



December 2017

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



The Orange-bellied Parrot (*Neophema chrysogaster*) is a critically endangered bird, less than 20 adult wild birds left. They spend the Summer breeding at Melaleuca in southwestern Tasmania and migrate to eastern Victoria for the Winter. Charlie Carter and Deb Clarke spent several weeks as volunteer caretakers at Melaleuca and entertained us with their adventure stories at last month's meeting. Write-up on page 3.

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 February 2018.
The deadline for the next newsletter will be 23 January 2018
Please send your contributions to Barb Gilfedder - bjfedders@gmail.com

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

Sat 2 Dec **End-of-year shared breakfast at Simpsons Gap** picnic ground. Make your own way there for 8.00am. Bring a plate of finger food to share, your own drinks, a chair and a picnic table if you have one. There is some seating there. Come early and walk down to the waterhole or up Cassia Hill if you wish. The really adventurous can cycle out there along the bike path! Contact: Lee Ryall

Wed 14 Feb **General Meeting** at the lecture theatre in CDU higher education building at 7.00pm. Barb Gilfedder will show pictures taken out at Newhaven Sanctuary over the last 14 years.

Proposed activities for beginning of 2018 – to be confirmed.

Sat 10 Feb Botanical and Bird drive with Pam Keil. Either Santa Teresa Road or Tanami Road.

Sun 18 Feb Breakfast of the other side of Ellery Big Hole. Swim or float across keeping your breakfast, camera, etc. dry. Leader: Colleen O'Malley. Meet Flynn's Grave at 7.00am.

Sun 4 Mar Planning Meeting, OPBG, 2.00pm

Wed 14 Mar ASFNC General meeting – Speaker: Pam Keil. Identifying Migratory Waders and their migratory habits.

AUSTRALIAN PLANTS SOCIETY ALICE SPRINGS

Contact: apsalicesprings@yahoo.com.au

Wed 7 Feb **APS AS Meeting** at Olive Pink Botanic Garden visitors centre at 7.30pm. Jenny Purdie will give a presentation "Rediscovering Top End Native Plants."

*The Committee wishes all
Members and Friends of Alice
Springs Field Naturalists Club
a very Happy Festive Season.
Stay safe and enjoy!*



Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Committee Members:-

President	Barbara Gilfedder	8955 5452	Committee Member	Pamela Keil	8955 0496
Vice-President	Lee Ryall	8953 6394	Committee Member	Robin Grey-Gardner	8952 2207
Secretary	Anne Pye	0438 388 012	Some other Club Responsibilities:-		
Treasurer	Neil Woolcock	8955 1021	Newsletter	Barbara Gilfedder	
Property Officer	Rosalie Breen	8952 3409	Website	Pamela Keil	
Public Officer	Anne Pye	0438 388 012	Minutes Secretary	Connie Spencer	0429 966 592
			Facebook organiser	Colleen O'Malley	

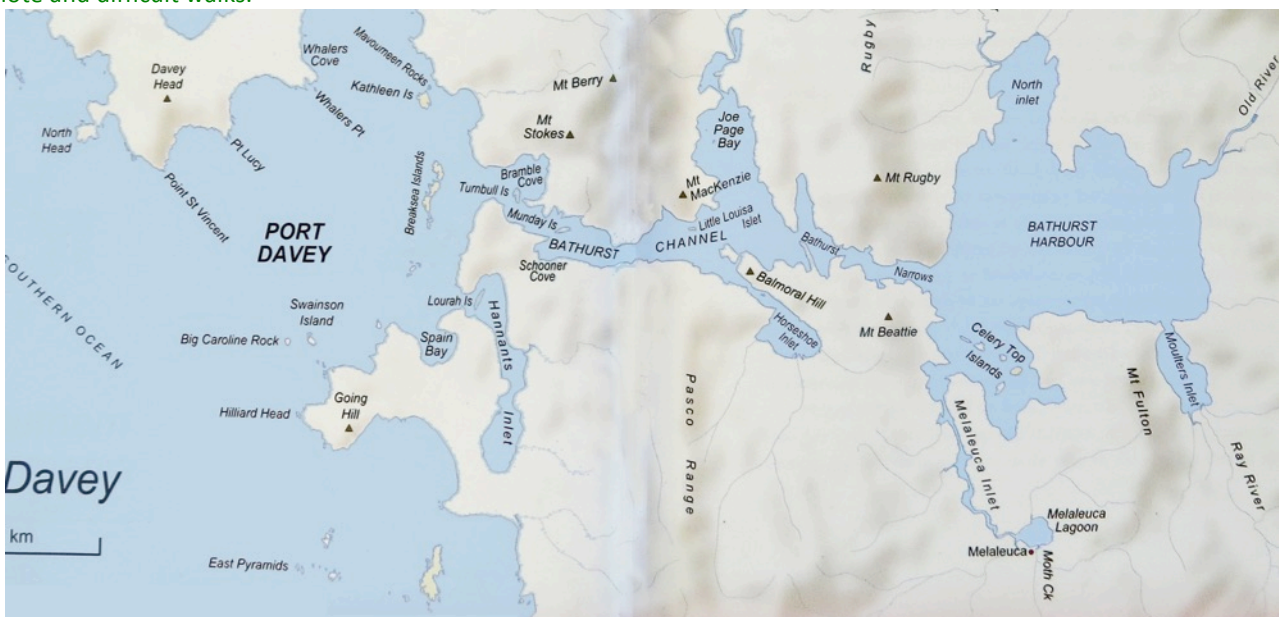


The Western Arthurs range reflected in Melaleuca lagoon.

November speakers - Charlie Carter and Deb Clarke at Melaleuca Report by Marg Friedel

Charlie and Deb spent 6 weeks as volunteers at Melaleuca in Southwestern Tasmania in February and March 2017. At their presentation to ASFNC on 8th November 2017, their many beautiful images were a highlight. This summary combines Charlie's and Deb's notes (in green) and photos and Marg Friedel's notes.

The Alice Springs Field Naturalists Society had circulated a call from Tasmanian Parks for volunteer caretakers, and Charlie and Deb applied. They were quickly accepted, which they attributed to their remote area experience with walkers, artists and scientists, as well as their practical skills. They explained: "Melaleuca is a Tasmanian Parks outpost on the Eastern end of the Port Davey waterway in southwestern Tasmania, in the middle of the World Heritage Wilderness Area. It was home to the legendary Deny King, 'King of the Wilderness', and is now the summer home of the remaining 20 or so wild birds of the Orange-bellied Parrot (OBP). It is also a mecca for bushwalkers doing the South Coast Track, the Port Davey Track, and various other remote and difficult walks."



Map of Southwestern Tasmania and Melaleuca (bottom right)

“There is an airstrip, the Parks quarters (a three room hut), two walkers huts, the old King house now occupied part time by his daughter Janet Fenton and her husband Geoff, and the house occupied, again part time, by Barbara Wilson, widow of tin miner and colleague of Deny’s, Peter Wilson.” The airstrip hut has a webcam for pilots to check the weather remotely.

“There is also water access via Port Davey, Bathurst Channel, Bathurst Harbour, Melaleuca Inlet, Melaleuca Lagoon, and Moth Creek, right up to our back door. Also a public jetty, and lots of moorings out in the harbour. Bob Brown’s boat was moored nearby when we came in. There are no roads in. The only motor vehicle is the Fenton’s ancient Fergie tractor, plus some wheelbarrows and bicycles.”



Cox Bight with Point Eric and tin mining area behind beach.



Last chick (Red Red Z) of the season getting lavished with attention.

Shorts and t-shirt weather continued for five weeks and consequently they had a good opportunity to get stuck into the long list of ‘work that needed to be done – sometime’. “We got a bit carried away and Charlie saw lots of annoying things not even on the list, that cried out to be fixed.” The peaty soil has a pH of 4, so steel lasts only a few months while timber is preserved.

It was not all work and no play, and they did an overnight walk to Cox Bight, the first (or last) leg of the South Coast Track. “Supposed to be easy, but we both were lacking a bit of fitness, and realised it was the first ‘pack’ walk either of us had done for a decade.” They did a day trip down the Harbour with the Fentons and the Senior ranger, and spent most of it clearing fallen timber off the track up Mt Beattie, but also got to see the view from the top of the mountain.

They flew into Melaleuca on 22nd of February for a six week stint. The day was glorious, sunny, 29°C and visibility was perfect as they were flown by Par Avion around the south coast to Melaleuca.

“Despite the remoteness we are hardly isolated, with 5 or 6 planes coming in each day (6 and 10 seaters only), bringing day trippers, scenic flyers, walkers, Parks staff, OBP volunteers and researchers.”

“The OBPs are an extremely endangered bird, less than 20 adult wild birds, and they spend the Summer breeding here. They migrate in from eastern Victoria. There is a slew of people looking after them and monitoring the progress of the breeding. We watched one of the researchers climbing a rope, with a very professional climbing rig, up to a nest box where he removed the three young which he brought down, and weighed, measured etc before returning them to the nest.” Charlie and Deb expressed some disquiet at the cost when there are many other conservation priorities and the likelihood of success seems low. (Adult OBP photo on front)



Windsock pole converted to pivoting with wooden supports.

“Two of the friends who inspired us to come to Melaleuca turned up in the harbour on their boat Caspian. We sat on deck in the late arvo watching the most amazing sky over the harbour, sipping our Pinot Noir, and sniffing the roast lamb in the oven. Close to paradise.”

“We had a great trip around Port Davey with them, around the Breaksea Islands, into Spain Bay, a walk across to Stephens beach, and the biggest middens I have ever seen, several metres high with several species of shellfish.” “Life was not all hard going for the Aboriginal inhabitants. However their absence from the landscape is a haunting reminder of the terrible Tasmanian genocide, the martial law period when there was a bounty on Aborigines.” The Needwonnee clan were known as the ‘fibre people’, who wove many items including baskets and canoes.

Charlie’s and Deb’s last week saw some more typical Melaleuca weather, gale force winds, squalls of rain and hail, no planes for a few days, and a chance for them to catch up on the paper work, and some ‘inside jobs’. “Our last day was hectic, our replacements didn’t get in at the scheduled 10.00 am, the morning flights were cancelled, and they arrived at 2.00 pm. A very rushed ‘handover’ and the pilot was keen to get going; we were out at 3.30 pm and back in civilisation at Cambridge airstrip at 4.30 pm after a bumpy ride around the coast”, instead of the usual more direct route.



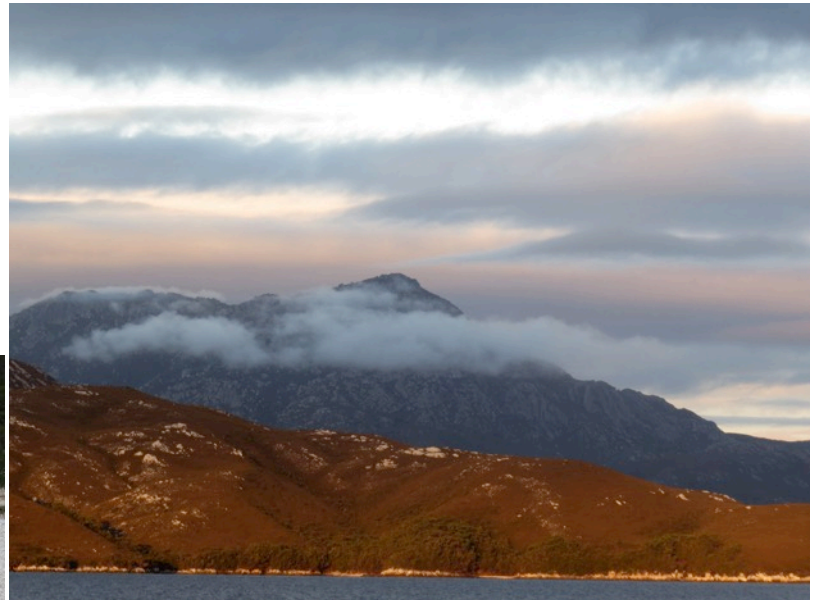
Button grass (*Gymnoschoenus sphaerocephalus*) moorland over peat and quartzite gravel; (not shown) Burrowing crayfish (*Parastacoides tasmanica inermis*) are found between tussocks.



Above: Midden on south coast at Stephens Beach, with Abalone (*Haliotis rubra*) probably, and several other shellfish.

Above right: View of Bathurst Harbour from Caspian.

Bottom right: Rocky Boat Harbour headland in wild weather on the flight out.



Thank you Charlie and Deb for a fascinating insight into life at Melaleuca!

Plant Identification and Distribution Webpages

Write-up by Peter Jobson of his talk given at ASFNC October 2017 Meeting

The Australian botanical community have really gotten behind the concept of sharing their data with the general public- the citizen scientists and natural historians. To this aim, this talk is about the strengths and weaknesses of various sites that have been put up in recent years, with a quick demonstration of how to use them.

<http://eflora.nt.gov.au/>



This site has been developed by the Northern Territory Herbarium, which is based both in Palmerston and Alice Springs. It is maintained out of Palmerston. This is a Beta site with many of the functions either empty or with minimal functionality. Limited resources mean it is updated regularly, but it will take some years to be fully functional.

Across the top of the Home page are a number of headings: Search by Name; Browse NT Flora; Regional & Ecological Floras; and, NT Vascular Plants would be the most common searches.

Search by Name and Browse NT Flora

Essentially both of these will produce similar outcomes. The searches within allow you to search a species by name and then call up all the specimens to produce a map, and hopefully there is a factsheet. Threatened species and MacDonnell Ranges species have the most complete factsheets, with those occurring in the Barkly and Victoria River districts having headings and little else. Using botanical names, or drilling through via family and genus, select the desired taxon and click on specimens to see the distribution map. There are three colours – green for herbarium record, blue for survey observation (no voucher), and orange for cultivated. Two databases are currently in use to give distribution records – the herbarium database, and the ecological survey database. This second database has flaws in that it is not possible to correct misidentifications over time, as no voucher was made or retained. Caution should be used with blue records.

In addition to the fact sheet, for northern species, if a flora treatment has been written from either Flora of the Darwin Region, or Floodplains Flora, then a link to that genus treatment is supplied. The factsheets for most of the southern region flora come from the MacDonnell Range flora.

Regional & Ecological Floras

Here you will find access to various floras such as Flora of Darwin Region (Vol 1 & 2), the Floodplain Flora, the Mangrove Flora, and importantly to us – the MacDonnell Ranges Flora. This is the Beta version of the MacFlora that Dave Albrecht has been working on for many years. There are keys and factsheets. It is also incomplete – it lacks grasses and sedges – and its reliability reduces as one moves further away from the Ranges.

The key starts as a semi-pictorial key, with couplets. For the smaller groups, the key takes you straight to the factsheet. For eucalypts and bloodwoods, the main dicot key, and the flower type monocots, the link directs you to a multi-entry key with a series of characters particular to that group. If you know you have one of these plants that matches one of these multi-entry keys simply scroll down to the pertinent link. After choosing a series of characters, and once the remaining taxa has come down to a manageable level, by clicking on the species name, you are directed to that species factsheet, pictures and distribution map.

NT Vascular Plants

This feature allows you to print a list of various groups of plants for the NT eg: all the daisies (Asteraceae) occurring in the NT. You can also produce a Plant checklist (regularly updated) for the whole of the NT, but at the moment, not for the Southern Region – this is a work in progress.

http://avh.ala.org.au/#tab_simpleSearch

AVH

The Australasian Virtual Herbarium

The Australasian Virtual Herbarium (AVH) is a national project that links all 5.5 million specimens housed in all the major herbaria in the country (including those housed in Alice Springs); this represents around 98% of all Australian specimens housed

in Australian herbaria. Recently New Zealand specimens have been included. This means you can search on any NZ species as well.

The Simple Search option is the easiest to use. Type in your species name, and press search; the search has predictive text so it often helps you having to write out the full species name. It is also useful if you have spelt a name incorrectly as the name will not come up.

The default for any search is the distribution map. The majority should be blue dots representing a herbarium specimen record; red dots means specimen data has been verified (this isn't important). You can zoom in on the map, and create subsets by putting a polygon or circle around the region of interest. The 1st tab (the 2nd is the map) are the individual records telling you all the basic data on each herbarium label. This can be downloaded as a spreadsheet.

Under Advanced Search, one option of interest available is Spatial Search. Here you can generate a species list of a particular area by drawing around the desired area – using polygon, circle or box. The list is based on all herbarium specimens recorded within that boundary.

Here is where the caution must be applied; errors are present in lat/long, and identification. For example, some central Australian endemics also have records from south of Kakadu. This is because there are TWO Waterhouse Ranges in the NT, and the person putting the data in (and allocating the lat/long) didn't know the Hermannsburg missionaries only collected down here. You will also see records in the ocean and check that interesting outlier – it may be an artefact. Secondly, not all specimens have had their identifications checked. For example: if a botanist from say Auckland came to central Australia to increase the value of their home herbarium, that specimen may not have been examined by the subsequent botanist doing the revision of that group. So- be careful of the full list using the Spatial Search as it may have out of date names listed.

<http://www.ala.org.au/>

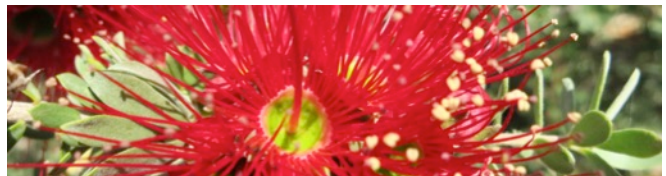


The Atlas of Living Australia is a collaboration between museums, herbaria, various databases and citizen science observations. The culmination is a large number of records covering all biota in Australia. Both vouchered and observational data is presented here, so one must err on caution when using this site. All the errors observed in AVH are still present in AVH, with the addition of unvouchered (observational) records. The same caveats regarding misidentifications apply here.

The one valuable outcome is this site has fauna records, which is the only one available to the general public, excluding the bird lists. It is unfortunate that close to 95% of all museum fauna vouchers have not been data entered as it has been shown how valuable the flora vouchers have been for research purposes.

<https://biodiversity.org.au/nsl/services/>

National Species List (APC) and APNI (Australian Plant Name Index)



APNI predates APC and even within the botanical community both are easily confused. There is a definite difference between the two, although the APC relies heavily on APNI.

APC is currently a definite list of all accepted names of Australian vascular plants; eventually all flora including mosses, lichens and fungi will be added. Note the word “accepted” – not all validly published names are accepted. Although all papers need to be peer reviewed, botanists may not always be happy with the outcomes (samples of Australian representative may be too few, misunderstanding of nuances of soil and altitude that often separate close species). Therefore, a consensus between all major herbaria is necessary. Even then, some species may have different names applied to them. For example: look up *Pseudognaphium luteoalbum* and note 3 names are accepted by various herbaria.

This is where APNI comes into play. APNI lists all validly published names. If that peer-reviewed paper is correctly published, then the new name is valid, even if the botanical community dislikes the outcomes. Only when a publication synonymises or makes nomenclatural notes on a species names does that published name lose acceptance. Within APNI, look for the red tick: this shows that the name has been accepted by the Australian botanical community as current and accepted. If in doubt, always refer back to APC. Where APNI is very useful is when searching for where your old species name has moved to, often including the reference, or by consensus (annual CHAH meeting); and if the species has been split which current name was applied within an old publication.

Many thanks Peter, for giving the talk and for writing it up. It will be such a useful reference. Barb



Alice Springs Sewage Ponds – 5 November 2017 – report by Pam Keil

Photo above: Alice Springs scenic Sewage Ponds with Hi-vised birdwatchers on the distant bank – Barb Gilfedder

Photos below: Pacific Golden Plover - Pam Keil; Oriental Pratincole and Glossy Ibis – Andrew Crouch.

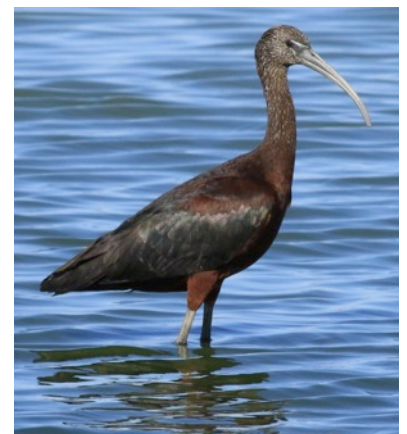
A dozen intrepid explorers braved the heat for the joint Field Nats / BirdLife Central Australia trip to the Alice Springs Sewage Ponds. With four spotting scopes available, we split into two smaller groups and went off exploring. My group headed off in search of migratory waders spending the arctic winter getting fat off our bounty, while the other headed off toward the Crake pond and rumours of an Oriental Pratincole spotted earlier in the week.

They found the Pratincole, my group only saw a quick flyby. However, we ended up seeing a Crake on one of the islands in the duck ponds, while they missed out on that one. So it all evened out. Some awesome sightings of an Intermediate Egret, that liked to pose for us and plenty of interesting waders to see.

A great time was had by all – and a few of us stayed a bit later to search for some more photo opportunities. The waders let us get up nice and close, and didn't seem to spook too much. A visitor from Queensland managed to tick off a few lifer species and it waited to get hot until we had pretty much finished up. All in all, a successful outing with lots of learning about waders and how to identify them, interspersed with the fun of playing "Where's Wally" when trying to find the one Long-toed Stint among the hoards of Sharp-tailed Sandpipers. **We should definitely do this one again!**

Migratory Species Highlights: Marsh Sandpipers, Pacific Golden Plovers, Oriental Pratincole, Common Greenshanks, Red-necked Stints, Long-toed Stint, Intermediate Egret, Darter, Glossy Ibis and our usual contingent of Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, Wood Sandpipers, Common Sandpipers.

Plus our usual resident species: Whiskered and White-winged Black Terns, Australian Spotted Crake, Black-winged Stilts, Red-headed Avocets, Masked Lapwings, Red-capped Plovers, Black-fronted and Red-kneed Dotterels, Grey Teal, Australian Wood Ducks, Hardheads, Pacific Black Ducks, Pink-eared Ducks, Freckled Duck, Australasian and Hoary-headed Grebes, Black Swan (with cygnets), Little Grassbird, White-winged Fairy-wrens, and plenty of other little birds.





ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED
Minutes of the general meeting held at the Higher Education Building
Charles Darwin University – Wednesday 8 November 2017

Open: The President, Barbara Gilfedder declared the meeting open at 8:30 pm following a presentation by Charlie Carter and Deborah Clarke on their time volunteering at Melaleuca, Tasmania.

Thank you to scribe Marg Friedel and to Sue O'Callaghan for supper.

Present: 26 members, 2 visitors and 2 apologies as per attendance book.

Minutes: The Minutes of the October 2017 general meeting as printed in the newsletter were accepted by the meeting.

Treasurer's Report:

Balance of all funds (including petty cash) end September 2017		\$3,492.78
Income October 2017		
Membership	\$290.00	
Bank interest	<u>.30</u>	<u>290.30</u>
No expenditure for October 17		
(Petty Cash	\$30.15)	
Total of all funds (including petty cash) end October 2017		<u>\$3,783.08</u>

Report accepted by the meeting.

Correspondence In/Out:

- Demi Cox – reminder calling for nominations for the Young Achievers Award by 6 December 2017.
- John Wylie – inquiring about the possibility of a mountain bike trip to Horseshoe Bend. Query forwarded to Jim Lawrence to follow up. Jim has telephoned him and left a message.
- Earth Hour 24 March 2018. If anyone has any ideas, please pass on to Barb Gilfedder. Pam Keil suggested a night walk spot-lighting.
- Two comments re spider photo on front of November newsletter. Beth Hansen says it brought back a memory of watching a wasp catch a big spider, and Marg Lawrence watched a similar activity in her garden.
- Atticus Flemming re translocation of Mala from Watarrka to Newhaven, plus additional fencing at Newhaven – forwarded to membership.
- Nic Bonomo, a visiting birder requiring information on access to sewage ponds. Forwarded to Pam Keil to reply.
- Bec Duncum asking if anyone in ASFNC but not in APS, willing to act as auditor for Australian Plants Society? Rhondda Tomlinson has done so in the past.

Past Events:

- Sat 21 Oct - The Pinch and Hells Gate. Leader: Neil Woolcock .
- Sun 5 Nov - Sewage Ponds with Birdlife Central Australia. Leader: Andrew Crouch.
- Sun 5 Nov - Spencer Hill Evening Walk. Leader: Rosalie Breen.

Future Events:

- Sat 18 Nov 2017 - Trepina night walk with Pam Keil. Meet at the car park, Trepina Gorge at 7.00pm. Contact Pam for car pooling, etc. If you wish to spend the day and or camp at Trepina, get there early enough to set up camp before the walk. The camp is not part of the ASFNC trip.
- Sat 2 December 2017 - End of year event – Shared breakfast at Simpsons Gap from 8.00am. Lee Ryall will be in charge.
- Sat 10 Feb 2018 - OPBG Master plan consultation with APS and ASFNC – OPBG at 10am (1 ½ hours max.) Morning tea
- Sun 18 Feb 2018 - Breakfast on the other side of Ellery Big Hole. Swim or float across keeping your breakfast, camera, etc. dry. Leader: Colleen O'Malley. Meet Flynn's Grave at 7.00am.
- Sun 4 Mar 2018 - Planning Meeting, 2.00pm at Barb's place.
- Botanical and bird drive down Santa Teresa Road with Pam Keil – date to be decided

Next Meeting: 14 February 2018 – Speaker - Barb Gilfedder on Newhaven Reserve. Supper - Pam Keil and Michael LaFlamme

Sightings:

Charlie Carter – Dusky Grass Wrens and Painted Finches at Ormiston.

Marg Friedel – White-faced Heron in Gillen area over several days in large Gum trees.

Bev Gray noted that the Channel-billed Cuckoos are back. Also 40 Masked Lapwings on the CDU grounds.

Close: Meeting was closed 8:55 pm