



July 2023

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



A beautiful but chill morning at Serpentine Gorge in late May. This was Neil Woolcock's third attempt to lead a visit to the Gorge: the first in March 2021 was prevented by a flooded Hugh River, the second in April 2023 was rained out by Cyclone Ilsa. It was worth the wait. See page 7.

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!

The next newsletter will be published on 1 August 2023.
We appreciate all contributions, articles and photos both local and elsewhere.
Please have them to Marg Friedel, capparis@inet.net.au by 23 July 2023.

ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Wednesday 12 July 7pm Speaker night at OPBG.

David Albrecht – NT Herbarium. 'What is involved in naming a new species'

Saturday 22 July – Day trip to Birthday Waterhole with Charlie Carter and Deb Clarke. High clearance 4WD essential or they have 5 spare seats in their big tour bus available at \$10 a seat. Contact Charlie 04178769360.

Wednesday 9 August 7pm – ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club to be held at Olive Pink Botanic Garden. This will be followed by Members' night. Please bring stories and pictures, a natural history item or a book to share.

AUSTRALIAN PLANTS SOCIETY – ALICE SPRINGS

apsalicesprings@yahoo.com.au

Friday and Saturday 7-8 July 2023 — Alice Springs Show

No monthly talk in July. We would love volunteers to register to assist with set up on Thursday 6 July and during the show.

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club **Committee Members**

President	Marg Friedel	0417 849 743
Vice-President	to be appointed	
Secretary	Suzanne Bitar	0419 897 735
Treasurer	Neil Woolcock	0428 521 598
Property Officer	Claire Norman	0448 341 795

General Members	Jan Black	0400 303 123
	Wendy Mactaggart	0434 495 903
	Lisa McLean	0412 642 987

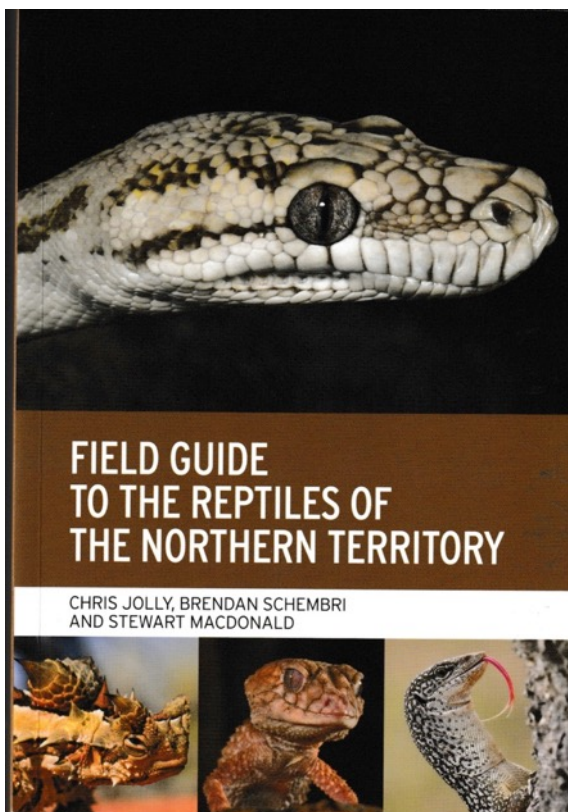
Public Officer	Anne Pye	0438 388 012
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Other Club Responsibilities:

Newsletter – Marg Friedel / Barb Gilfedder

Facebook Organiser – Meg Mooney moon3@inet.net.au

Website controller – position vacant



Know your reptiles - NEW FIELD GUIDE

Report by Jenny Purdie

"Field Guide to the Reptiles of the Northern Territory" by Chris Jolly, Brendan Schembri and Stewart Macdonald has just been published. The book covers the 390 species that occur or may occur in the NT. Each species has a photo, a description and a distribution map.

There are 4 sections – Crocodilians, Turtles and Tortoises, Lizards and Snakes and the pages of each section are colour coded so you can quickly access the relevant section. There are dichotomous keys for families, genera and species that are accompanied by clear drawings explaining the steps in the keys.



The book is available from CSIRO Publishing – <https://www.publish.csiro.au/> – in a paperback for \$49.99 plus postage or as an ebook from several distributors.

Newhaven Threatened Species Reintroduction Project – a work in progress

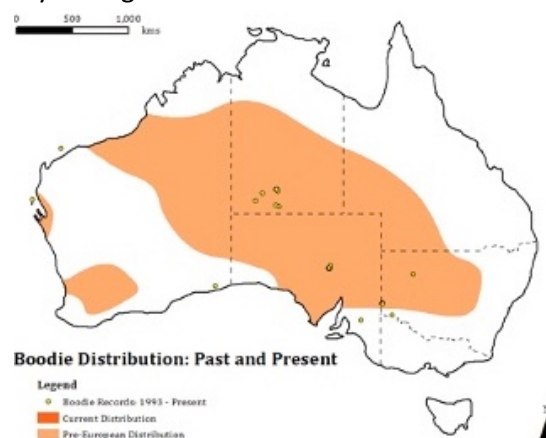
A talk presented on 14 June 2023 by Joe Schofield, Regional Operations Manager for Central and South Australia, Australian Wildlife Conservancy. Report by Marg Friedel. All photos and map: Josef Schofield/AWC.

“These warrens full of ghosts have been a constant reminder of what we have lost and continue to lose”

Joe Schofield and his partner Danae Moore (AWC Wildlife Ecologist) lived at and cared for Newhaven Wildlife Conservancy for almost 12 years to 2019. Joe first noticed the empty warrens of Burrowing Bettongs in 2003 during desert travels and had since seen them elsewhere (right), noting especially their remnant earthworks on Newhaven (below).



Burrowing Bettongs (*Purdaya* in Warlpiri) were once Australia's most common Macropod, with a vast distribution and occurring in high densities – see distribution map of 'Boodie' (a WA name). They were exceptional environmental engineers and their massive earthworks are a persistent reminder of the continuing extinction process. Burrowing Bettongs had been present for tens of thousands of years – pre-dating dingoes (arrived about four thousand years ago) – and became extinct in the area about 60 years ago.



In a bid to return locally extinct wildlife species to Newhaven, AWC fenced a 9450 ha area near the old homestead, headquarters for the Conservancy, to include a range of habitats. Completed in 2018, the area was declared free of feral predators and herbivores in 2019, after intensive efforts including those by Warlpiri rangers. The enclosure had previously contained 45 cats, amongst other feral species. Frequent monitoring ensures that the enclosure is not re-invaded.

Joe detected 50 old Burrowing Bettongs warrens in the area, which might have housed 500 individuals – imagine the amount of soil moved in a year when each individual would have moved the equivalent of a wheelbarrow of dirt every day! Clearly the Burrowing Bettongs were a critical part of the ecosystem.

Species reintroductions began in 2017 with the *Mala* and in total six locally extinct species have been reintroduced so far:



Rufous Hare-wallaby – *Mala*, reintroduced 2017/2019



Red-tailed Phascogale, (2020/2021)



Greater Bilby – *Walpajiri/Ninu* (2022)



Central Rock-rat (2022)

Also - Brush-tailed Bettong – *Putujuru* (2021)
Burrowing Bettong – *Purdaya* (2022)

Further species translocations for 2023 are:

- Central Rock-rat (May – cohort 2)
 - from captive breeding program with ASDP
- Golden Bandicoot (July/August)
 - pending approvals and population estimate
 - harvest from Charnley and Barrow Islands, WA
- Numbat (November)
 - pending approvals and research project development
 - trial translocation from Scotia NSW

Prior to translocations, the food supply was confirmed with vegetation surveys so that no artificial feeding was required, except initially. There are three artificial watering points.

In the last year, live trapping for health checks of some of the earlier introductions have found new recruits and pouch young in Mala and Brush-tailed Bettong, and sub-adults/juveniles in Greater Bilby and Central Rock-rat. Juvenile Burrowing Bettong have been captured on camera ([below](#)) but there has been no sign in Elliott traps of the 115 Red-tailed Phascogales released, so cameras will be tried next.



Numbats, on the edge of their original range at Newhaven, were reintroduced but failed to establish, so there's more to learn before any further attempts are made. Possums and Western Quolls are being considered for the longer term and, eventually, it may be possible to introduce species outside the enclosure.

In terms of predators being part of the ecosystem, birds of prey, Perenties, Sand Goannas, Mulgaras and (hopefully) Phascogales are already present. A much larger enclosure (25,000 ha) would be necessary for dingoes to be included.

Species reintroduction programs are complex, involving many people and a lot of resources, and depend on trusting relationships amongst organisations and individuals. Clearly, AWC and its many partners are successfully negotiating the challenge, and we can look forward to hearing more down the track. Thankyou Joe for another great talk.

For a summary of Joe's previous presentations, see the June 2021 Newsletter for an introduction to Newhaven's natural values, history and conservation programs, and the October 2021 issue for managing fire at Newhaven.



Peter Bannister

Conlons Lagoon, Rifle Range Swamp – 21 May 2023 by Jane Bannister

On Sunday afternoon as a large group of us arrived at Conlons lagoon and I, being a keen bird watcher, said I would keep a bird list during our outing. Soon after we arrived a flock of 15 Major Mitchell's Cockatoos flew through the trees behind us, calling. How beautiful. A few minutes later another 2 flew the same way. This certainly seemed to be a good omen for birds. However, over the next 2 hours, the only other birds we saw were a White-plumed Honeyeater and, just at the end, a Hooded Robin.



Where did all the water go? - Marg Friedel

I was very surprised not to see more; even though there was no water in the lagoon it is not far from water in the clay pans, and plenty of vegetation surrounding the lagoon. As always, life is surprising, and that is just how it was that afternoon. *[Thank you the sporting Shooters Association and the Shooting Complex manager for access to Conlons Lagoon. Ed.]*



Glinus orygioides – Megg Kelham



Maireana georgei – Barb Gilfedder



An honour for Barb Gilfedder OAM

In the King's Birthday Honours of June 2023, our immediate past President Barb Gilfedder was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia for services to conservation and the environment. The citation notes her contributions to the Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club, Olive Pink Botanical Garden and The Australian Plant Society, and her volunteering at the Herbarium and Greening Australia. Her Life Membership of the Field Naturalists Club and of Greening Australia were noted – a sure sign of long term contributions to conservation and the environment.

Congratulations Barb for such well-deserved recognition!

Photo by Mat Gilfedder - Barb with a friend .

Serpentine or bust – third time lucky – 27 May 2023

Report by Neil Woolcock. Photos by Marg Friedel unless otherwise credited.

On a lovely but chilly Alice Springs morning, eight of us met at Flynn's Grave to plan our visit to Serpentine Gorge.

Peter and Jane headed off in their trusty Defender to get a head start on us. Jill, Sue and Marg joined me in my car, and we soon headed off too, followed by Max and Sue.

Along the way we caught up and passed Peter and Jane, but Max and Sue showed better manners and stayed behind the Defender. We all met up again in the Serpentine Gorge carpark, then headed down the track towards the gorge.

There are always things to see beside any track and this was no exception. Several different native grasses and other natives were still finding places to



Above: Sparkle on the water ruffled by the wind, captured by Max O'Callaghan



thrive amongst the buffel grass. Max and I considered all grasses to be just that – grasses, but the others were able to identify most of them.

Sue and I climbed up to the lookout which rewards you with great views further up into the gorge (*left – by Neil Woolcock*).

By the time we returned to the rest of the group everyone was getting a bit cold, so we headed back up the track to the cars to have morning tea in the sunshine. Near the picnic table, an interesting natural sculpture created by fire and wood borers captured our imagination.



More photos from Serpentine...



Left: Remnant of a burnt tree.
Above: *Solanum aridicola*, *Pterocaulon serrulatum*, *Dodonaea viscosa subsp. mucronata*. Below: Picnic time.



Newhaven discoveries

Marg Friedel

While Suzanne Lollback was at Newhaven in late June, she made some interesting finds. One was a butterfly, which Barb Gilfedder was able to identify as a male Double Spotted Lineblue, *Nacaduba biocellata*. These butterflies love Acacias and this one was resting on an *Acacia inaequilatera*.



The other was a grasshopper, clinging to a *Heliotropium*, possibly *pachyphyllum* (not a *Halgania* – see below). Barb thought it might have been a relatively common Australian Plague Locust, *Chortoicetes terminifera*, but decided to check with our go-to expert Bob Read, a past Club President now living in Tasmania.

Bob replied: “The grasshopper is not the everyday *Chortoicetes*, but much more exciting [*Halgania* Grasshopper], *Histrioacridina roseipennis*. I found one of these at Newhaven, but some years after that booklet [*Grasshoppers at Newhaven* by Bob Read]. iNaturalist has only 15 observations of this species.”

Well spotted, Suzanne!

More on the Praying Mantis' egg case

Jane Bannister

Reading the last newsletter and Deb Clarke's comment about Praying Mantis, I was reminded of a time in 2011, when we had a Praying Mantis egg case stuck onto the fly screen of our kitchen door. I never saw it being made, so do not know how long it was there, but I do know that it was there for many months. By absolute chance I was on the verandah one morning when the nymphs started to hatch and fly. It was the most extraordinary sight, there were many hundreds of them, they kept coming



out, the air was full of them, tiny nymphs, filling the air. The times on my photos show that from 1st to last photo of them is 5 minutes, but they were already hatching and flying when I rushed inside to get my camera, so it was a fair bit longer than that. It is a sight I shall never forget and feel so fortunate to have seen them quite by chance; it was the sheer numbers which emerged from this one egg case, which just amazed me.

One or two Stick Insects

Jane Bannister

A few days ago, I saw a large Stick Insect on our kitchen fly screen.... That seems to have too many arms and legs, I thought.



On investigating further, I found that there were indeed a pair of Stick Insects mating. What an amazing sight! They were there all day, and the next day had gone. Hopefully we'll see many young ones in the future!

Hyles livornicoides, Australian Striped Hawk Moth (*Ayepe-arenye*)

By Barb Gilfedder



The caterpillars come in a variety of colours, green, brown or black with stripes in white or dots of orange and black, not necessarily related to age. Their favoured host plant is Tar Vine (several species of *Boehavia*) and they can be very common when these small trailing herbs grow after rain. They have also been observed on Purslane (*Portulaca oleracea*), Roly Poly (*Salsola australis*), Grape Vines (*Vitis vinifera*) and Caltrop (*Tribulus sp.*)



*Aborigines in central Australia used these caterpillars as food. They starved the caterpillars for a day or two before roasting them. The cooked larvae were said to have a pleasant savoury taste and could be stored for a long time. The caterpillars were a unique food source in the middle of the desert. Through the thousands of years of Aboriginal culture, the caterpillars came to be regarded as sacred totems of the local Arrernte people. The local name for this totemic caterpillar is 'Ayepe-arenye', often anglicised as 'Yeperenye' or 'Yipirinya'. The prefix 'Ayepe' is the local name for the Tar Vine, which around Alice Springs, is the primary foodplant of the *Hyles livornicoides* caterpillar. Sadly this wild vine is being displaced around Alice Springs by the alien Buffel Grass (*Cenchrus ciliaris*), which *Hyles livornicoides* caterpillars cannot eat (Alice Springs News 2017).*