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ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB DECEMBER 2003

MEETINGS

Sunday 7 Dec 2003 End of Year breakfast at the Telegraph Station. 8:30 am - Bring your own everything, including food to share.

Wednesday 11 Feb 7:30 PM in the staff room of OLSH off the Sadadeen Road - Speaker Stuart Traynor (topic to be announced).

TRIPS

Saturday 6 Dec 2003 Bird watching at the Sewage Ponds - 8 am meet at the gate. About 2 hours, but you can leave at any time. Bring hat, water and binoculars. There has been an interesting assortment of waders at the ponds recently, Wood Sandpipers, Pectoral Sandpipers, Black-tailed Godwit, Pacific Golden Plovers as well as the usual.

Sat 14 Feb	Bird watching at the Sewage Ponds - 7 am meet at the gate
Sat 21 Feb	Night walk - Simpsons Gap Bike Track -
Sun 22 Feb	Water Watch - Wigley's Waterhole - 8 am.
Sun 07 Mar	Walk in hills behind Zeil Street. 6:30 am. Meet at track beside Araluen Christian School, Blain Street.
Early March 2004	One of walks in Telegraph Station vicinity. Leader: Rosalie
March 2004	Kunoth Bore
April 2004	Slot gorge southern side of Mt Gillen. Leader: Connie
April 2004 (school holidays)	Newhaven
May 2004	Chain of Ponds (Trephina)
Sat, Sun & Mon 5, 6 & 7 June 2004	Mac Clark Conservation Reserve (Acacia peuce) and Acacia pickardii. This would be a combined FNC & APS trip.
After rain	Proposed activity: setting up a light trap.
Possible overnight camp	At Old Hamilton Downs one weekend next year if there is sufficient interest.
Unknown	Walk from Wigley's to the Telegraph Station. Organiser: Rosalie

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Please note that subscriptions are now due. If you have not paid already please do so as soon as

possible. The Committee has resolved that the cut off was November. Members will no longer receive newsletters if they are un-financial.

PAST TRIPS

Fringe Lily Gorge - 1 & 2 Nov 2003

This got off the ground on the second attempt, with four club members and Jason and Angus from Parks and Wildlife. After a leisurely start we got to the end of the service road and had lunch before carrying in our equipment: two inflatable boats, the 20 kg Hydrolab instrument to measure temperature and dissolved oxygen, a net made from shade cloth and plenty of rope and cords.

This gorge is one of the most spectacular in Central Australia. The waterhole is about 60 m long and 2 to 4 m wide, with near vertical cliffs of bare rock on either side. It is mostly over 2 m deep, with a maximum of 3.1 m. The water hole was still overflowing, being fed by water trickling in at the upstream end. With this depth of water, the shading by the cliffs and the fact that it is topped up by springs for so long after rain it is likely that this waterhole is permanent, and Angus was interested to see what fish were in it.

The inflatables could not be rowed because of the narrowness of the gorge, and using one oar as a paddle was difficult. Once a line had been fastened at each end of the gorge the boats could be pulled through easily.

The waterhole showed no sign of temperature stratification. Temperature and dissolved oxygen were the same bottom as at the surface. However when I was there in January there was certainly temperature stratification.

We used a person in boat to tow the other boat with the net loaded in it. The net was then set across the gorge, floating with plastic bottles at the top and lead weighted at the base, and with a cord on each of the four corners, quite a job, and pulled in by the assistants. Not surprisingly it did not go as planned, and pulling had to stop while the person in the boat sorted out the problems.

When the net was finally at the end it was grabbed and pulled up to trap any fish silly enough to still be in front of it. We caught a good number of Spangled Grunters and Rainbow Fish, but no other species. We tried several times with the same result, before going back to camp for dinner. After dinner when it was quite dark we walked back to the waterhole and tried another sweep with the net. The result for fish was the same, but at night shrimps could be seen in the shallow water, and large green frogs with white spots (*Litoria gilleni*) could be seen sitting on the walls of the gorge, presumably waiting for insects to fly within reach.

Next morning we used the boats to shuttle four of us to the top end of the gorge and then walked up to the fern bank, before returning to the cars for the trip home.

Sewage Ponds – 8 Nov 2003

A good number of birds were seen on this trip, the highlight being a Red-necked Phalarope. This species breeds in the Arctic and northern temperate region and spends the northern winters in the Asian region. It is only vagrant to Australia. I think that it has been recorded at Alice Springs before, but rarely. In the four year period of the latest Bird Atlas it was recorded only 12 times in all of Australia and not at all in the NT.

The other species in the family (Scolopacidae) are waders, but the phalaropes have lobed toes adapted for swimming. This one was showing normal phalarope behaviour of swimming while feeding with its long bill.

Another novelty was being approached by a security guard who politely asked for identification. I hope this is not the first sign of restricted access to the ponds as is the norm near larger cities.

Report on Hills Walk – 23 Nov 2003

Great timing led to an interesting walk through the hills. There had been at least 10mm of rain in the previous week and at 6.00am the air was clear, coolish and the sun was shining.

After the first up hill climb our small group, set off across country to the Frog Pond. It was good to see that the rain had been enough for the resurrection ferns to revive. The Pond had a puddle about 2m across and lots of little black tadpoles. As we sat and admired the view a couple of small raptors were seen in the distance, silhouetted against the sun. They circled each other then mated. One departed but the other sat patiently in a dead tree and waited for us to approach from the other direction to identify it as a Nankeen Kestrel.

We then followed the sandy creek back almost to Abattoir Valley. Some areas had been burnt. Liverworts covered some shady flat spots beside the creek, responding again to the rain. A pair of Yellow-rumped Thornbills flew between shrubs.

Back towards Larapinta tank we saw a couple of Euros, a few Spiny-cheeked Honey-eaters, a black-faced Cuckoo-shrike and a flock of Zebra Finches. The rain had certainly brightened the country with Beefwood and Plum bush flowering and Whitewoods and Wild Oranges heavy with fruit.

Back down a steepish slope, along the valley to Battarbee Street and a welcome drink and bite to eat. A very pleasant couple of hours.

Bradshaw Walk at Night – 28 Nov 2003

The same old people or same young people, depending on point of view, gathered at dusk for this. Initially things were slow with only a bat (presumably Gould's Wattled Bat) glimpsed flitting overhead.

Well into the walk we found the expected Euros and Rock-Wallabies, and then while I was looking for a spider Jim spotted a snake on the other side of the bush, a Central Australian Diamond Python about 2 m long. (There were no volunteers to stretch it out for measurement). Also seen was an attractive small gecko, *Diplodactylus stenodactylus* (I could not find a common name), and numerous wolf spiders.

NEWS

The New Bird Atlas.

This has been published at last. Like the first it is a large volume. This time there are six maps for each species, all records, breeding records and for four seasons. Unlike the previous Atlas there is no text description for each species. There is however text in a later chapter tabulating changes in abundance. This will take a lot of digesting.

Although the Atlas has been published data collection is continuing. The intention is to continue with low key data collection, with perhaps another burst of intense activity in 10 or 20 years time. Not surprisingly the largest gap identified is the lack of observations in the desert regions in summer.

'Extinct' bird rediscovered in Fiji

ABC Radio Australia News 28/11/2003 16:41.

A bird believed to have been extinct for over a century has been found alive and well in Fiji.

BirdLife Fiji researchers rediscovered the long-legged Warbler (*Trichocichla rufa*), which was last seen in 1894. They managed to photograph it for the first time and recorded its warbling songs.

The group says it found 12 pairs of the rare bird in Wabu Forest Reserve, in the highlands of the main island Viti Levu.

Where Do You Want To Go?

There has been a decline in attendance at outings. What excursions would **you** like to participate in next year? Rather than the committee pulling locations out of the hat we would like to hear what **you** would like to do. Please tear off the slip below, write in two trips you would like to do and return it to a committee member at the end of year party or when convenient. Suggestions for half day, full day or longer trips are welcome. We will run any trip that are two or three starters for, provided of course that we can get any necessary permissions. Contributions can be anonymous. Anyone can of course make suggestions to committee members or at meetings at any time.

ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Suggestions for Field Trips

Suggestion 1: _____

Suggestion 2: _____

Dead as a dodo? Not necessarily

Anna Salleh ABC Science OnLine

Just because an animal hasn't been seen for a long time, doesn't mean it's extinct, according to statistical research that sheds new light on the plight of the dodo.

Researchers estimate that the dodo actually became extinct nearly 30 years after its last reliable sighting.

Accurately estimating when a species becomes extinct is difficult as rare individuals can survive undetected for years after they are last seen. While the idea that an animal is not necessarily extinct just because it hasn't been seen for a while may seem obvious, extinction dates have traditionally been set as the date of last sighting.

To estimate the animal's actual point of extinction, researchers applied a statistical test to the last 10 recorded dodo sightings. Their maths related the probability of an animal still existing at particular times after it was last seen. While the extinction of the ungainly bird is commonly dated to 1662, the last time it was seen on an islet off Mauritius, Roberts and Solow's calculation put the date as 1690.

Australian biologist Professor Des Cooper of Macquarie University said it would be interesting to test the technique on a number of Australian animals.

Researchers have rediscovered some of these after they thought they were extinct. He gave the example of the marsupial Gilbert's Potoroo which, up until 1994, was thought to have been extinct for 100 or 120 years.

"A graduate student from the University of Western Australia went down to somewhere in the south west of the state to try to look for brush-tailed bettongs and to her utter astonishment started trapping Gilbert's Potoroo. Every one was quite taken aback," Cooper told *ABC Science Online*.

He also says it could be interesting to apply the statistical test to the thylacine in Tasmania, the Tasmanian devil, the night parrot in Central Australia, and even the disappearance of the megafauna in Australia.

To work out the 'new' dodo extinction date the researchers used actual sightings of the animal but Cooper said that fossil data could be used as a substitute.

However he said he would "be inclined to raise my eyebrows" at the idea of applying the concept to the extinction of the dinosaurs because he did not think there would be accurate enough data.

Northern Territory Parks and Conservation Masterplan

The NT Government is embarking on the development of a new Parks and Conservation Masterplan for the N.T. Parks & Wildlife Minister, Kon Vatskalis, said the Masterplan will be developed in partnership with the Commonwealth through Parks Australia North, and the Northern Territory's Aboriginal Land Councils.

"The purpose of the project is to provide a vision and blueprint for the conservation of the NT's extensive variety of plants and animals," he said.

"We need to ensure our biological and cultural diversity is protected and enhanced over the next 20 years."

Mr Vatskalis said the key objectives of the new Masterplan include:

- Protecting the Territory's variety of plants and animals
- Enhancing the existing parks system
- Enhancing the role of Aboriginal people in parks and conservation
- Allowing future generations of Territorians and tourists to continue to enjoy our natural and cultural heritage.

The development of the Masterplan will run from Nov 2003 to Dec 2004.

"Crucial to the success of this project will be the engagement of the wider community and key stakeholder groups," said Mr Vatskalis.

*Merry Christmas & a Safe
and Prosperous New Year
from all the Committee
members of the
Alice Springs Field
Naturalist Club*

