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Inc. PO Box 8663, Alice Springs, NT 0871

March 2008



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Web site : [www.geocities.com/alicenats](http://www.geocities.com/alicenats)

# Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club 2008

## MEETINGS

7.30 pm on the second Wednesday of the month.

Venue: Olive Pink Botanic Garden, Tuncks Road

**16<sup>th</sup> March.** Speaker Chris Brock. "Biophysical (vegetation) mapping and conservation"

**9<sup>th</sup> April.** Speaker Jon Delaine. "Invasive bird species in Alice Springs"

## TRIPS / ACTIVITIES

**Sunday March 9th.** Mound Springs near Ormiston Gorge. Meet 7 AM at Flynn's Monument, Larapinta Drive. It will help our relations with Parks and Wildlife if we can reduce the number of vehicles as far as possible. Bitumen road to Glen Helen, a short section of dirt track and possibly some sand to get to Two Mile Waterhole. Bring lunch, water, hat. Leader Bob Read Phone 8952 1935

**Sat -Sun 15 -16 March.** 8.30 -11am plant sale, Olive Pink Botanic Gardens.

**Easter Monday March 24<sup>rd</sup>.** Morning walk in the Kurrajong Hills. Meet 6.30am opposite 88 Kurrajong Drive or thereabouts. Bring hat, water, snack. Walk will be 2 to 3 hours depending on the temperature. Approx 5km. Leader Rosalie Breen. Phone 8952 3409

**Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> March,** barbeque tea at Simpson Gap to farewell Liz, followed by spotting for frog and other creatures around the water hole. Meet 6 PM at Simpson Gap. Bring a picnic dinner (BBQ or not as you prefer), drinks and a torch.

**Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> April, Fenn Gap.** (NOTE This trip is subject to obtaining permission, details will be in the April newsletter.)

Also coming up in April, drive through **Owen Springs and Lawrence Gorge.**

May, Ruby Gap, Larapinta Trail Stage 11, Wigley Gorge to Old Telegraphs Station.

## GUEST SPEAKER REPORT

### UNUSUAL ANIMALS, PLANTS AND HABITATS OF CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

Michael Barritt

Community Education Officer, Parks and Wildlife.  
12 Feb 2008

By Barb Gilfedder

Since leaving school, he has worked for NT Parks and Wildlife at several locations in the Territory. His interest and enthusiasm for our local environment made him an excellent speaker at the February Field Nats. meeting.

He said he would love to have seen the country 200 years ago and believes it would have looked very different and also have contained a much larger range of plant and animal species. For example the **common brushtail possum** was once common and widespread in Central Australia but underwent a dramatic decline between the 1920s and 1950s. Michael has only seen evidence of small remnant populations in the Western MacDonnells. This disappearance has been a boon for **mistletoe** species, a favourite possum food. This may well have had a detrimental effect on some of the **acacia** trees and shrubs. So the decline of one species can impact on many others.

More favourites of Michael's are the tiny **resurrection ferns**. There are several species that occur scattered through the rocky hills in our area. They often appear dead but within a few days of good rain they revive and look green and fresh. They nestle under rocks and also under mulga trees, both of which sites can be very vulnerable to buffel grass invasion. There are other species of ferns in Central Australia, surprising for such a dry climate, but many are relic species only occurring in secluded, sheltered gorges, leftovers from wetter climatic conditions.

Recently Parks and Wildlife have been monitoring Giles Spring, and Michael was lucky enough to be there last month when it rained. There is permanent water there and beautiful fern banks. The **green tree frogs** came out to celebrate the rain while he was there and he was amazed at the numbers of them - 270 were counted on a 350 metre walk back to camp after dark. Frogs don't seem to mind putrid water and Michael had an interesting photograph of a large group of **red tree frogs** sitting on the back of a dead euro that was floating in the water at Anna's reservoir.

He took his group of Junior Rangers out to Emily Gap where the water was also pretty smelly but teeming with macro-invertebrates. We have several species of native fish in Central Australia. These can also tolerate a wide range of water conditions – some even occurring in the Ormiston mound-springs which are salty and contain a range of other dissolved minerals.

Feral animals, horses in particular can threaten waterholes. They also pick out the best grasses to eat and are able to stay in good condition unless there is extreme drought. Horse control is a continuous job and the feral camel problem has become so enormous it will take a massive amount of money to eradicate them.



Central Rock-rat

Michael talked about and showed pictures of more interesting animals. The **central rock-rat**, which was thought to be extinct, was rediscovered at several sites within the MacDonnell Range National Park in quite large numbers. However in the 2002 bushfires it was hard hit and has not been trapped again since. The shaggy-haired **desert mouse** is another mammal that built up in numbers and was particularly common around the Ochre pits. The **Centralian blue-tongue lizard** is another very special animal. Michael recently picked up a baby one in Peko Road in Tennant Creek – such a fat little thing with beautiful stripes, that can flatten out its body to look really wide and angle it towards a perceived enemy. A more distinctly striped customer is the **bandy bandy snake** which can loop up its body off the ground, probably in order to confuse predators. Michael also talked about fire and our need to manage the country more effectively. He mentioned liverworts and blue-green algae and the sand crust they create which reduces erosion, and also the wide range of plants that only grow really well after fire...

...and as a finale Michael extracted from a calico bag a **black-headed python**. What a magnificent creature! Many of the audience were keen to take up the privilege of holding it and feeling it slide through their hands and around their waists.

Thank you Michael for sharing your enthusiasm and knowledge with us.

You can see more of his photos on [www.flickr.com/photos/centralaustralia/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/centralaustralia/).

A good site for children is [www.nt.gov.au/nreta/parks/kids](http://www.nt.gov.au/nreta/parks/kids)



Black-headed Python

Threatened species information can be found at [www.nt.gov.au/nreta/wildlife/animalsthreatened/specieslist](http://www.nt.gov.au/nreta/wildlife/animalsthreatened/specieslist) and in a 2007 publication “*Lost from our landscape*” Woinarski et al, NT Government. “*The Flaming desert*” PK Latz is also good on fire impact on Central Australia.

## **TRIP REPORT**

### **INTERTEXTA FOREST, ILPARPA**

A guided walk with Peter Latz

Sat 16<sup>th</sup> Feb.

By Michelle Walker

The Field Naturalists gathered at the Intertexta Forest in the cool early morning to lend an ear to local legend Peter Latz. Peter is the author of “Bushfires and Bushtucker” and “Flaming Deserts”, and has a passion for the Central Australian landscape that was evident during his guided walk of the Intertexta Forest. Much of Peter’s work looks at the influence of fire in the Central Australian landscape and even in an area as small as the Intertexta Forest there was clear evidence of the effects of fire. The following represents some of the information Peter talked about during our visit to the Intertexta forest.

*Eucalyptus intertexta* or bastard coolibah as it’s affectionately known is one of the tall trees found in woodland surrounding Alice Springs. Peter refers to the Intertexta forest as a dry jungle. Although not a true forest or jungle because of the sparse canopy cover, the

area does have a high biodiversity of woody plants, around 20 species of trees and shrubs, and four vines including bush banana (*Marsdenia australis*) and native jasmine. A veritable smorgasbord (edible or otherwise) appeared as we were presented with wild passionfruit (*Capparis spinosa*), bush banana, beefwood (*Grevillea striata*) and native apricot (*Pittosporum angustifolium*). Apparently a good pepper can be made by grinding up the seeds of wild passionfruit and bush banana is best lightly toasted on the fire.

Peter has worked hard to remove buffel grass from under several large trees, with the patches exhibiting a good return of native species. Thanks to the work of Peter and the Ilparpa Landcare Group there is now no live buffel grass in the fenced block, but seeds hidden in topsoil provide a constant threat. Peter suggested spraying buffel a few weeks after rain when growth is at its most rigorous, using 'frog-friendly' Round-up due to the surprising number of frogs, identified by call as *Cyclorana mainii*, that lie dormant in the woodland soils waiting for rain.

According to Peter very few old trees now remain in Central Australia, meaning there are no possums, native cats or other larger mammals that depend on the hollows of old trees. One cause for the lack of old trees is hot fires; trees with hollows form funnels that allow fires to burn extremely well, particularly hot fires that are spread by weeds. The largest tree at the Intertexta Forest had died after a fire was deliberately lit 3 years ago. Multi-stemmed *E. intertexta* trees that have re-sprouted are evidence of earlier fires.

The short walk in the Intertexta forest uncovered a surprisingly green oasis hiding a myriad of curiosities, not to mention the tallest needle bush tree (*Hakea leucoptera*.) Peter has seen.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

I had a phone call from Morgan Flint and he is going back to Adelaide for a while to look after his 93 year old mother at Thebarton (near Mile End). His family, he said, has lived there for the last 180 years!

His new e-mail address is: [morganlfli@gmail.com](mailto:morganlfli@gmail.com)

His mobile is: 0437422494.

Rhondda.

## **Creature Feature**

### **SUMMER MIGRATION**

By Rosalie Breen.

Where did they go?

Like migratory birds, most of the committee deserted Alice Springs during the hot summer.

Bob went solo walking for two weeks on the South Coast and Port Davey Tracks in Tasmania.

Birdwatching in Thailand was for Liz and meeting up with Eric Tan and his family.

Rhondda opted for the colder areas of the Antarctic Peninsular and the fiords of Chile.

Rosalie also got to be cold in Nepal, trekking and exploring Katmandu. .

## **BIRDWATCHING WITH ERIC**

CHANGI POOH PITS

Singapore

8/2/08

By Liz Carpenter

I caught up with Eric Tan, Alice Springs' one time bird photographer, during a brief stop-over in Singapore. Eric eagerly made his escape from Chinese New Year celebrations to show me his favourite smelly hunting grounds in Singapore. The area is restricted so I can't tell you exactly where it is, except that the birds were to the east and the Jumbo Jets were to the west!

We bumped around the area in Eric's trusty Land Rover, dedicated to the ghost company "Mountains Beyond". We avoided Sri Lankan guest workers who feared that we would disappear deep into their smelly work areas. They followed us doggedly to anxiously tell us of their responsibilities for preventing disasters, and seemed reassured when they recognised Eric!

Eric was in fine form chasing an elusive snipe that took flight as soon as he was ready for the "shoot". Up and down the same stretch of soft smelly road for an hour watching and waiting.

As chief spotter I reported the description of a bird that was not supposed to be there...a Red-throated Pipit. This prompted yet another race up and down to get the proof picture for the "boys". Alas, it was not meant to be.

We saw Blue-tailed Bee-eaters, a Little Ringed Plover, a Brahminy Kite, Western Marsh Harriers, Black-shouldered Kites, Little Egrets, Purple Herons, Barn Swallows, Yellow Wagtails, Richards Pipits, Scaly, White-headed and Black-headed Munias, a Tiger Shrike and House Sparrows. Not bad when the runway was less than a kilometre away with Jumbo Jets taking off every 3 minutes or so!

I was privileged to share Chinese New Year feasting with Eric and his family at the end of the day. A very pleasant way to end a great holiday.

Eric has now returned to working in Derby and advises that his new pics, including those from Christmas Island in January, will be on his website [www.mountainsbeyond.org](http://www.mountainsbeyond.org).

## **a note on CAPITALS**

Previously newsletter policy has been to follow Birds Australia policy and capitalise common names as in Crested Pigeon, and we have tried to do this for other groups, as in Witchetty Bush and Red Kangaroo, on the grounds that these are proper nouns. However it has become increasingly clear that general practise is to use lower case for common names. We have therefore given up, gone with the flow and accepted lower case.

Bob

**Copy DEADLINE** for articles for the next newsletter Monday 24 March.  
(Have to get this copy posted early this month. Thanks, Ed.)

**ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED  
MINUTES OF GENERAL MEETING HELD AT OLIVE PINK BOTANIC GARDEN  
WEDNESDAY 13 FEBRUARY 2008**

**OPEN:**

President, Bob Read

**PRESENT:**

As per attendance book

**APOLOGIES:**

Ian Fox, Ian Archibald, Sarah Wilson, Rhondda Tomlinson

**PREVIOUS MINUTES:**

Rosalie moved that the minutes of the previous meeting (Wednesday 14 November 2007) be accepted as a true and correct record.

Seconded - Jenny Purdie

**CORRESPONDENCE - IN:**

- The Naturalist News (Western Australian Naturalists Club)
- Westpac bank statement - current balance of \$3093.56 cr.
- Letter from Australian Natural History Medallion seeking nomination for candidates and/or donation towards administrative costs.

**GENERAL BUSINESS:**

- Position of Secretary still vacant - Sue happy to fill in until AGM in August. Meeting accepted.
- Newsletter Editor, Liz Carpenter leaving end of March. Volunteer needed.
- Visit to museum postponed as Ian is in Turkey.
- As from Friday week, Bob will be working in his new position at Power and Water. He will advise new contact number.
- Colleen has advised that there are no Field Nats. brochures left. Rosalie will attend.

**OUTINGS:**

- Sunday March 2<sup>nd</sup>, meet 7am at the Sewage Ponds
- Trip to mound springs near Ormiston Gorge brought forward to 9<sup>th</sup> March.
- Morning walk Easter Monday (24/3/08) in the Kurrajong Hills. Meet 6.30am opposite 88 Kurrajong Drive or thereabouts.

**SIGHTINGS:**

Channel-billed cuckoos, mistletoe birds, Barb sighted an albino zebra finch. Leonie saw flocks of budgies and a perentie. Six seagulls sighted at the sewerage ponds on Christmas Day.

**Gate Opener for March:**

**Note Taker for March:** Rosalie

**Supper for March:** Liz

**Meeting closed:** 9.35 pm