



June 2010

Alice Springs Field Naturalist Club Newsletter



Ghost Gum near Running Waters by Jim Lawrence

Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month (except December & January) at 7:00pm at the Higher Education Building at Charles Darwin University. Visitors are welcome

Look - New Meeting Venue and Start Time. Details inside.

CONTENTS

Meeting....p2 Trips/Activities...p2 Change of Venue & Time...p3
May Speaker...p3 Illamurta Springs Trip...p5
Todd River Walk...p7 Conlin Lagoon Trip ...p8
Club Badge...p9 Interesting Sightings...p9

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

Web site:

<http://www.alicefieldnaturalists.org.au>

NEXT NEWSLETTER

The deadline for the next newsletter is **Friday 25th June**. Please send your contributions to Emily Findlay – robbiemily@hotmail.com

MEETINGS

Wed 9 Jun: 7.00pm at CDU, Chris Palmer, entomologist Parks & Wildlife Service
“Central Australian insects and their adaptations to our harsh climate”.

Wed 14 Jul: 7.00pm at CDU, Ashley Sparrow “Landscape ecology in Antarctic dry valleys”

Australian Plant Society

Wed 2 Jun: 7.30pm at OPBG is a Members' evening. Please bring your plant and habitat photos to share, either on a disk or memory stick.

FIELD TRIPS / ACTIVITIES

Sun 29 May 3-5pm Wander around Olive Pink Botanic Garden checking out the native grasses that have come up after 400mm of summer rains. The late afternoon light is quite special.

Sat/Sun 5 & 6 June Overnight camping trip to the Train Hills. Delightful valleys to wander through. High clearance 4WD only and maximum of 6 vehicles. Round trip approximately 300 km. Contact Connie Spencer on 8952 4694 for further information plus meeting time and place.

Sat/Sun 12&13 June Overnight trip to *Acacia latzii* sites SW off the Ernest Giles Road for monitoring work. Can be a one day trip on the Sat for those who do not want to camp. Approximately 320 km round trip. Meet 8 am at the Information Bay on the South Stuart Hwy opposite the Old Timers Home. Contact Connie Spencer on 8952 4694 for further information.

Sun 11 July Day walk on the southern side of Mt Gillen Range from Heavitree Gap. Contact Connie Spencer on 8952 4694 for further information.

Sat 17 July Bird watching trip with Mark Carter to the vicinity of Kunoth Bore on the Tanami Road. Meet at 6.40 am sharp, at the end of Sargent Street on the North Stuart Highway. Contact Barb Gilfedder 89 555452.

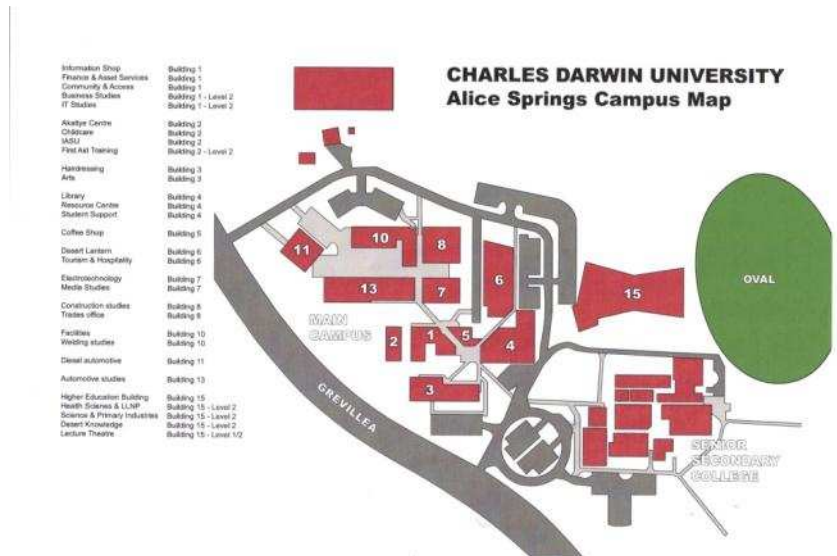
President	Barbara Gilfedder	8955 5452	fedders@octa4.net.au
Vice-President	Sue Fraser	8955 0675	suefra@hotmail.com
Secretary	Shirley Goodman	8952 5724	sunbear68@hotmail.com
Treasurer	Rosalie Breen	8952 3409	rosalie.breen@email.com
Property Officer	Sarah White	8953 8605	sarahsg2@dodo.com.au
Public Officer	Rhondda Tomlinson	8953 1280	rhondda.tomlinson@nt.gov.au
Committee Member	Vicki Gordan	89533981	vickigor95@bigpond.com
Committee Member	Connie Spencer	89524694	constans@bigpond.net.au
Newsletter Editor	Emily Findlay	8955 0385	robbiemily@hotmail.com

Change of Meeting Venue and Time

Alice Springs Field Naturalist Club will meet as from May, at the lecture theatre in the Higher Education Building at Charles Darwin University. To find this, enter from Grevillea Drive, entrance 2, next to the Childcare facility. The same entrance that you would use going to the Greening Australia Nursery or the Desert Lantern Restaurant. The Higher Education Building is the large, newish brown building on the left side of the road (15 on the map). The lecture theatre is just inside the main entrance on the right.

Meetings will start at 7.00pm, still on the second Wednesday of the month. We need to be out of the building before 9.00pm.

Last month, members found the new meeting venue at CDU was comfortable and safer; Excellent viewing of the power point presentation and no problems with keys or moving furniture.



May Speaker - Jochem Van der Reijden - "The Invertebrate Displays at the Desert Park" by Wendy MacTaggart

Joe's enthusiasm for invertebrates is infectious and he is clearly passionate about his zoo-keeper job at the Desert Park, spending half of his time with the invertebrates and half of his time with the reptiles.

This talk was prepared for a presentation to inspire interstate zoo-keepers to increase their invertebrate displays without too much cost and time. Invertebrates are very poorly represented in Australian zoos where the focus is mostly on bigger, furry animals.

Displaying invertebrates to the public needs to be done in a way that will generate interest and this presents some challenges:-

There are many considerations in deciding type of invertebrate display. Does one species eat another species or does a single species eat each other? In these cases an impressive looking cage containing many specimens could be left with only a single individual. And is an exhibition of cannibalism appropriate? How to light the cage if the invertebrate only comes out at night or likes to hide in dark places, lives in burrows etc.?

Single Species Display: Clever use of lighting can give the impression that a display is larger than it really seems. In this example a centipede is seen at the edge of darkness on a clay pan with cage boundaries not visible.



Multi-species Display: The evil looking praying mantis (*Archimantis quinquelobata*) 14cm total length eats grasshoppers providing an interesting spectacle for visitors. This impressive invertebrate can be combined with a Curl snake (*Suta suta*) which eats mice. The Curl snake is a ground dweller whilst the Praying mantis is primarily a tree dweller.



Due to their different feeding habits and use of display space these two species can live together without any problems. Multi species displays can be as easy as the Thorny Devils mixed with Black Ants which are really their food source. Ants when interpreted correctly can be a valuable addition to the display.



In situ Displays: These fixed or mobile interpretive displays have the advantage of informing the public what invertebrates can be found by looking in the surrounding natural environment, for example the bush coconut story or the witchetty grub story. The one that is currently being developed is a planted area with *Capparis spp.* and *Cullem spp.* to attract butterflies and thus create a “natural” butterfly garden.



Interpretive Displays without the invertebrates

present - These have only the signs of the invertebrate, for example a Mulga Ant nest or Cicada larva shells.

Many accounts of the fascinating behaviours of invertebrates were included giving a new appreciation for invertebrates as well as the challenges of exhibiting them. I’m sure those present at this interesting talk will be checking out the invertebrate displays at the Desert Park very soon.

At the end of Jochem's talk, he offered to show Field Naturalist members (a few at a time) the displays that he has put together at the Desert Park nocturnal house. It would need to be during a weekend when he is at work. You would need to pay your own entry fee, but I expect most of you already have an annual pass - available at the same cost as a single entry for locals.

I am compiling a list of people who would be interested. Please contact me if you wish your name to be added to the list. When Jochem is available I will then give you a ring and match you to a time slot. Barb Gilfedder 89555452

Illamurta Springs, Running Waters and Finke River 4WD Route - 1, 2 & 3 May 2010

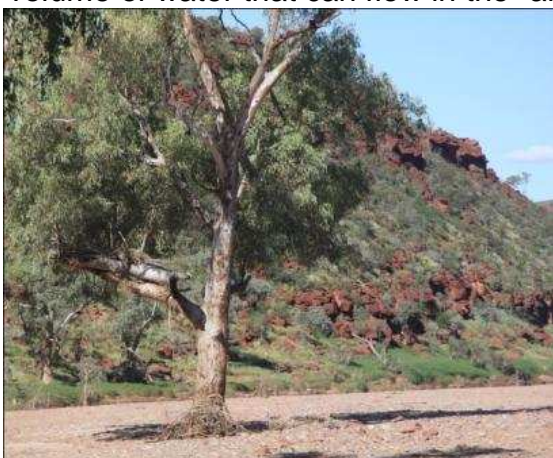
Jim Lawrence (our fearless leader) - We have been going bush for 40 years and have seldom seen the countryside looking as fantastic as it is now. The long stretches of water in the Finke were picturesque and the numerous river crossings we had were fun. The paddling across beforehand was reminiscent of one's youth!!!!

Marg Lawrence – I learnt a great deal as there was so much vegetation to be seen. I followed Connie with my book to note it all down (I am a beginner in such things). More highlights were the large flocks of Budgies on the ground, feeding - seemingly unaware of us - and Cockatiels at the Running Waters' cattle yards.

Jenny Purdie - Apart from all the wonderful flowering plants, the great camping site and wonderful company, the thing that stood out for me, was the forest of juvenile Desert Oaks (*Allocasuarina decaisneana*). They went for about 15 km along the road from the Ernest Giles Road to Illamurta Springs. After visiting the springs on day 2 Steve & I doubled back to photograph these young trees which perhaps were the result of the big rains in 2000/2001.



Steve Sinclair - After living in the Top End for 30 years I was amazed to see debris high in the trees along the Finke River indicating the huge volume of water that can flow in the "arid" centre. Although disappointed there were no barramundi in the beautiful waterholes there was plenty of life in the form of tadpoles and small fish!



Gavan Breen - Most impressive wildlife act of the weekend was by the dashing little fish charging up and down a short stretch of the river, obviously catching edible things that we couldn't see.

Connie gave us the biggest laugh of the weekend. She took a billy out of the fire and blew on it to blow the ash off. She didn't know the power of her lungs, and a snowstorm of ash erupted from the fire and enveloped her.

The easiest wheel change I've ever had was when one of my tyres started going down on the first day. I wound the jack up and down again, and did very little else. Thanks, you others, especially Allan.

My biggest triumph of the weekend was getting up the bank at the Ellery-Finke junction first try! You just have to charge headlong at your target, just like those little fish.

Rosalie Breen - It was a real high clearance 4WD trip. Most impressive for me was Gavan wrestling all day with his non power-steering Toyota, over the rocks, through the water, up the steep sand banks, and slurring along the beautiful white and deep sand stretches. When we came to the first big river crossing, I thought no way! But then far across on the other side were car tracks up the bank. So it was aim for that. Jim and others walked out over rock shelves and water to check the best path, explained it to the drivers, and had people marking the way. Then one by



one the drivers came across- no trouble. We knew that Jim was there with his trusty Nissan and tow rope to help, which were needed twice.



We camped both nights at Running Waters – could hardly have been better. There was a small creek crossing and up the sand to get to a sandy island above the numerous channels of the mighty Finke river bed. We had plenty of room to spread out and have a camp fire, as we were not in the national park. The sand was sparsely covered with couch, Gavan skited that he could walk about in bare feet because no prickles. First night we went to sleep after a light show of stars and rising moon, with a dingo chorus. In the morning it was the Butcherbirds

and Magpies to greet us. First morning was cold and there were mists over the water.

From the camp we could explore the many channels of the river, some deep others shallow and admire the beautiful river red gums. It must have been busy at night because of the numerous little foot prints over the sands. Some of us climbed up the hill above the main or deepest waterhole for a magnificent view, and to delight in the many flowers, especially near the top - Ptilotus shining in the late afternoon sun, Spade flowers and lots of different grasses. Spiders had put their ropes across the trees and spun great webs to capture the abundance of grasshoppers and other insects (and unobservant walkers). Across the river are the old stock yards. At the end of the race is a interesting gate arrangement,



the top hinge being a hole in an overhead beam.



Illamurta Springs was very overgrown with grass, and the lower spring choked with reeds. The walk up the creek led to a couple of pretty pools in the red rocks, with River Red Gums as a backdrop and moss, liverworts and ferns hiding under overhangs. Also, as we discovered a bit later a very aggressive burr daisy (*Bidens sp*) with three small barbs on the end of black “stick”, which attached to everything. There are ruins of the police station which was established there once to counteract cattle

disappearances. But I was a little disappointed in one part of the remains which had been patched up with stark white mortar. It didn't really fit the atmosphere. On the way to the Springs we passed through an aboriginal community – quite impressive and apparently they have accommodation for visitors.

Bev Dawson - What a great camping trip. Everywhere seemed so fresh and green with the contrast of red dirt and rocks, and blue skies. We came to a huge lake of water on the first afternoon. A bit later, a slow trip on a very



rough track to Running Waters – our most wonderful sandy camping spot, on a rise between channels of the Finke River.

On Sunday, we explored Illamurta Springs; then lunch in the rocky bed of Illibilla Creek with hundreds of Budgies in the River Red Gums. On the way back Jim detoured from the track to photograph 3 beautiful Ghost Gums, then stopped at the old Running Waters stockyards, where we saw flocks of Cockatiels. Back to camp and climbed a mountain!

A “very 4WD” trip on Monday with many crossings of the Finke River which had long picturesque stretches of water. A memorable time, with great company.

Connie Spencer – On top of all of the above, a highlight for me was my relaxing day in camp – leisurely cuppas by the fire chatting with Marg, a morning stroll to check out the old stockyards, perch on a sand dune listening to the birds and the whirring of the Desert Oaks in the breeze, wander across to a stand of Bloodwoods then back to camp for a leisurely lunch followed by a meander down river for a swim. And just to top the day off, climb a rocky ridge, covered in wildflowers, and stunning views of the countryside in the soft late afternoon light.

Although Pat and Allan Weeks have not submitted a highlight, Pat was heard to say, “I didn’t know adults were supposed to have so much fun.”



.....

Mothers’ Day walk along Todd River from Old Telegraph Station to the Gorge.

By Barb Gilfedder

Beautiful weather - we started off with sweaters but soon shed them.

Australian Ringnecks - enjoying an early morning bathe in the shallow waters.

Lots of Budgerigars and Cockatiels – chattering and whistling in the River Gums while inspecting possible nesting hollows, then swooping down in groups for a quick drink.

Nephila spiders – golden webs decorating almost every gap between the bushes.



Pied Butcherbird, Striated Pardelote and Crested Bellbird - unseen but making their beautiful distinctive calls.

Grey Teal and a Black-fronted Dotterel - enjoying the ephemeral pools.

Ferns and Commelina – still lush in the shelter of rocks near the gorge.

Buffel and Couch were the predominant grasses but some natives were pounced on and names discussed.

Sad to see Ruby Dock growing on the rock faces in places – but good to see Nardoo and mosses well established beside some pools.

The waters were clear. Meg braved a swim but we noticed that she didn’t stay in long.

Thank you Rosalie - for sharing your familiar territory ... and the chocolates!

.....7.....

Hidden Treasure! - By Carmel Leonard

There's a little bit of "Treasure Hunter" in all of us they say, and the Field Naturalists and Australian Plants members really struck gold when we visited Conlin Lagoon, or Rifle Range Swamp as it is more locally known, last Thursday afternoon 13 May 2010.

There is always an element of danger in visiting a rifle range, especially if you are not on the safe side of the target, however, as the range was not 'in action' we were quite safe and were permitted to wander at leisure for a couple of hours among the most amazing landscape one could imagine in an Arid Zone!

Beautifully cradled between Blatherskite Range and a smaller range to the south a vast expanse of water rippled in the afternoon breeze, while a very busy population of water birds fossicked, fed and flew much to our delight, at quite close range. Binoculars were a great advantage in identifying Grebes, Coots, Pink-eared Ducks, Pacific Black Ducks, Grey Teal, Variegated Fairy Wrens and Red-tailed Black Cockatoos.



Although the water level had obviously dropped since the rain, the soil was still very moist supporting extensive populations of Nardoo, Swamp Canegrass, sedges, Lignum and in places, liverworts.

There was some discussion about the Eucalypts, whether they were *E. coolabah* ssp. *arida* or *E. intertexta*. We decided both were present, and very attractive specimens they were, with thick, lush canopies.

Note from Connie – I have since done a bit of research and have found that only *Eucalyptus coolabah* ssp *arida* occurs in this swamp.

It was sad to see the extent to which the Buffel Grass had spread since previous visits to the area.

Among the "non-feathered" creatures we met was a very laid-back Bearded Dragon, which permitted itself to be lifted off the ground, shown-off to the assembled crowd and then posed for the cameras in the afternoon sun on a convenient tree trunk. A very large Golden Orb spider was also totally unfazed by the cameras and continued to deftly wrap up an enormous grasshopper in a silken cocoon, no doubt for a tasty meal later in the week.

As the sun continued to head for the horizon, the small range to the South glowed the most glorious orange in the changing light, while the southern side of Blatherskite Range, in shadow, presented the most wonderful variety of 'greens' with Mulga, Blue Mallee and Dolomite Fuchsia all contributing their colour-card to the hillside.

As we wandered back to our vehicles we all agreed, we had found a real Treasure!



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 Breen, 89523409 for arrangements or enquiries

.....

INTERESTING SIGHTINGS

Please let Barb Gilfedder know of any interesting birds or animals seen locally for inclusion in this list.

Peregrine Falcon	6 May	Alice Springs sewage ponds	Don Haddon, Barb Gilfedder
Zebra Finches nesting	May	In suburban garden, one nest in a mulberry tree and one on a light tucked under the eaves of a verandah	Sue Fraser
Zebra Finches nesting	May	Several nests with eggs and chicks in large Wild Orange tree beside Kunoth Bore.	Wendy McTaggart
Painted Finches	May	Serpentine Gorge	Wendy McTaggart
Grey Fantail	30 April	BBQ area at Simpsons Gap	Barb Gilfedder
Square-tailed Kite (See photo)	27 April	Hugh River. A very rare sighting in the Centre.	Mat and Cathy Gilfedder
Black-shouldered kite, Australian White Ibis, 100+ Black swans including one nesting in the middle of one of the tracks between ponds	18 May	Alice Springs sewage ponds	Barb Gilfedder



ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED

Minutes of General Meeting held at Higher Education Building, Charles Darwin University on Wednesday 12 May 2010

Open: President, Barb Gilfedder declared the meeting open at 8.20pm.

Present: 12 people attended with 5 apologies as per attendance book.

Minutes of previous Meeting: The minutes of the April meeting had been circulated as part of the newsletter. The Minutes were accepted as circulated.

Correspondence In:

Western Australian Naturalists Club -The Naturalist News – May 2010

NT Field Naturalist Club - Nature Territory – May 2010

CSIRO Publishing - New Title 'Wetland Habitats' - \$49.95

Birds Australia - Annual Report 2009

Mark Carter - Formation of Larapinta Trail Foundation - probable public meeting in August.

Mark Carter - Kunoth Well trip suggested dates - circulated to the committee - July 17 decided on. Details in next newsletter.

Tida Nou, President NT Field Nats. - Help with Project on Values of Protected Areas - visiting Alice Springs region from 13 May and hoping to talk to a range of people (on camera) if willing about the benefits of well-managed protected areas.

Bill Low - Info about lectures - forwarded if appropriate.

Robbie Henderson - Lecture re Papua/New Guinea rainforest - forwarded to membership

Robbie Henderson - ALEC dinner and guest speakers - forwarded to membership

Robert Kittle - Series of e-mails to and from about organising a trip to Rifle Range Swamp - tomorrow, 13 May. Meet opposite Old Timers at 3.45 sharp.

Correspondence Out:

Pete Collins - Thank you card for speaking at April meeting

Treasurer's Report:

This report covered the months of March and April. There is a current balance of \$1573.47

General Business:

- The President has made calls to Alice Springs Council advising of the club's new meeting place and time so that the council website can be up-dated.
- Sue Fraser commented on the great job that Emily is doing as editor of the club Newsletter. Everyone agreed. Thank you Emily.
- Araluen Precinct plans – Connie drew attention to the fact that the report about plans for the Natural History section as stated in the May ASFNC newsletter differed from the report in the recent 'Alice Springs News'. It will be necessary to look at the new Draft Plan for clarification. Barb will check.

Outings/Trips

Thurs 13 May **Rifle Range Swamp**

Sat/Sun 22/23 May - Colleen O'Malley will lead a walk to **Bowman's Gap** which is an extension of the Ormiston Pond walk. If there is interest a Pound Walk only day walk is an option.

Sat 29 May Open Day at Desert Knowledge

Sat/Sun 5/6 May Overnight trip to **Train Hills** south of Santa Teresa, afternoon and next morning walks in valleys. 4WD high clearance vehicles needed and numbers will be limited to 6 vehicles. Estimated distance is 300km round trip. If you intend to go please contact Connie Spencer

Wed 9 June **Chris Palmer** will be the guest speaker.

Sightings: As in Newsletter

Next Meeting: Wednesday 9 June 2010

Note taker: Sue Fraser Supper: Rosalie Breen

Meeting closed at 8.45 pm.