

Sambar's Roar



February 2026

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Using ADA as a Genuine Reason

Don't forget if you use your ADA membership as a Genuine Reason for having a Firearms License, please remember that you are required to attend a minimum of two (2) branch activities. Whether they are shoots, meetings or club hunts, it is your responsibility to ensure you meet the requirements. The secretary is required to submit attendance records to State on a regular basis, who in turn collate attendances for the Firearms Registry.

Meetings

Meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month, excluding December and January. Locations will be advised through the newsletter and email communications.

Newsletters

If you would like to submit an interesting article or photo, please send it to the email below. Articles must include the name of the author. We are interested in a wide range of outdoor activities.

The Central West Branch executive no longer have access to membership details. All communication is now via Sean Kilkenny (sean.kilkenny@austdeer.asn.au) and Penny (ada.admin@austdeer.asn.au) from National. Please ensure that your details are up to date, especially your email address as all communication is via email. That way you will continue to receive communications from the branch.

Don't forget to send in any articles or photos to be included in the newsletters. Let the other members know what you have been up to. Email to centralw.editor@austdeer.asn.au.

Coming up:

February Meeting – Bathurst Bushrangers, 189 Browning St, Bathurst, Wednesday 18th of February, 6:00pm

March Meeting – Bathurst Bushrangers, 189 Browning St, Bathurst, Wednesday 18th of March, 6:00pm

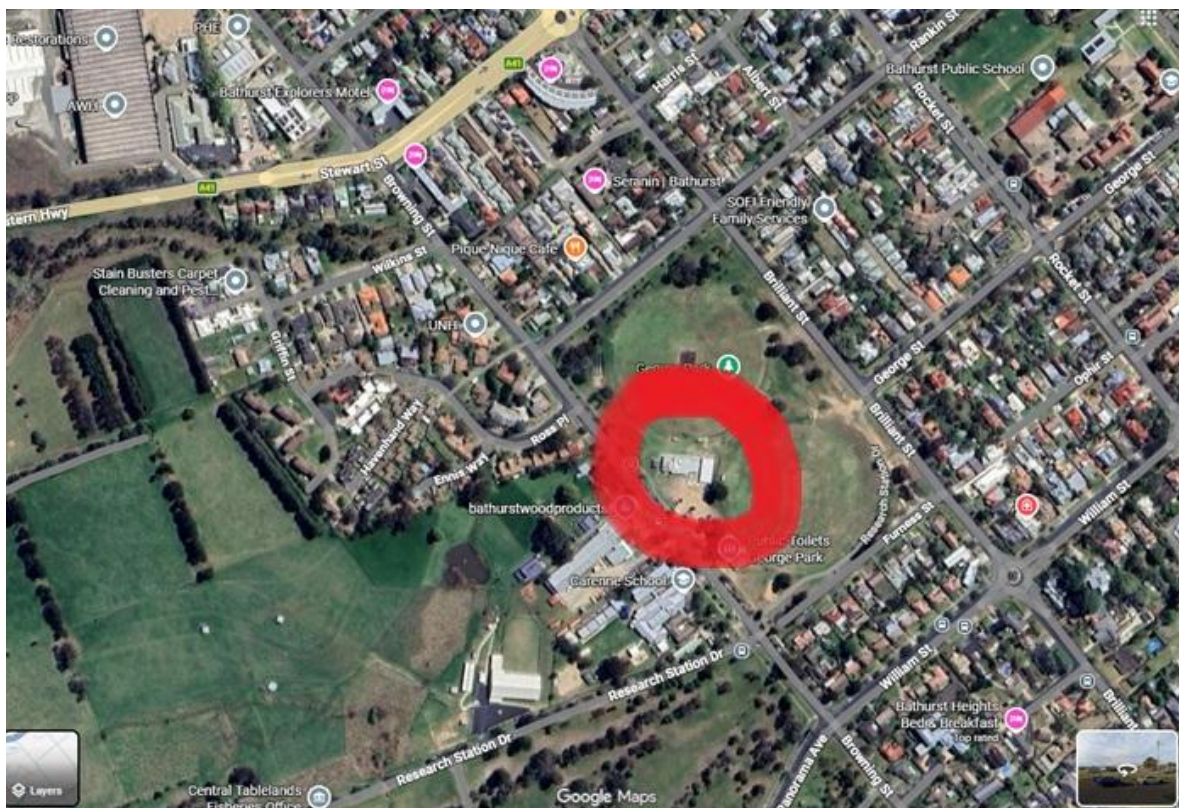
Disclaimer:

The Central West Branch of the Australian Deer Association takes no responsibility for the views expressed in any article in this newsletter. All articles submitted are signed by the relevant author.

Cover Photo: Pic by James Leven.

New Meeting Venue.

We will start the year at a new venue. Meetings will be held at the Bathurst Bushrangers Club House at 189 Browning St, Bathurst. There are BBQ facilities and the club will have drinks for sale. Meetings will be held on the third Wednesday of the month with a start time of 6:00pm.



2025 Christmas Party.

There was a good turn out at the Christmas Party at Oberon Dam. We had a great site with a scenic view of the dam. Several members went for a fish and several trout were caught from the kayaks. Unfortunately the wind came up Saturday afternoon so the fly rods stayed in their cases. Members were content to sit around the fire and catch up.



Out and About – What the members have been up to.

Pete Bartolacci has sent in a short recount of a recent trip to Victoria. Enjoy!

A Reputation to Uphold.

I'll preface this hunt report with a huge thank you to everyone who helped make this hunt happen. To those I've harassed for advice or rambled and ranted to about gear choices and hunt plans, I sincerely appreciate your patience and support.

November 2024 was eventful, to say the least for the Bart household. After a nine-month wait, we finally welcomed the arrival of our second son. Unfortunately, there were complications that resulted in an emergency caesarean, and then two days later, a transfer to a base hospital for extra treatment for both Mum and Baby Brady. The next few weeks were a chaotic mix of emotions—swinging from pure joy at the arrival of a new baby, mixed with anxiety, and finally relief once both mum and baby were home and given the all-clear.

Towards the end of November, I received an email from the ADA with information about the Shelley camp hunts and decided that the end of March 2025 camp was exactly the kind of distraction and event I needed to plan towards. I find that with our young family, it's much easier to plan towards a longer, larger hunt further afield than a day trip close to home.

After a quick discussion with my wife, it soon became apparent that my plan of dragging the two-year-old, five-month-old, and wife along with me in the camper trailer for six days of hunting was probably a bit optimistic. Lucky for me, I scored the jackpot in the mother-in-law lottery. I arranged for her to make the four-hour trek west and stay at the house with my wife and kids to have some quality time together.

As the months ticked by, I decided it was time to get serious about hunt preparation to make the most of this opportunity.

The Journey South

March rolled around, and after packing the ute and camper in the days beforehand, I jumped in the car after work and pointed myself south. I wasn't exactly sure how far I would make it that night. My intention was to play it by ear and find some free camping to roll into.

The hours drifted by, and as I was approaching Holbrook at midnight, I quickly discovered that the free camping was no longer available. After a stretch of the legs, I was back in the car headed to Jingellic. Rolling into the free camping there, I set the camper up to the bare minimum and crawled into bed, drifting off to the lovely sound of the Murray flowing past.

Up at dawn, a quick pack-up and French shower had me on the road again for the short trip to Shelley Forest Camp.

Once I arrived, I got to meet John, our hunt master and set up camp while figuring out which hunt areas I was going to get assigned. A trip into Corryong to load up the fridge, and then I was off to the southwest of the camp for an afternoon hunt in an area where some fallow had been spotted recently.



Day 1

The weather conditions in the region were interesting, with below-average rainfall to start the year but some nice falls in the fortnight leading up to my arrival. These warm temperatures and recent rain resulted in an abundance of feed available, but horribly dry leaf litter that hampered quiet approaches. To my amazement, I found multiple patches of clover and feed with minimal deer sign—certainly different from where I normally hunt, where any clover concentrates deer. I pulled out the maps on my phone for a reassessment after two hours of working my way up the slopes over what can only be described as Kellogg's Crunchy Nut cornflakes.



Looking at the maps, I saw a nice opening that I thought would be a great sit-and-wait spot until sunset. I realised I would need to pick up the pace to make it in time, so I made the choice to speed up my walk.

Unfortunately for me, this came at the worst possible time, as not 10 metres later, I bumped into a mob of Fallow Does. The Does barked at me and jumped off into some thicker cover. Judging from the direction they headed, I realised they were going to head to the clearing I was heading to. I circled wide to give them some room and attempted to cut them off.



As I made it to within visual range of the clearing, I could clearly see that a few hunters had set up camp between my arrival at the hunting area and now. I decided to call it a day and head back to where I'd parked my car. On the walk back to the car, I ran into the hunters camped in the clearing and gave them a heads-up that there should be a mob of Fallow near their camp.



Back at the car as the last of the legal shooting light faded, I packed up and headed back to Shelley. On my arrival back at camp, I discovered there were six other hunters at camp that night. Some introductions were made while I prepared dinner, and we were all swapping stories about the day's hunts and what we thought worked and didn't work. This was my first time sharing a camp with multiple groups of other hunters, and it was great to be able to swap stories and brainstorm with like-minded individuals. After some discussions with Keira, one of the other hunters in camp, she selflessly offered to share a spot she had been hunting the previous week that was showing some very promising sambar sign, as she was leaving camp the next day.

The kitchen and facilities at the Shelley camp were well-suited to the setup. This was my first time doing an extended hunt with warm showers available, and I cannot overstate how nice it was being able to have a hot shower at the end of each day.

Day 2

As I'd explained to anyone silly enough to listen to me, my original plan for this trip was to focus on fallow, especially a nice early-rut fallow buck. But after discussions with Keira the night before, I was quickly distracted by tales of a heap of sambar stag sign in an area of recent back-burning to the east towards Corryong. Over the next 45 minutes or so, I was brought up to speed with her experiences in the area and where she thought would be a good start for the morning. I input all the data into HuntStand to use as a reference while navigating in the dark.

I was up at 4:30 the next day for a quick bowl of Weet-Bix and onto the road. One thing that has been drilled into me for any sambar hunting is to be where you want to be well and truly before dawn. Sunrise was scheduled for 7:11, and I wanted to be in the area where I wanted to park the car and ready for the short hike by 6:10. I would much rather arrive early at a spot and have a 20-minute sleep under a tree or in the car than arrive late and start bumping animals on their way back to their beds.

Leaving the car, I had made it about 15 metres uphill when I heard the familiar foot stomp and snorts of a sambar trying to figure out what I was. I froze and then very slowly turned off my headlamp, hoping this might calm down whatever deer I was now in a standoff with.

Over the course of the next 35 minutes, I stood as still as I could and silently cursed how exposed I was as the pre-dawn light slowly crept in, revealing my surroundings in greyscale lighting. All the while, I was getting a foot stomp every five minutes or so. Thankfully, the wind was cooperating, and I was relatively well covered, including gloves and a buff on my face.

The leaden light revealed that it was not a single deer I was in a standoff with, but a hind and a Snack Pack no more than 15 metres uphill from myself. For what felt like an eternity, I waited, watching as the Hind and Snack Pack browsed until I finally managed to get a glance at my watch, revealing legal shooting light was only a couple of minutes away. I was stuck with my decision: take the opportunity for probably the easiest carry-out of my hunting life so far, or hold off and hopefully find the stag that was floating around in the area.

The thought of the stirring I would cop from my wife if I came home with empty eskies was enough to make the choice easy. Unfortunately, my ability to stumble onto sambar through sheer luck has given me a somewhat undeserved reputation to uphold with her. I started the process of raising my rifle and settled the crosshairs on the hind's shoulder. To my surprise, I felt remarkably steady after the 40 minutes or so of standing as still as practical, waiting for legal light.

In the lead-up to pulling the trigger, everything felt solid and calm. Unfortunately, just as I pulled the trigger, I was hit with a sharp pain between my eyes and lost sight of the hind in my scope. The lead-up to the shot felt great, so I was confident in the shot and immediately cycled the action and lined up the Snack Pack. I

was starting to feel a warm sensation running down my face as I fired my next shot on the shoulder of the Snack Pack.

I took note of where I was standing and the last seen location of both the hind and Snack Pack. Slightly amazed at the turn of events that morning, I sat down on a nearby log and had an apple while waiting for the bush to calm down again after the shots. It was pretty apparent that I had given myself a decent knock with the scope, opening an old scar I had plus creating a new cut next to it. The obligatory post-shot selfie was taken, and I was on my way to track down my prize.



I went to the location where the hind was standing and started searching for the blood trail. Over the next 45 minutes or so, I became increasingly concerned as I could not see any evidence of a shot connecting with the hind. I did circles, spirals, and grids over the area and could not locate a single drop of blood. I was honestly feeling baffled, as the lead-up to the shot felt good, and I was only 15 metres from the hind at the shot. Deciding to take a break from looking for the hind, I went to the location of the Snack Pack and was immediately greeted with a decent blood trail and bone. Following the trail, I quickly found the Snack Pack on the other side of some bracken fern.





Marking the location and taking advantage of the cool morning, I made the call to head back to my shot location and see if I could find any sign of the hind with a fresh perspective. For the next few hours, I looked through the area without spotting a single sign of blood. Confused and feeling a bit defeated, I went back to my Snack Pack and worked through the butchering process. Unfortunately, prior to the trip, I had misplaced my knife pack from my hunting gear, so I was resorting to knives that I usually use at home, as can be seen by their hobo sheaths that I had quickly made for this trip out of tape, stubby holders, and paper towel to prevent any backpack mishaps.

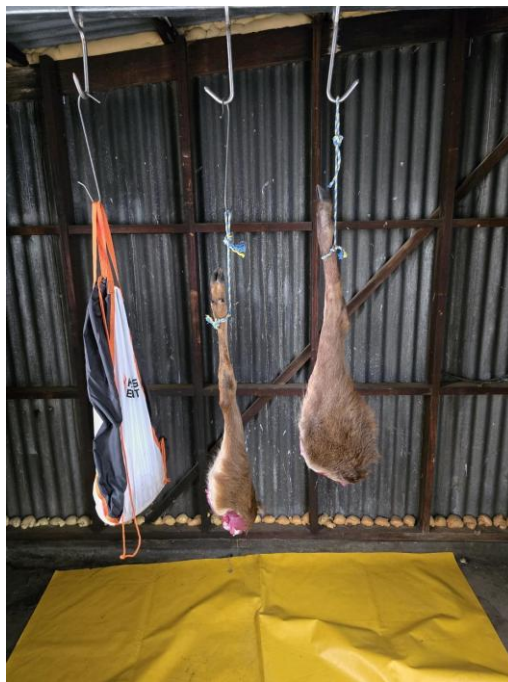


During the gruelling 50-metre walk back to the car, I noticed some rubbish on the track near where I had parked. I'm sure I'm preaching to the converted here, but nothing frustrates me more than seeing people leave their rubbish in the bush. Taking three seconds, I collected the plastic bottles to take with me.





I made the trip back to camp and placed my meat into the meat safe they have available at Shelley. I set about trying to figure out what could have caused me to not only miss but give myself a Weatherby eyebrow.



Thankfully, a post-hunt conversation with a good friend of mine, Gordon, in which he asked if I was wearing a backpack, led to a bit of an event breakdown in which I'm confident we identified the root cause. Gordon mentioned that while guiding in the NT, he'd had a few clients pull off similar clean misses at short range when the butt of the rifle slid off the shoulder strap of their backpacks and caused the scopes to contact the shooter. Funnily enough, talking to another friend of mine, Dave later in the night, he confirmed he'd had similar issues with a backpack in the past as well.

A quick lunch, and it was time for a sneaky midday nap. I looked out the camper window to spy two Fallow Does walking straight past my camper. The Fallow, it seemed, were calling me back to them. I made the decision to target the same area each morning in hopes of finding the sambar stag I was chasing but dedicate each afternoon to fallow. That afternoon, I had a short hunt and pre-scout to the west of Shelley in an area

that had some promising features on the satellite imagery and came up with a plan of attack for the next few evenings.

Day 3

4:30 rolled around too quickly, and I was up, diving into a bowl of Weet-Bix. The game plan for that morning's hunt was to return to the same area as the day before. There was a heap of fresh stag sign, which called to me like a moth to the flame. I was about halfway up the ridge when I heard the first howl. This was my first proper experience with wild dogs during a hunt in Victoria, and I was soaking up the experience. Over the next 30 minutes or so, I heard a chorus of howls throughout the gully. Some came from just out of headlamp range and seemed to circle the same area I was in. Dawn arrived, and the dogs dispersed. I began my hunt, following a game trail through some very promising-looking country. Fresh scat, fresh rubs, and an abundance of feed and bedding opportunities had me excited.



As I stalked along, I passed more and more evidence that a stag was active in the area. My excitement grew, and it felt like any second I'd lay eyes on him.



I stopped at a few locations for an apple or a drink and gave the Flexmark call a few quiet chirps, but unfortunately, nothing came to investigate.





Lunchtime rolled around, and I headed back to camp for a siesta and to plan the afternoon hunt. My morning interaction with the wild dogs had my brain ticking over. I wondered if they might have pushed the stag further afield, so I sent through some questions and photos of the sign to a few mates with more Sambar experience than me. We quickly came up with a plan of attack for the following day. Not wanting to put too much pressure on the gully, I decided to hunt a different system about two kilometres away, bordering some pine plantations. Unfortunately, a decision to cut through a gully quickly led to me being stranded in an ocean of blackberry.

About an hour before sunset, I found a nice spot overlooking the base of a small gully, with an old peach tree visible. As time passed, I watched black wallabies come out and start feeding. Unfortunately, no deer were sighted. Over the course of the day, I saw two separate hunter camps set up and multiple people out in the bush hunting. It was great to see public land hunting thriving.

Day 4

After contacting the brains trust the previous day (thanks again, Kev and Grant), I had come up with a pretty solid plan of attack to try and locate this sambar stag: sitting on a nearby wallow before dawn and then circling around to climb rapidly, aiming to get above his bed. This was my first time deliberately trying to target a single animal in an area I was hunting. In the past, I'd typically locate what looked like great habitat and/or a decent amount of sign, then hunt it. This time around, I was following the footsteps of a single stag—and thoroughly enjoying the challenge of trying to crack the nut of his routines and movements. I arrived at a nice clearing about 45 minutes before dawn, quietly optimistic. On the walk in, I'd spotted at least three different sets of green eyes reflecting in my headlamp. I hadn't sat in this area before but found a surprisingly comfy spot one row of trees back from the clearing, which I had marked on my phone for reference.



As dawn and legal shooting light approached, I was slowly alerted to the sound and outline of a hind and her calf moving toward the clearing, just 10 metres from where I sat. I chose to hold off, hoping to encounter the Stag—who, by this stage, was even invading my dreams. The hind and her calf were thankfully on my right-hand side. It was interesting to watch how they instantly picked up the pace as soon as they stepped onto the clearing, only to slow back down to a deliberate walk once they reached the other side. When I stood up from my spot, I realised that it wasn't just a comfy patch of grass—it was an area of deer beds. I'm guessing the hind and calf had probably used them in the previous days and, luckily for me, moved to a different set for the day.



Unfortunately, no other deer were spotted—either at the clearing or up in the higher country. Although, I did hear one set of very tentative fallow croaks just before dawn.

That afternoon, I headed in to investigate a clearing I'd seen on satellite imagery. What followed was one of the most exciting evenings of hunting I've ever had—even though no animals ended up on the ground. I left the main fire trail and was stoked to see a small fallow rub tree staring back at me. The bush was thick, with well-established blackberry and tea trees surrounding the game trail. The vegetation made it feel like a buck could be just metres away, hidden behind the intervening foliage.



Another 10 metres down the trail, it opened into a small 15-metre clearing, where I spotted someone else's game camera pointing at another rub tree. Unfortunately, the lens was obstructed by blackberry that had shot up since the camera was placed. I did the right thing, trimmed the blackberry back to clear the view, and gave it a friendly wave.



As I stalked along the game trails, I found heaps of scat, rubs, and browsing signs from the deer. I also found some older scrapes and decided to try my hand at rattling (thanks again to Pisco for the set of casties).





I repeated this routine over the next four hours—finding fresh scat and rubs, but always feeling like I was just ten minutes behind the buck. I was loving the game of cat and mouse, it honestly felt like success was just moments away... Until the wind threw a spanner in the works and started swirling. I persevered in the area, but the trail eventually started to go cold. I waited out the last hour or so of hunting light just off a clearing with a few rub trees on the boundary. A local beekeeper had also taken a liking to the location and had filled the next clearing with over 100 hives.



Day 5

Unfortunately, my camera seems to have lost the photos from Day 5, so to save a wall of text, I'll keep it short and sweet.

As Day 5 rolled around, I decided to stick with the same game plan as the day before. Coming to the edge of the clearing at predawn, I decided to stick a little further to the west to get a better field of view than the day prior. As the colours slowly started creeping in, I noticed a Hind on the edge of the clearing. This prompted a great game of mental gymnastics in my head. Do I hold off on some guaranteed meat to fill the rest of the eskies in the hope of finding the stag I'd been chasing? Or do I take the meat and then head back home to chase some fallow closer to home? I'd been receiving a steady supply of videos of nice bucks croaking their hearts out, and the grass was looking greener at home (both metaphorically and literally).

Finally, after coming to the conclusion that full eskies and fallow were the main reason for the trip, I made the call. Over the course of my mental dilemma, the hind had slowly worked her way around the edge of the

clearing, going from about 30 metres away to about 100 metres. Taking a few moments to double-check I wasn't about to give myself another scar on my forehead, I squeezed off the shot. The 165gr SST did its job perfectly, and she was down for the count. I spent the rest of the morning butchering and making the trek back to the car, before packing up camp and pointing myself north. A pit stop at Cowra, and I was home just on dark, very excited to see my boys and wife.

Peter Bartolacci.

Fun in the Sun.

Dan had 12 days in the Cobar region in January chasing the pigs. The temperature when he arrived was 37 degrees and it got hotter from there with most days 40 degrees and above. However, after a couple of days it was quite bearable as he acclimatised. Sitting on the dams in the afternoon with bottles of iced water in the shade, it was quite pleasant. Pigs were coming into the water at all times due to the heat. Dan hunted the open paddocks and oat crop in the mornings, then stalked them up in the scrub which is the best way to get them. Then back to the quarters to lie on the queen sized bed under the aircon until 3:30pm when he headed out to sit on a dam.

The country was dry with limited feed but the pigs were in fine condition with several of the boars fat as a barrel. After the first couple of days the pigs started cleaning up the carcasses. One boar was shot as it started to eat a sow that was shot only 20 minutes before. There was an oat crop that just didn't quite make it so the farmer never harvested it. As such, there was a heap of grain heads that the pigs were gorging themselves on and it was a pig magnet in the mornings.

Although, the weather was hot and dry, it was a fantastic trip and probably the best trip in 28 years going to this property. Dan's total for the trip was 136 pigs.....and a fox. All up about 700 – 800 pigs were sighted over the trip. The farmer was sorry to see him leave at the end.



First pig of the trip shot on the first afternoon on the first dam checked. Not that big but it christened Dan's new Ruger Number 1 in .300 Holland and Holland. Some people think single shots are no good for hunting but the Ruger took 68 pigs with only two misses.



Dry conditions.





How's that for a pig bed!





The boar that charged on the oat crop.





Best pig of the trip at around 80kg.





This cow got stuck in the mud in a dam and drowned. After dragging it out, the pigs had cleaned out the guts and organs in 24 hours.



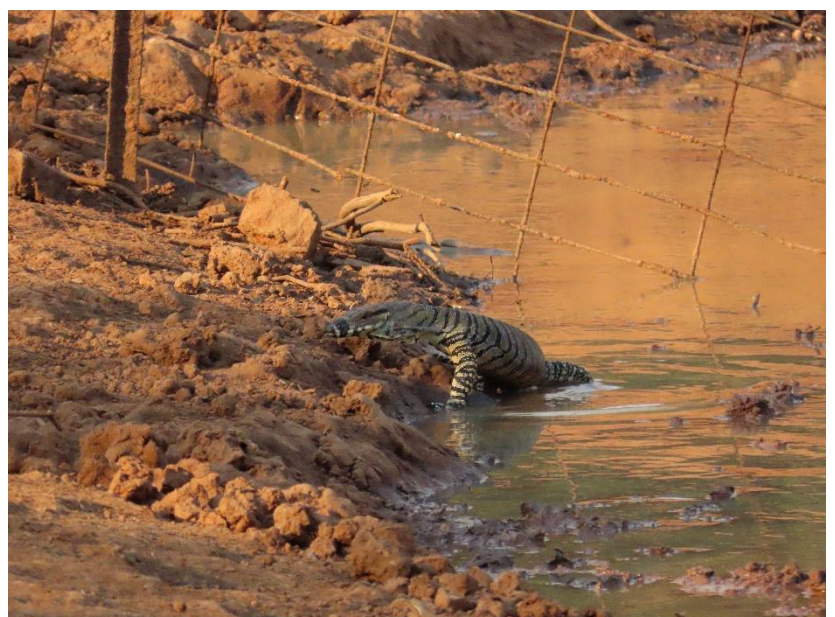
Last pig shot on the last evening with the .300 H&H. Loaded with 165gn Sciroccos, shot angle didn't matter. Several pigs were shot as they were running away and the bullet exited out the chest with three feet of penetration.



Red Shoulded Parrot.



Spotted Bower Bird.



It was so hot the lace monitors were lying in the water each afternoon.

And just to finish off, Dan took a couple of bass from the kayak. Great fish to target over summer!

