



March 2021

## Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



Always exciting to see our normally dry central Australian rivers flowing. Neil Woolcock sent in this photo of the Hugh River cutting Namatjira Drive after the big storm on 12 February 2021. Thanks Neil!

Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of the month (except December and January) at 7:00pm at the Olive Pink Botanic Garden.

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*Follow us on Facebook!*

## NEWSLETTER

The next newsletter will be April 2021

The deadline for the April newsletter will be 21 March.

Please send your contributions to Barb Gilfedder: [bjfedders@gmail.com](mailto:bjfedders@gmail.com)

### ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB



#### Wednesday 10 March

General Meeting at Olive Pink Botanic Garden at 7.00pm.

Speaker: **Jocelyn Davies.**

“HaRinh langurs: pro-active primate conservation by poor Vietnamese farmers.”

Photo courtesy: CIRD and the Tuyen Hoa community conservation group

**Watch for more trip details that will be sent out just before the trips.**

**Saturday March 6** - Wander up a limestone hill and explore the surrounding area, situated approximately 30 km along the Ross Highway. There are splendid views and interesting flora. Meet at 7:15am in Palm Circuit just past the United Heavitree Gap Supermarket. Bring water and wear suitable footwear. Expect to be out for 2-3 hours depending on the weather. Leader Connie Spencer.

**Saturday March 13** - Serpentine Gorge exploration and picnic. Meet at Flynn’s Grave at 8:00am or at the Serpentine Gorge car park at 9:00am. Leader- Neil Woolcock will be at Flynn’s Grave. Contact him on 0428 521 598 if you are planning on coming.

**Wednesday, March 24**, 4.30 to 6.30 - Botanise at Conlons Lagoon (Rifle Range Swamp). Meet opposite Old Timers at 4.00pm. Wear closed shoes and bring a drink and possibly mozzie repellent. Leader – Barb Gilfedder

**Sunday March 28** - Drive North Stuart Highway to Native Gap – walk, then on to Sunday lunch at Aileron. – Connie Spencer

#### Wednesday April 14

General Meeting in the gazebo at Olive Pink Botanic Garden at 7.00pm. **Lisa and Pete Nunn** will introduce us to some of the best Australian wildlife watching locations.

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### AUSTRALIAN PLANTS SOCIETY - ALICE SPRINGS

[apsalicesprings@yahoo.com.au](mailto:apsalicesprings@yahoo.com.au)

#### Wednesday 3 March 2021

**7.30pm Olive Pink Botanic Garden** - Annual General Meeting followed by a talk by **Ian Coleman** about his travels in Tasmania over Summer, where he spent 9 days walking the Overland Track.

#### Wednesday 7 April 2021

**7.30pm Olive Pink Botanic Garden** - Talk by **Peter Jobson** about Ilparpa Claypans - Buffel-busting .



### **JOIN IN and follow us on Facebook!**

Our Facebook group, Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club has 130 members. It is a great place to post photos of all the wonderful fauna and flora you see. Any group member can post and comment on the sightings or help you identify them.

So much around after the recent rains

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club

### Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club

#### Committee Members

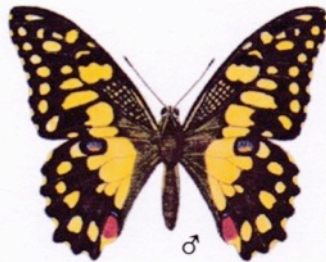
<b>President</b>	Barb Gilfedder	8955 5452
<b>Vice-President</b>	Margaret Friedel	0417 849 743
<b>Secretary</b>	Connie Spencer	0429 966 592
<b>Treasurer</b>	Neil Woolcock	0428 521 598
<b>Property Officer</b>	Rosalie Breen	8952 3409
<b>Member</b>	Lee Ryall	0417 401 237
<b>Public Officer</b>	Anne Pye	0438 388 012

#### **Other Club Responsibilities:**

Newsletter – Barb Gilfedder [bjfedders@gmail.com](mailto:bjfedders@gmail.com)  
Facebook Organiser – Meg Mooney [moon3@iinet.net.au](mailto:moon3@iinet.net.au)  
Website - Robyn Grey-Gardner 8952 2207



Dingy Swallowtail  
*Papilio anactus*



Chequered Swallowtail  
*Papilio demoleus*



Common Migrant  
*Catopsilia pyranthe*



Lemon Migrant  
*Catopsilia pomona*



Orange Migrant  
*Catopsilia scylla*



Small Grass Yellow  
*Eurema smilax*



Narrow-winged Pearl White  
*Elodina padusa*



Caper White  
*Anaphaeis java*



Lesser Wanderer  
*Danaus chrysippus*



Painted Lady  
*Vanessa kershawi*



Australian Admiral  
*Vanessa itea*



Meadow Argus  
*Junonia villida*



Common Eggfly  
*Hypolimnna bolina*



Glasswing  
*Acraea andromacha*



Icilius Blue  
*Jalmenus icilius*



Amaryllis Azure  
*Ogyris amaryllis*



## Central Australian Butterflies



Common Grass Blue  
*Zizina otis*



Pea Blue  
*Lampides boeticus*

There are so many butterflies fluttering around after the recent rain and new growth, This ID sheet, found on the Land for Wildlife website might be useful to print out and stick on your fridge.

Please note that the Scientific name for the Caper White is now *Belenois java*.

Included with the permission of Kate Stevens and Bill Low of Land for Wildlife, Alice Springs



**Intertexta Forest revival with the recent rains – Barb Gilfedder**

There is still evidence of fire damage in the Intertexta Forest, but the herbage on the ground is amazing. If you feel like covering up well, both with clothes and mosquito repellent, it is a great place to visit. The picture above shows mainly *Eremophila longifolia*, shooting from the undamaged roots. I did look for the Eremophila Hawk Moth caterpillars that love to eat its leaves, but no sign of them yet. The knobbly looking flower heads in bottom centre are *Malvastrum americanum*, a weed introduced from America, first collected in the NT in 1951 and now quite widespread.

We went out there recently mainly to look at the Nardoo which grows along the creek. (right) There was lots there, but I couldn't find any sporocarps so am unable to identify it at this stage. It will remain as *Marsilea sp.* till I find some. I notice *Marsilea exerata* is on the species list for the area. It is such a pretty little fern that grows in water where the leaves float or in the mud on the edge where they stand up. There was still water in the little creek,. It was edged with Beetle Grass, *Diplachne fusca* and also Native Millet, *Panicum decompositum*. (below)

Also enjoying the damp areas was the dainty daisy, *Minuria integerrima* with its mauve, shaggy petals. (Below right)



There was not a lot of colour in the forest apart from green, but I did stumble over a few fruits trying to attract the birds to distribute their seeds. A few Goosefoot Tomato Bushes, *Solanum chenopodium* were fruiting, with berries looking like tiny cherry tomatoes; Ruby Saltbush, *Enchylaena tomentosa* some with pink berries and some with yellow ones; and of course the relatively large fruits of the Wild Passionfruit or Caper Bush, *Capparis spinosa ssp nummularia*, a favourite of Bowerbirds.



There were lots of birds, Budgerigars in small groups chattering overhead; a flock of six Galahs eating Tribulus seeds on the ground; a couple of Ringnecks; and a Sacred Kingfisher was calling continuously but I didn't search for him.

I found the chrysalis case of a Giant Wood Moth, possibly *Enoxylyla cinereus*, lying on the mulch. It was about 10cm long. Evidently the large caterpillars, that look like Witchetty Grubs bore into the wood of smooth-barked Eucalyptus trees where they stay and pupate. The moth emerges during Summer often leaving the case sticking out of its exit hole. These sometimes fall to the ground. (I found an adult Giant Wood Moth some years ago under the big Gum Tree in our garden (pictured right). The wingspan is up to 23cm.)



The Intertexta Forest is one of my favourite places, always interesting and with something different to discover, if you brave the mozzies...



## Saddling the horse and riding off: the flora of Southern and Eastern Arizona

A talk and report by Peter Jobson – 10 February 2021

The thing that hits anyone from central Australia when they visit the arid south west of the USA are the striking similarities. Take away the cacti that are prolific in this region and you could easily be excused for thinking you haven't left home; only the higher humidity (equal to Tennant Creek) helps disabuse you of the idea.

Arizona is geographically diverse and ranges from sea level to the highest peaks over 3000m. This type of topography allows for different vegetation types.

The main attraction is the Sonoran Desert with which occupies close to half the area of the state. This grades into thorny shrublands and low woodlands of usually Mesquite or Parkinsonia, and surprisingly there are Oak and Pine woodlands and forests, and even Madrean Evergreen Forest (tall Pine forest) in the montane and alpine regions.

At roughly the same size as arid Northern Territory, Arizona has c. 3500 species, which is higher than ours at c. 2300, but these montane and alpine regions are refugia for cooler more northern species.

The Cacti are the fourth largest plant family in Arizona and species can form the upper dominant layer, mid- layer and the ground layers. The largest Cactus in the USA is Saguaro (*Carnegie gigantean*); this is the famous Cactus that features in so many movies and cartoons. They are very slow growing and the tall plants are often over 200 years old. They are bat and insect pollinated with the flowers in the spring and early summer.



Peter's trip, from Los Vegas, south through the Sonoran Desert to the Mexico border, east to Tucson and then north west through a variety of higher altitudes and different plant communities.

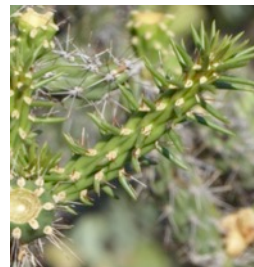
Interestingly, Saguaro are not adapted well to fire. They boil when a fire goes through a community and may take up to a year or more before they actually die. Splits and holes are obvious in older plants where they have split due to hot conditions. Animals of various kinds will use these as burrows and for nests.



Close to the Mexican border is the equally impressive Organ Pipes Cactus (*Stenocereus thurberi*). This is another slow growing cactus and often forms a co-dominant upper storey with Saguaro. In mid-July, the flowers were long gone, but the fruits were being visited by large bees or wasps.

Other Cacti in the region include species that have become naturalised in Alice Springs. One commonly seen species was *Cylindropuntia fulgida* var. *fulgida* (Rope Cactus or Jumping Cholla). The Teddy Bear Cactus may look lovely and fuzzy from a distance, but close up and it was a forest of intersecting spines just waiting to catch something. Finally, Ball Cacti such as the Fish Hook Cactus (*Ferocactus wislizeni*) and the Pincushion Cactus (*Mammillaria grahamii*) were encountered, but not in large numbers.

Saguaro, Organ Pipes Cactus, Staghorn Cactus, Fish Hook Cactus and Jumping Cholla.



Three families that don't occur in Australia were the Fouquieriaceae, Malpighiaceae and Krameraceae. *Fouquieria splendens* or Ocotillo is ubiquitous like Saguaro in the Sonoran Desert landscape. It has fire red flowers in spring, followed by orange to red fruits. By mid July they had all gone, but the spindly long branches were evident as they spotted the landscape. *Cottsia gracilis* in the Malpighiaceae are small creepers in the understory and vegetatively look remarkably like our own *Glycine canescens*. Krameraceae, along with Polygalaceae are the sister families to the Fabaceae. The mauve pea-like flowers of *Krameria bicolor* on small grey leaved shrubs produce fruit pods that have red hooks covering the surface. These hooks attach to fur of passing animals to get distributed.

The delightful surprise of seeing genera that we know such as *Senna*, *Abutilon* and *Hibiscus* was fun, but the real surprise is seeing species that also occur here (*Evolvulus alsinoides* and *Dodonaea viscosa* for example).



Above: *Cottsia gracilis*, *Krameria bicolor* and *Fouquieria splendens*

The creek lines and valleys have been heavily impacted by thousands of years of human habitation. It is along here that many famous former native Indian settlements can be found, including those that were built into cliffs and caves and could be accessed by ladders. Lining the streams is the Arizona Sycamore (*Platanus wrightii*), a welcome relief from the summer heat, with its smooth white trunks and large leaves. The other dominant tree was Velvet Ash (*Fraxinus velutina*). The understory was a mixture of shrubs, herbs and grasses: these included the 4-winged Saltbush (*Atriplex canescens*), Watson's Goosefoot (*Chenopodium watsonia*), both were also used as food plants. Silverleaf Nightshade (*Solanum elaeagnifolium*) is a species that looks very like our local ones and was recorded once as a weed for Alice Springs.



"Taking a ladder to your front door" – former native Indian settlement.

On the plains away from waterways were thorny shrublands dominated by Mesquite (*Prosopis*) and *Parkinsonia* – both are plants that are noxious weeds on the Barkly Tablelands. The understory was wholly reliant on how dense the upper canopy was: from completely absent with a dense leaf litter, to a herb understory, to a grass/shrub one. It was here that familiar genera such as *Lepidium* and *Euphorbia* were encountered. *Mimosa distachya* (Arizona Mimosa) was an attractive pink flowering shrub, often lining highways.



*Atriplex canescens*, *Lepidium*, *Euphorbia*, and *Mimosa distachya*

The remaining plant communities are all restricted by elevation and the temperatures of both Summer and Winter. On the drier lower slopes of the mountain ranges that flank the central eastern portion of Arizona, chaparral is the first after the cactus dominated communities. Cactus is still present, but the vegetation is more open, grasses and herbs are obvious in the ground layer, and plants like Yuccas and Agave are more evident. One very conspicuous Yucca was *Yucca parryi*. This lovely plant with its large orange flowers on tall flowering spikes was common along the roadside. They were a big favourite with the local bee and insect population. Another agave-type plant was the Sotal or Beargrass (*Dasylyron wheeleri*). This time the spikes were white-green and also towered high above other species.

From the chaparral, the pinion pine – oak woodlands became apparent. The canopy height can be greatly reduced due to soil fertility but the understorey is often dense and shrubby and looks like a heath. At the elevations now encountered, snow is annual and can be quite thick and prolonged. The gymnosperms observed here included One-seed Juniper (*Juniperus monosperma*), Arizona Cypress (*Cupressus arizonica*) and various *Pinus*. The most common Oak seen was *Quercus tubinella* with its attractive toothed leaves and green or black acorns. *Yuccas* are still obvious, as well as other delights such as Red Paintbrushes (*Castilleja*: Lamiaceae) a very messy genus in North America, and weird to us, the Alderleaf Mountain Mahogany (*Cercocarpus montanus*: Rosaceae) with its feathery curved styles out in the open waiting for the wind-dispersed pollen.



Above: *Quercus tubinella*, *Castilleja* and *Cercocarpus montanus*. Below: *Oenanthera hookeri* and *Purshia stanburiana*.



The most alpine community visited was the Madrean Evergreen plant community. This community is dominated by a number of tall Pines and some Oaks, with a very open shrub and herb understorey. It is significant in North America as they only occur in isolated patches of mountain summits above a certain elevation, and are known as “sky Islands”. As would be expected these sky islands also contain a number of endemics or rare species. Mt Lemmon is the closest sky island containing Madrean Evergreen woodlands to Tucson. The mountain is named after the botanist Sarah Lemmon who trekked up there in 1881. This mountain is granite, with shallow sandy soils, looking very much like the wilder areas of the Blue Mountains in NSW. On the more exposed areas of the mountain range Pringle’s Manzanita (*Arctostaphylos pringlei*: Ericaceae) forms dense shrubby thickets. They have a lovely Erica shaped bell flower, but in summer they were fruiting madly. The plants had bright red bark that peeled off in strips.



*Ceanothus fendleri* was a thorny bush with white flowers and hard red fruits. This genus is equivalent to say *Grevillea* in that it has many species and is an important element in some habitats. Evening Primrose (*Oenanthera*) is another large genus, with some species naturalised in Australia. This species (*O. hookeri*) was much taller than usual at over 1 m. The Rosaceae is another well-represented family in the US, full of great genera we have never heard of. Here is one: Stanbury’s Cliff Rose (*Purshia stanburiana*). It was a lovely dog rose type flower with interesting foliage.

Finally, one of the interesting stories of weeds is the mass introduction of Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*: Anacardiaceae) to Jerome. Jerome is a tin mining town perched on a steep slope. A former mine owner thought the town needed beautification and aerially it seeded across the town. Now it is a huge headache – it ruins the foundations of historical buildings and smothers all other vegetation in vacant lands making revegetation programs a nightmare.

Arizona is worth the visit from a central Australian natural historian. There is much that is similar, but there are lots that are exciting and interesting. Unlike many, we can deal with the summer heat when the crowds are missing.

Thank you Peter, an interesting presentation. I really liked the way you linked it to central Australia and the flora we know. Ed.



## Crested Tooth-grinder Grasshoppers

Barb Gilfedder

Alice Springs Field Naturalists had a lovely wander around the Spencer Valley on Saturday 27 February. It was not as green as I had seen it previously, but there were certainly green patches. Connie and Rosalie were great leaders. A team of Landcare enthusiasts have been removing the Buffel grass from there for many years and we are all reaping the rewards. Story and photos next month.

After the walk, Suzanne sent me some photos of a strange looking grasshopper that she had found feeding on *Sida phaeotricha*. Bob Read identified it for us as *Ecphantus quadrilobus* (Crested tooth-grinder), saying it was an adult male.

Going back for another look on Sunday, I located females of the same species. The female is about twice the size of the male. This species feeds exclusively on Sidas.

Photos: top – the male by Suzanne Lollback;  
lower - the female by Barb Gilfedder



## Scorpions – Patrick Nelson

I went hunting scorpions one night recently, finding them in abundance about 1-2km south of the airport with my new UV torch. In the space of about 15 minutes, I saw about a dozen of them, all of which fluoresced, as well as a little brown snake. Not really up to speed with the ID, but at least one person has speculated that they may be *Lychas buchari*.

Bob Read said "I am not sure from these images. The black scorpions around Alice are *Urodacus* sp. As usual the best thing would be to post the images on iNaturalist".

From the web... *Most scorpions glow a blue-green color when illuminated by ultraviolet light or natural moonlight. Scientists aren't sure how this fluorescence benefits the creatures, but some have speculated that it acts as a sunscreen, or helps them find mates in the dark.* (Science daily)





In response to a call out for a few newsletter contributions, Mandy Webb sent these pictures of this beautiful Jewel Beetle, possibly *Chalcophorotaenia australasiae*: Bupresidae family. Their host plant is Eucalyptus where the larvae chew away beneath the bark, while the adults fly in the sunshine feeding on flowers and sometimes leaves. The legs will fold up neatly against the body. Thanks Mandy!

Gordon Roberts spent a few days out at 2 mile waterhole, across the road from Glen Helen. It is a great place to camp, beautiful light and reflections in the water and he said the budgies were very active. Thanks Gordon!



And lastly, thanks to Neil Woolcock who sent in this wonderful classic shot of Rainbow Valley reflections.

