



February 2013

## Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



A Black-footed Rock Wallaby enjoying the first rays of morning sun on Spencer Hill.  
Photo: Barb Gilfedder

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

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Many thanks to Jenny and Steve for sharing their adventure with us!*

## NEXT NEWSLETTER

The deadline for the next newsletter is **Friday 22 February 2013**. Please send your contributions to Barb Gilfedder at [fedders@octa4xxx.net.au](mailto:fedders@octa4xxx.net.au)

## MEETINGS

- Sun 10 Feb **ASFNC** PLANNING MEETING will be held at Barb and Jim's house – 33 Battarbee Street at 3.00pm. All welcome. As you can see from this page there is very little planned for 2013. Please come with lots of ideas for trips, activities and speakers. If unable to attend the meeting please pass your ideas on to a Committee Member.
- Wed 13 Feb **ASFNC** Meeting 7.00 pm at the lecture theatre in the Higher Education Building at Charles Darwin University. – Speaker: Meg Mooney
- Wed 6 Mar **Australian Plants Society** AGM followed by a guest speaker (to be announced). 7:30 pm Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Everyone welcome.
- Wed 13 Mar **ASFNC** Meeting 7.00 pm at the lecture theatre in the Higher Education Building at Charles Darwin University. – Speaker to be announced.

## FIELD TRIPS / ACTIVITIES

- Wed 6 Feb **APS** Please feel free to join the Australian Plants Society in a social evening at the Telegraph Station. Meet 6pm near the kiosk for a walk up Trig Hill or the Bradshaw Walk (depending on the temperature) followed by a BBQ or picnic tea about 7pm. This is a BYO everything. Remember to bring a chair or rug to sit on.
- Sat 9 Feb **ASFNC** Visit to the Alice Springs Sewage Ponds. This is not a shorebird count, just a wander around looking at the birds. Meet promptly at 7.00am. Contact Barb Gilfedder Ph. 89555452

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Please delete the xxx when emailing – their placement is an attempt to stop some spam emails.

# HATS FOR SALE

We now have some cloth hats with Alice Springs Field Naturalists logo embroidered on the front. They come in two sizes and are all the same colour. If you would like to buy one, please contact Rosalie Breen (pictured modelling hat) details above, or catch up with her at a meeting. They are at cost price \$18 .  
Many thanks to Jill Brew for organising this purchase.



# Spencer Hill at Dawn

1 December 2012

By Connie Spencer



Beautiful dawn light from Spencer Hill – Connie Spencer

When Rosalie set the meeting time for this walk at 5:30 am at the November FNC meeting there was an audible sigh amongst those present! However, Barb, Rhondda and I were sitting the Gosse Street Playground at the appointed time awaiting our leader. Although not a spectacular sunrise, the early morning light was just divine.

Black-footed Rock Wallabies were popping their heads up from behind boulders and Euros bounded off to a safe distance from us and then

turned, sat and watched as we huffed and puffed our way to the top. I can't remember ever seeing so many at one time although Rosalie probably has.

After a stop at the top to admire the view we made our way down into Spencer Valley and wandered over to a hillock where Rosalie has been declaring her personal war on Buffel Grass! What a thrill to see all the native plants such as Pigweed (*Portulaca oleraceae*), Orange Spade Flower (*Hybanthus aurianticus*), Blue Periwinkle (*Evolvulus alsinoides*), just to name a few coming up.



A Black-footed Rock Wallaby silhouetted against the sunrise. – Barb Gilfedder

Congratulations to the Landcare Group of Spencer Valley. You are making a difference.

A number of Galahs perched in a dead Ironwood kept their eyes on us as we made our way back to the playground where we said our good byes and thank yous to Rosalie – always a pleasure to climb Spencer Hill especially at dawn.

# Treasure Hunt and Christmas Breakfast 2012



I'm not sure who came up with the idea, but...

Pam Keil and the Alice Springs Desert Park organized the Treasure Hunt; Cecily Sutton organized the yummy juices; lots of people brought plates of interesting tasty food to share; everyone agreed it was a great fun time. Trust the Field Nats to participate so enthusiastically. For me having a few youngsters around made it special. Thanks to Pam and to all who came. Barb Gilfedder

**AFRICAN SAFARI**  
**PART 2 –BOTSWANA & BACK TO ZIM**  
Text by Steve Sinclair, Photos by Jenny Purdie

We bussed over the border from Zimbabwe to a small airport at Kasane where three, 7-seater planes were waiting for us. These planes were made in Gippsland, Victoria. Off we went over MMBA (this is a fairly well known acronym, that I soon learnt means: Miles and Miles of Bloody Africa), and eventually the landscape got greener and greener



and wetter and wetter. This was the Okavango Delta. Our destination was the Moremi Reserve. The Okavango is a massive river system that starts off way up north in Angola and takes months to get to the delta in northern Botswana where it spreads out to form a huge wetland which never reaches the sea. The reception and the accommodation at Xakanaxa Lodge was just as good as The Hide. The big difference was the river running past the dining room and our rooms. We had a resident crocodile

between the bar and the dining area and bush buck (Bambi like, antelope) were grazing between the rooms. Similar rules and schedules to before. Our guide Montsho has had 38 years' experience guiding and knew the country like the proverbial. The guides in Botswana only have to have two years training and it's easy to get stuck with a lemon. The first game drive and we saw a family of 17 wild dogs, 11 of them pups. They behaved just like domestic dogs when playing but when hunting become a co-ordinated killing machine. Some of the people on this trip had been to Africa many times and not seen a dog in the wild, let alone 17. While at Xakanaxa we saw (as well as the usual) lions, leopards, cheetahs, and a honey badger (an animal of legendary status amongst the guides; they all have a honey badger story). My favourite was the guide who saw a young male lion grab a badger by the back of the neck (they have very thick neck skin and very flexible neck joints). The badger swivelled its head around and bit the lion on the cheek. The lion then dropped the badger which immediately ran between the lion's back legs and latched onto his ball bag. You can imagine the rest.



We did a boat trip with Montsho through channels of reeds and floating plant mats. How he knew where he was is beyond me. We saw enormous bull elephants swimming the channels and eating the reeds and herbs. Elephants get six sets of molars which push up as the old ones wear down and given the stuff they eat you can understand why, but the rub is, that when they are gone it's soup and custard time, so in places like the delta an ele can extend his life by eating reeds and soft herbs. While on the water Monty spotted a vulture (I had binoculars and could hardly see the tree it was sitting in) and decided to investigate.

As we boated around the island we saw more vultures and so Monty pushed our 5.5m punt (with a 60hp Yammy 4 stroke) through a channel half the width of the boat and eventually ran it onto firm ground pushing the last of the reed aside. I don't know who was more surprised, us or the adult male lion. The panic to get back from the front of the punt and to unpack and focus cameras was like a scene only seen in silent movies. After regaining his composure the lion realised what we were and went off in a huff. He had been chewing on a young elephant. (Another thing I learnt was that lions are quite good swimmers.) We finally backed out; this involved a lot of prop clearing, and went to see a bird rookery. As expected it was noisy and smelly. We had a ride in a traditional mokoro; a canoe made out of a tree trunk and poled up the shallower channels. Then we had gin and tonics and beers on the boat as the sun set. And all I could think of was the look on that lion's face.



Everyday Montsho tried to outdo the day before and on our last day he took us to a massive plain that was lightly wooded in places and had several water holes. We drove to the far end of the plain and while skirting the scrub along the edge Monty saw a family of warthog that were acting a bit out of character (looked OK to me through the binoculars). Then he turned off the engine and said "cheetah" and got out his own binoculars. (I eventually saw them.) The Pumba's took off as we started up and moved closer (I was always amazed that the big predators and elephants mostly ignored vehicles.) We got to within 6m of three adult male cheetahs. One was wearing a radio collar but Monty did not know where he was from, possibly they had travelled in from outside the reserve. It is possible that these three were related. As the other vehicles caught up, we would leap frog each other as the cats



moved down to drink. We all got some fantastic photos. While drinking at the waterhole, one of the cheetahs leant over the water and his paw slipped in. He immediately pulled his foot out and shook it like it was radioactive...obviously, not at home with water. Afterwards we had some well earned Gee & Tee's (and beer), and then we headed back. We were almost at the camp and the lead car encountered a distraught Italian woman and a submerged rental Land Rover. Her husband had walked off for help, the wrong way. He was less than a kilometre from a lodge and he walked back into the bush. It appeared he knew as much about maps as he knew about engaging hubs before making a

river crossing. He was eventually found, somewhat red faced (literally) and returned to safety. Hope he took insurance on that rental.

The next day we were off to Chobe National Park and moved into a typical tourist hotel (a bit of a disappointment after what we had experienced so far). Chobe NP is on the Chobe River (which flows into the Zambezi and over the falls). We went on a river cruise on a house boat style affair with a top deck and a well stocked bar. Mostly it was an excuse to have a drink while watching hundreds of elephants, cape buffalo and hippos and watching the sun go down. Africans call this "having sundowners". Besides the above we saw lots of other wildlife and birds we hadn't seen before. One highlight of this booze cruise was a dead hippo. Yep, dead as; with legs in the air and floating down the river with an escort of 3-4 metre crocs taking friendly bites out of his hide. Wouldn't want to be there when they broke through. The next day we went on a game drive with some guides that would struggle to get a taxi licence (again; we had been spoiled by previous guides). Their saving grace was due to their policy of following everybody else that looked like they knew where they were going.

Someone had spotted a lion, so off we went in a Land Rover conga line, but then we saw another and another, eight in total. This pride was made up of several mature females and cubs of various sizes, I don't know where the old man was, probably down the local getting away from the women and kids. After watching for a short time we realised that the lioness was stalking a big buck kudu. The younger lions all dropped back to watch and take up flank positions in the typical pincer formation. She was 20 metres away when she began her run and only 10 metres away when the kudu woke up and took off, but he was too late, she sprang onto his hind quarters to pull him down, then two other mature females arrived to help hold him down while another latched onto his windpipe to suffocate him. Some of the cubs, thinking dinner was on, bit into the kudu's rump, only to be kicked in the head; he wasn't dead yet. It wasn't too much later and he gave his last kick and dinner was served, it's been awhile since I've seen such terrible table manners. Leaving was like getting out of Woollies car park on a Friday afternoon. We drove to a suitable lion free area for yet another Gee & Tee (& beer), before slowly driving back with the African sun setting behind us and all suitably quiet as we absorbed what we had just seen. On the way we saw a spotted hyena who obviously had not heard of the feast going on down the track, although the vultures were already circling.



Next morning we left Botswana and drove back over the border into Zimbabwe and Vic Falls airport where we boarded two small planes and flew down the Zambezi River to Lake Kariba. Lake Kariba was formed in 1956 by damming the eastern end and incorporating a hydro power station at the same time. This was the biggest manmade lake at the time; now the fourth largest in the world. It's seriously big. We touched down on a small dirt strip in the middle of nowhere. There were two safari vehicles waiting to take us to next lodge, Musango, on an island. Half of us were driven a short way to a small bay where we climbed on board a beautiful old fashioned timber catamaran and we sailed to our destination. The other half had a game drive to another, more sheltered bay, where they were



taken to the island on a small barge. Another warm welcome by the staff and we were shown to our rooms. Onto another sumptuous lunch. The owner of Musango, Steve Edwards, is a legend in this part of Africa. His story of what he went through to keep his place during the early Mugabe years and his efforts in animal conservation would make a bestselling book, if he would take the time to write it. Again, Nicholas has bought to a special place with a special story. This location was meant to be a wind down location to recuperate before heading back home. As if. The guides, two white Africans this time, were determined to show us as much as

they could. I will never forget the walk with Mark (again with a massive gun), where we found ourselves surrounded by a herd of female elephants, some with calves. These enormous animals were so quiet and they blended into the dry season bush so perfectly that if it hadn't been for Mark we would have literally bumped into them. Of course they had known we were coming and had moved the smaller calves behind their mothers who stood to face us, gently flapping their ears as a warning, which we heeded. The next warning would have been more vigorous flapping and foot stomping. The next warning is being charged, not a good career move. This happened three times on this walk and each time we backed out to no more than gentle flapping. Don't go out in the woods alone Goldilocks. We also learnt more about animal tracks and the favourite of all guides, dung. While at Musango we boated to a small African fishing village and a rather large crocodile farm where they breed them for skins. Some of us went fishing, for small tilapia; a bream sized fish caught with worms and small hooks. Quite tasty. We put a small one out as live bait and caught a small tiger fish (about 450mm) which we threw back. Only the locals eat them as they are so full of bones they are almost armour plated from the inside, but they have a mouthful of teeth that would make jaws jealous. It put up a good fight for its size but not as good as a salt water barra.

**ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED**  
**Minutes of general meeting at Higher Education Building, Charles Darwin University**  
**Wed 14 November 2012.**

Following presentation by Adam Yates on the South African Palaeontology

**Present:** 19 Members, 3 visitors and no apologies as per attendance book.

**Previous minutes** – accepted.

**Business arising from the minutes:**

- Information on club hats from Jill Brew, who was unable to attend – Barb will forward to members

**Correspondence in:**

- Ken Johnson with apology for not being able to attend visit to Natural History Museum visit.
- Jude Mapleson re fundraising for education and welfare for African Children's Choir.
- Paul Rilstone/Sam re proposal to manufacture seats.
- Alan Whyte from Power and Water re seating at sewage Ponds. Proposal has been forwarded to Rod Randall, Manager Water Services.
- Jo from Landcare re Spencer Valley Buffel and Rubbish Removal morning. Barb to forward to members
- Bill Low re talk by Fiona Walsh and book launch by Andy Vinter. Barb to forward to members
- Department of Business (Gambling and Licensing Services) re services.

**Correspondence out:**

- Barb to Alan Whyte from Power and Water re Seating at sewage Ponds.
- Barb email and photos of proposed seats to Rod Randall, Power and Water
- Barb reply to Ken Johnson re Natural History museum visit.
- Thank you card to Michael Green for talk on Gold.

**Treasurer's Report:** In Jill's absence, the Bank Statement shows

Balance at 31 Oct 2012	\$3632,68
Subs \$55	
Debits Nil	Petty Cash \$26

**General business:**

- Awaiting further action from Power and Water re seating. In the interim members are to consider potential positions for seats.

**Past Activities/Trips discussed:**

- Recent successful trips to Upper Todd River, Winnecke and Standley Chasm discussed and photos from Aileron and Winnecke trips displayed by Barb.

**Future activities:**

- Sat 1 Dec 5-30 am. Walk up Spencer Hill. Rosalie Breen Ph 89523409.
- Sun 2 Dec 7am Quarterly Shorebird count, at Sewage Ponds
- Sun 9 Dec 7-30am. ASDP Picnic area. Desert Park Activity followed by shared Christmas Breakfast.

**Sightings:**

- Lots of activity due to spring/recent rains. Huge flocks of Budgerigars.
- Frequent sightings of birds in breeding colours - Pam Keil
- Sightings of Grey Shrike-thrush (Rosalie Breen), Peaceful Doves (Ian Mann) in back yards.
- Channel-billed Cuckoos are back – Bev Gray.
- Snipes at sewage ponds. Individual species of these birds are so difficult to identify without catching them
- Impressive flowering Bush Oranges.
- Resurrection Ferns and Mosses in green grotto in a slot gorge, South of Heavitree Gap - Connie Spencer.
- 2 Black Falcons on the way to Winnecke - Michael Green.

**Next meeting:** Wed 13 February 2013

Speaker: Meg Mooney

Notetaker: Rosalie Breen      Supper: Ian and Wendy Mann