

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

May 2007



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# Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club 2007

by Rosalie Breen

## MEETINGS

**7.30 pm** on the second Wednesday of the month.

**Venue:** Olive Pink Botanic Garden, Tuncks Road

**Wed 9<sup>th</sup> May.** Speaker to be a surprise.

June, Rick Davies of CSIRO, *Endangered plants in the Australian arid zone*

## TRIPS / ACTIVITIES

**Sat 5-Mon 7 May.** Larapinta Trail stage 9. Contact Bob Read 8952 1935

**Sat 19 – Sun 20 May.** Old Hamilton Downs Youth Camp. Cost \$25 per night. Meet at Sargent Street/ North Stuart Highway sign at 8.30am. Contact Bob Read 8952 1935

**Sun 27 May** Walk along hilltop to the west of the Old Ghan Railway Stn to Rifle Range fence and return along base either southern or northern side. ½ day easy walk. Meet at the Old Ghan Railway Station at 8:00 am. Contact Connie Spencer on 8952 4694

**Sat 9-Mon 11 June.** Ruby Gap. Leader needed please.

### NOTE ON CLUB TRIPS

This is a reminder that off major highways we travel by convoy rules as below.

Check regularly that the vehicle behind is still following. If dust is bad this may mean slowing or stopping to allow the dust to clear. Always wait at each turn off until it is absolutely clear that the vehicle behind can see exactly where you are turning.

UHF radio can be used as alternative to establish that the vehicles behind are still OK.

## NEW MEMBERS

Welcome to our new members Portia Peterkin, Colleen O'Malley, Michelle Walker, Anne Pye, Julie Starkey and Gary Wright

## GUEST SPEAKER REPORT

### FIRE AND SEEDS

#### IN THE ALYAWARR REGION

David Moore of CSIRO, and linguist  
11<sup>th</sup> April 2007

When David and his family lived at Parrngurr, 375 km from Newman, Canning Country in WA, smoke plumes were the norm, from fires deliberately lit by the Aboriginal people. In fact he said it was part of a school picnic event to light up some spinifex. But when he moved to the Sandover area, Alyawarr country, in 1995-98 there was little or no burning.

Aboriginal people use fire for many reasons:

- Flushing game
- Seeing tracks
- Regenerating grass for game animals to eat
- Easy access to sites
- Stimulating growth of bush foods.

Part of his work was linguistic and the production of a dictionary of the Alyawarr language. This is important as words and their meanings define the culture. One word will show what is important and tell a whole story of the way of life.

*ilpat* = a burnt area of ground; an area cleared by fire, often with new growth

*ilpatilevel* = a verb, to burn grass, or clear by burning

The people would go a long way to visit such areas to hunt Echidnas which burrowed in under the termite mounds. With the clear area they could easily see the tracks of game, and also read who or what had passed their camp area. So they don't like too many trees or lots of leaf litter. At one place, quite open with a few Acacia Trees for shade, one day David found the trees cut down. The old man said "the trees were hemming me in". Aboriginal attitude to trees is different to the white culture, which poses a problem when tree planting is encouraged around outstations. Some have suggested that humans prefer a Savannah, with clear land around them.

*antywenp* = thick grass, unburned area

One word again used to describe an important concept. The mind set of the Alyawarr is to clear areas of overgrown grass, whereas the station owners look to the grass to feed their cattle. So in this area there is a conflict of interest in the uses of burning between these two lots of people. If the systematic burning of grass and fire-loving plants does not take place a major holocaust could occur and some plant species could die out. A change of attitude or compromise is required.

One of the plants which require burning to produce well is the Desert Raisin. Stories in language have been collected about how to manage this plant and the effect the white fellows' culture of not burning has had. Fiona

Walsh and Josie Douglas are managing a project for the commercial gathering of Desert Raisins, and are learning from the traditional owners. Alyawarr has different names for different stages of the raisin, indicating the importance of the food. Their food gathering was not haphazard but followed areas of fire clearing.

David showed us the Alyawarr Picture Dictionary and a large booklet of photos about gathering desert raisin. (published by IAD Press)

Also a couple of references about burning country.

‘Burning Bush – a fire history of Australia’ by Stephen Pyne (1991)

‘Fire and Hearth – a study of Aboriginal usage and European usurpation in South West Australia’ by Sylvia Hallam (1975)

Twenty –six people, half being visitors, enjoyed this enlightening talk which engendered quite a bit of informative discussion.

## **TRIP REPORT**

### **KUYUMBA RESERVE**

By Rosalie Schultz

10<sup>th</sup> March 2007

We confronted both Arrernte and whiteman law this morning, as we stroll around the Kuyumba Reserve adjacent to the Joint Defence Facility at Pine Gap.

A great turn out of 19 people came for an “easy plant focussed walk around the reserve”, led by Connie.

Clear signage indicated that part of the trail was taboo and prohibited for women. Like the majority of women in the group, I agreed to return along the same path, rather than face whatever the taboo sight was. I feel that we have offended enough of the Arrernte culture already, without passing through areas we now know are forbidden. I doubt there is any enforcement of these Arrernte laws, besides our own consciences.

However the whiteman law was much more visible. Two uniformed officers arrived and confronted us soon after we began our walk. Apparently our convoy of 9 vehicles had been reported to them, and they recorded the licence plate of every vehicle. When they met us they politely demanded the licence details for the driver of every vehicle. I recorded their identification details to make a fair exchange. Contact me for further details.

Once legitimated, we set off on our walk.

Definitely a plant-centred walk, led by our plant experts. Some very attractive Cypress Pines (*Callitris*

*glaucophylla*) grew against the sandstone rock face. The colours and shapes of different trees were very attractive. Other trees were the Ironwood (*Acacia estrophiolata*) and Mulga (*Acacia aneura*). The range of leaf shapes of the Mulgas is notable even in adjacent bushes, from needle-shaped to broad spade-like leaves. Stories of a particular Mulga variant, the “Holey Mulga” led some of the group up the hillside in search of specimens.

Other trees were the Colony Wattle (*Acacia murrayana*), a beautiful tree with its smooth smoky white trunks, colonising the lower areas through shoots. Up the hillside was an attractive Wild Orange (*Capparis mitchellii*), old and straggly. Its dense leaves provided a suitable daytime roosting place for an owl....

However it was the grasses that gave us most to talk about. These are in two families, the Poaceae, and the Cyperaceae. All but the sedges are Poaceae.

The first one we looked at was the Woollybutt Wanderrrie, *Eriachne helmsii*. This is a coarse stalky tussocky grass to 90cm. The roughened leaves are pointed and the seed heads loosely branched. They turn white and fluffy when mature.

The “true” Woollybutt, *Eragrostis eriopoda*, is a lovegrass, with smooth stems and seed heads making up a large proportion of the plant. We saw these close by.

Cotton Panic Grass (*Digitaria brownii*), is a slender, tussocky, hairy perennial grass. Stock like to eat it, so it suggests the exclusion of cattle from the region. It occurs as scattered plants and requires heavy summer rain for establishment. The leaves are flat, small, soft and grow mainly at the base.

The 8 Day Grass, (*Fimbristylis dichotoma*) is a sedge. Sedges are characterised by unjoined triangular stems and the flowers being at the ends of the stems, where 2 to 4 flat leaves point out horizontally. 8 Day Grass is good cattle feed.

There were Spinifex tussocks, another a Poaceae, in the valley, probably the *Triodia basedowii*, with the sharp bases dominated by the flowers. This is a hard Spinifex, growing in dense circular hummocks.

The Button Grass, *Dactyloctenium radulans*, is a soft sprawling tuft. It is much lower than other grasses and has a distinctive seed head.

Other plants I wrote in my list included a Sida, *Ptilotus obovata*, and *Eremophila latrobei*,

Birds were seen by the bird-lovers on the walk. These included:

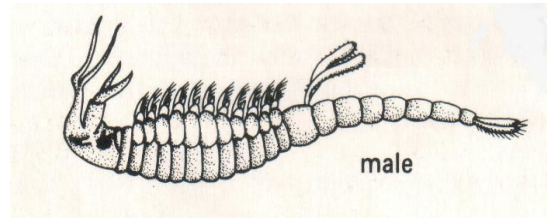
Southern Boobook Owl hidden in the Wild Orange up the hillside

Grey-headed Honeyeater (identifiable by its *yellow* underparts and ear plume)

Grey Fantail fluttering in some Mulga

Bowerbird in a huge Fig Tree.

It was a hot day, and we finished off before 10am.



Fairy shrimp diagram

## FAIRY SHRIMPS AT RINGWOOD STATION

Easter 2007

by Rosalie Breen

Looking down from a small hill near Ringwood Homestead we saw a beautiful wetland amid an extensive green grassland, a legacy of the recent rains. The soil was clayey and sticky, the water not very deep – knee high. Colleen reverted to a younger day and went paddling in the mud, netting for invertebrates. Much to our delight we found nine different species, the majority being crustaceans; including Fairy Shrimps (order Anostraca) and Shield Shrimps (order Notostraca).

These two primitive animals can survive in quite salty environments and lay their eggs in the clay soil, resistant to periods of desiccation, so that rain water sets them hatching and into a frenzy of growth and reproduction. Fairy shrimp are elongate and swim upside down, filter feeding on microorganisms collected along a groove in their thorax. A delicate creature, they are almost invisible in the water, their two black protruding eyes and the contents of the alimentary canal noticeable, their bodies and feathery legs transparent. The station wetland shrimps were tiny, 2-3 mm long (*Parartemia?*), whereas those from another area near the Telstra communication tower were around 20 mm, and had two reddish fanlike appendages at the end. (*Branchinella?*) The other invertebrates found were Seed Shrimps, Copepods, Water Boatman, Backswimmers, Beetles, Midge Larvae and Mosquito Larvae.

Bob measured the salinity level using electrical conductivity in the pools near the Telstra tower. 315 microSiemens/cm in a shallow puddle, 200 in a deeper po

## BIRD LIST FROM RINGWOOD STATION

Easter 2007

By Bob Read, several observers

White-necked Heron  
Chestnut Teal  
Black Kite  
Black-breasted Buzzard  
Whistling Kite  
Wedge-tailed Eagle  
Peregrine Falcon  
Grey Falcon  
Brown Falcon  
Nankeen Kestrel  
Little Button-quail  
Peaceful Dove  
Diamond Dove  
Crested Pigeon  
Red-tailed Black Cockatoo  
Galah  
Cockatiel  
Budgerigar  
Mulga Parrot  
Red-backed Kingfisher  
White-backed Swallow  
Richard's Pipit  
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike  
White-winged Triller  
Red-capped Robin  
Hooded Robin  
Rufous Whistler  
Grey Shrike-thrush  
Crested Bellbird  
Willie Wagtail  
Chiming Wedgebill  
Grey-crowned Babbler  
White-browed Babbler  
Rufous Songlark  
Brown Songlark  
Variegated Fairywren  
White-winged Fairywren  
Chestnut-rumped Thornbill  
Southern Whiteface  
Banded Whiteface  
Varied Sitella  
Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater  
White-plumed Honeyeater

Black Honeyeater  
Pied Honeyeater  
Crimson Chat  
Red-browed Pardalote  
Zebra Finch  
Magpie Lark  
Masked Woodswallow  
White-browed Woodswallow  
Black-faced Woodswallow  
Little Woodswallow  
Grey Butcherbird  
Pied Butcherbird  
Australian Magpie

### **N'DHALA GORGE TRIP**

Sat 21 April

#### **A POEM**

By Gavan Breen

We got all the way to Jessie Gap,  
Before we had our first mishap.  
No stopping to dance the Corroboree Rock,  
But rubbers a-rubbing gave Robert a shock.  
The camel pedestrians crossed at their leisure,  
Then humans pressed on to go searching for treasure.  
A chain of small waters, all teeming with life,  
Giant larvae that mystified my busy wife.  
The active green shield shrimps, with red legs all waving,  
Must have studied us gawkers, how we were behaving.  
In waterside branches doves and finches were buddies,  
While raptors were rapting, with eyes on the budgies.  
The old people left us their carvings on boulders,  
Of ancestral butterflies' lives these rocks told us.

#### **Creature Feature**

### **VENEMOUS LIZARDS**

By Jim Gilfedder

Did you know that the bearded dragon has poison glands in its mouth?  
Not only that, but 9 toxins are shared by snakes and lizards, including classic rattlesnake toxins in the bearded dragon.

Nasty swellings and excessive bleeding following lizard bites have in the past been explained as due to bacteria in the mouths of carrion-eating lizards!

It seems that snakes and lizards evolved from a common ancestor some 200 million years ago.

DNA studies show that the closest relatives to the snakes are the iguanas and a group including the two known venomous lizards AND the monitors, (or goannas as we call them). No other lizards have venom, (but they do have salmonellae, but that's another story/end).

Classification may need to be revised. Tell that to a botanist!

References to Google...

[newscientist.com/article.ns?id=dn8331&print=true](http://newscientist.com/article.ns?id=dn8331&print=true)

Bryan Fry, University of Melbourne.

Copy deadline for articles for the next newsletter.

Friday 1<sup>st</sup> June 2007

**PHOTOCOPYING**

**COURTESY**

**LJ HOOKER REAL ESTATE**

**ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED**  
**Minutes of the General Meeting held at Olive Pink Botanic Garden**  
**Wednesday 11 April 2007**

- Open:** The President, Bob Read, welcomed members and visitors. Speaker: David Moore on “Bush seeds and burning - traditional Alywarr land management”. Business meeting opened 9 pm.
- Present:** As per attendance book (12 members and 12 visitors).
- Apologies:** Leoni Read, Rhondda Tomlinson, Gary Wright, Julie Starkey & Ian Archibald.
- Minutes:** The meeting resolved to accept the minutes of the previous meeting held Wednesday, 14<sup>th</sup> March 2007 as a true and correct record of that meeting.

**Correspondence In:**

Fleurieu Birdwatchers	Information on the Fleurieu Bird Encounter
WANC	Newsletter <i>The Naturalist News</i> April 07
NTFNC	Newsletter <i>Nature Territory</i> April 07
SEANA Inc.	Information on Spring Camp hosted by the Peninsula FN Club
WBC	Bank statement

**Correspondence Out:**

Chris Palmer thank you

**Treasurer’s Report:**

Opening balance end Feb 07		\$2691.97
Plus		
Annual subscriptions	\$42.50	
Bank interest	3.96	
Less		
Post office box renewal	\$65.00	
Closing balance end Mar 07		<u>\$2673.43</u>

**General Business:**

Garden for Wildlife – Jenny Purdie advised that she has joined and is the seconded member. Heidi Groffen, Coordinator is keen for those who expressed interest to joining, do so ASAP. Website information passed around.

**Outings:**

Sat 21 Apr 07	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 May – Mon 7 May 07	Larapinta Trail Section 9. Contact Bob Read on 8952 1935
Wed 9 May 07	FNC monthly meeting 7:30pm OPBG
Sat & Sun 19 & 20 May 07	Old Hamilton Downs Youth Camp. Cost \$25pp/night. Meet Sargent Street sign on the North Stuart Hwy @ 8:30am. Contact Bob Read on 8952 1935.
Sun 27 May 07	
Sat 9- Mon 11 Jun 07	Ruby Gap. Need a leader.

Barb advised that she will be unable to carry out **treasurer duties or collate/post newsletter** for the month of June. Marilyn Hall offered to do newsletter and Jenny Purdie treasurer duties.

**Gate Opener for May:** Connie Spencer      **Supper for May:** Marilyn Hall      **Note taker for May:** Bill Smyth

**Sightings:**

- Liz – Channel-billed cuckoo still around. Avocet & Pacific Black Duck chicks at sewage ponds. Wader numbers dropping off from 150 – 20. Also reported seeing Swifts.
- Bob – Crimson Chats, Masked and White-browed Woodswallows and Grey Falcon on Ringwood. Centralian Carpet Python at Santa Teresa.
- Rosalie B. – Fairy & Shield Shrimps in wetland on Ringwood Station.

**Meeting closed:** 9:35 pm.