

If not claimed within 14 days please return to the Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Inc. PO Box 8663, Alice Springs, NT 0871

**November 2004**



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# **ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS INC.**

## **NEWSLETTER – NOV 2004**

### **Meetings 2004**

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

10 Nov	Greg Fyfe, Alice Springs Desert Park. "The History and Natural History of <i>Egernia slateri</i> " (a large endangered desert skink).
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**This is the last newsletter for the year. Instead of an evening meeting in December we are having an end of year walk and breakfast on Sat 11 Dec. First meeting for 2005: Wed 9 Feb.**

### **Field Trips 2004**

Date	Field Trips
Sun 7 Nov	Early morning walk (about 3 hours return) from Flynn's Grave to Flagon Hill. Meet 7 am at Flynn's Grave. Contact: Connie Spencer on 8952 4694.
Sat 13 Nov	Night walk at the Telegraph Station. Meet 7.15 pm in front of the Old Telegraph Station kiosk to do the Bradshaw walk, about 2 hours. Contact: Bob Read on 8952 1935.
Sat 4 Dec	Birdwatching at the sewage ponds. See the summer migrants! Meet 7.30 am at the gate. Contact: Bob Read on 8952 1935.
Sat 11 Dec	Walk & breakfast at Olive Pink Botanic Garden. 8 am. Bring a plate to share.

### **Subscriptions are now overdue**

Single - \$25, Family - \$30, Concession Single - \$20 and Concession Family - \$25.

Treasurer, Barb Gilfedder, will be happy to relieve you of your money at the next meeting or send your cheque/money order to the Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Inc. PO Box 8663, Alice Springs NT 0871.

**NB This is your final newsletter if your subscription is not renewed.**

# **Welcome**

We welcome new member Jenny Purdie.

## **October Meeting Guest Speaker Gary Fry**

By Barb Gilfedder

## **Mala Update**

Until the 1930s mala (rufous hare wallabies) were common across much of Australia. By the 1990s they were reduced to two small colonies on the mainland – both in the Tanami desert. Realising they were under pressure, a large enclosure was erected and a captive population started. In 1991 with bushfires and cats, the wild population was finally wiped out. There are also small populations of mala on two off-shore islands in Western Australia. Although the same species, they are different in size, characteristics and habits.

Gary told us that without the efforts of Don Langford, Ken Johnson, Geoff Cole and others the mainland mala would be extinct. As it was, there were 27 mala safe in the enclosure in the Tanami.

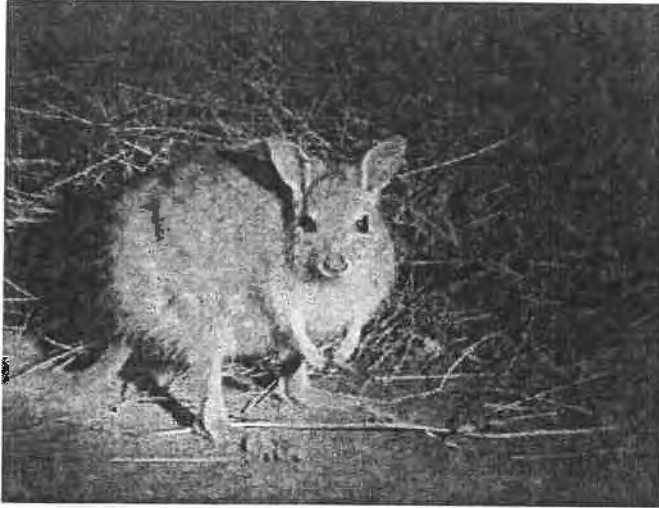
Gary Fry has been the Curator of the Zoology Department at Alice Springs Desert Park for 3 years. His main concerns are species management and population management.

All the mainland mala can be traced back to those 27 captive ones. It was lucky that these presented a good genetic diversity. A stud book has been kept with the pedigrees of all mala and part of Gary's job is to be a dating agency for the 25 mala currently held at the Desert Park. This is to prevent in-breeding which could lead to an unhealthy population, more susceptible to infertility and disease.

Mala breed well in captivity but are obviously better in big pens rather than small cages. The enclosure on the edge of the Tanami was difficult to maintain because of its isolation and a fire could easily go through and destroy the entire population.

A new enclosure was set up at Watarrka where it is easier to keep an eye on. There is plenty of spinifex and big desert oak trees. The 100 hectares is surrounded by a 2 metre high fence, mesh and electric, with a soft flip over at the top. It is surrounded by a firebreak and there are also several firebreaks running through the enclosure. These are all graded every week and then checked for cat, fox or dingo paw-prints. These can be assessed and decisions made as to

whether control action needs to be taken. Seventy mala were placed in the enclosure five years ago.



Still it is better not to have all your eggs in one basket, or all your mala in one enclosure.

Currently two new enclosures are being built, one in Scotia, Northern NSW and one at Uluru.

It was important to find out how the mala were progressing in the Watarrka enclosure. A census was carried out by building temporary fences within the enclosure dividing it into smaller pens. Then, an army of workers marched across in lines gradually catching each animal. They were measured, weighed and ear-tagged. Hair and faeces samples were taken and they were combed for parasites. All this information adds to our knowledge and improved prospects for the species. 77 mala were tagged, and we estimate there is about 250 mala in the enclosure.

A computer program, Vortex, has been fed all relevant information to tell us the best way of helping the mala continue their fight away from extinction, and how best to distribute the gene pool between the 3 enclosures. It has been decided to send animals from the Desert Park to Scotia and to move some of the Watarrka population to Uluru. Then every 10 to 12 years some females from each of the populations will be passed on to a different enclosure.

Mala are one of very few mammals that have been saved from extinction in Australia. They are obviously doing well in the large enclosures and increasing their numbers. Gary sees problems in the future that may arise with overcrowding in their fenced enclosures.

Thank you, Gary.



Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter

## Outing to Temple Bar Station

Saturday 23 October 2004

By Rosalie Breen

Mid afternoon we drove out to Temple Bar Station where Rod Cramer joined us to guide us over the property. Originally taken up in 1946, Rod's parents bought the property in 1987. We had a discussion on the name. Rod reckoned the name Temple Bar was given to the now present Honeymoon Gap by Mills on OTL survey, because of a similarity in shape of the west ridge of the gap to the Temple Bar, one of London's city gates near the Temple Law Courts. It is also seen on Temple Bar tobacco tins, one of which he showed us. But when Bob Darkin (outback policeman) married Vicki and had their honeymoon at the gap, their many visitors virtually renamed it. So Temple Bar Gap relocated a bit south to its present position.

Rod is very aware of road construction on his property to minimise soil erosion and disturbance of natural drainage lines. Old tracks have been rehabilitated and new tracks graded. In one spot the buffel grass from the sides has been buried into the middle of the road to build up the centre and have no verges (and to get rid of it). Speed limit is 20kph with proper signs in parts, which prevents the development of corrugations. On a new road, Rod asked us not to drive in the same wheel marks as the leading car, to help compact the whole surface and so as not to develop wheel ruts.

Four cars took all the travellers, the first stop being in the mulga paddock where the trees are quite dense and relatively small. Great for cattle to hide in. Most of the wild flowers had gone but still plenty of Billy Buttons (*Calocephalus platycephalus* and a *Gnephosis* spp), *Ptilotus polystachyus* (Longtails) and *Ptilotus obovatus* (Silvertails), a few Parakeelyas and Jim's onions (woollybutt grass), plus a few seeding Golden everlasting (*Xerochrysum bracteatum*) and possibly *Chrysocephalum apiculatum* (small yellow buttons). No guarantees on the ID! Turpentine bush, *Eremophila sturtii*, which is a late flowering species was on show. Rod pointed out a Wedge-tailed Eagle's nest adjacent to a rocky ridge face where a couple of years ago photos were taken of young being fed (on show in

one of the photo shops). We actually saw three Wedgies circling above the ridge.

We displayed a little bit of energy and went for a walk on a limestone ridge where predictably *Eremophila christopheri* was growing, also Ironwoods and Corkwoods, and further in the valley Supplejacks, their one-winged fruits lighting the trees in bright yellow green – quite spectacular. They were big trees and we didn't really see their habit of intertwining trunks. Gavan thinks the name might have originally been swiveljack. From the ridge we did some spying on Pine Gap, but don't tell anyone.

One of Rod's favourite areas is a gap which could be aptly named Wild Orange Gap after the many native orange trees, *Capparis mitchelli*, growing there and flowering at the moment. A very pretty spot. Some sharp eyes noted a Native Currant Bush emerging and we saw Native Pines further up the ridge. It is on the boundary with White Gums Station and being a windy gap is quite a fire risk. A few years ago he conducted a controlled burn with no tree loss, whereas a wild fire would really destroy the area. He also is waging war on buffel by slashing and poisoning. The difference on both sides of the fence was quite noticeable.

In another spot he showed us a Ghost Gum with coolamon shaped scars on two of its multiple trunks, posing the possibility of Aboriginal use of the bark. This was growing on a flat colonised with numerous *Eremophila duttonii* which had finished its red flowering leaving only the yellowing and drying calyx for show.

All the gates on the property are named. We had already encountered Mulga gate but on the return it was through Stinky Poo Gate (don't know why – didn't ask). A previous owner had constructed a number of ponding banks in the 1960's to help in water harvesting and to promote grass growth, and along this track the old banks were noticeable, and growing mulga indicating that these are almost a woody weed and quick growing if water is available.

As we approached the homestead we saw a ridge of Whitewoods and a few Bloodwoods, the trunks of the Whitewoods coloured salmon by the evening sun. The light glowed on the cliffs of the

gap, and the roos were out on the grass flats and ridge. As we passed by the "resource centre" (Bert's treasures) among the Corkwoods, I looked sadly at a graveyard of land rovers, but they may help other land rover users in the future with spare parts.

We then set ourselves up in Roe Creek at the base of the Gap for our BBQ tea and chat. Perfect in the moonlight and very relaxing. Connie, Elsa, Rosalie, Kaye, Bob, Sue, Max, Barb, Jim, Rosalie and Gavan all were grateful for Rod's hospitality and for sharing his property with us, and voted an afternoon/evening excursion a great idea.

Oh, nearly forgot – the birds. Barb and Bob provided the main birdwatching eyes and ears as usual, and noted a Rufous Whistler, Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters, Ringneck and Mulga Parrots, Rainbow Bee-eaters, as well as the majestic Wedge-tailed Eagles.



## WALKING ON THE WILDSIDE

By Kaye Percy

### Ochre Pits – Inarlanga pass return, West MacDonnell Range.

Leaving Ochre Pits at 8:30am four adventure seekers Rhondda, Rosalie, Connie and myself were anticipating a warm day for walking although at this point of time it was very pleasant.



Just as we were leaving the Ochre Pits a pair of nesting kamikaze Kingfishers came swooping down on us making us quicken our walking pace. Up and over the rise was the trail (Arnernte bush walk 4km) to Inarlanga pass. As we progressed along the trail the display of wildflowers was astounding, including daisies, native curry wattle, spiny fan flower *Goodenia ramelii*, bluebells,

hibiscus, desert rose, plum bush, native jasmine, native orange & currant trees, 7 species of mulla mulla, also noted Finke river mallee & blue wattle. Thanks to Connie & Rosalie for their identification knowledge.



We also encountered butterflies & grasshoppers, honeyeaters, wrens, miners, bellbirds and willywag tails.

Upon reaching Inarlanga Pass we decided on a rest stop in the shade, the temperature was rising & it had taken us 2hrs to walk 4 kms due to so much to look at along the trail. For the Western Arrernte people the pass was a significant watering point & ceremonial place, and only men could travel through the pass. Thomson daisy, MacDonnell Ranges Cycad & spearwood also noted.

Continuing on through the pass with rockhopping, boulder climbing & ledge walking we encountered an easily identified Moya Tomlinson, who had walked out from Serpentine Chalet Dam area by herself. We invited Moya to join us to walk to the end of the pass and have lunch with us. Along the way 3 spinifex pigeons were spotted.

After lunch and with the temperature steadily rising we made our way back through the pass & decided to walk back with Moya to her car at the chalet area & then Moya would drive us back to the Ochre Pits. This part of section 8 of the Larapinta trail is 2.3kms, so our return journey was slightly shorter, which was welcomed by us all as the day was very hot now & rest stops were more frequent.

An interesting section of the trail to walk as the landscape changes & there is a variety of plants and wildflowers. Bush bananas were spotted.



The water tank at the chalet area was a welcome sight, after a quick cooldown & a short walk to Moya's car, our walk on the wildside had come to an end. Thanks everyone for your great company for the day. In the evening when watching the weather news, the day's temperature had reached 37 degrees. This walk had been one of the warmest walks I have been on.

### Lyndal says "hello from Pannawonica"

"Just a note to say hello now that I have settled in my new home in the Pilbara in W.A. I have been here since August 12th & loving it. It is very similar in many ways to Central Australia. We share a lot of plants & wildlife plus there are some Mulla Mullas that I haven't seen before & Desert Peas are blooming in abundance...."

Trevor, my partner, had Star Finches in his front yard at another place here but they disappeared after the cyclone last March. We have seed & water dishes out attracting many Zebra Finches & hope the Star Finch will find its way too. There are lots of Cockatiels, & Long-beak Corellas are like Galahs in Alice. There are a few Galahs but not as many & they seem a bit darker in colour. We get Euros on our front lawn most nights & as the weather dries up the surrounding water there will be more.

We have a family of Brown Honeyeaters in the Poinsettia tree outside the bedroom window & lots of long tail dragons & geckos on the windows & walls... There are Blue-wing Kookaburras near the river which is 10 minutes away & a welcome relief after a hot day.... There is so much beautiful scenery & waterholes around here once you start exploring. This morning I was up before daylight to photograph sunrise on the red hills.... if I find any special flora or fauna I'll let you know."

# 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 uative fish and plant surveys.

For further information contact the President,  
Bob Read Tel: 8952 1935  
Email: rread1@iinet.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.

**ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED**  
**Minutes of the General Meeting held at OLSH College, Saddadeen Campus**  
**Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> October 2004**

**Open:** The President, Bob Read, declared the meeting open at 8:40 pm.  
**Present:** As per attendance book (15 members)  
**Apologies:** Kaye Percy, Max O'Callaghan & Kevin Boyle  
**Minutes:** The meeting resolved to accept the Minutes of the previous meeting held Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> September as a true and correct record of that meeting.

**Business Arising from the Minutes**  
Nil

**Correspondence In:**

Australian Plants Society	newsletter
A/S Volunteer Resource Centre	recognise and thank volunteers during Local Gov't Week
Tas Field Naturalists Club	new book plus order form

**Correspondence Out:**

Morgan Flint, Hamilton Downs Y/C	re acceptance of representation on committee
Michael Barritt	thank you

**Treasurer's Report:**

Opening balance end August 04		\$1500.56
Plus		
Subscriptions paid	25.00	225.00
Bank interest	1.64	<u>26.64</u>
		\$1527.20
Less		
Lodgement of annual return	\$15.00	
State Gov't tax	<u>.15</u>	<u>15.15</u>
Closing balance end August 04		<u>\$1512.05</u>

The meeting accepted the treasurer's report.

**General Business:**

**Trips**

Sat 23 <sup>rd</sup> Oct 2004	Afternoon walk at Temple Bar Station to be followed by a BBQ in the creek bed. Leader Connie Spencer. Meet 3:30pm at information bay opposite the Old Timers Home. Bring your own food, drinks & chair. Small gas BBQ will be provided.
Sun 7 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2004	Early morning walk (about 3 hours return) from Flynn's Grave to Flagon Hill. Meet 7am at Flynn's Grave. Leader Connie Spencer
Nov 2004	Night walk option. Committee to decide on a date and time and publish in the newsletter.
Sat 4 Dec 2004	Sewage Ponds. Committee to decide a time and publish in the newsletter.
Sat 11 <sup>th</sup> Dec	Walk & breakfast at Olive Pink Botanic Garden. 8am. Bring a plate to share.

**Sewage Ponds** – Rosalie advised that the Club has a key and members can borrow with a \$30 deposit.

**Supper for November** – Sue Fraser

**Note Taker for November** – Rhondda Tomlinson

**Sightings**

- Bob Read reported that he and Ian Archibald saw 49 mammals and 250 bird species on their recent trip to Africa.
- Barbara reported seeing 136 species of birds in Broomie – many of them waders.

**Meeting closed:** 8:55pm

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