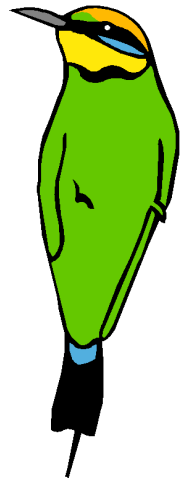


# GARDEN FOR WILDLIFE

## SIGNS OF A CREATURE NO LONGER WITH US



This dark specimen photographed above was found by a *Land for Wildlife* member in a cave on the Blatherskite Range above his property! It is what's known as 'Amberat', and is the excretory product of the now extinct Lesser Stick Nest Rat, *Leporillus apicalis*.

The Stick nest Rat was a moderately sized (60g) nocturnal rodent, about which little is known. It differs from its relative the Greater Stick Nest Rat (*Leporillus conditor*) by a narrow brush of white hairs near the tip of its tail and size. The Greater Stick Nest Rat now survives only on the West and Eastern Franklin Islands off South Australia and a few others it has been successfully introduced to where cats have never existed or have been removed.



Lesser Stick Nest Rat  
Illustration by Peter Schouten

Most rodents burrow, but the Lesser Stick Nest Rat differed in its construction of large elaborate nests of sticks up to a metre high and more than twice that in diameter. The sticks were interwoven to form a sturdy structure which protected them from most predators and perhaps sheltered the rodents from

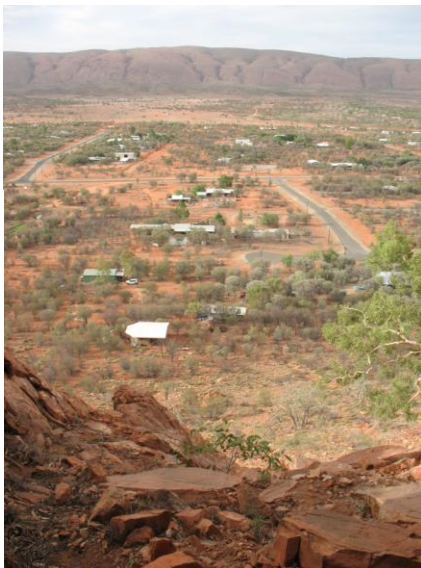
the sun. These nests are still found in crevasses and caves in sandstone rocky country and have been studied by various students including former LFW coordinator Kim Webeck who has written a paper on their distribution. The rats were apparently fairly specific in their latrine duties and deposited urine and droppings in these nests (cemented together by viscous urine), which solidifies into a hard substance known as Amber-rat. So this dark specimen photographed above is a solidified, fossilised mound of urine and faecal matter from the extinct Lesser Stick Nest Rat, one of the few tell-tale signs left that this creature once existed in our Centre. Quite special really. Peter Latz has

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Illustration: John Gould, F.R.S., *Mammals of Australia*, 1863.

had the materials analysed and if you would like to read more about it, look for the paper in the AZRI library.

The middens are widespread across arid zones in Australia, and dating shows that some nest/midden sites have been used continuously for centuries! Nests also contain bone, egg shell, hair, faecal matter of bats, echidnas, dingos, owls, insects and other species, due to the rodents scavenging behaviour. This allows researchers to investigate the history of Australia's arid zones and reconstruct what plants, animals and insects were living in these past environments, using traditional macroscopic analysis (pollen profiling), carbon dating and DNA profiling.



View from the cave  
Photo: Ilse Pickerd.

The Stick Nest Rat once lived in the arid and semi-arid areas of central and southern Australia. It has been extinct in the NT since the 1940s after a 30 year decline. Extinction was probably due to range of factors; predation from introduced cats and foxes, habitat alteration by introduction of exotic herbivores (sheep, cattle, rabbits) and changed fire regimes, and competition with these introduced herbivores. The Stick Nest Rat formerly occurred from the Riverine in NSW through the Gibson Desert and inland South Australia to Western Australia. In the NT it was found in arid and semi-arid areas such as in Uluru-Kata-Tjuta National Park, Arltunga Historical Reserve, Trepkina Gorge National park, West McDonnell National Park, Finke Gorge national Park, and next door to a Land for Wildlife member's backyard!

Interestingly, in 2008 the updated IUCN Status for the Lesser Stick Nest Rat was 'downgraded' from nationally 'Extinct' to 'Critically Endangered (Possibly Extinct)' due to a reliable record in 1970 of a sighting in Western Australia, and continued occasional reports of fresh vegetation added to old stick-nests. However, no confirmed reports have been made since 1933, and the possibility of a small population still existing in yet to be surveyed remote lands of the Australian is slight. This species is probably extinct and if there are surviving animals the numbers would be very small.

**Recent Workshop: Trap making for the feral Spotted Turtle-dove**



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Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> February Land for Wildlife hosted a very successful Trap-making workshop for feral Spotted Turtle-dove. Around 30 people attended to learn about the invasive bird and made traps to take home. Fact sheets and Bird Identification sheets were distributed (available online [www.lowecol.com](http://www.lowecol.com), 'Member Information' page), and disposal methods discussed (I recommend taking all feral Turtle-doves to the Desert Park for disposal). Welcome to new Garden for Wildlife member Sam Bettany who joined the program after the workshop.



We now have a limited number of traps available, and I have a small waiting list of members that have requested traps over the past couple of months. But if you would like to borrow a trap, please



contact me (8955 5222, [lfw@lowecol.com.au](mailto:lfw@lowecol.com.au)) and I can place you on the list. As there is a waiting list I am recommending a 2 week loan period, after which I will collect the trap for recirculation. It is fine for you to then go back onto the waiting list, and once I have more traps in our collection loans can be extended. If you have had a very successful trapping period and have removed your ferals, it may be useful to rest your trap by loaning it to a friend or neighbour, and retrieving it from them when feral doves re-appear in a few weeks.

**Important:** For anyone trapping Turtle-doves please report to Land for Wildlife the number of birds you have caught, the date, and your address. This enables us to estimate bird abundance, to identify hotspots, and also to monitor the effectiveness of the program. A data sheet is available for

download on the website. Go to [www.lowecol.com.au](http://www.lowecol.com.au), follow the Land for Wildlife link to Member Information: Feral Animal Management, and download 'Spotted Turtle dove Catch records Form' (Word doc). Thank you. Be careful to distinguish between the native doves (Crested pigeon, Peaceful Dove and Diamond Dove) and the Spotted Turtle-dove and let the local natives go free from the trap. The local natives have a hard enough time competing with the Turtle doves, that they don't need added difficulties with land holders! There is an ID Sheet available online (same location as the Catch Records Form).

Could anyone that has a Parks & Wildlife or a home-made Turtle-dove trap that is not currently using it and wouldn't mind lending it to other GfW/LfW members please let us know on 8955 5222 or [lfw@lowecol.com.au](mailto:lfw@lowecol.com.au). Thanks!

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## Letters to the Editor

Hi Ilse

Last week I FINALLY finished my feral dove trap. Am ashamed it has taken so long!

Have been scattering seed around and waiting for my head to adjust to dealing with trapped birds.

Early this morning I went out to scatter seed to lead birds inside the cage... and lo & behold! there were already 2 feral doves inside - with NO seed around to encourage them.

It was easy catching them and putting them into pillow cases.

Then I drove out to put them in the holding cage at Desert Park.

They were 2 young ones wide eyed and knew no better. Perhaps they were looking for somewhere to sleep last night?

There are plenty more out there coo cooing! However, there have been no ferals near my back yard since then! They seem to be staying in the safety of neighbours - even though I have scattered seed.

Cheers, Julie Taylor

Garden for Wildlife member

*Ed-You may find that your success rates decline after time as the birds, as unintelligent as they are, clue onto the trap site. A solution to this is to move the trap to a new safe position in your yard, or to stop trapping for a period of time then start up again. Remember, they really truly are not so intelligent and can be easily fooled!*

Yes Ilse - I caught one yesterday. This was an adult bird. It looked at me very crossly and accusingly when it was sitting on the perch in the Desert Park holding cage!

Happily, I had a crested pigeon return to my yard today and some of the silly coo-ing has stopped for a while.

Think I will get my neighbours across the road to try the trap in their yard sometimes. I can hear their doves from my place.

Regards,

Julie

*Ed- Fabulous work!*

## Announcements

### Mobilemuster

Alice Springs Town Council is swapping old mobile phones for native plants. Hand in your old phone by March 11 to The ASTC reception for a voucher redeemable at the Greening Australia Nursery, CDU Sadadeen. Avoid phones, which are made of 90% recyclable materials, ending up at the tip.

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# Central Australian Frog & Insect Talks



Always wanted to know a little more about our unique desert waterholes?

Due to popular demand three frog & insect walks and talks are planned for the summer of 2010.

Come along for an updated FREE slideshow down in the creek at Simpsons Gap.

Finish off the night with a spotlight walk, spotting some of our astonishing frogs and insects.

Bring a chair or rug, a torch and wear appropriate clothing and footwear. Feel free to bring your camera - there will be frogs and waterhole insects!

Simpsons Gap BBQ area  
7-9pm Friday 19th February 2010

Simpsons Gap BBQ area  
7-9pm Saturday 20th February, 2010

Simpsons Gap BBQ area  
7-9pm Saturday 27th February, 2010

**Bookings Essential!**  
Numbers limited, call Michael Barritt at Parks and Wildlife on 89518247 or email at: michael.barritt@nt.gov.au



fresh ideas | real results

## Workshops

### Spiders!

Free Garden for Wildlife (and Land for Wildlife) workshop on Spiders!



Alice Springs, and your garden, is home to an impressive diversity of spiders! This Garden for Wildlife workshop with Robbie Henderson (former invertebrate keeper from Desert Park and bug enthusiast), and Alan Henderson (Manager "Bugs Alive", Melbourne Museum) will throw some light on the fascinating habits of our local spider fauna. Come along to find out who's who of spiders in your backyard, and how they make a living. Pick up some tips on spider photography, and bring your torch... You will be guaranteed to look at spiders in a different light...

**When:** Thursday February 18, 7pm

**Where:** Olive Pink Botanic Gardens

**Bring:** torch, camera

**RSVP or for more information contact Ilse:** 8955 5222/lfw@lowecol.com.au

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## Milkwood Permaculture Course

Interested in arid permaculture? There is a fantastic course coming to Alice Springs in April! See the below links for information and the attached poster and enroll now!

More info on the course online:

<http://www.facebook.com/home.php?ref=logo#/event.php?eid=261209086444&ref=mf>

<http://milkwoodpermaculture.com.au/courses/details/11-alice-autumn-pdc>

## Gardening

Geof Miers Garden Solutions Nursery are conducting some fantastic Gardening Workshops over the next few months. See 'Dates to remember' for more details.

## New Growth – new photos – what is it?

With all the plant and insect growth from the good rains early in January there are many photo opportunities around. Send us your best shots of your best plant growth or animal life and we'll publish them in coming newsletters. If you have trouble identifying plants or animals in your yard, take a digital photo and email us it to us and we'll try to identify it for you. Photos also provide a good record of what your place looked like and putting them into an album (digital or paper) to record changes over time is a very useful tool to help assess how your wildlife gardening is going.

## Dates to remember:

**Monday 15<sup>th</sup> February** - Climate Action Group Meeting @ CAT 32 Priest St, 5.45pm-7pm

**Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> February** - ALEC Action Meeting – ALEC office 5.30pm

**Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> February** - Poison Wind Screening @ Watch This Space 7pm

**Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> February** – Spiders! Hunting the Hunters! Garden for Wildlife Spider Workshop, 7pm at Olive Pink Botanic Gardens. (Flyer below)

**Friday 19<sup>th</sup> February** – Central Australian Frog & Insect Talks, 7-9pm@Simpson's Gap BBQ area. Numbers limited, bookings 89518247/Michael.barritt@nt.gov.au

- Closing date for submissions on development south of Gap (more details

<http://www.futurealice.nt.gov.au/forum/schemeamendment.shtml>)

**Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> February** - Central Australian Frog & Insect Talks, 7-9pm@Simpson's Gap BBQ area. Numbers limited, bookings 89518247/Michael.barritt@nt.gov.au

**Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> February** - Gardening Workshop with Geoff Miers: 'Identifying & Managing Summer Pests – organic options & chemical fixes', 2pm – 3.30pm, \$15. To register call 8953 7477 (limited 20 places)

**Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> February** – Central Australian Frog & Insect Talks, 7-9pm@Simpson's Gap BBQ area. Numbers limited, bookings 89518247/Michael.barritt@nt.gov.au

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**Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> March** - Gardening Workshop with Geoff Miers: 'Establishing & Maintaining an Organic No Dig Garden', 2pm – 3.30pm, \$20. To register call 8953 7477 (limited 20 places).  
- Clean Up Australia Day

**Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> March** – Field Naturalists' Meeting. Guest speaker Stuart Traynor, 'John McDouall Stuart's 1860 Expedition; A 'Natural' History'. 7:30pm @Olive Pink Botanic Gardens

**20<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> March** – Miss Pink's Birthday celebrations at Olive Pink Botanic gardens. A plant sale and the launch of the Friends of OPBG will be part of the celebrations

**Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> March** - Gardening Workshop with Geoff Miers: 'Secrets to Successful Composting', 2pm – 3pm, \$15. To register call 8953 7477 (limited 20 places)

**Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> April** - Gardening Workshop with Geoff Miers: 'Planting Citrus with Confidence', 2pm – 3pm, \$10. To register call 8953 7477 (limited 20 places)

**April 4 -17** – Milkwood Permaculture Course. Bookings/Info phone Kirsten (02) 6373 7763. (Poster below)

Take care  
Ilse & Bill



Garden for Wildlife Coordinators  
Low Ecological Services P/L  
P.O. Box 3130, Alice Springs, N.T. 0871, Australia  
ph (08) 89 555 222, Fax 08-89 555 722  
Email: [LFW@lowecol.com.au](mailto:LFW@lowecol.com.au)

Don't forget to check out the LfW & GfW website at [www.lowecol.com.au](http://www.lowecol.com.au), you can download membership application forms, newsletters, vegetation type species lists, and find out about upcoming workshops!

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