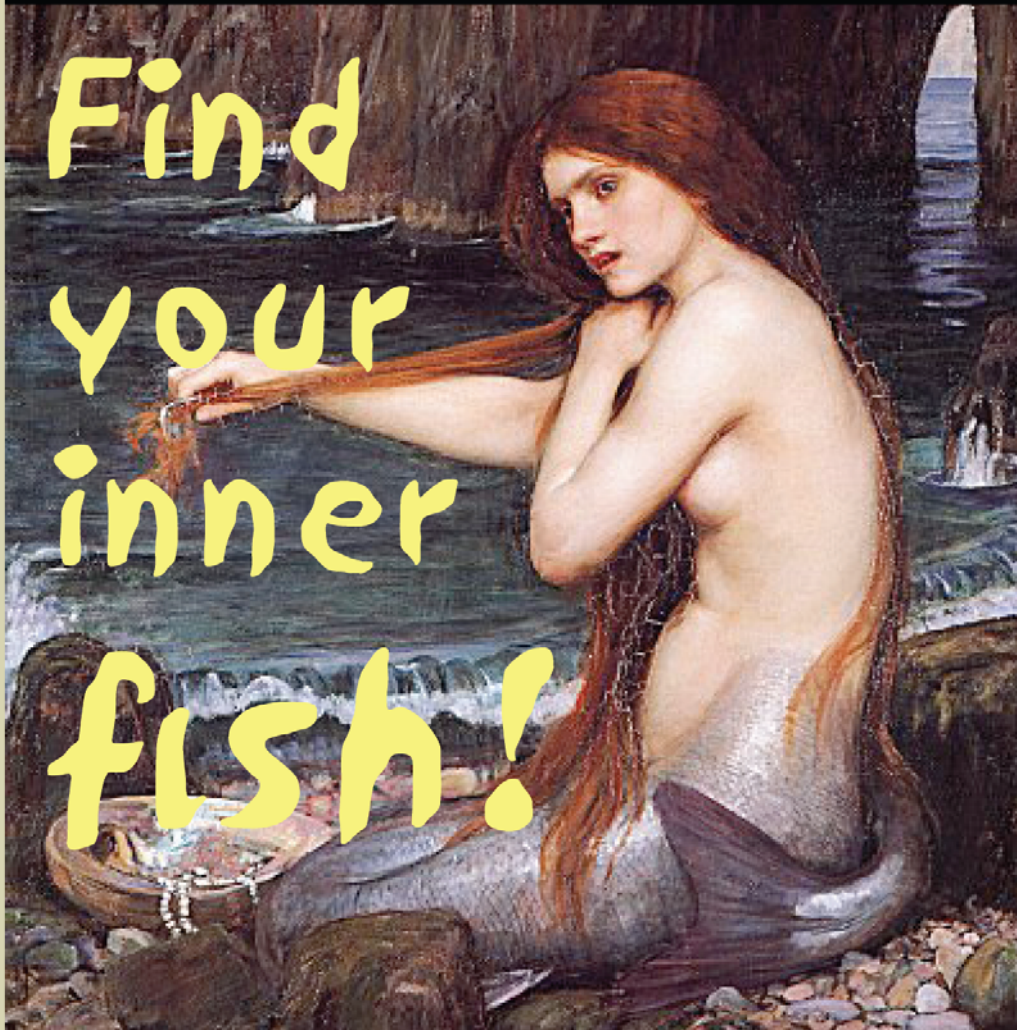


ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

February 2009 Newsletter



Northern Territory
Government



An entertaining talk by Interpretation Ranger Mark Carter on the remarkable evidence for Darwin's theory of Evolution you can find inside your own body!

7:30pm 11th February, Olive Pink Botanic Gardens

Part of the worldwide celebrations of Charles Darwin's life and work.

www.darwin200.com.au

For further details contact Mark Carter on 89518208

The cover picture is based on a painting, 'A Mermaid' by John William Waterhouse in 1901. The original is in the Royal Academy of Arts in London.

MEETINGS

11 Feb 2009: Mark Carter, Interpretation Ranger, Parks and Wildlife. “*Find your inner fish*” an entertaining talk on the remarkable evidence for Darwin’s theory of Evolution you can find inside your own body! (See front cover.) This is an event to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the birth of Charles Darwin.

11 Mar 2009: Holger Woyt on Spitsbergen. 7:30 pm Olive Pink Botanic Garden

8 Apr 2009: Jenny Purdie on Africa – 7:30 pm Olive Pink Botanic Garden

Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month (except December and January) at 7:30 PM at the Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Visitors are welcome.

TRIPS/ ACTIVITIES

Fri 13 Feb 09: Wander around the Ilparpa claypans @ night. Meet 6:45 pm at the information bay opposite the Old Timers Home, South Stuart Hwy. Bring picnic tea, chair, torch, and mosquito repellent. Contact: Shirley Goodman on 8952 5724.

Sat 21 Feb 09: Bird watching @ the Water Treatment Ponds. Meet 7 am at the access gate off Commonage Road.

Sun 8 Mar 09: Early morning walk up Cassia Hill, Simpsons Gap. Meet 7 am @ Flynn’s Grave Memorial on Larapinta Drive. Contact: Connie Spencer on 8952 4694.

Sat 21 Mar 09: Native Plant Sale @ Olive Pink Botanic Garden as part of Miss Pink’s birthday celebrations. 8 am – 11 am.

Sat 28 Mar 09: An early morning wander around the *Eucalyptus intertexta* dry jungle, near Ilparpa claypans. Meet 7 am at the information bay opposite the Old Timers Home, South Stuart Hwy. Bring breakfast or morning tea for afters. Contact: Connie Spencer on 8952 4694.

Also in March a proposed night visit to the nocturnal house at the Alice Springs Desert Park. Details later.

Easter 10-13 April: proposed trip to Newhaven. Leader required.

WANTED

a newsletter editor

for a month, a few months, a year, or even longer if you wish.

Deadline for articles for the next newsletter 23 February 2009.

You can use my (Connie) email address constans@bigpond.net.au for articles for the next newsletter and I will pass material on to whoever takes up the challenge.

President	Bob Read	8952 1935	rlread1@bigpond.net.au
Vice-President	Sue Fraser	8952 5728	suefra@hotmail.com
Secretary	Shirley Goodman	8952 5724	sunbear68@hotmail.com
Treasurer	Rosalie Breen	8952 3409	rosalie.breen@email.com
Property Officer	Sarah White	8953 8605	sarahsg2@dodo.com.au
Public Officer	Rhondda Tomlinson	8953 1280	rhondda.tomlinson@nt.gov.au
Newsletter Editor	Connie Spencer	8952 4694	constans@bigpond.net.au

Web site: www.geocities.com/alicenats

Postal address: P.O. Box 8663 Alice Springs, Northern Territory 0871

Report on talk by Dr. Christopher Palmer,

Entomologist with the
Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Service
12 November 2008
By Barb Gilfedder

Over the warmer months Chris Palmer will be searching for a needle in a haystack in the beautiful MacDonnell Ranges. More specifically he will be looking for Desert Sand-skipper butterflies, *Croitana aestiva*. Not the most comfortable weather for combing this area.

Desert Sand-skipper are small, mainly brown butterflies with yellow markings. Wingspan is about 22mm. They are currently on the endangered animal list and research attracts national funding from the Commonwealth Department of the Environment.

There are about 40 species of butterflies commonly seen around Central Australia, but the Desert Sand-skipper has been particularly hard to track down. It was first collected in 1966 and again in 1972. Little is known about this species.

Inland Sand-skipper *Croitana arenaria* is a closely related species that lives in a much larger area of the MacDonnell Ranges and can be quite common within the locality. Hence, much more is known about it. Description of eggs, larvae and their host plant (Curly Windmill Grass, *Enteropogon spp.*), behaviour, range and adult food plants (daisies) are written up. None of these things are known for the Desert Sand-skipper and Chris hopes to discover them.

There is a possibility that the invasive weed, Buffel grass, has encroached on the habitat, reducing the range of this tiny insect.

Thank you for an interesting talk Chris and good luck with your research.

Reptile night with Peter Nunn

22nd November 2008
By Rosalie Schultz

Following beautiful rains over 2 weeks, we were glad for the opportunity to go to Simpsons Gap to look for reptiles and frogs. 10 of us met at Flynn's Grave on a cloudy but rain free night.

First stop (after a few false alarms for locusts and spiders) was a fat tailed gecko, *Diplodactylus conspicillatus*.



This is a beautiful creature, 6cm long with a fat tail, with distinct scales on the tail. Peter reported that the tail is used to keep rain out of spider and other burrows where the gecko shelters. This gecko eats termites. Male geckos can be distinguished by a pair of hemipenes that can be seen as two bulges at the base of the tail.

Next gecko we saw was Bynoe's Gecko, *Heteronotia binoei*.



Note the regrown tail that does not match the original patterning.

This one is unique in having a spiny rather than smooth skin. Bynoe's Gecko is also special because when conditions are poor, it is able to reproduce by parthenogenesis, with females cloning themselves.

No more lizards until we got to down to Simpsons Gap, which was echoing with the sounds of frogs singing.

We saw all four central Australian frogs, and heard their distinctive calls.

First was Spencer's Burrowing Frog *Limnodynastes spenceri*, also most numerous. Bob Read said that this frog makes "Ho Ho Ho" sound, although my book describes it as "Bok" and that's what is sounded like to me. This frog is stumpy with strong limbs.

Next we saw Main's Frog, *Cyclorana maini*,



an elegant frog distinguished by a line down its back. Main's frog goes "Baaa", remarkably like a sheep. Like Spencer's Burrowing Frog, Main's Frog burrows and hibernates between wet periods.

There are two tree frogs, the red *Litoria rubella* and the green Centralian Tree Frog *Litoria gilleni*, both elegant creatures. They do not burrow to escape the desert dry, but keep moist by living in crevices in rocks near the water. The Centralian Tree Frog is larger, at 10cm. This one croaks with a sound like sawing wood, and the night was pierced by a droning sound as if the forest was being hewn down around us. Happily it was only the tree frog. The Red Tree Frog only 3.5cm makes the remaining frog sound, which you can distinguish if it is neither "Bok" nor "Baaa" nor like a saw.

After we left the waterhole, we inspected the walls of the toilet block, a good source of warmth and light to attract insects. A Marbled Velvet Gecko *Oedura marmorata* was enjoying the warmth; he was 15cm long and again, a pleasure to watch.

A Ringed Brown Snake *Pseudonaja modesta*



was our final "catch". His rings were very faint, but the identification was not in doubt. This brown snake is much smaller than his dangerous cousins, at around 60cm but still venomous. We kept clear but enjoyed watching him.

In all an amazing night – I'm always so happy to see frogs which are said to be markers of a healthy ecosystem. Big thanks to Peter for his skill, expertise and patience.

Behind the Scenes at Desert Park By Shirley Goodman

The penultimate activity for the Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club in 2008 was an opportunity to see some of what goes on behind the scenes at our wonderful Desert Park. Not many members were able to avail themselves of this opportunity and I encourage more people to try to participate in future visits that may be offered in 2009.

Most of us know Desert Park to be a fantastic tourist resource for Alice Springs, a place that provides an opportunity for tourists and locals alike to learn about the plants and animals that live in some of the different habitats in Central Australia. Less is known about the role of Desert Park as a research facility and its role in breeding programmes for endangered species and animals for other wildlife parks.

Head keeper Pat(rick) Hodgens gave generously of his time to explain what goes on beyond the public areas, to share his enthusiasm for his work and to give us a guided tour of the extensive areas that the public don't usually get to see. Pat explained the importance of keeping new animals in isolation to reduce the introduction of disease and he showed us the range of secure areas designed to accommodate birds and mammals with different requirements.

I have to admit that I am writing this several weeks after the visit so you are getting the highlights as I remember them – without the benefits of notes taken at the time! I know that we saw a variety of animals but the ones that I clearly remember are the two rock rats; the only rock rats in captivity; possibly the last two rock rats in existence and unfortunately both ageing males! However, it is possible that there are still rock rats living in isolated refuge areas that have not yet been found. Let's hope so!!

We also saw a pair of Bustards, the female of which has just laid one egg. These birds do not breed easily in captivity so the staff was waiting to see what happens next.

Desert Park has a well equipped clinic where injured and sick animals can be cared for or animals examined. There were several birds in residence when we visited. However, Desert Park is not the place where the public should take injured birds or animals, there is another organisation, (Wildcare Inc. Alice Springs mob: 0419 221 128) that is set up for that purpose.

We were impressed by the immaculately clean, neat and tidy animal food preparation area with a place for everything and everything in its place! Feeding containers of various sizes were stacked, a range of knives and cutting boards were hanging in appropriate places and detailed diet lists were on the walls. The food storage areas are like a small supermarket stocking a large range of fruit, vegetables, grains, and supplements.

Thank you Pat for spending so much time with us. Hopefully we will be able to organize more visits, in particular to the reptile area and to Desert Park's new free-range nocturnal experience. Field Nat members may be interested in 'Critter Watch', a program that Desert Park is in the process of instigating. Volunteers to 'Critter Watch' contribute valuable observation time to monitor new or research - related situations. This could be when a new animal is introduced or something is changed and feedback is required. Just watching and noting behaviors is something that the regular keepers often don't have enough time to do. Volunteering for 'Critter Watch' can be a flexible arrangement but if Pat knows in advance that someone is available, he can plan around this to make best use of their time. If you are interested in finding out more, Pat can be contacted by email at patrick.hodgens@nt.gov.au

Finally, thanks to Sarah for organizing the visit. Amongst other things Sarah has an important role as the person responsible for constantly updating the detailed records pertaining to all the animals living at Desert Park.

Publications

Invasive Species Publications

Greening Australia has released two publications on invasive species:

From Cane Toads to Camels - *evaluating Northern territory pest management through community consultation* Dionne Walsh. (2008). Greening Australia (NT) Ltd (Darwin office - \$20

From Athel Pine to Rubber Vine - *evaluating Northern territory weed management through community consultation* Dionne Walsh. (2008). Greening Australia (NT) Ltd (Darwin office - \$20

Hard copies are available from Greening Australia for \$20 each, or they can be downloaded free from <http://www.greeningaustralia.org.au/index.php?nodeId=157>

Christmas Breakfast in the rain!

The day dawned with light showers of rain (a not so unusual occurrence at this time of year) but, the plan was for an early morning walk followed by breakfast at



Rosalie B supervising, Bob in the hot seat & Shirley providing shelter

the Old Telegraph Station where shelter in the picnic area is at a premium and we were expecting about 20 members! A quick word with Bob who assured us it was only going to be light and wouldn't last long, so carry on as planned. He was right too although the word "light" was a little subjective and we did meet a wet and bedraggled looking Rosalie and Jude returning from their walk as we entered the OTS. At least they were game to do the walk! The rest of us just fronted up for breakfast.



Barb serving with Jenny and Jude tucking in.

A good time was had by all with special thanks to Rosalie and Rhondda for all the preparation.

A Book Review! **By Shirley Goodman**

Members who enjoy a light read that is also informative and funny may be interested in a book that I was given for Christmas. It is called '**Anoraks to Zitting Cisticola** - a whole lot of stuff about Birdwatching' by **Sean Dooley**.

This is his second book, the first is called 'The Big Twitch', I missed out on that so it is now on my 'to read' list. Sean Dooley's claim to fame is that in 2002 he devoted the whole year, and presumably a lot of money to serious twitching which gave him a 'list' for that year of 703. In doing this he broke the Australian birdwatching record for seeing the most species in one year.

'Anoraks to Zitting Cisticola etc.' is light-hearted, cheeky and informative. It is an easy read that made me laugh out loud at times – you will have

to read it for yourself to find out which bits you think they are! I take issue with a few of Sean's statements (for example, I will continue to call my binos noccies!) but he gets a lot right and has a laugh at himself along the way.

I am quite relieved to find that I don't have Asbirders Syndrome – read the book to find out if you have this condition! Perhaps it will help you understand the person you are living with!

Another plus for the book is that our club gets a mention! Even if you choose to skip some sections, it's a fun read and you may learn something, perhaps even quite a lot!

Pitchi Richi Update **Submitted by Bob Read**

As you will have heard, Pitchi Richi was heritage-listed in mid December 2008.

Just before Christmas, Mrs Elsa Corbet and Heritage Alice Springs Inc signed an Agreement for HAS Inc to take over the lease for the five land parcels that make up the site known as "Pitchi Richi". HAS Inc. is still awaiting ministerial approval for the transfer of the lease and expect this to happen over the next week or so. Heritage Alice Springs Inc, has made the setting up of Pitchi Richi, a top priority over this coming year and has prepared a draft Plan (ask Bob Read if you want a copy)

Domenico Pecorari, Chairperson of HAS Inc. stated "We need to form a sub-committee, to continue to plan the future of the place, to organise working bees and, if possible, open the place to the public for one afternoon a week over the cooler months of this year. I will be involved in the sub-committee but I will need help. "

Anyone interested in being involved can contact Domenico Pecorari on 8952 7546 or at this e-mail address: rread1@bigpond.net.au

FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED

Minutes of General Meeting held at Olive Pink Botanic Garden on Wednesday 14 November 2008

Open: President, Bob read declared the meeting open at 8.50pm

Present: As per attendance book.

Apologies: Margaret Lawrence, Leoni Read, Rhondda Tomlinson, Bev Dawson.

Minutes of previous Meeting:

Shirley moved that the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 8 October be accepted as a true and correct record. **Seconded** by Rosalie. All in favour.

Treasurers Report:

Rosalie assured the meeting that the Club was in a sound financial state.

Correspondence In:

Nature Territory – NT Field Naturalist Club
The Naturalists News – Western Australian Naturalists Club
Membership subscription from Jose Petrick
Membership subscription from Ian Richter
Westpac Bank Statement

Correspondence Out:

Michelle Walker – thank you for speaking at September meeting
Jocelyn Davies- thank you for speaking at October meeting

General Business:

- Newsletter- the club still needs someone to take this job on. In the meantime Connie has offered to compile the next (February) newsletter.
- Bob reported on an email that he had received from a New Zealand film maker, he will provide more information if it is relevant.

Outings/Trips

- 22 November- a Reptile Spotting Trip post rain with Peter Nunn to Simpson's Gap. Meet 7.30 pm at Flynn's Grave.
- 29 November- behind the scenes at Desert Park. Meet 8.30am in the holding area past the herbarium. Expected to be for 1-2 hrs.
- Christmas Party will be a breakfast at the Telegraph Station on 6 December starting at 7.30am. Club will cater, Rosalie offered to organize catering – Sarah and Shirley offered to help.

Sightings:

- Graham Goodman observed 4 black-faced cuckoo shrikes engaging in communal wing shuffling behaviour. He followed this up on the internet and received replies from others about the behaviour including a short film clipping showing the behaviour at <http://sandystraitsandbeyond.blogspot.com/2008/09/birding-in-my-backyard.html>. The amount of interaction, interest, ideas and help was impressive! Apparently Shufflewing is an old name for these birds.
- Several people have heard/seen Channel Billed Cuckoos, earliest reported on 6 Nov.
- Rosalie has seen a sand goanna at school (OLSH-Sadadeen)
- Barb and Jim Gilfedder had been at the sewerage ponds with people doing 'The Biggest Twitch' – they had added 9 new birds to their list
- Barb saw a snipe at the sewerage ponds, not sure what type, Latham? Pintail?
- Red necked stint, Whiskered Tern and White-Winged Terns were all reported at the Sewerage ponds.
- Report of seeing a Black-Breasted Buzzard being buzzed by crows and galahs
- Following recent rain 2 species of burrowing frog and a brown tree frog were heard in the *E.intertexta* forest area
- Shield shrimps are in the water opposite the YMCA at Sadadeen.

Next Meeting: Wednesday 11 February 2009

Gate Opener: to be decided

Note taker: to be decided

Supper: to be decided

Meeting closed at 9.15 pm.