

January 2011 in Our Catchment

What a different summer we have been having! So many days of overcast conditions, intermittent showers and high humidity were punctuated by short runs of hot, sunny days. Perhaps the rest of January and early February will be more consistently warm and dry.

Your Results

Almost everyone has reported very warm water temperatures, several rather warmer than most aquatic life enjoy! 34°C at Banksia Street Wetland is high, but as yet the many shrubs around the pond have not started to fill out. And the absence of cover, mostly as a result of flood clearance, is probably the main cause of the elevated temperatures throughout the catchment. Most places have depleted Electrical Conductivity, now that ground water is back to field capacity and urban run-off is unusually clean, but Stony Creek in Carwoola and Burra Ck at Williamsdale Rd are still high. The pH is slightly up along the middle stretch of Jerrabomberra Ck; and phosphates are high at ANU (as usual). One of the ANU sites reported blanket-weed; no-one else so far has reported any adverse algal growth. Again, blanket-weed thrives on sunlight.

Water Rats, Water Dragons and River Skinks

Platypus are important, and are frequently reported to ACT Waterwatch, but they are not the only large animals that you let me know are about.

Golden Bellied Water Rats (*Hydromys chrysogaster*) are common, distinctive NATIVE rodents that are aquatic in their behaviour. They enjoy life and exploit many kinds of waterways and appear to have adapted to our presence and our modifications of the landscape. They show much of the active behaviour of otters, and often the most you see at first glimpse is a flash of a white tail-tip. They can but don't stay down long. They have wide-ranging tastes, and while they enjoy catching yabbies, mussels and other small animals, they will feast on carrion as well. They often have a feeding table, with its own midden. They also have burrows. Look round your sites and see if you have signs of water rats.



The Gippsland Water Dragon (*Physignathus lesuerii howittii*) is a majestic creature, even when not in full male glory. They really thrive in parts of creeks and rivers that have trees close to the water, and both snags and



rocky outcrops in the water to sunbathe on! When you first arrive you may just hear a loud PLOP. If you wait, you may even have a visitor, who is as curious as you. They have a wide diet that includes invertebrates and fish as well as flowers and fruit.

Ever get that feeling when you get to your site that you are being watched? If there is a warm expanse of rock there, or a concrete pipe, you probably are...by one of the River Skinks (*Eulamprus* spp. in the built-up areas you are probably looking at *E. heatwolei*). These are moderately large brassy black skinks (20–25 cm long) like oversized penny lizards. Often you see



more than just the one. They are social, active and once they have become used to your presence get on about their business. They eat all kinds of invertebrates, especially those of the riverbank.

We'd love to know when any of these, and long-necked river turtles as well, turn up at your sites.

Calendar

Date	Event	Locality	Time
2 nd February	World Wetland Day, twilight picnic.	Banksia Street Wetland	6:00 pm on
19/20 th February	Sampling weekend	Your sites	
12 th March	Conspicuous Algal Identification Workshop*	National Botanic Gardens	2:30 pm
19/20 th March	Sampling weekend	Your site	
16/17 th April	Sampling weekend	Your site	
16 th April	QA/QC	Scout Hall, The Valley Ponds, Gungahlin	3:00 pm
21/22 nd May	Sampling weekend	Your site	
18/19 th June	Sampling weekend	Your site	

*You can go to the ACT Waterwatch website at www.act.waterwatch.org.au and on the Library page you will see 'Teach Yourself to Identify Algae Online Tutorial'. This is another way to learn about the algae. They may very well become prominent at your sites in the next few weeks!

If you are interested in the Twilight Picnic go to www.environment.act.gov.au/functions/calendar_of_events/event_items_-_homepage/world_wetlands_day_twilight_picnic or contact Edwina Robinson at Macarthur House.

We are also making plans for Macroinvertebrate training, and Using Dissolved Oxygen kits in the next few months.

Thanks to John Bruggeman for the adult water dragon, and Luke Johnston, C,P&R for the water skink.