



NT  
**LANDCARE  
AWARDS<sup>09</sup>**  
CATEGORY FINALIST



# Land for Wildlife

*Conservation is in your hands*



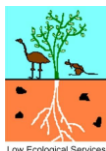
Spencer's Burrowing Frog,  
*Limnodynastes spenceri*,  
caught during LfW Biodiversity Surveys.



## NEWSLETTER

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PowerWater



Northern Territory Government

Alice Springs Municipality | October 2010



## Land for Wildlife Update

### 2010 Biodiversity Survey volunteer opportunities!! –

The 2010 Biodiversity Survey has begun, with one property having been surveyed early in October. 3 further properties in the Ross Highway area will be surveyed from the 2<sup>nd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> November, and the 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup>.

If you're interested in coming along to give us a hand, or just to see how we do things, let us know.

The photograph on the cover is a Spencer's burrowing frog, caught in a pit trap during the survey earlier in October. Hopefully, we'll catch more species in the coming weeks.

Read our articles below to find out more about Spencers burrowing frog.

**New Members** – Welcome to new Land for Wildlife members Alcoota School! The school is in Engawala community, north of Alice Springs. The 40 students have been learning about biodiversity in the school grounds and Land for Wildlife coordinators will be travelling to Engawala this month to run a workshop at the school.



**Get in quick!! Pindone** on oats is useful for rabbit control in the rural blocks and some potential 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](http://www.lowecol.com.au/lfw/lfwnews.htm)).

## Articles

### Dead as a Dunnart!

Recently, land for wildlife coordinators went to assess Uwe Path's property near the racecourse. Previous to our visit, we were forwarded a photograph (seen below) by Uwe of a dead animal he found in his garden. We identified the animal as possibly a stripe faced dunnart.

Dunnarts are small, mouse sized marsupials. At first glance, they may appear to be rodents, but on closer inspection, it soon becomes clear that they are quite different animals from a mouse.



Photo: Uwe Path

Look closely at the photograph. You can see that the dunnart has tiny, needle-sharp teeth in its pointed snout. Dunnarts are fierce predators and will tackle anything from insects and spiders to small geckos and skinks.

There are several different species of dunnart that you may encounter in the Alice Springs area. The most common are the fat-tailed and stripe faced species. As its name suggests, the fat-tailed dunnart has a fat tail, equal to the body length of the animal. The tail holds fat reserves that enable the animal to survive through lean times.

The Stripe faced dunnart has a slimmer tail greater than its body length. It has a characteristic dark stripe from the tip of its nose to between its ears.

Some dunnart species are extremely difficult to identify, with distinguishing features being as indistinct as the arrangement of the pads on the soles of the animal's feet. If you do find any on your property or in your garden, try and take good pictures of the underside of the feet and all aspects of the animal's head, as these can lead to more precise identification.

Dunnarts are active at night, mainly during the warmer months of the year. In winter when food is scarce, the animals find shelter in burrows, fallen timber or under rocks and enter a state of torpor (deep sleep), conserving their



Fat-Tailed Dunnart

energy. Females generally outlive males, who expend vast amounts of energy fighting over and mating with females, often leading to their death from exhaustion during the breeding season. We theorise that this may be what killed the fellow in the photograph!

Some species of dunnart have become increasingly rare since European settlement and some have been recorded on so few occasions that not enough is known to accurately estimate their status and distributions. Even the common species are animals that are not often observed, due to their small size and nocturnal habits, which makes any sightings or dead animals you might find in your backyard worth reporting to us, just as Uwe has done.



## Life After Buffel

Buffel grass is probably one of the most talked about weeds in Alice Springs amongst land owners and managers. Past newsletters have contained articles about how to control Buffel and there's certainly plenty of other information out there to cover the topic.

Recently, while out surveying members properties and assessing new member's blocks, we came across a couple of examples of what can happen if you do manage to get the weed under some control. Both cases are two completely different types of properties and different control methods have been used in each.

### Case 1: Heenan Road



For our annual Land for Wildlife biodiversity survey, we have been working on properties in the Ross Highway area on the outskirts of Alice. Most of our members in this area participate actively in controlling the weed on their properties, but one block in particular was noticeable in that the Buffel in a control area was showing few signs of regenerating.

Several years ago the owners, together with the fire department, carried out a burn-off in a small portion of their 42 hectare property. The area, a floodout plain carrying mulga woodland, was infested with Buffel. The burn was a slow, cool burn that burnt down through the root mass of the Buffel clumps.

The photograph above shows the area in early October. There has been almost no regeneration of Buffel either from existing rootstock or seed. The seed bank of native plants in the soil has presumably not been affected by the



burn, with this year's rain producing a mass growth of annual grasses and flowering plants. Species such as oat grass (*Enneapogon avenaceus*), kerosene grass (*Aristida contorta*), white paper daisy (*Rhodanthe floribunda*), billy button (*Calocephalus platycephalus*) and bluebell (*Wahlenbergia* sp) were found here.

Isolated plants of Buffel have been found amongst the regrowth, with the owners simply pulling these by hand when they're found. The main entry point for Buffel to recolonise the area seems to be at the entry point of water draining from neighbouring land, seeds presumably being washed downstream during rain. In the photograph, this area is on the extreme right hand of the frame where you can see the large mulga. The shaded area beneath this tree is still thick with Buffel.

### Case 2: Kurrajong Drive



The second example of successful Buffel control is on Susan Grant's suburban property on Kurrajong St, Eastside. When Susan moved into the house, the nature strip adjacent the footpath and the front garden were full of Buffel.

The control method used in this example was simple hand pulling of plants. Being a much smaller land area than the example above, this was a time effective and safe control method, not requiring the use of chemicals or other potentially harmful methods.

The results, however, have been similar, with Buffel completely gone from the front of the house. When Garden for Wildlife coordinators went to perform an assessment of the property, they were quite surprised at the diversity of native species growing on the nature strip. The vast majority of these plants have grown from natural regeneration after the Buffel was removed and were not planted by the owner. They include grasses such as kerosene



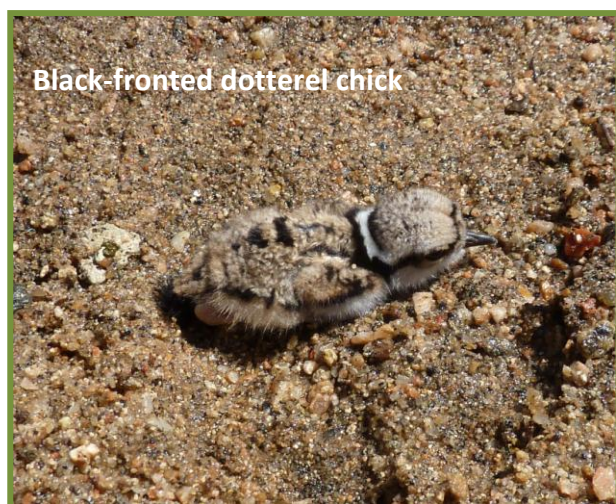


and oat grass, as well as the native lemon grass (*Cymbopogon ambiguous*) and even smaller shrubs including hop bush (*Dodonaea viscosa*) and silver cassia (*Senna artemisioides*). The area across the road from the property is vacant crown land made up of rocky, gneiss hills. Remnant vegetation here includes the species that have germinated on the property and is the likely source of seed.

Buffel grass occurs in the crown land area and still pops up on the property from time to time, but the owners are ever vigilant and pull any plants they notice before they set seed. The result – a great garden for wildlife!

## Spring Chickens

With spring well and truly upon us, many of you may have noticed that all over Alice Springs the birds are already well into their breeding cycles. Migratory species like Rainbow Bee-eaters and Sacred Kingfishers have arrived and are busy pairing up and laying clutches, while other resident species already have chicks fledged and may be about to start rearing a second brood. With all the activity, it's a great time to be outside early and listen to the dawn chorus, as males of species like Rufous Whistler, Rufous Songlark, Grey Shrike-Thrush and Willie Wagtail intimidate their rivals by singing on the edges of territories. Last month on our cover, we featured a Crested Pigeon on her nest, and this month we have some more great pictures of some 'spring chickens'.



**Black-fronted Dotterel** – Angela Stewart, from Low Ecological Services, snapped this picture of a Black-fronted Dotterel chick at Trepina Gorge. Black-fronted Dotterels are small shore birds that are quite common in wetter parts of the country, but in central Australia are found only around more permanent waterholes. Glen Helen on the Finke River is a good place to see them, and they have recently been sighted feeding by the water pooling in the Todd River at Schwartz Crescent. This year's rain has increased their habitat (albeit temporarily) in the area by filling up more ephemeral water

holes and swamps and the birds can be found on both sandy and pebbly stretches of river bank. In these areas, they dart about the water's edge, picking up small insects as they go.

Dotterels nest on the ground, simply excavating a small depression amongst the sand or pebbles. They rely on the superb camouflage of both eggs and chicks to avoid predators. When approached while brooding eggs, the parent Dotterels will act as a decoy for the predator, flapping about and feigning injury to lead the danger away from the nest.

**Tawny Frogmouth** – This family of Tawny Frogmouths were happy spending a day in an *Eremophila* tree outside the Land for Wildlife office. The two upper birds in the picture are juveniles, while the lower bird is an adult. These chicks are at quite an advanced age, but are probably still dependant on their parent for food.



Tawny frogmouths are nocturnal birds that hunt mainly large insects, but will also take prey such as smaller reptiles and mammals. Their extremely wide gape and stiff bristles around their bills helps direct prey into their mouths when hunting in the dark.

Frogmouths build quite flimsy nests, usually a platform of sticks in the fork of a tree and, like the Dotterels, rely on camouflage to avoid detection while sitting tightly on their eggs. Their plumage is remarkably patterned and they will sit during the day with nose pointed toward the sky in an attempt to resemble the broken stump of a branch.

Quite common around Alice Springs, even in the suburban area, they are often not noticed due to their nocturnal habits and remarkable camouflage.

## Spencer's Burrowing Frog

At the beginning of October, Land for Wildlife began its annual biodiversity survey, this year taking in members' properties in the Ross Highway area. The weather during

the week of the first survey was less than ideal, being generally cool and overcast with showers and heavy rain over one night.

The wet weather did bring some wildlife out of hiding, however, and we caught numerous frogs in our pit traps over the three nights of trapping.

We identified these frogs as Spencers' Burrowing Frog (*Limnodynastes spenceri*), a common resident in the Alice Springs area and southern NT.

Like many of central Australia's frog species, they survive dry times by burrowing into soil to conserve their moisture, relying on events of heavy rainfall to trigger breeding. During and after rain on damp, humid nights, the frogs will emerge from their underground hiding place to breed in temporary pools and feed.

The frogs we found were caught in pit traps. Pit traps are composed of a 20L bucket sunk in the ground with a netting fence run along the surface for a few metres and over the bucket opening. Small animals encounter the fence blocking their passage, and run along it until they drop into the bucket, just like the frogs in the pictures below.



## Letters to the Editor

More letters have been sent in this month regarding Spotted Turtle-doves. It's great to see that the community is aware of the problem and helping do something to control the pests. Remember that trapping the birds is an exercise that takes time and patience. It takes time for the

birds to accept the trap as a food source and even then, they may enter the trap infrequently. However, with perseverance, you will catch some birds and make a difference, as Steve's example shows below.

Hi Bill

Following up from our conversation on Saturday - attached is my log - not a high success rate - about 1 per fortnight average - so patience I guess. Attached is a photo of the trap in its current position in my front yard, "hidden" under a tree and behind a shrub. For the first few months it was under a tree on the lawn in the backyard. I am using a native bird mix bought from Woolies (the container of it is on the right in the photo). The trap is bent up from 12 mm mesh and the side and top access doors are made using fencing and tie wire. The funnel is some gutter guard as per the workshop design - I did have to make the funnel end smaller as initially the birds were getting out.

I put a hand full of seed at the entrance, throw a hand full "through" the entrance and a hand full inside on the floor. Originally I had a container of it inside with the water one but don't bother now (mainly because of the rain regularly making it soggy). Hope this helps  
Regards  
Steve



## Announcements

### Botanical Illustration Workshops

Jo Boniface is organising for Mali Moir, a highly qualified and regarded Botanical Illustrator from Melbourne, to come to Alice Springs in September 2011. If anyone is interested in doing Botanical Art and Botanical Illustration workshops in September next year please email a letter of support to Jo: [red dirt@octa4.net.au](mailto:red dirt@octa4.net.au).

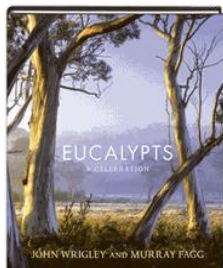
Mali Moir has been a Botanical and Scientific Artist for 20 years, and has been teaching Botanical Art and Botanical Illustration for 10 years. Mali teaches on a regular basis, her workshops can cater for general Botanical Art right thru to Scientific Plant Dissection Illustration for publication. Covering Beginners to Advanced. Mediums can include pencil drawing, pen&ink on drafting film, watercolour on paper and vellum, watercolour pencil for "en plein air" nature journaling trips or scientific expeditions.  
<http://www.botanicart.com.au/members/mali-moir/page04.htm>



### Mexican Poppy Alert!

As like many plants in Central Australia, both native and invasive, Mexican Poppy is having a field day this bumper year. If anyone lives near a river system or sandy soils on their property watch out for this one. If you are unfamiliar with what it looks like there are unbelievable fields of it growing along the south Todd River banks; from individual plants to isolated groups, it has spread to dominate large sections of the south Todd among other river systems.

## Recommended Books



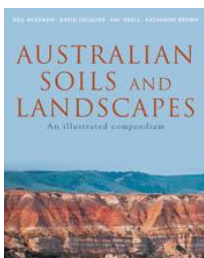
**Eucalypts: A Celebration**, By John Wrigley and Murray Fagg

Looks at gum trees and their significance in Australian art and history. It also provides an in-depth examination of their evolution, biology and classification.



**The Butterflies of Australia**, Albert Orr Roger Kitching

A complete guide to Australian butterflies, with hundreds of beautiful illustrations in typical habitats.



**Australian Soils and Landscapes**, Neil McKenzie, David Jacquier, Ray Isbell, Katharine Brown

A unique compendium of the most important and widespread soils of Australia and their associated landscapes.

## Calendar of Events

See next page.

Take care,

Ilse, Jesse & Bill  
Land for Wildlife Coordinators



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](mailto:lfw@lowecol.com.au)

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

Sunday 14th Nov. 10am-12 noon

**The ALICE SPRINGS COMMUNITY GARDEN is HAPPENING!**

You are invited to a picnic to celebrate the signing of the lease on your community garden

Take a walk over the site to find out what is happening and how you can get involved

Bring a blanket to sit on and some picnic food to share. For more information contact [info@alec.org.au](mailto:info@alec.org.au) 8952 2497

Frances Smith Park, Access via Burke St.

Arid Lands Environment Centre

Alice Springs Town Council

## Calendar of Events

Date	Time	Event	Venue	Contact
9 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> Nov		Biodiversity Surveying	Land for Wildlife properties	Land for Wildlife, Ilse or Jesse 8955 5222
9 <sup>th</sup> -11 <sup>th</sup> Nov		4 <sup>th</sup> Desert Knowledge Symposium	Alice Springs Convention Centre	<a href="http://www.desertknowledgesymposium.com">www.desertknowledgesymposium.com</a>
13 <sup>th</sup> Nov	8:30am	Buffel weeding and bush regeneration field day	Maynard Park – meet at Braitling Primary School carpark	Alice Springs Landcare Inc. Andy Vinter, 0429 977 436 <a href="http://www.alicespringslandcare.com">www.alicespringslandcare.com</a>
20 <sup>th</sup> Nov		ALEC 30 year celebration	Witchetty's	More information soon...
20 <sup>th</sup> -21 <sup>st</sup> Nov		Overnight trip to Two Mile Waterhole. Native fish in the Finke River with Robbie Henderson	Glen Helen	Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club, Barb Gilfedder, 8955 5452
26 <sup>th</sup> Nov	3:30pm	Tom Newsome, PhD candidate and Low Ecological Services consultant, will present a seminar on dingoes in the Tanami Desert	Charles Darwin University	Land for Wildlife Ilse or Jesse 8955 5222
14 <sup>th</sup> Nov	10am	Community Garden Picnic	Community Garden site, Frances Smith Park, Eastside. (Access off Burk St.)	ALEC 8952 2497 <a href="mailto:info@alec.org.au">info@alec.org.au</a>