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December 2002

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Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club

December 2002

CLUB NEWS

NEXT MEETING

2003 Feb 12th 7.30pm at OLSH staffroom, Sadadeen Rd.

Guest Speaker: **to be advised**

TRIPS

Saturday November 16th. -- Animal Trapping. Meet at 6am opposite Old Timers to go to western end of Ilparpa.

Sunday November 17th -- Waterwatch at Wigley's Waterhole. Meet 8.30am Sargent St sign.

November 22nd -- Desert Park open night. All welcome.

November 24th -- Bradshaw Walk. Meet at 8am at Telegraph Station.

Saturday December 7th -- A walk around the Sewage Ponds. There has been a good selection of waders this year. Meet at 8am at the gates to Ponds. Bring hat, binoculars.

Sunday December 15th. Christmas Brunch / end of year celebration. Plan A = meet 8.30am at Simpson's Gap. Bring a plate of interesting food, drinks etc.

Wet or gusty weather Plan B = gather at the Read house at 64 Lackman Tce. If in doubt, phone Bob & Leonie on 8953 1935 or email <rread@octa4.net.au>

2003, February 8th -- Watch sunrise from Spencer Hill. Meet at 5:40am, Gosse Street playground.

KINDRED ORGANISATIONS' ACTIVITIES & EVENTS

Please confirm details with the organisations

Dates	Activities	Venues / Contacts
1 st Wed ea mth	Australian Plants Society: Topics for 2003 could include Growing Plants (collecting / storing / cleaning seeds; identifying characteristics of different species; propagation; potting on; buying & maintaining plants; pest mgt) Garden Café & giftshop in Olive Pink Botanic Grdn	Contact Sec. Gary Bastin, ph 8952 5229 or Gary.Bastin@dwe.csiro.au Website: http://users.tpg.com.au/opbg/aps

THREATENED SPECIES LIST OF NORTHERN TERRITORY ANIMALS *Robert Read*

As mentioned at the last meeting I am attempting to review this. I suppose that we are all aware of the sorry record of extinction, but the statistics are still depressing.

Eight mammals that formerly lived in the NT are now totally extinct. Seven of these were inhabitants of Central Australia. Another species, the Mala, survives only in captivity. A further six species have become extinct in the

NT, although they have hung on elsewhere in Australia. These too were from Central Australia.

Birds have fared better, only the Slender-billed Thornbill is considered extinct. The only record of this species is a single specimen taken at Idracowra in 1913 and now in the American Natural History Museum, and there is some doubt about the record. On the other hand the Plains Wanderer, listed as Data Deficient, may well be extinct. The Night Parrot and the Malleefowl are Critically Endangered.

The table below summarises numbers of species in each classification.

	Mammals	Birds	Reptiles	Amphibians	Fish	Invertebrates
Extinct (1)	8	0	0	0	0	0
Extinct in wild (2)	1	0	0	0	0	0
Extinct in NT	6	1	0	0	0	0
Critically endangered	1	3	0	0	0	5
Endangered	8	5	3	0	2	4
Vulnerable	11	5	5	1	6	27
Near Threatened	21	29	5	0	4	1
Least Concern	66	316	260	44	40	127
Data deficient	24	20	37	2	144	33

- (1) That is gone from the planet forever
(2) The Mala, surviving in captivity only

All 15 mammals in the extinct categories formerly lived in the southern NT.

Curiously with birds the situation is different. The critically endangered Night Parrot and Malleefowl are from our region, but four of the five Endangered birds and three of the five Vulnerable birds are from the Top End.

There is room for debate as to the correct classification of some species, but the over all picture is clear. The situation is unlikely to improve in the near future. Control of the introduced fox and cat seems as far off as ever. To date there has been little impact on frogs, but the spread of the Cane Toad may change this.

There are two small ways that we can help. One is that there are obviously large gaps in knowledge of the status of some species, especially invertebrates, and there may be opportunities for amateurs to assist in this. The other is to continue political lobbying into research into the control of feral animals.

Threatened Species CD

Comments are wanted by January 31st, 2003 for the Threatened Species CD. Contact Bob Read if you'd like to contribute.

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*Female Hooded Robin. John Hayes Rockhole
Aug 20, 2002. Photo: Pat Gallagher*

Worrying Results from Wigley Waterhole
Felicity Forth, Waterwatch Coordinator

After the recent heavy rains we should be breathing a sigh of relief for Wigley's Waterhole as was probably unsafe for swimming in early November. The latest Waterwatch testing conducted by members of the Field Naturalist Club at Wigley Waterhole revealed very worrying results. Conducted on the 11th of November following light rain the previous week, phosphate levels were at their highest ever and dissolved oxygen so low at 2 mg/l that fish would have been struggling to stay alive.

These results are probably due to very low flows carrying waters rich in cattle dung from adjacent Bond Springs into the Waterhole. Cattle dung contains very high levels of phosphate, nitrate and organic matter which decrease water quality.

Nutrients such as phosphate and nitrate cause, water plants and algae to over-grow, which eventually can choke the water of oxygen causing fish to die. Organic matter in the cattle dung uses up oxygen as it breaks down and would have been a major factor in the very low dissolved oxygen readings recorded."

If these poor results were due to pollution from cattle dung upstream, the chances of high levels of faecal contamination occurring Wigley's at the time of monitoring would have been very high.

The last monitoring revealed the worst condition we have ever seen Wigley's Waterhole & the results really highlight the utility of continued



Rosalie Breen showing Beth Hansen how to count all the bugs and beetles from a sample of Wigley's Waterhole. November 17, 2002
Photo: Barb Gilfillan

monitoring at Wigley's Waterhole. It shows that even a waterhole fenced from cattle in a National Park can sometimes be severely impacted upon when the right conditions combine.

On a brighter note the recent heavy rains and high flows in the Todd River would have flushed the pollutants away. The next monitoring should reveal a much cleaner and healthier waterhole.



Rosalie Breen & Barb Gilfillan testing the water quality at Wigley's Waterhole. November 17, 2002. Photo: Beth Hansen

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From *Nature Territory*, newsletter of the NT Field Naturalists, Nov. 2002

- Peter Otto, Bureau of Meteorology, gave a talk on Thunderstorms & Cyclones. This was followed up with a field trip to the Bureau's Casuarina office
 - December activities include a reef walk and a natural history trivia night.
 - A rainforest boardwalk & walking track through the Duke St. rainforest (cnr. of Duke St & Dinah Beach Rd, Stuart Park) was opened on Oct. 26th.
 - The NT Bird Atlas website <http://birds.rhyme.com.au/> has recently had many more records added to it, increasing the size of the underlying database by about 30%
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