



ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

May 2009 Newsletter



Tecticornia verrucosa Newhaven. Photo J. Richter

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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

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

MEETINGS

13 May 2009: “*Birds and fire in mulga*” - Adam Levensly, (scientist with Bushfires Council)

TRIPS/ ACTIVITIES

- Sat 16 May 09** Walk from Wigley’s Waterhole to Junction Waterhole along the Todd River with a bit of rock-hopping, and then back along rough tracks. About 5-6 km. Bring morning tea, water and strong shoes. To get to Wigley’s ordinary cars are OK if they don’t mind a rough bumpy road. We will meet at the Sargent St sign near Mt Nancy Hotel for a 7.30am start. Contact Rosalie on 89523409. New members especially welcome.
- 23 & 24 May 09** The Gem and Mineral Club have invited the Field Naturalists to their annual weekend trip to Sloan’s Gully (in the Winnecke Range area) for a bit of gold panning etc. It’s an interesting area with hills to climb, old diggings to explore and good vegetation cover. Contact: Jenny Mason on 8952 8380 (ah) or 8952 9299 (BH) or call into Outback Gems in the Coles Shopping Centre.
- 6 – 8 June 2009** Three day trip to “Mac Clark Conservation Reserve” and *Acacia pickardii* valley, Andado Station. Contact: Connie Spencer on 8952 4694
- Sun 21 June 2009** Full day walk from Ellery Creek to the saddle and back again. This is part of Section 6 (Hugh Gorge to Ellery Creek) of the Larapinta Trail. Contact: Connie Spencer 8952 4694

NEXT NEWSLETTER

The deadline for the next newsletter is **Wednesday 27 May**. Please send your contributions to Emily Findlay – robbiemily@hotmail.com

AFRICAN KALAIDESCOPE

By Jenny Purdie

In September 2008 I set off for Zimbabwe with 12 others on a SAVE Foundation safari. SAVE is a voluntary organization based in Perth & was formed in 1987 to help save the black rhino but has since expanded to cover a wide range of projects. We all minimized our check-in luggage in order to take vital equipment & supplies such as spare parts for vehicles & water pumps, medical items, school supplies, clothes & even soap.

Once in Zimbabwe we visited several sanctuaries and



projects such as the rhino breeding program at Imire ranch, the Lion & Painted Dog projects at

Hwange. We were able to walk with the anti-poaching team at Hwange (we found two wire snares), track black rhino from a helicopter and visit a school & a clinic. In between we had plenty of time to enjoy the beautiful safari lodge on the edge of Hwange and go for game drives and walks with professional guides. We also visited the magnificent Victoria Falls both on foot and from the air; we canoed down the Zambezi River, went for a ride on an elephant and walked with a couple of “tame” young lions.



From Victoria Falls we drove into Botswana for more game drives at both Chobe National Park and Moremi Game Reserve (located on the edge of the Okavango Delta). The SAVE safari finished here but I stayed on and with a friend visited the Makgadikgadi area where we were privileged to walk with some semi-habituated meerkats, were taken on a walk with some San people and camped out on one of the huge salt pans. We then flew to



the Kwando Concession where we were lucky enough to encounter two packs of painted dogs and onto Linyanti Concession where we came across two tiny 2-day old lion cubs, several honey badgers and a cheetah and of course saw many of the usual animals - elephant, giraffe, buffalo, several species of antelope, hippo, zebra etc.



Livingstone in Zambia was our next stop where we viewed Victoria Falls from the other side & did an amazing walk along the rim of the falls. We then visited Kafue National Park where the animals were very shy because poaching has not long been stopped there; however the tsetse flies were not shy & bit into us with gusto so that we had to drive around with a bucket of burning elephant dung attached to the towbar! When we did see animals they were the more unusual species – eland, sable, oribi, Defassa waterbuck. South Luangwa National

Park was our final destination where we stayed at three different camps. We did some great bush walks coming across a pride of feeding lions on one walk. We saw 7 leopards in this park to add to the 4 we had seen in other places – an amazing total and most of them were great sighting & included two pairs at night with one female feeding in a tree just above our heads.



For more information on SAVE Foundation check out www.savefoundation.org.au

A morning visit to the *Eucalyptus intertexta* jungle!

By Shirley Goodman

A jungle in Alice Springs! Well perhaps not quite the usual concept of a jungle but we certainly found a place with a

variety of trees, a surprising number of vines and comparatively dense vegetation.

Nine members enjoyed a couple of hours exploring the 'jungle' which is located at the western end of the Ilparpa claypan area. Connie was the leader for this trip and with her usual attention to detail she had done some research and reconnoitred the area a couple of days before.

Our first impression was surprise at the density and health of the vegetation, this impression was soon confirmed when Connie pointed out the regeneration and new growth that was underway. This can be attributed to the continuing effect of the substantial rains that fell in November. Young *Acacia victoriae* were particularly prolific.

There certainly were Gum-barked Coolibah (*Eucalyptus intertexta*) trees but they by no means dominated. Other large trees included Beefwood (*Grevillea striata*), Ironwood (*Aacacia estrophiolata*) and River Red Gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*). Several people commented on the mallee form of the *E. intertexta*. Connie told us that this was the result of a fire many years ago but she was also able to show us a magnificent single trunk specimen that had escaped the burn.

Medium to large bushes included Victoria Wattle (*Acacia.victoriae*), Witchetty Bush (*A. kempeana*), Curley-pod Wattle (*A. sessiliceps*), Needlewood (*Hakea leucoptera*) Weeping Emu Bush (*Eremophila longifolia*) and Weeping Pittosporum (*Pittosporum angustifolium*). It was early enough in the day for the flowers of the Wild Passionfruit (*Capparis spinosa* var. *nummularia*) to still be at their best; Cattle Bush (*Trichodesma zeylanicum*) was also flowering although Tickweed (*Cleome viscosa*) was present but past flowering. We found the vines hard to identify but *Einadia nutans*, Head-ache Vine (*Mukia maderaspatana*) Native Jasmin (*Jasminum didymium* and Bush Banana (*Marsdenia australis*) were all present.

Under our feet evidence of the rain was still visible as dried up Nardoo. (Despite knowing about the plight of Burke and Wills, I still have no idea of how they should have prepared this potential 'life saver' - perhaps it could be the subject of a meeting at sometime!)

Although this trip had a botanic focus the birders amongst us were rewarded with several sightings that included a Pallid Cuckoo, Diamond Doves, Peaceful Doves, a Whistling Kite and a flypast of Major Mitchell Cockatoos accompanied by a single Sulphur-crested Cockatoo.

The walk concluded with a very pleasant shared breakfast.

Thanks to everyone for contributing to a very pleasant morning but especially to Connie who made sure that it was also informative.

A comprehensive vegetation study of the whole Ilparpa Valley lists over 400 plant species that have been found in this relatively small area. If you are interested, the report

"Ilparpa Commonage: issues and actions" by the Arid Lands Environment Centre (2000), it can be found in the Frances Smith Library at the Olive Pink Botanic Garden.

A Trip to TARKINE

By Rosalie Breen

The Tarkine is an area of Tasmania in the north west, encompassing Australia's largest temperate rainforest growing on the rich volcanic soils of mountain ranges with high peaks and plateaux, and steep river valleys. There are heath and button grass on the less fertile soils and of course the wild and rugged west coast which the uninterrupted Southern Ocean pummels and carves.



The Tarkine temperate rainforest

Annual rainfall can be around three metres. It is 400,000 hectares of wilderness from the Arthur River in the north to the Pieman River in the south. For sheer beauty, diversity of landscape, Aboriginal cultural history, almost pristine vegetation, sense of isolation and timelessness, this is the place. It is also a place which demands protection from "development", so its uniqueness and beauty is preserved. The diversity of plant

communities in the Wilderness is amazing. The dominant tree is the Antarctic beech (*Nothofagus cunninghamii*), mighty trees up to forty metres. They are a relic of the ancient Gondwana era. Because this is an ancient and undisturbed (by humans) forest you can trace the cycle of forest life which generates diversity, lost if logging were to be allowed. Where a giant beech crashes to the ground the opened canopy gives opportunity for tree ferns and other saplings to flourish, while the mouldering trunk gives back its nutrients and is home to mosses and fungi which eventually devour it and it disappears from view. Twenty-



Walking the Tarkine Trail

seven species of flora have been identified as threatened or representing a significant population. Fauna too is very diverse. Marsupials abound with quolls, devils, wallabies,

pademelons, wombats and possums. And from a conservation perspective the Tarkine's integrity and size makes it an ideal refuge for threatened species. It is a dream that the Tarkine be joined to the Tasmanian World Heritage Area of the south, creating a wonderful natural area safe for the future.

In Dec/Jan Gavan and I visited the area mainly for a six day walk on the Tarkine Rainforest Track which was marked out only recently. And I can say without those little pieces of pink ribbons you would certainly be "bushed", because the route went up and down, and around and about, skirting fallen giant trees, crossing rivers with no visibility of the route ahead and little indication of it being an actual track. But so beautiful - walking in a cathedral-like rainforest canopy, mainly the Beech, with an understory of Sassafras, Leatherwood Tree-ferns and others. The ground and trunks of trees were carpeted in mosses, lichens and ferns which spread up the trees and over the fallen trees and undergrowth. Coloured fungi grow on the trees or ground. I thought I was in Heaven; in fact one of the places we visited is called Heaven. The sun came out from the rain and we had lunch there, on an expanse of exposed bedrock beside a gorgeous waterhole amid tumbling falls. One day we walked up out of the rainforest to a clear mountain top set in heathland and button-grass plains for a wide view of the area. We did not see many birds as vegetation was thick, but heard them. The final highlight was crossing two big rivers, three

walkers linked arms together and waded with the help of a rope for the deeper river, both being swollen above expectation



Meditation in Heaven

with the previous week's rain.

Tarkine Trails ran the walk and I have no hesitation in recommending them. Our two guides were wonderful. The walkers, there were ten of us, carried our own supplied tent and a share of the food for all in our backpacks. The guides prepared our meals and it was surprising that such good food appeared each day. They are well into conservation, minimal impact, and using natural and



The Tarkine Coast

sustainable products. Check out their website.

After the walk, we hired a car and explored more of the area, driving the "road to nowhere" (Western Explorer) from Arthur River south to Corinna where we stayed for a few days with more walks up mountains and in the forests for waterfalls and to enjoy the views. We cruised down the Pieman and spent a day walking along the coast, again with Tarkine Trail guides, to experience the roaring ocean, the fantastic rock formations and the beautiful meadows of pink pigface and other wildflowers, pebbly beaches, marshy heathlands and to hear stories of Aboriginal life among the middens. On the return trip to Burnie we visited some Tasmanian Devils, toured limestone caves and climbed Mt Roland. A great experience.

Easter Trip to Newhaven Sanctuary

By Jenny Richter

Twelve of us in five vehicles set out for Newhaven Sanctuary on Good Friday. An early stop at Mulga woodland revealed a lot of digging for grubs under the witchetty bushes (*Acacia kempeana*), some interesting mulga ant nests, but no birdlife. At Tilmouth roadhouse the number of wedge-tail eagles seen along the way was reckoned to be about 15.



Arrived at Newhaven late on a hot afternoon pleased to find there were hot showers and a clean, efficient composting toilet at the campground at \$10 each per night and we were warmly welcomed by the managers, Joe and Danae. Detailed tour booklets were loaned to each vehicle. These can also be downloaded from the website of the Australian Wildlife Conservancy that now manages the site.

Saturday was the (dry) Lakes tour. At Susie's lake, surrounded by Inland Teatree (*Melaleuca glomerata*), we found tracks of the Australian Bustard.



The dry lake bed was covered in grasses and dried up Nardoo (*Marsilea exerata*) a 'renaissance' plant that, on wetting, returns to life

and grows rapidly. Bottleneck Lake was covered in the very interesting samphire (*Tecticornia verrucosa*) - rare on Newhaven –

and the Heart-leaved Frankenia (*Frankenia cordata*). Here also were Aboriginal grinding and mill stones. Lake Bennett was a treasure



trove of multi-coloured samphires and the dunes were covered in a plentiful array of plants including the Sandhill Sage (*Newcastelia spodiotricha*). At the foot of the dunes were spotted variegated and white winged fairy wrens.

On the Potato Creek Gorge tour the four rock pools were also bone dry. On the road into the gorge were Holly Grevillea (*Grevillea wickhamii*), Bush Tomatoes (*Solanum* species), Curry Wattles (*Acacia spondylophylla*), Native Cotton (*Gossypium australe*), and Ghost Gums (*Corymbia aparrerinja*). At the gorge was a small stand of Bloodwood (*Corymbia deserticola*) and plenty of grasses and spinifex.

Joe generously invited us to join in the morning wildlife surveys in two days. Accordingly, half the group accompanied him early on Sunday to check Elliott traps (total 60) and pit fall traps at three sites - the commencement of an extensive wildlife survey.

Only one Military Dragon (*Ctenophorus isolepsis*) and one Leonhard's skink

(*Ctenotus leonhardii*) were in the pit falls and a single Desert Mouse (*Pseudomys desertor*) finally turned up in an Elliott trap at the last site. A dunnart and a gecko were also trapped. Meanwhile, back in camp a tree full of budgies exploded into life and a Collared Sparrowhawk flew right past the camp with a captured budgie.



Birds were again scarce on Sunday's Dunes tour considering there are more than 160 species listed for the



whole of Newhaven but it would be amazing to sit in the dunes at night. Judging by the multitude and variety of footprints in the sand the dunes must be teeming with desert night life. A haughty Australian Bustard was seen striding in its superior way through the grass along the roadside at one point and a flying pair was also sighted. A flowering *Eremophila sturtii* was identified at the edge of the track. There were many stands of the magnificent Desert Oaks (*Allocasuarina decaisneana*) and some of Blue mallee (*Eucalyptus gamophylla*). Smaller plants seen were *Thryptomene (Aluta maisonneuvei)*, Needlebush (*Hakea leucoptera*) and a blue flowering *Halganina cyanea* along with a white flowered variant.

The second group that checked Monday's traps was shown the latrine area designated by the Great Desert Skink (*Egernia kintorei*). Again there were few captures – but the desert mouse caught the previous night turned up again in a neighbouring trap. She must like the bait!

On most days we saw many camel footprints and droppings over a wide area, but saw only four captive animals near the ranger station to keep the buffel grass down.

Birds seen at Newhaven: Collared Sparrowhawk, Brown Falcon, Australian Bustards, Crested Pigeon, Spinifex Pigeon, Mulga Parrots, Budgerigar, Variegated Fairy-wren, Rufous-crowned Emu-wren (only by Wendy), White-winged Fairy-wren, Banded Whiteface, Inland Thornbill, Yellow-throated Miner, Singing Honeyeater, Crested Bellbird (heard only), Willie Wagtail, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Torresian Crow, Richard's Pipit, Zebra Finch, Hooded Robin.

After a pleasant, if hot, weekend we headed for home along the Siddeley Range tour.

Many thanks to Joe and Danae for their assistance. There are possibilities to develop links between the club and the sanctuary.

For further information:

<http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/publications/recovery/great-desert-skink/index.html>
<http://www.wildherps.com/species/C.leonhardii.html>
http://birdingwa.iinet.net.au/reptiles/species/ctenophorus_isolepsis.html
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/centralaustralia/357677286/in/pool-mammals> (Desert mouse)

Grey Falcon sighting Barb Gilfedder

On the first weekend in April Jim and I were lucky to catch sight of a very white-looking raptor perched quite high in a river gum on Owen Springs Reserve. It was quite unperturbed as I wandered



around the tree trying to get as close as possible to take photos. My camera only takes 6X zoom. My first thought was a Black-shouldered Kite, but when I realised that its shoulders were not black, it had to be a Grey Falcon. I have only seen this bird once previously. Its range is almost all over Australia but it is very thinly spread and listed in most guides as rare. At one stage it took off, flying around showing both over and under wing patterns and then came back to another river gum close by.

There is plenty of other bird life out at Owen Springs at the moment - big flocks of Budgerigars, flocks of Zebra Finches as well as all the usual birds so it wouldn't go hungry. There are still small waterholes along the Hugh River course. I reported the sighting to Bob Read and also to Don Haddon who both confirmed the identification and would have loved to have been there.

I emailed Jonny Schoenjahn, who keeps records of all Grey Falcon sightings for Birds Australia. He was quite excited by it and believes it to be a 2007 hatching because it still has black spots on its chest and the cere and eye ring are not as dark yellow as in a more mature bird.

I also contacted the ranger at Owen Springs. He had not seen it, but said he would be keeping his eyes open for it.

Just for Fun!

What is Rhondda thinking? Or suggest a suitable caption for this picture, taken on a recent trip to Painted Canyon.



Email to editor or send your idea to a committee member.

A Big Thank You

The Alice Springs Field Naturalist Club was treated to a free Nocturnal tour of the Free Range area at the Alice Springs Desert Park on April 22nd.

A great time was had by all that attended. Members and the committee of the Field Nats would like to extend a big thank you to Staff and Management of the Alice Springs Desert Park for the opportunity.

See next months Newsletter for a full report of the night.

And another thank you.....

Robbie Henderson and Emily Findlay would like to thank all their friends at the Field Naturalist Club for the beautiful flowers and well wishes on the arrival of their little boy Fynn.

Your kind thoughts added further joy to his arrival. We look forward to bringing him along to Field Nat adventures in the future.



An invitation to the opening of

Colours of the Centre

An exhibition by Alice Springs watercolourists
Cecilia Price and Jude Mapleson

at

The Residency, Parsons Street, Alice Springs
Sunday 10th May 2009
3:00pm to 5:00pm

Open daily 10:00am to 2:00pm
until Saturday 23rd May
(cash and local cheques only)

Support HERITAGE ALICE SPRINGS –coin donation
please

ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED
Minutes of General Meeting held at Olive Pink Botanic Garden
on Wednesday 8 April 2009

Open: President, Bob Read declared the meeting open at 7.35pm.

Present: 25 people as per attendance book.

Apologies: Sue Fraser, Leoni Read

Minutes of previous Meeting:

Moved for acceptance by Barb Gilfedder, seconded by Vicki Gordon. Accepted.

Matters Arising:

Ideas for constructive use of club funds- it was suggested that Mark Carter be asked if he needs extra funds to help organize Bird Week.

A thank you from Robbie and Emily for the card and flowers.

Treasurer's Report:

Bob read the report as presented by Rosalie. Cheques for the donations agreed at the last meeting have yet to be written.

Correspondence In:

Phone call- Svenn	Resignation from club as returning to Denmark
Western Australian Naturalists Club	The Naturalist News - April
NT Field Naturalists Club	Nature Territory – April
Sarah White -email	Night Visit to Desert Park on 22 April
Aust. Rural and Outback Awards	To Bob and guests, invite to launch on 16April, 9.30-10.30 at Crowne Plaza. RSVP 15 April

Correspondence Out:

Emily, Robbie and Fynn	Congratulations and welcome card and flowers
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General Business:

- Invitation to Australian Rural and Outback Awards- Bob can't go but any members interested in going and representing the club were invited to let Shirley know for RSVP purposes. Jenny Purdie and Connie Spencer are already going in another capacity.
- Robbie has offered to address a future meeting about his experiences in Papua New Guinea

Outings/Trips

- The Nocturnal tour at Desert Park will take place on Wednesday 22 April. There are 20 places available. Please contact Sarah to book your place.
- Easter trip to Newhaven. Meet at 9am on Friday 10 April just past Sargent Street.

Sightings:

- Barb had a great sighting of a Grey Falcon at Owen Springs! She was able to

take photos which she has sent to Jonny
Schoenjan <http://www.users.bigpond.com/jonnybird/greyfalcon.htm>, the 'Grey
Falcon specialist' (see
<http://www.users.bigpond.com/jonnybird/greyfalcon.htm>).
<http://www.users.bigpond.com/jonnybird/greyfalcon.htm>

- Barb – a Swamp harrier at the Sewerage Ponds
- Kaye- saw her first Channel-Billed Cuckoo a couple of weeks ago! The consensus of the meeting was that the CBC's have now left the area.

Next Meeting: Wednesday 13 May 2009

Note taker: Rhondda
Supper: Kaye
Gate: Jenny

Meeting closed at 7.50 pm.