

Summary of the Fauna Survey of Witchelina Reserve 22nd to 26th April 2011

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with the

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Witchelina Reserve was purchased by Nature Foundation SA (NFSA) in 2010 from Australian Government's Caring for Our Country, State Government and corporate funding totalling \$2 million. Previously Witchelina had a 140 year history as a pastoral lease for stock grazing. Witchelina is just over 4,200 square kilometres, 42 x 100km, twice the size of greater Adelaide, and is the largest property ever purchased for the National Reserve System. It provides a fauna corridor linking the bioregions of the upper Flinders, Arkaroola and Gammon Ranges with the lower Lake Eyre and Lake Torrens and Stony Desert bioregions to the west.

Witchelina Reserve is northwest of Lyndhurst and south west of Marree, 27 kilometres west of the turnoff to Farina ruins and Farina Station. Visits to Witchelina are by appointment and arrangements can be made through Nature Foundation SA at Hindmarsh.

During 2010 a Bush Blitz survey was undertaken by the SA Museum and the Department for Environment and Natural Resources to record the biodiversity within the reserve. This Bush Blitz survey was to identify plant and fauna species within the reserve. Our Field Naturalists Society of SA (Mammal Club) and SA Herpetology Group (SAHG) approached NFSA to undertake a further fauna survey over Easter, April 2011.

Our fauna survey was confined to the Witchelina Homestead area due to the short autumn day periods and to reduce daytime travelling over long outback distances. Apart from opportunistic searches at several locations, five traplines with buckets and Elliott traps were erected off the main north-eastern track from the Homestead to sample five different habitats.

The twelve months prior to April were cooler and wetter than average across South Australia. This provided, apart from an increase of revegetation across Witchelina, an increase in rodent and small mammal activity and numbers, increased bird flocks nesting, and greater than expected insect and spider activity, which is usually low during a drier average Autumn. Dams and creek lines normally dry in April contained more surface water across this arid region. During our Autumn survey the daytime weather was surprisingly warm to hot providing adequate basking temperatures and activity for reptiles. Nights were cold.



*Survey party at work on a trap line
for mammals and reptiles*



Flowering Eremophila



Budgerigar with young in tree hollow



Mallee Orb Spider

Our April survey recorded the following mammal species caught in traps or by opportunistic searching;

Forrest's Mouse	<i>(Leggadina forresti)</i> ,
Desert Mouse	<i>(Pseudomys desertor)</i> ,
Inland Desert Mouse	<i>(Pseudomys hermannsburgensis)</i> ,
Long-haired Rat	<i>(Rattus villosissimus)</i> ,
Fat-tailed Dunnart	<i>(Sminthopsis crassicaudata)</i> ,
Stripe-faced Dunnart	<i>(Sminthopsis macroura)</i> , and
House Mouse	<i>(Mus musculus)</i> recorded in seasonal plague numbers following significant 2010 and 2011 summer outback rains.

Summary of Mammals Seen or Identified from their Tracks and Traces include:

Red Kangaroo	<i>(Macropus rufus)</i> seen in small groups of 2 or 3,
Euro	<i>(Macropus robustus)</i> from skeleton remains in a gorge,
Goat	<i>(Capra hircus)</i> from skeleton remains,
Rabbit	<i>(Oryctolagus cuniculus)</i> ,
Dingo	<i>(Canis lupus dingo)</i> from tracks and skeleton, and
Echidna	<i>(Tachyglossus aculeatus)</i> seen at one creek line site.

Bats caught in a Harp Trap or seen or heard around the Shearers' Quarters included:

Gould's Wattled Bat	<i>(Chalinolobus gouldii)</i> ,
Lesser Long-eared Bat	<i>(Nyctophilus geoffroyi)</i> and
White-striped Free-tailed Bat	<i>(Tadarida australis)</i> .



Fat-tailed Dunnart



Bat in the bedroom

Bats detected by Anabat based on their Echo-location Calls included;

Chocolate Wattled Bat	(<i>Chalinolobus morio</i>),
Gould's Wattled Bat	(<i>Chalinolobus gouldii</i>),
Inland Free-tailed Bat	(<i>Mormopterus</i> sp. 3),
South-eastern Free-tailed Bat	(<i>Mormopterus</i> sp. 4),
Lesser Long-eared Bat	(<i>Nyctophilus geoffroyi</i>),
White-striped Free-tailed Bat	(<i>Tadarida australis</i>) and
Inland Forest Bat	(<i>Vespadelus baverstocki</i>)

Our April 2011 survey recorded 23 reptile and 3 frog species, which included the following:

Central Netted Dragon	(<i>Ctenophorus nuchalis</i>) 1 caught.
Mallee Dragon	(<i>Ctenophorus fordi</i>) numerous in the southern sand dunes on Tues.
Painted Dragon	(<i>Ctenophorus pictus</i>)
Red-barred Dragon	(<i>Ctenophorus vadrappa</i>) 4 males in the gorge.
Central Bearded Dragon	(<i>Pogona vitticeps</i>) adults and juveniles.
Smooth-snouted Earless Dragon	(<i>Tympanocryptis intima</i>) numerous hatchlings and a few adults.
Eyrean Earless Dragon	(<i>Tympanocryptis tetraporophora</i>) 1 photographed.
Tree Dtella	(<i>Gehyra variegata</i>) numerous photographed
Bynoe's Gecko	(<i>Heteronotia binoei</i>) common
Sandplain Gecko	(<i>Lucasium stenodactylum</i>) (SAM revised) trapped 1
Barking Gecko	(<i>Underwoodisaurus milii</i>) (formally <i>Nephrurus milii</i>) 3 at campsite.
Saltbush Ctenotus	(<i>Ctenotus olympicus</i>) numerous as juveniles, sub-adults, adults.
Eastern Desert Ctenotus	(<i>Ctenotus regius</i>) numerous as juveniles, sub-adults, adults.
Sandplain Ctenotus	(<i>Ctenotus schomburgkii</i>) numerous at traplines
Desert Wall Skink	(<i>Cryptoblepharus australis</i>) numerous
Gidgee Skinks	(<i>Egernia stokesii</i>) numerous as individuals and in family groups.
Dwarf three-toed slider	(<i>Lerista timida</i>) 2 recorded,
Dwarf Skink	(<i>Menetia greyii</i>) common.
Common Snake-eye	(<i>Morethia boulengeri</i>) common.
Sand Goanna	(<i>Varanus gouldii</i>) caught one juvenile and saw tracks.
Patched-nosed Brown Snake	(<i>Pseudonaja aspidorhyncha</i>) 2 recorded a sub-adult and adult.
Rough-nosed Blind Snake	(<i>Ramphotyphlops bituberculatus</i>) 2 collected at Farina Ruins.
Curl Snake	(<i>Suta suta</i>) sub-adult collected at the Witchelina Homestead dump.
Water-holding Frog	(<i>Cyclorana platycephala</i>) 1 adult at 'The Bend' found in leaf litter.
Sudell's Frog	(<i>Neobatrachus sudelli</i>) 1 caught in a trap at site 2.
Desert Tree Frog	(<i>Litoria rubella</i>) numerous, active at night around the homestead, campsite, along tracks, on water tanks and along creek lines.



Red-barred Dragon



Eastern Desert Ctenotus



Water-holding Frog

Other reptile species known to occur for Witchelina prior to April 2011 include:

Southern Rock Dtella	(<i>Gehyra lazelli</i>) in rocky regions.
Eastern Striped Skink	(<i>Ctenotus robustus</i>) in more rocky regions.
Sleepy Lizard	(<i>Tiliqua rugosa</i>) seen but is in low numbers.
Stimson's Python	(<i>Antaresia stimsoni</i>) seen in Oct 2010 at shearers building.
Mulga Snake	(<i>Pseudechis australis</i>) from a roadkill photographed south of Leigh Creek.

A plant list is being compiled for publication with the efforts of FNS member Ashley Walker.

A list of bird species compiled by FNS and Mammal Club member, Andrew Wurst has been published in our society's journal *The South Australian Naturalist*, Vol. 85, No.1, pp. 33-37, January –June 2011.

Further Witchelina Reserve fauna surveys are planned for the years ahead particularly:

- The north-eastern gorges and north-eastern plains where dried salt lakes may show the presence of Lake Eyre Dragon (*Ctenophorus maculosus*).
- Surveying around Termination Hill south of the Witchelina Homestead, with sand dune and rocky hill habitat using the base of Termination Hill as a campsite.
- The region and gorges northwest of Witchelina Homestead.

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