photos of wildlife on your properties – we had a very hard time deciding on the winners. Here's your chance to check them out:

Overall winner: Sand Goanna by Adrian James



Runner Up: OLSH Dragon by Rosalie Breen (OLSH Senior School at Sadadeen is a Land for Wildlife property)



Special Mention: Katydid, by Alex LeCouteur



Special Mention: Long Nosed Water Dragon on Flyscreen, by Bryan Clark



Special Mention: White-winged triller chicks, by David Woods



Bush Detective

Who made these diggings?



Here's a clue – what kind of animal uses its forepaws for digging, has a long pointy snout and extends its long tongue, covered with sticky saliva, into ant nests to get food?

If you guessed an Echidna you'd be right!

Wildlife Calendar

What kind of critters are you seeing at the moment?

Lesley Reilly, near honeymoon gap, reports seeing: Peaceful Doves, Spinifex Pigeons, Pink Cockatoos (Major Mitchells), a Legless Lizard (*Delma tinctoria*) and a Black-headed Monitor. Oh, and a mob of LfW'ers with binoculars at the Bird workshop!



What else have you seen?

Write in and let us know: lfw@LowEcol.com.au, P.O. Box 3130, or 89 555 222.

Some tips for wildlife spotting over the next month or so: Reptiles are hard to spot at this time of year, having gone into a period of inactivity (also known as torpor) to save energy over the cold winter. There are still plenty of birds around, however, and it's fantastic weather to go for a walk in the bush and see how many bird species you can identify. Don't forget your beanie and gloves if you go early in the morning!

What's on around town?

Iparpa Valley

The word from Sunil Dhanji, Bushcare Facilitator (Greening Australia), is that the Iparpa Valley draft Plan of Management is due to be completed soon. There will be a chance for community members to add their input – so keep your ears open for this opportunity.

There is also a possibility for a field day at Iparpa, where the plan could be launched, a review of previous work conducted, and the Iparpa Valley Landcare Group could be reinstated. Watch this space - and if you want to know more give Sunil a call on 8953 2882 (BH).

Lower Todd Landcare Group



The Lower Todd Landcare Group has been busy, with 120 kids and 20 adults from the Asia Pacific region coming along for a giant working bee in April, as part of the Round Square Conference hosted by St Phillips College. Between them they cleared around the base of many river red gums and used GPS's to record the location of 40 trees. They also picked up 10 cubic metres of rubbish – not bad for a morning's work!

Things have quietened down a little since, but the Lower Todd Landcare Group are still holding working bees from 8.30-11.30am on the second Sunday of each month – meeting South of the John Blakeman Bridge on the Ross Highway.

They're also in need of a Chair and Secretary, to fill the shoes of Michelle and Nick Smail. The Chair's responsibilities include convening meetings, signing funding applications and acting as the spokesperson for the group. The Secretary coordinates correspondence, writes minutes and agendas for meetings and maintains a register of members. If anyone wants more information, or is interested in taking on these roles and really making a difference, get in touch with Karen May on 89 519 264 (BH).

Calendar of Events

Meetings

Wed 7th June – Australian Plants Society
Carolyn Ellis (DPIFM) - Quarantine issues in Alice Springs. Olive Pink Botanic Gardens, 7.30pm.
Ph. Tim on 8952 2631 (AH).

Wed 14th June – Alice Springs Field Naturalist Club. Speakers from the Gem and Mineral Club. Meet 7.30pm at Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Ph Bob Read, 8952 1935.

July 7th & 8th – Alice Springs Show - Seedlings available for sale at Australian Plants Society stall.

Wednesday 12th July - Alice Springs Field Naturalist Club. Bill Low, Low Ecological Services, speaking on "Lake Lewis, its flora and fauna" (Lake Lewis is a salt lake NW of Alice). Meet 7.30pm at Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Ph Bob Read, 8952 1935.

Wed 2nd August – Australian Plants Society
Colleen O'Malley - (Threatened Species and Buffel project). Olive Pink Botanic Gardens, 7.30pm.
Ph. Tim on 8952 2631 (AH).

Wed 9th August - Alice Springs Field Naturalist Club. AGM and members night. Meet 7.30pm at Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Ph Bob Read, 8952 1935.

Wed 6th September – Australian Plants Society
Dee Walsh (CLMA) - subject to be announced.
Olive Pink Botanic Gardens, 7.30pm.
Ph. Tim on 8952 2631 (AH).

Rangeland Biology and Ecology Seminars

Wed 7th June, 3pm: Mary Bourke, Jet Propulsion Lab /NASA. Dalhousie Mound Springs geomorphology and landscape (in relation to studies of Mars); 3pm

3.45pm: Jon Clark, CRC for Landscape Environments & Mineral Exploration, Canberra. Mapping groundwater flow systems, aquifers, water tables and salinity systems in the lower Balonne, SW Queensland. CSIRO Conference Room

Fri 16th June, 3.30pm Gary Bastin, CSIRO, Alice Springs. MODIS (satellite) imagery for assessing landscape utilisation in wool growing areas in northern SA. CSIRO Conference Room

Thur 29th June 3.30pm, Abe Francis. HLA, Alice Springs. Great Barrier Reef Wetland Prioritisation Decision Support System. CSIRO Conference Room

Conservation Volunteers Australia are seeking volunteers for the trips below. For more information call: 8953 6411 or email alicesprings@cva.org.au

Alice Springs – Ghan carriage restoration
29 May - 2 June 2006

Volunteers will conduct restoration activities on Ghan train carriages of historical significance.

Uluru - Kata Tjuta National Park weed management program

5 – 16 June, 19 – 23 June and 3 – 14 July 2006

Assist with the restoration of waterhole areas at the base of the rock, by carrying out weed removal and some track maintenance. This on-going project mixes Aboriginal culture and conservation!

Wartarrka National Park (Kings Canyon)

21 – 25 August 2006

Participate in weed monitoring and removal, mapping and control activities along creek lines in this water catchment area.

Alice Springs Field Naturalists - Field Trips

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|----------------------------|---|
| Sat 17 Jun | Walk Woodland Trail to Rocky Gap and back. Meet 8 am Flynn's Grave Memorial. Leader: Kaye Percy 8952 3405 |
| Sat 1 Jul | Walk from Connie's place (De Havilland Tee) to Charles River via Abattoir Valley & the railway cutting. 3/4 day walk, bring lunch Leader Connie Spencer, 8952 4694 |
| Sat 15 Jul | Day trip to Lake Lewis. Option - camp at Tilmouth Well campground. |
| Sat 29 & Sun 30 Jul | Alcoota fossil dig. |
| Sat, Sun & Mon 5,6 & 7 Aug | Stage 6 Larapinta Trail, overnight walk. No decision on which night. |
| 19 August | Walk from Flynn's Grave Memorial to Nutcracker Hill and back. Bring lunch. Organiser: Rosalie Breen |
| Sun 27 Aug | Day trip to Chambers Pillar. 4WD required. |
| Sat 2 Sep | Native Gap |
| 16 & 17 Sep | Hamilton Downs |
| Sat 30 Sep & Sun 1 Oct | Palm Valley |
| Sat 14 Oct | Sewage Ponds |

This newsletter has been produced by Cassie Wright and Bill Low, *LfW* coordinators, W.A. Low Ecological Services, with the assistance of the NT Government and the Alice Springs Town Council
Contact Cassie on 89555222 or lfw@lowecol.com.au

