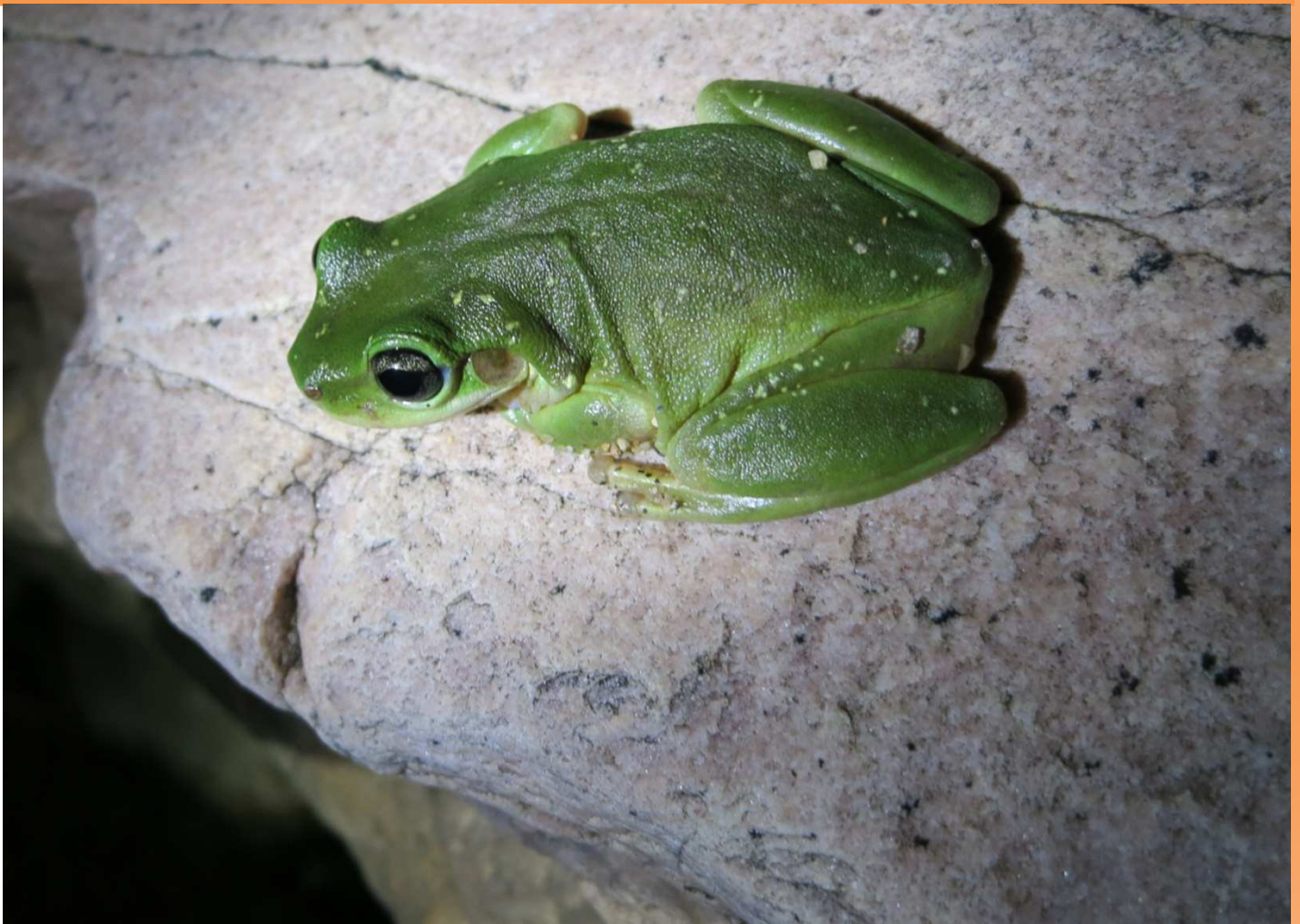




March 2014

## Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



Ready to leap from the flash of cameras, the beautiful Centralian Tree Frog, *Litoria gilleni*, shows off his green glossy skin. One of the frogs we saw on the recent Simpsons Gap trip. Photo: 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.

**Postal Address: P.O. Box 8663  
Alice Springs, Northern Territory  
0871**

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**Web site:**

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## NEXT NEWSLETTER

The deadline for the next Field Naturalists newsletter is **Friday 21 March 2014**.  
Please send your contributions to **Pam Keil** at the email [pamelakeil@yahoo.com](mailto:pamelakeil@yahoo.com)  
Please send photos and text separately.

### ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

- Fri 28 Feb, Sat 1 Mar** **Ormiston Gorge** overnight camp, early morning walk and a swim. Meet 4pm Friday at Flynn's Grave or make your own way to Ormiston. Walk for a couple of hours from 6 am Saturday on Stage 9 of the Larapinta Trail followed by a swim. Leader: Connie Spencer 8952 4694 [constans@bigpond.net.au](mailto:constans@bigpond.net.au). Please be sure to advise of your intention to attend.
- Sat 8 Mar** Walk up **Spencer Hill** with Rosalie Breen. No matter how many times you climb this small hill on the outskirts of town, you always see something different and interesting. An easy climb and stunning views as the sun lights up the surrounding hills. Meet at Gosse Street Playground at 6.00am. Leader: Rosalie Breen 8952 3409. [rosalie.breen@email.com](mailto:rosalie.breen@email.com)
- Wed 12 March** **Meeting** 7.00pm at Charles Darwin University Higher Education Building lecture theatre. Speaker: **Dr Boyd Wright** on "Mast seeding and the fire ecology of Mulga (*Acacia aptaneura*)"
- Sun 23 March** **Native Gap/Aileron**. Meet 7am Sargent Street sign on the north Stuart Hwy. Wander around the Native Gap Conservation Reserve then lunch at Aileron. If time and weather permit, on our way home, we will stop at a sandplain area often home to many wildflowers and small flowering shrubs. Round trip – 260 km. Leader: Connie Spencer 8952 4694 [constans@bigpond.net.au](mailto:constans@bigpond.net.au). Please be sure to advise of your intention to attend.
- Wed 9 April** **Meeting** 7.00pm at Charles Darwin University Higher Education Building lecture theatre. Speaker: **Steven Priestley**, Nursery manager at Alice Springs Desert Park on "Sand Country Wildflowers at the Desert Park"
- Long weekend 25-27 April - Newhaven Reserve**. High Clearance 4 wheel drive desirable. Up to 750km return travel plus travel on Reserve could be another 250km. Fuel available at Tilmouth Well. This will be a limited numbers trip so important that you email Barb Gilfedder [bjfedders@gmail.com](mailto:bjfedders@gmail.com)
- Long weekend 3-5 May** **Henbury Station** – High clearance 4WD essential. Allow for 350km total, visiting Duck Swamp, Snake Hole and Weener Spring. This will be a limited numbers trip so important that you email Barb Gilfedder [bjfedders@gmail.com](mailto:bjfedders@gmail.com)

### AUSTRALIAN PLANTS SOCIETY Contact: Connie Spencer [constans@bigpond.net.au](mailto:constans@bigpond.net.au)

- Wed 5 March** **AGM at Olive Pink Botanic Garden** at 7.30 pm. If you are interested in standing for or nominating anyone for any Committee position please contact Connie Spencer. After the AGM, **Peter Jobson**, Botanist at Alice Springs Herbarium will talk on "**Understanding the latest plant families**: there is a long history of family and genera changes so the recent changes are no different."

### OLIVE PINK BOTANIC GARDEN Contact: Benjamin Covery [curator@opbg.com.au](mailto:curator@opbg.com.au)

- Friday 14 March** **OFFSHOOTS Exhibition opening 6:30pm** and open until 30th March 2014 consisting of botanical drawings, etchings, paintings and mixed media artworks. **ARTIST: Julie McEnery**
- Sunday 16 March** **Miss Pink Birthday Plant Sale - NATIVE PLANT SALE** - Olive Pink Botanic Garden  
A great range of tube stock trees, small and larger shrubs. Starting 8.00am

### BIRDLIFE CENTRAL AUSTRALIA Contact: [birdlifeca@gmail.com](mailto:birdlifeca@gmail.com)

For information regarding meetings and activities with this group, please contact the above email address.

### **Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club email address : [contact@alicefieldnaturalists.org.au](mailto:contact@alicefieldnaturalists.org.au)**

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

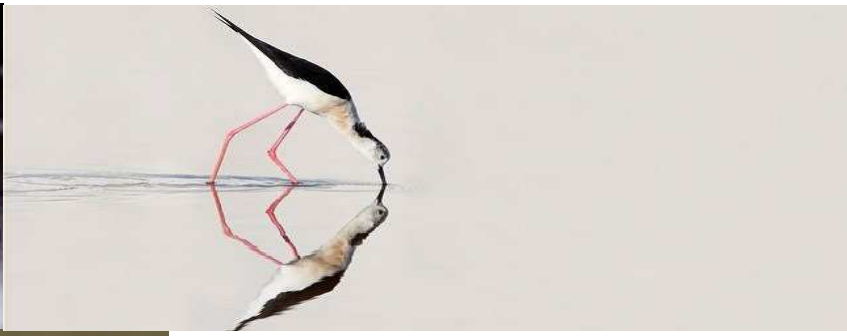


## Friday fortnight walks – Archery Club

### “A Hidden Oasis” by Rosalie Breen

I wonder if members of the Archery Club realize what a treasure they have. Early on Friday Cecily shared with Field Nats this beautiful parkland of mature Corkwoods and gigantic majestic white Ghost Gums set on a carpet of green (regrettably of Buffel, courtesy of recent rains). We strolled among the trees and shrubs on constructed paths leading off here and there to many white bales stuffed with plastic which served as targets for arrows. The early morning light set the red ranges aglow and coloured the white trunks of the gums. We climbed a little up a gully in the range to be rewarded with a great view, including Conlon's Lagoon (no water), noting many plants rejoicing and growing from the rain, especially the flowering, *Eremophila freelingii*. Thanks to Cec for the chance to walk in this hidden oasis.





## World Wetlands Day Alice Springs 2014



### Report by Rosalie Schultz

"World Wetlands Day is celebrated internationally each year on 2nd February. It marks the anniversary of the signing of the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance ([Ramsar Convention](#)) in Ramsar, Iran, on 2 February 1971.

World Wetlands Day was first celebrated in 1997. Since then government agencies, non-government organisations and community groups have celebrated World Wetlands Day by undertaking actions to raise public awareness of wetland values and benefits, and promote the conservation and wise use of wetlands. These activities include seminars, nature walks, festivals, launches of new policies, announcement of new Ramsar sites, newspaper articles, radio interviews and wetland rehabilitation." from [Australian Department of Environment](#).

Here in Alice Springs, Pam and Barb led a stroll around the sewage ponds, which is a wetland providing habitat and food for resident and migratory birds, an oasis in the desert. Of note, migratory waders do not breed here, so we do not see breeding plumage, nor nests or eggs. Shirley and Graham, Leigh and Neil, Barb, Connie, Pam, Jooby and I enjoyed the slightly cooler temperature of the early morning, learning and marvelling at all the birds.

While I could easily live without my mobile phone, I do like Michael Morcombe's "Birds of Australia" phone app.. You can make your own list of birds, and add a brief field note. This list will include date and location (including GPS coordinates if you turn on the GPS). You can play the bird calls, check the maps of birds' distributions, and view descriptions of behaviour, habitat and breeding patterns. And when there are updates the app. will download these automatically. However live experienced birders are much more valuable - thanks Pam and Barb!

My list for today contains 44 birds, all of which are special, but some unusual and unforgettable. We focussed on the waders since Pam is doing a special project on waders. What is a wader? "*Waders are those birds commonly found on coastal shores, including beaches, rocky shores, mudflats, tidal wetlands and lagoons. These include the many Plovers and Sandpipers in the families Charadriidae and Scolopacidae, as well as the Stone-curlews, Snipes, Pratincoles, Oystercatchers, Stilts, Avocets and the Plains Wanderer.*" Birds in Backyards.

The Black-winged Stilt is one of the most common, visible and beautiful birds of the Alice Springs sewage ponds. I love the clean black and white appearance, and those amazing pink legs that trail behind when it flies. These birds are useful as size comparisons to assist in identifying other birds. They live not just throughout suitable habitats in Australia, but also much of Africa, the Middle East and Asia. [Above are some amazing images from the Internet.](#)

Much more unique to today's outing were the two Crakes. What are Crakes? "*Crakes are "Rails" in the family "Rallidae...a large cosmopolitan family of small- to medium-sized birds. The family exhibits considerable diversity and also includes the Crakes, Coots, and Gallinules. Many species are associated with wetlands, although the family is found in every terrestrial habitat except dry deserts, polar regions, and alpine areas above the snow line.*" (from Birdlife Australia)

Today we saw both Baillon's Crake and the Australian Spotted Crake - exactly as described in the phone app. These birds are secretive, and rarely forage out of cover except early and late in the day. Their habitat is dense cover, fresh or salt wetland, lakes, swamps, salt-marsh. They usually keep to dense reed beds. They might be noticed because of the constantly flicking tail. The Baillon's Crake was particularly beautiful, with its blue grey breast contrasting the speckled wings and back. Both these birds live in suitable habitats across Australia, South-East Asia and Africa.



Baillon's Crake



Australian Spotted Crake

A Complete list of birds seen at the Alice Springs sewage ponds:-

Straw-necked Ibis  
 Glossy Ibis  
 Grey Teal  
 Chestnut Teal  
 Masked Lapwing  
 Whiskered Tern  
 White-winged Black Tern  
 Common Sandpiper  
 Marsh Sandpiper  
 Sharp-tailed Sandpiper ("Sharpie")  
 Black-fronted Dotterel  
 Hardhead  
 Yellow-billed Spoonbill  
 Black-winged Stilt  
 Black-tailed Native-hen

Purple Swamphen  
 Baillon's Crake  
 Australian Spotted Crake  
 Little Grassbird  
 Australian Reed-warbler  
 White-winged Fairy-wren  
 Silver Gull  
 Whistling Kite  
 Black Kite  
 Magpie Lark  
 Pacific Black Duck  
 Eurasian Coot  
 Royal Spoonbill  
 Black-tailed Godwit  
 Pectoral Sandpiper

Red-capped Plover  
 Fairy Martin  
 Maned Duck (Wood Duck)  
 Pink-eared Duck  
 Common Greenshank  
 Wood Sandpiper  
 Wedge-tailed Eagle  
 Red-necked Avocet  
 White-faced Heron  
 Australasian Grebe  
 Hoary-headed Grebe  
 Black Swan  
 Australian Pipit  
 Willy Wagtail



**FIDDLER BEETLE - *Eupoecila australasiae***  
**FAMILY : SCARABAEIDAE**  
 by Jenny Purdie

Steve Sinclair found this attractive beetle in Lawrence Gorge, Owen Springs Reserve on February 9. It was actually crawling up the sole of his foot as he knelt in the sand letting air out of our tyres. We were parked in the shade of a large River Red Gum tree. These beetles are 15-20 mm in length and the common name is derived from the patterns on their bodies which resemble a violin. The eggs are laid in rotting logs or damp soil under logs, and the larvae feed on rotting wood until they pupate in a cocoon made of soil and debris. The adults are strong fliers and move from tree to tree feeding on nectar, Eucalyptus being one of the species they feed on.

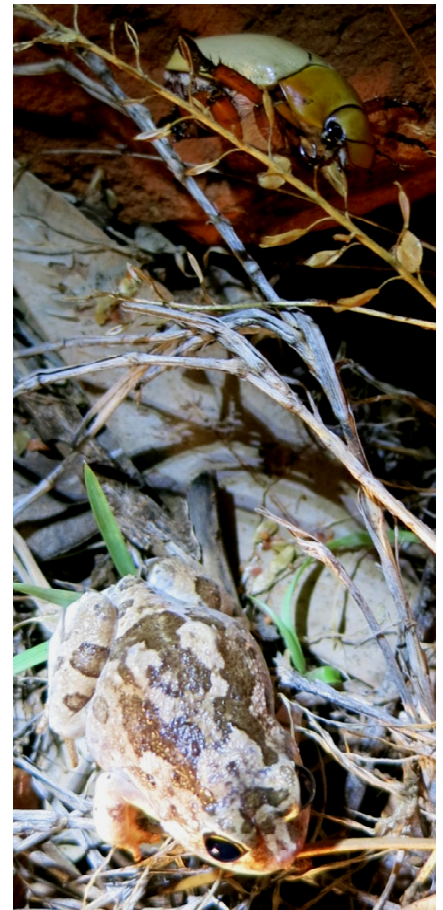
The beetles occur in all states except Western Australia.



## **Frog Search at Simpsons Gap**

**Barb Gilfedder:** What a lovely picnic area it is at Simpsons Gap surrounded by Mulga Trees, near a really handsome Wild Orange tree with its glossy green foliage and still with a keyhole view of a lovely rocky outcrop from the range. Sixteen of us settled in there to munch on our picnics and catch up after the holiday break. Great to see Megg Kelham recovering well from her operation, Neil Woolcock back from teaching English in China, as well as Rosalie Schultz and Shirley and Graham Goodman who still feel like they have only just returned to Alice, as well as red-headed Pam Walker who used to be in the Field Nats before my time and has returned, Jenny Purdie who is temporarily back in town and Susie Pendle who is the Parks and Wildlife Community Engagement officer. The later brought some excellent laminated cards picturing and describing the frogs we might find. Cec showed around an Echidna scat that she had collected from the Desert Park. We had been discussing exactly what Echidna scats looked like on a recent walk to Echidna Point, east of the town.

As the sun reached the horizon, the rocks to the East of the Gap glowed that unbelievable red and cameras snapped. We were hopeful that there would be a few frogs about after some rain earlier in the week, but they took some finding. First, I think, Pam Keil found a Spencer's Burrowing Frog, *Opisthodon spenceri*. (right) Really it found her, hopping past her feet. We saw several of these as the evening continued. True to their



name they burrow in damp river sand in the daytime. We also found a few of the beautiful Centralian Tree Frogs, *Litoria gilleni*, with their beautiful green silky-looking skin (front cover). They like being on rocks near the water and hide away in crevices during the day. We also saw a few of the smaller, Desert or Red Tree Frogs, *Litoria rubella*. (left) These were mostly hiding at the base of the reeds. So of the four species anticipated, we only missed out on the Mains frog, *Cyclorana maini*.

We did see a puddle full of very active tadpoles, but we were unable to be sure of the species, at least two Water scorpions with their long snorkel tails and fierce-looking pincers, and a variety of water snails and spiders, mainly we thought Fishing Spiders and a few beetles. One of the beetles that I recognized as a Dung Beetle, Jenny, who has studied them, identified further as *Onthophagus gazella*. It was one of the species introduced from Zimbabwe in the 80's to cope with the larger, wetter dropping of cattle. Our native species only being used to the smaller scats of Kangaroos, Echidnas, etc.

It is always pleasant puddling about in damp watercourses. Thanks Cec for organizing the opportunity.

**Jim Gilfedder:** Frogspotting....sadly without Ewan McGregor or Kermit. Still three out of four ain't bad, I suppose.

One highlight for me was along the footpath, when Pam found an Orb-weaving spider busily orb-weaving. She explained the different types of silk and the method and stresses and strains of construction. Amazing how it can control eight legs at the same time as being an engineer (and so quickly).

Later as I walked from my car to my house, I walked through a similar web. I had to apologize and try to rescue as much silk as possible, while feeling guilty. Then as I lay in my bed and listened to the croaking of the *Litoria rubella* in the garden, I felt part of the whole business of nature. Lovely!





Echidna Rock



## Echidna points from Rosalie.

About 10 years ago during walking wanderings I came upon a rock which could be easily dubbed Echidna Rock. I took its picture but can't find the rock anymore. Where it is exactly I do not know. So when Cecily suggested a walk to Echidna Point I thought, "Ah, I will find my rock again". But no, the walk was on bike trails to a lookout point where an echidna had been spotted once. And a very good walk it was too, but not the right sort of rocks.



View from Echidna Point



Echidna scat

Some years back Nick Tylis took some Field Nats up Mt Undoolya. On the way Bob Read spotted some echidna droppings. These were gray, gritty, because echidnas pickup quite a bit of soil when sourcing their food, round about 1cm diameter and reportedly 7cm long though these were in broken segments with unrounded ends. I kept some. Termites and ants are preferred, but also they eat earthworms, beetles, and moth larvae. Some of these remains can be identified in the scat. Smell is the main sense for locating prey which they catch with a long sticky tongue. No teeth, so they can't chew but grind food between tongue and the bottom of the mouth. Their snout is 7-8 cm long, rigid so they can break open termite mounds along with digging them out. Ravaged termite mounds are indicative of echidna presence too.

On another trip to old Winnecke Goldfields we were lucky enough to



Beth Hansen with an echidna at Winnecke

see a real live echidna. It was the

short beaked echidna (*Tachyglossus aculeatus*). Beth, with gloves on, picked it up as it curled itself into a ball, its defence mechanism. It can burrow itself down into the soil too, to escape as it has an efficient system with five flattened claws on the front feet for digging, and the back feet face backwards to shovel the dug earth out of the way. We had a good look at him (or her) noting the quills. They have hair between the quills, Tasmanian and southern ones have thicker hair presumably for warmth, and are black in colour. Central Australian echidnas are more golden. The quills incidentally are modified hairs.



Just recently my friend Joan sent a picture of a Tasmanian echidna, so I share this too.(left)

Happy hunting both for an echidna and Echidna Rock. Please let me know if you meet either.

February speaker: Jenny Purdie

## “AFRICAN IMAGES”

Report by Barb Gilfedder

Jenny started her presentation with this stunning photo of the African Elephant. She said the adults were easy to photograph because they were so big, whereas the babies were much more difficult because they were always well protected by the adults and usually hidden behind legs.

She continued with a collection of the more familiar African animals, Wild Dogs, Leopards, Lions, Jackals, Cheetahs, Giraffes and Hippos. Then some of the ones we are maybe not so familiar with such as the Dwarf Mongoose, a variety of Antelope species and of course the Rhinos, Black and White. Both Rhinos are black in colour. The White Rhino has wide jaw and is much less aggressive



than the Black Rhino which has a hooked upper lip. Then came the birds, many resembling ours like the bee-eaters, but many so different, like the Crowned Cranes pictured below. She also showed photos of African daily life, village huts (one with a rather incongruous solar panel outside), people drying fish, bullock and donkey carts pulling firewood or containers for water, and shops such as the 'Peace and Love Drug Store' (I wonder what they sell) and roadside markets selling handmade carved artefacts.

Jenny has travelled twelve times to Africa. These last two trips have been with the SAVE African Rhino Foundation. They are based in Western Australia, and work hard to help protect rhinos and other African wildlife. Nicholas Duncan, the president of the organisation, leads a safari to Africa once or twice a year. Each group of people who travel on them, are asked to limit their personal luggage so that they can carry goods for parks and other organisations. Such things as car parts, pumps, radios, uniforms, backpacks and medical supplies are more useful than money. They may bring home artefacts bought in the roadside markets to auction to raise more money for the foundation. The problem with Rhinos is that their horns are extremely valuable as medicine in China and also increasingly in Vietnam. The horn can reach \$60,000 US\$/kg in these markets, although of course the poachers would only get a fraction of that.



Even after the horn has been removed in an attempt to make the animal less attractive to poachers, the root of the horn has to remain because it contains blood vessels. This root bit may weigh up to a kilogram, so poachers find it is still worth killing the animal for. Numbers of both Black and White Rhino are slowly increasing, breeding now keeping slightly ahead of poaching deaths.

The SAVE Foundation supports the Save Valley Conservancy which is an amalgamation of about twelve cattle properties in South East Zimbabwe. Fences between and within the properties have been removed and the area has been restocked with native animals. At present they have put 92 Rhinos in there, as well as many other animals.

Thank you Jenny for interesting signs and insights.





# A Morning stroll through the Intertexta Forest

by Rosalie Breen



Jasmine flowering prolifically under the mallee Coolabahs

Always, on a visit to the Intertexta Forest, I am enchanted by the mallee character of the coolabahs. After a fire the burnt trees have rejuvenated from the root stock with many trunks.

The jasmine, *Jasminum didymium*, one of the vines of Peter Latz's dry Jungle, was flowering prolifically with an almost overpowering scent. I've not seen so much of it before.



A golden display came from the Golden Goosefoot, or more correctly, Northern Bluebush, *Chenopodium auricomum*, the cluster inflorescence a pale yellow all over the bush. Not often seen were the white papery fruits which hug, within a leaf axil, the stems in some of the fresh looking roly poly plants *Salsola tragus*. Another saltbush has little spongy balls for fruit - *Atriplex spongiosa*. There were a couple of Solanums, Quena, *Solanum esuriale* had tiny yellow berries and Wild tomato, named *Solanum chenopodium* because its leaves are lobed like the saltbush leaves. It has red berries.

The Bush Passionfruit, *Capparis spinosa*, was everywhere and had many mature fruits, The inside pulp has lots of black seeds and can be eaten. Check for ants first, the plants are always covered with them. But I think they looked like a set of bananas left by monkeys peeling the skin back and leaving the five segments of split skin hanging like big yellow stars.

The jungle harbours *Marsilea exarata*, especially along a shallow clayey water channel, no water though. As we moved south away from the road the nardoo changed from being dry to quite lush and green.

All through the area was Yalka, *Cyperus bulbosus*, a sedge producing little bulbs good for eating. Surprisingly there were not so many grasses considering the summer rains. Button grass, Queensland Blue, and Oat grass were noticeable and plenty of dried clumps. The plant litter on the ground is quite thick as one would expect in a jungle.

There is only one specimen, at least that we saw, of the rare wattle *Acacia sessiliceps* in the forest, easily identified by its wonderful curly twisted pods. *Grevillea striata*, the beefwood has interesting seed cases too. Small brown woody, they have a little hook on one corner.

Daisies flowering were small yellow buttons, *Chrysocephalum apiculatum*, and the small white *Rhodanthe stricta*, Others were growing but not in bloom.



Also special was finding a bush bean, *Rhyncharrhena linearis*, another vine. Jenny and Barb took ages trying to get the perfect picture, not only of the few beans but flowers too, which to me looked dead but were really dark purple, buds and a tiny (5mm across) five-petalled star flower. (left)

Magic was a minute long rain shower just in one area ahead of us with the sun jewelling the curtain of drops.

Back to reality we had breakfast on the edge of the claypans, no water but the dried and cracked mud shimmering in the sun.

