

Land for Wildlife

Conservation is in your hands



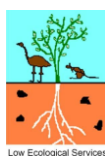
Habitat workshop! Primary class at Alcoota School with LfW coordinators Jesse Carpenter & Ilse Pickerd.



NEWSLETTER

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PowerWater



Alice Springs Municipality | November/December 2010

Land for Wildlife Update

A Note from the Coordinators

Hello Wildlifers,
Welcome to the November newsletter.

Firstly, we would like to jump in and extend warmest Season's Greetings to all our members, and to those of you heading out of town for the summer (will we get a summer?!) safe travels enjoy your holiday.



Some sad news. It is with regret that I (Ilse) say farewell to you all and all at Low Ecol., as I am heading off for some overseas travels. It has been a pleasure working with you and your gardens, and seeing the results of your hard work and the pride on your faces. I am especially lucky to have been your program coordinator during this rainy season, and seeing/-hearing reports of such interesting plants and animals turning up. I'm sure it's going to keep getting better and better too!

Thankyou for all your efforts in providing habitat for our native wildlife on your properties. And in addition, for contributing to wildlife corridors and the maintenance of arid zone bushland.

Many of you will have met Jesse Carpenter already, who will continue coordinating both programs. If you have any queries or stories Jess would love to hear them and can be contacted via the same Land for Wildlife avenues (lfw@lowecol.com.au/89 555 222). I look forward to hearing lots of Land for Wildlife news while on my travels.

See you all in a year. I'm sure that by then, with all the rain predicted, your properties will all be in amazing condition!
Ilse

2010 Biodiversity Survey – Field work for the 2010 Biodiversity Surveys has finished. Stay tuned for the report, and check out a brief report of our findings in 'Articles: Biodiversity Surveys'.



Get in quick!! Pindone on oats is useful for rabbit control in the rural blocks and some LfW members wish to combine forces to buy the large (and fairly expensive) bulk quantity available. Let us know if you would like to chip in too and control rabbits on your block. Rabbit control using Pindone is described in the July LfW Newsletter (see www.lowecol.com.au/lfw/lfwnews.htm). The late release of calici virus has decimated rabbits but don't let up on control

Articles

2010 Biodiversity Surveys

Fieldwork for 2010 Biodiversity Survey was completed mid November. With the assistance of property owners and volunteers, four Land for Wildlife properties were surveyed in the Ross Highway area.

Surveys ran for three trapping nights on each property. We trapped for small mammals, reptiles and invertebrates using three methods:

1. Elliott traps. Small metal boxes with a door operated by a trigger system. An animal enters the trap for the bait placed inside and triggers the mechanism, closing the door and trapping itself.



2. Pitfall traps. Holes are dug in the ground and a 20L bucket inserted. A netting fence is then run across the top of the bucket and for 5-10m either side. Small animals follow the fence and fall in the pit.



3. Funnel traps. These are tubes of shade cloth with a funnel entrance at either end. Animals run inside the tapering entrance and can't find their way out through the narrow inner opening.

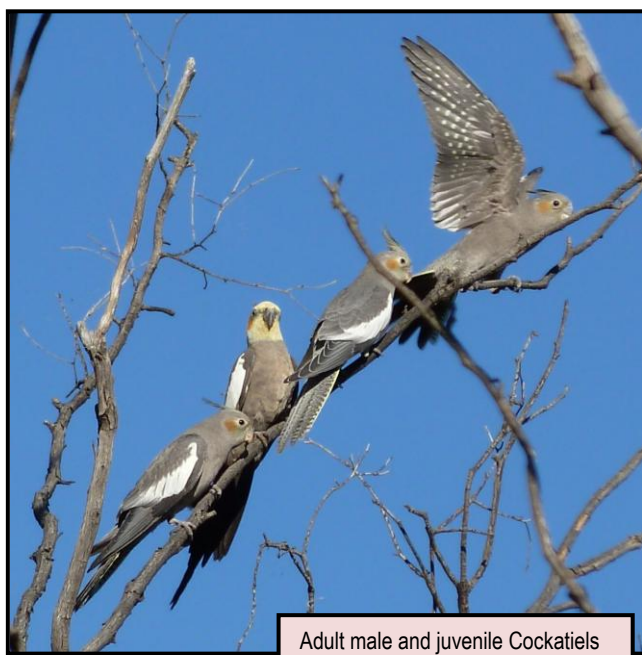


In addition to trapping, we also searched for physical signs of animals in the form of scats, diggings and tracks and completed bird observations each day. Vegetation transects over a distance of 100m helped us record the plant species on each property.

During the first week of the surveys, weather was poor. Heavy rain fell on two of the three nights, leaving pits flooded and making access to our trap lines difficult. One of the biggest catches during this week was frogs. Spencer's Burrowing Frogs were caught in the pit traps each morning.

Bird life was abundant, with 46 species recorded across the four sites. Perhaps the most interesting being a Black-Shouldered Kite, relatively uncommon in central Australia, and a White-Faced Heron.

We recorded breeding activity for many species including Zebra Finch, Splendid and Variegated Fairy Wrens, Black-faced Cuckoo shrike and White-Winged Triller. Six species



Adult male and juvenile Cockatiels

of raptor were sighted. But perhaps the most significant find was on a Minahan Road property. It was here that we trapped two button quails in funnel traps. One was a Little Button Quail, a common resident of central Australia, but the second was a Red-Chested Button Quail (see the article 'Red-Chested Button Quail'), a vagrant species and significant record for Alice Springs.

Reptile and mammal captures were disappointing. At least for the reptiles, the weather may have played a role in the results, with wet weather and below average temperatures probably impacting on their activity, particularly at night. We trapped a few small geckos and skinks on two of the properties.



Active nests of Splendid Fairy Wren (left) and Zebra Finch (right)

Mammal results were disappointing not because of low numbers trapped, but because they all belonged to one species – the introduced house mouse. No native mammals were trapped and it seems as if numbers of introduced mice are high. Perhaps so high that they were first to all our traps before any native species that might have been present.

With all the seeding grasses present on all the properties, particularly in sites where Buffel has been removed, it's not surprising that mice and other seed eaters are abundant at the moment.

The full report on our survey will be available soon on our website, including complete lists of the flora and fauna that we found at the different sites. Early next year, we plan to get the 2011 surveys underway. We'll be revisiting properties surveyed in 2009 to see if the weather has made a difference to those sites. Anyone who is interested in volunteering for field work, contact us and we'll keep you up to date with the plans. It's certainly a good way to get out and learn some new skills that will help you assess the success of your own Land for Wildlife property.



Captures during the surveys included House Mice (top left), Spencer's Burrowing Frogs (Top right), a tiny Beaked Gecko (centre) and insects like this ladybird (left)

The Red Chested Button Quail

Button quails are small, quail like birds that are found throughout Africa, south-east Asia and Australia. Although they appear similar to true quails, they are placed in a family of their own, the Turnicidae. They are more closely related taxonomically to shorebirds, such as plovers, than quails.

Like true quails they are ground inhabiting birds, feeding, nesting and socialising on the ground. They differ in that the female is the larger and more brightly coloured of the sexes and is polygamous. That is, she breeds with several males during a season. Female button quails establish a territory, excluding other females. They mate with any

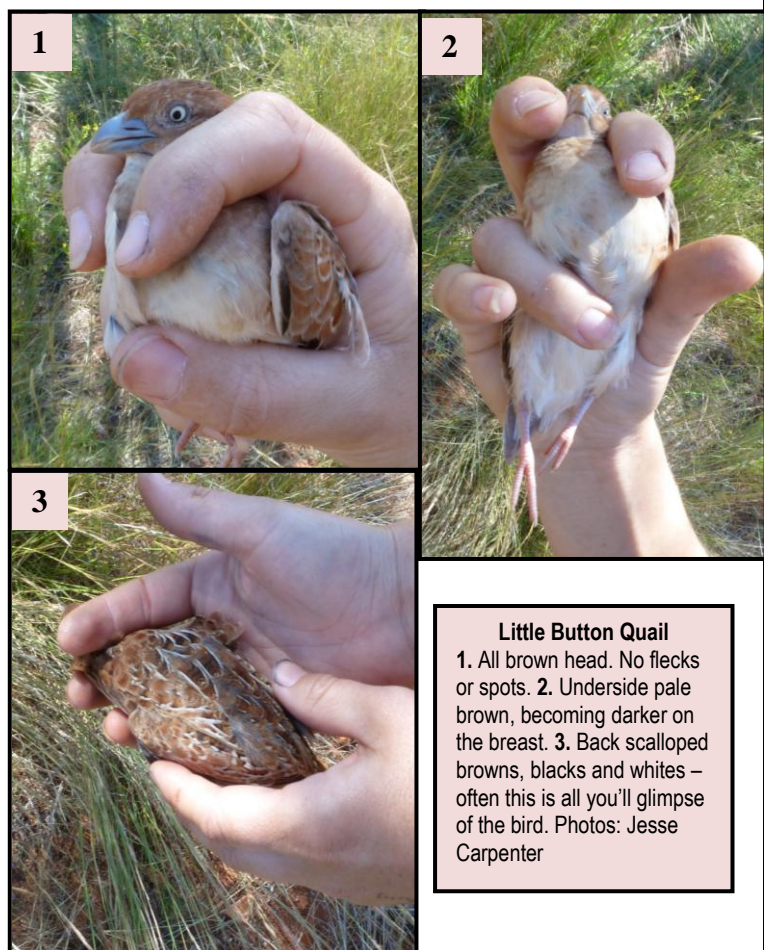
males in their territory and help with nest building, but then the male is left to incubate the eggs and rear the chicks on his own.

There are seven species of button quail in Australia, distributed across the continent. In central Australia, the Little Button Quail (LBQ) is a common resident species whose numbers fluctuate periodically according to rainfall events. Currently, little button quails are abundant around Alice Springs. They can easily be flushed from thick grass and weed growth on rural properties, open space areas within the town and out bush.

During Land for Wildlife's recent biodiversity surveys, button quails were flushed every time we walked our trap lines on each of the sites surveyed. It is very difficult to get a good sight of these birds as they shoot up from under your feet, fly low over the ground for a few metres only to drop back into thick grass cover, all within a few seconds. Typically, all you're presented with is a brief view of the birds back and tail as it drops to ground.

On consulting several field guides, we assumed that the birds we were seeing were all LBQs. We had been able to identify white flashes either side of the tails of most of the birds (a diagnostic feature of LBQs) and based on the distribution maps in the guides, thought we were on to it.

On checking a trap line one morning, we found we'd caught a bird in one of our funnel traps. This was strange in itself, as these traps are not renowned for catching birds. In fact, it seemed remarkable that the bird would have entered the trap where no bait was used and that it had even fitted through the entrance. We theorised that the bird had encountered our pit fence during the night and run along it straight into the funnel. We removed the bird, positively identified it as a male LBQ and after taking some photographs released it. This seemed to prove our previous identification of birds we'd flushed in the area previously.



Little Button Quail

1. All brown head. No flecks or spots. 2. Underside pale brown, becoming darker on the breast. 3. Back scalloped browns, blacks and whites – often this is all you'll glimpse of the bird. Photos: Jesse Carpenter

The next morning, in the same funnel trap, we discovered another quail had been trapped. Once removed from the trap, it was obvious that this bird was different. Larger than the bird we'd caught the day before, it was also more brightly coloured. As female button quails are larger and brighter than their male counterparts, we thought that this bird was perhaps a female LBQ. Again, we photographed the bird and released it.

It was not until we were back at the office and were talking to other Low Ecological staff, that we realised our female LBQ was something even more surprising. On close inspection of various field guides it was obvious we'd captured a different species – a female Red-Chested Button Quail (RBQ).

This is a significant record for Alice Springs and central Australia. RBQs are residents of northern and eastern Australia and in these areas they are not uncommon in areas of grassland.

Central Australia is well outside the usual range of RBQs, with only 8 recorded sightings of the bird in central Australia. All these sightings have been at times following significant rainfall events, when ground layer vegetation,

particularly seeding grasses, has increased dramatically in density. For these birds to be present is an indicator of unusually resource rich conditions in central Australia. It's an indicator of a diversity of seeding grasses and other herbaceous plants in the area the bird was found, and a good reward for the property owners after many hours of Buffel grass control (the weed was almost non-existent here).

After talking about our 'discovery' among people in the 'birding' community, we've since found other's who've also recorded RBQs around the area this year, both from the birds' calls and sightings. As our weather starts to move back to normal rainfall patterns and things start to dry out again, we can expect that RBQs will return north or east to more suitable habitat. No doubt only to return during another boom season.

References: SIMPSON K & Day N; Field Guide to the Birds of Australia; Penguin Group, Australia 2004



Red-Chested Button Quail

1. Note the fine black and white flecks on the head. 2. The rufous plumage extends over the entire underside of the female. The male's breast is paler, becoming buff white towards the abdomen. Photos: Ilse Pickerd

Wolf Spiders - Silent Hunters of the Night

Wolf spiders are spiders that belong to the Lycosidae family. This family consists of 130 described species in Australia and they are common residents in gardens here in Alice Springs and around the country. Most species have a wide distribution, due to the ability of the small juveniles being able to disperse on the wind.

Wolf spiders are agile hunters, ranging in size from 1 – 8cm. They typically exhibit camouflaging body patterns of brown, grey, black, white and yellow, which make them difficult to spot on the ground.

Wolf spiders are active predators. In fact, they get their

name from the mistaken belief that they hunt in packs like wolves. Whilst this is not the case, unlike the stereotypical spider, they don't snare their prey in a web, but hunt terrestrial insects by sight, using their four pairs of eyes. In central Australia, most hunting takes place at night, and you will often be able to see spiders' eyes reflecting torch light if you wander around after dark. Most species shelter in burrows, either open or with a trap door. Some arid zone types even build turrets to deflect sheet flooding caused by downpours and others use pebbles to plug the entrance. If you find a spider



burrow, the materials used to construct it and its shape can be used to identify the species.

Wolf spiders are one of the few spiders to show some degree of parental care. Males are attracted to females by the scent markings she leaves, and mating takes place outside the females burrow. The female uses her silk to construct a white, ball shaped egg sac. She then carries this around with her. When the spiderlings hatch, they cling to the female's back until they are large enough to disperse, either on the ground or using silk to drift on the wind.

Usually non-aggressive, wolf spiders will bite if provoked. The venom may have mild effects, including swelling and itching, localized pain, headaches and nausea.

Wolf spiders are an important prey item for larger central Australian predators that may also inhabit your gardens. Skinks and other lizards, carnivorous marsupials such as dunnarts, and birds all feed on spiders at times. And larger wolf spiders are not fussy about eating smaller members of their own species!



The two wolf spiders pictured were collected during LfW biodiversity surveys

REFERENCES: www.csiro.au/resources/Wolf-spiders.html,
www.xs4all.nl/~ednieuw/australian/wolfspiders/Wolfspiders.html

Workshops

Alcoota School

Land for Wildlife travelled to Engawala community last week to host a workshop for the Primary Class at Alcoota School. Students have been learning about biodiversity and conservation



Anmatyerre rangers Nigil, Fabian & Nathaniel

this semester, so LfW coordinators had lots of fun with kids running a power point presentation and activities about animals found in their area and the types of habitat they prefer. In addition, the Anmatyerre Rangers travelled from Ti Tree to present to the school about what they do as Rangers. Alcoota school is our newest Land for Wildlife member, and they have a native plant garden with Eremophilas, Colony Wattle, River Red Gum, Witchetty Bush, and Needlewood Hakea. There is also a veggie garden and orchard planted by the kids.



Fun in and out of the classroom at Alcoota School

Workshops planned for next year

Workshops on the Garden for Wildlife agenda include Smart Gardens for Biodiversity; habitat requirements for local fauna, landscape planning and weed management, and of course our quarterly trap-making for the Spotted Turtle-dove. Stay tuned for more details. If you have any workshop requests, something you would like to more about, please let us know. We can develop workshops on your specified topics.

Announcements

Bird Field Guide Sale!

With many birds, including rare ones, appearing, breeding and displaying in the rainy Red Centre – and it's only going to get better! - it's a great time to get interested in bird watching. The Post Office is selling the 8th Edition Simpson & Day *Field to Guide to the Birds of Australia* for **\$19.99**, and it includes 5 posters of Australian birds! A great bargain, and good Christmas gift idea for nature-loving friends.

Reptile and insect season!



With the warmer weather upon us keep your eyes out for reptiles emerging in your gardens! Also some spectacular invertebrates may reveal themselves, such as the Cicadas that are singing away or this Acacia Stick Insect pictured above with colourful wings extended. Pictured above right: Sand Goanna emerging from a burrow.

Congratulations!

This month 109 Spotted Turtle-doves were caught and taken to the Desert Park, with a phenomenal 23 Turtle-doves caught on one GfW property! Thank you to all those participating in the Trapping program. If you would like to borrow a trap please contact Jesse Carpenter on 89 555 222/lfw@lowecol.com.au. Please be advised there is currently a waiting list. If you would like to construct your own trap we can provide instructions.

Calici virus

Calici virus has been released, initially in the airport and Gap areas. Let us know if you have noticed Rabbits affected on your block and we can determine how far the virus may have spread. We have four members willing to share in the purchase of Pindone. Please indicate as quickly as possible...



Calendar of Events

The Alice Springs Community Garden Fundraising pod had its first meeting on Monday, starting with the Christmas Carnival BBQ and many more great fundraising ideas planned for next year. The next **Fundraising Pod meeting will be on the 31st of January, 4:45pm for a 5pm start** at the [Arid Lands Environment Centre](#), all welcome.

To get started the Community Garden Fundraising Pod will be holding a BBQ with camel and veggie burgers at the **Council Christmas Carnival on Friday the 10th of December**. Come down to the Todd Mall between 5pm and 9pm to show your support for the Garden and enjoy the stalls, activities and live entertainment.

If you would like to help out on the night please let us know.

The community garden now has its own email address info@alicecommunitygarden.org.au

13th Feb 2011 – Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club birding trip to the sewage ponds. Meet at the gates at 7am. Contact Barb Gillfedder 8955 5452

15th Feb 2011 – Public information session; Alice Springs Catchment – focus on flood forecasting. Presented by NRETA. Contact Desert Smart Cool Mob for more information. 8952 0299
<mailto:info@desertsmartcoolmob.org>

Christmas Message

On behalf of everyone at Land For Wildlife and Low Ecological Services, we thank you for your support in 2010 and look forward to your continuing involvement with the program into the New Year and beyond. We hope you have a happy and safe Christmas season and welcome 2011 in similar style.

Take care,

Ilse, Jesse & Bill
Land for Wildlife Coordinators



Don't forget to check out the LfW & GfW website at www.lowecol.com.au, you can download membership application forms, newsletters, vegetation type species lists, and find out about upcoming workshops!

This newsletter has been produced by Ilse Pickerd, Jesse Carpenter and Bill Low, LfW coordinators, W.A. Low Ecological Services, Contact Ilse on 89555222 or lfw@lowecol.com.au