

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



MAY 2004



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**ALICE SPRINGS FIELD**  
**NATURALISTS INC.**  
**NEWSLETTER – MAY 2004**

**Meetings**

**Wednesday 12 May** – Speaker Michael Green -  
Henbury Meteorite Crater.

**Wednesday 9 June** – Speaker Helen Puckey –  
Carpentarian Rock-rats

**Field Trips**

**Saturday 15 May.** Henbury Meteorite Crater and possibly *Acacia latzii* sites. Combined FNC and APS trip. Meet 7.30 am at Information Bay opposite Old Timers Home, South Stuart Hwy. Leader – Bob Read.

**Sunday 23 May.** Ridge Top Trail from Trephina Gorge to John Hayes Rockhole (6.5 hrs). Meet 7.30 am at The Date Gardens, Palm Circuit. Leader – Connie Spencer

**Saturday 5 June.** Walk from Wigley's Waterhole to Telegraph Station. Meet 7.30 am at the Sargent Street sign on North Stuart Highway. Leader – Rosalie Breen.

**Saturday, Sunday, Monday 12 - 14 June.** Mac Clark Conservation Reserve *Acacia peuce* and *Acacia picardii* sites on Andado Station subject to permission being granted. This is a combined FNC and APS trip. Leader – Bob Read.

**Saturday, Sunday 26, 27 June.** Winnecke Goldfields subject to permission being granted. Mainly driving. Leader – Kevin Boyle.

**Other suggestions being considered**

**Day trips**

Ochre Pits - Inarlarga Pass - Pioneer Pass – 5 hours return

Bat caves

Native Gap

Rainbow Valley

Emily to Jessie Gap along the top.

West Gap to Flynn's Grave along top of Mount Gillen.

Painted Canyon, Harts Range

**Overnight Trips**

Old Hamilton Downs

James Range

Aleoota Fossils

Lake Lewis – 3 days - drive

Larapinta Trail Stage 11 – 2 day walk

Larapinta Trail Stage 3 – 2 day

Night trip after rain

Setting up light trap for insects.

If you have any suggestions for field trips you would like the club to undertake, please let any member of the committee know.

**Kindred organizations events**

**Wednesday 5 May - Australian Plants Society monthly meeting - 7:30 pm** - Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Guest Speaker, Helen Puckey on Buffel grass in Central Australia - *What we know and what we don't know.*

**Club Subscriptions**

Club subscriptions will be due in August. The Committee is recommending that we increase all categories by \$5.

At present we have agreed to stay as an independent organization and be responsible for our own insurance costs. Currently our finances are very healthy but we need to keep them so, as insurance premiums are bound to rise.

New subscriptions would be -  
Waged Couple - \$30, Unwaged Couple \$25,  
Waged Single - \$25, Unwaged Single \$20.

All members will have the opportunity to discuss and vote on this at the next meeting.

**Guest Speaker Report**

At the April meeting we were entertained by Margaret Friedel as she told about and showed pictures of her ecological journey to Namibia. There are strong similarities between the Central Australian landscape and the Namibian desertscapes. However the hills there are higher, much of the country is a high plateau; sand hills lacked our vivid reds but were bigger and of course the animals were much bigger.

Large areas of the country was very degraded. I found it quite incredible that Reserves were allowed to become overstocked with animals - elephants, giraffes and all types of antelopes that were completely eating out the vegetation within nine kilometres of watering points. This was seen as good because with less vegetation the animals could be more easily seen by tourists.

In some areas there is almost no rainfall, plants and animals only survive because every evening fog rolls in from the sea and condenses. It is being investigated if it can be used as a water resource for people.

An interesting talk - Thank you Margaret.

## Field Trip Reports

### Newhaven Highlights

The Field Nats trip to Newhaven Bird Reserve was very enjoyable. There were eight in the group, Rosalie and Gavan Breen, Bev Dawson, Marg and Jim Lawrence, Barb and Jim Gilfedder and leader Bob Read.

After setting up camp in the prickly-infested campground (*Tribulus terrestris*), just as well they had scraped areas for tents, we decided to stretch our legs. First there was a mixed group of birds, Yellow-rumped Thornbills playing on the ground, a Western Gerygone, a Singing Honeyeater and a Red-capped Robin. A thorny devil was standing motionless on the track, tail pointing to the sky. Jim L picked him up and explained that the patterns on their tummies were all different like fingerprints. There were many scorpion burrows, the smiley faced ones which made some of us pleased that we would be enclosed in tents for the nights. We puzzled over a strange stunted acacia, with spiky, uneven, grey leaves. Later we decided it was fire wattle (*Acacia inaequilatera*). We were also intrigued by a different prostrate herb, with large, globular, papery seedpods with wings (*Tribulus macrocarpus*). We saw Zebra Finches, a White-winged Triller, a Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Budgerigars, a Crested Bellbird singing as we watched him, Willie Wagtails and a Banded Whiteface carrying a feather. Not bad for a first walk near the camp.

In the morning a Pied Butcherbird serenaded us while we ate breakfast, Grey-crowned Babblers squeaked and a pair of Collared Sparrowhawks wheeled overhead. Bob pointed out their very square tails that made identification easier.

Susies lake was a highlight for all of us. It has lovely clear water and is fringed with inland Teatree (*Melaleuca glomerata*).



A few Grey Teal and Pink-eared Ducks were enjoying a morning swim but decided they didn't particularly like our company. Staying in the water were tiny clam shrimps (*Ostracods*) swimming around, along with water spiders, tadpoles and other strange water creatures which kept Rosalie happy. We found tiny frogs with little red spots hopping on the edge. Jim G found flightless female wasps, large black hairy things, also called Velvet Ants (*Mutillids*) scurrying around on the sand, digging occasionally and inspecting every little

hole they could find. Evidently they parasitise other bees and wasps and would have been looking a host nest. Jim and Marg found Variegated Fairy-wrens and Bob and I chased a strange call which led to a Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo.



At Lake Botileneck we were intrigued by the fleshy samphires and a flowering specimen of the rarer *Tecticornia verrucosa*, with its strange flowering spikes at right angles to each other and the stem.

On to Swan lake where we were fortunate to witness an impressive death of a maiden Australian Bearded Swan (*Gaviana breenova*).

At a dry, greened-over salt lake we watched Brown Songlarks, flying up, hovering and then dropping quickly to perch for a while on the low shrubs before repeating their performance. We counted eight of them. A Black-breasted Buzzard flew overhead several times really showing off the large white windows in his wings.

There were carpets of tiny Parakeelya along the road and clumps of the more subtle Frankenia spreading everywhere.

At Lake Bennett, the biggest salt lake in the area, we climbed red sand hills and admired the reflection of more red dunes and hills in the mirages that stretched across the lake. I feel sure there was water in the middle of it but it was difficult to work out which was water and which was mirage. A hunt in the teatree revealed a small group of Rufous-crowned Emu-wrens. It was a first view of them for some members and very exciting. We then had lunch sheltering under the melaleucas, then most decided siestas were in order.

The day continued with more birds including a group of Crimson Chats, more watery places for Rosalie to examine and a nip from a water scorpion for Bob.

On Sunday we decided to start the day with the Camp Hill walk. We were disappointed that it merely circled the hill on level ground, but it was

pleasant. There were vast areas of native grasses, all seeding and looking beautiful in the sunshine. We did find small areas of Buffel grass on the reserve and hoped they would be eradicated. We saw a range of birds but nothing unusual.

Then we drove to the gorge. The country changed dramatically. Here was Morning Glory (*Ipomoea costata*) with its large glossy leaves and purple flowers contrasting with the brilliant yellow spikes of the Flat-topped wattles (*Acacia hilliana*), Curry wattles (*Acacia spondylophylla*), and Mineritchie wattles (*Acacia monticola*), Holly-leaved grevilleas (*Grevillea wickhamii*) madly flowering, and Desert Bloodwoods (*Corymbia deserticola*) with their sandpapery leaves as well as Ghost gums (*Corymbia aparerinja*). In the gorge there were tiny waterfalls and small waterholes. White-flowering Sundews (*Drosera indica*) were taking advantage of the increased insect population in the damp conditions. The water and flowering grevilleas were also attracting Grey-headed and Brown and Singing Honeyeaters as well as heaps of butterflies – Common Eggfly, Lesser Wanderer, Lemon Migrant and Chequered Swallowtail. Zebra Finches darted down to the water, Painted Finches hopped over the rocks, while Little Woodswallows flew above. What an idyllic place.

On the loop road around the northern boundary we admired the hills, Gavan climbed the Mesa, it was too hot for the rest of us, though we all climbed up to Alex's Lookout rock. We went through lovely country – parklands of a different teatree (*Melaleuca lasiandra*) it's leaves broader and more pointed than the more familiar *glomerata*; areas of young Desert Oaks (*Allocasuarina decaisneana*) and a few older ones; sand plains with so many different plants that we were not familiar with but tried to name. Back at the camp Rosalie set up the microscopes so we could get a closer view at a scarab beetle and some watery treasures, rotifers and a midge larva.

On the last morning a few of us decided to tackle the short climb up Camp Hill. It had been burnt sometime last year, and with the recent rains was smothered with young plants – Curry wattles (*Acacia spondylophylla*), Butterfly bush (*Petalostylis cassioides*), Holly Grevillea (*Grevillea wickhamii*), Solanum species and lots of other. The Glass-wing butterflies were enjoying those that had started to flower. From the top we tried to identify mountain ranges 100 kilometres or more away. Rosalie found a strange small tree which had large glossy leaves and two different sorts of flowers in the same flower head, some long, thin, white trumpet flowers with stamens sticking out the end and some much fatter, shorter, bulbous and mottled. She had found the same tree earlier on the sand hill near Lake Bennett, but that

only had the bulbous flowers on it. We identified it later as *Clerodendrum floribundum*.

Then to a puddle on the other side of the airstrip, that the new volunteer rangers, Ted and Kerry Davenport had told us about. We were lucky to see Banded Lapwings, two parents and four small chicks walking off through the low herbs, continually calling to each other. The Davenports had seen them the previous day. A Whistling Kite circled overhead no doubt looking at the chicks too. Zebra Finches, Diamond Doves and a small group of Budgerigars were coming in for sips of water then flying quickly back to the safety of their trees.

At that stage Jim and I headed home, but Rosalie, Gavan, Bob and Bev looked around the south eastern bores. Rosalie found a Flat-tailed Gecko which hid under a tuft of grass rather than running, so she got a good look at it. Over the few days we saw several groups of camels of various ages, all looking very healthy. We also saw lizards, dragons and skinks that zoomed off before we could see them properly. We saw at least fifty bird species.

I have left so much out but hopefully have given you an idea of what a great time we had exploring Newhaven. Perhaps we should make it an annual event.

Barb Gilfedder

Pictures by Rosalie Breen

## Slot Gorge

Sorry, no write-up yet but a couple of pictures from Connie Spencer.



This bat had perished on barbed wire.



Barb, Rhondda and Rosalie negotiate the gorge.

## Other News

I received an e-mail from Don Haddon the other day and thought others might be interested in what he is up to.

*"Thankyou for the latest Alice Springs Field Nats newsletter. You are still having those wonderful trips. I learnt so much when I was out and about with all you good folk. I see Barb showed people a Rainbow Bee-eaters nest. We have plenty here so I must check to see if they are nesting yet.*

*We have finally bought a 4WD. A 1994 Toyota Hilux twin cab ute. It has got snorkel, bullbars and running board, a strong roof rack like frame over the tray which I can put my hide on. It also has a winch and spotlights and is in tip top condition. Could certainly have done with it in Alice Springs.*

*We are presently in Lajamanu, an aboriginal settlement about 600 km south west of Katherine on the northern edge of the Tanami Desert. I have been busy filling in Atlas sheets for the next Atlas. Whenever! There had been no wet season bird observations for here and just 56 species listed for the dry season. So far I have seen 120 species in this square.*

*I was thinking of you Barb, the other day when I saw my first Grey Falcon. You had it in your back yard but I had to come out here and wait two months to see one. Actually I have had two sightings now. A scientist from Alice Springs called Nic Gambol was out here doing some studies and he mentioned to me that Grey Falcons would often fly very high. Well I saw a Wedge-tailed Eagle, rare out here, soaring high and so I put the binoculars on it and then saw a smaller grey bird with dark wing tips soaring with it - Grey Falcon. I had the scope on the tripod and actually managed to get it in the scope and track it as it circled. Great views. Suddenly it dived and I saw it flash past the Wedgie and then I lost it.*

*I thought I would be too far south for Gouldian Finches but have come across three lots. I saw a pair exploring a hole in a eucalypt and had high hopes they would nest but it was not to be.*

*Probably the most remarkable wet season sighting was a Crested Grebe that turned up near the start of the Tanami Rd when it was flooded. Even had a Magpie Goose call in for a short time.*

*There are an amazing number of raptors. I have seen 15 species. The rarest is Wedge-tailed Eagle which I have seen just once. Then the Grey Falcon which I have seen twice. The Black-breasted Buzzard is very common. I see it most days I'm out. The Spotted Harrier and Square-tailed Kites are attractive birds but I only see them occasionally.*

*Three Fairy-wren species can be found. I've seen one family of White-winged Fairy-wrens. We must be about the northern limit of them. There are also Red-backed Fairy-wrens and we must be about the southern limit for them as far as the NT is*

*concerned. There are also Variegated Fairy-wrens. I had my hide on a nest of them and the male worked twice as hard as all the females in attendance.*

*My regards to the Field Nats members."*

In another e-mail Don told me there was someone on the settlement who was carrying around a bilby in a plastic shopping basket. He and his dogs had caught it and he intended to eat it - good tucker, tastes like rabbit. Don was surprised that bilbies were that far north. Poor old bilby, sad but quite legitimate for an Aboriginal.

## Club Shirts

It was resolved at the last meeting to have shirts printed with the club logo.

It was decided to use a small logo so it could be printed to one side on either a t-shirt or polo shirt.

The best value was at M & M, Shop 3,39 Elder Street.

**Please visit them as soon as possible and choose the shirt/s you would like.**



They have a variety of styles and colours available - t-shirts, polo shirts with collar, with or without pocket. Cost will be \$10 to \$18 depending on the style of shirt, plus \$6.00 to cover initial screen and printing costs. Choose the shirt you would like and leave your name with them. FNC will distribute and collect money after they are printed. We need at least 10 orders before they will print. The print will initially be just in black so please choose a shirt that this will show up on. (Changing print colour costs more and needs a minimum order.) Light coloured shirts are more suitable in our climate anyway. **We would like orders finalised before the next meeting.** Any queries contact Barb Giffedder.



Early morning walk through native grasses at Newhaven.

**ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED**  
**Minutes of the Meeting held Wednesday 14 April 2004 at O.L.S.H. College**

**Open:** The President, Bob Read, declared the meeting open at 9:05pm  
**Present:** As per attendance book  
**Apologies:** Kaye Percy, Sally Breaux, Kevin Boyle & Punch Hall  
**Minutes:** The meeting resolved to accept the minutes of the previous meeting with amendment that Pat Gallagher's name be added as an apology.

**Business Arising from the Minutes:**

- NT Parks and Conservation Masterplan – Bob advised that no action has been taken due to work commitments.
- Entry to sewage ponds – no further news on the subject.
- T-shirts: Barbara reported on costs of t-shirts, making a screen & printing from M & M Designs as follows:  
Large screen - \$70.00. Small screen - \$17.50  
T-shirts: from \$10 - \$16 depending on quality and style plus printing (minimum of 10) \$3.50 - \$3.80 each.  
The meeting resolved to choose the small screen option, advise members of prices through the newsletter with orders finalised by the next meeting.

**Correspondence In:**

- |                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| 1. NTFNC              | newsletter   |
| 2. WBC                | bank statement   |
| 3. The FNC of Vic     | thank you for donation to Aust Natural History Medallion |
| 4. Parks and Wildlife | newsletter   |

**Correspondence Out:**

- |                  |           |
|------------------|-----------|
| 1. Ajay Nerandra | thank you |
|------------------|-----------|

**Treasurer's Report**

Opening balance (end February 04)		\$1710.00
Pius	Subscriptions collected	\$23.00
	Badge sales	2.00
	Bank interest	2.10
		<u>27.10</u>
		\$1737.10
Less	Postage	\$50.00
	Renewal of post box rental	55.00
		<u>\$105.00</u>
		<u>\$1632.10</u>
The meeting accepted the Treasurer's report.		

**General Business:**

**Trips**

**Sun 18 April** – Slot gorge southern side of Mt Gillen. Meet 7:30am Information Bay opposite Old Timers Home on South Stuart Hwy. Leader, Connie Spencer.

**Sat, Sun & Mon 24, 25 & 26 April** – Bowman's Gap overnight camp. Meet 2pm Sat 24<sup>th</sup> Flynn's Grave. Travel to Ormiston Gorge. Camp overnight at campgrounds (showers and BBQ available). Camping fees apply. Sun 25<sup>th</sup> walk through Ormiston Gorge then on to Bowman's Gap and camp. (If you want to come out on Sunday morning, the walk will start at 8am. Must let Kaye know you are coming.) Easy walking, great scenery within Ormiston Pound. Mon 26<sup>th</sup> April return to Ormiston carpark via Pound Walk. Two walks for the weekend. Provide your own food and camping gear. Contact Kaye Percy on 8952 3405.

**Sat 15 May** – Henbury Meteorite Crater and possibly *Acacia latzii* sites. Meet 7:30 am Information Bay, South Stuart Hwy. Contact – Bob Read on 8952 1935

**Sun 23 May** – Ridge Top Trail from Trephina Gorge to John Hayes Rockhole (6.5 hrs.) Meet 7:30 am at The Date Gardens, Palm Cct. Contact – Connie Spencer on 8952 4694

**Sat 5 June** – Walk from Wigley's Waterhole to the Telegraph Station. Meet 7:30 am at the Sargent Street sign on the north Stuart Hwy. Contact - Rosalie Breen on 8952 3409.

**Supper** for May meeting – Marilyn Hall

**Sightings**

Kevin has seen a Peregrine Falcon on the lamp post outside his unit in Tilmouth Court.

Rosalie advised that breeding Banded Lapwings with 4 chicks were seen at Newhaven Station.

Bob saw Bustards on the Hugh River Stock Route.

**Meeting closed** at 9:30 pm