

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

May 2006



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Web site : www.geocities.com/alicenats

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club 2006

Meetings

7.30 pm on the second Wednesday of the month.
Venue: Olive Pink Botanic Garden, Tuncks Road

Wednesday 10 May: Dr Dirk Megirian from the Central Australian Museum, "Measuring the Miocene 'climatic optimum' across central Australia -just how idyllic were the good-old days?" (this will describe the cooler wetter environment in which the megafauna lived.

Wednesday 14 June: Sonny Mason and Greg Mair from the Gem and Mineral Club

Trips / Activities

Sat 13 & Sun 14 May

Trip to springs of Wallis' Paddock (Mordor Pound). Leader: Bob Read on 89521935. Gravel road and station tracks, 4WD needed, about 350km return. Please let me know if you are going as I may have some people looking for spare seats

Sat 27 & Sun 28 May

Trip to Sloan's Gully off The Garden Rd. Meet 8:00am at McDonalds. Organiser and contact Rhondda Tomlinson on 89531280. Gravel road and tracks, 4WD or high clearance vehicle needed, about 260 km return.

Sat 10, Sun 11 & Mon 13 June

Combine APS/FNC trip to *Acacia pickardii* & *Acacia peuce* on Andado Station subject to permission being granted. Organiser Connie Spencer on 89524694

Guest Speaker Report

"The Larapinta Trail"

presented by Dr. Charlie Carter
Wednesday April 12th 2006

Summarised by Rosalie Breen

Charlie Carter gave his philosophy of walking the trail, accompanied by superb pictures, taken by Deborah Clarke, mostly of what we might find along the way rather than of the scenery. At each section of the walk he likes to emphasize a different theme about the natural life of the Centre.

Section 1: Begins at the Telegraph Station with stories of European influence on the country. Generally two day walk with great views of Alice town, then a climb to Euro Ridge. Along the way are corkwoods, the flower of which was the name the aborigines gave to Olive Pink -

Unjiamba. After Wallaby Gap there is good bird watching in the woodland area.

Section 2: In Central Australia the climate is non seasonal, unreliable, unpredictable, and extreme. The track passes Bond Gap a beautiful and permanent waterhole. Next day is an easy walk through a variety of country, passing through Spring Gap, another gem.

Section 3: Acacias are well adapted to conserving water having replaced their leaves with phyllodes, flattened leaf-stems, which have less and sunken pores which reduce water loss. True leaves only appear on the seedlings. This is one of the harder bits, but most rewarding. On the ridge tops are a variety of mallees including round leaf (*E.minerichie*), blue (*E.gamophylla*) and red (*E.eucentrica*). These are found all along the trail.

Section 4. Definitely hard, and windy on top of the Brinkley Bluff ridge. The descent on the west of the bluff is very steep and poorly formed so great care is needed. Back down on the Hugh River is Stuart's Pass which was a route for the early explorers.

Section 5. This is the most remote and physically demanding. From Birthday Waterhole there's rock scrambling in Paisley Gorge, the best campsite after the descent from Razorback Ridge, at the headwaters of Fringe Lily Creek, which usually has (but no guarantee) water. Purple *Keraudrenia* on the ridges. Close encounters with spinifex after the saddle from the linear valley. Last, a rewarding walk in Hugh Gorge, big boulders, high cliffs and probably wet feet.

Section 6: Long, two days, fairly ordinary, this was the last part to be finished. Some great views from the saddle as you approach Ellery Gorge. This area was burnt in '01 and '02 and affords an opportunity to discuss fire adaptation and its part in the ecosystem and Aboriginal use of fire. Picture of water among the burnt remnants after a storm immediately following the fires

Section 7: Day walk which goes up and down a lot on sharp dolomite which is hard on boots and feet. Quite a variety of vegetation and many reptiles.

Section 8: Up from Serpentine Gorge to Counts Point, the best views of the whole Trail. 360 degrees of mountains and valleys, where you have been and where you are going. See Sonder, Giles and Zeil, the three highest peaks in NT. Charlie's theme for this section is the geology of the area. The gneiss boulders show exfoliation after fires. Looking to south can see patterns of landforms and erosion in the younger Pacoota

sandstones. The Chewings range quartzite is purplish with white stripes of quartz through it indicative of the lower melting point of the quartz which was squeezed into cracks within the matrix. Fossil ripple marks. These need to be formed under special conditions. The ripples are formed in the bed of the river (or lake). Fine clay is deposited out over the ripples, and then more sand on top. It is like clay casting, it retains its continuity breaking at the ripple level and thus preserving the ripple marks.

Section 9: Another long and strenuous two day section. Through a U-shaped long valley, then from Waterfall Gorge up onto the ridge. Termite mounds sticking up on the ridge tops. There are many species of termites which play a vital part in the ecosystem. Some build tunnels among the spinifex to protect themselves from the sun and dehydration. It looks like coral. This section is where the once-thought-extinct rock rat was recently discovered. A variety of country leads to Ormiston.

Section 10: A pleasant day to Glen Helen walking through and beside the Finke River, with a favourite campsite in the sand near Glen Helen. The water is salty because the rocks through which it flows were laid down in marine conditions and the rivers wash out the salt from the rocks. There is paleo-evidence that this river flowed into Lake Eyre basin 700 and 1200 years ago. Now it floods out into the Simpson Desert

Section 11: Overnight camp at Rocky Bar Gap is a beautiful spot. Often hear a dingo. They were introduced by the Macassans some 4 thousand years ago, and took over from the Thylacine. May see a red kangaroo. Most other places see euros or blackfooted wallabies.

Section 12: Climb Mt Sonder for another set of great views. If lucky may find the rare heath plant or the pink mountain hakea which is also seen on section 3.

Charlie and Deb run **TREK LARAPINTA** which provides guided and catered walks along the trail for various sections including the whole length taking twenty days.

Pages of notes and maps of the whole trail can be collected from the map place in Alice Plaza (free), or in more detail A3 size, (need to ask for photocopies) from Parks and Wildlife office. The club has a collection of the brochures for all sections

Creature Features

ANN Get-together 2006 HIGH COUNTRY IN THE ALPINE SPRING

(part 2 of part 1)

By Rhondda Tomlinson

I left off last month saying that the **Day 5** evening talk was on the Mountain Pigmy Possum by Dean Heinze.

Day 6 We passed through the Mt. Bogong Village which was originally a construction camp for the Snowy Mountains Hydro Electricity Scheme. As previously stated there was a marked difference between the burnt and un-burnt areas from the 2003 bushfires. The regeneration and re-growth never ceased to amaze us. The township of Falls Creek became known as the accepted stop two hours after leaving Harrietville enroute this day to Mt. McKay.

The bus let us off at the base of Mt. McKay and our path was lined with many mountain flowers and breath-taking scenery. At the top we were met by Dean Heinze and his merry band of students. They had been up early checking animal traps the result being:

1. The bush rat – Typical rat-like appearance with tail as long as the body. They are quite common in this area.



Photo: Rhondda Tomlinson

2. Dusky Antechinus (pictured above) is a marsupial which does not hibernate and has to put on a lot of body weight before the winter. They breed as the snow is melting and the male dies after breeding.

3. House Mouse – since the 2003 bushfires big numbers have appeared due to the Ledge Grass seeding. Before the fires they were rarely seen.

4. An Alpine Grasshopper – Females can't fly and males have very little flying ability. They are large with orange and black stripes which intensify. In the summer and their abdomen becomes a brilliant blue.

5. McLay's Swallow Tail Butterfly – which was flying around as Dean was talking.



6. Mountain Pigmy Possum (*Burramys parvus*) – habitats are Mt. Buller, Mt. Hotham, Mt. Bogong and Mt. Kosciusko. Its main diet consists of Bogong moths, seed from the plumb pine, Bossiaea and Alpine mint bush. Their home ranges are around granite and basalt boulders. The males hibernate at lower altitudes than the females and move up to the female habitat in the spring. The females drive them back to their territory soon after mating. A problem developed with the building of the Alpine Road which ran right through the middle of one of the habitats – Solution, “**The Tunnel of Love.**” This is an area which allows the males to travel under the road, a concept they soon caught onto. A few problems still exist though as silt can fill the holes between the boulders and the foxes also have worked out ‘the solution’.



Photo: Rhondda Tomlinson

The Ruined Castle was our lunch stop and Dean this time talked about the basalt lava flows and how the weathering had caused the formations. We saw an Alpine Stonfly in the nymph stage and Dean said that the frog populations are very poor on the Bogong High Plains. The most common snake is the White-lipped and the Highland Copperhead occurs at lower altitudes of near aqueducts.

Our evening talk was by Dr. Ruth Lawrence on the Cultural History of the Bogong High Plane, which included the Aborigines, Early European exploration,

Gold mining, Cattle Grazing, Kiewa Hydro-electric scheme, Tourism and Bushfires.

Day 7 started with a sighting of a Swift Moth, which is nocturnal and only lives for 3 days in which time they hatch, mate and die. (Very hectic lifestyle!!!) On the Mt. Beauty Road we encountered 2,000 push bike riders taking part in an event. I really admire the skill and patience of our coach drivers in manoeuvring very large buses up these narrow mountain roads past bike riders going both up and down the mountain.

We made a brief stop at the Tawonga lookout over the Kiewa Valley. The Clover Power Station is the 2nd power station in this section and was built in 1940’s then onto the McKay Creek power station which is the 1st power station on the mountain.

Our walk was across part of the Bogong High Plane where we stopped at a stream gauge (pictured below) which measures the silt and water flow.



Photo: Rhondda Tomlinson

Our lunch stop was at Cope Hut the first tourist hut in the area. We then walked to Wallace Hut dating back to 1889 where the grazers took shelter while tending their stock. In this area were some very beautiful, colourful, twisted and distorted snow gums.



Photo: Rhondda Tomlinson

Our evening talk was by Clyde O'Donnell a nature photographer and past guide in the Mt. Buffalo area.

Day 8 We had a free day to wonder around Harrietville and in the night we heard about sightings from those who were out and about.

Day 9 Historic Beechworth where we had a meeting in the park and Jim Blackney from the NE Trust for Nature spoke about Ned Kelly and his involvement in the town as well as the reduced amount of natural vegetation remaining in Victoria due to farming and horticultural activities. Some species of birds have diminished and others increased.

Mt Pilot Christine Watson spoke about her project on the 'Black Cypress Pine and the effects of fire'. It was exactly 3 years to the day when this area was burnt in 2003. It has taken a lot longer to re-seed due to the sandy erodible soils, sheep grazing and a past history of timber harvesting and mining.

In the afternoon we did a tour of Beechworth and of course headed for the ice cream parlour.

Our night talk was on the Flame Robin which two of the participants were involved with.

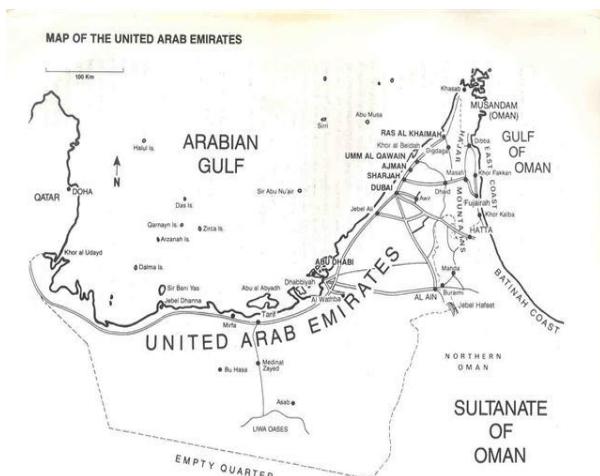
Next month I will talk about our last visit to the Bogong High Plains and prepare to move from Harrietville on to Jindabyne in NSW.

BIRDWATCHING IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

By Andrew Twyman

The United Arab Emirates lies at the South end of the Arabian Gulf. It is positioned astride a North projecting peninsular and, as such, has two coast lines.

The North East coast faces onto the Arabian Gulf and is where the major cities of Dubai and Abu Dhabi are located. The East coast faces onto the Gulf of Oman.



The UAE is a major bird migratory flyway between Eurasia and Africa. Large numbers of passage migrant birds can be seen during the Northern hemisphere spring (March to May) on the way to their breeding grounds, and again on their return in the Autumn on the way to their wintering quarters in Africa.

Many choose to remain in the UAE over winter due to its abundant parks, gardens and other suitable habitats which provide food and shelter along with the warm winter climate.

Of course there are many birds which are resident throughout the year which brighten up the trees and grassy areas of the towns and cities. Amongst these is the noisy **Purple Sunbird**, a small but highly noticeable ball of purple gloss flitting through the leaves.

These are accompanied by the **Bulbuls** – chirpy inquisitive birds – which can be seen virtually everywhere.

The Emirates, although small, has a variety of landscapes ranging from desert terrain in the West and central regions to mountains and wadis (dried river beds) in the East and North.



Mountains and Wadi, northern UAE

Photo: Andrew Twyman

These different habitats result in specialities, such as **Plain Leaf Warbler** and **Desert lesser Whitethroat** occupying the Acacia trees that survive in the rocky savannahs and wadi beds, to **Hooded** and **Hume's Wheatears** that are at home in the mountains.

Of course this has not yet mentioned the 700Km of coastline of the UAE which is a haven for sea and shore birds alike. **Broad-billed sandpiper**, **Bar-tailed Godwit**, **Pacific Golden Plover**, and the occasional **Great Knot** regularly over winter and many thousands of **Black-headed Gulls** also join them.

Many of the best bird watching sites within the Emirates arise out of man made developments such as golf courses, grass growing projects for camel and cattle feed and of course the inevitable sewage works areas. These sites often attract surprise visitors such as **Egyptian Nightjar**, **Marsh and Pallid Harriers**, **Spotted and Imperial Eagles** and opportunist breeders like the **Black-winged Stilt**, **Red-wattled Lapwing** and the much rarer **White-tailed Plover**.



White-tailed plover

Photo: Andrew Twyman

The pleasant winter climate of the UAE makes it a popular destination for visiting birdwatchers. From late October to April the temperature rarely exceeds 30° C, with the evenings balmy to cool. May to September is very hot and humid with daytime temperatures reaching 45° C + and humidity over 90%.

The infrastructure is modern with many hotels, varying from 5 and 6 star to modest budget outlets. Car hire is cheap and with fuel also very inexpensive.

A bird watching holiday to the United Arab Emirates combined with an interesting culture experience, in a safe

country that lies at the crossroads from Europe to Asia, is to be thoroughly recommended.

Andrew is happy to be contacted for further information about bird watching in the UAE.

Andrew Twyman email: andytwy@yahoo.co.uk

Interesting and well produced websites in the UAE :-

Natural History Groups: www.enhg.org

Bird watching:
www.uaeinteract.com/nature/bird/twitchers.asp



Hume's wheatear

Photo: Andrew Twyman

ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED
Minutes of the General Meeting held at Olive Pink Botanic Garden
Wednesday 12th April 2006

Open: The President, Bob Read, declared the meeting open at 9:20 pm and welcomed members and visitors

Present: As per attendance book

Apologies: Barb Gilfedder & Liz Carpenter

Minutes: The meeting resolved to accept the minutes of the previous meeting held Wednesday, 8th March 2006 as a true and correct record of that meeting.

Correspondence In:

West Australian Naturalists club	newsletter
Yeperenye Pty Ltd	activity for school holiday program
ASTC – Dale McIver	thank you
WBC	bank statement
Australian Naturalists Network	registers of clubs

Correspondence Out:

Nil

Treasurer's Report:

No report due to the absence of the treasurer.

General Business:

Speakers:

Wed 10 May	Dirk Megirian from the Central Australian Museum
Wed 14 June	Sonny Mason & Greg Mair from the Gem and Mineral Club.

Trips:

Tue 25 April	Walk Section 1 of Larapinta Trail. Meet 7:30 am at 64 Lackman Tce. Heather Whittaker to pick up at Simpsons Gap at 4pm. Leader: Bob Read
Sat 29, Sun 30 &	Trip to Ruby Gap. Leader: Bob Read
Mon 1 May	
Sat 13 & Sun 14 May	Trip to Mordor Pound. Leader: Bob Read
Sat 27 & Sun 28 May	Trip to Sloans Gully off The Garden Rd. Meet 8:00 at McDonalds. Organiser and contact Rhondda Tomlinson
Sat 10, Sun 11 &	
Mon 12 Jun	Combine APS/FNC trip to <i>Acacia pickardii</i> & <i>Acacia peuce</i> on Andado Station subject to permission being granted. Organiser Connie Spencer

Other Business:

The meeting resolved to purchase a book (a volume of the Flora of Australia) for the France Smith Library in appreciation for the use of the visitor centre for meetings.

The meeting resolved that a belated letter of thank you be sent to OLSH for the use of the staff room for meetings over the past few years.

Supper for May – Helen Morgan

Note taker for April – Heather Whittaker

Sightings:

- Many Red Tailed Black Cockatoos along the Todd River sighted by Marg Lawrence
- Major Mitchell sighted Owen Springs Reserve Homestead Waterhole on the Hugh River.
- Dingo on Owen Springs Reserve
- Leoni sighted a Spinifex Pigeon
- Jim Lawrence sighted Wedge-tailed Eagles feeding on a kangaroo
- Helen Morgan reported seeing a Big Red Kangaroo on the Simpsons Gap Bike Track.

Meeting Closed 9:55pm