

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



August 2004



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|------------------|-------------------|------------|-------------------------|
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**ALICE SPRINGS FIELD
NATURALISTS INC.
NEWSLETTER- AUGUST 2004**

Meetings

August 11th – AGM –7.30pm

Following the AGM there will be members' 'show and tell' and social. Please bring photos, interesting items, etc. Bob will organise the computer projector.

September 8th – Michael Barritt will talk about Central Australian possums.

Field Trips

Saturday 14 August - James Ranges subject to permission. 4WD essential. It should be possible to camp overnight and return on Sunday if you wish. Leader Kevin Boyle. Mobile 0422 006 140

Sunday 22 August - Waterwatch at Wigleys waterhole. Meet at Sargent Street sign on North Stuart Highway at 8.30am. Leader Rosalie Breen.

Saturday 28 August - Rainbow Valley.

Sunday 19 September - Native Gap.

Suggestions wanted

If you have any suggestions for field trips you would like to undertake or speakers at meetings you would like to hear, please let any member of the committee know. We would love to have your suggestions.

Kindred Organisations

Australian Plants Society

Wednesday 4 August 7.30pm– monthly meeting at the Botanic Garden.

Speaker: Mark Harris with an update on the Central Australian Herbarium plus plant survey and planning projects.

Guest Speaker report

“Kerfuffel about buffel”
by Connie Spencer

Col Stanton from the Department of Infrastructure Planning and Environment wasn't getting into the “kerfuffel about buffel” in the local newspapers for the past few weeks, but rather going back to the basics of **why where and how** in his entertaining presentation at our July meeting.

Why? From 1959 to 1966 central Australia suffered the worst drought in history. Col showed photos of the country with absolutely no ground cover. Dust storms were a weekly or even daily occurrence. He went on to show incredible photos of the storms. Dust storms caused: road rage, airport closure, no mail run or RFDS, health issues, air conditioners clogged up, endless cleaning and no washing days.

Where? So it was decided to call in Bob to fix it (not Bob the Builder but another Bob). To alleviate the situation a “Dust Control Program” was instigated starting with erosion control around the airport. Buffel grass appeared to be the answer as it was drought resistant, could be grazed, had rapid growth, suited to a range of soil types, deep rooted, huge seed dispersal, long seed dormancy and loves to be treated rough. Col pointed out that seed of native grasses was difficult to find and collect and had to be treated very carefully.

How? Col then showed photos and explain the various machines used to sow the seed – many of which they built themselves. Some were successful and others not. First machine was a disc pitter, then a 3 tined pitter, then a machine to make furrows as the furrows were better than the pits. Next came ponding banks made with a grader and they even tried

sowing from a helicopter. They made the famous spirals which appeared on the cover of the NT Telephone Directory in 1980. They were planting 1200 h annually and sowed seed on 70 stations.

Eventually the red clouds were replaced with black clouds and then the rains came and more rain and more rain and then the buffel grew and grew! And now we have a kerfuffel about buffel but with a better understanding of the reasons for planting in the first place.

Field Trip reports

Hamilton Downs Youth Camp

17th & 18th July 2004

By Connie Spencer

Participants: Max and Sue O'Callaghan, Bob Read, Rhondda Tomlinson, Kaye Percy, Connie & Stan Spencer.



It was "brass monkey" weather as we pulled into the meeting point and it didn't change for the whole weekend. Not to worry – we were all well equipped with jackets, beanies, scarves & gloves and not many of the items were removed during the weekend!

First stop was along the Tanami Highway where we headed off into Mulga woodland noting the Mulga ant nests, flowering Mulga Fuchsia (*Eremophila gilesii*) and Native Fuchsia (*Eremophila latrobei*). We had a good view of a Rufous Whistler and Bob caught a glimpse of a Red-capped Robin.

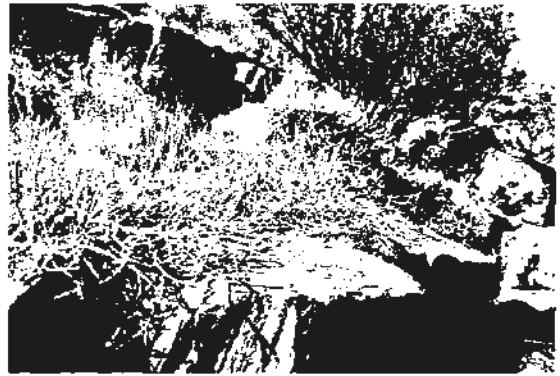
We made our way to the Youth Camp (the original Hamilton Downs homestead) where Morgan Flint showed us around the various buildings and made us feel most welcome. We learned that Hamilton Downs Station takes its name from a spring in the headwaters of the Jay Creek. The spring was discovered and named by explorer, John McDouall Stuart, in 1860 commemorating George Hamilton, who supported Stuart's three expeditions between 1860 and 1862. The Station was established in 1913. In 1948 the old homestead was abandoned and a new one established in a more accessible site to the northwest. In 1972 the Apex Club of Central Australia took on the task of restoring the old homestead buildings and converting the site to a youth camp which was officially opened on 11th March 1978. In 1980 the Hamilton Downs Youth Camp was entered in the Register of the National Estate.

We opted for an early lunch and then an afternoon of walking towards the Chewings Range up one of the lower slopes, down the other side into a valley and then back towards the camp with Morgan in the lead. I managed to put names to a few of Morgan's plant queries but also had to admit defeat in many cases. A couple of plants that stood out in my mind on this walk were the small compact perennial herb *Rostellularia adscendens* (sorry, no common name) with its tiny deep pink flowers. It was growing amongst the rocks of the slope we climbed. The other plant was Spearwood (*Pandorea doratoxylon*) with its bright green fern-like foliage and profuse creamy bell-shaped flowers. We noted various forms of Mulga – fine leaved, broad leaved and Christmas tree shaped. Bob pointed out a Western Gerygone as we made our way up the slope plus a Splendid Wren in an Acacia Bush (*Acacia victoriae*) towards the end of our walk.

A comfortable cosy evening was spent in the Heritage Cottage (the old homestead) around the fireplace where some of us consumed a drop of red and Max entertained us with stories of his youth in Central Australia, some of it in the very room we were sitting in.

Sunday morning we drove to the car parking area and then donned day packs for a walk to Fish Hole. This walk of approximately 2km was along Jay Creek which cuts through a ridge of the Chewings Range. The creek was lined with River Red Gums and Cycads whilst the slopes had Ghost Gums and Native Pines. As we neared Fish Hole the higher ridges were a tinge of grey with Waxy Wattle (*Acacia melleodora*) and Holly-leaf Grevillea (*Grevillea wickhamii*). When Kaye spied a bright green clump growing out of a rock crevice several meters up a rock wall, Bob was sent up to investigate. We identified this plant with the very apt name of Cliffside Daisy (*Cremnothamnus thomsonii*). After a spell of sunning ourselves on the rocks and eating some energy food we made our way back to the vehicles with a stop to check on a grey foliaged, bright orange flowered plant – Hill Wallflower Poison (*Gastrolobium brevipes*). Its close relative, Wallflower poison bush, is poisonous to horses and killed those belonging to John McDouall Stuart during his overland crossing. On our return we saw a Yellow-rumped Thornbill, a Weebill and a Brown Falcon sat close by in the long grass and watched us as we had our lunch.

After lunch we made our way back to the Camp and went for a short walk up Jay Creek to look at a considerable collection of Cycads (*Macrozamia macdonnellensis*). This area had large flat slabs of rock along the creek with the cycads growing from the edge of the creek all the way up to the top of the steep ridge top. We also found a very large Caustic Vine (*Sarcostemma sp.*).



This dense grey sprawling leafless plant with its tangled and twining branches was very attractive on the red rock slab it was spreading itself over. The white milky sap of this highly poisonous plant is used for medicinal purposes by Aboriginal people, mainly for skin complaints.

By now it was time to head for home so we said farewell to Morgan, thanking him for his hospitality and a promise to return. We all agreed that Hamilton Downs Youth Camp should be placed on the trips agenda for next year. To sum up, it was a thoroughly enjoyable weekend with great company.

Letter to the editor

Hamilton Downs Youth Camp

Would you please pass on to your members (especially this weekend's group) my sincere thanks for your visit. Whilst I'm perfectly happy with my own company and whilst there is plenty to do in the on-going development of the Camp, I do enjoy visitors. I especially enjoyed your visit because we 'blazed' a new walk, for future visitors. Above all you helped me identify plants and birds of the area. I won't have to say "I dunno" so often in the future.

Come again - Cheers Morgan

BIG WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Greg Fyfe and Angie Stephanatos, Susan Carlyle, Kathleen Leahy, Cassie Wright, Elizabeth Lewis, Rosalie Schultz and Nick Tyllis, Sue and Max O'Callaghan

Acacia pickardii Trip

12, 13 & 13 June 2004

by Rhondda Tomlinson

Most people heading South from Alice Springs on Finke weekend are going to "The Finke Desert Race". However our small intrepid group, Connie and Stan Spencer, Bob Read and I had other plans. We headed south along the road to Maryvale, turned off at Deep Well and then headed East to the stand of Red Mallee (*Eucalyptus eucentrica*). The bird list was soon commenced by Bob with a Wedge-tailed Eagle. All the birds mentioned in this write-up are credited to Bob.

Connie told us that these Red Mallee were quite tall in comparison with the same species in other areas. I was impressed by my first sighting of a *Solanum* species in flower. We saw a lot of these plants flowering on the rest of our trip. The country which had been burnt in 2002, was looking really good after the recent rains but the devastation was still evident.

We added to the bird list – Major Mitchell Cockatoo, Chiming Wedgebill, and a quick overhead flight of some Budgerigars. (I am still hoping to see a flock of these at a waterhole.) At the eastern end of the James Range were Mulga Parrots. My sightings started with a dead camel and about 20 minutes later a live one near a bore.

We drove through the Gidgee (Stinking wattle) country heading for the Andado Road. On the way to the Train Hills, we saw a Brown Falcon, Pied Honey-eaters, Southern Whiteface, Willy Wagtail and a White-winged Triller. Our second stop at the Train Hills, just before the Rodinga Range, was to see the *Acacia desmondii*. Connie said that this *Acacia* was named after Des Nelson, a well known plant person in Alice Springs.

There were no signs of flowers, seed pods or new seedlings but the tree looked very healthy. Apparently there are other trees of this species scattered in the area.

We travelled through the Rodinga Range and had a couple of stops to open and close road gates.

Lunch stop was at a detour off the main track near the Arookara Range. It had been a while since Connie and Stan had visited this area and they were quite disappointed by the damage done by cattle and camels. Only I was delighted to see a herd of camels grazing nearby. They posed for a photo and then left us to our lunch. There was a *Hakea lorea* flowering.



Connie also found two other plants at our lunch stop *Dipteracanthus australasicus* and *Harnieria kempeana*.

We left the ranges behind and entered the desert sand country. The country was really coming to life as a result of the recent rains and a green carpet was happening everywhere. En route we saw Australian Pipit and Pied Honey-eater.

There was water lying along many parts of the road and we had to use side tracks. The road into Mac Clark Reserve was no exception.

The *Acacia peuce* (Waddy Wood) were all lined up like soldiers on the horizon. I was fascinated by the fact that these trees were doing so well with so many young trees but there were no other tree species in the same area.

The information sign read – 'The *Acacia peuce* are found in just two other places, near Birdsville and further north near Boulia in Queensland. This is the tallest *Acacia* and has deep roots'. Looking at the young plants the needles are strong and sharp but the needles on the mature trees were easy to break. Beyond the trees, Bob spied some water and on closer investigation he reported Grey Teal, Pink-eared Duck, Australian Wood-duck and Brown Falcons.

A campsite was yet to be reached so we set out to go past East Bore and on a few kilometers further to a dry river bed where we camped the night. We did have a large night time visitor which was probably a Mouse Spider.

Up and at it the next morning as Connie had our 'trip purpose' on her mind – '*Acacia pickardii*'. A short stony across country drive and the end result was within sight.



The photo is of Stan and Connie standing beside the tallest of the *Acacia pickardii*. We found that many of the older trees showed damage on the western side but one that was particularly damaged had shoots at the base and it looked like the remnants of a birds nest tucked in behind a knot hole. There were quite a few juvenile plants in the area both in the valley and on the ridge.

We drove to another *Acacia pickardii* site just past East Bore. This area was sandier and less stony. We walked to the top of a sand hill and found a variety of rock formations being eroded and the red sand was encroaching on what remained of the hill top. The view across the valley was an invitation to sit and appreciate this wonderful opportunity to be able to visit this area.

On we drove back toward the Andado Road. Connie had a stop to look at some lilies near East Bore. At Andado Road we turned left and made a stop at the first sand dune to hunt for Grass-wrens. We didn't find the birds but to be

able to see the sand dune disappearing into the distance flanked on both sides by flat plains with low depressions of water was a fascinating sight.

Heading back the way we came we stopped at another sand dune where we were able to look back at the previous sand dune and it was amazing the plants that were growing in the sand. The night's camp was just off the main road in a nice quiet area. In the morning I saw two emus. I had been expecting to see kangaroos as we had seen their tracks but the emus were a surprise.

On the road again and the sightings were Banded Lapwings, horses, camels and a dingo. Bob was doing well and I have only recorded some of his list which included Nankeen Kestrel, Zebra Finches and Brown Falcon. Back into the Mereenie sandstone country and we took a detour along a bore road for a closer look at the ranges.

Thirty-five kilometres from Alice Springs and there were still places to stop and things to see. Connie's stop near Santa Teresa in the limestone and shale country was interesting and she found a plant she did not know, so took a small specimen for later identification. It turned out to be *Phyllanthus fuernrohrri* (Sand spurge). Thirty-three kilometres from Alice Springs it was Bob's turn for a stop in the Spinifex country to look for the elusive Spinifex Bird. The whole area was covered in very large and healthy spinifex plants.

This weekend was a wonderful experience and we saw such a variety of country and I should like to thank my fellow travellers for such an interesting and fascinating time.

CLUB T-SHIRTS

We have had lots of positive comments about the t-shirts printed with the club logo.

A few more members have expressed an interest in purchasing one. We need a minimum of 10 orders to do a print re-run. If you let me know, I will start a list and have them printed when the minimum is reached. Barb Gilfedder

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

Open: The President, Bob Read, declared the meeting open at 9pm.
Present: As per attendance book
Apologies: Sally Breaux, Barbara Gilfedder, Ian Archibald, Leoni Read, Rosalie Breen & Punch Hall
Minutes: The meeting resolved to accept the minutes of the previous meeting.

Business Arising from the Minutes:

T-shirts - Connie advised that ordered t-shirts were ready for collection at \$20 each. Another 5 t-shirts wanted by members at the meeting. Minimum required for printing is 10. Note to go in the newsletter regarding a second printing.

Correspondence In:

DIPE - feedback form with regard to developing an integrated natural resource management plan for the NT

Planning for People - Workshop Tue 20 July 5-7pm in the Noonies Room at the Mercure Diplomat Hotel to develop a management strategy for the Larapinta Trail.

Australian Naturalists' Network - ANN Register.

FN Assn of Canberra (Rosemary Blemings) - re insurance

Correspondence Out:

Helen Puckey - thank you

Treasurer's Report

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|----------------------------------|------------------|
| Opening balance (end of May 04) | \$1330.80 |
| Plus income for May (subs & int) | <u>54.11</u> |
| Closing balance (end of June 04) | <u>\$1384.91</u> |

General Business:

Trips

Sat & Sun 17 & 18 July - Hamilton Downs Youth Camp meet 9am at the Sargent Street sign on the north Stuart Hwy.

Nothing organised for **August long weekend**. Connie advised that she was planning a day trip to the Australian Plants Society *Acacia latzii* sites off the Ernest Giles Road. Details not firm at time of meeting. Anyone interested to contact Connie for further information

Sat & Sun 14 & 15 Aug - James Range. Bob to contact Kevin Boyle

AGM - Bob Read announced that the Annual General Meeting would be held Wednesday, 11 August 2004. Pat Gallagher asked if the committee had discussed the proposed fee increases following the issue of inequity between single and couple subscriptions raised at the May 2004 meeting. Committee has not met since then. Pat stated a preference for a flat membership rate with no concessions. Connie to advise Pat of the original proposal.

Leoni Read announced that it was Lyndal White's last meeting as she is moving to Karratha WA. Members thanked Lyndal with a round of applause for her involvement over the years with the Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club not only has a member but also as a committee member, trip leader, supper provider etc. Members wish Lyndal well in her future endeavours.

Supper for August - Margaret Lawrence

Sightings

Jim reported seeing a Banded Lapwing in the Simpson Desert (150 km north of the French Line).
Bob reported a strange duck at the sewage ponds - mostly white. There are various opinions as to whether it is a hybrid or a freak of a Plumed Whistleduck.
Pied Honeyeaters on the Andado Road and Black HE at Winnecke.

Meeting closed at 9.40 pm