



Land for Wildlife and Garden for Wildlife Central Australia Newsletter

August 2018

Farewell from the Team

Myself and Candice are moving on to our next chapter in life, relocating to the east coast of Australia. After three and a half years in Central Australia, I am feeling sad to be leaving the red earths and grey leaves behind for now. Candice Appleby has been in and out of Central Oz for over twelve years and so her connection with country runs deep. But all good things must come to an end and other good things come in their place!

I have had an amazing time working as the Land for Wildlife coordinator for the last two and a half years, taking on the challenges of plant identification, environmental issues in a new landscape and community engagement in a transient town with all the energy I had to muster. I can only hope that I made a difference, even in the short time I was here, by increasing knowledge of landholders and enthusing the community to care for wildlife habitat.



It seems fitting to have the Western Bowerbird (*Ptilonorhynchus guttatus*) as the cover picture for my last in situ newsletter. See pg 6.

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At a progress level, we were able to run a round of cat monitoring, hosted the Land for Wildlife's 15th birthday, got the NT Register of Significant Trees up and active (and online!) and a few other interesting workshops to engage with the community (Buffel busters tour, mist netting workshop). Some biodiversity surveys run over the years proved to be a fun way to learn about the wildlife and the newsletters kept me on my toes as well. The website overhaul was something that consumed some time, as did updating the land unit and vegetation maps.

My main goal, no matter the avenue to achieve it, was to engage with our existing members and build the profile of the program. The feedback I have received over the years and the two awards under our belt seems to show that the hard yards were worth it. So I feel proud to hand over the program to the next coordinator in a healthy state. However, the program has been such a group effort over the 16 years of its presence, with myself and Candice coming in as the fourteenth and fifteenth coordinators of the program in its tenure. And each coordinator has brought in a new set of skills and focus areas that have helped to make the program what it is.

I feel privileged that I was able to work alongside a community that already has so much experience and knowledge. With groups like the Australian Plants Society Alice Springs and the Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club, we are spoiled for choice with groups to share enthusiasm with. The knowledge of their members is a testament to the willingness of the community to learn about the environment and share it with others.

While this is farewell from us for Alice Springs, it's not farewell from the program just yet. I will be taking up a new role with Clarence Valley Council in Grafton on a part-time basis and so will be sticking with Land for Wildlife Central Australia for a while doing a day a week of remote work to help the program run smoothly during the transition to a new coordinator. You may see my flourishes on various projects or in newsletter articles here and there. So I'll be around in spirit, just not physically in the red centre. Thanks for a jolly good time!

~ Caragh Heenan



Seeking a Land for Wildlife Coordinator

Caragh Heenan, the current Land for Wildlife Coordinator, is sadly moving on to a new role. As a result, Land for Wildlife Central Australia is looking for a new full-time coordinator to take over the management of the program.

Do you think you have what it takes to engage the community regarding natural resource management? Download the [position description](#) and apply now!



Vegetation List Upgrade

As many of our members will be aware, when you sign up to the program, you are provided with a map of your suburb and the associated vegetation list for the relevant block. We have had a lot of feedback regarding the lists with members asking for more information on the plant species and what their growth habits are. We are here to please! We've been working on upgrading the lists so that they include the growth habit, but are still sorted alphabetically for easy searching. The growth habits include Grass, Sedge/Rush, Herb, Shrub, Mistletoe, and Tree. The scientific nomenclature has also been updated.

You can find the updated lists on the [Vegetation Maps](#) webpage within our site.

If you require further help in identifying which plants on the list suit your particular needs, check out the [Books for Sale](#) page to find a plant reference guide, or come and speak to us at the next event we attend with the Land for Wildlife stall.

Note that if you have downloaded lists from the site in the past, you may need to open the link in an incognito browser so that your computer doesn't recognise the file and re-open a previously downloaded version.

Fauna of Alice Springs List Upgrade

With the introduction of genetic mapping of DNA, the taxonomy and nomenclature of species is constantly shifting and it's certainly a task to keep on top of the standards! At Land for Wildlife, we generally use the accepted nomenclature based on entries in the [Atlas of Living Australia](#). To keep the fact sheets you receive up to date, we have been taking note of changes and have updated the Fauna of Alice Springs list to come into line with accepted nomenclature (for now...).

You can find the updated list on the [Native Fauna](#) webpage within our site, or download the [Fauna of the Alice Springs Region](#) list directly.

Note that if you have downloaded this fact sheet from the site in the past, you may need to open the link in an incognito browser so that your computer doesn't recognise the file and re-open a previously downloaded version.



New Growing Native Plants Fact Sheet

Land for Wildlife hosted a workshop at the 15th Birthday event in 2017 on seed collection, presented by Samantha Hussey from Charles Darwin University. The workshop stimulated a newsletter article, which appeared in the [November 2017](#) issue. We've been working on expanding the information to include propagation of seed and cuttings to give you a quick and dirty guide to growing native plants yourself. It's not comprehensive so you may need to experiment or attend an Australian Plants Society Inc. Alice Springs propagation workshop or a CDU course for more detail.

You can find the fact sheet on the [Native Plants and Gardening](#) webpage within our site or download the [Propagation and Revegetation](#) fact sheet directly.

Ecological Observations

By Des Nelson

My article on the origin and spread of Buffel Grass (*Cenchrus ciliaris*) posted in the Alice Springs News online (and shared on the Land for Wildlife blog as [A Buffel Grass Story](#) promoted some discussion. Among topics it was said that the cover provided by Buffel Grass would prevent dust storms such as were experienced in the 1958-65 drought. It was also claimed that without Buffel Grass the ground vegetation would dry off and be blown away by winds.

Dealing with the first statement, I hope that this will never be put to the test as it could only be proved by the advent of another protracted drought. Should such an event occur again, Buffel Grass would certainly die, as did areas of Spinifex (*Triodia* sp.) in the big drought.

The idea that native ground cover would blow away was proven incorrect in my experience.

In 1960 I built ten small enclosures on the Burt Plain between the Burt and Harry Creeks. They were part of a project designed to study the diet of the Red Kangaroo (*Osphranter rufus*, formerly *Macropus rufus*). As Yambah Station on which the trials were conducted was lightly stocked, it fared better than did some other properties. Even so there became a dramatic difference between fenced-off and open spaces. Ground vegetation in the enclosed areas remained largely intact throughout the drought, whereas outside areas had vegetation denuded by Cattle (*Bos taurus*) and Kangaroos grazing. Eventually, Kangaroos broke through the Ringlock fencing of one enclosure to get at the protected pasture.

A more dramatic evidence of the stability of ground cover and its removal took place at Atherritta Bore at the base of the Rodinga Range on the southern boundary of Todd River Station. Atherritta Bore was a drought-relief bore that had never been stocked when I visited the area in 1964 to conduct a vegetation survey. The stocked areas of the station had been denuded to such an extent that the Hereford Cattle were climbing high into the hills searching for feed, or, as told to me by the station owner Sandy Pye, walked out as far as 22 km from a watering point looking for feed. I, myself, followed Cattle tracks for 15 km from Camel Flat Bore, but turned backed as I had to get on with work. The Cattle came in every second night to have a drink. On another trip I saw Cattle, Herefords again, high in the hills on Bushy Park station. They were climbing along Euro (*Osphranter robustus subsp. robustus*) pads.

Although the drought was well advanced I recorded 55 species of ground cover plants up to 1.5 km from Atherritta Bore. Most were dried out, some were recorded as abundant. Along the drain that took the overflow from the bore tank was a line of Buffel Grass. I was told the seed had been planted by the contractors who built the bore. The only other place on the station that showed any ground cover was in a small paddock at Halfway Bore in which was a dense stand of dry Silky Browntop Grass (*Eulalia aurea*).

When my survey was completed, 400 Cattle were shifted to Atherritta. The area was eaten out in six months and the Cattle removed. I returned there in 1965. A vegetation survey was easy as the place looked as if it had been swept clean. The plants had not blown away; they had been eaten away. The Cattle had also heavily grazed trees and shrubs, in particular Whitewood (*Atalaya hemiglauca*), Mulga (*Acacia aneura* s.lat.), Emu Bush (*Eremophila longifolia*), and Plumbush (*Santalum lanceolatum*). Although severely grazed, the Buffel Grass along the bore drain persisted. The fence of the paddock at Halfway Bore had been broken into and no trace of the Silky Browntop remained.

Good rains fell in early 1966. When I went back to Atherritta in June I noted how well growth had returned, although the plant composition was different from the original growth. In particular, there was a lot of Birdsville Indigo (*Indigofera linnaei*) present in an area on which a horse paddock was proposed. Birdsville Indigo is the cause of the deadly Birdsville disease in horses. Silky Browntop had regenerated at Halfway Bore. The Buffel Grass near Atherritta Bore had increased but not to a great extent.

Further surveys were made up to 1972. The Buffel Grass at Atherritta appeared to have settled to a relatively small area. Another visit was not made until October 1979. In between this time the Centre had experienced a series of very wet years. Now the Buffel Grass had made a great increase, noted to cover at least 50 hectares of a virtually monospecific community.



(Continued from page 4)

By 1983, Buffel Grass had colonised the Atheritta region to such an extent it was recorded as "Dominant in entire area as far as the eye can see". It was also recorded as abundant at Halfway Bore.

I will add here some further observations from the past of Buffel Grass sightings, from my personal records:

- » 1959: Between Tanami and Hooker Creek (Lajamanu). Before the establishment of Supplejack Station. Specimen collected.
- » 1964: Specimens collected at Katherine (common on footpaths), Elliott, Renner Springs, Barrow Creek.
- » 1966: Noted as scattered at No. 6 Bore Manners Creek Station.
- » 1967: Noted at No. 6 Bore as covering several hectares and spreading up to 400 m from it.
- » 1976: Noted as covering the area of a flood-out of the Todd River south of Ringwood.

[Blog►](#)

~ Des Nelson OAM

Alice Springs, May 2018

NT NRM Awards

Do you know someone who has helped to safeguard a threatened species? A primary producer who has taken the long view and is farming sustainably with an eye to the future? Is there a school or community group in your area actively engaging in resource issues and changing how we interact with our surroundings? A conservation group whose collaboration has resulted in real action and tangible results? Take the first step in recognising the Territory's champions of nature, conservation and farming for the future by nominating an individual, group or organisation you know for one of TNRM's prestigious awards.

There are awards on offer in 10 categories - including the new TNRM Lifetime Achievement Medal. The medal will be presented to the individual who best reflects the NRM vision through their exceptional contribution to nature, conservation or farming for the future.

The remaining categories are;

- Best Collaboration in Natural Resource Management
- Farmers & Fishers Sustainability Award
- Indigenous Natural Resource Management Award
- Ranger of the Year Award
- Research in Natural Resource Management Award
- Community Engagement & Action Award
- Junior Natural Resource Management Champion Award
- Sustainable Enterprise Award
- Environment & Conservation Award



*Nominations open until midnight on
Monday, 3rd September.*

*More information to be found at
[https://www.territorynrm.org.au/
awards](https://www.territorynrm.org.au/awards)*

**The Land wildlife
team at the Awards
in 2017.**

CONGRATULATIONS
Australian Government Excellence
for Landcare
Australian Government Excellence
in Sustainable Farm Practices
Australian Government Innovation
in Agriculture Land Management
Fairfax Landcare Community Group
Junior Landcare Team
Rio Tinto Indigenous Land
Management
Austcover Young Landcare Leader



2018 CONFERENCE 13-15 NOVEMBER, DARWIN

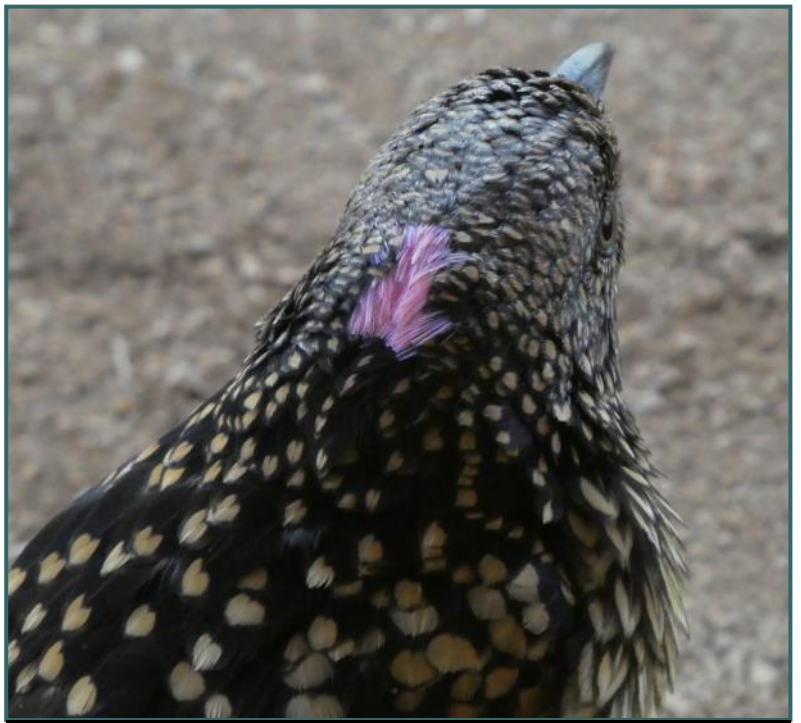
Goodbye, my Kindred Spirit

I feel like the Western Bowerbird (*Ptilonorhynchus guttatus*) is my kindred spirit. Quirky, hops around making silly noises while trying to look serious, and generally collecting all manner of things to make a nice home. When I first arrived in Central Australia, I was living in Mutitjulu at the base of Uluru and working for Parks Australia. One day while pottering around the house, I heard what sounded like a puppy making yappy noises. I went outside ready to greet the new dog that I assumed my neighbour had obtained. I was mystified when I got to the fence and there was no dog in sight. A few moments and some head-scratching later, I found the source of the carry-on. A somewhat chubby Bowerbird was sitting amongst the Arnguli bush having a laugh with its call that is reminiscent of a broken motor. A mimic!

In my time at Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, I was lucky to work with a supervisor that was as enthusiastic about bird antics as I am. He told me stories about the local birds and encouraged me to visit Olive Pink Botanic Garden (a long-time Land for Wildlife member) as there was a bower (hence the name!) there that was well-tended and a must-see. I fulfilled my promise to do so and snapped a pic of the bower within a few days of arriving in town.

The species is currently accepted as *Ptilonorhynchus guttatus*, however has been known in the past as *Chlamydera guttata*, with the word 'guttata' meaning spotted and referring to the plumage. They can be found throughout central Australia and within an arid central strip over to the west coast. There are eleven species of Bowerbird found in Australia: the Tooth-billed Bowerbird (*Scenopoeetes dentiostri*) and Golden Bowerbird (*Amblyornis newtonianus*) in north-eastern QLD, the Regent Bowerbird (*Sericulus chrysocephalus*) and Satin Bowerbird (*Ptilonorhynchus violaceus*) of the mid-east coast, the Spotted Bowerbird (*Ptilonorhynchus maculatus*) of inland eastern Australia, the Great Bowerbird (*Ptilonorhynchus nuchalis*) of northern Australia, Fawn-breasted Bowerbird (*Ptilonorhynchus cerviniventris*) of Cape Tribulation in FNQ, and our local, the Western Bowerbird. There is also the Spotted Catbird (*Ailuroedus maculosus*) and Black-eared Catbird (*Ailuroedus melanotis*) in north-eastern QLD, and the Green Catbird (*Ailuroedus crassirostris*) along the eastern coast of Australia. Of these species, nine are endemic to Australia, with only the Spotted Catbird and Fawn-breasted Bowerbird found in New Guinea as well.

The Bowerbird is famous for building a bower, a structure made from sticks that is used to display for females. Within Australian species, there are avenue designs (as in the Western Bowerbird and others of the *Ptilonorhynchus* and *Sericulus* genus), court designs (*Scenopoeetes*), and maypole (*Amblyornis*). The Catbirds do not produce a bower, despite being closely related species. The bowers of the Western Bowerbird are decorated with a variety of objects, usually green or white in colour (though other species have different colour preferences), such as



The Western Bowerbird (*Ptilonorhynchus guttatus*) has a splash of pink on the crest that is flared out during display.



(Continued from page 6)

shells, pebbles and bones. Near human habitation, man-made objects such as bottle caps, pegs and other plastics are often prized decorations. When native figs are fruiting, they are removed from trees while still green and used to decorate a bower.

The Western Bowerbird has a splash of pink on the nape of the neck known as a nuchal crest, which shimmers in the right light. Males and females are similar, with a slightly longer tail in the female. The male is polygamous and will mate with several females, leaving them to tend the nest (located away from the bower). As opposed to the bower, the nest itself is a shallow cup of twigs and sticks, housing a couple of buff coloured eggs with a scribbly pattern.

The bower is constructed and decorated by the male alone. He will advertise the bower with calls and performs ritual dances in the presence of a female. Some objects will be picked up in the bill and shaken around to display to the female. On one occasion, I saw an opportunistic male pick up a green leaf in the presence of a female and use it to display as he was away from the bower at the time and didn't want to miss a trick. So what about the puppy? The Bowerbird is a great mimic! In the years of living in Central Australia, I've heard these cheeky birds copy a Cat meow, mimic Whistling Kites and do a poor impression of an Australian Ringneck. It will learn calls of other birds and use them to display and possibly also to want others off a territory. If you were a small bird, wouldn't you stay clear of a bird bath that was being visited by a Whistling Kite? With several Bowerbirds visiting the yard to use the bird bath every day, you would think their antics would become old hat. But still, I find them hilarious. And it seems only fitting that I dedicate an article to them before I scoot out of their neighbourhood. Goodbye, my kindred spirit!



The bower is used for displaying mating prowess and is usually adorned with white or green items. Their eggs are patterned with brown scribbly lines (Image of subspecies *carteri* found in WA: Museums Victoria).





Land for Wildlife at the DesertSmart EcoFair

Land for Wildlife Central Australia took part in the DesertSmart EcoFair again this year, with the Arid Lands Environment Centre proving to run an excellent event yet again. There were various activities spread out over a few days, with Land for Wildlife hosting a workshop at the schools day and a stall at the EcoFair markets.

The schools day has historically been run over a single morning, with four sessions of 40 minutes. This year, it was game on with two consecutive days of school workshop mornings. Land for Wildlife's Caragh Heenan and Candice Appleby had a range of activities for school students from St Philips, Sadadeen Primary and Centralian Middle School. Students were asked to watch two short videos on biodiversity before the session (one by [CSIRO](#) and another by [TED Education](#)), with the follow-up question of 'why is biodiversity important locally?'.



This opened up the discussion on the main components of habitat, how habitat influences biodiversity, and what happens when habitat is compromised. The discussion led on to threatened species, with students being asked to think of some threatening processes in central Australia that could result in species decline.

Weeds, feral species, land clearance and anthropogenic climate change were all on the agenda.

Older students were then given an activity that involved splitting into groups with butchers paper, pens and a thinking cap. Each group had a threatened species biography and were asked to brainstorm actions that could be taken to halt the decline of the species or even boost populations. The students were switched on and came up with some excellent ideas!

Younger students were given an activity that involved each student being provided with a plant or animal and food web connections were made between each of them. What happens if a student (plant/animal) is no longer present in the environment due to species extinction? The connections break and the kids got it in one—our future seems like it's in good hands!

A follow-up activity was asking students to assess the habitat components in their school to see if there were small ways that they could increase biodiversity in their backyards.

Sunday saw the team attend the markets with the Land for Wildlife stall, a chat with Costa and plenty of new interest in the program.

Above: Candice Appleby from Land for Wildlife and students at the DesertSmart EcoFair Schools Day 2018 learning about biodiversity and threatened species.
Below: The Land for Wildlife team chat with Costa Georgiadis regarding the importance of conserving small patches of land for wildlife habitat (Image: J. Francis).





Join us for
A DAY IN NATURE

**MEET ON THE LAST SUNDAY OF EACH MONTH FROM 7:30AM TO 10:30AM
 TO HELP OUR BEAUTIFUL ALICE SPRINGS' BIODIVERSITY***

**SUNDAY
 AUG 26**

**COOLIBAH SWAMP
 TREE PROTECTION**

**CALL JUDE
 0497038210**

**SUNDAY
 SEPT 30**

**ILPARPA CLAYPANS
 BUFFEL CONTROL**

**CALL MARIE
 0467879254**

**SUNDAY
 OCT 28**

**EASTSIDE
 CACTUS CONTROL**

**CALL SUNIL
 0400889010**

**SUNDAY
 NOV 18**

**TELEGRAPH STATION
 AGM**

**CALL SUNIL
 0400889010**

***PLEASE WEAR COVERED FOOTWEAR AND BYO HAT, WATER, GLOVES AND A MATTOCK IF YOU HAVE ONE !**

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Crimson Foxtail (*Ptilotus sessilifolius*) in bloom.

Further Reading

Click the link symbol to be redirected to the article



Article • Wildlife in a tangle



Article • Mistletoe, friend or foe? Melbourne Council arborists embrace a former pest



Article • Mistletoe as a keystone



Audio • John Woinarski interview about cats



Video • Trees in Time

Cheers,

Caragh, Candice and Bill

Do you have any stories or images to share? Get in touch! We are always looking for members to share their experiences via our social media and newsletter. Email us with your suggestions of articles or topics that you wish to hear more about.

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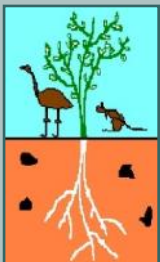
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