



February 2018

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



This Long-billed Corella was photographed by Rosalie Breen. It was hanging out with a gang of Galahs in Spencer Valley. Not a local bird, its normal distribution is restricted to areas closer to the coast in the eastern states. There have been a few around Alice for a while, often seen with our local flock of Little Corellas at the sewage ponds or the council lawns. It is possibly an aviary escapee. See more from Rosalie on page 4.

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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**Postal Address: P.O. Box 8663
Alice Springs, Northern Territory
0871**

Web site:

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

Email:

contact@alicefieldnaturalists.org.au

[Follow us on Facebook](#)

NEWSLETTER

The next newsletter will be March 2018.

The deadline for the next newsletter will be 23 February 2018

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

It is essential that you contact leaders if you intend going on any field trips.

- Wed 14 Feb** **General Meeting** at the lecture theatre in CDU higher education building at 7.00pm. Barb Gilfedder will show pictures taken on trips to **Newhaven Sanctuary** over the last 14 years. Covering 262,000 hectares, Newhaven Wildlife Sanctuary is one of Australia's largest non-government protected areas. ALL WELCOME. Presentation followed by light supper, tea and coffee and then a short general meeting. Finishes at 9.00pm.
- Sat 24 Feb** **Botanical and Bird Drive** with Pam Keil . Probably along the Santa Teresa Road or the Tanami Road depending where the most birds are at the time. Important that if you wish come, you contact Pam for meeting time and place pamelakeil@yahoo.com
- Sun 4 Mar** **Planning Meeting**, at 33 Battarbee Street at 2.00pm. Committee Members please attend if possible. All Members are very welcome. Come along with ideas for speakers and trips or activities. If unable to attend please pass on any ideas to a Committee member.
- Sun 11 Mar** **Breakfast of the other side of Ellery Big Hole.** Swim or float across keeping your breakfast, camera, etc. dry. Some lilos available. Essential you contact leader, Colleen O'Malley as trip will be cancelled if temperatures too high. Meet Flynn's Grave at 7.00am. shrikestar8@gmail.com
- Wed 14 Mar** ASFNC General meeting at the lecture theatre in CDU higher education building at 7.00pm. – Speaker: **Pam Keil. "Identifying Migratory Waders and their migratory habits"**.
- Sun 18 Mar** Proposed Bird count at sewage ponds jointly with Central Australian Birdlife. **TO BE CONFIRMED.** Contact Pam Keil pamelakeil@yahoo.com

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.**" Jenny has written several books on native plants and their flowers and is an excellent plant photographer. Tea, coffee and light refreshments served after the presentation, so stay on for a chat. All welcome!

OLIVE PINK BOTANIC GARDEN

Contact: admin@opbg.com.au

- Sat 10 Feb** **Garden Design Plan Public Consultation Meeting** at 10.00am in the Olive Pink Botanic Garden Gallery. You can download the draft garden design plan which outlines a staged 30 year plan for the garden by following the link at the website opbg.com.au . Feedback is invited either at the meeting or by emailing a contribution.

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Committee Members:-

President	Barbara Gilfedder	8955 5452	Committee Member	Pamela Keil	8955 0496
Vice-President	Lee Ryall	0417 401 237	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	

Watch out for frogs. Barb Gilfedder

January is meant to be our rainiest month in central Australia, but it doesn't always happen. In our part of Alice Springs we had almost 40mm in a couple of days mid-month and I am hoping we will get more before the end of the month. However falls around the area have been quite variable and localized.

It has been enough to wake up some of the frogs and the release of the new Frog app <https://www.frogid.net.au/faq> has aroused some interest among local naturalists. Unfortunately this new app does not yet work on my ipad, only on android devices. It will be updated eventually. However I do have an app – **Frogs of Australia**, which lists 241 described species, giving distribution maps, species accounts, calls and photos for most of them. So it is useful for identifying them and finding out more about them

At Simpsons Gap, Field Naturalists will probably be familiar with four local species.

			
Mains Frog <i>Cyclorana maini</i>	Centralian Burrowing Frog <i>Platyplectrum spenceri</i>	Desert Tree Frog <i>Litoria rubella</i>	Centralian Tree Frog <i>Litoria gilleni</i>

Another local frog that I photographed some years ago at Ilparpa claypans, after January rain, is the Northern Trilling Frog, *Neobatrachus aquilonius*. Sorry, he was a bit breaded with sand at the time.

The Frogs of Australia app describes him as
“ This robust, burrowing species has short, stout limbs, a rounded snout and protruding eyes. The dorsum is dark brown with bright or greenish-yellow markings. A narrow mid-vertebral stripe is sometimes present. The colour pattern disguises the tympanum. The ventral surface is smooth and white except for the limbs which are plum-coloured. The inner metatarsal tubercle is heavily keratinized and black. Toes are about half-webbed. Males are 48-50mm and females 52-55mm. Distribution is across the arid zones of Western Australian and the Northern Territory.”
“Its call is a low, short trill repeated at regular intervals. January and February would be the peak time of year for hearing these calls.”



Recently, the Parks and Wildlife Ranger at Simpsons Gap, Mark Anderson, told us that he had heard this frog calling there recently, but only once, so they are watching and listening out for it.

On Wikipedia I found this paragraph about its ecology and behaviour.

“The Trilling frog is adapted to desert conditions and can spend years without having to surface, buried deep underground with their glands under the skin full of water. The Trilling Frogs will commonly dig themselves to the surface at the beginning of the late summer rains. There are stories that to prevent death by thirst, Indigenous Australians could catch these frogs by cleverly stamping on the right patch of ground to simulate thunder or falling rain, causing the frogs to surface where they could then be made to give up their stored moisture. These frogs will spend a few weeks calling nightly while floating in or sitting at the edge of rainwater filled claypans, puddles and waterholes.”

Keep your eyes and ears open for it, especially if we get more rain!



An interesting local walk

by Rosalie Breen

After a very hot week, the morning of the last Saturday in December was cooler, so I chose a walk from Winnecke Avenue and along Spencer Hill Track in the Telegraph Station. The morning sky was glowing fiery red which fades off to orange and yellow as the sun comes up to the horizon. I was not the only one enjoying the cooler weather. High on the rock faces two young Black-footed Rock Wallabies were skitting around playing who can jump best. And close by two adults were chasing each other with more serious intent. Close by the track sitting on a rock, another was just watching me, contemplating if I posed a risk or not. Further on the big Ghost Gum elder with his blotchy skin peeling to reveal the new white underneath, delighted me with its beautiful patterns. Then over the creek bridge constructed for the bike track. Here Babbler families are often heard gossiping together, but not today. At the junction of the Stuart Walk I always check for *Commelina ensifolia*. Yes, there were few dark green shoots. Hope they grow to show off their blue flowers.



The Stuart Walk has a steep crumpled rocky section for which mountain bikers are urged to dismount. One morning when walking with a couple of others, we caused a rider who was descending and had not dismounted, a little consternation as he endeavoured to stop his bike and not face an interesting collision or fall.

On the flat above I went to see if there were any new cactus plants, where a couple were found some years ago. Six tiny ones were easily collected with tongs and small trowel which I had brought in anticipation. Following the bike trail back I was lucky to spot a Bearded Dragon on some rocks. Like the wallaby he was very still, pretending he wasn't there, and well camouflaged.



Approaching Spencer Valley you can see the Landcare Group's efforts in clearing Buffel Grass from a triangle area in contrast to the parts which are almost a monoculture of Buffel, straw coloured as it has dried off in the heat. The cleared area is rather bare at the moment. Caltrop provides some cover but is not really welcome with its prolific spiny fruits which when dry stick into shoes, feet and bike tyres. Native grasses, notably Kangaroo Grass, *Themeda triandra*, (pictured left), *Aristida species* and Oat Grass, *Enneapogon avenaceus* are all growing and extending their range, and I noted the annual Button Grass, *Dactyloctenium radulans*, is emerging green. (These last three pictured at the top of the next page)



Also a few patches of straw Buffel which had been sprayed and hopefully are really dead. Growing amongst the Buffel is the yellow daisy, *Chrysocephalum apiculatum* (right), a species able to successfully compete with it. Unfortunately also in view was a mess of cans, bottles, alfoil, plastic spoons and other rubbish denoting a recent “party” in a creek bed beside some big Ironwoods. I would have to come back next day with more rubbish bags to remove the evidence. (I did)



Then I saw him. The big old Red Kangaroo (right) who was around a year or two back, was there again, looking a bit worse for wear, both ears now droopy and ragged. He looked old, and appeared to just want to rest among the shrubs. This is not really kangaroo habitat. Another unusual visitor seen a couple of weeks earlier, was a single Long-billed Corella (cover picture). He now belongs to a Galah gang here. Apart from being white and a little bigger than the Galahs he waddles like a duck. He is a long way from home – Victoria. I am not far from home and appreciate this gem on my doorstep. Always something special, views of Spencer Hill and Mount Gillen, birds, a new plant and sometimes brilliant cloudy skies and of course sunrises.



This article was originally published in Australian Plants Society Alice Springs newsletter December/January 2017. Included with the permission of Karlee Foster and APS AS.



Evidence of previous hard-yakka around the bigger trees on the track.



Above: Morning sun hitting 'Henry's Garden' in July.
Below: Early December (midday)

A Secret Garden by Karlee Foster

On a brisk Wednesday morning in late July this year, I accompanied Connie and Rosalie (who knew where we were going) on a short walk to find a secret garden coined 'Henry's Garden', in the hills to the north of Kurrajong Drive. On the track to this special place, evidence of keen conservationist's presence stand out with Buffel grass having been manually cleared from around pockets of the larger *Acacia aneura* (Mulga), *Hakea divaricata* (Fork-leaved Corkwood), *Hakea lorea* (Corkwood), and *Acacia estrophiolata* (Ironwood).

As we followed the track up into the hills passing a few red-stemmed *Prostanthera striatiflora* (Striped Mint bush), we conveniently met the gardens keepers; Henry and Sue, who live nearby. It wasn't long before this secret garden revealed itself; an eastern facing pocket of *Pterocaulon sphacelatum* (Apple Bush), *Indigofera leucotricha* (Silver Indigo), *Senna artemisioides* subsp. *helmsii* (Blunt-leaved Cassia), *Themeda triandra* (Kangaroo Grass), *Eriachne mucronata* (Mountain Wanderrie), *Corymbia opaca* (Bloodwood), *Cucumis* sp. (Bush Cucumber), *Acacia kempeana* (Witchetty Bush), *Solanum* sp. (Bush Tomato), *Sida* sp. (Sida) and more.



Having not had rain since Easter and before that January, everything was pretty dry. Further up the little gully, a couple of *Eremophila latrobei* subsp. *Glabra*, crispy *Hybanthus aurantiacus* (Orange Spade Flower) and *Cheilanthes* sp. (Woolly Cloak Fern) were tucked into the rocks where water would flow down into the pocket when it rained. The edges of a vehicle track close by had swathes of *Heliotropium asperrium*. These are all the species you would expect to be in an area like this, but these 'common' species seem to be getting rarer as the feral invasion of Buffel grass continues.

After we took some photos and had stood in awe of the sizable patch of bloody hard work for a bit, we continued on further up the hill taking in the views to the east, north and the west over Spencer Valley and Mt. Gillen. We were soon wading back through Buffel country. A straggly Bloodwood sat atop of a glistening quartzite peak in the morning sun. The area is full of tracks used by mountain bikers, off road motorcyclists and walkers and their dogs.

I'm sure this area would be full of these patches of diverse native vegetation – it's always bitter sweet seeing these areas. Thanks to Henry, Sue and others who have put in countless hours of hard work over years and taken this upon themselves to care for a beautiful piece of Alice Springs.

Karlee visited again...

I've returned to 'Henry's Garden' twice since this trip, once in October and again in December. The crispy *Hybanthus aurantiacus* had certainly made a comeback and the *Indigofera leucotricha*'s seemed to have had a growth spurt and were full and lush. The start of what will be mats of *Boerhavia coccinea* covered large areas of the flat contours surrounding the garden - no doubt the yeperenye caterpillars will soon make it disappear as quickly as it came. A very nice surprise was identifying what I previously thought may have been species of *Sida* but in flower and without much doubt, we found several healthy specimen's of *Hibiscus sturtii* var. *campylochlamys*. Again, it was lovely to visit such a botanically diverse pocket so close to town.

Thanks Henry and Sue and thanks Karlee. Editor



Solanum quadriloculatum in July...



...and in December.



Cheilanthes sp. In July...



...and in December.



Hybanthus aurantiacus in July...



...and in December.



Hibiscus sturtii var. *campylochlamys* in July...



...and in December.



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. ([Date since changed – see page 2](#))
- 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 ground

Close: Meeting was closed 8:55 pm.