

INSiGHT #6 - An action packed last quarter!

December 2012



Greetings to all you avid iNSiGHT watchers!

This photo was taken in October, when I spent some time in a hide 30 metres above the Marri forest floor filming eagle behaviour at a nest in the Perth Hills (hide photos here:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/76932919@N06/8127670428/in/photostream/>). Capturing some decent High Def footage of this gentle parental behaviour, which MIGHT get purchased by a Japanese film company for a documentary about wedgies, was one of the highlights of the last few months for me. But, more about that soon...

What a long time in between drinks it has been! I can offer no excuse for not writing 2 other newsletters in between the last one and now, other than to say TIME FLIES WHEN YOU'RE BUSY (and when you're HAVING FUN)!!! Since my last scribblings in August I've had that much on that I could almost take a whole year to repeat things at a more reasonable pace! But now, at this fabulous time of year when I like to make the effort to do some winding down and spending quality time with family, I have found a gap to write to you all.

## NEWS BLOG

In order to improve my communication to various followers (like YOU!), and increase the value of my website to school children as an educational resource, I

spent some time a few months ago revamping the 'News' section that you may already be familiar with. All my 'blog' posts from 2011, and some from 2008-2010, have now been archived on a blogspot website. This means you can go back and read previous posts, and find them easily by: 1) using the archival tree which lists posts by year and month, or 2) searching for a particular post by typing in a topic to the 'search' tool. The format of the posts has vastly improved, and they look more professional and are easier to read than those on the website (well, I think so anyway!).

SOOO.... while I still really love writing these newsletters and try to get them out when I get time, they are pretty much becoming quarterly updates (instead of monthly!), and I am also posting regular blog updates which you can keep an eye on if you are bored or miss hearing my voice (hahaha!).

To view the improved blog (and to save you some time reading this whole bloody email!), you can visit my blog here:

<http://simoncherriman.blogspot.com.au/>

(Quick, remember this and go now, I can tell your eyes are glazing over!).

Ok, some news... Once again, when I get to this early stage of these newsletters I think "what do I tell them first!?" Well, how about I begin with an exciting upcoming event, then some news of what I was up to last week, then see where that takes us?

## WILD AUSTRALIA - PHOTOGRAPHIC EXHIBITION

Two friends (Judy Dunlop & Sean Tomlinson), Gill and I are pleased to announce we are having a PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION! We pick up our prints tomorrow and are getting very excited because it's less than 2 weeks away! The opening night is on Thursday 3rd January at LITTLE CREATURES brewery in Fremantle, WA. A variety of enlarged canvas prints of Australian wildlife and landscapes will be for sale on the night, and for 3 weeks after. Please see the attached flyer for more details - we hope to see you there!

## OUTBACK EAGLES



Research on my beloved Wedge-tailed Eagles in the Murchison region of Western Australia, about 1100kms drive north of Perth, is progressing well. (It's true, I'm still addicted to the eagle habit and no matter how hard I try, I just CAN'T give it up!). In October last year Gill and I conducted the initial field trip, then I returned in August this year to locate more nests. Also in August I was thrilled to receive a DEC Community Grant to help me conduct an Australia first by catching and tracking wedgies with long-term (1-3 year) satellite transmitters. The stage is set to do the first captures in March, which I am VERY excited about, as this work has for me been a childhood dream. I can still remember laying on a granite outcrop as a small boy, watching an eagle circle high above me, and thinking 'imagine if I could one day have a way of following their movements'. That dream is not far from being realised.

I spent the last week with a good friend of mine (THANKS for your help Mick!) revisiting nests I discovered during the last survey in August, to check their status. We've now found and mapped over 50 nests across this arid landscape and identified at least 20 territories. Seven nests contained either eggs or chicks back in August, and five more territories were active with resident eagles being present but not breeding. Last week we found that none of the nests bred in earlier in 2012 had succeeded, which was initially strange, but having re-read the fabulous literature available on eagle breeding from research by CSIRO

scientists in the past (thanks Michaels Brooker and Ridpath!), I know this is not unusual. Eagles may attempt to breed each year, even in environments where rainfall is erratic, but in order to succeed they need prey density to meet a minimum threshold. Several dry years has meant this is not the case at our study site, so we had no young to photograph this year :(

We did, however, cover lots more ground (about 3/4 of our 2500 square km area has now been searched) and I'm very happy with how comprehensive our map of eagle nests/territories is looking! We also collected bucketloads of bones from below nests, which will keep me busy sorting through to compile a detailed list of eagle prey. Traversing the Mulga scrub each day also brings you some fabulous opportunities to see other wildlife, and some highlights for us were seeing a Perentie (1.5m giant lizard), a Mulga dragon (20cm small lizard), a very inquisitive Brown Falcon, a nest with 2 Large Australian Hobby (a small falcon) chicks, and many beautiful Spotted Nightjars, fluttering just above the ground on dusk as they searched for insects.

The weather was overall much cooler than expected which made our ventures much more bearable, although on one afternoon I did get a touch of heat stroke/migraine and we had to return to the homestead. Summer days at Lorna Glen can easily climb above 40°C, so we were happy with low 30's for most of the time.

You can read more about my Lorna Glen adventures, related articles and see photos here:

October 2011 -

<http://simoncherriman.blogspot.com.au/2011/11/raptors-out-back.html>

August 2012 -

<http://simoncherriman.blogspot.com.au/2012/08/desert-eagles.html>

MEDIA

- <http://simoncherriman.blogspot.com.au/2012/08/eagle-tracking.html>

- <http://simoncherriman.blogspot.com.au/2012/08/echo-article.html>

December 2012 -

<https://www.facebook.com/?q=#/pages/INSiGHT-Ornithology/253246861402812?ref=hl>

There is also a movie clip of my appearance on a locally-produced TV show called 'The Couch', where I talked about eagles, filmmaking and research in the Murchison. The Couch broadcasts on Foxtel every week. You can see the interview here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M9nb70JHZrs>

Ok, let's jump back to August and I'll tell you some stories which eventuated between then and now...

## BECK ACROSS THU DUTCH!



Shortly after sending the last newsletter, I travelled back to New Zealand (yeh bru!) to attend the graduation ceremony for my Masters in Science Communication. I was very excited to graduate with Alex and Carla (Hola mis queridas amigas!!), two close friends I studied with, so this made the event extra special! We collected our gowns on that Saturday morning and got very dressed up, then drank champagne with our supervisors at the Sci Comm building. The ceremony began with a street parade, so we zipped outside and walked up the main street of Dunedin with the 300 or so other Otago graduates, and people smiling all around us. Then we had the ceremony and presentation of degrees at Regent Theatre in the Octagon (centre of town). It was just fabulous to attend the ceremony in person and afterwards I felt a real sense of closure to what has been an incredible part of the last 4 years of my life.

Following graduation, Gill and I jumped in our Wicked Van and did some travelling around the South Island. We

headed to Queenstown for 4 days of snowboarding/skiing with my real Bro' (eh bro?), another great fun experience. The Remarkables ski slopes were a new place for us this time and we found it brilliant despite a poor season. Each time locals said "over from OstrAYLia bru!??, ah thet's shut, the snow's bun shut thus yeaar!", we said 'no worries mate, we're from WA so we'll be happy with a heavy dew!!"

We left Qtown and drove into Milford Sound, constantly in awe of the AMAAAAAAZING scenery along the way. The ancient forests, towering above the road on both sides and stretching out from almost sheer rock faces, capped with snow at their peaks, oozed with water and glistened in the sun. I didn't get my wish of photographing a Kia up close, but was rewarded with some nice opportunities of grabbing shots of Tui, New Zealand Shelduck (Putangitangi) and NZ Robin (Toutouwai). We also experienced seeing an avalanche thundering down the mountainside while we had a break at the Homer Tunnel, the 'gateway' into Milford. Such an awesome place. You can see all the photos I took during our trip here:

[http://www.simoncherriman.com/Simon\\_Cherriman/Gallery/Pages/Aotearoa,\\_Aug-Sept\\_2012.html](http://www.simoncherriman.com/Simon_Cherriman/Gallery/Pages/Aotearoa,_Aug-Sept_2012.html)

After a quick stint in Te Anau and returning to Christchurch via Wanaka, we spent our last night in the warm, greeting company of Gill's friend Emily and her lovely family. The night literally went off with a BANG as a massive thunderstorm crashed down from above, and we hoped it wouldn't affect our flight in the morning. Luckily, it didn't!

### [VICCO \(in the Queen's 'strayan, or 'Victoria' in the Queen's English\)](#)

The plane from NZ took us to Victoria where we spent a great week and a bit with Gill's family. One of the highlights for me was getting to find lots of new frog varieties which called noisily from Barker's Creek. Here's a short story about them:

<http://simoncherriman.blogspot.com.au/2012/09/frogs-in-victoria.html>

But the most memorable occasion was conducting a NEST BOX WORKSHOP with Gill's nephew's class at Winter's Flat

Primary. We were lucky to be donated some second-hand form ply from a local building company, who (fortuitously!) were building a new bridge just outside of Castlemaine, and managed to get 6 boxes made and installed with the little Year 1s. Apparently a pair of Crimson Rosellas moved into one of the boxes only a week later, and we think they have now reared chicks! An article about our workshop which appeared in the local paper appears at the end of this Newsletter (I promise there WILL be an end at some point, but not just yet!).

Another little thing I did in was find the nest of a pair of Little Ravens, one of Australia's 5 species of Corvids. It contained 2 chicks and, being so conveniently placed just across the road from Gill's mum's house, inspired me to make a short film about it. So, gather your friends, get the popcorn ready, draw the curtains and bring your kids INSIDE!! Here is 6 minutes of

## THE RAVENS OF CASTLEMAINE

<http://simoncherriman.blogspot.com.au/2012/09/the-ravens-of-castlemaine.html>

## EDUCATION AND MORE NEST BOXES!

Back in Perth, where we returned in September, Gill and I ran a few more of our 'Home Among the Gum Trees' nest-box workshops. Applecross Primary (September) and Mundaring Primary (October) were both fabulous places to work at, with friendly teachers, enthusiastic children and lots of tall trees to place our boxes in! One of the cockatoo boxes at Mundaring has already had many smaller parrots looking at it, and we are continuing to monitor 'who's out there' with a motion-sensing camera courtesy of the Shire of Mundaring (thanks Toni!).

Speaking of parrots, the first success story from one of our boxes at Ardross Primary

(<http://simoncherriman.blogspot.com.au/2012/10/they-work.html>)

came through shortly afterwards when the school emailed us to say that they were certain some Australian Ringnecks had chicks inside! The kids had written detailed notes in their 'Bird Observations' diary, kept in the front office at the school, which was thrilling (and tear-jerking!) to see! I visited the school as soon as

I could to photograph the 3 chicks, who were nestled cosily in their box made almost entirely from recycled materials. Needless to say the children were all very happy to see the photos!

You can read about the most recent Nest Box workshops, and a few of the other activities I did at schools to educate and inspire children, on the blog here:

<http://simoncherriman.blogspot.com.au/2012/09/more-nest-boxes-applecross-primary.html>

<http://simoncherriman.blogspot.com.au/2012/10/isnt-above-picture-amazing-it-was.html>

<http://simoncherriman.blogspot.com.au/2012/09/pt-walter-peac-and-penrhos-butcher.html>

<http://simoncherriman.blogspot.com.au/2012/09/back-to-pt-walter.html>

<http://simoncherriman.blogspot.com.au/2012/10/they-work.html>

<http://simoncherriman.blogspot.com.au/2012/10/if-you-look-carefully-at-bottom-left-of.html>

<http://simoncherriman.blogspot.com.au/2012/11/nestonia.html>

## GREAT WESTERN WOODLANDS

One of the October highlights for Gill and I was helping run a Millennium Kids citizen science/youth leadership camp, in the largest INTACT Mediterranean woodland left in the WORLD! The Great Western Woodland encompasses an enormous stretch of inland WA, contains amazing Eucalypt diversity and a whole suite of unique fauna. Multiple stakeholders are conducting activities in the woodland in order to promote understanding of the area, and ultimately its conservation. Millennium Kids, a not-for-profit kids environmental education/sustainability organisation (from whom I am a council member), has been conducting workshops with children living locally to the GWW to inspire them about this natural asset. The Citizen Science Camp was another such activity. We travelled with 2 other MK staff members and 5 Year 10 students from Kalgoorlie through the woodlands, conducting a variety of leadership/environmental activities and scientific research linked to organisations such as Birdlife Australia, Murdoch University, the Smithsonian Institute, and the WA dept. of Environment and Conservation. The camp's structure was informed by questions raised by children at some of the workshops conducted earlier this year - eg what is the highest point? what types of birds live there?

We had a very productive week and it was truly amazing

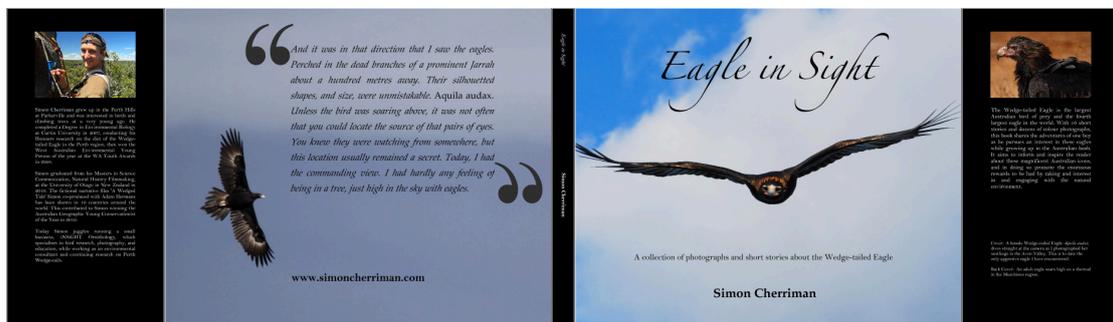
to watch leadership qualities emerge from the five participant children. It was great to see their environmental and spatial awareness develop as we went on too - starting to tune into bird calls, reptile/mammal tracks, and switching on to identifying natural vs human impacts to the landscape.

To view my photo album from the week, check the Photo Gallery on my website here:

[http://www.simoncherriman.com/Simon\\_Cherriman/Gallery/Pages/Citizen\\_Science\\_Camp,\\_Oct\\_2012.html](http://www.simoncherriman.com/Simon_Cherriman/Gallery/Pages/Citizen_Science_Camp,_Oct_2012.html)

Thanks so much for a BRILLIANT week Wayne and Cat, and the five John-Paul Baptist College students for attending.

## EAGLE INSIGHT - DRAFT BOOK RELEASED



After about 3 years in the making, I finally completed my first book! 'Eagle in Sight' aims to educate and inspire others about a connection to nature, through my interest in eagles. It is written in the form of the Wedge-tailed Eagle's life-cycle (egg to adult), but instead of 'scientific facts' about each stage, I've written 16 short stories about my experiences relating to each stage, to inspire others (young and old) how much adventure you can have by being interested in the environment. The stories are enhanced with colour photographs of eagles, their nests, eggs and chicks. The book is currently being reviewed by various publishing options and I'm hoping to announce its publication early next year. As soon as it has been published it will be available for purchase on my website!

This project started well before A Wedged Tale began in 2010, so now the book is done, the film will be next! I've

recently started working on the 'making of' docco for AWT again so I will announce when the DVDs are ready as soon as they are! I know there are many of you who are anticipating this DVD release, but all I can say is 'everything comes to he who waits!'

## KIMBERLEY NEWS

You might remember that I've been involved with the Australian Geographic Society's annual Scientific Expedition to the east Kimberley region in northern WA for the last 2 years. It's exciting to announce that this event is again happening in 2013, provided there are enough paying volunteers (like you!) willing to register. If you're keen to be part of what I can guarantee will be an exciting week of raw natural history encounters in one of Australia's most BEAUTIFUL places (and one of the most memorable experiences in your life!), then see this link for details: <http://www.australiangeographic.com.au/society/kimberley-scientific-expedition-2013-.htm>

Earlier this year I was involved in production of a documentary about the 2012 expedition by helping with the camera work to film scientists and their activities, and shooting the wildlife footage which features throughout the film. The draft of this documentary was released a few weeks ago and the final film should be coming out early next year. Keep your eyes on the Aus Geo website (above) and the Aus Geo journal for news about where to get a copy!

## ANOTHER YEAR NEARLY DONE!

Ok folks, time to wake up.... wake UUUUUP! Sorry, I knew you'd drift off with all those words! That is about all the news I can fit in for now! Whew, I only just got that one done before Christmas - I can smell the turkey cooking and the custard brewing as we speak!

Thank you all of you who have been involved in my runnings around this year, and to those whose help I've been lucky enough to have, I am very grateful. Looking forward to seeing many of you in the New Year.

I hope you all have a **FABULOUS,**  
**SAFE** and **MERRY CHRISTMAS,** and  
**VERY BEST WISHES** for a fresh start  
to 2013.

Love, hugs and many smiles to all of you and your families.

Best Wishes,

Simon

 Save a tree, please don't print this e-mail unless necessary

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Qualified Tree Climbing

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