May 2020

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter

Leigh Woolcock photographed this common Wolf Spider, *Tasmanicosa godeffroyi* in their Larapinta Garden. Females produce a white spherical egg sac that may be carried around. When the spiderlings hatch out they crawl onto the female's upper surfaces, almost completely covering them. Neil said it looked weird especially when they all moved. It may serve as an efficient means of dispersing the young spiders.

All organised meetings, presentations, activities and trips are currently cancelled due to health restrictions. We will let you know when we restart. We encourage you to get out into the bush, if you can, as lots of things are happening – plants, insects, birds and animals are busy and active.

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NEWSLETTER

The next newsletter will be JUNE 2020

The deadline for the June newsletter will be 23rd May.

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

You can also send any photos or reports of anything that you think other Field Naturalists will be interested in, to Barb anytime and she will forward to the Membership.

I would also encourage everyone to add posts to our Facebook site.

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 Admin. – Meg Mooney moon3@iinet.net.au

Website - Robyn Grey-Gardner 8952 2207

We regret that we have had to suspend all ASFNC meetings, activities, walks and other trips.

Many of out local parks and reserves are still closed. I am hopeful that more will open soon. The Alice Springs Telegraph Station and Simpsons Gap remain open and some walks at Ellery and Ormiston are available. To check if a park or reserve is open go to https://nt.gov.au/leisure/parks-reserves/plan-your-visit

Yeperenye Caterpillars - painting by Jude Mapleson and poem by Meg Mooney

Red and green tartan caterpillars
demolish the tarvine
sticky mats of leaves
that took 25 years
to appear in my garden

soon the vines are nets of stems
lined with caterpillars
it's good to have them here
and look up at the range
its giant Yeperenye cliff

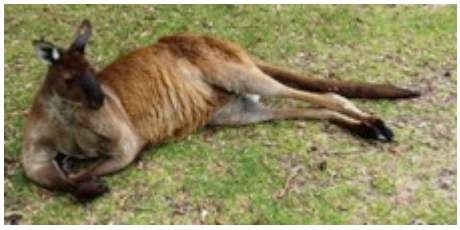
I've never seen these grubs in my yard before
In these tricky times
I almost feel like patting them

A Photographers trip on the Fleurieu Peninsula by Johannes Ammerschlaeger – Part 1

Johannnes was going to present this as a slide show at our April meeting. So many beautiful photos – Thanks Johannes!

Pictures of Victor Harbor
– from the top

Horse-drawn tram, the beach; the Anchorage Hotel; the Uniting Church; Victor Harbor beach, Granite Island jetty; Granite Island; Granite Island Pigface; Granite Island lighthouse; Victor Harbor Inman River; Victor Harbor letterbox.



Urimbirra Wildlife Park
Tawny Frogmouths; Eastern Grey Kangaroo x3; Echidna; Water Dragon; Koala; Rainbow Lorikeet.
Right: ***Goolwa*** *- park bench*
Middleton *– Basham Beach;*
Goolwa *– Teddies Christmas tree.*

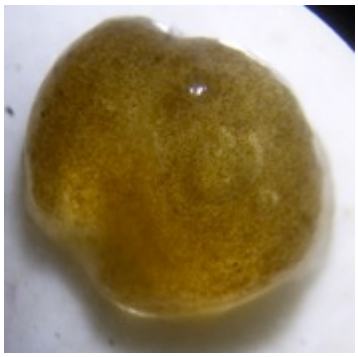
Goolwa
Paddle steamer x 2

Hindmarsh Island

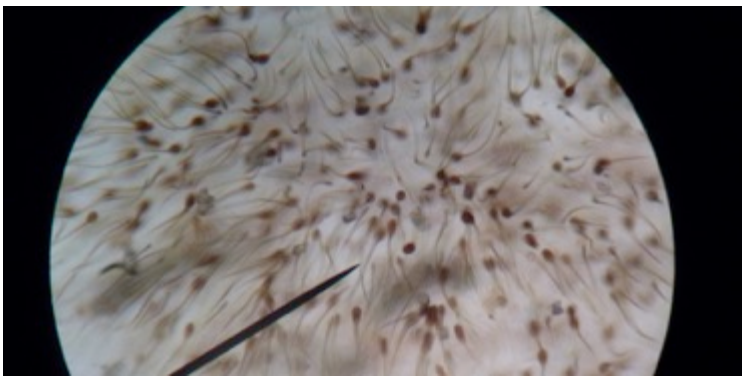
Coorong National Park
Pelicans and Cormorants; Emus;
Barker's Knoll Oceanside;
Ducks, Stilts and Cormorant.

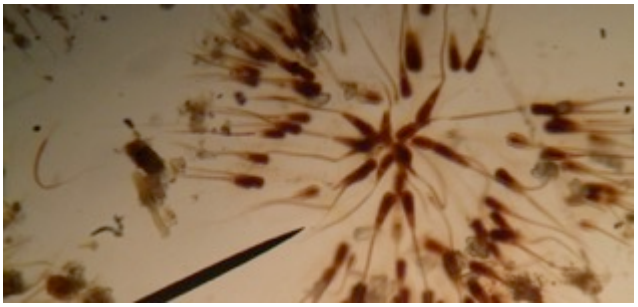
Algae detective – Rosalie Breen

Inspired by Johannes' report on plenty of water in Wigley's, I set off to check waterholes on the Todd River, with help with transport from Wendy and then Anne and Connie. In one little pool among the big rocks and sand, looking most uninviting, were little brownish gelatinous balls varying in size from 2-8 mm attached to dead-looking water weed, some balls were free floating. These were colonies of an alga, containing hundreds of tiny filaments, dark and thicker at one end, with a tapering tail. It was only possible to see this clearly under a microscope. After much examination, research and consultation with my algae expert Joan Powling, I decided on a *Gloetrichia* species, probably *G.natans.* It felt good.



Pictures from the top: Anne Pye took this one of the algae balls attached to a water plant; the gelatinous ball colony; what is inside the jelly ball; microscope view of lots of individuals.





Surf zone algae - Joan Powling

This phenomenon appears regularly at this same time of the year and concerns the local residents as they assume it is "dirty" water and should be avoided. In fact it is an accumulation of a tiny diatom (a type of alga made of silicon) and it occurs only in the foam of the wave at its most turbulent, when it is breaking. Beyond the breakers the water is quite clean and clear.
The diatom is a species of *Anaulis* probably *A. australis* and it really is tiny, measuring 20x10 microns.

The following paragraph is taken directly from a paper by A. McLachlan and A.C. Brown published in The Ecology of Sandy Shores (Second Edition), 2006.
4.3 Surf-zone Phytoplankton.
Rich accumulations of diatoms are a typical feature of the surf zones of many exposed beaches. These accumulations are composed in most cases of a single species, in this case *Anaulus*. They were first thought to be blooms and have an appearance like oil slicks in the surf. They have been shown not to be blooms, but rather semi permanent features of high-energy surf zones where the diatom cells divide at a constant rate. In some cases, dominance can change with seasons. They have been recorded from most continents and are characteristic of beaches with broad dissipative surf zones exposed to strong wave action. These accumulations seem to be more common in the Southern Hemisphere, where *Anaulus australis* is endemic.

A long way from Alice Springs I know, but an interesting phenomenon involving algae, this time marine algae.

Burrowing frogs – Meg Mooney

After a year with almost no rain, I am very happy to walk beside churning brown water in the Todd River, just north of the Telegraph Station. Especially with a soundtrack of burrowing frogs. There's the loud 'baaa baaa baaa' of the Sheep Frog and the more subtle 'urr-ur urr-ur urr-ur' of Spencer's Burrowing Frogs.

I'm almost as excited as the frogs, who've just broken out of cocoons of dried skin and scrabbled a metre or so to the surface. It's a year since we've had decent rain, so the frogs have been underground at least that long. There are hundreds of them calling along a kilometre of river.

At least some burrowers reduce their metabolic rate so they can remain dormant underground longer. The sound or vibration of rain on the ground is known to be a cue for some of them to remove and eat their cocoons and dig their way up to the open air.

They'll mate almost straight away. I haven't seen this but tadpoles appear in a few days. In less than two weeks there'll be so many tiny frogs jumping around along these banks at night that'll be impossible to walk here without stepping on some – this is happened along the drain at the back of my place. Apparently the tadpoles of Sheep Frogs develop more quickly as pools start to dry out and get hotter.

Out at an Aboriginal community, two weeks after the rain, the teachers and I go to a tablecloth of water under a shady gum. In a few minutes we find lots of tadpoles, a few Shield and Fairy Shrimps, water beetles, a Damselfly larva and a Sheep Frog in this pool left from when the river flowed. Sheep Frogs are about the size of a small child's hand. They can be mottled or plain brown but almost always have a thin cream stripe along the middle of their backs.

When we show the children the next morning, the teacher aide tells them in their language, Pintupi Luritja, that their great grandparents dug up burrowing frogs to eat. Some frogs were also dug up for a drink, because they fill themselves with water before they burrow down to cocoon.

From the top

- Sheep or Main's Frog, *Cyclorana maini*;
- Spencer's Burrowing Frog, *Opisthodon spenceri*;
- Spencer's Burrowing Frog burrowing backwards in the sand;
- Two Tanami Toadlets, *Uperoleia micromeles* and one Desert Spadefood, *Notadon nichollsi.* These three were sharing a burrow.

Ecologist Rachel Paltridge tells me that after big rains she's seen Desert Spadefoot Toads, large frogs with orange and black spots, and tiny Tanami Toadlets come up in red sand dunes. These frogs don't form cocoons but dig burrows up to two and a half metres deep in the loose sand. It seems that the larger Spadefoot Toads dig the burrows and groups of Toadlets share them, with the Toads usually nearer the bottom and the Toadlets further up.

Aboriginal people can find the small depressions made by burrows of these toads, six months or more after the frogs have made them. After rains, the toads burrow back down during the day, but not very far while there's still water about, so it is easier to look for the fresh holes and dig them up and eat them.

Here in central Australia the burrowing frogs seem to be fine for now, unlike some of their east coast cousins. Let's hope – and act – so it stays that way.

Mount Gillen stunning views and plants – Neil Woolcock

Leigh and I went up Mount Gillen when we were freed from our quarantine.
For those who haven't been up Mount Gillen for a while I took a few photos

A few years ago fire wiped out much of the growth on both the north side and up on top.
Now things are growing back but the Buffel on the north side (never much up top) hasn't grown back anywhere near as thickly as it was before the fire. Presumably the fire plus low rainfall has kept it a bit in check, and this has given lots of wildflowers a chance to grow and flourish.

Lots of Tickweed, *Cleome viscosa*; some spade plants, *Hybanthus auriantiacus*; different types of Ptilotus (only a green variety, *Ptilotus nobilis*, of the bigger flowers) above; *Indigofera leucotricha* (not flowering, but lots of bushes); Cattle Bush, *Trichodesma zelanicum*; Yellow Portulaca, *Portulaca oleracea* and I'm sure many others. Up on top the spinifex is growing back. Only low, bright green clumps at the moment compared to the tall clumps I hiked through once with Cec Sutton.
Others on top were lovely patches of bright blue Halgania, *Halgania cyanea* and a little bush like a solanum with small flowers. Peter Jobson identified it as *Seringia nephrosperma* (this was previously called *Keraudrinia nephrosperma*).

The little grey bushes are *Indigofera leucotricha*

Portulaca oleraceae flowering brightly

The best blue – *Halgania cyanea*

Mauve flowers of *Seringia neprosperma*

NOT "THE BIG FIVE"

African Animals by **Jenny Purdie … Part 1**


Oryx

The "Big Five" animals (Lion, Leopard, Black Rhinoceros, Elephant and African Buffalo) were those known to the early big-game hunters as the five most difficult animals in Africa to hunt on foot. Visitors, especially first timers, to Africa always want to see these iconic species. These animals are certainly wonderful to see and watch however there are many lesser known species that are also fascinating.

ANTELOPE: 72 species of antelope occur in Africa, some better known than others. The largest is the Eland weighing up to 900kg and the smallest in southern Africa is the Damara Dik Dik at around 5.5kg. Some antelope are commonly seen such as Impala, Wildebeest, Springbok, Kudu and Waterbuck. Some are quite rare - the majestic Sable and Roan, some confined to smaller areas - Nyala, Bontebok, some around water – Lechwe, Sitatunga and then there are the small Klipspringer standing on the tips of their hooves on the top of rocks. In some species both males and females have horns eg Springbok, Oryx, Wildebeest, Eland; while in other species only males have horns eg Damara Dik Dik, Klipspringer, Steenbok, Bushbuck, Impala, Waterbuck.
Note, the words "bok" and "buck" are often interchangeable with bok being the Afrikaans word for buck.


Bushbuck


Common Duiker


Grey Rhebok


Damara Dik Dik – female


Damara Dik Dik - male


Klipspringer


Blesbok


Eland


Hartebeeste


Impala


Kudu - male

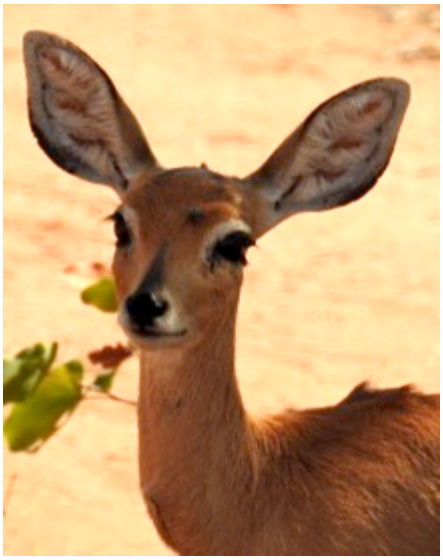

Lechwe


Nyala - female


Nyala - male


Sable Antelope


Springbok


Steenbok


Waterbuk - male


Tsessebe


Wildebeeste


Waterbuk - female

That is nineteen of the seventy-two species of Antelope that live in Africa.
Well done, Jenny! Lovely photos!

2020 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT GRANT APPLICATION

Neil Woolcock submitted an application for a grant from Alice Springs Town Council to buy four UHF radios and an updated First Aid kit. We recently heard that it was successful. *"Council has assessed all applications submitted for the 2020 round of the Community Grants Program. We are pleased to advise that your application was successful for the amount of **$1,155.**"* Thank you and well done, Neil! We look forward to being safer when we resume trips and excursions.

AUSTRALIAN NATURAL HISTORY MEDALLION

Michael Laflamme spent many hours and much effort rewriting our nomination for Peter Latz for the Australian Natural History Medallion. Margaret Friedel did the proof-reading and it was sent off to Maxwell Campbell, President of Field Naturalist Club of Victoria this week. Thanks to you both.

CANCELLATION OF THE AUSTRALIAN NATURALISTS NETWORK GET-TOGETHER

In the light of the current restrictions on group gatherings, interstate and regional travel and exclusions of public access to many national parks and state forests, the organising committee of the Australian Naturalists Network has very reluctantly decided to postpone the get-together planned for this September in Stanthorpe.

Although this get-together is some months away, it is difficult to predict when life may return to normal and we therefore decided it was only fair to make an early decision so that potential participants could cancel their travel and accommodation arrangements. We were very much looking forward to showcasing the diverse natural values and beautiful scenery of Queensland's Granite Belt as the region is starting to recover from drought and bushfires following recent rain.

If it is agreeable to the Australian Naturalists' Network Steering Committee, we are hoping to be able to offer the get-together at about the same time in 2022.

Meanwhile stay safe everyone and we look forward to seeing some of you visit our special part of Australia in 2022.

Liz Bourne on behalf of the Stanthorpe Field Naturalist Club ANN 2020 Organising Committee

ASFNC TREASURER'S REPORT – MARCH 2020

Balance of all funds (inc. petty cash) end of February		**$2,712.80**
Activity in March		
Income received	Membership	$15.00
	Bank interest	$0.21
Expenses	Austcover public liability insurance	$460.00

[Petty cash *Petty cash opening balance $21.85; Expenses Nil; Petty cash balance end March $21.85]*

Total of all funds (inc. petty cash) end March	**$2,268.01**

SNIPPETS, FACEBOOK AND WEBSITES

1. Thank you to the many Members who have sent in photos or interesting Natural History notes to be distributed to the Membership. It has been amazing to see the amount of wildlife active in our gardens and local area and these snippets have been well received by members.
2. Meg Mooney has recently been added to the administration of our Facebook page and is posting lots of photos to that. Not all ASFNC Members are in that group and there are many other non-ASFNC Members in it. Check it out, if you haven't seen it recently.
3. Bob Read recommended individuals use the iNaturalist website for sightings and identifications. *"Loading is quite easy. Once you have created an account it is simply a matter of drag and drop images to the upload screen. The site reads the time and date, and if the camera has a GPS location too.*
Not all observations get identified. Some images are too poor, others no one with the right expertise gets around to looking at. Having said that, I have been amazed at how many are, sometimes a long time after posting."
4. Bec Duncum commented on the large number of butterflies around at the moment and suggested some websites. *"There are some great resources online, but I'd like to draw your attention to a citizen science project which was released in October last year. It's called 'Butterflies Australia' and you can find more information at https://www.butterflies.org.au/external/home. To be involved in the citizen science project and record butterfly sightings, you will need to download the app. Once downloaded you can count butterflies and utilise the fabulous inbuilt field guide.*
The SA butterflies and moths website https://sabutterflies.org.au/home/butterflies.html has a factsheet on each butterfly species and often shows you what they look like in larval (caterpillar) and pupal (chrysalis) stages. This is great to know so when you see a caterpillar in your garden, you know which butterfly it will become."

Oxpeckers on a Giraffe

This is the last of Jenny Purdie's African bird photos. The Red-billed Oxpeckers have a yellow eye-ring and a full red bill. The yellow-billed ones don't have an eye-ring and have a red bill with a yellow base.

And a last-minute ID.

There are at least 10 species of Tribulus, Bindieye or Caltrop, in the Northern Territory, some native and some introduced. The one I have seen most commonly around Alice Springs in recent weeks is *Tribulus eichlerianus*, which is a native species. The best way of identifying it seems to be the fruit, which is velvety-hairy and with prominent, short, median dorsal spines.