

INSIGHT #7 - The New Year is getting old!

October 2013

Happy 2013 Everyone!!!

It's a bit crazy to say this now I know, as we are well and truly into it. But **FINALLY** I have found a minute to sit down and get a newsletter written. YES it has been a happy one, very much, and I'll scribble down a few reasons **WHY** in this edition of **INSIGHT**!

Very sorry for the lack of updates for the last 9 months but time has just flown. And you have probably been thankful that you haven't needed to swim through the deluge of words that normally comes when you see an 'inbox item' from me!

Part of the reason why my emails went from monthly to quarterly to almost NEVER is I still regularly post updates to my blog, so I figure people can still follow what I'm up to by reading that. But I know, you probably need a little reminder when stories are written so you remember to have a read! So, here it is at last, the reminder you've all been waiting for (ha ha!). Just click

www.simoncherriman.blogspot.com.au to check it out - but I will refer to specific posts/photos in the next few minutes ;-)

FLAT OUT LIKE A LIZARD DRINKING

This is what we often say in Australia when one is kept very busy. (If you translate that to New Zealandish it becomes 'flet out like a luzzard druunking', but of course that never happens in my head any more as it's coming up 3 years ago since I finished living in that incredibly beautiful country doing my Masters, and just gone 12 months since I graduated with my piece of paper.... so I can no longer say I am corrupted by speaking Kiwi (haha!!) BUT, this saying is very appropriate to the year that has been 2013, for me at least. It feels great to find a few moments where my feet are on the ground (not dangling from a branch!), with some spare time. Well, a spare afternoon at least. The busy life I lead is all self inflicted, I know, but when so many things are happening

around you, how can you not dive in head first!!??

Ok, let's begin at the beginning and I'll tell you what happened on a month-by-month basis...

JANUARY



Judy Dunlop and Sean Tomlinson both of Como, Gill Basnett of Mt Helena and Simon Cherriman of Parkerville with their work. Picture: Martin Kennealey www.communitypix.com.au d393460

PICTURES GO WILD

I began 2013 with the 'Wild Australia Photography Exhibition' with Gill and 2 friends, Judy and Sean, which saw us collecting large canvas prints of some of our best wildlife and wilderness photos and holding an exhibition launch night at the 'Little Creatures' pub in Fremantle. Lots of people went in for a look, gave us great feedback, and we had a few photo sales which was very pleasing! After our 3 weeks ended, Gill and I took our prints to be displayed in Murphy's Café, Mundaring (http://simoncherriman.blogspot.com.au/2013_01_01_archive.html), where they still remain for viewing and for sale right now. So if you need a new wall-hanging for the lounge - feel free to zip in, grab a wonderful coffee, and leave some cash on the counter for us hahaha! The other thing which happened in January was an awesome trip to the Porogurups with my friend Jeff

(http://www.simoncherriman.com/Simon_Cherriman/Gallery/Pages/Porongurups_Jan_2013.html), but this nearly ended in disaster when I had a car accident. In a sudden moment while I was driving back to Perth, the car's bonnet latch came off, and the bonnet flipped up and smashed the windscreen right before my eyes. I managed to keep control of the vehicle, pull over and realise how lucky I was to be alive. It was a sure reminder of how easily something can go wrong, and made me grateful for packing so much in to my life and living every day to the full. Thankfully Mum and Dad drove the 3 hours to pick me up while the car was collected and repaired in a nearby town.

FEBRUARY

The next month started off much better with a wonderful discovery at a nearby wetland - the cryptic nest of a Musk Duck, one of Australia's most interesting ducks. This find was extra special because when I looked into the nest, I discovered the eggs were hatching RIGHT in front of me! You can watch the short film I made about it here: simoncherriman.blogspot.com.au/2013_02_01_archive.html

For a few weeks afterwards I relished the sights of a prolific flowering show put on by the forest surrounding my home. Anyone else who lives in the Perth hills would have noticed the wildflower spectacle that Marri Trees put on - they blossomed like never before (simoncherriman.blogspot.com.au/2013_02_01_archive.html)! This brought all sorts of animals out and about, and created a tranquil setting for me to spend outdoors in my shed, sifting through bags of bones. That's right - bones of animals eaten by eagles living bang in the middle of WA. My priority was to compile report about the diet of Wedge-tailed Eagles at Lorna Glen, a study which began in late 2011 for the WA Dept of Parks and Wildlife. If you happened to see the latest Landscape magazine (http://www2.dec.wa.gov.au/component/option,com_virtuemart/page,shop.browse/category_id,5/Itemid,2526/), you would have read all about the findings in there. If not, have a look at my website under the 'Research' tab where you can find a link to a copy of the article.

MARCH

Have you ever heard of Deep Pool reserve? Nor had I until I was commissioned by [Wheatbelt NRM](http://www.wheatbeltnrm.org.au) (www.wheatbeltnrm.org.au) to install some nest boxes made by local members of the Beverley community in bushland there. I was amazed by what a gorgeous patch of bush remained in the reserve, which was apparently kept aside by a local farmer who took great value in having this spot set aside as a place for his family and local people to enjoy wildlife. Such initiatives are fantastic to hear about and so encouraging in a region which has lost so much precious native vegetation. Read more about this beautiful spot here:

http://simoncherriman.blogspot.com.au/2013_03_01_archive.html

After dangling from Wandoo trees on ropes and ladders I was fortunate to have the help of local raptor rehabilitator Terry High with some captive trials on his Wedge-tailed Eagles. The purpose of these trials was to test the attachment procedure for fitting satellite transmitters to eagles using a 'backpack' mount, to 'practice' in captivity and ensure the methods are suitable, prior to attempting this in the field. This experiment was an important step towards this year's prime goal (which has now been achieved - read on!) - satellite tracking wild Wedge-tails. Once a trial transmitter had been fitted, I left the harness on the captive eagle and returned after a month, then removed it with the pleasing result that it had stayed attached beautifully, and best of all not left a mark on the eagle's body or caused it any stress. I also ran a few more trials earlier in the year at [Eagles Heritage](http://www.eaglesheritage.com.au) (www.eaglesheritage.com.au) in Margaret River, and used miniature cameras to monitor the birds' behaviour once the transmitter was on. This showed that the eagle accepted its new backpack after only a few hours before resuming normal behaviour. I must send a huge thankyou to Phil and Kathy Payne for their assistance and willingness to help. Here's what it looks like being 'beak to beak' with the only beak in Australia that is more hooked than mine!



While this eagle helped me by testing out a flash new 'backpack', I went to visit some of its relatives up north with a fellow filmmaker friend from Melbourne. Dan and I headed to Lorna Glen for another eagle research trip where we continued with nest-searching and brought our tally up to 65 nests for the study area. We also built some traps in preparation for catching adult eagles (yep, read on!), and did some planning for the next *INSiGHT* Film: a documentary about tracking eagles in arid WA. Photos from this field trip can be viewed here, (just click on the 'Lorna Glen March 2013' album):

http://www.simoncherriman.com/Simon_Cherriman/Gallery/Gallery.html

APRIL

It was a busy month! On April Fools Day in Mt Helena the only fool was an unfortunate Bronzewing Pigeon who was killed outright by a swift Sparrowhawk just after sunrise. The magpies and honeyeaters found it and told me with their insistent alarm calls, and I was lucky enough to be lured out of bed and snap photos of the hawk as it plucked and ate the pigeon in our backyard. Another dead animal, this one a carnivorous marsupial which unfortunately met its end with a vehicle, gave me welcome topics for my blog, which you can read about here:

http://simoncherriman.blogspot.com.au/2013_04_01_archive.html. The Last Post (and I'm not talking about a war

memorial but the 'final entry' on my blog for that month) had a froggy theme as I crawled around, camera in tow, on hands and knees in local swamps in search of Big Hooters. And no, I'm not talking about large parts of the female anatomy, as I'm sure you are thinking, but smaller, independent creatures of the bushland which emerge after dark. What then, you ask? Check out the short film which resulted here to find out:

<http://simoncherriman.blogspot.com.au/2013/04/big-hooters.html>

Other April antics saw Gill and I off to Toodyay (about an hour's drive from our place) to run a community workshop building Nest Boxes for black cockatoos. We had a great day and lots of laughs with a merry bunch of willing nest-box builders, and were even blessed with a visit from a real live cockatoo, brought by fabulous staff from **Kaarakin Black Cockatoo Conservation Centre** (www.blackcockatoorecovery.com). On the way home we even enjoyed an especially nice Vegetarian pastie from the Toodyay bakery. We'll definitely be back there next time we pass through that town!

MAY

May, may, time for a HOLIDAY! That is what Gill had been thinking anyway and her idea of a secret holiday to an undisclosed location led us to the airport early one morning in the dark on a magical mystery tour. I had packed for snow, drought and everything in between but our destination and timeframe turned out to be 2 weeks in the magical KIMBERLEY (northern WA), one of the best plans Gill's had ever had! We both had a well-earned period of R&R in our hire car, camping along the Gibb River Road, spotting amazing birds, hiking up gorges past hoards of crocodiles (harmless freshwater ones), and dining in luxury at Mornington Wildlife Sanctuary where Gill used to live and work. I was amazed by the number of different birds I had never seen before (Purple-crowned Wrens by the dozen!), the awesome, friendly, lovely people who run the place, and the incredible scenery. It felt strange to be away from work, out of mobile range and totally on holiday but as expected this break left me refreshed and rejuvenated for the biggest mission yet...

JUNE

How do you catch an EAGLE!? Along with 'how tall are you?' and 'do you play basketball?' this became the hot question as I planned 'The Capture Mission' to follow on from the captive trials mentioned earlier. The month

began driving 1200km north to the study site in central Western Australia where I have been researching eagle ecology. Our mission was simple: bait some tall, wire, open-roofed cage traps with carrion (road-killed kangaroo) and wait for an eagle to enter one! Having discussed this in depth with WA's 'grandfathers of eagle research', Michael Brooker and Michael Ridpath, I expected that adult birds would be very wary and difficult to lure in. However, luck was on our side and we trapped 2 adult birds in 2 days. Helped by Neil Hamilton whose expertise in raptor handling was invaluable, and Gill who took on the role of 'chief camera-woman', the attachment of solar-powered Platform Terminal Transmitters (PTTs) went like clockwork and I am now following the movements of these birds remotely via satellite. **YOU TOO** can read all about it and follow the two birds' progress by following my new blog which documents this Australian first study. You can also view the trailer to the documentary mentioned above. Here's the link: <http://wedge-tailedeagletracking.blogspot.com.au/>

And here's a snippet from the West Australian Newspaper showing 'Gidjee', our female tagged eagle. Although she

Looks like a sparrow in my hands, she is actually about 4 kg and has a wingspan of more than my 2m height (I am probably not the best person to make Australia's largest raptor look big!!). You might say my smile in the picture says it all!

Satellites keep tabs on eagles

■ Daniel Mercer

In something more than a flight of fancy, a Perth researcher has tagged two wedge-tailed eagles in a breakthrough he claims will shed light on the predators.

Ecologist Simon Cherriman captured and tagged the two birds at Lorna Glen, a remote wildlife sanctuary 150km north-east of Wiluna in the Mid West.

Hailing the effort a first, Mr Cherriman said the satellite-tracking tags would help scientists better understand Australia's largest bird of prey.

"In terms of this type of technology and research being done in Australia, we're very far behind other parts of the world," he said.

"So in that respect it is very significant."

The 29-year-old, who has grants from the Department of Environment and Conservation and the Australian Geographic Society, said the project was simple.

"It basically involves following the movements of wedge-tailed eagles and making a film about it," Mr Cherriman said.



Taking flight: Simon Cherriman with one of the tagged eagles.

JULY

Another month, another Nest Box workshop! This time we headed further inland to Corrigin, a small Wheatbelt town about 3 hours drive away, and worked with another great bunch of people to build more nest boxes. Gill's mum was visiting from Victoria which made it really nice to give her a sense of some of the work we have been doing this year, and also meet some fabulous, down-to-earth locals. You can see a couple of snaps from the weekend's workshop here:

<http://simoncherriman.blogspot.com.au/2013/07/corrigin-nest-boxes.html>

On the nest box theme, I expanded my 'target species range' by building my first set of bat boxes. That's right - contrary to popular belief, we DO have bats in the Perth area, but unlike what most people think of when they hear the word 'bat', these ones are tiny microbats, about the size of a mouse with wings. Microbats come in a few different varieties but all are small, insectivorous and nocturnal, roosting by day in small crevices in trees, roofs, wall cavities - and hopefully Bat Boxes! I was commissioned by the City of Bayswater to make 7 boxes, which I installed in a riverside reserve in the Bayswater area. Click here to see what they look like and read more about bat boxes:

<http://simoncherriman.blogspot.com.au/2013/07/bat-boxes.html>

While out filming Black-flanked Rock Wallabies for a 'wildlife cameraman' job with WWF (<http://simoncherriman.blogspot.com.au/2013/07/wallabys-rock.html>), I received a fantastic phonecall from a hills resident for whom I had made and installed a large Black Cockatoo nest box last year. Brad was excited to tell me that, after many months of keeping tabs on the box and hoping, he had an endangered Forest Red-tailed Black Cockatoo nesting in it! The species is resident on his property and just needed a nest site. This news was thrilling for me as it confirmed that the box design I have been using not only works for Carnaby's Cockatoos, but also for Red-tails. Sadly, though, this nesting attempt did not succeed after the egg inside the box failed to hatch. We are unsure what happened but suspect harassment by Galahs (self-introduced to the Perth region) could be a

possible reason. I am still focussing on the positives though and very happy that the birds at least used the box. Hopefully this bodes well for a future nesting attempt. See this link to watch a short clip of the female red-tail in her nest box:

<http://simoncherriman.blogspot.com.au/2013/07/red-tails-in-box.html>

AUGUST

We began the month at Mundaring Primary School making nest boxes with almost every student in an ambitious but well-planned environmental education activity based at the school. Following the nest box activity, I set up a school photo so this exciting moment could be captured in time... then we got stuck into hanging the nest boxes in trees in a bush reserve adjoining the school.



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Gill and I then took off to Adelaide where I was a guest speaker at the Australasian Raptor Association conference, run in a joint venture with Birds South Australia at the Adelaide Zoo. After screening the film 'A Wedged Tale', and showing some preliminary findings of the Wedge-tailed Eagle satellite tracking study, I enjoyed two fabulous days of very interesting and informative talks on current bird of prey research around the country. It is

always fantastic to catch up with like-minded people and share stories, talk about research techniques and have a few laughs.

An early flight back to Perth on Monday morning had me land just in time to dash to Lynwood Senior High School for a motivational speech for Sustainability Week. It was very cool to be waiting at the traffic lights at the school's entrance and see my name on a 'welcome notice' - thanks to Lynwood for giving me the opportunity to emphasise to another group of people (this one being over 1000 teenagers!) how cool the natural Australia is!

Gill and I caught an early train which snaked its way through the Avon Valley from Perth (past about 5 eagle nests!), to Kalgoorlie, where we were to help run some [Millennium Kids workshops \(www.millenniumkids.com.au\)](http://www.millenniumkids.com.au) in the Great Western Woodlands - aimed to engage young people with their local environment and instill an ownership which hopefully promotes them to protect the unique biodiversity of the area. You see more of this fabulous place by clicking on this link, which takes you to an album of photos I took during this trip:

http://www.simoncherriman.com/Simon_Cherriman/Gallery/Pages/Millennium_Kids_Woodland_Workshops,_Aug_2013.html

SEPTEMBER

And now we reach the final of the 9-month gestation of this newsletter, which from any moment now will be collecting, lifted up and delivered via 'air-mail' by the cyber stork we call the internet. I'm nearly out of breath! I will just keep this month short by saying the highlights of the month have been watching some incredible eagle behaviour at a nest in the Perth Hills, visiting an amazingly diverse and wildlife-rich patch of bushland in the WA Wheatbelt for a Community Environment Event called 'Bioblitz', and climbing an enormous Marri at Helena College to install a Black Cockatoo nest box. Read all about these things and more here:

http://simoncherriman.blogspot.com.au/2013_09_01_archive.html

OKAY.... that brings us to the end of another long read!
And another 9 months in the life of Simmo! I hope you
have enjoyed hearing about my antics and most
importantly, have learnt something new or become inspired
about our **wonderful land**, the place of unique wildlife
and wilderness that epitomises the true meaning of the
word '**AUSTRALIA**'. Thanks for tuning in, and remember,
you can always keep in touch with my movements by
visiting my website.

Take care and best wishes,

(and as we say at Millennium Kids - have fun, eat
chocolate and care for the environment!)

Simon

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

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