If not claimed within 14 days please return to the Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Inc. PO Box 8663, Alice Springs, NT 0871

February 2003

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ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

President	Bob Read	8952 1935	rread@octa4.net.au
Vice-President	Kevin Boyle	0422006140	
Publicity Officer	Rosalie Breen	8952 3409	
Secretary/Treasurer	Lyndal White	8955 0525	LMP56@bigpond.com
Property Officer	Kaye Percy	8952 3405	
Public Officer	Sue Fraser	8952 5728	suefra@hotmail.com
Newsletter Editor	Beth Hansen	8953 3728	hansenbeth@bigpond.com

Web site http://www.octa4.net.au/alicenats

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club

February 2003

NEXT CLUB MEETINGS

February 12th 7.30pm at OLSH staffroom, Sadadeen Rd. Will Dobbe will speak about the Central Australian Land Management Association, and give an update on rabbit calichi virus".

March 12th 7.30pm at OLSH staffroom, Sadadeen Rd. Guest speaker: Rachel Paltridge "Threated species of Central Australia". Note that Rachel and Steve McAlpin have just published a book of this title.

TRIPS

Feb 8th: Watch sunrise from Spencer Hill. Meet at 5.40am, Gosse St. playground.

KINDRED ORGANISATIONS' ACTIVITIES & EVENTS

2nd March, Cleanup Australia Day. Meet at Heavitree Gap Caravan Park, at 7.30 am. Join your local community to help keep our river clean. Return for a Free cooked breakfast at 9.30 am. Bring your family and friends and community spirit!
Bags and Gloves provided.

CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations to Barbara Gilfedder for winning the Alice Springs section of the NT Waterwatch Catchment Photographic Competition. Barbara is one of eight winners in the Territory wide competition. Barbara's winning photo of Wigley's Waterhole has been printed on magnets and will be available soon. Barbara will be presented her prize of a Waterwatch pack including a Waterwatch hat, T shirt and waterbottle as well as 5 magnets of her prize winning photo at the NT Waterwatch Education Kit Launch on February the 21st.
(By kind permission of the Waterwatch newsletter)

Birds Australia Newhaven Reserve Update
9 December 2002

Greetings Newhaven supporters

Newhaven Reserve has now been open to the public for five months.
Volunteer rangers have coped well with having the one interim camping ground, and visitors have been tolerant. We expect to have sacred site clearance for further development by January 2003 at the latest. We will then be able to proceed with setting up two more camping grounds and capital works, such as the volunteer ranger's house and visitors' centre.

Some visitors this year have wondered why the plaque with donor names hadn't yet appeared. This is because of delays in getting the above clearances, and should be remedied by the middle of next year.

With the arrival of very hot weather, visitors and volunteers at Newhaven
have been very occasional.

As with elsewhere in Australia, we've had some major fires through
Newhaven in the last month. There is no volunteer ranger at the moment, so dealing with these fires fell mainly to Alex Coppock, Jurgen Heucke and Birgit Dorges, with some help from Bushfires Council, Peter Latz and others.

Thanks to their quick response and long hours putting in fire breaks, less
than half of Newhaven has been affected by these hot, destructive fires.
Big rains in late November have reduced the fire danger for the time
being.

The preliminary vegetation and fauna surveys, funded by the Natural
Heritage Trust, are now close to completion, with the reports due at the
end of the year.

For the vegetation survey, Peter Latz monitored 126 sites representing vegetation units identified from air photo and satellite image
interpretation. Six hundred and thirty plant species have been recorded,
increasing the Newhaven plant list by nearly 200 species. This list
includes at least ten species of national conservation significance and 12 weed species.

Peter Latz has set up a field herbarium for Newhaven.
A preliminary vegetation map was produced in August to help Steve McAlpin with site selection for the mammal and reptile survey. Steve surveyed ten sites to sample habitat and geology/soils across Newhaven, spending two days at each site. Warlpiri rangers were present at each site and Aboriginal elders also came out several times to contribute their tracking skills and other knowledge to the survey work. Overall, five species of dasyurids, three of rodents and 50 types of reptiles were trapped. The
trap success for Elliot traps was less than 2%. which was disappointing. However, the result was not too bad for such a dry spell, and indicates
that the diversity and richness of Newhaven is quite good. Birds
Australia plans a longer term survey in the future.

A highlight of the fauna survey was the discovery of an active burrow of the greatdesert skink (*Egernia kintorei*).

Several more active burrows have since been confirmed by Rachel Paltridge while she was doing a threatened species project in the region. Only four other populations of the great desert skink are known to occur in national parks or reserves in Australia. These skinks are under threat from extensive, hot wildfires, and they seem to thrive best where the country is regularly burned in small, mosaic burns. Cats and foxes are also a major threat to the survival of this skink. Birds Australia plans to assess further the numbers of these skinks on Newhaven, and to set up management strategies for them.

Cats have been very much in evidence at Newhaven this year, as they tend
to hunt during the day in hard times.
Unfortunately there are currently no effective and specific control measures for cats.

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Threatened Species & Communities series of pamphlets

These include
Threatened species & ecological communities in Australia: Why is it threatened ? Habitat loss, change & fragmentation Who is responsible for conservation ? Invasive plants & animals. Legislation.

Bilby: National conservation status. Threats. Recovery action – in NT, WA, Qld & SA. Captive colonies. Desert Aborigines & the bilby.

Green kids guide to threatened species: Conserve habitats. Control introduced plants & animals. Do not dump weeds / pets in the bush. Control cats. Re-use & recycle whatever you can. Make compost.

Available from Environment Australia, Community Info. Unit. Freecall 1800 803 772. or at the following website: http://www.biodiversity.environment.gov.au/plants/threaten/

The Threatened Species Network in Alice Springs also produces two page pamphlets on topics such as:

- Threatened arid zone animals
- Great desert skink
- Central Australia plants & animals under threat
- Threatened arid zone plants
- Gouldian Finch &
- What your school can do to help threatened species.

The last mentioned has a page listing nationally threatened species in the NT including *acacia pickardii, acacia undoolyana,* central rock rat, *Eremophila* "Rainbow Valley', *Ipomoea* sp. (Stirling) (a vulnerable desert plant with edible tubers), *olearia macdonnellensis* & *ricinacarpos gloria-medii* (respectively vulnerable daisy & a shrub, both restricted to the MacDonnell Ranges near Alice Springs) & Slater's skink (known only in the Finke Gorge National park.)

Contact: TSN NT Coordinator on ph. 8952 1541 or email at tsnnt@ozemail.com.au

The Birds of Groote Eylandt by Richard Noske & Graham Brennan was launched late last year. The book, from NTU Press, describes the habitats, movements & regional distribution of each of 228 bird species that have been reported on Groote Eylandt since 1920. A distinctive feature is "its coverage of histories from pre-European history to the European presence & also the history of ornithology.

BLUE GREEN ALGAE AT ILPARPA SWAMP

The recent toxic blue green algal bloom discovered in St Mary's Creek is indicative of extreme nutrient levels that occur at St Mary's Creek and Ilparpa Swamp. Algal blooms occur when low water levels, combined with high water temperatures and high nutrient levels allow these algal cells to multiply uncontrollably, creating a toxic algal stew.

The algal bloom was first discovered by Rosalie Breen a keen Waterwatch volunteer and Field Naturalist who identified the sludge under a microscope and contacted authorities fearful that the sludge was toxic blue green algae. Her suspicions were later confirmed by laboratory analysis with the Laboratory finding high concentrations of toxic blue green algae (*Mycrocistis aeruginosa*) in the sample. The major nutrient responsible to algal bloom is phosphate. Volunteer Waterwatch records taken over the past 3 years show the phosphate levels at St Mary's Creek and in Ilparpa Swamp have been consistently high, ranging between 4mg/ L and 11 mg/ L. In comparison the pristine water of Kings Canyon are regularly around .04mg/L. Even the cattle impacted Wigleys Waterhole rarely exceeds .5 mg/ L. Horrified Following the algal bloom a group of Waterwatch volunteers and myself tested the water to see how bad it was. The results were horrific, with phosphate levels greater than 12mg/ L (higher than ever recorded in Central Australia) and dissolved oxygen so low at 1mg/L that any fish present would have long since died. Given these extremely high phosphate levels at St Mary's Creek and Ilparpa Swamp it is surprising there hasn't been more algal blooms. Phosphate at Ilparpa Swamp comes from the Sewerage Treatment Plant that drains into the swamp. The major sources of phosphate at Sewerage Treatment Plants are human waste, human waste and phosphate in laundry and dishwashing detergents. In Central Australia the general risk of algal blooms in water holes is generally low as most rivers and waterholes receives very little nutrient rich pollutant including animal and human excrement and fertilisers.

(By kind permission of the Waterwatch newsletter)