



June 2015

## Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



**Thorny Devil** on the track at Newhaven Reserve (kindly rescued and moved off to the side by Michael). Photo by Pamela Keil.

**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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## NEWSLETTER

The deadline for the next newsletter is **Sunday 21 June 2015**.  
Please send your contributions to the club email [contact@alicefieldnaturalists.org.au](mailto: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](mailto:contact@alicefieldnaturalists.org.au)

**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 13 June.**      **Day walk** along tracks North West of Alice Springs. Meet at 8.00am at Corkwood Tree just before the railway line, on the dirt beyond the western end of Smith Street. Walk around the West Macs Mountain Bike Track from the South Alice gate to the cattle yards, and on to the North Alice gate. 15km walk. Shorter option available - out and back total of 11km. Start at South Alice Gate and turn back at South seat. Bring lunch and adequate water. Please contact me if you want to come, so I can arrange car shuttle. Leader Cecily Sutton, mobile 0412 501396 or [cecsutton@gmail.com](mailto:cecsutton@gmail.com)

**Sun 28 June**      **Shorebird count** at Alice Springs sewage ponds. Meet at the birders' gate for 9.00am start. Wear closed shoes and bring telescopes and binoculars if you have them. Bird Counters and scribes all welcome. Contact Barb Gilfedder [bjfedders@gmail.com](mailto:bjfedders@gmail.com)

**Wed 8 July**      **Meeting** 7.00pm at Charles Darwin University Higher Education Building lecture theatre. Doug McDougall, Horticulturalist at Olive Pink Botanic Garden will talk about his gardening adventures 'Behind the scenes' at Werribee Zoo.

**Sat,Sun11-12 July**      **Fossil dig at Alcoota** The dig at Alcoota is going ahead again this year and Adam Yates, from the Central Australian Museum has invited the Field Naturalists to visit on the weekend of 11-12 July. For those who haven't been previously, this is a chance to see palaeontology in action as workers extract fascinating megafauna bones from 8 or 9 million years ago. It's also a great weekend camping, learning about geology and enjoying the plants and animals of the area. If you're interested, please contact Lee at [ryall.lee8@gmail.com](mailto:ryall.lee8@gmail.com) .

**Sat, Sun18-19 July**      **Hamilton Downs Trip – Christmas in July.** Register your interest with Wendy and Ian Mann as soon as possible. [wikks@gotalk.net.au](mailto:wikks@gotalk.net.au)

### AUSTRALIAN PLANTS SOCIETY

Contact: **APS Secretary** [Jude.pringle@nt.gov.au](mailto:Jude.pringle@nt.gov.au)

**Sunday 26 July**      10am visit Peter Latz's property to discuss revegetation and see the difference removing the Buffel Grass can make. Contact Bec Duncum to attend [becduncum@y7mail.com](mailto:becduncum@y7mail.com)

### BIRDLIFE CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

Contact: [birdlifeca@gmail.com](mailto:birdlifeca@gmail.com)

**Wed 24 June**      **Monthly meeting** – 7pm in the meeting room, Alice Springs Desert Park

### Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Committee Members

President	Barbara Gilfedder	8955 5452;	Public Officer	Rhonda 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](mailto:contact@alicefieldnaturalists.org.au)

## May Speaker: Fiona's Films: Impressions of a special night by Rosalie Breen

I have not seen so many people before at a Field Naturalists meeting.

Fiona gave an introduction first, emphasising that this was something she had to do - make some films for a number of reasons. Video is a form of story-telling, the medium which has most impact on people now, and can reach a large and mixed audience to disseminate a message or begin to change attitudes and behaviour, to educate the public to see and think about issues. She made the comment that more people responded to her videos than her scientific papers. It also was an outlet for her artistic talents, to create beautiful pictures of our unique place, Central Australia. It invites collaboration between both professional filmmakers and the characters of the story.



She called her presentation Beauty, Sadness and Hope in our Desert Heartland. It really was this. Over three years she has made ten films either scientific ones for CSIRO or personal ones. All have the themes of how we connect to place and how we connect to people

The first, **Helping my Desert Come Back**, was about how Peter Latz has brought back to life his block in Ilparpa Valley, after 100 years of degradation. It was presented as a series of photo montages and audio which suited his character.

The Bilby story from Martu country was 219 days of movement sensor camera pictures of a bilby burrow. Gradually the visions of bilbies was taken over by feral cats. It prompted the local rangers to ask **Wanja Mankarr? Where is My Bilby?**, and brought home the problem of ferals.

Video was the accepted form to use when the Martu were asked how best to record the old culture of fire burning for food and its transition to present day practices, as an education tool for the community. Fiona went out with the people burning, had helicopter shots of country and old photos, and combined these to make a trailer (which we saw) for a 40 minute documentary for SBS, **Waru, Kuka and Everything** about burning, bushfoods and biodiversity.

Another CA character was artist Jenny Taylor. For the video **Sadness and Beauty: Painting in Arrernte Country**, Fiona captured her out painting and just talking about how learning to understand the country, its unacknowledged and painful history, its lands and relationships with people, helped her have a sensitivity which gave her works meaning and authenticity.

**Seasons.** Tyson Mowarin, a Ngarluma Roebourne man, made this subtle and alluring film of the land calling and yearning to share its beauty and wealth with the people of that land. A family went out to the sea to catch fish and went home to enjoy the food it gave. The commentary was Country talking softly gently, inviting them to appreciate the little things and happy to see the family together. It was a beautiful powerful lasting image.

Fiona collaborated for **Cycle of Life in a Desert Town**, about the moth plague around Peter Kittles last year. She just happened to be around and videoed the phenomenon, then with schoolgirl Ruby Robinson added a poetic story for the pictures. The last image was the dead moths in the gutter, the "ephemeral wings of time". Ironically this also showed the benefits of street plantings.

**Somebody's Child** invited us to review the memorials which families of that 'somebody's child' have set up around town on roadsides. Fiona saw it as a way of honouring and remembering the grieving families as well. It was accompanied by a haunting and sad song Ngura Watjilpa sung by Frank Yama. Fiona's last comment was "If we care can this country heal us?"

The collection was wonderful, opening our eyes to a different view, generated by Fiona's ability to capture the moment and weave it into a whole, matching her presentation methods to the subject. In writing I cannot capture the atmosphere or really share the experience. We need to congratulate her on her film making skill and thank her for sharing..

So if you were unlucky to miss this presentation you can go to <https://open.abc.net.au> or get information from CSIRO about the scientific productions, and view for yourself some of these gems.

## Visit to Old Timers Museum - 9 May – Report by Rosalie Breen



I did not know what a treasure trove of historic items was hiding behind a door at the Old Timers Museum until Megg Kelham took us there. Thank you.

John Flynn set up Old Timers as a retirement hostel for bushmen, six to start with. They were a little apprehensive of Mrs Traeger because they had not had any experience of women or people who wore dresses. They were quite an assembly of characters and early tourists used to come to the place to view the men. John Blakeman, the then manager, decided to create a museum of old artefacts for the tourists to view instead. It opened in 1966.

Megg was a very suitable guide for us because she has been conducting provenance research on the collection in recent years and pointed out special items accompanied with interesting stories.

Out in the yard is a heavy wagon. It had been drawn by donkeys to bring Abraham Andrew and his family from South Australia to Central Australia in the 1930s. He eventually leased Curtin Springs, which he wanted to call Stalin Springs, but was then suspected of being a communist. He had to compromise and called it after the Labour prime minister of the time.

One of Megg's favourite exhibits is a knife of "hybrid technology". The blade made of glass with handle of spinifex resin. That is among a collection of Aboriginal tools. To discourage use of insulators of the overland telegraph line to make tools, glass bottles were given to the Aboriginals but actually this sample was manufactured by an enterprising fellow for tourists. Another is a hookah, a water smoking pipe used by Afghan men. It was in the form of a green bottle and a rather rare item. Robert Drogemuller, one of the volunteers who caretakes the museum, lovingly exposed a couple of colourful and beautifully embroidered garments worn by the Afghan traders too.

Our attention was drawn to some carvings in white soapstone from Charlotte Waters. A pipe bowl and a bush rat were carved by Jimmy Kite, an Aboriginal man who should be acclaimed as an artist and sculptor. He once held an exhibition in Adelaide. Described as an 'excellent blackfellow', he accompanied Spencer and Gillen in 1901-2 as guide and interpreter. Megg led a discussion about the use of neck irons on Aboriginal prisoners, considering it was more humane under the circumstances than hand cuffs. She also discussed the conflicts, or not, between original and new inhabitants of the land. On the walls were a series of sketches of the first residents and a few others drawn by Peverill, cartoonist for The Advocate.

I enjoyed Sallay Mahomet's blacksmithing tools including a sledge hammer, and marvelled at the obviously much used, hammered forms for moulding. For the ladies there was an old sewing machine, fine needlework and kitchen gadgets. Many photo collections would need lots more time to peruse. And there is a display of rocks, minerals and fossils to study. Also there is an audio presentation to borrow so you too can hear many of the interesting stories and learn of the many items in the collection.

Certainly I will be going again.



## Excursion: Newhaven Sanctuary - May Long Weekend

Editor's note: A great thanks to everyone who went on this lovely excursion, and a big thank you for all the great stories! Susie's lake was a highlight for many – chock-a-block full of water and critters. Heaps of flowering plants around, birds galore, and even a few lizards – hard to identify a favourite for me! Below is a compilation of some of the highlights of a wonderful weekend. (Photos by Pamela Keil unless otherwise specified.)

### Colleen O'Malley:

My first trip out bush after a year away from the desert, and how better to do it than amongst Field Nat friends and out at Newhaven. And what timing! The January rains had provided a lot of zing to all the plant life - bubblegum-scented *Acacia hilliiana* flowers on rocky hill slopes and plenty of other flowering wattles for Barb to photograph for the next brilliant pocket-friendly field guide!

My favourite place this trip was the fairy garden of tiny sedges, miniature poached egg daisies, delicate monkey faces, and sparkling predatory sundews that fringed Susie's Lake and to top it off a Freckled Duck amongst gangs of Zebra Ducks and Hardheads hanging out in the near-full lake. Perfect way to let the magic of the desert work its way back into my psyche!



Sundew and Mini Poached Egg Daisy were found hiding among the lush green sedges surrounding Susie's Lake. Photos by Michael LaFlamme.

### Meg Mooney:

The highlight for me was the camping. Waking up in my swag in a little clearing in spinifex in that calm time just before sunrise. I'd go for a short walk and hear the tinkling of pots in the distance, as people got up. By the time I got back, Stan would have a fire going and there'd be a billy on, people sitting around. The gatherings at the fire at night were a lot of fun. Some people were a bit cheeky – a couple got yellow cards (just joking).

In between there was a lot of coming and going. Plant highlights for me were the little *Acacias*, *spondylophylla* and *hilliana*. The former, was a feature of a short walk Shrike and Gavan and I did up the home range while everyone else was mooching around collecting seed, taking photographs, wondering about grasses, and plants with small grey leaves. As we walked up the rocky hill, our feet crunched on low bushes with branches like tough narrow bottlebrushes and the scent from these curry wattles filled the air.

Shrike and I did a walk out near Yarapilangu range, across a sandy, rocky flat covered in fine specimens of *Acacia hilliiana*, another low spreading wattle (I think they both get called 'flying saucer bush'.) These were covered with bright yellow spike flowers. For me these two wattles have a strong association with the Western Desert.

Bird highlight was the orange chats around Swan Lake, which was dry. The males are actually bright yellow with a black bib. It was lovely to see these little spots of yellow flitting around in the light green mat of herbs around the edge of the lake.



It was wonderful to see what a great job Newhaven managers Jo and Danae and volunteers continue to do clearing buffel grass in the area between the two campgrounds on either side of the main living quarters, including from the main road north up to the home range. There is very little buffel in this area now, something that Jo said he thought, when they first moved to Newhaven, wouldn't be possible. They are now nuking buffel around Freshwater Bore, to the east, and the bore just north of the western campground. They are also spraying along all the roads north of the lakes, to stop any further spread of buffel, which has inundated the calcrete country south of the lakes.

**Barb Gilfedder:**

Susie's Lake, Newhaven. From the top - April 2004, April 2012, April 2014 and May 2015 . It is always different.



## Rosalie Breen:

Highlights of a trip to Newhaven Sanctuary are always the variety of plants, the desert oaks, the peaceful Susie's Lake with the knarled teatree and perfumed daisies underneath, views from atop Camp Hill of big wide country including Lake Bennett and Mt Ziel but I enjoy our campsite camaraderie too. We had the smaller East camp to ourselves and spread among the shade of mulga and bloodwoods. But we all came together sitting around the fire in the evening eating tea, chatting and telling stories, like Pam W 's experience of an earth tremor in NZ at a school. All the kids scrambled under the desks while Pam stood by in amazement. Shrike told us that people have earthquake drill at NZ schools. It was fun to watch Meg and Stan adding wood to the fire and working out the logistics of balancing a long log.



Field Nats checking out the critters that Rosalie caught after a quick wade with her net at Susie's Lake – lush green carpet to sit on. Photo by Connie Spencer.



We all looked through the scope at Jupiter and its moons, and a star cluster where to the naked eye there were no stars. The moon was full and kept us under its spell until the wood burnt down and people drifted off to bed. That is the way friends are made – campfire evenings.

By the way, there were quite a variety of algae in Susie's Lake. Millions of backswimmers and water bugs, dragon and damsel fly larvae were found. These help provide food for the waterbirds. Freshwater Bore trough was green from a monoculture of a *Scenedesmus* algae commonly found in standing water.

## Gavan Breen: The saga of the barn door

Gavan got a shock on Saturday evening when he went to open the back door of the land cruiser and the handle broke in his hand. (Apparently if you're in the mechanicking profession you call it a barn door.) Anyway, we had a cargo barrier behind the rear seats so this made everything in the back inaccessible. Fortunately we had got our bedding out, and we had already eaten (and put the food away again in the back). So we had the night to spare and we could sleep on the problem,

Sunday morning brought out all the experts (Gavan being the least of them). We tried poking something in to hook the inside handle, but there was not tool both long enough and strong enough, Then our hero went to work – a bloke named Les with a set of magical spanners. He went to work on the bolts holding the two top corners of the barrier, making it possible to push the barrier back so it lay across the contents of the cargo space, and from the passenger seat to crawl in and lie across it so that it was possible, just, to reach the inner handle and open the door. Thanks Les, it was nice to be able to eat again.

Rosalie made life easier with a Heath Robinson style arrangement of a string, duct taped to the inner door handle and going back to the driver's side rear seat, a pull from there operated the handle so we did not have to crawl in over the barrier every time we needed to open the door.

## Jim Gilfedder:

This was our 8th trip there and back, 9th visit. And it was our slowest and most fuel efficient. We used 8.75 litres per 100km. Other times it was generally 10 to 11 litres. -- Convoy behaviour was such that it took an hour to get back to Stan and his puncture! Pretty poor. Should we have a naughty corner at our campfire? (*Editor's note: Ooops...*)

I loved the small glistening Sundew plants (*Drosera* probably *indica*) around the edge of Susie's Lake.

Do they eat flies? (*Editor's note: YES!*)

**Connie Spencer:**

Newhaven trips always have interesting and memorable facets and this trip was no exception.

Susie's Lake, brimming to overflowing was certainly a highlight. Glistening Sundews (*Drosera sp.*), tiny Poached Egg Daisies (*Myriocephalus rudalii*) and the delicate Monkey flower (*Mimulus gracilis*) were poking their heads through a thick lush green bed of sedges surrounding the lake. And once again I had to admire the granddaddies of Inland Teatree (*Melaleuca glomerata*).

Other notes in my trip log are carpets of grey Purple Sand Sage (*Dicrastylis lewellinii*), olive-green Desert Fire Weed (*Rulingia loxophylla*) and the swirls of the Native Morning Glory (*Ipomoea muelleri*) found on the road verges. The tallest Butterfly Bushes (*Petalostylis cassioides*) I have ever seen, flowering Dogwood (*Acacia sericophylla*) and Flying-saucer Bush (*Acacia hilliiana*) on the Siddeley Range tour.



Field Nats discussing the identity of one of the many flowering *Acacia* species.

You can't beat sitting around the campfire discussing your various finds after a day in the field and with everyone putting in their two cents worth, you more often than not come up with answers and if not the conversation is stimulating and the company the best.

Thanks Barb for organising another fabulous trip.





**Michael LaFlamme:**

The highlight for me was being with so many enthusiastic explorers! Desert plants are so diverse and specialised, I was continually amazed at the variety. I thought I had seen all the different types of desert plants, but this was a haven for species I had never seen before. Looking through my magnifier I saw that every plant new to me had a complex structural detail or puzzling survival strategy that I never imagined was possible, especially at so small a scale! It was great to be introduced to those plants by several knowledgeable botanists. At the same time, it was sad to learn that this biodiversity was once common and is now rare, due to the promotion of buffel grass to pastoralists.



Can you figure out the plant species (or even genus) from these extreme close-ups? Take your best guess... ID's revealed (as far as we can) in the next newsletter. (photos by Pamela Keil)

The seclusion also enabled us to watch bird behaviour at length, such as how a Black Falcon who was hunting budgies and cockatiels at a pond would attack, then fly away toward the sun and spiral very high before returning at high altitude and suddenly plummeting down and swooping low to attack -- again and again.

Finally, the fine-grained sand was excellent for seeing tracks, and occasionally the trackee! I moved a Thorny Devil out of the road, and I was surprised to feel how soft its body was, between the spines. All of this is only a few short hours from Alice, and the campsite included a sink! As usual, Gen. Barb did an outstanding job managing the riffraff so we saw a lot in a short time. It was my favourite Field Nats excursion so far.

**Pamela Keil: Bird List (And a few other critters)**

Wedge-tailed Eagle	Mulga Parrot	Black-faced Cuckooshrike	Yellow-throated Miner
Brown Falcon	Ringneck Parrot	Pied Butcherbird	White-fronted Honeyeater
Black Falcon	Cockatiel	Magpie Lark	Brown Honeyeater
Nankeen Kestrel	Pink-eared Duck	Willie Wagtail	Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater
Whistling Kite	Grey Teal	Jacky Winter	Crimson Chat
Black Kite	Hardhead	Hooded Robin	Orange Chat
Black-breasted Buzzard	Freckled Duck	Red-capped Robin	Zebra Finch
Little Eagle	Hoary-headed Grebe	Crested Pigeon	Painted Finch
Owlet Nightjar	White-faced Heron	Diamond Dove	Banded Whiteface
Pallid Cuckoo	Masked Woodswallow	Australasian Pipit	Variagated Fairy-wren
Galah	Black-faced Woodswallow	White-winged Triller	White-winged Fairy-wren
Budgerigar	Australian Magpie	Rufous Whistler	Chestnut-rumped Thornbill

There were also some unidentified Corvids around...and Barb saw Black-fronted Dotterels and Black-shouldered Kite.

It was warm enough for a few reptiles, too: I was able to identify the Thorny Devil and a couple of skinks, a Panther Skink (*Ctenotus pantherinus*) and Leonard’s Skink (*C. leonhardii*), but many more skinks and dragons went darting off into the spinifex unidentified.

Awesome trip – and I think everyone else has managed to hit all of my highlights... So a big thanks to Barb for organizing!

**ASFNC, APS and OPBG stall at Launch of Bilby’s Ring**

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club and the Australian Plant Society Alice Springs held a combined stall at the mini Bilby Festival – the launch of Kaye Kessings’ Bilby books on Sunday 17 May. Our main aims were to promote our associations and sell a few items. It was a lovely afternoon. We estimated over 300 people were there and we did steady business selling a few plants from OPBG, the new Central Australian Flora Brochures, books and cards.

Many thanks to all the helpers.



**ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED**  
**Minutes of the general meeting held at the Higher Education Building**  
**Charles Darwin University – Wednesday 13 May 2015**

Following a presentation by Fiona Walsh on *Videos of Central Australians*.  
Thanks to Rosalie for doing a write up of the presentation and to Rhondda for supper.

**Meeting opened** at 8:30pm

**Present/Apologies:** as per attendance book (17 Members and approximately 45 visitors). Apologies from 8 Members.

**Previous minutes** accepted by the meeting.

**Business arising from the minutes**

- The Flora of Central Australia brochures have arrived. The launch of this brochure was well received; Peter Latz showered it with praise. It is now available to members and retail outlets for \$4.00. Many distributed to shops and tour companies, including at Kings Canyon and Ayers Rock by Jenny. Barb has been contacted by a local tour guide company regarding supply to the guides and potentially for sale to tourists.

**Correspondence In/Out**

- Rosalie sent Pam Keil, last month's speaker, a thank you card
- Newsletter was distributed to extra people, including Wendy Kittle (Key holder for Conlon's lagoon), Dominic Chaplin (Dingo photo) and Mark and Christina ( finders of the 'unidentified thing' in last newsletter)
- A few inquiries have been made re: birding in the centre. Forwarded to Pam for reply
- An inquiry re: ASFNC assistance with a field trip for Year 6 Ross Park students. Pam Keil, Jen Kreusser and Charissa Allan expressed interest and are dealing directly with teacher, Cara Brown.

**Treasurer's Report**

Balance of all funds 31 March 2015	\$1,178.55
Income for April 2015	\$50.00
Australia Post (PO Box)	<b>\$120.00</b>
Petty cash balance end March 2015	<b>\$8.10</b>
Total funds 30 April 2015	<b>\$1,128.55</b>

**General Business**

- Mugs – Charissa obtained quotes for mugs, to be used as speaker gifts and sold at events. Decided by members that idea would be put on hold until August planning meeting. ASFNC to purchase 10 Flora Brochures to be used as speaker thank you gifts.
- Old Hamilton Downs end-of year celebration – numbers requested as soon as possible.
- Stall at Bilby Books Launch, Sunday 17 May 3-6pm. Combined ASFNC/APS/OPBG. Promote clubs, Flora Brochure. Need to sell at same price as Beantree Café as on their patch. A few mugs, cards, plants. No roster, but help appreciated.

**Past Trips**

- 2 – 4 May - Newhaven Reserve – 12 in attendance
- 4 May - Owen Springs NT Parks and Wildlife 4x4 Photography tag-a-long – 2 in attendance.
- 9 May - Old Timers' Museum

**Future Trips**

- 30 May - Telegraph Station, 7km walk, round trip. Meet at Telegraph Station at 8am. Please contact Cecily to express your interest.
- 13 June - 17km walk, round trip. Meet at Sargent street sign 8am. Please contact Cecily to express your interest.
- 6-7-8 June - Mac and Rose Reserve camping trip. Contact Pamela Keil - Phone 8955 0496. Destination may change as Pam having making contact.
- 11-12 July - Alcoota Fossil Trip – Further details to come.
- 18-19 July - Hamilton Downs Trip – Christmas in July.
- August - Owen Springs, to be confirmed.

**Sightings**

- Photo of unknown spider species to be identified – Bev Gray
- Dingo sighted near Telegraph Station road
- Freckled duck at Susie's Lake, Newhaven

**Next meeting** – Wednesday 10 June; Speaker is Jen Kreusser from Land for Wildlife to talk about feral Cats. Jill Brew will scribe, and Rosalie Breen will provide supper. Should any one wish to contribute, please feel free to bring a plate.

**Meeting closed:** 9:00pm