



May 2015

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



Dingo hanging out at the Sewage Ponds during our Farewell to Waders shorebird count. There were three young dingoes out and about during our walk, but this one was the most curious – though still quite wary. Photo by Dominic Chaplin.

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.

CONTENTS

Meetings...p2 Trips/Activities...p2 Contacts...p2
Speaker: Pamela Keil – Farewell to Waders...p3
Conlons Lagoon Walk... p5
*New **Central Australia Flora** Brochure...p7*
Animal, vegetable or mineral?...p8

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

Web site:

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

Email: contact@alicefieldnaturalists.org.au

NEWSLETTER

The deadline for the next newsletter is **Wednesday 20 May 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

- Sat 9 May** Guided Tour of Old Timers' Museum with Megg Kelham, who knows the museum items well and investigated the provenance of many of them. She promises to look at the exhibits with an environmental twist. Meet there promptly at 2.00pm. Contact: Barb Gilfedder Phone 89555452. Individual donations requested.
- Wed 13 May** **Meeting** 7.00pm at Charles Darwin University Higher Education Building lecture theatre. 'Sadness and Beauty: People, Plants and Landscapes in central Australia' **Fiona Walsh** will introduce several recent short films made with central Australians. The films have been co-edited with David Nixon and screened on ABC TV.'
- Sat, Sun, Mon** Queens Birthday long weekend Mac and Rose Chalmers Reserve camping trip.
- 6-7-8 June** Contact Pamela Keil to express your interest – pamelakeil@yahoo.com Phone 8955 0496.
- Wed 10 June** **Meeting** 7.00pm at Charles Darwin University Higher Education Building lecture theatre. Jen Kreusser from Land for Wildlife will talk about, "Cunning, curious, carnivorous... CATS!"
- Sat, Sun 11-12 July** Fossil dig at Alcoota – Further details to come.
- Sat, Sun 18-19 July** Hamilton Downs Trip – Christmas in July. Register your interest at or before the May Meeting.

AUSTRALIAN PLANTS SOCIETY

Contact: **APS Secretary** Jude.pringle@nt.gov.au

- Wed 6 May** **Meeting** 7:30 Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Speaker: Peter Jobson on "When a Rainforest Isn't: A Case Study on dry monsoon rainforests in Australia."

BIRDLIFE CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

Contact: birdlifeca@gmail.com

- Wed 27 May** **Monthly Meeting.** 7:00pm in the meeting room, Alice Springs Desert Park. Pete Nunn will be speaking about Princess Parrots prior to the meeting. Guests welcome.
- Sun 7 June** Starting in June, BirdLife Central Australia will be leading monthly birding activities on the first Sunday of every month. Each month we will go to a different location. Non-members are welcome to join our excursions for a gold coin donation to BirdLife. Please contact us at the email above to express your interest in attending and for details on times and locations.

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	Charissa Allan	0400 343241;	Committee member	Connie Spencer	8952 4694;
Treasurer	Neil Woolcock	8955 1021;	Website and Newsletter	Pamela Keil	8955 0496.

email address: contact@alicefieldnaturalists.org.au

“Migratory Waders in Central Australia: The importance of permanent and temporary waterholes”

Every summer, thousands of migratory waders come to Australian shores to fatten up during the harsh winters of the northern hemisphere. They arrive in September and October, spend all summer eating and storing up fat, and then start the long journey back to the Arctic to breed during the northern summer. The waders begin to disappear in March and are almost all gone by late April.

Each year BirdLife hosts a Welcome to Waders event in September, and Farewell to Waders in March and April. Before the BirdLife Central Australia branch was formalized, the Alice Springs Field Naturalists club helped track the waders’ movements by participating in the National Shorebird Surveys (between 2 and 4 times per year) at the Alice Springs Sewage Ponds. This year BirdLife Central Australia and the Field Nats joined forces to ensure that we record the importance of arid zone wetlands for these amazing birds.



Black-tailed Godwit

In my talk, I looked at the different types of shorebirds and waders that use our Sewage Ponds, then analysed some of the data that has come from the Field Naturalists efforts over the years and data from the eBird sighting records given by birders that enjoy the ponds.

There are three different groups of waders that use the Sewage Ponds: (1) resident waders that live and breed in Australia; (2) migratory waders that are regular visitors through the summer months; and (3) vagrant migratory waders that show up as only one or two individuals for a short time.



Red-necked Avocet

Resident waders can be found at the ponds at all times of year, and may even breed there. Some use the ponds during times of drought, and choose to breed when rainfall events fill the local salt lakes and clay pans. Resident waders commonly found at the Sewage Ponds include: Black-winged Stilt, Red-necked Avocet, Masked Lapwing, Red-kneed Dotterel, Black-fronted Dotterel, and Red-capped Plover. Make sure you keep to the wheel ruts when you walk through the area – many of these birds simply lay their eggs on the ground in the middle of the roads!

Some species of migratory waders show up every year and can be found at the sewage ponds through most of the summer. Individuals may come and go, or they may stay the whole season. Sharp-tailed Sandpipers can show up in very large numbers at the beginning of the season (a couple hundred birds), and quite a number of these will spend the whole season in the area. Other species tend to be here in smaller numbers throughout the year, including Wood Sandpiper (fairly common along the rocky shores of the ponds), Common Sandpiper (a few usually call the ponds home for the whole season), Common Greenshank, Marsh Sandpiper, Red-necked Stint, and Pectoral Sandpiper (generally only a few individuals of these last three groups at any one time).



Grey Plover

Still other species are rarely seen at the ponds, but an individual or two may stop by for a few days, or a little longer, to take a break before continuing on their way. Cyclones on the coast may cause these individuals to veer off track, but it’s always good to find that unusual bird that’s just decided it needs a bit of a recharge. After visiting one year, it sometimes seems that an individual may make it into a regular stop for a few years in a row. Others are only a one-off event. Some species that you might see if you’re lucky include: Pacific Golden



Common Greenshank

Plover, Grey Plover, Black-tailed Godwit, Little Curlew, Ruff, Long-toed Stint, and Curlew Sandpiper.

Official Shorebird Counts only happen twice per year, once in summer and once in winter (Field Nats occasionally does more). Rainfall events can open up new habitat to these birds, which leads to few birds using the sewage ponds until the land dries up again. The data we have recorded is quite useful and tells us a lot, but I left the group with a few questions to ponder... and I'll leave you with these as well:

1. How many "stop-over" events do we miss during these counts?
2. How many species use the surrounding wetlands and waterholes?
3. What is the effect of a super wet year on our perceived wader numbers?
4. Should we be doing something different? Something more?

And also remember that more than just shorebirds call our wetlands home...



Farewell to Waders – Introduction to Migratory Waders and Count; joint adventure between BirdLife Central Australia and Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club.

In addition to my talk, I also led several joint excursions to the sewage ponds during the Farewell to Waders event. In addition to the inquisitive dingo on the front page, we did actually manage to find a few waders. A number of people, both locals and visitors, participated in these excursions and fun was had by all. Here are the migratory wader counts:

28 March: The waders were very spread out and a bit flighty, and we were wandering slowly and talking about ID, but here's our best estimate: Wood Sandpiper (10+), Common Sandpiper (5+), Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (40+), Pectoral Sandpiper (2 or 4), Red-necked Stint (4), Long-toed Stint (3 or 5), Curlew Sandpiper (1), Marsh Sandpiper (6+), and Common Greenshank (2)

11 April: Wood Sandpiper (10), Common Sandpiper (2), Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (25), Pectoral Sandpiper (2), Red-necked Stint (5), Long-toed Stint (1), Curlew Sandpiper (0), Marsh Sandpiper (1)

18 April: Wood Sandpiper (5), Common Sandpiper (0), Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (12), Pectoral Sandpiper (0), Red-necked Stint (4), Long-toed Stint (1), Curlew Sandpiper (1), Marsh Sandpiper (2)

30 April: Pam was at the ponds and found only 2 Red-necked Stints hanging out with the resident Red-capped Plovers; everything else has gone north.

Excursion: Conlons Lagoon 26 March

Report by Anne Pye

Thursday night was a lovely night to be a field nat...not too hot, no flies and timing perfect to get in some golden light at the end of the day and still be back at the cars before it was too dark.

About fifteen of us turned up – many like myself not having been there before. An early highlight of the walk was the legless lizard that Lisa was able to inform us about after there had been a bit of scrabbling under bushes to catch it. Red-tailed Black Cockatoos were also spotted early on. Other birds spotted included two pairs of White-faced Herons and some blue Fairy-wrens. As you expect with the water around, Budgerigars and Zebra Finches were also in the air.



Barb had a short list of 7 plants for the Lagoon and she was determined to improve upon this. Upper storey included *Corymbia opaca*, *Acacia aneura*, *Acacia estrophiolata* and of course, *Eucalyptus coolabah*. The dominant vegetation on the claypan and in the water was *Eragrostis Australasica* – and of course there was some Lignum *Muhlenbeckia florulenta*, as well. There were also plenty of small forbs and groundcovers including several varieties of *Portulaca* and *Glycine*. The list of 7 was definitely added to!

The remnant water in the lagoon made for some lovely reflecting photos and I think everyone enjoyed our little loop – which Barb had timed so well.



Bird List: Conlons Lagoon (compiled by Lisa Nunn)

Red-tailed Black Cockatoo	Whistling Kite	Willie Wagtail
Australian Ringneck	White-plumed Honeyeater	Weebill
Budgerigar	Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater	Striated Pardalote
Cockatiel	Variegated Fairy-wren	Red-kneed Dotterel
Wedge-tailed Eagle (performing territorial display flight over range)	White-winged Fairy-wren	Black-fronted Dotterel
Nankeen Kestrel	Diamond Dove	White-faced Heron
	Zebra Finch	Magpie-lark

A Burton's Legless Lizard with a regenerated tail was seen at the beginning of the walk. Two dead *Delma* legless lizard specimens were found, one of which was identified as Excitable Delma (*Delma tincta*) and the other was likely the same.



Plant List: Conlons Lagoon (compiled by Barb Gilfedder; not confirmed)

<i>Eragrostis setifolia</i> (Neverfail Grass)	<i>Enchylaena tomentosa</i> (Ruby Saltbush)
<i>Eragrostis australasica</i> (Swamp Canegrass)	<i>Einada nutans</i> (Climbing Saltbush)
<i>Eragrostis dielsii</i> (Mallee Lovegrass)	<i>Atriplex holocarpa</i> (Pop Saltbush)
<i>Panicum decompositum</i> (Native Millet)	<i>Maireana georgei</i> (Golden Bluebush)
<i>Fimbristylis</i> sp. (Rush)	<i>Sclerolaena diacantha</i> (Grey Copper Burr)
<i>Cyperus</i> sp. (Sedge)	<i>Dysphania</i> sp.
<i>Marsilea</i> sp. (Nardoo)	<i>Maireana aphylla</i> (Cottonbush)
<i>Muehlenbeckia florulenta</i> (Lignum)	<i>Chenopodium nitrariaceum</i> (Nitre Goosefoot)
<i>Goodenia</i> sp.	<i>Acacia tetragonophylla</i> (Dead Finish)
<i>Teucrium integrifolium</i> (Grey Germander)	<i>Acacia kempeana</i> (Witchetty Bush)
<i>Pterocaulon serrulatum</i> (Apple Bush)	<i>Acacia sessiliceps</i> (Curly-pod Wattle)
<i>Glinus lotooides</i> (Hairy Carpet-weed)	<i>Acacia estrophiolata</i> (Ironwood)
<i>Glinus origioides</i>	<i>Acacia aneura</i> (Mulga)
<i>Bergia henschallii</i>	<i>Eucalyptus coolabah</i> (Coolibah)
<i>Calotis plumulifera</i> (Woolly-headed Burr-daisy)	<i>Corymbia opaca</i> (Bloodwood)
<i>Heliotropium</i> sp.	<i>Hakea leucoptera</i> (Needlebush)
<i>Portulaca oleracea</i> (Pigweed)	<i>Hakea divaricata</i> (Fork-leaf Corkwood)
<i>Portulaca</i> sp.	<i>Capparis mitchellii</i> (Wild Orange)
<i>Sida</i> sps.	<i>Senna</i> sp.
<i>Dissocarpus paradoxus</i> (Cannonball Saltbush)	<i>Eremophila latrobei</i> (Native Fuschia)
<i>Salsola tragus</i> (Buckbush)	<i>Eremophila longifolia</i> (Long-leaved Fuschia)

New Central Australia Flora brochure – It's HERE!

On 26 April there was a very successful launch of the new Central Australian Flora brochure. Peter Latz praised it highly and at least 50 people attended.

It displays 121 photos of local native forms and small shrubs but folds up small enough to slide easily into your car glovebox or the pocket of your backpack. Being laminated it is also tough and weather proof. Jenny Purdie, Barb Gilfedder and Rebecca Duncum (all pictured below) have selected which flowers to include and chosen their best photos making it a stunningly colourful brochure as well as a practical first reference guide.



They would like to thank Australian Plant Society Alice Springs and Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club for investing funds to make it happen. These funds will be returned as soon as the brochures are sold. They are now being distributed to shops and other outlets to make them available to locals and to tourists.

They would also like to acknowledge help from Peter Jobson and the Alice Springs Herbarium and Ian Coleman and Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Copies will be available at a special price to APS and ASFNC Members at their meetings. Don't miss out!



Unknown thing on the Larapinta Trail – Animal, vegetable or mineral?

Have a look at these pictures and see what you make of them before reading our experts explanations below.



Mark and Christina from Germany, were visiting family in Alice. They found this intriguing object somewhere along the Larapinta Trail and took these photos. They said the scales were smooth one way and sharp the other. I circulated the photos among a few experts and believe they have come up with the correct answer.

I suspect it isn't plant material. My gut feeling is it is the skin of a reptile that has sloughed off. I'm very happy for someone to prove me wrong :-D

Peter< who thinks you should avoid the Larapinta Trail, before you are captured by aliens (ie: the thing that sloughed this skin....)

Peter Jobson

My feeling is reptile. It looked to me to have very rough scales, unlike Centralian snakes and there is no sign of legs.

My guess is the tail of a Spiny-tailed Monitor, either cast off skin or mummified tail separated from the rest of the body, probably by dingoes. I am in Adelaide at present, and do not have access to my files of the other computer.

Bob Read

Definitely reptile. Has to be dragon or goanna.

Only possible dragon at that size is beardie. Scales do not at all look like beardie.

Which brings us back to goanna. I also think the scales look the shape of spiny-tailed monitor tail scales.

The lack of big spines and the uniform colour baffled me at first, but in the top picture I think you can see that the main visible section of scales are the ventral surface (less spikey). Just visible at the bottom may be some more spikey scales with variation in colour, which would be more typical of the dorsal or lateral surfaces of a spiny-tailed monitor.

Pete Nunn

Spiny-tailed Monitor, *Varanus acanthurus*. Many thanks to the experts. Do you agree? Barb Gilfedder

ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED

Minutes of the general meeting held at the Higher Education Building

Charles Darwin University – Wednesday 8 April 2015

Following a presentation by Pamela Keil on *Migratory waders in Central Australia: The importance of permanent and temporary waterholes*.

Thanks to Pam for writing up her own talk and to Cecily and Rosalie for supper

Meeting opened at 8:18pm

Present/Apologies: as per attendance book (8 members and 4 apologies)

Previous minutes accepted by the meeting.

Business arising from the minutes

- No business arising from minutes

Correspondence In/Out

- Bec Duncum sent Barb advertising for cheap photo mugs at Big W online. She made an email inquiry as wasn't sure it was possible, but the reply came after the offer had finished! Charissa will do more research;
- Rosalie sent Graham Ride, last month's speaker, a thank you card; and,
- Ian Mann rebooked Old Hamilton Downs – new date. (see below).

Treasurer's Report

Balance of all funds 28 February	\$3,776.71
Income for March 2015	\$1.84 (interest)
<u>Expenditure for February 2015</u>	
Cheque to Plant Society for Plant ID pamphlet	\$2,500.00
Deposit for 'Hamilton Downs Christmas in July' trip	\$100.00
Petty cash balance end March 2015	\$8.10
<u>Total funds 30 March 2015</u>	<u>\$1,178.55</u>

- \$115.00 still to be paid to Australia Post for Post Box.
- Treasurer's report accepted by the meeting.

General Business

- Central Australian Flora brochure now with printer;
- All members are encouraged to contribute to the newsletter. A 1 paragraph write up of field trips would be appreciated
- Hamilton Downs trip – please provide an indication of attendance at May meeting
- Victorian Naturalist books from the AZRI were donated, by Rhondda to the Field Naturalists library.

Past Trips

- 8 March - Intertexta Forest walk – 9 in attendance
- 26 March – Conlons Lagoon – 13 in attendance. Report in Newsletter.
- 28 March – Sewage Ponds
- 2 April - Morgan's farewell – Barb wrote in the memorial book from all the Field Nats.

Future Trips

- No trips listed for April – Should anyone wish to plan any trips, please contact Barb. Birdlife AGM is being held 29 April
- 2,3 and 4 May Mayday long weekend: three day trip to and around Newhaven Reserve. Two nights camping with toilets and showers at campground. Contact Jim Lawrence to express your interest - Phone 0428 823 631 or email jim.lawrence.asp@gmail.com
Leader: Barb Gilfedder. Please let Jim know as soon as possible.
- Sat 9 May Guided Tour of Old Timers' Museum with Megg Kelham, who knows the museum items well and investigated the provenance of many of them. She promises to look at the exhibits with an environmental twist. Meet there promptly at 2.00pm.
Contact: Barb Gilfedder Phone 89555452. Individual donations required.
- 6-7-8 June Mac and Rose Reserve camping trip. Contact Pamela Keil to express your interest - Phone 8955 0496.
- 11-12 July Alcoota Trip – Further details to come.
- 18-19 July Hamilton Downs Trip – Christmas in July.

Sightings

- Grey Falcon, reported to Birdlife Central Australia;
- White-fronted Woodswallow at the Desert Park;
- Fire-tail Skinks at Pamela's place;
- Kingfisher at the Indoor Pool.

Next meeting – Wednesday 13 May - Speaker is Fiona Walsh introducing and showing some of her recent films interviewing central Australians. Rosalie will scribe, and Rhondda will provide supper. Should any one wish to contribute, please feel free to bring a plate.

Meeting closed: 8:40pm