



February 2012

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



This stunning photo by Rosalie Breen is to remind us of cool, wintery weather. It will return. Rosalie took this near Spencer Hill in August 2011

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

CONTENTS

Meetings and Trips/Activities...p2 Club Contacts, Planning Meeting Report – Future field trips...p3; A little way up Mount Gillen...p4; End-of year breakfast...p5; Cruise down Warburton Creek...p6; A few Field Nats photos from 2011...p8.

**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 **Tuesday 21th February 2012**.
Please send your contributions Barb Gilfedder 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: **Dick Kimber**, local historian and bird enthusiast. He will show photos and tell anecdotes about Central Australian birds including stories and photos illustrating Aboriginal perceptions.
- Wed 14 Mar** **ASFNC** - Meeting 7:00pm at the lecture theatre in the Higher Education Building at Charles Darwin University. Speaker to be announced.
- Wed 1 Feb** **APS** - Picnic Tea at Jessie Gap – 6.00pm – bring your own everything. No BBQs available. Short walk first.
- Wed 7 Mar** **APS** - AGM and talk by Ben Convery, Curator at Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Subject to be announced.

FIELD TRIPS / ACTIVITIES.

- 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.
- Fri 3-Sat 4 Feb** Camp Friday night at Ellery Big Hole....in search of Nocturnal Birds. Leave Alice Springs independently some time in the afternoon (or after work). Plan is to swim/fish-watch/bird-watch at the Big Hole until it is cool enough to wander down the creek. Bring torches and it will be interesting to look and listen for nocturnal species. Up early the next morning for a wander along the Dolomite Trail, then a swim. Back to Alice in time for lunch. Contact Cecily Sutton on 0412 501396 or cecsutton@gmail.com Let her know if you need a lift or if you could take a passenger.
- Sun 12 Feb** Looking at rocks/fossils at Roe Creek Borefield, then similar rocks at Jim and Marg Lawrence's house at 2 Battarbee Street, on the corner of Tmara Mara Circuit, followed by a cup of tea. Meet at the Information Bay opposite the Old Timers Home at 7.00am. Leader Jim Lawrence. Contact Barb Gilfedder - details below
- Sat 25 Feb** A tour of the Alice Springs Desert Park Farm in Summer with Scott Pullyblank, Curator of Botany at ASDP. Meet at the workshop area at Alice Springs Desert Park (turn off to the left before the car park, approach the gate and it will open automatically) at 8.00am. Contact Barb Gilfedder.
- Sat 10 Mar** Cycad Walk at Old Telegraph Station. Meet at Gosse Street Playground at 6.00am. This is a moderate walk including a scramble up and down a rocky hill. It will take about three hours. Leader Rosalie Breen - details below.

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	89550961	Sarah.White@nt.gov.au
Public Officer	Rhondda Tomlinson	8953 1280	rhondda.tomlinson@bigpond.com
Committee Member	Rosalie Breen	89523409	rosalie.breen@email.com
Committee Member	Connie Spencer	89524694	constans@bigpond.net.au

Planning Meeting Report

A planning meeting was held on Sunday 22 January. It was excellent to see so many members attending and contributing. A big thank you to all who came.

It is impossible to plan all field trips in detail, as for many places we need to check access and gain permission. However, below is a list of unconfirmed field trips. Dates may change, so only pencil them into your diary.

24-25 March – Camping at Gemtree. Carmel Chalmers tells us that it is a great spot for birding and flora and fauna as well as for gems of course and is keen for Field Nats to visit. They have Powered and Unpowered sites as well as a couple of cabins. Unpowered sites are a discount price of \$10 per head. Camp oven dinners (\$20 a head), are also served at the weekend. There is a Nature Trail (3.5km) which is a great place to spot birds and has a self-guided full-colour booklet. This covers a variety of landscapes throughout the park – mulga scrublands, watercourses, rocky ridges, open grasslands and the sandy creek bed along our boundary. We do need to book in advance for camping as well as dinners, so please contact Barb Gilfedder when you decide to go. Closing date for bookings Friday 16 March.

6- 9 April, Easter – Barrow Creek and Davenport Ranges. Organiser Rosalie Schultz. Rosalie now lives in Tennant Creek, so we need a volunteer in Alice Springs to coordinate things this end. Please contact Barb Gilfedder if you can help.

28 – 29 April plus a day or two either way to extend it on an individual basis, if you can. (Anzac day is Wed 25 April) – **Newhaven Reserve.** Contact Barb Gilfedder

5-7 May – Long weekend – Horseshoe Bend. Contact Rosalie Breen

19 -20 May - Alice Valley. By making this a weekend trip we can probably reach Fishhole in the Chewings Range.

9-11 June – Mordor Pound

August long Weekend – a trip along the Finke river bed with Jim Lawrence.

Other places that were mentioned, but were not attached to specific dates were:-

- **Rainbow Valley,**
- **Lindsay Bookie's camp on the Plenty Highway**
- **N'dhala Gorge**
- **Winnecke Goldfields, including an underground mine.**
- **Ooraminna Rockhole**
- **Arltunga**
- **Mac and Rose Chalmers Reserve**
- **Duck Swamp on Henbury Station**

Barb Gilfedder



Even just to the fence, commanded a nice view of the valley

A little way up Mount Gillen Report by Barb Gilfedder

On Saturday 19 November a small group of Field Natters ambled part way up Mount Gillen. We were grateful for the slightly cooler morning with cloud cover and even a light breeze.

First stop was along a small creek where something had tunnelled into the vertical red banks. We decided they were probably Rainbow Bee-eater nesting holes, although not currently in use. While we checked out strange marking on the bark of a tree, a Rufous Whistler serenaded us.

We wandered through a recently burnt area. Connie pointed out that it had not been a very hot fire, because there was little buffel grass and the native grasses do not burn as hot and destructively. Some of the native grass stumps were already reshooting, as were shrubs, *Hakea divaricata*, *Acacia kempeana*, *Ac. aneura* and even *Ac. tetragonophylla* with delicate soft shoots along its branches. A *Capparis mitchellii* tree seemed completely dead and several large *Ac. aneura* were burnt down with branches lying on the ground. However Connie thought it likely that they were already dead

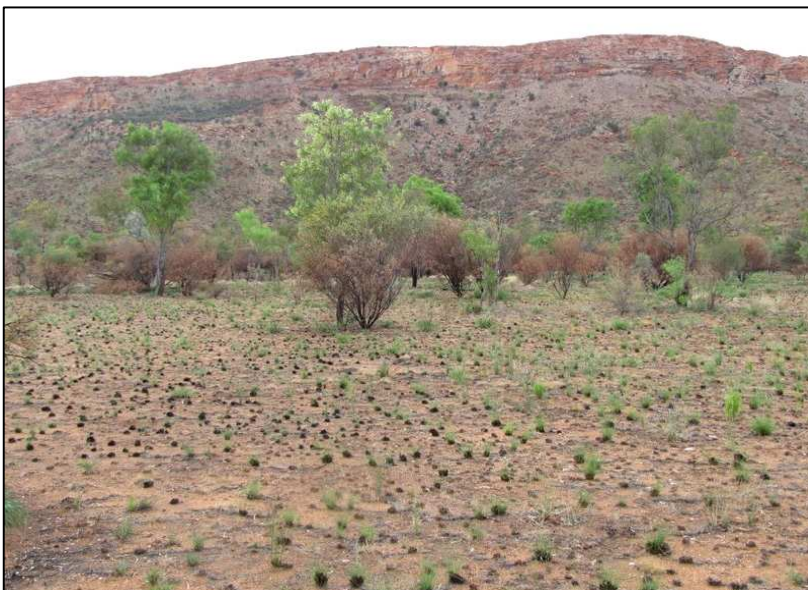
trees, before the recent fire. The Whitewoods, *Atalaya hemiglauca* were covered with pale green winged seeds and the Bloodwoods, *Corymbia opaca* were still loaded with large gum nuts, evidence of magnificent flowering earlier in the year.

We looked at a variety of ant and spider holes and webby debris left by borers in a Witchetty bush.

Other birds we saw were Mistletoebird, Magpie Larks, Singing Honey-eater, Crested Pigeons, Australian Ringnecks and a Pied Butcherbird.

We were invited back to Sue's for a delicious morning tea and a look at her two beautiful Bearded Dragon pets.

Thank you Sue Fraser for organising a very pleasant Saturday morning.



Burnt patches of grasses reshooting and some larger trees undamaged by the fire.

Field Nats End-of-Year Breakfast - Olive Pink Botanical Garden - Dec 4th 2011

At 7:00am a small group arrived in anticipation of a walk with Paul Rilstone to the old Power House. Only problem was that Paul could not remember being told he was taking us on a walk. However, that was soon sorted out by Connie Spencer and off the group went with Paul up Meyer Hill.

Paul explained that soon Power and Water will be vacating most of the land they now occupy adjacent to OPBG. Once it became known that Power and Water were planning to vacate, the developers became active and submitted plans for housing subdivisions. Olive Pink Botanic Garden intervened and fortunately for current and future generations, Power and Water decided to cede all the land right across to the distant water tank to OPBG.

At the top of Meyer Hill we went off road and headed east. We did a bit of a scramble up past a large water tank and onwards through barbed wire fences and other obstacles until we reached a great vantage point from where we could look right across the valley and directly down on an abandoned power station building. This old building is to be kept and may be used by OPBG.



From that same point you can readily see the current power station further east, and even further to a water tank at the far end of the valley. It is wonderful to report that the land ceded to OPBG extends all the way to that distant tank.

This is a large tract of land that one day should become one of the major attractions for visitors and locals alike. A comparison was made with King's Park in Perth where a large area of natural bushland was retained in the heart of the city. The land forms, plants and fauna make it uniquely central Australian as well as central Alice Springs.

Paul told us that there are a number of Aboriginal sacred sites in the area, and to avoid disturbing them there were plans to build boardwalks over some sensitive areas. Most of the land is fairly degraded with lots of Buffel Grass, but section by section will be rejuvenated over time. Lots of work for lots of volunteers!

About 8:15am we headed back towards the gazebo where breakfast was to be had. On the way we passed what Connie Spencer called a Minniritchi Eucalypt. Paul said it was a *Eucalyptus orbifolia* and showed us the label to prove it. Connie stuck to her guns and declared that the sign was on longer correct as there had been a name change some years ago, and that the correct name now, was in fact *E.minniritchi*. Paul decided (as I would have under Connie's intense look) that the wiser course of action was not to argue with Connie and so we continued on back to the gazebo.

More people turned up for the breakfast. The food was fantastic. The selection included sliced mango, cheese and crackers, corn fritters, ham fritters, savoury muffins, fruit scrolls with spiced yoghurt, ham and cheese croissants, fruit juices, coffee and tea, and more.



Cruise down the Warburton Creek, north of Lake Eyre - by Anne Pye

In June 2011 I was lucky enough to take a boat trip down the Warburton Creek from near Mungerannie to the entrance of Lake Eyre while it was flooding and back again. There were 4 boats in all, each with a boatie and three passengers, and the trip took about 9 days there and back. As it turned out just about all of the passengers had seen the boats on the ABC Paul Lockyer documentary about Lake Eyre and googled www.safarico.com.au immediately afterwards....As part of the trip we also enjoyed a fantastic 2 hour flight over Lake Eyre – when it was 80% full....lots of mesmeric blue horizons with light cloud mirrored in reflections...



It was the second trip the company had done down the river in a short space of time and the river was already dropping quite rapidly, but still flowing very strongly. However our trip apparently had the benefit of much more birdlife than the previous one. For a lot of the time we had a constant circle of Black and Whistling Kites over the four boats, several hundred at a time. There were lots of Grebes, Fairy Martins and a variety of Ducks along the way; Barn Owls at night and plenty of Pelicans, Gulls and Terns as we got closer to the Lake. The two serious birdos on the trip counted over 80 species on and off the water. You could also see fish at some points but unfortunately nobody had bought a line so we couldn't tell what species were there. The camps were often visited by Dingoes overnight and every night there were rodents (which may have been the Long-tailed Rat) trying pretty hard to join you in the swag.

The routine was to camp on the side of the creek, get up before dawn for a cooked breakfast, go along the river until morning tea, pull over for morning tea, get back in the boat until stopping for lunch, then continue on until about 4ish when we would knock off for the day and set up camp again.

The campfires at lunch and dinner helped keep us warm during some cold days and nights. And tarps on the boats were protection against a pretty frigid wind. The country was flat once you got over the river bank (which could be quite steep) with white sand. There was a variety of landscapes including reddish cliffs as well as the white sand dunes as we went down the river. Just about every different smoko, lunch and camp spot seemed to have a different composition of wildflowers and forbs. A lot of the species were the same as Central Australia such as Lavatera, Helichrysum, Poached Egg Daisy and Wahlenbergia but there were others such as the Yellow Darling Pea which we don't get. It was amazing to see the big old Coolibahs with their roots partly out of the ground where the underlying dune had been washed away over successive floods.



Apparently the Warburton floods more often than the Cooper – but also has more variation in the landscape on the way down the river. It was really a once in a lifetime opportunity and I feel so fortunate that I was able to see this country when there was so much water around and before large corporate interests (which includes some of the big conservation landholding groups operating in Australia) succeed in their efforts to try and block public access to these ephemeral waterways.

Next page – a few Field Nats photos from 2011

From the top: Relaxing at Annas Reservoir; a big crowd learning about geology at Ellery Big Hole; sharing a joke in Alice Valley; a cup of tea after a walk at Ooraminna Rockhole; helping a stranded vehicle on Larapinta Drive; at the top of Witchetty Hill; more geology at Ellery Big Hole; finding tiny native snails at Ilparpa swamp. Many thanks to the leaders of these and many other interesting trips.

