

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club

August 2008 Newsletter



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WEBSITE

www.geocities.com/alicenats

REMINDERS FOR NEXT MEETING

Gate Opener: Connie **Supper:** Sue **Note Taker:** not needed

MEETINGS

13th August, AGM and members night. Bring a short selection of images on CD or flash drive or specimens, if there is anything around.

10th September, Michelle Walker will speak about her trip to South Korea as a part of the Australia Korea Young Leaders Exchange Program



OTHER EVENTS

Australian Plants Society meets Wednesday, 6th August, 2008, 7:30 pm @ Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Speaker: Jenny Purdie, *What's in a name?*

TRIPS / ACTIVITIES

August 2-4. Trip to Illamurta Springs and Boggy Hole, Jim Lawrence to lead if available.

Saturday August 16. Day walk on Larapinta Trail Section 8, Counts Point, leader Rosalie Breen. Full days walk 16 km, graded hard with steep climb and descent, but rewarded with possibly the best views from the trail (and only a day pack needed). Meet at Flynn's Grave for a 7:00am start. Phone Rosalie 89523409 or Connie 89524694.

Sat August 30. Visit to Ian Archibald's workshop. At last we are able to run this very popular excursion. Meet 8:30am at the gate at the back of the Aviation Museum on Memorial Drive, around the corner from the museum.

September 13 and 14. Overnight car-based trip to Painted Canyon, off Plenty Highway.

September 20. Sustainability and Desert Garden Fair, Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Contact Colleen O'Malley 8952 2154, email: curatoropbg@internode.on.net or visit www.opbg.com.au.

GUEST SPEAKER REPORT

Reptiles of Alice Springs

Presentation by: Peter Nunn
By Rosalie Breen

Peter Nunn from the Desert Park, where he has been a keeper for six years, gave us an identification lesson accompanied by fantastic photos of many of the most common reptiles that live around Alice Springs. My favourites were the Rough Knob-tailed Gecko which looked a bit like "only his mother could love him" and the Variegated Dotted-tailed Gecko which is often seen skittering around the walls and windows of houses looking dark in the daytime and transparent at night.

Here is the list of notes he gave out, but of course the pictures and talk were the best part. Peter recommended the book - "Complete Guide to Reptiles" by Steve Wilson and Gerry Swan

Backyard Reptiles of Alice Springs

Species	Identifiers
Monitors	
Perentie (<i>Varanus giganteus</i>)	Large, pale tail tip, pale spots on body
Sand Monitor (<i>Varanus gouldii</i>)	Medium to large, pale tail tip, dark head stripe
Spiny-tailed Monitor (<i>Varanus acanthurus</i>)	Dark head stripe, spiny tail, rock-dweller
Black-headed Monitor (<i>Varanus tristis</i>)	Dark colour, especially tail. Spots on body
Dragons	
Long-nosed Dragon (<i>Amphibolurus longirostris</i>)	Pointed snout, 2 stripes down back, long tail
Central Notted Dragon (<i>Ctenophorus nuchalis</i>)	Blunt snout, reticulum on head/throat
Central Bearded Dragon (<i>Pogona vitticeps</i>)	Spines around throat, neck, flanks
Skinks	
<i>Ctenotus leonhardii</i>	Reddish-brown, prominent spots on flanks
Stony-soil Skink (<i>Ctenotus saxatilis</i>)	Olive-brown, typically just stripes (no spots)
Desert Rainbow Skink (<i>Carlia triacantha</i>)	Small, waves tail, male has breeding colouration
Wall Skink (<i>Cryptoblepharus australis</i>)	Lives on walls/trees/logs, flecks over body
Fire-tailed Skink (<i>Morethia ruficauda</i>)	Black with white stripes, red hindlimbs and tail
Grey's Skink (<i>Menetia greyi</i>)	Small, dark upper-lateral stripe
<i>Lerista frosti</i>	Dark upper-lateral stripe, fossorial (litter dweller)
Geckos	
Fat-tailed Gecko (<i>Diplodactylus conspicillatus</i>)	Short round tail
Bynoes Gecko (<i>Heteronotia binoei</i>)	Coarse scalation, long tail
Rough Knob-tailed gecko (<i>Nephurus amyae</i>)	Large, spinose, tail small with terminal knob
Smooth Knob-tailed Gecko (<i>Nephurus levis</i>)	Smooth body, fat tail with terminal knob
Variiegated Dtella (<i>Gehyra variegata</i>)	Arboreal, strongly variegated pattern
Purplish Dtella (<i>Gehyra purpurascens</i>)	Arboreal, slightly larger with weaker pattern
Zigzag Velvet Gecko (<i>Oedura rhombifer</i>)	Vertebral stripe consisting of joined diamonds
Marbled Velvet Gecko (<i>Oedura marmorata</i>)	Very large, arboreal, banded tail, purple/yellow
Legless Lizards (Pygopods)	
Burton's Legless Lizard (<i>Lialis burtonis</i>)	Very pointed snout
<i>Delma nasuta</i>	Elongated snout, pale-edged ventral scales
<i>Delma tincta</i>	Black head broken by 2 pale bands (typically)
Hooded Scaly-foot (<i>Pygopus nigriceps</i>)	Dark band through eyes and dark nape patch
Pythons	
Centralian Carpet Python (<i>Morelia spilota bredli</i>)	Orange-brown with pale dark-edged blotches
Stimson's Python (<i>Antaresia stimsoni</i>)	Pale brown with bold dark blotches
Elapids (Front-fanged Venomous Snakes)	
Shovel-nosed Snake (<i>Brachyuropsis incinctus</i>)	Wedge-shaped snout, dark head and neck bands
Orange-naped Snake (<i>Furina ornata</i>)	Dark head and neck bands split by orange band.
Yellow-faced Whipsnake (<i>Demansia psammophis</i>)	Orange-brown head and tail, blue-green body
Mulga Snake (<i>Pseudechis australis</i>)	Robust, dark-edged body scales, flattens neck
Curl Snake (<i>Suta suta</i>)	Dark head cap, pale stripe on side of head
Western Brown Snake (<i>Pseudonaja nuchalis</i>)	Highly variable colouration, S-shaped strike pose

TRIP REPORT

Trekking in Umbria, Italy

April 12-19, 2008

By Liz Carpenter

“Rugged, wild, incredibly varied and beautiful where pretty valleys descend from high mountain pastures and peaks of the Sibilini Mountains, is known as Italy’s heart.”

With that kind of introduction there was no way that I was going to reject an offer of a trekking adventure with my friend Garth. Summer in Alice Springs had been its usual long hot dry self so the opportunity of walking in cool green valleys was very appealing.

Garth’s daughter, Sarah, who lives in England, had been making arrangements for her dad with Inntavel and got inspired. She, too, decided to come along. Inntavel is a UK based holiday travel company that provides all the information, maps, instructions, bookings, tickets and support that one needs to enjoy “luxury” walking holidays in many parts of Europe and Asia.

Our trip started at Heathrow Terminal 2 (whew! Not that infamous new Terminal 5). We flew over the French, Swiss and Italian Alps at sun-up and I believe that we saw The Eiger and Matterhorn in the clear air of the day. We proceeded on a one and a half hour train trip from Rome to Spoleto which is known for its summer Spoleto Arts Festival. Spoleto developed from an ancient walled city on a mountain and was inhabited by Romans who built aqueducts, temples and amphitheatres. These have been restored/renovated and are now used during the festivals. It was added on to by the Christians who built numerous churches with frescos, statues and stained-glass windows. It was in this historical city, at the beginning of the northern spring, that we began our trek.



Sarah and Garth, aqueduct in Spoleto

We walked through woodlands, up and down gentle valleys and steeper mountain pathways. We walked through villages that were ghostlike with summer residents not yet back, and past farms that were asleep except for the chained up noisy dogs.

Each day for 7 days we walked 13-17 km, carrying only day packs with Aqua “no-gas”, picnic lunches of mozzarella, Parma ham, crusty bread, fruit and pilfered pastries from the over laden breakfast bars of the hotels. We were relieved of the portage of our heavy bags as that was nicely taken care of by Inntavel’s connections.



Parma ham, and mozzarella, Norcia

Our hotels were luxurious by my standards. They were either family owned mansions or converted abbeys. They had gorgeous views over valleys and terracotta-tiled roofs, central heating, hot baths and sumptuous meals. Dinners were of local trout, asparagus, risotto, soups and breads tossed down with local bubbly or red wine. Breakfasts came with cappuccinos, cakes, pastries, hams, mozzarella and crusty bread. You will not be surprised to hear that weight loss was not a guaranteed outcome of the trek! Starting off each day was hard work after all of these gastronomic delights.



The Abbey

We used walking poles that Garth had brought for us and quickly discovered their uses in negotiating downhill scree slopes, muddy edges of puddles and hauling us up the inevitable steep slope at the end of the day. I can now thoroughly recommend using walking poles to any one contemplating lengthy walks over steep and slippery terrains.

The three of us shared the direction finding with Sarah reading the details (especially details of where not to go), Garth wielding his compass over the map and me keeping an eye on the sun and signposts. Surprisingly we did not get lost.

Bright red poppies flashed in the valleys everywhere, while higher up there were blue and pink crocuses. Snow-capped mountains of the Mt Sibilini National Park in the distance provided us with inspiration when the going got tough.

Only the last day brought snow to our feet when we traversed around the highest part of our trek at 1400m, the Piano Grande (big expanse), before dropping down to Castelluccio, a ghost town that tourists were helping to enliven. People came from as far away as Rome on their motorbikes or in little

cars to picnic, BBQ, play soccer and just gather amongst the red poppies on the big plain surrounded by beautiful snow capped mountains.



Liz, Garth and Sarah on the Piano Grande

Weather was generally kind to us, providing only a few thundery showers and many opportunities to take off our down jackets to bask in the warm sun in the middle of the day. Interestingly, the Italian Airforce came out about the same time with low level flying in the valleys and broke the otherwise silence.

There were few tourists, few locals and few cars. We did meet a kindly Sister Immacolata at her church on the cross roads to the lowlands as we were ushered in from a rain shower. She made us a welcome Espresso coffee while we munched our picnic lunches and tried to remember our Italian, while she tried to remember her English!

Birdlife was disappointing except for the many Alpine Swifts and Pallid Swifts that soared over the roof tops of bigger villages. We saw what we thought were Sirin, Goldfinches, Greenfinches, Blue Rockthrushes, Blackbirds, Jackdaws, Stock Doves, Rock Doves, Hooded Crows and Corn Buntings.

Our trek ended in Norcia, birthplace of St. Benedict. The town is a tourist spot for Italians who come to eat truffles, buy their Wild Boar hams and Mozzarella cheeses, and purchase locally made linen. We did try some Truffles at great expense and were disappointed as the flavour was almost indiscernible.



Liz and green plants, above Norcia

We had plenty of time to explore the churches, museums, restored Roman ruins, mausoleums and trout farms and to just gaze at the views. No traffic jams, no mobs and no noise. Priceless really.

After a train trip back to Rome, we flew back to a cold London very fit and a little heavier. We had wandered in the green valleys between walled villages, marvelled at the historic buildings at our own pace and gazed at distant snow covered mountains, all the time being greeted by red Poppies. It had been an inspiring and beautiful trek.

If this sounds good to you, do check out www.inntravel.com.au!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

NOTICE OF AGM

The Annual General Meeting of the Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club will be held at Olive Pink 7:30 pm August 13th.

Some of the existing committee members will be standing down, and we need volunteers to take on committee positions; at the minimum a new vice-president and a new secretary.

The vice-president's position simply involves filling in when the president is absent and attending committee meetings.

The secretary takes minutes at general and committee meetings, and collects the mail. Outward mail is usually only one thank you letter a month.

We generally have about 4 committee meetings a year. Minor matters between meetings are resolved by email.

Please remember that without volunteers for the committee the club cannot function. It is a chance to be more involved in the running of the club.

Copy DEADLINE for articles for the next newsletter 27 August. Thanks, Ed.

**ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED
MINUTES OF GENERAL MEETING HELD 9/11/2008 AT OLIVE PINK BOTANIC GARDEN**

OPEN:

President, Bob Read - 8.55 pm

PRESENT:

As per attendance book (7 members and 5 visitors).

APOLOGIES:

Jenny Purdie, Rhondda Thomlinson, Sarah Wilson, Leoni Read, Michelle Walker, Sarah Wilson

PREVIOUS MINUTES:

Marilyn moved that the minutes of the previous meeting (Wednesday 11 June 2008) be accepted as a true and correct record. Seconded Rosalie. All in favour.

TREASURER'S REPORT:

Not available. Bank tabled showing a balance of \$2,661.85 credit.

CORRESPONDENCE - IN:

- The Naturalist News - Western Australian Naturalists Club Inc.
- Heritage Alice Springs Inc. – Newsletter, Winter 2008
- Nomination form for Australian of the Year Awards.
- NT Field Naturalists Club Inc. – Nature Territory Newsletter
- Westpac Bank statement

CORRESPONDENCE – OUT:

Thank you letter to Fiachra Kearney.

GENERAL BUSINESS:

- AGM coming up next month – all positions are up for grabs.
- Bob moved that we purchase a number of whistles for use on field trips. Seconded Bev. Number not yet agreed upon
- Club Badge – discussed briefly. Will discuss at a later date when more members are present.

OUTINGS:

- July 12 - Larapinta Hills – Connie to lead.
- July 26 - Emily Gap to Heavitree Gap cancelled.
- If available, Jim is happy to lead the Boggy Hole/Illamurta Springs trip on the August long weekend (2 - 4).
- Aug 16 - Count Point - Rosalie/Bob leaders.
- Aug 30 - Ian's workshop visit. Need to check with Ian.

SIGHTINGS:

- Connie saw feral doves foraging in compost.
- Marilyn saw crows ripping at bark of paperbark tree for nesting material.
- Red capped robin sighted close to campsite at Acacia Latzii site.
- Connie and Colleen saw a cinnamon quail thrush.
- Black cockatoos sighted flying over town.
- Bob saw rufous crowned emu wrens.
- Saw a pair of crows pecking the fruit off a ruby saltbush plant outside Krummies bakery.

Gate Opener for August: Connie **Supper for August:** Sue (don't forget milk)

Notetaker for August: not needed

Meeting Closed: 9.25 pm

Next meeting: AGM and general meeting 13/8/08