



Land for Wildlife and Garden for Wildlife Central Australia Newsletter

July 2020

From the Land for Wildlife Coordinators

Hi everyone

Welcome to the Newsletter's middle-of-winter edition. The cooler weather is certainly making itself uncomfortably known, especially in the overnight temperatures of late. Much of the environment has hunkered down to save energy now there is less availability of critical resources such as sunlight, warmth and water. Mature plants are seemingly static and seedlings have slowed their growth rate substantially. Those wildlife that tend to go into a period of brumation will now be snoring, and little if any breeding is being undertaken. All in all, it's really just too cold to do much else except eat, sleep and enjoy the warming sunshine during the day. For us human animals it's a good time to do similar, hence we have compiled some interesting local Land & Garden for Wildlife reading material for your enjoyment, perhaps to sit with a cuppa outside in your own garden in the pleasurable warm sunshine.

Over the last two months we have completed several on-ground property assessments of new program members and discussed ideas, provided ready advice and a detailed membership package to assist them achieve their habitat management objectives. We asked them about their gardening experiences and observations and how being part of the program might help them in their planting plans. So this edition is a lot about our new program members who have recently joined the '... for Wildlife' community of conservation champions.

We hope that some of their stories might inspire you with new ideas or opportunities for projects in your own habitat garden, and long may you delight in your efforts (and the warm sunshine!)

*"Small acts, when
multiplied by millions
of people, can
transform the world."*
- Unknown

**A VERY BIG THANKS to the
following members for their
generous financial donations:**

*Sharon Bliss
Bronwyn & Marcus Druce
Marilyn & Allan O'Keefe
Liz Olle
Chris Schlesinger &
Clive Rosewarne
Chris Connellan*

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The tiny, delicate pink flowers of *Zaleya galericulata*, aka Hogweed!!



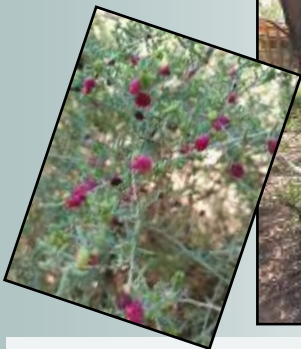
Pre-order your local native plant hampers ready for Spring planting.

Hampers are available to Land & Garden for Wildlife members only.

We can tailor hampers to your property's natural vegetation type or your heart's desire.

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IN KATHRYN'S SACRED GARDEN



Kathryn Thompson (KT) is no stranger to hard work. Taking me on a tour of her delightful habitat garden, KT regaled me with anecdotes of the early vision and efforts she and her (former) husband put into making their garden a refuge and peaceful sanctuary for people and wildlife alike. The garden areas surrounding her house certainly reflect those original aspirations as we observed numerous birds, small skinks and varieties of insects appearing-disappearing-reappearing as we talked and walked.

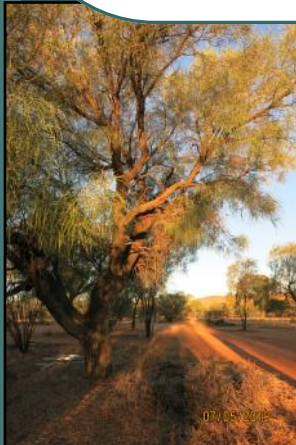
A full-length patio has been constructed on the rear of the house and is a particular favorite area for KT and visitors to pass some quality time bird watching. However, since making the front entrance into a porch/outdoor room, KT has created a different sense of fun where she sits to bird and people watch, while still remaining partially hidden. She told me that she is amused by passerby's shock if she calls out to those that let their dogs defecate in her driveway. They don't realise they are being watched!

KT and her husband bought the property in 2007. At that time the backyard consisted of a lawn, a Hills hoist and a solitary grapevine. The front garden also sported a lawn, a single line of roses and a bauhinia tree, which has since died. They immediately set to work to remove the lawns, plant trees throughout both front and back areas and put in a dripper system. In 2010, they set about establishing their front native garden, which is now resplendent with secret winding pathways and patches of native vegetation that creates a diversity of habitat types and strata. The front garden, now 10-years old, provides good shade over the front of the house and conceals the porch/outdoor sitting area from the street. KT maintains her gardens now by regularly checking the dripper system for calcium build-up etc. and a watering regime which involves running the dripper system twice a week in the summer and every 10 days or so in the winter. Easy!

KT continues to formulate new ideas and aspirations for additional garden enhancements and home business ventures, such as a children's lending library on the front porch and a special area in the backyard designed especially for kids enjoyment and engagement with nature in safe and protected surroundings. KT hopes to welcome visitors and clients into a natural space within Alice Springs where they may find peace, serenity and delight in her garden, which has been tailor made for wildlife. Interestingly, the previous owner was a charismatic lay preacher and conducted backyard bath baptisms, hence the property has had a continual 'enhancement' of spiritual energies for many years. In fact, the idea to facilitate a spiritual or soul refuge came after many visitors commented on how relaxed and restored they felt after their stay, especially being able to just sit and bird watch in the backyard. The garden will undoubtedly provide limitless opportunities for dwellers to witness nature up close and busy living in an urban bushland.

NEW LAND FOR WILDLIFE MEMBERS INCREASE NATIVE HABITAT BEING MANAGED ON PRIVATE LAND IN ILPARPA

New members to Land for Wildlife, and to the Ilparpa/White Gums neighbourhood, Annette, David and Dub Miller, are regenerating the native vegetation on their property for habitat conservation and wildlife refuge



Ironwood tree captured in the long shadows of the

Owing to their inspiring ventures, the Millers are increasing the area of conservation reserves on private properties in the local area...little do the neighbours realise!

Annette and David's land was previously managed as a horse-riding school. The northern area has hence suffered from the impacts of hard-hooved animals evidenced by a lack of visible ground covers, smaller shrubs, herbs or native grasses. Annette and David have been working hard toward remediating the horse paddocks and restore the local native vegetation back in the denuded paddocks.

The southside of the property, which faces Jane Rd, already maintains a large area of native flora, which provides suitable remnant habitat for a variety of wildlife including Red-tailed Black Cockatoos, Major Mitchell Cockatoos, Ring Neck Parrots, skinks and goannas. Being a new Mum and in a time when we have all been experiencing a more simplistic life, Annette has gloried in spending time outdoors in the garden with their baby son, and tending to habitat restoration while observing nature during seasonal changes in our Central Australian desert environment.

Annette shares her habitat gardening experience with us:

Over 18mths ago, we started planting trees (River Red and Ghost Gums & other natives) and letting nature restore itself from the previous horse hoof damage, compaction and vegetation clearing. I did lose some smaller shrubs due to the very hot summer this year, but I am learning more now just by observing the land and thinking of permaculture techniques. I love all native plants and shrubs and am currently researching local natives like grasses and herbs. I am presently interested in Kangaroo Grass, Themeda, and experimenting with its rage against Buffel Grass. Apparently it emits a hormone to suppress other weeds.

Initially, I spent a lot of time hand watering to establish plants. Now I concentrate more on using well rotted manure and existing tree mulch, and instilling more drought tolerant placement and planting. Maintaining the garden now consists of watering at least 1hr every couple of days and sometimes half days pulling out buffel. I should be 1 stone lighter from all the spade work I have been doing with buffel!!!! Hopefully, once the plants are established, I won't have to water the natives except during really really hot spells. New citrus plants though, will need to be fertilized and watered regularly.

Rabbits are a problem. When I plant something new they wait until the new roots are ready and then eat up any progress. They have taken over the sand monitors den under our shipping container. Surprisingly enough, I chicken wire covered up some trees that they started digging at and they survived. The rabbits are quite a nuisance on new local sprouting's and digging near bore pipes. They are burrowing under tree branch piles which have a purpose for collecting seed bank and water flow. I am yet to work out what to do with them [see information over page].



"My favourite part of the property is the dirt, often overlooked, but it's nice just to watch my baby sit on it and explore."



Some of the beautiful native plants and animals on the Miller's Land for Wildlife property (L-R): Turpentine Bush, *Eremophila sturtii*; a very large and lustrous Wild Orange, *Capparis Mitchellii*; and a Bandy-Bandy, *Vermicella annulata*



Solutions for managing rabbits...

Firstly, monitor the rabbit populations to determine density and therefore control method:

- Zero: No sign - No action necessary, other than to monitor for future activity.
- Low density: Some sign, few holes - Limit their habitat.
- Medium density: Active warrens present, scratches, dung heaps, feeding areas - Limit their habitat, bait with Pindone.
- High density: Abundant active warrens, rabbits visible - Limit their habitat, bait with Pindone, fumigate warrens.

Limit Their Habitat

The best way to minimise the impact of rabbits on your block is to remove places where they can hide, and protect plants from browsing. We recommend that you:

- Remove piles of debris such as roofing iron, timber, mounds of dead branches etc. These materials provide a good place for rabbits to hide and protect them while digging holes. Get rid of the rubbish and you may well get rid of the rabbits. Scatter the dead branches around the place to provide habitat for lizards, small birds, etc.
- Block holes underneath buildings to prevent rabbits from living there.
- Look for warrens, and if you find one, block the holes with newspaper (they don't like digging through it) and then cover with dirt.
- Protect plants from rabbits and euros using mesh or plastic tree guards.
- Note that rabbit-proof fencing is not always recommended for the property boundary, as it limits movement of native wildlife (we want to be attracting native wildlife to the property, after all).

Fumigation

Fumigation of rabbit warrens is suitable for controlling rabbits during winter, when there is plenty of food around for rabbits and the warrens are active (potentially with young). Fumigation is successful for controlling the next generation within two months from the time the young are born (before the young become mobile and independent). Fumigation tablets are used to fill the warren with gas that is heavier than air. As such, all burrow entrances must be closed to prevent the escape of rabbits and retreat any new warren openings found.

Fumigation tablets react with water in the soil or atmosphere to produce a gas, which then diffuses through the warren.

Chemical Control

Use a chemical control for rabbits if you wish. For this option, get in touch with the Land for Wildlife team as we can advise and offer support for using oats dosed with Pindone. Pindone is a blood anti-coagulant, causing rabbits to simply run out of energy, and needs to be used with caution. It takes quite a large quantity, and animals can recover fully from a sub-lethal dose.

Rabbits are one of the most susceptible species to the effects of Pindone; however other animals such as birds, cats (feral and domestic) and native mammals may be vulnerable to poisoning. By using a good baiting technique, you can minimise the risk of poisoning by non-target species and maximise rabbit control.

Baiting with Pindone is recommended when alternative feed is scarce and rabbits are under stress - baiting when there is plenty of feed around is likely to be less successful. The bait will not work in rainy weather as the Pindone is soluble and washes off and breaks down. Pindone can only be bought in 10kg buckets, and as you would only need about half a kilo we recommend members sharing the purchase of a bucket. If you are interested in purchasing some Pindone let us know and we can put you in touch with like-minded members. Please ensure you have read the guidelines for Rabbit control using Pindone poison.

Start with laying some un-poisoned rolled oats on the ground in the area where the rabbits are feeding; it will get them used to eating oats. Hoe a shallow furrow to put the oats into as rabbits are attracted to the turned dirt and will find the oats quicker. Next replace the un-poisoned oats with some anticoagulant oats and put it out for a few days so the rabbits get a good feed. If there are non-target animals around, only put the oats out late in evening and bury them the next morning (push dirt back over the furrow you have made). Rabbits have good noses and will dig for the buried oats once they know to look for it. Be sure to check near warrens in the days following baiting, to ensure that any rabbits can be collected and disposed of (to prevent the rabbits from being consumed by non-target scavengers).

Ilparpa Claypan Buffel Busting - a bunch of friends committed to conserving and regenerating habitat

Over the past 3-years, four dedicated friends have met regularly for an hour on a Saturday morning to chip out that testy invasive grass species, Buffel, at the Ilparpa Claypans. This foursome, now dubbed 'The Friends of the Ilparpa Claypans' (FoICP), have happily started their weekends with some healthy, vigorous buffel busting, banter, and good humour. Undoubtedly these Friends have regularly tended to their physical and mental wellbeing and left the Claypans feeling satisfied and uplifted by their efforts and good company (haven't we felt the lack thereof in these extraordinary times?)

Recent aerial mapping surveys have shown that buffel busting by FoICP, assisted on occasion by the Alice Springs Landcare Group, have managed to remove 9 hectares of Buffel from the Claypans. The Friends group have particularly focused their efforts on removing Buffel

around the base of older trees and shrubs to help reduce the risk of fire damage and destruction. Alice Springs Landcare have organised working bees at the Claypans which have assisted the Friends by connecting the established buffel free areas around vegetation by buffel busting the areas inbetween.

The results speak for themselves! Freed of the competition from Buffel, trees and shrubs have responded with new and more vigorous foliage, a diversity of native grasses have popped up and many native ground covers and herbs have appeared, flourished, and flowered, which are easily seen in the days and weeks following rain. Removing the Buffel also assists in stopping the spread of fire, which automatically saves other vegetation from fire spread in surrounding areas.

Now however, recent departures of some of the Friends from Alice has depleted the little group of four Friends. Hence, Land for Wildlife is helping spread the word that the remaining Friends are asking for new Friends to join the group. New Friends or anyone interested, anytime, can join in a Saturday morning at 7.15 am for an hour socialising with like-minded people (at a socially-acceptable distance – easy done!) You can then drive away feeling good about yourself for the rest of the week...until the next time!

Get your gloves on, grab your favourite weed removal tool and and come join the fun and frivolity of this buffel busting working group. Turn up at the Claypans entrance gate any Saturday morning just after 7 am, or look for a group of people that are Buffel Busting... and laughing!!



Native grasses flourish after Buffel removal at the nearby *Eucalyptus intertexta* forest on the claypans.

Let's get the Claypans buffel free by 2030!

check out the Friends Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/IlparpaClaypansLovers/> or @IlparpaClaypansLovers.

BACKYARD BOUNTY AMONGST THE NATIVES



Joining the Garden for Wildlife family recently, Marilyn & Allan O'Keefe are excited to display their gorgeous new Garden for Wildlife sign.

The sign is unique to the Central Australian program and subtly infers a love of wildlife, habitat conservation practices and an observant, caring and proactive nature of those that reside here...including the human residents!

Marilyn and Allan O'Keefe have lived at the same Alice Springs address for nearly 30 years. Being home-builders and visionary's, they have been able to create a natural Centralian paradise in the suburb of Sadadeen. The established gardens are composed of beautiful plants including many and varied local natives. Growing local native plants has created a diversity of vegetative textures, habitat strata and microclimates, all combining to facilitate a variety of habitats and eco-communities in a small urban patch.

It is an obvious sign of a favourite plant when several species of the same genus are apparent in someone's garden. Marilyn was keen to share her delight for Eremophila and showed me several different species she has planted. Eremophila are successful growers in this area of Alice and Marilyn's garden contains a number of flourishing self-seeded individuals.

Due to the availability of habitat, numerous wildlife access and live in the garden which is providing their critical resource requirements. I happily suspect that the wildlife may also utilise it just for a bit of inter-taxa socialising and enjoyment. Marilyn has

observed Bee-eaters, Ringnecks, skinks, a resident Sand Goanna, and a plethora of insects.

The O'Keefe's maintain a small backyard production of honey and eggs, the latter laid from happy Araucana chooks, a delicate grey, bantam-sized chicken that lays blue or green eggs (perhaps that's where Dr Seuss got his inspiration for the children's book '*Green eggs and ham*'?)

On the following page, Marilyn has kindly provided an article about her experiences in native and home produce gardening in Alice Springs. Read on for some really interesting methods and tips about how to engage with the wildlife and plan for habitat provision in your own wonderland.

Pink Mulla Mulla, *Ptilotus exaltatus* at Roma Gorge



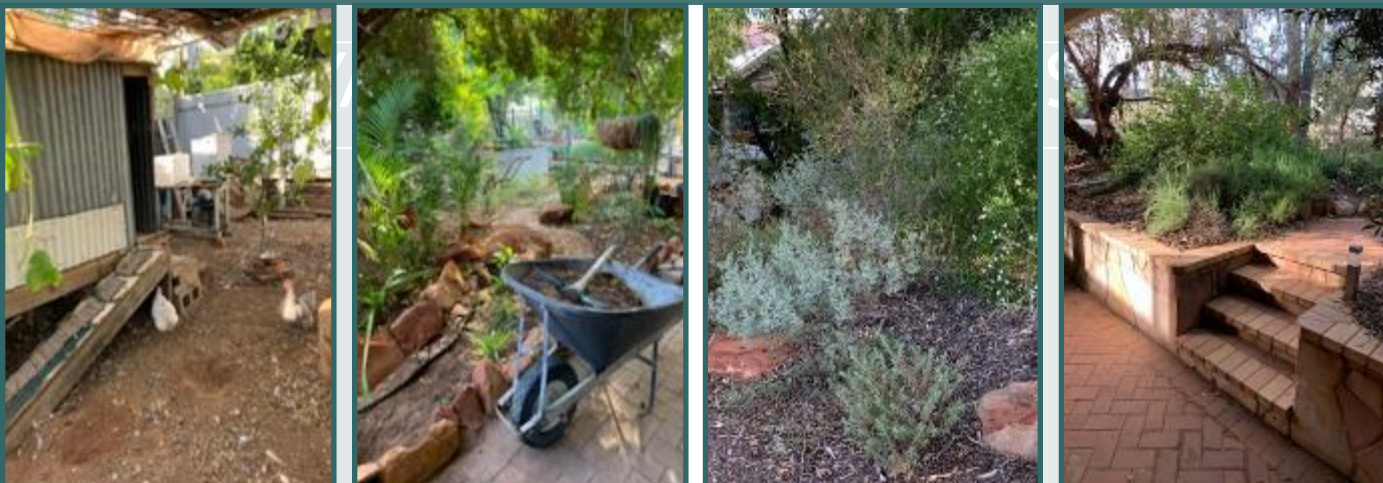
Twinleaf, *Zygophyllum eichleri*, at Roma Gorge



White Gum leaves fallen amongst the river bed stones



Native vegetation persisting on the slopes of Roma Gorge



Images (L-R): Happy chooks with a raised hen house which offers a much sought-out shady spot during the hot months. The beehives are in the background; A garden filled with local native plants, Australian natives and exotics that constantly provide opportunity and satisfaction from time spent in the garden; The front garden is filled with native plants and wildlife which veils the house front from the street, and; Warming winter sunrays filter through the front garden onto the stonework entrance to the O'Keefe home.

Words from Marilyn...

The Araucana breed of chicken originate from Chile. They are great mothers and are predator aware. Egg laying is only around 160 per year, much less than other breeds, however [they] do lay in winter and adapt well to our cold winter and hot summers.

Our bees are standard European honeybees. We have two hives and harvest both ourselves in spring, each hive yielding about 10 kilos of honey. We have set up the garden for bees with lavender, borage etc., but also feed the bees in winter, due to them needing more energy to keep the hive at a constant temperature. We are registered beekeepers and attend workshops on biosecurity, disease and other focused workshops so that we can support the bees and keep them healthy. When we have an abundance of produce, we swap citrus, vegetables, eggs and honey for all sorts of interesting food. We instigated a little community pantry at our front door during the COVID19 lockdown in Alice and people could help themselves. It was great fun!

There was nothing on our block when we moved in (1980's). It was a sloping block with loads of clay and gravel and water would just run off. Our first job was to map out where our house [would be built] and we planted native trees before the building started. We have continued to map our block, before planting vegetables, citrus etc. and now work with a close friend with a permaculture method of crop rotation. We make our own soil with worm droppings and compost, and feed hungry citrus with worm juice, compost water and diluted chook droppings. Our watering regime for the summer months is over a 30-minute period and done daily between 4.30-5.00 am. Winter watering lasts for 20 minutes every second day and at around 10.30 am to avoid any frosts. These methods have proven very successful at growing food for quite some time now.

We are both concerned about the welfare of insects, and other animals who visit our property. We have set up the bird baths on the automatic water system and I check for mould in any water container and clean them all regularly.

TOP TIP: keep the water up for bees, birds and other visitors during winter and summer.

Eremophila are most definitely my favourite flower, with a huge variety and colour range. They naturally self-seed in my garden and offer a magnificent display throughout the garden. We have grown a garden with a huge natural canopy to support us to stay living in Alice and hence, our house temperature is very bearable in summer.

Lastly...

***“Thank you so much [GfW] for the information session.
We are very pleased to be part of the group.”***



A bunch of Centralian wildflowers (Clockwise from top left): Long Pussytails, *Ptilotus polystachyus*; White Paper-daisy, *Rhodanthe floribunda*; Tjilpi (meaning 'old man') or Latz's Wattle, *Acacia latzii*; an ancient individual of *A. latzii*; Veined Peppercross, *Lepidium phlebopetalum*.

Letters to the Coordinator

Dear Kate,

I have only seen one cat track at Mt. Zeil in 6 months. It was about one month ago, so I activated 2 traps immediately, alas no luck. It [the cat] must have been passing through the area.

All wildlife is scarce as it is dry, but Crows are the exception. One day recently about 200 visited and left the 3 Magpies exhausted. They and the Butcher Birds normally hound them, but were overwhelmed [by the numbers].

Since then, the 4 resident Crows have been visited by the normal murder of about 30 on several occasions. However the murder seems to have left the area and all is currently quiet.

Best wishes

Chris [Connellan, Mt Zeil Wilderness Park]

LfW Coordinator's reply:

Thanks so much for your email. I love the stories of the murderous crow visits and exhausted magpies. Did the butcher birds put in as much effort or left it all to the maggies?

It's really interesting that all member replies (6) for numbers of cats trapped since the beginning of winter have reported zero cats. I wonder if cats are seasonal in their activities??? But there are so many confounding factors such as the dry conditions impacting on native fauna, and native fauna seasonal habits, that a dedicated experimental design to account for those things would reveal more. Nevertheless, it's extremely useful in my reporting to the Town Council and may well reveal patterns of predator movement further down the track in warmer months, over a number of years and certainly after rain.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK...

"I think they [doves] can read! I'm going to cover the 'dove trap' sign tomorrow"

GfW member, Liz Olle, referring to catching no Spotted Turtle-doves in a newly installed trap!

This Month's Habitat Quiz...??

1. What are the two faunal emblems of the Northern Territory?
2. How many cat traps does it take to catch over 400 feral cats in Alice Springs?
3. What is the oldest river system in the world, and is located in the NT? How old is it?
4. What is the physical response of the Bandy-Bandy Snake (pictured on page 4) when it is threatened?
5. How many known populations of *Acacia latzii* (pictured on page 9) are in Australia, and what does its common name 'Tjilpi Wattle' mean?

Answers will be in the next newsletter

Species Of The Month

Desert Short-tailed Mouse, *Leggadina forresti*

The Desert Short-tailed Mouse is a small native rodent with relatively small, round ears, dark eyes, light-brown fur with dark tips and an average weight between 15-25 gms. The species is widespread but sparsely distributed throughout arid and semi-arid areas of inland Australia, encompassing much of southern NT in its range. The mouse is found in riparian Coolabah forest, tussock grassland, stony saltbush plains, sandy ridges, and mulga or savannah woodland habitats, all typical ecosystems of the Centralian region.

The Mouse is nocturnal and preys on insects and moths, but will also eat seeds, plants and fungi. During daylight hours it shelters in soil cracks, and grass nests in shallow burrows, often at the base of spinifex tussocks. Having adapted to the arid desert environment, the species is able to obtain sufficient moisture from its diet so that it is not reliant on standing water for hydration.



The species, although classified with a status of 'least concern', it is vulnerable to predation from the usual feral culprits for exterminating our wildlife: cats and foxes! It also faces resource competition during house mouse plagues which also influence the numbers of feral predators in the landscape.

Active at night and when disturbed, this native mouse quickly dives for cracks in the soil and disappears from sight.
Image: Rohan Clarke (aka D2);
Wildlifemages.com.au

May Quiz Answers

1. Seven of the 18 species of butterfly found in Central Australia have a common name that is associated with colour, which include:

Lemon Migrant
Orange Migrant

Icilius Blue
Amaryllis Azure
Pea Blue

Small Grass Yellow
Common Grass Blue

Although you may have included two additional species in your list; the *Narrow-winged Pearl White* and the *Caper White*, technically speaking, white is not a colour.

2. As water is an important element in rock breakdown during weathering, Central Australia's arid climate decreases the rate of weathering significantly. The iconic landforms around Alice Springs consisting of rock faces, scarps and rock-strewn slopes are a result of slower rates of weathering than erosion, or the removal rate of degraded rock. In wetter climes, degraded rocks are reduced to soil particles before they reach the base of the slope.
3. The most common vegetation throughout Alice Springs is Veg type 17, Fork-leaved Corkwood & Ironwood
4. The Australian Museum has assigned the Western Australian populations of Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo, *Calyptrorhynchus banksii samueli* to a new subspecies, *C.b. esconditus*, meaning 'hidden' in Spanish/Portuguese. Genetic revelations show that these populations were most closely related to *naso*, rather than the Centralian subpopulations of *samueli*.
5. At least 93% of species of reptiles, amphibians, flowering plants and conifers are unique to Australia. That amounts to 3,000 endemic vertebrate animals and 18,000 endemic plant species.

\$70 ea.

**CAT
TRAPS
FOR SALE**



**Free delivery
in the Alice
Springs area**

Email LfW to order your trap.

Further Reading
Click the link symbol
to be redirected to the website



The 'Bush Regeneration Handbook' by ex-local, Andy Vinter, remains a favoured resource for anyone wanting to establish or maintain a native garden in the Alice Springs area.

You can [contact us](#) to purchase your copy for \$28



Appliances make up around 25% of the energy used in the average Australian home. Visit the Climate Council website about things you can do around *your* home to reduce power usage and benefit from cost savings!



Pet cats kill 186 reptiles, birds and mammals per year, most of them native to Australia. Do you believe your cat needs to be outside for exercise? WRONG! Here's some professional tips to keep you pet cat content living indoors....for life!



Some mosquito species are attracted to frog calls. Australian Museum researchers are using iDNA to discover previously unknown locations of some frog species by trapping mozzies.



New research has revealed that Antarctic wildlife needs increased protection from human presence while Australia has plans to build the first concrete runway in Antarctica, located in one of the highest biodiverse areas in the world's biggest natural reserve.

Please consider donating to Land for Wildlife (see right). Your money will help us to continue to support you...



...to support our wildlife

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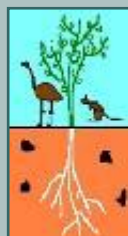


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