



# Land for Wildlife

Conservation is in your hands



**NEWSLETTER – JANUARY  
2012**

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**On our cover this month...** Bush tomato *Solanum quadriloculatum*, which normally has purple flowers, showing flowers of pure white at Alice Springs sewage ponds. This occurs occasionally in wild populations due to the expression of a recessive gene. Solanums can sometimes be difficult to identify because of this and other more subtle variations. The South Australian Herbarium has constructed a fantastic web site to use as a tool for identifying solanums. Covering every species known to occur in Australia, including introduced species, the site takes you through a step by step process of identification. NOTE: having a specimen in hand when using the keys helps!

[www.flora.sa.gov.au/lucid\\_keys/Solanaceae/index.shtml](http://www.flora.sa.gov.au/lucid_keys/Solanaceae/index.shtml)

Photo: Chris Watson

## Land for Wildlife News

### Visit Postponed

In last month's newsletter, we told you of Alan Fleming's visit from Forest and Bird New Zealand at the end of this month.

Unfortunately, Alan has had to postpone his trip until a later date. Thanks for those of you who volunteered to meet Alan and show him your properties.

We'll be in touch when we hear from Alan again and let you know of the revised dates.

### 10 Years in the Alice

In 2012, Land for Wildlife celebrates 10 years of running in Alice Springs. From small beginnings, the Land for Wildlife and Garden for Wildlife programs have grown to include a membership of over 300 properties totalling almost 16,000 hectares.

Plans are underway to increase this throughout the year, with funding to take the program to pastoral properties and Aboriginal communities announced by the NT Government's Territory Ecolink initiative.

Later in the year, we'll be holding a 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary event to celebrate this milestone. LfW Coordinators are busy brainstorming some ideas right now, so if you have any suggestions about how to ring in the 10<sup>th</sup> year of LfW in Alice, let us know.

Call us or send us an email:

Email: [lfw@lowecol.com.au](mailto:lfw@lowecol.com.au)

Ph: 89 555 222

### Territory NRM Community Action Grants

In late 2011, LfW was successful in its application for a Community Action Grant from Territory Natural Resource Management.

Each year, Territory NRM receives funds from the Commonwealth Government's Caring for our Country initiative to distribute to small scale NRM projects.

Projects are selected based on management priorities identified in the Integrated Plan for Natural Resource Management, a document compiled from a lengthy process of public consultations and submissions.

One of those management priorities is the control of feral animals and in the southern NT, rabbits feature prominently. LfW submitted an application for funding for a rabbit monitoring and control program and was successful in obtaining the funds to run the project.

The project will take place on six LfW properties and include the monitoring of rabbit numbers and impacts on the property and control programs. Other LfW members and members of the public will also have the opportunity to be involved through workshops run as part of the project.



## Articles

Would you like to share some of your stories and experiences of managing your property for wildlife? Maybe you've implemented a successful weed control program or simply have some interesting wildlife hanging around?

If you do, send us an email or better yet, write a short article about your experiences of natural resource management in Alice Springs. We'd love some member input into our newsletter and blog content!

### Mystery Skull Baffles the Land for Wildlife Office

Throughout the year, numerous Land for Wildlife members send us interesting photographs and specimens of plants and animals they find on their properties. Often they come with the question "What is it?"

Usually we're able to answer that question, sometimes with a bit of research, conversations with colleagues at Low Ecological Services, or by forwarding the material to relevant people in the know. It's not often that something has us completely baffled about its identity.

One regular contributor to our growing stockpile of photographs and specimens is Uwe Path, whose Pathdorf bed and breakfast property is nestled between the race course and Todd River. Since becoming a Land for Wildlife member, Uwe has come across some interesting finds on



his property, particularly after the rains of the previous years and after carrying out weed control and buffel removal activities.

Just before Christmas, Uwe emailed these pictures of a skull found on his property.

On first impressions, the skull above resembles that of a dog or fox, especially with those vicious looking canines. But when we viewed the photo with some scale (the 50c coin), the tiny size immediately ruled out that possibility.

We really were stumped with this one – Land for Wildlife and Low Ecological staff alike. Several suggestions were made including bats, a very young dog of small breed and several others. But it wasn't until we had the skull in hand that its identity was made clearer.

When inspected in the hand, the skull showed characteristics of a small, carnivorous marsupial, or Dasyurid. Being a little large for a Dunnart, our best guesses were a Fat Tailed Antechinus, or perhaps even a Mulgara.

While we're unable to conclusively ID this specimen, this example does show two things:

1. Some idea of scale in a photograph is extremely important when using them for identification purposes and
2. having a specimen to view is much better than possessing only photographs.

Without the benefit of the scaled picture and the specimen, our initial ideas of a dog's skull would have been clearly wrong.

If any of you can shed some additional light on the identity of Uwe's find, don't be afraid to send us an email. Uwe would love to be able to conclusively add a new species to his property's list!

### Revealing the Mysteries of the Night

Many of the animals that might be found using resources on your property such as water sources or fruit trees are only active at night, especially in the hot weather currently being experienced.

Spotlighting - literally walking around in the dark with a high powered torch (see Nov – Dec Newsletter) – is one way to discover night time visitors. However, this method can be disturbing to animals and many may hear you coming and vanish long before you're able to spot them in the torch beam.



A growing trend in the business of wildlife monitoring and surveying is the use of remote infrared cameras to sample nocturnal animals that may be trap shy or simply too large to capture easily or humanely.

Our eyes were opened to the use of these cameras by NT Parks and Wildlife, who have been using remote cameras over the past year to monitor waterholes. Parks have had some great results using this technology, even snapping images of endangered Brushtail Possums at Ormiston Gorge, where they hadn't been seen for many years.

"What has this to do with me?" you may ask. Well, the fact is that this technology is relatively cheap, easy to use and, if used correctly, can capture some great images of wildlife on your property. Most will also take good pictures in colour in daylight.

Without becoming an advertisement for any particular camera, I'll just say that quality and applications vary greatly from one brand to another and, as is most often the case with technology, you get what you pay for. For those who enjoy playing around with technology and have an interest in wildlife though, you should be able to pick up a decent unit for around \$300 - \$500.

We gave our camera a test run at Ooraminna Rockhole recently. Things had started to dry out since all the rain over past years, but the rockhole still contained a reasonable amount of clean water. There were plenty of kangaroo and bird tracks in the sand bar at the waterhole entrance, so we rigged the camera a few metres distant from Set one up near a birdbath, dam or other watering point on your place, and you never know what you might find!

**Left:** a series of images taken on an infrared remote camera of a Euro drinking at Ooraminna Rockhole.

## Ants to Look Out For

When people think of feral animals, they don't often consider insects as potentially destructive pests. However, some species of insects can possibly have just as damaging effect on Australia's ecosystems as rabbits, foxes and cats that usually come to mind.

Recently, two reports of Singapore Ants (*Monomorium destructor*) in Alice Springs have been brought to our attention. These introduced ants may go unnoticed for a while due to their tiny size – up to only 2mm long. They will not go unnoticed for long as they will bite humans and it has quite a nip.

This species is known to nest in power sockets and chew on wiring. It has even been responsible for house fires, earning them the name, "Electric Ants".

This ant can be spread around the country by the movement of soil, goods and the transport industry. It has been known to turn up in unexpectedly remote locations, transported there inside machinery, vehicles and shipping containers. It can impact on ecosystems by replacing native ant species and changing ecosystems functions.

We'd love to hear from you if you've identified this species around your property. If you have this species, or the Big-headed Ant *Pheidole megacephala*, then there are a few things you can do to eradicate them or limit their encroachment on your garden. Your steps should look something like this;

**Hygiene –** This does not imply that your house is unclean! Simply looking at the areas where ants are congregating, can often reveal food scraps or other food sources that might be attracting ants. By removing these, ant populations can often be very effectively "moved on".

**Baits –** The next step in your escalation should be domestic baits. These are usually more effective than sprays as the ants will carry the baits back to the nest helping to incapacitate other ants in the process.

**Sprays –** If you still have problems you could look at sprays. There are a lot of different options here depending on how large the problem is. See the link at the end of this article for more detailed information on spraying options.

**Physical Barriers -** Using grease or adhesive barriers to prevent ants ascending furniture or house fittings can be very effective but will require regular maintenance.



(Above) Singapore Ant, *Monomorium destructor*. April Nobile – Wikicommons.

As well as protecting your own property from this ant and other introduced insect pests, you can help prevent their spread to other parts of the country by thoroughly checking

your vehicles, trailers and camping gear for insect invaders. If you find any, treat them using methods such as those above before heading bush.

The NT Government has a useful factsheet available which deals with all of the introduced ants in the NT and how to go about tackling an infestation. You can find this information online at the following link;

[http://www.nt.gov.au/d/Content/File/p/Plant\\_Pest/ENT2%20Ants%20in%20the%20household%20and%20garden%20Factsheet.pdf](http://www.nt.gov.au/d/Content/File/p/Plant_Pest/ENT2%20Ants%20in%20the%20household%20and%20garden%20Factsheet.pdf) or just do a Google search for "Singapore Ants".

## Websites Worth a Look

### RED KANGAROO BOOKS

<http://www.redkangaroobooks.com/>

For all of us who love Central Australia and natural history in general, Red Kangaroo Books will be a familiar and much-loved destination. The good news is that everyone's favourite bookstore has now gone online. You can order and purchase anything from their unrivalled catalogue from the comfort of your desk, and have it shipped to your door.

So now those of us living in Alice Springs aren't the only ones with access to such an extensive collection of Australian literature and non-fiction titles.

### THE POST GROWTH INSTITUTE

<http://postgrowth.org/>

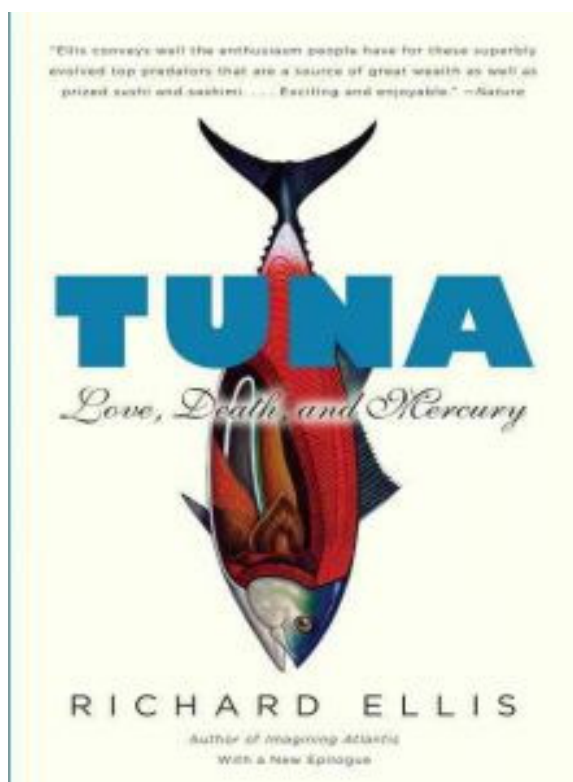
This is a mob doing some interesting work at the cutting edge of sustainability thinking. The blurb from their website puts it succinctly;

"Post growth is about developing human potential, wellbeing and happiness within, and in relation to, a physically finite earth. It's about putting life and everything needed to maintain it at the center of economic and social activity, instead of the never-ending accumulation of money, and the pursuit of growth of all kinds without regard for the consequences. "

There's some really interesting food for thought here on this very well laid out and readable website. There is plenty of practical advice too, for those of us looking to make a change for the better in our approach to living in a more thoughtful and sustainable manner.



## Recommended Books



### **TUNA: Love, Death and Mercury.**

By Richard Ellis

This book tells the story of an extraordinary fish, and an unsustainable fishery. I hadn't realised quite how dire the situation was for the tuna, and by extension, the tuna industry. The main grievance that I have been aware of between conservationists and commercial fishers has been the criminal levels of by-catch involving mass deaths of sea turtles, dolphins, albatross, and myriad other non-targeted fauna. Richard Ellis however, paints a picture of an ecosystem teetering on the edge of collapse if something isn't changed in the way we harvest the seas. *Tuna*, is not an overly technical book, but still has more than enough scientific clout within to have convincingly turned me off eating tuna.



### **The Sources of The Finke River**

By Charles Chewings

This account of Chewings' travels through the river systems of Central Australia in the late years of the 19th century, while written long ago, has only recently been published for the first time. It has been released by the Friends of the State Library of South Australia in two separate limited editions (standard and deluxe leather bound) in 2010.

Chewings is sometimes described as one of the forgotten explorers, and he is certainly one of the lesser known. This is difficult to justify given his extensive travels in South Australia and Central Australia, searching for water, exploring potential stock routes, and all the while working to preserve some of the languages and culture of The Centre's indigenous peoples.

This edition also includes some of Chewings' later accounts of explorations from Barrow Creek up to the Victoria River. Visit the Australian Publications website for further details on obtaining a copy.

<http://www.australianpublications.org.au/book.php?bid=47>

## Letters

Together with the skull above, Uwe sent us a further email and specimen for identification. An unidentified plant had appeared in a patch where buffel Grass had been removed. Uwe correctly narrowed it down to a *Solanum*, but a native or introduced species was the question.

Using the Flora SA website (see **On Our Cover This Month**), we identified the plant as *Solanum Chenopodium*,

a native species that looks similar to some introduced varieties. Luckily, Uwe waited for ID before pulling out the plant!

## Calendar of Events

**24/1/2012** – Dinosaur Storytime at the Museum of Central Australia, Library School Holiday Program.

**2/2/2012** – World Wetlands Day

**21/2/2012** – International Mother Language Day

We look forward to working with you this year and beyond.

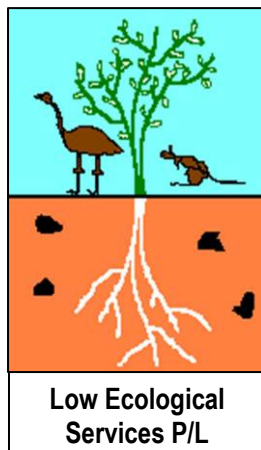
Take care,

Jesse, Chris & Bill  
Land for Wildlife Coordinators

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