



Land for Wildlife and Garden for Wildlife Central Australia Newsletter

May 2020

From the Land for Wildlife Coordinators

Hi everyone

What a time of life we have been privileged to live and journey through being 'alone together' (the catch phrase of 2020!). Have you noticed an increase in wildlife activity about you? Given the recent slower pace and less consistent presence of human activity in the world about us, it seems anecdotally at least, that wildlife (and plants?) have taken the rare opportunity to visibly inhabit the space where they belong. Many people have reported hearing and observing more birds, noticeably less roadkill(!), and records show a significant reduction in global air pollution. These, and so many more unseen, are consequential benefits from the COVID-19 pandemic. I'd like to believe that the earth has been breathing easier for a time, but is it long enough for the earth to have caught it's breath??...will remain the question.

In this issue you can read about some of those beneficial life changes that have been taking place here in Central Australia and we meet our newest GfW member as we profile her garden and retell some delightful stories of wildlife observations in the backyard. While we await community events to restart, we have replaced our community events calendar, 'Start Where You Are', with 'Species Of The Month'. This new and informative grab provides insider knowledge about lesser known species existing about us. For our first species we are showcasing a very special species of microbat. Perhaps you have noticed this species at twilight and here we detail some of their unique characteristics and living skills which allow their survival in our harsh environment. Information about this species has been provided by Alice Springs bat expert, Erin Westerhuis. Many of you know Erin who is currently finalising her PhD research on Central Australian bats, birds and River Redgums. We are looking forward in future issues to provide more about her scientific revelations of the unique species in our region that she has come to know so well.

We hope you enjoy this read and take some moments sublime to bear witness to life in your own lands and gardens for wildlife.

~ Kate and Bill

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Below: Sunrise over Haas' Bluff - ancient lands for wildlife





In the backyard of a small urban unit, Liz Olle has successfully managed to transform her once concrete courtyard, to a haven of native vegetation that is distinctly representative of natural habitat in Central Australia.

OUR NEWEST GARDEN FOR WILDLIFE CREATIVELY BUILT A HABITAT HAVEN IN A SMALL URBAN BACKYARD...AND IT WORKS!!!

Liz Olle's small urban backyard is the only space available for a private garden within the confines of an Alice Springs unit complex. Situated at the foot of a small range in Araluen, the garden is just under 84 m² in size and has room enough for an outdoor bath, small shed, sizeable vege garden and an outdoor table setting. In amongst these items is habitat in the form of rocks, leaf litter, a birdbath, and food and shelter provided from native and introduced vegetation, all supporting an array of wildlife. With this new membership, Liz has become Garden for Wildlife's inaugural program member in the suburb of Araluen.

Although Liz considers replacing a large, introduced tree with a native species, the sturdy tree was likely planted at the time the units were built and is well-established. It continues to provide beneficial habitat for many birds, insects and reptiles from its dense foliage and successfully screens the backyard view from neighbouring houses. The tree has also provided Liz with sufficient wood to stoke her outdoor fire over the course of several winters. The birdbath is located in a shady area underneath its branches and many species of birds visit the bath. The tree also provides adequate cover for smaller birds and the addition of a line of wire from the birdbath to the tree has added a useful perch for many species to sit above the bath before deeming it safe to drop to the edge to drink. Liz makes sure she keeps the bath topped up during excessively hot, or prolonged dry, periods.

On her backyard bird list, Liz includes White-plumed Honeyeaters, Galahs, Western Bowerbirds (one visited while were standing in the garden), Magpie Larks and Australian Ringneck Parrots. Other wildlife that utilise the property's resources are a family of Central-netted Dragons, small lizards and skinks, busy bees, caterpillars that become butterflies, a plethora of insects and even a baby Tiger Snake.

A pair of Whistling Kites are new arrivals in recent weeks and can often be seen meters above the backyard on the range to the north. The two Black Kites that were resident of the area haven't been sighted since the Whistling Kites have arrived. Liz suspects the Whistling Kites have successfully muscled in and staked their claim over the range top and surrounding areas.

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BACKYARD BARNYARDS!

The recent community surge for spending quality time in the great outdoors of our own backyards is providing many people a new found enjoyment for keeping chooks. Here we are revisiting a LfW website blog about housing chickens, by Candice Appleby. Candy provides detail about responsible husbandry, NT legalities and hot (and cold!) tips and tricks for caring for your chickens.

Make yourself a breakfast omelette from your home-grown eggs, brew up a fresh pot of tea, and...well, read on...

Chickens make great mates, to you and to your garden. They not only provide you and your family with a wealth of freshly laid eggs, they also produce incredibly nitrogen rich fertiliser and reduce the amount of household waste in the form of food scraps heading to landfill at the tip. The sudden, unexpected, public interest in keeping backyard hens has left live chicken suppliers in Alice out of stock as soon as birds are ready for sale. But if you have been fortunate enough to acquire some chickens recently, have you got everything ready and how can you maximise the benefit provided by your new family members?

There are a few things you need to consider when constructing and maintaining an outside chicken run. Weather conditions are variable and extreme in Central Australia. Summer is quite the character-builder and chickens respond to the heat in much the same way as humans do. Ensure you provide adequate shade and a sufficient water supply. A little trick to use is hooking up the chickens' water supply to the garden irrigation system, much like you would with a birdbath. This ensures the chickens water gets topped up daily and your chickens are happy. On the opposite side of the temperature gauge, winter nights can get down to seriously cold temperatures. Provide a wooden insulated nesting box for your chickens to keep warm and where they can lay eggs. Chickens will also tend to eat more in winter so don't worry if you find they require extra food at this time.

Something that can often be overlooked for backyard chicken runs but is essential, is a good old-fashioned dust bath. A dust bath is great for the prevention of parasitic infestation on chicken feathers and legs. The simplest way to provide this is with a small cleared area covered with some dusting material; sand is best. Remember to keep this area clean of faeces and food scraps by raking it out and adding fresh dusting material regularly. If you want to treat your ladies to a day at the chicken spa, add a few herbs like rosemary, lavender, thyme and mint. This will leave them feeling pampered and smelling lovely, while utilising the herbs' natural insecticide and anti-inflammatory properties. If you're finding mites, fleas and ticks are becoming a problem, you can try popping a handful of garlic husks in their nesting boxes to reduce infestations.

Feeding your chickens is relatively straight forward. They will eat compostable food scraps, especially leafy greens and you can purchase chicken feed; grains and

pellets and the like, from reputable suppliers. It's important not to over-feed your chickens. Typically only feed them enough that they can eat in ten minutes. Also, be sure not to give them food scraps that are showing signs of rot, as rotten scraps can be a source of botulism in chickens.

The outcome: So many Eggs!



Chicken chicks huddle together for warmth and comfort under a hatching lamp.

Image: Caragh Heenan

Foods not to give to chickens:

- Decomposing material or maggots
- Meat or bones
- Tea leaves
- Coffee grounds
- Citrus fruits
- Onion
- Rhubarb
- Orange
- Banana
- Raw potato peels

Now that your chickens are happy and settled into their new home it won't be long until they start popping out eggs left and right (unless you have yourself a rooster!) Keep in mind, if you want to sell your the eggs, you will need to be registered as a food business. However for private consumption, simply ensure your eggs are thoroughly cleaned, dispose of cracked eggs not suitable for consumption, write the date they were laid on the shell and store them in the refrigerator below cooked or ready to eat foods.

Continued next page

BACKYARD BARNYARDS

It is important to remember also that over the counter wormers and medicated food have the potential to transfer to the eggs produced by the chickens. Take note of package warnings and respect any egg 'Withholding Periods' (WHP).

Everything is fair in love and chickens, however it is important to be aware of legalities. Luckily for us here in Alice Springs there aren't too many restrictions for keeping chickens on your premises, either on rural or suburban properties. Alice Springs by-law states that "chickens have to be contained in a securely fenced yard or run, which is no closer to a house than 12 metres". The Northern Territory Government also requires properties that are housing poultry to be registered with a 'Property Identification Code' (PIC) regardless of the number of animals on the property. The PIC is a biosecurity tool to help the government manage any outbreaks of disease and enable Government officers to quickly and efficiently notify anyone who may be effected (Animal equivalent of the COVID19-tracer app??).

Registration is free and can be completed online [here](#)

Enjoy your new feathered happy friends and their happy, healthy produce!

~ Candice Appleby (with some additions from Kate)



No meal tastes as good, or provides the (smug) satisfaction, as a wholesome meal made with your home-grown produce does!



Clockwise from left: **Red-necked Avocet flying over Alice Springs 'poo ponds'; Channel-billed Cuckoo; habitat contained within the property of our new LfW members, Annette & David Miller (their story in the next issue); Black-lined Monitor in the house! - cr. C. Carter.**



Activities of wildlife in her backyard habitat provide interest and delight for Liz. She tells me that a favourite pastime is quietly sitting outside with a cuppa and watching as the wild residents go about their lives; the Bowerbirds purloin small white shells or ceramic pieces off her outside windowsill, dropping those that are too heavy to fly further than a meter or so with. And the family of Dragons have a regular route they traverse; around the fence, under the table, squeeze behind the gap between wall and step, and nip behind the outside bath. There is no doubt that local wildlife have much to be pleased about in Liz's habitat garden and where they have found a comfortable home in the suburbs.

From my observations when I visited Liz, there seems to be several potential gardens in the area that would easily qualify for the Garden for Wildlife program. However, we currently have no other nearby properties registered as members. We are hopeful that Liz's small habitat haven will encourage and inspire her neighbours to look around their own surrounds and consider some of the garden space they may have to support wildlife in the suburbs. We are always keen to discuss possibilities and opportunity for incorporating habitat into a garden, and encourage anyone interested to apply for membership and gain the ready support that our program offers.



The only registered member in Araluen, Liz Olle's habitat garden is situated between a small range (see circled water tank atop the range) and Mt Gillen. Her garden helps create habitat continuity through our urban environments.

This Month's Habitat Quiz...??

1. How many of the 18 species of butterfly found in Central Australia have a common name associated with colour?
(*Three tricks to this question!*)
2. What is one of the most important elements in the weathering process on landforms, and how does it impact on the Mountain ranges in Central Australia?
3. What is the most common vegetation type, described by Albrecht and Pitt, overlaying the town of Alice Springs?
4. What is the name for the new subspecies of *Calyptorhynchus banksii* (Red-tailed Black-cockatoo) found in West Australia, that is genetically different from its former Central Australian cohorts of the subspecies *Calyptorhynchus banksii samueli*? What does the name mean in Spanish/Portuguese?
5. What is the current estimated number of vertebrates and plants, including moss, ferns and liverworts, that are endemic to Australia?

Answers will be in the next newsletter

Species Of The Month

Chocolate Wattled Bat

Chalinolobus morio



~ Erin Westerhuis

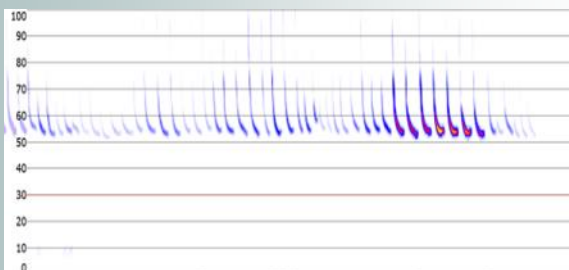
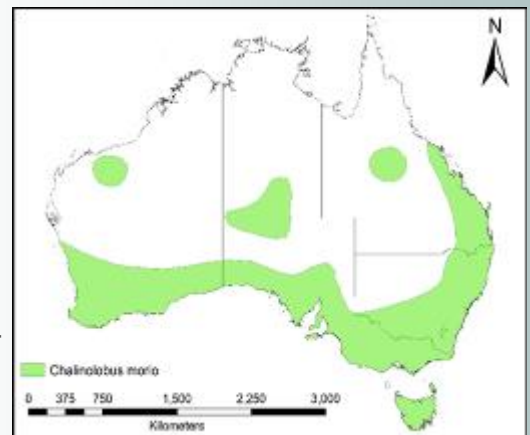
The chocolate wattled bat (left) (*Chalinolobus morio* – pronounced kal-in-oh-low-bus mor-ee-oh) is a small insectivorous microbat in the 'evening bat' family (Vespertilionidae). They are a tree roosting species found primarily in south-eastern Australia, with three disjunct populations in central Queensland, the mountainous region of central Australia and in the Pilbara.

Chalinolobus morio weighs 7 grams on average in central Australia, with females slightly larger than males. They are nearly 20 % smaller in central Australia than in southern Australia (Lumsden & Bennet 1995) and may represent a unique subspecies (B. Thompson, pers comms March 2019).

Chalinolobus morio, like all insectivorous bats, use echolocation to find food and for navigation. The echolocation produced by most insectivorous bats can be species-specific. This means it is possible to record bats using ultrasonic microphones. *C. morio*'s echolocation is of a particularly high frequency (bottom left) which is perfect for hunting small moths along the edges of vegetation, but this makes them more difficult to detect acoustically compared to some other species.

The species are considered a moth specialist (Kolkert et al. 2020). A single bat can eat approximately a third of its body weight of insects each night. This might not sound like much, however an insect may only weigh a fraction of a gram and so bats need to consume hundreds of insects every night when they are active.

Populations of *C. morio* are considered to be stable (IUCN Redlist), however as a tree roosting bat they require hollows on a day to day basis and special maternity hollows when breeding (Lunney et al. 1985). The loss of trees with hollows from catastrophic wildfire, land clearing or age, means that less nesting space is available in the area for the bats, which can lead to a decrease in population numbers.



Left: The high frequency echolocation of *Chalinolobus morio* captured on a bat detector device. The red section indicates the characteristic frequency for this species.

Above: The Australian range of the *C. morio* resembles a smiley face! Why wouldn't Australia be smiling with such a resident?!

LAND FOR WILDLIFE, KANGAROO ISLAND: UPDATE ON THE CONTINUING EFFORT TO SAVE THE REMAINING KANGAROO ISLAND DUNNARTS—POST FIRES

~ Heidi Groffen, Land for Wildlife, KI

The last couple of months have been incredibly busy and we thank you all for your financial support during this wildfire recovery period on Kangaroo Island. KI Land for Wildlife has been monitoring two known KI dunnart populations on privately owned bushland. We are thrilled to say that your support has saved these populations from extinction. We have been managing feral cat pressure 24/7 and monitoring the other threatened species within the sites.

The private landholders most impacted by these wildfires are now seeing the regeneration of critical habitats, which brings a smile to their faces. Your donations have encouraged these landholders, whom have lost everything, to get back out onto their properties and monitor the recovery of threatened species so that they can be protected into the future. Peter and Nirbeeja lost their home and bushland that supported one of the largest KI dunnart populations. Your wonderful donations have helped them purchase cameras and binoculars for long term monitoring post fire. We thank you again for your generosity.

The Western River Refuge population of KI dunnarts are now safely protected within a feral cat exclusion fence. The monitoring sites within are showing us regular images of the dunnarts foraging and utilising the protected habitat which we are thrilled about. Survey sites within regenerating habitat outside the fenced area are also providing evidence that protection is working from the numerous KI dunnart and Bassian thrush (a threatened woodland bird) records .

Twenty-five new survey sites have been established across western Kangaroo Island private properties post fire. These sites have recorded dunnarts, Southern brown bandicoot, Western whipbird, Bassian thrush, KI echidna and many more species. Thanks to the many landholders who are partnering with KI Land for Wildlife and to all our donors that have helped save our endangered species from extinction post fire.



Signage indicating
membership of Land for
Wildlife, Kangaroo Island

Peter and Nirbeeja checking their
camera trap



Images from the camera traps show KI
Dunnarts in the survey area

Setting drift nets and camera traps to
record species using the unburnt habitat



\$70 ea.

Feral Cat Traps for sale



Land for Wildlife encourages members to assist their wildlife conservation efforts through the ethical management of feral cats on their property.

We currently have a number of Australian made, sturdy cat traps ready for use in the battle against the bulging feral cat population here in Central Australia.

Feral cat caught in a LfW trap



Free delivery in the
Alice Springs area



Phone 89 555 222 to order your trap today.

Answers to the February Habitat Quiz

1. The edible portion of *Portulaca oleracea*, or Pigweed, is the entire plant! Seeds are roasted and ground to a paste before being eaten. Roots can be cooked (e.g. roasted) and leaves and stems are best steamed.
2. Thorny devils are native to the outback and cannot drink water with their mouths. Their entire mouth has evolved specifically to feed on ants. Instead of using their mouth, they obtain water through channels between their scales which draws moisture towards their mouths and they squeeze it inside in small gulps. The thorny devil can drink water just by standing in a puddle!
3. The two defining features that distinguish the Lesser Hairy-footed Dunnart from the Hairy-footed Dunnart are its smaller size and (you probably guessed it...) less hairy soles on their feet.
4. Native snakes are protected in the NT and you cannot interfere with them without a permit. It is illegal to kill a snake unless it is within 100 metres of an occupied building, or if you can prove it is absolutely necessary to kill or injure the snake to avoid death or injury to a person or domestic animal.
5. Anangu have, for centuries, divided the flora in the Uluru National Park into four categories: *Punu* (trees), *Puti* (shrubs), *Tjulpuntjulpunpa* (flowers) and *Ukiri* (grasses).

Please offer your support to Land for Wildlife by donating much needed funds (see right).



Your money helps us to continue to support you.....to support our wildlife

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