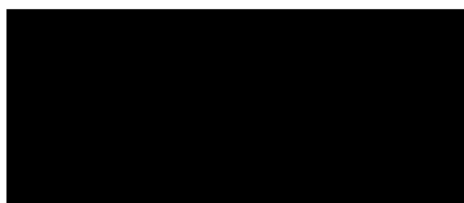


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Naturalists Club Inc. PO Box 8663, Alice Springs, NT 0871



July 2002



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# Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club

July 2002

## CLUB NEWS

### MEETINGS

**July 10<sup>th</sup>**, 7:30 PM at OLSH staff room, Sadadeen Road. **Chris Pavey** of Parks and Wildlife, will talk on **Bats**

**August 14<sup>th</sup>**, AGM. Kaye Percy will give a short video presentation on Field Naturalists Club trips before the AGM.

**September 11<sup>th</sup>**, Graham Griffin, CSIRO, **Spinifex**.

### TRIPS

**Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> June**. Walk from **Flynn Grave to Wallaby Gap** and surrounding area. Meet 8 AM at Flynn Grave, bring lunch and water. Leader, Sue Fraser 8952 5728.

**Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> July**. Walk in **Valley of the Eagles**, John Hayes Rockhole area. Meet 7:30 AM at the Date Gardens, Palm Circuit. Bring lunch and water. Leader Kaye Percy 8952 3405.

**Ellery Gorge**, date to be announced.

Note. The walk on Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> will make the fourth consecutive weekend on which we have had a Club event. This is a combination of the Queen's Birthday weekend, dates set by circumstance and moving a July walk forward to the end of June.

### KINDRED ORGANISATIONS EVENTS

July 3<sup>rd</sup>, Australian Plants meeting at Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Last minute Show preparation.

August 7<sup>th</sup>, Australian Plants meeting at Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Glen Edwards on Camels in the NT - a growing problem.

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APOLOGIES for the late delivery of this month's newsletter. Bob usually prints out what he wants in the newsletter, knowing my lack of disc-use on computers, but he delivered a disc on Thursday June 27. I thought I would be able to manage, 'cos I HAD been shown how ---- but when it wouldn't come through on my computer, (or I couldn't get it to,) I had to resort to a friend's assistance. That, and other things on my personal calendar, prevented an earlier delivery. (Pat. *Pat.*)

## Larapinta Trail – Section 5 Hugh Gorge to Birthday Waterhole

### Day 1.

Departed Flynn's grave at approximately 9.00 and proceeded to Hugh River along Larapinta Road. From the turn off at Hugh River we followed a rough dirt road which continued to a "T" junction separating vehicular tracks to Hugh Gorge and Birthday Water Hole. The road required four wheel drive vehicles with high ground clearances. Beautiful views of Chewings Range heightened the anticipation of the walk ahead.

Leaving one car at the "T" junction all seven walkers piled into the remaining vehicle and headed off to Hugh Gorge. Strapping on our packs we left the car near the camping area not far from the entrance. Within moments we were rock hopping along the watercourse between massive red quartzite walls. Ponds were numerous with fish species including Spangled Grunter and Desert Rainbow Fish. Bob intermittently collected details on the vegetation and water quality of these ponds, allowing us time to admire the massive walls around us. The going was surprisingly slow as we hopped along under the burden of our packs to Pocket Valley and through to Hugh Gorge Junction. Although we had only traveled 3.5km we camped in this beautiful spot. Only a short walk away the high walls of the Gorge closed in to be brilliantly framed in the red afternoon light, while ferns spotted the walls of the cool canyon immediately around us. Numerous cycads hugged the scree beneath the massive walls. A very comfortable camp was made on beds of river sand, which was topped off with an amazing meal whipped up by Beth, Ann and Bob.

### Day 2

From Hugh Gorge Junction the well-defined path took an easterly direction along Linear Valley. The trail surface remained rocky and again proved surprisingly quite slow going. The valley remained richly vegetated with cycads lining the surrounding walls. At a junction called "Creek" we decided to leave the trail and detour south bypassing a steep climb up Razorback Saddle and with hope of finding better water. We soon found a wonderful camp nestled amongst riverbank boulders at a junction to a valley roughly parallel to the main trail. Before dinner a small party explored down the small gorge (a few even dared a swim) to find a huge log-jam of massive trees suspended above a narrow canyon.

### Day 3

A steady climb was made along the valley to Windy Saddle. The saddle provided stunning views over Spencer Gorge and the valley behind us. Firm cool winds channeled along this massive valley gave us a refreshing chill. Climbing down from Windy Saddle to Spencer Gorge proved a challenge. A very steep highly vegetated drainage channel was the only way down. The pace slowed as we scrambled and scraped our way down the loose rocky chute. Rocky Talus at the base of the gully provided a welcomed shady break for lunch. Spencer Gorge proved a spectacular down hill stroll with huge Melaleucas, Cypress Pines and Ghost Gums. At the end of the Spencer Gorge we failed to find any path signs but simple navigation led us back to the car. The route back came all too quickly. Following a quick shuffle to fetch the other car, a quick tea was shared before all seven walkers were heading back to Alice after a long fulfilling day.

We would like to thank Simon from Lone Dingo Outdoor Equipment in Alice Springs for his support and help equipping some of the walkers. Further information on the Larapinta Trail can be sought from Parks and Wildlife (08) 89518211

Jonathan Vea

## HIBERNATING WOODCHUCKS

Woodchucks of the Northern American woods sleep so profoundly that, at times, it can be difficult to be certain that they are still alive. A woodchuck's body temperature falls to only one degree or so above freezing, and its muscles set rigidly, so that the animal not only feels as cold as a stone, but seems, beneath its fur, to be almost as hard as one. In this state, the bodily processes barely tick over, making the minimum demands on the animal's reserves of fat. During the summer, in the period of a minute, a woodchuck's heart beats about 80 times, and it takes 28 breaths, but in winter, that heart rate drops to 4, and it takes only one breath.

(Notes supplied by Puntj Hall)

*The Spotted Turtle-Dove (Streptopelia chinensis)*

This bird, also known as the Spotted Dove or Indian Turtle Dove, is not a native of Australia, but originates from Asia. It was first regarded as a popular aviary bird, but over the years the species has spread to all mainland cities and large towns of Australia. The first sighting of them in Alice Springs was reported in the early 1990s, and since then, their numbers have continued to increase dramatically.

Males and females are quite similar in appearance, being mainly grey-brown in colouring, and having a body-length of 30-33cm, and a wingspan of 40-46cm. They are seldom seen alone, but rather in pairs or groups of up to six.

These birds breed all year round, enabling numbers to increase rapidly. Their nests, which can be found in trees or roof-beams, consist of a frail platform of sticks encrusted with droppings. The hen lays two glossy white eggs, which are incubated for 13-16 days.

The Spotted Turtle Dove competes with our native birds, especially the crested pigeon, for food and habitat. As an introduced bird, it is a potential carrier of exotic diseases which could spread to local native birds.

(FROM NOTES SUPPLIED BY KAYE PERCY)

**LA PAZ TO CUZCO**

Dear friends,

On the 6th of May Doug and I went to pick up Ilona from La Paz airport (Bolivia). Ilona was promptly struck down with 'soroche', or altitude sickness). This is quite serious, though often down-played. It requires almost a month to get properly used to altitude and mostly we only give it a couple of days, a week if lucky.

While Ilona was recovering we scoured the crafts markets and gorged ourselves with fresh grapefruit juice, squeezed right while we waited in little hole-in-the-wall shop. Lunches at Bolivian joints where the locals eat cost AUS3 to AUS6 for an entree, a huge plate of Bolivian soup and a mains, usually either fish or a chicken dish with rice and vegies and a cup of tea. Really healthy food at incredibly cheap prices, and you get to see what the locals do. Very few Bolivians smoke, and most of the native joints are smoke free. If you want gringo food like pizza, spags you pay higher prices and have to put up with tourists (mostly the backpackers set) who smoke.

From La Paz we took a bus to Copacabana, on the shores of Lake Titicaca, the highest navigable lake in the world. This trip is very scenic and passes through the straights of Tiquina where the bus is ferried over in a 'balsa', while the passengers are ferried across by boat. Seeing the bus with our belongings on board bob up and down on the balsa brought a bit of an uneasy feeling, but all went well. Copacabana was mainly our base for a tour to the Isla del Sol. While there we checked out the 'La horca del Inca' which is an astrological calendar carved in rock by pre-Inca people.

Isla del Sol is a couple of hours boat trip away from Copacabana, very nice and relaxing with a calm lake, a blue sky, snow capped peaks in the far background and terraced hills way up to the tops of the ridges, and a patchwork of cropping fields in the near distance. The terraces which are ubiquitous were built by pre-Inca peoples. The Incas made good use of them, and they have been in use ever since.

On the Isla del Sol is Pilko Kaina, the ruins of the Inca kings' summer holiday palace and then huff and puff and heave up hill for about one hour until you get to your hotel. On arrival a cup of mate de coca was in order. The next morning we visited the Chincana Laberinth another complex of ruins in the north of the island. This involved a one hour boat ride and a four hour return walk. We had a serious young Aymara guide who was fiercely proud of his culture and went into denial when questioned about the grazing practices of the locals which contribute an incredible amount of erosion. The weather on this excursion was just on perfect, with the sun shining and a coolish breeze blowing.

THANEDON  
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After the walk we welcomed the long return trip on the boat and snoozed during part of it. One of those lovely three course Bolivian (late) lunch was waiting for us at the hotel on arrival.

From Copacabana we travelled to Puno by bus. Crossing the border into Peru was interesting. Three Bolivians three migration officers quickly and efficiently stamped our passports out of the Country. Then we walked to the Peruvian border where one officer slowly processed the entry of two buses full of tourist. While queueing up, Ilona and I were rather sick and while Ilona chundered on the petunias I madly ran in search for a toilet. Finally we got on our way to Puno.

While the scenery with the lake on one side and the hills on the other had a beauty, but after a while it all acquired a quality of sameness and I dozed off. In one of the valleys where there must have been a health project going on, because there were blue loos scattered all over the country side, even on the side of the road.

Our tour organiser did a sterling job and we had all good connections and people waiting for us right through the trip, so our arrival into Peru was greatly simplified and we did not experience any of the oft-mentioned theft incidents.

Puno was a dismal little town, with lots of unfinished-looking building and little urban pride. A total strike was going to happen on the second day of our stay, so we were more than eager to organise a tour to Uros reed islands and another couple of regular islands. Tequile

The Uros reed island were certainly interesting but they are being kept practically only for tourist purposes. The original inhabitants have long since disappeared and they have not even got enough information to know what the original culture was, so what you get is today's natives putting up another crafts' stall to assist in parting you with your money. We got a ride in one of the reed boats, very pleasant, if short.

From Uros we travelled nearly four hours to Amantani and were received by the local mayor who allocated each tourist or group of tourists a local house to spend the night. We were also fed on their local diet, healthy and quite delicious. Before sunset we walked (uphill all the way) to the top of the hill to visit the temple to Pachamama and get a lecture on local culture and beliefs. The last part of the path was flanked by crafts sellers who hassle you all the way to buy their crafts. Actually they were reasonably cheap in this part of the world and of reasonable quality, even if there was some confusion between sheep and vicuña wool!!! Anything for a good sale I suppose. In the evening the locals organise a ball in local dress. Even the tourists get dressed in the traditional outfits. It was quite funny to see the wide Peruvian skirts bouncing on top of walking trousers and boots. The local lasses young and old, were quite uninhibited coming forward to chose a dancing partner, male or female, so we all danced quite vigorously to the sounds of quena, charango y bombo.

The following morning after a typical local breakfast, back to the boat for a visit to the island of Tequile. The local customs here and crafts are quite different from Amantani and so is the lay and scenery of the island. Here the men knit and the women weave. After about one hour's lecture we were let loose on the island, where the main activity seems to be geared to shopping the local crafts. After having to wait for most of our free time for the museum to open we managed to see it in 10 mins flat. Not really mind stretching. After a 10 minute walk weaving through the island's narrow paths we were delivered to one of the local restaurants for another of their typical comidas and then back on the boat for the return trip to Puno.

The return trip provided a modicum of entertainment when we encountered a reed blockade on the Titicaca in sympathy with the land strike. Our guide procured a penknife and proceeded to cut the string that held the reeds together and so end the blockade in less than the 5 minutes it took to push the reeds out of the way. Everything was done in good

humour and fun. The town of Puno presented another sight altogether. Our transport could not deliver us to the hotel because of the broken glass on the streets left by the demonstrators. However, the whole lot was gone by the next morning and we were safely delivered to our train ride to Cuzco.

Ah the joys of travelling by train, very civilised and the scenery was magnificent on both sides of the train. Most of the passengers were gringo tourists anyway, and there were quite a few free seats so we moved from one side of the train to the other to catch the best bits of scenery on offer. Adobe is the main construction material in this part of the world, and most towns look quite poor. Some are quite clean, others are not. Nearing Cuzco was the worst sight with rubbish literally covering their waterways. On some of the towns very prominent signs prohibit urinating and defecating on public space, by order of the Mayor!!!

Our hotel pick-up service was dutifully waiting for us at the station, just a tad confused because our names did not appear on the train list. The train tickets got made out in the name of the tour company!! but by then we were already there, ready for our next adventure: Cuzco, Manu bioforest and Machu Picchu.

Catch you later. Love.  
Haydee