



May 2014

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



This beautiful male Redthroat was photographed 4.4km West of Flynn's Grave on the South side of Larapinta Drive by Mat Gilfedder. His song is a rich and varied, a bit like a Reed Warbler but softer. Hear it at - <https://soundcloud.com/mat-gilfedder/redthroat-male/s-XXV98>

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**

CONTENTS

*Meetings...p2 Trips/Activities...p2 Contacts...p2
Speaker report – Steven Priestley "Sand Country Wild Flowers"...p3
Native Gap trip ...p5 Beetle identification correction ...p7
Minutes Secretary needed ...p7
Some Kangaroo Island animals ...p8*

Web site:

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

Email: contact@alicefieldnaturalists.org.au

NEXT NEWSLETTER

The deadline for the next newsletter is **Friday 23 May 2014**.
Please send your contributions to the club email contact@alicefieldnaturalists.org.au
Please send photos and text separately.

ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

- Wed 14 May Meeting** 7.00pm at Charles Darwin University Higher Education Building lecture theatre. Speakers: **Simon Ward and Robyn Delaney** "A month in Ethiopia: a biodiversity hot-spot and a fascinating country."
- Fri 16 May Bike ride** to The Knoll picnic area - 3 ½ Km along Simpsons Gap bike track. Meet at Flynn's Grave with bike, bike lights and picnic tea at 5.30pm. Leader: Barb Gilfedder
- Sat-Sun 24-25 May John Hayes Rockhole** Cars should meet at Macdonnell Range Caravan Park on Saturday afternoon. It will take just over an hour to get there. High clearance 4WD recommended as last 4 km very rocky. A short one hour walk after we arrive and the longer two hour Chain of Ponds Circuit walk the following morning. Be ready for a bit of scrambling. Footwear with a robust sole recommended. As the camping area is quite small there will be a maximum of 5 vehicles. Leaders: Wendy and Ian Mann. Contact them to book your place at wikks@gotalk.net.au or Ph 89527808
- Sat-Mon 7,8,9 Jun Tower Rock trip** (to be confirmed) -- A trip to Mac and Rose Chalmers Conservation Reserve (Tower Rock) on MacDonald Downs Station has been proposed for the June long weekend, but Pamela Keil is not available to lead this trip. If anyone is interested in leading, please contact pamelakeil@yahoo.com for information from the last time we took the trip.
- A write up of our previous excursion can be found in the June 2012 Newsletter:
http://alicefieldnaturalists.org.au/12_06.pdf
- Wed 11 June Meeting** 7.00pm at Charles Darwin University Higher Education Building lecture theatre. "A journey through Victoria, Field Naturalist style: recording the sights and sounds of a region" **Pamela Keil and Michael LaFlamme**.
- Sat 21 June Ooraminna Rock hole** and the Pinch. Leader: Jim Lawrence
- Tues 24 June Extra Meeting** 7.00pm at Charles Darwin University Higher Education Building lecture theatre. Visiting speaker **Brian Timms** will talk about Brachiopods (fairy, clam and tadpole shrimp)

AUSTRALIAN PLANTS SOCIETY Contact: APS Secretary karlee.foster@opbg.com.au

- Wed 7 May Meeting** 7.30pm at the Alice Springs Herbarium (Take the left hand turn to the 'Workshop' via the entrance to the Alice Springs Desert Park, Larapinta Drive) Speaker: Botanist Peter Latz. Learn about what happens in the herbarium and what information the public can access. Join us for light refreshments following the meeting. All Welcome. Free event.

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Committee Members

President	Barbara Gilfedder	8955 5452;	Public Officer	Rhondda Tomlinson	8953 1280;
Vice-President	Lee Ryall	8953 6394;	Property Officer	Rosalie Breen	8952 3409;
Secretary	Cecily Sutton	0412 501 396;	Committee Member	Connie Spencer	8952 4694;
Treasurer	Jill Brew	8953 0551;	Website and Newsletter	Pamela Keil	8955 0496.

email address: contact@alicefieldnaturalists.org.au

Alice Springs Desert Park Sand Country Wild Flowers

Steven Priestley on 9 April: report by Rosalie Breen and photos by Steven Priestley

Steve is now Nursery Manager at the Desert Park after some time looking after the Sand Country habitat. This habitat was started in 1996 and it took three lots of imported sand to establish it. The first was blown away, the second got washed away, and finally by using red sand from Hatt Road with a bit more clay in it, 1.2 to 1.3 metres of sand was successfully deposited over the area. Steve says he likes to work in the Sand Country because it has nearly all the wild flowers on it, plus a great selection of Grevilleas and Eremophilas. Also "it is easy to dig".



"General view of Sand Country taken in 1997" and "The Sand Country today taken from the claypan towards Nocturnal House"

The Desert Park is a Category 'A' Botanical Garden. To be so designated certain requirements need to be met. All the plants are mapped and positioned on a GIS database; all plant identifications are confirmed by the Herbarium; all seeds or cuttings are collected within a radius of 40km from Alice Springs (Wild Provenance) and all plants have vouchered Herbarium Specimens, so their origin is documented.



The Sand Country is modelled on seven sand country areas around Alice each with a different suite of plants reflecting each region. These are named and shown on the map (left).

So that consistent good growth of plants occurs, all plants are on irrigation using desalinated water, with 15 stations - 9 drippers and 6 popup sprinklers. The later are especially for the wild flower annuals. Plantings and other work takes place in the early morning before visitors arrive, to ensure the place looks natural (no humans!). Footprints are raked over.

Many wild flower seeds are sown in the trays in the nursery and transplanted into tubes when quite small. From tubes they are planted in the prepared areas.

394 *Schoenia cassiniana* were recently propagated, though not planted in the habitat. In perfect timing just before the recent rain, some species were planted by direct sowing of seed. First the ground was fertilized, seed scattered and the area raked and watered. Seedlings should emerge in 3-4 weeks and create a great display in a few months.

Poached Egg Daisy can be a "weed", in that too many can grow up and smother other species, or grow up in an inappropriate habitat. So these must be sprayed or physically removed! Grasses too can be a problem. The irrigation encourages their growth and many of them need to be removed to maintain a more natural environment.

Most of the trees and big shrubs in the Sand Country are now well established. Sadly some Desert Oaks are dying because the sand cover is not deep enough and the roots cannot penetrate the hard surface below. In the Yulara



section, Honey Grevilleas are blooming well and there are also plenty of Melaleucas. Marble gums *Eucalyptus gongylocarpa* (pictured left) can be found at the back of the salt pan, while Blue Mallee *Eucalyptus gamophylla* is mainly in the Napperby Lakes section. The salt pan had a few problems being established. Several efforts were made to grow typical salt-loving *Tecticornia verrucosa* by planting young ones grown in the nursery. They all failed. However, eventually plants just emerged on their own.

Another general problem is with possible cross-pollination among species of plants because plants from different regions are grown in close proximity, so new plants are sourced from their home region out of the park, in an endeavour to keep them true to type.

We were shown many pictures of the different sections and their typical vegetation.

In 2012 there were 219 species of plants listed in the Sand Country habitat, including 11 Eucalypts, 33 Acacias, and 28 Eremophilas. Steve was proud of having all six local species of Grevillea. The Darling Lily *Crinum flaccidum* is growing well and producing flowers and a Grass Tree *Xanthorrhoea thorntonii* is flourishing, unfortunately out of view.

There are a couple of old Bloodwoods of cultural significance to Arrernte people. The one leaning is the woman and the spreading one the man. (See if you can find them on your next visit)

The wild flowers of the sand country, which are on display mostly from Autumn to Spring, can be divided into those which are self propagating and those which need to be propagated in the nursery. There are six daisies cultivated in the nursery, Pink Everlasting *Schoenia cassiniana*, Annual Yellowtop *Senecio gregorii*, Poached Egg Daisy *Polycalymma sturtii*, Saltspoon Daisy *Leucochrysum stipitatum*, Davenport Daisy *Lawrencella davenportii*, and Golden Everlasting *Xerohrysum bracteatum*. (Pictured below in that order)



Those flowers which self seed are Bluebells *Wahlenbergia queenslandica*, Tall Yellowtop *Senecio magnificus*, Burr Daisy *Calotis kempei*, Desert Rattlepod *Crotalaria eremaea*, and Small Yellow Buttons *Chrysocephalum apiculatum* (which incidentally likes a hair cut).

A couple of specials in the nursery are new. The daisies *Rhodanthe citrina*, *Rhodanthe stricta*, *Schoenia ayersii* and *Waitzia acuminata* have recently been propagated. Also *Gomphrena canescens*, which has showy pink pompom flowers. It will be planted in the courtyard area near the Visitors' Centre, because it is not endemic in the source area and therefore can't be planted in the habitats area. It will delight visitors as does Sturt's Desert Pea *Swainsona formosa* which grows too far south to be included in the habitat plantings.

One of the things I took away from this talk is that the job of managing an artificial habitat so that it is true to its natural counterpart is extremely complex and takes loads of ongoing work and special care in selecting plants, so I say congratulations to management and ground staff. As visitors we appreciate the beauty and opportunity to see so many different places in the one place.



Native Gap Trip - 23 March 2014

Beth Hansen

The Arrente name for Native Gap is *Arurlte Artwatye*, translated as “the gap in the top of the shoulders across the neck”, presumably in reference to the shape of the 30m high sandstone ridge above the Burt Plain. In the late 19th century, the Overland Telegraph Line was built through the gap and there is now a telecommunications tower on the way up the track from the highway. In the 2 -3 hours we spent there, we saw a Toadhopper *Buforania crassa*, some lizards, a few Ringneck Parrots and some Singing Honeyeaters.



Connie, Rosalie, Bev, Rhondda and Scott by Beth

However, given that we had the botanical expertise of Scott, Connie and Rosalie, the main focus of interest was on the plants. I'll do my best to report on some that I remember. Not far from the parking area, back towards the highway, there were several large leaf *Senna venusta*. On the way up the hilly track and beyond the tower, we passed Curry Wattle, a Rat's-tail Goosefoot, *Dysphania kalpari*, Blue Mallees, Holly Grevilleas and a variety of hibiscus. There was some discussion as to whether it was a hibiscus or an alyogyne. Beside the track, were delicate grasses - Silky Heads, *Cymbopogon obtectus* – the boiled liquid of this plant was traditionally use to relieve coughs and colds or used as a liniment for sore muscles and head aches.

We welcomed a rest in a shady cave looking south over the Hann Range with the MacDonnell Ranges on the horizon. At least the flies stayed on our backs up there and not in and around our eyes, ears and noses, as they did down on the flat!

We returned to the parking area before heading into the fenced conservation area to see the Native Pines, *Callitris glaucophylla* and Native Fig, *Ficus brachypoda* on the southern side of the rocky hillside. The latter seemed to be struggling in the dry. Scott and Connie headed up the rocks to check out other plants such as the Desert Chinese Lantern, *Abutilon otocarpum* and debated about a possible Hakea.



For me, the native grasses were most interesting on this trip. As well as the Silky Heads, down on the flats and along the side of the roads were Kangaroo Grass, and lovely Silky Brown-tops, *Eulalia aurea*, blowing in the breeze.

We drove on to the Aileron Roadhouse for the traditional Sunday roast for lunch before returning with a couple of brief stops on the way back.

For more information about the geology of the Native Gap area, there is an article in the November 1999 issue of the ASFNC newsletter by Bob Read. Of course, Bob also covered the plants, animals, birds as well as some European history.

Arurlte Artwatye Adventure - Jacob's highlights: **Jacob's highlights:** brushing for treasure, finding teddy bears bottoms, jumping on rocks between the 'river of lava' (*pictured left*) and finding a cubby house.

Rosalie Breen

It is always impressive to see the red sandstone cliffs of the Hann range at Native Gap, covered with its stands of native pine and some large fig trees. Scott was impressed by the obvious recruitment of young pines. This healthy environment indicates it is in a fire shadow. The northern more gentle slope has suffered fire, though this has encouraged growth of a great variety of plants which we explored as we walked up to the tower and further to the top to shelter from the sun among the rock overhangs and relax with the vast view to the south.

Connie spotted a “green patch” down on the flats, which we investigated later, it being a bit of a clay pan now dry but hosting a thick growth of grasses which flourish in wet places, mainly Silky Browntop.

I found many different grasses on and around the Range, mostly dried off a bit. Here is a list, not complete, being those I knew and those ID’ed by Peter Latz at the Herbarium. Thanks! Peter says “grasses are difficult”, so I don’t expect ever to be an expert. I just enjoy them and the challenge of trying to identify to at least genus level.

- | | |
|--|----------------------------------|
| <i>Paraneurachne muelleri</i> | Northern Mulga Grass |
| <i>Monachather paradoxus</i> | Bandicoot Grass |
| <i>Eragrostis eriopoda</i> | Woolly Butt |
| <i>Urochloa holosericea ssp velutina</i> | Silkytop Armgrass |
| <i>Setaria surgens</i> | Brown Pigeon Grass |
| <i>Eriachne mucronata</i> | Mountain Wanderie |
| <i>Paspalidium constrictum</i> | Knotty Butt or
no common name |
| <i>Leptochloa fusca ssp muelleri</i> | Brown Beetle Grass |
| <i>Eulalia aurea</i> | Silky Browntop (pictured) |
| <i>Cymbopogon objectus</i> | Silky Heads |
| <i>Aristida latifolia</i> | Feathertop Wiregrass |
| <i>Sporobolus australasicus</i> | Australian Dropseed. |



Afterwards we drove further north to Aileron Road House to have a delicious Sunday roast dinner provided as always by Greg Dick and his staff, And lots of ice cream!

Connie Spencer:

Native Gap is always an interesting place to visit – with its history, rock formations and varied flora. The majestic Native Pines shelter on the southern side of the Hann Range whilst the northern side has been ravished by fire in the not too distant past. Perhaps ravished isn’t quite the right descriptive word, for many of our native plants need fire to promote new growth and so it was on this occasion.

Of particular interest to me on this trip were a couple of species of Hibiscus which had a bit of déjà vu about them. We had come across them on a previous



trip and I felt I should know their names, but apart from being a Hibiscus I wasn’t prepared to go any further. Specimens and photos were taken and are currently at the Herbarium awaiting identification. However, I’m 99% sure of *Hibiscus solanifolius* referring to leaves like Solanum. Incidentally this is the only Hibiscus on the checklist of the area. It is a shrub to 1 m high with oblong or three-lobed leaves. Flowers are pink to lilac with a dark red base. It is an uncommon shrub in sandy and rocky soils.





The second one (pictured left) I'm not quite so confident but placing bets on *Hibiscus leptocladus* (Variable-leaf Hibiscus). If I'm wrong, I'll let you know via the next newsletter. This is a spindly shrub up to 1 m high with leaves that vary in shape (hence the common name). The flower is whitish pink to purple with dark centre. This species is widespread on rocky, sandy or loamy soils.

Naturalists are becoming an endangered species

Why we need to recruit younger people into Field Naturalists...

Pam Keil sent me this interesting article. Follow the link below to read more.

"It is a fact that at university level we produce fewer and fewer field-based biologists – experts who know and understand the range and variety of creatures found in real world environments, and how they live. Everything is becoming increasingly modular and based on computer models in labs as biology becomes more technologically driven".

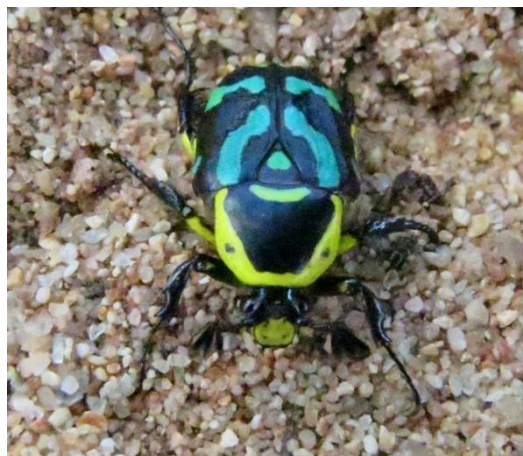
<http://theconversation.com/naturalists-are-becoming-an-endangered-species-25119>

Beetle - correction from March newsletter

Remember this beautiful beetle found by Jenny Purdie and Steve Sinclair on Owen Springs. We made a mistake with the identification. Error picked up by Adam Yates.

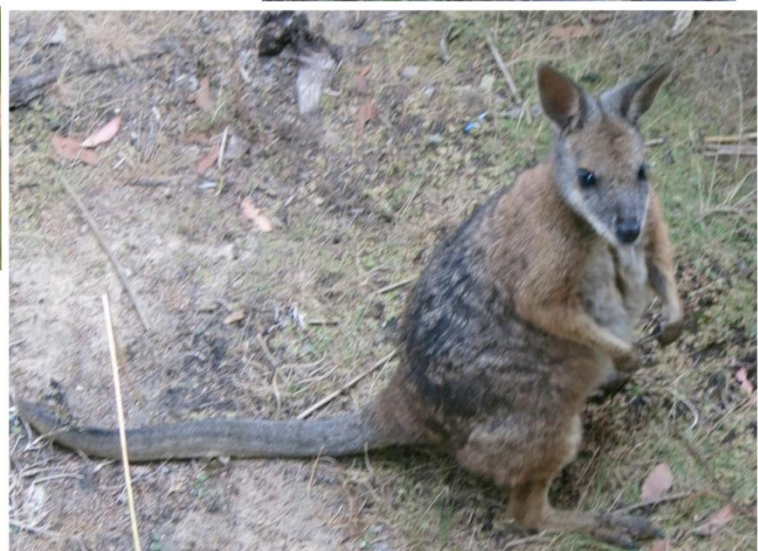
"Just a minor note to pass on to Jenny and anyone else interested. I'm a beetle aficionado and note that the fiddler beetle that Steve Sinclair found is in fact Chlorobapta frontalis. C. frontalis does look like Eupoecila australasiae but differs in having greener stripes on the wingcases and no central yellow stripe on the pronotum (the segment of the thorax in front of the wingcases). Eupoecila australasiae is restricted to the east coast whereas C. frontalis is more widespread and does extend into central Australia."

Thanks Adam!



CAN YOU HELP, PLEASE?

ASFNC Secretary, Cecily Sutton will probably be unable to attend the next few Club meetings. We are looking for someone to collect the mail from the mailbox and act as Minutes Secretary for the May, June and July meetings. Please contact Barb at bjfedders@gmail.com if you can help.



Some Kangaroo Island animals. Clockwise from top left – Kangaroo Island Kangaroo *Macropus fuliginosus* subsp. *Fuliginosus* (endemic subspecies) someone was feeding these; Koalas were introduced to KI in the 1920s, their population now needs to be controlled; KI Short-beaked Echidna race *multiaculeatus* which is smaller and paler than the mainland race; Tamar Wallaby, common around the house we rented at Vivonne bay, regarded as a farmland pest; Garden Skink *Lampropholis guichenoti*; New Holland Honeyeaters loved the Banksias in Stokes Bay Bush Garden; Rosenberg's Heath Goanna *Varanus rosenbergii*. We saw several of these on roads, alive and dead; part of a big flock of Crested Terns at Vivonne Bay. Taken on a recent holiday - Barb Gilfedder

ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED
Minutes of the general meeting at Higher Education Building
Charles Darwin University – Wednesday 12 March 2014

Following a presentation by Steven Priestley on
Thanks to Rosalie Breen for note taking and Connie Spencer for supper

Meeting opened at 8:20pm

Chair : Barb Gilfedder, **Minutes :** Jill Brew

Present: 13 Members, 8 Visitors and 4 apologies - as per attendance book.

Previous minutes accepted by the meeting

Business arising from the minutes – nil.

Correspondence In/Out

- Lake Eyre Basin : Minister's report to the community, 3 copies – distributed to members, takers asked to return and pass on.
- Thank-you card sent to speaker Boyd Wright, March speaker.
- Certificate of currency received from insurer Austcover

Treasurer's Report

Balance as at 9th April : \$3209

Debits: Insurance, PO Box (no discount), Ray Prunty gift

Credits: One membership \$20

General Business

- Basket delivered by Connie, Jenny and Rosalie delivered hanging basket to Ray Prunty at Standley Chasm.
- ALEC Biodiversity Matters Program. Barb G spoke to Jimmy Cocking and Nicole at ALEC re Threatened Species Day She will lead a walk at Sewage Ponds on Sunday 7 September.
Note : Letitia Baldwin of Power and Water has said it is okay for groups with non-inductees to go in provided a group induction process happens at start of walk.
- Pam asks contributors to the newsletter to use the club contact address to submit items.
- No listed speaker for next month.

Past Outings/Activities

- Visit to Native Gap and Aileron – 9 people came. Reports of people “really enjoying” seeing places they normally passed on the highway.

Future Outings/Activities

- 25-27 April – Newhaven. There has been some rain in the area and lots earlier in the year.
- 3-5 May - Henbury.
- Friday 16 May evening bike ride, to picnic spot on Flynn's Gap bike path.
- 24 – 25 May trip to John Hayes Rockhole. Wendy and Ian Mann leading. 5 vehicles max. High clearance 4WD recommended.

Next Meeting – 14 May 2014. Speaker to be advised.

Scribe:

Supper : Sue O'Callaghan