



September 2010

## Alice Springs Field Naturalist Club Newsletter



One of Australia's most difficult to find birds, the Princess Parrot, turned up in 100s along a little used track between Kings Canyon and Browns Bore, south of Mount Liebig. Don Hadden was very excited about getting good photos of these beautiful birds. (see sightings)

**Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month** (except December & January) at 7:00 PM at Higher Education Building at Charles Darwin University. Visitors are welcome

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<http://www.alicefieldnaturalists.org.au>

## NEXT NEWSLETTER

The deadline for the next newsletter is **Monday 20<sup>th</sup> September**. Please send your contributions to Emily Findlay – [robbiemily@hotmail.com](mailto:robbiemily@hotmail.com).

### MEETINGS – Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club, held at CDU.

Wed 8 Sept. 7.00pm **Anthony Molyneux** from the Alice Springs Desert Park, talking about the Wedge-tailed Eagles that regularly nest on Mount Gillen.

Wed 13 Oct. 7.00pm **Michael Green** talking about the basic geology of the Alice Springs area.

### MEETING - Australian Plant Society, held at Olive Pink Botanic Garden

Wed 1 Sept, 7:30 pm **Jenny Purdie** talking on some of the plants of South Africa's Namaqualand and Cederberg

### FIELD TRIPS / ACTIVITIES

Sat 4 Sept **APS Geoff & Jenny Kenna's garden**, 3485 Greatorex Rd, open under Australia's Open Garden scheme, between 10am and 4.30pm Entrance \$6.

Sat 18 Sept **Eco-fair** at Olive Pink Botanic Garden. ASFNC will have a stall showing photos and books and a competition "Recognise the Raptors". You will be asked later to volunteer for the stall roster.

Sat 11 Sept **APS Andy Vinter** will guide a walk around two of the **Northside parks**, following on from his talk at the Plant Society meeting last month. Meet at the car park for the Rhonda Diano oval next to Braitling Primary School at 9.00am. Walk to Dixon Road Park to look around, then back to Maynard Park. Participants may like to help by pulling up a few weeds before going home. Finish by about 11.00am. Contact: Barb Gilfedder.

Sept 25 Day visit to Mallee Fowl site at Owen Springs. (To be confirmed). Leader: Colleen O'Malley.

Sept 25 to Oct 3 **Red Centre Bird Week** at Alice Springs Desert Park with many activities including "Introduction to Birdwatching" and "Nature Theatre Training" talks, Bird films, a 24 hour "Twitchathon" and "Birds before work" events at the Telegraph Station. For detailed information and timetable, visit [www.alicespringsdesertpark.com.au](http://www.alicespringsdesertpark.com.au).

Sat & Sun 2 & 3 Oct **APS Acacia latzii monitoring** sites for measuring seedlings and checking rain gauge. Leader: Connie Spencer.

Weekend 8 to 10 Oct **Hayes and Salt Springs**. The ranger coordinator at Santa Teresa, Ben Lambert and Jayne Brim Box are interested in building a bird species list for the springs. They are asking the Field Nats to help by joining them over a weekend to do some bird watching there. Some of the Santa Teresa rangers would also come out, as would Ben and Jayne, Meg Mooney and possibly Veronica Dobson. The springs are on the Santa Teresa Land Trust, and the area surrounding the springs is quite beautiful and interesting. It is an opportunity to visit a new area for the Field Nats. Please contact Barb Gilfedder if you wish to take part.

Sat 16 Oct A follow up to Michael Green's geology talk – tag along and view the geology of Alice Springs area with explanations from Michael. Contact Barb Gilfedder.

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## President’s Annual Report – presented at the AGM, August 2010

I did have some reservations when I agreed to stand for the Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club president position twelve months ago. However it has become less daunting than I expected. Many thanks to Bob Read for making it such a smooth changeover and also to many others for their support and encouragement!

I think the Club is going very well at present. We have lost a few members, but I think we have gained more than we have lost. We are also in a good financial position.

We have had some excellent speakers at our monthly meetings, and even those who don’t attend benefit from the good reports that members contribute to the newsletter. We are lucky having organizations like CSIRO, the Alice Springs Desert Park and other professional groups in town, with people who are happy to spend their time and energies educating and entertaining us. I have tried, where possible to link talks to trips, for example Peter Collins talk on migratory waders followed by a trip to the sewage ponds. This however doesn’t always work or we would all be in Antarctica now with Ashley Sparrow. I would like to thank you to members who pass on to me ideas for suitable speakers.

It has been another good year of excursions and activities – from the 4-day Easter camping trip to Newhaven to short walks close to town. It has been particularly pleasing to me to have other members organizing and leading walks. A special mention goes to Connie Spencer who has instigated several trips as joint ones with the local Australian Plants Society group - an arrangement that has worked well for both groups-. Also thank you to Colleen O’Malley, Meg Mooney and Rosalie Breen have each organized several trips. It is interesting that the more educational trips, such as behind the scenes tours at the Desert Park and the Natural History Museum are usually better attended, but all are enjoyable. It has also been pleasing to see more non-committee members attending planning meetings. I value everyone’s input.

Buying the laptop computer has made us more independent, not having to borrow equipment or ask speakers to bring their own laptop. It has also made Emily Findlay’s job as newsletter editor easier, and she has responded with fantastic-looking editions. Every month I get emails and comments about how good it is looking and also about the interesting content. Well done all you contributors!

While on the subject of the newsletter, I think an interesting development has been the multi-author trip reports which make for interesting reading. I have had positive feedback particular from members who don’t take part in trips.

The change of venue was a big decision for the Committee, but I believe it has worked well.

Thank you to all members of the Committee who have all performed their duties efficiently and who are always willing to help and support the club any way they can.



I still have concerns about our website. It contains valuable information particularly on our local birds and I often refer visiting birders to it. However the website does not link to other sites and I am still looking for a computer wiz who could improve this aspect of it.

I am looking forward to our next twelve months with lots more talks, walks and other educational trips. The bush is looking so wonderful at present after the repeated rain we have had. Plants that haven't been seen for years are showing up and flowering profusely along with the old favourites. The revived vegetation has led to bird and animal populations responding (how many clutches of chicks can a pair of Budgerigars have in a season?) and the Field Natters following everything with such excitement and enthusiasm. Well done everyone!

Barb Gilfedder

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## Members' Evening - August 11

### By Emily Findlay

I was lucky enough to negotiate a 'Baby Free' night which enabled me to attend this year's Field Nats AGM. Now granted, an AGM is not everyone's idea of a great way to spend a free night out, but the stories shared during the members' evening presentations were a highlight. I wanted to share a summary of them here for those of you who could not make it.

Barb put out the call in our last newsletter – *'Members please bring your photos of Natural History, Field Trips, Plants, Birds, Animals etc. to share, either on a disk or memory stick. Alternatively bring any interesting items'*.

Well we just about got all these bases covered by the five members' presentations.

Barb covered *'Natural History and Field Trips'* by sharing a selection of pictures from recent trips including the Bridal Path Walk. Highlights for me in the slideshow were the WA Bower Bird's bower, giving us a chance to get a close look at what the male thinks will win the heart of a female, his treasures included dry white bones, white rocks, empty cycad seeds and the odd ring pull. I also was impressed with the shot of Colleen assisting the love life of a Callitris by shaking a branch and dispersing pollen in a cloud of dust. You can see this and other pictures from the trip in the next newsletter story.

Jenny Purdie adequately covered *'Plants'* by sharing a selection of her plant slides. She had a wide variety of Eremophilas, Goodenias and some great shots of some juvenile Desert Oaks. The collection of slides reminded me of when I was studying a botany unit at university and I had a semester to put together a herbarium collection of 10 different species from 10 different pre-determined plant families. As a result I now know these 10 families very well – what a shame there are so many more to get to know.

*'Birds'* was covered by Beth Hansen who, although no longer living in Alice Springs, was able to join us for the AGM. Photos she showed of a recent visit to the Tarn Gorge area in southern France (near the Millau Bridge -- longest / highest in the world), included Vultures. Griffon and Black Vultures had been re-introduced to the Jonte R. tributary gorge, where they had been hunted out of existence. After long consultations with the farming community, they have been successfully re-introduced and there are now about 500 Griffons and 50 Black Vultures.

*'Animals'* was covered by other photos shared by Beth of Green Turtles laying eggs on North West Island (70km off Gladstone, QLD) but, most memorably in a fantastic poem written by Meg Mooney called 'Up Birthday Creek'. The poem is about a visit from a dingo while camping at Birthday Creek. My favourite part describes the dingo cautiously taking a look at the campers but keeping a safe distance away;

*"you padded quietly along the sandy creekbed  
towards us, keeping a handful of strides away,  
splashed through the silvery ribbon of creek  
and disappeared"*

This was only one of the lovely poems written by Meg which she shared with us on the evening and you can read another titled 'Birds' later in the newsletter.

'Alternatively bring any interesting item' was covered by Rosalie who brought a microscope and an algae sample. The algae were collected from pools in the creek line to Bridle Pass Lookout near Standley Chasm a couple of weeks ago. Through the microscope the algae could be seen magnified 400 times and it showed mostly filamentous types with long cells and differing chloroplasts (the green bit) within the cells, which aid in the identification of the algal genus. So it was a very interesting item indeed.

Overall it was a great night enjoyed by everyone. Well done to all members who made the effort to share with the rest of us. I think it is something we should do on a more regular basis.

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## Bridle Path Walk – 8 August

It was an interesting and slightly challenging for some, walk for nine Field Nats, from Standley Chasm up to Bridle Path Lookout.

**Margaret McDonell:** Sunday's walk started as we headed up the creek, clinking, clanking and clunking over the stones along its bed. And what splendid stones they are! A miscellany of shapes and colours and textures – such soft pink and grey, blue and lilac, black and near white, ochre and red and yellow, and quartz bouncing sunlight; with patterns of ripples and layers, bands and spots; some tumbled smooth and round as eggs, some freshly broken and jagged.

Amid the sounds of our walking were others – one less heard but very welcome: the trickle and tinkle of water flowing quietly between the rocks, and then there were the bird calls, singly and in chorus. Add to this the human cries of excitement at the discovery of another rare plant or fine specimen.

*Hakea grammatophylla*



*Baeckea polystemonea*

So many plants were in bloom, it was a glorious sight. My favourites were the strawberry pink *Hakea grammatophylla* and the heath starred with tiny white flowers (*Baeckea polystemonea*), both on the high part of the walk.



**Connie Spencer:** This was the second time this season that I have done this walk and thankfully this time at a much more leisurely pace carrying a day pack rather than a 15 kg overnight pack! What a treat! The scenery as always, spectacular but this time many more shrubs in flower and more water in the creek which is always a welcome sight in central Australia. It's so hard to pick a favourite; but, I'll go for the Round-leaf Wattle (*Acacia strongylophylla*) which lined the creek and travelled up the hillside. When not in flower it is just another prickly Acacia with spines on the end of the phyllodes which will get you if you brush up against it! But, what a superb plant when in flower. Large Brilliantly bright yellow flower heads gave it the wow factor for me



Round-leaf Wattle *Acacia strongylophylla*



**Barb Gilfedder:** One of the incidents that stuck in my mind was when Colleen noticed a Callitris with the male pollen bearing parts ready to release their pollen. She gently shook a branch and pollen dispersed like a cloud of dust.

She suggested we tasted the minute grains that landed on our hands, then she remembered all parts of the tree are poisonous as a defense against termites. It was a still morning, but a breathe of breeze came through and a large cloud of pollen drifted from another tree.



## BIRDS by Meg Mooney

Four birds are working  
the top end of a valley  
although it hardly seems like work  
as they float above the deep cut  
its steep slopes striped  
with rock, mallee and spinifex  
all glistening in the sun

the birds' grey wings curve gracefully  
back from their cinnamon bodies  
as they swoop and dip, tumble  
down towards the depths I can't see  
a ribbon of white creek bed  
maybe with water snaking along it  
after all the rain

then the woodswallows turn  
in neat little arcs, fly up again  
circle around just below  
where rock turns to sky  
sit on bare branches  
so I see their pale, silver-blue beaks

soon push off again, dark tails  
fanned  
to show the clean white tips  
with a black centre band  
I first saw on their cousins  
in the south decades ago

above this little valley  
the cliff woodswallows  
soar close to me, like their cousins  
in those other days

and I'm reminded of  
an easy companionship  
a lightness sailing ahead of me  
as I tramped across the country

**Colleen O'Malley: Bridle trail - by a nose.** For me this walk was memorable for the amazing array of flowery smells we were assailed with. Bubblegum scents from the candelabra flowers of *Indigofera basedowii* greeted us as we wandered along the

rocky creekline toward the start of the trail, these sweet tones were interspersed with tangy smells of crushed leaves of Native Lemongrass and the more medicinal scent of mushed up *Plectranthe*



*intraterraneus* leaves (which, incidentally, *Indigofera basedowii* dye your hands a bright yellowy-orange).

Further into the walk we were almost overwhelmed by the heady smells from heavily blossomed Hill Mulga (*Acacia macdonnelliensis*), and the perfumed wafts from cassias and clumps of Yellow Tails (*Ptilotus nobilis*) growing on the rocky slopes. A walk that will certainly stay strong in my memory because of all the olfactory cues we got to experience.





# Searching for Gabbro – a visit to the Pinnacle Mine - August 15

Report by Colleen O'Malley, photos by Barb Gilfedder

Walking back eighteen hundred million years in time over gabbros and granulites book-ended mafic phlogopite and smears of fleshy coloured feldspars into this other world of mulga woodland dense with thigh-high cattle bush and wafts of sweetly-scented Wild Parsnip and Mulla Mulla, in the company of Meg, her trusty geology map and lexicons of complicatedly-enticing rock terminology, thirteen of us headed into the Pinnacles mine north of The Gardens road on the way to Arltunga.



Wild Parsnip

Parking near a carefully-made ruined stone building littered with rusted refuse from an age before plastic and crazy consumerism, we picked through piled tailings of mica and abandoned bottles and tins before following an algae-puddled creek fringed with Ti-tree and cushioned with mossy fairy gardens up into the hills.

Jim gallantly ferried our backpacks and lunchtime billy up the rutted 4WD track while the rest of us dallied over picturesque trackside settings of silver-leaved *Indigoferas* laden with crimson pea flowers, four types of delicately scented *Cassias*, and fleeting glimpses of Pied Honeyeaters interspersed with snatches of melodious Western Gerygone song. Gwenny skipped on ahead espying shiny treasures with her sharp seven-year-old eyes while Meg and Rosalie tested each other's memory of igneous creations and crystalline structures, and Denise and Margaret tried out their recently learned collection of bird and plant names.

Paced by the steepness of the hill we had plenty of time to exclaim over misplaced Coolabah trees, exquisitely etched purple-flowered *Goodenias*, cymes of bright white *Heliotropium* flowers, swathes of medicinally-scented *Eremophila acrida*, rocky glades of mulga grasses, and bursts of red-flowered *Eremophila latrobei*. Not to be outdone, the birds also put on a gallant display – flickers of Red-capped Robins and their more subdued two-toned hooded cousins, a fleeting show of aerobatics from a visiting Grey Fantail, an explosion of Brown Quail from amongst the sedgy creekline, and the background boom of an invisible Common Bronzewing.

Close to the top of the hill we deviated off into the remnants of a WWII mining village with collapsed wire-tied wooden hut frames and once elegant stone steps which provided a sunny lunch time rest area. After lunch we wandered amongst the deep mine shafts – some still with wooden gantries up above and a good fifteen seconds before a stone hit the bottom – fossicking through mica tailings for gabbro, amphibolites and garnet-rich rocks, or through rusty scrap heaps of flattened oil tins faintly embossed with “Penrite” or “Shell”, discarded tin buttons and broken bottles.

Gavan generously shared his fossilised centipede-in-a-bottle with a delighted Gwenny, and we left behind a beautiful altar of long-neck vases filled with flowers, offerings of rusty treasures and crystals for all the ghosts of miners past.

We wandered our way back down the hill, back into our own time and then back to the bitumen to hurtle through time zones till we hit home amongst the Heavitree – almost a youngster by comparison – at a mere twelve hundred million years old!

Thanks to Meg for sharing all her geology know-how with Barb, Jim, Rosalie, Gavan, Kaye, Meredith, Margaret, Maureen, Denise, Jenny, Gwenny and me.





## Assassin Bug

We found this very distinctive bright red and black Assassin Bug on the walk to Bridle Path Lookout. Chris Palmer confirmed the identification and added more information.

*"It's Poecilobdallus formosus, a widespread species found through arid WA, NT and into inland and coastal Qld. It tends to sit on top of flowers and wait with its front legs outstretched to catch something that lands on the flower to feed on nectar. It's a most attractive species, isn't it? The immatures are also very attractive. They do the same thing as the adults, sitting on flowers."*



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## Fat-tailed Psuedantechinus

Connie Spencer found this little mousey thing under a log she was collecting for the camp fire, when we were on Argadargada Station. I forwarded the photo to Jo Vander Reidjen at the Alice Springs Desert Park and it went on to several others before Lisa Harris sent me this reply.



*"Anthony forwarded your photo to several staff on zoology for their thoughts. I was fairly certain it wasn't a Stripe-faced Dunnart and showed it to Pete Nunn. He confirmed it as a Fat-tailed False Antechinus (Pseudantechinus macdonnellensis) which is a rocky range dweller and asked if there were hills nearby to where you found it. In this case the carrot-shaped tail gives it away as Dunnart tails do not get that fat. Excellent spotting!"*

There were some low hills nearby, but the find was in Mulga woodland. Thank you everyone.

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## Lone Dingo Discounts

The Lone Dingo shop in Todd Mall sells a big range of walking and outdoor gear. They have a club that members of the public can join for \$20 and then obtain a 10% discount. If you tell them you are in the Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club you can join the Lone Dingo club free. You must register with name, phone number and e-mail address before you buy. They also have occasional super specials, heavily discounted only for members of their club



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## SIGHTINGS

Please let Barb Gilfedder know of any interesting birds or animals seen locally for inclusion in this list.

Echidna	21 July	Argadargada Station	Steve Sinclair and Alan Weeks
Great Egrets,	29 July	Alice Springs Sewage Ponds	Barb Gilfedder
Princess Parrots in their hundreds. (Many interstate birders were later disappointed when CLC refused permits to visit this Aboriginal land)	August 2-6	Between the Mereenie Loop road and Browns Bore, South of Mt Liebig	Don Hadden, etal.
Cattle Egrets, Nankeen Night Heron, Wood Sandpipers. (The Wood SPs marked the beginning of the arrival of the migratory waders. The Cattle Egrets, well out of their normal range, stayed at the ponds till time of writing this 22.8.10)	6 August	Alice Springs Sewage Ponds	Chris Watson
Common Sandpiper, Common Greenshank, Wood Sandpiper, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Cattle Egrets	20 August	Alice Springs Sewage Ponds	Michael Green
Common Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper, Brown Goshawk, Horsfields Bronze Cuckoo, Crimson Chats	22 August	Alice Springs Sewage Ponds	Barb Gilfedder
Major Mitchell Cockatoos	Mid-August	Owen Springs Reserve	Miranda and Albert Sage

## SUBSCRIPTIONS NOW DUE

Membership fees are due as from the Annual General Meeting in August. Prompt payment would be appreciated, paid at meeting nights, posted to the Treasurer or direct into the club account at Westpac BSB No.35303 and Account No 100981.

**Please put your name in the reference so we know who has paid.**

If your personal details have changed please indicate, especially email address. New members please fill in the complete form.

**Subscriptions:** Family \$30. Family Concession \$25. Individual \$20. Individual Concession \$15.  
Life member 10 times annual subscription. Interstate past member - newsletter only \$10 .

<b>MEMBERSHIP FORM</b>	
Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Inc. PO Box 8663, Alice Springs NT 0871	
Name(s) .....	
Address: .....	
Phone: (home) ..... (work) ..... (mobile) .....	
Email (print carefully) .....	
Renewal or new membership .....	
Payment enclosed \$ .....	

**ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED**  
**Minutes of General Meeting held at Higher Education Building, Charles Darwin University**  
**on Wednesday 11 August 2010**

**Open:** President, Barb Gilfedder declared the meeting open at 7.35pm.

**Present:** 17 members and 5 visitors attended and there were 10 apologies as per attendance book.

**Minutes of previous Meeting:** The minutes of the July meeting had been circulated as part of the newsletter. The Minutes were accepted as circulated.

**Correspondence In:**

Western Australian Naturalists Club  
NT Field Naturalist Club  
National Trust. (NT)

Naturalist News – August 2010  
Nature Territory – August 2010  
Invitation to talk by Dr Ken Johnson on 15 August

**Correspondence Out:**

Thank you to Ashley Sparrow, last month's speaker

**Treasurer's Report:**

There is a current balance of \$1457.59  
Accepted.

**General Business:**

- Reminder about the planning meeting that will be held on Sunday 22 August at 2pm. The venue is Olive Pink Botanic Garden. All members are invited to attend.
- The Eco Fair is on 18 September. The club is running a stand and members will be invited to volunteer to take a turn running the stand.
- Fees. The club's BSB and bank account number will be given in the newsletter so that members will have the option to pay their club fees by direct transfer. The payee is requested to give their name as the reference so that the treasurer knows who made the payment.
- We now have 2 small containers for supper supplies, so the mugs used during the supper break will be staying at the meeting venue in future.
- Barb informed members that the 'Lone Dingo' store in Todd Mall will give ASFNC members loyalty club privileges (usually a 10% discount) without requiring the usual joining fee.

**Outings/Trips/Activities**

15 August	Day trip to Old Mica Mine site off Gardens Road.
22 August	A.S.F.N.C. planning meeting. 2pm at Olive Pink Botanic Garden. All welcome.
18 Sept	Eco Fair at Olive Pink Botanic Garden

**Next Meeting:** Wednesday 8 September 2010..

**Note taker:** Sarah White

**Supper:** Jenny Purdie

**Meeting closed** at 7.55 pm.