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Inc. PO Box 8663, Alice Springs, NT 0871

APRIL 2007



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## Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club 2007

### MEETINGS

7.30 pm on the second Wednesday of the month.  
Venue: Olive Pink Botanic Garden, Tuncks Road

**Wed 11<sup>th</sup> April.** Speaker David Moore of CSIRO with "Bush Seeds and Burning, traditional Alywarr land management".

### TRIPS / ACTIVITIES

**Sat 21 April.** N'Dahala Gorge. Meet 7.30 am at the Date Farm. Approx. 180 km return, 4WD needed.  
Contact Bob Read on 8952 1935

**Sat 5 – Mon 7 May.** Larapinta Stage 9 proposed.

**Sat 19 - Sun 20 May.** Old Hamilton Downs Youth Camp. Cost \$25 pp / night.

**Sun 27 May** Walk along hilltop west of the Old Ghan Railway Station to Rifle Range fence and return along the base either northern or southern side. ½ day walk.

### NEW MEMBERS

No new members

### GUEST SPEAKER REPORT

#### WORLD OF EXTINCTIONS

14<sup>th</sup> February, 2007

Mike Barritt

(Senior Ranger for Community Education).

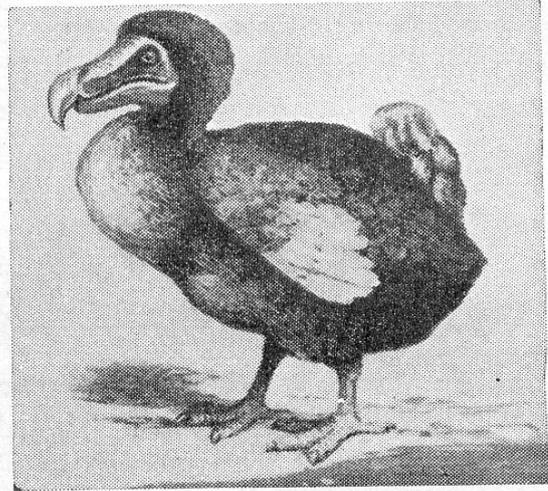
By Rhondda Tomlinson

Mike's work involves mainly child education and the Junior Rangers through the Desert Park. He is also a very welcome speaker at the Field Naturalists here in Alice Springs.

Mike's comment that children are 'non prejudiced and adults can be prejudiced through experience', is very much food for thought.

Mike recommended several books for further interest and research two of which were 'Monster of God' and 'Song of The Dodo' by David Quammen. As well as a visit to the Adelaide Museum

**The Dodo** was an example of extinction after thousands of years of evolution it could not adapt to co-habitation with humans.



The Dodo

This was perhaps one of the first concepts of extinction, as in earlier times very little research had been done on the mortality rate of species. This bird was a welcome source of fresh food to the early explorers and settlers of the 'New World' and unfortunately very easy to capture.

**The Tasmania Tiger** was another causality of feral animals (competition from the dingo) and human intervention (where a bounty was placed to protect the sheep population).

**The Giant Tortoise** a very good source of food that could be preserved as when turned upside down the tortoise goes into a state like hibernation and thus could be kept for quite a while in the ships hold as fresh food.

**Lions** in India's Gir Forest near Pakistan where the pressures of habitat deforestation. The lions are killing people for food.

**Insects** are a group of species that have an accelerated rate of extinction happening and due to lack of resources and funding in many cases little is know of so many and varied life forms.

**Crocodiles and Cycads** give us a glimmer of hope in that they are being preserved due to utilization for the tourist trade and the floral industry.

Mike also used examples of the Tasmanian Devil, which is being attached by a cancerous disease. The Passenger Pigeon, the Falklands Dog; and the lighthouse keeper's cat on Stevens Island NZ, which wiped out a whole species of a bird colony.

In Alice Springs we have the Rock Wallaby and the Mala which are endangered but this has been recognized and

attempts are being made to address these problems. We have about 35 different species of land snail with individual species in isolated areas particularly where native fig trees grow. Fire is another obstacle to some plants and others a necessity and as a result fire management can cause differences of opinions. The Bat Caves south of Alice were of interest to the Horne Expedition due to the Ghost Bats but it is not known if they are still there.

Mike gave us a list of the general introduced feral animals and of course the buffel grass and couch grass.

To encourage the birds and animals to raise their young where tree hollows are diminishing specific boxes designed for the variety of users are being placed in the more habitated areas.

The Junior Rangers are open to all children, even the School of the Air.

Thank you Mike for a great talk and an enjoyable evening.

## INSECT DIVERSTIY (Part 2)

Presented by Chris Palmer  
Entomologist with Parks and Wildlife Department

14 March 2007  
By Barb Gilfedder

### Higher order insects.

It was great to see Chris Palmer back again to continue talking about insects.

First, he reminded us of the enormous number of described insect species compared with other life forms. More insects than everything else combined including bacteria and fungi.

Also, that there are 30 insect orders, divided into 19 'lower' orders and 11 'higher' orders. World wide there are over 153 000 described species in the 'lower' orders and 755 000 in the 'higher' orders.

The lower order insects have young (nymphs) very similar to the adults, that gradually get bigger with each moult; the higher orders have larvae hatching from the eggs in the form of caterpillars or maggot-like creatures, then they go through a pupal or rearrangement stage before the final emergence as adults. The active larva and adult stages usually bear very little resemblance to each other and exploit complete different niches in nature.

Chris then went on to describe and show illustrations of examples from each of these higher orders and filled in with some interesting facts about them.

**Dobson flies**, that I had never heard of before, have about 300 species worldwide, about 26 of them in Australia but mainly in moist, coastal areas. Their main identification feature is a very soft, large abdomen. The larvae are aquatic with many feathery external gills.

**Lacewings** are a much larger group with about 5000 world wide, quite a few we should be familiar with in Central Australia. Their eggs are usually in groups on silky stalks and the larval stage of some species are the ant-lions, that make those conical pits in sand. They sit in the bottom of these traps with just the large jaws exposed waiting for an ant to come for dinner. The adults look delicate and can be identified by the twiggy end-veins on their translucent wings.

**Snake flies**, also called camel flies only occur in the Northern hemisphere. Strange that a whole order should be restricted in this way. They have a very long prothorax and strike their prey with a snake-like movement – hence the name.

**Scorpion Flies** do occur in Australia but not in our area. Their mouthparts are extended into beaklike shapes. They do not have a sting, as the name might suggest, but the male genitalia are often large and curled over its back like a scorpion sting.

With **Caddis Flies** all the larvae are aquatic, and I know many Field Nats will be familiar with them as an indicator of water quality in waterholes. Some build themselves cases to live in and carry around for protection. These are made in a variety of shapes – straight or coiled, - plain or fancy and from a variety of materials like sand or reeds. Some species even manage without them altogether. Most of us would be less familiar with the adult stages. These are moth-like, although clothed in hairs rather than scales and usually with the wings at rest held over the body like an apex roof. They do not have a proboscis and many adults do not feed. They have long antennae, almost the same length as the wings, while moth antennae are usually shorter and feathery.



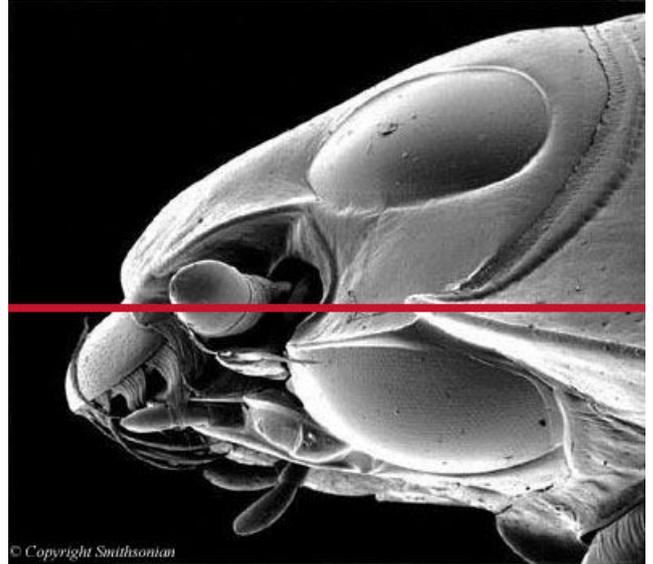
Hawk Moth Caterpillar

**Moths and Butterflies** are one of the larger orders with 160 000 described species, with many more moths than butterflies – 140 000 moths and 20 000 butterflies. In most species the adults have a coiled proboscis. The hawk moth caterpillar is distinguished by large false eye patches well back from the head as protection from predators while its real head and eyes are well hidden under a fold of skin. It also has a prominent spine arising from the tail end and is often very colourful. Our local Yeperenye caterpillar is one of these. Portia had brought in an adult hawkmoth for identification. Its clear wings were smallish compared to the size of its large green fluffy looking body. Interesting too, that no one is really sure what our other local larva with Aboriginal associations, the witchetty grub, develops into. It is known to be a wood moth, but Chris is interested in finding out exactly which species.

There are 6400 described species of **Flies** in Australia. The larvae lack true legs and are therefore maggots which live in a wide variety of habitats. Most 'higher' order insects have 2 pairs of wings but in flies the hind pair are modified into *halteres* (balancers) – little knob like structures which beat alternately to the wings and maintain balance while flying. Chris had some interesting photos of unusual stalk-eyed flies whose eyes are at the end of long horizontal stalks. They are used for display or mating rituals, when males line up against each other like antlered deer. These live in far-north Queensland.

**Wasps, Bees and Ants** form another order. We will all be familiar with the ovipositor on their abdomens which can be used as a sting against prey or enemies. They come in a big variety of sizes and wasps particularly can be brightly patterned.

The **Beetle** order contains by far the largest number of described species, 350 000 world wide, 23 000 in Australia. They are heavily armoured and compact, with the fore wings modified into hardened *elytra* or wing cases, with the hind wings folded underneath when at rest. One of the largest Chris showed us has the grand name of *Titanus giganteus* and a size to match it. We also saw pictures of ladybirds, dung beetles, water beetles and whirligig beetles, all of which we will have seen examples of in Central Australia. The whirligigs have particularly unusual eyes which are effectively divided into four eyes, two to see above the surface and two below, no doubt very useful when you spend most of your life skimming around in circles on the top of the water while looking for dead or injured insects to feed on.



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Microscopic Image of head of Whirligig Beetle

Thank you Chris for a very informative and entertaining talk.

Watch out for another talk from Chris on some of our local insects.

## TRIP REPORT

### A WALK ON THE WILDSIDE

Friday 16 Feb 2007

By Kaye Percy

What better way to end a typical summer's day here in Alice Springs but at a BBQ tea and night walk out at the Telegraph Station? Six members and 2 visitors were able to attend, although I thought there would have been a bigger attendance by members being so close to town.

After a short walk to the waterhole & seeing 3 euros on the other side of the riverbank, we went back to the picnic spot for our dinner. At 7.15 p.m. we headed off to the Bradshaw walk, over by the large car park. The trail is named after Thomas Andrew Bradshaw, station & post master at the Alice Springs Telegraph Station 1899 - 1908.

At the beginning of our walk we came across small puffball fungi, grasshoppers and Mulla Mulla plants. After 10 mins or so of walking torches were put into use spotting Black-footed Rock Wallabies, Fairy Wrens, Wolf Spiders, ants & plenty of grasshoppers.

As we ventured along the trail it was handy having the torches to guide us. Nearing the riverside section of the walk a cooling change in the air temperature was appreciated. Continuing our journey back to the picnic grounds a rather large bush cricket was spotted on the trail, with enormous antennae. The creature was very obliging with not flying off & letting those with cameras take their pictures. Hope your shots turned out well.

We returned to our cars at 8.45 p.m. & drove out of park before the 9 p.m. closing time.

The Bradshaw trail is always interesting & easy to walk, whether during the day or at night time. It's in your backyard so to speak, so check it out!

Thanks to Bob for being our leader.

## WALKING IN THE KURRAJONG HILLS

Sunday 4 March 2007

By Connie Spencer

We expected a half dozen walkers (the diehards), considering the 41 degree temperature the day before but there turned out to be 15 of us. Early arrivals were treated to a viewing of a Channel-billed Cuckoo pursued by a Crow flying into a nearby Ironwood tree (*Acacia estrophiolata*). We introduced ourselves, donned hats, fly repellent, sun screen and packs and off we went with Rosalie Breen in the lead. A light breeze made the morning quite pleasant.



The names of those in the photos

Photo: Connie Spencer

Back row L-R Rhondda, Kate, Melanie, Terry, Rita, Siri, Graeme  
Front row Robyn, Rosalie S., Vicky, Diane, Connie & Kaye  
Not in photo: Gary and Rosalie B.

It wasn't long before hawk-eye Kaye spotted a couple of Western Bower Birds with Gary confirming her sighting. Our next stop was buffel grass free hill slope with a great array of herbs, forbs and grasses which had come up after the January rains, although now past their best. When you see the diversity of a patch like this you realize how much we have lost because of the buffel grass invasion. We discussed a couple of grasses – Mountain Wanderrie

(*Eriachne mucronata*) and Cotton Panic (*Digitaria brownii*) plus the Bottlewashers (Enneapogons). We continued, making our way down the slope to a valley. Black Teatree (*Melaleuca bracteata*) lined the track.

Gary, Rosalie S. & I pondered over the identification of a small tree with smooth grey bark, dark green mostly opposite narrow linear leaves with a prominent raised central vein. There were several in the area and I'm fairly confident they were Supplejack (*Ventilago viminalis*) although Gary wasn't convinced.

Our next stop was to look at a cluster of Bush Bananas (*Marsdenia australis*) in a Corkwood Tree and not long after that we had an excellent view of a Brown Falcon with its dark patches below and behind the eye which Gary referred to as a moustache.

It wouldn't be a Rosalie B. walk without a little geology lesson and she didn't let us down. She pointed out the green & pink rock called unakite which has been used for making jewellery, also a dolerite dike near a Native Orange tree (*Capparis mitchellii*) and that the hills we had been wandering through were made up of schist and gneiss rocks.

We stopped briefly for a rest and energy fix and then it was back to the cars. It was quite a sight from my position as whip to see all the brightly coloured hats, packs and tops traversing a downhill slope in single file.

Thank you Rosalie and to all the other walkers whose love of the bush made everyone such interesting and pleasant company.

## OWEN SPRINGS – TO BE OR NOT TO BE BUT THE CAKE DEFINITELY HAPPENED

By Rhondda Tomlinson  
24<sup>th</sup> March 2007

Friday night I phoned Liz and she was in the middle of cooking a cake for Saturday.

Saturday just past seven o'clock some of us arrived at Bob Read's wondering if the trip was 'a goer' as we had had quite a lot of rain but we could still cross the Wills Terrace causeway. We set off to meet the rest of the party at the Flynn Memorial to head to Owen Springs.

Off down Larapinta Drive we headed and we started the bird list + with a Black Kite, dingo and a Willie Wagtail. One of the small floodways had a little water over the road and 3 Grey Teal having a lovely time. Some "budgies" were doing a fly past and then the fun started. In front of us was the AAT Kings 4WD vehicle parked in the middle of the road with its hazard lights flashing. Of course we all had to see what the problem was:

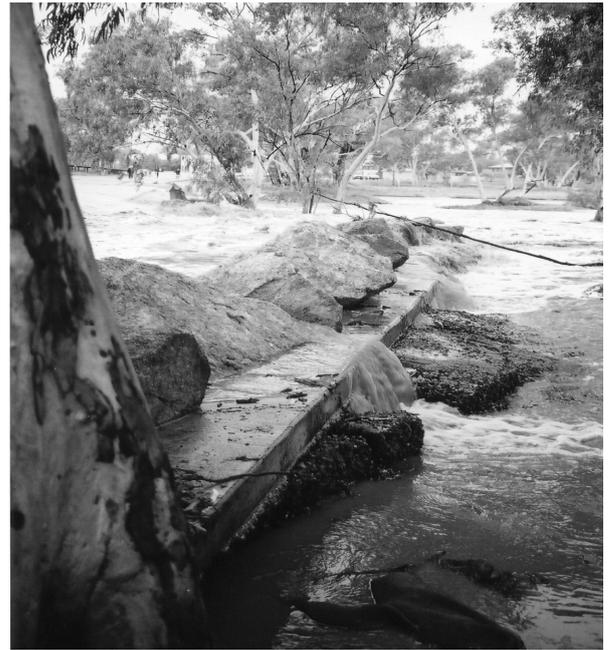


Jay Creek

Photo: Rhondda Tomlinson

Jay Creek was an awesome sight in flood and many photos were taken by the tourist entourage and some 'locals'. Emu Run also joined our traffic lineup. Obviously Owen Springs was off for the day so some of the group turned around and went home.

Bob and his group tried the Standley Chasm Road which soon had the same result but Bob being Bob, he had to combine work with pleasure.



The Todd at Wills Tce

Photo: Liz via Rhondda's camera

I really enjoyed the experience of seeing Jay Creek flowing.

Thank you Bob, Liz and all for a great morning.



Bob's pleasure at Jay Creek

Photo: Rhondda Tomlinson

Bob taking water samples to be later recorded at work. Wood swallows were sighted at this stop.

On the road again and Simpson's Gap just had to be visited as we hadn't found a sheltered place to eat the cake that Liz cooked. Roe Creek was dry but the weather was wet and cold. While eating one very delicious cake the sightings were, a Grey-headed Honeyeater, Rufous Whistler and 25 German school children in summer gear and armed with cameras.

Outside Bob's home were a Rainbow Bee-eater, Turtle Dove and some Grey-crowned Babblers waiting our arrival.

When Liz and I arrived back in town the Todd River was a very different scene.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### **Australian Plants Society speakers.**

Our next meeting is Wednesday 4th April at 7.30 pm at Olive Pink Botanic Garden and the **speaker is Angus Duguid on "A Tale of Two Rare Plants: Two New Names, Two New Surveys"**

Jenny Purdie



## THE NATURALIST NEWS

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THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN NATURALISTS' CLUB INC  
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WESTERN AUSTRALIAN NATURALISTS' CLUB  
Presidents' Report - AGM 2 February 2007

In January – February 2006 when I went on the 2006 ANN Get-together in the Victorian and NSW Highlands which was hosted by the South Eastern Australian Naturalists I met some of the Western Australian Naturalists and they suggested we swap our newsletters. I have been doing this and now have a collection of their news. If anyone is going to WA or is just keen to know what another club is involved with you are most welcome to borrow these newsletters. Just let me know and I can get them to you.

Rhondda Tomlinson.

### Creature Feature

#### MEGAHERBS

By Rosalie Breen

What are they? They are plants endemic to the New Zealand sub Antarctic islands (Campbell Island and Auckland Islands) - flowering plants with very large leaves and colourful and big floral displays. The genera are *Anistome*, *Bulbinella*, *Pleurophyllum* and *Stilbocarpa*.



Pleurophyllum Speciosum

Photo: Rosalie Breen

Gavan and I were lucky to visit and walk around a few of these Islands in January. Stunningly beautiful, wild, windswept, they are largely unspoiled by humans and feral animals (though some areas have been reclaimed).



Meadow of Megaherbs

Photo: Rosalie Breen

What impressed me most were meadows, acres of these big succulent looking gigantic plants with brightly coloured daisy type flowers, so closely packed that sometimes you couldn't help walking on them. Other times growing among tussock grasses where the Royal Albatross (southern race) were nesting.



Royal Albatross in tussock grasses

Photo: Rosalie Breen

The size of the foliage is thought to be an adaptive response to cloudy, humid conditions and cool temperatures, creating an increase of up to 15 degrees C under the leaves. The bright and dark colours of the flowers possibly absorb more heat from the diluted sunlight, enabling fertilization and seed development to proceed more quickly in the short summer season.



Pleurophyllum Criniferum and Bulbinella Rossi Photo: Rosalie Breen

**Copy Deadline** for articles for the next newsletter.  
Friday 27<sup>th</sup> April 2007

### **THE FROG THAT DID NOT CROAK**

After the good rainfall on March 17<sup>th</sup> I was struck by the fact that I could hear no frogs around my house, whereas after the January rain the Brown Tree-frogs were croaking furiously. It can not be the difference in temperature, as in October they call at the least hint of rain. The only explanation I can think of is that a reasonable period of warm temperatures is necessary for the eggs and tadpoles to mature, and as they cannot breed successfully this late in the summer they do not bother to call. This in turn raises the question of what they use for a calendar, perhaps day length? A small mystery that would need a research project to resolve. In retrospect I wish I had recorded whether the frogs were calling after February rain in other summers.

Robert Read

Photocopying

Courtesy

LJ Hooker Real Estate

**ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED**  
**Minutes of the General Meeting held at Olive Pink Botanic Garden**  
**Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> March 2007**

**Open:** The President, Bob Read, welcomed members and visitors. Speaker: Chris Palmer, Entomologist on the “Higher Order Insects”. Business meeting opened at 9 pm.  
**Present:** As per attendance book (19 members and 7 visitors)  
**Apologies:** Kevin Boyle, Leoni Read, Marg and Jim Lawrence, Iain Campbell, Kaye Percy & Rosalie Schultz  
**Minutes:** The meeting resolved to accept the minutes of the previous meeting held Wednesday, 14<sup>th</sup> February 2007 as a true and correct record of that meeting.

**Correspondence In:**  
 WANC newsletter The Naturalist News  
 TSN newsletter The Web  
 Australia Post account for PO Box  
 NTFNC newsletter *Nature Territory* Mar 07  
 WBC bank statement  
 Helen Morgan (email) greetings

**Correspondence Out:**  
 Michael Barritt thank you

**Treasurer’s Report:**  
 Opening balance (end Jan 07) \$2654.47  
 Plus  
 Subscriptions \$37.50  
 No expenditure  
 Closing Balance (end February 07) \$2691.97

**General Business:**

**Australian Natural History Medallion** – The Medallion is awarded annually in recognition of services to Australian natural history. It is administered by the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria. It costs about \$800 per year and is reliant on donations from natural history clubs throughout Australia. Moved by Jenny Purdie and seconded by Rhondda Tomlinson to send \$100.

**Earth Hour:** Proposal for individuals to turn off all electricity on March 31 for one hour. Bob to email details to members.

**Outings:**

Sat 17 Mar 07	Miss Pink’s Birthday celebrations – “Art in the Garden” at Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Volunteers required for 2 hour seating in the visitor centre 10am – 4pm 18 <sup>th</sup> March – 31 March. Raffle tickets for sale. Contact: the Curator, Colleen O’Malley on 8952 2154.
Sat 24 March 07	Owen Springs Reserve. Visit waterhole near ranger station. Meet 7:30 am Flynn’s Grave. High clearance vehicle recommended. Contact Bob Read on 8952 1935
Easter LWE Fri 6 Apr – Mon 9 Apr 07	Trip to Ringwood & Numery Stations. Meet 9am Friday at the Date Farm. Bob to email details when finalised.
Wed 11 Apr 07	FNC monthly meeting 7:30pm OPBG. Speaker to be announced.
Sat 21 Apr 07	N’Dahala Gorge. Suggested that we ask Peter Latz if he would like to attend. Meet 7:30 am at the Date Farm. Contact: Bob Read on 8952 19345.
Sat 5 May – Mon 7 May 07	Larapinta Trail Stage 9 proposed
Sat & Sun 19 & 20 May 07	Old Hamilton Downs Youth Camp. Dates confirmed. Increase in cost from \$15pp/night to \$25pp/per night.

**Newsletter:** Barb suggested that Australian Plant Society outings and meeting notices be printed in the FNC newsletter. Details need to be passed on to Liz Carpenter.

**Gate Opener:** Jenny Purdie      **Supper for April:** Rosalie Breen      **Note taker for April:** Rosalie Schultz

**Sightings:**

- Connie – Lemon Migrant & Common Eggfly butterflies in Araluen area also Channel- billed Cuckoo in Kurrajong Drive.
- Liz – 6 Pacific Black Duck chicks and 1 pelican at the Sewage Ponds.
- Boobook Owl at Kuyunba Reserve
- Barb – Red-throats in the Larapinta hills.
- Rosalie - Little Corellas on ANZAC oval

**Meeting closed:** 9:27 pm.