

WELCOME TO THE WILDSIDE

Monday, October 15, 2007

Greetings from the Editor

G'day all and welcome to our second issue of 'Welcome to the Wildside'. This newsletter is put out by David Lindenmayer's research team at the Australian National University. It is our aim is to ensure that all our research partners, such as yourselves, are up to date with our work around the area.

Our research team has had another busy six months since the last issue. Another winter bird survey was completed across the South West Slopes Restoration Study with some interesting results. We have continued our communication strategy with numerous presentations and the showing of the exhibition from Bingara in northern NSW to the Henty Field Days.

Recently we have been contracted by the Murray CMA to monitor and baseline the biodiversity of that catchment, which will see our studies extend out to the Deniliquin area.

This November with the help of the Canberra Ornithologists Group we are conducting another bird survey at Nanangroe. It will be interesting to see if we observe the same trends that we have been seeing over the last couple of years, namely of some bird species increasing and others decreasing.

Finally, thanks to all those people in the Restoration Study that filled out our landowner surveys. We will let you know the results as soon as they are compiled.

Mason Crane

Spreading the Word

Over the last six months the team has continued it's commitment to communicating the results of our research:

Posters and Brochures



We have just had printed our new 'Home Sweet Home – Life in a Woodland Tree' poster. The poster aims to educate people about the importance of our ancient paddock trees and the many resources they provide for wildlife. The poster also explains what 'ecosystem services' some animals provide.

Our new brochures series has also been released. The aim of the brochures is to help explain what we do and who we are, and to summarise some of the key findings from our research. Hope-

fully this better equips land managers with information to help guide management decision that may affect wildlife.

If you want to pick up some posters for your school or kids, or some brochures, please call into our Gundagai office or give us a call.

Henty Field Days

Again this September we set up a display at the Henty Field Days. It was a great couple of days in which Damian and myself got a chance to chat with many people. Thanks to the Murray and Murrumbidgee CMAs for letting us have some space in the Landcare Shed.



The Great Australian Marsupial Nightstalk



The Great Australian Marsupial Nightstalk is held annually from the 1st of September-16th October. It is coordinated by the Perth Zoo and can be conducted by individuals, community groups and schools. It is a great way for kids and adults to learn more about the native animals that live in their area. This year, we had a great time helping the Wee Jasper and Adjunbilly Public Schools with their nightstalk and saw plenty of possums. If you have the internet 'Google' the great Australian Marsupial Nighthstalk. The official website has a spotlighting game, great for little (and big!) kids.

If you are thinking of conducting a similar activity at your school, we are more than happy to help out with talks or by offering expertise when we can.

Extending our Results

Locally the team have also been involved in an advisory role with the Slopes to Summit project and the Hume Highway Duplication project. It is good to see some of the results and knowledge from our studies helping shape on-ground conservation works.

Last June's bird surveys of the South West Slopes Study

Winter bird surveys are usually very interesting with the arrival of the altitudinal migrants such as the Flame Robins and Golden Whistlers. Normally it is also the time when honeyeaters and birds such as the Swift Parrot arrive to spend the winter feeding on the flowering whitebox and ironbarks. This year very few trees flowered due to the previous 12 months being so dry. This resulted in very few honeyeaters being recorded during the survey. The good news was many of the small insectivorous birds numbers had come back after being few and far between in the November 2006 survey. Yellow Thornbills, Weebills and Fairy-wrens seem to have had good breeding success with large numbers of juveniles about.

Some interesting sightings this survey were Zebra Finches at two sites, Yellow tufted Honeyeaters at two sites, a Sea Eagle near Nangus and a pair of Bush

Stone-curlews (**see picture**) near Walla Walla.



This survey the native farm forestry plantings were great, particularly the ones containing Spotted Gum (one of the few trees flowering). One farm forestry site near Holbrook was literally aswarm with honeyeaters and other birds feeding in, and around, the flowering gums. Not only was it a feast for the Yellow-tufted and White-plumed Honeyeaters, Little Lorikeets, Noisy Miners and Red Wattlebirds, but also the predators. Within a 20 minute period, I saw a Peregrine Falcon, a Brown Falcon and a Collared Sparrow hawk dive bomb the area. Another farm forestry site near Big Springs was great for another reason. The site had been recently pruned, with the prunings left on the ground. This fine woody debris creates great habitat for small birds, attracting at least two pairs of the threatened Speckled Warbler to this site. Speckled Warblers use such places to feed, hide and nest.

Mason Crane

Travelling in Style



In 2006, David Lindenmayer was awarded the DaimlerChrysler Australian Environmental Research Award. This award recognises and promotes Australian researchers or research programs that have made a significant contribution to understanding, or resolving, local or global environmental problems. David received the award for his work on the Tumut and Nanangroe studies which have helped improve the scientific understanding of biodiversity impacts associated with plantations and have also helped to guide best practice plantation management.

In addition to the generous prize money (which was used to extend the employment of Darren Brown- a Research Officer and member of the Wreck Bay Aboriginal Community working with us on the Jervis Bay Fire Response Project), DaimlerChrysler have also kindly sponsored the team with two Jeep Commanders (you may have seen us driving around looking pretty flash in these!).

These Jeeps are diesel AWD models and can seat up to 7 people (ideal for us transporting volunteers around). Not only are they super-stylish and very comfortable, but they also handle remarkably well off-road and with their low 4 option, perform surprisingly well under steep or slippery terrain.

Thanks DaimlerChrysler!!

Going West



We have recently been awarded an exciting new contract with the Murray CMA to manage the "Biodiversity Baseline Monitoring Project". This project will be based in the Riverina Bioregion of the Murray Catchment (i.e. heading west and south from approximately Urana to the Victorian border). The Murray CMA are hoping that this will be a long-term study, and so have asked the ANU to design a project, set up sites and implement a suitable biodiversity monitoring program that can be used to track changes to biodiversity in the long-term and determine the reasons for such changes. The Murray CMA are to be applauded for their visionary thinking as good long-term data sets are vital for effective natural resource management in this rapidly-changing world.

We are contracted to the project for 3 years and wish to answer the following questions in that time:

- How does wildlife differ between vegetation types in this region?
- How does wildlife differ between grazing practices (e.g. set-stocking, sporadic stocking)?
- How does wildlife differ between sites of varying conditions?
- What is the relative merit of different 'biodiversity initiatives' (e.g. active management of remnants, saltbush plantings and pasture management for native grass enhancement)?

Excitingly, we are getting beyond the 'patch' and studying wildlife out in the paddocks- as you know, many different animals spend considerable amounts of time feeding and 'hanging out' in these areas.

One hundred new sites will be set-up across five vegetation types including:

- Boree Woodland (**see picture**);
- Sandhill Woodland (Callitris pine dominated);
- Black Box Woodland;
- Grey Box Woodland;
- Pastures with scattered chenopod shrubs.

While many of the birds will be familiar to us from the South West Slopes, we are also looking forward to seeing birds more typical of the 'western country' such as White-winged Fairy-wrens (the males are blue with white-wings), Australian Ringnecks (an *amazingly* vibrant parrot), Blue Bonnets (another more subtly coloured, but equally attractive, parrot), Yellow-throated Miners (like the Noisy's but black does not extend above their eye and they are not quite so pugnacious) and Spiny-checked, Striped and Singing Honeyeaters. I could go on (and on and on) but I will leave it there.

In the western country, you also get a lot of 'cracking clay' soil which can be home to all manner of reptiles and mammals. We are getting quite excited about seeing the myriad of 'western geckos', such as the Gibber Gecko and Beaked Gecko and hoping for sightings of Fat-tailed Dunnarts

(**see picture**). During the good times, these little guys store fat in their tail!



David kindly informed us that a study showed the area immediately south of Deniliquin was home to one of the highest concentrations of Eastern Brown Snakes anywhere. Got to love that biodiversity!!!

We look forward to keeping you up to date with the happenings in this project!

Rebecca Montague-Drake

Critter Files: Olive Legless Lizard *Delmar inornata*



The Olive Legless Lizard is a fairly common lizard in the South West Slopes, which is often mistaken for a baby brown snake and killed. The key differences are that Olive Legless Lizards do not have a black head unlike baby brown snakes, and that legless lizards have an ear hole (as you can see in the picture) and a solid, fleshy (not forked) tongue.

The Olive Legless Lizard eats spiders and other invertebrates. They spend most of the time under logs, grass tussocks, rocks and in spider holes.

What Can I Do?

- Leave fallen timber and rocks in paddocks and bush blocks.

- Promote native grass tussocks in pastures.
- Have areas on your property where grasses can grow tall and rank.
- Protect existing native grasslands: intact and modified.
- Control feral and pet cats.

A Year in the Life of a Carpet Python.



It was in May 2006 when we began searching for Inland Carpet Pythons in the hills north of Albury. Two hours into the search we spotted our first python, coiled in the fork of a Red Gum, 10 m above the ground. After scaling the tree it wasn't long before we had bagged the surprised snake. After a short spell in a holding tank, recovering from an operation in which we implanted a radio transmitter into the stomach cavity, the 2 m female python was safely released back into her tree. She spent the next few days soaking up the sun before day temperatures dropped too low for her to digest any more food. The next time I located her she had moved 200 m into a large granite outcrop where she spent the winter months sheltered inside a crevice. Contrary to belief, she didn't strictly hibernate because on a few occasions in mid June, she would bask outside the crevice. It is thought that some snakes bask during winter to adjust their body clocks with the season and possibly even prepare their reproductive systems ready for spring breeding.

The breeding season arrived and she left the winter hideout at the start of September, making short movements before occupying a system of rabbit burrows at the edge of the remnant.

Unfortunately, I missed all mating activity as it all happened below ground but shortly after, in mid November, the pregnant snake moved a distance of 800 m and laid a clutch of approximately 20 eggs in a small cavity below the ground. She stayed coiled on the eggs, incubating them for nearly 70 days! The young are completely independent from birth, although only a few usually survive the first year. As soon as the babies hatched in late February, she left the nest and spent the next two months moving about the outcrop hunting rabbits, nesting birds and possums.

An intense wildfire occurred while she was on the eggs, removing much of the ground cover vegetation and many trees, so spotting her after she left the nest was almost impossible as she was always below ground or in rock crevices. So after one year, I had located her 35 times but only saw her on four occasions. I guess this is a good survival strategy when living in areas with eagles, foxes and goannas, all capable of killing a large python. She ended up back at the same winter site last winter but because she had lost a third of her fat reserves she will not attempt to breed now for at least 3 years. As of last week, mid October, she left the winter site so I'll continue to track her over the few years and hopefully bump into her companions or offspring.

Damian Michael

About the Traps

The summer migrants have arrived including Dollarbirds, Rainbow Beaters, and Sacred Kingfishers.

The dry continues but the wildlife is still hanging on. Many birds are attempting to breed and some with success already.

In our recent surveys at the VISY Paper Mill, Tumut, we sighted over 1000 Hardhead ducks on their waste water dam and found some interesting frogs including the increasingly rare

Smooth Toadlet (see photo).



Other interesting sightings have been: Magpie Geese at Albury and Corowa.; a Sea Eagle at Nangus; the Bush Stone-curlews at Walla; the tiny Feather-tail Glider at Adjungbilly and Tarcutta; a Crimson Chat (a bird normally found in spinifex and mallee) turning up near Holbrook; and a Yellow-faced Whipsnake in Albury.

Staff Profile

The idea of having a staff profile is so you can get to know some the many people who are part of David Lindenmayer's research team.

Chris MacGregor

I started my first career as an IT Systems Auditor (with a Bachelor of Financial Administration from the University of New England). After 10 years in the finance industry, I was inspired to leave the city life behind after travelling overseas and then completing an 'Outward Bound' Course.



I went back to the Australian National University where I completed a Bachelor of Science (Resource and Environmental Management) degree. I also did volunteer work with the ACT

Parks Service, NSW National Parks, and ANU, and completed a Bush Regeneration course. With the completion of my degree I join David Lindenmayer's team at the ANU as a casual employee. This then became full-time, as I took on the role of managing the Central Highlands Monitoring Study from 1998 to 2001, and then both the Tumut Fragmentation and Nanangroe Projects from 2000. I also played an integral role in the establishment of the Riverina Restoration Study In 2004 I moved to the beautiful area of Jervis Bay where I manage the Jervis Bay Fire Response Project and am completing a Masters degree part time.

Further information

For any further information or general inquiries, please phone us, drop us an email or call in and see us.

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Thanks to:

