



July 2016

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



Leschenaultia divaricata, Tangled Leschenaultia is not as showy of some of the wonderful red and blue flowering ones of Western Australia, but still a stunning tiny flower. It is in the Goodenia family. Photo Neil Woolcock – see page 9

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 August 2016.
The deadline for the next newsletter will be 23 July.
Please send your contributions to Barb Gilfedder: bjfedders@gmail.com

ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

All ASFNC trips may be subject to change, please contact relevant leader if you wish to attend.

Sat 9–Sun 10 July

Ambalindum – Arltunga weekend

Meet at 8:30am at the Sargent Street sign on the North Stuart Highway. We will travel north and turn right along the Arltunga Tourist Drive (Gardens Road) then south on the Binns Track. There is camping area at Ambalindum but if you wish to stay in the accommodation there you will have to contact the homestead to make arrangements. On Sunday we will explore the Arltunga Historical Reserve and then return to Alice Springs via the Arltunga Road and Ross Highway. The approximate distance for the round trip is 300km. Four wheel drive would be a better option. You have to be self-sufficient with food, water and vehicle wise.

If you are interested in coming, I can give more information when you contact me.

Phone or leave a message: Rhondda – 89531280

Wed 13 July

ASFNC meeting at Lecture Theatre in Higher Education Building at CDU at 7.00pm. Speaker – **Colleen O'Malley** "*Kakapo population recovery - 123 birds and counting! Nest minding on Anchor Island, New Zealand, during the 2016 Rimu and Beech mast*".

Sun 17 July

Cycle on new Bicycle tracks through Alice Springs Desert Park. Meet at 8.00am at Flynn's Grave. Finish with a coffee at Lawrence's, 2 Battarbee Street. Car ride back to Flynn's Grave available afterwards. Leader: Jim Lawrence jim.lawrence.asp@gmail.com

Sat 23-Sun 24 July

Old Hamilton Downs Youth Camp – Xmas in July – Leaders: Wendy and Ian Mann
wikks@gotalk.net.au

Sat 30 July–Mon 2 Aug

Newhaven Wildlife Sanctuary 2 or 3 nights camping (\$10 per person per person per night) extended either way by personal choice. The plan is to make your own way out there on either Friday 29 or Saturday 30 July. Joe Schofield will be giving a talk on Saturday night and at other times we can explore the Reserve. There are excellent self-guided tours that can be followed. We usually do a round trip of about 900km, including travelling around Newhaven. Fuel is available at Tilmouth Well but not at Newhaven. Leader: Barb Gilfedder bjfedders@gmail.com

Wed 10 Aug

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING at the Lecture Theatre in Higher Education Building at CDU at 7.00pm. All Committee positions will be declared vacant and the Committee will be elected. Annual subscription fees due at this meeting.
This will be followed by **Members' night**. Please bring pictures, either hard copy or on a thumb drive, or other items to share.

AUSTRALIAN PLANTS SOCIETY ALICE SPRINGS

Contact: apsalicesprings@yahoo.com.au

Sat 1 and Sat 2 July

APS Stall and display at Alice Springs Show. Don't miss this wonderful display of native flowers. Volunteers required to man the stall. Contact Doug McDougall stenocarpus75@gmail.com

BIRDLIFE CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

Contact: birdlifeca@gmail.com

Sunday 3 July

Social Birding. Contact birdlifeca for place and time.

Wed 26 July

Meeting 7.00pm in Education Room at Alice Springs Desert Park.

17-21 August

Central Australian Bird Festival. Watch for more information.

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	vacant		Committee Member	Connie Spencer	8952 4694
Treasurer	Neil Woolcock	8955 1021	Committee Member	Claire Meney	0448341795
Website and Newsletter	Pamela Keil	8955 0496.			

Report by Lee Ryall

Old Andado homestead area is set in the western Simpson Desert. A number of different habitats occur there. Parallel dunes vegetated with cane grass shine dramatically. The gibber plains have little vegetation normally but turn bright green quickly after rain, and are utilised by nomadic populations of birds. The Mac Clarke Conservation Reserve is one of only three places in the world to support a population of *Acacia peuce* (Waddy wood) which looks very much like a Casuarina. And then there are the swamps which, when full, extend right to the base of the dunes supporting Coolabah trees as well as Lignum bushes.

Wildlife around the homestead

The permanent water around the homestead brings in a number of bird varieties. Some such as the Yellow-throated Miner, the Crested Pigeons and the Galahs, which are common in Alice Springs. The Fairy Martins build painstakingly elaborate nests each summer, one mouthful of mud at a time. (pictured) They favour eaves and similar spots for their edifices, whereas Lisa had some intriguing photos of the creative constructions of Zebra Finches utilising old rubbish, sometimes even a tin can as their homes. Budgerigar flocks and the more unusual White-breasted Woodswallows are found from time to time.



Sand Country inhabitants

Reptiles in this habitat include the Sand Goannas (pictured), a little perentie-like in their appearance and decoration, and the Woma Python which in Lisa photo, peered gently into the camera, displaying bands of dark brown against a golden glow. Ctenotus Skinks bask near or in the cane grass, spreading their toes to maximise warmth, and head for the cool side of the bush in the afternoon heat. Canegrass Dragons are here, too, blending into invisibility among the stalks.



Eyrean Grasswrens, desert habitat birds, bolt between the bushes on the dunes, singing out ownership of their territory. Cinnamon Quail Thrushes are well camouflaged amongst the pale rocks and the sandy soil as they flicker in and out of the shadows and the bushes.

Small mammals inhabit the dune vegetation as well - rodents such as the Spinifex Hopping Mice sporting kangaroo-like long back feet and dasyurids- a family which includes the Tasmanian Devil and the Quoll, and in this area of the Simpson, Dunnart and Mulgara. The Crest-tailed Mulgara is a miniature member of this carnivorous family. Lisa had photographed a handsome specimen showing a pointed pink wet-look nose, flat ears, a black tail brush and elegant long pointed toes.

These animals and small birds are prey for the Spotted Harrier, one of the desert raptors, which flies in low over the ground, systematically searching for choice mouthfuls. And of course, there is always the possibility of an Emu, sharply inquisitive but ready to take off at a run.



The Gibber Plain

The Inland Dotterel disguises himself among the stones, his black 'chain of office' markings blending in to the patchy surrounds (pictured). When surprised, he'll generally strut off rather than flying. Some Orange Chats might appear, but the Gibberbird, a chat with a yellow eye and a blazing yellow front is more common.

Kestrels are on the lookout for grasshoppers and lizards such as the Earless Dragon whose plump, orange speckled body can be found basking in the bushes or on rocks in the morning but in the afternoon may be on the shady side, cooling off. The open country attracts the Fat-tailed Dunnart, big eyes and pointy nose, and another dasyurid, the Kultarr (pictured), whose eyes are even larger, ears cocked to catch the slightest sound and back legs like a miniature kangaroo.



The gibber also provides a refuge site for the Plains Mouse - a rodent species that is threatened in the NT. As their name suggests, these creatures look much more like the House Mouse.



A larger rodent, the Long-haired Rat, *Rattus villosissimus*, which might normally be seen only occasionally, can breed rapidly in a good rain season and achieve such large numbers that they 'come to town' and are found as far away as Alice Springs. These will take on *Acacia peuce*, chewing the base like a beaver.

The gibber is a boom or bust habitat, and exploding numbers of these animals attract an unusual visitor - the elegant Letterwing Kite (pictured). In most years there are only a couple of dozen pairs of these, seen in the whole country, but in a good Long-haired Rat season they breed rapidly in the *Acacia peuce* before disappearing again as rat numbers decline.

The swamps

The swamps are also boom or bust. When full of water they attract thousands of waterbirds - Avocets, Black-winged Stilts, Pink-eared Ducks and a variety of Terns - the Whiskered, the Gull-billed and possibly the Caspian. Black-tailed Native Hens and Orange Chats turn up, as does an occasional group of the rare Flock Pigeons, also known as Harlequin Bronzewing, possibly due to their oddly splotched faces. And of course, no watery desert environment would be complete without the fat, squat shapes, and urgently present song of the Centralian Trilling Frog, *Neobatrachus centralis*, (pictured) one of the burrowing frogs.



This was a fascinating talk, and for those who were going to Old Andado, a tempting foretaste of the delights the trip might bring. Thanks, Lisa. *Stunning photos Lisa! Thank you, Ed.*



Old Andado trip – 11,12 and 13th June 2016

Neil Woolcock – Overview. Six vehicles gathered at the 80km sign on the Santa Teresa Road just past the airport at 9:00am on Saturday morning. We met there to avoid the Finke race traffic.

Those on the trip were :-

Neil and Leigh Woolcock, Yogita Thompson, Michelle Wilson, Liz Moore, Ian Archibald, Rosalie Breen, Aileen Lakey, Rosalie Schultz, Pauline Walsh, Rhondda Tomlinson ... and Jim and Barb Gilfedder. The eleven who arrived pictured right.



It's a straight forward trip of about 75km to Santa Teresa on a good road where we stopped opposite the store to discuss the next stage. Before leaving Pauline guided us up to a spot overlooking Santa Teresa. Somehow we managed to lose two vehicles, which was an ominous sign, but we soon regrouped on the Binns Track and off we went again.

A short drive found us in the Train Hills about 11:15am where Barb took us for a walk to find some *Acacia desmondii* trees. One good specimen was located, just beginning to flower, [below left](#). The others seem to have mysteriously disappeared.

Off again to the Arookara Range (part of the Rodinga Ranges) about 80km from Santa Teresa where we stopped to look for *Eremophila sp. Arookara Range*. Barb suggested we climb up a gully and there were many beautiful specimens, [below right](#).



On our way again, but unfortunately Barb was not feeling well and she and Jim turned back to Alice Springs. The rest of us regrouped and continued down to Old Andado. Lots of water in places and many diversions to get around it, but eventually we reached Old Andado with enough daylight left to decide if and where to camp. Some of us wimped out and stayed in the bunkrooms – a good choice in my opinion because it was windy and cold.

Dinner for several of us was an impromptu get-together in the homestead kitchen – a lovely experience.

At 8:00pm we went for a stroll up the dunes to walk off our dinners and then it was time to settle down for the night.

The clouds that had been with us for much of the day rolled away and when the moon went down in the early morning. The night sky was a breathtaking sight.

Sunday saw mainly blue skies and rewarded those who took an early walk up the sand dunes with some lovely sunrise photos. After breakfast we went on a walk over the sand dune to the airfield and the Old Andado International Airport terminal. Lots of water about so Rosalie Breen was in her element, catching shield shrimps and other creatures.

Back to the homestead for lunch then another walk past Molly Clark's grave and over more sand dunes in the afternoon.

Everything was green and vibrant. Plenty of flowers out but it would be quite spectacular in another week or so.

Time left for those who wanted to explore the homestead or do a bit of bird watching or just sit on the veranda of the bunkrooms and enjoy the ambience of the place.

Another sunny day on Sunday, with everyone packed and ready to go at 8:00am. The Little Corellas were about to leave their roost in a tree near the homestead and head off into the dunes for another day.

About 38km back up the Santa Teresa Road is the Mac Clark Conservation Reserve for the Waddywood, *Acacia peuce*. Again, lots of water around in what is usually a red, parched land. Instead of dust there were Avocets and other water birds. Ian spotted plenty of good birds but not the Letter-winged Kite that we had hoped to see.

We spent quite a while looking at the acacias and doing some bird watching before once again hitting the road. There was a quick stop for lunch and to stretch our legs before pressing on to Santa Teresa and back to Alice Springs where we hit the Finke traffic and crawled through The Gap and back home.

This was a lovely mix of people, with some experts in plants and birds and water creatures, and newcomers eager to learn and get involved. What the Alice Springs Field Naturalists is all about I think.

Rosalie Breen - Tracks . Photos Rosalie Breen

First outing on the Sunday was an early morning visit to the big red sand hill to the west of the homestead, to see the myriad of little animal tracks in the low angled light. It must have been a very busy place during the night and it was hard to decipher individuals in the confusion.

Beetle tracks are easy to identify, they were everywhere. The one in the picture is probably a scarab beetle. I call them railway tracks. The long line could be a mole cricket skimming just below the surface. Lizards leave delicate toed footprints, maybe a gecko in the picture. Hopping mice are everywhere too, leaving a variety of tracks depending on how fast they are travelling. The two Rosalies on a walk saw a weevil beetle out for a stroll in the sand, kindly leaving footprints on the surface. So small, it is hard to believe his dainty feet would make an impression.

Another co-operative, was a frog which emerged from a small hole. We observed firsthand his tracks, and so were able to identify frog tracks later too. We saw these on the big sandhill and would have been from a Desert Trilling Frog, *Neobatrachus centralis*, which is associated with arid sandy areas and burrows underground to avoid dehydration. The recent rain encouraged frogs to emerge. In fact damp sand was only a few centimeters below the surface. Over the next day the wind erases the activity signs, ready for the next night's story. Thanks to Lauren Young and Bill Low for some help. Recommended is the book 'Tales in the Sand' by Katherine Moseby and others.

More track thoughts. The road to Andado which mostly follows the swales in between sandhills and over gibber flats often was a little damp to say the least, side detours needed to be followed so as not to get bogged down in the mud. This at times took careful navigation to choose the safest set of wheel tracks. Ian proved a very reliable leader in this case. Thanks. On the gibber plains near "Andado International Airport" we found big but low ant nests. Radiating from these cities were a few straight clear tracks round 5-6 cm wide. (below) Again hard to imagine how ants could clear such definite tracks as they go out foraging.



Pictures from the top: -
1. Beetle tracks;
2. Frog hole and track and Hopping Mouse tracks;
3. Frog tracks at the top, Gecko at the bottom;
4. Probably a Mole Cricket.

Rosalie Breen - Green

None of us Andado travellers could get over how green the country was. Some remembered bare red/brown earth on previous visits. But this season all the ground was glowing in the green of vibrant plants, especially the now virtually waterless Andado swamp close to the homestead. The sand hills were thick with shrubs as well as the ubiquitous Sandhill Canegrass, *Zygochloa paradoxa*.

A special find in gibber clay area between a couple of sandhills was a cushion plant. I thought I was transported to alpine Tasmania. It turned out to be *Dentella pulvinata*, which is a prostrate moss-like perennial, short branches forming cushion-like clusters (as Jessop says). It is rather rare and has been found before near Andado and in the Finke flood out in the Simpson Desert. (Pictured right)

The other special was the many pools of water in the gibber swales as we drove down. Surprisingly most had dried up on our way back two days later. Indinda swamp still had water, but you could drive on the usual road through the middle. A big pool was present at North Bore near Mac Clark reserve (below). Avocets and ducks were enjoying it. Floating around the edges was a water plant which can also persist after the water has gone *Peplidium foecundum*, (Pictured right) and also another with big crennated leaves in deeper water, *Nymphoides indica*. (ID not confirmed).

I did not find many invertebrates but we saw Shield Shrimps, a few beetles and small calanoid copepods. Must have been a good supply of algae though, the water was tinged with pink.



Rhondda Tomlinson - Travelling south the road was much better than I thought it would be. We stopped at Santa Teresa for a brief break and scenic lookout.

The mystery tree stop and Barb was right it was the *Acacia desmondii* (Left). I found a photo from June 2004 with Connie Spencer and Bob Read and the same tree (right).



We were lucky to see the *Eremophila* sp. Arookara Range in full flower.

The road did have a few boggy patches and detours but the late afternoon light and the “green” plains were amazing.

Next morning the reflected sunrise was an inspiring start to a magical “green” day and an insight into some of the overnight activities of the local residents was on the red sand hills. See Rosalie Breen’s contribution.



Rosalie Breen and Rosalie Schultz slushed through the water in the name of science. Photos- Rhondda.

So much could be said about this trip and the awe inspiring “green” scenery but really it had to be experienced. Thankyou Neil and Leigh for organizing the trip and a special thank you from me for being my fuel support, as well as Ian and Jim.



‘Welcome to Old Andado’ showing thick green growth , mostly *Cullen* in the Andado swamp. – Rosalie Breen

Ian Archibald's Old Andado Trip Bird Lists

Seen Alice Springs to Old Andado - 46

Galah
 Crested Pigeon
 Cockatiel
 Rainbow Lorikeet (A/S feral)
 Grey Shrike-thrush
 Little Crow?
 Yellow-throated Miner
 Spotted Turtledove (A/S feral)
 Magpie Lark
 Grey-crowned Babbler
 Port Lincoln Parrot
 Black-faced Woodswallow
 Spotted Harrier
 Whistling Kite
 Willy Wagtail
 White-plumed Honeyeater
 Crested Bellbird
 Rufous Songlark
 Hooded Robin
 Diamond Dove
 Red-browed Pardalote
 Brown Falcon
 Brown Songlark
 Little Corella
 Budgerigar
 Zebra Finch
 Australian Magpie

Fairy Martin
 White-winged Fairywren
 Red-capped Robin
 White-winged Triller
 Crimson Chat
 Corvid species, Torresian Crow?
 Nankeen Kestrel
 Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater
 Red-backed Kingfisher
 Wedge-tail Eagle
 Eyrean Grasswren
 Pallid Cuckoo
 Black Kite
 Red-necked Avocet
 Banded Plover
 White-necked Heron
 Grey Teal
 Little Eagle
 Masked Woodswallow

Seen at Mac Clarke Reserve - 7

Red-necked Avocet
 Budgerigar
 Spotted Harrier
 Banded Lapwing
 White-necked Heron
 Grey Teal
 Little Eagle

Seen at Old Andado 11-13 June - 27

Spotted Harrier
 Little Corella
 Budgerigar
 Rufous Songlark
 Yellow-throated Miner
 Fairy Martin
 Zebra Finch
 Black-faced Woodswallow
 White-winged Fairywren
 Red-capped Robin
 White-winged Triller
 Crimson Chat
 Brown Songlark
 Galah
 Corvid - Torresian Crow?
 Magpie lark
 Australian Magpie
 Willy Wagtail
 Crested Pigeon
 Nankeen Kestrel
 Brown Falcon
 Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater
 Red-backed Kingfisher
 Wedge-tail Eagle
 Eyrean Grasswren
 Pallid Cuckoo
 Black Kite



Clockwise from top left: - Little Corellas roosting near the homestead. Neil taking the cover photo. Investigating the Mac Clark Reserve. These Fairy Martin nests being recycled by Zebra Finches. Photo of Neil - Rosalie Breen, others by Ian Archibald.



Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club

Minutes– general meeting – June 8, 2016

After a presentation by Lisa Nunn.

Thank you to scribe, Lee Ryall and to Rhondda Tomlinson for supper.

Present: 18 Members and 5 Visitors

Minutes of May 2016 meeting were on back of June 2016 newsletter – accepted by meeting

Business arising

- No progress as far as sewage ponds are concerned. Birdlife are keen to organize more trips there as a message to Power and Water that people are keen to access them. This is an important place as the main water bird site in Alice Springs.

Treasurer's Report.

Balance of all funds (inc. petty cash) end of April \$2559.82

Income received \$0.00

Withdrawals

Loan to Plant Society for second Flora Brochure \$1300.00

Petty cash opening balance \$18.60

Expenditure in May - Rhondda Tomlinson for stamps \$14.00

Petty cash balance end May \$ 4.60

Total of all funds (inc. petty cash) end May: \$1245.82

Correspondence out/in

- Email from Ian Coleman, OPBG with regards to Field Naturalists helping with Wallaby surveys at OPBG.
- Nanette Helder "Green snaps" competition in Katherine. This year subject "Ferals" . Rather late notice especially considering postal service!!! Forwarded to Membership
- Atticus Fleming New York highlights – Americans getting excited and raising money for Newhaven fence project – forwarded to Membership
- Doug McDougall re. Green Army Participants free membership of ASFNC while at OPBG.
- Tilmouth Well information and menu. Meals are available. Camping at \$15 per person
- Bill Low re. coming on our Lake Lewis trip.
- Marie Ryan renewal and cheque

General Business :

- Anyone who is willing to help on the APS stall at the show please contact Connie

Future Activities/trips

- Thursday morning walks email from Connie has been forwarded to membership
- Sat 11 – Mon 13 June - Old Andado, sand dune trip - Neil and Leigh Woolcock (more info)
- Sat 18 – Sun 19 June - Lake Lewis – Plan is to drive out Saturday afternoon, camp at Tilmouth Well on Saturday night, eat at café there, and go into Lake Lewis early Sunday for the day.
- Sun 26 June - Maloney Creek fossil hunt – Lee Ryall
- Sat 9 - Sun10 July - Overnight to Ambalindum and Arltunga – Rhondda Tomlinson
- Sun 17 July - Cycle through ASDP on new bike tracks in daylight (later in year we will do it by moonlight) Jim Lawrence
- Sat 23 July - Sun 24 - Old Hamilton Downs – Xmas in July – Wendy and Ian Mann

Next meeting – July 13 –

Colleen O'Malley presentation. *"Kakapo population recovery - 123 birds and counting! Nest minding on Anchor Island, New Zealand, during the 2016 Rimu and Beech mast"*.

We need volunteers for both a scribe and for supper, please.