



August 2011

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



Old Andado Swamp. Near the Old Andado Homestead.
Photo by Jim Gilfedder

The sun was just going down and highlighting the red sand with that unbelievable intensity.

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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NEXT NEWSLETTER

The deadline for the next newsletter is **Friday 26th August**. Please send your contributions to Rhondda Tomlinson – rhondda.tomlinson@bigpond.com

MEETINGS.

- Wed 10 August **Field Naturalists Club** Meeting, 7.00 pm at the lecture theatre in the Higher Education Building at Charles Darwin University. **AGM and Members' night**. Please bring along interesting objects or a memory stick of photos to share.
- Wed 14 September **ASFNC** – Meeting, 7:00pm. at the lecture theatre in the Higher Education Building at Charles Darwin University. Speaker: **Stuart Traynor**. "A history of weather in Central Australia".
- Wed 3 August **APS** – Meeting, 7:30pm at Olive Pink Garden. Speaker **Jane Addison** on "Pastorally Important Plants of the Gobi Desert"
- Wed 7 September **APS** - Meeting, 7:30pm at Olive Pink Garden. Speaker to be advised.

FIELD TRIPS / ACTIVITIES.

- 19-21 Aug **Eco-fair** at OPBG – **APS** will assist with OPBG plant stall. **ASFNC** Barb has organized a competition for this event. Sue Fraser will be contacting the membership to organize a roster.
- Sun 28 Aug 3.00pm – **Planning/Committee** meeting at Olive Pink Garden. Committee members please attend if possible. All members welcome to attend.

Treasurer's Report

The audited financial report for 2010-2011 from the Treasurer is available. Ring Rosalie Breen on 89523409 if you wish to have a look at it before the AGM.

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A Birding day in Thailand

July speaker - Chris Watson. Reporter - Iain Campbell. Photos Chris Watson.

Our Guest Speaker for July was Chris Watson. Chris has become well-known to local “birdos” through his weekly Bird-Column in the Advocate and his Tuesday morning sessions on ABC radio. I had never met Chris personally – only communicated with him via email, so I was looking forward to seeing him and hearing his talk. My first impression was “My, he looks very young for one so knowledgeable” and knowledgeable Chris certainly is.

He opened his talk with two drawings of Thailand women, which his dad had drawn in 1972. As an artist myself, I was most impressed by them; they were beautifully executed and most expressive – delightful. Chris had included them to show his connections to Thailand.

This trip was done in May, which is the Pitta season and mostly took place in the National Park, the largest in SE Asia, near Phuket, and he was very fortunate to have a fluent English-speaking guide. The trip was certainly no “stroll in the park”, birdwatching from 3.30 am to 9.00 pm at night, in the most difficult terrain with almost continual rain and lots of mosquito bites. Chris told us how, by the end of the first day he was covered in leeches.

Given the difficulties, Chris’s photos are outstanding and many had their own soundtrack of the subject’s call. Not all the photos were of birds. Included were Gibbons, 4-footlong Catfish, Dragons, Water Monitors and a giant Snail.



Walking in the National Park



Water Monitor



Brown-throated Sunbird

Of the 25+ bird species he showed us, I was particularly impressed by the Hooded Pitta, Great Hornbill, Asian Fairy Bluebird, Black-headed Oriole, Little Grebe, Brahminy Kite, two Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters, Oriental Honey Buzzard, Brown-throated Sunbird and White-throated Kingfisher.

Chris also discussed the 25 species of Swiftlets that nest in caves in limestone outcrops and the difficulty of differentiating between them. He also showed us the Brown Fishowl and Water Monitor in the mangroves.

What an amazing amount of information in a small space of time - stunning and exhilarating – thank you Chris Watson.

For a full report of Chris’s birding in Thailand see:- <http://www.phuketbirdwatching.com/archives/2364>

Andado Rainbow. By Rosalie Breen, Photo by Bob Read

During the holidays four of us drove south to the edge of the Simpson Desert. Andado Swamp, close to Old Andado homestead, normally dry was still filled with water after last years rains. Further on is Indinda Swamp, way, way bigger. We couldn't see the southern end. It was just magnificent – an expanse of water with coolibah trees and lignum and many birds and those red sand hills as backdrop. We camped on its western shore and next morning with threatening dark blue rainclouds above were treated to a spectacular display of light and colour.



Some types of rainbow (condensed from Wikipedia by Gavan Breen)

Ordinary rainbows are caused by the sun shining onto droplets of moisture in the atmosphere. They appear in the opposite section of the sky to the sun. I won't discuss rainbows caused by other light sources.

The normal rainbow, called a "primary rainbow", is caused by light being reflected once in the water droplets. In a "double rainbow", which you have all seen, the second arc is outside the primary arc and, as observant field naturalists will have observed, has

the order of the colours reversed.

The primary rainbow has red on the outside and the secondary one has red on the inside. This second one is caused by light reflecting twice inside water droplets. The area between the two rainbows is dark, because light from the primary rainbow is reflected to the inside of the arc and light from the second rainbow is reflected to the outside of that arc, so no light is reflected to between the arcs.

A "supernumerary rainbow" is infrequent and consists of several faint rainbows on the inside of the primary rainbow. It has pastel colour bands which don't fit the usual pattern. Its cause is complex and I won't attempt to explain it; see Wikipedia. These rainbows are clearest when raindrops are small and all of similar size.

A "reflected rainbow" is seen when the light reflected from the raindrops is then reflected from quiet water before it reaches the observer. It is seen in the water surface below the horizon. We didn't see one of these.

A "reflectant rainbow", on the other hand, may be seen when the sunlight is reflected off a large body of quiet water close to the rain curtain. It appears above the horizon, and intersects with the primary rainbow at the horizon, and reaches higher in the sky. Due to the combination of requirements a reflectant rainbow is rarely visible.

We saw a primary rainbow with supernumerary bands, plus a secondary rainbow, plus a reflectant rainbow. We won't forget it in a hurry. These are all visible in the photo.

For more information, stacks of it see Wikipedia.

Hamilton Downs Youth Camp Weekend

History and birds by Morgan Flint. As you all probably know from recent publicity, May of this year marked the centenary of Hamilton Downs as a cattle station, when in 1911, 2 young "knockabouts", Ted Harris and Sid Stanes, established the first rough Cypress pine shelter on the Jay Creek site where the youth camp now is. The site was abandoned in the late 50's for 3 reasons.-.the buildings were virtually falling down around "their" ears, there was better drinking water at Ceilidh Well, further west, and finally, the new site was more accessible at all times of the year. By that time, the Stanes dynasty was firmly established at Erldunda (Sid sold his share in 1921), and the Miller family owned the station. I was the on-site/ caretaker-in-residence at the youth camp between 2004 and 2007 incl. I loved the job, and



I'm fond of saying that there were about 6 of my mates who wanted me to die so that they could have my job!! True, or almost. Those who were out at the old homestead on the weekend would know just why the site/area is soooo attractive; the two days were splendid after cold nights, and the breeze throughout both Saturday afternoon, and Sunday, made walking a pleasure.

There were 9 of us overnights, and 7 for Sunday. Neil and Leigh brought along a lovely couple, one

half of which was Fin from Finland, (my stamping ground for 8 wonderful weeks in June/July of 1993); and Rae was the caretaker, who turned out to be John Stevenson's first cousin!! True story.-.they hadn't seen each other for 20 years.

Chris Watson came out for a flying visit (well what else for a twitcher??) on the night, and alerted us to a pair of nesting Hobbys. On Sunday's morning walk, we were treated to a visit by a White-necked Heron; someone claims to have seen a Galah, while nearly everyone heard and saw Ring-necks by the score. A



couple of Crested Bellbirds caught Joey's attention, as did a nesting pair of Yellow-rumped Thornbills, on our walk to the petro glyphs, and that was after we'd seen the Cycads. Needless to say, we saw a couple of Yellow-throated Miners, and believe it or not, a Nankeen Kestrel. There was a bit of debate about the pronunciation, but it was generally agreed that the Western Gerygone, (Gerry-gonnie?) should be added to the list. A White-winged Triller was there too, as were a Brown Falcon and a Weebill. Sarah and her 2 lovely mates Rebecca and Janelle said they saw a Blue Falcon, but added that it was burnt out. (Joey thought that was a scream, and laughed all the way home).

And to finish this brief report on what was a delightful weekend at the old homestead, a Bushwalkers Code: you may lose up to 10% of your group; if you pick up strays, they count as "credits" for your next walk. (Stevensons) And as we were descending from the range on Saturday evening, Graeme Shaughnessy was heard to complain that "his calves were bellowing".

A moment to remember from Hamilton Downs by Jill Brew - Juveniles impress with agility as catch a wave, and feed, concurrently. (Suspected) immature Pied Butcherbirds noted surfing in a vertical dimension : paddling up (flapping hard, wing edge flared), navigating currents, then flipping, swooping, darting down with effortless triple turn and pike, sleek, and snapping up insects on the way.

Binocular view from top of hill behind HD homestead provided 3-D sensation as birds performed in clear cut near distance, with broad sweep of valley dropping behind.

ATLAS OF LIVING AUSTRALIA - Robert Read

Barb circulated an email about this, but I will give it another plug. If you have not already done so look at the website at <http://www.ala.org.au> to see what they are doing. This project follows on from the Australian Faunal Directory (AFD), which listed all described animal species in Australia. The disappointing thing about the AFD is that for most invertebrates the data fields in it were blank, and there was no simple way of supplying images. For example there is no image of the species of snail on cover of the March newsletter, and quite possibly Barbara's are only images of a living specimen in existence. (The species was described from preserved specimens sent to the USA.) Similarly the website only shows one record of the Golden Drummer cicada (locally known as "The big W") around Alice Springs, but at times we have all seen and heard them.

The Atlas of Living Australia (ALA) provides an opportunity for amateurs to fill in the blanks like this by contributing images or records of any organisms. The project is similar to the Atlas of Australian Birds, which has used the contributions of numerous observers, some perhaps contributing only a handful of records, to build up a continent wide picture of the distribution and movements of Australian birds. However the ALA is far more ambitious, trying to capture data and images for all organisms, plants animals and fungi, in Australia. For many groups it will take the observations of many people over many decades to build up a picture. But as the old Chinese proverb says "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step", and every small contribution whether records of cicadas in your garden or plague rats in your camp will help.

Old Andado – Barb Gilfedder

The picture on the front cover was taken at Andado Swamp near the Old Andado homestead. The sun was just going down and highlighting the red sand with that unbelievable intensity. Also on that recent trip we found Inland Dotterels. For several years this has been one of the birds I looked for but never saw. I had a few good hard looks at it in one of the aviaries at the Desert Park but it's not the same as seeing them in the



wild. In January his year everything changed. We first saw a small flock of them just north of Coober Pedy on the side of the road and then from there to Marla we saw many of them, usually on the road which was reddish like them. Perhaps they thought they were well-camouflaged there. At Marla the road surface changed to blue and we didn't see any more on that trip. Recently down near Old Andado they were standing around on an unused part of the dirt road. Jim managed to snap this photo up close from the car window.

THE TELEGRAPH STATION WALK

By Rhondda Tomlinson

This was advertised for Saturday 25th June 2011 as:-

(THE CYCAD WALK)

Not very often in Alice Springs a half day walk is cancelled or in this case change of direction as our Cycad Walk was. The reason being that in the cycad locality the dry vegetation and buffel grass was so dense you could not see where you were placing your feet or what rocky trap lay beneath.



Bob, Marie and Rhondda (photographer) set off behind our fearless expedition leader, Rosalie B. Of course we asked where we were heading but this was to be discovered as we headed in a north easterly direction into and near the easterly boundary of the Telegraph Station. We saw several euros sunning themselves on high vantage points. Bob saw and heard birds to add to his list for the morning.

I was interested to find out about an area where it looked like the ground was quite dark and I thought it looked like at some stage it had been burnt. Rosalie explained that is was caused by cryptogams which when active can be like a green slime in wet conditions and has now dried off and leaving the ground bare and chard looking.



On our adventure we saw several plants starting to flower, it was just a perfect morning to be out in the bush.

There was some quite thick buffel to negotiate down the river bank into the Todd and we emerged just north of the Telegraph Station from where we walked down the river and back along the well trodden path to Gosse Street. It was great company and an enjoyable way to spend a Saturday morning.

Thank you Rosalie!

ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED

Minutes of general meeting at Higher Education Building, Charles Darwin University

Wednesday 13th July 2011.

Present: 25 members and 1 visitor as per attendance book.

Apologies : Jenny and Ian Richter, Steve Sinclair, Rosalie Breen

Thank you to Jenny Purdie and Vicki Gordan for supper and Iain Campbell for taking notes.

Minutes from last general meeting : accepted.

Correspondence in:

- Australian of the Year Award – invitation to nominate someone.
- NT Field Naturalists Club 'Nature Territory' newsletter – July 2011
- Western Australian Naturalists Club newsletter
- South East Australian Naturalists Association newsletter
- CSIRO flyer for their book 'The Complete Guide to Finding the Birds of Australia'.
- Australian Naturalists Network 2012 Get-Together - flyer.
- Tanya Howard, Program Manager for Territory Natural Resource Management - expressing concern about the badly eroded track leading into Mac Clark Conservation Reserve (*Acacia Peuce* site) on Andado Station. She wondered if Field Nats would be interested in applying for a Caring for Country Grant for \$20 000 and overseeing the fixing of it. – See General Business
- Pam Keil – talk on Geology of Ormiston
- Rhondda Tomlinson – Mountain Gorillas
- Threatened Species network – Kimberley - - (These last 3 all forwarded to membership.)

Correspondence out:

- Thank you card to Wendy Mactaggart for her talk on Maatsuyker Island.
- Email from Barb Gilfedder to Tida Nou, NT Field Nats contact, suggesting that we stop exchanging newsletters as both ours and theirs are available on the web. No reply as yet.
- Application for stall at Eco-fair – see general business

Treasurer's report – none as Treasurer away.

General business:

- Tanya Howard email forwarded to Committee, also to Jenny Purdie (President APS) and Bob Read (past President ASFNC). Rosalie Breen and Connie Spencer, Jenny and Bob all considered the idea and got back to Barb. Jenny, Bob and Barb met with Tanya and although we were interested and concerned, decided that it would not be appropriate for the club.
- Closing date for August newsletter is 19th July. Thank you to Rhondda Tomlinson for taking over as newsletter editor for the remainder of the year.

- Eco fair 20th and 21st August, 8:00am to 2:00pm. Sue Fraser organising Hookers marquee and starting roster for manning the stall. Stall may cost \$100 (small) or \$200 (large).
- Past newsletters put on website by Bob Read. Some back in 2008 missing. May scan hard copies as a last resort.

Activities/Trips:

- Long weekend in August – nothing planned as yet
Suggestions raised were Horseshoe Bend and Redbank Gorge on Owen Springs.
- Ormiston Pound walk – waterhole is filling up again.
Walk early September? Date to decided. Leader- Pam Keil.

Sightings:

- Flock Bronzewings at Indinda swamp on Andado Station (Bob Read) Inland Dotterels also in area.
- Long haired bush rats near Old Andado (Jenny Purdie)
- Kultarrs at Chambers Pillar (Vicky Gordon) on 2nd July

Next meeting : AGM and Members' night on 10th August 2011

Note taker : Rhondda Tomlinson **Supper** – Jill Brew