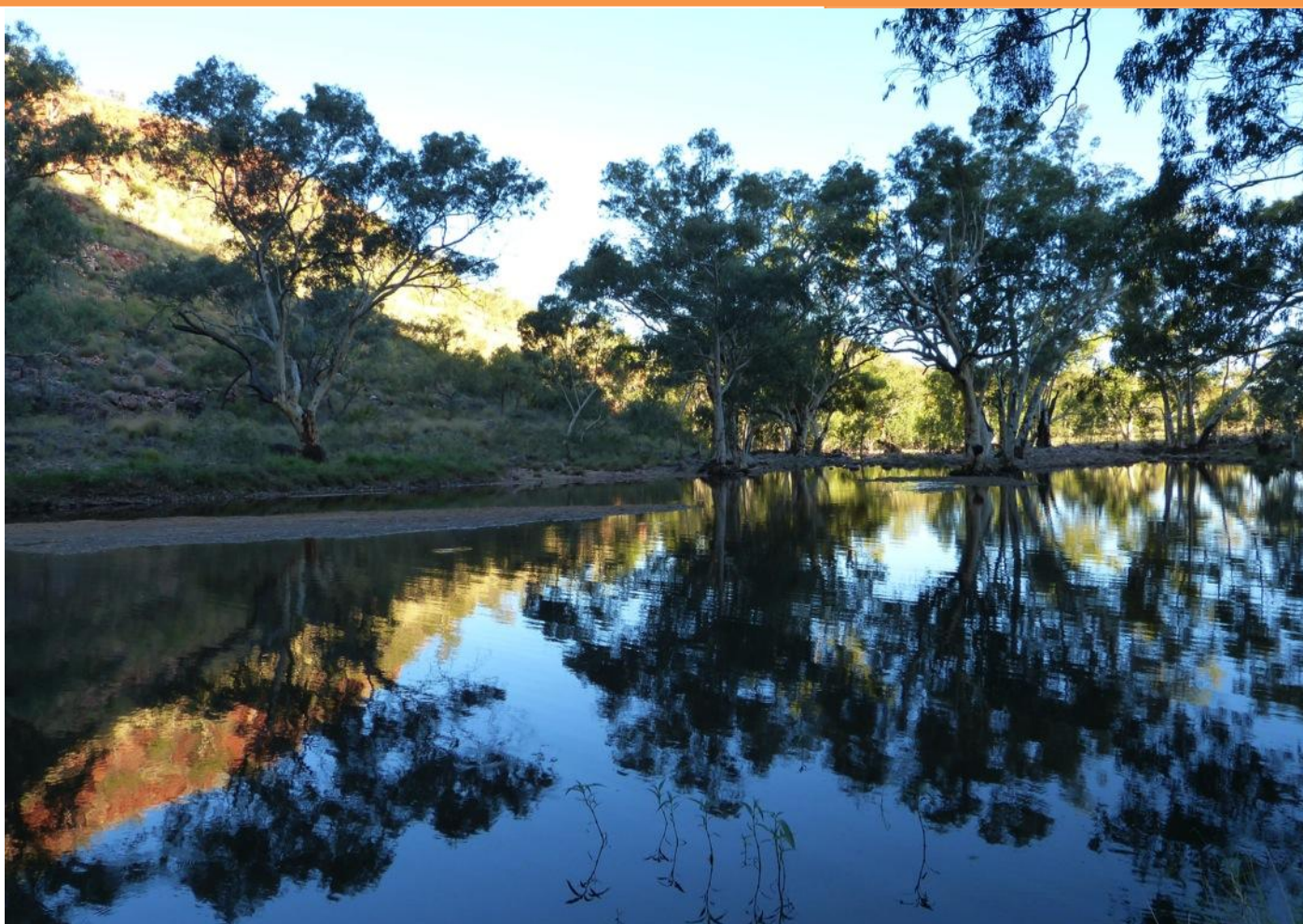




March 2015

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



Ormiston Gorge reflections. Still plenty of water around, so make sure you get out and about before it dries up! Photo by Julie Wilson.

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
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Web site:

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

Email: contact@alicefieldnaturalists.org.au

CONTENTS

*Meetings...p2 Trips/Activities...p2 Contacts...p2
Speaker: Ian Coleman...p3 OPBG Field Trip... p4
Ormiston Overnight Trip...p5
Archery Walk ...p6 Spencer Hill Walk... p8
Spencer Hill Native Grass List... p9*

NEWSLETTER

The deadline for the next newsletter is **Friday 20 March 2015**.
Please send your contributions to the club email contact@alicefieldnaturalists.org.au
Please **send photos and text separately** as combining them causes formatting issues.

ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Contact: contact@alicefieldnaturalists.org.au

- Sun 8 Mar** **Intertexta Forest Walk.** Wander through a small, but interesting woodland of *Eucalyptus intertexta* along with other trees, shrubs and vines. Wear closed shoes. Meet Old Timers 7.00am. Leader Barb Gilfedder. Ph 89555452
- Wed 11 Mar** **Meeting** 7.00pm at Charles Darwin University Higher Education Building lecture theatre.
Speaker: Graham Ride on the evolution of Parks, from the NT Reserves Board to the NT Conservation Commission to the NT Parks and Wildlife Commission: philosophy, policy, planning and implementation from the 1950s until the present day.
- Thurs 26 Mar** **Conlons Lagoon.** (Rescheduled from 19.3.15) This claypan is within the rifle range complex and only accessible through locked gates with permission. It filled with the January rains and should now be growing an interesting range of plants. Wear closed shoes. Meet opposite the Old Timers at 4.30pm. Contact - Barb Gilfedder Ph 89555452
- Sat 28 Mar** **Sewage ponds** – Look at Birds and learn to identify shorebirds. Meet at the locked Birders gate promptly at 7.00am. Leaders: Barb Gilfedder and Pam Keil.
- Wed 8 April** **Meeting** 7.00pm at Charles Darwin University Higher Education Building lecture theatre. Speaker to be confirmed.

AUSTRALIAN PLANTS SOCIETY

Contact: APS Secretary karlee.foster@opbg.com.au

- Wed 4 Mar** **APS AGM Meeting** at Olive Pink Botanic Garden at 7:30pm. Barb Gilfedder will show photos, mainly of native plants, from a recent trip to Tasmania.

BIRDLIFE CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

Contact: birdlifeca@gmail.com

- Wed 25 Mar** **BLCA Meeting.** 7:00pm at Alice Springs Desert Park meeting room; **Speaker: Pamela Keil** – Special presentation for Farewell to Shorebirds – Shorebirds in Alice Springs?! The importance of inland wetlands and the central Australian migration routes.

End of April is our next AGM! Looking for new committee members including a new president.
Contact the email above if you are interested in joining our growing organization.

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	<u>POSITION NOT FILLED AT AGM</u>		Minutes Secretary	Connie Spencer	8952 4694;
Treasurer	Neil Woolcock	8955 1021;	Website and Newsletter	Pamela Keil	8955 0496.

email address: contact@alicefieldnaturalists.org.au

We do need a Club Secretary. The position is not very arduous. We write few letters.
Please volunteer if you can help us out. Barb Gilfedder, President.

February Speaker: Ian Coleman, Curator at Olive Pink Botanic Garden

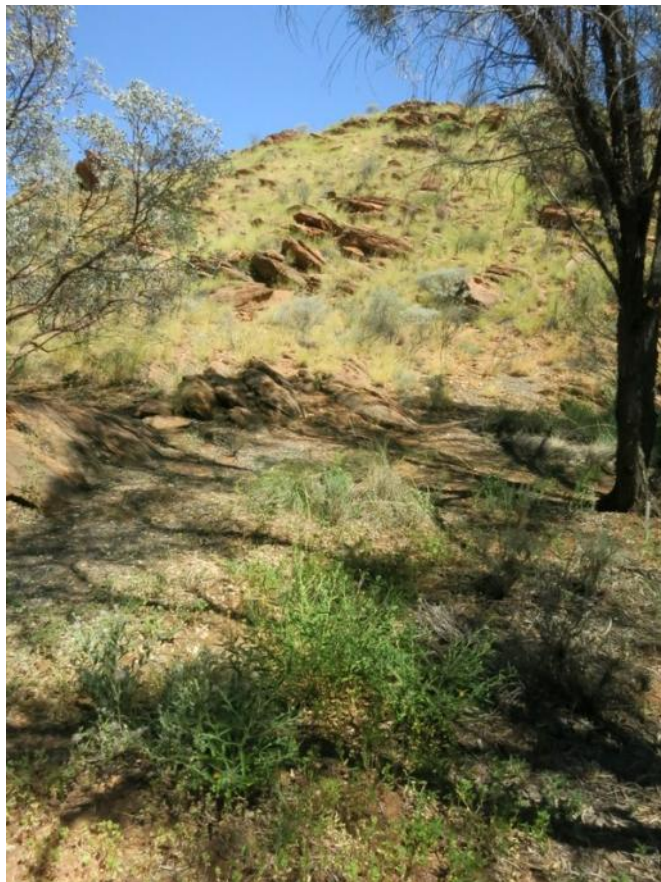
“Future directions for a globally unique treasure”

Report by Lee Ryall; Photos by Barb Gilfedder

Wednesday night was a little different from many of the talks at the Field Naturalists. Ian Coleman, Curator at Olive Pink Botanic Garden was speaking about future directions of the Garden, and asking for our suggestions and comments in the context of the passion with which Alice Springs people regard Miss Pink's legacy.

The Garden documents, cultivates and displays over 600 central Australian plant species, and plays a critical role in conservation, education and research relating to these plants. Having the Garden here in Alice Springs greatly enhances the understanding of the flora of the region for enthusiasts and members of the public alike. Volunteers help with weeding and maintenance, contributing to the sense of community ownership.

It is time to review the strategic plan for Olive Pink Botanic Garden and look at directions and priorities for the coming five years. Ian mentioned infrastructure and interpretations as examples of areas which are under consideration, and asked for people to raise any issues or concerns as starting points for discussion.



Nurses' Hill. The base where the Buffel Grass has been controlled shows a range of native forbs, while the hill is still in the grips of Buffel.

Initially the audience mentioned the need to maintain what has been excellent labelling of the plants at the Botanic Garden, and the value of the occasional sales of local, acclimatised plants to the general community.

Other people then raised the question of school involvement - how is this to be encouraged? The possibility of a teacher resource pack or even curriculum guide which might cost \$25 000 was mooted. Maybe the garden could play a role in climate change education...

Other suggestions to engage young people included the garden artworks. The labyrinth is interesting but high maintenance. Members pointed out that different modes of engaging people might be effective - such as providing exploration trails for children. Would posters help move people out from the cafe into the gardens? Maybe a 'What's Happening Now?' style of poster could achieve this, or providing basket picnics from the cafe.

The vexing question of buffel was raised, and Ian talked about the role of volunteers, casual labour



The waterhole area which has problems with water quality.

and trainers in this never-ending work. The recent rain has exacerbated the problem at the moment, but work is ongoing. The gully between the hills has been sprayed as a firebreak as well as a weedbreak and options include sponsorship programs for areas on the hills.

Other points mentioned included the screening of the eyesore area near the entrance and waterhole area which has been changed to a series of concrete-lined pools is taking time to establish. This led to a discussion of the problems with the pH of the water – and the need for studies and research to look at effects and alternatives. Expanding the number of species under cultivation was also suggested, and Ian pointed out that this would be tricky because the garden would need to start looking at species which are much more difficult to grow in the local conditions. The possibility of taking on the additional 120 Ha on offer from Power and Water was brought up, and Ian pointed out the need to maintain any extra land, even if it isn't cultivated.

As this indicates, the discussion was both stimulating and wide-ranging. We took surveys and filled them in, but were left on notice to contribute further to the debate around the future of the Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Ian has been in the position of curator for only a short while, but his enthusiasm for his work is infectious, and the evening gave us a valuable chance to contribute to discussion about the options for the future directions of this botanic garden. Peter Latz describes it as central Australia's 'globally unique treasure'.

...and a wander through the garden.

This talk was followed two days later, by a late afternoon stroll around the garden with Ian Coleman, Peter Latz and several members of the Olive Pink Board of Management.

Rain in central Australia is a mixed blessing. Washaways had cut through some areas and some paths were still under repair. Since the rain it has been a massive task to remove pockets of Buffel Grass from the main garden area. We stopped at the bottom of Nurses' Hill. The trees at the base had a lovely understorey of fresh green forbs, while the hill was still covered with the exotic grass. No doubt there is a wealth of small

native species amongst the grass and Ian is keen to get an army of volunteer gardeners to attack the enemy, and allow these small natives a chance to thrive.

Peter pointed out other introduced grasses, which could take over if the Buffel disappears. These included Small Stink Grass, Eragrostis minor, a sample of which he handed around for us to smell.

The waterhole area certainly looked sad and it will be good when Ian finds a solution to the water quality problem. Only then will it be worth planting the waterhole and surrounding area with appropriate native plants.

In spite of these things, it is always lovely wandering around our Botanic Garden, birds were everywhere and Euros soaked up the shade. Ian talked of immediate problems that needed attention while Peter opened our eyes to the bigger pictures. Thank you both, Ian and Peter very much! Barb Gilfedder



In the centre Peter Latz talking, Ian Coleman on the right, with some of the Field Naturalists group.

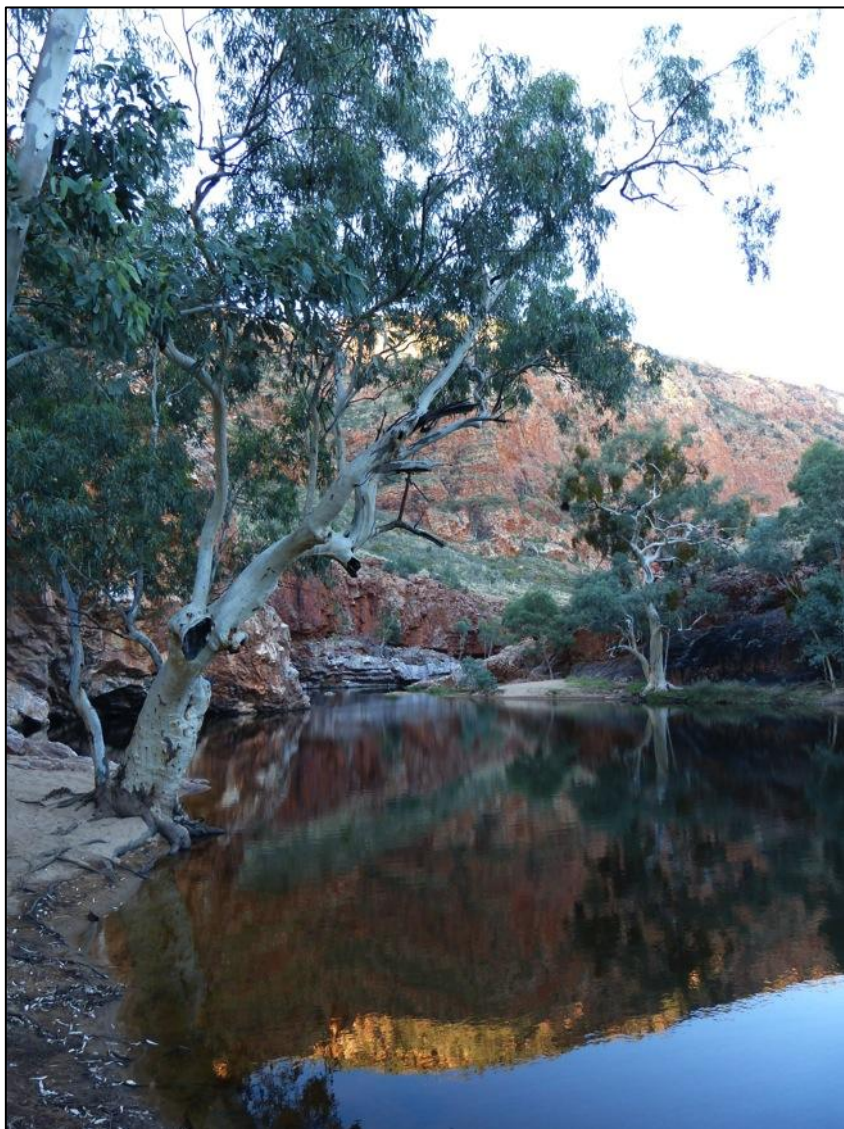
Ormiston Gorge Overnighter - 31 January

Report by Cec Sutton: Photos by Julie Wilson

The plan was to make the most of the recent rain. It was great to be accompanied by Julie Wilson (who had arrived in Alice a week ago) as well as Steve and Jess from the Desert Park (who provided professional expertise).

The drive along the West Macs was amazing due to the red rock/bright green vegetation contrast. Everything seemed to glow in the afternoon light. First stop was Ellery Big Hole for a swim and some geology revision.

The drive into Ormiston Gorge was as stunning as ever. It was interesting to view it through a newcomer's eyes. Julie did not expect such development. I was amazed that there was absolutely no-one there, such a contrast to the peak season.



We dined in the dusk at the Ghost Gum lookout. The Ghost Gums seem to glow in the dark. I went to the waterhole and was delighted to see a Stimson's Python.

The response of the vegetation and the wildlife to the recent rains was impressive. There was life everywhere. There were swarms of Blue Line Spotted Butterflies hovering around the undergrowth of the flowering acacias. There were lots of flowers.

The blue/purple coloured flowers - Native Wandering Jew, Scaevola, Eremophila, Brachyscome and Solanum. The yellow flowers - Mulga, Witchetty, Sidas including Desert Lanterns, Peaflowers. They almost seemed to glow to attract pollinators.

Early Sunday morning, mega swim time. We walked up the gorge to the end of the deep waterholes, and waded down in the warmish water. The reflections of the gorge walls on the water were impressive, at times an intense red, and at other times a bright dappled effect as the light reflected off the water onto the rocks. Two rock wallabies seemed unconcerned by our presence, at times having a fight, at times grooming. Young males practising we surmised

It was time to head off as it was getting a bit hot.

A stopover at Standley Chasm, won again, nobody in there at noon and a magnificent glow from the rocks.

It was an impressive 24 hour excursion.

I should have taken a photo of Julie swimming through Ormiston Gorge with her iphone attached to her head via a large hair clip...but of course I did not take my phone on a swimming trip.

Critter List (without binoculars)

Red-tailed Black Cockatoos(a flock of 5 doing a flyover while we swam though Ellery Big Hole Gorge)

Woodswallows	Spinifex Pigeon	Port Lincoln Parrots
White-plumed Honeyeaters	Zebra Finches	Magpie Lark
Fairy Wren (female)	Sacred Kingfisher	Tree Martins
Budgies	Large raptor	Australasian Grebe
Western Bowerbird	Willy Wagtail	

HEARD

A magnificent dawn chorus

Bush Stone Curlew

Rufous whistler

**Archery Range Walk –
6 February**

**Report by Louise Samways;
Photos by Jim Lawrence.**

A great way to start the day. Crispy air damp on the skin. Venus(?) still bright in the dawn sky, and a hot cup of tea on the drive to somewhere I had never been before.

Out past the claypans , down a narrowing dirt road, along the dry river bed under massive gums, around the corner at the base of a towering rock face and before us a plain of bloody buffel..... with some stunning ghost gums and corkwoods in the distance.



As we walked towards the archery field range my fellow “naturalists” (not “naturists” which had been my first misreading of the web site) commented on various plants and bird calls.

What a revelation! Instead of focusing on what shouldn't be there.... *weeds*.... I was focusing on what was *between* the weeds.

Forty years of bush regeneration has rather distorted my perspective, and while I can spot a weed from a hundred metres, my knowledge of flora is reduced to “bush”, “ground cover” and “tree” (I can distinguish acacia, in flower, and eucalypt). My knowledge of fauna?.....“bird” and “animal”....although I can recognise a kangaroo from a possum, but not from a wallaby.

Walking towards the range to the north we passed through pockets of air with very different temperatures, from very cold to suddenly very warm. This is something I have only noticed walking in the desert early in the morning.



As we scrambled up the hill we left the buffel behind and gingerly picked our way around the spinifex (I remember that name because it constantly attacked me with its spiny “leaves”). I began to realise there was a huge variety of grasses and small plants especially under the large bushes (acacias?).

I particularly liked the bush that smelt like minty tea...Ha! mint bush! Lots of conga lines of cute furry little caterpillars. (They seemed to be marching to some collective rhythm...necessary I suppose to coordinate all those legs.) Lots of birds (kites?) high in the sky looking for breakfast.

The ants had built some amazingly high fortresses for the recent rains and some seemed to be busy repairing them...more big rain coming?

The view from the saddle over the claypans was just stunning, and with so much water shimmering as the sun came up made you realise the full extent of the pans. I was especially interested in the really healthy looking stand of Coolibahs off to the west ...a stark contrast to those struggling against man-made changes to the water table at Ankerre Ankerre (Coolibah Swamp). Behind us looking out over the rifle range to the south was more water spread across the plain, which became even more visible as the sun rose further in the sky.

As I jumped from rock to rock returning down the hill, the contrasting colours and shapes of the rock and plants created a mesmerising kaleidoscope of flashing patterns....much more fun than looking for weeds.

We returned to the cars via a track taking us past groves of ancient corkwoods, alarmingly threatened by buffel, and the largest ghost gums I had ever seen. Under the deep shade of their canopy we paused for some relief from the sun’s warmth and brightness, which was intensified by its reflection on the surrounding dry grass.



We found a tiny little nest blown off a tree containing a half egg shell, white with brown speckles, which is now hanging on its branch at home as a reminder of this lovely morning.

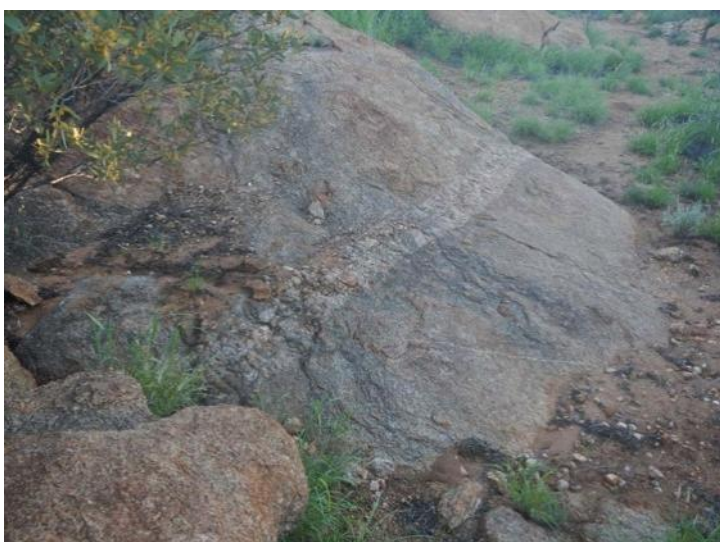
The Central Desert landscape is so wonderfully humbling. It is such a relief and so liberating to realise how utterly insignificant I am in the scheme of things....in the end my little stuff ups just won’t matter.

Many thanks to Cec for organising this little adventure and to Connie and others for sharing their great knowledge with such a novice naturalist (I am only a naturalist when painted up with the ladies out bush.

Spencer Hill and Valley – 24 January

Report by Connie Spencer; Photos by Rhondda Tomlinson

Members must have been “hanging out” for an outing after our summer break as thirteen turned up at 5:40 am to catch the sunrise from Spencer Hill. The sunrise was rather ordinary and we didn’t see many if any Rock Wallabies or Euros but with the recent high rainfall in the area the flora was flourishing. Rock Fuchsia (*Eremophila freelingii*) was putting on new growth and flowering sporadically whilst the Emu Bush (*Eremophila latrobei*) had finished flowering. Resurrection ferns were peeking out from under rocks.



Rosalie led us across the top of Spencer Hill to a site where there was evidence of wartime installations. Megg gave us a brief insight into wartime Alice Springs.

From here it was down the hill via a different route taking in some of the geology of the area, a very prominent pegmatite dyke, with help from Annette (photo left).

Caustic Bush (*Sarcostemma viminalis* subsp. *australe*) was in fine form sprawling over the rocks. All the above mentioned plants were interspersed with clumps of the dreaded Buffel Grass.

However, down in the valley where there has been a concentrated effort to control Buffel Grass, especially by Rosalie, there was a smorgasbord of native grasses. On Rosie’s little hillock we stopped whilst Rosalie gingerly evicted a few cactus plants from the area. The Orange Spade Flower (*Hybanthus aurianticus*) had everyone with their cameras out. It is wonderful to see what comes up after rain particularly in the absence of Buffel Grass. The area is a credit to you, Rosalie and other Landcare members



Rosalie's Native Grass list from Spencer Hill trip.

IDs confirmed by Peter Jobson, NT Herbarium. * introduced species

<i>Aristida</i>	<i>contorta</i>	Kerosene Grass	
<i>Aristida</i>	<i>holathera</i>	Erect kerosene Grass	
* <i>Cenchrus</i>	<i>ciliaris</i>	Buffel Grass	common
<i>Chrysopogon</i>	<i>fallax</i>	Golden Beard	
<i>Cymbopogon</i>	<i>ambiguus</i>	Lemon Grass	
<i>Cymbopogon</i>	<i>objectus</i>	Silky Heads	
* <i>Cyniodom</i>	<i>dactylon</i>	Couch Grass	
<i>Dactyloctenium</i>	<i>radulans</i>	Button Grass (pictured right)	
<i>Dichanthium</i>	<i>sericeum</i>	Queensland Blue Grass	
<i>Digitaria</i>	<i>brownii</i>	Cotton Grass	
<i>Eneapogon</i>	<i>avenaceus</i>	Native Oat Grass	
<i>Eneapogon</i>	<i>polyphyllus</i>	Woolly Oat Grass	
* <i>Eragrostis</i>	<i>minor</i>	Small Stinkgrass	
<i>Eraichne</i>	<i>mucronata</i>	Mountain Wanderie	hills
<i>Eulalia</i>	<i>aurea</i>	Silky Browntop	creek line
<i>Fimbrostylis</i>	<i>dichotoma</i>	Eight Day Grass	
<i>Panicum</i>	<i>decompositum</i>	Native Millet	
<i>Paspalidium</i>	<i>clementii</i>	Clement's Paspalidium	
<i>Sporobolus</i>	<i>caroli</i>	Fairy Grass	
<i>Themeda</i>	<i>triandra</i>	Kangaroo Grass	
<i>Tragus</i>	<i>australianus</i>	Small Burr-grass	
<i>Tripogon</i>	<i>loliformis</i>	Five Minute Grass	common
<i>Triraphis</i>	<i>mollis</i>	Purple Plume Grass	
<i>Urochloa</i>	<i>piligera</i>	Summer Grass	common



The small creek that flows through the intertexta forest was flooded with the January rains. This picture was taken from the road. It is now dry, but awash with native grasses, vines and forbs. Peter Latz is self-appointed caretaker of this lovely area and has been removing Buffel and other weeds for many years.

Don't miss the ramble through here on Sunday 8 March.

ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED
Minutes of the general meeting held at the Higher Education Building
Charles Darwin University – Wednesday 11 February 2015

Following a presentation by Ian Coleman, Curator Olive Pink Botanic Garden on
“future directions for a globally unique treasure”

Thanks to Lee Ryall for note taking and Connie Spencer for supper

Meeting opened at 8:15pm

Present/Apologies: as per attendance book (20 members, 3 visitors & 1 apology)

Previous minutes accepted by the meeting.

Business arising from the minutes

- Still in need of a secretary. Connie Spencer preparing the minutes, Rosalie Breen writing thank you letters to speakers and Rhondda Tomlinson printing and sending out hard copy of newsletter to those not on email

Correspondence In/Out

- Neil and Barb sent out reminders regarding membership renewal and had a good response.
- Letter received from Esther Coleman-Hawkins wanting to speak to someone from ASFNC for stories on plants and animals for a future documentary film on the Red Centre. Letter to be passed to Pam Keil.
- Letter received from Australian Natural History Medallion advising that our nominee Peter Latz was not successful but nomination was still good for another year. Cec Sutton to advise Michael Laflamme that nomination needs updating.

Treasurer's Report

Balance in bank 31 December 2014	\$3,628.11
Income for January 2015	<u>110.00</u>
	3,738.11
Expenditure for January 2015	<u>119.50</u>
Balance in bank 31 January 2015	<u>\$3,618.61</u>

Treasurer's report accepted by the meeting.

General Business

- Barb read the minutes of the planning meeting held Sunday 25 January 2015. A Committee recommendation to invest \$2,500.00 into producing a Central Australian Flora fold-out pamphlet to be sold in order to recoup funds spent was put to the members. Members unanimously in favour.

Past Outings/Activities

- 24 Jan 2015 - 13 members for Spencer Hill and Valley walk led by Rosalie Breen.
- Friday 6 Feb 2015 - Dead Centre Bow Hunters Archery Range walk led by Cec Sutton. 10 participants. Jim Lawrence has sent Barb some good photos.
- Sunday 8 Feb 2015 - good turn up for Shorebird Count at Alice Springs sewage ponds.

Future Outings/Activities

- Fri 13 Feb 2015 – late afternoon stroll around Olive Pink Botanic Garden with curator Ian Coleman.
- Wed 18 Feb 2015 – Cec Sutton organising a late afternoon visit to Pitchi Richi Sanctuary with dinner afterwards at Heavitree Tavern. Small donation to Alice Springs Heritage would be appreciated.
- Fri 20 Feb 2015 – Cec Sutton leading an early morning walk from eastern end of Eagle Court to Sunset Hill.
- Sat & Sun 25 & 26 July 2015 – Ian and Wendy Mann are organising the end of FNC year function to be held at Old Hamilton Downs.

Sightings

- Lee Ryall came home to a Boobook Owl on her doorstep.
- Look out for Hawk Moth caterpillars on Tar Vine.
- Bev Gray mentioned seeing and hearing the Channel-billed Cuckoos in the Gillen area.

Next Meeting – Wednesday 11 March 2015. Speaker: Graham Ride on *The evolution of the NT Reserves Board to the NT Conservation Commission to the NT Parks and Wildlife Commission and the philosophy, policy, planning and implementation from the 1950s until now*. Jill Brew note taker and Marg Lawrence supper.

Meeting closed – 8:30 pm