

LAND FOR WILDLIFE NEWS



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

Vol.1 No.4 September 2003

Land for Wildlife Update

Audrey Hill is heading to Darwin in early October to expand her life experiences and has pleasure in handing over the position of Primary Coordinator to Danae Moore who joined the *LfW* team at Low Ecological Services in August. Danae has been employed with both Tangentyere Nursery and the Threatened Species Network in Alice Springs.

Audrey would like to thank the Landholders for contributing to the strength and success of the *Land for Wildlife* Pilot Program through the sharing of their time, knowledge, skills and experiences as well as their enthusiasm and commitment to conserving natural habitats within the municipality. Alice Springs Town Council and the Natural Heritage Trust also receive my thanks for supporting our unique natural environment by providing funding and benefit in kind support for the *LfW* Pilot Program in Alice Springs.

The past ten months of *LfW* would not have been as successful without the support and assistance of my colleagues: Bill Low and Marc Cassanet and of the Advisory Committee Members: Ange Vincent – ASTC; Dave Albrecht – Herbarium; Basil Zadow – Registered *LfW* Landholder; Dr Lynn Day – PWCNT; Andy Vinter – Greening Australia and Alison Kennedy – DIPE. Thank you all and continue to uphold your high standards.

Future

Alice Springs Town Council and Low Ecological Services have renegotiated the contract to deliver *LfW* on a part time bases for as long as the remaining Natural Heritage Trust funding allows. It is hoped that the outcome of the application for further funding, submitted by Low Ecological Services on behalf of *LfW* property holders, to "Envirofund" will be known in the near future. When a decision has been made the *LfW* coordinators will notify the property holders and decision as to the delivery of the program can be made from there.

As the "Envirofund" application is for 12 months of funding the long term future of the program in the Territory continues to be pursued. The ideal long term goal for the future of *LfW* is for the NT Government to become the coordinating body for the whole of the Territory similarly to the practice for *LfW* in other States. We will investigate and cross each bridge as we come to it.

Recent Activity

24 properties have been assessed and a further 9 properties are awaiting assessment.

Since the last newsletter the priorities for the *LfW* coordinators have been the recent Soil Conservation Guided Tours and the launch of the Natural Heritage Trust funded booklet "Reptiles and Frogs of Alice Springs" by Nic Gambold and Deborah Metters.

The A5 publication is available to registered *LfW* properties and copies have been given to local libraries including the AZRI, CSIRO, CLC and Town Libraries. If you are a registered *LfW* property holder and were not present at the launch your copy of the booklet was posted to you.

More detail regarding both of these events is contained within the newsletter.

In this Issue

<i>Land for Wildlife Update</i>	1
'Reptiles and Frogs of Alice Springs'	
Booklet Launch at the Silver Bullet	2
Soil Conservation with Col Stanton:	
On the Zadow's Block	2
Watch out for:	
Mossman River Grass	3
Possums	3
Cats trapped	3
Buffel Busting Baskets	6
Spotlight on:	
Black-footed Rock-wallabies	4
Land Clearing	5
Workshops & Events	5
Books Worth a Look	6



The Honourable Mayor, Fran Kilgariff, launching the "Reptiles and Frogs of Alice Springs" with Glenn Marshall at the Silver Bullet Café on the 19th of September, 2003. See page 2

The (A)boreal skink to (Z)ig-zag gecko of local Frogs and Reptiles

*On the 20th of September a crowd of 35 people gathered to celebrate the successful completion of a very special Land for Wildlife devolved grant (NHT funded) project; the release of the field guide: **Reptiles and Frogs of Alice Springs**.*

It was another bright and sunny Friday in Alice Springs that heralded the launch of a valuable new resource for Land for Wildlife members. Conceived by the Lilliecrapp Road LfW Group, former LfW Coordinator Deb Metters and reptile expert Nic Gambold, it took close to a year of hard work, dedication and a deep love of all things herpetological to produce the field guide: *Reptiles and Frogs of Alice Springs*.

Previously, budding naturalists and LfW property owners tended to rely on the weighty *Reptiles and Amphibians of Australia* (Cogger) when wanting to identify some of the local fauna of the croaking or scaled kind. Though highly informative this book was never designed to fit in your back pocket. With the advent of *Reptiles and Frogs of Alice Springs* written and produced by Nic Gambold and Deb Metters and funded through the NHT assisted LfW devolved grant program LfW members now have a simple and easy to use pictorial reference to assist them in gaining a better understanding of the fauna inhabiting their properties.

The launch was held at the Silver Bullet Café, which is itself located on a registered LfW property under the management of Mike Gillam and Maria Gaicon. Over 35 people including thirteen LfW property owners and a number of private business and government representatives took a break from their busy schedules to adjourn to the Silver Bullet for a delicious lunch and to find out about the new book.

LfW Coordinator Audrey Hill opened the launch proceedings followed by speeches from both Nic and Deb who gave thanks to all those who contributed to the project. Glenn Marshall, Chairman of the Lilliecrapp Rd LfW group also gave a speech, thanking all LfW members for their valuable contribution to preserving the natural environments of the Alice Springs region. The Mayor, Fran Kilgariff, representing LfW sponsor Alice Springs Town Council, officially launched the *Reptiles and Frogs of Alice Springs*, presenting the first print run copy to Glenn Marshall. With thanks from LfW Coordinators Audrey Hill and Bill Low the launch was over and everyone settled in to peruse the guide and swap comments. Bill also thanked Audrey for her key role in coordinating the LfW program over the very successful last 10 months and wished her well in her new life adventure in Darwin.

Free copies of the *Reptiles and Frogs of Alice Springs* were handed out to all registered LfW property owners and contributors to the book who were present at the launch, copies were posted to those who could not attend. However as the field guide was designed primarily as a tool for LfW members, it remains a rare item with a total of only 50 copies printed. For public reference, copies were lodged with the LfW Office (Low Ecological Services), the Town Council Library, TSN, CLC and the libraries of CSIRO, AZRI and Centralian College.

By now all registered LfW property owners should have received their copy of the field guide and both the authors and the LfW Coordinators hope that it has proven to be a useful and interesting tool in helping members to understand and appreciate the native fauna of the Alice Springs area. Future publication is being looked into of this already popular guide.

Soil Conservation with Col Stanton on the Zadow's Block

Sixteen people enjoyed the opportunity to be guided around Basil and Lyn Zadow's property to learn of the different soil conservation techniques employed there and the reasons for it.

Having other environmental organisations on hand was also beneficial for fielding the questions about plants and animal habitat.

Greening Australia, Threatened Species Network, Aust. Plant Society and Alice Springs Field Naturalists were kept busy in sporadic bursts with queries and identification of samples.

The Zadow's property allowed attendees to view clear examples of successful rehabilitation techniques including the "whoaboy" across the driveway that reinstates the natural flow line of one of the properties creeks, rehabilitation of the old road that crosses the property so that the water runoff now flows down the slope and thoughtful creation of the rock drain that reduces erosion at the properties boundary with the road verge.

Attendees also were given the opportunity to view examples of poorly managed run-off and as a result soil erosion problems. This was a good time to ask questions of the experienced as to what they would recommend.

It was interesting to see how seemingly small changes in the grounds surface or the placement of a log in a drainage line can result in large redirection of the water flow.

Deep thanks goes to both Lyn and Basil for opening their property to the public as well as their neighbours for doing the same and to Col Stanton for his laid back and practical presentation style.



Photo: Col Stanton leads participants up the neighbours' driveway during the Soil Conservation Guided Tours.

Watch Out For

Mossman River Grass

Mossman River grass, *Cenchrus echinatus* is a declared noxious weed that was possibly introduced to Queensland during the 1860s gold rush period.



Description

It is an erect annual grass that forms loose tussocks that can be up to 90cm tall. It is similar to but distinct from Buffel Grass because of its large spiny seed-bearing burrs. These are pale brown to reddish in colour and arranged in dense cylindrical spikes, between 2 and 10cm in length. *The burrs inner bristles are broad, joined together for half to one third of their length, and have minute downward pointing barbs towards the tip* (D. Albrecht and L. Rogersl, 1999).

Habitat and Distribution

The grass is a native of tropical America. Generally growing in moist sandy or other light soils along creek lines and floodouts, as well as in highly disturbed areas. It is now a troublesome rural and urban weed in Qld and the coast of northern NSW. It also occurs

locally and around Darwin in the NT. In WA it is widespread in the West Kimberleys.

Control

As Mossman River grass is an aggressive annual pioneer plant, it is essential to prevent seeding. Seedlings can emerge from depths of 9cm in clay soils and 10cm in loams.

Control before burrs appear can be by hand pulling, cutting below ground level, burning or spraying. However, with all of these methods, they are only effective on plants already present, therefore follow up is necessary as new germinates appear.

References

- Auld B.A. and Medd R.W. (1987), *WEEDS: An illustrated botanical guide to the weeds of Australia*. Inkata Press. Melbourne, VIC.
- Albrecht D. and Rogers L. (1999), *Weeds of the Tanami: A field guide to the environmental weeds of the Tanami region, Central Australia*. Asprint Print Group, Alice Springs, NT.
- .Parsons W.T. and Cuthbertson E.G.. (1992). *Noxious weeds of Australia*. Inkata Press. Melbourne, VIC, Sydney, NSW.

Possum Search Guides

The Threatened Species Network has recently compiled a guide to searching for brushtail possum sign in the arid zone.

The common brushtail possum (*Trichosurus vulpecula vulpecula*) is anything but common in the arid zone, and has been listed as an endangered species in the NT.

The guide contains photos of scats, scratch marks and tracks, information about preferred food plants and habitats, and also has a sightings datasheet for those of you keen to do some searching. Copies are available by email tsntt@ozemail.com.au or printed copies can be supplied for a small cost.

Cats Trapped

Since the LfW Ilparpa cat trapping program commenced, 16 cats have been caught.

Currently there are seven traps out on properties leaving three available for anyone else who would like to reduce the pressure on our native fauna.

At this time of year the reptiles are becoming active and likely to become the main component of a feral cat's diet. Sue Ripley recently delivered chux clothes and sardines to the properties with traps as encouragement to people to set traps.

If you are interested in borrowing one of these traps, please contact Sue on telephone: 8952 5073.

Spotlight On

Black-footed rock-wallabies – on the hop!

Around Alice Springs we are very lucky to have healthy populations of the nationally threatened black-footed rock-wallaby (*Peterogale lateralis lateralis*). Although it is not at all uncommon to see mobs of wallabies on Spencer Hill or out at Simpson's Gap, the story isn't quite so rosy across the species' range. The MacDonnell Ranges race of black-footed rock-wallaby was once common across rocky range country in northern SA, central WA and the southern NT - in fact when naturalist H.H. Finlayson first travelled through central Australia (1932-35) he reported that '... it was one of the commonest mammals ... with swarming populations in many of the rocky outliers of the main ranges'. But by 1956 Finlayson concluded that the black-footed rock wallaby was rare in the Northern Territory, and persisted only in a few scattered locations in the MacDonnell and Davenport Ranges and the drainage of the Sandover and Bunday Rivers.

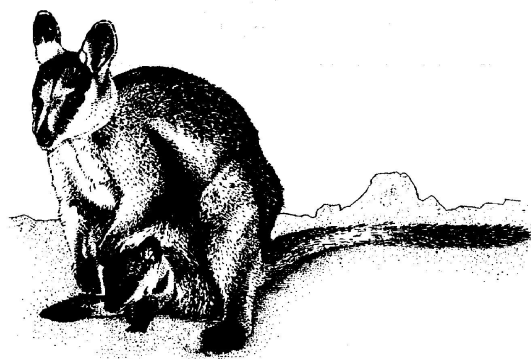
Rock-wallabies have become extinct in the wheatbelt and desert areas of WA, from most of northern SA, and more recently (post 1979) at Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park and outlying range systems in the southern part of the Territory. The main cause of their decline appears to be fox predation, and a ten-year fox control program around wheatbelt populations of black-footed rock-wallabies showed dramatic recovery in populations where baiting was done. Cats, dingoes and wild dogs are also known to kill rock-wallabies, but there have been no studies to show the relative impacts of these pressures. Habitat change due to unfavourable fire regimes or weed invasions are also likely to impact on rock-wallaby survival.

The onward march of buffel grass into range habitat around Alice is of considerable concern, and although there is some debate as to whether rock-wallabies might in some way actually benefit from the presence of buffel (it might possibly provide forage during dry times when other food plants are in low supply), it is clear that repetitive hot wildfires that potentially result from buffel invasion would have a very negative impact on biodiversity generally.

There have been several projects focussing on collecting more data on rock-wallaby population in the region. Parks and Wildlife have rangers involved in monitoring populations at Parks in the West MacDonnell Ranges. Monitoring involves counting the numbers of fresh scats within a 1m² permanently marked area, or spotlighting and recording numbers of individuals along a permanent transect.

The Centralian Land Management Association ran a project called "Rock-wallaby Watch" as part of the TSN community grants

program, and collected data on rock-wallaby populations across pastoral lands in the southern NT. As a result of extensive searches for rock-wallaby sign on ten pastoral stations where historic records of wallabies existed, or where suitable habitat was deemed to occur, CLMA concluded that rock-wallabies are surviving in good numbers in only a handful of locations on pastoral lands within the fox-line, and that populations are continuing to disappear from isolated hills and outlying ranges on the edges of their current distribution.



Aboriginal people have been involved in rock-wallaby survey and predator control work funded through TSN community grants on Anangu-Pitjantjatjarra Lands (northern SA) and Ngaanyatjarra Lands (WA, around Warburton). Fox control is seen to be crucial in maintaining these very small colonies that are surviving in isolated spots within the Central Ranges system.

Land for Wildlife members (or others) with rock-wallaby populations near by may be interested in setting up some ongoing monitoring sites to look at the impact of buffel grass on rock-wallaby numbers and to see whether rock-wallabies graze on buffel preferentially at any time of the year. The Threatened Species Network can help with the set up of these experiments, and would be keen to hear from anyone interested in dedicating some time to this activity. Please call Colleen O'Malley ph. 8952 1541 or email tsnnt@ozemail.com.au. . Sketch and text by Angela Gee/TSN.

Looking for Black-footed rock-wallaby Scats

Rock-wallaby scats are roughly 2 cm long, black or grey in colour, cylindrical in cross section and tapering to a point. When broken, scats show coarse fragments of plant material. Euro scats, by comparison, are larger and cube-shaped, while similar looking possum scats are harder to break and have more finely digested plant material inside.



Photograph supplied by, *A guide to rare and threatened animals in Central Australia.*

The above mentioned guide authored by Rachel Paltridge and Steve McAlpin is available to *Land for Wildlife* landholders at a discounted price. Copies are available through ALEC (Arid Lands Environment Centre). Refer to *Land for Wildlife* newsletter issue 1 for book review.

Land Clearing

New Native Vegetation Clearing Controls apply to properties two hectares or greater in size where more than one hectare of Native Vegetation is wanted to be cleared. If one hectare of Native Vegetation has already been cleared from the property then a permit is required for further clearing. These permits apply to freehold and Crown land. Pastoral Leases will continue to operate under the Pastoral Land Act.

Applications for a permit to clear native vegetation must be lodged on a prescribed application form. Application forms are available from the Department of Infrastructures, Planning and Environment and to cover the cost of processing, most applications will incur a fee of \$120.00.

The Native Vegetation Clearing Controls are covered by the Interim Development Control Order No. 12 under the Planning Act. Enforcement of these controls and prosecution are provided for under section 75 of the Planning Act. Contravening the Act could result in the maximum penalties of \$20,000.00 for an individual or \$100,000.00 for a corporation.

For further information or application forms, contact Department of Infrastructures, Planning and Environment, 1st floor, Alice Plaza, Todd Mall Alice Springs 8951 9245 or view the Land Clearing Guidelines on-line at: www.lpe.nt.gov.au/advis/land/clearing/default.htm

Workshops & Events

2003 October

1st October, Wednesday

Australian Plant Society - The meeting will be held at the Olive Pink Botanic Garden, 7.30pm. Peter Meech will demonstrate "Pruning of Native Plants".

5th October, Sunday

Cool Communities House, Barclay Crescent. Open House Tour. Learn ways of making your every day living more sustainable.

8th October, Wednesday

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club - Meet in the staffroom of OLSH on Spearwood Rd, 7.30pm. Joe Benshemesh will be making a presentation on Marsupial Moles

Image supplied by Threatened Species Network, Alice Springs.



10th October, Friday 3.30pm

Rangelands Seminar at CSIRO - Heath Road. Felicity Forth of **Water Watch** will present 6 years data on water quality in the Todd River.

11th & 12th October, Saturday & Sunday

Join the **Field Naturalists** in assisting with a fish survey at Fringe Lilly George. 4WD needed. This will be an overnight camp, but those who just want to help out for the day are welcome. Leoni Read, Public Officer for the Alice Springs Field Naturalist Club on 8952 1935.

19th October, Sunday

WaterWatch. Join Rosalie Breen at Wigley's Waterhole for monitoring. Please contact Leoni Read, Public Officer for the Alice Springs Field Naturalist Club on 8952 1935.

2003 November

1st November, Saturday, 9am-12pm

Greening Australia Local Native Plants Sale - Bushcare Nursery, the Centrailian College (Grevillea Drive, Sadadeen).

Enhance biodiversity and reduce water consumption by planting with local native species.

5th November, Wednesday

Australian Plant Society - The meeting will be held at the Olive Pink Botanic Garden, 7.30pm. Topic will be "Pests on Native Plants", presented by Geoff Miers.

12th November, Wednesday

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club - Meet in the staffroom of OLSH on Spearwood Rd, 7.30pm. Jose Petrick will be giving us an insight to Egypt.

2004

July 5th to 9th, 2004. The 13th Australian **Rangelands Society Biennial Conference** will be held at Minamurra Hall, St. Phillips College in Alice Springs. For more information contact *LfW* coordinator Bill Low or Dionne Walsh at CLMA on Leichhardt Tce, telephone: 8953 4230.

Buffel Busting Baskets

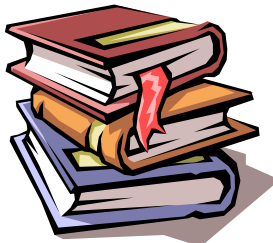
During 2001, Alex Nelson suggested to me that Buffel Grass could be used in basket making. At that time I had thought about some of the European traditional methods of weaving for which Buffel would be too brittle. However, Alex was correct.

Recently, Sonia Bazzacco, displayed baskets that she had created using Buffel and twine. This style of basket making is based on the method used by indigenous women.

By winding the twine around rows of Buffel it is possible to bind together a strong and decorative basket. Other fibres can be employed in place of twine such as wool or strips of fabric.

Have you come across any innovative ways of utilising the Buffel fuel load? If so, please share it with us by phoning 8955 5222.

Books worth a look



Reptiles and Frogs of Alice Springs – A pictorial field guide to the reptiles and frogs of the Alice Springs district, Northern Territory, by **Nic Gambold and Deborah Metters**.

This publication came about due to the Natural Heritage Trust's Devolved Grants and a successful application from the Lilliecrapp Road *Land for Wildlife* Group.

With this warm weather about us, this booklet should be kept within easy reach because, " ...This booklet aims to assist landholders and interested individuals in the basic identification of reptiles and frogs that may occur in and around Alice Springs. Every reptile and frog known to occur within a 50 kilometres radius of Alice Springs has been included, based on confirmed records from the Parks and Wildlife Commission NT Fauna Atlas for the Alice Springs municipality and personal observations by Nic Gambold, Greg Fyfe, Peter Comber, Steve McAlpin and Mike Gillam. Habitat and dietary preferences are discussed to assist landholders in identifying and protecting micro-habitats that may occur on private properties...."

Weeds of the Tanami – A field guide to the environmental weeds of the Tanami region, Central Australia

An A5 booklet prepared by Newmont Australia (Mining Company) in cooperation with the Alice Springs Herbarium to help people identify and stop the spread of weeds in the Tanami. Having written that, the species contained within this publication are also relevant to Alice Springs.

There are high quality photographs, detailed descriptions, including notes on species reproductive cycles and modes of dispersal.

Newmont Australia kindly donated 17 of the remaining copies to the *Land for Wildlife* program. As this is now out of print, please call the office (ph: 8955 5222) to request your copy. First come first served.

Environment Online is now live!

www.environment.org.au

This innovative and exciting new website, Environment Online is the initiative of about 20 of the major environmental advocacy organisations in the Australian environment movement. These groups together constitute a Forum known as the Mittagong Forum.

The Mittagong Forum, together with Social Change Online has conceptualised and developed this site that will be of interest and use for wide range of people, including fellow conservationists, environmentalists and activists, government, business people, and all those people in the community who are concerned about the natural world we live in.

Click onto this site when you are next online and provide us with some feedback.

WILDCARE ALICE SPRINGS

WILDCARE is a non-profit organization of volunteers providing a support network for carers of sick, injured and orphaned wildlife with the objective to rehabilitate and release them back into their natural habitat.

Wildcare members are provided with -

- "hands on" training and are encouraged to participate in training courses and talks about the principals of caring, handling, rehabilitation and release of native birds and mammals;
- Subsidised foods and specialised equipment;
- Access to medical supplies and veterinarian advice.

All Carers ***must*** have a current Rescue Permit issued by Parks and Wildlife. You can obtain your permit or become a member by contacting: **Wildcare Inc**, at PO Box 1752, Alice Springs NT 0871 or telephone 0419 22 11 28.