

Bringing Back the Bilbies



Over 12 days in September, a group of 8 Earthwatch volunteers were extra helpers for the Arid Recovery Project near Roxby Downs in South Australia. We came from 4 different countries with an age range spanning four decades and we really didn't quite know what we were in for.



Our project coordinator was self-proclaimed Commandant Brydie, who also lead the sleepy lizard research. We tracked, traced, swept and GPS



marked transects. We marveled at what amazing creatures the sleepy lizards are with their blue tongue (not just any old lizard What a gorgeous sight red dunes. Another research was "scat most of us got pretty

'mate)! And the tracks! meandering over the facet of the sleepy analysis," something

expert in. Brydie proved to be a fantastic jack-of-all trades, keeping us organized and on time for all activities. If there was a problem, Brydie dealt with it and we all very much admired her no-nonsense, get-it-done style.

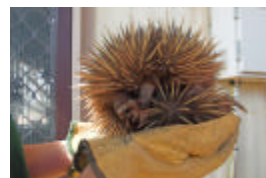


Second in command, Jenny, enriched our skills in getting up early, trapping, fencing and making peanut butter "Bettong Balls" for the Annual Mammal Trapping. She also worked with us to record Bettong antics at the hide and gave many of us new insight into the need for feral animal management in the Arid Zone. Jenny's dedication and passion was so infectious. She really did go over and above for us – even down to chocolate

and muffin bonuses for our fencing.



The next researcher with whom we had the privilege to work was walking encyclopedia John who is also co-PI for this Earthwatch project. We defy anyone to find a person as John on the topics of Meat Ant scat and the thrills of downtown Finding Inga, the local tour stroke of pure genius. But we



enthusiastic as tracking, Echidna Andamooka. guide, was a are still wondering

John, how do you manage to stay warm in those shorts?!?

Karl also worked with us divine “weeBB’s” (Western great experience for all of one of a “pregnant” Karl underneath his clothes, the safety of their mom’s the Bilby costume at Open



on the project and was in charge of the Barred Bandicoots). The netting was a us but the image that will remain is the holding a weeBB mother and babies waiting for the youngsters to return to pouch. He was also very impressive in Day, that is, until he lost his tail.

We felt a lot of sympathy for Karleah during the trip, getting bogged twice was just pure bad luck! If Jenny had helped us to learn how to get up early, Karleah’s 3 AM starts really allowed us to perfect the technique. Spooling the Hopping Mice was great fun and getting the spools to stay in place remained a constant challenge. It is incredible the paths we had to chase following the threads through the undergrowth to find the elusive burrows.



“Queen Bee” Katherine, the other co-PI, was one more inspiring individual who gave us a clear view of the big picture of the Arid Recovery Project. She helped us to identify and locate Stick Nest Rat nests which became all the more interesting when we actually trapped and sighted a Stick Nest Rat or two. She was also one of the expert netters with the weeBB’s.

Though our experience with Michelle was a brief one, it was intense and interesting. One hundred and twenty traps laid out in the Red Lake expansion made us think some optimistic thoughts. But, even though there was only one Plains Rat caught, the two of us that were there thought it was cute. We hope that future surveys find many more Plains Rats.



“Bilby Man” Paul was another researcher keen to see us get better at getting up early – though he seemed to struggle a little appearing to wake up halfway along the Borefield Road. For many of us, the Bilbies were a big reason why we had chosen this project so



the chance to track, trap, find their burrows, and actually touch them was wonderful. Releasing these Bilbies outside the reserve into the big wide world filled us with some trepidation but also with hope that the species will continue and maybe even flourish. We wish Paul luck in his new job and want to thank him for his expert chauffeuring and the humor which kept us going as we followed him – at a bit of a distance – over the dunes.



On top of all this, we saw Emus, Kangaroos, Geckoes, a Mulga Snake, lots of different birds, the magnificent Sturt Desert Peas, and some lovely Bearded Dragons.

We toured the Olympic Dame mine site and “noodled” at Andamooka.



We experienced amazing weather – from rain and bog-holes to winds so strong the Sleepy Lizard tracks were blown away and a couple of days of the real heat we thought we would get everyday.

As well, there were so many memorable occurrences. For most of us, this was our first trip to Australia so the moments that stuck in our minds included the first sighting of an old-man Red Kangaroo, the vibrant red sand of the so-called Australian desert, the velvety panorama of stars at night, and getting the chance and skills to really see nature in action.



We came as representatives of Earthwatch; we came away as ambassadors for the Arid Recovery Project and all its inhabitants.

