



## *Greetings from the Editor* (Mason Crane)

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G'day all and welcome to the 10th issue of 'Welcome to the Wildside'. This newsletter is produced by David Lindenmayer's research team at the Fenner School of Environment and Society, Australian National University. It is our aim to ensure that all our research partners such as yourselves are up to date with our work.

It is almost curtains for another year, drawing to an end a big year of field work. Over the last six months the team has surveyed around 500 sites for birds through the central west and south west slopes of NSW, northeast and northern Victoria and the

border region of Queensland and NSW. We have also surveyed the same sites for reptiles and checked a few hundred nestboxes.

This year it has been great to see the wildlife respond to last years big wet. Water birds, frogs, and others are still reaping the benefits of last years flood. This **picture is of Doodle Coma Swamp near Henty NSW**, still holding large amounts of water almost a year after the big inflows. As these wetlands now start to dry, they expose the mudflats creating

habitat for a new wave of birds, the waders.

At the end of the year we will unfortunately be losing Rebecca Montague-Drake from our team as she will be moving to Jabaru NT. On behalf of the team we thank her for the enormous contribution she has made.

From our entire team have a happy and safe Christmas and New Year.



### Special points of interest:

- Budgees popping up around the western slopes.
- 2012 calendar now out.
- Farewell to one of our senior research officer Rebecca Montague-Drake



Regent Honeyeater near Woodstock

## *Year One of the Woodland Grazing Experiment* (Geoff Kay)

This year we completed the first round of surveys for the Woodlands Grazing experiment. Sites covered a range of different grazing management regimes, including:

- \*Continuously grazed sites (greater than 6 months/yr)
- \*High-intensity

short-duration grazed sites (less than 45 days/yr)

- \*Complete grazing excluded sites, and
- \*Stewardship (Government 'Best Practice') grazing sites (open grazing excluded during spring and summer)

The team set about measuring vegetation, reptiles and birds and have already started to turn up some

interesting critters, such as regent honeyeaters (south-east of Woodstock). In addition, the team set about collecting data on invertebrates and soils (including carbon) which we will be able to use to better understand how grazing can influence the health and condition of our critically endangered box gum woodlands.

## The latest round of reptile and bird surveys in the Northeast and Goulburn Broken Catchments (Damian Michael)

During the second round of surveys in the North East and Goulburn Broken catchments this year we continued to record several species of declining woodland birds such as the speckled warbler and hooded robin and additional species of reptiles such as Dwyer's snake on our existing sites. Preliminary analysis of the data revealed comparatively high levels of threatened birds and na-

tive ground cover on sites funded under the Australian Governments Caring for our Country initiative, highlighting the value of investing time and effort in changing management practices in remnant vegetation to help conserve woodland flora and fauna. Our results indicate that bird diversity was strongly linked to vegetation structural diversity, primarily in the form of natural tree regen-

eration and shrub cover, whereas reptiles were related to the presence of native grass cover, surface rocks and fallen timber.

Dwyer's Snake near Benalla



## 2011 Restoration Study, Spring Bird Surveys

The Restoration Study is based on the SW Slopes of NSW, study sites are typically tree plantings and small remnant woodlands on farms.

This survey was 6th Spring bird count over an 11 year period.

In this years bird counts there were few surprises. Generally we found the birds we have come to expect at each individual site.

However this year it seems the birds have hit the 'turbo charge button' when it comes to breeding. Most birds were either attending nests or feeding fledglings. It is amazing what a wet year can do.

This year the highlight for me was seeing big flocks of water birds (cormorants and ibis) flying over again. Something I haven't seen for

many years.

Another point of interest this year was that a few groups of budgies were popping up around the slopes.



Big rains in central Australia has likely seen a explosion of budgies, with some spilling over into the slopes

During the bird survey our staff and volunteers went out to check out Doodle Coma Swamp

(Henty) and Gum Swamp (Walla Walla). They are both looking great and both worth a look. Doodle Coma Swamp is particularly impressive (looking more like a lake), with plenty of water birds including sea eagles, crested grebes, musk duck etc.



Royal spoonbills and Australian white ibis are back in bigger numbers.

## *Birds in Northern Woodland Stewardship Study*

(Geoff Kay)

Because the team was unable to survey for birds in northern NSW and southern QLD late last year due to the incredibly wet weather, we decided to re-attempt the surveys this year. Thankfully, this proved successful with surveys proceeding without

delay, although this time we had to contend with smoke instead of rainclouds as fires burned through the thick vegetation. Nevertheless, this trip marked the teams first successful bird survey, which turned up interesting species such as plum-headed finches,

hooded robins, and red-browed pardalotes.

The team will be returning to all Stewardship sites in 2012 for vegetation (April), reptiles (August) and birds (September).



Plum-headed Finch

## *New Horizons: Kakadu Calling*

2012 will see my family move from Gundagai to Kakadu. I wish to sincerely thank all of you for your many kindnesses over the last 6 1/2 years, whether it be allowing access to your property, sharing anecdotes and information or more

directly participating in our research and extension activities. While the 'top end' undeniably has a magical allure that I am looking forward to learning about, Australia's temperate woodlands will always remain special to me, and it has been a great

privilege to assist in their conservation. I will be back for occasional bird surveys and to visit family and friends and so may see you then!

Kind regards,

*Rebecca Montague-Drake.*

## *Staff Profile: David Blair*

**The idea of the staff profile is so you can get to know some of the many people involved in our research team.**

Dave Blair completed a Forest Science degree before heading to Borneo with his wife to study orang-utans for a year. He worked as a professional photographer for several years shooting wildlife and conservation efforts before finally getting a real job doing environmental consultancy work based around native vegetation assess-

ments. Dave worked for the Shire of Yarra Ranges as a weed officer and native vegetation specialist. Following the Black Saturday bushfires, he was offered a position with the ANU to help assess the impacts of the fires in the Mountain Ash forests of the Central Highlands. Dave lives in Healesville with his wife and two boys where spare time is usually spent pedalling his bike up long hills or taking cub scouts camping.



# Spreading the Word

Over the last 6 months the group has again been active communicating the results of our research and raising environmental awareness in our communities.

In September we lead a community nightwalk with the Kyeamba Valley Landcare Group at Tooles

Creek Travelling Stock Reserve near Wagga Wagga. Over 40 people attended. We found big numbers of ringtail and brushtail possums and even seen a squirrel glider.

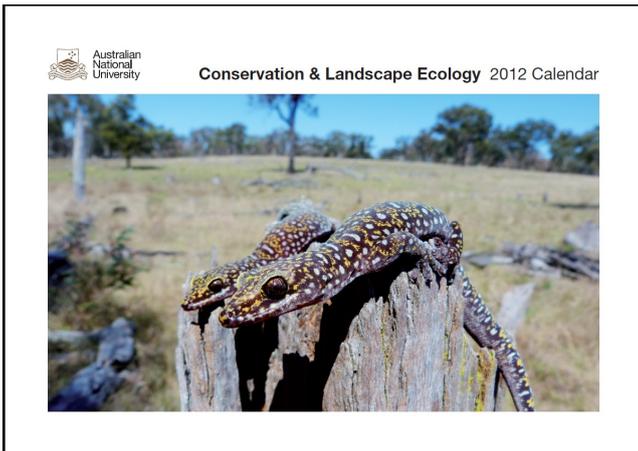
In November in conjunction with the Murray CMA we participated in a biodiversity workshop at Albury. It was a

great chance to exchange knowledge and ideas. We also used the occasion to officially launch our book "What makes a good farm for wildlife?"

We also have presented talks in Cowra for the Cowra Birdwatchers and at Yeoval for the

Little River Landcare Group.

Our 2012 Calender is also out feature pictures and insights into our research across all our studies from Marysville Vic to Warwick Qld and Moulamein NSW to Jervis Bay.



Common Brushtail in spotlight

## Planned field surveys for the next 6 months

- Jan- Grazing experiment vegetation surveys
- Feb- RTA Nestbox checking
- Apr- Stewardship vegetation surveys

## Further Information

For any further information or general inquiries, please phone us or drop us an email.

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Thanks to



CARING  
FOR  
OUR  
COUNTRY