

ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

November 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.

Postal address: P.O. Box 8663 Alice Springs, Northern Territory 0871

REMINDERS FOR NEXT MEETING

Gate Opener: Bob Read

Supper: Shirley Goodman

Note Taker: Barb Gilfedder

MEETINGS

Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of the month, 7:30 PM at the Olive Pink Botanic Garden.

12th November, 2008: Chris Palmer will speak about Inland and Desert Sand-skippers, two of our more elusive butterflies.

TRIPS/ ACTIVITIES

8th November, 2008: Bird watching at the Sewerage Ponds. Meet at the pond's gate 8:00 am. Leader Bob Read

29th November, 2008: Behind the Scenes Tour of the Desert Park. There are 8 places left. If you wish to come please let Bob Read know, either at the November meeting or email or telephone.

6th December, 2008:

7.30am Christmas Get-together at the Telegraph Station. Breakfast of bacon and eggs, fruit salad and yogurt plates, cutlery and drinks too will be provided. Bring something else if you wish, or to share, and a chair for sitting on. Please RSVP Bob 89521935 if you are coming for catering purposes. We will have a short walk leaving 6.40am for the energetic early birds.

Night Reptile Trip. I have discussed this with Peter Nunn, and we decided that it is probably not worth doing until there has been some rain. It is not possible to set a date, but if you are interested email me at rread1@bigpond.net.au and I will contact you when and if conditions are right and we are able to set a date.

NEWSLETTER DEADLINE

Deadline for articles for the next newsletter 26th January 2009

Connie Spencer will be compiling the next newsletter.

8952 4694 constans@bigpond.net.au

SUBSCRIPTIONS

This is the last newsletter for the year. If you wish to continue membership please pay subscription by the end of the year. Pay at the next meeting, or to the Club at PO Box 8663 or Treasurer at home 40 Chewings St. If for some reason you cannot pay please contact the Treasurer to explain and promise.

Fees are Family \$30, Concession \$25

Individual \$25, Concession \$20

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Australian Frog Watch

Summer is here and the frogs are finally out and about! Come along for a FREE slideshow down in the creek at Simpsons Gap to celebrate the Year of the Frog. Finish off the night with a spotlight walk, spotting some of our astonishing amphibians.

Bring a chair or rug, a torch and wear appropriate clothing and footwear

Simpsons Gap BBQ area 7-9 PM Sunday 9TH November, 2008

Simpsons Gap BBQ area 7-9 PM Tuesday 11TH November, 2008

Simpsons Gap BBQ area 7-9 PM Saturday 15TH November, 2008

Bookings Essential: Numbers are limited, call Michael Barritt at Parks and Wildlife on 89518247 or email at: michael.barritt@nt.gov.au

GRASSLANDS OF MONGOLIA

“Where meat is for men and grass is for animals”.

Jocelyn Davies 8th October, 2008

Jocelyn Davies had a very captivated audience as she talked about and showed photos of her trip to Mongolia, and spoke of the comparisons between Mongolia and Inner Mongolia.



Inner Mongolia is in China to and south of Mongolia.

This is Genghis Khan Country and the people are very proud as he united the country which is now an independent republic.

Jocelyn referred back to a book written in 1902 and found many of the references still are true today of the people, lifestyle, religion, flora and fauna.

The Mongolians are herders and graze goats, sheep and cattle. Their camels are of the two hump variety and horses are the predominant mode of transport.

Inner Mongolia is more densely populated and has a sophisticated infrastructure of mainly Chinese culture and religion.

The Mongolian people are very conscious of the importance of education even though they have a more nomadic lifestyle. Their religion now is Buddhism but they have a varied and colourful religious past which is evident in their traditional ceremonial dress, music, throat singing and prayer shrines. The prayer shrines are draped in blue flags.

Walking in the mountains the group saw areas of wild flowers resembling some of our high country plants. On the plains they saw 3 species of crane grazing with the cattle and Mongolian antelope, swans and many kinds of ducks. There were birds of prey and red bill chuffs.

Jocelyn, thank you for such an interesting and inspiring talk.

Mt Undoolya

The mountain of shade

(my crude Arrernte transliteration)

**Field Naturalists Outing Saturday 4th October
2008 by Rosalie Schultz & photos Rosalie
Breen.**

Two Rosalies (Breen and Schultz) and one each of Gavan (Breen), Bob (Read) and Nick (Tyllis) managed to assemble ourselves for a 6am start. We anticipated a temperature later in the day of 100 degrees, and enjoyed the cool of the early morning.

We drove toward the rising sun through heavy dust to a turn-off at the base of Mt Undoolya, about 40km east of Alice Springs.

We walked about 2km through pastoral country, some of which had almost no vegetation, even the

buffel grass almost completely removed by heavy grazing.

Closer to the mountain the vegetation was more attractive. We were much rewarded by our climb over boulders, up a gully and onto the top of Mt Undoolya 822m.



The top of Mt Undoolya

We saw diggings and scats from echidnas. Scats are distinctive, being cylindrical like a dog's but they do not lose their colour. The scats are full of sand that the echidnas ingest with the termites they eat. Under a magnifier we could see insect casing and lots of grass remnants in the scats. The echidnas must be safe up there, from their major predator, a large hominid mammal.



Rosalie S. examining scats

We discussed how many Australian plants and animal names suggest an Aboriginal origin – incorrectly. For example, the echidna from the Greek for sea-urchin or a mythical monster. “Emu” is Portuguese for ostrich.

Also notable on our walk were the white cypress pines (*Callitris glaucophylla*) protected from fire in deep gullies and rocky outcrops.

On top of the mountain we enjoyed watching a bird of prey - a peregrine falcon, soaring and calling as it hunted for food. Little wood-swallows were sharing the airspace, but we didn't see any attacks. The dust in the air restricted our views of the ranges.

The day heated up as we continued along the ridge, but the interest of the bush heated up too. Choruses of crested bell bird, rufous whistler, and grey shrike thrush charmed us. We saw the whistler and shrike thrush but not the bell bird. Inland thornbills and grey-headed honey eaters were seen, and dusky grass wrens heard.

Nick flushed out two spotted nightjars, which captivated us as they flew up then dropped back to the ground for cover. These are rarely seen but distinctive birds with white panels in their wings and scalloped buff plumage.

The return to the car was suspended as we examined a small clump of supplejacks (*Ventilago viminalis*). Distinguishing features were the deeply creviced brown-grey bark; pendulous leaves with prominent mid-veins; and tiny yellow flowers. This tree is omitted from Phillip Moore's book on Plants of Inland Australia, which is my main tool for plant identification. I note from Wikipedia – a more comprehensive reference but not very useful in the field – that supplejack is in the order Rosales. So maybe this was the third Rosal(i)e on the walk. The family is Rhamnaceae.

THE PAINTED CANYON

Eblana River, Mt Riddock Station
Saturday/Sunday 13-14 Sept 2008
By Joan Wharton & photos Rhondda T.

Bob, Rosalie, Rhondda and myself set out on Saturday morning to drive the 210 kms to Painted Canyon, on the Eblana River at Mt. Riddock Station, just off the Plenty Highway. As a fossickers' site this proved a very interesting location to explore. My interest was birds but I learned much about plants, trees and rocks as well.

On the way we noted the highest point on the Stuart Highway (700 metres) just after the Tanami turnoff and learned that this is the edge of the Todd catchment. Green shoots of grass along the verge were evidence of recent rain. Turning right onto the Plenty Highway, we checked out views, rocks and plants at the Radio Repeater Station 8388 as Rhondda knew we would find green epidote there as well as quartz.



Ptilotus and mint bush (*Prostanthera striatiflora*) were in flower and Bob photographed two bushes he is still to identify. Is one a native current? Colony Wattle and *Acacia victoriae* were in flower all along our route towards Gem Tree; Hooded Robin, Wedgetail Eagle, Australian Ringneck, Whistling Kite, Crested Pigeon, Pied Butcherbird and Grey-crowned Babbler were seen; while we noted the transition in the colour of the land from a deep red to the paler hues of garnet and zircon country as we neared Hart's Range. We even had to use the windscreen wipers as the clouds had opened!

About 210 kms along, Rosalie directed us to turn right just before a grid and follow the track along the fence line and river bed. Here we passed Bean Trees, Tea Trees, Bloodwoods (*Corymbia*) and Whitewoods and saw Black-faced Woodswallow, Yellow-throated Miner, Brown Falcon and Rainbow Bee-eater.

After lunch and a welcome cup of tea in our delightful camping area, complete with Red Gum and a special rock, we set off to explore the Painted Canyon.



In the riverbed we found evidence of garnets and rocks of epidote, iron rich, and quartz. Bob caught two specimens of grasshoppers (*Sphingonotus erythropterus*, common in sandy creek beds). On the surrounding rocky hillside many native plants were flowering including native *Oxalis*, three different types of Daisies, two species of Tea Tree, Corkwoods, two types of Native Cress and several types of Eremophila. Bob was amazed at an *Eremophila longifolia* which had set lots of fruit. It is still a mystery as to how these germinate. Birds love and feed on the fruit. Unfortunately the introduced Buffel Grass and Rosy Dock were there too.

After setting up camp, resting and yarning in the cool of the evening, we were very grateful for Rhondda's stew and rice as well as apple pie and custard. Bob watched and listened for bats. We did see one. Before long we had retired for the night taking precautions should some rain fall from the clouds overhead.

Next morning we set out to explore the area along the river bed noting the Red Gums, Bloodwoods, Tea Tree, Bean Trees and smaller plants, native geranium with its purple flower and wild passionfruit. Birds, including Brown Honeyeater, Diamond Dove, Rufous Whistler, Grey Shrike Thrush, Zebra Finch, Rainbow Bee-eater and Willy Wagtail were seen. Bob found Variegated Fairy Wrens in desert saltbush (*Rhagodia eremea*) while Rosalie was fascinated by the many large folds in the rocky outcrops, evidence of past earth movements. Rhondda was captivated by the shapes and shades of the River Red Gums.



On the river flat Rosalie, Rhondda and I looked for evidence of past habitation by miners who had worked the now abandoned mica mine. We found a pile of about 3 dozen Pickaxe beer bottles but they may have been the result of more recent human activity. Bob was already exploring the mica mine in the rocky hillside. Beside the gully where the mica had been extracted a large, soft mullock heap of mica pieces, was evidence of the cutting and sorting that had been done there. Rosalie loved the large chunks of white feldspar with prominent shiny cleavage planes. In the Red Gums a Grey Shrike Thrush called and Yellow-throated Miners mobbed a Brown Falcon.

Rosalie then had us looking for evidence of human ingenuity in the landscape. A small wall of rocks, lined with tar would have stored water for people and maybe stock, if and when it rained.

Leaving the main river bed we ventured up a side creek to find Desert Petunia (*Dipteracanthus*) in full flower two types of tea tree, wild tobacco and the call of a Bronzewing. To our delight the banded metaphoric rock formations showed evidence of large volumes of water having flowed down them over the years to a now dry pool which would have been heaven to thirsty people and animals. It looked like an exhilarating waterslide with several bumps and gullies. Rosalie and Rhondda were in their element!



Rosalie, plankton catcher on hand, took a sample for analysis of the little water remaining while Bob wielded his butterfly net. As we climbed up this rocky “glacier” Rosalie was checking out a rock only to discover the silhouette of a claw.



A huge Perentie sunning itself! Bob’s agility ensured we have a photo of the Perentie and not just a silhouette.

Our lunch stop was further along the Eblana River where huge, interesting Red Gums had their roots firmly in the river bed. Bob was called away by the sound of a Pallid Cuckoo but he and I didn’t find it. To track down a Singing Honeyeater in *Hakea leucoptera* was a further delight for the birdwatchers.

As we set off to drive home, I noted how well equipped the party was - not only water, esky, food, binoculars and cameras but also Bob’s butterfly net, geologist hammer, bat detector as well as Rosalie’s plankton net. A stop at Gem Tree refreshed us and enabled us to see the many

special rocks and gems that the surrounding landscape provides for our delight.



A special thank you to Bob, Rosalie and Rhondra for including me in this outing and teaching me more about the Red Centre.

KUPRILYA SPRINGS

4th October, 2008

Four of us set out in Bob’s vehicle to attend the bush church service and thanksgiving for the water being piped from Kuprilya to Hermannsburg in 1935. The pipeline is no longer in use but there is a small spring and remnants of the original pipeline.



The church service was a little late starting which gave us chance to look around and talk to people. The setting was so peaceful and the shady trees added to the atmosphere.



Nearing the end of the service the babies born within the last 12 months were brought forward by their parents and sponsors to be christened. Later there was a BBQ which all were invited to take part in but we took our own food as we had not let anyone know we were coming. By mid afternoon there were people everywhere having picnics under shady trees and lots of children. Kuprilya Springs is a very interesting story and Jose Petrick has written a book which tells the story of a unique adventure of Violet Teague and how the water came to be piped to Hermannsburg.
By Rhondda Tomlinson



This very gracious lady spoke on how she came to be a primatologist and where it has led her life. She is now traveling the world promoting the Jane Goodall Institute for the preservation of the chips she has come to love and personally know.



She praised all the local environmental heroes and commended their work to save wildlife from extinction.

Rhondda Tomlinson

JANE GOODALL'S TALK

Alice Springs Desert Park

3rd October 2008

This was not an official Field Naturalists outing but in the audience were many members so I thought it deserved a mention. A very talented group of Aboriginal children played a drum welcome and introduction to the speaker, Jane Goodall DBE.

ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED
Minutes of General Meeting held at Olive Pink Botanic Garden
on Wednesday 8 October 2008

Open: President, Bob Read declared the meeting open at 9.15pm

Present: As per attendance book.

Apologies: Margaret and Jim Lawrence

Minutes of previous Meeting:

Rosalie moved that the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 14 September be accepted as a true and correct record.

Seconded by Rhondda. All in favour.

Treasurers Report:

Statement tabled showing a credit balance of \$3161.85.

Correspondence In:

Nature Territory – NT Field Naturalist Club
The Naturalists News – Western Australian Naturalists Club
Membership subscription from Meg Mooney
Membership subscription from Jude Mapleson
Westpac Bank Statement

Correspondence Out:

L J Hooker Real Estate – thank you for loan of shade tent for Garden Expo.

General Business:

- Newsletter- the club still needs someone to take this job on. In the meantime the following people have offered to do a month each.
November – Rhonda
February – Connie

Outings/Trips

- 25/26 October. Proposed trip to Hamilton Downs. – Lapsed due to lack of interest
- 8 November, Sewerage Ponds will be the next trip
- 29 November, Christmas Break-up, a breakfast at Desert Park

Sightings:

- Barb, Joan, Rosalie and Will saw an OSPREY at the sewerage ponds on 28 September. An Oriental Plover and Major Mitchell Cockatoos have also been seen at the ponds.
- Joan has seen an Orange Chat, Black Breasted Buzzard a Grey Honey-Eater and 3 Banded Whitefaces.
- Joan and Rosalie watched two Grey Fantails displaying in the Bond Gap area.
- Barb saw a 200ml knob tailed gecko in her shed – bigger than we usually see.
- Members on the Mt Undoolya trip saw 2 Peregrine Falcons and 2 Spotted Night Jars

Next Meeting: Wednesday 12 November

Gate Opener: Bob
Note taker: Barb
Supper: Shirley

Before closing the meeting Bob thanked Joan for her participation and contribution to club activities during her stay in Alice Springs and concluded with the words “it’s a pleasure to have you around”.

Meeting closed at 9.30 pm.