



Greetings from the Editor (Mason Crane)

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Special points of interest:

- Nestbox monitoring is proving to be a great way to detect phascogales
- New Book "What Makes a Good Farm for Wildlife".
- "Wildlife Explosion" results of Spotlighting in Nanangroe and Restoration studies in SW Slopes of NSW.

G'day all and welcome to the 9th 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.

Again it has been another busy 6 months. So far this year we have been flat out remarking and replacing the timber, tiles and tin (used for reptile surveys) and carrying out spotlighting 360 sites in both the "Nanangroe Pine Plantation Experiment" and the

"Vegetation Restoration Study" in the SW Slopes of NSW. Through autumn we checked around 650 nestboxes and we have just finished a winter bird survey for the "Vegetation Restoration Study" and Victorian section of the "Murray Biodiversity Monitoring Study".

While these surveys can be often difficult (early mornings are not everyone's cup of tea!) you do often get rewarded with seeing some fantastic critters, such as this sugar glider found in a nestbox in a tree planting near Junee.

Thanks again to all landowners involved in our



studies. Your participation through allowing us access to these sites do, and continue to, make an enormous contribution to a better understanding of wildlife conservation on farms and generally how wildlife populations are going across the region. Our sites in the SW Slopes are now some of the longest running wildlife monitoring sites in Australia and the world, making them uniquely important.

The Victorian Murray Biodiversity Study (Damian Michael)

Since this project commenced in May 2010, we have been surveying reptiles, possums, gliders and birds over 40 sites on 19 farms in the North East and Goulburn Broken catchments. The main aim of this project is to determine the effectiveness of CMA in-

centives on wildlife conservation. As a comparison we are also studying remnants in agricultural production areas and in Parks Victoria reserves. Some of the highlights of the project so far include: a record of the Fat-tailed Dunnart and Brush-tailed Phascogale near

Longwood; Burton's Legless Lizard near Barnawartha; a significant population of Sugar Gliders near Dookie and a range extension for the Dwyer's Snake in the upper Murray near Mount Granya. Already it does seem incentive sites are doing better, but only time will tell.

Nestbox Insights (Hume Highway, Junee, Gundagai) (Rebecca Montague-Drake)



Above Sugar Gliders, **below** Yellow-footed Antechinus in nestboxes along Hume Highway



During spring 2010 and summer 2011, we checked 681 nestboxes from Albury to Junee. This project is being conducted in partnership with the NSW Roads and Traffic Authority, the Junee Area Landcare Network and the Gundagai Bushcare Group. Species using nestboxes were identified by their presence or secondary signs (such as scat and hair). A range of species were found to occupy nest-

boxes (see Table). The most exciting finding was the detection (via scat samples) of Brush-tailed Phascogales along the Hume Highway and also on a property near Junee (read more on the rediscovery of the Phascogale further on in the newsletter). The detection of Sugar Gliders near Junee is also of high conservation interest as this is the first record for the Junee Shire outside the Ulandra Nature Reserve.

Right Black Rat commonly seen using nestboxes in February check.

Top 8 Nestbox Users

Feral Honey Bees 15% of boxes used
Common Brushtail 10%...
Starling 10%...
Rosella 5%...
Antechinus 5%...
Common Ringtail 2.5%...
Black Rats 2.5%...
Sugar Gliders 0.65%...



2011 Spotighting Restoration and Nanangroe Studies

Now with over ten years spotlighting data in both these studies we are starting to get some very interesting long-term data on populations of possums, gliders, owls and other nocturnal species. The breaking of 10 years of drought has made our data even more fascinating.

Previous to our last spotlight survey, Ringtail Possums had been declining in numbers not only in these studies but in all our studies across south-eastern Australia. This was likely due to reduced tree growth and increased dieback in tree canopies. These factors are important to ringtails as they primarily eat leaves. With the return of above-average rain, it does seem that their numbers are increasing again.

House mice and black rat popula-

tions have exploded (as I am sure many people are acutely aware). While this has been damaging to many farming operations, it is fueling the recovery of many predatory species such as barn owls and boobook owls, falcons and hawks, snakes and goannas



We also found of barking owls around Walla Walla and Walbundrie

and feral predators such as cats and foxes. In fact this last spotlight survey revealed the highest

owl, fox and cat numbers we have seen since both surveys have started, after many years of declining populations. It does seem almost every fox, cat, brown snake, owl, hawk etc. born last season is going to reach maturity.

We also recorded sugar gliders and squirrel gliders at many sites for the first time. However it is difficult to say if they are definitely increasing as they are rarely detected, due to being hard to spotlight. One pattern that seems to be emerging is that some tree plantings are becoming increasingly used, probably due to increasing age of trees.

Once the data is entered and analysed I am sure we are going to get many interesting stories to report on.

The Rediscovery of the Brushtail Phascogale in the Southwest Slopes of NSW



Brushtail Phascogale

During nestbox checking we discovered phascogale nests and scats. This has been very exciting news. While some scats were definitely phascogale, others were 'probable'. This is highly exciting as this threatened species has not been recorded from the

South West Slopes bioregion since the 1800s. Brushtailed Phascogales are a rat-size marsupial, which spends most of their time in the canopy of large trees. They eat mainly insects, but will eat small reptiles, mammals and birds. It was obvious they were taking ad-

vantage of the mouse plague with mouse hair also found in their scats. They are one of a number of species that may be detected more readily in nestboxes than by conventional survey techniques. We hope to see one of these critters 'in the flesh' before too long!

Woodland Grazing Experiment (Geoff Kay)

Last year the ANU team, set up and monitored over 300 farms between Queensland and Victoria as part of the Caring for our Country Box Gum Grassy Woodland Stewardship Project. Monitoring this project every second year over the full 15 year contract allowed the team to spend 2011 establishing a new exciting 'Grazing management study' on a subset of farms near Cowra and Boorowa

within the Lachlan Catchment. The team will visit these sites annually to monitor the response of wildlife (including birds, reptiles and invertebrates), pastures and soil condition to a wide variety of different grazing management regimes, including High-Intensity Short-Duration grazing, continuous grazing and complete grazing exclusion. The huge scale and long-term nature of

this new exciting study ensures that it will be able to provide very valuable information about how graziers might best achieve any biodiversity and productivity goals set for their properties.



Staff Profile: Geoff Kay

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

Geoff grew up on a family farm in Murrumbateman, in the very area he now works managing the Box Gum Stewardship project. Geoff's fasci-

nation with wildlife and grazing begun as a kid where his father, once president of the National Farmers Federation, spent 25 years running grazing trials for the CSIRO. Geoff completed his degrees in Ecology and Forestry at the ANU, and has experience working in both fields right across the world spanning the Antarctic

to the Arctic as well as and the tropical forests of Borneo, Brazil and Madagascar.

Geoff's main role in the team is to manage the Woodland Stewardship and woodland grazing studies, while also help carry out surveys across all of our studies.





Above Students from ANU trapping gliders near Gundagai **Below** Wagga and Gundagai lads and lady helping out at Nanangro, near Jugiong.



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.

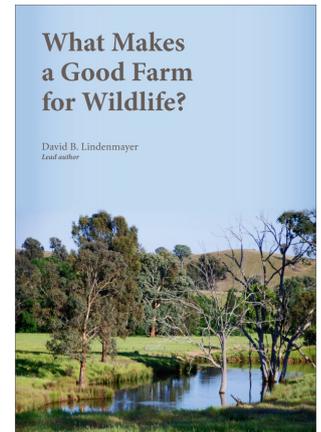
Over the last few months we have continued our wildlife nightstalks and presented our findings at various conferences, workshops and talks in Albury, Dookie, Alma Park, Deniliquin, and Holbrook.

Earlier in the year we hosted over 30 students from the Australian National University on a field camp. The camp enabled

students to learn more about wildlife survey techniques and landscape ecology in general. The students ranged from foresters and environmental scientists to economists and geographers.

Our team is committed in putting back in to our local communities through being available to community groups for talks etc, by shopping locally and giving opportunities to people, particularly youth to gain work experience and occasional casual employment, always feel free to give us a call.

Our new book “What Makes a Good Farm for Wildlife” was released in February. This brings together the findings over 10 years of studying wildlife on farms by the team and other colleges.



Planned field surveys for the next 6 months

- Aug- Junee, and Gundagai Nestbox checking
- Aug/Sep- Reptile Surveys for Nanangro and Restoration Study
- Sep- Grazing Experiment Reptiles
- Sep- Nth NSW and Qld Stewardship Bird and Reptile Surveys
- Sep- RTA Nestbox checking
- Oct- Nanangro and Grazing Study Bird Surveys
- Oct/Nov- Restoration Study Bird 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