

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



MARCH 2006

Connie Spencer  
PO Box 945  
ALICE SPRINGS  
NT 0871



Details inside

President	Bob Read	8952 1935	<a href="mailto:rread1@bigpond.net.au">rread1@bigpond.net.au</a>
Vice-President	Karen May	8953 1446	<a href="mailto:kmb@bigpond.net.au">kmb@bigpond.net.au</a>
Secretary	Connie Spencer	8952 4694	<a href="mailto:constans@bigpond.net.au">constans@bigpond.net.au</a>
Treasurer	Barbara Gilfedder	8955 5452	<a href="mailto:fedders@octa4.net.au">fedders@octa4.net.au</a>
Property Officer	Rosalie Breen	8952 3409	<a href="mailto:rosalie.breen@email.com">rosalie.breen@email.com</a>
Public Officer	Rhondda Tomlinson	8953 1280	<a href="mailto:rhondda.tomlinson@nt.gov.au">rhondda.tomlinson@nt.gov.au</a>
Newsletter Editor	Emily Findlay	8955 0313	<a href="mailto:robbiemily@hotmail.com">robbiemily@hotmail.com</a>

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

## ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB MARCH 2006

### MEETINGS

**Please Note**  
**New meeting venue**  
**Olive Pink Botanic Garden**  
**on Tuncks Road.**

7:30 pm on the second Wednesday of the month.

**Wednesday March 8th:** Andrew Greenwood will be speaking about *Ipomoea* spp. found on 3 Stations 400 km north of Alice Springs.

**And a last minute replacement is;**

**'A Taste of the Pacific - more than just Cocktails and Coconuts'** - As most of you will probably know by now, Emily & Robbie are heading off to work in Vanuatu for two years, but before they depart join Emily for: Some highlights of there 12 month Pacific experience.

### TRIPS / ACTIVITIES

**March 9<sup>th</sup>** Field Nats information display at Sportsfest 06 at the Lyle Kempster Baseball Field, Traeger Park Sporting Complex from 4:30-8:30pm, Volunteers welcome. Contact Bob Read 8952 1935

**March 12<sup>th</sup>** Land for Wildlife Birdwatching workshop on Lesley Reilly's property near Honeymoon Gap. 7.30am - 9.30am Please RSVP to Cassie Wright, Land for Wildlife 89555 222.

**March 18<sup>th</sup>** Conlins Lagoon (Rifle Range Swamp). Meet Information Bay opp. Old Timers Home at 7:30 am. Organiser: Karen May 8953 1446

**April 8<sup>th</sup>** Owen Springs Reserve. Permission granted to visit waterhole on the Hugh River nr the homestead. Meet Flynn's Grave Memorial, Larapinta Drive, at 7:30 am. Leader Bob Read on 8952 1935

Easter or ANZAC Day	Maybe trip to Newhaven over Easter or four days up to and including ANZAC Day. For discussion at next meeting.
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### GUEST SPEAKER REPORT

Cassie Wright, Lowe Ecological Services  
*'A snapshot of the Land for Wildlife Scheme across Australia with a special focus on Alice Springs'*

Last meeting Cassie Wright gave us an informative talk about Land for Wildlife. This is a voluntary scheme that aims to encourage and assist private landholders to provide habitats for wildlife on their properties. It began in Victoria in 1981, an initiative of the Victorian Government and the Bird Observers Club. Taken over ten years later by the Natural Heritage Trust it is now running in 5 states and the NT with over ten thousand properties. Alice Springs Town Council first signed an agreement for initiating the scheme in 2002, then contracted it to Bill Lowe's Ecological Services with Cassie as the present main organizer.

It costs nothing to become a member, but there are plenty of benefits as well as the satisfaction of conserving the land, its vegetation and native animals. Property assessment is the first step with personalized advice on how best to maintain or restore the habitat. Information on suitable plants, weed control, feral animal solutions, reduction of fire hazards, erosion control etc. There are occasional workshops, the last one about echidnas and ants, which also give an opportunity for networking among like minded owners. Monetary grants are available in some cases. The members get a great newsletter and recognition in the form of a blue sign to put near the front gate.

In Alice Springs 35 properties are recognized, all sorts from rural blocks, to schools and a cafe. Many different types of habitats are covered. Cassie mentioned nine, which include as well as the natural, artificial habitats like ponds. At the moment only private land in the municipal area is included. Government owned or Aboriginal land may need other incentives.

Anyone can contribute to conservation. A few tips were:

- Plant local species for habitat and food
- Watch for feral ants, doves, cats and remove them
- Remove weeds to improve lizard habitat
- Preserve ground cover of logs leaf litter and ground vegetation
- Join the Lower Todd Land Care Group or similar group
- Join Land for Wildlife

Then we had a feast of slides showing some of the properties and many of the birds, animals, reptiles and insects which have been given a secure home.

Written by Rosalie Breen



## TRIP REPORTS

### Sewage Ponds Feb 3 2006 Report and notes from Rosalie Breen

Early start for the first official trip of the year. 6:15am with a cloudy sky after a shower or two during the night and a discussion about what a jumper was, as one member felt she almost needed one. Actually it was a delight to feel cool and great to watch the sun dappling the hills in the west as it rose higher and peeped through the clearing clouds.



Looking through binoculars are Connie, Liz, Barb, Bob.

There were plenty of birds on the blue and green waters of the ponds and along the edges. This is where the sandpipers, who have migrated from Siberia, gather. We saw four varieties. Wood Sandpiper is dotted on its folded wings and has a zebra stripe on its tail, and yellow legs. Common is a little smaller, has a very white chest, a darker wing with a black edge, and a white shoulder stripe. It always seems to be bobbing. The Sharp-tailed Sandpiper has a scaly or scalloped pattern on its wings, looks a bit rusty and has green legs. Marsh variety has a long needle beak which makes it a bit more distinctive. All these little tips certainly helped an amateur birdo like me.

An Australian Pratincole was a special find. They are ground nesting birds in gibber plains but come for a holiday here in glorious wetlands. It was strutting around the muddy water edge, head staring up like a pipit at times, looking for insects. It is a tallish bird, reddish-buff colour generally, black on the tail which is really its long wings which extend beyond and thus hide its tail. In flight its tail is white and square ended. The beak is reddish. (The book shows black on the tip).

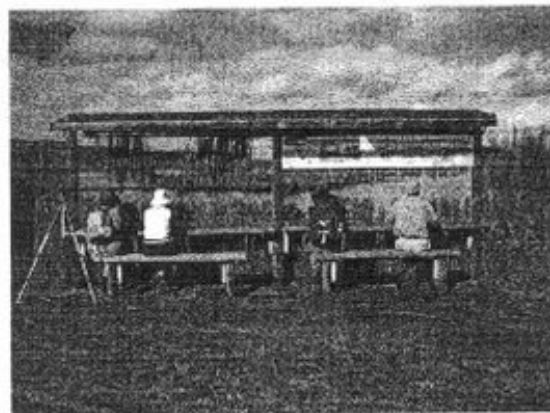
Among the bushes, mostly saltbush, were some Orange Chats, pretty little yellow birds, often tantalising because you know they are there but are hard to spot.

The best birds were what first looked like dark domestic chooks flying into the saltbush. A closer look revealed the Purple Swamphen, beautiful glossy purple body,

darker wings and striking red beak, eye and front head shield.

A big plover was spotted and after much discussion among the experts, Bob, Barb and Liz, they decided it was a Golden Plover, a rare find for Alice Springs. It is slender, generally grey/brown but quite spotty (golden) on its upper parts and has a big black eye. Birds have armpits! Well actually the Grey Plover has a black marking under its wing next to body in flight just where its arm pit would be, and this distinguishes it from the Golden which doesn't have this marking.

It was a very relaxing morning, cool, a bit of a breeze, and good company – the experts and Jocelyn, who had to leave a bit early, Connie and the writer. We saw lots more birds but I have only mentioned the "special" ones.



Back views are Barb, Connie, Liz and Bob.

### Moonlight walk/bike ride to picnic spur on Simpsons Gap Bike Track Saturday 11 February

\*\*See next edition of the A/S Field Nats Newsletter  
for details on this trip.



## CREATURE FEATURE

### Wader Birds off to Siberia written by Janet Parker

In the month of March wader birds gather on Australian shores before flying north to breeding grounds as far away as Siberia. They'll fly between 10- 15,000 kilometres and lose half their weight on the way.

Out of the estimated 3 million wader birds in Australia, about 2 million leave at this time of year. When they reach their final destination, where they stay for only a brief few weeks, they find the Arctic alive with insect life - just the sort of food young wader birds need.

Around Australia birds are gathering at staging grounds to fatten up before leaving en masse on the first leg of their journey. Here, they spend their time feeding and waiting for the right winds. Often, late in the day, a few birds can be seen out testing the wind to check if direction is right.

In Northern Australia there are staging grounds at Broome, 80 Mile Beach and the Gulf of Carpentaria. The West Australian beaches traditionally have huge tides revealing many hectares of mudflats, rich pickings for a good feed before a long journey. In Southern Australia there's a staging ground at Corner Inlet and in Victoria, at Wilson's Promontory, where the largest and most diverse population of birds gather for flight.

#### The secret life of a Wader bird

Wader birds lead double lives, changing plumage for different times of the year. In Australia we see their white/grey plumage, but before heading off north they change into their breeding colours of chestnut, gold & bronze. They will go through two full body moults each year and change their big feathers once a year.

Finding out about wader birds isn't easy. First you have to catch them, and then even if you weigh and measure and band a bird, there's no guarantee you'll ever come across it again. Almost all the wader study activities in Australia are carried out by volunteers. Very little professional research is conducted. The Australasian Wader Study Group is one of the most dedicated bird groups.

#### Flyway Preservation

Flyways are the regular routes taken by migrating birds. The flocks must rely on a series of 3 or 4 stopovers on their journey. If just one of these points becomes unsafe or degraded it can spell disaster for the whole migration. That makes wader bird conservation a very complex business. Although about 10% of the bird species in Australia are wader birds, we share responsibility for their welfare with Russia and many Asian countries on the East Asian Flyway. Australia is a signatory to two important agreements, CAMBA, the China-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement and JAMBA, the Japan-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement, which aim to protect birds crossing international boundaries.

#### Wader Birds in Australia

Of 214 species world wide 70 species are seen in Australia. Fifty of those 70 species are migratory, and eight of the remaining are endemic species, found only in Australia.

The Hooded Plover is an endemic resident bird, found only in southern Australia. It's now under threat from human disturbance on ocean beaches and fox predation.

The Masked Lapwing is a widespread resident species found all over Australia.

Most waders are seen in the north of Australia and of the migrant species, all are from the northern hemisphere, except one. The Double-banded Plover is the only land bird from New Zealand that regularly migrates to Australia. It's migration is east-west rather than north-south.

For the whole article including audio go to:

<http://www.abc.net.au/science/scribblygun/March2000/default.htm>

## NOTICE BOARD

### Association Act Training for you and your Management Committee

During 2006 Business Affairs will continue to offer the Association Act Training sessions to assist you and your Committee to manage the affairs of your Association. This training will be a continuation of the Capacity Building Training that has been offered during 2004 and 2005.

Alice Springs will be held at the Crown Plaza Monday 13<sup>th</sup> March, 2006 and Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> March, 2006 from 6.30pm to 9.00pm.

As limited places are available registrations are essential. Scheduled sessions may be cancelled due to insufficient registrations.

For further information and registrations contact 8935 7722 or e-mail [businessaffairs@nt.gov.au](mailto:businessaffairs@nt.gov.au)

### Sportsfest 06 - live.work.play.love.life

The 3rd Annual **Sportsfest** will be held on Thursday 9th March at Traeger Park from 4.30pm - 8.30pm. Kerri Pottharst (OAM) Olympic Beach Volleyball gold Medallist will be at this years event offering free Volleyball clinics and skills sessions for all those who are interested. She will also have her Olympic Gold medal on display and will be available to chat to and sign autographs.

There will be over 45 interactive and informative displays and plenty of activities to try.

The Alice Springs Field Naturalist Club will be among the groups that will be promoting an active lifestyle and opportunities available for recreation in Alice Springs.

Come down and lend us your support!

**Donations are welcome for interesting natural items for our touch / display table - please bring them along to Wednesday's meeting.**