Land for Wildlife and Garden for Wildlife
Central Australia Newsletter

From the Land for Wildlife Coordinator

Land for Wildlife has been quiet on the newsletter front for a month as we have been super busy finalising the Domestic Cat Monitoring and Awareness program. The numbers have been crunched for Alice Springs based cats, the videos have been through the cutting room and the scats have been teased apart for their hidden gems!

As August begins, we can look forward to the last of the frosts in town and prepare for spring plantings at the end of the month. Wildflower seedlings can be planted and soon you can take cuttings for any propagation you may wish to conduct (but wait for the weather to warm a little first).

“*When we drink, we drink the rivers and the rain... And we wash into that ocean where the cycle starts again*”

~ Alice Eather

To all our new members, thanks for your patience in report delays—we will be finishing these in the coming weeks as we get back on track after the projects are wrapped up!

A Spinifex Pigeon (*Geophaps plumifera*) is not so hiding amongst the grass (*Image K. Mitchell*).
Cat Owners *Feline Fine* About Domestic Cat Monitoring and Awareness in Alice Springs Results

As the Domestic Cat Monitoring and Awareness in Alice Springs project starts to wrap up, we have been engaging with domestic cat owners that took part in the project regarding the monitoring results. We conducted a workshop this month on the findings from the cat monitoring, which will be officially released in a report next month. The owners had positive feedback from the monitoring and were genuinely interested about the results from the GPS-tracking, video surveillance and scat analysis.

The video surveillance is the first item on the agenda for the public and has been released on our [YouTube channel](https://www.youtube.com). Head there to see all Land for Wildlife videos or go and watch the videos as a [playlist](https://www.youtube.com/playlist).

Stay posted for the official release of the monitoring results - coming soon! [Blog](https://www.lnfw.org.au/blog)

*This project is supported by Territory Natural Resource Management, through funding from the Australian Government’s National Landcare Programme.*
Domestic Cat Monitoring & Awareness in Alice Springs

Engaging domestic cat owners regarding the travelling patterns and behaviour of their feline friends, to assist owners with making informed and responsible cat management decisions.

GPS-tracking:
Monitor the spatial travelling patterns of domestic cats while roaming.

Video surveillance:
Record visual footage of the behaviour of roaming cats.

Scat analysis:
Assess the diet of roaming cats and how this differs from regular feeding regimes.

Protecting our cats and our wildlife relies on responsible management.

What you can do to manage your cat responsibly:
- De-sex, microchip and register your cat
- Keep your cat indoors or install an enclosed outdoor cat play area
- Fit your cat with a bell, luminescent scrunchie, sonar or other device to alert wildlife to its presence

Learn more about the Domestic Cat Monitoring & Awareness project by visiting the Land for Wildlife website!
Scan the QR Code.

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

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National Tree Day Festivities

By Candice Appleby

To celebrate National Tree Day on Sunday 30th July, the Land for Wildlife team hosted an official launch of the new online interactive Central Australia Register of Significant Trees map. Thanks to the support from Territory Natural Resource Management, Olive Pink Botanic Gardens and Low Ecological Services P/L.

It was a lovely mild winter’s afternoon at Olive Pink Botanic Gardens on Sunday the 30th July. The birds were singing, the breeze was softly blowing and all the trees were celebrating happily as it was their day – National Tree Day.

Land for Wildlife was pleased to call this the setting of the official launch of Central Australia’s Register of Significant Trees interactive online map. There was a great turn out on the day with around 30 people attending. Over a cuppa and slice of delightful cake (baked by Caragh Heenan, our ever so talented Land for Wildlife Coordinator), attendees had the chance to learn a little more about the history of the register and the recent work that has brought it to its new digital platform. Some great discussions took place around how the register should be presented to the public regarding retaining historical listings if the trees may be no longer present, and what actions we as a community can take to advocate for tree protection in and around the Alice Springs municipality. The latter seemed to be a major concern to those attending, with many developments proposed in the local area and Alice Springs currently having no tree protection by-laws in place.

Fiona Walsh also presented an update from the ‘Strategies to reduce loss of our Red River Gum Habitat’ meeting that took place at Olive Pink Botanic Gardens in late July. Offering some suggestions and insight as to

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Significant Trees Interview on ABC with Paul Serratore

Candice Appleby was interviewed by Paul Serratore on breakfast radio about the online register launch as part of National Tree Day and the legalities behind the register. Missed it? Why not listen to it on our YouTube channel?
how the community can get behind preventing habitat loss in the Todd River caused by wildfires through management and wildfire response. Thank you Fiona for your contribution!

The launch also served as an opportunity to announce an open expression of interest to members of the public to join the NT Significant Trees Committee. This committee will be responsible for attending triannual meetings to discuss significant tree matters and to conduct final assessments of new listing nominations. If you think you would like to join the NT Significant Trees Committee send an email through to lfw@lowecol.com.au and let us know!!

It was a great afternoon tea and a nice way to spend National Tree Day. Land for Wildlife would like to thank Territory Natural Resource Management for supporting this event through the National Landcare Program with a small community grant. TNRM made it possible for LFW to host the event as well as design and print a new NT Significant Trees brochure to be available at upcoming community events and downloadable from the Land for wildlife website.

We would also like to thank Olive Pink Botanic Gardens for providing the wonderful venue for the day, and the on-going support from Low Ecological Services P/L.

Head to the project page at the Land for Wildlife website to read more about the register, see a list of the trees on the central Australian register, download PDF fact sheets about the trees and even take a ‘virtual’ tour of the register via an interactive Google Map. Blog►

~ Candice Appleby

Save Our Trees:
Reduce Buffel
Call 000
Collaborate

By Fiona Walsh

What can you in the public do?
The best prevention is to reduce Buffel grass and allow native plants to flourish. This is possible with persistent and strategic landcare methods. Adopt a tree or adopt an area of bush and join Alice Springs Landcare with people expert in Buffel control.

Alternately, when a grass or tree fires is seen you note the street names, dial 000 and ask for the Alice Springs fire station to respond – the earlier the better.

Threats to a tree that is older than you, I or any of us is an ecological emergency. Contrary to the views of some, it is possible to extinguish fires in burning trees.

~ Fiona Walsh

To read more about the preventative methods for wildfire, check out the article by Fiona Walsh at the Alice Springs News.

You can read more about wildfire on Page 7...
Owen Springs 4x4 Tag-along

Drive the Reserve with a Ranger...

Celebrate World Ranger Day with a tag along tour through scenic Owen Springs Reserve.

Enjoy an afternoon cuppa by the creek, and learn about the history and management of the Reserve first hand.

Where: Owen Springs Reserve
When: Public Holiday Picnic Day Monday 7 August
Time: 1 pm - 6 pm
Cost: Free
Bring: Chair or picnic blanket, sturdy shoes & hat
Note: High clearance 4WD essential.

Bookings are essential as numbers are limited. Please call the Parks and Wildlife Commission in Alice Springs on 8951 8250. Meeting place and packing list will be made available on booking.

Owen Springs Reserve is a 40 minute drive, 60 km south west of Alice Springs and provides an outback 4WD experience, quiet bush settings for camping without facilities and ideal picnicking and bird watching opportunities.

Fact sheets on Owen Springs Reserve are available from www.parksandwildlife.nt.gov.au, Alice Springs Visitor Information Centre and information shelters at the reserve entrance.

www.parksandwildlife.nt.gov.au
www.facebook.com/ParksandWildlifeNT
The Impact of Wildfire in Central Australia

Fire has been an integral part of central Australian arid ecosystems for thousands of years. Fire is used by humans as a hunting aid, for signalling presence, for warmth and for cooking. Fire has a positive effect on germination of ephemeral plants, and is also known to be important for germination of many tough-coated seeding plants in central Australia (such as Hakea sp. and Greveilla sp.). As a result, many plant species have evolved to cope with periodic fire disturbance.

However, in central Australia, Buffel Grass (Cenchrus ciliaris) has changed the way that the land burns and so fuel reduction burning and slashed firebreaks are more important than ever. Buffel Grass grows fast following heavy rains, it generally out-competes native grasses (producing a thick monoculture), and when it burns – it burns hot and fast. Consequently, the presence of Buffel Grass can be problematic for controlling fire.

Lately (or not so lately?), Alice Springs has seen a spurt of fire in the Todd River, which has got many residents concerned about the fragility of the old River Red Gums (Eucalyptus camaldulensis). The death of River Red Gums in the Todd River is saddening, as it means a loss of habitat for many of the amazing hollow-nesting birds and bats in the region. But there is a sentimental value to the beauty of the trees as well, which many long-term residents are keen to protect. Several of the large trees have cultural value to local Indigenous groups, which also warrants their protection from fire.

Removal of Buffel Grass around large River Red Gums (and other large trees) is one of the main ways that we can protect them. As a result of big summer rains, we have a huge fire risk with thick Buffel Grass growth around town and rural areas and there is a need for fuel reduction through slashing, spraying or prescribed burning.

Slashing is effective at removing Buffel Grass but it can be time-consuming and costly over large areas and is non-discriminatory (slashes the native grasses and herbs as well). It is best-suited to large and flat grassland areas that require quick fuel reduction.

Spraying can be effective at killing Buffel Grass but doesn’t remove the biomass and nor does it remove the fire hazard. Spraying as a technique is only effective when the Buffel Grass has green pick that is then able to absorb chemical for purposes of killing the root system. At this time of year, much of the Buffel Grass is dry and needs to be chipped out with a mattock if working at a small scale. Chemical is expensive and so is the time needed to spray large areas of Buffel Grass. With the loss of funding to programs such as Green Army – where does the funding come from to support such endeavours? In this case, the town largely relies on local initiatives.

“The best prevention is to reduce Buffel grass and allow native plants to flourish”

~ Fiona Walsh
on groups such as Landcare, as well as individual residents to volunteer their time and do the hard yards. Adopt an area or a tree and go from there!

Fuel reduction by prescribed burning an essential component of fire management, and in most cases the aim is to reduce the ground cover by 60 to 80%. Such prescribed burning can be effective for a year or two in protecting large trees and habitats from large-scale fires, as well as preventing the spread of large fires. Prescribed burning needs permits and trained fire teams to conduct appropriately and becomes tricky within municipal areas – so it isn’t a reliable venture for protecting the large gums in the Todd River.

Want to know how you can help protect the River Red Gums? Read more about the recent suggestions in Fiona Walsh’s article.

If fire takes hold, what is the consequence for our wildlife and the ecosystem as a whole?

In terms of the soil, there will be an immediate loss of soil organic matter, and nutrients will be mobilised following a fire. These nutrients have the potential to be relocated downslope (hillside fires) or downstream (riverside or river island fires). There is an immediate loss of groundcover (plants) and leaf litter, which in turn can make an area susceptible to erosion, and result in wetter soils (fewer plants to absorb water through the roots).

Many central Australian birds (such as Cockatoos, Nightjars and Owls) rely on large tree hollows for nesting space. Following a fire, general bird abundance in the area will remain stable; however the loss of hollows can result in a long-term reduction in the population of hollow-nesting species. The loss of a small number of trees may not affect the ecosystem balance to a huge degree, while a large loss of trees may be consequential.

Bat population stability following fire depends on the insect population. Invertebrate population is extremely variable in time and space with or without fire. It is driven by environmental factors such as temperature, rainfall and insolation; and therefore the effect of fire is extremely difficult to determine. As a result, the effect of fire on bat populations will depend on a host of environmental factors as well.

Mammals can experience some initial mortality as a direct result of fire, and in the period following fire there can be increased predation due to lack of cover, and emigration from burnt areas. Patch burning can alleviate the risk to mammals to some extent - leaving intact patches of habitat for mammals to retreat to can be effective at protecting mammal populations.

For reptiles, the effect of fire on populations will depend on the amount of leaf litter and hollow logs left intact for shelter and foraging for food. Patch burning can provide useful refuges for skinks, lizards and snakes, and therefore populations can recover quickly after small and patchy fires. If a large tree with hollows does fall, it’s important to remember that while their hollows may no longer be useful as bird nesting sites, if left in place, they will provide useful habitat for many of the native reptiles in time.

So while fire can leave scars on the land and reduce the number of old hollow-bearing trees, in healthy ecosystems fire is important to regeneration of ephemerals and the wildlife can cope readily with small-scale and patchy fires. It’s the large fires that take hold in fuel-rich areas that are a concern, and fire in fragile systems such as rivers can result in a change in nutrient levels and erosion on the banks. The sentimentality of the beautiful old River Red Gums means that fire in Todd is an unwelcome event that we would like to avoid, which means removing Buffel Grass before a fire takes hold.

Want to do your bit? There are several keen Landcare groups in Alice Springs that are removing weedy species to make way for the native forbs, which is proving successful at preventing the spread of large fires. Join a group near you!
Chickens make great mates, to you and to your garden. They not only provide you and your family with a wealth of freshly laid eggs. They also produce incredibly nitrogen rich fertiliser and reduce the amount of household waste in the form of food scraps heading to landfill at the tip.

It is now approaching the time of year when the chicks you purchased at the Alice Springs Show are starting to get big enough to be moved out to your chicken run. Have you got everything ready, and how can you maximise the benefit from your new family member?

Here in Alice Springs there are a few things you need to consider when constructing and maintaining an outside chicken run!

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Weather

Weather conditions can be quite variable. Summer is quite the character-builder and our chickens respond to the heat in much a similar way to us. Ensure you provide adequate shade and a sufficient water supply. A little trick I use is hooking up the chickens’ water supply to the garden irrigation system, much like you would with a bird bath, this ensures the chickens water gets topped up daily and your chickens are happy!

Winter nights can also get down to seriously cool temperatures. Provide an insulated nesting box made of wood for your chickens to keep warm and lay eggs. Chickens will also tend to eat more in winter (don’t we all) so don’t worry if you are finding them going through more food.

Parasite Control

Something that can often be overlooked in the backyard chicken run, but is vitally essential, is a good old-fashioned dust bath. A dust bath is great for prevention of parasite infestation in the chickens’ feathers and legs. The simplest way to provide this is just a small cleared area covered with some dusting material; sand is the best for this purpose. Remember to keep this area moderately clean of faeces and food scraps by raking it out and adding fresh dusting material regularly.

If, however, you want to treat your ladies to a day at the chicken spa, add a few herbs like rosemary, lavender, thyme and mint. This will leave them feeling pampered and smelling lovely, while utilising the herbs’ natural insecticide and anti-inflammatory properties. If you’re finding mites, fleas and ticks are still becoming a problem, you can also try popping a handful of garlic husks in the chicken nesting boxes to help prevent infestation.

Food Restrictions

Feeding your chickens is quite easy, they eat everything right? Well, somewhat, but not exactly. It’s important not to over-feed your chickens. Typically only feed your chickens the amount they can eat in ten minutes. Also, be sure not use food scraps that are showing signs of rot, as rotten scraps can be a source for botulism disease.

The Outcome: So Many Eggs!

Now that your chickens are happy and settled into their new home it won’t be long until they start popping out eggs left and right (unless you have yourself a rooster!). Keep in mind, in order to sell your chickens eggs, you will need to be registered as a food business. However, for private consumption simply ensure your eggs are thoroughly cleaned, throw away any cracked eggs not suitable for consumption and store the rest in the refrigerator below any cooked or ready to eat foods. It is important to also remember that over the counter wormers and medicated feed have the potential to transfer to the eggs. Take note of any warnings on packaging and the respect egg ‘Withholding Periods’ (WHP).

Legalities

Everything is fair in love and chickens; however it is important to be aware of legalities. Luckily for us here in Alice Springs there aren’t too many restrictions regarding keeping chickens on your premises, for either rural and

“Chickens have to be contained in a securely fenced yard or run which is no closer to a house than 12 metres”

~ Alice Springs By-law

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or suburban properties. Alice Springs by-law states that “chickens have to be contained in a securely fenced yard or run which is no closer to a house than 12 metres”.

Northern Territory Government also requires properties with poultry to be registered with a ‘Property Identification Code’ (PIC) regardless of the number of animals on the property. This PIC is a biosecurity tool to help the government manage any outbreaks of disease by quickly and efficiently notifying anyone who may be effected. Registration is free and can be completed online at www.nt.gov.au/industry/agriculture/livestock/get-a-property-identification-code

Enjoy your new garden friends! Blog→

~ Candice Appleby
Lygaeid’s Common in Central Oz

Land for Wildlife member, Apples Kemp, has sent in a picture of a bug she has seen frequently in her yard. She wanted to know more about it.

The bug in question belong to the Lygaeid family of Hemipterans (half-winged bugs). They do well in moist leaf litter, where you will likely see lots of the larval stages (the larvae are red and don’t have wings).

They are harmless, and spend their time foraging on the leaf litter and fungal mycelia (roots). This helps to break down the litter and recycle the nutrients, which are incorporated back into the soil.

They seem to prefer Whitewood (*Atalaya hemiglauca*) leaf litter though can often be found elsewhere.

~ Bill Low

Upcoming Events

» **DesertSmart EcoFair: 11th to 13th June**

The DesertSmart EcoFair is coming around again, with an Eco-Science Schools Day, Critical Mass with Costa, Bicycle Film Festival, Garden to Plate, and the Sustainable Living Festival (plus more!). Land for Wildlife will be running a school workshop on biodiversity, hosting a stall at the Sunday festival, as well as running a Significant Tree Tour of Alice Springs. Come say hi and get involved in the activities.

» **Alice Springs Night Markets: 17th and 31st August**

The Alice Springs Night Markets are back after the winter break! There will be a couple of additional markets this year following a successful season last year. From 5-9 PM. Head to the Alice Springs Town Council website to see the upcoming dates.

» **Keep Australia Beautiful Week: 21st to 27th August**

Encouraging Aussie’s to pick up 1 piece of rubbish per day for the week (#LitterRally). Learn more at the Keep Australia Beautiful website.

**11-14 Sep and 2-5 Oct 2017**

AHCPG502

**Collect and Classify Plants**

(From AHCPG5116 Diploma of Conservation and Land Management)

The unit will cover:
- The process of collecting, pressing, preserving, mounting and labelling plant specimens.
- Field spotting characteristics for plants in local major plant families.
- Identifying plants using taxonomic keys.
- Field trips and talks with local botanists and plant experts.

For more information, contact Kath Watson

kath.watson@cdu.edu.au or phone 08 8959 5268

RTO Provider # 0373
Further Reading
Click the link symbol to be redirected to the article

Article • Australia’s Doctor Seuss tree

Article • Hairy and dangerous

Article • Hidden feather patterns tell the story of birds

Article • 'Beautiful' bush tomato plant discovered in northern Australia named in top 10 new species

Article • Scientists are accidentally helping poachers drive rare species to extinction

Article • Nematodes reveal the importance of biodiversity

Article • Australia is building a sanctuary in Newhaven to protect its native species from feral cats

Video • Alknege Irlpe

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, Candice and Bill

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