



Greetings from the Editor (Mason Crane)

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

Well it is June again and isn't it a relief to see some rain, in what has been a very dry twelve months. With these re-

cent rains we have seen the emergence of thousands of frogs. One species in particular the Common Spadefoot (*Neobatrachus sudelli*) has surprised us as it has popped up right across the southwest slopes (see below).

The dry twelve months seems to have had an impact, with many species in low numbers in our study areas, with some exceptions (eg. the fox).

Over the next 6 months the team will be working on the Nanangroe, SW Slopes and Woodland

Grazing studies, with a focus on reptiles, vegetation and birds. For those involved in the Woodland Stewardship and the Greater Murray studies, don't worry, you haven't been forgotten. We will be back working on those projects next year.

A special thanks to Geoff Kay who has done the hard work setting up the Woodland Stewardship and grazing studies and is now handing the job to Dan Florance, while Geoff focuses on his PhD.

Little lorikeets were one species noticeably absent from this winter



Special points of interest:

- Rains bring out rarely seen frogs.
- What affects bird breeding in plantation landscapes?
- What has been seen across the SW slopes in the winter bird and spotlight survey?
- New survey method for reptiles.

Common Spadefoot (Mason Crane)

The Common Spadefoot *Neobatrachus sudelli* is a medium size frog about 40mm long, they vary in colour, but mostly have dark olive blotches. They are fairly similar in colour to Spotted Marsh Frogs *Limnodynastes tasmaniensis*, but can be distinguished by spadefoots having a vertical pupil (like a cat's eye).

This species spends a majority of its time buried deep in the ground, waiting for heavy rains, at which time they will emerge from their dormant state. For a few days these frogs can be found calling in puddles on contour banks, wheel ruts etc. and also dams, here they will lay their



eggs (which will hatch in 3 days). Within a few days they will disappear again under ground.

Does surrounding land use affect bird breeding success in woodland remnants? (Sachiko Okada)

We have started to look at bird breeding success in woodland remnants within a radiata pine plantation and on remnants on the nearby farms. In the first year of the study (Spring 2012) we found that, not only did more numbers of birds attempt to nest in remnants on the farms, but the birds also bred much more successfully there. Another interesting finding was that the birds that successfully bred on remnants in pines were all predatory species, such as the Australian Magpie and

the Australian Raven, while various species of birds including small woodland birds successfully bred in remnants on the farms.

Predations on nests, nestlings and fledglings are the main cause of nest failure. Given this we also conducted a short term experiment in March 2013 using artificial nests and quail eggs to investigate which surrounding landscape (pines or farms) has a higher predation rate. We found that more nests had been preyed upon in remnants within

the plantation. By installing infra-red cameras at some of the nests we could determine what was taking the eggs. It turns out that the Australian Magpie was the main culprit, along with a number of other birds such as Grey Butcherbirds and Australian Ravens.



Magpie raiding a nest

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WINTER BIRDS AND SPOTLIGHT SURVEYS ACROSS THE SW SLOPES

(Mason Crane)

Recently the research team has just completed our fifth winter bird count and sixth spotlight survey across the SW Slopes study and our 8th spotlight survey on the Nanangroe study. While the data still needs to be entered and analysed, there seem to be some noticeable trends.

In both studies the spotlight surveys seemed to still be turning up large numbers of foxes and cats. Since the mouse plague two years ago, the population of these species have been sitting at the highest numbers we have recorded since the surveys began in 1998 and 2001.

Possum and glider numbers seem to be a bit down, possibly because

of the dry twelve months we have experienced or the big number of feral predators, or both.

We saw a few more tawny frogmouths and owlet nightjars than last time, but fewer owls.

On a more positive note, we found squirrel gliders on some new sites and heard lots of Common Spadefoot frogs after the recent rains. We are also starting to see the greater use of some tree plantings by possums and gliders, this is something I think we can investigate further, to determine what makes a good planting for possums and gliders.

Winter birds surveys were mixed, many small birds seem down in

numbers, but not all. Scarlet robins and Double-barred Finches seem to have done very well over the last two winter surveys, in 2011 and now 2013 their numbers continue to be the highest we have recorded.

One other interesting find was a possible record of a Lyrebird near Benambra Nature Reserve. While it was a "heard only" record, we are fairly confident, but will try and get some confirmation.



Owlet nightjar at Nanangroe

WOODLAND ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP NEWS

(Dan Florance)

The ANU team has recently begun rolling out an exciting new study on selected sites within the Stewardship project. Similar in principle to our other herpetofauna (reptile and amphibian) artificial on-ground substrates (timber, roofing tiles and tin) we have set up an artificial bark study for detecting arboreal reptile species. We have taken to the trees and installed an artificial bark substrate around the trunks of trees as a new non-destructive detection method for tree-dwelling reptile species such as skinks and geckos. At this stage we are trialling the technique on a sub-set of sites as a way to increase detection of these rep-

tiles whilst minimising destruction to natural habitat. We will begin checking the artificial bark in Spring.

Just a little reminder to those landholders involved in the Environmental Stewardship Project to keep sending those grazing diaries in for both your Stewardship and Control ("business as usual") paddocks so that we can relate biodiversity outcomes to grazing pressure. For those of you who continue to do this we thank you for your assistance.

If you require further diaries or assistance in identifying monitoring paddocks, maps etc. do not hesitate to contact me. If you need to get hold of Geoff his email is geoffrey.kay@anu.edu.au

(no longer has same phone number).

Hope all is well and look forward to catching up with you again soon.



Dan and a few volunteers setting up artificial bark substrate

CHANGES IN THE WOODLAND STEWARDSHIP PROJECT

(Geoff Kay)

After 4 exciting years of traipsing the Queensland and New South Wales woodlands as part of our Environmental Stewardship Monitoring Project, our team has started to summarise the large dataset to better understand the impacts of Stewardship management on woodland condition. So far there have been a number of important discoveries, including a general improvement in vegetation species richness in Stewardship sites compared to control areas, a higher bird species richness in Stewardship sites, as well as a strong (expected) influence of the record rainfall events experienced during the past 4 years.

Many more important findings

will emerge with continued monitoring of these sites. Excitingly the Federal Government has just committed to extend the Stewardship monitoring for a further 4 years, so we look forward to seeing you all again next year.

In other exciting Stewardship news, I am handing the management reins of the project to Dan Florance, while I will be following my deep interest in woodland conservation on farms by undertaking a PhD on the subject at the Fenner School. I am excited about the opportunity to build on what we have already learnt from Stewardship management, and how we might enhance it for future programs which continue to build conserva-

tion outcomes from a basis of strong partnerships with landholders like all of you. It will be hard keeping me out of the paddocks though, so you will still see me out there during Stewardship monitoring time.



Two-clawed worm skink *Anomalopus leuckartii* found only in the northern part of the study (nth NSW and into Qld)

Staff Profile: Wade Blanchard

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

I grew up in Summerside, Prince Edward Island, a relatively small town in Canada's smallest province. I moved to Halifax, Nova Scotia where I did my undergraduate degree in statistics at Dalhousie University. Anxious to see the West coast of Canada, I travelled to Vancouver to do my master's degree in Statistics.

My career in statistical consult-

ing began at Dalhousie University where I consulted with researchers from a variety of disciplines. Gradually my research interests took on a more ecological flavour, specifically marine biology, ecology, and fisheries research. This led me to pursue my PhD in statistics with an ecological application, specifically estimating the diets of marine predators. A few field trips to Sable Island solidified my interest in applying statistics to ecological applications.

My role on the team is to analyse data from the numerous long-

term monitoring programs and to provide statistical advice to other team members.



Planned field surveys for the next 6 months

- **August/Septemeber**—Reptiles and vegetation surveys for SW Slopes and Nanangroe studies
- **September**— Grazing study reptile surveys
- **October**— Hume Highway Nestboxes
- **October**- Nanangroe and Grazing study Bird Surveys
- **November**—Spring bird surveys SW Slopes

Further Information

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Thanks to



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