

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club

October 2008 Newsletter



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Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month (except December and January) at 7:30 PM at the Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Visitors are welcome.

REMINDERS FOR NEXT MEETING

Gate Opener: Bob Read **Supper:** Marilyn Hall
Note Taker:

MEETINGS

8th October, Jocelyn Davies to speak on **Grasslands of Mongolia, where meat is for men and grass is for animals.** Wed 8th October

12th November, Chris Palmer will speak about Inland and Desert Sand-skippers, two or our more elusive butterflies.

TRIPS / ACTIVITIES

October 4 (Note change of date). Mount Undoolya. Meet 6 am in front of the Date Farm in Palm Crt. Rosalie Schultz to lead.

October 5. Kuprilya Day. Meet 7:45 AM at Flynn Grave. The Kuprilya Day service starts at 10am at the spring about 7 km W of Hermannsburg. It is a thanksgiving commemorating the completion of the pipeline to Hermannsburg in 1935. The service is in Arrernte and is followed by a christening service for all the babies born in the previous 12 months. Seating is on rocks arranged around the site, or bring your own chairs. After the service there is a BBQ. By tradition many of the men ride out from Hermannsburg on horses and lead the traffic back after the BBQ.

Bus loads of people come from neighbouring communities such as Areyonga, so expect a bit of congestion before and after. There is 130 km of sealed road to Hermannsburg, then 7 km of dirt. The road is suitable for all cars except for the last 100 m or so.

Bring hat, water and chair or cushion. It might be advisable to bring something for lunch, as I do not know what will be left from the barbecue.

October 25 and 26. Old Hamilton Downs, if sufficient interest.

November 8. Bird watching, at the Sewage Ponds. Meet at the pond gate 8am.

November 29. Behind the Scenes Tour of the Desert Park. This trip will be limited to the first 15 putting their names down on a list to be started at the October business meeting.



TRIP REPORT

Visit to Ian Archibald's Workshop Saturday 30 August, 2008

First of all, thank you Ian for an extremely informative and enlightening tour of your workshop. We met outside the workshop gates at 8:30am, which are at the back of the Aviation Museum. Ian greeted us and left the morning open for questions. Questions about Alcoota were some of the first as there were bones on a nearby counter that had been going through the lengthy process of being painted with a glue mixture to harden them.



Ian explained about the dinosaur dig and how careful you have to be; the bones are in such a fragile state that it is very easy to break parts off while uncovering them.

When we last visited the workshop Ian had his taxidermy animals in display cases but now he has a large container which is airtight and smells like naphthalene to store his work in. This protects the work from friendly little beetles that like to eat museum exhibitions. Inside this container we saw evidence of how gifted and talented Ian is in the field of taxidermy.

Ian told us about how he uses glass eyes and how this is a very important part of the display presentation. We saw how the polystyrene and

foam bodies are moulded and the animal skin is then stretched over the frame. With birds a lot of care has to be taken in the skin and feather drying; Ian likened it to a bad hair day if the feathers are not kept in place. This was the answer to the question as to why a couple of the birds had knitting yarn wrapped around them.



Ian at the moment is working on the reconstruction of an emu from real bones and explained how each bone has to be individually wired and set up on a frame.



Lots more questions were asked and lots more interesting answers given. If you want to know more then you will have to come to Ian's workshop next time.

Counts Point

Saturday 16 August 2008

By Connie Spencer

Photos by Jenny Raven

It was a brisk morning with strong south-easterly winds which didn't abate one bit for the entire day. Jenny Raven, her friend Bernice and I headed to Serpentine Gorge where we left one vehicle and then proceeded to Serpentine Chalet Dam. After a hot drink we donned our day packs and headed for Counts Point.

The first 3 or 4 km of the trail is flat and easy going, following a creek through good stands of mulga, a variety of mallees and other shrubs. The Native Currant (*Psydrax latifolia*) is one of the more unusual shrubs with its broad, leathery olive green leaves. I was pointing out Dolomite Fuchsia (*Eremophila christopheri*) and lamenting the fact that Meg wasn't with us to explain the geology of the area when who should appear behind us but Meg Mooney, son Paddy and a friend (a 7am start was a bit to early for the boys). Following introductions, the boys went on ahead with instructions to wait for us at the top of the range – oh, to be young again!

Soon the easy bit was over; we made our way around Lomandra Gully and then upwards with yours truly climbing at a snails pace. Nevertheless we reached Counts Point where Meg had a welcome cup of tea for us.



How's this for a lunch spot with a view! Looking west from Counts Point - arguably one of the best views along the Larapinta Trail.



After a leisurely lunch out of the wind it was all downhill in the afternoon with many a stop to admire the views.



The hill slopes were covered in the spiny shrub, Yellow Broom (*Mirbelia viminalis*), giving them a yellow hue.

We arrived at Serpentine Gorge car park in the late afternoon, the boys having been there for some 3 or 4 hours! Our feet were telling us that we had hiked some 16 or 17 km but that would soon fade. The superb views will remain in our memories forever. Thank you, Jenny, Bernice, & Meg for your great company.

FAIR REPORT

Sustainability Fair at Olive Pink

Saturday 20 September, 2008

By Rosalie Breen



As in previous years the Field Naturalists Club had a stall at the Fair. Thanks to L.J. Hooker for providing a big shade structure, which gave

us plenty of cool space to meet and talk to visitors.

The competition to match names to photos of frogs (from Barb Gilfedder) and snakes (Peter Nunn's photos) created a lot of interest. We had entries from little people with parents, to tourists learning about our local animals. John Birmingham won the lucky draw for a book on Frogs and Reptiles of Alice Springs. The volunteers, Bob Read, Rhondda Tomlinson, Rosalie Breen, Shirley Goodman, Sue Fraser, Kaye Percy, Emma Bliss, Joan Wharton, and Jocelyn Davies who manned the stall had a good time chatting with interesting people, telling about our club, assisting with identification, with a chance too to buy plants and look at the other displays and later to sample the solar cooked foods. Bob also did a bit of advertising about the club by talking on local ABC radio.



Photos Jo Smith

NOTICES

GARDEN FAIR THANKS

Our stall at the Garden Fair went off well. A big thank you to all who helped out and especially to Rhondda for doing the organising. Thanks also to L J Hooker for not only lending the shade but also the labour to put it up.

SUBSCRIPTIONS AND WARNING

The AGM was held in August so **subscriptions are now due**. These can be paid at meetings or posted to the Secretary (see first page of newsletter).

Fees are Family \$30, Concession \$25
Individual \$25, Concession \$20

If you wish to continue getting the newsletter please pay now, or give the Treasurer a promise. We will start reviewing the mailing list this month.

NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the latest new members to the club and hope to see them at meetings and field trips. Peter Collins, Sabine Gonelli, Holger Woyt, Kaissa Preuss, Alicia and Elly Buchanan.

THE BIRD-BATH STUDY

Dear Colleague

Thankyou sincerely for your interest in our bird-bath project. We are interested in hearing about the use of bird-baths in any setting – suburban backyard, farm, inner-city apartment. As described in the *Wildlife Australia* article (2008 45(2)), in the context of the prolonged drought that much of eastern Australia has been experiencing it is likely that the bird-baths provided by people in their house yards are of great importance for the survival to many species. Remarkably, almost nothing is known about this potentially significant activity. This project aims to start the long process of understanding faunal use of bird-baths, as well as the motivations of the

people involved. There are three ways to be involved.

First level: Starting simply

With so little known, even the most straight-forward observations can be important. For example, a simple list of the species that are known to have visited your bird bath/s will be useful. Even better would be information on when and how often – there are often specific times of the day or the year when birds come. A simple note describing these things would be very helpful to us.

Second level: A bird-bath diary

For people with more time and interest, we would like to invite you to keep a slightly more detailed diary of bird-bath visits. We recognise that most people cannot sit and watch their bird-bath throughout the day but it may be possible to keep a note-book handy and jot down the species, how many individuals came, the time of day and any other relevant notes. For example, your diary entries might look like this:

12/7/08 7.35am Noisy Miner 3 Chased away the Crested Pigeons
12/7/0 8.05am Crested Pigeon 2
12/7/08 4.45pm Silvereye 4 Bathing vigorously

Third level: Timed observations

This would be best for people who are able to watch their bird-bath/s either regularly or for extended periods of time – say an hour or so. These observations aim to record more detail about the visit, such as how long the birds stayed and whether there were any interactions with other species – especially displacements.

There is a blank data sheet that could be used for these observations with an example of how they could be filled out (contact Darryl).

Why do you have a bird bath?

Finally, we are inviting everyone to write a simple explanation of why you have bothered to buy and maintain a bird-bath at your place. There is no 'correct answer' this; we genuinely would like to know why you like to provide water for wildlife.

Thankyou very much

Please send all information, queries and questions to:

Darryl Jones [or D.Jones@griffith.edu.au]
Griffith School of the Environment
Griffith University Nathan Qld 4111

Copy DEADLINE for articles for the next newsletter 26 September. Thanks,
Ed

2008 President's Report

The club continues in a healthy state.

Despite a few anxious moments it has been possible to find speakers for all meetings.

Once again we have had a good program of excursions. Attendance at excursions has been erratic, sometimes near the upper limit for safe management and sometimes looking like a committee meeting.

With our current membership our finances are sound. With the change in technology from printed to mostly digital newsletters our costs have decreased.

Michelle has stepped ably into the editor's position on Liz's departure. All ten editions have been published, and each has been well filled. Longer standing members may recall the time when the newsletter was only one or two sheets, and contrast it with the present one.

One thing that has not been particularly successful was the attempt to broaden participation in the planning of activities. I have run out of ideas on how to do this and can only ask again that any members with ideas please feel free to pass them on to the committee.

I would like to thank the committee for their efforts, and indeed thank all those who have contributed to the running of the club in any way. For the second consecutive year the secretary had to resign for personal reasons, and this time our thanks are due to Sue for stepping into the breach.

Robert Read
President

ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INC.
General Meeting held at Olive Pink Botanic Garden
Wednesday 10 September 2008

Opening: Bob Read, president as Chair, 8:55pm

Attendance: as per book

Apologies: Sue Fraser, Leoni Read, Barb Gilfedder, Shirley Goodman, Jenny Purdie

Minutes of previous meeting: Resolved that these be accepted

Business arising: nil

Correspondence in: Naturalist News, WA naturalists Club
Nature Territory, newsletter of NT Field Naturalists Club
Threatened Species Network news
Young Achievers award invitation to nominate (up to 26 yrs)

Treasurer's report: \$2661.85 in the bank, unchanged since last month, although 9 subscriptions yet to be deposited. Subscriptions for 2008-2009 now due

Newsletter editor required for October and November newsletters. Connie offered to edit Jan 2009 newsletter

OUTINGS AND OTHER EVENTS COMING:

- 13-14th September Painted Canyon; Bob Read to lead
- 20th September Desert Garden Fair; volunteers still needed for Field Nats stall, this supports Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Contact Rhonda Tomlinson
- 5th October Kuprilya Springs; Hermannsburg, Rhonda to lead
- 11th October Mt Undoolya; Rosalie Schultz to lead
- 25-26th October Hamilton Downs; Bob to lead
- 8th November; Sewage ponds

October meeting: Jocelyn Davies to speak about Mongolia, Wed 8th October
Note taker: Rhonda; Supper: Marilyn; Gate opener: Bob

Christmas party: possible sites to be considered by committee

SIGHTINGS:

- Spearwood flowers (*Pandorea doratoxylon*), dense and beautiful seen at Telegraph Station by Connie
- Bee-eaters back
- Golden headed *Cisticola* seen at sewage ponds by Bob
- Australian bustard and Jabiru seen by Michelle en route to Nhulunbuy
- Grey butcher bird seen by Bev

Closure: 9:15pm