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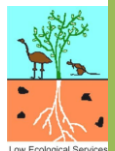


NEWSLETTER

Alice Springs Municipality September 2011

PowerWater

Northern Territory Government



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On our cover this month...

A sleepy **Southern Boobook** *Ninox novaeseelandiae*, photographed at his daytime roost by Matt Le Feuvre. This bird had selected a thick stand of *Acacia victoriae* to rest in during a very smoky day in Alice Springs.

Articles

Ferals and Vagrants; Feral Doves May Be the Least of Our Worries

Varied Lorikeets were seen in small numbers in late January in the lemon-scented gums around Braiting School on the northside of town. From a birdwatcher's point of view this was an exciting encounter.

The Varied Lorikeet is not an invasive species; it is native to the northern half of the Northern Territory. Most likely this is a fleeting visit from a traditionally much more northern species – what birdwatchers call a *vagrant*. These little birds may have flown close to halfway across the continent. Considering the exceptional rain that we've had this last year it is perhaps not surprising that these birds managed to spread a little bit further south following plentiful food and water. However, when finding a species this far from its traditional territory it is always wise to check for any local aviculturists who might be missing some birds.

While the birds could quite feasibly fly as far as Alice Springs, the aviary-escapee theory sometimes turns out to be the answer in many cases. Long-billed Corellas have been seen around the Alice Springs Tip and the Sewage Treatment Ponds for many years and are known to have escaped from one aviary in town. Princess Parrots, the legendary rare nomadic birds from the western deserts are also one of the more commonly kept cage birds in Australia. Many birdwatchers have been excited by a Princess Parrot

sighting right here in town, only to discover the rarity they've spotted has been lost from a local pet collection.

The list goes on; a Sulphur-crested Cockatoo has been living among the Major Mitchell's Cockatoos around Honeymoon gap for several years. This bird is a considerable distance from its supposed distribution limits and is likely to be another escapee. Rainbow Lorikeets are reported fairly regularly in small flocks around Old Eastside. Not long ago, I came across a small flock of Double-barred Finches in town which I had heard reported missing from an aviary several months earlier.



This is all well and good for native species when they go wandering and provides a brief thrill for attentive birdwatchers, but not all aviary escapees are as welcome. Peach-faced Lovebirds (*Agapornis roseicollis*) continue to be seen around town in small flocks and this African species is most certainly an exotic, lost (or released) from a local collection. When exotic species are released there is always the risk of these birds finding a suitable nesting site and reproducing. Rose-ringed Parakeets (*Psittacula krameri* – an Asian native) have been caught by PWSNT on more than one occasion in Alice Springs, and these are a real threat if they take hold. Sitting at a street cafe in the Netherlands or in some parts of the United Kingdom it is quite common to see flocks of Rose-ringed Parakeets flashing overhead. In Amsterdam alone the population is estimated at over 10,000 birds. Similarly, in Chicago and parts of Arizona in the United States, Peach-faced Lovebirds can be seen zipping around in sizeable flocks. These populations are all the result of aviary escapes of just a few birds here and there, congregating and founding viable wild populations. If this species took hold in Alice it would do the same to our native parrot species as the feral Spotted Turtle-doves have done to our native doves. They outbreed and out-compete the locals for food and nesting space and slowly push them out of suburban areas.

Anyone who has visited suburban Melbourne lately, where feral bird control has been intermittent, will be aware of the prevalence of feral Indian Mynas. They are extremely aggressive feeders and are not fussy about their selection of nesting sites either. The list of

avian pests in Melbourne and some of our other big cities is extensive; European Blackbirds, Tree Sparrows, House Sparrows, Greenfinches, Goldfinches, Starlings, Red-whiskered Bulbuls, ship-assisted House Crows etc, etc.



Just over the horizon in Tennant Creek there is a population of European House Sparrows just waiting for a chance to spread down into Alice Springs. Just over the border in South Australia there are feral Rock Doves, Barbary Doves and Common Starlings all ready to spread across a sodden desert at the first opportunity. In Alice Springs we have successfully eradicated the Barbary Dove. This and the Spotted Turtle-dove are the only avian pests which have thus far managed to become established here. This is a great achievement as the Barbary Dove is still feral in parts of Adelaide. There is no reason we can't have the same level of success and eradicate the Spotted Turtle-dove completely over the next few years – and once they're gone it is much easier to prevent further colonisations in the future.



This is the position we find ourselves in now with Lovebirds. If we can remove these flocks from the wild before they establish themselves any further, then it will be easier to remove aviary escapees as they appear. If the birds establish a wild breeding population then it is more difficult. The Peach-faced Lovebird is native to the arid south west of Africa around Namibia. This region has a similar climate to Alice Springs. We are fortunate with the Spotted Turtle-dove in that it is unlikely to spread beyond the outskirts of Alice Springs – it is not a natural desert dweller. The Lovebird however, might have no such difficulty. It is a territorial hollow-nesting species. It is

not difficult to imagine the central ranges in their present lush condition becoming infested with these birds. Our hollow nesting parrots, cockatoos, night birds, and even some bat species may be bullied out of a home by this bird if a wild population were to establish itself here. Once they establish beyond the limits of Alice Springs they would be very difficult to eradicate.



If you see any introduced bird species around town or even further away from town, you can call the avian pest hotline on **1800 084 881**.

Please contact Chris and Jesse if you'd like to learn more about trapping feral Spotted Doves in your back yard, or check the Garden for Wildlife website for instructions on how to build your own trap.

You can also visit the website of Feral.org for more information on a variety of introduced species and the impact they have on our ecosystems.

Significant Trees in Alice Springs – A New Register

The word is out! If you haven't heard about the new Significant Tree Register for Alice Springs, we're awaiting your nominations.

The original register begun by National Trust and Greening Australia has proven tricky to find. We've decided to start rebuilding this important document with the hope of incorporating it in a national register that will one day be produced by National Trust.

This project takes on added importance at the moment with the ever-present threat of fire across The Centre. Many of our large, old trees are choked with Buffel Grass and the best chance we have of effecting the enactment of by-laws in the future that might protect them, is to have an accurate record of special trees that might help to focus maintenance efforts in the future.

So we are cataloguing any and all egregious specimens that we and you can identify. If there are any on your property or if there are any special trees that you know around town, please fill out a nomination form and let us know about them. We'll certainly lose many trees over the coming season and making sure as many as possible are documented before their demise is our goal in the short term. We need as much information as you can provide about the history, folklore, cultural associations, and biology of unusual trees around Alice Springs.

If you haven't already received one, then please email the Land for Wildlife coordinators for a nomination form and we'll send one over. - lfw@lowecol.com.au

Announcements

Yulara Comes Onboard

The desert resort town of Yulara looks set to become the newest member of the fastest growing club in the country – Land for Wildlife.

The coordinators have been approached by representatives of the new owners and they are very keen to re-landscape a significant portion of the grounds in line with conservation principles espoused by Land for Wildlife.

In coming months, Chris and Jesse will be visiting Yulara to start work on this exciting new report. As a busy tourist hub, this will be a great opportunity for some international exposure for the Land for Wildlife program in Central Australia.

Stay tuned...

Websites Worth a Look

seaturtle.org

Satellite Tracking Our Wild Animals

<http://seaturtle.org/tracking/>

A fascinating website providing access to a huge array of wildlife satellite tracking projects. From albatross, Whale Sharks, or Flesh-footed Shearwaters, to a variety of different sea turtle species, there is plenty of material here for anyone interested in the movements of wild animals.

THE CONVERSATION

<http://theconversation.edu.au/>

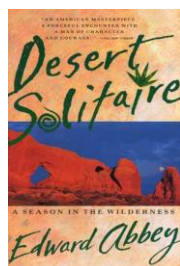
This is a fairly new site which promises something very rare – *truly* independent news, analysis and opinion.

It is collectively authored by academics from a range of universities and research facilities. The most important bit though is that, along with stating their credentials as an expert in their field, each author submits to a disclosure statement at the top of the page asserting that they have no conflicting interests associated with the subject of their writing.

This is an innovative approach which has already drawn praise from many quarters. Articles are regularly sourced from 8 of the "big" universities and a variety of academics involved in research around the world.

The subject matter is diverse enough to cater for any interests, but their science, technology, and environment content will be more than enough to keep anyone with an interest in the natural world reading.

Recommended Books



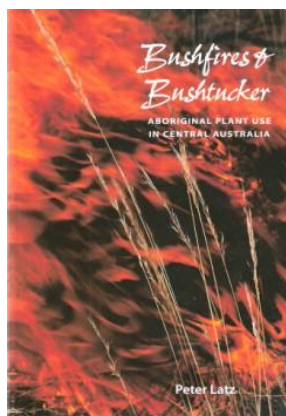
Desert Solitaire by Edward Abbey.

Written in the stark, muscular style of a latter day Hemmingway or Mailer, *Desert Solitaire* is Ed Abbey's classic memoir of his season in the wilderness as a ranger at Arches National Monument in Utah, USA.

Living alone (except for the mice, the rattlers, and the gopher snakes) in a clapped out Government trailer, he paints a vivid picture of the splendid isolation to be found in the desert landscape. The more I read of Abbey's experiences with extremes of climate and weather and encounters with unusual wildlife, the more I began to see the parallels with our own amazing desert regions.

It may seem odd to be recommending a book about experiences half a world away in the continental US but Centralian readers may find they have much in common with Abbey's deep love of the desert country; the rocks, the sand, the diverse and unique vegetation and the silence.

While this experience is firmly rooted in the US, I think this will be an enjoyable read for desert-lovers anywhere.



Bushfires and Bushtucker by Peter Latz.

More than just a field guide to plant identification, *Bushfires and Bushtucker* puts Central Australian plants in their historic, cultural, and ecological context. I have two copies of this book; one on the bookshelf and one (a much-loved, dog-eared shambles)

in the Landcruiser for field trips. While not exhaustive, Latz covers a generous chunk of the plant communities of The Centre, providing local names where possible and background information on their practical and ceremonial uses as well as dietary and medicinal values. Managing to assemble all of this knowledge in one volume is a mind-boggling feat. This is an indispensable reference for any Centralian naturalist.

Calendar of Events

1/9/11 – 16/10/11 – Annual Tiwest Nightstalk. Full details at;
<http://www.perthzoo.wa.gov.au/act/tiwest-night-stalk/>

September 8 - International Literacy Day, recognised by the UN

September 10 - World Suicide Prevention Day

September 11 - World First Aid Day

September 15 - International Day of Democracy, recognised by the UN

September 16 - International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer, recognised by the UN

September 19 - International Talk Like a Pirate Day

September 21 - International Day of Peace, recognised by the UN

September 21 - World Alzheimer's Day

September 22 - (World) Car Free Day(s)

September 27 - World Tourism Day

September 28 - World Rabies Day

During last week of September - World Maritime Day, recognised by the UN

First Monday of October - World Habitat Day, recognised by the UN

1/10/11 – 8/10/11 – Red Centre Birdweek. Full details at;
<http://www.alicespringsdesertpark.com.au/plan/events.shtml>

October 1 - International Day of Older Persons, recognised by the UN

October 1 - World Vegetarian Day

October 2 - International Day of Non-Violence, recognised by the UN, observed on M.K. Gandhi's birthday

October 3 - World Smile Day

October 4 - World Animal Day

October 5 - World Teachers' Day

- Second Wednesday of October** - International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction, recognised by the UN
- October 8** - World Hospice and Palliative Care Day
- October 8** - World Humanitarian Action Day
- 9/10/11 – 12/10/11** – **First set of Land for Wildlife biodiversity surveys for 2011. Contact Jesse & Chris to volunteer.**
- October 9** - World Post Day, recognised by the UN
- October 10** - World Mental Health Day, recognised by the UN
- October 10** - World Day Against Death Penalty, recognised by the WCADP
- October 14** - World Standards Day
- October 14 - **NT Landcare Awards in Darwin**
- October 15** - World Blind Day / World Sight Day
- October 15** - International Day of Rural Women, recognised by the UN
- October 16** - National Boss Day (Boss's Day)
- October 16** - World Food Day, recognised by the UN
- October 20** - World Osteoporosis Day
- October 20** - International Day of the Air Traffic Controller
- October 20** - World Statistics Day
- 23/10/11 – 26/10/11** – **Second set of Land for Wildlife biodiversity surveys. Contact Chris & Jesse to volunteer.**
- October 24** - United Nations Day, recognised by the UN
- October 27** - World Day for Audiovisual Heritage, recognised by the UN

October 29 - **Shorebird count at sewage ponds with Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club**



Take care,

Jesse, Chris & Bill

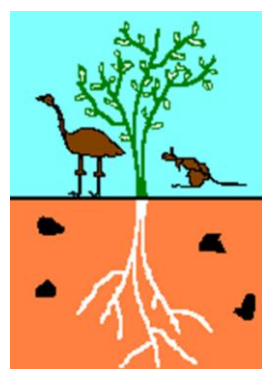
This newsletter has been produced by Jesse Carpenter, Chris Watson and Bill Low, LfW coordinators, W.A. Low Ecological Services, Contact Ilse on 89555222 or lfw@lowecol.com.au

Land for Wildlife Coordinators

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