

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter

July 2008



Bridled Naitail Wallaby, see guest speaker report

REMINDERS FOR NEXT MEETING

Gate Opener: Connie Supper: Rosalie Breen Note Taker:
Volunteer needed.

MEETINGS

9th July. Speaker Peter Nunn "*Common Reptiles of Alice Springs*"

13th August. AGM (see notice) and Members' Night. Members are encouraged to bring images, specimens.



OTHER EVENTS

Australian Plants Society meets Wednesday, 6th August, 2008, 7:30 pm @ Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Speaker: Jenny Purdie, *What's in a name?*

TRIPS / ACTIVITIES

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

Sat 12 Jul an easy walk, 2 - 3 hrs, in the Larapinta Hills in the vicinity of the Scout Hall. Meet 9am at 45 DeHavilland Drive (Connie's place). Contact: Connie Spencer 8952 4694.

August 2nd to 4th. Vehicle base trip to either Boggy Hole, or alternatively Garden Road, Plenty Highway area to take advantage of the June rain. Decision will be based on member preference.

A Brush with the Desert

Olive Pink Botanic Garden

July 3 – July 20

A Brush with the Desert is the new exhibition of works by Barbara Stuart opening at Olive Pink Botanic Garden on Thursday July 3rd at 6pm. Barb has made many extended trips through these desert regions over the last few years, and has captured beautifully the exquisite light, rich colours, and sense of endless horizons of the central Australian landscape in her new series of paintings. The exhibition will be on show until Sunday 20th July, open daily 10am – 4pm.

WHAT'S HAPPENED TO THE NEWSLETTER?

To state the blindingly obvious we have started to give the newsletter a makeover to take better advantage of the electronic technology that is now the main means of distribution. Expect more changes in coming editions.

GUEST SPEAKER REPORT

Conservation of the Bridled Nailtail Wallaby

Presentation by: Fiachra Kearney
By Rosalie Breen

Bridled Nailtail Wallaby is described as one of the most endangered mammals in Australia with only 350 animals left in the wild in three populations. The wallaby is relatively small, 4-5 kg for females and 6-8 kg for males. The wallabies have a horny protrusion on the end of the tail whose use is a bit of a mystery. When courting the male drags it and draws on the ground, possibly to impress the female?



Horny protrusion on the end of the tail

In 1973 the wallaby previously declared extinct was found on Taunton station near Dingo in central Queensland, by a fencing contractor. There are two stories of the finding:

He just observed it.

He shot an animal and kept the skin. Either way while browsing a Woman's Day magazine recognized it to be the Bridled Nailtail and reported it. The government then acquired the station for a National Park. Other translocated populations exist at Indalia and Avocet stations. Originally they were distributed over a wide area in inland Queensland and New South Wales.



The wallaby has quite specialized requirements for habitat, needing an interface between dense brigalow country for protection and open eucalypt forest for grazing, never moving too far from the brigalow. Land clearing and cattle grazing has influenced the decline in numbers, as has competition with the black striped wallaby. The species does not adapt to buffel grass invasion, unless it is managed, as it impedes their movement. They are curious animals and easy to work with because they can be trapped easily and not stressed by handling for taking observations. Predation by feral cats of the young joeys is a major problem.

At Avocet an interesting synergy between the Queensland Parks and Wildlife (who needed the cats gone) and the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia (who like to shoot cats) has arisen, after agreements with the station owner. Now the sporting shooters who wanted to do something useful come twice a year for 7-10 days, often making it a family holiday, and take on spotlight shooting of cats and foxes while also aiding in trapping of wallabies and gathering of information. They are extremely effective; earlier, Parks staff caught only 3 cats in 2001-4 while the shooters in the last three years have eliminated 72.

Lots more needs to be done in respect to data collection, genetic analysis, determination of the viable population, feral control, and so on. In 2007 a trust fund was set up by Fiachra Kearney to aid in the conservation of the wallaby and its habitat; the BNW Trust. Information can be found at www.bntwallaby.org.au. Fiachra is the chairman of the trust so naturally gave an enthusiastic and entertaining talk with lots of great photos. Photos in the newsletter are courtesy of Fiachra Kearney.

TRIP REPORT

Glen Helen to Redbank Gorge on foot via the Larapinta Trail

Saturday & Sunday 17 & 18 May 2008

By Connie Spencer

The completion of Stage 11 had been on the agenda for a couple of years and planned twice before but something always seemed to get in the way; but this time it was a goer. With a mixture of apprehension (for me that is) and excitement, Rosalie, Shirley and I set off for Rocky Bar Gap at 9:30 am. We left the boys, Gavin and Graham, to sort out the vehicles (we needed one at each end) and catch up with us at Davenport Creek. We had 17 km to walk the first day with a steep hill climb in the middle which had to be negotiated with a full pack!

As we walked to Davenport Creek passing through low spinifex-covered hills, we disturbed a flock of Spinifex

Rocky Bar Gap was a very welcomed site for our weary bones and feet. It was especially welcome to Rosalie and Gavin as it was the end of a mission - to complete every section of the Larapinta Trail. The occasion was marked with a celebratory "staminade" drink!



Congratulations Rosalie and Gavan!



Pigeons. The boys caught up with us at Davenport Creek with its wide sandy bed and small waterhole being a welcome spot for morning tea.

We push onward and upward. First traversing a red earth plain with Mulga (*Acacia aneura*) and then following a creek into the foothills and the start of a tough (very tough for me) climb up a quartzite ridge. It was one of those climbs where you think you are nearly at the top and lo and behold there is another ridge just out of sight of the one you are on. I really struggled on the climb and if it hadn't been for the help of Sherpa Graham I might still be out there counting each step I took! Despite the discomfort of the climb, on reaching the top the views were spectacular with Mt Sonder dominating the skyline to the west.

After lunch, with the body was very much rejuvenated, we proceeded down the northern side across low spinifex hills and mulga woodland to Rocky Bar Gap. Most of the hillsides have been burnt. However, despite the very dry period since the fires, there is regrowth and some of it quite vigorous.

Celebration or not we were not long out of our sleeping bags that evening.

The next day dawned with the walk in front of us "a piece of cake"; only 12 km to go and not a hill to be climbed. Rocky Bar Gap to Redbank Creek is indeed a very pleasant walk through mulga woodland and a variety of mallee eucalypts with Mt Sonder a constant feature to the north. Not far from Redbank Creek you pass through a Native Orange (*Capparis mitchellii*) Grove with some of the biggest mature trees I have ever come across. It was like walking on ball bearings under the trees – there was that much fruit on the ground! Finally, Redbank carpark is in sight – a welcome relief – even if I did just describe the walk as a piece of cake!

The memory of my struggle on the hill climb has faded but not so the great companionship of my fellow walkers, the majestic views we encountered or the wonderful variety vegetation we wandered through.

Ruby Gap

By Shirley Goodman

I was a bit apprehensive about my first camping trip with the Alice Springs Field Naturalist Club! I've been a member since 2005 and participated in quite a few day trips but never overnight and I wasn't quite sure what to take and how things are 'done'! I shouldn't have worried, it was all very easy.

The party consisted of 9 people travelling in 4 vehicles. We met at the Date Farm at 8.30am and it was nice to have a leisurely drive out to the camping spot at Ruby Gap Nature Park; after all, the journey, and what we saw along the way and during the stops were all part of the trip. First stop was Arltunga Historical Reserve for morning tea and a brief visit to the excellent visitor centre. It wasn't long enough to do it justice; I have been there before but I want to go back again. Next was a stop at the Policeman's House, built during the 1890's when Arltunga was a busy gold mining town with a population of up to 300 people. We spent some time poking around and trying to imagine this place as a hive of activity.

We ate lunch in a dry creek bed. After so much dry weather there was little or nothing blooming and few birds to get us twitching, but it was a nice spot. Along the route we had commented on the healthy looking Wild Passionfruit (*Capparis spinosa*) which at this stage has not been decimated by the Caper White caterpillars. Could that be something to do with the dry conditions?

Onwards and the road became a little more challenging! By about 4pm we had found our camping spot on the bank of the dry Hale River. Once again it was nice to have the time to select camping spots, erect tents, light a fire and have a cup of billy tea and even wine and nibbles before cooking our dinners. I had brought a convenience pouch type meal that I was trialling in preparation for the assault on Section 11 of the Larapinta Trail in two weeks' time; other people had frozen stews and such like which were defrosted in camp ovens on the wood fire.

Washing up completed, it was pleasant just sitting around watching the night sky and spotting the occasional satellite and one splendid meteor. I think that everyone had an early night but I don't really know because I was in the sack by 9pm!

I got up at 7am to find that most of the group were already enjoying cups of tea. There was plenty of time to eat whatever variety of breakfast that we had taken and tidy up and be ready to walk by 8.30am.

Our plan was to walk upstream from Ruby Gap to Fox's Grave which is at the far end of Glen Annie Gorge. We estimated that we walked about 10km; it was fairly level walking although the surface varied from sand to bare earth to rock hopping. The geology was intriguing with red stained quartzite overlying yellowed dolomite and

siltstone that had been folded into contorted layers. Not a lot of plants were blooming although we saw some magnificent Bloodwood trees (*Corymbia opaca*) that were heavy with seed pods.



Quartzite (red, top left), thrust over yellowed dolomite and siltstone folded into contorted layers



Bloodwood trees laden with seed pods

Scattered amongst the mulgas, Corkwoods were flowering bravely (although I can't remember if they were the long-leaved or the fork leafed variety) and in the sandy river bed in the gorge were patches of Sticky Blue Rod (*Stemosa viscosa*); a plant that I always feel compelled to touch because of the pleasant smell it leaves on my fingers.

As we walked into the early part of Glen Annie Gorge reeds indicated the presence of water and we soon encountered waterholes with varying degrees of clarity. Cow pats indicated that although this was a National Park, cattle were still accessing the area. Further into the gorge we found some very beautiful and very clear waterholes that seemed to be quite undisturbed. We saw snails and diving beetles, dragonflies and interesting water plants, some of which had small bladders on them.



Waterhole in Glen Annie Gorge

From the start of the trip Bob Read was keeping a log of bird sightings. I think that it added up to about 24 species for the weekend. A new sighting for me were the Varied Sitellas which were flitting about high in the canopy of some River Red Gums. Painted Finches were plentiful in Glen Annie Gorge where we also saw one Black fronted Dotterel.

An interesting fact is that Ruby Gap is actually misnomer! Unfortunately for the many miners who trudged the dry, hot miles to this area in search of their fortunes, what were thought to be rubies turned out to be garnets (see June newsletter). We were more fortunate because with no fortunes in mind we could just enjoy spotting the garnets in the sandy gravel or seeing where they were washed into ledges or against small shelves in the river rocks.



It was difficult to visualise this area as it was during the 'ruby rush' of 1886 when it was 'home' to over 200 prospectors, dotted with tents or rough shelters and supporting visits from traders. To the inexperienced eye there is no trace of this time except the grave of J. P. Fox, set in a peaceful location on a sandy, slack water deposit above the flood plain. The grave faces west, marked by a rectangle of fairly large river stones with a well carved headstone that reads 'Sacred to the memory of F.P.H.

Fox died May 28th 1888 Aged 55 years'. It was a good point at which to eat lunch before retracing our steps, this time seeing Glen Annie and the other rockfaces in the afternoon light.



Next morning after our various breakfasts, we packed up our tents, repacked the vehicles, made sure that our campfire was well and truly extinguished and headed west back to Alice Springs.

Thank you to Bob for organizing the trip, (and for making room for me in your vehicle) and thank you to the rest of the group for making my first away trip with the Fields Naturalists so pleasant. We are indeed fortunate to have specialists in our club, notably Bob when it comes to birds, Connie and Jenny for plants and Rosalie who is a generalist across several areas and whose enthusiasm is always infectious and inspiring.

Spencer Hill Walk By Graeme Shaughnessy

Saturday 14 June saw 7 people (Bob, Connie, Graeme, Jackie, Sabine, Holger and Rhondda) join Rosalie Breen on an early morning walk up Spencer Hill to watch the sunrise. We met at Gosse Street playground at 6.40am and rugged up against the early morning chill walked around the base of the hill and climbed the gentle slopes to reach the top just as the sun was creeping up over the horizon.

On the way up Rosalie told how she often does this walk and has often noticed wallabies sitting with their long tails hanging down over the rocks, with their backs to the east, waiting for the sun to warm their backs. There were a couple of sightings of wallabies watching our progress. Bob pointed out the difference between a wallaby and a euro.

The recent rain had brought up some new growth and rock fern and liverwort were growing under rock ledges. Rosalie also pointed out clumps of Caustic Vine (*Sarcostemma australe*). At the top of the hill we looked over several impressive Native Figs (*Ficus platypoda*).

Whilst waiting for the sun to illuminate Mt Gillen (which was not as impressive as usual) we had a hot drink then slowly made our way down the rocky path (Photo1). Sabine and Holger left for an early appointment and the rest of us headed north to a point overlooking the river bed towards the Telegraph Station (Photo2).



Photo 1



Photo 2

Bob pointed out an outcropping dolerite dike; a (relatively) younger intrusive rock (Photo3). On the way back we found a mixed flock of Splendid Fairy-wren, Weebill, Chestnut-rumped Thornbill and Inland Thornbill, with Willie Wagtail and a flock of Yellow-rumped Thornbill nearby. It is curious the way different species sometimes flock together outside the breeding season. We returned to the car park by 8.40am.



Photo 3

Thanks Rosalie for organising this sunrise outing.

Critter Watch at Alice Springs Desert Park

Sunday 15th June 2008
By Rhonda Tomlinson

I replied to an e-mail from Lisa Harris about doing the Critter Watch. We made arrangements to meet on Sunday at 10.00am. Not long after we set off for one of the bird aviaries and my task was to take notes on the pair of Mistletoe birds.



Lisa had a small branch with a spider web draped over it and she placed this into the bird enclosure. The aim was to see if the female was ready or interested in nesting. My job was to observe and write down anything that was happening.

It was interesting to see how the other different species of birds that were in the enclosure reacted to this new and different article that has appeared in their habitat. Some were curious and others had to have a close up view even though it meant getting this web stuck to their beaks. Meanwhile the Mistletoe pair was more intent on the chasing game and did not show any interest in the web. The two hours I was there I spoke to several visitors and

all were just so impressed with the surroundings and all the work that is being done at the Desert Park. I am now looking forward to my next Critter Watch visit.

If you have some time to spare I can assure you it is a great experience.

ANNOUNCEMENTS **NOTICE OF AGM**

The Annual General Meeting of the Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club will be held at Olive Pink 7:30 pm August 13th.

Some of the existing committee members will be standing down, and we need volunteers to take on committee positions; at the minimum a new Vice-president and a new Secretary.

The Vice-president's position simply involves filling in when the president is absent and attending committee meetings.

The secretary takes minutes at general and committee meetings, and collects the mail. Outward mail is usually only one thank you letter a month.

We generally have about 4 committee meetings a year. Minor matters between meetings are resolved by email.

Please remember that without volunteers for the committee the club cannot function. It is a chance to be more involved in the running of the club.

Trip reminders for members

- 1 If you haven't a 4WD or a car to go on a field trip, there are usually places in other member's cars for extra passengers. Notify the leader if you need a lift, and it can be organized. Sharing vehicles to save fuel is encouraged
- 2 On car drive trips it is acceptable to contribute a share of fuel costs to the driver if you can manage.
- 3 On field trips always bring plenty of water, a hat and wear strong boots or shoes. Keep in contact with the party and note any instructions from the leader.
- 4 Notify the leader if you intend to go on a trip. This is imperative on some walks which do not begin and end in the same place and need transport organization, or on overnight walks to make sure you

CONTACTS

President	Bob Read	8952 1935
Vice-President	<i>Vacant</i>	
Secretary	Sue Fraser	8952 5728
Treasurer	Sarah Wilson	8953 8605
Property Officer	Rosalie Breen	8952 3409
Public Officer	Rhonda Tomlinson	8953 1280
Newsletter Editor	Michelle Walker	8952 9727

are properly equipped and capable of the walk, always remembering we go at a more leisurely pace than the bushwalkers.

Turtledoves

Following the April meeting Punch Hall built a trap for the feral doves. This has been very successful and as of the June meeting 52 doves had been caught and delivered to the Desert Park cage.

A MESSAGE FROM ROBBIE AND EMILY

We have had a big few months. After returning from Africa in February, we had to recruit a new manager for our office in Vanuatu and finalise our projects so that we were free to leave in early April. We have spent a month living and working in Melbourne city.

Upon returning to Australia we found that Parks had transferred my permanent position to Katherine (only 2 weeks notice) and we had to relocate our whole life again out of Alice.

So now here we are living in a temporary house at Katherine Gorge trying to settle into a new house, town and job not to mention getting used to being back in Australia!

Rob is busy setting up a Live & Learn NT Office and has just scored a contract with the Indigenous Coordination Centre here in Katherine to do Community Development plans for a few surrounding communities. He hopes to get some Pacific Island staff to Australia for a bit of cultural sharing.

I will be doing the Senior Ranger Community Education Position for the Katherine Region. A position that sees me coordinating school and community talks about areas of Parks & Wildlife responsibility, The Junior Ranger Program for town as well as bush schools and working on community awareness programs about this such as crocodile safety, Flying-fox and cane toad awareness. We are looking forward to exploring all the great natural places Katherine has to offer.

If you are ever heading up this way feel free to drop in for a cuppa. Give our regards to all the Field Naturalists that remember us.

Cheers for now,
Emily.

Copy DEADLINE for articles for the next newsletter 25 July. Thanks, Ed.

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MichelleL.Walker@nt.gov.au

OPEN;

President Bob Read – 8:40pm

PRESENT

As per attendance book (7 members and 4 visitors)

APOLOGIES – Leoni Read, Jenny Purdie, Michelle Walker, Sarah Wilson, Sue Fraser, Ian Archibald & Bev Dawson

PREVIOUS MINUTES

The meeting resolved to accept of minutes of the previous meeting held 14 May 2008 as a true and correct record of that meeting.

BUSINESS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

Connie advised that one of the 2 books on order has arrived – Native Mice and Rats.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Due to the absence of the treasurer, Sarah Wilson, there was no report. However, a bank statement ending 30 May 2008 shows a balance of \$2737.56.

CORRESPONDENCE IN

- **Threatened Species Network Newsletter**
- **Western Australian Naturalists Club Newsletter**
- **Nature Territory Newsletter**
- **Westpac Bank statement**

CORRESPONDENCE OUT

- **Thank you letter to Dick Kimber**

GENERAL BUSINESS

- **AGM August – notice to go in the July & August newsletter asking for nominations. Bob to advise Sarah that the books need to be audited and presented at the AGM.**
- **FEES – Discussion held on whether or not to reduce fees considering our adequate bank balance. Barb moved that all levels of membership fees be reduced by \$5. Not seconded. Motion failed.**
- **CLUB BADGE – Rosalie Breen suggested an investment of \$80 - \$100 in an embroidered club logo for use on t-shirts, hats etc. The meeting resolved that further discussion was necessary when more members are present.**
- **OUTINGS**
Proposed outings. Subject to confirmation.

June 14	Spencer Hill
June 21 & 22	APS trip to Acacia latzii monitoring sites
July 4 & 5	The Alice Springs Show
July 12	Larapinta Hills. Barb to lead
July 26	Emily Gap to Heavitree Gap (check descent)
Aug 2-4	Running Waters, Illamurta, Boggy Hole 4WD based camping trip, if sufficient support
Aug 23	Ian's workshop subject to Ian's approval.
Sep 13 & 14	Painted Canyon – car based camping trip on Plenty Highway.
Sep 20	Garden Fair
	Mount Undoolya
	Part of Larapinta Trail 6 – Ellery Ck Big Hole east to saddle
Oct 5	Kaporilya Day

SIGHTINGS

- **2 Banded Lapwings back of Senior Citizens**
- **Peregrine Falcon swooping and catching a feral dove**
- **Winged ants**
- **Black-breasted Buzzard**
- **Marilyn Hall reported that they had caught 52 Turtle-doves since Jonathon Delaines talk in April.**

NEXT MEETING

Gate opener for July – Connie Supper for July – Rosalie Breen Note taker for July required

MEETING CLOSED – There being no further business, Bob declared the meeting closed at 9:20pm.

Minutes compiled by C Spencer