



September 2012

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



A beautiful *Eremophila paisleyi* in full flower was discovered on the Finke River trip - with no others of its kind to be seen nearby (see p. 5). Photo by Barb Gilfedder.

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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Web site:

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

NEXT NEWSLETTER

The deadline for the next newsletter is **Friday 21st September 2012**. Please send your contributions to Barb Gilfedder at fedders@octa4.net.au

MEETINGS

- Wed 12 Sept **ASFNC** Meeting 7.00 pm at the lecture theatre in the Higher Education Building at Charles Darwin University. – Speaker: Rick Churchill – Rick spent several weeks volunteering with Australian Wildlife Conservancy studying Echidnas on Kangaroo Island
- Wed 10 Oct **ASFNC** Meeting 7.00 pm at the lecture theatre in the Higher Education Building at Charles Darwin University. – Speaker: Our favourite geologist, Michael Green – GOLD
- Wed 5 Sept **APS** Meeting 7.30 pm at Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Speaker- Karlee Foster from Alice Springs Nursery on “Grafted Australian Natives”.

FIELD TRIPS / ACTIVITIES

- Sat 8 Sept **ASFNC** Walk Fenn Gap – the cave through the mountain –Start from Flynns Grave at 9.00am. Please let Neil know before Friday If you intend going on this trip. Leader Neil Woolcock Phone 8955 1021 neilwool48@gmail.com
- Sun 16 Sept **ASFNC** Ormiston Pound walk or part of. – Asante Sana Choir performing in afternoon. If Field Nats walk in morning – members can stay on if they wish to hear choir. (Rosalie Breen is willing to lead but does not have transport on that day. If anyone is keen to go and can provide transport for Rosalie too, please contact Barb as Rosalie away until 7 September) Contact details below
- Sun 23 Sept **ASFNC** Aileron walk followed by lunch at the pub – Leader Neil Woolcock. Meet at MVR at 9.45am. Neil needs to know numbers before Friday 21 September, as he needs to book in advance. Phone 8955 1021 neilwool48@gmail.com
- 30 Sept - 7 Oct **BIRD FESTIVAL** - keep an eye on the [Desert Park](http://DesertPark.com.au) website for more details as they get posted.
- Sat 13 Oct **ASFNC** Upper Todd Walk – Rosalie/ Connie
- Sat Sun 27-28 Oct **ASFNC** Winnecke overnight with Michael Green, a follow-up to his talk on Gold
- Sat Sun 3-4 Nov **ASFNC** Walk from Serpentine Chalet, overnight camp on Saturday night followed by an interesting morning walk – Ian and Wendy Mann 8952 7808 wikks@gotalk.net.au

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Walking on the Southside of Heavitree Range with Connie Spencer

Saturday 23 June 2012; by Elizabeth Thurgood; photos by R Tomlinson, R Breen & C Spencer

Each year that Denis and I travel from our home in Beaufort, Victoria back to the desert, we have to not only 'get our desert eye in' but also relearn the names of what we are seeing all over again. A visit to the Olive Pink Botanic Garden was therefore a must while we were in Alice Springs. It is a beautiful garden and we really enjoyed it but the most important thing we learned was that the Alice Springs Field Nats were having a walk on Saturday, the very next day!

Thanks Connie for letting us join you.

The walk itself, after leaving the Buffel Grass behind, was a delight, whether strolling along pretty tracks, clambering up a small rocky gully, or finding our way through the Mulga it was all fun as was all the talk as we met a great bunch of Centralian Field Nats.

For me though the highlights of the expedition were the opportunities to meet old friends again and to have Connie and the crew right there to re-introduce them, without my having to resort to searching through our field guides for their names! Thank you!

Even I couldn't forget the beautiful Ghost Gums, *E papuana* (now called *Corymbia aparrerinja*), and the Holly Grevillea *G wickhami* but I did need reminding about the 'fruit trees' *Capparis mitchellii*, Wild Orange and *Canthium*



latifolium (now *Psydrax latifolia*), Native Currant. By the way, it was the Emu Apple, *Owenia acidula* that stands out from the grey bush in outback Queensland as does the Cherry Ballart *Exocarpos cupressiformis* back home.

A stand of Spearwood, *Pandorea doratoxylon* in the gully and a truly beautiful stand of Blue Mallee *Eucalyptus gamophylla* were great to meet again! But it was the Supplejack, *Ventilago viminalis* that I really loved. I had never before been really sure of it but we saw lots, all looking really good with lots of smooth new growth, and being able to compare it with Whitewood, *Atalaya hemiglauc* was a bonus. There were lots of other plants that we saw (and smelled). I had never considered the use of *Melaleuca glomerata* for aromatherapy or tried to resurrect a dead looking fern. Denis appreciated the geological talk and the birds and Euros too!



Photos from top: Strolling along a pretty track; Clambering up a rocky gully; Observing a Native Currant *Psydrax latifolia*.

So thank you everyone who helped us enjoy our walk so much and to the club for displaying your newsletter. We learned heaps and will be well prepared for our next stroll along a desert track. We extend a warm welcome, despite our cold weather, to any Alice Springs field naturalists who might visit Ballarat. The Ballarat club meets the first Friday of each month and has an excursion the Sunday after. All the details about our activities can be found on the club blog Fieldnatballarat.wordpress.com



Reflections on the Finke River Trip led by Jim & Marg Lawrence

August long weekend - photos by Connie Spencer (palm), Allan Weeks (bustards), and Barb Gilfedder



Water, fish, birds and a surprise. - by Barb Gilfedder

There were waterholes all along the sandy Finke river bed. At the first small puddle we managed to identify four different species of fish – Bony Bream *Nematalosa erebi*, Desert Rainbow Fish *Melanotaenia splendida*, a single Hyrtl's Catfish *Neosilurus hyrtlii* and a single Finke Morgurnda *Morgurnda larapintae*. That would not have been possible before Angus Duguid's talk in June.

I remember camping at Junction Waterhole many times in the past, but not recently. This is where Ellery Creek joins up with the Finke River. Twelve Little Black Cormorants and a Darter were sitting in a row on a branch over the water, so no doubt there were fish in there too. Bob Read collected a little pot of a Charaphyte, a branching algae, from there, for Rosalie Breen to look at and pass on to the experts.

Looking down at another waterhole from a steep grassy bank we were surprised to see a big school of Bony Bream – large fish about 40cm long and so many of them.

"Big enough to eat," someone said.

"But not worth trying with a name like that," was the reply.

But I'm sure the water birds enjoy them.



Boggy Hole had a few interesting looking birds on it including a Pelican and a Purple Swamp Hen but we didn't stop as we needed to get on to our planned camp, the other side of Running Waters.

There was just a narrow flowing strip of water at our campsite just outside the park, a lovely spot where we camped for two nights. Bob walked beside the water, back towards the range and found a large number of bird species. I watched the beautiful Major Mitchells inspecting hollow branches probably looking for possible nest sites.

The next day we drove into Illamurta Springs Reserve. This was disappointing as it had been badly burnt in a bush fire and also the perimeter fence was down. Camel, horse and donkey droppings identified the invaders. The old stone buildings were interesting but the old yards had been completely burnt leaving strange circles of metal on poles that had obviously been put in to support the large wooden logs. There was still water in the springs and lots of green younger plants thriving and under many of the blackened shrubs bleached shells showed where native snails had been. I hope some had survived the fire.



On the way home we called in at one of *Acacia latzii* sites that are monitored by the Australian Plants Society. It was great to see an *Eremophila paisleyi* flowering beautifully beside the track in (cover photo). I haven't seen it in the wild before. It is strange that there is just the one plant there with no others anywhere near it.

Thank you Jim and Marg for a relaxing weekend.
Barb Gilfedder

Finke Gorge National Park - From Connie Spencer

The best thing about the August long weekend trip along the Finke River 4WD Route was our fellow travellers. What a lot of expertise in our small group.

Although the trip did not have the excitement of umpteen water crossings that we encountered last year it is still a challenging drive through stunning scenery and camping at Running Waters where there is permanent water was delightful. I won't forget the many Cormorants watching us lunching at Junction Waterhole or the schools of Bony Bream in another large body of water, or the Red-backed Kingfisher that sat still in a River Red Gum ever so long.

Bird List for Finke River Trip compiled by Bob Read and Barb Gilfedder

Little Black Cormorant Australian Magpie Brown Falcon Zebra Finch Willie Wagtail Galah Australian Ringneck White-plumed Honey-eater Magpie Lark White-necked Heron Black-faced Woodswallow Weebill Darter Black-fronted Dotterel	Whistling Kite Wedge-tailed Eagle Torresian Crow Striated Pardalote Grey-crowned Babbler Purple Swamp hen Little Pied Cormorant Tree Martin Pelican Eurasian Coot Australasian Grebe Australian Bustard Hardhead Spinifex Pigeon	Budgerigars (flocks up to 200) Australian Reed Warbler Pacific Black Duck Grey Teal Crested Pigeon Black Swan Little Button Quail Pied Butcherbird Australian Bustard Red-backed Kingfisher Australian Woodduck Hoary-headed Grebe Red-tailed Black Cockatoo Australian Pipit	Major Mitchell Cockatoo Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike White-faced Heron Australian Hobby Cockatiel Frogmouth (heard) Total 51 Species Bold all seen near Running Waters Yard where we camped.
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Jim's Place Walk

21 July by Rosalie Breen

As you round the arrowed corner on the approach to Stuart's Well, or Jim's Place as it is affectionately called, there are masses of interesting rock stacks, blocks, boulders or whatever in the gullies among the equally rocky hills. These have intrigued me for years. So on Jill Brew's suggestion a walk there was investigated, and permission given for us to explore.



On Saturday, thirteen of us set out through the gate of Jim's Place yard. Surprisingly on climbing the wall of the dam ahead, we found no water but a big tent. It belonged to a man observing the stars (at night). We followed a road which once was the highway up into the hills, and then along little tracks among those big rocks, soon deteriorating into scrambling around rocks. Weathering of the rock made for interesting shapes including a balanced rock. Cecily climbed high to explore but did not push it over. Very large Spearwoods and Figs grew on the heights.

The rock is Pacoota Sandstone, part of the sequence of depositions in the Amadeus basin and laid down between 505 and 487 million years ago. The sandstone is mostly friable quartz sandstone. Trace fossils can be found, such as worm tubes, which we did find, and trilobite markings. Further to the west it is this rock which contains the oil and gas of Palm Valley. In a gully and ascending the first hill we saw different coloured and textured rocks, mudstones, siltstones and dolomite reminding me of the Ochre Pits deposits. The many *Eremophila freelingii* shrubs growing there indicate the dolomite soil. There is a cutting on the highway around that corner where you can see these exposed in clear layers. This is an exposure of an older underlying deposit, called the Goyder Formation. It is safe to stop there if travelling north.

After scrambling around the rocks we stayed in the valley, easy walking along animal tracks, criss-crossing a little dry creek, through the trees and shrubs and looking up into the rugged hills on each side. We were following trails which camels must take from the nearby Camel Farm. As we neared the farm we passed through "camel graveyard", a number of dead beasts left in the bush. Back at Jim's Place lunch was intended, but with staff problems that day only snacks could be bought, which we enjoyed outside at the back, where we also met Jim Cotterill himself and Dinky the musical dingo. Jim told us a great tale of something left on Mt Sonder in the early years. You ask him, it's really funny especially with him as the story teller.

The Cotterill family pioneered tourism to Kings Canyon from Wallara Ranch in the sixties. When they had to move out Jim set up this roadhouse for tourists. He called it Stuart's Well as a tribute to John McDouall Stuart who passed that way on his explorations north. Stuart's well itself was really just a soak in the Hugh River to the north a bit, where he would have camped.

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We would like to send a big

Thank You

to Emily Findlay for all your hard work on the Newsletter over the years.
You will be missed. Good luck to you and your family on your move and stay in Darwin.

August AGM President's Report - Barbara Giffedder

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 with over 80 individual members. Our financial position is also sound.

As usual we have had some excellent speakers at meetings. My thanks go to all of them. In the last half of 2011 we heard from some of our Field Naturalist club members – Stuart Traynor with a history of Central Australian weather, Michael Green gave us a geologist's view of climate change and Anthony Molyneux a great recount of camel treks in the centre. In 2012, we have been lucky to have talks from Dick Kimber, Peter Latz, Ken Johnson and Stuart Traynor, all great Centralians and expert story tellers; Andrew Bridges explained the Territory Eco-link initiative; Glenn Marshall made us jealous with his trips to Flores, digging up the Hobbits and Angus Duguid gave us a comprehensive talk on the Lake Eyre basin fish. We scored an extra lecture this year with Joan Powling talking about fresh water Algae in the arid zone. My thanks also to the note takers and supper bringers.

We have also had some excellent Field Trips. I am particularly pleased that we have had many of them organized and led by different members. The most popular was the recent visitors' weekend trip out to the Alcoota fossil dig site. Many thanks to Lee Ryall as well as the NT Museum staff for organizing this along with the pre-trip talk at the Museum. Jim and Margaret Lawrence organized and led two trips to Ooraminna Rockhole, a fossil hunt to Roe Creek borefield and a long weekend along the Finke River 4WD track. Jim is such a comfort to have on a driving trip with his mechanical and practical help. Cec Sutton led a group to Ellery Big Hole. Morgan Flint organized a fun trip to Mordor Pound. Michael Green led a very popular trip looking at Ellery Creek geology. Many thanks to all the leaders including Rosalie Breen, Connie Spencer, Pam Keil, Bob Read, Chris Watson, Rosalie Schultz and Sue Fraser who have all led interesting trips in the past year. New places that we have visited have included Alice Valley behind Ellery, just a day trip but I hope we can make a longer trip and explore more at some stage, Mac and Rose Chalmers Reserve on MacDonald Downs and Duck Swamp on Henbury Station, a place certainly worth making regular visits to. It was on this last trip that Rosalie Breen found an interesting Charaphyte, a branching algae that had first been collected by Ferdinand von Mueller and rarely been identified since. 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.

While I am talking about trips I would like to stress the need when travelling or walking with a group to consider and care for other members of the group. This usually happens, but not always. Travelling in convoy means watching out for the vehicle behind you, stopping on a crest or the end of a long straight to check, particularly on a dusty road and waiting at turn offs and gates. I heard that the long convoy to Alcoota broke into three groups. They all got to the right place eventually but the split would not have happened if everyone had followed the rules. The same goes for walking groups, the rule is that you stay with the leader throughout the walk, and not take off on your own without getting permission from the leader. We live in an unforgiving region, where it is easy to get lost and disorientated. As far as I know we have never lost anybody and I would like to keep it that way.

Other activities this year included the 2011 Eco-fair with its popular competition. The committee decided not to participate this year, but will look at the situation again in 2013. Regular quarterly bird surveys at the sewage ponds have continued. We have always managed to attract enough counters and scribes to conduct these and counts are always followed by interesting birding discussions.

All these things have been reported in our monthly newsletter. I frequently hear comments from people about how much they enjoy 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 Findlay for putting it together. Unfortunately for us, Emily is relocating to Darwin for the next twelve months and we are looking for someone to take over as newsletter editor.

Pam Keil has taken over responsibility for our club website. She adds each newsletter to it and is gradually updating other information that is on it as well. Many Thanks, Pam!

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.

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

After the AGM - Show & Tell by the Members - by Rosalie Breen

Many members were good little students and brought something to Show and Tell

Sarah showed some wonderful pictures of birds and whales from her recent trip to New Zealand. Impressive were close-ups of the majestic Albatross, and Giant Petrels and Cape Petrels.

Cecily was lucky to be at the Reptile Centre when a Taipan was shedding its skin. Dave ducked home for his camera and captured the action. They were impressed by the shimmering of the snake's muscles as it was moving the skin off, just like peeling off a stocking. The whole process took half an hour.

Rhondda, a couple of months ago, went along the Canning Stock Route, and shared the experience with pictures of the different landscapes. Lots of spinifex, sand and flat-top hills. Lizards were the stars too, and a big Woma snake. Connie and Barb named some of the flowers for us as we went along, but were silent for some! I enjoyed the beautiful campsites with coolabahs and water.

Michael provided the humour with his specially preserved desiccated burrowing frog lovingly wrapped in a hanky, which we were invited to handle "for your enjoyment". He also showed a special pair of binoculars which could focus on really close objects like a small flower or butterfly.

Pam is working on organized birthday parties at the Desert Park, so showed us a set of lizard swap cards with pictures and information. These and more to come are to be prizes for games. Incidentally you can book for \$60/hour and you don't have to prove it's your birthday.

Barb showed off her native snail photos.

Sue O'C had a spool of Golden Orb Spider web. Very strong and thick (and golden) but made up of many strands within the one thread. She also brought along information about silk worms; how the silk cocoons can be spun off into one long thread. She had a bookmark made of silk and under the microscope we could see the mass of individual fibres, quite a comparison to the spider web thread.

Rosalie with her microscope also had a few insects to view.

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SUBSCRIPTIONS REMINDER

Membership fees were due as from the Annual General Meeting in August.

Prompt payment would be appreciated, paid at meeting nights or posted to the Treasurer (P.O. Box 8663) or direct into the club account at Westpac BSB No.035-303 and Account No 100981

Be sure to put your name in the payment details

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

New members to 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 \$

Please circle relevant membership

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.

Other Upcoming Events of Potential Interest to Field Nats:

ALEC Biodiversity Matters Program

Below is a brief listing of the program for the Biodiversity matters workshop series. For a full program with descriptions, please contact ALEC. Space is limited and some workshops include a small fee. To join in any of the workshops, or for any enquiries, you will need to contact:

Arid Lands Environment Centre (ALEC) - 8952 2497 - info@alec.org.au

Sat 1 Sept **Urban Connectivity and Biodiversity Conservation;** Alice Springs Desert Park

Sat 8 Sept **Monitoring Biodiversity in the arid lands (Part 1);** Simpson's Gap
(must attend this workshop in order to attend Part 2 at Finke Gorge)

Sat 22 - Sun 23 Sept **Monitoring Biodiversity in the arid lands (Part 2);** Finke Gorge
(overnight camping; \$20 fee applies; bring your own swag)

Sat 6 Oct **Landscape conservation on private land;** Conlan's Lagoon

Red Centre Bird Festival 2012

Sunday 30th September to Sunday 7th October 2012

The Red Centre Bird Festival is a celebration of birds. The week is full of opportunities to get out into the desert and connect with local birdlife, learn about birds from the experts, compete with zany birdwatchers in the Red Centre Twitchathon, admire the creativity and talent displayed at Bird Art in the Park, pick up a bird-inspired artwork from the Bird Art Market or feel the festivity of the school kids in their Bird Flags displays around the Desert Park. Events are free (or included with Park entry) unless otherwise stated.

Sunday 30th September

Red Centre Bird Festival opening event - Bird Art in the Park begins + Jeanette Wormald and The Baker Suite: Desert Park Courtyard Session; 4 - 7 pm (\$15 per person; or \$10 for registered Festival attendees)

Sunday 30th September & Thursday 4th October

Bird Walkabout Tour - Alice Springs Desert Park; 7 - 9 am (\$50 for adults; \$25 for children - bookings essential)

Monday 1st to Friday 5th October

Artist in residence: Bronwyn Beesley in the Desert Park

Monday 1st October

Birds before Work - Alice Springs Telegraph Station; 7 - 8 am

Tuesday 2nd October

Birds before Work - Ilparpa Ponds; 7 - 8 am

Music of Nature and Nature of Music, by Hollis Taylor - Alice Springs Desert Park; 7 - 9 pm (\$10 per person)

Thursday 4th October

Bird Watching & Night Stalk - Simpsons Gap: Cassia Hill; 4 - 5 pm (Bird Watching) & 6:30 - 7:30 pm (Night Stalk)

Friday 5th October to Saturday 6th October

The Red Centre Bird Festival Twitchathon; starts 6 pm to go for 24 hours (\$10 per person)

Sunday 7th October

Birds on Film - Alice Springs Desert Park; 7:30 pm start (\$15 adults, \$8 children 5-12 years)

*This schedule may change. Call Desert Park on 08 8951 8788, or watch the [Desert Park website](#) for up-to-date information & for bookings. There will also be a closing session, time to be confirmed, with music by Hollis Taylor.

ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED

Minutes of general meeting at Higher Education Building, Charles Darwin University Wednesday 8 August, 2012

Meeting was preceded by AGM..

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

Previous minutes - Accepted.

Business arising from the minutes: Nil.

Correspondence in:

Two emails received from Arid Lands Environment Centre about Biodiversity Matters - Meeting 14 Aug 2.30 – 4.00pm ALEC courtyard. Let Barb know if interested in being involved and she will forward emails to you.

Correspondence out:

- Thank you card to Ken Johnson

Cec to send a card to Albert Sage to thank him for auditing accounts.

Treasurer's Report:

Balance in bank at 31st July : \$2814

Petty cash : \$26.20

Activities/Trips:

Recent:

Fantastic trip to Alcoota – about 60 people.

Jim's Place walk – good walk, some interesting places to go back to.

Long weekend at Finke – waterholes, fish and birds

Coming up:

12 August: Eco Fair. Field nats not involved this year.

12 Aug 8.30am: Sewage ponds bird count

19 August 3pm Planning Meeting at Desert Park courtyard

8 Sept: Neil's walk to Fenn gap – Neil to get permission

Michael Laflamme to lead habitats drive and walks – date to be decided.

30 Sept – 7 Oct Bird Festival.

Barb spoke to Ken Johnson and Michael Cawthorn about looking at Finlayson Collection in NT Natural History Museum.

Ken is away until mid September.

Sightings:

Grey Falcon – sewage ponds- Chris Watson

First Wood Sandpipers for the season at Sewage Ponds – Chris Watson

Chestnut Teal at sewage ponds – Chris Watson

Flock of Varied Sitellas in woodland at ASDP- Pam Keil

Major Mitchells in garden cemetery – Bev Gray

Little Button Quail – Henbury Station – Connie Spencer

Golden-backed Honeyeaters at Joker Gorge, Arltunga – Neil Woolcock

Lizards starting to come back with warmer nights – Pam Keil

Brown Falcon that Jim Lawrence has seen on Temple Bar Station appears to recognise him as a food source when he is cutting wood.

Next meeting: 12 September

Speaker: Rick Churchill talking about volunteering with AWC studying Echidnas on Kangaroo Island

Note taker: Sarah White

Supper: Anna Melton

Thank you to Rhondra Tomlinson for supper and Rosalie Breen note taker tonight.

Meeting closed: 7.50pm.