



July 2015

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



Field Nats exploring the trails just to the North of Alice Springs.

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 **20 July 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

- 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.** Adam Yates, from the Central Australian Museum has invited the Field Naturalists to visit the Alcoota site. 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.
- Sat, Sun18-19 July** **Hamilton Downs Trip** – End of ASFNC year. Walks and a shared Christmas meal. Register your interest with Wendy and Ian Mann as soon as possible, no later than at July meeting. wikks@gotalk.net.au
- Wed 12 August** **Annual General Meeting (AGM)** 7.00pm at Charles Darwin University Higher Education Building lecture theatre. This will be followed by a short break for supper.
- 7.45pm we have an interstate speaker, **Kristi Abbott "School of Ants Australia: heads down, bums up for citizen science"**.
- If you do not wish to attend the AGM, just come at 7.45. This talk will be very special and too good to miss.

AUSTRALIAN PLANTS SOCIETY

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

- Sunday 26 July** Wander around Peter Latz's block and see amazing diversity of grasses and birds once Buffel Grass is removed. Meet at 9.30 at information Bay opposite the Old Timers. Contact Bec Duncum to attend becduncum@y7mail.com
- Wed 5 August** **Meeting** 7:30 Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Propagation workshop with Bec Duncum

BIRDLIFE CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

Contact: birdlifeca@gmail.com

- Wed 22 July** **Monthly meeting** at 7pm in the meeting room, Alice Springs Desert Park.
- Wed-Sun 19-23 Aug** **Red Centre Bird Festival** - A range of birding activities for everyone, presentations, art and photography workshops and competitions at Alice Springs Desert Park and around town www.alicespringsdesertpark.com.au

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

Jen Kreusser gave us a call to action with an upbeat and enlivening consideration of what is a dispiriting and long-acknowledged problem : cats, whether feral, stray or domestic, are a threat to native wildlife and thus the health of the ecosystem. Instinctive, nocturnal hunters, they have adapted to the arid environment. With few if any predators, cats have the field to themselves. The evidence of their preferred prey is clear: scats show hair, fur, feathers and bone fragments. There is no effective management strategy at present to control the threat from cats, nor is there any plan to completely eradicate cats.

Jen explained how, with Territory Natural Resource Management (TNRM) support, *Land for Wildlife* has headed a monitoring and community engagement project, with various activities to help people realise how they can help reduce pressure of cats on reptiles, mammals and birds. Working with Andy Vinter and Conservation and Land Management students at Batchelor Institute, a week of feral cat management included monitoring with remote cameras and cage-trapping, with 2 cats trapped and weighed from 5 traps.

Cat movement and presence was monitored in a 6-week project at Garden for Wildlife and Land for Wildlife properties that are adjacent to bushland in the suburban area of Alice Springs (at Basso Rd, Lackman Tce, Clarke St, Nelson St, Kurrajong Dve and Sadadeen Rd), using, initially cameras. Then, where there was a frequent cat presence, traps were introduced. Clarke St was the most active cat-roaming area, with 5 cats (2 collared and 3 uncollared) showing on camera. By 4 weeks into the 6-week project, 1 or 2 cats were seen at the other sites, apart from Basso Rd, which showed no cats.



The LfW team also offered feral cat familiarisation workshops, with Ntaria Junior Rangers and Tjwanpa Women's Rangers (Hermannsburg) facilitating students' identification of various scats from carnivores and herbivores, and understanding that cats are predators and prey on mammals, birds, reptiles and invertebrates. As well, the project included opportunities to engage with community members through events such as Pets on Parade, where responsible domestic cat ownership was a key focus.

Jen proposed ways to minimise harm to native wildlife and to domestic cats themselves:

- Begin gentle conversations with cat-owning neighbours or residents in your area about domestic cats and how simply things done differently can make a huge impact across town (such as keeping cats indoors at night). Night containment also reduces harm to pets, and related Vet bills.
- Register cats with the Alice Springs Town Council (required after 6 months).* See <http://www.alicesprings.nt.gov.au/services/animal-management/pet-ownership>
- Have cats desexed.
- Keep cats contained within property boundaries (e.g. install a cat-proof fence with PVC pipe placed to restrict climbing)
- Build an outdoor enclosure ('Catarium') or construct a cat net. Avoid the chances of domestic cats breeding with feral cats and increasing cat numbers.
- Borrow a cat trap from ASTC if cats are regularly visiting your property

Jen had pamphlets for letter box drops to give information to cat owners. Request more if you wish at lfw@lowecol.com.au



Junior rangers get creative 'building' a scat from play-dough, feathers, hair and bones to show how cats prey on mammals, reptiles and birds.

The next project proposed, given funding, is a spatial analysis, showing the distance and areas that domestic cats/pets roam at night, followed through GPS tracking. Carried out in Hobart, the results were effective in startling people into realisation of the range and potential for harm of an uncontained cat at night.

Stray and feral cats, and wandering pets, can all be legally trapped and taken to the Alice Springs RSPCA Animal Shelter, where animals are cared for until owners collect. Cats have to be registered and desexed before they leave the shelter.

Some hints on trapping (audience discussion and follow-up checks provided some extra points here):

- Call the ASTC Rangers for a trap. Ph 8950 0500. (The traps are oblong cages with a tiltable door at one end for entry.)
- Set it up with raw meat, tinned fish (drip some around the entrance as a starter) or with 'pongo' (a potent mix of cat faeces and urine) as the attractant.
- Position the cage wedged if possible against a tree, rock or foliage, so that the entry point is (crucially) the main point of investigation. If in the open, cover top and sides with foliage to direct the scent towards the entrance. This covering may also reduce metal reflections that could disturb cats.
- Shade cloth or hessian over the trap can prevent cats looking in so that they have to go via the fiendish front door to satisfy curiosity.
- If in loose soil or dirt, flatten the surrounding area if identification of tracks is important.
- Covering the metal rungs on the floor of the trap (with sand or newspaper or other material) may encourage the cat to step in further.
- It's possible that, particularly for feral cats, scent of human activity near the trap may deter them.
- If you catch a cat, call the Council so they can collect it. (8 am – 5 pm Mon – Fri ; 6am – 6 pm Sat and Sun.)
- If it's feral and is very disturbed in the cage, cover the cage with an old towel or similar and it should calm down.
- For humaneness, check the trap each morning.

Jen's presentation prompted discussion from the large and very interested audience. Other topics that emerged included mention of new cat-free Canberra suburbs (perhaps Alice Springs' new suburb of Kilgariff could follow?); the work on fencing and cat-safe enclosures at Uluru, Kata Tjuta NP, Watarrka NP and the Alice Springs Desert Park nocturnal walk area; the recent increase in the cat population in town camps, possibly for mouse control. A comment was made on the unintended consequence of transmitting a culturally-based idea that cats are to be petted rather than seen as good eating.

Thanks to Jen for her energetic fresh look at this problem, and for providing details for this write-up.



Wednesday 12 August

Annual General Meeting (AGM)

Our 2014 AGM is on the August meeting night. Officers and Committee Members will be elected and Club business discussed. Please contact a Member of the Committee if you wish to nominate for a Committee position. The AGM will be followed by a short break for supper, then we have a visiting speaker, see above.

Subscription fees for the 2015-16 year are due at this meeting.

Walking Tracks North of Alice - 30 May and 13 June - By Cec Sutton

There has been a lot of trail work being done recently north of the Telegraph Station. A professional crew has been constructing paths to extend the network of mountain bike tracks. These paths are great to ride on and also to walk on, so I organised two walks to show them to fellow Field Nats.

On 30 May, nine of us headed north from the Telegraph Station. I was joined by Connie, Louise, Anne, Jill, Rosalie, Gavan, Bob and two visitors from Hobart, Ingrid, and Michael. We were only 20 minutes into the walk, when we meet 4 cyclists coming the other way. One of them I knew, and he also knew Michael from their work together in Antarctica. How amazing is that!



Some of the party turned back after an hour as they had other domestic and travel commitments. It was good to have them join us for that short time. We headed on, noting newly developed trails for future walking possibilities. We got to the Charles River Bridge, and headed back on the newly created combined cycling/Larapinta Trail path. It is high up the high, so gives good open views. Then we turned off onto the walking only section of the initial part of the Larapinta Trail that goes along the Telegraph Line.



It was good to get some exercise in the bush, and see the network of trails that are emerging.

Morning tea at the Telegraph Station was a good finish to a very sociable occasion.

On 13 June, virtually, the same crew joined me for the West Macs Track.

Connie, Anne, Jill, Rosalie, Gavan, Bob and Haydee (a visitor from Perth and past Alice resident). This was a vote of confidence, as there was a little issue of the previous trip being a little longer than I advertised. So this time I

did more homework on the maps, and organised a bit of a complex car shuttle.

The walk officially started at the South Alice gate, just west of the railway line. In places it is a high, benched track with great views. We noted the intersection with the Larapinta Trail. There were some areas that had a lot of bird sounds, but it is hard to walk and birdwatch, so we enjoyed the calls, without seeing much. It did not take long to get to the South Seat, which was the turnaround point for half the party. The rest continued on to the old cattle yards, then Slick Rock, which is a nice hunk of smooth red rock that the recently constructed trail had specially included to enhance the experience of nature. We had lunch at the North Seat and admired the view onto Mount Gillen and the Heavitree Range. It was only 4 km from there to the North Gate at the railway line.



It was pleasant walking over the newly constructed trail, with the highlights for me being the flowering corkwoods. Ironically, the best birds of the day were seen from the car - Nankeen Kestrel, Black-shouldered Kite, and a group six Spinifex Pigeons (I think I have seen them twice before in the same area).

Thanks for your company everyone. I have ridden these trails by myself. It was great to share them with good company and fully appreciate the bush on foot.



Some amazing cloud formations on the ranges lately: (photo by Barb Gilfedder)



There have also been some great early morning mists (photos by Rosalie Breen)



A Couple of Notes from Bob Read:

Giant Grasshoppers

As usual numbers of the Giant Grasshopper (*Valanga irregularis*) are around in Alice Springs gardens at present. At up to 90 mm long this is the largest species of grasshopper in Australia. It is generally found in higher rainfall districts of the Top End and down the east coast, but has made itself at home in Alice Springs gardens.



[Distribution from Australia Dept. Agriculture website](#)

The nymphs are a variety of colours, and while smaller and less conspicuous probably do even more damage in the garden than the adults.

Mixed Feeding Flock

On the morning of the morning of 1/6/15 I was walking up Spencer Valley when I was surprised to hear a lot of bird calls mostly from a clump of Ironwoods, *Acacia estrophiolata* that were in flower. Searching the area and listening for calls I saw 21 species in all, including the following smaller species:

Western Gerygone
Rufous Whistler
Zebra Finch
Rec-capped Robin
Grey-crowned Babbler
Splendid Fairy Wren
Chestnut-rumped Thornbill
Willie Wagtail
Inland Thornbill
Weebill (away from their usual haunts in the River Red Gums of the Todd.)
Redthroat (only time seen this year)
Crimson Chat (only time seen this year)
As a finishing touch a Peregrine Falcon flew overhead.

The next day a search of the same area produced a typical total of 12 species.

The Ironwoods were in flower and many of the birds appeared to be feeding on small insects attracted to the blossom. However this alone does not explain the abundance of species on this one morning. My feeling is that this was a "feeding flock" of mixed species that happened to be in this spot. These flocks seem to sometimes occur outside of the breeding season, I have seen them on a few occasions before. The only reference that I could find quickly was Wikipedia.





ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED

Minutes of the general meeting held at the Higher Education Building Charles Darwin University – Wednesday 10 June 2015 at 8.30pm

After presentation by Jen Kreusser on LfW cat monitoring program
Thank you to scribe Jill Brew and to Rosalie Breen for supper

Present: 12 Members and 18 Visitors as per attendance list.

Apologies: Lee Ryall, Sue O'Callaghan, Connie Spencer, Meg Mooney, Pam Keil, Michael LaFlamme, Wendy and Ian Mann, Margaret and Jim Lawrence.

Minutes of previous meeting were on back of last newsletter – accepted by meeting

Business arising

- Inquiry about possibility of ASFNC helping with a field trip for Year 6 Ross Park students. Pam Keil, Jen Kreusser and Charissa Allan expressed interest. They are dealing directly with teacher, Cara Brown. No progress reported as these people not present.

Treasurer's Report. Prepared and presented by Neil Woolcock

Balance of all funds end of April (including \$8.10 petty cash)		\$ 1,108.55
Income received during May	Memberships	\$90.00
Withdrawals during May - Australian Plant Society, purchase of 10 plant brochures to be used as gifts.		<u>\$40.00</u>

Total of all funds end May (including \$8.10 petty cash) \$1,158.55

Correspondence in/out

- Letter to Post Master requesting Neil be allowed to collect new keys for PO Box.
- Information regarding ANN 2016 in WA – has been forwarded to membership
- Information regarding Giant Skink lecture from Bill Low – has been forwarded to membership
- Eco-fair – 9 August. \$35 single stall, need to register by 17 July
- Rosalie Schultz says P&K Bird App is the best and available \$10 off until end June
- Invoice for annual Insurance premium from AUSTCOVER for \$380

General Business

After some discussion, it was decided by the meeting not to hold a stall at the Eco-fair this year. Barb to notify Carmel at ALEC.

Past Trips

- Telegraph Station walk – Cec said it was slightly longer than she had anticipated, but no one complained but commented that it was very enjoyable
- Queens birthday weekend. No club trip undertaken due to lack of information on Mac and Rose Chalmers Reserve accessibility.

Future Trips

- Cec walks - 13 June 8am - 17km – Cec spoke to the meeting – need to contact her if you wish to attend.
- Old Andado working bee – contact Barb for more information.
- Sun 28 June – shorebird count at Sewage Ponds. 9.00am start. Ponds currently closed but Letitia Baldwin assures me can get in for the survey. Be good if participants let me know they are coming and also make sure they have up-to-date Induction licence - free – don't need a key – Any problems with induction ring 1800 307 595
- 11-12 July - Alcoota Fossil Trip – Contact Lee Ryall.
- 18-19 July - Hamilton Downs Trip – Christmas in July. Numbers needed by July Meeting. Contact Ian and Wendy Mann by email.

Next meeting – 8 July, Speaker- Doug McDougall.

Scribe: Barb Gilfedder. Supper: No volunteer – please bring a plate to share

(Pam Windle offered to bring supper to August Meeting)

Sightings: Several members reported seeing large Grasshoppers, eating everything!

Meeting closed: 8.55pm