



June 2017

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



Two almost fully-grown Channel-billed Cuckoos harassing their Little Crow adoptive parent for food. This is one of the birds that Andrew Crouch talked about at our May meeting – See page 3. Thank you Siri Omberg for this stunning photo!

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 July 2017.

The deadline for the next newsletter will be 23 Jun 2017.

Please send your contributions to Barb Gilfedder: bjfedders@gmail.com

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

10/11/12 June **Hugh Gorge trip** If you are keen to escape the Finke Desert Race mayhem come and camp out at the Hugh Gorge trailhead (Stage 6) and partake in some day walks toward Hugh Gorge, up side creeks or up into the Chewings Range (depending on peoples' interest and fitness levels). The plan would be to head in Saturday morning (departing town around 10.00 am) and camp out Saturday and Sunday nights (or just one night if you have other commitments) and then head back into town around 2pm on Monday. The section of the Larapinta Trail heading toward Hugh Gorge and further towards Birthday Waterhole is really spectacular and there are loads of interesting plants and birds and other wildlife to enjoy. Access to the trailhead campsite does require a high clearance 4WD. BYO camping gear and food and water.

Please contact Colleen shrikestar8@gmail.com.au for more details or to arrange ride sharing.

Wed 14 June **Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club GENERAL MEETING** at the Lecture Theatre in Higher Education Building at CDU at 7.00pm. Speaker - **Will Dobbie – Pest Animal Management in central Australia**

Wed 12 July **Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club GENERAL MEETING** at the Lecture Theatre in Higher Education Building at CDU at 7.00pm. Speaker - **Dr Claire Treilibs – 'Conservation Ecology of Slater's skink in central Australia'.**

Sun 16 July **Lake Lewis.** Morning drive to Napperby Lakes (Lake Lewis) with Bill Low. Meet at 9am at Tilmouth Well along Tanami Road, approximately 190km from Alice Springs. You may prefer to drive to Tilmouth on Saturday, dinner and camp at Tilmouth Roadhouse.

Vehicle numbers are limited so essential that you contact Barb Gilfedder with your plans.

bjfedders@gmail.com

22/23 July **Old Hamilton Downs overnight – Wendy and Ian Mann**

AUSTRALIAN PLANTS SOCIETY ALICE SPRINGS

Contact: apsalicesprings@yahoo.com.au

There will be no Australian Plants Society Meeting at Olive Pink Botanic Garden in June.

7/8/9 July Alice Springs Show (**APS STALL**)

FRIENDS OF ILPARPA CLAYPANS [FaceBook.com/IlparpaClaypansLovers](https://www.facebook.com/IlparpaClaypansLovers)

Email: ilparpaclaypanslovers@gmail.com

If you are interested in the preservation and conservation of the Ilparpa Claypans, come to one of our regular events

ACTION GROUP – 10am on the first Saturday of every month at the Gazebo table, Bean Tree Café, Olive Pink Botanic Gardens

WALK AND TALK – 5pm to sunset on the last Tuesday of every month at the Western Claypan.

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	

Cover picture.

There is an excellent article on Channel-billed Cuckoos at link below. However it does say they leave in Feb-Mar, while Siri took photo in May.

[Channel-bills go cuckoo in spring > Nature Features \(ABC Science\)](#)

www.abc.net.au > In Depth > Nature Features > Environment and Nature

May Meeting:
Andrew Crouch talking about
birdwatching and local birds
 Report by Lee Ryall

The basics and the birds

Andrew started by talking about some of the basics of birdwatching. He pointed out that, in order to identify birds, the watcher needs to look and listen carefully. Binoculars are helpful for visual recognition, and it's important to be comfortable with your pair as there is a large range available. The balance between large and powerful and smaller, more compact items has to be considered. He pointed out that those with a larger objective are better in low light - and dusk and dawn are favourite times for bird watching. A larger field of view than the standard 7 degrees can also be beneficial.

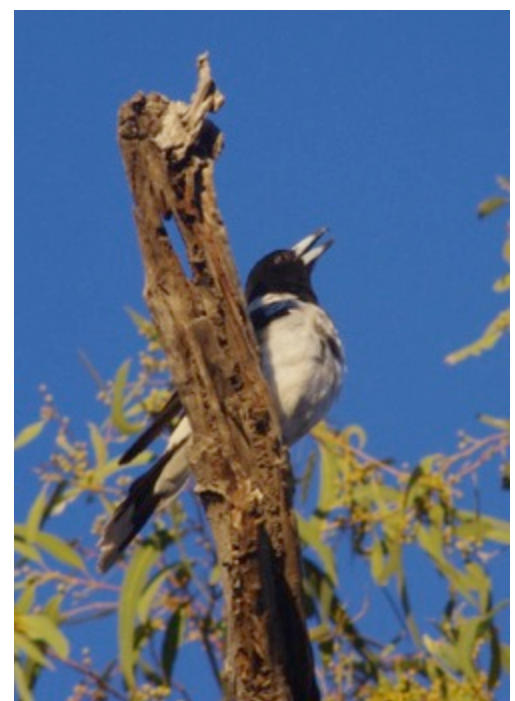
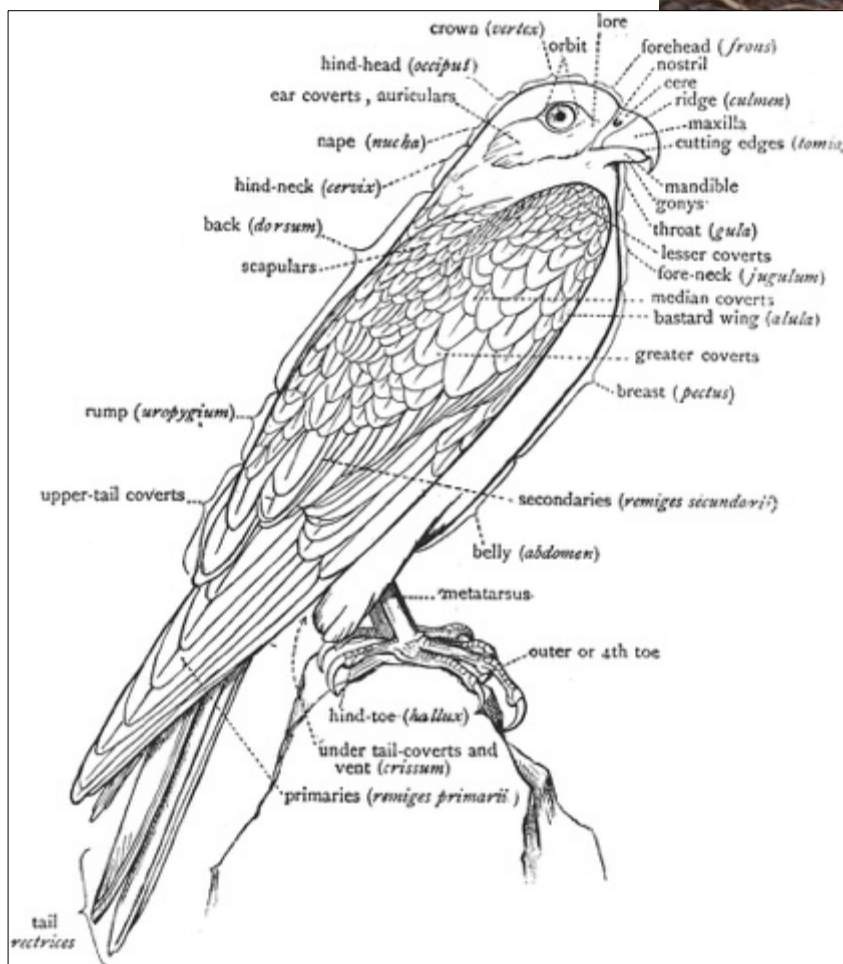
Field guides are vital, and these too range in size weight and cost from heavy tomes to the two available for smartphone, based on Morecombe or Pizzey and Knight. Another advantage of these apps is the inclusion of recorded calls for most species.

Key observations include wing shape, beak shapes, the colour not just of feathers, but of eyes, the lores (a new one on me!), the cere, and the legs as well as watching the way a bird moves both on the ground and in the air.



Photos: Two young Galahs at the entrance to their nest hollow; a Port Lincoln Ringneck picking up a treasure; a Pied Butcherbird singing its heart out.

Diagram: Many terms are self-explanatory, but the 'Cere' and 'Lore' are more bird-specific.





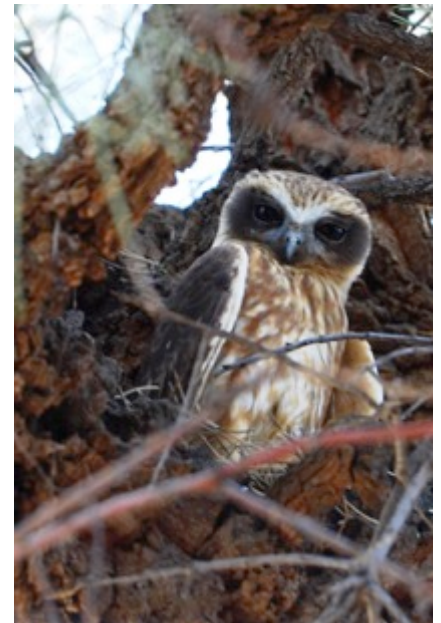
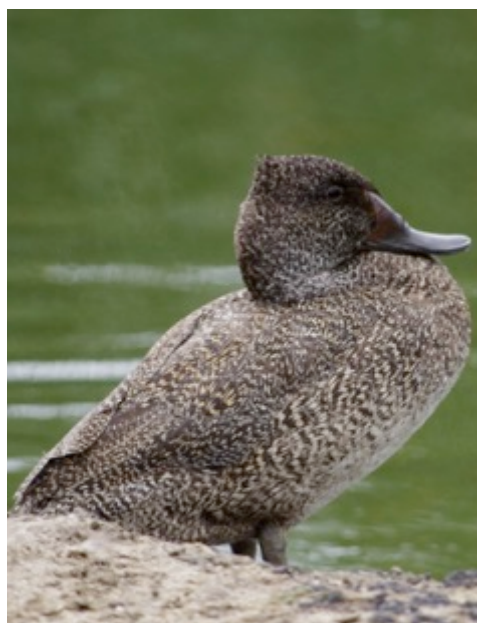
Getting to know birdcalls and songs is a pleasure in itself, as well as a means of naming birds. Andrew talked about some of the variation that occurs in birds - within a species as well as between related species. Appearance can be affected by gender, season and age - hence the extreme helpfulness of the field guides to the beginner.

Andrew then went on to show us slides of the 40 birds he had seen in his backyard, talking a little at first about the way to create an attractive environment for birds, bearing in mind that birds will visit birdbaths all the more readily if there are nearby bushes to enable a quick retreat. These need to be kept clean, refreshed regularly and height is important as well. The slides of his backyard birds were often accompanied by comments on the birds' characteristics and behaviours which brought home Andrew's profound fondness for and understanding of these visitors to Alice Springs backyards.



*Photos above: a sodden Whistling Kite; a snuggle of Rainbow Bee-eaters; a Crow feeding a juvenile Channel-billed Cuckoo.
Photos below: Spinifex Pigeon; Freckled Duck; Boobook Owl.*

Many photos gave us an insight into important moments in a bird's day: two young Galahs posing in their nest, a Pied Butcherbird singing its heart out, a Port Lincoln Ringneck picking up a treasure, a sodden Whistling Kite, a snuggle of Rainbow Bee-eaters and a Crow feeding a Channel-billed Cuckoo juvenile, that was larger than the 'parent'. Unfortunately, there wasn't time to see his other local bird photos but some are included here to give us a taste. Maybe we can ask him along another time to go through them... Thank you, Andrew!



Stick Insects

By Robert Read

From time to time I had noticed thin wingless phasmids in spinifex, but always assumed that they were nymphs. I caught a pair at Newhaven that had been flushed by a control burn and realised that they were adults. Consulting Brock and Hasenpusch (2009), I found that they were *Denhama gracilis* or Graceful Stick Insect. (Top three photos show female; detail of female abdomen tip; male.)

Identifying features for this species are:-

- Wingless
- Slender bodied, especially the male.
- Stripes on the male. According to Brock and Hasenpusch the stripes are black, but the ones I have seen are brown.
- A projection on the tip of the abdomen in the female.

These features are shown in the attached photos. The body shape camouflages the animal in spinifex, an essential strategy for a defenceless animal that can neither fly nor run particularly fast.



The distribution map in Brock and Hasenpusch (2009) looks strange, with a blob around Alice Springs and another near Cape York. The only record in the Atlas of Living Australia (ALA) is mine, presumably because there have not been the resources to capture details of specimens in museums.

As it feeds on Acacias at night and shelters in spinifex during the day I suspect that it occurs through much of the southern NT, and presumably across much of Queensland. The distribution map is a reflection of very limited records rather than a true indication of the range of the species.

I photographed another pair of stick insects near Yuendumu, assuming that they were the same species. However when I looked carefully at the tip of female's abdomen I realised that they were in fact *Hyrtacus caurus* (Tepper's Plain Stick Insect). (right) This species is thicker bodied, and the female has a short pointed projection at the tip of the abdomen.

Both these species are fairly easily recognised, and it would be good if the Field Naturalists could record any seen and upload sightings to the Atlas of Living Australia (ALA).



Reference

Brock P.D and Hasenpusch J.W. The Complete Field Guide to Stick and Leaf Insects of Australia. Publ. CSIRO 2009.
Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club



N'Dhala Gorge Weekend Camp

13 and 14 May 2017

By Rhondra Tomlinson and Connie Spencer

We departed from Palm Circuit, 4 cars in all. Ian and Wendy; Pauline and Heather; Connie and Rhondra. The first stop was a limestone hill that is affectionally known as 'Barb's Hill'. A short climb along a rocky track and wow - what a view. (left) Connie explained that one of Barb's much-loved daisies (*Anemocarpa saxatilis* – Hill Sunray) is found on this hill. However, due to a hot summer and no rain for a few months most of the ground covers and smaller shrubs were dry but the overall view still looked green and reasonably lush.

Second stop was Corroboree Rock and a walk around the rock geologically is quite fascinating.

"How the rock was formed - Corroboree Rock
(*Antanangantana*) is an eroded remnant of an ancient rock strata known as the Bitter Springs Formation. It is

estimated to be about 800 million years old. The rock formation is the result of successive layers of silt deposited in shallow salty sea-water in which algae grew. Over millions of years the silt was compressed into layers of rock. These layers have been tilted vertically, by the process of folding. The rock containing dolostone or magnesium carbonate has been weathered to a mottled dark brownish black. The orange and white colours indicate tropical weathering, which occurred about 60 million years ago."

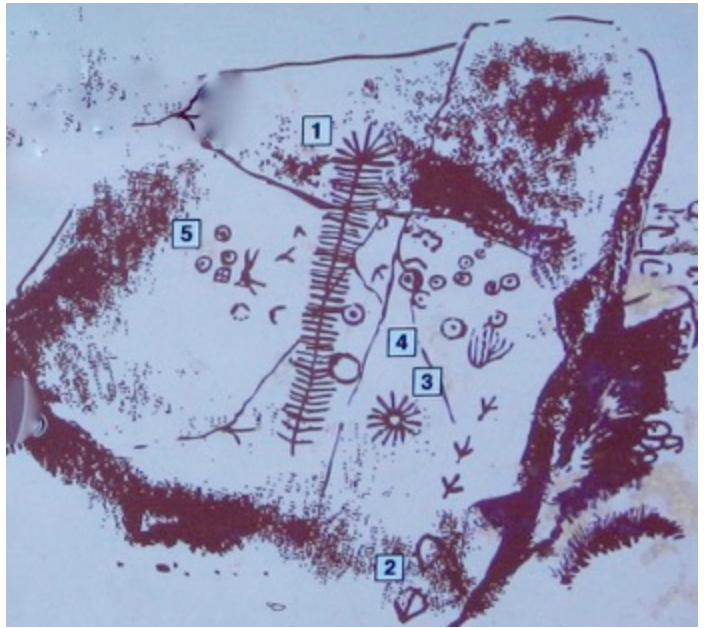
There had been a fire go through at some stage in the not too distant past and the *Eucalyptus socialis subsp. eucentrica* – Limestone Mallee trees are vigorously re-shooting.

The third stop was a stand of *Acacia georginae* – Georgina Gidgee near the turn off to N'Dhala Gorge. A dense canopy made for a shady area and a perfect spot to keep in mind for a summer picnic.

Down the N'Dhala turnoff and not far past the caravan park at the bottom of the hill was a stretch of reasonably deep water which had been there for quite a while as it had a good crop of rushes growing on either side of the track. This negotiated, we drove through some dry sandy riverbed crossings and past some spectacular rock formations to the N'Dhala Gorge campground. We set up camp, relaxed and looked at the stars and kept vigil waiting for the moon to rise.

Morning and a magical sunrise and the moon was still visible just above the hills. Breakfast dealt with, we broke camp and then were ready to go for a walk into the Gorge. (sign right)





The Caterpillar Dreaming was depicted on one of the petroglyph groups we saw. (above)

This tells the story of the life cycle of two caterpillars.

1. Butterfly crawling along after coming out, testing its wings until it can fly. The star is the top of the flying butterfly.
2. Butterfly resting after coming out of the ground and testing its wings as they dry.
3. Butterfly moving about.
4. Caterpillar coming out as a butterfly.
5. A caterpillar went into the ground here.

These boulders (right) contrasted with the rough and rugged hill behind. I would not like to have been there when they came down.



Connie showed us the curved leaf of the Undoolya Wattle growing not far from the information sign.

'Undoolya Wattle' The only known stands of Undoolya Wattle (*Acacia undoolyana*) are in a small area of the East MacDonnell Ranges, including here at N'Dhala Gorge (Irlwentye). Hot wildfires are thought to be the main cause of its rarity. The potential for Undoolya Wattle to become rarer means that it is nationally listed as threatened. First collected by a botanist here at N'Dhala Gorge in 1966, Undoolya Wattle or Hayes Wattle has curved (sickle shaped) leaflike phyllodes, which have a distinctive silvery sheen. The bark is dark brown and rough. The average height of a mature tree is about 6 metres but some reach as high as 12 metres. It is mostly found on steep rocky hills, favouring south facing slopes, which tend to be protected from wildfires. The flower spikes are rod shaped and do not always produce seeds. They probably do so only in very wet years, which is another reason that Undoolya Wattle is rare.



The towering rock formations did not cease to amaze the further we walked into the Gorge as well as more petroglyphs and a very determined flowering *Isotoma petraea* – Rock Isotome despite its rocky ledge isolation.(right)

To sit in the cool shade of the Gorge was so tempting but eventually we had to return to the vehicles as all had commitments back in town. Connie and I drove to Trephina and ate our lunch and on the way home we stopped at another interesting spot. The rocks were laid down in thin sheets and varying patterns and colours like a type of slate. I have driven past this spot many times and never really noticed.

Thank you to Ian and Wendy for organizing such a great weekend getaway and to Connie for her botanical input and to all for a perfect weekend.





Gaps in the Macdonnell Ranges

By Barb Gilfedder

Over the Easter holidays, Jim and I had occasion to go out to Glen Helen. The water was higher than I had seen it before but not as cold as I expected when I swam through the gorge and back. There is a wonderful small Eucalypt tree, which is growing horizontally from the northern cliff. [\(left\)](#) For me, when in that vicinity, a view of the Finke River from the nearby lookout is essential. A nice place to sip hot chocolate needed after the swim. It overlooks the bush camp at Two-mile and sure enough, there were several tents set up. What an idyllic spot to camp! [\(left\)](#)



I knew that the Finke River is often referred to as one of the oldest rivers in the world, but was unsure how this was worked out. Wikipedia had the answer: -

"The Finke River has long been cited as "the oldest river in the world", particularly by tour operators, and in popular books and brochures. In places such as the James Range, the Finke flows through deeply incised meanders (See Google Maps image). Because meanders only form on flat plains, the river must have formed before the ranges were pushed up; this happened in a mountain building event referred to as the Alice Springs Orogeny which peaked between 400 and 300 million years ago (Devonian to Carboniferous Periods). Therefore, some parts of the river's course must have already existed around this time. But southern parts of its course must be much younger because the areas where the Finke now flows near the southern edge of the Northern Territory, and further south, were under the sea during the Mesozoic Era, part of the Great Artesian Basin."



But not all gaps in the MacDonnell Ranges have rivers running through them. I am thinking of 8 mile Gap, which is immediately East along the range from Ellery Creek Big Hole. I'm not sure why the water no longer flows through this gap, maybe the land rose too quickly and the flow of water was not powerful enough to continue. What is lost as far as water is concerned is more than made up for by the beautiful array of native plants growing there. There is a gate and a 'no entry' sign in the gap itself, as it borders on Aboriginal land, but even before the gate the plants are wonderful.





Plants in 8-mile
Gap from
top right:

Hibiscus solanifolius
flowering;
Dodonea lanceolata
Fruits;
View of the Gap;
Dicrastylis gilesii
flowering;
Acacia melleodora
flowering.

Previous page:
Grevillea wickhamii
flowering.





ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED

Minutes of the general meeting held at the Higher Education Building Charles Darwin University – Wednesday 10 May 2017 at 8.40pm

Meeting following presentation by Andrew Crouch. Thank you to scribe Lee Ryall and to Pamela Keil for supper.

Present: 23 Members and 12 Visitors as per attendance book.

Apologies: Connie Spencer, Marg & Jim Lawrence

Minutes of April 2017 meeting were sent to members via email. Accepted by meeting.

Treasurer's Report.

Balance of all funds end of March	\$ 3470.89
<u>Income received</u>	
Membership	\$ 0.00
Bank interest	\$ 0.00
<u>Withdrawals</u>	
Insurance	\$ 560.00
Medallion Trust Donation	\$ 100.00
Photo Cards (Barb)	\$ 36.00
(Petty cash balance end April \$26.65)	
Total of all funds end April	\$ 2774.89

Correspondence in/out

- Insurance certificate received. Clarification sought, as it did not mention extra trips.

General Business

- Cards from Pamela Keil. Order not delivered yet.
- 23 April -- Heritage market stall shared with APS AS – A busy stall. Many thanks to Rebecca Duncum for organizing, Rosalie Breen for putting together an excellent interesting objects table, and to all others who helped on the stall. APS native plant seeds and flora brochures were popular as well as the basket of native plants we sold for OPBG.
- Australian Plants Magazine – summer 2016/17 also sold well. APS as have more copies if you would like one \$5.00 each.
- Newsletter items into Barb by 23 May.

Past Trips

- 22 April Creek line walk Standley chasm – written up in newsletter

Future Activities/Trips

- 13/14 May - U'Dhala Gorge overnight with Wendy and Ian Mann.
- 18-21 May – Writers' festival – collect a program from Red Kangaroo Books or search online. (2 Tim Low talks on 20 and 21 May at OPBG)
- 24 May – BirdLife Central Australia AGM and presentation on African Wildlife by Lisa Nunn @ Desert Park 7pm (later postponed to 31 May)
- 27 May – Hike along Perentie and Warrigal OTS tracks – contact Rosalie or Connie
- 3 June - APS AS outing to Old Man Plains Research Station. Limited vehicles – Contact Connie

Next meeting Wed 14 June 2017

Speaker: Will Dobbie "Pest Animal Management in central Australia"

Scribe: Marg Friedel (?)

Supper: Pauline Walsh (later replaced by Rosalie Schultz)

Sightings:

Baby reptiles still around, not many older ones seen (Pam Keil);

Juvenile Collard Sparrow Hawk (Marg Friedel);

Heaps of Chats around.

Meeting finished 9.00 pm.