

Land for Wildlife and Garden for Wildlife Central Australia Newsletter

July 2016

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From the Land for Wildlife Coordinator

It looks like winter is finally here (at least for a week). The weather has been chilly but the warm pockets of sun that have come through have seen a variety of fauna out and about. On a personal note, I've been out exploring some of the parks and reserves near Alice Springs and finding some real beauties! I snapped a chatty Crested Bellbird at the Alice Springs Telegraph Station (see page 4).

There are plenty of flowers in bloom and the insect life is coming to the party to feed on the nectar. Below is a Lesser Wanderer that was fluttering about at Palm Valley.

I've also been busy with lots of Land for Wildlife property visits—stay posted for the new members joining us!

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A Lesser Wanderer butterfly (Danaus petilia) at Palm Valley.

Alice Springs Show

Land for Wildlife and the Australian Plant Society braved the cold at the Alice Springs Show earlier in the month to help give advice on planting local natives. Land for Wildlife were also selling books and talking to show-goers about a range of local conservation topics. We are now contacting potential new members to assist them with their properties and expand the network of members. Thanks to everyone that popped by the stall – we hope that you had a great time! <u>Blog</u>



Land for Wildlife stall at the Alice Springs Show, providing information and advice on flora and fauna.

Feather Map of Australia

The Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation and the Uni of NSW are asking members of the public to collect and send in waterbird feathers to be analysed. The project will enable researchers to gain information about the nutritional ecology and habitats of birds, and the Feather Map produced will be used to track the movement of waterbirds. Interested in taking part? Get involved by visiting the <u>Feather Map</u> website and follow the instructions for feather collection and submission.











Frosty Mornings at the Land for Wildlife Office

It has been a bit chilly here at the Land for Wildlife office this month! Frost has made for a refreshing bird bath on several occasions. The Buffel Grass (*Cenchrus ciliaris*) was a little worse for wear after the frost (which is great!), but so was the Spearwood (*Pandorea doratoxylon...* which was not so great).

Want to know what to do to protect plants from frost and hail? Read our June newsletter for some tips and hints on how to keep your plants safe in the cool weather. Stay warm Alice Springs!

From top left: A log got a touch of frost this month at the LFW office; the Buffel Grass took a bashing; a layer of ice built up on the bird baths making for a refreshing morning drink for those who braved it; succulent forbs struggled their way through the cold nights.

Keep an Eye to the... Ground

» Mulga Parrots

Mulga Parrots (*Psephotus varius*) were seen foraging near the Land for Wildlife office earlier in the month. The scientific nomenclature, *Psephotus varius*, translates to 'variegated mosaic bird':

- ♦ Variegated from the Latin 'Varius', owing to the mixture of colours (especially in the male)
- ♦ Mosaic bird from the Greek 'Psephotos' (inlaid with mosaic or precious stones), owing to the pattern of cheek feathers

Mulga Parrots are found in arid and semi-arid shrublands or woodlands, mostly where there is some significant ground cover in which to forage - eating the seeds of grasses, shrubs and trees, as well as flowers and fruit. Their numbers have declined in some parts of Australia, though the reason for their decline is unclear (may be vulnerable to predation by introduced mammals while foraging on the ground). While the occasional individual may be found in the Alice Springs township, they are more likely to be found in the rural areas.

They are one of the prettiest parrots in central Australia and it is easy to tell the sexes apart, as they exhibit sexual dimorphism (different appearance for males and females). The female is a little smaller and has muted colours in comparison to the bright emerald greens of the male. Mulga Parrots are monogamous, travelling in pairs rather than flocks. They breed in tree hollows or creek embankments in spring or after good rains, where the female is responsible for incubating the small white eggs.



Australian Bird Feeding and Watering Study

Australian Bird Feeding and Watering Study: A citizen science study to explore the effect that bird feeding is having on the environment. Starting August 1st - they need your help. See the <u>CSDB</u> website for more details.

Land for Wildlife Launches YouTube Channel

» Crested Bellbird

A Crested Bellbird (Oreoica gutturalis) was snapped by the Land for Wildlife coordinator while hiking at the Alice Springs Telegraph Station. The Crested Bellbird translates to 'Panpanpalala' in Pitjantjatjara and 'Kwepalepale' in Central Arrernte. This fun bird keeps a low profile and so isn't seen often, but has an unmistakable call, which sounds much like the two Indigenous translations for its name. The bird is able to throw its voice, such that it sounds as though it is calling from another direction than it is actually located. From the walking track, it appeared to be calling from 20 m away in a south-westerly direction but it was actually sitting in a *Hakea lorea* right by the track above my head! Blog▶



View the Crested Bellbird Video on YouTube





Poisonous Plants and Pesky Pollen Problems

Plants utilise a variety of defence mechanisms to ward off predators, with chemical defence being the most common – there are more than a thousand poisonous plants in Australia. Harmful components range from fruits and seeds; to roots, bark and leaves. The toxicity of plants usually increases with higher CO₂ levels and during periods of drought. Plant toxins include harmful organic compounds (e.g. hydrocyanic acid and cicutoxin), alkaloids (e.g. atropine, hyoscyamine and strychnine), saponins (which damage cell components), oxalic acid (crystals), lectins (e.g. ricin), toxalbumins (abrin) and cyanide.

Plants can be toxic to pets and small children, with some plants even proving to be toxic for adults. Ingestion of fruit stones, berries and seeds can lead to serious intestinal blockages and they may contain toxic compounds that are harmful to animals. Symptoms of poisoning range from fever and vomiting to muscle tremors, staggering and seizures. The most toxic of plants can even cause fatalities. Many more plants lack specific poisonous characteristics but cause allergies, such as skin and eye irritation, from pollen. The poison recipient (i.e. human adult versus child or species of animal) as well as the dose and the circumstances of ingestion, are factors that influence whether a plant will be poisonous or not. For example, avocados are edible (and delicious!) for humans but are poisonous for dogs. A poisonous plant that has been introduced to Alice Springs is the White Cedar (Melia azedarach), which has fruits that are toxic to children but are regularly eaten by birds with no side effects. Oleander (Nerium oleander) is still widespread in the older parts of Alice Springs and is guite poisonous if eaten.

Other introduced species that are poisonous include the Pepper Tree (Schinus molle var. areira), Desert Bird of Paradise (Caesalpinia gilliesii), Coffee Senna (Senna occidentalis) and Black Nightshade (Solanum nigrum). Native species such as Pituri Bush (Duboisia hopwoodii), Boobialla (Myoporum acuminatum) and Swainsona

(Swainsona canescens) are also poisonous. Poisonous plants do not share a common attribute to make identification easy – they can be a variety of colours, scents, and forms. The best safeguard is to know your plants research your garden and find out what you are growing. You can find a basic list of poisonous plants in the Northern Territory at the NT Government website or a national list for pets through AEC Vets. There are a range of books available, such as 'Australia's poisonous plants, fungi and cyanobacteria - a guide to species of medical and veterinary importance' By Ross McKenzie.

It is recommended that plants with seriously poisonous components are not used in new plantings around yards with children or pets. If they exist in your yard, you may wish to assess the risk of the plant (which component is poisonous and to whom) and consider replacing it with an alternative non-toxic native plant. If retaining plants that have poisonous seeds you could remove the seeds as they appear. It is also advised to teach children not to put any plants in their mouths – education regarding the hazards posed by such plants may prevent misfortune.

If poisoning is suspected, contact the Poisons Control (Ph 08) 8922 7341) and seek medical/veterinary attention immediately.

Despite the dangers posed by some plants, they're weird and wonderful and we love them - just don't get on their bad side! Blog▶



Above: Introduced plants such as the Desert Bird of Paradise (Caesalpinia gilliesii) can be toxic to people and pets
Below: Native plants exhibit their own dangers, such as

Boobialla (Myoporum acuminatum).

Green Army: Rabbit Control

Land for Wildlife were invited to run a feral rabbit control workshop with the Green Army Team. The team are hosted by Olive Pink Botanic Garden and supported by Conservation Volunteers Australia.

The feral rabbit control workshop was a great learning experience about the impact that feral animals can have on the ecosystem. Olive Pink Botanic Garden was empty of rabbits, so the demonstration was brief.

There is plenty of rabbit food around at the moment with the lush grasses taking off after rain. The additional food enables rabbits to thrive - if you have a rabbit problem on your property, get in touch with Land for Wildlife. We can assist you with rabbit control and provide you with information and resources. Keep an eye open for active rabbit warrens and fresh pellets.

Bill Low leads a rabbit control workshop.

Buffel Grass Bashing – A Rewarding Addiction!

By Bruce Simmons

Andy Vinter's Bush Regeneration Handbook provides terrific practical information for anyone interested in arresting the progress of weeds, and Buffel Grass (*Cenchrus ciliaris*) in particular, on their block, streetscape or local feature. So you might go there as a starting point if you are interested in 'bashing the Buffel'.

My history with weeds goes back to early childhood times helping my father remove couch, three corner jacks and onion weed from our big three quarter acre block in suburban Adelaide. In spite of frequent ouches and an occasional protest, I think the rewarding experience of companionable times and visible wins became an entrenched part of my DNA.

When it comes to gardening and gardens I have never viewed invading weeds as all bad, though I think couch is the real villain in many ways and should be addressed with a big mental alert KEEP OUT sign! But most other weeds, including Buffel Grass, can be recycled as greens for the chooks, valuable compost or mulching materials... some are pretty nutritious for humans too I hear, though I haven't explored that option seriously as yet.

Skilled weed spotting and assessment is a virtue and potentially a stick for one's own back. My grandma always used to helpfully remind me "one year's seeding, seven year's weeding" and the message reverberates and drives me on in so many ways most days of the year. So I might decide to leave a weed to grow for a

while for its potential recycling value but once its seeds start to mature I have an urgent or even an EMERGENCY bell ringing in my head. I'm confident those bells ring for many keen gardeners.

The bullying potential of Buffel Grass is unfortunately extreme. Over time, Buffel Grass muscles everything else out of its way even without the additional support of fire. The good news is that the native vegetation is not obliterated so much as hidden in seed form. With good conditions, and a Buffel-free zone, many interesting natives return in abundance to reward the worker. And from my experience they'll stay on – so long as the Buffel is kept at bay!

I have always either pulled or mattocked out the Buffel Grass, depending on its size. Sometimes a spade or hoe works well on smaller plants in dry soil. I've not adopted poisoning but I know some very keen Buffel



Buffel Grass can be used as mulch around the base of fruit trees.

(Continued from page 6)

Grass bashers who do an effective regular hunt for ferals in their patch with RoundUp spray packs on their backs.

When tackling a new field of established Buffel Grass I have a sturdy old Toyota HJ45 tray top to which I add galvanized iron 'hungry sides' so that I can pile, stomp and add more and more Buffel Grass until I have a 'decent load' ready for mulching or composting. It takes me in effect a full day of steady labour, generally spread over a few vigorous *Buffeling* sessions to get a load. Sometimes I've been lucky enough to have my sister Jenny help or I find a fellow traveller who shares some time with me clearing a patch and filling the tray. Hopefully they feel as good as I do about the experience. I'm confident it will stay memorable!

What to do with your Buffel Grass once removed? I have taken a few tons to the Alice Springs Community Garden as a major component of our new plots. Combined with cow manure, watered and covered with a layer of compost it composts down, virtually without any regrowth, while veggies grow above. I have also used it to mulch our fruit

Top, down: Buffel Grass has been successfully removed from the verge along Schaber Rd; Removal of Buffel encourages a host of native plants to regenerate, including Erect Kerosene Grass and Woolly Oat Grass

trees, piling it up 50 cm or more. Neighbours have simply heaped it up with very little subsequent regrowth. I'm not inclined to simply leave it where it's been dug up as logically I'd expect a lot more new seedlings from leaving the seed heads on the soil.

To keep Buffel Grass from coming back there's no alternative to eternal vigilance. I do a monthly feral hunt around our block and along Schaber Road verges where residents and I have cleared all the Buffel Grass. After the recent heavy rains we've had a heap of new seedlings come up. But if you can see it as a bit of friendly competition and rewarding exercise then there's no problem with keeping on the job.

Every year it gets a bit easier, especially if you extend your Buffeling to include a few extra metres beyond your

Bruce Simmons with the Buffel Man, a temporary art installation by Trevor Finn at the Alice Springs Community Garden (*Image T. Flinn*).

natural boundary. The only question for me then is whether or not to surrender to my keen desire to strike further into enemy country! Giving in and going further is generally met with appreciation from grateful neighbours, some of whom have been encouraged and strengthened to become more passionate Buffel-hounds themselves.

I'd be curious to learn if the new environment attracts more wildlife. Certainly, we have many birds and lizards on our property and a diversity of flora on our verges that we couldn't have imagined on our arrival to Schaber Road twenty plus years ago.

Many happy outcomes from a rewarding addiction.

Bruce Simmons

Blog▶

Domestic Cat Monitoring and Awareness in Alice Springs

Land for Wildlife is embarking on a new round of domestic cat monitoring and awareness in Alice Springs. This project will involve monitoring the movements of domestic cats when they are out and about, by kitting the kitties out with a GPS harness. We will also be trialling the use of small cat-mounted video cameras to see if we can get a visual idea of what the cats are getting up to, as well as scat analysis to see what they are eating. To learn about managing your roaming domestic cat, download our brochure Where Is Your Cat Now?

We have plenty of cat owners in the urban area that are interested but we are lacking volunteers in the rural areas (Ilparpa, White Gums, Ross, Connellan, *etc*). If you have a domestic cat and are interested in taking part in the upcoming project to determine where cats wander, we want to hear from you - please get in touch! Email <Ifw@lowecol.com.au> Blog>

This project is supported by Territory Natural Resource Management, through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Programme.



Kitty Relevant Articles



Article • Is the Felixer cat trap safe for native carnivores?



Article • Fighting back against the ferals— Bettongs learn to survive through predator training at Arid Recovery park near Olympic



Article • Traditional hunters and western science join forces in the fight against feral cats



Article • Cat scrunchies are saving birds' lives and making cats look stupid, two very important goals



Article • Cats kill more than one billion birds each year

Feral Cat Survey to Support the Threatened Species Strategy

As part of the Australian Threatened Species Strategy, RMIT University in partnership with the Australian Government is conducting a <u>National Feral Cat Management Survey</u> with funding from the National Landcare Programme. The results of the survey will be used to report progress against the Australian Government Threatened Species Strategy target.

The purpose of the survey is to support quantitative understanding of the national feral cat management effort and better understand people's motivations for, and understanding of, feral cat management. It will provide insight into feral cat control not typically included in existing databases. The survey is open until 7 August 2016.

APS Book Launch

Join the Australian Plant Society for the launch of their new book: Central Australian Flora—Trees, Large Shrubs, Grasses and Sedges. The book will be launched by 2015 Landcare award winner Peter Latz.



Green Army: OPBG Cat Trap Turns Up An Unusual Visitor

Thanks to the Green Army team at Land for Wildlife property Olive Pink Botanic Garden for sending in this photo of their recent catch - a Spotted Turtle-dove (*Spilopelia chinensis*).

The unsuspecting pest bird ended up in a cat trap baited with sardines, while ignoring the nearby Spotted Turtle-dove trap set with seed (though didn't partake in the dining experience). That's right, caught in a cat trap.

One must wonder...

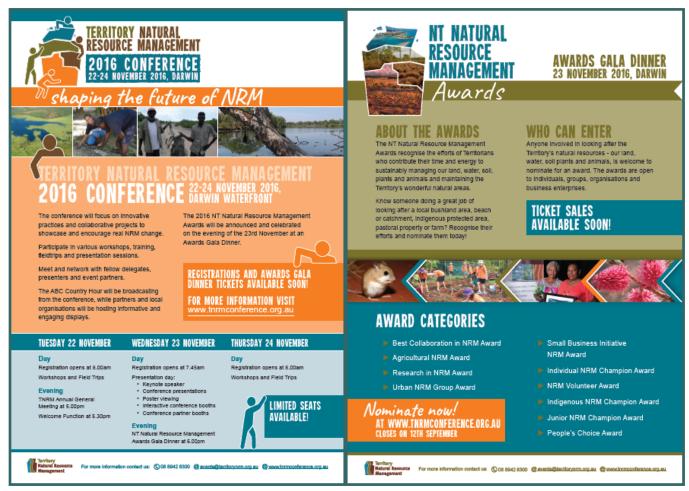
Blog▶

Spotted Turtle-dove (*Spilopelia chinensis*) caught in a cat trap by the Green Army Team at Olive Pink Botanic Garden (*Image C. Appleby*).



TNRM Conference and Awards

The Territory Natural Resource Management Conference will take place 22-24 November. The call for abstracts and award nominations is open. Visit the TNRM Conference website for more information.



Upcoming Events

» National Tree Day: 31 July

Go on, plant a tree! To find out what local native plants would be appropriate for your property, check out the <u>Vegetation Maps</u> webpage link.

» desertSMART EcoFair: 12-14 August

The desertSMART EcoFair is on again in August, with a host of excellent activities planned. Friday will see the Schools Day, ABC Broadcast and Bicycle Film Festival take place at Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Saturday's activities include presentations at various locations around town. Sunday brings it all together with the Sustainable Living Festival and Eco-markets at the Alice Springs Desert Park Courtyard (Land for Wildlife will have a stall so pop over and say hello). Check out the EcoFair website for more information.

» Red Centre Bird Festival: 17-21 August

This five-day event comprises of a Big Bird race, sunrise walkabouts, prizes and competitions. Hosted at the Alice Springs Desert Park. Read more.

» ASTC Night Markets: 25 August

Land for Wildlife will be hosting a stall at the first of this year's Alice Springs Town Council Night Markets. Pop by the stall to sign up or grab any additional information you may require.

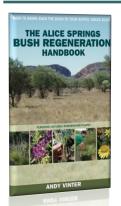
Domestic Cat Monitoring Nationwide

Land for Wildlife Central Australia have had great successes with the Domestic Cat Monitoring and Awareness program in 2015 and will run with it into 2016-2017. We'd like to take all the credit, but there are a few other groups around Australia that are running similar projects, with equal success.

The Uni of South Australia paired with Discovery Circle to run a Citizen Science cat tracker program. The Central Tablelands Local Land Service have followed the lead of Citizen Science to track moggies. Their findings are reported by Mashable, ABC and Mental Floss.

See a snapshot of some of the ranges in Alice:





Growing Demand for Local Bush Regeneration Handbook

by Andy Vinter

The Alice Springs region is alive with regrowth after the incredible hail storm and other recent rainfall. Gardeners will be asking themselves what plants have come up this time. *The Alice Springs Bush Regeneration Handbook* has been written to help answer this question. It features 150 of the common regenerating plants and has just entered its second print run.

There are many young plants emerging now that can be identified from their developing features. Some native forbs (herbs) seen emerging include Annual Yellowtop (*Senecio*

gregorii), Blue Herons Bill (*Erodium crinitum*), Bogan Flea (*Calotis hispidula*), Golden Everlasting (*Xerochrysum bracteatum*), Green Peppercress (*Lepidium oxytrichum*), Muellers Peppercress (*Lepidium muelleri-ferdinandi*), and Variable Daisy (*Brachycome ciliaris*).

Gardeners will also need to be dealing with weeds that have also responded to recent rain. Small-flower Mallow, Smooth Mustard, Milk Thistle and Prickly Lettuce are some of the weeds that have emerged. Controlling these weeds before they set seed, and bagging any flower or seed parts, will be needed to reduce future regrowth. Gardeners may also need to tackle the native Bogan Flea which is a locally infamous prickle plant.

The Alice Springs Bush Regeneration Handbook is available from Afghan Traders, the Arid Land Environment Centre, The Bean Tree Café (at the Olive Pink Botanic Gardens), Geoff Miers Garden Solutions, Land and Garden for Wildlife coordinators, and Red Kangaroo Books. For more information contact the author at <andy vinter@yahoo.com.au>

Further Reading

Click the link symbol to be redirected to the article



Article • Hope for 'Aussie battler' as critically endangered birds found



Article • It's not the size of your property that counts!



Article • We're kidding ourselves if we think we can 'reset' Earth's damaged ecosystems



Article • Australia quietly adds 49 species to threatened and endangered lists



Article • How one man repopulated a rare butterfly species in his backyard



Article • 19 Before and after photos of butterfly and moth transformations



Article • New Zealand to eradicate rats, possums in bid to save native wildlife

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.

Cheers,

Caragh, Jen and Bíll

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