

the **basin**

BULLET

the voice of desert channels queensland

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exit

December 2006

*from sleighbells to
surveillance...*

Not... As I See It

Coping with drought is not easy.

How we do it is no reflection of our worth as a person, and is not necessarily an indication of our business management skills. Event and conditions often conspire against those who chose to serve such a fickle mistress as the Australian climate.

Prolonged drought, such as we're currently experiencing, most obviously results in financial pressure, but also causes health and relationship issues.

Only last issue we ran two items dealing with depression, or 'the black dog' as Sir Winston Churchill called it. One was a short poem, The Black Dog, and the other was a review of the book, Tough Times - short, inspiring stories of 10 men who have confronted and overcome their demons.

Drought poses different challenges to different people; not only landholders but small business operators in country towns.

We all cope in different ways.

To assist all parts of the community to come through this current dry stronger and better equipped for the next one, the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries is conducting a series of Community Drought Information Sessions through the DCQ region and beyond.

Representatives from State and Commonwealth departments and DCQ will be in attendance to share information on health, family support, financial assistance, climate, small business assistance, and devolved grants.

So if you're interested, get yourself along to the one closest to you.

Well done, DPI&F.

*Not...*Bruce Honeywill

IN THIS ISSUE

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find out how the old bloke in the red suit manages at 45°C.

Smooth, laid back and going nowhere!

The official opening of the new business premises of Desert Channels Queensland showed three things about this community-based group: it's smooth, laid back and here to stay.

While Desert Channels Queensland is a professional, polished organisation, it is also relaxed, informal and laid back, a reflection of the community it serves. And the fact that DCQ has outgrown its old office and has moved into a highly visible position close to the centre of town shows that it's here to stay.

The opening itself took place on the closed-off street in front of the building while children of the more than 200 invitees were kept busy with the jumping castle and face-painting laid on in the park across the street.

On behalf of the Australian Government, Senator George Brandis officially opened the revamped tin shed with a restating of the Howard Government's continued commitment to the regional process for the sustainable management of natural resources.

From under his battered, work-stained Akubra, Peter Douglas, Chair of DCQ said that while the organisation was funded by the Australian and Queensland governments, it was the people who deserved the credit.

"It's you people of the community and staff of DCQ that make this organisation what it is," he said, "...simple as that."

"Without your support and hard work, we couldn't deliver the projects that are making a difference, things that will ensure our kids have a future in this region."

Pictured from left: Leanne Kohler (DCQ Executive Officer), Mayor Pat Tanks (Longreach Shire), Peter Douglas (DCQ Chair), Howard Hobbs MLA (Member for Warrego); Senator George Brandis (Queensland).'



from the chair

It has been a privilege, though not entirely without personal cost, to be the chair of Desert Channels since the group's inception 4 years ago.

Created in difficult circumstances, with a baggage train of real hurt and mixed feelings, DCQ has evolved into an entity that is largely accepted in the community that it serves. While DCQ is giving real support to sustainable rural and urban use of our natural resources, it's still an unknown entity to some.

The recent opening of our new premises in Galah St, Longreach finally kills off the perception that we're government, a perception that, despite our best efforts, endured while we were housed in the Department of Natural Resources and Water complex on Landsborough Highway.

At the opening of our revamped tin shed, Senator George Brandis (Liberal Senator for Qld), Howard Hobbs (Member for Warrego and stand-in for our local Member, Vaughan Johnson), and Pat Tanks (Mayor of Longreach) all spoke of the improving knowledge and commitment of the community in the field of resource management.

To keep this commitment growing, Desert Channels will continue to put people first, despite warnings that this is not the preferred option of some of our partners who believe that process takes precedence. Residents of our region feel they are under constant attack from those further in who seem to know what is best for the area without genuinely consulting. We will act to facilitate discussion where ever possible and to spread the gospel of sensible resource use by whatever means necessary.

Desert Channels operates as a broker of funds, information and assistance to urban and rural people, and has spoken out against suggested legislation that would make a mockery of what we do. To stay silent would be to waste money, resources, credibility and integrity. Some clear-sighted people in the State Government have acknowledged our feelings and our commitment on this, for which I am grateful.

I believe we are strengthening our community's faith in themselves and their ability to understand and handle country, and what it demands of them, by offering whatever assistance we can so that they can make their own decisions.

Without the continued support of the community, State and Australian governments and the honest dedication and skills of our staff and board the cost would be unbearable.

Thanks is, at times, an inadequate word.

Peter Douglas



birds that tease!

Sixteen years after the last dead specimen was found, and almost a century since the last live collection, people are still talking about the Night Parrot (*Pezoporus occidentalis*).

Long believed to be extinct by many, this elusive, ground-dwelling parrot delights in teasing both amateur and professional alike by periodically popping up as a sighting by lucid people with varying levels of expertise.

The serendipitous discovery of a fresh Night Parrot carcass beside an outback road in 1990 re-ignited hope for this elusive species.

To add to this serendipity, the discoverers were none other than a team of pre-eminent Australian bird experts, taking a break from their long drive through the outback studying their favourite subject. The team included Wayne Longmore, now the Collections Manager of Terrestrial Vertebrates with Museum Victoria in Melbourne, but who was then with the Queensland Museum.

He remembers the moment well.

"The story goes that we pulled up to stretch our legs," he says. "But it was too bloody hot to get out of the car."

"The only reason we stopped was to have a closer look at some Australian Pratincoles (*Stiltia isabella*), and Inland Dotterels (*Charadrius australis*).

Wayne's travelling companion, Walter Boles, had got out of the car, and then came up to Wayne's passenger door with handful of months-old road-kill. "What do you think this is?" Walter asked, knowing full-well what he was holding.

Wayne was staggered. "Holy s***!" he said.

He says the aftermath of the discovery was even more staggering. "When I got back in the office - about 4 days later - the phone started, and kept it up, eight hours a day for two weeks.

"It was incredible. I don't know of anything else, anywhere in the natural history world, that's had as much impact."

According to Wayne Longmore, the profile of the Night Parrot in particular, and other endangered species and broader wildlife issues generally, got a huge boost from the discovery.

He says the most important things in dealing with a species like the Night Parrot are communication and coordination.

Sightings should be well-documented and the experts need to be notified immediately to allow for timely follow-up investigation. This is particularly important in the case of the nomadic Night Parrot (also known as the Spinifex Parrot), because it follows its feed sources of spinifex and chenopods (saltbush, poverty-bush, bluebush, roly-poly, copper burr etc.). If experts are not in the field quickly the birds may have moved on.

While the Night Parrot has undoubtedly been affected by the predation of feral animals (particularly cats and foxes), and grazing activity in its favoured chenopod country, it seems its habits have as much to do with it being elusive to the point that it was thought extinct. It is nomadic, inconspicuous and active from dusk till dawn. Consequently, it is rarely seen. Wayne Longmore says that the Night Parrot population is probably reasonable but it would be localised.

"It's like a lot of Australian birds," he says, "you know they're there but you just can't find one when you want to. You have more chance of finding a dead one."

Ten years ago there was a confident sighting near Duchess in north-west Queensland but a week of searching by experts found nothing. The birds, most likely, had moved on. Late last year a group of ecologists working in Western Australia's Pilbara region claimed to have seen a Night Parrot but, again, the subsequent search came up empty-handed. While there is, at least, a small population out there (somewhere), the future for this elusive denizen of the dark is far from certain. Although it was probably never 'common', it ranged across much of inland Australia until the early 20th century when it faded in the face of pastoral and feral animal pressures.

The best that land-managers can do for the Night Parrot now is to try to ease the grazing, feral animal and fire pressure on the edges of breakaway country where you find both spinifex and chenopods. And hope like heck that this wonderful bird is, at least, still teasing our grandchildren.



"I don't know of anything else, anywhere in the natural history world, that's had as much impact."





Airborne Reconnaissance finds Front Line

story by Steve Wilson

Thirteen hours in a Robinson R44 helicopter has left Brett Carlsson very confident that he has mapped all the Parkinsonia south of Windorah and identified the furthest spread of this Central American invader down the Cooper channels.

"We went well past the last plants and I reckon we've got a pretty good handle on the extent of the spread," he says.

Brett is the Project Officer for Desert Channels Queensland's Cross-Catchments Weeds and Feral Animals Initiative, and he works with landholders and shire councils on what the community of the region has identified as its greatest land management challenge.

The aerial survey, on the 21st and 22nd of November, located and mapped infestations of Parkinsonia (*Parkinsonia aculeata*) in the braided channels of Cooper Creek and along Kyabra Creek.

Brett says that Queensland Helicopters' Robinson R44 was a great choice for the job. "Queensland Helicopters are based in Longreach and have extensive knowledge of the area.

"Not only that, but the R44 has great vision with the doors off and it's a 4-seater which meant we could have 2 spotters and even take the land-owners up for a ride.

"It always helps to have an extra pair of eyes, even though Parkinsonia is relatively easy to spot; they have long, spindly, light-green leaves, unlike any native plant. They stick out like the proverbials."

According to Brett, having the landholder along also helps improve their awareness and knowledge of the spread of the weed on their place, and is a great way to demonstrate how important survey work is in control and monitoring of weed infestations.

A handheld Garmin GPS was used to record the flight path and mark each plant or infestation as a waypoint. This information is then passed to relevant landholders to assist in planning and conducting control works. It is also entered into the DCQ weeds database and the state-wide PestInfo database to provide an accurate picture of weed infestation in the region and across the State.

In line with DCQ's close involvement with local government, Peter Pidgeon (Barcoo Shire's Rural Lands Officer) contributed two days of his time to assist with the survey. Peter's knowledge and experience of the local area was invaluable and helped with navigating the braided channels and locating remote waterholes.

Brett says that the infestations south of Windorah can be best described as low density, scattered plants.

"There's not a lot there, but getting in to the plants on a quad bike or in a vehicle to spray them will be a big challenge; the channels are very difficult to cross in places."

Kyabra Creek was also flown and some remote, small infestations, mostly of 4 to 10 plants, were mapped. All but two of these had previously been mapped. The amount of work to control these plants is minimal but because of the distance between plants more time will be spent travelling between them rather than spraying.

After receiving a report of Parkinsonia at a bore to the north of Windorah, a quick recce was done. It revealed about a dozen small, scattered plants that are easily accessible and treated.

Brett Carlsson says that while the survey was very successful, it was only one small piece in the weed control jigsaw.

"We've had great success in the past three or four years," he says. "But it's all about everyone doing their little bit in their own neck of the woods. That's the only way we're ever going to beat it."



passion or politics?

Both passion and politics can cause a spike in the mercury, but what, if any, is the correlation between human activity and temperature.

A three-year-old study using remotely sensed radiometric land surface temperatures has come up with some interesting findings.

Unsurprisingly, in 2004 and 2005, the hottest place on the face of the planet was in south-eastern Iran's Lut Desert with 68°C and 70.7°C respectively. This area of Kerman Province, near the border with Afghanistan, is said to be the only place on Earth that is devoid of life - even bacteria can't survive (<http://www.wonderquest.com/DesertDriest.htm>).

But if we wind the clock back one more year to 2003, the year that Desert Channels Queensland started to crank up, we find the hottest spot on the Earth's surface (69.3°C) has moved from the Lut Desert to a spot north of Winton.

In 2003 the people of the DCQ region were, and they still are, very passionate about their land.

Desert Channels Queensland consulted widely on what the community saw needed to be done to wisely manage the natural resources of the region, and the resulting document, Protecting Our Assets, has been guiding natural resource management investment in the region since.

Was it passion or politics that caused the mercury to bubble in western Queensland? Or was it that other 'P' word, the dreaded planning?

While measuring the land surface temperature (LST) may, or may not, be an indication of the level of aggravation or excitement of the population, it does have an application in land management. By studying LSTs and their correlation with vegetation cover, scientists will be able to develop better models to detect changes in land cover and understand the potential consequences.

Global warming, fiery politics, excess passion or simply, too much planning...who knows?

For more information, see: http://secure.nts.gov.au/publications/2006/MZR06/Mildrexler_et_al_EOS_2006.pdf



Drought Info Days

If you're a producer or small business owner, and want information on the range of government and non-government assistance including financial counselling, exceptional circumstances assistance, Centrelink payments, livestock nutrition advice, access to health and well-being councillors, and small business advice, you need to be at a drought information day near you.

Six towns in western Queensland will have the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries sponsored Drought Information Days before the school holidays: Cunnamulla, Thargomindah and Quilpie in the south west; and Yaraka, Windorah and Jundah in the central west.

The first three cabs off the rank are: Yaraka (Tuesday, 5th December at the Community Hall); Windorah (Wednesday, 6th December at the Information Centre); Jundah (Thursday, 7th December at the Barcoo Shire Council Board Room). DCQ will be at all three to keep people up to date with the latest funding opportunities.

All sessions will commence at 3 PM and will be followed by a barbeque. For other venues and dates or further information, contact your local DPI&F.

The most recent foray Desert Channels Queensland has made into the wider world of natural resource management was at the October's International Landcare Conference in Melbourne. Having won the 2005 Regional Landcare Award, DCQ was in the running for the National Landcare Award for regional Landcare work. And while we didn't get another gong, it was great to share our experiences with national and international Landcarers.

Landcare, which started as an Australian initiative, is now a global phenomenon. It has grown to reflect community spirit and care of our environment in a practical and sustainable way.

And while we're on the subject of Landcare, our recent, schools' Landcare competition was very successful with a range of entries from both large and small schools in the region. Students were asked to identify a natural resource management issue in their area and put together a plan on how to fix it.

"You could see from the posters that the kids had put a lot of thought and work into the entries," said Cameron O'Neil, DCQ's Landcare Coordinator. "This made it hard for our judging panel."

In the end, though, it was the six students of the tiny Windorah State School who won for themselves two hand-shaped chairs for their library, some DCQ caps and pens and other promotional material.



Still in Windorah, Brett Carlsson, our Weeds and Ferals officer has just completed an aerial Parkinsonia survey of parts of the Channel Country. This has revealed a scattering of plants still to be poisoned and, more importantly, the extent of the success of previous control efforts.

The Quik Spray unit for weed control has already been out an about with the users giving glowing reports. If the interest expressed is anything to go by, it will be spending most of its time in the sun.

Dave Thompson, DCQ's Indigenous Facilitator has seen all his hard work across the region come to fruition in the shape of an Indigenous Advisory Panel that is providing representation to the DCQ Board. Congratulations to the Indigenous community of the region for their enthusiasm and commitment to ensuring they have a voice in the management of the region's natural resources.

On the funding front, we will be announcing several rounds of devolved grant funding early in the New Year. So if you could use some help with a project that will be helping to ensure that our kids have a better future in the region, keep your eyes peeled for the announcements.

Happy Christmas to you all and may 2007 be wet and prosperous.



WaterSmart™ Project Update

Project Officer, Colleen James reports that the project is on the cusp of the exciting stage...

We had a great response from landholders to participate in the project and the selection committee has chosen three very different properties in three very different areas: Monkira Station on the Diamantina River, De Rose Hill Station on the Stuart Highway in the far north of South Australia; and Mt Ive Station in the Gawler Ranges of South Australia.

These properties will be set up to test and demonstrate water reticulation, delivery and monitoring equipment. This will allow landholders to see technology in operation, and demonstrate cost-effective ways to use water as a property-wide management tool providing better production and sustainable outcomes.

North Australian Pastoral Company's 373,000 hectare Monkira Station is dominated by the mighty flood plains of the Diamantina River. These produce highly productive pastures of blue bush and native sorghum for the growing out of weaner steers. Monkira offers opportunities to look at technologies addressing evaporation, Occupational Health and Safety issues, and remote monitoring of water points cut off during the wet.

In Central Australia, the owners of De Rose Hill Station plan to increase the number of bores using solar-powered submersibles to pump water to remote hilltop tanks and gravity feed to new watering points. This will be remotely monitored and controlled using a telemetry system.

Mt Ive Station is 85,250 hectares of fairly hilly, wool-growing country with saltbush flats that borders Lake Gardiner in the north. This property offers a broad view of the regional water issues facing landholders in the Gawler Ranges. Equipment installation will include technologies tailored for salinity, renewable energy, reticulation systems and new watering point locations.

The WaterSmart Pastoral Production™ Project is a Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre project, funded by the National Landcare Program, and administered by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Project partners are Desert Channels Queensland, the South Australian Arid Lands Natural Resource Management Board, and the Northern Territory Department of Primary Industries, Fisheries and Mines.

For further information, contact Colleen James (07 4652 7826 or colleen.james@dcq.org.au) for Queensland and South Australia, or Adrian James (08 8951 8111 or Adrian.James@nt.gov.au) for the Northern Territory.



What plant is that?

If you're travelling through the Channel Country you no longer need to ask the question. Long-time Landcarer, Rhondda Alexander has put years of blood, sweat and tears - not to mention passion - into her wonderful book, *Plants of the Channel Country*.

This 324 page, full colour, field guide to plants of the Channel Country should be in every library, glove-box, back pocket and coffee table in western Queensland and beyond.

Plants of the Channel Country was produced by the Channel Landcare Group with the printing funded by a National Landcare Program devolved grant from Desert Channels Queensland.

As part of its education and awareness-raising campaign, DCQ is distributing this must-have book for the special price of \$20. You can get your copy from DCQ at PO Box 601, Longreach Q 4730 or 4658 0600.

Rick from South Australia wrote: "*Plants of the Channel Country* is a fantastic book. It should be in the kit of every traveller to this region. It cost surprisingly little ... and I declare it to be one of the best resources I have seen for the Channel Country."

catchment round up

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Georgina Diamantina Catchment

Twenty-four Georgina Diamantina Catchment Committee members and guests descended on the Cultural Centre in tiny Bedourie for their final meeting of the year and the AGM.

Congratulations to Errol Enriken on his election as the new Chair of the committee. Errol has significant experience on the land and is excited about the future of the committee. Errol succeeds long-time member, Bob Young who retired from the chair after several years. Bob's effort and commitment has been greatly appreciated.

Other office bearers were Rhondda Alexander (Queensland Vice-Chair) and Sharon Oldfield (South Australian Vice-Chair).

A deal of the meeting was spent reviewing the Georgina Diamantina Strategic Plan. Despite the fact that the Strategic Plan is six years old, it is still relevant which is a reflection of the wisdom with which it was written. It was a good exercise to get members thinking about issues and to refocus the group for the year ahead.

In addition, there were presentations on the Analysis of the Water Planning process in the Georgina Diamantina, Nature Assist and Nature Refuges as well as the always entertaining Gary 'The Fish Man' Muhling from the Department of Primary Industries & Fisheries.

After the meeting, members and guests headed out to Ehabuka. Ehabuka is a former cattle station on the edge of the Simpson Desert which has been purchased by the Australian Bush Heritage Fund and turned into a nature reserve.

The track crossed truly spectacular country from vast white moonscapes to blood-red sand dunes. After a visit to Pulchera waterhole the day finished with a well-earned meal.

In other catchment news, committee members, Rhondda Alexander and Jan McIntyre have just completed a road trip around the catchment with DCQ Regional Coordinator, Steve Wilson. As well as keeping in contact with the people and issues of the region, they were promoting the *Plants of the Channel Country* book and the up-coming weed deck and poster

Cooper Creek Catchment

This teleconference meeting began under very trying circumstances when the DCQ conference phone went on the blink. Those members who were in town huddled around a telephone on speaker until Mike Chuk saved the day with a replacement conference phone.

The meeting was scheduled for Innamincka but events conspired against it and the wonders (those that work) of modern technology were called on instead.

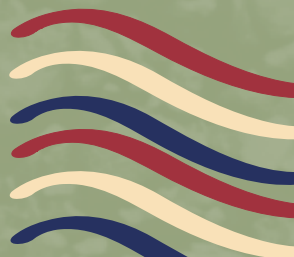
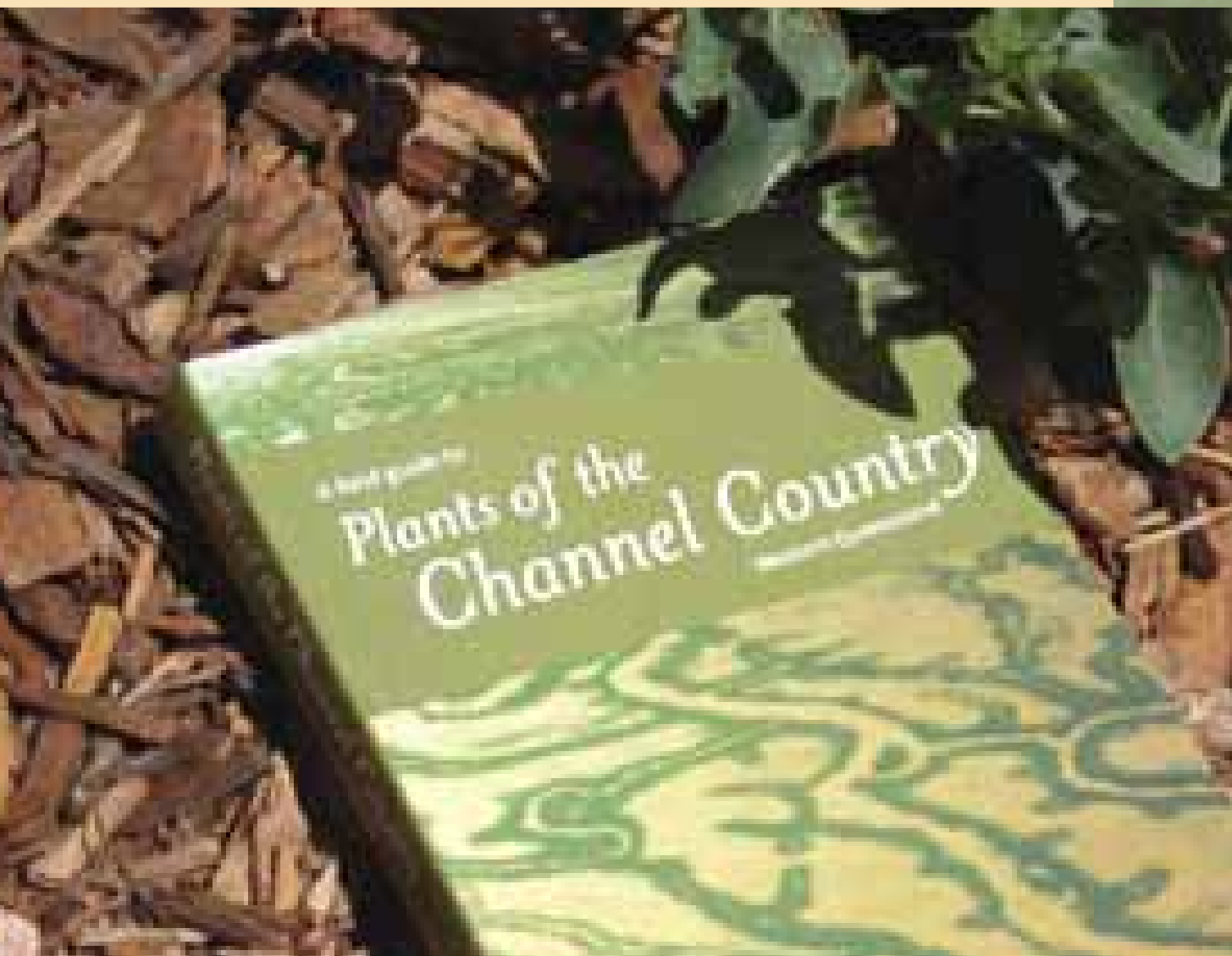
There was a lot of interest in the WaterSmart™ Project which is currently underway. A joint project with Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre, South Australia Arid Lands Natural Resource Management Board, and Desert Channels Queensland, the project is trialling different techniques and technologies to best manage water in the arid pastoral lands.

The cane toad also reared its ugly head. They are now common in Longreach and moving south, and it is believed that a significant flood event will carry toads to the lower catchment and South Australia. The committee will look at possible ways to verify their distribution and what can be done to prevent their spread. The consensus seems to be that genetic sterility is the only solution, which puts the ball in the court of the scientists.

The balance of the shortened meeting was spent assessing past projects and generating ideas for future activities.

Members of the community are reminded that these are open meetings; attendance is welcome and encouraged.

The next meeting for the catchment committees is the combined one with DCQ on 7th and 8th February 2007.



Foreign Insurgency in West

Weeds are a major land management issue in the Desert Channels Queensland region with most occurring on a large scale across the north and east. These insurgents from foreign shores have become entrenched and are slowly spreading down watercourses towards the heart of the Lake Eyre Basin.

To date, land-managers have fought the battle however they could: hand-held sprayers; backpacks; home-made units; and even those guns for hire, contractors. And while all these methods have won skirmishes and a little breathing space, they have had little impact on the course of the war. The small units are grossly inefficient at covering the large areas required and contractors are unable to keep up with demand.

Enter DCQ.

Desert Channels Queensland has purchased an \$11,000 spray unit which it hires to land-managers to radically increase their capacity to control and eradicate pest plants on an extensive scale.

The 400 litre QuickSpray unit is for water-based chemicals only and is mounted on a frame that enables it to easily slide onto the tray of a four-wheel-drive. Its state-of-the-art weaponry includes dual, 100 metre hoses mounted on remote-controlled, retractable reels.

The unit was purchased through DCQ's war on weeds armament committee, the Cross-Catchments Weeds and Feral Animals Initiative, with funding from the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust. In the community interest, DCQ has not sought to make money from the venture; it has, therefore, set a hire rate to cover only maintenance and ultimate replacement of the unit.

Very few landholders can afford these larger, time-efficient units, and DCQ sees its recent acquisition as a vital arming of the front-line fighters with a weapon to give them the edge.



The Aussie Christmas Run

Santa's such a shy old bloke; he comes just once a year,
And only in December, but never when it's clear -
He travels in the dead of night with darkness all around,
When everyone is sleeping - he never makes a sound.

He flies in on a silent sled, across the icy sky,
Reindeer pulling joyfully, presents piled high.
A thick red suit to keep him snug, a beard to warm his face,
Dashing in to leave his gifts at every fireplace.

Now that's all right in winter climes with snow upon the land,
But south of the equator in Australia's sunny strand
He encounters quite a hurdle in the form of searing heat,
For Christmas is in summertime on Santa's southern beat.

Yes it's different in Australia - as everybody knows -
'Cause in the land of kangaroos, it very rarely snows.
It's way too hot for reindeer so poor old Santa Claus
Needs the help of others for his summer Christmas chores.

It really is amazing how the presents make it through
To every household in the land: from Perth to Uluru.
If you listen carefully, I'll tell you how it's done,
Just how old Santa manages his Aussie Christmas run.



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Way down by Kosciusko, on a lonely mountain top
Where no one ever goes and it isn't quite so hot,
There's a tiny fire glowing, marking Santa's landing point,
Where his second cousin, Snowy, keeps a secret little joint.

While Snow unhooks the reindeer and harnesses the roos,
Santa fills his waterbag and catches weather news.
"Forty-five in Alice," says the voice from ABC,
More sweat breaks out on Santa as he sips his billy tea.

He wriggles from his heavy suit and sits in underclothes,
Sweat still springing to his brow and dripping from his nose,
He dons a pair of boxer shorts and a bulging 'Jacky Howe',
Climbs aboard the laden sleigh and mops his beaded brow.

A kindly word and off they bound, dashing through the sky,
Kangas pulling joyfully, Santa sitting high.
He flits across the country making sure to reach each home,
He even knows the camping place of those who like to roam.

He passes in a twinkling; you might just hear a whoosh
As he scoots around with kangaroos above the silent bush.
Sleigh bells tinkling softly in the still Australian night,
Leaving gifts at every house to bring each child delight.

And all the while his sweat soaks out from every piece of skin -
He can't risk dehydration or he'd end up much too thin,
So he suckles on his waterbag to keep his fluids up,
Lips around the open spout - he doesn't use a cup.

And when he finally finishes his hot Australian chore
He returns to Kosciusko to his cousin Snowy's door,
Shares a pint of billy tea, slips into his suit,
And organises flight plans for his northern winter route.

With the kangaroos unharnessed and the reindeer hitched again,
Santa boards the empty sleigh and gathers up the rein,
He mops his flid, sweating face, waves farewell to Snow,
Then flies off with the reindeer just as fast as they can go.

Yes, that's the way it happens every summer in this land;
Santa couldn't do it without cousin Snowy's hand.
So when you see a kangaroo flying like a spear -
It's probably in training to help Santa Claus next year.

Written by Mark Kleinschmidt