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**October 2004**



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# ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS INC. NEWSLETTER – OCT 2004

## Meetings 2004

7:30 pm on the second Wednesday of the month, in the staff room at the OLSH College on Sadadeen Road.

13 Oct	Gary Fry, Alice Springs Desert Park, on work being done at the Park on Mala populations.
10 Nov	Greg Fyfe, Alice Springs Desert Park "The History and Natural History of <i>Egernia slateri</i> " (a large endangered skink).
Dec	Break up function - Olive Pink Botanic Garden

## Field Trips 2004

Date	Field Trips
Sun 10 Oct	Walk – Ochre Pits to Inarlanga Pass and back. Meet 7am Flynn's Grave.
Sat 23 Oct	Afternoon walk at Temple Bar Station to be followed by a BBQ in the creekbed. Leader Connie Spencer. Meet 3:30 pm at information bay opposite the Old Timers Home.
Sun 7 Nov	Morning walk from Flynn's Grave to Flagon Hill. Leader Connie Spencer. Meet 7:00 am Flynn's Grave.

# Welcome

We welcome new member Morgan Fliut.

## Suggestions wanted

If you have any suggestions for field trips or speakers at meetings, please let any member of the committee know. We would love to have your suggestions.

## September Meeting Guest Speaker

Last meeting Michael Barritt gave us a report on his research on Central Australian Possums while working for Parks and Wildlife at Ormiston. Strangely he has never seen one. Only three people have seen any in recent years. One was Dave Gibson, who while camping at Roma Gorge was awakened by small branches falling on him. Looking up he spied two possums spying on him. Geoff Cole also saw one around Sonder.

*Trichosurus vulpecula*, the brushtail possum, is rare and listed as endangered in CA. Genetically similar to possums in South Australia, they differ in size and colour. Most possum recordings in the past have been opportunistic, noting scats while looking for the rock rats and long tailed dunnarts, and by people working on the Larapinta Trail. Michael's work involved surveying historical and new potential sites. The habitats they prefer are south facing slopes in rocky quartzite creeks which have less evaporation and support growth of their food plants. Old growth mulga stands are favourite areas because apart from food sources the trees have hollows for high class living. Indicator plants for possums include mulga, ghost gums, hill mulga, cypress pine, river red gums, ironwood, fig, native orange and bloodwood. They like fruits of fig, beefwood, bush bananas, mistletoes, conkleberry, the red tips of native pine, snake vine and even paddy melons. Analysis of scats gives this information.

Possum signs are scats which are quite distinctive being reddish and banana shaped. We examined some samples so we can help in surveying on our trips. Scratch marks on tree trunks especially on the clear bark of river red gums can be indicators. Sometimes tracks are found perhaps in cave crevices. The chewed leaves of especially fig in appropriate areas give clues.

Aboriginal people talk of possums being once a food source but their decline has been due to feral animals especially cats in Central Australia and foxes in the Tanami and further south. Cattle and horses impact on their sites and rabbits eat young food plants. Weeds too, notably buffel and couch, replace the understorey and create hot fires which threaten food plants and trees with good hollows. Old growth mulga is very susceptible to fires and spinifex creeps into the edges of burnt mulga. In

the years 2000 -2002 around 50% of the MacDonnells were burnt reducing habitats drastically. No scats have been seen recently in Roma Gorge.

Some premier sites are the Gunpowder Gap area, around Ormiston Pound, and a Heavitree Range site on the Larapinta trail with lots of mulga and pine. Chewings Range areas are remote, relatively untouched with few weeds and so offer suitable havens. Seventy-two individual sites in eight different areas have been identified and these must be protected by fire management and by feral animal and weed control if the possum is to survive in Central Australia.

Rosalie Breen

## Journey to Rainbow Valley



"No stopping until we get there" said our leader Barbara Gilfedder, but just at the turnoff from the highway the wildflowers proved too much of a temptation. We were glad she stopped, for in the sand we found a profusion of species including *Calytrix carinata* (Desert fringe myrtle). Bev found a sample of *Adriana hookeri* which she remembered from a previous visit.

On again, passing desert oaks and mulga, pretty country, we didn't stop until at the Valley



we met up with the ranger Rick Hope who told us how the sandstone bluffs and cliffs were formed. Three million years ago when this part of central Australia was an inland sea the Hermannsburg sandstone was deposited. As the country began to dry the groundwater dissolved and brought to the surface red iron salts giving the dark red colour while leaving the lower parts bleached. These were more prone to weathering, the red iron and silica rich top surfaces more resistant. Rick

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brought to our notice conservation measures in place, eg no driving on the claypan areas to prevent breaking of the surface so ensuring water remained for longer periods and their successful elimination of buffel grass in the park and continued war on buffel and other weeds – Mosman grass, caltrop and Brassica.

We then set off on the walk. Bill patiently waited for a good picture of Variegated Fairy-wrens in scrub, early along the path. The picturesque range is always impressive with the sun brightening the different colours and intricate weathering patterns. The dry claypan in the foreground emphasised the ancient landscape. After Mushroom Rock which harboured Fairy Martin nests on its under side



(and sheltered field naturalists from the sun), we noted many Blackfaced Woodswallows circling the hills to the left. A couple of Grey Shrike-thrushes serenaded us as we walked. Willie Wagtail was about and White-winged Trillers, a Brown Falcon, and a Nankeen Kestrel hovered and then swooped above the hills.



Again the honeycomb textured surface on the rock walls was intriguing, reminding us in places of eastern mosques and alien beings, and the swirling colours of all shades of red and yellows would grace any art gallery. *Frankenia cordata* was a mass of flowering clumps at the base of the walls.

Wandering in the sandy areas we found many flowers and shrubs, lots of wild flowers given life from the rains in May. The annual yellowtops had mostly seeded, the area covered with white hairy balls. Taking over the show were billy buttons, poached egg daisy, saltspoon daisy (I think), and occasional small parakeelya.



One small tree puzzled us for a while until identified as *Duboisia hopwoodii*, pituri bush. Its white flowers have faint purple streaks inside the tube. The Aborigines used it as a poison for hunting, putting crushed dried leaves in a small waterhole to stupefy emus, parrots or other birds. It is not used as a narcotic locally. A grevillea though not flowering was identified as *Grevillea albiflora* because of its hairy seed pods. Eremophilas were in flower notably *Eremophila willsii*, a lilac blue variety which loves Rainbow Valley sand.

We sheltered from the sun for lunch in the information shelter and then decided it was a little hot to explore further so set off home with stops along the dirt road. A large flowering bush was *Olearia subspicata*. Growing among mulga stands were the beautiful pink everlasting daisies, *Schoenia cassiniana*. And further on a sea of pink parakeelya, *Calandrina balonensis*, in the red sand. Interestingly there was a white mutant plant and another few with a definite blue tinge (which did not show up in my photo). A couple of people collected some plant material to propagate (it not being in the park area). I had great success with my trimmings discarded on the concrete which are still continuing to flower. I wonder if the cuttings will root!

Roll call included Barb and Jim Gilfedder, Morgan Flint, Sue and Max O'Callaghan, Bev Gray, Bill Dowling a visitor from Sydney area, and Gavan and Rosalie Breen (report writer). Thanks Barb.



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## Native Gap Conservation Reserve Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> September 2004

By Connie Spencer

Roll Call: Rhondda Tomlinson in the driver's seat and Connie Spencer navigator and observer.

Our first stop was the Tropic of Capricorn. There is usually quite an array of plant species amongst the Mulga community and although drying out we weren't disappointed. I counted seven different annual wildflower species and three grass species (amongst the buffel grass) and these were just the ones I could put a name too. The four sections of irrigated plantings along the car parking area are thriving and will greatly enhance the stop when more mature. Plants include Ghost Gums, Mulgas and Cassias.

Continuing north to Native Gap we passed swathes of wildflowers (mostly yellow and white) but also drier areas where either the rainfall was less or the moisture holding capacity of the soil is less. The most outstanding display of colour was the Desert Grevillea dressed in full regalia of bright orange flowers.

Soon the Hann Range was in our sight. The gap where the Stuart Highway goes through the range is called Native Gap. The first recorded use of the name "Native Gap" was by W.W.Mills in his 1872 report to Charles Todd regarding construction of the Overland Telegraph Line. The Line was constructed through Native Gap. Mills referred to "the Native Well" which was "situated in a gap in Hann's Range". Presumably the gap took its name from the native well it contained.

The Native Gap Conservation Reserve is a small roadside park to the left of the Highway. The Reserve area is important to Aboriginal People and a sacred site. The Aboriginal name for the place is Arulta Atwarte meaning "back of the shoulder – gap, as the ridge of the Hann Range appears when approaching from the south.

While it was still cool, we decided to climb to the top of the ridge via the Telstra repeater tower track. Although on the dry side, there were still some shrubs flowering.



There were magnificent displays of *Ptilotus sessilifolius* – Crimson Foxtail and the less pretentious *Ptilotus schwartzii*. A small patch of Wild Parsnip caught my attention as I haven't seen much of it recently. One of the abundant shrubs on the slope is *Acacia monticola* or Hill Turpentine with its red curly bark. Another common shrub in the area is *Acacia spondylophylla* commonly known as Curry Wattle for very good reason. You only have to smell it to know why! It has mostly finished flowering but its sticky green pods were glistening in the sunlight.

We made our way to the ridge top through the spinifex (I was wishing I had worn trousers) and sat on the edge of the sandstone outcrop which reaches heights of 30m above the surrounding plain. We sat for sometime engrossed in our million dollar view. Below us was a canopy made up of mostly Native Pine and Native Fig trees.



As we sat, a Mistletoe Bird was whistling to us from a nearby Native Pine and below us a couple of birds flying about caught our attention but they wouldn't settle and we had no idea what they were. By this time we had a great list of plant

species but only two bird species and one was a Willy Wagtail! We agreed we had to do better than this! So, we noted as much detail as we could and decided to head back to the picnic area for lunch and hopefully see these birds from below.

After lunch we wandered along the base of the range. We added more plant species to our list, notably, Native Jasmine, Native Currant and our bird list was gradually increasing adding a Western Bower Bird in the Native Fig and a Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike. We observed our unidentified birds from below but still unable to give them a name. By now it was getting a bit warm and we made our way up the track to the Aileron Pub for a cool drink before heading for home.

Two stops were made on the way back to town – one being to photograph the Desert Grevillea and what a worthwhile stop this was. The plant diversity was amazing. We added *Dicrastylis lewellinii* – Purple Sand-sage, *Newcastelia cephalantha*, *Petalostylis cassioides* – Butterfly Bush, *Leptosema chambersii* – Upside-down Plant and *Leucochrysum stipitatum* – Spinifex Everlasting to our plant species list plus lots of species that I couldn't put a name too. The second stop was to photograph a thick patch of Bluebells growing on the roadside.

There you have it. That was our very enjoyable day out. Thanks Rhondda for being the chauffeur. Oh yeah, one more thing! Rhondda said I have to mention a small yellow butterfly that we saw at the Reserve! The unidentified birds? Best guess, a Woodswallow of some sort.



Land for Wildlife would like to invite members and others to join them for a

#### **morning with the ants**

Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> October 8 am – 10.30 am  
@The Silver Bullet Café

Mike Gillam will take us on a tour through his ant city and Craig James will be there too, letting you know what it means to have ants on your property. If you want to identify any of your resident ants, bring them in and find out. RSVP to the Land for Wildlife Co-ordinator on 895 5222 or email [lfw@lowecol.com.au](mailto:lfw@lowecol.com.au)

**Notable plant species  
Five Mile Bore  
Owen Springs Reserve  
August 2004**

<b>Botanical Name</b>	<b>Common Name</b>	<b>Botanical Name</b>	<b>Common Name</b>
<b>ACANTHACEAE</b>		<b>LAMIACEAE</b>	
<i>Harnieria kempeana</i>		<i>Prostanthera striatiflora</i>	Striped Mint-bush
<i>Rostellularia adscendens</i>		<b>MALVACEAE</b>	
<b>AMARANTHACEAE</b>		<i>Sida platycalyx</i> plus other Sida species	Lifesaver Burr
<i>Ptilotus helipteroides</i>	Hairy Mulla Mulla	<b>MYOPORACEAE</b>	
<i>Ptilotus schwartzii</i>		<i>Eremophila christophori</i>	Dolomite Fuchsia
<i>Ptilotus sessilifolius</i>	Crimson Foxtail	<i>Eremophila duttonii</i>	Harlequin Fuchsia-bush
<b>ASTERACEAE</b>		<i>Eremophila freelingii</i>	Rock Fuchsia Bush
<i>Brachyscome spp.</i>	Daisies	<i>Eremophila latrobei</i>	Native Fuchsia
<i>Calotis hispidula</i>	Bogan Flea	<b>MYRTACEAE</b>	
<i>Othonna gregorii</i>	Annual Yellow Top	<i>Eucalyptus sessilis</i>	Finke River Mallee
<i>Polycalymma stuartii</i>	Poached Egg Daisy	<b>PITTOSPORACEAE</b>	
<i>Rhodanthe tietkensii</i>	Sand Sunray	<i>Pittosporum angustifolium</i>	Native Apricot
<b>BIGNONIACEAE</b>		<b>POACEAE</b>	
<i>Pandorea doratoxylon</i>	Spearwood	<i>Cymbopogon sp.</i>	
<b>BORAGINACEAE</b>		<i>Digitaria brownii</i>	Cotton Panic Grass
<i>Halgania sp.</i>		<i>Enneapogon spp.</i>	
<i>Trichodesma zeylanicum</i>	Cattle Bush	<i>Eragrostis eriopoda</i>	Woollybutt Grass
<b>BRASSICACEAE</b>		<i>Eriachne mucronata</i>	Mountain Wanderrie
<i>Blennodia canescens</i>	Wild Stock	<i>Eulalia aurea</i>	Silky Browntop
<i>Lepidium phlebopetalum</i>	Veined Peppergrass	<i>Themeda triandra</i>	Kangaroo Grass
<i>Stenopetalum spp.</i>	Thread-petal	<i>Zygochloa paradoxa</i>	Sandhill Canegrass
<b>CAMPANULACEAE</b>		<b>RUBIACEAE</b>	
<i>Wahlenbergia sp.</i>	Bluebell	<i>Canthium latifolium</i>	Native Currant
<b>CHENOPODIACEAE</b>		<b>SOLANACEAE</b>	
<i>Maireana campanulata</i> plus other Maireana species	Bluebushes	<i>Nicotiana rosulata</i> subsp. <i>ingulba</i>	Sandhill Pituri
<b>FABACEAE</b>		<b>VIOLACEAE</b>	
<i>Swainsona spp.</i>		<i>Hybanthus aurantiacus</i>	Orange Spade Flower
<b>GOODENIACEAE</b>		<b>ZYGOPHYLLIACEAE</b>	
<i>Scaevola spinescens</i>	Spiny Fan-flower	<i>Zygophyllum spp.</i>	Twin-leaf

**Observers: Kevin Boyle, Rosalie Breen, Connie & Stan Spencer, Barbara & Jim Giffedder, Rhondda Tomlinson and Anita Smyth.**

# Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Inc.

PO Box 8663, Alice Springs, NT 0871

The object of the club is to promote interest in all aspects of natural history.

Regular monthly meetings, usually with a guest speaker, are held on the second Wednesday of every month, except December and January, at 7.30pm, in the staffroom at OLSH senior campus, Sadadeen Road.



There are frequent field trips usually at weekends and mostly in the cooler months. Past trips have included bush walks of various lengths, bird-watching, caving and excursions led by experts in many relevant fields. Projects include Waterwatch monitoring, participation in the Australian Bird Atlas, and native fish and plant surveys.

For further information contact the President,  
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Email: rread@octa4.net.au

## Application for Membership

Name			
Postal Address			
Telephone Home		Work	
Email			

## Membership type

Single, employed	\$25	Any special interests or skills?
Family, employed	\$30	
Concession - Single, pensioner/student	\$20	Signature
Concession - Family, pensioners/students	\$25	Date

Membership subscriptions are due in August each year.  
People joining halfway through a year pay half fees.