



ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

June 2009 Newsletter



Black-footed rock wallabies *Petrogale lateralis*. Photo R. Breen

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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

Wednesday 10 June, Fiona Walsh of CSIRO and Veronica Dobson, "Anpererrentye: relationships between bush foods, creation laws, people, country and all things". This will include a 14 minute DVD, introduction and questions.

Wednesday 8 July - "*Birds and fire in mulga*" - Adam Leavensly, (scientist with Bushfires Council)

Wednesday 12 August, Annual General meeting and members night.

TRIPS/ ACTIVITIES

6 – 8 June 2009 Three day trip to "Mac Clark Conservation Reserve" and *Acacia pickardii* valley, Andado Station. Contact: Connie Spencer on 8952 4694

Sat 13th June 09 Woodlands Trail Simpsons Gap area meet Flynn Grave 7.30 a.m. sharp 3/4 day walk bring water, food, hat, sturdy walking shoes. Contact Kaye Percy Ph 89523405. About 15 km, easy walking.

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. About 9 km return, some steep rocky sections.

11-12 July 2009 Hugh Gorge and Birthday Waterhole with two options-

1. Arrive early on Saturday morning, leave vehicles at Birthday Waterhole and do an over-night walk to Hugh Gorge. (Section 5 of Larapinta Trail).

2. Arrive later on Saturday and camp at Hugh Gorge (or arrive early on Sunday morning) and do a day walk into Hugh Gorge and back and then ferry Trail walkers back to Birthday Waterhole.

Leader Nick, details to be finalized.

Sat 18 July 2009 Dawn on Spencer Hill. Leader Rosalie. Meet 6.30am Gosse St playground.

NEXT NEWSLETTER

The deadline for the next newsletter is **Friday 26th June**. Please send your contributions to Emily Findlay – robbiemily@hotmail.com

May Speaker – Oil Palm & Deforestation in Papua New Guinea

The May presentation was a break from arid zone issues and focused on the deforestation occurring across the Torres Strait in PNG. Speaker, Robbie Henderson from Live & Learn Environmental Education, has been working with Pacific Island communities since 2004.

Robbie showed various maps and photographs of PNG (focusing on the West New Britain region), which highlighted its incredible forest and marine bio-diversity. He also spoke about the people and their customs that depend heavily on the natural environment. The majority of people in PNG live a subsistence life, practicing 'shifting agriculture' in the forest and relying on forests and fringing reefs for food, building materials, medicines and cultural resources. The forests also play a critical role in protecting sensitive water resources.

However, Robbie also spoke about the causes of rapid deforestation in West New Britain, which includes logging, conversion to agriculture and in particular Oil Palm. A variety of photos were shown of Oil Palm, demonstrating how it is grown in monoculture. Images from Google Earth showed how extensive areas of lowland rainforest have been cleared for this cash crop.

On a positive note, Robbie mentioned a number of initiatives designed to assist communities to make informed decisions about land use, hopefully leading to more sustainable development. One of the most promising opportunities for cash poor rural people in PNG is in the form of emerging carbon markets for avoided deforestation. At present approximately 20% of annual global CO2 emissions come from deforestation in the tropics. Communities can now receive income for establishing conservation areas (thereby protecting the carbon reservoir) and also finance sustainable community development initiatives.

More on Oil Palm...

May 13, 2009 By Earth's Newsdesk, a project of Ecological Internet (EI) <http://www.ecoearth.info/newsdesk/>

Over-developed, over-populated, and land and water scarce Asian and Middle East nations embark upon global land grab to produce food and agrofuels; threatening global human rights, rainforest and other natural ecosystems, and regional and global ecological sustainability. Deadly global ecological issues require global citizens to unite in escalating protest action!

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Relatively rich countries in Asia and the Middle East, short of food and water at home, have leased or purchased more than 20 million hectares of farmland in Africa and Latin America, equal to 25 percent of Europe's farmland. This global "land grab" by foreign governments and companies is a result of last year's food crisis and a shortage of arable land

and water. About one-quarter of these investments are for biofuel plantations. Ecological Internet's current global campaign against Malaysian oil palm plantations in the Amazon rainforests [1] fits within the context of this larger trend.

Malaysia's federal land agency will soon break ground on a joint venture with a Brazilian firm to establish 30,000-100,000 hectares of oil palm plantations in the heart of Brazil's Amazon rainforest. Sime Darby, a Malaysian palm oil producer, will invest \$800 million for 200,000 hectares (500,000 acres) of palm oil and rubber plantations in Liberia. "It is increasingly difficult to acquire arable plantation land in Asia and thus it is imperative that new frontiers be sought to meet increasing demand," said Ahmad Zubir Murshid, chief executive of Sime Darby. "Sime Darby will also have the first mover advantage over future entrants into Liberia in terms of securing choice land."

"This flood of land grabs by emerging nations, mostly of land under local customary land tenure, is eerily reminiscent of past and ongoing European and U.S. Colonial practices," states Dr. Glen Barry, Ecological Internet's President, who is a practicing Political Ecologist and hold a Ph.D. in Land Resources. "We are witnessing the intensification of social turmoil caused by climate change, land and water scarcity, and over-population and inequitable consumption. Until these root causes of global ecosystem collapse are addressed, there is no chance of achieving equitable and just global ecological sustainability."

NOCTURNAL DESERT PARK TRIP

By Rhondda Tomlinson

Thank you Sarah for organizing our unforgettable tour of the Desert Park Nocturnal Area in April. I was lucky to be one of the twenty of the Field Naturalist Members able to go on the tour.

We all gathered at the public entrance where we were greeted by the staff and given a talk on how and why this area had been set up to breed endangered species. In most cases where species have become endangered and breeding programs have become necessary, it is a result of the invasion of feral cats, foxes and rabbits. Here in Alice Springs the dingoes also can present a problem.

It was decided to divide us into two groups one going one way and the other going the other and cross over in the middle of the walk. We were issued with red head light torches and given some important instructions on how to use them and not to dazzle our co-walkers when we look at or speak to one another.

Off we set up the trail behind the restaurant. We would be only going into a small section of the fenced off area but it was hoped we would encounter some of the animals. I chose to hold my torch in my hand. Our guide had a red light spotlight searching the surrounding bush and soon we were all standing still taken by the sight of Mala loping around in the distance under the shrubbery. It was not in the least

concerned with us and we were able to watch it for a few minutes. Moving on it took a little while for our next sighting. The mounds that had been built for the Bilby nestings were pointed out. I was taken by the town light reflections on the MacDonnell Ranges. The ranges appeared to look like dimly lit snow mountains looming above us that reminded me of sights I had seen in Antarctica. All of a sudden we stopped and there was a Brush-tailed Bettong happily doing its own thing. I think this was just after we passed the halfway meeting of the other group. I did not take my camera so I had to rely on scanning a photo from “Key Guide to Australian Mammals” by Leonard Cronin and Illustrated by Marion Westmacott.



Bettongia penicillata

Nearing the end of the walk and seeing the lights of the other group we spied a couple of Mala and then all together there were four just going on with life and not caring about our adventure. The Bettong and Mala look similar but have different behavioural patterns.

The Bettongs are nocturnal night browsers on grasses as well as digging up roots and tubers.

The Mala is extinct in the wild on mainland Australia. It is also a night browser on perennial grasses, grass seeds and bulbs of sedges. They have been known to eat insects during dry periods.

This is a recommend tour to take your visitors on as varying weather conditions and seasons present a new and different experience.

The Desert Park now has this tour on a regular basis and you should contact them for cost and booking information.

A WALK ON THE WILDSIDE

By Kaye Percy

Six adventure seekers some still yawning
ringnecks and pied butcher birds
greet the new day dawning
along the bank of Todd River we go
ant tunnels on river gums
rock wallabies atop Spencer hill move slow

crossing Todd River rubbish everywhere what a shame
rufous whistler and zebra finches sighted
now a climb up the side of a hill
intriguing rock formations some sounding hollow
further along MacDonnell cycads & variegated fairy wrens
to follow
up, over in & around we go
tortoise rock, chefs hat to our right
balancing & mushroom rocks to our left
rocks forming railway tracks leading us back to Alice
all in your backyard

WIGLEY'S WATERHOLE

By Rhondda Tomlinson

I should firstly apologise to all who took part on this walk and thank everyone as well. We did not get very far into a very enjoyable walk. We were starting to see a good variety of birds plants and the storm damaged hail pitted trees from late 2008 that Rosalie was pointing out to us. I slipped on some sand on the rocks and was unable to continue on. Unfortunately the walk was abandoned and we very slowly we returned to the vehicles. I was happily taking photos and generally enjoying and looking forward to what lay ahead as I had not been to this part of the Todd River before. I love water reflections and I have called this photo Wigley's Waterhole, Todd River Reflections.



I hope this walk can happen again in the near future. Thank you everyone for your concern and assistance and Rosalie for putting so much time and effort into organizing the walk.

WIGLEY'S WATERHOLE

By Rosalie Breen

Wigley's is a quite spectacular area with rugged red cliffs a variety of trees and shrubs and grasses and of course the Todd river winding around among the rocks with the sandy waterhole, and then upstream where we walked lots of clear waterholes which was a great attraction for lots of different birds.

It was slow progress apart from the rocks, as the birds with binoculars to eyes had a wonderful time spotting and sharing their identifications. I was impressed with a wedge-tailed eagle which was being harassed by kites and which settled into a small tree having a bit of difficulty folding its wide wings down through the branches.

Barb Gilfedder provided this list which just proves what a good place Wigley's is to visit.

Bird list

Yellow-rumped Thornbill	Singing Honeyeater
Willie Wagtail	Variegated Fairy-wren
Brown Falcon	Wedge-tailed Eagle
Nankeen Kestrel	Black kite
White-plumed Honeyeater	Whistling Kite
Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater	Hobby
Grey-headed Honeyeater	Brown Goshawk

WALLABIES IN THE MORNING

By Rosalie Breen

Now that the nights are cool the black-footed wallabies sit themselves on the rocks facing to the morning sun, generally with their backs to the sun and their very long tails dangling down or sometimes tucked under so they stick out in front of them. They sit and dream waiting for the sun to rise and to be warmed up before they go back to bed in the caves and crevices of their rocky range country.

They feed at dawn and dusk on a range of native grasses, and buffel grass when nothing else is available, and low shrubs. They consider orange spade flower a particular delicacy. Buffel is a concern if it replaces the majority of their food plants. When feeding they don't venture far from their rocky protection as they are quite timid, and water requirements are mostly met from their food.

They can breed at any time of the year, with joey staying in the pouch for about six months. Droppings are usually in communal areas, the scat being small, one centimetre, black when fresh and generally pointed at one end.

Black-footed rock wallabies (*Petrogale lateralis* [MacDonnell Ranges Race] if you are scientific) are small,

agile, greyish-brown, with distinctive black markings on their face, paws and long furry tail. The tail always looks even longer than their body length. At about half a metre tall, they are smaller than the euros which also live in this habitat of the MacDonnell Ranges near Alice Springs. Formerly quite widespread and numerous they now have the status Vulnerable, but can be seen at Simpson's Gap, Standley Chasm and southern Telegraph Station hills. Spencer Hill is one stronghold and as it is out of the National Parks system people need to be mindful of minimum disturbance and not to allow dogs on the hill.

Reference: Threatened Species Network Fact Sheet, personal observations.

Volunteers needed for Red Centre Bird Week

This year between 19th and the 17th September is Red Centre Birdweek- the first and only desert birdwatching festival in the southern hemisphere. The event is being pulled together by a team of diverse volunteers brought together by our love of all things feathered. A range of events are on the cards ranging from dawn 'birds before work' guided birdwatching events at locations near town to 'The Great Red Centre Bird Race' - a twitchathon where teams race to see the most species in 24hrs! Birdweek is also being supported by Alice Springs Desert Park who will be hosting their own daily program of unmissable bird spectaculars. Birdweek is receiving support from Birds Australia, Territory Discoveries, Tourism NT, Olive Pink Botanic Garden, Ozzie's Outback Adventures, Trek Larapinta and others. A full program of what is on offer will be available soon.

If you would like to **volunteer** to assist organise or hold any of the events before or during Red Centre Birdweek, or if you'd like to join a team for the Bird Race please get in touch with Mark Carter on 0447 358045- NB: Bird knowledge not essential!

Rabbit Scan

The Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre is running "RabbitScan" throughout May (and beyond). They are trying to determine the distribution and density of rabbits in Australia. We know that rabbits are coming back after more than a decade significant relief through calicivirus. When we look, we are finding populations further north than our current maps indicate and in great densities in some coastal areas, for example. The densities are important, because we have a greater awareness of the impact of low rabbit numbers on native vegetation.

RabbitScan only takes about an hour of your time, or less. You register a site on the RabbitScan site, then log rabbits seen, plant damage and indicators of rabbits (scats). The position can be entered either by clicking on the map or by GPS coordinates. If you do not see any rabbits that is still data.

Thanks for your help. Link to RabbitScan is on the following page.

[May 2009 is RabbitScan month](http://www.rabbitscan.net.au/joomla/index.php)

<http://www.rabbitscan.net.au/joomla/index.php>

More on Tarkine Wilderness....

ABC News Website Posted Sun May 24, 2009 10:35am AEST

A Tarkine wilderness lobby group has called for reform of Forestry Tasmania and questioned the agency's role in running tourism ventures.

Concerns about the State Government's plan to build a \$23 million tourist road through the Tarkine, in the north-west, were raised at a forum in Wynyard yesterday.

The project is expected to create 600 jobs and inject \$70 million a year into the north-west economy.

But there is concern the project could impact on the Tasmanian devil and jeopardise tourism by tarnishing the Tarkine's wilderness brand.

The Tarkine National Coalition's spokesman Phil Pullinger says some of the \$23 million should be going to local tourism ventures rather than Forestry Tasmania to build the road.

"We've got these tourism operators that are completely having to sink or swim on their own merits and we've got a government agency, which is supposed to be returning money to the taxpayer, swallowing up all of the public money," he said.

"That is a real problem and that is what we need clear reform on."

Forestry Tasmania's Ken Jeffreys says it would not gain from building the road.

"Forestry Tasmania will not make a brass razoo out of this \$23 million Tarkine drive, in fact it will lose access to some 650 hectares of forest that would otherwise be available for harvesting, so this is really a community service by Forestry Tasmania," he said.

Both Opposition parties are urging the government to drop the plan.

The Greens want the Tarkine made a national park or world heritage wilderness area.

Love in the Air for Lonely Dugong

ABC News Website Posted Thu May 28, 2009

An Opposition Senator has taken on a match-making role for a lonely male dugong on Cocos Island.

The Cocos (Keeling) Islands lie in the Indian Ocean between Australia and Sri Lanka and Country Liberal Party Senator Nigel Scullion says there is only one dugong on Cocos Island.

During a Senate estimates hearing, he suggested the National Parks Service could fly in some female dugongs from the Northern Territory.

"The dugong ... is a terrific tourist attraction, he's a young fellow or a middle-aged bloke who staggers around the lagoon. Fantastic bloke," he said.

"Last chat I had to him, he doesn't have any girlfriends and it says here that you have the power to take actions to implement a recovery plan.

"Do you think there's any scope for providing a couple of girlfriends?"

"We've got plenty in Kakadu, plenty in Borroloola."

Gerard Early from the Environment Department has agreed to consider the issues involved in moving dugongs to the Island.

Rare Xmas Island bat 'facing extinction'

ABC News Website Posted Thu May 28, 2009 6:32am AEST

Efforts to save a tiny Christmas Island bat from extinction have hit a setback, with a trial capture program failing.

The Federal Government is considering whether to approve the program for the remaining pipistrelle bats, which are believed to number fewer than 20.

But a trial with similar bats in the Northern Territory found it was nearly impossible to capture them and very difficult to keep them alive in captivity.

Director of National Parks, Peter Cochrane, has told a Senate estimates committee the trial only managed to capture two bats.

"One of those died, so we have one in captivity, which continues to survive but it is being hand-fed," he said.

Greens Senator Rachel Siewert says the Senate committee was told several other species on Christmas Island are also facing extinction.

"[It] highlights the absolute urgent need for a very significant recovery program," she said.

"[We need a] multi-species approach, a whole-system approach to Christmas Island.

"Otherwise, we are unfortunately facing extinction of a number of species on Christmas Island."

ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED
Minutes of General Meeting held at Olive Pink Botanic Garden
on Wednesday 13 May 2009

Open: President, Bob Read declared the meeting open at 9.00pm.

Present: 18 people attended.

Apologies: Jenny Purdie

Minutes of previous Meeting:

Accepted as circulated in newsletter without amendment

Matters Arising: None

Treasurer's Report:

Opening balance of \$3669.05.

Interest of \$3.04

Closing balance of \$3672.09.

Donations to Olive Pink Botanic Garden (\$500) and to Birds Australia (\$500) are still to be finalized and should show up on the next report.

Correspondence In:

Western Australian Naturalists Club The Naturalist News - May

NT Field Naturalists Club Nature Territory – May

Aust. Rural and Outback Awards Invitation to nominate people for awards.

Westpac bank Monthly statement

Correspondence Out: None

General Business:

- Request for a volunteer to do a written report on the nocturnal visit to Desert Park. Thank you to Rhonda for volunteering.
- Rhonda requested that the Western Australian Naturalists Club be added to our Newsletter mailing list. (To date she has been forwarding a Newsletter.)
- It is time for a committee meeting to plan for the second half of the year.

Outings/Trips

- For May and June mostly as per newsletter.
- Connie is co-ordinating the three day trip to Mac Clark Conservation Reserve over the Finke long weekend June 6-8. There will be a limit of 6 vehicles – on a first come best dressed basis. This is a 600km round trip and areas of bulldust are to be expected. Members were requested to let Connie know by email if they intended to go.
- May 16 Junction to Wigley Waterhole – meet Sargent St sign at 7.30am
- **Extra walk –13 June.** Kay volunteered to lead a 'Woodland Tail' – this will be a ¾ day walk. Meet at Flynn's Grave at 7.30am
- June 21 walk at Ellery Creek. Meet at 7.30am at Flynn's Grave

Sightings:

- Kay saw 5 Plovers on the oval on her way home to Sadadeen
- Rhonda regularly sees two Red-tailed Black Cockatoos at morning tea time. Others reported regular sightings of flocks at Heffernan Road and near Jim's Place on the Stuart Highway.
- Vicki saw a dead Wood swallow being harvested by a Butcher bird
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Next Meeting: Wednesday 10 June 2009

Note taker: Shirley

Supper: Connie

Gate:

Meeting closed at 9.20 pm.