



# HOT TOPICS

Celebrating our network

September 2019

## Increasing capacity across the Vernon/Arafura region

The Daly River Volunteer Bushfire Brigade was one of the latest to receive an additional Grass Fire Unit (GFU) doubling the regions fire response capacity. This vehicle is one of many being delivered across the Northern Territory over the next few years as Bushfires NT rolls out new and improved vehicles improving safety, reliability and reducing the average age of the GFU fleet.

Thanks to Captain Shane Taylor and the brigade for the fire management and community support in the region.



*Photo of Kate Richardson, Peter Clouting, Shane Taylor and Collene Bremner, Executive Director Bushfires NT*

Point Stuart Volunteer Bushfire Brigade was another of the brigades that recently allocated a new Grass Fire Unit.

Captain Adrian Phillips was delighted to collect the new vehicle from the Winnellie office.



*Captain of Point Stuart Volunteer Bushfire Brigade Adrian Phillips accepting keys to new GFU*

## Labasheeda shed

Labasheeda Park Volunteer Bushfire Brigade would like to thank the Northern Territory Government Community Benefit Fund for the grant it received to complete the final stage of our shed.

The grant was used to install roller doors for the shed. Thanks again for the support.





## Goodbye and good luck!

**Damien Roebuck**

After more than 10 years with Bushfires NT, we say congrats to Damian as he relocates to Wildman River in his new role as a ranger with Parks and Wildlife. We thank Damo for his contributions and wish him all the best on his new endeavours.



## The training brigade winds up after 8 years

The training brigade was established in 2011 to assist with the delivery of FF1 training for volunteers. Unfortunately, in recent years, brigade membership has fallen away, and as a result their ability to assist with training was diminished. The training brigade committee decided last year to dissolve the brigade. This became official on 17 July 2019 when a notice appeared in the Government Gazette.

A huge thanks to all of those volunteer trainers who have given so much of their time over the years!



## You spoke, we listened

As you are aware, the Bushfires NT Volunteer Strategy 2019-2022 (the Strategy) will be released soon. Work has already commenced to achieve its goals.

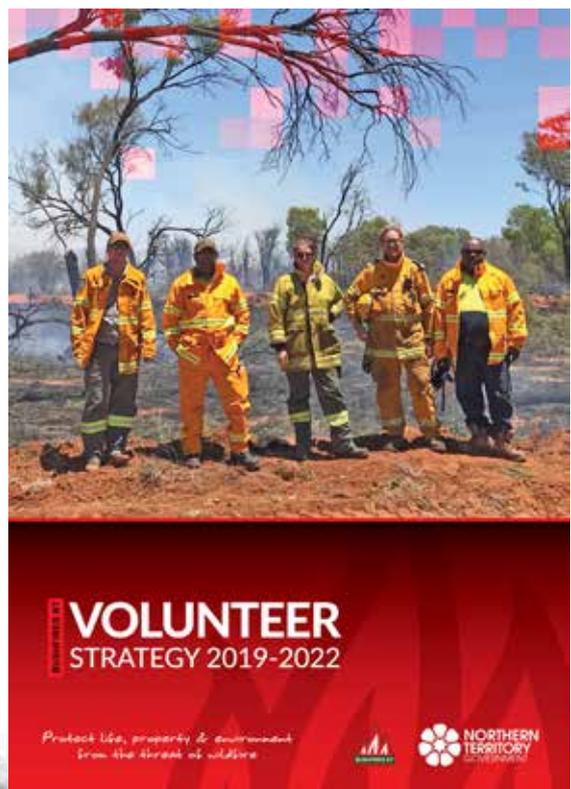
Throughout the development of the Strategy, there was a strong desire across the volunteer network to undertake more frequent, more genuine forms of consultation. Volunteers also expressed their desire for their opinions/ideas to be incorporated into decision making.

As a result, Bushfires NT will undertake a series of surveys annually. The data collected from these surveys will help Bushfires NT monitor progress of our commitments made in the Strategy. This information will then allow us to make informed decisions to continue to change the way we do business and improve your experience as a volunteer.

The surveys will be conducted online and are anonymous. This first survey is scheduled to take place in October 2019.

All volunteers are encouraged to take part. To help make the information we collect from these surveys more useful. Please ask other brigade members to spare some time to take part as well.

If you have any questions, issues or suggestions regarding the surveys, please don't hesitate to call 8922 0847 or email [lucas.fiddaman@nt.gov.au](mailto:lucas.fiddaman@nt.gov.au).



## The annual Northern Territory Volunteer of the Year Awards have snuck up again

The Northern Territory (NT) Volunteer of the Year Awards highlight exemplary volunteer work and recognise the outstanding contribution of NT volunteers, volunteer involving organisations, corporate volunteering programs and volunteer managers who make an invaluable contribution to our communities.

This year, Bushfires NT have put forward the following nominations. We're sure you will agree that each nominee provides an invaluable contribution to our organisation and communities across the Territory.

If you cross paths with any of the nominees please show your appreciation of their time and commitment to fire management and, wish them all the best in the awards.

Category	Top End Nominations	Central Australia Nominations
Chief Minister's Volunteer of the Year Award	Paul Pokorny, Elizabeth Valley David McLachlan, Lambells Lagoon	
Emergency Service Volunteer Award	Dean Mcmanamny, Livingstone	
INPEX Lifetime Contribution to Volunteering Award	Bev Shuker, Darwin River	Joshua Clarke, Alice Springs
Alice Springs Town Council Excellence in Volunteer Management Award		Benjamin Balmer, Alice Springs
Excellence in Volunteer Management Award	George Low, Berry Springs	
NT Volunteer Certificate of Appreciation	Samantha Trott, Dundee Sue Jones, Milne Chris Edwards, Elizabeth Valley George Watts, BART Cindy Holden, Berry Springs Maureen Kohlman, Acacia Hills Lisa Carusi, Labasheeda Park Karen Percival, Darwin River	Simon Casey, Alice Springs Darryn Clarke, Alice Springs

### Awards Presentation dates:

Central Australia (Alice Springs) 6 November 2019

Top End (Darwin) 7 November 2019

Invitations to the awards will be extended to volunteers in due course.

A big thank you goes out to all who helped prepare nominations.



## Alice Springs vollies are back in the Top End

Alice Springs volunteers have been back up in the Top End to provide support for this year's fire season. So far, they have assisted at some of the larger events in Howard Springs, Berry Springs, Darwin River providing incredible support to local volunteers and staff.

Simon Casey from the Alice Springs Volunteer Bushfire Brigade said they had a busy, but good week while they were here, and were pleased to be able to experience new things.

With any luck, we'll be seeing more Central Australian volunteers in the Top End this year to continue to provide some relief. Great work!



## Clontarf academy learn about bushfire

The Clontarf Foundation mission is to improve the education, discipline, life skills, self-esteem and employment prospects of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men. Clontarf's employment/job awareness program organises worksite visits to different organisations and companies to expose the boys to different career pathways.

Recently Michael Carter from the Batchelor office got a visit from Palmerston College Clontarf participants to discuss the work of Bushfires NT. The boys also learnt about back burning and firebreaks on rural properties. They were surprised about the amount of work that goes on behind the scenes that the public doesn't actually see.

The helicopter and water plane were also highlights, the boys were amazed how much water the plane can hold, as well as the time to refill and take off again.

The boys wanted to say a "big thank you" to Michael Carter for accommodating the visit.



## When the rescuer needs rescuing

By Paul Johnston  
Bushfires NT WHS Volunteer Representative

Emergency service workers or first responders are generally at the highest risk of developing symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or depression (Paul Barratt 2018). This can result from the routine exposure to trauma. Mostly this type of injury either goes unreported or the symptoms are ignored.

There are many complexities as to why psychological injuries go unreported by first responder personnel. Quite often the worker will ignore the symptoms due to poor mental health literacy and may rationalise the way they feel down to fatigue.

Beyond Blue (2018), suggests that emergency workers or first responders are typically quite resilient. Working under pressure for extended periods of time in hostile environments, these people have built up resilience and developed techniques to push through difficult circumstances. It is believed that first responders usually are of stoic character demonstrating perseverance and the admission of being impacted by a psychological injury could suggest weakness or fragility amongst their peers.

One of the challenges addressing psychological injury is admission and the stigmatisation attached to it (Beyond Blue, 2018). Nevertheless, sometimes the rescuer needs to be rescued. Self-awareness is a good starting point. This can be achieved by understanding the triggers such as agitation, lack of sleep, nightmares, memory relapse, inability to concentrate, relationship difficulties, mood swings and substance dependence.

### Reference list

Beyond Blue, L. (2018). Answering the call National Mental Health and Wellbeing Study of Police and Emergency Services- Final report (pp. 1-4). 6

Paul Barratt, L. S. a. M. P. (2018). When Helping Hurts: PTSD in First Responders Landmark First Responders Report (pp. 1-80).

## A note from Bushfires NT

Bushfires NT has commenced work to develop a mental health framework to ensure staff and volunteers have access to the appropriate support to prevent and manage some of the stresses associated with working/volunteering in this space.

Paul Johnston also plans to contribute to future issues of the Hot Topics newsletter to further the discussion of mental health amongst our volunteer network.

Currently, the services available for Bushfires NT volunteers and staff are listed in the table below.

Darwin Consultant Psychologists (t/a Kim Groves and Associates Pty Ltd)	Toll free: 1800 289 129 (NT only) Phone: 8941 5369 Email: dcp@dcpnt.com.au	Darwin: 5/90 Frances Bay Drive Tipperary Waters NT 0820  Alice Springs: The Retreat Aurora Alice Springs Leichhardt Terrace Alice Springs NT 0870
	Toll free: 1800 769 205 Phone: 8932 8460 Email: reception@darwinpsychology.com.au	3/6 Woodlaka Boulevard Durack NT 0830
EASA Incorporated	Darwin: Toll free: 1800 193 123 (NT only) Phone: 8941 1752 Email: easadarwin@easa.org.au	Darwin: Level 2 The Avenue (Above Karma Cafe) 217/12 Salonika Street Parap NT 0820
	Katherine: Phone: 8941 1752 Email: easadarwin@easa.org.au	Katherine: Block F (Room 3) Katherine Regional Training Centre 19 Second Street Katherine NT 0850
	Alice Springs: Phone: 8953 4225 Email: easaalicesprings@easa.org.au	Alice Springs: Jock Nelson Building 10/16 Hartley Street Alice Springs NT 0870
Industry Health Solutions	Toll free: 1800 432 303 (NT only) Phone: 8931 2642 Email: info@industryhealth.solutions	6/5 McCourt Road Yarrawonga NT 0830
Relationships Australia Northern Territory Inc	Darwin: Toll free: 1300 364 277 Phone: 8923 4999 Email: reception@ra-nt.org.au	Darwin: Level 2 Cavenagh Centre 43 Cavenagh Street Darwin NT 0800
	Katherine: Toll free: 1800 650 276 Email: receptionkfc@ra-nt.org.au	Katherine: 6 Katherine Arcade 15 Katherine Terrace Katherine NT 0850
	Alice Springs: Free call: 1800 634 405 (Remote areas) Phone: 8950 4100 Email: receptionas@ra-nt.org.au	Alice Springs: 4/11 Railway Terrace Alice Springs NT 0870
Wisemind Psychology	Toll free: 1800 166 180 Phone: 8981 5605 Email: admin@wisemind.com.au	2/7 Fannie Bay Place Fannie Bay NT 0820



## Work on the new headquarters has begun

Great news!

Work crews have broken ground at the site of the new Bushfires NT HQ. Once complete, our new headquarters will bring us closer to our stakeholders, allowing us to provide a better service to our volunteers and the community.

Thanks to Christine Platell for providing this amazing aerial shot of the work underway.



## Update from MARRAKAI VBB

Marrakai Volunteer Bushfire Brigade has received funding from the Community Benefit Fund (CBF) to upgrade the air conditioners in the fire shed, the work has been carried out and the air conditioner is working marvellously. We have also received CBF funding for a Toro Zero Turn lawn mower, a Honda blower as well as a trailer to transport their ATV. The mower and blower have been purchased, however we are now just waiting for the trailer to be manufactured.

On 29 August we were advised of a successful grant for upgrades of our laptop as well as an A3/A4 colour printer. When these funds are received we intend to purchase new IT equipment.

Our Medium Attack Tanker suffered some major technical issues and thanks to BFNT it has now been repaired and back in service.

Due to BFNT fire break inspections early in the season the Marrakai area has not looked so good for years. Lots of fire access breaks have been installed which of course make it so much easier to access fires should this be needed. Thank you BFNT - well done.

## Northern Land Council ranger forum

The 2019 Indigenous ranger forum was hosted by the Northern Land Council and the Kenbi rangers at Debilipu (Charles Point) on Kenbi land from the 26 to 30 of August 2019.

The event, attended by over 60 Indigenous ranger groups from across northern Australia, continues the theme of biosecurity and land and sea management with ranger groups participating in a schedule of hands on interactive workshops, presentations and interactive on-country visits providing a shared learning experience and networking opportunities for all attendees.

Bushfires NT staff members Mark Gardener and Rhys Swain attended this year's forum delivering a set of 45 minute workshops titled 'Risky Business' where rangers and program staff held discussions about what risk means to them. A total of 5 risks were identified of a hypothetical project and then established control measures to reduce those risks. It was great to see how different people within the groups considered risk and great to hear on some overlooked aspects of cultural risk from senior members of the groups.

Indigenous rangers often carry out very risky work involving remote travel, fire management, saltwater crocodiles and the workshops were well participated and hopefully rangers came away with a different outlook on how they observe and manage risk.



## Access your Hot Topics newsletter online

Bushfires NT recently took a poll of brigades to see how many are still interested in receiving each issue of the Hot Topics newsletter in a paper based format. As it turns out, the vast majority of brigades prefer reading the newsletters online or via email.

As a result, Bushfires NT does not plan to print and post future issues. If your brigade feels very strongly about this, please contact

[lucas.fiddaman@nt.gov.au](mailto:lucas.fiddaman@nt.gov.au) to discuss.



**BUSHFIRES NT**  
August 2019

**HOT TOPICS**  
Celebrating our network

**NEW RURAL PROPERTY BUSHFIRE PLANNING GUIDE**

Are you and your property prepared for bushfires?

Bushfires NT has developed an easy to use, rural property bushfire planning guide for blocks less than 100 hectares. Having a bushfire plan can help you understand and manage the risk of bushfire. It also offers a structured way to have a conversation with your family and neighbours.

The guide explains your responsibilities how to prepare your property, creating your own bushfire plan and what to do when a wildfire comes.

The guide can be found [here](#)

Mark Gardener, Senior Risk Planner

**CRACKER OF A NIGHT**

Thank you to all who did the right thing on Territory Day and thank you to the volunteers and staff who worked through the evening and night.

Overall Bushfires NT and Northern Territory Fire & Rescue Service received 180 fire-related calls with most of them being grass fires that were extinguished quickly thanks to the prompt response of those on the ground and those working in the joint Incident Management Teams (IMT) in Batchelor and Darwin.

A special thank you to Samantha Trott of the Dundee brigade who assisted the Batchelor IMT as 'scribe' for the night and following day. Sam provided an abundance of support and was a delight to have part of the team. Thank you Sam.

**RURAL PROPERTY BUSHFIRE PLANNING GUIDE**  
Are you prepared?

Joshua Fisher, Assistant Director Operations (BFW) and Mark Sodin, Executive Director (NTFRS)

**NORTHERN TERRITORY GOVERNMENT**

## Gouldian Finch

By Dr Denise Lawungkurr  
Goodfellow  
Darwin River VBB



Gouldian Finch. Photo courtesy of K. Kaplan

Now is the time of year when birdwatchers visit the top end, and one of the species they most want to see is the beautiful Gouldian finch. Named by zoologist John Gould after his wife Elizabeth, this rainbow hued little bird frequents the savanna woodlands of northern Australia. While more common further south there are recent records from Tumbling Waters and Darwin River. Indeed, until the mid 1970s there were many sightings of the bird further north in Darwin.

Unlike other finches Gouldian finch nests in tree hollows, including those of Salmon Gum, Eucalyptus tintinnans (a visiting birdwatcher once referred to these as 'naked lady trees' because of their smooth salmon coloured bark). They breed in the early dry season, and in good years may raise more than one brood. As ephemeral waterholes dry up the birds gather in mixed flocks with Long tailed and Masked finches, and Chestnut-breasted mannikins, at rivers and permanent waterholes (Goodfellow and Stott, 2001, 2005).

In the early 1990s, I led a team of field assistants around the southern top end looking for Gouldian finches. We often saw them on recently burnt ground early in the dry season or later in the year at waterholes and rivers with shallow, stony or vegetated edges. Gouldians, particularly the brightly coloured males, are cautious about venturing out in the open. They will sit motionless, blending in to the foliage of trees and shrubs surrounding the water while females and immature birds descend to drink among cobbles and reeds. The young birds, incidentally, look nothing like the coloured adults, their plumage being largely olive, paler underneath.

Gouldian finches eat grass seed almost exclusively. The 2 most important are the annual sorghum and cockatoo grass, *Alloteropsis semialata*. Cockatoo grass is particularly significant as it sets seed in the early wet season (Crowley, 2008), a time when few other resources are available. In the early dry season the finches will eat sorghum seeds directly from the plant and when it falls, from the ground after cool fires have cleared the dead grass.



Cockatoo grass. Photo courtesy of D. Goodfellow

However, Gouldian finches are under threat. Gamba grass (*Andropogon gayanus*) outcompetes perennial grasses such as Cockatoo grass, and it carries hot fires that kills the trees they nest in and the grasses they feed on (Scott, Setterfield, Douglas and Andersen, 2010), and destroys seed on the ground (Weier, Radford, Woolley and Lawes, 2018). Unfortunately, gamba grass is already taking over Gouldian finch habitat.

Michael and I are providing feeding habitat for Gouldians and other finches on our Darwin River property by encouraging the growth of native grasses and controlling for gamba grass and other weeds. In the early wet season parts of our land are now a sea of Cockatoo grass. When we arrived in 2013 only a few granivorous birds were present on our property.

Since then Masked finches and Chestnut-breasted mannikins have made our property their home, the latter in large numbers, and along with these birds we have seen Gouldian finches, as have other landholders.

As gamba grass encroaches further into top end landscapes people in the hinterland, from landholders as well as firefighters and rangers, play a significant role in aiding the survival of such iconic species.

## References

- Crowley, G. (2008) Cockatoo grass *Alloteropsis semialata* as a keystone species in northern Australia. *Northern Territory Naturalist*, 20, 58–63.
- Goodfellow, D.L. and Stott, M.P. (2001, 2005). *Birds of Australia's top end*. Scrubfowl Press, New Holland.
- Scott, K.A., Setterfield, S.A., Douglas, M.M. and Andersen, A.N. (2010). Environmental factors influencing the establishment, height and fecundity of the annual grass sorghum intrans in an Australian tropical savanna. *Journal of Tropical Ecology*, 26: 313–322 <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266467409990629>.
- Weier, A., Radford, I.J., Woolley, L-A. & Lawes, M.J. (2018). Fire regime effects on annual grass seeds as food for threatened grass-finch. *Fire Ecology*, 14: 8. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s42408-018-0019-3>