

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

June 2008



President	Bob Read	8952 1935	rlread1@bigpond.net.au
Vice-President	<i>Vacant</i>		
Secretary	Sue Fraser	8952 5728	suefra@hotmail.com
Treasurer	Sarah Wilson	8953 8605	sarahsg2@dodo.com.au
Property Officer	Rosalie Breen	8952 3409	rosalie.breen@email.com
Public Officer	Rhonda Tomlinson	8953 1280	rhonda.tomlinson@nt.gov.au
Newsletter Editor	Michelle Walker	8952 9727	MichelleL.Walker@nt.gov.au

Web site : www.geocities.com/alicenats

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club June 2008

REMINDERS FOR NEXT MEETING

Gate Opener: Connie Spencer **Supper:** Bob Read
Note Taker: Rosalie Breen

MEETINGS

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

11th June. Speaker Fiachra Kearney, CSIRO.
Conservation of the Bridled Nail-tail Wallaby.

9th July. Speaker Peter Nunn on Reptiles.

13th August. AGM and member's night.

TRIPS / ACTIVITIES

June 14 Spencer Hill. Climb the hill (easy) for sunrise and wander in the area. 1-2 hours. Dress warmly and bring own breakfast snack. Meet at Gosse St playground for a 6:40 am start. Contact Rosalie Breen 89523409

June 21-22 *Acacia latzii* monitoring; to help in survey. Option for day trip on Saturday. Contact: Connie Spencer on 8952 4694

July 4 Show day. Visit Australian plants stand and check out plant identifications. Also information about Land and Gardens for Wildlife.

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

Early Naturalists in Central Australia **Presentation by: Dick Kimber**

By Bob Read

Decades after white settlement on the coast the interior of Australia remained unknown.

Oxley found the west flowing rivers ending in swamps, and the idea of a large lake was widespread. Eyre believed that the centre was taken up by large salt lakes. One early geographer concluded that the country was all desert from Sturt's desert to Western Australia. Others felt that there must be something of interest in the interior, perhaps even civilizations as in South America. The rivers that flowed to the north coast were supposed to originate in mountains.

The first white man to see part of Central Australia was Sturt, who reached the south east in part of what is now called the Simpson Desert in 1844. He was appalled by the endless rows of near parallel sand dunes, "did ever man see such country".

Stuart in 1860 became the first white man to penetrate to what we now call the Centre. He was not a trained naturalist, but described cycads, bean trees, Sturt's desert rose and what was probably a bush banana.

Waterhouse, who was on Stuart's 6th expedition in 1862, was the first scientist to visit the region. He was curator of the South Australian Museum and was appointed as naturalist to the expedition by the SA Government. The government failed to recognise the incongruity of including a naturalist in a party that needed to travel fast and light to traverse about 6000 km on horseback.

Inevitably there was tension between Stuart and Waterhouse, the former needing to keep moving, avoid unnecessary baggage and resentful of another mouth to feed, and the latter whose role required him to spend time observing and to collect specimens. Waterhouse was Oxford educated and a "gentleman", not obliged to do tasks such as gathering firewood, which added to Stuart's dislike of him. On the expedition Stuart decreed that Waterhouse was not to go out collecting alone, and not surprisingly the men were reluctant to volunteer for this at the end of a hard day's travel.

Waterhouse was hampered by the non-arrival of some of his equipment, possibly because of sabotage by Chambers, Stuart's financial backer. Despite all this he managed to make some useful observations.

He recognised three broad geographic divisions:

Northern SA to just over the NT border.

From the above to about Newcastle Waters.

From Newcastle Waters to the coast.

Waterhouse was the first to attempt a scientific classification of the flora. He was able to examine some of the aquatic fauna. He was the first to record the Princess Parrot and the first to describe bloodwood apples. He recorded 18 species of bird new to the region, collected some fresh water snails and one land snail in the MacDonnell Ranges.



Princess Parrot

(See <http://www.flickr.com/photos/7533960@N02/880969946/>)

Matters possibly came to a head in August 1863 when Stuart found that a horse having difficulties was carrying 140 pounds, 5 pounds over the weight he had ordered as its limit, and Waterhouse's specimens were blamed.

On the expedition's return Stuart insisted that Waterhouse should not get a share of the reward, but was eventually over-ruled. For his part Waterhouse published his own account of the expedition which was highly critical of Stuart and Chambers, his wealthy backer.

In 1863 S.A. White (the elder) attempted to travel from Adelaide to the north coast. He first went up the west side of Lake Eyre, but was driven back by drought conditions. He then went up the eastern side, getting as far as Koperramanna before turning back. The dray broke down and he and his son were lucky to escape with their lives. He managed to find 10 new species of bird, but was only able to bring back one specimen of a Black-faced Woodswallow.

In 1872 Giles travelled up the Finke and found palms at the Glen of Palms, but did not find Palm Valley.

Winnecke, another explorer surveyor, was the first to record rat plagues, noting that the rats had eaten 30 lb of flour in one night. Larry Wells, an explorer and surveyor who was on both the Elder and Calvert expeditions was the first to recognise that although spinifex was a curse to travellers it was valuable habitat for the animals that lived in it.

Larry Wells

All nature clad with Porcupine,
Bristling points so superfine,
Seeking repose in clothes and skin,
Adding to mortal's suffering.

But uses has this wiry weed,
Which cattle serves 'ere shedding seed,
The dusky heathen a gum extracts,
For fixing wommera spear or axe.

Shy wallabies rats and bandicoots,
In search of lair precisely suits,
Refuge from eagle or cannibal band,
Throughout this dreary desert land.

The cricket's shield from cruel sun,
'Ere myriad chirps when night's begun,
Does impede the drift of burning sands,
Our Creator's *Triodia irritans*.

(Reference: Wilfred and Christopher Steele (1978). *To the Great Gulf: the surveys and explorations of L. A. Wells*. Lynton Publications Pty. Ltd; Blackwood, South Australia).

The next professional scientist to visit the centre was Baldwin Spencer, biologist and photographer on the Horn Expedition in 1894. The expedition was well-equipped and travelled by train to Oodnadatta, but Spencer still faced some difficulties. A local drank his collecting fluid and the "fly farm" he had set up as an experiment on a window sill at Charlotte Waters was inadvertently swept up. Material collected on the Horn Expedition formed a basis for the scientific study of central Australia. Other observers were mostly amateurs, who made some useful observations and discoveries.

S.A. White (son of the one above) above travelled into what is now known as the Pitjantjatjara Lands in search of Night Parrots in 1914. On shooting parrots coming to water after dark, he found that they were Bourke Parrots. All explorers noted flood debris, evidence of large infrequent floods. Davidson (prospector and explorer who discovered gold at The Granites and Tanami) was caught out by a flood. He managed to move his flour, but spent days recovering his gear. Most of it was in the first 5 miles, but some was scattered up to 20 miles downstream.

Also noted and reviled by all explorers were the bush flies. Accounts ranged from tall tales, such as Gillen's (telegraph employee and later post master at Alice Springs) account of the buggy springs sagging under the weight of flies. Davidson made detailed observations of fish and pondered on the frogs that appeared in thousands after rain.

Arguably the last of the early explorers was Michael Terry. In 1932 his dog caught a wallaby. Terry boiled

the skull, which remains the only specimen of the Central Hare-wallaby known to science.

Many thanks to Dick for an entertaining presentation.

TRIP REPORT

GARNET OR RUBY

By Bob Read

On the recent trip to Ruby Gorge on the Hale River the question was asked as to what is the difference between garnet and ruby.

Chemically ruby is a clear red form of corundum or aluminium oxide, as is sapphire (Al₂O₃). Garnet is actually a group of minerals, with the general formula M₃Al₂(SiO₄)₃, where M is calcium (Ca), magnesium (Mg), or iron (Fe). Its colour can vary, but is sometimes, as at Ruby Gorge, a deep red like ruby. Physically the two minerals are quite similar, as below.

Property	Corundum (including ruby)	Garnet
Specific gravity	4	3.5
Hardness (Moh scale)	9	About 7
Refractive index	1.7	1.7



Garnet

(from www.palagems.com and www.chineseastrologer.org)



Ruby

(from www.astrologicalgem.com and mog.com)

The two minerals have different crystal forms, but this would not be obvious in waterworn specimens. The only property of use in the field would be hardness, with garnet being as hard as quartz and ruby far harder. This would be hard to determine without a very hard mineral like corundum for a reference. It is not that surprising that first Lindsay the surveyor, then prospectors and later

gem buyers who went to the field were fooled by the clear dark red garnets. Long after the ruby rush, collections of garnet from the Hale River sat in the safes of some Adelaide businesses, the owners unwilling to accept that they were near worthless. The large difference in price is a consequence of rarity. Garnet, even of good gem quality is relatively common, while ruby is the rarest, and consequently most expensive of gems.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

House sitting wanted

Hello all,

I am returning to Alice on the 24th of July for about 7 weeks, working again at the Renal Dialysis Unit and wondering if there might be any HOUSE SITTING needing to be done over that period. I'm bringing my bicycle only this time, so it would need to be within about 6kms distance.

Just to refresh your memories: I love gardens and pets and would look after both well for you. I have a room booked at the ASH Staff Quarters, so the house would not need to be "sat" for the whole period of my stay but a few weeks here or there would be a very welcome change, as well as help me financially.

I am looking forward to seeing you all, Alice Springs and the country-side again very much.

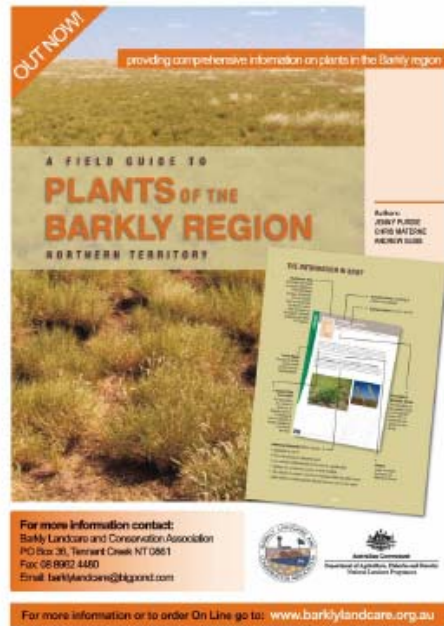
Contact me by email: janedanne@impulse.net.au or telephone: 03 5255.5732 (you may have to leave a message).

Regards,
Jane (see picture)



Jane Danne – looking to house-sit

Plants of the Barkly Region



Written primarily for the pastoralists in the Barkly region this book will also be of interest to those with an interest in native plants. It contains descriptions of photos of 374 plants with references and some photos of a further 125 species. The plant descriptions are written in plain English, there are also distribution maps, information on habitats, nutrition data and whether a particular species is a weed, an indicator of pasture condition or contains a poison.

All profits from the book go to the Barkly Landcare and Conservation Association to be used for conservation projects such as weed control.

The book is available from Jenny Purdie for the **wholesale price of \$35** or from www.barklylandcare.org.au (plus postage and handling), and at retail prices from Greening Australia, the Desert Park, Dymocks, Book City and Red Kangaroo Books.

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 or contact Sarah Wilson on 8951 8758 or sarah.wilson@nt.gov.au.

Copy DEADLINE for articles for the next newsletter 27 June. Thanks, Ed

**ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED
MINUTES OF GENERAL MEETING HELD 14/05/08 OLIVE PINK BOTANIC GARDEN**

OPEN:

President Bob Read – 9.00pm

PRESENT:

As per Attendance Book (13 members and 9 visitors)

APOLOGIES: - Ian Archibald, Leonie Read and Sarah Wilson

PREVIOUS MINUTES:

Rosalie moved that the minutes of the previous meeting (9/4/08) be accepted as a true and correct record. All in favour.

BUSINESS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES:

Connie has ordered the two books for our library as passed at last month's meeting.

TREASURER'S REPORT:

As tabled. Current balance of \$2,737.56 cr.

CORRESPONDENCE – IN:

Sarah collected mail – will pass on to Sue.

CORRESPONDENCE – OUT:

Thankyou letter to Jonathon Delaine.

GENERAL BUSINESS:

Committee Meeting arranged for 25/5/08 2.30pm at Bob's Place.

OUTINGS:

- Section 11 of Larapinta Trail 17-18 May.
- OTS to Wigley Gorge – Meet at Sargent Street 31/5/08 8.00am, bring lunch.
- Walk in the Western Macs July 7th to 9th.

SIGHTINGS:

- Black-eared Cuckoo – Ruby Gorge
- Varied Sitella, small flock at Ruby Gorge
- Black Breasted Buzzard – 80km north on Stuart Highway.
- Bob caught a 5 second glimpse of a Black Falcon over the Northside shops.

Gate Opener for June

Connie Spencer

Supper for June

Bob Read

Notetaker for June

Rosalie Breen

Meeting closed at 9.23 pm