

iNSiGHT (yes it's a new title!)  
October 2010



The galahs' voracious squawking alerted me to his presence. Even though I was sitting at my computer, a quiet desk space away from the natural world, I could just tell he was around. I listened... silence. The galahs had stopped. Songlarks continued to sing happily, an occasional honeyeater trill. But no other birds issued a warning. I tapped away at the keyboard. Twenty minutes passed.

Then it came again, much louder, my ears pricked up as the grating galah screech burst into the room. I glanced over my shoulder, and there was a galah, sitting in a tree just outside the window. It was perched low down and its attention focused sharply on the ground. With each irate squawk it bent its head forward and raised its wings, looking down at him. I laughed but turned back to the screen, consumed almost entirely by my work, not thinking to investigate any further. I tapped away and the squawks faded in my mind. The computer had my full attention once more.

It was late afternoon when I ventured outside. I'd been working all day and needed some respite, so I stretched and peered out the front door to see what was left of the day. Immediately I jumped to my camera and burst outside eagerly to photograph an old man emu as he grazed metres from the driveway with his six chicks. His long neck stretched down as he plucked red berries from low saltbush, like a hand-puppet performing a strange dance. His beautiful chicks fed at his feet, occasionally peering at this other long, gangly figure which was taller than their father, and had a blonde scalp and five toes rather than black fuzz and three.

I glanced down and crossed the driveway and there he was. Well, there were his tracks at least. Large scratchy feet, long toed, pressed into the sand, with a long thick-skinned tail that trailed a snake-like line between them. I immediately realised THIS was the reason for the galahs' commotion. I'd never seen him but his path was there in the sand, to me just a spirit reptile, as ancient as the land itself. But to the galahs he was real. And their warning had spread through the bush and told the other birds, reminded the kangaroos as they lay sleeping in their daytime hideaways, told the shrubs and the giant red-gums and all the other life in the bush that the warm days were here, and greeting the earth to leave his tracks was the goanna of eastern Australia. The lace-monitor.

## Hullo My Friends!

Yes - I've changed the title of these newsletter updates. I figured a change is as good as a holiday, and seeing as INSIGHT is my business name, and sums up my goals in life (to educate and inspire others about the environment... or, to give INSIGHT), I thought it an appropriate title of my newsletters from now on.

I'm here at the amazing Mambray Creek in the southern Flinders Ranges of South Australia, staying with my lovely girlfriend Gill in a remote but tranquil bush setting. I've been here for 3 weeks working flat out on the final stages of A 'Wedged Tale,' the film project of 2010. Things are going well and every day the film gets tweaked and shaped and morphed closer to its final stage. I decided to start with a story of the lace-monitor as when I saw his tracks for the first time the other week, these tracks symbolised the last 6 weeks of my life. I have indeed been making lots of tracks! Here are some quick accounts of what I've been up to since the last newsletter.

I'm going to try and keep this brief as there's lots to say and not much time for detail, but it will still end up being longer than the average email!

### MOUNT CAROLINE, early September

My good friends Jeff and Mike (thanks guys!) were part of a great weekend adventure to Mt Caroline in the Wheatbelt of WA. We zipped out here because Jeff and Mike had planned this visit for ages, and after chatting in the



Mundaring Weir Hotel about the place we all got excited and decided now was the time to go. We also went as a last romantic weekend for Adam and I to spend together (sob sob), before his return to the land of the long white cloud, NZ. Caroline is

an incredible place, and one of the last strongholds of the black-footed rock wallaby. After many hours of watching we were lucky enough to see plenty of these incredible mammals basking in the late afternoon sun. I was also thrilled when we found two barn owls one night, perched on fence-posts just next to the road. The barn owl's giant facial disc is in fact a radar dish which aids in the detection of prey, channelling the slightest sounds of a moving mouse to their ears and allowing them to detect their prey without any light at all. I managed to creep close enough for a couple of photos before this owl flew off into the night.



### THE AUSTRALIAN BIRDFAIR, 17th-19th September.

I was invited to be a guest speaker (needless to say I talked about eagles) at this amazing event organised by some brilliant, dedicated people in New South Wales. On the Friday I ran an Eagle Photography-Wildlife Filmmaking workshop with 3 groups of school-kids. I made a mock bird's-nest and collected some camouflaged and got the children to build a hide from which to look at the nest without being seen. It was just like building a cubby and they loved it! It was a fantastic day and left me amazed by how switched-on some of our young people are. The birdfair brought many people from across the country together to share research, knowledge, stories and

photographs of our beautiful avifauna. A vast range of informative talks were given.... brains ached and laughter echoed as 2 panels battled over bird knowledge with the 'Flockquiz' quiz session held at lunchtime on the opening day.... and raptor expert Nick Mooney from Tasmania gave an incredible speech at the conference dinner, one of the highlights of the weekend. A great initiative to be involved in overall and I'm already thinking about going again next year. Here's some squabbling birds that I met during the weekend:



Sulfur-crested Cockatoos

### MAMBRAY CREEK, Sept - Oct

From Leeton in NSW I flew to Sydney then onwards to Adelaide and headed north to a place where I was to spend the next month. This gorgeous spot is about 3 hours drive north of Adelaide. I'm living with Gill (who's been working for Parks and Wildlife here) in a great house surrounded by bush. It's amazing, we have emus with young chicks that visit often, singing honeyeaters nesting in the garden, and we back onto acres of giant river red-gum bushland, interspersed with cypress and low scrub, and a gorgeous creekline full of birdlife. The Flinders Ranges are literally next door which have rugged gorges, orange rocks at sunset, and illusive yellow-footed rock wallabies (which I haven't seen yet). So you might think its great for

me - which it normally would be - but I'm supposed to be indoors working and I've found it very hard not to be distracted by the incredible wildlife in this NEW place! As the attached photos will show you I have spent one or two minutes outside, but I have also managed to stay indoors and be (reasonably) productive with the film for most of the time. The lace monitor gave me a good idea about how to start this newsletter as I felt a real connection with his coming and going, something I could relate to after zipping around to so many places this year. I'll let the photos below do the talking and won't say any more about Mambray Creek, other than it is a MAGNIFICENT place and I thoroughly recommend you visit it if you get the chance.



Our little house!



River Red-gum woodland



Old man emu with his young



Euro



Singing Honeyeater feeding chicks

## AN AWARD - 7th Oct

It's always nice to finish on a bright note, so I thought I'd add this bit of good news in at the end as a nice wrap-up to this newsletter. You may have heard via the grapevine that I received an award from Australian Geographic. I don't know what for... I swear they've got the wrong bloke (sshhhh!).... but if you'd like to read more about it then check out this link.

<http://www.australiangeographic.com.au/society/2010-ag-awards-young-conservationist-of-the-year-simon-cherriman.htm>

The best bit was I got to fly to Sydney for the awards ceremony which was a GREAT experience. Awards are humbling but I always think there are so many people doing wonderful things in our country, there just happens to be a few who get recognition for their efforts. The night proved this as the room was full of inspiring people and it was fantastic to meet so many. The highlights were



meeting Sorrel Wilby (who was a host on Getaway, a holiday TV programme) and Valerie Taylor (who did TV documentaries about Sharks which I watched as a small boy). But the best thing was that my wonderful

mum and dad were able to fly over for the night, as well as Gill, Pat and Murray (thanks again for coming!), so this made the event extra special for me and very memorable.

So the next newsletter you'll get from me might be another SUNZ (Simmo's Update of New Zealand), as I'm flying back to Dunedin on 1st November. I'm really looking forward to seeing my friends again and spending time in some familiar places in Dunedin. I'll be there for one month before returning to Australia for Christmas and some relaxing time over summer.

Hope you are all keeping well and that you are finding time in this busy life to enjoy the things in our natural world which we are blessed to see for free.

Best Wishes,

Simon

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

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