

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



Christmas Beetles enjoying Christmas Lunch. Photo by Jenny Purdie. See page 2.

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 next newsletter will be March 2016.

The deadline for the next newsletter will be 23 February.

Please send your contributions to Pamela Keil pamelakeil@yahoo.com

Please **send photos and text separately** as combining them causes formatting issues.

ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

- Sunday 7 Feb** **Gentle wander** around the Ilparpa claypans while there is still water in them, especially looking at the interesting vegetation around them, in spite of the Buffel invasion. Meet at Information Bay opposite the Old Timers at 6.45 am. Leader: Connie Spencer 0429 966 592 constans@bigpond.net.au
- Wednesday 10 Feb** **Meeting** 7.00pm at Charles Darwin University Higher Education Building lecture theatre. Presentation by Lisa and Pete Nunn on the wildlife seen on their recent African adventure.
- Sunday 21 Feb** **PLANNING MEETING** will be held at Barb and Jim's house – 33 Battarbee Street at 2.00pm. All welcome. As you can see from this page there is little planned for 2016. Please come with lots of ideas for trips, activities and speakers. If unable to attend the meeting, please pass your ideas on to a Committee Member.
- Wednesday 9 March** **Meeting** 7.00pm at Charles Darwin University Higher Education Building lecture theatre. Presentation by Andy Vinter "**Tackling the prickly problem of invasive cacti in Alice Springs**". He will have his Landcare and Batchelor Institute hats on for the talk.
- Saturday 5 March** **Mystery Tour from Spencer Valley.** Wander in the hills to the north, mostly cross country, and discover some interesting human interventions in the bush and wonder about them. We can also appreciate the birds, plants etc. Meet at Gosse St Playground 6.30am. Phone Rosalie B 89523409

AUSTRALIAN PLANTS SOCIETY

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

Wednesday 3 Feb Meeting at 7.30pm at OPBG. Speaker: Peter Jobson. "A day trip to Lesser Slave Lake".

Sunday 14 Feb Visit Peter Latz's block in all its green glory. Meet at Information bay opposite Old Timers at 8 am.

Wednesday 2 March Annual General Meeting at 7.30pm at OPBG.

BIRDLIFE CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

Contact: birdlifeca@gmail.com

Wednesday 24 Feb Meeting at 7.00pm at Alice Springs Desert Park Education room. "Birds seen over Summer"

Sunday 6 March Social Birding, Meet at Sewage Ponds gates at 7.30 am.

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	Committee Member	Claire Meney	0448341795
Website and Newsletter	Pamela Keil	8955 0496.			

Cover picture: Christmas Beetles (*Anoplognathus* sp.) at Trepina Gorge

Christmas Beetle is a name commonly applied to Australian beetles belonging to the genus *Anoplognathus* because the adults emerge around Christmas time. Beetles in the northern parts of Australia tend to become active earlier in the year than those further to the south. Christmas beetles range from 15 - 40 mm in size and come in many colours. Most are golden brown, but they can be green or black. The 35 species of *Anoplognathus* belong to the subfamily Rutelinae in the Family Scarabaeidae .

Mostly active at night, Christmas beetles are often attracted to lights. Adult Christmas Beetles feed on eucalypt leaves. Their larvae are white, crescent-shaped grubs with pale reddish brown heads that feed on roots in grasslands, lawns and pastures.

Farming and clearing in the past 200 years has changed the environment, creating a Christmas Beetle population boom. Once only small areas of grassland existed. Now there are vast areas of grazing land, increasing the feeding grounds for beetle larvae.

Eucalypt forests, where the adult beetles feed, have decreased in size since European settlement. As a result the adult beetles often overgraze the eucalypts, with isolated trees particularly vulnerable.

Ribbed Case Moth – Barb Gilfedder

I took the photo on the right four years ago, out at Redbank Waterhole on Owen Springs Reserve but did not know what I was photographing. We thought they were probably related to some sort of insect, but only recently tracked down the answer.

They do look a bit like the protective cases of case moth caterpillars but the ones I had seen previously were covered with leaf or stick bits. These were smooth apart from seven longitudinal ribs and were firmly fixed to Red River Gum trunks.

This species that I now think is *Hyalarcta nigrescens* is a type of case moth. The caterpillars live and pupate in a conical silken case. Initially the case has sparse bits of debris attached to it. (below)



The caterpillars normally only protrude the head and thorax, which have a hard orange and dark blue skin, from their case. The abdomen is greyish and soft, so they normally keep that inside the protective case.

The case can grow to a length of up to 4 cms, When ready to pupate the caterpillar hangs the case firmly under a branch. (top picture) The male pushes his way out when he turns into a moth. He has a hairy black head and body, with a fringe of white hairs around the head and a tuft of yellow hairs on the tip of the abdomen. The fore wings are transparent and the hind wings are blue. The wingspan is about 2.5 cms. I haven't seen one of these.



The female is wingless, with a tiny head and thorax. She stays within her case for fertilisation, and lays her eggs within the case. When the eggs hatch, the small caterpillars move to the outside of the case and onto the food plant. Though only about 3mm long, these small Caterpillars each make a small conical case, which they hold perpendicular to the surface they are on.

The reference I found on the web, said the species is found in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. It, or something very closely related to it, is obviously in Northern Territory too.

Thanks to Don Herbison-Evans and Stella Crossley for information and the three lower photos. Don tells me he has added NT to the areas where it is found.

Cooling Columns

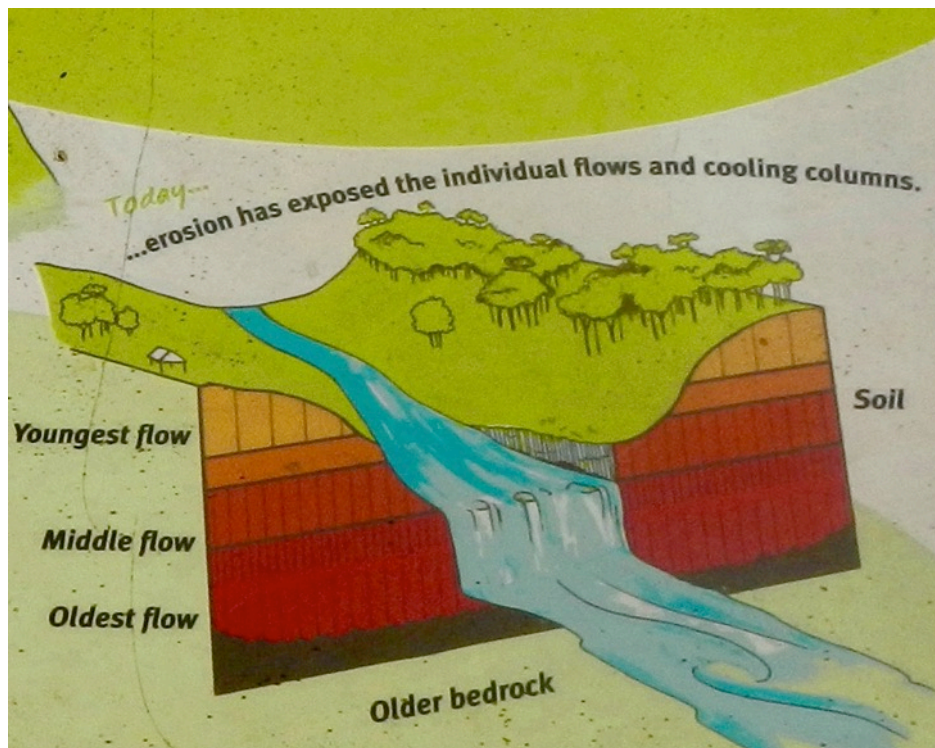
By Rhonda Tomlinson

I have been looking through my photos from my International Parks holiday in July 2015 and came across the term 'Cooling Columns'.

It was in relation to Basalt columns we saw at Windy Hill, near Ravenshoe on the Atherton Tablelands in Queensland. The falls are called Millstream Falls.



I took photos of the explanatory signage at the site and also had to go on the internet to glean an explanation and description of this geological feature.



Basalt columns are formed from cooling lava that weathers naturally. Each column has been formed in slightly different conditions and this creates unique sculptural elements with individual patterning.

About 3 – 1.2 million years ago Windy Hill was created by a volcano. Periodic eruptions poured three lava flows into the rivers, partly filling the Millstream and other ancient valleys. As each lava flow cooled, contraction formed vertical cracks and produced the cooling columns that can be seen in the cliffs and rock surfaces above the falls.

**Summer rain makes grasses grow.
Watch out for these natives amongst the Buffel.**



Fimbristylis dichotoma
Eight Day Grass (really a sedge)



Dactyloctenium radulans
Button Grass



Enneapogon polyphyllus
Woolly Oat Grass



Enneapogon avenaceus
Native Oat Grass



Digitaria brownii
Cotton Panic Grass



Panicum decompositum
Native Millet



Eragrostis eriopoda
Woollybutt Grass



Eulalia aurea
Silky Browntop



Dichanthium sericeum
Queensland Bluegrass



Chrysopogon fallax
Golden Beard Grass

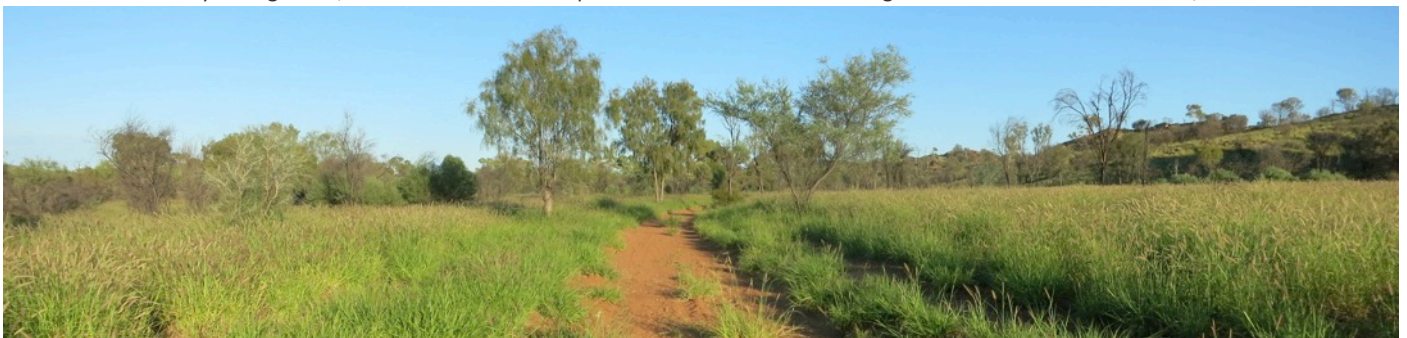


Aristida contorta
Bunched Kerosene Grass

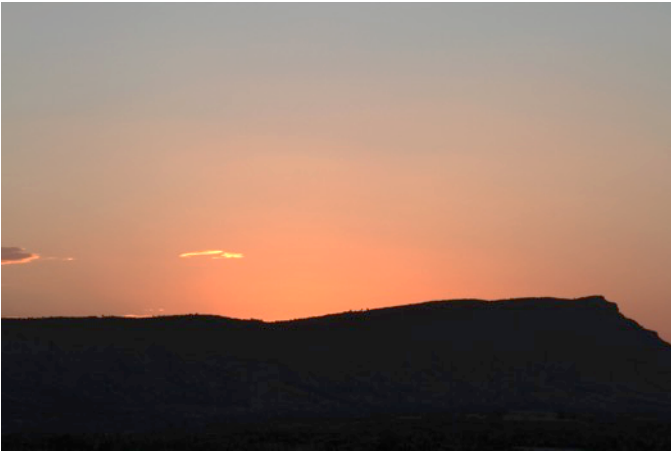


Themeda avenacea
Tall Oat Grass

There are lots more you might see, but of course the most prolific around the town are large monocultures of Buffel Grass, *Cenchrus ciliaris*



Sunset, moonrise from Spencer Hill



"The sun has just set behind Mount Gillen" and "The moon has risen amongst the clouds"
Photos by Jenny Purdie

Early Morning Walks – Connie Spencer



Have you ever walked along the Sink and Skyline Tracks where some unusual artefacts can be found? What about the Big Downhill – now that is scary. Have you been to Salt Shaker Rock via Echidna Point and the Eagle Track passing Deb's Lookout and Dom's Corner? The West Macs MTB track from the Stuart Hwy to Wiggly Road is a short one with specky views. Then there is the Ridge Track, the Humpy Track and Lovegrove Lane. They are a must. A hike up to Todd Gorge and back down the other channel is always a challenge especially after rain. And what about Sunset Hill and Quartz Hill? Have you been there? What about Trig Hill? You must have been there.

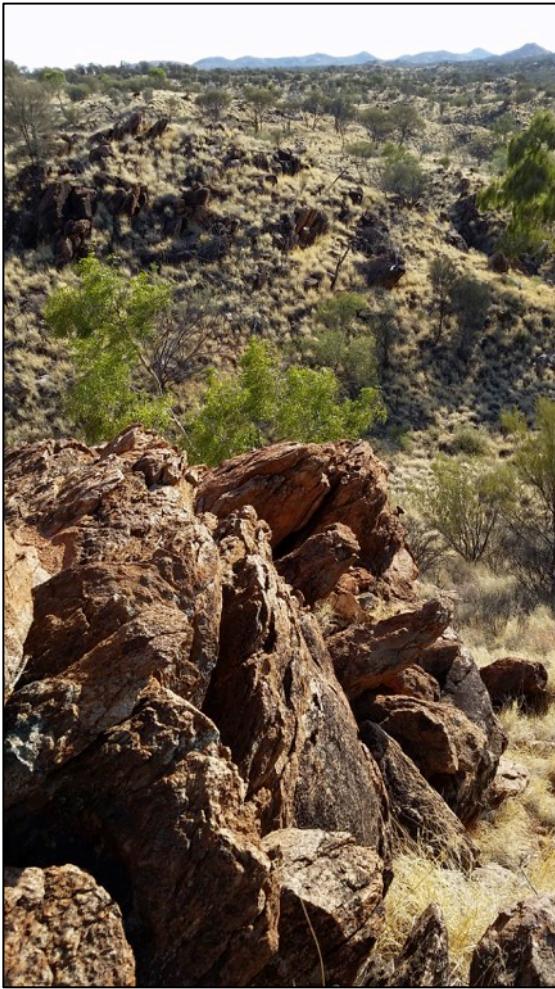
Are you intrigued? Do you want to know where these walks are? Join us on an early morning walk – we are bound to retrace our steps. I know, not easy for those of you still in the work force. We will try to schedule some in on the weekends and in cooler weather when you don't have to start so early.



Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club

View from Trig Hill





EARLY MORNING WALKS 2016

The holidays are over – time to get back into some early morning walks

Walks are on bush tracks (some mountain bike tracks and some 4WD tracks) of 4-8 km in length and of 2 to 3 hours duration.

Thu 4 Feb 6am Wander in the Kurrajong Hills. Meet at the 2nd green Telstra box on Kurrajong Drive. Contact Rosalie Breen on 8952 3409 rosalie.breen@email.com

Thu 11 Feb 6am Walk to Flagon Hill and back. Meet Flynn's Grave. Contact: Connie Spencer 0429 966 592 constans@bigpond.net.au

Thu 18 Feb 6am Walk to Todd Gorge in Telegraph Station and back. Meet Telegraph Station gate. Contact: Connie Spencer 0429 966 592 constans@bigpond.net.au

Thu 25 Feb 6am Walk to Hat Hill Saddle from Simpsons Gap and back. Meet Flynn's Grave Contact: Connie Spencer 0429 966 592 constans@bigpond.net.au

Above: Western Macdonnells view

Right: Cec, Margaret, Rosalie and Collette at Salt Shaker Rocks

Below: Another artefact to add interest and a smile to a walk!



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

Following a presentation by various members on *a variety of trips and relevant topics*.
Thanks to Lee Ryall for doing a write up of the presentation and to Barb Gilfedder for supper.

Meeting opened at 7:00pm

Present/Apologies: as per attendance book (22 Members and 1 visitors). Apologies from 4 members.

Previous minutes accepted by the meeting.

Business arising from the minutes

- Flora NT website – Peter Jobson, Botanist at the Alice Springs Herbarium said that the website is very basic and will present to either APS or ASFNC when it is up and running properly.

Correspondence In/Out

- Write-up sent to Nicole Pietsch, ALEC about the Intertexta walk, with paragraph about Field Naturalists. No acknowledgement received.
- Bill from AUHost4u re: website – 3 years for \$100.00. Barb has paid this via PayPal as AUHost4u do not accept cheques. Receipt received and Barb to be reimbursed.

Treasurer's Report – October 2015

Balance of all funds 30 September 2015	\$1,508.41
Income for October 2015	\$35.00
Bank interest	\$0.00
Expenditure for October 2015	Nil
Petty Cash	
Opening balance	\$8.10
Added funds (from membership payment)	\$20.00
Expenditure	\$17.00
Petty cash balance end October 2015	\$11.10
Total funds 31 October 2015	\$1,526.41

General Business

- Rhondda will be away during early 2016. Charissa to take over posting hard copy newsletters and posting copy at OPBG;
- Pam has newsletters up-to-date on website. Pam will show Barb how to update site early next year;
- Brochures have been selling well – APS had repaid \$2500 via cheque to ASFNC. Received 4 November 2016;
- Barb has purchased chocolates for John, Security at CDU. as a thank you from ASFNC;
- Cecily is leaving the area. ASFNC would like to express thanks to Cecily for many years of participation. We would like to wish Cecily and her family well for the future.

Past Trips

- Various early morning walks organized by Connie and Cecily.

Future Trips

- Various Early morning walks – contact Connie for information;
- 14 Nov Standley Chasm – Meet at Flynn's Grave at 7:30am. Contact Barb for information;
- 26 Nov Sunset/moonrise walk at Spencer Hill – Meet at Gosse St Playground at 06:15pm. Contact Rosalie for information;
- April 2016 Arltunga overnight trip (postponed from Oct 2015) – Date to be confirmed. Contact Rhondda or Charissa for information.

Sightings

- Black-tailed Godwits – Sewage Ponds;
- Grey Wagtail- Nyrripi

Next meeting – Wednesday 10 February; Speakers are Peter and Lisa Nunn, "Wildlife seen on recent Africa Trip".

Lee Ryall will scribe, and Sue O'Callahan will provide supper.

Meeting closed: 9:00pm