



October 2010

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



Inland Bearded Dragon – *Pogona vitticeps* Photo Jenny Purdie

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

Subscriptions Due Now
See page 7 for payment options.

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NEXT NEWSLETTER

The deadline for the next newsletter is **Friday 22nd October**. Please send your contributions to Emily Findlay – robbiemily@hotmail.com.

MEETINGS

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

Wed 10 Nov **Speaker to be advised.**

Australian Plants Society

Wed 6 Oct In lieu of a speaker, walk around the Olive Pink Botanic Garden to check on the response of the plants to all the rain. Meet at 5.00pm at the garden or come when you can and join in. Finish 6.30pm.

Wed 3 Nov **Tim Leane** will talk about Rainforests.

FIELD TRIPS / ACTIVITIES. (See box below for contact numbers and email addresses.)

Sat 2 Oct **Eco-fair** at Olive Pink Botanic Garden 8.30am to 2.00pm. ASFNC will have a stall showing photos and books and a competition “Recognise the Raptors”. This is our only public event of the year. Please support it. There will also be several local native plant stalls - a good time to replenish your garden after all the wonderful rain. Lots of other demonstrations, stalls and activities.

Wkend 9 & 10 Oct **Hayes and Salt Springs** trip with Jayne Brim Box is fully subscribed

Sat Oct 16 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.

Sun Oct 24 Walk near **Ooraminna Homestead**. Meet at the Information bay opposite the Old Timers on South Stuart Highway at 7.30am. Walk can be 8km or less depending on the weather. There should be lots of flowers and birds. Contact Rosalie Breen.

Sat 6 Nov Bring your own BBQ or picnic tea at **Simpsons Gap**, followed by a hunt for reptiles and amphibians in the Gap with Robbie Henderson. Contact Barb Gilfedder.

Wkend 20-21 Nov Overnight or day trip to **Two-mile Waterhole** near Glen Helen. Look at native fish in the Finke River with Robbie Henderson. There should be lots of birds too. Contact Barb Gilfedder.

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September Speaker, Anthony Molyneux: Wedge-tailed Eagles at the Desert Park

Report by Sarah White

Anthony Molyneux came to talk to us about the history of Wedge-tailed Eagles at the Desert Park and share his stories of watching a rarely seen part of the Eagles' life. Wedgies have been in the stars of the Desert Park's Nature Theatre show since the Park's opening. In 2007 the resident pair of wild Wedgies built a nest in the range above the Desert Park and started to become increasingly aggressive towards the Park's captive birds. As frustrating as this was for the keepers it gave them an amazing opportunity to observe the daily activities of the Wedgies as they built their nest and raised their young. In 2008, opportunities for Wedgie watching became even more tantalising as the pair built a new nest above the Nature Theatre. This was the perfect chance to film something never caught on camera before, sibling rivalry between Wedgie chicks. Anthony called in nature photographer and film maker, David Curl, to capture the drama in the nest.



Wedge-tailed Eagles exhibit a breeding strategy that in some ways may seem strange, but provides the parents with the ultimate insurance policy on their breeding success. Females lay 2 eggs a few days apart. The first egg will usually hatch 2 days before the other creating a situation where one chick will always be more developed than the other. The normal outcome of this is that only one of these chicks will survive to fledge unless conditions are exceptionally good. This breeding strategy is not seen in other Australian birds of prey, but is seen in Australian Pelicans. The chance that Anthony and David jumped at was to film what happens in the nest to lead to the survival of one chick and the demise of the other.

A bird hide was built on the range just above the nest, allowing a clear view of the chicks. The trick with the bird hide was to fool the eagles into thinking they weren't being watched. So working on the assumption that eagles can't count, 2 people would walk up to the hide and one would come back down.

The chicks hatched 2 days apart and Anthony and David soon saw signs of sibling rivalry. The older "Chick 1" was always fed first and "Chick 2" would get whatever was left over. Early on, Chick 2 was exhibiting submissive behaviour at meal times. Anthony told us that this pair of Wedgies is a bit different in their hunting behaviours. Most Wedgies will eat mainly kangaroos or wallabies, however this pair had a diet predominately consisting of birds. When they nested on the Southern side of the range, Anthony observed them hunting the crows which forage around the tip. On the Northern side of the range, they have been observed hunting galahs around Albrecht oval. Wedgie chicks are messy eaters and leftovers from previous meals often litter the nest and the ground underneath. Amongst bones found in and around the nest, Anthony has found the remains of Tawny Frogmouths, crows, galahs and wallaby feet.

The first injuries on Chick 2 were spotted when it was 41 days old. Anthony observed a small injury to its eye. Despite this, Chick 1 still seemed tolerant of Chick 2's presence, aggression was never actually observed. Chick 1's dominance was clear however. It occupied the dominant position in the centre of the nest while Chick 2 was often seen stumbling around the edge of the nest, having trouble balancing.

Chick 2 died at the age of 42 days. Unfortunately neither Anthony nor David were able to observe the events that led to its death. So for now we still don't know whether Chick 2 succumbed to aggression from its older sibling or whether it was too weak from lack of food.

It's possible that Chick 2 saw its sibling as another source of food, but the view of the nest wasn't clear enough to confirm



this.

The adult Wedgies were good parents and were able to bring a steady stream of food to the rapidly growing Chick 1. The Nature Theatre staff were lucky enough to observe something amazing. The female managed to catch the Nature Theatre's captive Black-breasted Buzzard. Staff watched as she attempted to take him to the nest to feed the chick. Luckily enough, he managed to get free and was found not long after and taken to the vet for some much needed attention.

The chick was fully feathered at the age of 74 days and left the nest (fledged) at 84 days. It wasn't seen much after that. Anthony told us however that Wedgie chicks hang around with their parents for at least 3 months after fledging, learning how to fly and hunt. They eventually get kicked out of their parents' territory before the next breeding season comes around.

Unfortunately for us, the Wedgies have nested on the Southern side of the range for the last 2 years. So we're still waiting to get the evidence on what happens to the younger chick.

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A Fog Bow by Rosalie Breen

I always knew Spencer Hill was special, and during the foggy morning we had on August 25th it was crowned with this fog bow or white rainbow. It is formed in the same way as a rainbow in that light is reflected inside tiny water droplets and emerges to form a large arc (or circle). But because the droplets in a fog are much smaller than rain, less than 0.5mm, they cannot refract the light to break it up into typical rainbow colours, only reflect it back as white or as overlapping pale colours that cancel each other out. Sometimes the fog bow has a faint reddish tinge on the top edge and faint blue on the bottom. The size of the bow is dependent on the droplet size, smaller size giving a paler, thicker and smaller radius bow. To see the bow the observer must have her back to the sun and the sun fairly low on the horizon. I saw it round 7.30, with sunrise being about ten minutes to 7.



Because of the very high humidity of the air that morning (from all the recent rain), dew point, when the water vapour condenses to form water droplets, was reached with only a small amount of overnight cooling from the earth (this enhanced by the clear sky). This created the fog or low stratus cloud right to ground level and is termed a radiation fog. Again because the drops are so small, light is reflected off in all directions causing the white opacity. As the morning progressed the sun warmed the air allowing it to hold more water as vapour so the fog disappeared.



Early that morning the thick fog so quiet and still, was quite eerie. I could face the sun and see the trees as silhouettes before a glowing white backdrop. Everywhere there were sparkling cobwebs and the subdued sunlight cast a special light over the wet shrubs, grasses and rocks. From the top of Spencer Hill I could see Mt Gillen and other peaks showing as islands in a vast white sea. It was changing all the time, as the sun rose higher the town was revealed again among the wafts of white as the fog moved, and eventually flowed to the north and I thought I had better go back home and to school. I was late but I didn't care. I had had such a unique and wonderful experience.



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Spencer Valley Landcare Field Day 11 September.

Report by Rosalie Breen

What a great morning it was, and it did not rain! Lots of people turned up around 7.30am at Gosse St Playground and armed with mattocks trooped off to the valley to attack the buffel grass. The Spencer Valley group have spend much of the last year trying to clear buffel from around the base of trees and along tracks to create fire breaks. This has been achieved through physically removing grass tussocks, spraying using the trailer tank or backpacks with weedicide, and slashing. Those at the morning could see the results of these efforts with the emergence of many native plants in the cleared areas. There were Lepidiums, *Wahlenbergia* (blue bells), lots of daisies including billy buttons, blue *Brachycome*, yellow everlastings, both blue and pink flowering *Erodium*, and even a parakeelya or two. And more which I could not identify. Most not in full flower yet, but wait a few more weeks.

The group, with much appreciated volunteers, earlier in the year also removed the boxing glove cactus which had infested the south east corner. Pat Hodgens, a Park ranger has plans to fight the same cactus which has spread in the adjoining Telegraph Station.

At 8.30 Geoff Miers broadcast his Gardening Show, and Buffel Busters returned for a pancake breakfast provided by ALEC, and found even more people attending. Then we had a few speakers including Andy Vinter, explaining Landcare in Alice which oversees small local groups like Spencer Valley and Northside. And advertising the website www.alicespringslandcare.com where you can get information and notice of activities.

Lastly Dick Kimber, renowned local historian, took a large group of people around the park to talk about the history of Spencer Hill area mainly emphasizing its rich cultural significance to the Aboriginal people. It was very entertaining and interesting as usual.

So now we need more volunteers to continue the work here so Spencer Valley can continue be a beautiful oasis for walking. I was so pleased to see so many Field Naturalists come to help and show their interest. Thank you.

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Welcome to new members.

We welcome our new members and hope to see you all at meetings and on trips.

Megg Kelham, Chris Watson, Denise Thomas, Jenny and Anthony Molyneux, Pamela Keil and Michael Laflambe, John and Layne Stevenson, Cecily Sutton and Neil and Leigh Woolcock.

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Actinobole or What's in a Name – Ugly one?

One of the plants that have appeared in Spencer Valley is a small, prostrate, grey-woolly forb, growing in small clumps or scattered plants on bare ground. Its name is *Actinobole uliginosum*. (No not ugly!). How you pronounce it is debatable. Also called flannel cudweed, camel dung, cotton weed, it belongs to the daisy family. I think it is quite attractive, small and compact, with tiny insignificant yellow flowers, surrounded by many woolly bracts. It only appears after good cool season rains, just like now.

When the seeds are mature, the pappus bristles suddenly reflex and shoot the fruit out of the plant, "like a firecracker". This can also happen if rain falls on the fruits. I have not noticed it for about ten years, so make sure you spot it as I think it is special.



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Up Birthday Creek – a poem by Meg Mooney

at first I thought your eyes had the height of a human
as I looked from our camp upstream into the darkness
of the gorge – my heart raced
but then you formed the faint outline of a dog
your eyes reflecting yellow-green from my torch

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

as I was going to bed
I saw eyes glittering close by
but they were a warm orange-red –
a rock wallaby clambering around

it wasn't till after midnight you returned –
or was it you? –
no slinking around camp
nuzzling tins and mugs
like I'm used to
even walking quietly around swags
that wouldn't have surprised me

but you howled and barked –
though dingoes aren't supposed to –
didn't leave when my friend
threw the stones holding down his tent pegs

you paced between our tents, growling
I laid low, glad there was fabric between us
you kept up your protests til my friend got up
picked up a stick from our ebbing fire

then you skulked of
having made it clear
for the sake of your pups
that humans rarely visited
and did not own this place

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Gardens in Focus Photography Competition

We recently received this information on a national photography competition.

Friends of The Botanic Gardens Sydney is proud to present the Gardens in Focus photography competition.

Capture a magical moment in an Australian Botanical Garden – First Prize \$8000.

Open to all photographers, professional, amateur and students from around Australia.
We invite you to show off your talents. Take photos of plants, people and events in any Botanic garden around Australia. There are 9 categories to enter. Your pictures can reflect the changing seasons in your favourite Botanic garden or capture the essence of what makes that garden special. Plants up close or trees from a distance!

The competition aims to showcase the unique qualities of our Botanic Gardens.

There are great prizes to be won and winning photos will be showcased in a major Botanic Gardens display early in 2011.

Olive Pink Botanic Garden and Alice Springs Desert Park are both local Botanic Gardens, where you could take photos.

Competition Closes 10 December, 2010. For more information visit www.gardensinfocus.com.au

SIGHTINGS

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

Lots of Lemon Migrant Butterflies	Sept		Bob Read (Robbie & Emily saw a huge flock at Jessie Gap)
Rainbow Bee-eaters are back	Sept		Vicki Gordan (and others)
Bearded Dragon	Sept	In gardens in Golf Course and Stirling Heights.	Jenny Purdie and Sue Fraser both reported seeing them in their gardens.
Western Bowerbird	Sept	Another garden bird on the East side. This one checking out the baby capsicums, presumable to decorate his bower.	Rhondda Tomlinson
Grey Shrike-thrush	Sept	Araluen area	Morgan Flint - very vocal in his garden
Australian Pratincole	13 Sept	Sewage Ponds	Barb Gilfedder
Spotted Harrier	26 Sept	Ross Highway East of Corroboree Rock	Emily Findlay & Robbie Henderson
Buff-banded Rail	27 Sept	Trephina Gorge	Emily Findlay & Robbie Henderson

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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. 735303 and Account No 100981.

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

If your personal details, especially email addresses, have changed, please indicate. 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 .

MEMBERSHIP FORM	
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 8 September 2010

President, Barb Gilfedder declared the meeting open at 8.25pm.

Present: 18 members, as per attendance book. Welcome back Morgan Flint!

Minutes of previous Meeting: The minutes of the August 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
Museum of Central Australia

The Naturalist News – September 2010
Nature Territory – September 2010
Invitation to opening of 'Wildflowers, Central Australia on Kodachrome' on 20 August. (Exhibition dates Aug 2010 – April 2011)
Information re Photo competition. Details to go in newsletter
Recent report - "*Into Oblivion? The Disappearing Native Mammals of Northern Australia*"

Friends of Botanic Garden, Sydney
The Nature Conservancy in Australia

Justice Dept (e-mail)

Requesting an extra statement to finalise Annual Report - now finalised

Correspondence Out:

Justice Department
Extra Newsletters

Annual documentation relating to being an incorporated body
Barb advised the members that she sends complimentary copies of the newsletter to speakers, contributors who are not members and to prospective new members

Treasurer's Report:

There is a current balance of \$1692.24
Accepted.

General Business:

- A planning meeting was held on Sunday 22 August. Six members attended and there were 2 apologies. Minutes of the meeting are available from the secretary.
- The Eco-Fair is on 18 September. Planning is well underway. The competition this year will be based on identifying raptors.
- 'Land for Wildlife' is conducting a survey on feral doves in backyards. This involves recording observations over a period of 10 minute surveys. Participation is invited, for more information please contact Barb Gilfedder.

Outings/Trips/Activities

11 September Buffel Grass eradication in Spencer Valley with the Landcare group, 7.30 at Gosse Street
18 Sept Eco Fair at Olive Pink Botanic Garden
25 September A look at Northside Parks with Andy Vintner
26 September Day trip to 'Mallee Fowl' site at Owen Springs

Next Meeting: Wednesday 13 October 2010.

Note taker: Morgan Flint

Supper: Sue Fraser

Meeting closed at 9.53 pm.