



April 2016

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



Surfing the Noodle. The Schmidt family found this big, beautiful spider in their swimming pool. It is a Barking Spider – see more information on page 2.
Photo by Anne Schmidt.

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
Information on cover photo...p2 Andy Vinter, Feral Cacti...p3
Frenchman's Cap – Bob Read...p5
Sewage Ponds shorebird Count...p7 Intertexta Forest...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 next newsletter will be May 2016.
The deadline for the next newsletter will be 23 April.
Please send your contributions to Barb Gilfedder bjfedders@gmail.com

ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

- Sat 2 April** Drive to several locations along Santa Teresa Road – **CANCELLED, sorry!**
- Sat 9 - Sun 10 April** **N'dhala Gorge** Meet at parking area opposite Old Timers at 1.45 for 2pm departure. N'Dhala Gorge is 90km from Alice Springs, the last 11km off road (4WD high clearance recommended) so a comfortable 90 min trip. This should allow time for a short stop along the way if there is any water in the creek or anything else of interest. At the campground there are three barbeques, each with two parking bays so a maximum of six vehicles including us. There is a pit toilet at the campground but no water or wood for the barbeques. Arrive around 4-4.30pm then a walk to a small hill nearby before sunset (around 6.30pm). In the morning after breakfast a leisurely walk into the Gorge (1.5 km) to observe plants and birdlife. Depart for return to town by midday. Contact Ian and Wendy Mann on 8952 7808 or wikks@gotalk.net.au
- Wednesday 13 April** **Meeting** 7.00pm at Charles Darwin University Higher Education Building lecture theatre. Presentation by **Rex Neindorf** of Alice Springs Reptile Centre
- Sunday 17 April** **Combined ASFNC/APS stall** at Heritage week market at Old Telegraph Station 9.30am – 1.00pm. If you can help man the stall, please contact Barb Gilfedder 89 555452
- Saturday 23 April** **Owen Springs.** Possible paid tag-a-long with rangers, otherwise drive through and return or camp at Redbank and return on Sunday.
- Sat 7 and Sun 8 May** **2 Mile water hole** near Glen Helen. Either stay at Glen Helen or camp at 2 Mile. Walk in the morning. Would anyone like to be leader for this trip, please?

AUSTRALIAN PLANTS SOCIETY

Contact: APS Secretary karleefoster@hotmail.com

- Wednesday 6 April** **APS Meeting** at 7.30 at Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Presentation '**Weedy Grasses**' by **Peter Latz**
- Saturday 9 April** Autumn **Native Plant Sale** from 8am at Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Choose from a wide selection of stunning central Australian plants. Volunteers needed to help - contact Doug McDougall 8952 2154 garden@opbg.com.au
- Sat 16 April** **APS Working Bee** at show site commencing at 8.30am. General tidy up and pruning.

BIRDLIFE CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

Contact: birdlifeca@gmail.com

- Sunday 3 April** **Social Birding** at Sewage Ponds. Meet at gates for 7.00am start. Visitors welcome provided that they have previously undertaken Power & Water induction course. Gold coin donation non-Birdlife Members.
- Wednesday 27 April** **Meeting** 7.00pm in Education Room at Alice Springs Desert Park
- Sat 30 April - Mon 2 May** **Birdlife Camping trip** to Lake Woods near Elliot – **Field Nats invited** – Plant and bird surveys.

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



The Barking Spider (*Selenocosmia stirlingi*) is a primitive spider. They have gill-like lungs that require humidity and are built for digging, spending most of their life in the moist underground. They produce their barking sound by rubbing rows of spines on their palps against spines on their lower jaw. This noise is used to deter predators. The deserts are prone to flash flooding and Barking Spiders live in burrows with leaky roofs. The hairs on their body trap air bubbles during flash floods and the air pockets prevent them from drowning. Brush feet with claw tufts and a film of oil produced from special glands give them a suction cup ability to climb smooth vertical surfaces. Barking Spiders live in the leaf litter in Mulga Country, hunting insects, lizards and frogs from the entrance of their burrows. Adult females live in a web-lined burrow while young spiders and males use flimsy silk retreats under rocks and logs. Females may live up to 20 years. Males usually die after mating at around 5 years of age. Females may reach a body length of 6cm with a leg span of 16cm and have powerful 1cm long fangs.

Pictured here on the back of Graham's hand! It must be a female to be that size.

Information courtesy of Alice Springs Desert Park Nature Notes.

Andy Vinter - March speaker

Tackling the prickly problem of invasive cacti in Alice Springs

Report by Rosalie Breen

At our last meeting, Andy Vinter from Landcare and lecturer in Land Management at Batchelor Institute guided us on a big learning curve about cactus species which have invaded bush around Alice Springs. It engendered much discussion and we are now all much more aware and knowledgeable about the problem.

If you want to be scientific Cacti belong to the *Cactaceae* family. None are endemic to Australia, so all can be termed invasive. But the problem ones are in the Opuntoid branch, in the genera *Opuntia*, and *Cylindropuntia*. Both are declared as "Weeds of Significance". For NT south of 18 degrees *Opuntia* species are declared as B/C weeds, which means their spread must be controlled and they are not to be sold. Rangelands of inland Australia are vulnerable to cactus invasion as cacti are drought resistant, hardy and thrive in low rainfall.

Cylindropuntia cacti reproduce by vegetative means, producing segments which can be readily dislodged. Each piece (even tiny ones) can root and produce a new plant. These segments can be spread along drainage lines or by attaching to animals such as wallabies and dogs and even humans. Then they can be transported away from the initial plant patch. Rubbish dumping can be a source of new infestations too. Andy had samples of four that are found around Alice Springs. found around Alice Springs.



The top four photos are *Cylindropuntia* Cacti. From top:- Coral Cactus (Boxing Glove) *Cylindropuntia fulgida* var. *mamillata*, Devil's Rope, *Cylindropuntia imbricate*, Jumping Cholla, *Cylindropuntia prolifera* and Hudson's Pear, *Cylindropuntia rosea*.

The bottom two photos are *Opuntia* Cacti, Prickly Pear, *Opuntia stricta* and Riverine Pear, *Opuntia elata*.

The *Opuntia* species, Prickly Pear, *Opuntia stricta* is spread mainly through animals eating the fruit and thus dispersing the seeds. Fruits should be picked to prevent spread. Riverine Pear, *Opuntia elata* is the other main *Opuntia* invasive.

Control and eradication of these invasive plants has been concentrated around the *Cylindropuntia* types because of their easy and rapid spread.



Practical work, with the chemical treatment trial in the Telegraph Station by Andy's Land Conservation students demonstrates **foliar spraying** method of control. First step is to conduct a **survey** of cactus plants, GPS positioning, and mapping. **Control** in this situation is by spraying, using mostly Garlon. All surfaces of the cactus need to be covered. Next, regular **monitoring** of the effects is carried out, with follow-up spraying if necessary. Effects are slow and 2-3 or even more years of effort are needed. (Photos on left)



The other method of control is **hand removal**. This is suited to smaller infestations and individual plants, and for work by community volunteers. It involves knocking off most segments and picking them up using kitchen tongs, digging out the plant including roots, and collecting all pieces meticulously. The refuse is collected into bins and transported to council landfill. The count at the end of 2015 was around 1700kg taken to the tip. (Photos on right)



I found the map of infestation of cactus around Alice Springs interesting. The most concentrated area is in the south-eastern corner of the Telegraph Station and in Spencer Valley environs, with odd occurrences all through the suburbs, even out on crown land off Undoolya Road. Prickly Pear is the most widespread cactus outside of Alice Springs. Riverine Pear and Devils Rope are widespread out of town too and other species occur especially in gardens. Alice Springs acts as a node for further spread of cactus species into the bush and rangelands, so containment is imperative.

So what must the general public do to halt the spread and eliminate these cactus species?

Be observant, and report to Landcare or Weeds Branch of Department of Land Resources any sightings of cacti in the bush or the suburbs, preferably with a GPS reading. (reports are not necessary in the area around the treatment sites in the Telegraph Station as these are undergoing control).

Those mentioned organizations will undertake removal or chemical spraying, and/or give advice.

Join in Community work days.

Be aware of the difference between *Cylindropuntia* and *Opuntia* in their method of spread and use the appropriate method of control. *Cylindropuntia* species pose the major threat to the environment and should be the first priority.

Undertake treatment or physical removal of plants if you understand safe methods. Dispose of material by taking to the landfill or burying material up to 30cm. deep. Burning is not appropriate.

Do not plant invasive species of Cactus in your gardens or share those plants and encourage others to do the same. Beware of "Fete" plants.

Thanks Andy, a mine of information!

Climbing Frenchmans Cap – Tasmania

by Bob Read

I climbed Frenchmans Cap last week. We successfully made the summit, taking 5 days for the trip. In terms of hours it would fit into 3 days, but would need a lot of stamina, even though the infamous “Sodden Loddons”¹ have been transformed by engineering and Dick Smith money.

The trip was planned at fairly short notice. A friend, Margaret had missed out on going with the Devonport over 50’s walking group and asked if I would go with her. I had not done any real training, was supposed to be finishing a kitchen cupboard and a report, but accepted the invitation immediately.

The walk to the mountain begins on the Lyell Highway, 28 km west of Derwent Bridge about 3 hours drive from where I live. On the first day it started to rain. At first it was too light to be worth putting over-trousers on, then there was no point as our legs were already soaked. We got to the excellent Lake Vera Hut and were able to dry clothes out by the stove. I found that my pack liner was leaking and part of my sleeping bag was wet. I was able to dry the bag and wrapped it in a plastic groundsheet for the rest of the trip. I will go back to garbags in future.

Next morning it was raining again. We walked up through more lovely rainforest. Some wonderful track work using local materials. Steps made by cutting notches in sloping logs with a chainsaw, very well done with every step sloping gently inwards to prevent boots slipping off. When we finally got to the top of Barron Pass the rain turned to hail with a little sleet. We had lunch in a rock shelter, no doubt used by hundreds of walkers.

In the afternoon the weather cleared a little, giving views of Frenchmans Cap with a dusting of snow. Unlike Cradle Mountain and others near it which are dolerite Frenchmans Cap is composed of Precambrian quartzite.

Fortunately there was only 1 other party of 4 at Lake Tahune hut. Another nice light modern hut built 1971 with 16 bunks.

Margaret found a log book entry by her friend Kerry 2 weeks before. It read “Gutted, stopped by a stupid rock”. Marg was a bit disconcerted but was persuaded to give it a go.

Next day the weather was unpromising with low cloud, and everyone was sitting around the hut. Just before midday someone said that the cloud was lifting and there was a sudden rush of grabbing snacks and donning wet weather gear.



Pictures from the top-

Suspension bridge over the Franklin River, one person at a time.

Frenchmans Cap from near

Lake Tahune. The 300 m cliff attracts very good and very brave rock-climbers!

Looking north from part way up Frenchmans Cap.

Getting near the summit. Low alpine vegetation and bare quartzite.

Margaret and myself at the top.



¹ The track crosses a lot of soft boggy soil near the Loddon River. Long sections of it were a soggy mess into which walkers regularly sank knee deep and occasionally waist deep. Dick Smith walked it in 2008 and was so appalled by the environmental damage that he offered to pay a large part of the cost of fixing it if the Tasmanian government contributed the rest.

The other party soon left us behind, and we started up following the cairned route through intermittent low cloud. After some time we got to what was obviously Kerry's rock, a near vertical wall about 2.5 m high with few holds. I started up, and feeling the ledge above found 2 good handholds. As I pulled myself up my rational brain pointed out that it was a stupid move, as getting down would be harder, but the drive to make the summit won out. I directed Margaret to the handholds, and with some encouragement she got up.

It is quite a complex mountain. What looks like a sloping plateau in the distance is dissected by deep gullies, and the track wanders around with a number of false skylines. This is a consequence of the way it was carved by glaciers on different sides in the ice ages. At last we reached a point where there was still a little snow on the ground, and then I saw a low wall with what looked like an odd shaped black rock sticking up. The black rock moved and I realised that it was one of the other party at the summit.

The cloud had largely broken up by this stage and we had good though intermittent views.

After the obligatory summit photos we started down again. Fortunately the other party went part of the way down with us. One of them was a good climber and she directed Margaret and me down the difficult rock. (There was an alternative route in a sloping chimney I would have tried otherwise.)

Then down the hill and back to the hut for a cuppa. Marg was stoked that she had succeeded where her younger (50) friend had failed.

Over the years bushwalking has given me aches, bruises and scratches over much of my body, but I think this is the first time I have had sore fingertips from rock.

We were very lucky with our timing both in regard to the weather and to the number of parties we passed on the way up as we were going down. A number of people would have had to use tents.

Two days later we got back to the highway, the weather steadily getting better as we went.

At home I found there had been insignificant rain over most of the island, and the fires were still burning. As is often the case the mountain had caught the rain.

*Pictures from top: -
Looking east from the summit.*

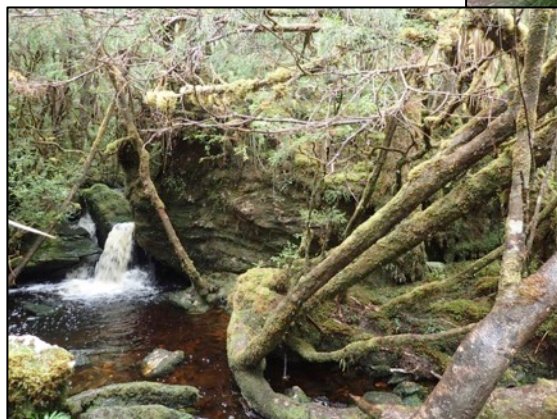
Descending from the summit, other party in front. Snow centre and lower right

Track through rain forest, Lake Tahune to Lake Vera.

Lake Vera hut.

Small creek with tannin stained water in rainforest.

Margaret descending steps skilfully chain-sawed in a log.



Many thanks Bob ... and Margaret.

Bob Read was President of Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club for many years.

He was always a great adventurer. Good to see he is keenly battling even in the rain and cold. Ed.



SHOREBIRD COUNT - ALICE SPRINGS SEWAGE PONDS – 28 February

Every six months a group of interested birders and scribes armed with telescopes, binoculars, cameras and notebooks, gather at the Alice Springs sewage ponds to count the birds. Unfortunately Power and Water have found it necessary to have the ponds closed to the public since November 2015. We were pleased to be able to get special permission to enter and conduct this important event. Other groups throughout Australia, conduct similar counts on their beaches, lakes and waterways.

We were mainly looking at the shorebirds – waders, many of them migratory. These birds spend our Summer with us in Australia, flying enormous distances to reach their breeding grounds for the northern hemisphere Summer, some as far as the Arctic circle. Many have been here since September enjoying our local ponds, but will all be moving north in March.

This summer's count, held at the end of February, attracted 16 birders, who in two hours counted 1903 birds across 47 species. This included our permanent residents as well as the migrants.

The detailed information gathered is shared between shorebird research and conservation groups within Australia and around the world, to assist in the development, implementation and monitoring of shorebird conservation projects globally.

I would like to thank the Birders and the Field Naturalists who supported this event. Barb Gilfedder

Photos: top, a family of Pink-eared Ducks, permanent residents who breed here. Below, a small group counting at the ponds. Steve Sinclair.





The Intertexta Forest again – always different – always special.

By Barb Gilfedder

Five of us met opposite the old Timers on Sunday 13 March, to go to the Intertexta Forest - Connie Spencer, Sue O'Callaghan, Jennifer Noble, Jim and myself. It had been a recently organised trip, after a friend had told me how good it was at present. We were pleased to find Peter Latz and Alan Keeling waiting at the forest.

The Intertexta Forest is one of Peter's special projects. He said when he first visited, it was a dumping and burning ground for old cars, as well as a camping/drinking area and a place for motorbikes to hoon through. In spite of all of this he recognized it as a hotspot of biodiversity and suggested a fence. The local Landcare group put a fence where the Commonage borders the Ilparpa Road, which is a fair distance but a vehicle access gap in the fence meant it did not protect the forest. Peter managed to scavenge fence materials and built a fence with pickets and wire between the chenopod plain and the forest with no breaks in it. Although not particularly sturdy, it has worked very well to keep out the undesirable activities. Since then Peter and others have worked hard to reduce the plant undesirables, mainly Couch and Buffel grass.

We climbed through the fence, Peter with his hoe over his shoulder. It didn't stay there long, as he started chipping at young Buffel plants. I found it is quite hard to distinguish the Buffel from other grasses until it had seeds, but Peter pointed out the red tinge to the slightly swollen butt and the fact that there is a short fringe of hairs where the leaf blade angles away from the leaf sheath. Some young Buffel plants were starting to produce seed heads, but these are not viable unless they can be pulled easily off the stalk.

As we wandered through, we did find areas of Couch too, but no good trying to chip those out, Peter said. He noted where they were and would come back later to spray them.

Another introduced plant we saw a lot of was *Malvastrum americanum*. Spiked Malvastrum. This was fairly easy to remove having a single stem that pulled out from the damp ground. We all did a bit of removal as we walked.

It is great trudging through the forest, with the damp ground and thick mulch layer underneath. The browned leaves last well having fallen from the dominant trees, River Red Gums, *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* nearer the road and Bastard Coolibah, *Eucalyptus intertexta* further back. There are lots of smaller trees too – *Hakea divaricata*, Fork-leafed Corkwood; *Acacia estrophiolata*, Ironwood; *Pittosporum angustifolium*, Native Apricot; *Hakea leucoptera*, Needlewood; *Atalaya hemiglauca*, Whitewood; *Grevillea striata*, Beefwood. There is even a small *Capparis mitchellii*, Wild Orange, still with its juvenile leaves and tangled thorny branches, a defence against being eaten. Peter told us that branches of this were used by the Aborigines to snag bats as they tried to leave caves for a night of foraging. As the tree matures the leaves grow larger and the spikes disappear.

Lower down are the smaller shrubs, too many to mention, but a standout is the *Capparis spinosa*, Native Passionfruit with its large showy white flowers.



Below them are all sorts of interesting smaller plants, little daisies, solanums and smaller saltbushes. A few were flowering – the *Goodenia lunata*, *Chrysocephalum apiculatum*, and *Minuria integerrima*. There was water in the small creek that flows through the forest and at the northern end a carpet of very green Nardoo, *Marsilea exarata*. Also in the creek we found Brown Beetle Grass, *Leptochloa fusca subsp muelleri*. Peter called it Rice grass. Indeed it looked like rice, growing in the water with the seeds looking like tiny rice grains.



Photos from the top: The showy flower of *Capparis spinosa*.
A carpet of Nardoo, *Marsilea exarata*. – Connie’s photo.
Brown beetle Grass, *Leptochloa fusca subsp muelleri*.

Peter calls the forest, a dry jungle as vines are evident everywhere, Headache Vine, *Cucumis argentata* with its small red berries; Bush Banana, *Marsdenia australis* and Bush bean, *Rhyncharrhena linearis* with their interesting fruits. The largest area of Pencil Yam *Vigna lanceolata*, that Peter knows stretches out over the ground. Its thin underground tubers were a valuable food source for Aborigines throughout this area.

The Intertexta Forest cannot fully look after itself. It needs continuous monitoring and maintenance. The feral plants may not be as obvious as burning cars were, but they could still damage this wonderful area if left unchecked.

...so an enjoyable couple of hours was spent.

Many thanks Peter for sharing your enthusiasm and some of your wonderful store of knowledge as well as for all the work that you have done over the years to make this place as special as it is today.

Minutes – General Meeting – 9 March 2016

After the talk by Andy Vinter on feral Cacti, Barb thanked scribe Rosalie Breen and Margaret Lawrence for supper. She welcomed the visitors, especially the three new members.

Present and Apologies as per attendance book. 17 Members, 5 visitors, 2 apologies
Three of the visitors signed up for club membership.

Minutes of Feb 2016 meeting were on back of March 2016 newsletter – accepted by meeting.

Treasurer's Report.

Balance of all funds (inc petty cash) at end January: \$4177.50

Activity in February

Income		
Memberships	0.00	
Interest	0.00	
Withdrawals		
Natural History Medallion Fund Donation	-100.00	-100.00
Australian Wildlife Conservancy Fund (Newhaven Project)	-1000.00	-1000.00
Petty Cash		
Balance at end January	11.10	
Activity	0.00	
Balance at end February	11.10	
Total of all funds (inc petty cash) at end February		<u>3077.50</u>

Correspondence out/in

- PO Box renewal- \$121. Agreed to pay using normal method.
- Thank you from AWC re Newhaven donation
- Advertising Norfolk Island Bird Week
- Advertising CSIRO publishing
- Thank you from Birdlife – for support over the past year (volunteering time for bird count)

General Business

- Pam agreed to show Barb and Rosalie how to put newsletter onto website.
- There will be a stall at Alice Springs Heritage week open day – Parks and Wildlife – Sunday 17 April, 9.30am -1.00pm. Joint stall with APS to promote our Associations and sell Central Australian Flora Brochure. Barb asked for volunteers to man the stall
- Planning meeting –the draft program was sent out. Barb noted a few changes
 - May long weekend trip with Central Australian Birdlife Group to Longreach Waterhole north of Elliott
 - Next Shorebird Count will be May 29

Past Trips

- A few more early morning walks – Connie, Rosalie
- Spencer Valley walk (viewing cacti)
- Look at Peter Latz's block
- Shorebird count February

Future Trips

- Thursday 10 March 6.15am - Telegraph Station walk
- Sat 12 March 5.00pm APS walk around OPBG with Ian Coleman
- Sun 13 March 7.00am Intertexta Forest – Barb Gilfedder
- Sun 20 March 7.00am Ellery event – Meg Mooney. Meet at Flynn's grave.

Next meeting – Rex Neindorf – Reptile presentation.

Scribe...Lee Ryall

Supper...the Manns