



September 2019

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



Field Naturalists with their fossil hunting tools of trade, brushes and dustpans, sieves and ice-cream buckets, listen as Adam Yates explains the ways of doing things on the recent Alcoota Field trip. See Page 5.

Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month (except December & January) at 7:00 PM. Meetings are held at the Olive Pink Botanic Garden Visitors Centre.

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NEWSLETTER

The next newsletter will be October 2019.

The deadline for the next newsletter will be 23 September 2019.

Please send your contributions to Barb Gilfedder: bjfedders@gmail.com

ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

PERMANENT CHANGE OF MEETING VENUE.

All general meetings are now held in Olive Pink Botanic Garden Visitors Centre

Wednesday 11 September

ASFNC Monthly get-together at 7.00pm at the Visitors Centre at Olive Pink Botanic Garden.

Speaker will be **Colleen O'Malley** – A second chance of a lifetime: volunteering on Whenua Hou for the biggest Kakapo breeding season on record! This will be followed by light refreshments and a short general meeting.

Saturday 14 September

Walk to greet the sun and say goodbye to the full moon, from Spencer Hill, while admiring changing and beautiful sky colours. Meet at Gosse St Playground, Old Eastside, at 6.00am. That's early but rewarding. Leader: Rosalie Breen 89523409

Wednesday 9 October

ASFNC Monthly get-together at 7.00pm at the Visitors Centre at Olive Pink Botanic Garden.

Speaker will be **Sue Morrish** – Celebrating 10 years of Buffel Removal in Spencer Valley with Landcare.

This will be followed by light refreshments and a short general meeting.

AUSTRALIAN PLANT SOCIETY ALICE SPRINGS apsalicesprings@yahoo.com.au

Wednesday 4 September at 7.30pm Meeting at Olive Pink Botanic Garden.

Speaker will be Suzanne Lollback - Hassans Walls Reserve (Lithgow, NSW)

This talk is about how a group of friends, interested in nature, came together to record over 500 plants on the Reserve and how sharing their knowledge through the production of a book has contributed to community awareness of its diverse and rich plant communities and environmental values.

Now again living in Alice Springs, Suzanne will share this experience with a slide show featuring many of the plants on the Reserve. All welcome, light supper following presentation.

SUBSCRIPTIONS TO ASFNC

Payments for 2019-2020 are now due.

Please pay by cash or cheque at a meeting or by post ...or by direct deposit.

Family \$30, Concession \$25,
Individual \$20, Concession \$15,

Life membership - Ten times normal fee.

Email Newsletter Only for interstate Members who have previously had full Membership \$10.

Westpac bank details:- BSB No. 035303
Account No.100981. Please include your name as reference on the transaction.

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Committee Members

President	Barbara Gilfedder	8955 5452
Vice-President	Lee Ryall	0417 401 237
Secretary	Kimberley Morgan	0402 527 195
Treasurer	Neil Woolcock	8955 1021
Property Officer	Rosalie Breen	8952 3409
Public Officer	Anne Pye	0438 388 012

Committee Members:

Anne Pye	0438 388 012
Margaret Friedel	0417 849 743

Other Club Responsibilities:

Newsletter – Barb Gilfedder bjfedders@gmail.com

Facebook Organiser – Position vacant.

Website - Robyn Grey-Gardner 8952 2207

President's Report 2019

Membership numbers this financial year have decreased a little, but we retain a core of keen and interested members and a few new ones, too.

As usual we have had some excellent speakers at meetings. Cyd Holden gave us an amusing talk about Botanical Latin; Colleen O'Malley researched some great information on Mosses and Lichens; Jane Brim Box expressed her worries about Running Waters; while Simon Mann talked about Geo-physics and the bush; Robyn Delaney and Simon Ward took us on a fantastic walk between Finke Gorge and Watarrka National Parks; Megg Kelham introduced us to Orang-utans and other perspectives in Malaysian Borneo and for local wildlife we learnt about Northern Quolls from Billy Ross, Bilbies from Kate Crossing and Grey-crowned Babblers from Kate Stevens. My thanks to all the speakers who have entertained and educated us, the members who suggested and contacted them and the note takers and supper bringers at our general meetings.



At Standley Chasm after the horrendous summer fires. Colleen O'Malley

We have also had some excellent Field Trips, not as many as the previous year - only 10 as opposed to 16, but we have shared a few with other groups. For example, the Bat Evening presented by Erin Westerhuis at Simpsons Gap; a bird count at the Sewage Ponds with Birdlife Central Australia and a celebration of 10 years buffel busting in Spencer Valley with Sue Morrish and Rosalie Breen. The longer trips were a weekend at Tower Rock organised by Neil Woolcock, another at Alcoota Fossil dig with Marg Friedel, while I organised a camp at Newhaven. Other leaders that should be mentioned are Connie Spencer, Lisa Nunn, Peter Jobson and Rosalie Breen. There has certainly been a lot to learn and lots of willing, sharing, knowledgeable people to learn from. The Committee is always open to suggestions of activities or interesting places to visit. It can be disappointing when trips have to be cancelled due to lack of participants. Please support organisers when you can by going on club events.

I have been especially pleased this year about compliments for Field Nats that I have heard. For example, from Joe Schofield at Newhaven taking special care of us because "Field Nats are special" and Adam Yates, not holding a public open day at Alcoota this year, but inviting Field Nats.

Most of these speakers and trips have been reported in our monthly newsletter. I frequently hear comments from people about how much they enjoy reading it and looking at the stunning photos our members take. Many past members continue their membership just to enjoy the newsletter. Well done to all the contributors!

Our recurring main Club expense is insurance. It is still a very good price for this type of cover. Our newsletter is mostly sent out by email so costs are low and we are grateful to CDU for allowing us to use their lecture theatre free of charge while they could, and now a big thank you to Ian Coleman and Doug McDougall for allowing us to use Olive Pink Visitors Centre for our meetings.

As Neil mentioned Lisa and Pete Nunn have completely repaid the bird brochure loan. We have now donated \$500 to help them set up their Letter-winged Kite research project. We will hear later tonight about their initial research trip to Queensland.

Lastly, my thanks to the Committee, who have performed their duties efficiently and who are always willing to help and support the club and me in any way they can. Also all those others – Connie who has written up the minutes as well as minded and replenished the tea/coffee box; Colleen who puts things on Facebook; Robyn has been keeping the newsletters up-to-date on our website, and has also just completed the first draft of an index of reports and articles appearing in our newsletter since February 2009; Rosalie who sent out thank you cards to speakers and Anne has dealt with the officials as Public Officer.

I look forward to another year of interesting talks, walks and trips with as many members as possible organising and participating over the next twelve months.

Barb Gilfedder

Treasurer's report for the 2018 – 2019 financial year

The Financial Report, audited by Rebecca Duncum, is presented for approval.

The club's account balance was \$2,145.99 as at 30th June 2019 (up from \$1,569.21 in 2018).
The club recorded a gain for the year of \$576.78

The major outgoings for the year were a \$500.00 donation to Peter and Lisa Nunn for their Letter-winged Kite project and \$440.00 for public liability insurance. No extra insurance charge has been applied for overnight trips this year.

Income for the year was \$2,225.76 of which \$878.00 was a repayment in August 2018 from Lisa Nunn for the bird brochures.

Membership subscriptions were \$995.00 (down \$237.50 on last year).

We received 44 payments for memberships (49 last year), many being family subscriptions. We have five life members, three of which have been awarded and two have been paid for. Life memberships are 10 times the normal subscription but well worth it. We attracted 4 new members to the Club during the year, but some others have moved on or have not renewed.

Membership subscriptions for 2019/2020 are now due.

These subscription payments will boost the club's funds to about \$3,000.

I recommend that subscriptions for membership remain the same as last year :-

Family membership \$30. Concession \$25

Single membership \$20. Concession \$15.

A life membership can be taken out at 10 times annual fee.

Newsletter only for past members who move interstate \$10

The club is in a position to pay normal expenses and remain financially secure in the coming financial year.

Neil Woolcock

AGM and Members' Night.

- I would like to thank and congratulate Committee members who agreed to continue in their positions, Lee Ryall as Vice President, Neil Woolcock as Treasurer, Rosalie Breen as Property Officer, Anne Pye as Public Officer and Margaret Friedel Committee member.
- Anne Pye stood down from the position of Secretary and Robyn Grey-Gardner from the Committee altogether, due to other pressures, although she will continue to upload the newsletter and work on our web site.
- After the AGM Kimberley Morgan was recruited as the new Secretary. Thank you Kimberley for agreeing to do this and Congratulations. There are lots of others to help and answer questions if necessary.

After the AGM and some yummy refreshments from Wendy and Ian Mann, we proceeded with a Members Night:-

- Rosalie Breen brought along her new magnifying glass and some interesting natural items to study in more detail. Unfortunately the light available was not as bright as it really needed to be for this activity.
- Margaret Friedel and Kimberley Morgan showed photos from the recent trip to Alcoota.
- Pete Nunn showed some excellent photos of Letter-winged Kites and spoke about some interesting observations that he and Lisa made on their research trip to a station near Boulia.
- Anne Pye showed photos from a recent trip north-east and to the Gulf.

Thank you to you all contributors and to Doug MacDougall who manned the IT equipment.

Barb

Gilfedder – President and newsletter editor

Wonderful Informative trip to Alcoota Fossil Dig Site – 20 July 2019

Report Marg Friedel

Photos Marg Friedel and Kimberley Morgan

Seven lucky ASFNC members travelled to the Alcoota fossil dig site for the weekend of 20-21 July, to be hosted by Adam Yates, who is the Senior Curator of Earth Sciences at the Museum of Central Australia. Adam was very generous with his time and took us to several separate digs within the 8 million year old 'bone bed', which covers an area of about two football fields. We watched Flinders University students diligently clearing away earth from around large *Dromornis stirtoni* bones as well as many other smaller fossils ([top](#)). Other students were sieving slurries of mud in search of smaller items ([middle](#)). We sat around the rim of an early, unproductive test pit dug by Woodburn, the first PhD student to study the site, and heard about the history of the discovery and development of the site from the 1950s.

Adam outlined the theories about why the fossils ended up in a billabong or overflow of the ancient Waite River. Peter Murray, Adam's predecessor, suggested that it had been a drought waterhole and that continuing drought led to overbrowsing of the vegetation, starvation and death. Adam explained that their work is showing that the females were healthy and that they were accumulating calcium in the medullary material in their bones, indicating that they were reproductive. Pouch young have also been found. Consequently, he suggests that the waterhole became toxic from time to time due to algal blooms. The surrounding soils were phosphate-rich, providing a source that could contaminate the water.

Later Adam led us up Cowpat Hill, a younger formation from about 6 million years ago. At the base there were fossils of land crocodiles, which had blade-like teeth similar to those of the Komodo dragon, so had a slashing bite rather than the crushing bite of modern crocodiles. Higher up there were no more fossils and the environment was drier. The silcrete cap at the top was about 4 million years old. ([bottom –descending Cowpat Hill](#))

From Cowpat Hill we went to the discard pile for our own experience of sieving for fine remnants, and discovered plenty of gastroliths, the stones which birds swallow to aid in breaking down coarser food. Adam then led us across the extensive exclosure to sites of ecological interest that Peter Latz had examined over many years, and we discussed efforts to keep the larger area buffel grass-free. Our formal tour was then over but, before camping for the night, we sat around yarning with Adam, his assistants and students by the campfire and learned about future plans and funding needs.

What a wonderfully informative visit we had! To learn more about the site, see the Newsletter items from August 2015, pages 5-7, 'Alcoota Weekend August 2015', written by a number of contributors, and June 2018, pages 3-5, 'Burrowing through Paper' in which Lee Ryall summarises Adam's presentation to the Club on 9 May 2018.

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club





Pete and Lisa Nunn's first Letter-winged Kites research trip to the Boulia district



Peter Nunn spoke about his and Lisa's first trip to the Boulia district to research Letter-winged Kites. The countryside was looking better than central Australia thanks to rain earlier this year, meaning birds like Flock Bronzewings, Budgerigars, Cockatiels, Pratincoles, Songlarks and Trillers were about in good numbers.

They managed to find 4 groups of Letter-winged Kites on the property we were working on, for a total of 28 birds. Several pairs were preparing to breed, so a return trip is planned so they can try to fit leg bands to nestlings before they fly from the nest. They trialled a number of techniques to try and catch adult Letter-winged Kites, but were unsuccessful. They did however make lots of interesting observations, such as nest-building behaviour, which was mostly carried out by the males, and that the population had three times as many males as females. They are concerned about the potential impact of feral cats on this species during nesting, so are also planning to explore this further on the next trip.

Many thanks to Field Nats for their support of this project.

Photos top left and below show breeding behaviours – breaking off a stick for nesting and mating photo which also shows the colour difference of male and female. Other photos Flock Bronzewings and Brolga.



A Gulf Country Drive with Anne Pye

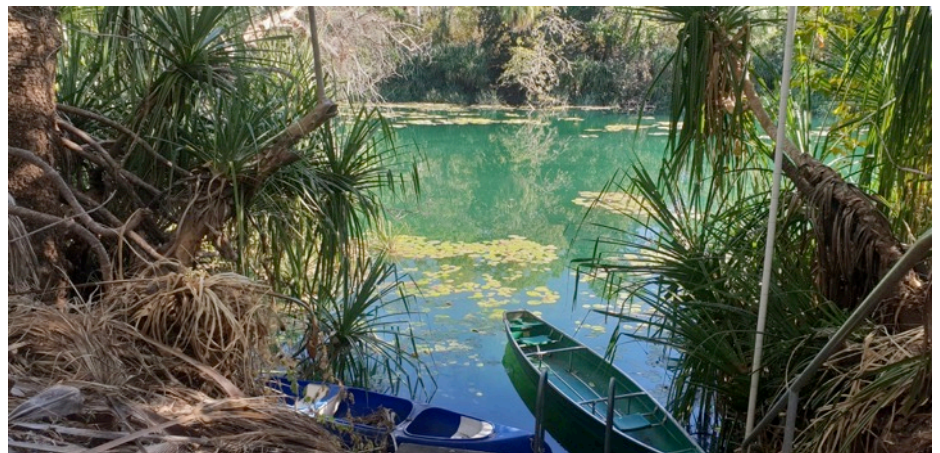
In August 2019 I went for a drive around Gulf country including part of the Savannah Way, which stretches from Cairns through to Broome. Starting in Camooweal, I checked out the Camooweal caves about 20km or more south of town. (right) If I hadn't printed out old directions on the web from the Mt Isa Tourist Information centre I wouldn't have been able to find it as there are no signposts...



Then it was north onto Lawn Hill National Park which has a lot more tourists and interpretative signage! There are two camping grounds at Lawn Hill and you need to book online with Qld Parks before you get there as the park is very popular.

In the southern section is Riversleigh known for its fossils. There is a short walk around a hill and a small interpretative centre. The signage and information was good including the online fact sheet but I didn't find the short walk particularly inspiring. A lot of the fossil species found there are also found at Alcoota and information is also available at the Megafauna Gallery in Alice.

Then it was onto Lawn Hill proper which is centred around a series of gorges with a creek running through. Even in the main campgrounds the bird watching was excellent and you can swim in the water as there are no salties about. There are some fabulous big old paperbarks along the nearby creek – and blue waterlilies. There are quite a few well-signed walks with some great look outs and you can rent canoes (at some expense) to paddle up the gorges. For



anyone used to bushwalking around Alice it is pretty easily handled. Plant and bird species lists are available from the rangers at the park. There were a number of familiar plants including Bloodwoods, *Grevillea wickhamii* and Spinifex – as well as more subtropical species such as *Grevillea dryandri* and *Cochlospermum gregorii* (Kapok) which were in flower. It was a very nice place to spend a few days.





Interesting flowers - *Cochlospermum gregorii*, *Grevillea dryandri* and *Jacksonia dilatata*

From there I drove to Karumba to visit a friend. On the way into town I saw 80 brolgas browsing on a flood plain to the side of the road. I stopped and counted! And it was possibly the same flock I saw a few days later the other side of Normanton. The Gulf of Carpentaria at Karumba is quite shallow – only just over 1m deep in large sections. It was too early for the barra season but Karumba has a fairly new Barra Discovery Centre, which gives information about the barra lifecycle, their fingerling breeding efforts and also information about some of their local birds. After looking at that I was later able to identify a pair of Red-necked Cranes, which look similar to the Brolgas – there were a lot of pairs of Brolgas about, even wandering around in Karumba itself. Karumba was also notable for the extraordinarily large groups of suicidal wallabies hanging about near road alongside the golf course between the town centre and the “point”.

Nearby Normanton had quite an informative information centre with history about the town and region, as well as reference to both Burke and Wills expedition and the 4 rescue expeditions, as well as Leichardt. Not far out of town is their northernmost camp, including some scarred trees. It is from there that they made a ‘dash’ to spot the sea at the Gulf. From Burketown on, the road starts to cross the big rivers that run through this country connecting to the Gulf. I startled a flock of 6 Jabirus in the middle of the road. The country was dry and showing the effects of drought – as well as being at the end of the dry season. It would look fresher, but then the many creek crossings would be a lot more ‘interesting’, at the start of a dry season.



Fern-leaf Grevillea, *Grevillea pteridifolia*

From Burketown across to Borroloola, the dirt road from Hells Gate Roadhouse was very corrugated. I saw a couple of small groups of very large Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos and on the side of the road were patches of an endemic Cycad, *Cycas angulata* and some tall silver willowy grevillea trees in flower including *Grevillea parallela* and *G. pteridifolia*. Borroloola is also characterised by a large inter-coastal river, which is good for fishing and access to the Gulf. The little museum there was quite interesting and included a tree supposedly scarred by Leichardt. (right)



It was on then to Limmen National Park, also surrounded by very corrugated roads. It has a number of campsites and I only visited the southern half of the park. The Southern Lost City has a good little walk around it and not far north of there is Butterfly Falls, which would be nice when the water is flowing and you can swim there. A little further north is the Ranger Station, which had a good interpretative section. Not far away is the gate to the Western Lost City. It is a one-way dirt track with some very sandy sections, about 30km each way to get to the rocks. As they are quite similar to the southern lost city, I was quite ambivalent about whether the drive in had been worth it – although it did showcase some different habitats. I did see one Bush Turkey on the way in and a number of flowering pea shrubs including *Bossiaea bossiaeiodes* and *Jacksonia dilatata* – and another flowering Grevillea tree *Grevillea heliosperma*. Driving around what I find quite scrubby 'savannah', it was probably the Woollybutt country that I found the most appealing. However, I also enjoyed the 29-30 degree days as a break from a more wintery Alice.



Above – Rock pillars at Southern Lost City, and below -Western Lost City in Limmen National Park



Thanks Anne for sharing what must have been a great adventure (Ed.)



ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED
Minutes of the general meeting held in the Visitor Centre
Olive Pink Botanic Garden – Wednesday 14 August 2019

Open: Barb Gilfedder declared the meeting open at 7:45 pm following the AGM. Thank you to Wendy and Ian Mann for providing supper.

Present: 17 members, 1 visitor, and 5 apologies as per attendance book.

Minutes: The Minutes of the July 2019 general meeting as printed in the newsletter were accepted by the meeting.

Business Arising:

- Letter to parliamentarians re. Land for Wildlife funding tabled. Thanks to Rosalie Schultz.
- Johannes Ammerschlaeger reported that he watched prisoners clearing sawn logs at Standley Chasm. Hopefully they will move on to removal of feral Johnston River Grass (*Paspalum conjugatum*) soon.

Treasurer's Report:

Balance of all funds (including petty cash) end of June 2019 \$2,145.99

Income for July 2019

- Membership 240.00
- Interest .20

Expenses for July 2019

- Lee Ryall for stationary 46.79

(Petty Cash - \$24.85)

Total of all funds (including petty cash) end of July 2019 **\$2,339.40**

The meeting accepted the Treasurer's report.

Correspondence:

- Various emails addressed to ASFNC have been forwarded to the membership.
- Reply from Eva Lawler, NT Minister for the Environment, advising that letter regarding Land for Wildlife funding has been forwarded to Lauren Moss, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Culture. Barb to ask Rosalie Schultz to also send a copy of the letter.

Past Events:

- Alcoota - 20 & 21 July. Marg Friedel reported that many participants had expressed to her "what an excellent weekend it was". Field Naturalists were made to feel very welcome.

Future Events:

- Visit Alice Springs Desert Park – Neil to check on his availability and set a date.
- Barb advised that many plants were flowering at Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Worth a visit.
- Jill Brew advised that although burnt, beginning of Stage 4 of the Larapinta Trail along creek worth a visit.
- Barb advised that there are very few future trips planned. Lack of rain has slowed enthusiasm for outings.

Next Meeting: Wednesday 11 September 2019 – Speaker, Colleen O'Malley on *A second chance of a lifetime: volunteering on Whenua Hou for the biggest Kakapo breeding season on record*. Scribe – Rosalie Breen. Supper – Kimberley Morgan.

Meeting closed at 8:30pm.

Minutes compiled by Connie Spencer

Following the meeting:-

- Margaret Friedel, Kimberley Morgan and Anne Pye showed slides of recent trips they had undertaken.
- Rosalie Breen had a selection of nature-based objects for members to view under her new magnifying glass.
- Pete Nunn showed slides and gave a talk on the Letter-winged Kite project that he and Lisa are undertaking. Following this excellent presentation, Neil Woolcock moved that we give Pete and Lisa a further \$500 towards the project. All Members in favour.