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April 2003



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Web site

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club

April 2003

CLUB NEWS

NEXT MEETING

April 9th 7.30pm at OLSH staffroom, Sadadeen Rd. Guest speaker: Audrey Hill, Land for Wildlife

TRIPS

Sat March 8th Night walk (approx. 2 hrs) around the Ilparpa Claypans. Meet **7:15pm** in front of Elsa Corbet's place in Palm Court (next door to Windmill Restaurant). Off street parking available. Bring a torch. Supper afterwards at Elsa's. Contact Bob Read on 8952 1935.

Sat 5th April, Anna Reservoir. Meet 7:30 AM at the Sargent Street sign on the North Stuart Highway. Full day, bring hat, binoculars, lunch and water. Short easy walks. About 320 km return, 130 km up Stuart Highway, then 30 km of station track. 4WD preferable.

Sat 12th to Sun 13th of April, *Acacia latzii* monitoring site, joint trip with Australian Plants Society. (See information below in Kindred Organisations section.) This is a chance to see the rare *A. latzii* and is also a good area for Cinnamon Quailthrush.

Mon 5th May, 4WD trip through Lawrence Gorge, Owen Springs

For further information on any of the above, contact Bob Read 8952 1935.

KINDRED ORGANISATIONS' ACTIVITIES & EVENTS

Please confirm details with the organisations listed.

Dates	Activities	Venues / Contacts
Mar 31 st – Apr 6 th	Arbor Week	Contact GA office ph. 8953 2882
Wed. Apr 2, 7.30pm	Aust. Plants Soc. (APS) monthly meeting: Peter Meech, Horticulturalist at the Asp. Nursery "Selecting plants – what to look for & what to avoid." Followed by supper & plant identification	at Botanic Gardens Ph. 8952 5229
Sat Apr 12 th & Sun Apr 13th	FNC members are welcome to join APS members in survey work at 2 monitoring sites for <i>acacia latzii</i> approx. 150km (130km sealed + 30km gravel) SW of Alice Springs. 4WD not necessary but good ground clearance is needed for site 2. Camp overnight at site 2 or return the same day. Meet 8am at the Tourist Info. bay opposite Old Timers Home on Stuart Hwy. Bring handheld GPS if you have one.	Contact Colleen O'Malley 8952 1541 (wk hrs) to confirm numbers & /or to arrange a lift
Wed May 7 th , 7.30pm	Aust Plants Soc. Guest speaker on <i>Acacia peuce</i>	at Botanic Gardens Ph. 8952 5229

Grey Shrikethrush Mimicry – Robert Read

On 8/3/03, on the slopes of Mount Gillen, I heard what sounded almost like the warble of an Australian Magpie. On tracking the call down I found two Grey Shrikethruses, both apparently mimicking a magpie.

At home I consulted my books and found that none of them said that this species was a mimic. I put a posting on the birding-aus newsgroup, and got two responses. One had heard Grey Shrikethruses mimicking Southern Scrub-robin another Crimson Rosella, Blackbird and Magpie.

It is remarkable that the books that I have do not mention that such a widespread and well known species is a mimic, and shows how much there is still to learnt about Australian birds.

From the NT Field Naturalists Club March Newsletter. Items about:

- The “Howard River Toadlet” – as yet undescribed species of the genus *Uperoleia* found only at one location in the Elizabeth River valley.
- New journals & magazines in the NT FNC collection
- Epiphytes on Silver Paperbark, by Don Franklin
- A checklist for common names for Top End ants from Andersen A N (2002), Common names for Australian ants (*Hymenoptera: Formicidae*) Aust. j. of Entomology 41, 285-293
- Comment on public forums about Darwin Harbour by Heather Ryan
- Water conservation strategies in frogs: how do Top End frogs do it ? by Lorrae McArthur
- Report of the frog-spotting field trip to Howard Springs, Jack Webster
- Cane toads have been reported within Kakadu National Park as far north as Nourlangie Rock & Jabiru, & on Feb. 16th, a single toad was found at the East Alligator Ranger Station. (Source: Greg Miles)
- The transferring of 90 northern quolls from the mainland to three of the larger islands in the English Company Islands group off NE Arnhem Land (because of susceptibility to the impact of cane toads

This week is Arbor Week for Central Australia

Andy Vinter, Arbor Week Officer with Greening Australia announces the following events & activities:

- Thurs April 3rd 4.30pm -- Todd River tree planting
- Sat April 5th, 9am-12.30pm -- Native Plant Propagation Workshop
- Throughout the week -- Community plantings (350 plants) at schools etc

The Native Plant Propagation Workshop is being readvertised as there were insufficient numbers to run it last time. This is a good time to be propagating plants prior to the onset of winter to produce seedlings for planting in spring.

The assistance of volunteers is sought to help out at the Todd River tree planting. Contact Andy on ph. 8953 2882.

Notes on Bird Field Guides by Dr. Chris Lotz, South Africa

Australia has a wealth of field guides. Each of the 4 high quality ones has its followers. The photographic ones as usual don't do the job well. Two people who replied to my request for information said they birded with Slater in their pockets, but had the other guides available in the car.

SLATER: a genuine field guide because it fits in a pocket (not a particularly small pocket though!). Pictures generally accurate even if not as artistic in other guides: intermediate in quality between Pizzey and Knight (good) and Simpson and Day (poor). Getting dated with respect to names, splits, lumps and vagrants, but apparently a new edition is on its way. Currently about A\$25 in Angus and Robertson bookshop.

PIZZEY AND KNIGHT: (1997) The Graham Pizzey and Frank Knight guide to the birds of Australia, Harper Collins, Pymble, NSW - since updated). This guide was shown to be the preferred guide in the field guide poll. The most beautifully-illustrated, with high quality pictures, and the best text according to some birders. Has more information than other guides. Pictures have good colour rendition. Stated disadvantages are that it is the heaviest of the field guides, and also that it vaguely follows taxonomic order rather than logically following birdwatching order (so that for

example terns, gulls and skuas are 100 pages away from the pelagic seabirds). Lacks a quick reference section.

MORECOMBE: Not included in the field guide poll - will be interesting if it proves to be more popular than Pizzey and Night. The most up-to-date guide. Very comprehensive. Has excellent information (the text and extra information adjacent to the illustrations are liked by some). Layout very good. Has graduated distribution maps. The illustrations have been significantly criticised, although some people consider the illustrations to be good, except unfortunately with the colours let down by the printing. Later editions have corrected early typos. Points out differences between similar species. Big W Department Store in Canberra currently has this book available at a sale price of A\$29 (usually retails for \$45). Interesting: the author has recently commenced a web page,

to complement the book. There are also other innovative features to help with ID.

SIMPSON AND DAY: Some people like this guide the most, especially those who used it as their first guide. Others say it must definitely be avoided, and that the more one gets to know it, the worse it becomes. Compact. Nice charts at the back of the book. The rear of the book contains excellent bird family information that could be published in a separate volume. But it is outdated and has minimal/brief text compared to the other three guides. The illustrations are attractive, but scattered haphazardly all over the page with only an adjacent number code that relates to the name, a system that has become long outdated. The drawings also aren't all that good (they tend to look "rough"), with variation in poses making comparisons difficult sometimes. Printing problems seem to have made the colours weird in the last edition. Arrows and text all over the pictures pointing out diagnostic features make it look busy, but some people may find this useful. Selling for about A\$30 at Angus and Robertson Bookshop.

There are other more specific guides available too. Bob Forsyth had a brilliant document with many details of all sorts of books (also great for this).

Story from the *Courier Mail*, March 6th, 2003
An abridged version of the story follows:

Whoosh! It's an urban sky scrapper by Catriona Mathewson

"It's about the size of a magpie, as fast as a Ferrari and mad as a cut snake. So mad, in fact, grown men are quaking in their steel-capped workboots and vowing to stop maintaining exhaust fans which keep the mist out of hundreds of bathrooms in one of Brisbane's high-rises.

The feathered foe responsible is a peregrine falcon -- the latest high-flyer to take up residence in riverside Admiralty Towers. It has laid claim to the rooftop of the 27-storey Admiralty Towers One, sparking a battle between apartment and wildlife authorities.

While building management has called for its eviction, Queensland Parks and Wildlife has jumped to the falcon's defence. The bird of prey can swoop at 220km/h - making it the fastest animal in the world -- and it has been diving on workers as they try to inspect ventilation fans. Last week contractors called a halt to work on the roof until it could be declared safe.

And yesterday the fiery falcon looked like adding another tower block to its territory. It swooped on window cleaner Nathan Howard as he dangled 5m from the top of neighbouring Admiralty Quays, missing his head by about a metre.

"I just heard a swoop and when I turned around it was about 100m away doing a U-turn and lining me up again," said Mr Howard, who was forced to abseil rapidly to the ground.

Admiralty Towers building manager Leon Azars appealed for Queensland Parks and Wildlife to oust the falcon. "We don't want to hurt the bird but we have to maintain the building," he said.

Parks and Wildlife said it could work with building management on methods to discourage nesting. A spokesman said the falcon was doing a public service as a natural predators of feral rock pigeons.

Ornithologist Roy Sonnenburg said a pair of peregrines forced the Brisbane Hilton to close a hotel room several years ago when they decided to start a family on a ledge outside."

[The story was accompanied by a lovely head-on shot of a 'semi-stooping' peregrine on the front page – see

http://www.couriermail.news.com.au/common/story_page/0,5936,6082750%255E952,00.html