



**Land for Wildlife and Garden for Wildlife
Central Australia Newsletter**

February 2019

From the Land for Wildlife Coordinator

For those of us that remained in Central Australia over the seasonal break (habitat and wildlife included), we have suffered through weeks of extreme heat, no rain and hot and blustery winds. Is this the future weather for the Central Australian region and it's inhabitants? Can we really foresee the future climate? And does a rapidly changing climate matter? Well, yes it matters and for an endless list of reasons that you can find clear and reliable information about (google 'climate change impacts'; see our section 'Further Reading'). Closer to home (and our hearts), LfW & GfW members are observing wildlife visiting shaded areas and/or water sources on their properties; of failed breeding attempts by multiple species of birds e.g. Black-faced Cuckoo Shrikes, Western Bowerbirds, Crested Pigeons, and; the demise and death of native vegetation. These stories are both worrying and sad. As we sit in air-conditioned homes and offices, or soak our hot bodies in swimming pools, let us not forget the good fight that all of you are party to - caring for our country, our backyard and our wildlife. You can help by placing extra bowls of fresh, clean water under shrubs and trees (add a large rock or lean a stick in water for animals to climb out if they fall in), and offer a thirsty plant a drink every so often. A friend once told me that during a prolonged drought, she talked to her struggling trees, encouraging them to hang on, that rain would come again. [I believe] they heard, because she didn't lose a single tree. So...go hug a tree and see how it makes you (and it) feel!

~ Kate Stevens

*“Bugs are not going to inherit the earth. They own it now.”
— Thomas Eisner*



A thirsty collection of bees finding refreshment from a Land for Wildlifer's birdbath, Connellan
Image: Marc Gooch

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Local feral trappers record amazing success!!

Recently I have been catching up with our members who have been putting the different types of feral traps we have available for loan, to very good use. The reason for following up with trappers is three-fold:

1. Check if traps are still required (length of loan is limitless);
2. Compile trapping data for our records, and;
3. Provide trapping data to the Alice Springs Town Council via the quarterly Environmental Advisory Committee meetings, where I present as *your* representative.

I have to say that I have been encouraged with the commitment, persistence and ethical attitude that exists amongst our members, and who are regularly trapping feral animals on their properties. I am also delighted with reports of the numbers of feral animals that folks are catching (or should I be alarmed???) On average, every cat trapper has caught between 2-6 cats over a period of anywhere between 5 weeks and 18 months. And while I have only received one Spotted Turtle-dove (STD) trapper's data, Sharon, our star STD trapper, has caught 239 doves over an 18 month period! Land for Wildlife & Garden for Wildlife extend our hearty congratulations and thanks to all our dedicated feral animal trappers and encourage other members to utilise the traps we have available for loan (see next page for details).

When I received the email confirming Sharon's trapping record of 239 doves, I went to visit her for a chat about how she had reaped such amazing success, and discuss her experience of trapping doves in urban environs. Here's Sharon's trapping story:

Sharon's Spotted Turtle-dove trapping methods :

Sharon decided it might be a nice idea to keep a couple of chickens in her backyard, supplying her and her two boys Jacka and xxx, with a regular supply of fresh eggs and a healthy dose of enjoyment. It wasn't long before Spotted Turtle-doves (STD), also discovered what a good idea it was. To their benefit there was now access to food (and fresh water) in the form of chicken feed available in Sharon's backyard!! Spotted Turtle-doves are none too shy and were introduced to Alice from a release of 10 birds from an aviary. The species is now classified as a pest in Alice Springs, mostly because of the detrimental impacts on native birds, and the nuisance it causes around peoples chicken coops.

Initially, Sharon tried to deter the prevalence and nuisance of STDs by having an enclosed pen for her chickens. However, the doves simply sat on top of the coop and patiently waited for the chickens to be let out of their cage to forage in the yard. The doves then had easy access to the chicken feed as the coop door needed to remain open for the chickens to access the food and water also.

Sharon then heard about Land for Wildlife providing feral animal traps for loan. Although she wasn't a member of either of our programs (Land for Wildlife/Garden for Wildlife), she followed up with us and was happily loaned an available dove trap. Sharon thought about the placement of the dove trap to maximise trapping success. She decided that an optimum location might be right next to the chicken coop. Eureka!! 18 months and (over) 240 trapped doves later, her record tells the story.

Things that Sharon keeps in mind when it comes to ethical considerations are:

- To avoid walking near the trap as much as possible when doves are inside,
- Regular (at least twice a day) checks of the cage and releasing native birds immediately,
- Doves are retained in the cage with fresh water and food until an end-of-the-week trip to transport the birds to the Desert Park,
- For transporting the birds, Sharon covers a smaller pet cage with a towel to reduce the stress to the birds. Sharon commented that they are quite calm when in the smaller cage and restricted in their movements,
- Pet dogs or visitors are kept away from the area where cage is located.

Transferring the birds into the 'feral bird cage' (located on Workers Rd, Desert Park) is straight forward with a small door on the side of the cage to release the birds into the interior. I have confirmed that the feral bird cage at Desert Park is accessible to the public during the hours that staff are on site. Available times are:

Weekdays 7 am – 9 pm; Weekends 7 am – 6 pm

Challenges.

Sharon found that some of the challenges she encountered she was able to use her ingenuity and come up with workable solutions. Due to the birds moving to the back of the cage when Sharon was retrieving them for transportation, she couldn't reach them. She enlisted the eager help of her two boys, Shayden, 11 yrs and Jaka, 9, to each stand at a back corner of the cage. This method gently encouraged the birds forward and Sharon was able to then reach the birds for retrieval. Owing to the continuing catch numbers, transportation costs to the Desert Park soon needed to be accounted for in the weekly budget. However, by transporting a cache of birds at the end of the week, reduced the costs. Sharon says that she now sees the costs as her financial contribution to the environmental effort.

Another challenge that Sharon faced was the Desert Park's opening times which impacted on access to the feral bird cage. However, since visiting Sharon I have confirmed with staff that a broader range of times are available for access (see previous page for times.)

Benefits.

Since beginning her trapping efforts, Sharon has noticed many benefits, not least of which there is now more food available for the families chickens. So Sharon is saving money on chicken feed which helps to balance out transportation cost. Sharon and the boys find that providing this environmental service in their own backyard, has shown an increase in the number of native birds and bird species visiting or inhabiting their garden. And importantly, they feel a sense of real satisfaction that they are contributing to the global effort to increase biodiversity in their local area

On behalf of everyone here and our wildlife,



"I like it when I sit and observe, and see birds [!] haven't seen before, and go 'Ooooh, what's that?' It's awesome!"

Sharon & Jaka show their Spotted Turtle-dove trap set up. Sharon and her two boys have caught more than 240 doves in just 18 months (including the 4 doves in the trap at the time of photo)!

Land for Wildlife loan a variety of feral traps to our members. We also loan to interested non-members if traps are available. Requirements for loaning a trap is a signed agreement to trap animals ethically and your details. If you or anyone you know are interested, please contact us to enquire about trap availability. Feral animal traps we loan include:

- » Cats
- » Dogs
- » Spotted Turtle-doves
- » Rabbits

CAMOUFLAGE

From 1969 to 1973 I monitored the growth of Witchetty Bushes (*Acacia kempeana*) in scrub to south of the Alice Springs airport, a project initiated by the late NT botanist John Maconochie. On selected stems of the bushes it was necessary to count the number of phyllodes [flattened leaf stalks which have adapted to look like and function as leaves] as growth progressed. When phyllodes were shed the scars left on the stems were also noted. Flowering was also recorded, from earliest bud emergence.



A problem arose when the number of phyllode scars showed anomalies during the monthly recordings. Sometimes there were too many to make sense. I began to think my eyesight was faulty until I saw some of the scars moving on the stems. They were tiny Jassids, which imitated exactly, the scars left when the phyllodes had fallen.

After a good rainfall the bushes grew and began to produce nucleus flower buds. Again, I was fascinated to see some of these moving away from their snug places at the bases of phyllodes. These were tiny yellow-green spiders the precise colours of forming flower buds. Without having to do such close examination of the Witchetty Bush stems I would not have noticed these little creatures. Perhaps the spiders preyed on the tiny Jassids.



Much larger but difficult to see is a Phasma, or Stick Insect, unless it moves. It is slender about 7cm in length and is straw yellow in colour. It resembles perfectly the dry stems of the grass *Aristida holathera*, known to some as 'Kerosene grass.'

Now I will describe a real winner in the art of disguise. It's a long time since I was first puzzled by seeing a mobile kangaroo faecal dropping while at work in Mulga country. It was a beetle, round in shape, of the size and colour to exactly resemble a red kangaroo scat. I saw a lot of these insects over the years, now I knew what to look for. Usually they were immobile, no doubt doing their necessary activities nocturnally.



It makes you wonder how long it was needed for an insect to develop its protection in such a way.

~ Des Nelson



Goathed Burr—an indicator of poor soil condition.

Image: SA Seed Conservation Collection

Prickly Problems and Spikey Snacks

We've updated our 'Guide to Identifying Bindiis, Burrs and Prickles'

They may be a nuisance, and you most certainly don't want them around when walking barefoot, but bindii and burrs are a favourite snack of birds in Central Australia, and we guarantee that you'll have a variety of bird species feasting on them in your garden.

We have updated our [facts sheet](#), which includes a helpful picture guide to assist in identifying what prickles the birds in your backyard are eating... or what's embedded in the bottom of your foot!!!

MEET OUR NEWEST LAND FOR WILDLIFER'S

Elaine and Doug Draeger joined the Land for Wildlife Central Australia family in January this year.

Doug and Elaine are maintaining and restoring habitat values to the vegetation on their property in Ilparpa. They are regularly visited by numerous reptiles and bird species, including the Grey-crowned Babbler. Doug and Elaine live in an area that would typically flourish with Mulga and Corkwood vegetation communities.



As well as providing habitat for wildlife on their property, Elaine has previously been a kangaroo carer, and Doug has an added interest in restoring WWII trucks that were used for transporting supplies to Central Australian stations.

Doug and Elaine Draeger proudly hold their Land for Wildlife sign at their Ilparpa property

Looking after habitat gardens during prolonged dry

Keeping our gardens and vital wildlife habitat alive during a continuing hot and dry spell can be daunting in an already arid environment. Here are some great tips to increase the resilience of your gardens (if you don't know about them already!) It doesn't take much to give a little thanks and TLC to our species that continuously provides support to life.

- Water first thing in the morning and instead of quickie irrigation, a nice deep drink a couple of times a week is far more beneficial!
- If you haven't done so already, look into drip irrigation. This will put the water where it is needed as well as reducing the risk of powdery mildew when the leaves get wet.
- Top up mulch on your garden patches. A hot summer tip is to mulch after watering the patch to a depth of about 7cm. Keep mulch clear of plant stems... especially young seedlings. Choose sustainable, low environmental impact mulch, one that will enrich your soil as it breaks down.
- On non-gardening days, why not head out to the shed, and construct a couple of shade cloth tents. They don't have to be elaborate, just a simple, moveable structure that you can pop over young or more vulnerable plants as the heat becomes more intense. Think of it as slip, slop, slap for plants! Pop these around where required, especially on high UV days, windy days, and extended periods when you are not at home e.g. holidays.
- Protect your pot plants which dry out faster than garden beds. Mulch the top of the pots, sit them in a saucer of water for a deep drink, or even run dripper lines to them from your main irrigation pipes.
- Check out the Sustainable Gardening Australia fact sheet [Irrigation In An Arid Nation](#) which has loads more info on smart water habits.

Below: Native flora species of arid Central Australia are usually drought tolerant and hardy. However, prolonged periods with little or no rain, and climate change pressures, may increase stress on the more vulnerable plants in gardens. Watch out for signs of stress in your plants and provide support by incorporating some of the gardening tips above.



Eucalyptus camaldulensis* var. *obtusa* — River Red Gum*Scientific Name:***Eucalyptus camaldulensis* var. *obtusa***Common Name:**

River Red Gum

Register Number:

28

Location of Tree:Roadside Planting on Gap Rd,
Alice Springs NT**GPS:**

-23.70281, 133.8808

Categories of Significance:Aesthetic
Unique Location
Group**Number of Trees:**Many, Whole avenue roadside
planting**Date Planted:**

1960's

Planted By:Jan Reus – Along Gap Rd
Remnant – Vacant lots**Year Listed:**

1996

The avenue of River Red Gums along Gap Road provides an important contribution to the 'sense of place' for Alice Springs. Dry river beds lined with these majestic trees are a symbol of the arid landscape of Alice Springs and surrounds. This avenue is significant for its aesthetic appeal and the important contribution it makes to the landscape along this road. Roadside Gums were planted in the 1960's by Jan Reus. However the gums in a vacant lot on the corner of Gap Road and Stott Terrace are remnant and indicative of the old floodwater levels of the Todd River. Some of the remnant gums could be over 300 years of age.



Register of Significant Trees

View the [NT Register of Significant Trees](#) page to learn more about the register. *The NT Register of Significant Trees was established by the National Trust NT and Greening Australia and is managed by Land for Wildlife Central Australia.*



**Australian Plant Society, Alice Springs
Annual General Meeting & Presentation
Wednesday 6th March 2019, 7.30pm
@ Olive Pink Botanic Gardens**

Come to celebrate a great 2018 program, cheers to an exciting 2019 program, put your hand up for a committee position, do yourself in to lead a walk or just renew your membership! Join us for the 2019 AGM and stick around to hear from Doug McDougall who will be taking us for a tour of the Jerusalem Botanic Gardens where he was based for 6 months in 2018. This is Israel's largest collection of live plants and home to many rare species. He will also take us to his favorite natural places in Israel, from the alpine regions in the north to desert canyons in the south.

Join us for a light supper following.
All Welcome!



The Habitat Quiz...??

1. What is a Cryptogam?
2. Which of the following is nature's toughest fibre? Is it a) spider silk, b) limpet teeth, c) cocoon silk, or d) qiviut?
3. Why is the Spotted Turtle-dove considered a pest species in the Alice Springs region?
4. What is the common or botanical name of the crimson flower pictured in the front page banner of this month's newsletter ?
5. Can you identify with the common *and* botanical names, the three flora species pictured in the article on page 6, which provides some tips for caring for native gardens in arid regions of Australia?
6. What is the first tree that was listed on the Central Australian Register of the NT Significant Tree Register, and where is it located?

Answers will be in the next newsletter

December 2018 Newsletter Habitat Quiz Answers

1. C). *Callistemon*. This showy native species is commonly known as the Bottlebrush and has flowers ranging from pale cream to vivid red. Some *Callistemon* species have been reclassified into the genus *Melaleuca*.
2. The spider is commonly referred to as a Golden Orb or Golden Orb Weaver (Genus: *Nephila*.)
3. The golden hue in the spiders thread that it uses to weave it's web gives the spider it's name.
4. Leaf litter. This describes the accumulation of leaf, twigs and bark that collects on the ground under trees and provides critical habitat needs for insects, lizards, birds and seed banks.
5. The sculpture in the Cultural Centre gardens in Alice is of the Yeperenye (pronounced Ayepe-arenye) caterpillar. This species is the most important of the three caterpillars that are the major creative ancestors of Alice Springs.
6. The plant species *Aerva javanica* is not native in Alice Springs, but originates from south-east & southern Asia

Further Reading

Click the link symbol to be redirected to the article



Article • How to use trees as 'drought busters'



Article • What are the impacts of climate change?



Article • When extreme weather wipes out wildlife, the fall out can be long lasting



Article • A guide to helping our native animals with the heat



Article • Identifying and maintaining wildlife refuges from threats

Cheers,

Kate, 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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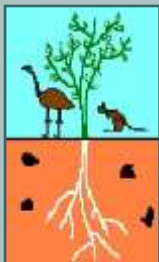
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