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Lyndal White

November 2002



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# Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club

November 2002

## CLUB NEWS

### NEXT CLUB MEETING

**November 13<sup>th</sup> 7.30pm** at OLSH staffroom, Sadadeen Rd. Guest speaker: Angus Duguid on **Native Fish of Central Australia**. Angus is a Scientific Officer with Parks and Wildlife who has done a major study of Central Australian wetlands.

### TRIPS

**Friday Nov 15<sup>th</sup> Setting traps at Ilparpa...** Meet 5pm at the Information Carpark (opp. Old Timers). Ann Grattidge has a permit to trap at Ilparpa. Contact Ann if interested to help. Pits will be dug a week earlier.

**Saturday Nov 16<sup>th</sup> Animal Trapping at Ilparpa** Meet 6am at the Info. Carpark (opp. Old Timers) No survey work has been done here for many years, so the results should be useful. Bring hat, water and perhaps a thermos and snack for when we have finished. The traps will be opened Friday night. We need to start soon after sunrise to save any geckos in the pits from being baked in the sun.

**Sunday Nov 17<sup>th</sup> Waterwatch.** Meet at 8.30am at the Sargent St. sign, North Stuart Hwy.

**November 24<sup>th</sup> Bird Watching on the Bradshaw Walk.** Meet at 8am in front of the kiosk at the Telegraph Station. (Gate opens just before 8am.)

Trip to the Bat Caves has been postponed due to breeding season.

### KINDRED ORGANISATIONS' ACTIVITIES & EVENTS

Please confirm details with the organisations.

Dates	Activities	Venues
Oct 30 <sup>th</sup>	Closing date for Waterwatch Photo competition.	Waterwatch, C/- D.I.P.E., (Alice Plaza) P.O. Box 2130, A Sp. NT 0871
Nov 3 <sup>rd</sup>	2.30pm Summer in Alice Slides & Guide Walk: Stuart Traynor - how nature copes with summer heat & how you can help your garden survive	Olive Pink Botanic Garden, Tuncks Rd
Nov 6 <sup>th</sup>	Australian Plants Society: 7.30pm Guest speakers, Des & Pat Nelson "Living in the Drought of the '60s".	Olive Pink Botanic Garden, Tuncks Rd
Nov 8-9 <sup>th</sup> Nov 13 <sup>th</sup>	Greening Australia: Wkshps \$10 non-members Weed Awareness Wkshp 5-7pm Native propagation Wkshp	Phone 8953 2882 to register for workshops. by Nov 5 <sup>th</sup> . Contact: Andy Vintner
Nov 14 <sup>th</sup>	4 - 6.30pm Greening Aust. members Plant Sale	Bushcare Nursery (Centralian College)
Nov 9 <sup>th</sup>	Desert Park Behind the Scenes: Fabulous Frogs - get into the spirit of Frog Week	Desert Park, Larapinta Dr

## TRIP TO TWO-MILE WATERHOLE

*Bob Read & fellow campers*

Friday was very hot, 42, and I was regretting the decision to schedule an overnight trip for the weekend. Mercifully Saturday was cooler, only 37 degrees, and 5 people gathered at Flynn Grave.

On the way out we stopped at Turnoff Bore, close to the Larapinta Drive Namatjira Drive intersection. I had been told that there was a cave there, and looking around we found a steeply-descending entrance with a well-beaten path into it in a small collapse structure. This could be an interesting future excursion, but we left it for another time with the right equipment and went on to the Two-Mile. This is a water hole on the Finke, close to Glen Helen and north of Namatjira Drive. It is a long strip of salty water with abundant bird life flanked by the white sand of the riverbed and some fringing reeds. At the upstream end it is fed by springs flowing out of limestone. The water is quite saline, and the fringes of the waterhole are crusted with white salt. This salt comes from salt beds deposited at the same time as the limestone (about 1200 million years ago), that is still being dissolved away by infiltrating rainwater.

### Great-crested Grebe



This species is widespread through much of Africa and Eurasia, and in eastern Australia. It is scarce in the Centre. This is the third time that I have seen it in the last six years, including about 5 years ago when we saw a small flock during a Club trip to the Sewage Ponds.

Highlights were a Great-crested Grebe and a Banded Stilt in breeding plumage.

### Banded Stilt



This species is not as widespread as the similar Black-winged Stilt. It breeds intermittently on shallow lakes in SA and WA. It has bred at Lake Mackay in the NT.

We camped on the sandy river bed close to the waterhole. The night was disappointing in that we neither heard nor saw any night birds, though there were plenty of bats around. However it was not peaceful as cattle were lowing and bellowing much of the night, and at one time Leoni wrongly accused me of snoring. This area is next to an "island" of cattle lease surrounded by the national park, and cattle stray through it.

In the morning I wandered the length of the waterhole to see if I could find any crakes in the more reedy end. I was unsuccessful, but after I came back to the camp Barbara spotted a Baillons Crake in the reeds on the bank opposite our camp. Sometimes I might do better if I could just keep still.



After we had packed up we followed the track upstream to the end and then walked a short way up the river. We saw nothing very remarkable. I spotted Peregrine Falcon soaring nearby, but it disappeared before I could show anyone else. Then I saw a Painted Finch on a rock the riverbank, but a Brown Honeyeater chased it away before anyone else saw it. On the way home we diverted through Eight Mile Gap to Ryan Dam. There was only a little water left in the dam, but there were two Grey Teal and a Black-fronted Dotterel. In the distance we saw a large bird of prey soaring on upswep wings like and eagle. As it turned the short tail and white bullseyes in the wing of a Black-breasted Buzzard were obvious. While we had lunch in the shade of some gums and a Collared Sparrowhawk flew in and a pair of Brown Falcons.



Banded Fruit Dove

## BIRDS AUSTRALIA NEWHAVEN RESERVE

(excerpt from an Update by Meg Mooney, Communications Officer, B.A.N.R. Mgt C'ttee)

### A recent campout

In spite of the lack of rain since February, the country is still flush with the floods of the previous two years and some acacias and Grevilleas were flowering. Committed bird watchers were privileged to see grey honeyeaters amongst the birdlife. Apart from lots of birdwatching, the campout was an opportunity for participants to understand the challenges of managing Newhaven, both past, present and in the future, with wildfire, feral camels and the encroachment of feral grasses like Buffel, as well

as the remote location and the heat of summer to deal with.

### Vegetation and fauna surveys

The preliminary vegetation survey, funded by the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT), is now well under way at Newhaven. Well-known local botanist, Peter Latz, is carrying out the fieldwork for this survey. Rachel Paltridge and Peter will prepare the final report and maps. Steve McAlpin began a fauna survey in mid-September. He will work on this survey, also funded by NHT, with local Aboriginal custodians and Central Land Council.

### Visiting Newhaven

Newhaven is about 330km by road north west of Alice Springs. Most of the Tanami Road is sealed to the turnoff, though unsealed sections are badly corrugated. The road from Tanami rd to Newhave has been recently graded (Sept.) and is in good condition.

Only one campground is available at the moment, so it is best to ring and check visitor numbers when planning a visit to Newhaven. Contacts are now as follows: Ranger:, David Wilson, Oct -Dec 2002  
PO Box 4427, Alice Springs, NT 0871

Visitors planning to camp:

Tel: Newhaven (08) 8956 8754, (08) 8956 4600

Volunteer contact: Elaine Sheridan

Email: grems@austarnet.com.au,

Tel: (08) 8952 6842 (h), (08) 8952 0190 (w)

See the Birds Australia website for information on Newhaven, and copies of the Newhaven visitors pamphlet and application forms for tour operators and volunteer rangers. [www.birdsaustralia.com.au](http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au)

**\*\* Anyone interested in a group excursion, let Bob Read know.**



White-lined Honeyeater

## CRESTED PIGEONS AND BRACKISH WATER

While on Curtin Springs I was surprised to see a flock of Crested Pigeons drinking from a spring at the edge of a salt lake. Checking the water I found that it had a salt content of about 9 000 mg/L. This is near the upper limit for cattle, and humans would find it difficult to survive on. Birds have much weaker kidneys, and should not be able to survive on such saline water. (Sea birds excrete salt through nasal glands, but as far as I know land birds such as Crested Pigeons do not have anything like this.)

I have not been able to get any further information or expert opinion on this. Does anyone else have any observations of birds drinking brackish water?

Robert Read

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Last month's article **In search of the White-Throated Grasswren** got the following response from a Darwin birder.

"Robert

You probably won't believe this but where the tour groups were in the pool was where our group found the grasswren 'dipping' with the touros at close to midday. They also had just about given up after been up the top at sunrise. Maybe next time.

Good find on the Grey Whistler at Maguk!

Cheers Heather & Max"



The rare & elusive Grey Whistler

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## RACCOONS INVADE GERMAN TOWNS

*BBC News, World edition  
Thursday, 17 October, 2002,*

Gangs of nocturnal thieves are stalking whole neighbourhoods in northern Germany's towns and cities. Unusually strong and agile, they jump onto roofs from tree tops and climb along drainpipes. But they are not out to steal cars or burgle apartments - they rummage through compost heaps, overturn rubbish bins and steal pet food.

They are raccoons - thousands of them.

They are leaving their natural habitat near German streams and lakes in their droves to make a home in towns and cities, where food, water and shelter are easy to find.

### *Massive invasion*

The furry animals, with their characteristic striped tail and little black mask, are not afraid of humans. Once they have chosen an attic, basement or garage as their den, getting rid of them becomes very difficult. German biologists are now exploring strategies to curb this massive invasion which seems to be spiralling out of control.

There are a growing number of sightings and reports of damage to private property in the outskirts of major cities such as Berlin, Hamburg and Frankfurt.

"People in Germany are split into two parties: those who find raccons cute and feed them, and those who resort to killing them to get rid of what they consider a real plague," biologist Ulf Hohmann told BBC News Online.

Mr Hohmann's team has led a year-long study on urbanised raccoons in the city of Kassel, near Frankfurt, where the highest presence of raccoons is recorded.

To draw a picture of the life of urban raccoons, they captured and marked specimens with microchips and ear tags to monitor their movements and activity. The study found that where people resort to killing raccoons, the animals tend to compensate by reproducing more.

#### *Advice*

"A person who had his house invaded managed to trap and kill as many as 40 raccoons in one year, but nothing changed," Mr. Hohmann said. "What we rather advise people to do is to invest in effective strategies to protect their homes, like trimming tree branches that stretch near the roof and covering drainpipes to prevent raccoons from climbing along them," he added. "It can be costly, but it certainly pays off."

Traditionally hunted for their precious fur in their native USA and Canada, raccoon pelts became popular in Europe at the beginning of last century. The first two pairs of raccoons were set free in Germany in 1934. More of the animals escaped during World War II, when a stray bomb hit a raccoon farm near Berlin.

Mr Hohmann said that raccoons have already crossed into most neighbouring countries and will eventually spread to the whole of Europe. Meanwhile, distressed German home owners will have to pioneer ways of keeping this furry menace at bay.

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#### **FOLLOWING EYRE**

Hi folks,  
School holidays came and went. I went to Sydney and was there for a short week. Sorry I did not have time to see anybody. Most of my time got taken up with ratting through my belonging both at Sacha's and Ian's places. I came up with a good lot of different clothes to wear. I no longer dress exclusively in regulation grey zippered travelling pants and Patagonia Whales T-shirt!

Ian drove me around Sydney looking at campervans, and I am now the proud owner of a Toyota Hiace campervan. I wanted to ship the thing over on the train, but it is too tall. A bridge in Port Augusta determines the height at no more than 1.96 m and my vehicle is 2.10 m, so I had to drive it to Perth in a hurry because I had to be back at college that week.

The trip through the Nullabor went exceedingly well. Left on Sunday noon and arrived in Perth on Friday afternoon 3845 km and 470 lt of petrol later. I was so thrilled with the trip that I did the corny thing and got me a Certificate at

Norseman that celebrates solo crossing of the Nullabor!!!

The machine behaved very well and it was really quite comfortable to drive. My only problem one broken lock and my only regret not to have had a bit more time to stop and do some whale watching and check out the area, specially as it was wildflower time. I will have to console myself and do the touristy stuff in December when I return to Sydney.

I am planning to go back meandering around through S.W. WA and check the place really out, and then head out through the Nullabor again. Might be a little bit hotter this time. Will be a good comparison too!

From my around the world trip I collected 36 rolls of 36 shots each. I decided to wait until I settle back at home before developing them. The sheer space and weight of 1300 photographs enough to put me off until I sit down in the same place for a while.

Now that I have all my papers together I have to get my head out of the sand and get my tax done like everyone else. Between that and college I have no time to get into mischief, what a bore!



Two of my latest photos show me at college and next to my new toy!

Haydee Adel, nomad. October 26, 2002  
<xantharea@yahoo.com.au>

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#### **\*\*\* WANTED \*\*\***

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If via email, save as WORD, rtf or jpg files