



December 2011

## Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



Photo by Barb Gilfedder

An Alice Springs Christmas picture  
-Holly Grevillea (*Grevillea wickhamii*)

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

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## NEXT NEWSLETTER

The deadline for the next newsletter is **Friday 20<sup>th</sup> January 2012**.  
Please send your contributions Barb Gilfedder [fedders@octa4.net.au](mailto:fedders@octa4.net.au)

### MEETINGS.

Wed 8 Feb **ASFNC** - Meeting, 7:00pm at the lecture theatre in the Higher Education Building at Charles Darwin University. Speaker to be announced.

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### FIELD TRIPS / ACTIVITIES.

**Sun 4 Dec** **ASFNC** - End of year breakfast at Olive Pink Botanic Garden. There will be a walk starting at 7.00am with Paul Rilstone, probably to the Old Power House, which OPBG are currently negotiating to take over. Breakfast will be in the gazebo at 8.00am. Please bring a plate of food to share and a thermos (if you have one) of hot water for hot drinks, also to share. Tea, coffee, milk, sugar, mugs and fruit juice will be available. There are chairs there but you may like to bring your own.

**Sat 10 Dec** Don't miss the full lunar eclipse at midnight.

### 2012

**Sun 22 Jan** **ASFNC** - Planning meeting – 3.00pm at Olive Pink Botanic Garden. All members welcome as well as the Committee. This is an opportunity for everyone to help organise speakers, activities and trips for the first half of the year. If you are unable to attend but have some ideas, please pass them on to a Committee member beforehand.

**Sun 29 Jan** Quarterly Shorebird Count at Alice Springs Sewage Ponds. Birders and scribes needed. Meet at the Birder's gate at 7 am sharp. Contact Barb Gilfedder.

Mid- Feb **ASFNC** - A tour of the Alice Springs Desert Park Farm in Summer with Scott Pullyblank, Curator of Botany at ASDP.

|                  |                   |           |  |
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## Two good seasons- Camel Treks to Eyre Creek (2009) and Ethabuka Reserve(2011)

Speaker: Anthony Molyneux

Some impressions from Rosalie Breen.



Andrew Harper encouraging the camel train over Eyre Creek

With lots of wonderful pictures Anthony took us on a couple of camel treks organised by Australian Desert Expeditions. Andrew Harper is the “camel man” and leader of the group which consists of 8 paying expeditioners, four or five camel handlers and a couple of biology experts. Not only do the members walk but they can assist in animal, bird and plant surveys. The camels are the pack animals carrying 100-150 kg each, of supplies for some 14 days, including 30 or more jerry cans of water. The area is remote and everything must be carried. You can imagine the logistic nightmare to be fully prepared for this expedition. Everything needs to be checked.

Camels are well adapted to dry and dusty places and are all individuals with their own characters and idiosyncracies. Morgan only bothers to be “hooched” down at the end of the day when he knows he will be relieved of his load. TC (tall camel) is another regal character. There is Jhummpa, Colson, and Istan who likes to be in the group photos. Another one lies down with his neck outstretched on the ground. They all have rather sexy legs, and padding or calluses where they kneel down, including on the chest. On the trek Andrew leads the first camel and the others follow in line, roped together. The camels keep a steady pace but meander a bit as Andrew picks out suitable vegetation for a bite on the way. They enjoy eating burrs! This means the trekkers can go at their own pace, with time for reflection or chances for sharing and discussions about special discoveries on the way, such as grinding stones. Stops are made every hour or so and they walk about 10 km per day. Over sand dunes camels need to zigzag up and down rather than in a line because their loads are so heavy and also for safety.

Anthony was lucky to take part in two expeditions. The first was around Eyre Creek, west of Birdsville. They travelled east-west, crossing dunes with the delight of not knowing what was in store over the dune in the next swale, green from the recent good rains, or a sea of flowers, or pools of water, including Canegrass swamps. There were water marks high on trees on the edge of a swale which recorded the massive amount of water which comes down these “waterways” when it does rain. Then there was the crossing of the Eyre Creek itself, which needed special negotiations as camels are reluctant to enter the water. On the way there were encounters with the wildlife, like three White-striped Free-tailed Bats, usually inactive during the day, which were flying around a tree moving to positions to sun themselves on the trunk, also Straw-necked Ibis, a Crimson Chat’s nest with two eggs, and an Owlet Nightjar.

Camp, made early afternoon, needs to be chosen with care. The camels require feed for the evening and space to rest tied up or hobbled away from the people. The people need a pleasant sheltered space with a supply of wood for cooking. Occasionally an oasis with a waterhole gives an opportunity for a good wash and shave. First job is to unload the camels, hobble them and give them a rubdown, tie them up, and organize camp. As well as dinner preparations there is also need to work on collected plant specimens and other data recordings. Cooking was done mostly using flour bin stoves. Always plenty to do!

Morning again follows a strict routine. There is a group session to study the map and discuss the day’s itinerary. Loading the camels is an art to maintain balance on each side of the packsaddle. Gear is packed in symmetry. For example, one jerry can on one side, then one on the other, then a second on first side, and so on up to eight. There were great big wooden food boxes just as used many years ago, and cold food boxes with insulation, and bags containing the personal gear. It takes a few hours.

Anthony's second journey was on Ethabuka Station formerly a cattle property but now a Bush Heritage Reserve, aimed at preserving the many habitats and wildlife in the area. Access is limited so expeditions like this are a chance to explore this beautiful country. The jewel is Pulchera Waterhole, an almost permanent waterhole, with birds in hundreds. Brolgas everywhere, and flotillas of Pelicans in their hundreds. Black Kites too were always present. Sand dunes can be quite thickly vegetated with the showy green Parrot Pea being dominant. The dunes reveal tracks of many animals. On the flats Emu tracks or Mole Cricket diggings. The Long-haired Rats were in plague proportions with diggings everywhere making walking a bit hazardous as you can sink into their holes. They also like to explore around the camp and inspect sleeping humans which can be a little disconcerting. They also like to chew on the trunks of the Desert Poplars. Below a number of small mesas is Pulchera Lake which was 9 km long in between dunes. It can extend to 11 km. Here the camels had a drink, not really needing it though, and they could have a bath which can be quite destructive as they wallow in the mud. Pitcheri Bush grows in occasional select places. This was/is used by the Aborigines, mixed with *Aacia. ligulata* ash as a narcotic and traded among neighbours.

The title of this presentation was 'Two Good Seasons', so green and wet expeditions like this are not the norm. Anthony was privileged to see the country at its best and we all appreciated his sharing the experience.



Mesas, camels and Lake Pulchera in the background

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## Access to academic journals at public library

by Megg Kelham

One of the great joys of the technological revolution is the ability to access academic journals through the digital portal of local libraries. For those of us living in Alice Springs this means going to the web site of the Alice Springs Town Library <http://www.alicesprings.nt.gov.au/library> clicking on Catalogue and then logging in to the library on the top right hand corner of the screen. For password details please ring the library on 8950 0555 or me on 08 8952 8024 if you are trying this out after hours. Once you are logged in go to Online Resources and select any of the online data bases to which the library subscribes. My favourites for historical research are Informit and Ebsco. These databases allow searches by author and subject. If you are lucky the journal article you are interested in will be downloadable free of charge or available for purchase at about \$30 a pop. I will confess that I haven't actually checked out any of the natural science data bases but hopefully someone will be inspired by this article to try them out and report back via this space. I'd be curious to know if 'scientists' are as happy as this remote historian, with what they find.

The other interesting on-line space for academic writing is Google Scholar [www.scholar.google.com](http://www.scholar.google.com). I often start my searches here because it's easier than the library's data bases. When I find something interesting - which is usually hidden behind a 'pay wall', I zip into the library data bases and search by author and title to see if the same article which I would have had to pay for via Google, is free via the library. It often is.

Happy research travels. I look forward to hearing about what people find.



## I wondered what they ate !

by Barb Gilfedder

Every time it rains, the tiny native Blue-horned Snails, *Pleuroxia adcockiana*, wake up and have another wander around the damp world, before things dry up and they seal off their shells again and go back to sleep. Last time it rained I found this one having a good munch on a Jelly Fungus, *Calocera sp.* which also rehydrates with the rain.

The first time I saw these snails I offered them a silverbeet leaf, which they ignored. They are obviously creatures of more refined taste.

## A rainy day in Ormiston Pound - Sunday 30 October 2011

Report by Connie Spencer. Photos by Connie Spencer, Michael Laflamme and Pamela Keil



Who would have thought that we would be wishing we had brought a jacket for warmth whilst hiking at the end of October! Michael, Pam, Bob, Rosalie and I set off from Ormiston Gorge to do the Pound walk under overcast skies with some ominous dark clouds hovering over Mt Sonder. The diverse flora, interesting rock formations, and spectacular scenery make the Pound walk one of my favourites in the West Macs. Our first stop was at this rock formation with Bob explaining that the un-weathered quartzite, which can be seen between the joints (or cracks), is white. Water circulating through the joints has diffused in the rock matrix, oxygen dissolved in it converting inconspicuous grains of iron oxides (magnetite and/or haematite) into hydrated iron oxides (limonite and goethite). These are very strong pigments, and although they make up only a tiny proportion of the rock, colour it brown, orange or purple.

We continued on up the trail through a forest of Hill Turpentine (*Acacia monticola*), noteworthy because of its red curling bark. The Hill Umbrella Bush (*Acacia bivenosa*) was setting copious amounts of seed, as were most of the plants we encountered after another good season. The constricted seedpods had opened displaying the dark seeds with brightly coloured orange arils. The only shrub that was in full bloom was the Desert Rose (*Gossypium sturtianum*).

Onward and upward with a spell overlooking the Pound. It had started to rain by now but nothing too heavy so we decided to continue down into the Pound. The trail follows a gully lined with the mallee, Normanton Box (*Eucalyptus normantonensis*) interspersed with Conkerberry (*Carissa lanceolatum*) and Native Currant (*Psyrax latifolium*) both favoured food plants with the latter being a very important plant in Aboriginal mythology. Whilst Bob and I were pondering over the identity of what I determined to be Poison Creeper (*Jasminum calcareum*), Michael was down in the gully photographing a rather magnificent specimen of *Ozothamnus kempei*. Although slightly past its best the sheer size of the shrub was impressive. This genus in the Asteraceae (daisy) family has some 56 species but only one is found in Central Australia.

Our attention is drawn away from the plants to a Spinifex Pigeon on the path just a few meters in front of us. His antics kept us entertained and cameras clicking for some time. Soon after Bob is off the path, heading cross-country towards the call of a Dusky Grasswren. I'm not sure if it was at this point that he actually saw the illusive wren but it is on his bird list so if not then, later on.

We headed down into the Pound basin but didn't last long as it was raining more heavily and there was no protection from the wind, so after checking out a Native Fig (*Ficus brachypoda*) we turned and headed back. On the way back not far down from the saddle, Bob, Pam and Rosalie stopped to observe a Spinifex bird. This was quite the occasion as they can be very hard to find. And whilst on the subject of birds, Bob also pointed out that the number of Fairy Martins in the area was notable.





By now the rain jackets had been donned - if not so much to keep dry (as it still wasn't heavy), but to keep warm. The scent of curry wafted up as we made our way through a dense patch of Curry Wattle (*Acacia spondylophylla*) and just to clear the nasal passages we had a sniff of the Aromatic Daisy (*Streptoglossa odora*)!

We are nearly back to the carpark and a warm cuppa, but still, there is plenty to take note of. As we cross Ormiston Creek, the rain has change the dull river rocks into a kaleidoscope of colour if not a little slippery under foot and the plants along the final stretch of the trail is a photographer's delight. There are clumps of yellow Billy Buttons

(*Calocephalus platycephalus*), the delicate Blue Periwinkle (*Evolvulus alsinoides*) and one of Rosalie's and my favourites, Wandering Jew (*Commelina ensifolia*) with its "best blue in the world" coloured flowers



Back in the carpark we checked out the temperature – 16 degrees! Now that we had stopped walking, we were cold but a hot cuppa, lunch and moreish fudge made the teeth stop chattering. What else can I say - great walk and great company.

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### **Jessie Gap to Emily Gap: Field trip / bush walk / bush whack !**

22 October 2011. Report by Beth Hansen. Photos by Dave Sutton and Beth Hansen.

Chris, Dave, Meg, Bob, Rosalie, Gavan and Beth met in the car park at Emily Gap, 10kms from Alice Springs. Two vehicles then ferried the walkers the 8kms more to Jessie Gap before we set off at about 7.30am. Fortunately, the day for this walk turned out to be the least hot day of the week.... at about 26 degrees.

Where to ascend began as a split decision with Chris and Dave initially heading straight upwards. The older four 'field trippers' voted with our feet for a more round-about, less steep route through the gap and around the northern side of the range. The scree slope was slightly easier to negotiate before quite shorter, steep climb to the top.

As always the views from the top of the range were wonderful – just a little smoky in the distance – and there were very welcome little breezes all along the route. We looked out over burnt out areas to the south, the north-west and further to the north. From closer to Emily Gap, we could see a fire to the east of Pine Gap burning up towards the range.



Since the last time some of us had been this way about 8 (?) years ago, the walking track had significantly grown over. In fact, we were following euro tracks for most of the way and occasionally ending up in false alleys and having to back-track. The overgrown vegetation resulted in many scratches and a whack or two if we weren't watching the actions of the person in front closely enough.

There were few flowers still blooming in amongst the little groves of trees but plenty of native grasses (rapidly drying out) along the ridge tops. Buffel grass only appeared closer to the Emily Gap end of the walk. There were a number of



grass-hoppers and we spotted one Jewel Beetle, prompting Bob to check this one in a book later (Could you find it, Bob?). From only a metre or two away, we watched a small Perentie, *Varanus giganteus*, with its yellow spots leaving it well camouflaged under the speckled shade of the trees.

One of the main botanical discussions was about a mallee – later identified as a Victoria Spring Mallee, *Eucalyptus trivalvis*, about half way along the track. Check it out at the Botanic Gardens in Alice Springs or on their website [www.opbg.com.au/](http://www.opbg.com.au/) in the mallee walks section.

Bob identified nearly 26 birds during the 5-6 hours. I was quite pleased that I'd managed to see about 18 of them. Thanks to everyone for teaching me over the years.

However, it's amazing how much you forget over 8 years. I'd forgotten the steep climbs at each end of this walk. I'd forgotten how many times the caterpillar's back went up and down. And I'd forgotten how much it takes out of you to do an 8-9km walk in almost summer temperatures when you are 8 years older! Thank goodness for Rosalie, Bob and Gavan keeping me company towards the back of the pack.

Highlights were the views, the birds and the good company. Thanks again Field Nats for a memorable day.

#### BIRD LIST by Bob Read

|                     |                           |                          |
|---------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| Common Bronzewing   | Rufous Whistler           | Splendid Fairy-wren      |
| Spinifex Pigeon     | Grey Shrike-thrush        | Little Woodswallow       |
| Wedge-tailed Eagle  | Crested Bellbird          | Mistletoebird            |
| Nankeen Kestrel     | Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike | Grey-headed Honeyeater   |
| Australian Ringneck | Grey-crowned Babbler      | Yellow-throated Miner    |
| Sacred Kingfisher   | Western Gerygone          | Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater |
| Merops ornatus      | Weebill                   | Zebra Finch              |
| Fairy Martin        | Inland Thornbill          | Pied Butcherbird         |
| Hooded Robin        | Dusky Grasswren           |                          |

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### **Annas Reservoir Trip – Nov 6, 2011**

by Barb Gilfedder

Three vehicles with ten people met at 7.00am to try and avoid the worst of the heat. A straight drive up the North Stuart Highway.

Just off the main road, five kilometers South of Aileron, we stopped at a clump of Mulga. We were surprised to see *Dipteracanthus australasicus* under the trees. It had been cropped by cattle, but was growing so lushly that at first we weren't sure what it was. At last we found a single purple flower which confirmed the ID. Bob was busy with the birds, finding Chestnut-rumped, Yellow-rumped, and Slaty-backed Thornbills, Rufous Whistler, Red-capped and Hooded Robin, Splendid Fairywren, Crested Bellbird, Black-faced Woodswallow, Western Gerygone and Mistletoebird.

Last time the Field Nats visited Annas Reservoir was in 2005. At that time, it was all a bit depressing. The country was then very dry with little ground cover, trees were stressed, the waterhole was green as pea soup and the ground around it was littered with Euro carcasses. Since then we have had two wet years and the country has revived. Now there is plenty of feed, native grasses as well as buffel; trees like the Corkwood, *Hakea lorea* a mass of flowers, Whitewoods



*Atalaya hemiglauca* and Supplejacks *Ventilago vernalis*

were well cropped as far as the cattle could reach and above that line heavy with winged seeds. The waterhole was busy with a large flock of Zebra Finches, a few Painted Finches. A Brown Goshawk and a Brown Falcon was eyeing them off for a tasty meal. Other birds Bob noted down were Red-browed Pardalote, Dusky Grasswren and Crested Pigeon. The waterhole was clean enough for several of us to cool off in, while Rosalie checked out the Macroinvertebrates and Bob pointed out the Blue Skimmer and Scarlet Percher Dragonflies and a Lemon Migrant Butterfly to us. A Red Treefrog, *Litoria rubella* was calling. I was particularly interested in the Water Snails but have not as yet got even a species name for them. Nature had revived.



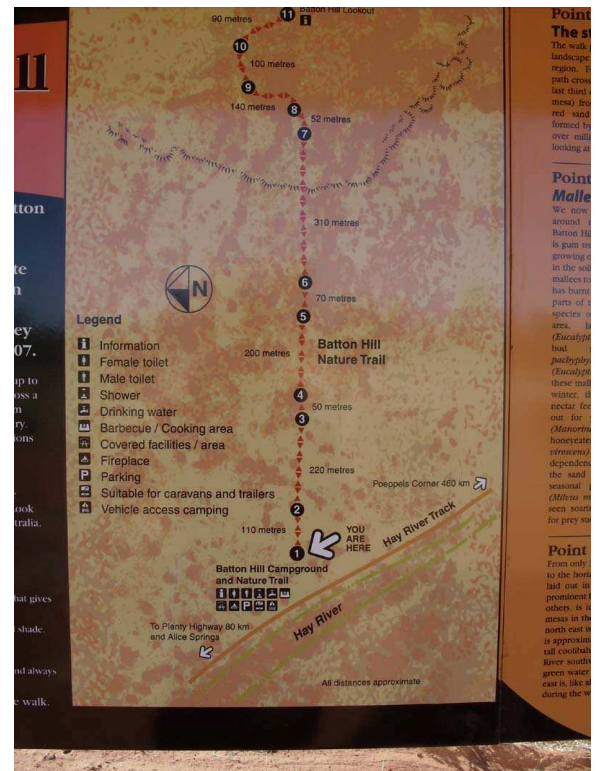
## BATTON HILL NATURE TRAIL CAMP

by Rhondda Tomlinson

In September 2011 as part of a 4x4 drive tag-along tour with Jol Fleming to Birdsville and the Hay River Track we spent out last night at Batton Hill Bush Camp before returning to Alice Springs. Jol suggested that this might be an ideal place for the Field Naturalists to visit.



So here I am presenting the idea as food for thought for a three or four day camp for the cooler months of 2012. Batton Hill is a mesa in Lindsay Bookie's country. Lindsay is an Eastern Arrernte Man who is well respected for his knowledge of Arrernte law and culture.





*Kevin Boyle (a past Field Naturalists member) a while ago wrote an article on a tour he did with Jol and he said that Lindsay was looking to establishing a bush tucker enterprise on his family property, south east of Jervois, about 350km east of Alice Springs. Lindsay has plans to build facilities for bush campers so that visitors can come and sample some of the simple delights of the area. Lindsay's aim was to establish camping facilities with showers and toilets and bow shelters to accommodate people wanting to make the trip from Alice Springs.*

Lindsay has achieved what he set out to do with the camping facilities and in the information shelter it tells of a nature trail walk that was the result of an Australian Geographic Society Scientific expedition that conducted a biological survey in 2007. I did not have the opportunity to do this walk but I did read the information display.

The walk starts at the Hay River, at Batton Hill and goes for about 2km and can take about 1.5 hours (maybe longer at Field Naturalists pace) and passes across Spinifex plain to the base of the ancient mesa and then up to the 30m summit from where there is a 360° of the surrounding country. There are points of interest marked along the route with interpretations provided by the scientists who attended the Australian Geographic expedition.

Many of the features found along this trail are typical of much of the northern Simpson Desert and other arid zones in Central Australia.

The information board has details on 10 points of interest along the walk:

1. General description of the walk and the country it passes through.
2. The vegetation.
3. The Fauna
4. Reptiles
5. Insects
6. Mallee
7. Stony rise
8. Liverworts, lichens and mosses
9. Birds
10. Termites.

Looking through this list I think it covers just about the majority of interests in our club as well as providing a very good camping site. An added bonus for those wishing to travel further there is Lake Caroline further down the track also an awesome place to visit.

If you want to know more about camping and visiting the area, I suggest you contact Jol Fleming, (08) 8953 0109 [jol@direct4wd.com.au](mailto:jol@direct4wd.com.au)

**THE FIELD NATURALISTS COMMITTEE  
WOULD LIKE TO WISH ALL A  
BLESSED CHRISTMAS  
AND A PROSPEROUS  
AND HAPPY NEW YEAR FOR 2012**



Christmas 2009 Pitchi Richi



Christmas 2010 Desert Park

Hoping you can all come to the 2011 Christmas Party at OPBG, Sunday 4 Dec,  
7.00 for walk, 8.00am for food.

# ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED

Minutes of general meeting at Higher Education Building, Charles Darwin University  
Wednesday 9 November, 2011.

## Preceding the meeting:-

- (i) Presentation by Anthony Molyneux on his camel treks with Andrew Harper.
- (ii) Website upgrade :- Pam Keil provided an overview of the website that she has been updating. It was agreed that Pam move the new homepage that she has developed onto the website and check other parts of the site.

**Present :** 28 members as per attendance book.

**Apologies :** Ben Price, Steve Sinclair and Ann Wilkinson

**Minutes from last general meeting:** accepted.

**Business arising from the minutes:** Nil

## Correspondence in:

- Nature Territory.
- WA Naturalist Club

Note : Links to NT Nats Club Darwin from our website are worth checking if heading up that way, good bird sightings.

## Correspondence out:

- Card to Michael Green – not received.

## Treasurer's Report:

|                    |           |
|--------------------|-----------|
| Opening balance    | \$2698    |
| Plus subscriptions | 105       |
| Petty cash         | <u>26</u> |
| Balance :          | \$2829    |

Still to provide \$500.00 of financial assistance to sewage ponds bird hide upgrades.

## General business:

- Box of chocolates bought for John - Security at the Uni, who opens up for our meetings.

## Activities/Trips:

Recent activities:

- Excellent trip to Ormiston Pound, cool and rainy.
- Annas Reservoir – great swimming spot

Coming activities:

- Flynn's Grave part way up to Mt. Gillen. 7.30am Sat 19 November, meet at Flynn's Grave. Followed by morning tea at Sue's.
- End of year celebration at Olive Pink. Walk at 7.00am on 4 December followed by shared food at 8.00am.

Next year:

- 29/1/12 Shorebird survey at sewage ponds at 7am
- Mid-Feb. Scott Pullyblank tour around Alice Springs Desert Farm.

Mark Carter mentioned two events:

- 2/2/11 World Wetlands Day, last year at sewage ponds
- 10/12/12 Full lunar eclipse at midnight.

**Sightings:** A large number of sightings were mentioned by members, including Nankeen Herons at both Ormiston and Glen Helen, Painted Finches at Annas Reservoir, Glossy Ibis in the gutter at Mt Ebenezer Roadhouse, Straw-necked Ibis on Middle School Oval, Bush Stone Curlews near water feature aviary and also near workshop area at ASDP, Grey HE close to old Hamilton Downs Road, Channel-billed Cuckoos back in town, Rainbow Lorikeets(probably escapees), 3 Crake species, Buff-banded Rail and also Snipe at Sewage Ponds, and an Echidna in someone's laundry at Il Parpa.

## Next Meeting: 8/2/12

Note taker – Pam. Supper – Sue O'Callaghan