



ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

October 2009 Newsletter

Red-necked Avocet. *Photo* Mat and Cathy Gilfedder



Learn more about this and other waders who live and visit Alice Springs sewage ponds from Peter Collins at this month's Field Nats meeting

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

Web site: www.geocities.com/alicenats

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MEETINGS

- Wednesday 14 October –** Peter Collins Ex Warden at Broome Bird Observatory talking about 'Waders, Flyways and Flagging'.
- Wednesday 11 November -** Dr Christopher Palmer, entomologist with Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Service talking about Central Australian insects and how they respond to climate.

TRIPS/ ACTIVITIES

- 10 October** Day trip to Native Gap Conservation Reserve, 115 km north of Alice Springs on the Stuart Hwy. This trip is suitable for all levels of fitness. The Reserve has a variety of plant species the most notable being the White Cypress Pine. It provides a good habitat for the Black-footed Rock-wallaby, and the Short-beaked Echidna is known to inhabit the sandy flats. Wear sturdy shoes, bring lunch, water & sun protection. Meet at the Sargent Street sign on the north Stuart Hwy @ 8am. For further information contact the trip leader Connie Spencer on 8952 4694.
- 17 October** Short (time and distance) visit to the Land for Wildlife site at O.L.S.H. College Sadadeen Campus on Sadadeen Road. We will wander around taking a close look at plants as a lesson in identification, and observe and checkout any other natural features we can find in the area, eg ants, rabbit damage, birds. I am hoping to have a spokes-person from the group to give a brief view of the aims for Land, and Gardens for Wildlife. Meet at 8.00 am in car park at front of school to be guided where to go. Enquiries Rosalie 89523409
- 24 October** Alice Springs Sewage Ponds. Peter Collins will come along. Contact person is Barb Gilfedder. The Recycling Plant open day is the same morning (see p. 5) and there is the opportunity to do both.
- 7 November** Early morning walk (2-3 hours) from Flynn's Grave to Flagon Hill using rough vehicle tracks and then cross country to Sue Fraser's place on Mparntwe Drive in Stirling Heights for morning tea. Approximately 4-5 km. Meet 7am @ Flynn's Grave. Wear sturdy shoes, bring water, hat and sun protection. Contact: Connie Spencer on 8952 4694

If you want to attend any trips please RSVP to Trip Leader

NEXT NEWSLETTER

The deadline for the next newsletter is **Wednesday 28th October**. Please send your contributions to Emily Findlay – robbiemily@hotmail.com

President	Barbara Gilfedder	8955 5452	fedders@octa4.net.au
Vice-President	Sue Fraser	8952 5728	suefra@hotmail.com
Secretary	Shirley Goodman	8952 5724	sunbear68@hotmail.com
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Public Officer	Rhonda Tomlinson	8953 1280	rhondda.tomlinson@nt.gov.au
Newsletter Editor	Emily Findlay	8955 0385	robbiemily@hotmail.com

From the President....

Thank you to the many members who have given me words of support, encouragement and congratulation on being elected President of the Alice Springs Field Naturalist Club.

It has so far been an easy job. Immediately after the Committee meeting, we drove off for five weeks to north Queensland and had a wonderful time there. The Committee and other members did great work, not only keeping everything going, but organising the stall at the Eco-fair. This I gather went very well. Thank you to all concerned.

Bob Read as President has laid down an excellent foundation for the club over the last thirteen years. I appreciate that, and also the fact that he is remaining on the Committee, while still in Alice Springs, by way of continuity and support. Thank you Bob.

This is a new role for me. I hope there will not be too many changes. However I would appreciate hearing about ideas any member may have about how the club operates, ideas for topics and/or potential speakers, and field trip suggestions. Please talk to me or any Committee member about these.

Thank you to Emily and contributors for the high quality of material and production of our monthly newsletter.

My last thank you is to all the Committee, most of whom have been returned at the AGM, for their hard work and dedication to the Club. Thank you all.

Barbara Gilfedder



**September Speaker - Star Gazing with Stuart Traynor.
By Rosalie Breen**

What a great meeting we had with Stuart. First we gathered at the gate of Olive Pink awaiting the gate-opener, who had forgotten us. But not to waste time we had a good chat, received our star charts, and began with the Southern Cross to get our bearings on the sky .The closest star of the cross is Alpha Centauri, but close! It would take 30 thousand years to get there knowing it would take the space shuttle 3 days to get to the moon and would take 5 weeks to get to the sun.

Once inside the gardens we wandered off into the dark to the clear area, with the Southern Cross the first focus. From the cross one can locate the south celestial point, a point in the sky around which all the southern hemisphere stars appear to rotate, clockwise, east to west. Though of course it is us, planet Earth which is doing the rotating.

The brightest object in the sky was the planet Jupiter which has a yellowish colour, easy to distinguish it from other planets by these features. These so called wandering stars have different paths across our sky depending on their distance from our own planet. Venus appears always low on the horizon either in the morning or evening. Saturn had already set. Jupiter was travelling in the constellation Capricorn the goat. The Scorpion is easy to distinguish with its curved tail and three stars in a slight curve for its head. The middle of these is the bright Antares which is a super giant, a massive star reaching the end of its life so it is cooling down and appears red. The Scorpion used to have claws but the Italians cut them off to make other constellations, chiefly Libra, the scales.

Above is Sagittarius, the Archer, more usefully called the Teapot. We could see the handle, lid and spout. Even a drip of tea. Stuart would show us the objects with his spotlight, the beam acting like a long pointer. Around this area is the centre of the galaxy. We are more to the edge.

Libra, Scorpion, Capricorn are constellations of the Zodiac, a band of twelve encircling the earth. These were marked out in historical times to aid in predicting equinoxes. The planets wander in the zodiac. Looking to the north the brightest star is Vega, and a bit to the east the Eagle with his head, tail and wings forward. Below him is Delphinus the dolphin, a small and close group of stars. We spotted the northern cross, also called Cygnus the swan, although a tree was in the way a bit.

Within this area is a black hole discovered by space missions because of its effect on a luminous star in Cygnus. The swan star was losing mass and emitting x-rays. Black holes are the vacuum cleaners of space. Put simply they are the remains of giant stars which, having burnt up all their energy, finally implode and their matter become so small and dense that nothing can escape from them, even light and anything vaguely close will get sucked into it because of its enormous gravity.

Back inside the building, Stuart borrowed a couple of dinner plates to demonstrate how our galaxy looks. He then answered questions, while we enjoyed supper and more conversations.



Desert Smart Eco-Fair

Once again the Field Nats stall was a success. The bird call competition attracted a lot of interest. Below are comments from the helpers which I think reflect

“Yes I enjoyed Saturday, and a big part of it were the helpers who were friendly and enthusiastic. And we all learned to keep up with new technology!” (Rosalie)

“I think it was a huge success, everyone enjoyed themselves and we coaxed lots of people into recognizing bird calls they didn't think they knew.” (Sue)

“Had fun learning how to operate the IPod – new skill learned.” (Rhondda)

Every year we learn to solve some of the problems in putting up the display that can withstand some wind. We now own a display board. Does anyone have somewhere to put it?

There are a lot of people to thank.

- LJ Hooker for the lending and erecting the shade shelter which made our stall a comfortable spot.
- Those who helped with the stall and setting up.
- Sarah and Craig for editing the bird calls and loaning the iPod and speakers.

Bob Read



Red Centre Birdweek

This year Red Centre Birdweek was held between the 19th and the 26th of September at Alice Springs venues including Alice Springs Desert Park, Alice Springs Telegraph Station, Olive Pink Botanic Garden and the Alice Springs Water Treatment Works.

Attendees at Birdweek events were a combination of locals, interstate visitors and a surprising number of overseas birdwatchers who happened to be in the region and took the opportunity to join in. At the time of writing attendance figures for the events at ASDP are not available but according to staff events such as Eaglewatch Live where visitors could view goings-on at a wild wedge-tailed eagle nest through a telescope

were very popular. By the time all attendance figures for all events are collated the number will be well in the thousands.

Olive Pink Botanic Garden hosted many events through the week including three guided walks on the relationships between plants and birds, two excellent seminars on bird-related topics and an exhibition of bird artworks by a local artist. The main event hosted by OPBG was the Ecofair of which Birdweek was a small part. A guided birdwatching walk, two bird-related workshops and a stall by Birds Australia were part of the goings on, and several other stallholders took on the bird theme and offered bird-related activities including ASFNC and ABC local radio. Birds Australia staff were very impressed by the interest shown by locals- they counted some 400 people visit the stall and chat with Birds Australia and Birdweek volunteers. Their goal was to raise the profile of 'Bird Atlasing' in the Red Centre. For more information see <http://www.birddata.com.au/>

Three dawn 'Birds Before Work' birdwatching events attracted much interest from the public. Two held at the Alice Springs Water Treatment Works (AKA the poo ponds!) were great successes- attendees viewed excellent migratory birds such as Greenshanks, Little Curlews and Wood Sandpipers as well as some of our glorious arid zone residents.

A screening of the bird race documentary 'Chasing Birds' at ASDP proceeded the NT's first ever 'Twitchathon', a race between teams of birdwatchers to see as many species as possible in 24hrs. Three teams competed officially (and 2 unofficially). The overall winning team: titled the 'Quadrabinoculars', clocked up 101 species in 24 hrs including great birds such as Grey Honeyeater and Oriental Plover. The prize for 'best bird' went to the 'Gibberbirders' for spotting Bourke's Parrot. Many great birds were seen by participants including Ground Cuckoo Shrike, Black Falcon and Dusky Grasswrens, showing just what an excellent birdwatching location the Red Centre can be. The results will be entered into this year's twitchathon national championships- our teams may not win in terms of quantity, but they could on quality!

A lasting legacy of this year's Red Centre Birdweek is the publication of a 'Birds in Backyards' fact sheet for Alice Springs which was distributed inserted into the Centralian Advocate generously supported by Territory Discoveries, ASDP and Birds Australia. This resource is aimed at the general public who want to identify birds in their gardens and learn more about ways to help them flourish. Copies can be obtained from ASDP and other venues around Alice Springs.

I'd like to extend my warmest thanks to everyone who donated precious time, resources and enthusiasm to make Red Centre Birdweek 2009 happen. Despite major challenges this event- the first desert birdwatching festival in the Southern Hemisphere- has raised the profile of desert birds in our community and has really put the Red Centre firmly on the map for birdwatchers.

A post-birdweek meeting to (constructively) debrief and perhaps make tentative plans for next year will be held if there is enough interest. Please contact me at goanna7000@yahoo.com.au if you are interested in attending.

Mark Carter- Birdweek Volunteer

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Open Day – Water Reclamation Plant, Alice Springs

As part of National Water Week, we are hosting an open day at the Water Reclamation Plant (Alice Springs Wastewater Stabilisation Ponds) on Saturday 24 October from 9am – 12 noon. Residents are being invited to take a tour of the plant, view the award-winning buildings by local architect Brendan Meney and native landscaping recently completed by Greening Australia. Water-saving materials will also be on display to encourage residents to reduce water consumption.

Bob Read

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Cryptogams - Note by Rosalie Breen with help from articles by David Eldridge

On Spencer Hill there are patches of microbiotic soil crusts, made up of groups of small organisms growing on or in the top layers of soil - mosses, liverworts, algae, lichens, fungi, bacteria and cyanobacteria. The group is referred to as Cryptogams a term from two classical Greek words, *kryptos* meaning hidden and *gamon* meaning marriage. . The cyanobacteria in particular are vital for the wellbeing of the soil in these semi-arid conditions. They stabilize the soil, preventing erosion from both water and wind, and aid in plant survival and growth by their ability to fix nitrogen making it available to plants, and, in a symbiotic relationship with other plants, enable these to photosynthesize. The cryptogams as well as stabilizing the soil provide a habitat and food for invertebrates, assist in water infiltration and provide niches for plants to germinate. The crusts are susceptible to fire and trampling, especially by hooved animals or vehicles, which destroy the pores within the soil. Once the crust is broken it is slow to re-establish. On the hill these patches looked dead/grey, but come rain the organisms will absorb water and swell up producing a beautiful green carpet.

Bob suggested the following worthwhile web site for more information and pictures
<http://www.anbg.gov.au/cryptogams/underworld/index.html>

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From the Editor

The paragraph in last month's newsletter titled "Araluen Cultural Precinct Natural History Collection, History?" was contributed by ASFN Member, Anne Pye. We inadvertently omitted her name.

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Alice Springs Waste Stabilisation Ponds - BIRDWATCHERS MAP AND GUIDE.

This leaflet has recently been published on the web by [Power and Water Corporation](#).
If you go to the Alice Springs Field nats web site; www.geocities.com/alicenats

you will find a LINK to this and can view it and print it out yourself.
It gives an idea of what birds can often be seen at the ponds and the best places to start looking for them.

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DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLANS (personal comment)

The West MacDonnells and Watarrka open for comment until the 13 November.

The West Macs in particular is of great interest to club members. The plan is a formidable document (5.8 Mb download and 164 pages). I would strongly suggest that all members look at this. I have not yet been able to download the file because of its size, but considering the amount of access we have lost at other parks I am uneasy as to what may be in it.

The club should consider and making a submission. The draft plans are available at
<http://www.nt.gov.au/nreta/parks/manage/comment.html> (good luck with downloading).

Bob Read

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NATIONAL WATER WEEK 2009 Alice Springs Events
“SECURING OUR WATER FUTURE”

THE DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES INVITES YOU TO THE FOLLOWING EVENTS:

MONDAY 19 TH OCTOBER

“SECURING OUR WATER FUTURE”: PUBLIC FORUM

Do you have questions about the water supply in Alice Springs, the Mereenie aquifer, how it is managed and what actions are being taken for water security? Come along to this facilitated public information event. Andy McNeil room, Alice Springs Town Council, 5.30 pm Speakers: Alan Whyte (Power and Water); Graham Ride (groundwater consultant, Centreprise Resource Group); Tanya Howard (Water Conservation NRETAS); Glenn Marshall (desertSMART COOLmob).

WEDNESDAY 21 ST OCTOBER: COMMUNITY FILM NIGHT

A special FREE screening of two locally produced films, which address water management from different cultural perspectives.

“Water in Alice Springs” – Climate Action Group. Melaleuca Award winning short film. An engaging look at local attitudes to water and where our water comes from.

“Mer Rrkwerakert” – April Campbell and Lisa Watts.

Traditional owners from Ti Tree go on a journey to visit *Rrkwer* (Brooks Soak) to respect their ancestors, to perform ceremony and to see how the country has changed. They haven't been back for over 40 years. This film records their journey and their observations on environmental change. Desert Park Exhibition Centre 7 pm. Free event.

ALL WEEK: DISPLAY AT ALICE SPRINGS PUBLIC LIBRARY

Student art works from Ti-Tree School. Indigenous Language and Culture students undertook a unit of work on water sources, its use and how to look after their water supply.

A selection of their posters will be on display at the library to celebrate National Water Week.

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The Great Australian Marsupial Night Stalk



Come along for a FREE slideshow about the marsupials of Central Australia, both rare and common! Finish off the night with a spotlight walk spotting some of our astonishing fauna.

Bring a torch, chair and appropriate clothing.

- Trephina Gorge Campground Sat 10 Oct 7-9pm
- Watarrka Picnic Area near Gorge Wed 14 Oct 7-9pm

Bookings Essential: Call Michael Barritt at Parks & Wildlife on 89518247 or email:

michael.barritt@nt.gov.au

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“Dry And Diverse” is an exhibition of recent etchings and linoprints exploring dry zone flora by Helen Clarke. Helen's reduction linocuts are noted for their lustrous, textured surfaces and strong colours. As the edition is created, the lino is slowly destroyed through the reduction process. The hand-coloured etchings depict seeds, pods and other parts of plants organised to suit her sense of design. Runs until 12 October. More info: Benjamin Convery, 8952 2154, curatoropbg@internode.on.net

Mark your Diaries – ‘Australian Naturalists’ Network

The Chinchilla Field Naturalists Club Inc (CFNC) cordially invites naturalists to participate in the Sixth ANN Get-together 24th August – 4th September 2010 Chinchilla Queensland.

On the basis of previous ANN Get-togethers it is expected that interest in the event will exceed the number of places available (max 90). IN order to reserve a place, an expression of interest and a deposit of \$200 should be sent to the CFNC Inc as soon as possible, and no latter than 1st December 2009.

Contact CFNC: Kath Truscott, ann2010@bordnet.com.au, alternatively write to CFNC (ANN) PO Box 368, Chinchilla Qld. 4413.

Club Badge Now Available

We now have available a club badge in colour, featuring our logo, the spinifex pigeon, which can be embroidered onto a t-shirt or other garment or made into a sew-on badge. This has been arranged through the business, Central Uniforms and Embroidery Janet and Bruce Skein Shop 2/24 Parsons St, Phone 8952 2458



Members are invited to visit the shop to choose a shirt from among their extensive range and put it aside or just designate style, size and colour. Alternatively take in your own garment. When the shop has an order of at least five they will process the order. At the next meeting we could collect orders or garments and I will take them into the shop if that is more convenient. Costs will be \$6.00 for embroidery on a shop shirt or \$6.50 for sewing onto your own garment or \$6.50 for a badge. Please ring Rosalie 89523409 for arrangements or enquiries.

Subscriptions are Now Over Due

Membership fees for the year 1 August 2009 to 30 July 2010 were due in August. If you have not renewed your membership, **this will be the last newsletter you receive.** These can be paid at meeting nights or posted to the Treasurer. If details have changed please indicate. New members to complete the form

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Inc PO Box 8663, Alice Springs NT 0871

Name(s) _____ Address: _____

Phone Contact (home) _____ (work) _____ (mobile) _____

Email (print carefully) _____ Renewal/New Membership

Payment enclosed \$ _____

Fees: Family \$30 Concession \$25 Individual \$20 Concession \$15

Interstate past member. Newsletter only, \$10

Subscription year begins at August AGM.

ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED
Minutes of General Meeting held at Olive Pink Botanic Garden
on Wednesday 9 September 2009

Open: Vice-President, Sue Fraser declared the meeting open at 9.00pm.
Present: As per attendance book
Apologies: Barb Gilfedder, Connie Spencer.

Minutes of previous Meeting:

As usual minutes of the previous meeting had been circulated as part of the newsletter. The minutes on the August meeting were moved for acceptance by Bob, seconded by Kay Bailey. Accepted.

Matters Arising:

Bird Week has received sufficient funding and does not need the extra funds offered by the club.

Treasurer's Report:

There is a current balance of \$2437.75

Moved for acceptance by Rhondda Tomlinson, Seconded by Marilyn Hall. Accepted

Correspondence In:

Western Australian Naturalists Club
NT Field Naturalists Club
Westpac Bank
ALEC
Membership renewal

The Naturalist News – September 2009
Nature Territory – September 2009
Monthly statement
emails re Desert Smart Sustainability Fair

Correspondence Out:

NT Dept of Justice

Notification of office bearers following AGM

General Business:

- DesertSMART EcoFair (Sustainability Fair.). Responsibilities have been allocated. Setting up of shade structure will take place on Friday evening and display will be set up on Saturday morning. Sue will email out the roster.
- Bird Week: Sarah handed out leaflets with activities for the week. The week culminates with a 24 hr Twitchathon starting at 7pm on Friday 25. Bob, Shirley and Barb expressed interest in being involved.
- Polo Shirts with the ASFNC logo are now available from Central Uniforms and Embroidery, with the option of buying your garment elsewhere and taking it in or buying from their range. It costs about \$6.50 for the embroidery which will be done when there are 5 or more orders.
- Sue Fraser donated a First Aid kit to the club suitable for taking on trips. It can be collected by trip leaders from Sarah White – ASFNC Property Officer.

Outings/Trips- Reports

- Sat 22 August - This walk with Connie in the Larapinta Hills was changed to an exploration of the south side of Mt Gillen. We will hear about it when Kaye Percy writes up a report for the newsletter.

Outings/Trips- Reports

- Sat 12 September – Ridge walk from Trephina Gorge to John Hayes Rockhole. Contact person – Shirley
- Sat 19 September - desertSMART EcoFair at Olive Pink Botanic Garden – ASFNC will have a stall and run a competition.
- Saturday 10 October – trip to Native Gap
- 17 October – Land for Wildlife area at OLSH

Sightings:

- The group that explored the south side of Mt Gillen saw a mulga snake, painted finches and a spotted night-jar.
- Several members commented on seeing/hearing more Grey Shrike Thrushes in their gardens than they are used to.
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Next Meeting: Wednesday 14 October 2009

Note taker: Shirley
Supper: Bob
Gate: Barb

Meeting closed at 9.17 pm.