



September 2011

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



A King Brown consuming a Tree Snake (refer to page 8)

Photo by Doris Köhler-Teufel

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

The King Brown was about 2 m and the Tree snake about 1.5 m. Photographed in the Kimberley close to the Gibb River where it crosses the Kalumburu Road.

CONTENTS

Meetings....p2 Field Trips/Activities...p2 AGM and Members' Night...p4
President's Report....p5 Sewage Ponds Bird Survey 2....p6
Eco-fair and Longreach Waterhole....p7 Cover Page Story.... p8
Book Reviews.... P8 Subscriptions due.....p9

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

Web site:

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

NEXT NEWSLETTER

The deadline for the next newsletter is **Friday 23rd September 2011**. Please send your contributions to Rhondda Tomlinson – rhondda.tomlinson@bigpond.com

MEETINGS

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 7 September **APS** - Meeting, 7:30pm at Olive Pink Garden. Speaker: Angus Duguid.

FIELD TRIPS / ACTIVITIES

NOT ALL TRIPS ARE CURRENTLY CONFIRMED, BUT I HAVE LISTED THEM, IN ORDER TO GIVE YOU SOME WARNING. SOME MAY BE SUBJECT TO CHANGE OR CANCELLATION AND SOME HAVE LIMITED NUMBERS. IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT YOU SPEAK WITH THE CONTACT PERSON FOR EACH TRIP THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO PARTICIPATE IN. CONTACT NUMBERS AND EMAILS ARE EITHER INCLUDED OR ARE LISTED IN THE COMMITTEE MEMBERS BOX BELOW.

Sat 10 September **Owen Springs** burnt sites survey. A large swathe of bush fire cut across part of Owen Springs reserve recently. It was suggested at our planning meeting that we make several trips there over the next few months to survey the new growth as it develops. These would only need to be quite brief trips, approaching the reserve from the Stuart Highway. Contact Sarah White.

Sun 11 September *Landcare Alice Springs - Buffel busting day at Stuart Terrace Arboretum between Stott Tce Bridge and Undoolya Rd. East bank of the Todd 9-11 am including talk from Peter Latz about control of Buffel ; 11 am Annual General meeting of the Alice Springs Landcare group. Info from Landcare website or Rosalie Breen 89523409.*

Sun 18 September **Ooraminna Rockhole**. This is about 120 km round trip, high clearance 4WD necessary, limited number of vehicles. Leader Jim Lawrence. Contact Barb Gilfedder for meeting place and time.

Sat 1 October Explore **Alice Valley behind Ellery Creek Big Hole**, full day trip high clearance 4WD needed, limited numbers, mainly driving. Contact Barb Gilfedder.

Sat 9 October **Owen Springs** as on 10 Sept.

Sat 9 – Wed 12 Oct *Land for Wildlife surveys see next page.*

Sat 15 October Possible Geology trip.

Sat 22 October Walk from **Jessie Gap to Emily Gap** along the top of the range. Contact Chris Watson 0419358942 Roadkill.chronicles@gmail.com

Sun 23- Wed 26 Oct *Land for Wildlife surveys see next page.*

Sat 29 October **Shorebird survey 3** at Alice Springs Sewage ponds – Birders and scribes needed. Contact Barb Gilfedder.

Sun 30 October **Ormiston Pound Walk**. Contact Pam Keil 89550496 pamelakeil@yahoo.com

Sunday 6 November **Annas Reservoir**, 320km round trip, 4WD recommended, remains of old station homestead and rockhole. Contact Barb Gilfedder

Sat 12 November **Owen Springs** as on 19 Sept.

Sat 19 November A short walk from **Flynns Grave towards Mount Gillen to the fence line**. Contact Sue Fraser

Members are trying to organise a trip to the **Salt Springs** soon. Also a late afternoon walk in **Conlin Lagoon** area sometime in Nov. and **End-of-year breakfast** at OPBG on 4 Dec.

Land for Wildlife will be conducting what should be a really interesting set of **biodiversity surveys** during October. We'd love some help from volunteers of all different levels of experience, and thought it might present a good opportunity for field nats to get up close to some of our sneakier critters and also get some field time with some experienced wildlife ecologists.

We will be setting traplines (Elliot, pit, and funnel traps) on 4 properties along Roe Creek. The first set of surveys will be conducted from the 9th (Sunday) to the 12th of October on two properties and then the remaining two properties will be surveyed from Sunday the 23rd to 26th of October. On each of the Sundays the starting time will be 1pm to allow us time to teach people how to go about setting up the traplines. People are welcome to volunteer as much or as little time as they can manage.

The biggest job will be on the two Sundays actually setting up the traplines and marking them out. On the subsequent dates we will be leaving the traps set late in the afternoon and return to each site at first light to check the traps. This is when we will also need a few helpers to act as scribes so we can get fauna out of the traps, measured, processed, and released with the minimum of stress. After the traps have been checked, and all the data recorded, the traps will be left open all day to prevent animals from being trapped in the heat of the day. We will return late in the afternoon to set the traps again before sunset.

While only NT Government authorised permit-holders are allowed to handle any fauna we trap, volunteers will be able to get a really close look at some of our less frequently encountered fauna. Of course, photographers are more than welcome to take as many snaps as they please.

Anyone who would like to come along and help out should contact Chris and Jesse directly via email on lhw@lowecol.com.au or by phone on 89 555 222.

President	Barbara Gilfedder	8955 5452	fedders@octa4.net.au
Vice-President	Sue Fraser	8955 0675	suefra@hotmail.com
Secretary	Neil Woolcock	89551021	neilwoolcock@yahoo.com.au
Treasurer	Jill Brew	8953 0551	jillinalice@yahoo.com.au
Property Officer	Sarah White	8953 8605	Sarah.White@nt.gov.au
Public Officer	Rhondda Tomlinson	8953 1280	rhondda.tomlinson@bigpond.com
Committee Member	Rosalie Breen	8952 3409	rosalie.breen@email.com
Committee Member	Connie Spencer	8952 4694	constans@bigpond.net.au



Conlin Lagoon was full of water last time we visited in May 2010.

AGM and Members' Night

Rhondda Tomlinson

Wednesday 10th August was our AGM. The early birds gathered to help set up the computer and make all ready for the meeting, amongst concerns about the bush fire at Larapinta where the road was closed from Flynn's Grave. All day Alice Springs was surrounded by smoke and Pam Kiel was able to give us a firsthand update on what was happening firewise.

Vice President, Sue Fraser opened the AGM and handed over to Jenny Purdie to deal with the election of office bearers. Congratulations to all elected.

We then had a general chat about the up coming Flower Show at the Residency; Bowerbirds and their mimicking abilities; turtle dove traps, where Neil had caught 12 birds and Marilyn said Puntj's total catch score is now 85. We were reminded of the upcoming Planning Meeting on the 28th August which all were encouraged to attend and bring lots of ideas for trips and activities.

Thank you to Jill who provided a very yummy supper and thank you to members who provided photos and items of interest:

1. From Sue Fraser: *Back in late April as I was riding along the Simpsons Gap bike track, I spotted a huge Golden Orb Spider guarding her web. On closer inspection I noticed she was accompanied by her much smaller male partner – this was the first time I had seen both spiders together.*

After some research on the web (pardon the pun), I discovered that Golden Orb spiders belong to the family Nephilidae and I'm fairly sure "my spider's" species is Nephila edulis. Golden Orb weavers are one of the largest spiders found in Australia. Female spiders can measure up to 45mm while the smaller males measure only 6mm. Web diameters can be over 1 metre and are commonly found hanging from signposts or between trees and shrubs. The male is often



found in or around the web of the female. The web is extremely strong and has a golden sheen.



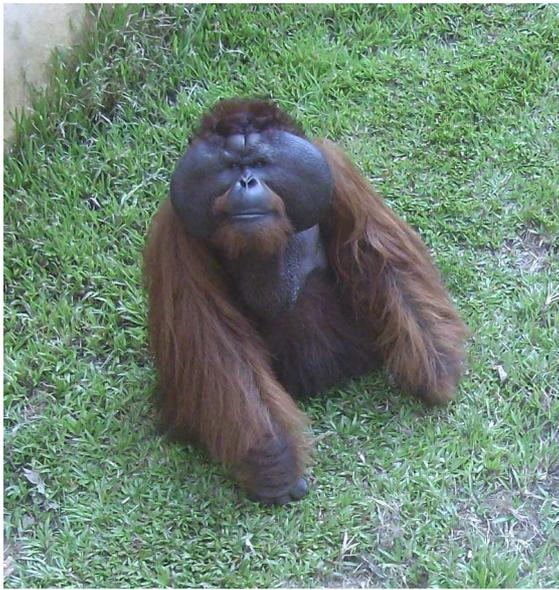
In May of this year Doug and I travelled to the US, Canada and Alaska. I fell in love with Canada and its scenery, its beautiful rivers and lakes, majestic snow-capped mountains and abundance of wildlife and plant life, such a contrast to our own arid landscape. I often found myself speechless because of the awesome natural beauty before my eyes. It had always been a dream of mine to see a wild bear in its natural environment and to witness a glacier calving – both these dreams were realised on our Canadian holiday. I would love to return again one day during the summer months to be mesmerized by Canada's beauty all over again.

2. Liz Carpenter: It was great to have Liz, a former Alice Springs Field Nat visiting from Mount Isa. Liz brought some photos of where she has been with her work in northern Queensland including Mornington Island, Burketown and some Aboriginal Communities. *Great to see you Liz and look forward to future visits.*

3. From Bev Dawson: Bev brought in a plant for identification. She saw growing on the side of the road near Dunmarra on the Stuart Highway. Jenny took one look and said it was no problem to identify it. This was Turkey Bush (*Calytrix extipulate*). *Thankyou Bev for your contribution and Jenny for the ID.*

4. From Rhondda Tomlinson: Rhondda brought along her photo books from her trip to Borneo last year as a volunteer with the Great Orangutan Project through the Way Out Experiences Organization. orangutan@w-o-x.com

I had two weeks at Matang Wildlife Centre near Kuching and I can recommend this organization to anyone who is interested in doing something really great and different.



*I would like to introduce **Aman** whom I met at Matang Wildlife Centre. Aman was moved from a semi-wild state at Semenggoh to captivity at Matang Wildlife Centre for his own safety because he was blind. This was when he was approximately 9 years old. Here in Matang Wildlife Centre, he served as the Centre's breeding male, fathering two offspring, Thambi and Mamu. In May 2007 Aman made history and found world fame by becoming the first orangutan to undergo bilateral phacoemulsification surgery to restore his eyesight. After 10 years in the dark and gaining a considerable weight during that time, rehabilitation and release is still a long journey for Aman. He is a little too big to pick up and carry into the jungle. For now the Centre is continuing to use him as a breeding male while concentrating on getting him into slightly trimmer shape and improving his climbing skills through its network of exercise and training structures.*

I spent a memorable time with Aman when I was hosing out his night pen and he was out in the day pen. He came and sat at the cage door and just looked at me with those all knowing eyes. He kept opening his mouth and I sprayed a little bit of water near him and he chased the water with his mouth open. I then sprayed the water into his mouth and he sat there playing with the water. I got the feeling that he knew so much. He looked very much like the gentle giant. Seeing him mutilate a coconut shell husk with his hands, his strength and agility were amazing. We were not allowed to go near any of the animals, especially the orangutans as have an extremely long reaching ability.

5. From Rosalie Breen: Rosalie brought two stereo microscopes through which we could “unlock the secret of the sands”. Plain old river sand under the microscope revealed a myriad of pieces of different coloured bits of rocks and minerals, looking almost gigantic; black sand from volcanic Fiji certainly wasn't all black; in the beach sands we could identify many white shell pieces, and Ruby Gap sand was glowing with red fragments of garnets. There were also a number of flowers, leaves and grasses to examine with more powerful “eyes” than our own.

President's Report 2011 – from the AGM – Barb Gilfedder

This has been another enjoyable year for me as President. I suppose many things get easier and less stressful with practice.

Membership numbers remain healthy, as is our financial position.

As usual we have had some excellent speakers at meetings. My thanks go to all of them. I didn't realize until I started writing this report that two thirds of them have been Field Nats members – Michael Green on the Geology of the local area, Anthony Molyneux on our local nesting Wedge-tailed Eagles, Pam Keil talking about keeping field notes, Mark Carter on native molluscs, Chris Watson on a Thailand birding trip and Wendy Mactaggart about a spell at a remote lighthouse. We have also heard about fires from Grant Allen, feral camels from Glenn Edwards and central Australian wetlands from Jayne Brim Box.

We have also had some excellent Field Trips. I think my favourite, and probably the most popular, was Michael Green's trip out the Ross Highway last October, with a hands-on look at the local geology. I hope he will do another before too long. Morgan Flint has organized some great trips including Winnecke Goldfields and old Hamilton Downs weekends. I'm sorry I had to miss both of them as they were obviously a lot of fun. Also thanks to Rosalie Breen, Connie Spencer, Pam Keil, Bob Read, Chris Watson, Robbie Henderson, Meg Mooney and Colleen O'Malley who have all been trip leaders of excellent trips in the past year. There has certainly been a lot to learn and lots of willing, sharing, knowledgeable people to learn from. Remember this club belongs to the members and each of you has the capacity to lead a walk, drive or excursion. My personal special interests this year have been all the native snails and fungi, both of which responded so well to the wet year.

All these things have been reported in our monthly newsletter. I frequently hear comments from people about how much they enjoying reading it and looking at the stunning photos our members take. Many past members continue their membership just to enjoy the newsletter. Well done all the contributors and Emily for putting it together.

Other activities included the 2010 Eco-fair with its popular competition on local raptors. A new initiative has been the start of regular bird surveys at the sewage ponds. We have had some expert birders to identify and count the birds and many willing scribes from the membership to write it all down and learn from the experts as they go. The plan is to continue these surveys quarterly. The data have been sent to Shorebirds 2020, Birds Australia team. Threats to shorebirds and evidence of their decline are growing and BA needs data to show conclusively how much trouble some species are in and what factors are driving their decline.

Bob Read, our previous President has not completely deserted us for the cold of Tasmania. I have put him to work every time he dares show up in Alice. He has taught me how to put the latest newsletters onto our website, has made links to other websites and has been steadily uploading old newsletters for reference purposes. I realized the benefit of this the other day, when I had an email from someone keen to use some of our published fungi photographs in a presentation he was about to give at a fungi conference in WA. Many thanks for your efforts Bob.

Lastly my thanks to the Committee, who have all performed their duties efficiently and who are always willing to help and support the club any way they can. It was sad to see our Secretary, Shirley Goodman move interstate, but she has been replaced very adequately by Neil and Leigh Woolcock.

I look forward to another year of interesting walks and talks with as many members as possible participating.

Alice Springs Sewage Pond Bird Survey 2.

(Sorry this was omitted from August newsletter)

Many thanks to all the counters and scribes who turned up at the sewage ponds on Sunday 10 July at 9.00am. I was pleased that I hadn't made the starting time any earlier, as the light wind was quite chilling as it blew over the water.



We didn't see any shorebirds. This is the time of year they are away to the North breeding. Sometimes a few younger birds over winter at the ponds, but not this year.

It was interesting to see mixed flocks of Tree Martins and Fairy Martins huddled on the ground, around the ponds. We speculated that possibly sitting on the ground was warmer than the fence, or maybe there were not enough insects flying in the cool morning air to make the expenditure of energy, chasing after them, worthwhile.

The numbers of most water bird species were significantly different from our April count, some up and some down, showing that there are not stable permanent populations of anything, even Black Swans.

Interesting sightings were a single Buff-banded Rail, Australian Spotted Crake and Spotless Crake. All these had been seen recently at the ponds so it was good to add them to this record. As we left a few Black-faced Wood swallows watched from the fence. Great to see as this attractive little bird as it is not common at the ponds. Results have been submitted to the Shorebird Group at Birds Australia.

Next count In October should be more exciting with some of the migratory waders back with us.

Reporter Barb Gilfedder – Photos Chris Watson



Eco-fair 2011



This girl was one of about 100 people who puzzled over the competition at the Field Nats Eco-fair stand. last month. Participants ranged from 5 year olds to pensioners and all seemed to enjoy the challenge. It gave Field Nats manning the stand, an easy way to strike up conversations with the public and talk about what Field Nats is all about. We answered many natural history questions and gained several new members over the two days, so was well worthwhile.

Many thanks to all those volunteers who helped. Special thanks to Sue Fraser who organised the roster and Hookers who loaned the marquee. Also to Rosalie Breen who organised borrowing display boards and OLSH Senior school for lending them.

Also thank you to Pam Keil for giving a presentation about the Field Nats to advertise our club. This also meant that stand fees were waived.

Congratulations to Ben Nowland who won our competition and was given the book 'My Desert Diary'.

Feeding Frenzy at Longreach waterhole – Barb Gilfedder



Recently on a trip north, we camped overnight at Longreach Waterhole, an extension of Lake Woods, just North of Elliot. We were amazed by a flock of about 2000 Cormorants, mainly Little Blacks that fed on what must have been an enormous school of fish. It was a very active, noisy affair with Darters, Egrets, Spoonbills and even Kites and other raptors joining in.

COVER PAGE STORY – Snake-eating snake

By Rhondda Tomlinson

The front cover page is a photograph taken by my friend, Doris Köhler-Teufel, who has visited Alice Springs on several occasions. She has been on one or two Field Naturalists trips. She lives in Derby, Western Australia and is very keen on photography. Having a Dive Masters and living in the north, she has taken many marine photos as well as travelling much of the inland in her ex-Britz van. She has kindly given me permission to print this photo in our newsletter. Doris' contact is: doristeufel@web.de

The King Brown was about 2 m and the Tree Snake about 1.5 m. The photo was taken in the Kimberley, close to the Gibb River where it crosses the Kalumburu Road. This photo was entered into the Kimberley Art Prize but did not rate a mention. However, the response from the Museum & Art Gallery of the Northern Territory in Darwin was much more interesting.

Dear Doris,

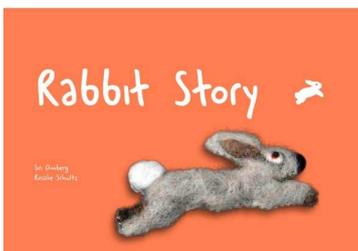
*Thank you very much for the images you have sent me. They do indeed show a King Brown snake (*Pseudechis australis*) feeding on a Brown Tree snake (*Boiga irregularis*). The most comprehensive study on King Brown snake diets was published in 1987 by Professor Richard Shine of the University of Sydney. He dissected museum specimens and recorded one that had fed also on a Brown Tree Snake. Your observation though is especially important as you were able to capture it with a photo, and in the world of snake biology that is not a common occurrence. I will of course take up your offer on using the photos and observations for my studies and will probably write them up for a short note in Australia's herpetological natural history journal "Herpetofauna". ... it is worth mentioning that unfortunately King Brown snakes are especially prone to death cause by the ingestion of Cane toads, so please cherish your observation as these days it is incredibly hard to even see one in areas colonised by the Cane Toad.*

Dane Trembath

Research Associate, Natural Sciences

Museum & Art Gallery of the Northern Territory

BOOK REVIEWS.



RABBIT STORY- Review by Rosalie Breen

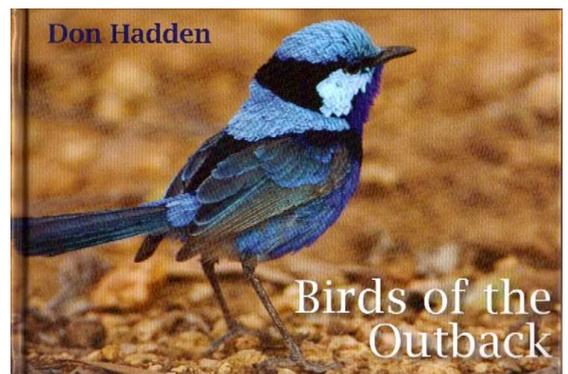
Two local conservationists Siri Omberg and Rosalie Schultz have collaborated in producing this little book to bring to our attention the devastation which rabbits have brought to our land, and to promote the "wellbeing of our land, its wildlife and plants".

Siri sewed her sheep wool rabbits and photographed them in various landscape situations and Rosalie gleaned the words from various texts on Australian rabbits. Set out like a children's book the pictures will intrigue the young ones and the words inform the older readers. Generously, all proceeds from the sale of the book go to Arid Lands Environment Centre.

BIRDS OF THE OUTBACK – Review by Beth Hansen

I recently discovered *Birds of the Outback* by Don Hadden at the Australian Museum shop in Sydney ... and what a treasure it is !

Don has an incredible ability to capture the essence of each bird -- the Emu in mid stride, the Grey-fronted Honeyeater and the Zebra Finch bathing in desert pools, the Sandstone Shrike-thrush in full song and the scuttling Rufous Bristlebird are just some of my favourite examples.



How on earth he managed to photograph the Eyrean Grasswren landing for a fraction of a second in the sandhills is a mystery. The distant glimpses of them that I had on one of the Field Naturalists' trips were barely enough for me to identify them as 'Little Brown Birds'.

The short and simple text descriptions don't detract from the photograph on the page. They absolutely enhance them. They inform as well as adding such a personal touch -- the White-plumed Honeyeaters "in a rare moment of inactivity" made me think about the time that Don would have spent to catch this rare moment. The Long-tailed Finch "attempting to bathe at the edge of a stock trough along the Gibb River Road in the Kimberley" tells me as much about the bird as it does about Don's travels and efforts to find and capture it for the book. The comments about the emu-like feathers on the Rufous-crowned Emu-wren make us focus even closer attention on the exquisite photograph.

The book brought back many wonderful memories of Field Naturalist trips: The photo of the Red-backed Kingfisher reminds me of the one we spotted during the Bush Tucker talk at the Desert Park in May this year. On another trip, I remember the Chestnut-rumped Thornbill that Bob Read and a fellow Field Nat were discussing. (A quarter of an inch difference in its leg length would have meant it was some other barely visible LBB.) The picture of the brilliant turquoise blue Splendid Fairy-wren takes me back to one of the walks in the Palm Valley area. And every time I turn to page 48, I think of the field trip when Don photographed the Dusky Grasswren -- an even more special memory now!

For so many reasons, this is such a stunning book.

SUBSCRIPTIONS NOW DUE

Membership fees are due as from the Annual General Meeting in August. Prompt payment would be appreciated, paid at meeting nights or posted to the Treasurer or direct into the Club account at Westpac BSB No.035-303 and Account No 100981. **Please put your name in the reference so we know who has paid.**

If personal details have changed please indicate, especially email address.

New members must fill in complete form.

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Inc. PO Box 8663, Alice Springs, NT 0871

Name(s)

Address

Phone Contact (home) (work) (mobile)

Email (print carefully)

Renewal/new membership ?.....

Payment enclosed \$

Fees: Family \$30. Concession \$25. Individual \$20. Concession \$15. Life member 10 times annual fee

Interstate past member. Newsletter only \$10

Subscription year begins at August AGM.

ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED

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

Wednesday 10th August 2011.

Brief general meeting following the AGM

Present: 14 members and 1 visitor as per attendance book.

Apologies : 8 members as per attendance book.

Minutes from last general meeting : not reviewed

Business arising from the minutes : Nil.

Correspondence in:

- Desert Smart Eco Fair 2011 : call for volunteers.
- Seniors' Month at the Residency – flyer detailing August events.
- Annual Flower Show flyer for show on 3rd and 4th September
- WA Naturalists Club newsletter.

Correspondence out:

- Thank you card to Chris Watson for his talk on birds of Thailand.

General business:

- Eco fair 19th, 20th and 21st August, 8:00am to 2:00pm.
Roster started by Sue for manning the stall. Saturday covered.
Need volunteers on Sunday. Call Sue.
Stall may cost \$100 (small) or \$200 (large).
- Maggie Turnbull letter re volunteers.
Neil to call Jimmy at ALEC to check on what the ASFN need to do regarding setting up the stall.
- Pam Keil reported on the current bushfires – Simpsons Gap and 1st 2 sections of Larapinta Trail closed on 10/8.
- Pam Keil reported that the Desert Park is looking for casual guides. Contact Reg. Also, Parks jobs will be available soon.
- Neil reported on the effectiveness of Spotted Turtle Dove traps. Chris Watson can show people how to make them.

Activities/Trips:

- 28/8/11, 3:00pm. Planning Meeting at Olive Pink
- September – Ormiston Pound walk. May not get right around due to water depth.

Sightings: Hooded Robin and Dunnart trapped in a mouse trap.

Next meeting : 14th September 2011

Presentation by Stuart Traynor.

Note taker : Rosalie Breen

Supper: Sue Fraser.