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JULY 2004



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**ALICE SPRINGS FIELD**  
**NATURALISTS INC.**  
**NEWSLETTER – JUNE 2004**

***Meetings***

**July 14<sup>th</sup>, Michael Barritt on Central Australian possums. 7:30 PM at OLSH staffroom on Sadadeen Road.**

**August 11<sup>th</sup>, AGM . Following the AGM there will be members "show and tell" and social . Bring photos, etc.**

***Field Trips***

**Sat & Sun 17 & 18 July – Hamilton Downs Youth Camp.**

Cost is \$15 per person.

Bunks have frame and mattress, bring own bedding and food. There is a fridge and stove and oven plus cooking utensils and plates etc. but bring all consumables.

There are a couple of long walks - one to Mt Lloyd and one to Chewings Range. Both take 6 to 7 hours return the Chewings Range. There are also several short walks around the camp, and down to Fish Hole.

Camping outside the buildings is allowed, but still costs \$15. If there are only a few of us we can have the heritage cottage which has a fireplace which would be nice.

Distance about 75km from Alice Springs, 50 km of sealed road and the remainder gravel road, passable to all cars with care.

**Field Trip Reports**

***Wigleys Waterhole to Telegraph Station***

led by Rosalie Breen

And a good one it was, too.

After two weeks of cloud and rain, only three of the less trepid club members — Rosalie, Connie and Bob — and one husband came along. It turned out to be a beautiful morning (clouded over in the afternoon, after we got home) and, although there was plenty of water around, it was not enough to affect our route or our progress.

The first highlight came right at the start: Bob spotted four Rock Wallabies silhouetted against the skyline, then someone said 'There's five — no, six!', and within a minute or two the count was up to ten. A few minutes later we could see a pair of ears appearing and disappearing and reappearing over a rock, and soon we saw that these belonged to two heads, and there were two wallabies playing there.

After a little while a pair of butcherbirds took over the musical accompaniment from the magpies (Australian Magpies, of course; none of those foreigners for us). Another pair later on inspired a member of the party to some awful nursery-rhymery:

Little Miss Butcherbird,  
Whose voice we just have heard,  
Sang "How beautifully pied am I."  
Then up came one pied-er,  
Who sat down beside her,  
And frightened Miss Butcher away.

Halfway down, at a place called Aperelengkeye, we saw a plaque, fixed to a rock on the riverbank, in memory of Jonathan Rodd, whose body was found there after he drowned in February 1997. Another area with some history, closer to town, was Werlatyatherre, where people camped for several months in 1983 to protest against plans to dam the river and flood an important sacred site. This, too, ended tragically, when two people died in a tent fire.

We had morning tea near a yellow thing, and soon after Rosalie led us up a little monolithic hill with interesting weathered rocks on top — one likened to a "chess horse". We took the west branch where the river divided.

Bob had the satisfaction of seeing some unexpected birds: Grey-headed Honeyeater, White-fronted Honeyeater, and a flock of sittellas. Other wildlife ranged from the occasional euro to Meadow Argus butterflies. The beautiful pink and white and green granite of the riverbed was another highlight.

We reached the Telegraph Station at midday, after starting walking about 8. We checked on the way home, and found that the river was running as far as the Charles junction.

***PS from the leader***

The yellow thing was seismic recording station No 13. And lunch was on a big rock overlooking the river valley to the north and south, with accompanying relaxing music of the river cascades.

# HENBURY METEORITE CRATER

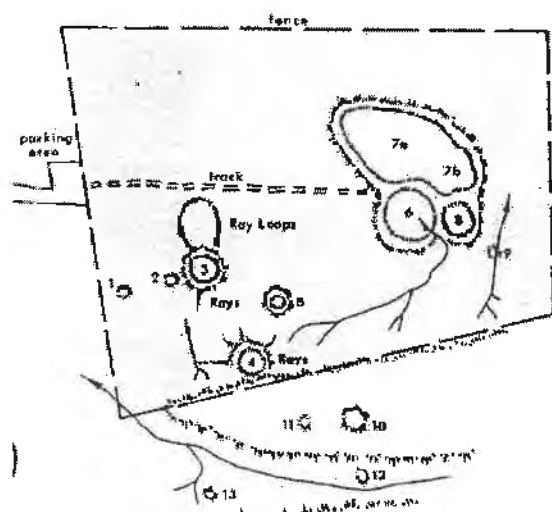
Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> May, 2004

7.30am Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> May saw two cars with 4 passengers in each meet at the Old Timers Home Information Bay and head south along the Stuart Highway to the Ernest Giles Road turn off.

With Bob Read as leader and sitting in the front seat would you believe that some bird observations were made!

I had heard that the Henbury Meteorite Crater site was just some holes in the ground. This may be true but we were armed with the knowledge and inspiration from Wednesday night 12<sup>th</sup> May's talk by the guest speaker Michael Green.

We learnt that there were 13 craters of varying sizes with the smallest being No. 9 and the largest No. 7 with a diameter of 183m and a depth of 15m. Michael said that the ray loops of No. 3 crater were visible. The craters are of great scientific interest and many rocks resulting from this impact can be seen at the Museum of Central Australia.



Now to continue with our journey! As we turned onto the Ernest Giles Road we saw a heard of camels grazing by the roadside. This for me was a new experience.

Not far from the craters we had a road side stop. An ingenious member in the group had nailed a magnet to a stick and was hoping to have a practice attempt to find a piece of meteorite (magnetic of course). The Henbury fragments are very heavy and are said to consist of a very high percentage of iron. Bob put a crashing damper to the plans when he said that there are many other rocks that are also magnetic.

I did take a photo of a plant that I identified as a *Ptilotus macrocephalus* (large green pussy tail) using the 'Flowers and Plants of Inland Australia by Anne Urban.



On arrival at the parking area it was morning tea for some and lunch for others. Then our leader with map in hand was able to identify the ray loops and explore the minor craters. Our major goal was to see numbers 6, 7 & 8 craters.

Rosalie was quite impressed to see a great variety of shrubs, trees and grasses growing in the crater beds. We made our way down to have a closer look. Below is the central section of No. 7 crater with the Bacon Range in the background.



We spent quite a while reading the information on the area and generally taking in the fascinating scenery over the plane and of the range. On the way back to the parking area I was fascinated to see how the termites were encasing the bare twigs of some plants.



Now it was lunch time! Needless to say for some it was snack time. When we had rested we decided to follow the fence up the hill to find the Nos. 10, 11 and 12 craters. We did not find Nos. 9 and 13.

Looking down from the lower ridge of the Bacon Range we could see the overall impact of these 'holes' in the ground on the plane. The craters in the hill showed that they had come in at an angle. I know that I would not have liked to have been there standing in their path all those thousands of years ago.

The other car being much faster left us in their dust but we were taking our time and of course had to have a camel photo stop. Would you believe that Bob heard a bird call on the other side of the road!

This was an excellent trip and I have since visited the museum to see the meteorite rock display.

Rhonda Tomlinson

**Trephina Gorge Nature Park – Ridgetop  
Walk**  
Sunday 23 May 2004  
By Connie Spencer

**Distance: 10 km one way. Time: 6 hrs. one way. Grade: difficult.**

The stats were a little daunting for a leader (yours truly) who had not done the walk before but nevertheless keen. And then, it started to rain at 3am and I lay there wondering if we would be doing the walk at all. As dawn broke it was cloudy but not raining and not cold so the walk was on as far as I was concerned. I knew I had company as a little rain wouldn't put Rosalie B. off – just have to see who else turned up. As we made our way to the meeting place at the Date Gardens, we were both glad to see Kaye's little car waiting in the distance. You see, Kaye had done the walk before and she issues confidence so the leader was not the slightest apprehensive now!

We three piled into my ute and made our way to Trephina Gorge. By the time we got to the turn off the Ross Highway it was drizzling and the gravel road was very slippery in places.



We decided that we would only go to Turner's Lookout (halfway) and back again as we only had the one vehicle and we felt the 10 km walk plus the hike back to the car would be too much. We donned our rain jackets and packs and started walking up along the gorge rim then leaving the gorge for the ridge top. The sheer red cliffs of the gorge were very specky. The track is very well maintained and as we continued our steady gradual climb we were serenaded by a Bellbird and Butcherbird. We managed a good view of the Bellbird. Soon we found ourselves looking down on The Bluff which towered over us as we drove into the carpark. Time for a photograph or two. Some of the plants we had identified so far were Witchetty Bush – *Acacia kempeana*, *Eremophila freelingii* and *latrobei* with the common names of Rock Fuchsia Bush and Native Fuchsia, Blue Mallee – *Eucalyptus gamophylla*, Holly-leaf Grevillea – *Grevillea wickhamii*, Mulga – *Acacia aneura*, Curry Wattle – *Acacia spondylophylla*, and lots of spinifex.

Our next stop was a beautiful little rock lined gully with a gentle flow of water and little rock pools all along. This was a real treat to have a water course with water actually flowing. The so called resurrection plants were certainly doing their thing; that is, resurrecting after many months without water. There were several different ferns at the base of rocks, liverworts, *Grahamia australiana* (and for the life of me I can't think of the common name or the family and haven't been able to look up as it has had a name change and my books have the old name which I can't think of either.)

It was perfect weather for walking – overcast and just the right temperature. We made our way around the top of a large gully and along the ridge top through a couple of species of Mallees,

one being *Eucalyptus gillienii* – not sure of the other one. Next stop was at the junction of the turnoff to Turner's Lookout where the odd happy snap or two were taken and then a further 500 m to the lookout and a well deserved lunch stop. Amazing views of the East Macs! What a lunch spot! "I can see Mt Gillen", says Kaye. "It can't be," says Connie! "Yes it is", says Rosalie. "I can see the towers!"

Oh well, time to head back. On the way we noticed a couple of interesting plants that we had missed on the way out. One the Native Currant – *Canthium latifolium* and the rare *Hakea grammatophylla* (sorry, no common name). We passed a very well camouflaged Bearded Dragon on the track and met two other couples making their way to the Lookout. The Bellbird was still sitting in the same tree singing to us as we passed. As we were making our final descent it was drizzling again making the smooth rock surface slippery and I was very glad of the walking stick Kaye had lent me.



The road out was very churned up by all the vehicles that had been in and out during the day and had deepish ruts but a solid base. We made our way slowly back to the Ross Highway and home. Now we have to do the other half! Thank you Kaye and Rosalie – you were great company.

#### **Note on bird field guides.**

New editions of all four of the popular bird guides have been printed in the last few months. I understand that the changes are fairly minor, but Slater in particular should benefit from updated taxonomy.

The changes are not big enough to warrant dashing out and buying a new edition to replace the old one, but be warned as bookshops often keep the old edition at the same price as the new one for some time.

#### **Good News for UK Thick-knees**

From the Independent in the UK

By Michael McCarthy, Environment Editor  
03 July 2004

The distinctive stone curlew or thick-knee is doing better at recovering its once-falling numbers than any of Britain's much-threatened farmland bird species, having increased its population by more than half in 20 years.

While skylarks, grey partridges, lapwings and turtle

doves have plunged catastrophically over recent decades, a conservation programme for the stone curlew has borne fruit – and its success is largely down to co-operation from farmers.

The key has been finding the birds' nests early in the breeding season, then notifying farmers so agricultural operations can take account of them. As a result, numbers have gone from about 170 pairs in Britain in the mid-1980s – the bird's low point – to about 260 pairs today.

It is the only European member of the thick-knees, a very distinctive bird family.

Across Europe the bird's numbers are dropping steadily as intensive farming takes away its living room, and this was formerly the case in Britain too.

From between 1,000 and 2,000 pairs scattered across the UK in the 1930s, the stone curlew's range had shrunk to two widely separated pockets. In these the bird has come to favour nesting in fields of young crops, and it is there that work by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and English Nature has had the most success.

Each spring the RSPB project officer, Tim Cowan, helped by three assistants, combs more than 30,000 acres of farmland, first looking for the birds, and then looking for their nests. Their locations are then notified to the farmers concerned – and almost universally they are spared from the destruction that ploughing, hoeing or harvesting would otherwise bring.

Editor's Note: The European Thick-knee or Stone Curlew is very similar to the Australian species, that is famous for its eerie calls at night.