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CATEGORY FINALIST



Land for Wildlife

Conservation is in your hands



Native Crested Pigeon sits on its nest made loosely of sticks in a tree fork. Photograph taken by LfW member Jon Raveney



NEWSLETTER

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PowerWater



Northern Territory Government

Alice Springs Municipality | September 2010

Land for Wildlife Update

2010 Biodiversity Survey – 2010 biodiversity surveys are being organised for October. The dates are yet to be finalised, but we will be surveying members' properties in the Ross Highway area.

Volunteers are needed to help with various tasks. This is a great opportunity to learn some new skills and see what wildlife is around town.

Australian Open Garden Scheme – Land for Wildlife member Geoff Kenna opened his garden on Greatorex Rd to the public in September, as part of the Australian Open Garden Scheme. Proceeds from the event went to the Rural volunteer fire brigade.

Pindone on oats is useful for rabbit control in the rural blocks and if several potential users wish to combine forces to buy the large quantity available, let us know. Rabbit control using PIndone is described in the July LfW Newsletter (see www.lowecol.com.au/lfw/lfwnews.htm).

It was lovely to see many of you at the **EcoFair** last weekend. It was a great day, and we held a successful Spotted Turtle-dove Trap-making demonstration with many more participants becoming involved in backyard trapping. Welcome to new members who signed up at the EcoFair: Allan Tyley & Judy Lovell, and to Rowan Foley.

Also welcome to Uwe Path and the Pathdorf Solar and Nature Bed & Breakfast! Uwe has been landscaping and birdwatching on the property for about 3 1/2 years, with about 400 plants, bushes trees planted. As a keen birdwatcher he can proudly announce that the number of bird species on/around the property has jumped from the initial 35/40 to 70! Other animals on the property include Burton's Legless Lizards, Dunnarts, and Sand Goannas. Recently the property swapped over to complete solar, whose 10.5 kW solar power system generates all electricity needed! Congratulations Uwe!

Articles

Watch Out For Dragons in October

Dragons, lizards of the Agamidae family, are common, often conspicuous members of the reptile fauna of central Australia. They come in a variety of forms, are generally active during the day and at least some species have adapted well to urban areas and backyards around Alice Springs. Many colourful, unique and spectacular lizards belong to this family.

Shown here are some of the more common species you might encounter within the limits of Alice Springs. Certainly, none of these lizards are dangerous and the bright colours and spines that they often exhibit are more for bluff or used to display to rival lizards. If you see any of them in your garden, leave them where they lie, and they'll do you a favour by eating any cockroaches. Get more information by Googling the scientific name.

Long nosed dragon,
Amphibolurus longirostris –
Common around watercourses



where they can often be observed on tree limbs or atop bare rocks. Males establish small territories and signal to rivals by 'waving'. These dragons have an extremely long tail, up to 3 times their body length, and can grow up to a total length of 52cm.

Canegrass Dragon,
Diporiphora winneckei – These are one of the smaller members of the dragon family (total length, including a long tail, just over 20cm).



They prefer sandy desert country with Spinifex and canegrass, where they live in a shallow burrow excavated beneath the vegetation. It's unlikely you'd see one in town, but if you travel into surrounding areas you may encounter them as they rush between sheltering clumps of Spinifex.



Central netted Dragon,
Ctenophorus nuchalis – So called because of the net pattern its back, these dragons are often obvious members of lizard fauna, often perching high on the top of a dead stump or fence post. When disturbed, they'll dash to the ground and into the burrow that's they've dug at the base of their favourite perch or clump of vegetation. Often quite trusting of people, they'll sometimes allow a close approach. During the breeding season, the male develops a deep orange colour over his head, identifying him from the female.



Photo: Stephen Burnett

Central Bearded Dragon, *Pogona vitticeps* – Central bearded dragons are a large member of the family, growing

up to $\frac{1}{2}$ a metre long and are quite robust. Their distinguishing feature is a large spiny 'beard' of skin under the chin that can be inflated as a threat or mating display. The males beard is black during the breeding season. These lizards are often on the roads at the moment, warming themselves in the open and displaying to rivals and potential mates.

Garden Spring Cleaning

October's a perfect time to carry out some garden maintenance. The rain this year has meant a mass germination of plants in the bush, and perhaps in your garden beds, as well as copious new growth on existing trees and shrubs in the backyard. Some areas of your garden may be looking decidedly over grown and untidy. However, this 'untidiness' may actually be providing some important habitat for some of the wildlife using your place - perhaps even attracting some species that ordinarily might not frequent your area.

Dense Grass and Weed Growth –

This year's rains have produced a massive growth of grasses, including weeds, such as Buffel grass, and native species. Famed as a hiding place for venomous snakes, there are also a number of other animals that will utilise this kind of habitat. Reptiles such as blue tongue lizards will use grasses as both foraging and shelter areas, as will many of the Ctenotus skinks.

Small birds can find a home in long grasses too. A number of times I have found fairy wrens nesting in tall, dense grasses and grain eaters like zebra finches use the grass as a food resource. Sometimes, weed species can offer some of the same resources as native alternatives. The fairy wrens I mentioned were nesting in thick Buffel grass for example. So before you clear any weed growth, carefully observe what animals might be using it. Maybe you might like to wait a few weeks while those wrens raise some chicks before you go crazy with the whipper snipper.



Dense grass growth (*Themeda triandra*)

Then, at the same time as removing the weed patch, establish an area of native grasses in your garden as an alternative for the birds next breeding season.

Dead Timber – Dead timber and tree hollows, either littering the ground, or standing as trees, is a valuable, often essential resource for many animals. It provides a refuge from predators and weather, safe sites for breeding and resource rich areas for foraging. Completely removing this resource from your garden will diminish the diversity of habitat you provide for wildlife, and therefore lessen the types of animals that frequent your property.

This is a resource that often takes many years to form in natural systems. Take tree hollows for example. Young trees, such as those that usually occur in revegetation areas or garden situations are generally strong and healthy and do not contain hollows. Old trees however, have been subjected to a wide range of elements such as fire, wind and attack by insects, fungi and disease. While the outer 'skin' of an old tree may be healthy, the dead timber inside the trunk can be eaten away due to these influences, leaving cavities behind. It is these resulting hollows that are used by wildlife.

Dead timber that may be lying on the ground is also an important resource for ground frequenting wildlife such as insects, reptiles (like those in the preceding article) and small mammals. This too is a resource that takes time to develop in a natural system and, particularly in the urban gardens, may not exist at all.

It may be tempting to clean up this kind of debris from your property and 'clean up', but instead of removing it completely, why not use it as a landscaping material in a garden bed?

Snakes - Both these elements of a backyard are often feared as a habitat for venomous snakes. Several dangerous snakes inhabit the Alice Springs area, including western brown and mulga snakes. It is quite true that these animals will shelter under dead timber, inside hollows and in long, thick vegetation. However, remember that these animals are also an important part of an ecosystem and,



Dead ironwood providing wildlife habitat

unless disturbed, will happily begin ridding your property of house mice with little impact on you.



Photo: Michael Barrit

Photo: J. Carpenter

A Sheathtail Bat roosting in a cave. Many bats will also utilise dead trees and hollows for shelter

Australian Ringneck nesting in a dead tree.

Garden Weeds – Prickly Lettuce (*Lactuca serriola*)



History – Prickly lettuce (*Lactuca serriola*) is a biennial or annual plant, germinating throughout winter and flowering through spring into summer months. Originating in north Africa and Europe, it is thought that this plant is possibly the ancestor of cultivated lettuce varieties. Ancient Egyptians used the seeds of prickly lettuce to make cooking oil as long ago as 4500 years and paintings of bunches of the plant have been found in tombs dating to this period. It is unknown when the plant was introduced into Australia.

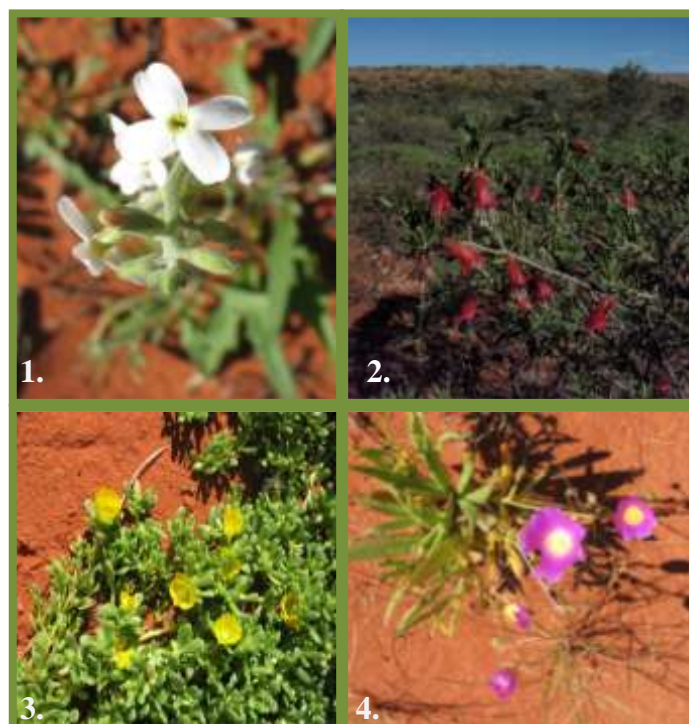
Description – A herb growing up to 2m tall with a deep taproot. The leaves are blue-green, the basal leaves forming a rosette and being up to 30cm long. Leaves on the upper part of the plant clasp the stem and are smaller. Both stems and leaves exude a milky latex sap when broken. Leaves generally have spines on their margins and lower mid-rib. The flowers are held in panicles and are pale yellow, being about 6 – 9mm long.

Occurrence – Prickly lettuce is a weed of disturbed areas, crops and pastures. Usually germinating at the beginning of winter, plants grow a rosette over the cooler months, developing flowering stems in spring and summer.

Control – Small and isolated infestations, such as may be found in a normal garden situation, can easily be done by hand pulling individual plants. Ensure that you remove the entire plant, especially the taproot, as the plant may re-sprout. In early growth stages, the plant can be easily controlled by spraying the rosette with glyphosate. However, once the flowering stems have begun to emerge, this may have limited success. They will begin to emerge from now into summer, so October is a perfect time to get on top of any lettuce at your place.

Spring Wildflower Guide

This August and September, the desert has really come into bloom, with consistent rain falls spread throughout the winter and spring months so far. Some of these desert flowers may even be blooming on your properties now. In recent weeks, we have received several emails asking us to identify plants that have burst into flower with ideal conditions. Many of the colourful blooms that may carpet large areas belong to annual species that grow and flower briefly when suitable conditions prevail, only to die away and disappear when their lifecycle is complete. Seed banks of these plants remain in the soil and wait until suitable conditions return. If you own a bush block around Alice Springs, or live adjacent to one, these pictures might help you learn what's blooming at your place.



1. native stock (*Blennodia canescens*); 2. Latrobe's desert fuchsia (*Eremophila latrobei*); 3. Munyeroo (*Portulaca*)

oleracea); **4.** Broad Leaf Parakeelya (*Calandrinia balonensis*) Photos: Ilse Pickerd



5. Annual Yellowtop (*Senecio gregorii*); **6.** Hairy Mulla Mulla (*Ptilotus helipteroides*) Photos: Ilse Pickerd



7. Saltspoon Daisy (*helipterum stipitatum*) **8.** Swainsona (*swainsona* sp) Photos: Ilse Pickerd

This is just a small selection of the spring flowers you might see around Alice Springs at the moment. As the year advances and the hot weather begins, they won't last long, so make the most of a colourful spring and see how many flowers you can find on your block.

Letters to the Editor

There have been quite a few emails in our mail box recently concerning Spotted Turtle-doves around town. There's been a wide range of responses from people, some who've had no trouble with the birds on their properties, to those who've suddenly been inundated with the pests. Here's some of the news from around town on the issue.

Hi Ilse and Jesse

Luckily we don't have any Spotted Turtle doves-or at least I have not seen one in the past year. We have around 30 plus resident Crested Pigeons who appear in small and large groups for our "bird bath" (and chook food! and are on the property daily. They have nested in our trees over the past year and really bred up in number. There are also a small group of around 10 diamond doves (I think - definitely tiny ones and not feral) that have recently moved in and are regular visitors.

Hope all is well. Have really been enjoying the flocks of

budgies that are staying overnight in big numbers and the increased number of kites trying to surprise them in the mornings!!

Jon

Thanks Ilse for the identification information, amongst the ferals I've caught over time, I caught a native Peaceful Dove recently and thankfully I let it go....

Jayne McAlister

Jayne's letter emphasizes the importance of successfully being able to recognise the Spotted Turtle-doves from native birds that might also be caught in the traps, if you're using them. While people might not like catching the native doves, it does show beyond doubt that those species are using your properties. As long as they are released promptly with minimum stress, the bird won't be any the worse for it either.

Mexican Poppies are still a hot topic in our in box, and it seems that this year has provided ideal conditions for this weed to establish itself in some of the creeks of the local area.

G'day all,

We've are now experiencing the largest germinations of mp in Roe creek in about ten years, and to a much lesser extent, some in Laura Ck,. Generally they are mostly against the banks, and disturbed areas, but the biggest worry are those up on the top of the banks in the Buffel grass, something we haven't seen for a long time.

All plants are extremely healthy, a quite a few flowers now, occasional immature seed pods.

Plenty in the sand leases. Denise, still getting lots against the boundary fence, both sides, and up on the islands.

Thanks & cheers

Rod Cramer

Member Carmel Ryan sent us this picture of a plant on her property to identify. The plant is *Prostanthera striataflora*, or Striped Mintbush.



With the abundance of rain this year, there are many plants flowering that may not often be seen. If you come across any unusual ones that you don't recognise, send us a picture, like Carmel's done, and we'll identify it for you.

Announcements

Feral cats wiping out endangered bush species [ABC]

By Timothy McDonald

A new report from the Nature Conservancy has found that mammal species in northern Australia are in rapid decline and many are at risk of becoming extinct within the next decade.

At least a dozen species are listed as critical or endangered and another dozen are thought to be vulnerable.

Researchers believe the problem is getting worse and feral cats and fire management are largely to blame for the decline.

The head of Biodiversity Section for the Northern Territory Environment Department, Professor John Woinarski, says the mostly small and furry creatures are under immense pressure and in many cases are living on borrowed time.

"When I came here 25 years or so ago it was a paradise for native mammals and that's just not the case anymore," he said.

"It's perplexing. Much of the landscape still looks extraordinarily intact and natural and extensive and beautiful, but some of the species are clearly falling out of that landscape.

"It's been a difficult task for us to figure out what's causing that decline, given the apparent naturalness of landscape.

"We think that the main contributing factors are predation by feral cats and changed fire regimes."

Professor Woinarski says it is one of the region's smaller inhabitants that may be the next victim.

"There's a beautiful rodent called a brush-tailed rabbit rat which is a guinea pig-sized animal but with a beautiful long feathery tail," he said.

"We're witnessing its really rapid decline over the last two decades. It's disappeared from a lot of places where formally it was very common and it's the one I'd pick as the most likely for extinction in the next 10 or so years.

"But there's a range of others which are similarly declining in more or less the same sort of synchrony I guess."

Websites Worth a Look

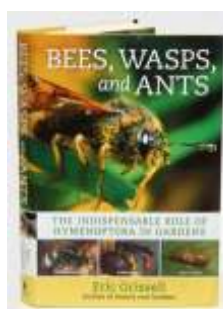
<http://www.ntinfont.org.au/>

Provides summaries of vegetation, soils and fire history (in the form of maps, graphs and statistics), and lists of all species relevant to any area of your choice. Results can be viewed online in the **Preview** tab or downloaded and saved in a PDF document. The site also provides management guidelines for threatened species, weeds and pest animals recorded in or near your selected area.

<http://www.landmanager.org.au/>

Enables people to make better land management decisions by providing information on the soils, pasture and plants and animals that need to be looked after, and on the problems land managers face. This site focuses on the regions north of Alice Springs, but still contains relevant information about many aspects of land management in the centre.

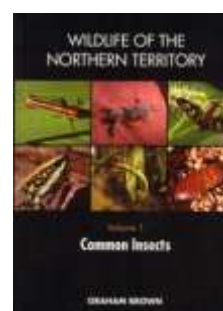
Recommended Books



Bees, Wasps and Ants: The Indispensable Role of Hymenoptera in Gardens, by Eric Grissell

These insects help to maintain the biological balance in a garden, fertilizing plants and recycling nutrients within the soil. This book explains the importance of Hymenoptera and how gardeners

can encourage (or discourage) them in the garden



Wildlife of the Northern Territory Vol 1: Common Insects, by Graham Brown.

An introduction to common insects, spiders, scorpions, millipedes and centipedes in the NT. A simple but accurate introductory field guide to NT species.

Calendar of Events

October – Land for Wildlife Biodiversity Surveys. Contact us to volunteer your help or for more information.

Gardens For Food Workshops –

- 3 Oct – Composting, pests and predators
- 10 Oct – Growing bush tucker
- 17 Oct – Seed saving
- 24 Oct – Battling problems

Workshops cost \$10 - \$15, and places are limited. To book, email gardensforfood@gmail.com

Wed 20 Oct - Ride to Work Day, 6am – 9am on the council lawns at the civic centre join in for a Pancake Breakfast. Call Lucy Griffiths 89500563 for more information.

October 29 - Seminar: Improvements in fire management on Aboriginal lands. Rangelands Seminar at CDU HE lecture theatre, 3:30pm.

9-11 November - 4th Desert Knowledge Symposium - Alice Springs Convention Centre, see www.desertknowledgesymposium.com for more information.

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 and Bill Low, LfW coordinators, W.A. Low Ecological Services,
Contact Ilse on 89555222 or lfw@lowecol.com.au

