

Land for Wildlife and Garden for Wildlife Central Australia Newsletter

November 2017

#### From the Land for Wildlife Coordinator

Wow—What a bird-centric month we have had! With National Bird Week taking place at the end of October and the events we hosted, November has been spend churning through hours of video surveillance data and putting it all together. You can read all about it in this newsletter. We have taken a plant perspective for the other portion of the newsletter, giving some info on seed collection as a follow up to the workshop held at the Land for Wildlife birthday event.

As we come into the summer months, things will start to slow down in your garden but fingers crossed we get a little more of the much-needed rain for the plants to take up and to fill up some of the remote watering points for our native wildlife to access.

Until next month, happy reading!

"In order to see birds it is necessary to become a part of the silence"

~ Robert Lynd



A Grey Shrike-thrush (Colluricincla harmonica) hops around in the undergrowth on a new Land for Wildlife property.

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LFW Central Australia Significant Trees Officer, Candice Appleby, and LFW Central Australia Coordinator, Caragh Heenan, receive the award for Fairfax Landcare Community Group (*Image Territory Natural Resource Management*).

# Land for Wildlife and Garden for Wildlife take out Fairfax Landcare Community Group Award at the NT Landcare Awards

Land for Wildlife is proud to announce that we have taken the prize for Fairfax Landcare Community Group award at the NT Landcare Awards in Darwin!

Appreciation goes to Bill Low of Low Ecological Services for the ongoing support and assistance as host of the program. Thanks to all our funding providers (Parks and Wildlife Commission NT and the Alice Springs Town Council) and project supporters (Territory Natural Resource Management) for enabling the work we do to be so successful.

The biggest of thanks go to the Land for Wildlife and Garden for Wildlife members that put so much effort into conserving wildlife habitat through land management initiatives, revegetation activities, weed removal, feral animal control and the creation of habitat spaces. The Land for Wildlife program is voluntary and relies on private landholders to protect, conserve and restore habitat with often limited resources. As coordinator of Land for Wildlife, my role to provide information resources, engage and educate the masses, and connect like-minded individuals with the greater network is the easy part – the rest is up to our members! So well done to our 101 Land for Wildlife and 137 Garden for Wildlife members for the tireless work you do to protect wildlife habitat across central Australia.

Thanks go to Territory NRM and NT Landcare for the lovely recognition of all of the hard work we have carried out through the program. Land for Wildlife Central Australia has had a huge year, taking on a number of projects in Alice Springs and the surrounding region. Some of the activities we have been involved in this year include:

- Signing up many new eager members and connecting with existing members.
- Producing monthly newsletters to provide members with articles of interest.
- We celebrated the 15th birthday of Land for Wildlife and the 10th birthday of Garden for Wildlife which was supported by TNRM and Olive Pink Botanic Garden and included a range of workshops, such as seed collection by Samantha Hussey from Charles Darwin University and Bat box making by John Tyne from Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife.

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- Engaging cat owners with the Domestic Cat Monitoring Project and developing a range
  of resources to encourage responsible cat management. This project was supported by
  TNRM and funded by the Australian Government's National Landcare Programme.
- The NT Register of Significant Trees (initiated by the National Trust of Australia (NT) and Greening Australia) was updated and converted to an online format for central Australia (and the top end is next).
- Launched the latest edition of the Reptiles and Frogs of Alice Springs guide by Nic Gambold and Deb Metters, by hosting a workshop by Rex Neindorf at Alice Springs Reptile Centre.
- Helped to organise and run a Buffel busting tour of Alice Springs, coordinated by Arid Lands Environment Centre, to inspire residents to remove buffel from their properties and encourage native forbs and grasses to grow.
- Began developing a grass identification book for central Australia with permission from AusGrass2 via the Queensland Herbarium.
- Encouraged members to learn about the birds in their backyards by running a Bird Bath Biodiversity Survey with camera traps at bird baths, as well as a mist netting survey with assistance from Bruce Pascoe. This was inspired by BirdLife Australia's Aussie Backyard Bird Count.
- Ran Biodiversity and Habitat workshops for school groups at the DesertSmart EcoFair schools day as part of National Science Week.
- Worked with the Bachelor Institute and Centralian Senior Secondary College to do biodiversity surveys and understand the impact of feral species.
- Ran a workshop for Conservation Volunteers Australia Green Army at Olive Pink Botanic Garden.
- Hosted stalls at many of the local events in Alice Springs to engage the wider community about the program.
- Continued to work with the Alice Springs Town Council on environmental management through the advisory committee.
- Feral cat and spotted turtle dove traps have been booked out all year with eager members trapping invasive species with our support.

To top it off, all of our work has been well supported and encouraged by ABC Alice Springs as well as local community groups such as the Alice Springs Field Naturalists and Australian Plants Society Alice Springs Inc.

Congratulations to all of the other winners and finalists! There were so many deserving groups and individuals - a great set of enthusiastic and passionate people working towards NRM in the central Australian and top end region. Land for Wildlife Top End was also hugely successful this year, taking out two awards for Australian Government Partnerships for Landcare (NT Landcare Awards) and People's Choice Award (Territory NRM Awards). This goes to show the level of interest in such a great program across the Northern Territory and proves that we are doing something right. At a local level, congratulations go to the Tjuwanpa Women Rangers for their well-deserved award for Indigenous NRM Group in the Territory NRM awards. Land for Wildlife is proud to be able to support the great work done by the ranger team and look forward to assisting with a biodiversity survey out their way next year.

We look forward now to taking on the big guns at the National Landcare Awards next year, going up against the winners from around Australia.

Well done team! Blog▶



Land for Wildlife Top End and Central Australia. L-R: LFW Top End member Jo-Anne Scott, LFW Top End Coordinator Emma Lupin, LFW Central Australia Significant Trees Officer Candice Appleby and LFW Central Australia Coordinator Caragh Heenan (*Image LFW Top End*).



#### Seed Collection in Central Australia

At the recent Land for Wildlife birthday event, Samantha Hussey from Charles Darwin University presented a workshop on seed collection to our members and it was of great interest and debate among attendees. Seed collection is something that may interest you at the local level, as you may be interested in revegetating your property through propagation practises. At a commercial level, nurseries will collect seed to propagate stock for sale. At a national level, agencies will collect seed for storage in seed banks. In Australia, there is a National Seed Bank at the Australian National Botanic Gardens, which has a role of conservation, research, propagation and supply of seed to researchers.

While many plant nurseries will have several local native species for sale, the ability for nurseries to stock a large variety of local native plants can be limited. Collecting local native seed and germinating the stock yourself can allow you to revegetate an area efficiently and with species that interest you. You can collect seed to germinate in growing houses or conduct direct seeding for revegetation purposes. Thus, we provide some information here to assist you with seed collection in the local area to maximise your ability to propagate local native plants.

Knowing where to collect seed will be your first hurdle. Seed collection in the Northern Territory requires a permit, which can be obtained through the <u>NT Government</u>. This is especially necessary when you are dealing with threatened species, such as <u>Cycads</u>. Ensure that you have a permit to collect seed from the locations that you have in mind. In addition, written permission from the landowner is required before collection can begin, including aboriginal land, roadsides, private land, pastoral properties, national parks / conservation reserves, or council reserves. There may also be sensitivity around collection from some locations – ensure that you respect and don't compromise the cultural values regarding trees and seed when collecting from an area.

Knowing what to collect in the acceptable locations is the next step. It's best to choose plants that are native to the region, representing provenance, as they will be best suited to the soil and climate. Check out the <u>vegetation maps</u> of Alice Springs to see what plants might be best for your property. If you are searching for particular plants, ensure that you have identified the plant correctly. There are a host of excellent plant identification resources out there to assist you, including <u>Andy Vinter's Bush Regeneration Handbook</u>. If you have a sample you need identified, you can use the assistance of the <u>NT Herbarium</u>. <u>FloraNT</u> also provides access to the Northern Territory Herbarium specimen data. Be mindful that some sap, fruits, seeds or dust from seeds can be toxic or cause skin allergies, so handle items carefully with appropriate PPE or avoid them altogether.

Knowing when to collect the seed will enable you to get on with the task efficiently. It might help you to observe the plants you pass in everyday life and begin making a calendar of when the desired plants are flowering and when they are producing fruit. Collect fleshy fruit when they are round and full, softening, falling to the ground or being eaten by birds or other animals. Dry fruits can be collected when they are brown and woody, or fruit capsules are opening. Grass seeds can be collected when they are changing colour, when seeds strip off easily by hand or the awns are falling off. It is important to collect mature seed, though be mindful that there are some species whose seeds don't mature for several months after being released from the plant and cracking dormancy in this species is a case of waiting and being patient. Resources such as native seed guides can help to fill in the blanks and provide information on sowing techniques and dormancy strategies

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Acacia sp. have seeds that are attached to a red aril and held in pods. They are mature when the pods turn brown in colour and seeds are released explosively.



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that need overcoming. Opportunistic collection may be necessary where seed set is irregular or influenced by seasonal factors such as rainfall.

It is best to collect seed from a range of healthy plants and avoid collecting any more than 20 % of the seed from one plant, to ensure you leave enough to naturally regenerate, add to the seed bank, and provide food for animals nearby. It's wise to avoid collecting seed from isolated plants, as self-pollination often results in low viability of seed and produces specimens of low vigour. Collect seed from several (10-20) plants that are widely spaced to ensure you have genetic diversity.

Seed can come in a range of vessels, including woody capsules (*Eucalyptus, Melaleuca*), papery capsules (Dodonaea, *Wahlenbergia*), seed pods (*Acacia, Indigofera*), drupes (*Santalum*), berries (*Atriplex, Enchylaena*), follicles (*Hakea, Grevillea*), nuts (no local native species), grains (*Spinifex, Themeda*), achenes (*Brachyscome, Helichrysum*), and cones (*Allocasuarina*). Find out how much seed a typical fruit of your desired species contains. For example, a *Hakea* follicle may contain one seed; an *Acacia* seed pod may contain a dozen seeds; while a *Eucalyptus* capsule may contain hundreds. Knowing how much seed a fruit contains will help you to know how much to collect to avoid taking too much. Collect a little more than you think you will use to account for poor viability of some seeds, but also avoid collecting much more than your own requirements. Use ecologically sustainable collection practices and adhere to a code of practice, avoiding damage to the environment and wildlife habitat.

Some seeds on tall trees may be out of reach and require ladders or long-handled tools. Ensure you are prepared with the tools required before you set out on your mission. You may also wish to coordinate seed collection with annual pruning activities.

Once you have collected the seed, the processing of the seed to maintain viability is integral. Clean and dry the seeds prior to storing them. For example, thick fleshy fruits should be placed in a bucket of water to remove skins and flesh, rubbed on a mesh tray to remove excess pulp, and then dried well. Woody fruits need to also be dried to crack the seed cases. This



can be done in a location that is well ventilated, dry, away from the wind and also protected from animals that may wish to eat the seed. Once dried, clean the seed to remove the pods, chaff, sticks and leaves. This can be done by hand or with the assistance of a mesh sieve appropriate for the seed size. You may wish to weigh the seed, especially if you are working under a permit, as you may need to report on this.

When collecting the seeds you can place them in calico bags, paper bags, boxes or buckets, but ensure they are well ventilated to avoid mould killing the seed. Keep the seeds

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separate (location and species). Storing seeds in paper bags and screw topped jars is preferable, though zip-topped plastic bags can work for very dry seeds. Seeds may keep for several years if they are stored correctly. Store the seed in a cool, dry and vermin-proof location away from sunlight. A fridge at 1-5 °C and relative humidity of 4-8 % is optimal.

It's important to keep a good record of the seeds that are collected. Record the species, collection location, and collection date as a minimum on or in the bag that the collected seeds are stored in. You may wish to fill out a seed collection record that has more space for information such as the common name, local language name, collector's name, the location description, and latitude/longitude. You can then simply label the seed container with a corresponding seed lot number, or double up on the important information in case the paperwork is separated from the container. This way you can keep track of the seed stock during the planting process and determine what works based on the records. You can check viability periodically by using a float test (floating seeds are generally viable), cut test (fleshy white centres usually indicate good viability) or by growing it out to check it directly.

When it comes to sowing the seed, some seeds will require treatment to enable germination. Nick the edge of hard-coated seeds or soak them in boiling water to break mechanical dormancy (e.g. *Acacia*, *Swainsona*, *Indigofera*, *Gossypium*, *Erythrina*, *Senna*), sow the seeds in a medium and conduct a smoke treatment (e.g. *Grevillea*, *Ptilotis*), remove the hairs

from seeds or soak and ferment in water for several days to break chemical dormancy (e.g. *Capparis*, *Ptilotis*), or wait and be patient to cope with morphological dormancy (e.g. Daisies, *Themeda*). <u>Blog</u>

For an additional range of excellent seed collection resources, head to the Flora Bank website.

We thank Samantha Hussey for her excellent presentation on seed collection, as well as information provided by Sarah Roberts and Charles Darwin University.

This workshop was supported by Territory Natural Resource Management with funding from the National Landcare Programme.









#### Pollinators Are The Bees Knees

November 20-27 was National Pollinator Week! You can find out more about how to <u>plant for our native pollinators</u> in the fact sheet by Bees Business. Not all the listed species are local so check your native plant list for your <u>vegetation type</u> to see some species you could plant on your property. You can also <u>attract butterflies</u> to your yard with this excellent fact sheet by the Australian Plants Society Inc Alice Springs. While you're at it, engage your kids to learn about pollinators by <u>collecting and identifying pollinators</u> in the garden and get crafty by building a native bee hotel - check out our newsletter article from <u>September 2016</u>.





## Bird Bath Biodiversity Survey

Land for Wildlife has conducted biodiversity surveys on member properties since 2007. They are an important tool in determining the success of land management activities carried out and to create a better understanding of species population dynamics in areas of mixed land use. The information gathered from the surveys adds to the knowledge of species distributions in areas that may otherwise pose access issues to do with land tenure and ownership.

Traditionally, the biodiversity surveys are conducted on Land for Wildlife properties only and involve trapping for a range of wildlife, including reptiles, frogs, mammals and invertebrates, as well as conducting visual transect surveys for birds. In 2017, as part of National Bird Week, Land for Wildlife took the aim of conducting a biodiversity survey targeted only at birds that visit the water baths provided on both rural and urban blocks so that Garden for Wildlife members would have an opportunity to take part in the process.

The survey was conducted using camera traps, which are small cameras housed within a pelican case that is responsive to movement. The camera is operated through infra-red sensors that detect movement and initiate recording. Three brands of camera trap were used for the survey, which included Reconyx (4), Bushnell (7) and Faunatech (1). Reconyx cameras were capable of taking still images, and were set to take 10 consecutive images following the detection of movement. Bushnell and Faunatech cameras were capable of taking moving footage, and were set to take 30 seconds of consecutive footage following the detection of movement. While Reconyx, Bushnell and Faunatech cameras are often called camera traps, they do not in fact capture the animal, but rather record its presence.

Cameras were set to run for a full day for each property. A total of 12 Garden for Wildlife members (including six in Eastside, three in Braitling/Northside, two in Larapinta, and one in Desert Springs) and seven Land for Wildlife members (including three at Ross, three at Ilparpa and one at Connellan) took part in the Bird Bath Biodiversity Survey 2017.

The Bird Bath Biodiversity Survey 2017 was an interesting exercise, highlighting the diversity of avian species that visit artificial or semi-natural water sources provided on urban, peri-urban and rural properties. A total of 566 visits to bird baths were recorded over the monitoring period. Overall, 22 species were observed in the camera traps, of which 16 were observed visiting Garden for Wildlife bird baths and 14 were observed visiting Land for Wildlife bird baths. The most common visitor to bird baths was the White-plumed Honeyeater and the Crested Pigeon, recorded at 10 properties each,

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Avian species visiting Land for Wildlife and Garden for Wildlife bird baths (^ Indicates an introduced species). Number of properties visited by species is recorded as all properties (Garden for Wildlife properties, Land for Wildlife properties). The list is ranked according to the number of properties visited.

Common Name	Scientific Nomenclature	Number of Properties Visited by the Species	Total Number of Visits to Bird Baths Across All Properties
Grey Shrike-thrush	Colluricincla harmonica	1 (1,0)	1
Grey-headed Honeyeater	Lichenostomus keartlandi	1 (0,1)	1
Variegated Fairy-wren	Malurus lamberti	1 (0,1)	1
Mulga Parrot	Psephotus varius	1 (0,1)	1
Hawk	Accipiter sp.	1 (1,0)	2
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	Coracina novaehollandiae	1 (1,0)	2
Diamond Dove	Geopelia cuneata	1 (0,1)	2
Willie Wagtail	Rhipidura leucophrys	1 (0,1)	3
Galah	Eolophus roseicapillus	1 (1,0)	12
Zebra Finch	Taeniopygia guttata	1 (0,1)	12
Australian Ringneck	Barnardius zonarius	2 (1,1)	4
Magpie-lark	Grallina cyanoleuca	2 (2,0)	85
Peaceful Dove	Geopelia placida	3 (1,2)	4
Crow	Corvus sp.	3 (3,0)	8
Western Bowerbird	Ptilonorhynchus guttatus	4 (4,0)	10
Singing Honeyeater	Lichenostomus virescens	4 (2,2)	11
Brown Honeyeater	Lichmera indistincta	4 (3,1)	67
Spotted Turtle-dove ^	Streptopelia chinensis	6 (6,0)	22
Yellow-throated Miner	Manorina flavigula	6 (3,3)	33
Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater	Acanthagenys rufogularis	9 (7,2)	111
White-plumed honeyeater	Lichenostomus penicillatus	10 (7,3)	64
Crested Pigeon	Ocyphaps lophotes	10 (5,5)	110
Total Species Count		22 (16,14)	
Total Visits to Bird Baths		566	



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whereas the Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater was the most persistent visitor to bird baths, visiting 111 times across all properties.

The Spotted Turtle-dove, an introduced species, was ranked 5th most common visitor at bird baths, recorded at six of the Garden for Wildlife properties monitored. Garden for Wildlife members can loan traps for free to help actively manage feral bird populations, as well as receiving instructions on how to make your own. Head to our website to see more information on feral dove control.

Several species were observed on only one property, which included four visiting Garden for Wildlife properties and six visiting Land for Wildlife properties. Of the species that visited several bird baths, the Western Bowerbird and the Spotted Turtle-dove were the only ones to visit Garden for Wildlife bird baths only. While the Western Bowerbird is known to visit rural bird baths, it wasn't observed in this case. On the other hand, Spotted Turtle-doves are rarely seen south of Heavitree Gap and therefore their presence at the Land for Wildlife bird baths is not expected.

Garden for Wildlife properties recorded 10 species on a single property, with the Crouch and Heller properties coming out on top. The Land for Wildlife properties recorded 11 species on a single property, with the Kenna property taking the lead. While it is sometimes expected that there would be fewer species observed in urban areas, this was shown not to be the case in this survey. The Sweeney property received the most visits by birds to Garden for Wildlife properties, totalling 101 visits, irrespective of species. The Kenna property took the prize for most visits to Land for Wildlife properties, totalling 171 visits.

The Bird Bath Biodiversity Survey 2017 showed that there is a range of species that visited bird baths around the Alice Springs area within a one-day monitoring period. However there are over 200 species that can be found in and around Alice Springs. A comprehensive list of birds likely to be observed in the region is given in the Land for Wildlife Fauna List. If you feel that you could be attracting more birds to your garden, you could try some of the hints and tips from Land for Wildlife on the Biodiversity fact sheet.

Full details on the Bird Bath Biodiversity Survey 2017, including images and species summaries for individual properties can be found in the <u>survey report</u>. Are you interested in taking part in the next Land for Wildlife or Garden for Wildlife biodiversity survey? Head to the Land for Wildlife <u>Biodiversity Surveys</u> Page to find out more information. Until next time, happy bird watching! <u>Blog</u>

We thank the survey participants for allowing the Land for Wildlife team to visit and monitor the bird baths on their property. Appreciation goes to Parks and Wildlife Commission NT for use of several additional camera traps. Thanks also go to

Birdlife Central
Australia for identifying several bird species.

This biodiversity survey was conducted with Animal Ethics approval (Charles Darwin University Animal Ethics 12006 Landscape, fauna and flora survey and impact assessment in relation to mineral and petroleum exploration, infrastructure development and conservation initiatives throughout the Northern Territory), a Parks and Wildlife Commission NT permit (60855 Permit to Interfere with Protected Wildlife) and a Department of Primary Industry and Resources permit (026 Licence to Use Premises for Teaching or Research Involving Animals).

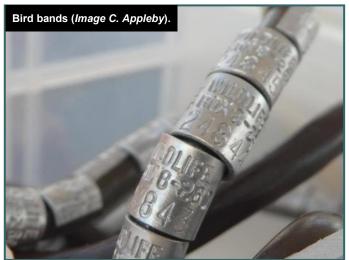




## Mist Netting and Bird Banding Workshop

As part of National Bird Week 2017 (inspired by the Birdlife Australia Aussie Backyard Bird Count), Land for Wildlife conducted a mist netting workshop for members on a rural property in White Gums. Bird banding is an activity that requires the bander to be trained to handle birds and trap them in an ethical and humane manner with mist nets. Bruce Pascoe, a local bird bander with an A-Class authority, conducted the mist netting and banding and explained the processes to the keen birders in attendance.

The mist netting workshop started shortly after sunrise, on a cool October morning, with the intention of seeing some birds up close and personal. A secondary intention was to observe and survey some of the species that can be found in the region. The final objective was to place band the captured birds so that they can be released and potentially recaptured down the line.



Three nets were set up from the evening before the workshop. On arrival, attendees were shown how to unfurl a net in preparation for a survey and the reasoning behind mist netting and banding captured birds. Mist netting and the subsequent bird banding allows us to see how many species and individuals reside in an area, their lifespan, migration habits, movement to feeding grounds and other long-term demographic questions. The data obtained is important for bird conservation, as well as help to guide habitat preservation activities.

Bird banding in Australia is governed by the Australian Bird and Bat Banding Scheme (ABBBS), who supply numbered metal bands to registered and qualified banders. These bands are fitted

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A Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater (Acanthagenys rufogularis) has its dimensions taken (Left) and a Yellow-throated Miner (Manorina flavigula) is banded ready for release (Right).



around the tarsus (lower leg) of the captured bird. The process is painless and doesn't cause distress to the birds. According to the ABBBS, over 2.6 million birds and bats have been banded Australia-wide, with 140,000 having been recaptured.

Other detailed information such as physical characteristics (sex, age, moult), and body length measurements (beak, wing) are obtained from the bird before it is released. For example, the head length can be used to determine sex in some species, but also age. The sex of a bird can also be determined from the plumage colouration or cloacal protuberance and brood patch shape. Feather wear and shape is a good indicator of the age of the bird, but many other characteristics can also be used. Anatomical features of birds, their moult and how to age birds can be found in an excellent section of <u>Birds of</u> the World.

While the going was slow to start, a fourth net was set up to the north of the property and this was successful at capturing three birds – two Yellow-throated Miners (*Manorina flavigula*) and a Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater (*Acanthagenys rufogularis*). Both species received size 05 alloy bands and measurements were taken. You can view summaries on the capture/recapture history of the Yellow-throated Miner and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater on the ABBBS website.

To learn more about the species biology, head to the Birdlife Australia listing for the <u>Yellow-throated Miner</u> and <u>Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater</u>.



Interested in birds and don't know where to start your journey? Get in touch with Birdlife Central Australia (centralaustralia@birdlife.org.au) or follow their Facebook page to keep posted about bird sightings in the Alice Springs area. <u>Blog</u>

We thank Cyd Holden and Peter Latz for allowing the Land for Wildlife team to visit and monitor the bird populations on their property.

Appreciation goes to Bruce Pascoe for the use of mist nets and assisting with the workshop proceedings.

This biodiversity survey was conducted with Animal Ethics approval (Charles Darwin University Animal Ethics 12006 Landscape, fauna and flora survey and impact assessment in relation to mineral and petroleum exploration, infrastructure development and conservation initiatives throughout the Northern Territory), a Parks and Wildlife Commission NT permit (60855 Permit to Interfere with Protected Wildlife) and a Department of Primary Industry and Resources permit (026 Licence to Use Premises for Teaching or Research Involving Animals). An A-Class bird banding ticket was held by Bruce Pascoe, who oversaw the survey.



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



Article • The faithful lizard



*Phone App* • 'Urgent rescue mission' to save Australia's frogs using smartphone app



Article • Bush tomato farm anticipates promising harvest after tough few years in the Red Centre



Blog/Images • At Australia's red heart



Video • Saving Warru

#### Cheers,

#### Caragh, Candice and Bill

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

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Northern Territory
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### **Contact Us**

Land for Wildlife & Garden for Wildlife Central Australia Low Ecological Services P.O. Box 3130 Alice Springs NT 0871 (+61) 8 89 555 222 Ifw@lowecol.com.au wildlife.lowecol.com.au

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