



April 2012

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



Black Fungus found in the *Intertexta* forest – as yet unidentified. Photo by Barb Gilffedder. More fungi on page 6.

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 **Thursday 26 April 2012**. Please send your contributions to Emily Findlay robbiemily@hotmail.com or Barb Gilfedder fedders@octa4.net.au

MEETINGS.

- Wed 11 April **AFNC** Meeting, 7.00 pm at the lecture theatre in the Higher Education Building at Charles Darwin University. Speaker: **Glenn Marshall** - "Hanging around the Hobbits of Flores, Indonesia". Glenn has keenly followed the story of the tiny *Homo floresiensis* ('hobbit') skeletons unearthed in a large cave on the volcanic island of Flores, Indonesia in 2004. He attended the dig last year and is currently studying archaeology to enhance his hominid knowledge. Hobbits inhabited the island for at least a million years and perished only 50,000 years ago with the coming of humans. They shared their world with dwarf elephants (stegedons), giant storks, Komodo dragons and giant rats. Their origins and bone structures remain one of the great mysteries of archaeology, still embroiled in fierce debate.
- Wed 9 May **AFNC** Meeting, 7.00 pm at the lecture theatre in the Higher Education Building at Charles Darwin University. Speaker: **Peter Latz** "Historical botanizing at Hermannsberg".
- Wed 13 June **AFNC** Meeting, 7.00 pm at the lecture theatre in the Higher Education Building at Charles Darwin University. Speaker: **Angus Duguid** "Lake Eyre basin Fish".

FIELD TRIPS / ACTIVITIES.

- 6-9 Apr **ASFNC Easter - Barrow Creek and Davenport Ranges.** Organiser Rosalie Schultz. With the four day weekend there is a unique opportunity to explore Davenport Ranges. This Park is at the junction of the arid central desert region and the tropical north, with a diversity of life from both. For example, both the Northern Nailtail Wallaby and the Black-footed Rock Wallaby are found there. Contact here is now Neil Woolcock. His numbers are 89 551021 and 04 2852 1598.
- 22 April **ASFNC Quarterly Shorebird Count** at Alice Springs sewage ponds. Meet at birders' gate at 7.30am sharp. Please let Barb know if you can be a counter or a scribe for this event. Contact Barb Gilfedder
- 28-29 Apr **ASFNC Newhaven Reserve.** This is down as a weekend trip, which is not really long enough. Please extend your time for a day or two either way on an individual basis, if you can. (Anzac day is Wed 25 April, so you may be able to incorporate that.) Contact Barb Gilfedder 89555452.
- Sat 19 May **APS** Tenille Durber has organized an APS and Friends of Olive Pink Botanic Garden planting workshop, bird-attracting species at OPBG at 10.00am
- 26 or 27 May **ASFNC** Duck Swamp on Henbury Station. Drive to and explore an interesting wetland in the desert - to be confirmed. Leader Barb Gilfedder
- 14- 15 July **ASFNC** members are welcome to visit **Alcoota Fossil** site, during the NT Museum's annual dig. These are the dates of their visitor weekend, but we need a volunteer leader, please.

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March Speaker - Andrew Bridges, Director, Territory Eco-Link “A Big Vision”

In the Northern Territory there are 67 sites of Conservation Significance, some nationally significant and some internationally significant. A map of these can be seen at <http://www.nretas.nt.gov.au/environment-protection/conservation/map> and you can click on individual sites on this map and there is an enormous amount of information describing each of them and the reasons for their importance. They support species not found anywhere else and provide key habitat for threatened species. *This is a fantastic site, look it up!*

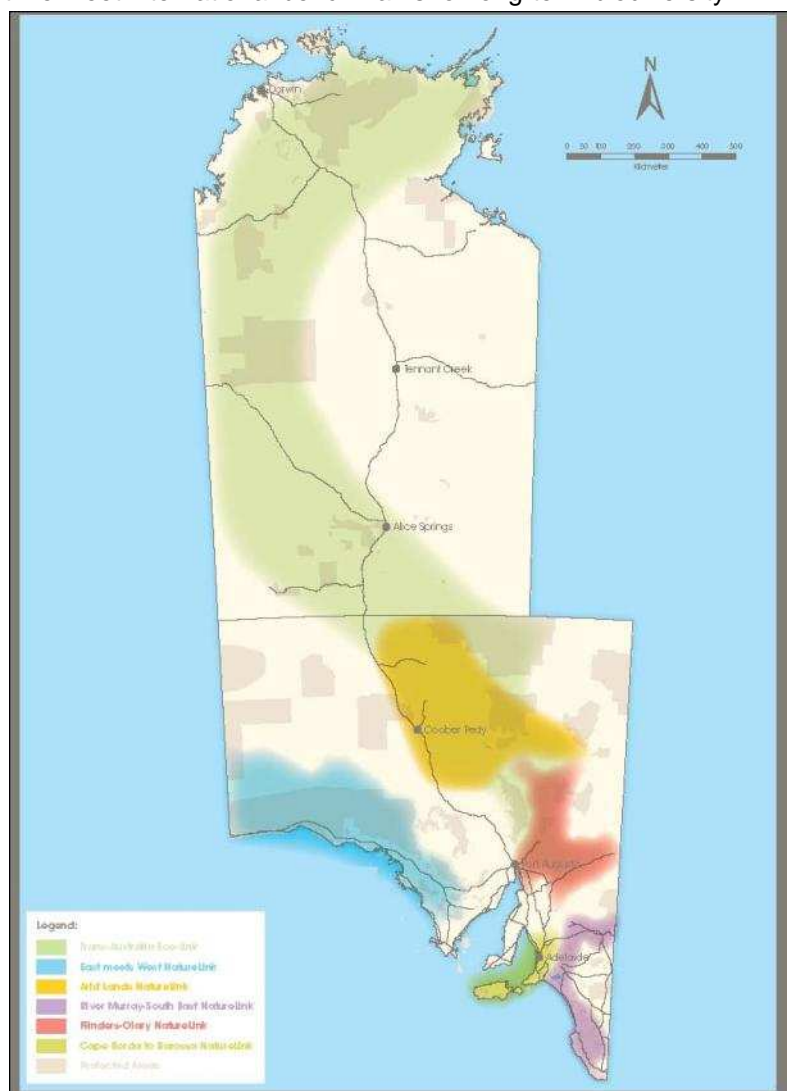
Territory Eco-Link is the Territory part of a joint initiative between the Northern Territory and South Australian Governments to establish a wildlife corridor extending more than 3,500 km from Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory to Port Augusta in South Australia. It started in the Territory as an election commitment by the NT Government in 2008 with 1.8 million dollars made available over 3 years. It has now been running for two and half years and there is a commitment to provide permanent funding. Its main aim is to undertake landscape scale conservation management, joining up existing protected areas and helping landowners look after the country.

The Territory has 87 Territory Parks and two National Parks managed by the Australian Government. By joining these in a variety of ways, individual species may be able to move North-South through the Territory, which could help them survive in the climate change situation and support biodiversity. Andrew stressed that there was no locking up of land to achieve this objective, no stopping of development or compulsory acquisitions.

Indigenous protected areas already exist in many parts of this corridor and more can be granted, with the Commonwealth covering much of the costs including funding Ranger Groups to manage the areas. There are five private reserves in the territory including Newhaven (which is managed by Australian Wildlife Conservancy) and Henbury Station, which was recently purchased by RM Williams Agricultural Holdings. Two thirds of the cost for the latter was covered by the Commonwealth Government. For the first time a business is attempting to establish a model for carbon farming - and at the same time meet international benchmarks for long-term biodiversity conservation. By removing stock and feral animals such as camels, less methane is produced and less vegetation is eaten. Andrew stressed that the Henbury purchase is very much an experiment. The idea is generally not to pull land out of production. Many properties only use 50 to 60% of their land for stock and often this is not the areas of interest to conservationists. It may be possible to exchange areas of land between stations and reserves for a better outcome for both interests.

Conlon's Lagoon on the Alice Springs Shooting Complex land, is an ephemeral claypan, to which we have had several club visits. The management has entered into an agreement with the Territory Government to conserve the claypan and its surrounds.

Macdonnell Downs Station is the first pastoral property in the Northern Territory to voluntarily place a perpetual conservation covenant over part of the property. Along the Binns Track, North East of Alice, it covers 4.7 sq km, includes a unique granite boulder outcrop and is called the Mac and Rose Chalmers Conservation Reserve. The graves of Mac and Rose are at the foot of the outcrop. A camp ground and walking tracks are being established. Territory Eco-Link have provided fencing and interpretive signage. The Field Nats hope to visit this reserve later in the year.



Animal and plant surveys have been conducted on sites such as this. It may be possible for groups, like the Field Nats to continuing to add data about the sites, such as bird and animal and plant lists or sightings. Territory Eco-Link has not yet developed a simple method for this to happen. However Andrew said it may be possible to borrow infra-red cameras to set up there, if we camp there overnight.

He stated that it is impossible for government alone to protect biodiversity. Territory Eco-Link involves working with many groups including pastoralists, Indigenous groups, not for profit conservation organisations, philanthropists, private land owners, land councils and various levels of government to encourage and facilitate a whole of community effort to conserve the Territory's biodiversity. Land for Wildlife programs which have over 200 properties registered – over 30,000 hectares are also funded by Territory Eco-Link.

It is important to value everyone's contribution and have as many as possible contributing.

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ALICE SPRINGS DESERT PARK FARM - Saturday 25th February.

Cecily Sutton

Scott Pullyblank, Curator of Botany at ASDP kindly showed 10 members from the Field Nats around the farm. We were blessed with a cool summer morning and it had rained overnight, so everything was looking superb.

The ASDP is endeavouring to produce more food locally for its birds and animals. The cost of food and the food miles are a consideration, as well as improving the nutritional status of their diet by using native foods. Obviously doing this has taken considerable thought. One of the first things we saw was a locally designed moth trap. Moths are good tucker for some of the rodents! Next we admired some of the Native Millet grass (*Panicum decompositum*). This one had just self seeded due to good conditions, but the Desert Park nursery are growing lots more from seed. There was a cluster of Quandong trees, (*Santalum acuminatum*) planted 2 years ago. Getting these to grow can be tricky, perhaps due to overheating of the roots or specific water requirements. Quandongs are semi-parasitic, so native grass is growing between them, as well as Mulga trees in the periphery, in an attempt to replicate optimal growing requirements.

We went into the enclosed farm that was planted about 10 years ago. This had some well established trees and garden beds that were thriving. The Bush Potatoes (*Ipomoea costata*) were flowering and looked beautiful, with huge purple flowers. There was a Caper Bush (*Capparis spinosa*), with glorious white flowers on it. This normally flowers at night, but because it was overcast the flowers were still out.



Native Cucumber *Cucumis melo*



Caper Bush *Capparis spinosa*

There was an impressive growth of Native Cucumber (*Cucumis melo*) and Bush Banana (*Marsdenia australis*) growing all over the fence. We had a nibble of both. The Desert Raisins (*Solanum Centrale*) were ripe. They have a slightly bitter taste. Maybe it is an acquired taste, maybe it might depend on how hungry you are. It is a popular ingredient to add flavour to dishes cooked by native food enthusiasts. The most beautiful plant was another Bush Potato (*Ipomoea poha subsp latzii*). This originates from the Ti Tree region and is thriving in summer. The long trailing stems were covered in large purple flowers. This has large round edible tubers, but we did not dig any up.

There were a collection of Wild Orange trees (*Capparis mitchellii*) of varying ages. The leaves and general appearance of the trees varied markedly. They had very impressive curved thorns.

There are medicinal bushes in the garden as well. A huge *Eremophila longifolia*. It is very important in traditional medicine. Others included Rock Fuschia Bush (*Eremophila freelingii*) and Striped Mint Bush (*Prostanthera striatiflora*).

We walked past the “Browse Garden” that is used to collect “furnishings” for the Nocturnal House. There are also lots of Acacia trees. The idea of collecting the acacia seeds then allowing them to sprout has been a very successful addition to the bird’s diet.

The Desert Farm is “work in progress”, with plans for extending. Some of the recent plantings of Kangaroo Balls (*Austrobryonia centrale*) and Pencil Yams (*Vigna lanceolata*) have been very successful. Five kilos of root vegetable a week are needed to keep the animals fed.



Collecting them, keeping up a regular supply, and encouraging the animals to adapt their tastes if there is an interruption of supply is a time-consuming activity.

It was fantastic to be guided around the Desert Farm. To be shown the plants, to hear the stories of innovation and hard work, try some of the food, and to admire the result of the Desert Farm Staff’s labour.

Thank you Scott.

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In search of *Macrozamia macdonnellii* - Report from Marie Ryan

In June last year, Rosalie planned a walk along the hills in the south-east of the Telegraph Station to view the few Cycads still extant in the immediate Alice Springs area. However, due to the inordinate amount of Buffel grass on the slopes, Rosalie advised that, for our safety, we should confine ourselves to a less overgrown walk in the Telegraph Station. But that did not mean she had given up on sharing the Cycads: they were put on hold until 10 March this year when, at 6.00am ten of us set off with renewed determination.

We crossed the Todd River, still with a few puddles from the recent rains, and surrounded by green grass (albeit much of it Buffel) and trees much refreshed from their recent cleansing. Soon enough, the upward clamber commenced, but not without its rewards. Within a very short time we came upon numerous Euros and Rock Wallabies, quite tame and posing like attention-seeking starlets on the rocky ledges.



At one stop, we looked back to a rosy-orange sun rising in the east, whilst the almost-full moon remained high in the sky, reluctant to relinquish its nightly dominance. There was a deep blue for some height above the horizon, and Cecily explained that this was from the shadow of the earth.

Whilst there were not too many bushes flowering, we did see the common red *Eremophila latrobei*, and some Native Figs, *Ficus brachypoda* with a few unripe fruits. We also came upon a number of Caustic Vines *Sarcostemma australe*, which ooze latex: this was used by indigenous people to draw patterns on their skin, as the milky substance dries to a transparent shine. It could also be used for the more serious purpose of being placed into the eyes of persons who viewed things inappropriate for

their position within the group. Sheltering among rocks were three different kinds of fern including the resurrection plant, Woolly Cloak Fern, *Cheilanthes lasiophylla*.

Birdlife was somewhat scant on our walk: we spotted a Crow and a few flashes of green, being Ring-necked Parrots – this was surprising, as the preceding few days had been remarkable for the early morning song as the birds awakened to the land refreshed by rain. Reptiles, too, stayed hidden as we passed.



And now the Cycads! We only viewed the small group known to be in this location, but what an interesting, ancient plant, with its differing male and female cones and palm-like fronds. We saw one male cone and Rosalie was armed with sufficient literature (and a seed sample) for us to have a clear picture of the large red seeds which are frequently seen in the western Macdonnell Ranges. This plant survives from when ancient forests extended to the inland but is now categorised by the NT Parks and Wildlife Service as 'near threatened'.

The geology too was interesting as we traversed the Alice Springs Granite and came upon conspicuous seams of quartz squeezed into cracks in the granite in the course of ancient geological upheavals. On a more mundane level, we saw rock formations which it pleased us to view as a snail, a turtle, and a mushroom.

As we descended and made our way back across the Todd, we came upon a multitude of plump black tadpoles, wriggling their way to a froggy future. We wished them a happy life as we headed home to talk of Cycads. Thank you Rosalie for a delightful morning!



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More Fungi - Barb Gilfedder

In our newsletter May 2011, I put in an article and photos called "Fabulous Fungi". With the recent rain, many macrofungi fruiting bodies managed to emerge again. The main part of the plants, a web-like mass called the mycelium is always there, usually hidden underground or in the dead wood it is feeding on. It releases enzymes and absorbs nutrients.



My first search this time was for the tiny puffballs that appear in sand or sandy soil under trees. Last year I was unable to identify them. I had sent photos to Fungi expert, Gaye Drady and she had suggested that they may be on stalks, but I had only seen them appearing stalkless on the surface. In fact, I discovered this year, that at least some of them do have quite long, slender stalks, most of which is below the surface, so we were able to identify them as a *Tulostoma* sp.



A fungus I hadn't seen before appeared in the mulch outside our backdoor. I looked right through Bruce Fuhrer's book "A field guide to Australian Fungi" checking all the photos, and thought the closest was *Scleroderma cepa*, a hard-skinned puffball.

Gaye agreed with my ID. It was about 60mm across, and would have started as a smooth-skinned ball. With age the outer skin splits into recurved lobes exposing the purple-brown spore mass. I only saw it at this later stage.

Peter Latz mentions 3 different fungi species in his "Bushfires and Bushtucker" book. One that I found several specimens of this time, is Scarlet

Scarlet Bracket Fungus, *Pycnospora coccineus*



And another species that I had not seen before, appeared on a dead log in the Intertexta forest. I thought at first that it was a burnt part of the wood then realized that it was fungus (See front cover for Picture). No identification yet. I will keep you posted.

***Scleroderma cepa*, a hard-skinned puffball**

Bracket Fungus, *Pycnospora coccineus*. It is such an eye-catching colour on the dead trees it lives on, especially when wet..

Peter tells us that it is poisonous, but is used for medicinal purposes by the Pintubi and Pitjantjatjara peoples. It is either chewed on like a teething ring, or portions are applied to the mouths of young children suffering from skin complaints. The native Snails *Pleuroxia adcockiana* have demolished most of a small specimen in a rotting log in our garden, so it is not poisonous to them.



Club Badge Still Available

Don't forget a club badge is still available through, Central Uniforms and Embroider Shop 2/24 Parsons St, Phone 8952 2458.

Members are invited to visit the shop to choose a shirt or take in your own garment. Costs will be \$6.00 for embroidery on a shop shirt or \$6.50 for sewing onto your own garment or \$6.50 for a badge. Please ring Rosalie 89523409 for arrangements or enquiries

A few interesting websites

Anne Pye forwarded this reference to me, about the Palm Valley Palms.

<http://www.abc.net.au/science/articles/2012/03/07/3447620.htm>

Also one about Cycads. "[Modern] Cycads aren't leftovers from dinosaur times, they're actually really recently evolved and very young plants."

<http://www.abc.net.au/science/articles/2011/10/21/3344101.htm>

And this one with Interesting pictures of spiders during the floods

<http://www.theage.com.au/environment/weather/web-wonders-spiders-spin-for-their-lives-as-floodwaters-rise-20120307-1ujov.html>

Jacylyn Anderson came across an astronomy activity in an email from the CSIRO's Science by Email about viewing the Transit of Venus (the next transit will be in another century). The link below has the viewing times for Central Australia. It will take place in the 6th June, in work time.

http://astronomy.swin.edu.au/~smaddiso/download/factsheet_24x.pdf

If you are interested in the scientific naming of plants, you could happily spend a few hours at this website.

www.CuriousTaxonomy.net

Pam Keil tells me that both Desert Park and NT Parks and Wildlife have recently gone onto Facebook. This is a great way for people to see events and opportunities (and to comment on them if they have a Facebook page of their own).

<http://www.facebook.com/ntparksandwildlife>

<http://www.facebook.com/AliceSpringsDesertPark>

Project Numbat Fundraiser

Every year the Australasian Society of Zookeeping (ASZK) does a fundraiser for a conservation species within the Australasian region. This year it is to raise money for Project Numbat and we will be having a "Bowling for Numbats" night very soon. However in the meantime we are having a fundraising raffle for the clay fired Numbat (photos attached) created by the very talented Nancy Hall. The Numbat stands 30cm tall and 30cm long. The raffle will be drawn at 10am on the 10th April at the Zoology amenities block and I will notify you all via email the drawn winner. Dig deep as it is for a worthy cause.

Tickets are;

- \$1.00 for one tickets
- \$2.00 for three tickets
- \$3.00 for five tickets
- \$4.00 for seven tickets
- \$5.00 for ten tickets

If you are interested in purchasing tickets contact me and I can arrange for tickets to be sent to you. All donations to this cause are also greatly appreciated.

Anthony Molyneux Assistant Curator Zoology, Alice Springs Desert Park. Phone: (08) 895 18722



ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED

Minutes of general meeting at Higher Education Building, Charles Darwin University Wednesday 14 March, 2012.

Present: Members, visitors and apologies as per attendance book.

Previous minutes – accepted.

Business arising from the minutes:

- Still need to find out about progress on bird hides at sewage ponds.
- Jill Brew has not yet checked up on Bendigo Bank.

Correspondence in:

- Bill Low - lecture last Friday.
- Pam Kiel – Kelly Knights, Volunteers needed for Larapinta Trail Maintenance
- Jenny Purdie and Tenille Durber - Plant Sale at Olive Pink on Saturday 17/3 8am

These three forwarded to membership.

- Anne Pye – Websites – Palm Valley palms, Spiders in flood areas, and cycads.

Will be listed in next newsletter.

- Pam Keil on Feral camels. Over 1,000,000 in Central Australia. Report sightings of damage to website. Business cards available for contact details.
- Nick Atchison – Curator of Zoology, at ASDP would like Field Nats involvement in Bird Festival 30 Sept – 7 October.
- Austcover insurance cover premium renewal advice
- Post Box renewal advice

These last two passed to Rosalie Breen in Jill Brew's absence

- WA Naturalists and NT Nature Territory March editions.

Correspondence out:

- Thank you card to Dick Kimber for his talk last meeting.
- Thank you email to Alan White, Billy Flanagan and Rod Randall – Roe Creek.
- Thank you card to Scott Pullyblank for his tour of the Desert Park farm.

Treasurer's Report: No Treasurer's report due to Treasurer's absence.

General Business:

Running low on thank you cards so Barb organised and Jenny Purdie printed 20 more for us, using Orange Potter Wasp photo by Barb. Jenny paid \$20 costs. Thank you Jenny.

Activities/Trips:

24,25 March - Gemtree. Need to know numbers.

Easter - Email Morgan re Davenport Ranges. So far Morgan Flint, Neil and Leigh Woolcock and Bev Dawson.

22 April - Shorebird count. Rhondda Tomlinson, Michael Green, Neil and Leigh Woolcock, Shane Green volunteered

28,29Apr - Newhaven. Surveys on for whole of April.

Speakers:

No speaker yet for April – possibly a friend of Rosalie Breen. A limnologist may be available the week after the scheduled meeting date, so may change date of meeting to 3rd Wed instead of 2nd Wed (18th instead of 11th) for April.

9 May - Peter Latz to speak either about history of Hermannsburg through plants or effect of camels on vegetation. Hermannsburg option preferred.

13 June – Angus Duguid – Fish in Lake Eyre basin rivers

Also trying to organise excursion with Angus to Duck Swamp in May.

11 July – Ken Johnson on H.H. Finlayson.

Sightings:

Jenny Purdie saw a Red Kangaroo near Lyndavale Drive; several members reported seeing flocks of budgerigars around Alice Springs, Cecily Sutton saw a Thorny devil near Wills Terrace, Michael Green saw a Peach-faced Lovebird (not a native) in Gillen Bev Gray had a Kingfisher (probably Sacred) in her garden.

Next Meeting:

Supper – no volunteers

Note taker – Lee Ryall, or if meeting date changed Michael Green.