



October 2013

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



Little Eagle landing – Henbury Station. Photo by Pete Nunn.

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 25 October 2013**.
Please send your contributions to Barb Gilfedder at the email listed below – **Note: new email address!**
Please send photos and text separately.

ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

- Wed 9 Oct** Meeting 7.00pm at Charles Darwin University Higher Education Building lecture theatre. Speaker: **Peter Jobson**, “ **Joseph Hooker Down Under: A tale of high seas adventure and profound botanical discovery.**” Joseph Hooker (2nd Director of Kew Gardens) and son of the William Hooker, the First Director of Kew Gardens, was considered one of the leading botanist of the 19th Century. He was a lifelong friend of Charles Darwin & was influential in encouraging Bentham to write *Flora Australiensis*. This talk will be full of information, but light hearted as well.
- Sat 12 Oct** Drive and look at plants and birds along the Tanami track as far as Old Hamilton Downs road. Meet at the Sargent Street sign on North Stuart Highway at 6.30am. Important you contact leader Barb Gilfedder if you intend coming.
- Thur 17 Oct** Angus Duguid of the Aquatic Health Unit of the Water Resources Division, Department of Land Resource Management is hoping to be conducting a fish survey on Henbury Station, surveying several waterholes, and camping for two nights near Snake Hole. Lesley Hartwig at Henbury thought it would be fine for Field Nats to come and help. Contact Barb Gilfedder for more details.
- Sat 2 Nov** Drive and look at the interesting plants around the claypan in Rainbow Valley. Meet at Information Bay opposite the Old Timers at 6.30am. Important you contact leader Barb Gilfedder if you intend coming.
- Wed 13 Nov** Meeting 7.00pm at Charles Darwin University Higher Education Building lecture theatre. Speakers: **Angus Duguid** and **Pat Hodgins** “**An update on fish distributions and drought refuges of the Finke River.**”

AUSTRALIAN PLANTS SOCIETY Contact: Connie Spencer constans@bigpond.net.au

- Wed 2 Oct** Meet 7.30 at Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Change of program. Slideshows of a recent Larapinta Trail trek, the myriad of daisies that have been flowering this Spring and guess the Eremophila species.
- Nov activity** (date to be announced)
A late afternoon wander around Olive Pink Botanic Garden with Petal from “Petal’s Perfection Pruning and Tree Removal”

BIRDING ACTIVITIES

- 29 Sept to 6 Oct **Red Centre Bird Festival at Alice Springs Desert Park.** A program has already been forwarded to ASFNC Members.

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Please delete the xxx when emailing – their placement is an attempt to stop some spam emails.

Apparently we Field Naturalists were quite busy through September! As a result, we have a long newsletter this month and several items will appear more fully in our next newsletter or on our website. Below is a brief description of these items.

September Speaker: Lisa Nunn – Sri Lankan Birds and other Wildlife

Lisa gave a wonderful talk and showed us many beautiful photos of Sri Lankan wildlife at our September meeting. A full write up and photos will appear in the November Newsletter.

Weedy Cacti in Alice Springs -

Andy Vinter has produced a wonderful guide to the weedy cacti that have escaped from gardens and are growing around Alice Springs. The article and photos will appear in the November Newsletter or will be sent out separately.

Barb Gilfedder's Daisy Identification Guide

After the recent abundance of Daisies across the Centre, Barb put together a wonderful photographic collection to help us identify the different species of Daisy. One page of this is in this newsletter with the Santa Teresa write-up, but the full guide will be on the website soon!

Cryptic Crust on the Santa Teresa Drive – Joan Powling

Biological Crusts (for next time)

Rewetting of one of the crusts (that was collected along the Santa Teresa Road) has been successful and several "live" cyanobacteria have emerged. As there may be more, I shall write this up for the next letter and will include some comparisons with the work done at Cravens Peak, a Bush Heritage property in the eastern edge of the Simpson Desert in April 2007.

Name that Flower – Pamela Keil photos

Still working on a few IDs from the photo quiz last week. If anyone has a good idea for all the species, send Pamela a quick email (listed above)... The answers will be posted in the November Newsletter.

Reminder: Membership fees were due as of August.

This will be your last Newsletter if you have not renewed your membership. Please refer to the August Newsletter (available on the Webpage if you do not have it) for renewal details.

And a Correction: The flower on the front cover of the September Newsletter (on which the Assassin Bug was sitting) was not a *Rutidosia helichrysoidea* as reported but rather *Rhodanthe tietkensii*.

HENBURY STATION WEEKEND – 31 August-1 Sept 2013

Connie Spencer.

Despite being a very hot weekend and the flies being exceptionally friendly, it was nevertheless a not to be missed trip. The wildflowers were “a vision splendid”! My pick for the weekend is the Bristly Sea-heath (*Frankenia serpyllifolia*). Our very first stop after leaving the homestead was on an open plain with sparse *Eremophila* species and other shrubs but the dominant ground cover was bristly sea-heath. This is a low-growing densely branched perennial shrub with numerous brittle branches covered in bristles (hence the common name). Flowers are clustered and consist of 5 pink petals. Found in saline areas, heavy clay soils or sandy soils overlying clay. I think the latter best describes where we stopped. It continued to pop up every now and again in our travels throughout the weekend.



Frankenia serpyllifolia or Bristly Sea-heath; Photo by Connie Spencer.



The Olive Pink Botanic Garden Growers often propagates this species and the flowers certainly last a long time on our stock plants. It can also be pruned back fairly hard and will regenerate. It is quite a hardy plant and I've seen some good specimens in gardens although I haven't had much luck in my garden. If interested, watch out for it in the next plant sale.

Cecily Sutton - Lots of things impressed me about this trip.

It impressed me that the wild flowers kept getting better. The colour contrast of the purple Parakeelya and the red sand. Then a massed display of Parakeelya. THEN Parakeelya with white everlastings in the foreground. And around the corner, just for variety, masses of yellow billy buttons in the foreground with the red dune covered in parakeelya in the background.



top - *Frankenia serpyllifolia*; below left – Button Daisies & Parakeelya; below right – Everlastings and Parakeelya; Photos by Pete Nunn.

There was a good collection of water birds at Snake Hole. Seeing Swans and Pelicans in the Outback never ceases to amaze me.

I was impressed with the people who have the knowledge of GPS and bird behaviour and could guide us with confidence to an excellent view of Inland Dotterels.

I loved the early morning chorus of birds and the beautiful drooping Coolibahs at Duck Swamp. I have got over the fact that there were no ducks at duck swamp. Something to come back for!

Thanks Barb and Henbury Station



Snake Hole and Black Swans. Photo by Pete Nunn

Rosalie Breen – Impressions

The fields of colour, yellow billy buttons and other yellow, and white daisies, white native stock, pink *Parakeelya*, covering the red sands was spectacular. And the myriad of different plants when we stopped to get out of the cars and search the ground, notably the mounds of pink *Frankenia serpyllifolia* and the unusual *Tecticornia triandra*, green and fleshy. Astonishment at the thick vegetation covering the swamp beside our campsite. Very strange, having previously seen it full of water, now you can walk over its rough red clayey surface with large clumps of spreading vegetation mostly mat plants of the genera, *Bergia* and *Glinus*, and the perfumed *Stemodia*. From the meandering depression through the lake bed, you could imagine the path of the water which fills the network of pools and then recedes as the lakes dry. Delicious and welcome tea provided by Anne Pye. Over-population of flies.



Seeking shade at lunch time. Photo by Anne Pye.

the water was *Ruppia*, a tough well-rooted perennial plant, which can take over some water areas, and enjoys a salty environment, as is the case here. Many schools of tiny fish evaded capture. The main waterhole where most of the birds were, was, not surprisingly, somewhat polluted with bands of green poo around the edges and the *Ruppia* had been grazed quite low, so did not break the surface.

My main objective for this trip was to see what was living in the waterholes on the Finke. The first, Snake Hole was busy with birds. We all had to stand quietly on the bank until the birdos had checked all the winged life. Then Joan and I descended to the water with nets. There were few macro-invertebrates, but Joan discovered a charophyte, a finer one than found last year at Hart's Camp. This she carefully collected and back home mounted it to be sent to the expert in Victoria for identification. The main vegetation in



Rosalie and Joan Hunting at Snake Hole. Photo by Barb Gilfedder.

Next was Hart's Camp waterhole which we had visited last year. This water was much fresher with a good growth of *Myriophyllum* and a charophyte, *Chara*. These plants act as filters keeping the water clear. The *Chara* felt a bit gritty due to the encrustations of calcium carbonate. Sampling here for macro-invertebrates was more productive. Many dragonflies were hovering. With the microscope at home I identified the larvae of, yes, dragonflies and also damsel flies which hold their wings folded and at 45 degrees, compared to dragons who hold them out flat when at rest. Plenty of mosquito larvae, and midge larvae and pupae. There were many snails, two different sorts, pond snails and tiny flat ones from the families *Lymnidae* and *Glacidorbidae* respectively. Also a few seed shrimps and copepods. I only found one beetle *Nectersoma* a diving beetle. And though I did not find any caddis larvae which live in cases of sand or plant detritus there were gelatinous blobs holding caddis fly eggs. Previous surveys (not by me) have found prawns and yabbies, and more beetles. Joan's algae sampling showed quite a variety including four different filamentous algae and many diatoms. With Jim's help I corralled a few fish, small, so hard to tell what they were, maybe Finke River Hardyheads. So a different and more prolific array of life here than that found in Snake Waterhole.



Little Eagle Nest; Photo by Pete Nunn.

Pete and Lisa Nunn

It was fantastic to be able to spend the weekend with the Field Nats at Henbury Station, a tract of land we have not had the privilege to explore previously. We are quite weak in our botanical knowledge so to travel with a group so keenly interested and knowledgeable in plant identification was extremely educational. The timing of the trip was also perfect, as the wildflowers were in full bloom and the landscape looked amazing. The wildlife highlights of the trip were definitely the small breeding group of Inland Dotterels we encountered, and the breeding pair of Little Eagles at Duck Swamp. Thanks to those who put the work in to organizing the weekend

Our bird list for the weekend:

Magpie

Magpie Lark

Willy Wagtail

Rufous Songlark

Rainbow Bee-eater

Australian Pipit

Crested Bellbird

Diamond Dove

Crested Pigeon

Australian Ringneck

Cockatiel

Budgerigar

Galah

Major Mitchell Cockatoo

Red-browed Pardalote

Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater

White-plumed HE

Yellow-throated Miner

Black Kite

Whistling Kite

Brown Falcon

Hobby

Pied Butcherbird

White-backed Swallow

Black Swan

Pelican

White-faced Heron

Great Egret

Darter

Great Cormorant

Little Black Cormorant

Little Pied Cormorant

Red-kneed Dotterel

Black-fronted Dotterel

Black-winged Stilt

Pacific Black Duck

Grey Teal

Wood Duck

Hardhead

Tree Martin

Crimson Chat

Zebra Finch

Grey-crowned Babbler

Inland Dotterel

Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike

Red-backed Kingfisher

Collared Sparrowhawk

Little Eagle

Rufous Whistler

Grey Shrike-thrush

Mulga Parrot

Horsfield's Bronze-cuckoo

Black-faced Woodswallow

Western Gerygone

Nankeen Kestrel

Reptiles seen:

Sand Goanna

Central Netted Dragon

Ringed Brown Snake

Leonhard's Skink

Stony-soil Skink

Brookes Skink

Beaked Gecko

Fat-tailed Gecko

John Childs - A poetic offering

Flowers – profusion, varied palettes, delightful
Fellow travellers – erudite, companionable, delightful
Swamp – dry, fascinating, delightful
Birds – variety, some unexpected, delightful
Field Nats – come along and be delighted.

Lyndon and Jill Stephenson Impressions on visiting Henbury

Wonderful red dunes set against a carpet of flowers
and being with a group with such wide knowledge and
a preparedness to share this.



Inland Dotterel doing the camouflage thing. Photo by Pete Nunn.

Birds added were the Inland Dotterel, Little Eagle, Grey-crowned Babbler, Rufous Songlark, and the Australian Hobby unassisted.

Camping under the magnificent old Coolabahs which ringed the dry clay pan (Duck Swamp) we were struck by how adapted the country is to climate variations. The trees must have their roots down in very old moisture.

Arriving at a place “we camp here“ which looks like a scene of desolation but becomes a place of special beauty etched in one’s mind hopefully forever.

Barb Gilfedder

First stop was Henbury Homestead, where Paul Hartwig, the Manager chatted to us about the Station and what its prospects as he sees them, now that R M Williams Agricultural Holdings is in receivership. He and his young family love living there and he hopes they will be able to stay on even if it is sold. We all enjoyed watching the little boys racing around the yard with wild enthusiasm on their miniature quadbike.

Everyone else has waxed lyrical about the flowers and the birds and the beautiful little geckoes. I liked the Ringed Brown Snake that Pete tried to catch on the nocturnal walk. I only saw its tail, then it disappeared into the spinifex clump – quite safe. Many thanks to Pete and Lisa for that walk and for identifying so many birds and other wildlife. Also thank you Connie for the morning Duck Swamp walk, and to everyone who came for their enthusiasm for the natural world.

Jim Gilfedder

Duck Swamp.....ready to go, just add water, (the ducks will look after themselves), so different from last time.

Best bits for me were the profusion of colourful flowers and the finding of little geckoes by torch-light, plus being able to re-join the Dots. Thanks Pete and Lisa.



Inland Dotterel – can you see me now? Photo by Pete Nunn.

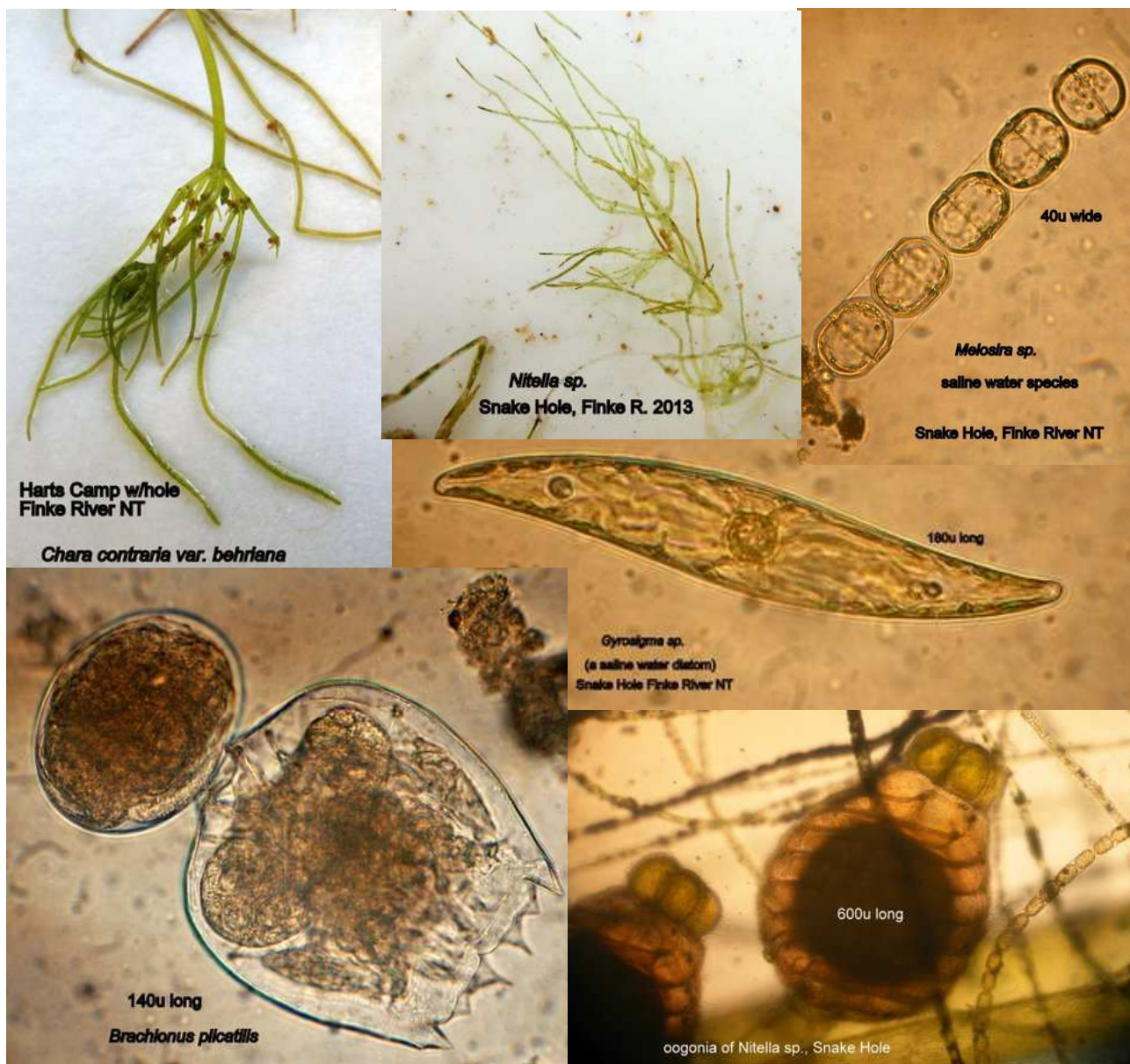
Joan Powling

A View from the Microscope

We visited two waterholes on the Finke River at Henbury, Snake Hole and Harts Camp Waterhole and they were quite different from each other. The salinity, judging by the taste, was elevated at Snake Hole and comparatively low at Harts Camp waterhole. A charophyte, found at Harts Camp during the last visit of the ASFNC in April 2012 and identified by Michelle Casanova of Lake Bolac as *Chara contraria* var. *behriana*, (photo) was present on this occasion also, in amongst dense beds of *Myriophyllum* cf. *verrucosum*. Filamentous green algae (*Spirogyra*, *Zygnema*, *Mougeotia*, *Oedogonium*) indicative of low salinity water, were common in the trawl sample as well as two species of the desmid *Closterium*. The zooplankton fraction comprised several rotifers and a cladoceran ("water flea").

Snake Hole contained algae, zooplankton and macrophytes indicative of higher salinity water such as the diatoms, *Gyrosigma*, *Nitzschia* and *Melosira* (photos), the rotifer, *Brachionus plicatilis* (photo) and the submerged plant *Ruppia*. Hiding away in the shallows near the *Ruppia* (heavily grazed by the water birds) was another charophyte, very small, fine-stemmed and wispy looking (photo). On site it was not possible to clearly discern the reproductive organs necessary for identification but microscopic examination has revealed female oogonia (photo).

Meanwhile, away from the waterholes, the flowers were magnificent and the Inland Dotterel sighting was a real thrill. Thank you all of you for making me welcome and guiding me through this wonderful country.



SANTA TERESA ROAD – FLOWER SPOTTING

Rosalie Breen

Pam and Michael set out one day down Santa Teresa Road. They found a wealth of wild flowers and different habitats, so being the generous people they are, they wanted to share with fellow Field Naturalists. A new idea was born. With a lot of work Pam put together a guide for about 25km of the road with commentary on what could be seen along the way and designated stops to get out of the car and discover the individual plants.

On Tuesday late afternoon a group set out for the test. Meticulous in the instruction's details I for one, had my eyes open to distinguish and appreciate the different habitats and be led to the best places to examine all the different daisies in the sand or the array of plants growing; on the rocky hill and so on. Connie was seconded to collect samples of many of the plants, and these were taken to the Herbarium for official identification. Then a list of names of the species encountered at each stop was produced. Now armed with trip guide and plant list, which is now on the club's website, others can drive out and have an experience of the beauty to be found along the road.

Thanks Pam, Michael and Connie for an interesting trip and for the excellent resource made available for all. The idea of afternoon excursion was pleasant too, to experience the bush in the colours of twilight.

Wendy and Ian Mann

We took the drive early on Saturday morning, and found the directions very clear. The bush on the right of the road was still smouldering after a fire for the first 3 kms of the dirt road, and then there was smoke further away to the left of the road for a spell, but by the time we returned the smoke had cleared. The Species list will help us identify some of the plants that we saw, and the bee-eater holes we would not have noticed without the guide.

It was a very flowery weekend, with the Intertexta Forest walk at the claypans, and then more beautiful and different blossoms up by the radio towers when we walked up on Sunday morning with the YMCA King of the Mountain event.

A note from the Editor:

To try the Drive for yourself, visit the website: http://alicefieldnaturalists.org.au/Santa_Teresa_Road.html

Be sure to email Pam (email on page 2) to tell her what you find! We're trying to put together a seasonal guide, and I'm sure it's all changed by now... We found over 50 species of flowering plant on a 2-hour evening drive – How many can you find?



Field-testing the Santa Teresa Road Guide with the Field Nats; Stop #6. Photo by Barb Gilfedder



Eremophila christopheri; Stop #7. Photos by Barb Gilfedder

Some Central Australian Yellow Daisies – Barb Gilfedder



The first two pictures are Billy Buttons, *Chrysocephalus platycephalus*. Notice the flattish top to the multiple flower head and the somewhat lumpy appearance.

The next two are a different species of Billy button *Chrysocephalus knappii*. These are lower growing and the multiple flower head is more like a drum stick in shape.



These in the next row both have hemispherical multiple flower heads. The first two photos are *Schoenia ayersii* with distinct tiny flowers. The second two are *Rutidosis helichrysum*, Grey Wrinklewort which has more individual flowers more closely packed.



These three are all different. First *Rhodanthe tiekensis*, Sand Sunray, this has pointy little flower buds like sputniks; second *Chrysocephalum apiculatum*, Small Yellow Button with stiff yellow bracts; third *Leucochrysum stipitatum*, Saltspoon Daisy, which has stalked bracts that curl back on themselves..

That is just a few of the many yellow daisies that flowered after the Spring rains – there are more.....

SLOT GORGE - report by Rosalie Breen; Photos by Jodie Clarkson



A Saturday morning walk With Scott

On the South side of Mt Gillen Range, there are a number of drainage lines down which the water has carved in the quartzite rock what Latzie calls slot gorges, a very apt name. We headed out on Ilparpa Rd but just before the turnoff to the Rifle Club, turned north and drove on 4WD tracks towards one of the biggest ones which was just below Mt Gillen summit. And Wow!

Awe-inspiring, rocky, steep, beautiful, with many different plants revelling in the sheltered and protected habitat.



Being a there and back walk people could choose how far they climbed up, those waiting could sit in cool shade enjoying the views. It was a scramble up and then a steep descent to return, but manageable. The oldest walker climbed the full length of the gorge and then on to Gillen summit. The youngest, Jacob, showed great agility and strength to climb quite high. The rewards were worth the effort.

Two special places. One which Connie called "the grotto". Under a wide curving overhang a garden of mosses. Water was not dripping but you could imagine how even more impressive it would be when damp. Further up was a small waterhole among the rocks actually with water. A haven for Zebra Finches, Firetails and Spinifex Pigeons. Such a surprise to find water there. We also spotted some paintings on the rock walls.



WIGLEY'S WATERHOLE TO OLD TELEGRAPH STATION

Cecily Sutton - There are a maze of mountain bike trails around Alice Springs. I have ridden a lot of them, but have had to concentrate on staying upright, so I cannot appreciate all of the fine scenery. I thought this would be an opportunity to improve my map reading, time management and natural history by sharing the River Ridge Track with fellow Field Nats on a Springtime walk.

John C, Connie, Collette, Rosalie and myself were the perfect number to do this trip with a simple car shuttle.

It was great to appreciate the rocky formations, wildflowers, spinifex pigeons and general ambiance of this easy walk along a narrow trail. There were familiar land marks, but a different perspective.

The walk took 2.5 hours. Just the right amount of exercise before it got hot. It would be good to do similar walks occasionally. It would have to be really early in the morning, as it gets hotter.

Thanks to John and Connie for the car shuttle, the mountain bike trail makers, nature, and good company.

Rosalie Breen - I like to think I know most of the tracks in the Telegraph Station, But this one was new and full of variety with glorious views and still plenty of flowers to identify. It was a mountain bike trail beginning from Wigley's Gorge, so a single lane trail that meandered in its general direction, south towards the Telegraph Station, or it could have been a circular trip returning on another trail. Great walk Cec, worth repeating.

Kevin Boyle

Kevin Boyle died on 15/9/13.

I met Kevin when he came to Alice Springs in the 1990's to work as a journalist at The Advocate, needing a change from more stressful work. He joined the Field Nats at a time when the membership was smaller than today, and served as Vice-President for some years. He was a quiet and un-assuming man who became a good friend of mine.

Despite a continual struggle with ill-health he remained active, travelled widely and maintained a positive outlook.

After retirement he moved to Georgetown in South Australia, but continued to travel widely around Australia, despite worsening health.

When I saw him in Crystal Brook hospital he was in poor health, but still cheerful, and I was saddened to hear of his death three weeks later.

Bob Read



Climbing Cassia Hill in November 2005. From the back - Eve and Stephen (visitors), Rosalie Breen, Kevin Boyle, Haydee Adel, Margaret Lawrence, Rhondda Tomlinson, Bob Read, Karen May, Michael Barritt, Bev Dawson – Photo by Connie Spencer



Christmas Party 2002 at Simpsons Gap. Standing: Lyndal White, Leoni Read, Bob Read, Jim Gilfedder, Pat Gallagher; Sitting: Rosalie Breen, Kevin Boyle, Jose Petrick, Barb Gilfedder, Elsa Corbet, Sue Fraser – Photo by Connie Spencer

ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED
Minutes of general meeting at Higher Education Building,
Charles Darwin University Wednesday 11 September 2013

Following presentation by Lisa Nunn on Birds of Sri Lanka
and Barb Gilfedder's photographs of Central Australian Daisies.

Thanks to Jill Brew for supper and Lee Ryall for notetaking.

Meeting opened at 8-40

Present: 18 Members/visitors and 1 apology as per attendance book.

Previous minutes – accepted.

Business arising from the minutes:

- Draft of Master Plan for NT Parks Estate is available for comment by 20 September. Email Barb for a copy if you wish to comment.
- Information re recent meeting of Birdlife Branch in Central Australia will be in next newsletter.

Correspondence in: Nil

Correspondence out:

- Thank you cards to Jean Mack and to Ray Prunty for Standley Chasm trip.

Treasurer's Report:

Balance at 11/9/13 \$3342.66

Subs \$255 Donation \$20

Debits: Printer Ink \$40

General business:

- Pam will put her detailed notes of the Wildflower trip along Santa Teresa Road, as well as a species list on our website. This will make it possible for visitors or members to do this trip at a time that suits them. Club trips could revisit at different times of year.

Past Activities/Trips discussed:

- Planning Meeting – thank you to those who attended and volunteered to lead trips
- Standley Chasm -
- Henbury Station - Duck Swamp overnight trip – Bonus of nesting Little Eagles, Inland Dotterels with chicks and spectacular wildflowers.
- Evening Wildflower trip along Santa Teresa Road – Thank you to Pam and Michael, Connie and Peter Jobson for IDs.
- Intertexa Forest Walk for ALEC. Jimmy thanked the club and asked if we could do again next year.
- Weekday Walk from Wigleys Gorge to Telegraph Station

Future activities:

- Sat 13 September; Slot Gorge South of Mt Gillen . Scott Pullyblank
- Friday 20 September. Simpson's Gap to Hatt Hill and return. Connie Spencer.
- Bird Week
- Xmas function to be held at Standley Chasm. Barb to get costings on a catered breakfast, then Club will decide on a subsidy.

Sightings- not discussed due to lack of time

Next meeting: October 9

Speaker: Peter Jobson: Historical Botany - Joseph Hooker

Scribes: Jill Brew

Supper: Barb

Meeting closed 9pm