



# LAND FOR WILDLIFE

and

# GARDEN FOR WILDLIFE

## NEWSLETTER- CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

SEPTEMBER 2023

Photo: Bronte Stray

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## WELCOME BACK

G'day, dedicated wildlife enthusiasts!

After a brief hiatus, this September issue welcomes you back to the Land for Wildlife/Garden for Wildlife quarterly newsletter. I'm delighted to introduce myself as your new Land/Garden for Wildlife Coordinator. My name is Jessie Longmuir. With a background deeply rooted in community engagement, education, and science, I'm keen to explore how we can work together to support the wildlife of biodiversity-rich Alice Springs.

Being a part of this vibrant community and working towards the conservation of local ecosystems brings me immense happiness. Our LFW programs will soon be back in action, and I look forward to incorporating workshops, surveys, property visits, celebrations, and other engaging events into the calendar. I am thrilled to embark on this journey and can't wait to meet all of you soon.

Jessie



Follow us on social  
media @lfwalice





## WELCOME LETTER

Over the past few months, the weather has taken us on a wild ride, from a week's worth of rain to blustery winds to wildfires and now the sun-drenched beginnings of September. It's the perfect time to step outside and explore. Have you marvelled at the colourful wildflowers and the delightful kaleidoscope of butterflies fluttering about? We certainly have.

In this edition, we are excited to join the festivities of Biodiversity Month by highlighting the crucial role that members of Land & Garden for Wildlife (LFW & GFW) play in bolstering biodiversity. We delve into captivating local Flora and Fauna species, draw inspiration from a long-term LFW member, learn about the impacts of the Spotted dove, provide you with updates on upcoming events, offer a selection of reading recommendations, and don't forget to flip to the final page for an engaging newsletter quiz!

As mentioned in our previous newsletter, we are actively seeking financial support to maintain/restore the LFW and GFW programs. If you know of funding opportunities, we'd love to hear from you! While we are in the process of securing funding, Low Ecological Services continues to provide support for a part-time coordinator. Ongoing sponsorship from the Alice Springs Town Council provides proof that the council also believes in the LFW program. This provides a strong message that a healthy environment can help lead to a healthy community. Wishing you a delightful spring, and we look forward to celebrating our 20th birthday anniversary with all of you soon!

From Jessie, Ilse and Bill- LFW/GFW Central Coordinators

## 20TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION!

Join us on Saturday, **the 23rd of September, at 9am** (just around the corner), on Lillicrap Rd, Ilparpa, for a celebration of Land for Wildlife's **20th anniversary!**

We'll delve into two decades of remarkable conservation efforts by LFW's members, followed by a hands-on, skill-building plant survey of Glenn Marshall's buffel-free property. Then, we'll wind down with tea, delicious snacks, and informal chats.

**Location:** Rsvp to secure a spot, and we will forward the exact address on to you.

RSVP by emailing [lfw@lowecol.com.au](mailto:lfw@lowecol.com.au) with the number of attendees and any dietary or accessibility requirements.

We can't wait to see you there!



Photo: Glen Marshall's Property. Jessie Longmuir

## BIODIVERSITY MONTH

As we dive into September's celebration of the incredible variety of life on Earth, let's pause and recognize the pivotal roles played by Garden for Wildlife and Land for Wildlife in the global efforts to conserve and restore biodiversity. It's truly heartwarming to acknowledge that right here in Alice Springs, we have these two exceptional programs and a dedicated community that exemplifies our commitment to preserving natural ecosystems.

For both newcomers and our existing members, let's take a moment to revisit the essence of these two programs and grasp what it means to be part of them. Garden for Wildlife invites members to transform their urban gardens into thriving havens for local wildlife. This program encourages the cultivation of native plant species, the adoption of wildlife-friendly practices, and responsible water use to nurture urban ecosystems and forge a profound connection with nature right in their own backyards.

Land for Wildlife extends its membership to those who own rural or semi-rural, pastoral or Aboriginal properties, empowering them to be champions of conservation on a larger scale. Participants voluntarily pledge to manage their lands in ways that benefit native flora and fauna, preserving natural habitats through actions such as safeguarding native vegetation, managing invasive species, and creating extensive wildlife corridors. Both programs encourage members to actively contribute to biodiversity conservation in Alice Springs. Moreover, these programs foster community engagement by hosting a variety of events, workshops, and educational activities that raise awareness about our local wildlife and highlight the crucial role each of us can play in their conservation.

If you're interested in **becoming a member** or know someone who might be, please don't hesitate to contact us at [lfr@lowecol.com.au](mailto:lfr@lowecol.com.au) or sign up directly at [www.wildlife.lowecol.com.au](http://www.wildlife.lowecol.com.au). Members receive recognition from and connection to a like-minded community, as well as access to advice, resources and support through a property visit and ongoing contact with one of our experts.

To our existing members, whether you've been part of these initiatives for years or have recently joined, we wholeheartedly invite you to share your property stories with us. Your experiences serve as a wellspring of inspiration and knowledge, and we would be delighted to hear from you!

We would also like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Alice Springs Town Council as a sponsor of the LFW program. Their commitment to the cause has played a pivotal role in our efforts to conserve and support local wildlife. In this spirit of gratitude, we also want to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of past sponsors, who have been vital to Land for Wildlife's success. We kindly invite them to consider rejoining us in our efforts to protect and celebrate the flora and fauna of Central Australia. Your support makes a significant difference, and together, we can continue to make a positive impact on the rich biodiversity of Alice Springs.

”

TOGETHER, WE ENSURE THAT THE  
RICH TAPESTRY OF LIFE IN OUR  
REGION CONTINUES TO FLOURISH  
FOR GENERATIONS TO COME.

“

Let's remember that biodiversity isn't a distant concept; it's right here, thriving in our gardens and on our properties. By actively participating in these programs, we are nurturing biodiversity in our own backyards.

## FLORA IN FOCUS

### THE STURT DESERT PEA

*Swainsona formosa*



Photo: Jessie Longmuir

**By Jessie Longmuir**

In the heart of Alice Springs, where nature's resilience takes centre stage, a botanical marvel known as the Sturt Desert Pea (*Swainsona formosa*) decorates the streets with its striking beauty. This unique and resilient plant is one of the most eye-catching wildflowers I've had the pleasure of observing. While researching this plant, I realised that it is not just a sight to behold but also a symbol of the resilience and adaptability of life in one of the world's harshest environments. Join me on a journey through the fascinating world of the Sturt Desert Pea and learn why it has captured my heart and, I'm sure many others too.

The Sturt Desert Pea is known for its distinctive appearance, with vivid crimson/pink or black flowers that starkly contrast the arid desert backdrop. These flowers feature a central black structure, the "boss", a visual masterpiece that inspires artists all around (check out this season's feature artist Tori Delany).

Surviving in the harsh desert is no easy feat, but the Australian Desert Pea has adapted. While hardy, they require regular watering during their initial growth, hence why after our winter

rains, we are spotting these beauties all around town. Its finely divided leaves reduce water loss through transpiration, and its long taproot reaches deep into the soil to find hidden moisture reserves, making it a true desert survivor. Its deep-rooted structure also helps prevent soil erosion, protecting the ecosystem against desertification. The vibrant flowers attract native pollinators and provide them with nectar and pollen, supporting local insect populations and promoting biodiversity. Additionally, while not a primary food source for many animals, its seeds can be a supplementary food source for certain herbivores and seed-eating birds during times of scarcity.

For those interested in growing this remarkable plant, many botanical gardens and nurseries cultivate this species, making it accessible to gardening enthusiasts. Find out more about how to grow this plant here:

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-08-17/sturts-desert-pea-blooms-display-alice-springs/102731880>

There are, however, ongoing conservation efforts to protect its populations. When you spot this bold plant around town, it's important to admire it in its natural habitat and refrain from disturbing or removing it from the wild.

To me, the Sturt Desert Pea, with its vibrant red flowers, symbolizes the resilience of life in arid environments. As we continue to appreciate and protect this iconic plant, we're reminded of the awe-inspiring beauty that can thrive even in the most challenging of conditions. So, next time you find yourself roaming the streets of Alice Springs, keep an eye out for the Desert Pea and take a moment to appreciate nature's tenacity and artistry.



## FAUNA IN FOCUS

### THE RAINBOW BEE EATER

*Merops ornatus*

**By Ilse Pickerd**

In the garden in mid-August, I heard a distinctive trill that brought a smile to my face. The type of smile you have when a friend returns to town who you haven't seen in a while. This friend is feathered and none other than the migratory Rainbow Bee-eater, *Merops ornatus*. Its Arrernte name is Tirre-tirre, which is exactly how its call sounds.

It returns to us from the Top End, a sign of seasons changing. We move away from Alhwerrpe/winter and towards the warmer weather of Uterne and the Arrernte fire season of Ure. The Bee-eaters avoid the humid heat of Top End's wet season and then return north away from the cold in the dry season. We can still expect fluctuations in temperature, but hopefully, for the Bee-eater's sake, the frost is behind us. You can often see them huddled up together in rows along branches or power lines in cooler weather as these small birds are susceptible to hypothermia, particularly after their long flight south, burning up their fat reserves. We will see more Bee-eaters arriving in the coming weeks.



Photo: Caragh Heenan



Photo: Caragh Heenan

A colourful plumage of greens, blues, yellows, and bronze with black markings, Bee-eaters are striking yet well camouflaged when they want to be. You can tell the sexes apart by their central tail feathers; males are much longer.

Rainbow Bee-eaters nest in communities, with up to eight birds helping to rear young, warming eggs and feeding chicks. Their nest is a tunnel dug into a sandy bank of a creek bed or even unusual spots like sandy roadside embankments. They lay 4 – 5 white glossy round eggs at the end of the tunnel and are discreet around the nest, hiding in nearby trees when not inside. Their nest sites are commonly in open clear areas without thick vegetation – a good idea for watching for approaching danger, but could it be becoming harder to find suitable places as Buffel Grass encroaches?

Please continue reading on the next page...

...Continued

We can expect to say goodbye to the Bee-eaters around April as they begin their journey north to warmer weather.

Another migratory bird heading south to us around now to watch for, also with a very distinctive (and loud!) call, is the Channel-Billed Cuckoo, flying all the way from Indonesia and New Guinea.

For more info, see an article from a previous newsletter here:

<https://wildlife.lowecol.com.au/blog/eye2sky160517/>



Photo: Caragh Heenan

## FIREBREAK TIME!

With less than average rainfall it is time to get prepared for a hot, and dry summer. For all of you rural land owners, this means maintaining the firebreak around your property.

Here is an interesting link that explains the legal requirements of land owners:

<https://pfes.nt.gov.au/fire-and-rescue-service/fire-safety/firebreaks>

Here is a past article about how everyone can prepare for fires:

<https://wildlife.lowecol.com.au/blog/fire-plans-have-you-got-one-for-your-property-yet/>

## KEEP AN EYE OUT



Photo: Danesh Antia

As the days get hotter, roads become an efficient heat source for many reptiles, including this Bearded Dragon.

Unfortunately, roads are a significant threat to local wildlife. As you zoom around Alice Springs, be mindful of wildlife, slow down if you see anything close to the road, and if there is an injured animal, call 0419 221 128 for support.

Here are two links with more details on who to call if you find any injured animals:

- Low Ecology:  
<https://wildlife.lowecol.com.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/25/Injured-Orphaned-Wildlife-LFW17.pdf>
- NT government link:  
[https://nt.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/377536/rescuing-wildlife-information-sheet.pdf](https://nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/377536/rescuing-wildlife-information-sheet.pdf)



## MEMBER MOMENTS GLENN MARSHALL



Photo: Jessie Longmuir

In Ilparpa, located Southwest of Alice Springs, one individual has made an indelible mark on this landscape: Glenn Marshall, a dedicated property owner and conservationist. Glenn is not just any landowner; he is a key figure in the Land for Wildlife program and has been part of the charge against buffel grass invasion for over 18 years. His commitment to the environment goes beyond the removal of invasive species; he is now eager to discover the impact of going "buffel-free" on the diversity of life on his land.

During my first visit to Glen's property, he showed me something remarkable: velvet gecko scats. His property is a haven for these unique reptiles, and Glenn has gone so far as to modify his roof to accommodate their nesting needs. He's installed small holes in his roof, providing a safe and welcoming space for these geckos to call home. This act of accommodation reflects Glenn's profound commitment to the preservation of local wildlife, even the smallest and often-overlooked species.

Among the many tales Glenn shared with me, one stands out (as an insect lover) – the remarkable story of an ant war. On his property, two species of ants, the formidable meat ants and the tiny but resilient piss ants, engaged in a territorial battle witnessed by Glenn and his children. The conflict raged, but after the war ended, an eerie silence settled in. The meat ants never returned to the vicinity of their home. This intriguing anecdote is a testament to Glenn's deep connection to his land and his keen observations of the intricate web of life that unfolds on it.

Glenn's involvement with the Land for Wildlife program in Central Australia dates back to its early days. In 2007, biodiversity surveys were conducted on properties in the Ilparpa Valley and Ross Highway areas. These surveys aimed to assess the impact of buffel grass on local biodiversity and increase landholders' knowledge of conservation practices. The Marshall's property, along with several others on Lillecrapp Road, was chosen for further study due to its relatively high biodiversity. The presence of diverse bird and reptile species showcased the positive outcomes of the Land for Wildlife program... *Continue reading on the next page...*



Photo: Jessie Longmuir

...Today, Glenn is eager to take his commitment to conservation to the next level. He would like to conduct a plant diversity survey on his property to measure the impact of being "buffel-free". This endeavour aligns with the original goals of the Land for Wildlife program, which aimed to empower landowners to assess the impact of their conservation efforts and record species richness.

Glenn's journey is an inspiring example of how individuals can make a significant impact on the environment. His dedication to removing buffelgrass, creating habitat for local fauna, and observing the intricacies of nature on his property is a testament to the power of individual action in preserving biodiversity.

**We invite you to join us on September 23rd to survey Glenn's property and celebrate the vital role that private landowners in Alice Springs have played in the conservation of our natural world over the last 20 years.**



Photo: New nest box in tree. Jessie Longmuir

## TORI DELANY LOCAL CONTEMPORARY ARTIST

In celebration of Biodiversity Month, we'd like to promote this incredible local nature artist Tori Delany.

Tori is a contemporary landscape painter living and working in Mparntwe (Alice Springs). Their work is a love letter to the natural environment and explores emotion, perception and power.



Photo: Jessie Longmuir

You can find Tori's art at DuYu Coffee Roasters (during September) or online at [www.toridelany.com](http://www.toridelany.com) @toridelany.



Photo: Jessie Longmuir



## IN THE LOOP SPOTTED DOVE TRAPPING

Did you know that the Spotted Dove is not native to Australia, despite its large population size in town? Did you know it displaces three species of native pigeon and dove, among many others? Did you know you can help to manage and reduce their population?



Photo: Spotted Dove.  
Low Ecological Services

Spotted Doves first became established in Mparntwe/Alice Springs in the early 1990s when approximately ten birds were liberated from a backyard aviary. Since that time, the population was nearly brought under control by Parks and Wildlife, but the surging populations outgrew the resources available to control them, and today the bird impacts the environment and residents of the town in several ways.

Spotted Doves are domesticated birds that are highly adapted to life in urban areas. They are native to China, Southeast Asia and the Philippines. They can breed all year round and aggressively compete for resources (food, water, shelter and nesting sites) with native birds such as the Crested Pigeon, Diamond Dove, and Peaceful Dove. Spotted Doves will eat a wide variety of items, including seeds, pet food and household scraps.

They can be a nuisance around aviaries, fowl yards and pet feeding areas, where they scrounge for food. High concentrations of droppings deposited around these sites not only increase cleaning chores but may pose a health hazard.

Key ID features: Black neckband with white spots. No crest. Red-brown eye. No distinct eye-ring. Large (30 – 33 cm). Head grey, tinged pink. Underparts pinkish-fawn. Outer tail feathers are tipped white. Pink legs. Voice: cooing, 'curoo, curoo'. Nest: Poor, feeble, disorganised scrape of sticks. Often nests in palms, on ledges, and tree branches.

You can help to manage this species by:

- Preventing access by feral birds to pet food and covering chicken pens to prevent access to Spotted Doves.
- Inspect your property regularly for nesting activity, and destroy their nests and eggs (seek a second opinion on identification if you are unsure).
- Building your own trap – attend a Land for Wildlife trap-making workshop and participate in a backyard trapping program. You will learn how to make a trap, bait it, identify and safely handle birds, and ethically dispose of birds (the Desert Park will euthanize them to feed their carnivorous animals). Traps are easily made from chicken wire and household items.
- Taking trapped birds to the Desert Park bird cage for euthanasing provides the native animals raised at the Desert Park with wholesome food.



Photo: Desert Park cage for Feral bird drop off. Lowe Ecological.

## IN THE LOOP A LETTER TO THE COORDINATORS

My name is Megan,

I met you ever so briefly at the Todd Mall Market last weekend as I recognised the feral bird traps you were making. That brought back lots of memories for me as I have been a member of Gardens for Wildlife for maybe 15 years. When my son was young, we were quite active in bird counts and trapping programs in our backyard in the Gap area. Time flies by and I got busy, and sadly I no longer trap the birds, but I do notice how many I have in my backyard. TOO MANY to say the least!

Unfortunately, the thing that stops me trapping birds nowadays is I do not have the capacity to get the birds to Desert Park where I believe they still need to go and become food for other animals. If there is such a program where someone could collect the birds from me I would happily participate. (I wish someone would collect my recycling too - ha ha)

I love that there is new funding for Land for Wildlife and new enthusiastic energy. Thank you for being part of this. I look forward to hearing about what you are up to and participating in what I can.

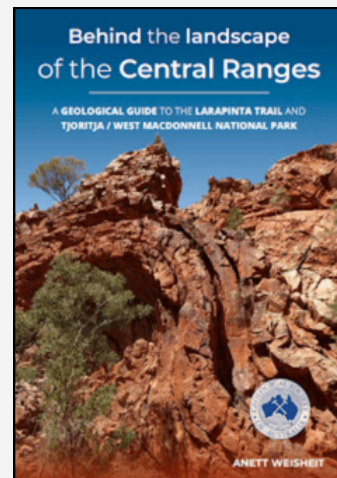
Lovely to meet you,  
Megan

**We welcome feedback from our  
members - it's the best way to improve!**  
**Please get in touch with us at**  
**lfw@lowecol.com.au with any feedback**  
**you have.**

## THE READING NOOK

**Behind the landscape of the Central Ranges**  
**By Anett Weisheit**

This field guide explains the geology and features of the ~230 km long Larapinta Trail in Tjoritja / West MacDonnell National Park landscape to the interested walker. The almost 60 stops along the trail and in Alice Springs also include additional information on culture, history and ecology, helping you to connect with this extraordinary part of the Central Ranges in Australia's arid zone.



**Australian Succulents- The Unfriendly Ones**  
**By Attila Kapitany & Jen Silcock**

A book for travellers, scholars, botanists, farmers and all lovers of Australia's vast drylands. Colourful and beautiful images, distribution maps and detailed information about each species to help with their identification.

A photographic journey through the intriguing but often overlooked world of Australian native succulent and spinescent plants.





## TODD MALL MARKET

Join us on **October 1st at Todd Mall Market**, where Land for Wildlife and Garden for Wildlife will host workshops on creating spotted dove cages. Please stop by to learn from our experts and get hands-on experience, or just pop by for a chinwag. Whether you're an experienced native wildlife enthusiast or just starting to dabble in conservation efforts, our workshops will cater to all interest levels.

If you want to take home a dove cage, email us at [lfw@lowecol.com.au](mailto:lfw@lowecol.com.au) before October, and we will send you a materials list.

I can't wait to meet you at this event and hear about your properties!



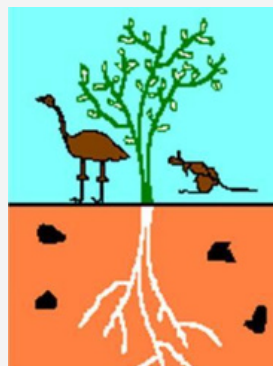
Photo: LFW/GFW stall at Todd Mall Market. Jessie Longmuir.

## THE QUIZ

1. What is the name of a scientist who studies insects?
2. Where are Buffel Grasses native to?
3. What does a thirsty Bearded Dragon do when there is no standing water to drink?
4. What is the family name of the flowering Callistamann (currently all around Alice Springs!)?
5. Where do you take a Spotted Dove when caught in your backyard?
6. When is the Aussie Bird count?
7. What year was Land for Wildlife established in Alice Springs?
8. What endangered reptile species used to be common in Alice Springs?
9. When is the best time to hand remove Buffel grass from your property?
10. What is the common name for *Gymnorhina tibicen*?

**Answers:** 1. Entomologist 2. Tropical and sub-tropical Africa, India and Indonesia 3. During light rain, it stands on its front limbs with its head and tail sloping down so that water runs into its mouth. 4. Myrtaceae 5. The Desert Park 6. 16-22nd October 7. 2002 8. Slater's Skink 9. After rain 10. Australian Magpie. For references, please email [lfw@lowecol.com.au](mailto:lfw@lowecol.com.au).

## SPECIAL THANKS TO



Do you have any stories, images or ideas 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 for articles, topics or workshops that you wish to hear more about at [lfw@lowecol.com.au](mailto:lfw@lowecol.com.au)