



February 2017

## Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



*Elephant among Springbok taken in Etosha National Park by Steve Sinclair. See more of Jenny Purdie's and Steve Sinclair's beautiful African photos on pages 3 to 5.*

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 2017.  
The deadline for the next newsletter will be 23 February 2017.  
Please send your contributions to Barb Gilfedder: [bjfedders@gmail.com](mailto:bjfedders@gmail.com)

Please contact leaders if you intend going on any field trips.

### Wednesday 8 February

**Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club GENERAL MEETING** at the Lecture Theatre in Higher Education Building at CDU at 7.00pm. Speaker: **Dr. Margaret Friedel** "Where did they come from and how did they get here? Examining the evidence for some familiar weeds of arid central Australia".

### Sunday 12 February

**Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club PLANNING MEETING** at the Visitors Centre at Olive Pink Botanic Garden at 2.00pm. All ASFNC Members welcome. Please arrive early if you wish to purchase drinks from the Bean Tree Café.

### Wednesday 8 March

**Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club GENERAL MEETING** at the Lecture Theatre in Higher Education Building at CDU at 7.00pm. Speaker to be announced.

## AUSTRALIAN PLANTS SOCIETY ALICE SPRINGS

Contact: [apsalicesprings@yahoo.com.au](mailto:apsalicesprings@yahoo.com.au)

### Wednesday 1 February

**APS AS Meeting** at Olive Pink Botanic at 7.30pm.  
Speaker: Jenny Purdie "A glimpse at the flora of Namibia"

### Saturday 11 February

Visit to the **Intertexta Forest** – 7.00am. Connie Spencer 0429 966 592. Meet at 7am at the information bay opposite the Old Timers. Please wear closed shoes.

### Wednesday 1 March

**APS AS Meeting** at Olive Pink Botanic at 7.30pm.  
Speaker: Jennifer Noble on her trip across the Simpson Desert.

### Sunday 5 March

Walk along the Todd River – details to be announced

### 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	Pamela Keil	8955 0496.	Committee Member	Pauline Walsh	0416 094 910
Treasurer	Neil Woolcock	8955 1021	Committee Member	Robin Grey-Gardner	8952 2207
Website	Pamela Keil	8955 0496	Newsletter	Pamela Keil / Barbara Gilfedder	



## CONGRATULATIONS, CONNIE SPENCER!

from all the Alice Springs Field Naturalists.

Connie was honoured in the Australia Day Awards and will be presented with her Member of the Order of Australia (A.M.) in April 2017.

The award is for "significant service to conservation and the environment through research into the native plants of central Australia".

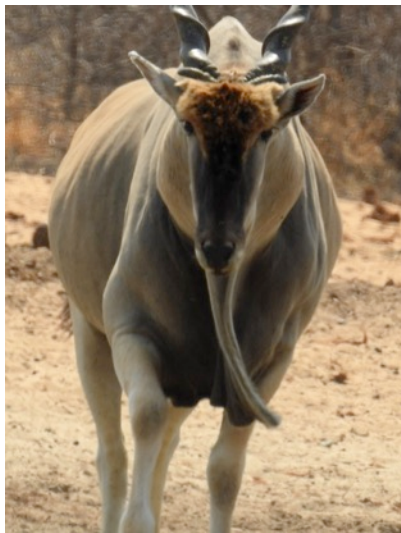
Well done, Connie! Very well deserved!

We'll expect you to remember all the scientific names after this accolade ;-)

**AFRICA REVISITED – November Presentation by Jenny Purdie and Steve Sinclair**



Jenny and Steve had another wonderful holiday in Africa in 2016. Jenny shared a wonderful collection of photographs they had taken there, at our November meeting. The desert sands come in a wonderful range of colours. These rich, red ones are fairly well inland at Sossusvlei in the Namib Naukluft Park; they are some of the highest dunes in the world (up to 388 m high) and are composed of 5 million year old sands that have a high iron content, which has oxidized to produce their red color. To understand the scale of these magnificent dunes, focus in on the people like tiny ants climbing the crest.



I always think of Antelope, when I think of Africa. Jenny and Steve photographed three of the rarer ones; a male Nyala (occurs in patches of the north eastern parts of southern Africa) the females are chestnut coloured with several white vertical stripes and don't have horns, a male Eland the largest antelope and now only occurring in the northern part of southern Africa. Both sexes have horns but only the males have a dewlap. and an Oryx, also known as Gemsbok, a striking somewhat horse-like antelope that is typically found in arid areas of Namibia and Botswana. Both sexes have similar horns and one theory is that they may have been the mythical unicorn as when seen side on the two horns can appear to be only one.

The Hartmann's Mountain Zebra and the Plains Zebra can be easily identified. The Hartmann's Zebra having stripes down to its hooves and a plain belly and have a small dewlap as can be seen in this picture



on the left, while the Plains Zebra has belly stripes, plainer lower legs and often have shadow stripes in between the main ones on its back (right). Harmann's Zebras are restricted to montane areas of Namibia and extend just into southern Angola. The Plains Zebra are widespread in southern, central & eastern Africa and as their name suggests are found on grassy plains and open grassed woodlands.



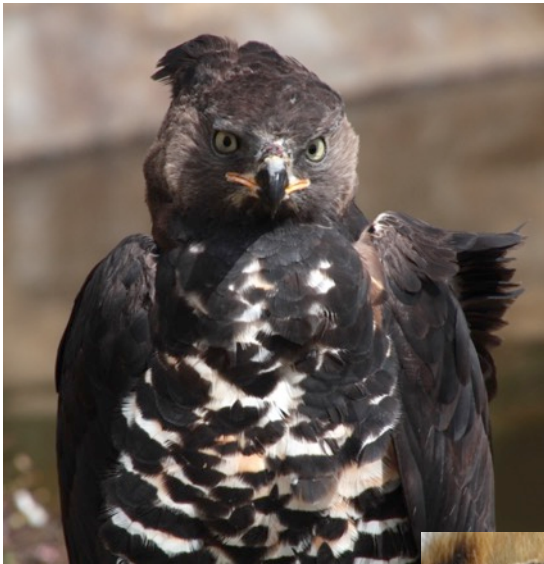


Also the two Rhinos, the Black Rhino with a hooked (prehensile) top lip and the White Rhino with the squarer wide jaw – the name “white” arose from the Afrikaans word “whyte” meaning wide because of their jaw. Neither is black or white, both are greyish. The black rhino, a browser, is usually solitary and can be an aggressive animal. Until recently it was thought that black rhinos did not usually associate with others of their kind, (except cows with calves and at mating) but as this photo shows they sometimes greet each other around waterholes at night. Black rhino calves walk behind their mothers. The black rhino is critically endangered due to poaching.

The White Rhino is the larger of the two species and is a grazer; it is a sociable animal and is often seen in small groups. It is not normally an aggressive animal and this photo was taken by Jenny while they were on a walk (and not with a tele lens); she said they would not have intentionally got this close to a Rhino while on foot! White Rhino calves walk in front of their mothers. White Rhino are also subject to poaching but there are more of them at present.

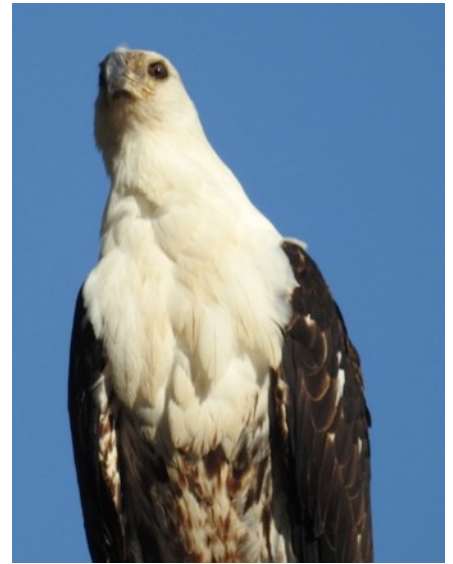


I love the Hornbills with their massive beaks. Africa is home to 23 of the world’s 54 Hornbill species, the largest (up to 6kg) being the Ground Hornbill (top right); this is a male - the females are similar but have a small violet-blue throat patch. They are scarce in savannah, woodland and grassland adjacent to forest. Others are sensibly called Grey-billed Hornbill – quite common in acacia savannah and dry broad-leafed woodland, Yellow-billed Hornbill and Red-billed Hornbill. These two species latter ones are very common in thornveld and dry broad-leafed woodland and are comically called flying bananas and flying chillies respectively! One morning in Kruger National Park, Jenny said they had a Yellow-billed Hornbill tapping at their sliding glass door.



Three more birds they saw were the Crowned Eagle (left)– a large raptor which is fairly common in forest and mature woodland and preys on monkeys, small antelopes and other small mammals, the Fish Eagle (right) - a widespread eagle, often seen in pairs, near water with a beautiful haunting call.

The incredibly coloured Lilac-breasted Roller (below) - is very common in savannah areas and even more spectacular when in flight with its dark blue-edged turquoise wings.



And where would a collection of African animals be without a beautifully-maned male Lion, one of two males and three females which had brought down a large Hippo. At the time South Africa was experiencing a bad drought and in Kruger National Park the Hippos were suffering from a lack of grazing. This may have just been an opportunistic killing as over a period of two days the Lions did not feed on the carcass. Also Giraffes – like many females, Giraffes are very defensive of their young and can kill an adult Lion with a well-aimed hoof.

Below are the paler desert sands, nearer the coast. They are obviously firm enough to drive over but Jenny said the tracks would all be obliterated by the wind by the next day. These dunes have the same origin as those at Soussevlei but are younger so oxidation has been less; some of the coastal dunes are quite yellow.

Thanks Jenny and Steve for sharing your stunning photos!



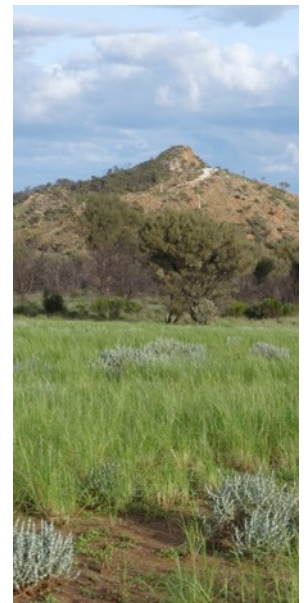
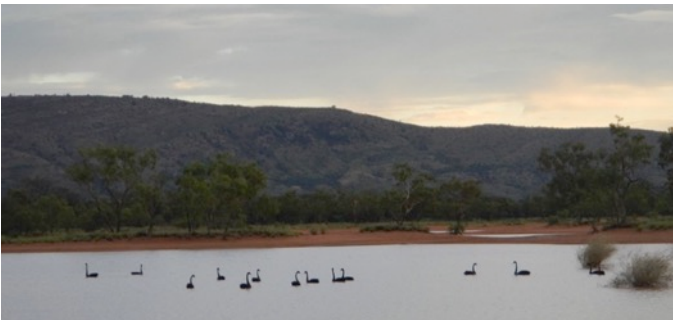


**Tranquility on our doorstep** By Connie Spencer  
 Photos by Rhondda Tomlinson, Rosalie Breen & Connie Spencer

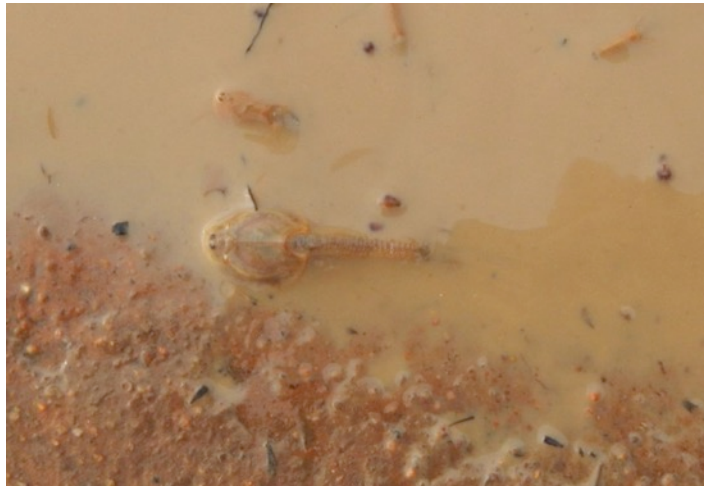
The Ilparpa claypans are brimming with water once again, this being our third wet summer in a row. Marg Lawrence, Rhondda Tomlinson, Rosalie Breen and I went for a meander amongst the claypans early in January. Our thoughts at the time were not to leave it too long as they would soon dry out, but no need to rush as they have had two top ups since our walk. Early morning or late afternoon is best as the light especially with the cloud cover we are experiencing makes for very picturesque views.

What a pleasure to see 14 *Cygnus atratus* - Black Swans on one of the claypans.

We continued on our way to the most eastern claypan along a corridor of *Acacia aneura* - Mulga and *Acacia kempeana* - Witchetty Bush (some in flower) serenaded by the most delightful bird chorus. This claypan is my favourite as it is covered in *Marsilea* sp. - Nardoo and *Diplachne fusca* subsp. *muellerii* - Brown Beetle Grass or Rice Grass with a sprinkling of *Sclerolaena bicornis* - Goathead Burr. The whole claypan a sea of green that isn't Buffel Grass!



As we wandered back towards our cars we caught up with Jocelyn Davies (out walking the dog). Jocelyn took us to a smaller claypan that was also fringed with Rice Grass but our interest was in two vehicle track mud puddles where we observed *Triops australiensis* - Shield Shrimp swimming about. My grandchildren thought the puddles looked like a giant's footprints! For further information see [www.abc.net.au/news/2017-01-13/shield-shrimps-in-central-australia...](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-01-13/shield-shrimps-in-central-australia...)



Do take the time to go out there and see all the water and all the green that isn't all Buffel Grass. Early morning is best.

## Insects are out in force with all the rain

**Barb Gilfedder**

Jenny Purdie sent in this photo of a beautiful Mistletoe Moth caterpillar on Wire-leaved Mistletoe, *Amyema preissii* at OPBG (right). A week later I found the Moths, *Comocrus behri*, busy mating, preparing for the next generation (below).



The lime green butterflies on the bottom left, are Lemon Migrants, *Catopsilia Pomona*, a medium-sized butterfly. This species is known for its community puddling, gathering in large flocks and collecting water and nutrients from damp soil. Jenny Purdie took this photo in Katherine but it is a species that occurs in central Australia  
And below one of the many Grasshopper species that are around at the moment. Sorry, it is a nymph and as yet unidentified, but such an unusual colour.



## Field Naturalists end-of-year get-together at Standley Chasm (Angkerle) by Jill Brew



Can you remember it? That end-of-year breakfast on November 20<sup>th</sup> – a real Sunday morning spread. We sat on the verandah at Standley Chasm kiosk, at long tables, in rustic comfort, and settled in to lively chat. Then at the call we sidled out to dip in and select food from the buffet set out just around the corner. The people in the kitchen handled the adjustable figures with no apparent worry, even without Ray Prunty on hand, and just kept sending out the food until we said ‘enough’...

Breakfast was Act II, coming after a walk into the Chasm on the new path: smooth, even, wheel-chair-accommodating. It was a warm morning, and still. The permanent spring, sheltered now from tramping feet, and shadowed, had a flowing cool sound – there’s a new sign set up near it explaining its importance to the life and culture of the place. The burgeoning cycads (MacDonnell Ranges cycad - *Macrozamia macdonellii*) have an informative sign too – highlighting the presence of sufficient ‘resident’ thrip pollinators (*Cycadotrrips albrechti*) and also enough cycads to support them – for viability of populations of both thrips and cycads.



Nano and Pavey (2008) note of cycads that ‘the largest populations occur in fire-protected habitat characterized by substantial rock outcropping’ – which seems to describe Standley Chasm fairly well. They also say that for cycads’ survival, it appears that relatively low fire-frequency habitat is necessary – in ‘sheltered sites with low grass-fuel loads’ – because ‘seeds and seedlings (and possibly the thrip pollinator) are intolerant of fire exposure’.

Up the widened track we went, past ornate railings in spots, and to the Chasm proper. Then, treading along between the towering walls and looking upwards to the sky at the end, the unexpected highlight of the morning : dozens of clumps of flannel flowers springing out into space from holding spots in the rock face, large, spidery, intense and vital. MacDonnell Ranges Flannel Flowers (*Actinotus schwarzii*) are typically found in precipitous spots, and are considered ‘naturally rare’ (and so are classed as ‘vulnerable’). Fortunate us to see them in the finest condition.

If you’d arrived the evening before, on Saturday, you would have probably walked out of the gates with the frisky group of 8 or so, down the road in that golden late-afternoon light, and taken a right hand turn to walk along part of the Larapinta Trail for a stretch before shifting to a shortcut back to the kiosk. Camp spots had to be sorted out before dark (at least 3 sites to choose from: one grassed; one dirt to the left of the kiosk [within range of generator sound]; and one new one, dirt, in the trees on the left of the vehicle track leading to the chasm).



Earlier and later arrivers on Saturday got together for pre-dinner, dinner and post-dinner chatting around the table on the grass. Jodie got things started with some well-timed nibbles to share. Thanks, Jodie! Another camping site was the carpark. Two less-staid, more-lively younger campers disappeared there early to set up their unfolding top-bunk hideout that doubled as a card-sharp saloon. Ray and four-legged Standley strolled over to have a welcoming yarn with the elders before Ray decamped to town (evidently reassured that the place was now in good hands – ours or the reliable staff’s). One person chose to head along the circular track in the dark and camp in the best spot to sight birds at first light. The rest set up close to facilities.



Joined in the morning by the others coming from town for the chasm walk and breakfast, there were 30 of us altogether that came out to celebrate the year’s end. Thanks to Barb for her careful planning and organising to bring it off, and to the club for subsidising breakfast. Thanks and congratulations to the unflappable chefs.

*Photos: Breakfast and chat – Pam Keil; New path and railings - Rosalie Breen; Cycad female fruits – Barb Gilfedder; Flannel Flower- Michael Laflamme.*

Nano, C and Pavey, CR, 2008, National Recovery Plan for the McDonnell Ranges cycad, *Macrozamia macdonnellii*. Department of Natural Resources, Environment, The Arts and Sport, Northern Territory, viewed 24 January, 2017, <https://www.environment.gov.au/system/files/resources/c17de516-c635-4c67-b040-c9db4da380e4/files/macrozamia-macdonnellii.pdf>

## The wet weather has encouraged fungi fruiting heads to emerge. By Barb Gilfedder



Here are a few of the ones we found at Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Sorry no IDs but always interesting in their diversity.





## ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED Minutes of the general meeting held at the Higher Education Building Charles Darwin University – Wednesday 9 November 2016 at 8.10pm

Meeting following a presentation by Jenny Purdie and Steve Sinclair.

Thank you to scribe Barb Gilfedder and to Jill Brew for supper.

Present: 20 Members and 1 Visitor as per attendance book.

Apologies: Jewelz Ricardo

Minutes of October 2016 meeting were on back of November 2016 newsletter – accepted by meeting.

### Treasurer's Report.

Balance of all funds end of September	\$ 2986.27
<u>Income received</u>	
Membership	\$ 405.00
Key Refund (Power & Water)	\$ 50.00
Bank interest	\$ 0.00
<b>Withdrawals</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>
(Petty cash balance end October <b>\$19.65</b> )	
Total of all funds end October	<u>\$ 3441.27</u>

### Correspondence in/out

- Sheridan Martin e-mail liking Owen Springs article in Newsletter – she will speak at a meeting sometime next year
- Barb sent out reminders to some members regarding subscriptions and has had a good response. One payment from unidentified sender.
- Connie Spencer - Thursday morning walks – forwarded to members.
- Stuart Traynor book launch information – forwarded to members.

### General Business

- Pam to make cards to give to speakers – ten for the year at \$5 each.
- NT Field Nats 30 year anniversary – decided we won't participate officially (we date back to 1974 as our first newsletter).
- Jocelyn Davies is looking for adventurers to go on a walk into Melaleuca with her; will send an email around to membership.

### Past Trips

- 1-10 October – ANN get-together in WA; 6 members attended (Rosalie Breen, Rhondda Tomlinson, Charlie Carter, Jocelyn Davies, Leoni Read, and Deb Clarke) so we will put together a special December newsletter to share their stories.
- Sat 15 Oct – Stroll in Spencer Valley; Neil Woolcock to lead.
- Sun 23 Oct – Ross Highway drive looking at wildflowers, Ross River Resort for lunch.
- Sat 29 Oct – Rosalie Breen led a walk along the some new mountain bike tracks at the Telegraph station; 8 attended and had a great time.

### Future Activities/Trips

- Sat 12 Nov – Simpsons Gap evening BBQ and spotlight walk; leader Pam Keil (details to be e-mailed to membership).
- 19-20 Nov – End of year celebrations at Standley Chasm – Choose your own adventure style! Barb Gilfedder organizing (details to be emailed to membership).
- Sun 4 Dec – Bird survey at the sewage ponds; Barb Gilfedder.
- Sat 5 Feb – Early morning walk up Spencer Hill; Rosalie Breen. [\(Since been postponed\)](#)

Next meeting – 8 February – speaker Margaret Friedel – a few interesting central Australian weeds.

Scribe – Rosalie Breen; Supper – Margaret Lawrence. [\(Margaret away – volunteer needed\)](#)

### Sightings

- Glossy Ibis, Oriental Pratincole, Australian Shoveler at Sewage Ponds.
- Meeting finished 8.55pm.