LAND FOR WILDLIFE

TASMANIAN LAND CONSERVANCY

NEWSLETTER 9 – WINTER 2024

Found bird nest. Photo by Manderlee Anstice.

FROM THE TEAM

After a quiet time over the winter months, we're back with a special bird edition of the Land for Wildlife (LFW) newsletter.

Early this year we ran five events across the state, where LFW members learned from experts in their fields, including all things insect at Orford with Dr Simon Grove and Kristi Ellingsen, and nature journalling workshops instructed by artist and ecologist, Paula Peeters. If you want to study up on insects, a great place to learn is the online Field Guide to the Insects of Tasmania **tasmanianinsectfieldguide.com**

The Bruny Island Bird Festival was an amazing weekend, with LFW coordinating a demonstration of the hollow hog at TLC's Apollo Bay Revolving Fund property. You can read more about this on page 3.

After the busy season we both took some extended leave. We would like to thank our enthusiastic volunteer assessors, and our TLC colleagues for carrying on property assessments and processing expressions of interest. It was reassuring to know everything was in good hands while we were away and it's good to be back with a newsletter full of hints on helping your local birds.

It's encouraging to know that Tassie's LFW community has now grown to over 770 properties (close to 27,000ha) and that so much of our private land is being used to understand and protect local plants and animals.

In June, we sent you a UTAS survey so you could have your say on the LFW program and let us know how you're managing your property for nature. Early results have indicated that the average LFW member has lived on their property for 18 years, rates their property an 8/10 for providing habitat for native wildlife, and identifies feral animals, weeds, and climate change as the biggest threats to their property (no surprises there!)

We encourage you to complete the survey if you haven't yet. We would love to hear from as many of you as possible and capture the diverse range of experiences to make improvements for all participants. It only takes around 15 minutes to complete, and you can find the link in the 'What's On?' section at the end of the newsletter.

We hope to hear from you.

Anna Povey (North)
Phil Wise (South)
Land for Wildlife Coordinators

How you can put a roof over a swift parrot's head, find out more on page 3.

Find out more about TLC and support our work at **tasland.org.au/donate**

Turn your garden into bird-friendly habitat with our hints on page 4.

John and Millie's property. Photo by Phil Wise.

John and Millie. Photo by Phil Wise.

LAND FOR WILDLIFE MEMBERS: JOHN AND MILLIE

Sustainability is fundamental on John and Millie's Huon Valley property. It was a pleasure to learn about their plans to restore habitat for the benefit of wildlife.

For John and Millie, buying their Cygnet block was a leap of faith. Living in New Zealand at the time, the lure of a block in Tassie was hard to pass up and they committed to the property, sight unseen.

'When we first arrived, I remember the smells of home that I had missed during our years living in New Zealand,' recalled Millie on arriving at the front gate.

'The soothing smell of the wet eucalyptus rekindled some treasured memories and we felt very welcomed onto the land.'

But it wasn't just nostalgia that they felt. They were determined to regenerate their land and clean up some problematic patches of vegetation.

Previously used for apple farming and sheep grazing, the block was marked with degraded habitats of low diversity. Heavy rainfall had resulted in creek erosion along the southern boundary and some areas showed signs of tunnel erosion.

Blackberry infestations and introduced grasses, like the distinctive onion twitch (*Arrhenatherum elatius var bulbosum)*, had become established. Other patches of weeds, including blackberry, foxglove, hawthorn and willow were dotted across the property, requiring persistent management to remove.

But the land also had a lot to offer, and John and Millie were determined to preserve its natural assets for future generations to enjoy.

There are pockets of old Tasmanian blue gums (a prime food source for swifties), stringybarks, varnish wattle and surprisingly, some soft tree ferns (*Dicksonia antarctica*) across the block.

Through strategically revegetating areas of the property, they are aiming to link remnant vegetation communities and bring back habitat for local fauna while combatting dispersive clay and soil erosion. They have even undertaken a traditional burning workshop within their stringybark forest.

Many of their objectives are long-term and won't show results immediately, but they are up for the challenge of restoring their land to its former glory.

John and Millie have also jumped at the opportunity to sign up to further TLC initiatives, like the WildTracker program, and have established photo points across their land.

'A Tasmanian devil took a selfie on our WildTracker camera,' Millie recounted excitedly. 'We've also seen firetails, yellow-tailed black cockatoos, wedge-tailed eagles and even quolls, some of which are permanent residents.'

Southern brown bandicoots, tiger snakes, she-oak skinks, brown tree frogs and numerous native birds have all also been seen.

John and Millie's talents don't end at regeneration, they're also the faces of our new LFW video where they speak about the benefits of the program and how it has helped them understand all their property has to offer. If you haven't seen the video on our socials yet, you can see it here **tasland.org.au/lfw**

I can't think of a better way to end this story than by quoting Millie again.

'We're blessed with so much natural beauty in Tasmania. Let's preserve it.'

Want to grow your own plants? The Understorey Network have reinstated their Home Grower Scheme. Register now to receive a kit and instructions in time for spring. Cost is $50 to grow 100-200 plants. Contact Will at understorey@landcaretas.org.au

Swift parrot. Photo by Chris Tzaros.

Yellow wattle bird. Photo by Sarah Lloyd.

SOLVING THE SWIFT PARROT HOUSING CRISIS

Securing a rental property in Tasmania is tough, but for the critically endangered swift parrot (*Lathamus discolor*), finding habitat is a matter of survival. Swifties spend winters soaking up the sun on the mainland before migrating south to Tasmania, seeking their favourite food, flowering blue gums (*Eucalyptus globulus ssp. globulus*) and black gums (*E. ovata*), along with hollow-bearing trees.

Unfortunately, human encroachment is destroying hollow-bearing trees, which many animals, including swifties, need for breeding and nesting. Further, the erratic flowering patterns of these gums make food scarce, and predation by the introduced Krefft's (sugar) glider adds to the pressure.

Given hollows can take centuries to form, immediate intervention is needed to ensure the swifties stand a fighting chance. Ecologist Dave James is addressing this with a novel tool – the Hollowhog. Acting like a large drill bit, the Hollowhog creates suitable hollows in living trees. Choosing the right branch is vital — Dave prefers dead branches to avoid stressing the tree and to prevent the hollow from growing over.

During the Bruny Island Bird Festival, TLC held a workshop where Dave demonstrated the Hollowhog on our Revolving Fund property at Apollo Bay (see TLC website for listing). This event showcased the tool in action and left a lasting legacy for future property owners and the swift parrots that might use these newly created hollows.

Several other initiatives are supporting swiftie conservation on Bruny Island and surrounding areas. The 'Swift Parrot Bruny Island Covenant Project,' a collaboration between TLC and the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania is conserving swift parrot habitats on private land. Additionally, TLC, with funding from the Elsie Cameron Foundation, is working with the Bruny Island Environmental Network to plant essential food sources for swift parrots and forty-spotted pardalotes through their Threatened Woodland Birds on Bruny Island project.

Why the focus on Bruny Island? Bruny is a stronghold for swift parrots due to its extensive blue and black gum areas and lack of Krefft's gliders. Dave has offered to work with Bruny Island LFW members to establish more hollows, while also exploring methods to exclude Krefft's gliders from artificial hollows on 'mainland' Tasmania.

Bruny residents interested in working with Dave can contact TLC for more information. There is also a private Hollowhog workshop for Bruny Island residents in August. For more information see 'What's On'.

GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR BIRD BATH

It's a pleasure to see birds taking a dip, but bird baths are more than decorative, they can be a lifeline and an important place for birds to socialise.

Birds need a supply of fresh water for drinking and for bathing, and during drier months, bird baths play an important role. And it's not just birds - possums, pademelons and echidnas all make use of a well-placed bird bath.

The tips below will help you get the most from your bird bath:

Location: Different species prefer different locations. Larger birds like currawongs favour open areas, while smaller birds like silvereyes prefer baths near shrubs for safety. Ground-level baths are accessible to animals like snakes and wallabies.

Cleaning: Regular cleaning prevents disease. Replace the water daily and scrub the bath with clean water regularly.

Shade: To keep the water cool and prevent evaporation, place the bath in a shaded spot. Metal can become too hot in summer, so other materials might be better.

Pets: Make sure your bird bath is out of reach of pets, particularly cats. Pedestal bird baths keep birds out of harm and can be the difference between a dip and dinner.

Garden at Inala Nature Reserve on Bruny Island. Photo by James Hattam

Cat Young leading a Land for Wildlife workshop. Photo by James Hattam.

TURN YOUR GARDEN INTO HABITAT FOR BIRDS

When planting to attract birds, it's crucial to include a variety of vegetation layers and species. Different birds have distinct needs: scrubwrens forage on the ground, brown thornbills inhabit mid-level shrubs, and parrots prefer trees. Dense vegetation is essential for many species, providing food, water, shelter, and breeding sites.

Key Planting Strategies:

Variety: Provide diverse vegetation to cater to various bird species. For example, fairy-wrens forage on lawns but need dense shrubs or branch piles for predator shelter and nest-building materials. By providing variety you can satisfy every bird's needs.

Large Trees: These act as urban stepping stones, offering rest stops in urban environments. Even non-native trees can be valuable. Imagine you're a bird flying through the suburbs – how would you traverse the sea of roofs and roads? While a large eucalypt may not be appropriate in a small garden, there are small ones that attract pardalotes and honeyeaters. Other smaller trees, such as wattles, banksias and she-oaks provide excellent habitat and food.

Native Plants: Favor local or non-invasive Australian natives. While exotic plants offer shelter and nectar, they often attract only versatile species like New Holland honeyeaters. Native plants support more specialised birds by hosting more native insects, increasing availability of bird food.

Balanced Planting: Avoid overusing "bird-attracting" plants like callistemons and hybrid grevilleas. While they will attract wattlebirds, noisy miners and New Holland honeyeaters, these species will aggressively defend their patch. A seven gram thornbill doesn't stand much chance against a 200 gram wattlebird or a mob of noisy miners. Ironically, too many nectar abundant plants can leave small birds completely excluded.

Using fewer of the showy species mixed with shelter-providing shrubs and other kinds of insect-attracting flowers will produce a greater variety of feathered friends in your yard. Smaller flowers, like common heath (*Epacris impressa*) and winter-flowering common correa (*Correa reflexa*) will attract smaller eastern spinebills, while wattles, tea trees, prickly box (*Bursaria spinosa*), daisy bushes and bushpeas are a safe bet for enticing insects.

Dead Branches: If safe, retain some dead branches. Eagles, black-faced cuckoo-shrikes and dusky woodswallows use these to study their surrounds before they hunt. Robins also need a perch from which they can pounce on small invertebrates below – another good reason to keep woody debris lying around instead of 'tidying up'.

Fruit and Seeds: Fruit-eating birds, such as silvereyes, will appreciate plants like native currants (*Coprosma quadrifida*) as well as any fruit in your orchard (my fig tree produces enough for them and us). Make sure you don't have any environmental weeds with berries in your garden, such as holly, elder, arum lily or hawthorn, as birds may eat the berries and spread them into local bushland.

Native grasses provide seeds for firetails and some parrots such as eastern rosellas, as well as fine foliage for many species to use in their nests, or nest in.

Fire Safety Considerations: In bushfire-prone areas, balance bird habitat with fire safety. The Nature Conservation Council of NSW offers a fact sheet on creating bird-friendly gardens in such areas, available at **birdsinbackyards.net/sites**

The joy of seeing and listening to birds at home is surely one of the best reasons to have a garden at all. By planting for a range of species, you can foster birds in your backyard and help populations in your local area.

Eastern spinebill. Photo by Sarah Lloyd.

Forty-spotted pardalote. Photo by Evan Draayers.

SHOULD YOU FEED BIRDS?

Feeding wildlife can bring a sense of connection to the nature around us. In some parts of the world it's actively encouraged but in Australia that's not the case. In fact, in Western Australia it's an offence to feed wild animals without a licence.

If done incorrectly, feeding birds can cause serious problems including disease and malnutrition, as well as encouraging exotic species. Despite this, it's estimated that anywhere from 30-50% of Australian households feed birds, so it's important we know how to do it properly.

If you do feed birds, mirroring their natural diet and keeping it hygienic is important. Birds require a balanced diet of nectar, insects, fruit and seeds, and introducing inappropriate foods can cause serious health problems or even death.

Things like wet and dry bird nectar mixes are specially formulated to attract nectar-eating birds like honeyeaters to your garden while meeting the nutritional needs of their wild diets. You can also leave grapes, berries, peas, apple and leafy greens out for fruit-feeders like parrots and silvereyes.

Insectivores and carnivores like fantails, fairy-wrens and butcherbirds are partial to mealworms, crickets and insects. You can purchase these from pet stores or just collect them from your garden. It's important to leave them in a regularly cleaned dish or some other easily accessible place and not on the ground. Food left on the ground can spoil easily and attract unwanted pests.

Do not feed birds bread, crackers, honey and sugar. These will not impart the nutrients needed for good health, leading to disease and deformities.

Mince is also a no-no for carnivores as it lacks the calcium birds would get from their natural diet. This can cause brittle bones and beaks, even long-term metabolic bone disease.

Consider planting a bird friendly garden instead

We recommend that you refrain from giving birds an unhealthy snack in your backyard.

The best way you can help your backyard visitors in the long run is to provide them with the habitat they naturally encounter. This will ensure they get their nutrition from natural food sources, while reducing their dependance on free handouts. You can see more tips on planting a bird friendly garden on page 4.

DON'T CHOP THOSE OLD BRANCHES DOWN

If you're thinking of removing those dead branches, think again!

When we think of overhanging dead branches, we think 'danger' – that widowmaker could drop at any moment, wiping out everything below. But these bare branches can also play an important role in the life of a bird.

When we see a bird on a particular branch, they've chosen it for a reason. Many birds find it easier to rest on long, slightly inclined branches. And those with fewer leaves provide a clear line of sight for any prey that may be moving across the ground.

And it's not just a clear vantage point that dead limbs provide for birds, they can be an important food source as well. Ageing trees attract a bevy of insects that breed in crevices and behind bark that can be a quick snack for any of our native birds.

Logs and brush piles created by fallen branches also play a valuable role for wildlife, providing smaller birds with shelter from the elements and predators.

If you do have to remove a dead branch for safety reasons, consider leaving some of the branch up so these important perches are left intact for birds that hunt. You can then use what you've removed to create your own brush piles on the ground.

Hollowhog demonstration on a TLC Revolving Fund property. Photo by James Hattam.

AVOIDING WINDOW COLLISIONS

Many of us know the dull thump of a bird hitting a window. It's a common occurrence and as urban sprawl continues, window collisions are a growing concern for the safety of our avian allies. Some estimates suggest up to a billion birds collide with windows each year, with the majority resulting in death.

Birds often see windows as reflections of safe habitats, like foliage or sky, leading them to crash into the glass. At night, lit windows can disorient birds, causing them to veer off course. During the breeding season, some birds even attack their reflections, mistaking them for rivals.

Preventive measures

Get creative: Draw on your windows to help birds see them as barriers. Vertical lines or grids work well. Use UV liquid markers, yellow highlighters, clay, or soap. High contrast colours are best, with lines no more than five centimeters apart, covering the entire window.

Use decals: Apply closely grouped stickers, decals, or tape. Birds focus on the gaps between objects, so ensure the stickers are close together to prevent birds from thinking they can fly through.

Get dirty: Clean windows might look nice but can be deadly for birds. Allowing some dirt, grease, or grime to build up can make windows more visible and reduce collisions. Next time you consider cleaning your windows, think of the local birds and leave some natural dirt.

If a bird does collide with your window, use gloved hands to place it in a safe area away from predators before contacting your local wildlife rescue centre for further advice.

WHAT'S ON

WildTracker exhibition – Camera Trap Chronicles

Our inaugural WildTracker photo exhibition is happening this month in Hobart and Launceston. If you've ever wondered what your animal neighbours get up to when no one's watching, book your free ticket at **events.humanitix.com/wildtracker-photo-exhibition**

Hollowhog demonstration

Bruny Island LFW residents can join a Hollowhog event run by private landowners at Apollo Bay 4 Aug, 11am. For more information and to RSVP please contact **perththiele@iinet.net.au**

Have your say about LFW

Thanks to everyone that has completed our LFW survey so far. We would love to hear about how you manage your property for wildlife and any ways that we can make the program more relevant to you. Tell us what you think at **tasland.org.au/lfw**

We acknowledge the Tasmanian Aboriginal people as the traditional custodians of the lands on which we work and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture.

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