

If not claimed within 14 days please return to the Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club  
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

## REMINDERS FOR NEXT MEETING

Gate Opener: Bob    Supper: Connie    Note Taker:  
Bob

## MEETINGS

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

**14<sup>th</sup> May**, Dick Kimber, "History of Natural History in Central Australia". Dick is the authority on early biological exploration in the region and this should be an entertaining and informative talk.

## TRIPS / ACTIVITIES

**May 17<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup>**, Stage 11 of the Larapinta Trail, Redbank Gorge to Glen Helen. For those who do not want to do the overnight walk there is the option of walking from Redbank to Rocky Bar Gap and back. Meet 7:30 AM at Flynn Grave. Please contact Bob Read 89521935 if going.

**May 31<sup>st</sup>**, Wigley Gorge to Old Telegraph Station, morning walk of about 3 hours.

**June 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup>**. 3 day walk in the West Macs for the enthusiasts, restricted numbers.

## AUSTRALIAN PLANT SOCIETY MEETINGS/TRIPS

Australian Plants Society meeting Wednesday 4 June, 2008, 7:30 pm @ Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Speaker: Glenis McBurnie, Biodiversity Conservation Officer with Greening Australia, Alice Springs. Topic to be announced.

Australian Plants Society meeting Wednesday, 2 July, 2008, 7:30 pm @ Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Speaker: Colleen O'Malley, Curator OPBG. Topic: Clues to identifying the major central Australian plant families.

### **Australian Plant Society trips**

Sat & Sun 21 & 22 June 2008 - *Acacia latzii* monitoring sites for a weekend of measuring growth of seedlings.  
Contact: Connie Spencer on 8952 4694

## GUEST SPEAKER REPORT

### Feral Birds in Alice Springs Presentation by: Jon Delaine

By Sarah Wilson

Feral animals have had a significant impact on Australia. The number of feral vertebrates alone stands at around 80 ranging from Camels to Cane Toads. The impacts of feral animals on the environment include promoting the spread of weeds and diseases, and contributing to habitat degradation. Introduced animals become feral when they either escape from captivity (i.e. doves), are deliberately released (i.e. mute swans, rabbits), or follow human migration routes (i.e. rats, sparrows).

#### **Impact of Feral Birds in Alice Springs**

Alice Springs is an ecological island, isolated in a desert of limited resources. For now, this means that feral birds are only present in town where water and food are plentiful. Native birds are still able to out-compete ferals in non-urban areas. In Alice Springs feral birds compete with native birds for nesting spaces, food and water. Feral birds have the potential to harbour diseases to which native birds have no immunity. In addition feral birds have been found to be more gregarious and aggressive than native birds, and, unlike native birds, are capable of nesting in areas of high human traffic. These factors combine to lead to a decrease in the population of native birds, such as Peaceful and Diamond doves, and lower biodiversity. A potential threat is that feral birds will adapt to the harsh conditions outside of Alice Springs and will disperse out of town.

Several species of birds have either escaped from aviaries or have been deliberately released in Alice Springs to become ferals. Most species haven't been able to establish a breeding population and have been controlled by Parks and Wildlife Service staff. These species include Lovebirds, Indian Ringnecks, Rock pigeons, and Barbary doves. Control efforts have included poisoning, trapping and shooting. Sparrows have followed the watering points along stock routes from QLD and NSW into the Barkly region and Tennant Creek. They are aggressive birds and have a high rate of reproduction, and therefore have the potential to spread throughout Central Australia.

#### **Turtledoves**

Turtledoves escaped from aviaries in Alice Springs during the 1990s. They quickly established a breeding population and are now the dominant suburban bird species in Alice Springs. Their population is estimated at around 8000 individuals. For the present, the birds are

only present in urban areas, but have been observed at Ilparpa and the Alice Springs turf club. Turtledoves are successful in Alice Springs due to their ability to out-compete native doves, and their high rate of reproduction.



*Spotted Turtledove, perched*



*Spotted Turtledove, in flight*

In the past, Parks and Wildlife staff have conducted large scale trapping and shooting programs. As the shooting program became unpopular with residents, public opinion and the large cost of equipment and staff time brought about its end. The trapping program has continued, but at a smaller scale due to reduced government funding. Currently, Parks and Wildlife have 30 dove traps available to the public.

#### **What Can You Do?**

Feral doves are so successful in Alice Springs because of the abundance of food and water. Many of us leave water and biscuits out for our dogs or cats, or perhaps have chicken coops where scraps are regularly provided. Some people even provide food and water for the turtledoves. This provides a haven for feral turtledoves, which are adept in sneaking past the family pets, and are able to nest in and around our back gardens. A simple action to control feral doves in your back yard is to feed

the dog or cat inside or to bring in any left over food after they're finished.

Another suggestion is to cover your chicken yard. This will protect your chickens from the heat and also keep doves from stealing their food. And don't worry about the native doves; they know how to thrive without our help. A final measure you can take to get rid of those Turtledoves from your back yard is trapping. You can contact Jon Delaine on the details below and put your name down on the list for a trap, or ask him to send you the designs to build your own trap.



*Cage trap*

What to do with the birds you catch, now you ask? The Alice Springs Desert Park receives many trapped turtledoves in a cage marked "Feral Bird Control" on the Workshop road at the Park. Simply bring out any birds you catch to the park and release them into the cage. By bringing the feral doves you catch to the Desert Park, you help provide a rich source of food for the birds of prey, quolls and snakes. The doves are humanely euthanased using CO<sub>2</sub> gas.

The turtledove population in Alice Springs is one of the few feral populations in Australia that could be eradicated, but due to lack of interest from the public and government they are being allowed to take over Alice Springs gardens. For now community education is the most important tool we have. If you build a trap or borrow one from Parks and Wildlife, talk to your neighbours about it. It's no use trapping birds in your backyard if your neighbours are throwing out food for turtledoves. If you're waiting on the list for one of the 30 Parks and Wildlife traps, contact the Minister for Natural Resources and the Environment, and ask for more to be made available.

For more information, contact:

[Jonathan.delaine@nt.gov.au](mailto:Jonathan.delaine@nt.gov.au)

89518283

[www.nt.gov.au/nreta/wildlife](http://www.nt.gov.au/nreta/wildlife)

## TRIP REPORTS

### The more you learn: the less you know

By Connie Spencer

Photos by J Purdie

This saying was brought home to me on a recent trip to the Mound Springs in the Ormiston Gorge/Glen Helen area. My plant knowledge was tested and I wasn't able to come up with "the goods". However, I pursued the subject and now have some answers.

Many suggestions were offered for the first plant that was queried but none of us came close. It was *Lawrenciac squamata* (sorry, no common name). This intricate, spiny low shrub was "nothing to write home about" but perhaps that was because of the very dry conditions. It is in the MALVACEAE family along with the Desert Rose and Hibiscus. That was quite a surprise to me. *L. squamata* has extensive and secure populations in other states but in the Territory it is considered rare as the populations are few and far between, and it is listed as near threatened under the Territory Parks and Wildlife Act (TPW Act). The plant is found in saline sand, around salt lakes and rock holes.



*Lawrenciac squamata*



*Lawrenciac squamata*, detail of flowers

Some of us were aware of a rare *Juncus* species but not sure what to look for (hadn't done our homework). Now we know it is *Juncus kraussii* subsp. *australiensis* or Sea Rush in the JUNCACEAE family. *J. kraussii* is a tussock-forming, strongly rhizomatous (rhizome meaning a root-like stem) perennial found in saline areas. Once again this plant has extensive and secure populations in other states – all in coastal areas. In the southern NT this plant is, indeed, a rare plant and listed as near threatened under the TPW Act, but it has more conservation significance than, say

*Lawrenciac squamata*, as it is possibly a relict plant. That is, it may be the remnants of a former more extensive distribution of the plant when Central Australia was experiencing a wetter climate.



*Juncus kraussii*, detail



*Juncus kraussii*

The third plant that we queried - *Hemichroa diandra* had me completely fooled (and I'm not the only one). I was sure it was a Frankenia (Sea-heath) species. We were reasonably confident about our determination of *Frankenia cordata* at the first mound spring but this plant, which was at the second, was quite different although habit and habitat the same. It was a small rounded succulent sub shrub with tiny pink flowers. Well, I was wrong! It was a *Hemichroa*, a genus I had not previously come across. It is in the AMARANTHACEAE family along with *Ptilotus* & *Gomphrena*.

And so, back to the title of this article, it's not so much "the less you know" but that you realise how little you know in the bigger picture.

## Fenn Gap Trip By Patricia Weeks

This was certainly the day that everybody agreed had the wow factor.

Eleven folk set out at 7am Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> April, traveling around 25kms out along Larapinta Road. Having parked the cars we set off along the bed of the river. Two homestead dogs decided it would be quite fun to join our group and stayed close by for the rest of the journey.

Passing through Fenn Gap we admired the early sunlight on the red rocky slopes and white trunks of the river gums. *Corymbia opaca* was in full bloom; its creamy blossom also caught the early light contrasting it against the clear blue of the sky. A short distance further we could see our planned destination, several hundred metres above on the range.

The lower slopes as we started to climb were covered with spinifex, changing to an area of burnt mulga trees. They ceased as the climb really began and we eventually had to crawl and scramble up the steep rocky incline towards the cave at the top, stopping several times to catch our breath and admire extensive views. Several healthy *Callitris glaucophylla* were growing in the gullies.



*Callitris glaucophylla*, P. Weeks

By now some of us more senior climbers were beginning to think we should have stayed home in bed, but once we reached the opening of the cave exclamations of 'WOW!!!!' were heard from all involved.

Before heading up into the huge expanse of the cave the dogs really enjoyed a drink of water from Jocelyn's hat. High up ahead in the cave we could see the sunlit opening onto the ridge where we must emerge. Large amounts of Euro poo covered the cave floor and the occasional Stick Nest Rat and even Echidna poo was identified as we forged our way upward. Falcon droppings were on the higher ledges.



Bob and Jocelyn looking at scats Photo: Rosalie Breen

What a sight once we emerged onto the ridge top; breathtaking views in all directions especially towards the West where the long rows of ridge tops thrust themselves sky-wood.

Re-generating *Eucalyptus sessilis* and *Corymbia eremea* were growing steadily. Lunching here was magic with a cool breeze gently drifting across us.

Now for the descent!!!!

Very, very carefully we picked our way down, stopping to rest or to catch a glimpse of a bird or two including one butterfly.

Sightings during the day by the birders included:-

Wedge-tailed Eagle	Australian Ringneck
Pallid Cuckoo	Dusky Grasswren
Weebill	Singing Honeyeater
Grey-headed Honeyeater	White-plumed Honeyeater
Hooded Robin	Grey Shrike-thrush
Grey Fantail	Willie Wagtail
Mistletoebird	Zebra Finch
Black-faced Woodswallow	

The only butterfly seen was a Lesser Wanderer. It was pleasing to see healthy re-growth of the Fork Leaved Corkwood.

Returning to base after a break under the cool river gums we passed a rather deep hole in the sandy river bed where kangaroos had been digging for water. A thoroughly worth while, memorable, dusty, **WOW DAY!!!!**

# Kurrajong Hills Walk

24<sup>th</sup> March 2008

By Rhondda Tomlinson

## Rosalie Breen (leader) and the Easter Bunny

Early Easter Monday morning – pre 6:30am while the local residence were still peacefully sleeping, cars began gathering opposite 88 Kurrajong Drive where Rosalie was waiting and ready to lead our walk. I had offered Rosalie a lift that morning but she declined, not because she was concerned I would be late but all will be revealed as the tale goes on.

This was a great starter for the coming “going bush” season as it was close to town, casual and planned to finish about 10:00am before it became too hot. It was a great surprise to see many new people. The sky was overcast and in the distance at sunrise we could see some isolated showers falling. We were even treated to a rainbow but no rain and the sky soon cleared.

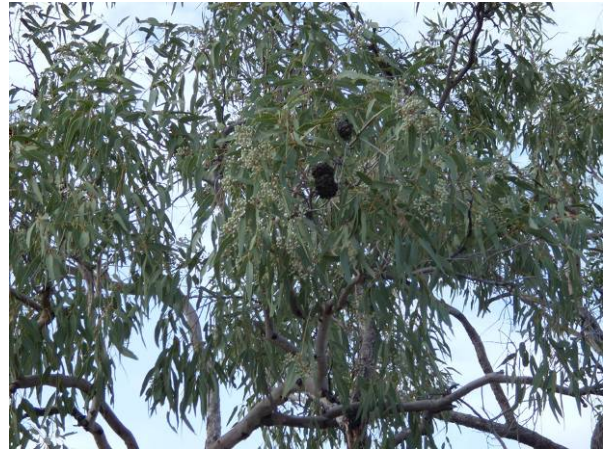


Rosalie led this very casual and chatty group along paths and then up onto a hill which all were taken by the panoramic view. We were all surprised to find that the Easter Bunny had somehow made an arrangement with Rosalie and left a basket of Easter Eggs.



Easter Egg refreshed we continued on. There was not a great deal of birdlife due to the fact that it had been so dry for so long and the same for the small plants as they

were all shrivelled to conserve moisture. One tree we passed did create quite a bit of interest from the plant people as it was covered in small blossoms.



Due to the lack of vegetation the rock outcrops were more pronounced and we saw mounds of gneiss rocks which contained granular feldspar, quartz, and mica.



Outcrop of gneiss

In this area it is common to see dolerite dykes which are a dark medium-grained igneous rock; where one had been split you could see the difference in colour compared to the weathered external rock.



Dolerite fragments

Thank you Rosalie this was a great start to 2008.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **Critter Watch at Alice Springs Desert Park!**

Critter Watch is a volunteer based animal observation group where interested people watch and take notes on the behaviour of our animals at the Alice Springs Desert Park. As keepers, our days are fairly busy and we often don't have enough time to observe the animals in our care as much as we would like. This is where Critter watchers can help!!!!!!

Some of the studies the Critter Watch group did last year were:

- Cinnamon Quail Thrush breeding observations
- Australasian Grebe aggression and breeding observations
- Yellow-rumped Thornbill interactions upon introduction of three new individuals to exhibit
- Studies of activity levels of mammals in the Nocturnal House
- Mulga Snake breeding behaviour
- Visitor behaviour in the Nocturnal House

Or you can suggest a project to our keepers....it might be something we've never thought of doing before.

Normally, watches are for 2 hours and can be done on any day of the week. The information we gain is invaluable and any time you could spare us would be much appreciated! If you would like to take part in Critter Watch or want any more information, please email Lisa at [lisa.harris@nt.gov.au](mailto:lisa.harris@nt.gov.au) or contact Sarah Wilson on 8951 8758 or [sarah.wilson@nt.gov.au](mailto:sarah.wilson@nt.gov.au).

Copy DEADLINE for articles for the next newsletter 30 May. Thanks, Ed.)

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

**OPEN:**

President, Bob Read - 8.53pm

**PRESENT:**

As per attendance book (13 members and 8 visitors)

**APOLOGIES:**

Rhondda Thomlinson

**PREVIOUS MINUTES:**

Bob moved that the minutes of the previous meeting (Wednesday 12 March 2008) be accepted as a true and correct record. Jenny accepted. All in favour.

**BUSINESS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES:**

Sarah will attend to payment of \$250.00 for part sponsorship of a sign for Olive Pink Botanic Gardens.

**TREASURER'S REPORT:**

Opening balance \$3093.56 plus subscriptions of \$259.50 less payment for Insurance (300.00) and PO Box rental (\$70.00) leaves a balance of \$2,987.56 cr.

**CORRESPONDENCE - IN:**

- Bank statement
- W.A... Naturalists Club – The Naturalist News
- NT Field Naturalists Club Inc. – Nature Territory News

**CORRESPONDENCE – OUT:**

Thank you letter to Michael Barritt – February speaker.

**GENERAL BUSINESS:**

- Members resolved to purchase two books to add to our library. A guide to Australian Moths (\$39.95) and Native Rats and Mice also \$39.95. Jenny moved. Sarah seconded. Carried unanimously.
- Jenny Purdie showed members a copy of her recently completed book A Field Guide to Plants of the Barkly region. Copies can be obtained from Jenny directly or local bookstores.

**OUTINGS:**

- Owen Springs trip 26/4/08. Contact Bob for details on 8952 1935.
- Larapinta stage eleven 17-18 May. Red Bank Gorge to Glen Helen. Meet 7.30am Flynn Grave.
- Overland Telegraph Station to Wigley' Waterhole or vice versa May 31<sup>st</sup>, 4 – 5 hours.

**SIGHTINGS:**

- Harry Osborn was sure a possum ran across the road in front of his vehicle recently approx. 1km north of the new railway bridge on North Stuart Highway

**Gate Opener for May:** Bob **Supper for May:** Connie **Note Taker for May:** Bob

**Guest Speaker for May:** Dick Kimber

**Meeting Closed:** 9.20 pm