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

November 2003

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ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB NOVEMBER 2003

MEETINGS

Wednesday 12th November: Jose Petrick will present a pictorial travelogue Egypt, including Valley of the Kings and Valley of the Queens. 7:30 PM in the staffroom of OLSH off the Sadadeen Road.

Sunday 7 Dec 2003 End of Year breakfast at the Telegraph Station. 8:30 am

TRIPS

November 1st and 2nd, assisting with fish survey at **Fringe Lily Gorge, second attempt**. 4 WD needed. Our first attempt at this flopped, Angus was sick and I had car problems. We are more organised now and are trying again. This will be an overnight camp, but anyone who wants to come for the day is welcome.

Saturday 8 November - Sewage Ponds. Meet 8 AM at the gate to the ponds. Leader: Bob

Sunday 23 November - 2 to 3 hour walk in the hills in vicinity of Scout Hall off Larapinta Drive. Rough tracks, up & down hills. Beat the heat - meet 6 am near Scout Hall. Bring hat & water. Leaders - Connie Spencer & Barbara Gilfedder. Contact Connie on 8952 4694.

Friday November 28 - Bradshaw Walk at night. Leader: Bob

Dec 2003	Sewage Ponds – early morning. Leader: Bob
Feb 2004	Sewage Ponds – early morning. Leader: Bob
Early March 2004	One of walks in Telegraph Station vicinity. Leader: Rosalie
March 2004	Kunoth Bore
April 2004	Slot gorge southern side of Mt Gillen. Leader: Connie
April 2004 (school holidays)	Newhaven
May 2004	Chain of Ponds (Trephina)
Sat, Sun & Mon 5, 6 & 7 June 2004	Mac Clark Conservation Reserve (Acacia peuce) and Acacia pickardii. This would be a combined FNC & APS trip.
After rain	Proposed activity: setting up a light trap.
Possible overnight camp	At Old Hamilton Downs one weekend next year if there is sufficient interest.
Unknown	Walk from Wigley's to the Telegraph Station. Organiser: Rosalie

KINDRED ORGANISATIONS EVENTS

Wednesday 5 November - Australian Plants Society meets 7:30pm Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Guest Speaker: Geoff Miers on the topic **Common Pests on Native Plants**.

Saturday 15 November. The Astronomical society is holding a family astronomy night, 7PM until 9PM at the Desert Park Picnic Ground.

Friday 21 November 'Big November Night' at the Alice Springs Desert Park 6.30pm to 9pm. Join in for this very popular annual open night, entry is free so come along and help celebrate a great year.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Please note that subscriptions are now due. If you have not paid already please do so as soon as possible. The Committee has resolved that this year the cut off will be November, that is no more newsletters if you are still un-financial.

New Members

We welcome the following new members to the club.

Bev Gray
Bev Ayres
Anita Smyth.

NEWS

Claim oldest vertebrate fossil found in SA

A fossil discovered in South Australia's Flinders Ranges is believed to be the oldest vertebrate fossil ever found.

It was located by a station owner 5 years ago and caught the eye of Dr Jim Gehling, a visiting palaeontologist from the South Australian Museum.

The oldest vertebrate fossil specimens were previously found in China and estimated to be 530 million years old.

Dr Gehling says the South Australian fossil is an even older specimen vertebrate and resembles a long tadpole.

"When we're getting back to the oldest possible thing that can be related to animals with backbones, and that includes us, that's pretty much what we expect," Dr Gehling said.

"But the fantastic thing about this specimen is it's at least 30 million years older than anything else that

could even be vaguely related to vertebrates, which is the group that we belong to."

The exact location is being kept secret to protect the site from looting.
ABC news Online Posted :Wed, 22 Oct 2003 10:42 AEST

The Alice Springs Desert Park is looking for a number of people who are happy to donate a couple of hours a month counting birds on the park. Zoology staff have for many years been recording species of birds within the developed area of the Park. Over time, they have seen the range of species expand dramatically. After pondering why that might be, they have decided to get into some good science and start counting birds.

They are seeking help over the next many months to spend a couple of hours a month counting birds within the Park. Volunteers will be given a bit of training by zoology staff and require a keen eye and a good ear. Surveys will kick off about 8am. Ideally it would be best if people can help out over a number of counts, to help with consistency and to make analysis a whole lot easier at the end. If you are interested in helping out please contact Bruce Pascoe, Senior Keeper by email bruce.pascoe@nt.gov.au or by telephone 8951 8722. Leave contact details and days which best suit you.

RESTORING RESILIENCE TO THE AUSTRALIAN CONTINENT

Edited from the transcript of a talk given by Michael Archer to a special Science Week forum in Canberra an broadcast on the ABC Earthbeat program 27/9/03.

We are asking for in effect, a revolution about the way that we utilise the land. I am a palaeontologist, and I find it bizarre coming out of the palaeontological world and being vitally concerned about the future of the biota of Australia. For 25 years my team has been working at Riversleigh and we have developed an understanding of what happened (to the Australian fauna) to produce what we've got now. We can draw dots through time, link them up and start to make predictions about the future. That understanding, needs to inform the way we utilise the land if we want to conserve the fauna into the future. The big message, besides the thingadontas and the bizarre dontas and the weirder dontas and all sorts of incredible things, was that 44% of family level diversity has vanished from Australia in the last 23-million years. That loss has nothing to do with humans. It is natural decline in the habitat that supported that kind of biodiversity. Broadly speaking biodiversity is proportional to the area that you can develop it in. Reducing that area will impact on the biodiversity.

Now there's nothing wrong with extinction, that is how animals and plants respond to a changing world. Without extinction, everything is going to be in big trouble. The trick is that new species must be able to be produced to replace the ones that go extinct. What we should really be focused on here is the conservation of evolution, the resilience of the system to maintain biodiversity. The question that we found ourselves asking is how big is big enough? We looked at the fossil record of islands around the world to see how well those islands have done in keeping the biodiversity that they had, and if they have the resilience to keep things into the future? The answer is, unless islands are as big as Borneo, New Guinea, Madagascar, that resilience is not there. Even places like New Guinea can't keep things on a long-term basis, it's kind of scary. New Caledonia, 19,000 square kilometres, has no long-term resilience. It had tree-climbing crocodiles, they had rhinoceros, and they're all gone. Unless islands are 300,000 square kilometres in size, they do not have long-term resilience, particularly for mammals.

Translated to Australian habitats that have unique things that we really want to keep, and it means 1-1/2-million square kilometres has to be available for conservation. That is 20% of the continent, a scary figure. At the moment 8% of Australia is protected. Where do we get the other 12%? The answer is private land. Nobody is going to be able to go out and rationalise taking another 12% of private land and turning it into protected area strategies, so we have to focus on private land. Sixty-five percent of Australia is under agricultural use for the production of monocultures of introduced species. That's giving us $3-billion to $5-billion a year land degradation. It is a serious issue; business as usual is not an option. We have got a massive extinction rate, more mammals are going extinct in Australia than in any other continent.

There are dangers to humans in our dependence on these monocultures of introduced species, because they're our cousins. Cattle, sheep, pigs are placental mammals; with which we share diseases like Mad

Cow. This is going to happen more and more frequently.
The danger to native ecosystems is that we do not value them. When we clear them to shove in more introduced species, we lose masses more of the native species.

There are dangers to rural and regional communities. No strategies have any meaning unless they are of value to these communities. And at the moment the resilience of those communities to survive into the future is declining. The revolution that we need hinges on two main concepts.

The first is we need to get resilience back into the Australian ecosystems and communities.

The second is we're going to have to do it by valuing native species.

Most people on the land view native species as pests. While the Wentworth Agenda is important, the part which says that the only way to make this work is to bribe people to keep native vegetation and native habitats has probably got a short-term future. We have to make people value keeping that. Those are the animals, and the plants that we should be focussed on, because they know how to live in Australia. What happened in this last drought? Long after the cattle had their feet up in the air, the kangaroos were still bouncing everywhere, and the graziers were complaining about it. But there was a message in there that needed to come through. Kangaroos deal with these sorts of crises better than the species we want to inflict on Australia.

We do not share diseases with kangaroos. The safest animals we can relate to in terms of sustainable utilisation are Australian marsupials. There is more meat per kilogram of animal. 99% of the kangaroos that are harvested are head shot, it's a lot better than starving to death.

To wind up the Australia 21 group's FATE project (Future of Australia's Threatened Ecosystems) is the group to watch. They are focused about trying to restore resilience between the geosphere and the biosphere of Australia. At present attention is not being given to the dynamics between those two systems, and they've listened to what we're talking about in the FATE project, they're grasped it and they're now behind it, and they're helping us try to get funding for the whole thing. We want to be on the land, we want to start these projects experimentally. We want to not assume, but to test that sustainable utilisation of native species has the conservation and the rural and regional benefits and the increasing resilience that we're hypothesising.

Work starts on NT renewable energy program

The Power and Water Corporation says the ground work for a $6 million project to install 30 solar dishes in three remote Northern Territory communities has begun.
The renewable energy program will be carried out progressively with preliminary work at Hermannsburg, near Alice Springs, expected to result in the erection of the first dishes in the New Year.
The corporation's Trevor Horman says that will be followed by work at Yuendumu and Lajamanu over a nine-month period.
He says the communities were chosen to trial the project because of their high diesel fuel consumption - other communities can become involved in the future.
"The performance of the 30 original dishes will be monitored over a year or two and if the performance measures up, there is a possibility we could go on with further dishes," Mr Horman said.
ABC news Online Tuesday, October 21, 2003

Rabbit eradication program proving successful

A successful rabbit eradication program on a cattle station in Queensland's far southwest could mean the preservation of unique flora and fauna.
The program has reduced rabbit numbers by 95 per cent on Bulloo Downs near Thargomindah with 48,000 rabbit warrens ripped over three years.
Prior to the work the station housed up to a quarter of the rabbit population in Queensland.
Natural Resources Minister Stephen Robertson says the partnership with the Stanbroke Pastoral Company may become a model for other rabbit control programs.
"Bulloo Downs management believed it was costing them around $600,000 per year in lost cattle production," Mr Robertson said.
Mr Robertson said the rabbits also would have caused considerable damage to native plants and animals.
"That's why they (Stanbroke Pastoral Company) were prepared to partner with the Department of Natural Resources and Mines and contribute significant financial resources to this project."
ABC news Online

Rabbits, Rabbits, Rabbits, by Kaye Kessing.