

iNSiGHT #8 - Eagle Tracking and the Highlands
April 2014



Greetings iNSiGHT Watchers!!

How are you all? I hope your 2014 has started fabulously.

Welcome to the first instalment of **iNSiGHT** News for this year. If you are a long-time follower, thanks for your loyalty. If you are a new member, then I hope these updates provide information, inspiration and an inclination to get outside and engage with some of Australia's fabulous natural history.

If you know someone who does not receive these updates, please get them to send their email and I'll add it to the mailing list. Provided they want to, of course. Also, if you would like to read ANY PAST ISSUE of an iNSiGHT Newsletter, you can find an archive of them here:

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

On the other hand - I'm always keen to keep up with who wants these updates and who doesn't. SO, if you no longer wish to remain on the mailing list, please let me know and I can remove your email (I know, these very long strings of

waffle can be off-putting and extremely frightening!)).

NOOOO... grab some match-sticks to prop your eyelids open, boil the kettle for a nice cup of hot caffeinated beverage (or three!)... prop yourself up with pillows, lock up your pets, and be prepared to be put to sleep by another bout of Wildlife Waffle.

So, where do we begin? I last left you three-quarters of the way through a rapidly disappearing 2013, which was one of the busiest years of my life. September ended somewhere between a well-camouflaged hide overlooking a developing eagle chick in the Perth Hills, and the top of a COLOSSAL Marri tree at Helena College where I clambered like Jack up his bean-stalk to install a nest box for Black-Cockatoos.

WHAT HAPPENED IN OCTOBER!!!???

As you're reading this, a juvenile Wedge-tailed Eagle is flying across the middle of Western Australia. "So what!", I hear you say. There are probably hundreds doing the same thing. True - but only one of them has a special piece of 'bling' on it's back. A small GPS unit, about the size of a mobile phone. This bird is called 'Kuyurnpa' (a Martu Aboriginal word which means 'little girl'), and back in mid-October I fitted her with a GPS when she was still on her nest, low in a Gidgee tree, smack bang in the middle of Western Australia. Kuyurnpa fledged in the first few days of November, began to explore her parents' territory for the next 4 months, while still relying on them for food... but on 29th March she began dispersal. Since that time (which is only a fortnight) she has flown more than TWO THOUSAND kilometres, explored the surrounds of the 250 000 ha Lorna Glen property, navigated around Lake Carnegie, and headed far north into the Pilbara region. Last night's data check showed her roosting in the middle of the Gibson Desert, 340km south of Broome.



This is the first time ever that the dispersal path of a juvenile Wedge-tailed Eagle has been tracked by satellite, and the study is already yielding many interesting facts about eagle movements. One such snippet is that Wedge-tails are capable of soaring to altitudes of more than 6000m, explaining why they can disappear well and truly when you see them soar out of sight!

You can read more about the findings of this tracking study at the website: www.wedge-tailedeagletracking.blogspot.com.au

I left Lorna Glen after a very successful eagle research trip, and in November headed straight over east to spend some time with Gill's family in Lismore and then Canberra. Walks through the beautiful rainforest, climbing a giant strangler-fig and seeing unique raptors such as the Pacific Baza and Grey Goshawk (shown to me by fantastic local experts Keith and Fay - thanks guys!), and exploration of magical coastline near Byron Bay, were some of the highlights. It's also amazing how much wildlife can be found in a seemingly boring storm-water drain, and I was thrilled to spend time adventuring along one of the many such drains in our nation's capital. Ducklings and Dragons (the water-dwelling,



reptilian as opposed to smoke-blowing variety) provided fantastic photographic opportunities, skinks and snakes slithered from my bare feet as the calls of fairy-wrens, quail crickets captured my attention, placing enormous emphasis on the fact that, no matter how 'man-made', EVERYTHING is an ecosystem.



An Eastern Water Dragon's Eye is very dinosaur-like at macro level.

You can read about a few of the news posts I wrote while over east on my blog.

MORE NEST BOXES...

...were keenly and carefully constructed by two more primary school groups that took part in Re-Cyc-Ology Project workshops later in November: Bull Creek PEAC and Parkerville Primary. Our visit to the latter was an extremely nostalgic experience for me as it was the first time I've been back to my old school since leaving it 18 years ago. It was such a highlight to talk to students about the school's landmarks ('the oval', 'the library', etc - highly important

points of navigation when your childhood world consists primarily of the school yard!) and give them a big laugh when I jumped up to touch the basketball ring! This was something that, even though I've been very tall all my life, I never managed to do before leaving primary school at the age of 12. These 26 students were a delight to work with and provoked a tear-jerking reaction when each and every one of them wrote a thank you letter, beautifully illustrated with pictures of birds, mammals, tools, nest boxes and smiling faces) and posted them in a package to Gill and I.

Take a look at more photos of these two workshops on the new website for the project: www.re-cyc-ology.com.au



WINE ABOUT BIRDS

This is something I have never been known to do (unless I'm talking about the dreaded Galah, an over-abundant native species which I wrote about last year at this blog post: <http://simoncherriman.blogspot.com.au/search?q=galah>)... But I notice your sharp eyes also detected the obvious grammatical error because I said 'wine' instead of 'whine'. Aahaaaa! It is in fact spelled W-I-N-E because I'm referring to the bottles of plonk that many people like to stock up with prior to the festive season. Christmas was fast approaching for one particular winery known as 'Drakesbrook' (www.drakesbrook.com.au), found in the scenic locality of Waroona just south of Perth. The owners of this

fabulous local business have always been keen on promoting the unique and beautiful bird species with which they share their vineyards (in more ways than one!), so they contacted me about providing photos for a few new wine labels due for production. (They actually contacted me months beforehand but the release of the new wines occurred in December). The result is this little series of fine wines, which you can sample at your leisure by choosing to support your local business, and of course keep the bottle to decorate your windowsill or mantelpiece with!



HIGHLANDS HERE I COME!

So... what's happening next? I am very excited to be heading overseas for the first time since New Zealand, and will be traveling to a place occupied by folk who are equally lovely but thrice as hard to understand: the thickly-spoken, kilt-wearing Scottish! I leave Perth (Australia) in early May, head to the highlands for just over a month where I will be helping a good friend and his colleagues research Scottish Golden Eagles, the European equivalent of my beloved Wedge-tail. I have dreamed of doing this since first seeing Golden Eagles in the Lake District at the age of 10, so it will be a great experience (provided I survive the cold and cope with the language barrier!! - on that note, be prepared for some S.U.S.H, or 'Simmo's Update of the Scottish Highlands' Newsletters, soon! Afterwards I fly to Singapore for 10 days to spend some time there... before going straight to the Eastern States to pick up a new car and travel back via the Nullarbor, returning to Perth in early August.

Well, that brings me to the end of another update from the land of tall dreadlocks for another few months! I look forward to mailing you from a much colder place very soon - but in the mean time keep an eye on my blog for shorter snippets of news! And remember - have fun engaging with and enjoying the wonderful natural world!

Very Best Wishes,

Simon

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

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