

LAND FOR WILDLIFE



& GARDEN FOR WILDLIFE



Land for Wildlife and Garden for Wildlife Central Australia Newsletter

August 2019

From the Land for Wildlife Coordinator

As you may be aware from recent local media attention and recent communication from us, the *Land for Wildlife* and *Garden for Wildlife* programs no longer have any funding. While we don't want this to be a reiterating theme in every publication and message you receive from us, a lack of funding has a critical impact on how we can operate the programs during the intervening period until we garner further funding. While we have done our best to continue the model as 'business as usual', in reality it has meant that there is a large amount of time necessarily focused on how, where and what funding we gain source. No trivial or easy task I was fast to learn! And what it also means for you, our dedicated conservation practitioners, is a reduction in the size and number of Newsletters sent out, an call for personal member donations in the near future (wait for it...we are working toward finalising this part), and a number of our usual projects and events are being put into hiatus e.g. NT Significant Tree Register.

We are hard at work to make funding a reality as soon as possible, so that we can continue to fully support our members and add to the 17 years of positive environmental actions and achievements which our members have been Nationally recognized for (seven awards and many previous project grants). However we *are* facing a current funding crisis and ask that you take any pertinent opportunity to highlight our situation with your local MP, local, National and even Global Business owners who are environmentally sympathetic (or not!) and amongst your own family, friends and associates in high places. In the following page, we offer some clear and strategic points to raise with any Government minister you talk with. *Your* action can strengthen and add impact to our cause as we continue to knock on doors of non-Government and Government organisations, business owners, Politicians and philanthropists for help. We are determined to succeed and you can help us to do that!

As I always say, every LITTLE bit, helps a BIG bit

~ Kate



A LITTLE and a BIG bit of
a Central Australian
Orthoptera spp (right)

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Our newest Garden for Wildlife-er is a TV star



Nannette (above) is happy with her new membership perks and an ABC TV Garden for Wildlife special showcasing her garden.

Meet Nannette Helder, our newest member to the *Garden for Wildlife* community in Central Australia. Nannette has already been a *Garden for Wildlife* showcase on the ABC TV!! Within a week of becoming a member, Nannette agreed to having an ABC film crew visit her garden and provide footage and comment in a piece that went to air on the local ABC 7pm news on Sunday 30 June*. Nannette is a surveyor by trade and nature enthusiast by birth.

Originally from Holland, Nannette is a long-time Territorian of 27 years, first in Katherine and for the last four and a half years, Alice Springs. When Nannette discovered an attractive house for sale, it was marketed as an 'easy-living home with a low maintenance and low water use garden'. This meant Pandanus palms and a small area of lawn.

Over the short time that Nannette has been in her 'easy-living' home, she has established a new-look garden which achieves the realities of a 'low maintenance and low water use garden'. A keen gardener with lots of enthusiasm and energy, Nannette has landscaped her garden and is transforming it into a sustainable and burgeoning natural wildlife habitat. She has done this by planting natives, encouraging self-propagating local native plants and placing bird baths strategically around the garden. Nannette was delighted to see evidence of a viable seed-bank in her soil once she performed a few basic rejuvenation efforts e.g. removing buffel grass (both inside and outside her boundary fence) and replacing the lawn (right), laying mulch and encouraging insects and soil microbes with leaf litter, mounds and fallen branches. The self-propagating native plants established themselves quickly and easily and she now pots growing seedlings to relocate them to other areas in the garden, replacing ornamentals and palms with the native species.



The leaves of an *Acacia murrayana* (foreground) are visible in front of the re-landscaped and heavily mulched area which was once a significant patch of water-hungry lawn.



The well-maintained courtship bower (above) of the Western Bowerbird that is resident in Nannette's back garden. The Bowerbird has made good use of decorating his bower with leaves of the Pigface plant nearby (inset).

Her inspiring efforts are obvious in the beautiful natural aesthetics of a habitat garden that overlooks protected areas of the West Macs. The garden is constantly being used by birds of all kinds, including up to three Bowerbirds - two males continuing to squabble over who shall retain ownership of a well constructed bower (left) and impress the female enough to garner mating rights. The growing garden is also providing habitat for Crows, Honeyeaters, Major Mitchell Cockatoos and Willy Wagtails, to name but a few. Nannette readily admits that working in her garden, watering plants by hand and even the simple act of watching the birdlife, is an effective use of her time as well as delightfully satisfying and relaxing.

*The ABC TV News item is no longer accessible online. However an associated online ABC article can be sourced [here](#)

Garden for Wildlife duo are neighbours!

Friendly banter and sharing some chook eggs across a neighbourhood fence resulted in our latest Garden for Wildlife membership! When Krissy Tonkin (left) followed up on her neighbour Nannette Helder's suggestion to 'have a look at *Garden for Wildlife*', Krissy was eager to find out what kind of support the voluntary program could offer in her gardening endeavours.



Krissy Tonkin (left) is an enthusiastic new member to the *Garden for Wildlife* community. She adds bright colour and habitat benefits to her front garden with several Sturt's Desert Pea plants.

Krissy, her husband Grant and their two young daughters have been renting an organisational home for nearly a decade. As a keen gardener, Krissy has re-landscaped her front garden to transform it from one of ornamental or non-local drought-resistant species only, to a gently undulating garden full of local and non-local Australian native plants. Central to the front garden is a vigorous example of a *Brachychiton rupestris* (right). These trees are commonly known as the Narrow-leaved Bottle Tree or Queensland Bottle Tree, and are endemic (i.e. natural range of species) to Queensland. You may be familiar with other members of this family, which include Boab Trees and Kurrajongs.

Ground covers flourishing under Krissy's careful attention are Surt's Desert Pea and Bottlebrush species. The back garden provides room enough for a wee forest of Long-leaved Eremophila which offer good shade and protective cover for the egg-laying



world and it's
So a

The distinctive 5-pronged leaves (left) of the Queensland bottle tree (right)

chooks. So when you think about fate, or cause and effect, it's the chickens' responsibility for the membership of our latest *Garden for Wildlife* community member!

As the Tonkin's *Garden for Wildlife* is right next door to our other new '*Garden for Wildlife*' member Nannette (see previous page), their combined habitat gardens have major ecological benefits for wildlife. First and foremost is habitat connectivity. If you consider how each organism experiences the environment, it's all about scale and perspective. Butcherbird can potentially move far further than a Slater's Skink, which can move further than a Caper White butterfly. Therefore, an animal's ability to move through the landscape (necessary for an individual's survival and species' genetic viability) depends on habitat connectivity. A very small insect cannot easily cross a road or move across large open spaces, but will use nearby or connected vegetation and leaf litter to move through habitat patches to access resources. This shows that size is important and certainly in this case, the principle of *BIGGER is BETTER* stands true. The more habitat available, the potential for habitat diversity increases and with an increase of habitat size and diversity, provides for an increase in animal diversity in that area...= BIODIVERSITY!

How can you increase your habitat patch and biodiversity in your local area?

- **Encourage your neighbours to join Land or Garden for Wildlife,**
- **create habitat linkages to crown land,**
- **remove buffel grass outside of your fence as well as inside.**



A SPECIES NAMED FOR ITS 'LOVE OF THE DESERT'

The picture (above) captures a magnificent specimen of an *Eremophila maculata* in full bloom. Commonly called the Spotted Emu Bush, the species was given its scientific name in reference to their Greek meanings. **Eremos** = desert and **phileo** = love. Because of the proliferation of the genera in dry country, it was considered to be 'desert loving'. The species name: *maculata*, is Greek for 'spotted', which of course refers to the spotted markings inside the flower.

Eremophila maculata is probably the most common *Eremophila* species both in the wild and in cultivation. It is usually a shrub to about 1 metre in height but occasionally grows taller. Two varieties are recognised; *var. maculata* and *var. brevifolia*. The most obvious difference between these varieties is the foliage, with *var. brevifolia* having much shorter leaves (<10mm) than *var. maculata* (up to 50 mm long).

Flowers occur in the leaf axils and are tubular in shape to about 25 mm long. Flower colour is variable and may be pink, mauve, red, orange or yellow, often with a pale, spotted throat. Flowering occurs mainly through winter and spring but some flowers may also be seen at other times. Fruits consist of four chambers each containing one or more seeds.

LOVE OF THE DESERT contd...

E. maculata is widely cultivated in many areas and, although best suited to dry climates, can be successfully grown in more humid areas. The *var. brevifolia* is, however, difficult to maintain in such areas. The species prefers soils which are alkaline to mildly acidic and well drained. Full sun is preferred and, once established, the plant tolerates extended dry periods. It is also tolerant of at least moderate frost.

Propagation from seed of *Eremophila* species is unreliable. A number of treatment methods have been tried including sowing the ripe fruits, sowing of aged and washed fruits and splitting the fruits to extract the seeds prior to sowing. The latter involves splitting the fruits in halves and quarters but some seeds are inevitably damaged during the process.

Most forms of *E. maculata* strike readily from cuttings of hardened, current season's growth.

Article source: <http://anpsa.org.au/e-mac1.html>



LETTERS TO THE COORDINATOR

Dear LfW

I have been trapping feral doves for a couple of years now, and have observed that the dry pet food that the neighbours on either side leave outside during the day for their pets, does provide a good and reliable food source for these ferals. It is also quite probable that this provides more favourable conditions for breeding.

Because the pet food industry encourages the use of dry pet food, this is the normal practice for most pet owners, and it is therefore to be concluded that this is exacerbating the problem of feral doves in our town.

By the way, the feral cats are out and about, once again. We have caught two this week.

Betty Davies

NOTE FROM COORDINATOR: Feral cats could also be benefitting from dry pet food left outside.

LETTERS contd...

Dear LfW

I've spent a bit of time doing up a document from my messy hand written form that I've been keeping a log of for 3 years at home.

I hope this helps for my [trapping] numbers. So far I've trapped (and taken to the Desert Park) – 334 Spotted Doves over a 3 year period!!

Believe it or not they're still coming thick and fast. I have had another 14 (& 1 egg laid) in my trap since Monday!! I imagine that my house is like a plug hole for all of Alice Springs!!

Regards,

Sharon [Bliss]

NOTE FROM COORDINATOR: We printed a story showcasing Sharon's champion efforts on Spotted Turtle-dove trapping in the February 2019 Newsletter. You can access this story by clicking [here](#)

Where has all the soil gone?

Focusing on soil management

Soil erosion is the movement of soil by wind or water, and it's through erosion that soil is 'lost'. If it is an organic soil, we also lose it by subsidence which happens when an organic soil is drained and its organic matter decomposes.

It can take roughly 500 to 1000 years to form one inch of soil, depending on the climate and the material from which soil forms. With that in mind it is not hard to see that soil is a non-renewable resource and worth protecting. Since the soil is the source of water and nutrients for plants as well as a bioreactor to purify and filter water, it is crucial to our quality of life.

Soil erosion occurs when the soil is not protected from the elements. Remove the plants and mulch from mineral soil and things start to happen. [Irregular bouts of] rain can break apart the soil making it easier to move it by wind and water. The water's ability to enter the soil is reduced and more water will subsequently flow over the top of the soil instead of infiltrating it and replenishing groundwater systems and reservoirs. Therefore, it stands to reason that water management is one of the most important factors affecting land use and management. In a disturbed environment, even a small amount of water can cause erosion. The soil that is lost can be measured in tonnes per hectare and will never be recovered naturally. Where does the soil end up? It might end up at the bottom of a hill, or in a river or stream bed, or it might end up against any barrier in the landscape such as a fence line. It will also be carried offsite into neighbouring property. As we can visibly see from dust and sand storms in Central Australia, when the soil dries out while it is unprotected, wind can pick it up and move it for many meters or kilometres downwind.

Another critical factor to *prevent* erosion is taking care of the soil. That means protecting it with mulch and plants, not disturbing soils on steep slopes, and maximizing the amount of water that enters the soil while minimizing the water that runs over the soil. Whether managing existing clearing or new clearing, adequate groundcover is essential in reducing the risk of erosion. Groundcover is an effective, comparatively cheap and easy way to manage erosion risk and can eliminate the need for other erosion or sediment controls.

Retained vegetation can intercept overland flow prior to discharging into watercourses, higher quality bushland areas surrounding the site, drainage lines and other sensitive areas. Retained vegetation can have the dual purpose of not only assisting in the settling of sediment from overland flows, but also provide a refuge for flora and fauna. Generally, the wider the strip of retained vegetation, the more effective it will be.

Native grasses and plants are a key component to a healthy, functional vegetation community and provide protection to the soil while reducing the potential for weed invasion. Native vegetation communities provide food and shelter for native animals and birds as well as protecting the soil from erosion.

To restore vegetation to a site, the ideal choices are:

- The species that grow in the surrounding areas or what grows on similar sites.
- Grasses from which you can get seed (Due to the lack of commercial supply, seed must be collected from naturally occurring stands. Note that most seed is produced following summer rain.)
- Ensure you get mature seed; harvest when some seed is just beginning to drop from the plant.
- Seed drop usually begins about one month after seed heads begin to develop.
- Harvesting seed by hand is a simple matter of pulling seed heads off the stand.
- Collect as clean a sample as possible to avoid the need for seed cleaning.

Information Source:

[Where has all the soil gone? American Society of Agronomy \(ASA\), Crop Science Society of America \(CSSA\)](#). [accessed 12/08/19].

Northern Territory Government: [Soil Management, Erosion and Sediment Control](#) [accessed 12/08/19].

Background image:

Natural soil erosion, Ilse Pickerd

Its not the sound of the 'bark' that matters.....

One night I was relaxing by my campfire In Gidgee country to the east of Alice Springs. I became aware of a faint tapping against my boot. I remained very quiet and still when I saw a very large, thick-set spider examining my (gladly) leather-clad boot. It was a so-called Barking Spider (*Selenocosmia stirlingi*). To me the title seems rather ludicrous as on the rare occasions when I have heard these creatures give voice, the sound is a soft but audible squeak, or chirp.



At the time I was assisting an NT naturalist, Shane Parker, who was collecting arthropods for the newly developing NT Museum. So, my campfire intruder involuntarily donated its body to science and became a specimen for that museum. Needless to say, in case my visitor had friends roaming in the vicinity I slept in my swag in the back of my ute that night.

The Barking Spider, along with many other Arachnids, make their appearance during times of high humidity, or pending rain. The spiders' large, vertical tunnels, 25 mm in diameter, are opened up overnight. These are readily visible as they do not have a lid like the tunnels of Trap Door spiders. Being of a curious nature I decided to find more. By pouring lots of water into their tunnels I sometimes had the spiders come to the surface, but they didn't always emerge from the hole. Sometimes the spider would come up near the entrance of the nest and then bunch itself tightly against the wall, forming an effective plug which prevented water from flowing into the tunnel.

I excavated nests to gauge their depth. At around 30cm, the hole terminated without revealing a spider. To answer this puzzle, I poured enough water to allow the excavation to be done more carefully. This method revealed the answer. At the base of the vertical shaft there came a 'U' turn for a short distance, at the end of which was a globular cavity in which the spider nestled happily and secure.

All creatures begin life as small, immature beings and this must be true for the Barking Spider. However, in all my years of observation I have never seen what I could recognise as a juvenile Barking Spider. They always present themselves as large, impressive adults.

Note from Coordinator: The barking spider is a desert species with special adaptations to survive harsh weather conditions. It is a hairy tarantula and, like all spiders, has two body segments, eight legs and two palps for sensing and feeling their prey.

(Image and further information sourced from [Wikipedia](#). [accessed 12/8/19]).

This Months Habitat Quiz...??

1. What is the very small mammal species, endemic to Australian stony desert country, which has a preferred habitat type that includes cracking clays i.e. lack of vegetation cover?
2. Can you identify the four ancestral spirits for which the streets Achilpa, Echunpa, Gnoilya and Arunga located in the Alice Springs suburb, The Gap, are named after?
3. Does the term 'habitat' mean, a) a group of organisms; b) the place where plants or animals prefer to live, or; c) populations of different vegetation species within a specified area?
4. What is the name given to the two structures located on either side of a spider's mouth and that assist in identifying and directing prey into their mouth?
5. What is the name of the website regarded as the primary online resource for information on the Northern Territory's flora?

Original Land for Wildlife Coordinator Visits Alice Springs

Deborah Metters recently visited the Land for Wildlife Central Australia staff for a good old fashioned 'sharing of ideas while sitting around a kitchen table drinking a long cup of tea'! It was a great chance to learn all about the very beginnings of the program being implemented within Alice Springs and to discuss the differences and similarities between the same program, just in different places.

Deb was instrumental in the introduction of the Land for Wildlife program in Alice Springs nearly 17 years ago. Way back then, she was engaged by the Alice Springs Town Council to provide a feasibility report for trialling a 1-year pilot Land for Wildlife program in Alice Springs. Following on from Council approval, she then worked with Council Officers to formulate a National Heritage Trust (Federal Govt.) grant with which to fund the trial. Following the success of this initial grant, Deb became the first Land for Wildlife Coordinator to deliver the voluntary conservation program in the Alice Springs municipality.

Within that first year of its existence in Alice Springs, 29 private properties were registered with the Land for Wildlife program. The program was so well received the Town Council and embraced by community members that it remains a highly recognised, 7-time awarded and integral community volunteer conservation program in Alice nearly 17 years later! The program has since increased its reach, and in 2007 incorporated a regional approach to become Land for Wildlife Central Australia with, along with its sister program Garden for Wildlife, serves over 300 members. That's a pretty impressive conservation commitment from a transient and fluctuating population base with a small percentage of long-term residents.

After her auspicious start to what has become a career with the Land for Wildlife program, Deb moved from Alice to the east coast. She has been the Regional Coordinator for Land for Wildlife South-east Queensland, a program with over 4,500 registered properties, 25 staff and 11 participating local Governments. Australia, far and wide, is being looked after by passionate and dedicated souls, is it not? Thanks to all our members....*everywhere!*

Bill Low (left), Director, Low Ecological Services, host of LfW program
Deborah Metters (centre), Regional Coordinator, LfW South-east Queensland
Kate Stevens (right) Coordinator, LfW Central Australia



Plant form (left) and seed pods (right) of Mallee Lovegrass *Eragrostis dielsii*. Images: Barb Gilfedder

Habitat Quiz Answers

1. Our closest population of the vulnerable listed species Latz's Wattle, (*Acacia latzii*) is ~150 km south-west of Alice. The only other population is south-west of Finke. It is listed as vulnerable owing to its small population and restricted species range.
2. The Thorny Devil is said to have a 'second head' at the back of its neck, which is thought to deter predators.
3. The term 'Environmental services' refer to the qualitative functions inherent in the natural assets of land, water and air and their biota, of which there are three types:
(a) **disposal services** which reflect the functions of the natural environment as an absorptive sink for residuals;
(b) **productive services** which reflect the economic functions of providing natural resource inputs, and space for production and consumption, and;
(c) **consumer or consumption services** which provide for physiological as well as recreational and related needs of human beings.
4. One of the most invasive introduced grasses in Central Australia is Buffel Grass (*Cenchrus ciliaris*) and it has a major impact on important environmental factors which are fundamental in changing landscapes naturally. For example, **fire**; increases the risk of high intensity fires in vulnerable habitat, **water movement**; decreases the water available to native species through competition and potentially changes the trajectory of ephemeral watercourses, **soil retention**; reduces the movement and erosion of surface soils and increases build up of soils around plant bases that are not preferred habitat for wildlife.
5. Three of the Australian Museum's 10 Top FrogID groups that have been diligently recording frog calls over the last 12 months hail from the NT! These inspiring citizen scientists call themselves *The Top End Toad Busters*, recording 1,284 individual calls; *The Garkman Trackers* from East Arnhem Land and recording 545 calls, and; *Renee's NT Frog Blitz* with 269 individual recordings

Happy habitat-ing
Kate 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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