



April 2018

## Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



Almost like a mechanical toy, a side-view of a fluoro-green Jewel Beetle, probably *Chalcophorotaenia australasiae*, Family Buprestidae. This one was playing dead while still clinging tightly to a gum leaf. When left alone for a while he extended his front legs and antennae and walked off. Photo: Barb Gilfedder.

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 May 2018.

The deadline for the next newsletter will be 23 April 2018

Please send your contributions to Barb Gilfedder - [bjfedders@gmail.com](mailto:bjfedders@gmail.com)

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

### ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

- Sat 7 April** Walk 3-4 km with Meg Mooney – Meet quietly outside 43 Kilgariff Crescent at 6.45 am  
[moon3@inet.net.au](mailto:moon3@inet.net.au)
- Wed 11 Apr** **General Meeting** at the lecture theatre in CDU higher education building at 7.00pm.  
"Exploring frogs through the Australian Museum Frog ID app" Jen Kreusser, Community Engagement Ranger in Parks and Wildlife will be introducing **Dr Jodi Rowley** of Sydney Museum who will talk via Skype. Presentation followed by light supper, tea and coffee and then a short general meeting. **ALL WELCOME.** Finishes at 9.00pm. (See page 9)
- Sat 14 April** **Drive to Kunoth Bore**, a birding hotspot about 50 km north-west of town – Leader Pam Keil.  
**Unconfirmed.** Contact Pam Keil [pamelakeil@yahoo.com](mailto:pamelakeil@yahoo.com) or 8955 0496 for information
- Sun 29 April** **OPBG Walk** with Connie, Meet at 7.00am at Olive Pink Botanic Garden gate on Tuncks Road.
- Sat 5 – Mon 7 May** **Tower Rock** bush camping trip was suggested at the planning meeting, but we have no leader at this stage, so **leader needed** for it to be confirmed. Pam Keil has information on distance and destination. [pamelakeil@yahoo.com](mailto:pamelakeil@yahoo.com) or 8955 0496
- Wed 9 May** **General Meeting** at the lecture theatre in CDU higher education building at 7.00pm. **Dr Adam Yates**, Curator of Earth Sciences at the Museum of Central Australia will talk about the Alcoota fossils and the upcoming opening of the Alcoota Museum in Todd Street. **ALL WELCOME.**

### AUSTRALIAN PLANTS SOCIETY ALICE SPRINGS

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

- Wed 4 April** **APS AS Meeting** at Olive Pink Botanic Garden Visitors Centre at 7.30pm. Talk and workshop about **Australian Bush Flower Essences** by **Nicole Joy**. Nicole will be enlightening us about what they are, how they work and how they are made. Everyone is encouraged to bring along a flower (or several) from their garden so Nicole can show us how to make our own essences.
- Wed 2 May** **APS AS Meeting** at Olive Pink Botanic Garden Visitors Centre at 7.30pm. Presentation by Peter Jobson of Bec Duncum's photos, "**Blue Mountains Summer flora**".

### OLIVE PINK BOTANIC GARDEN

[curator@opbg.com.au](mailto:curator@opbg.com.au)

- Sat 5 May** **Launch of Book – Olive Pink: artist, activist and gardener - at 5.30pm.** This beautiful book contains a large collection of Olive Pink's wildflower paintings with accompanying photos of the actual plants by Jenny Purdie and Barb Gilfedder. (See page 9)

#### 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	<b>Some other Club Responsibilities:-</b>		
Treasurer	Neil Woolcock	8955 1021	Newsletter	Barbara Gilfedder	
Property Officer	Rosalie Breen	8952 3409	Website	Pamela Keil	mail
Public Officer	Anne Pye	0438 388 012	Minutes Secretary	Connie Spencer	0429 966 592
			Facebook organiser	Colleen O'Malley	





**Ellery that wasn't.** Text and photos by Rosalie Breen

Oh what beautiful rain fell during the week before the trip. People, plants and the earth rejoiced. But the thought of swimming through Ellery Big Hole to have a picnic on the other side was not all that inviting. So Colleen our leader suggested pottering around Serpentine Chalet area. That sounded good. But the track in was a bit too wet for the car, so an alternative. As we had approached Serpentine turnoff we spotted a service road and decided to go back there, we drove a short way, parked the car and proceeded to potter. This meant walking along the service road or veering into the bush, looking and discovering whatever. Lichens, mosses, liverworts and ferns were flourishing from the solid watering. Buffel grass was thick for the first few hundred metres, then cleared to native grasses and mulga and bare areas of yellow sandy earth with a few rocks scattered in them, suggestive of once a popular place for Aborigines to manufacture cutting rocks of silcrete. (right) We spotted a few suitable fragments.

Geologically speaking we were walking across the Bitter Springs Formation, a series of different depositions in a shallow sea 800million years ago, in the Amadeus Basin, compressed into rock and then tilted so the beds are now vertical, forming rugged ridges or walls in east/west lines and weathered valleys between according to the different rock types. (See above)







Colleen told us of a scientific camp around here quite some years ago, to look for Central Rock Rats who lived in these rocky ridges. The nearby area of spinifex was another study area for Long-tailed Dunnarts. There was a row of stakes with motion cameras to catch the little creatures as they darted around the shelter of spinifex in the evenings, and a weather station (left).

Not far away was something black on a dead tree branch. What? It was a cluster of nine Little Woodswallows. Closer up, it was easy to see their distinctive blue beaks and to smile at their antics to keep close together. They obviously had been reading their bird ID book, because it says Wood swallows typically huddle tightly along a bough, both day and night. (below)



Back to the Central Rock Rat, *Zyomys pedunculatus*, it is currently critically endangered. It was first sighted by Europeans during 1894 Horn Expeditions and not seen again, until one was captured in 1996 in the West Macdonnells, by Conservation Volunteers. Now it still persists in parts of the ranges, though in small numbers, threatened by habitat destruction from large grazing animals and wild fires. Monitoring and research is continuing to help protect them. These little yellow-brown rodents grow to 14cm, have long thick fur, roman noses, large black eyes and long thick tails for storing fat supplies.



## ... and from Connie

Rosalie has covered most aspects of the Field Naturalists outing of 18 March. However, it is not just about the destination but the journey as well.

As we turned on to Namatijira Drive, the limestone rise on the left beckoned me. Many years ago I had heard of a sinkhole/cave in the area but had never taken the time to stop and check it out. Now was the time! We wandered over the hill looking at various plants refreshed from the rain and searching for the illusive sinkhole. Rosalie's memory bank finally kicked in when she saw the bore and so we headed in that direction and duly came across the sinkhole. Finding it satisfied my curiosity. I certainly had no intention in venturing into the abyss. On the edge of the depression was a large *Capparis spinosa* subsp *nummularia* (Native Passionfruit) covered in flowers in various stages – the dying ones turning from white to pink. (top right)



An outstanding patch of flowering *Gossypium australe* (Native Cotton) (2 pics on right) on the road verge was enough to put the brakes on. Native Cotton is very similar to *Gossypium sturtianum* (Sturt's Desert Rose) and is often mistaken for it. The main difference being that the leaves of the Desert Rose are glabrous (not hairy), whereas the leaves of Native Cotton are a dull green and covered in hairs. Even the seeds of the Native Cotton are hairy.



Point Howard is a great roadside stop if only for the view. Here we found several species of lichen plus mosses and liverworts. I'll leave discussion and identity of species to Colleen as this was all fodder for a presentation she will give in September. I was really taken with the hummocks of Spinifex in the valley below. Sorry, I don't know the species.



It was a great day out and we hope to walk all the way to the Larapinta Trail along the service road when the weather cools.

ID tip from NT eflora:

*Gossypium australe* is somewhat similar to *G. bickii* and very similar to *G. nelsonii*. *G. bickii* is a shorter plant with glabrous fruit and appressed crimped hairs on the seeds, and *G. nelsonii* has glabrous fruit. All occur in the Macdonnell Ranges. Ed.





# Migratory Waders in central Australia: identifying our shorebirds

Pam Keil Presentation - 14<sup>th</sup> March 2018

Text Rosalie Schultz, photos from Birdlife – Birds in backyards

Pam gave a passionate, interesting and educational talk about identifying shorebirds. Now we can better contribute to the global wader count Shorebird 2020, with a Sewage Pond visit this Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> March 2018. This is an exciting and important venture because bird migration is global, and we need a global approach to understanding and estimating their numbers and distribution.

Migratory birds in Alice Springs may be on an extraordinary voyage from the Arctic to the Southern Ocean, for example, the sandpipers, or shorter route from Indonesia to here as the Rainbow Bee-eater. Others are blown off-course and end up here.

Many of the migratory birds we see in central Australia breed elsewhere, giving us the more difficult task of identifying birds in their brown pyjamas, rather than in their finery. I was illuminated to see how stunning some of the birds I'm a little familiar with look in their other outfits. Identifying waders here takes both knowledge and experience.

Pam gave a brilliantly clear description of eight things to look for:

1. Relative size – compare to known species eg Pied Stilt, Dotterel (local breeders easier to ID).
  - a. Waders look bigger than they are
  - b. Large scale photos are very useful because they show relative size of birds
2. Height and stance – leg length compared to body length
3. Bill length – compare to head size. If bill is long, how far down its back can it scratch?
4. Bill shape – straight, curved up or down
5. Leg colour – red, grey, green, yellow. Doesn't change when they breed but may be under the mud
6. Feather patterning / under-wing pattern. Eye brow stripe, under wing and tail
7. Behaviour – bobbing tail, running/ stopping, flighty, depth of water they prefer. Local birds are often less "flighty" (timid) than migratory birds. Maybe they aren't so threatened by people and development.

## Waders in Central Australia      Key identification points in red

### Common migratory waders

**Wood Sandpiper** Bill same length or little longer than head. Yellow at bill base with yellow legs. Eye stripe. Feather pattern – edge is pale but splotchy – this is distinctive "freckled". Tail has banding – seen in flight. Stands on rocks, feeds from rocks, head stuck down to water. Wood Sandpipers are inland birds, and a few stay here over winter. (top right)



**Common Sandpiper** Bill same length as head, or little longer. Bib is characteristic, also eyebrow stripe. Grey legs. Bobs tail when walking – bright white underneath. (top left)



**Sharp-tailed Sandpiper** Key is the solid outline around each feather. Bill same size / slightly longer than head. Yellow-greenish legs. Most common summer bird here – often passing through. Breeding plumage has red (rufous) highlights – but we rarely see this in Alice Springs. (middle right)



Sandpipers are bigger than dotterels, smaller than stilts.

**Common Greenshank** Bottom mandible shorter than top, curved up slightly. Bill longer than head, and thick. Distinctive green legs. Slightly larger than sandpipers. (middle left)



**Marsh Sandpiper** Thinner bill, like a needle, slightly longer than head. Beautiful distinctive crescent wing pattern. 2/3 size of Greenshank. Bigger than other sandpipers. (bottom right)

**Pectoral Sandpiper** Looks similar to a sharp-tailed sandpiper with a straight-lined beard. Lives with Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, but much less common. (bottom left)

## Occasional migratory waders In Central Australia.

**Curlew Sandpiper** less common, occasionally in red plumage in early winter, resting here on their way to coast, or blown down by cyclone. Outline around feather. Size of sandpiper with **down-curved bill**. **Bill is black**. **Dark legs**

**Pacific Golden Plover** **Short bill, shorter than head**. **Golden eyebrow, and ear mark**. **Distinct pattern on wings**. Golden colour is distinctive (but not seen here during non-breeding times).

**Grey Plover** **Grey plumage, black armpit, bigger than other plovers**. Similar to pacific Golden plover but grey

**Black-tailed Godwit** **Bill is straight and twice as long big as head, with pink at base**. Same size as stilts. Zigzag on wing when flying.

**Little Curlew** **Down-curved bill, barely bigger than the head; also stumpy legs compared to body**. Wades in edge of shore, much bigger than curlew sandpiper

**Ruff** **Feathers in ruff around neck**. Infrequently seen here, migratory from Europe. Males twice as big as females.

**Long-toed Stint** **Tiny, smaller than all the others**. Looks like miniature sharp-tailed sandpiper. Bill slightly smaller than head. Toes usually below water but characteristic

**Red-necked Stint** Small, **easy to identify by bib**, also ear mark

**Oriental Plover** **Pinky peach coloured**, beautiful bird, rarely seen here.

## **Resident waders**

Live and breed in Australia, but may be migratory within the region ([Photos below in order from top left](#))

**Pied Stilt** (also called white-headed or black-winged stilt). Bright pink legs.

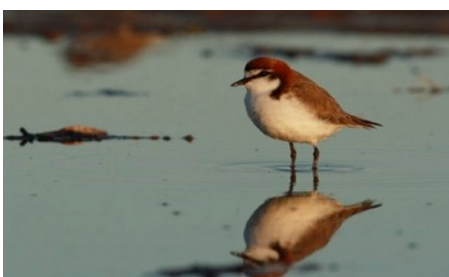
**Red-necked Avocet** Unmistakable head and bill. Probes worm tunnels – skims under the surface of sand – siphoning up food.

**Masked Lapwing** Bright yellow wattle, also swoop and dive bomb people. Spur wing (thumb vestige).

**Red-capped Plover** Much brighter red when breeding, orange tinge when not breeding. Smallest bird, similar to stint.

**Black-fronted Dotterel** Two toned bill, eye-ring, black band on chest

**Red – kneed Dotterel** Looks like wearing tuxedo. Rarely see red knees as they are underwater. Biggest of the dotterels



## Bird Count – Alice Springs Sewage Ponds – 18 March 2018

Many thanks to the eight people who turned up for the bird count on Sunday. Unfortunately there were a few apologies as there were other functions around town at the same time. Highlights were a few Freckled Ducks, Long-toed Stint, Spotted Crakes and a Black Falcon.

Lisa Nunn



Freckled Duck

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## Adelaide's Shorebird Sanctuary just got bigger

An interesting article from Birdlife

When the South Australian Government proclaimed the Adelaide International Shorebird Sanctuary on the shores of the Gulf St Vincent in 2014, it was a watershed moment for BirdLife Australia's Sapphire Coast Icon Project and Shorebirds 2020 project. Both projects were instrumental in the declaration, with their ongoing monitoring and engagement activities highlighting the importance of the region and bringing it to the attention of the government authorities.

Ongoing surveys revealed that the area supports at least 52 species of resident and migratory shorebirds, including an estimated 27,000 migratory shorebirds every year, after the birds fly from their breeding grounds in Siberia to spend the summer months in Australia. Some of the species occur there in internationally significant numbers.

But it got better. Late in 2016 the Sanctuary was proclaimed a National Park: the Adelaide International Bird Sanctuary National Park — Winaitiyaityi Pangkara, whose Indigenous name means 'a country for all birds and the country that surrounds these birds', in the language of the Kurna.

There's been another positive development recently. The National Park has just been expanded from its original 2500 hectares to include much more of the Gulf's shoreline and hinterland.

Now covering more than 14,000 hectares of intertidal mudflats, coastal saltmarsh, mangrove woodlands and saltpans, South Australia's newest National Park now stretches all the way from Gillman, in Adelaide's northern suburbs, north to Port Parham, including more than 60 kilometres of coastline.

With populations of many species of migratory shorebirds experiencing a rapid decline over the past two decades, the preservation of this additional important habitat is seen as a crucial move to sustain their survival into the future.





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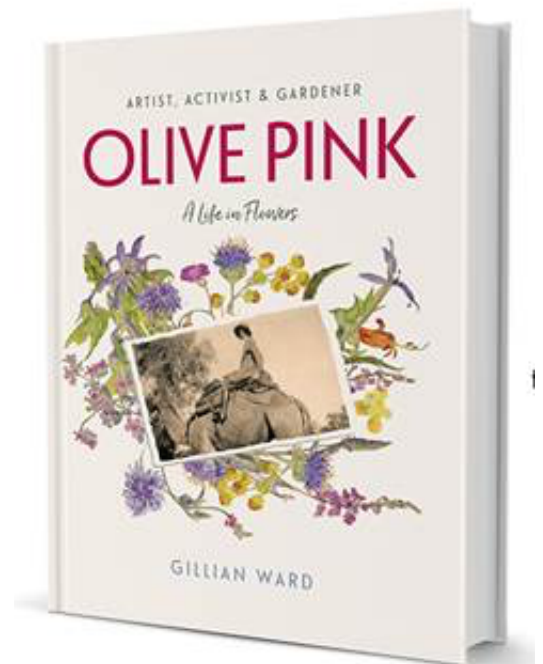
**Olive Pink:**  
artist, activist and gardener  
by Gillian Ward

to be launched at  
the Olive Pink Botanic Garden

on Saturday 5th May at 5.30pm  
by Colleen O'Malley

Refreshments provided

RSVP: [curator@opbg.com.au](mailto:curator@opbg.com.au)



**A few exciting beginnings**

Top left: Emily Findlay told us about the recently launched spider identification app. Robbie Henderson and his brother Alan did a spider talk for ASFNC some years ago. It is Alan and his wife that have been developing this app for the last three years. It is really very good and will be a great resource for the amateur naturalist. A number of the NT species were collected by Robbie, Emily and the boys.

Bottom left: Don't miss our Frog talk at this month's general meeting.

Top right: All are invited to Olive Pink Botanic Garden for the launch of this new Miss Pink book

**Want to find out more about frogs and the latest Frog ID App?**

Join Dr. Jodi Rowley, Curator at Sydney Museum, for an online talk via Skype about frogs and the latest Frog ID app!

**When:** Wednesday April 11th, 2018.  
**Time:** 7pm-8pm  
**Where:** Higher Education Building, Charles Darwin University Campus, Alice Springs.

**Invitation: All welcome!**

Alice Springs Field Naturalists extend the invitation to the wider community to join a talk about the latest Frog ID app by special guest speaker Dr. Jodi Rowley.

Introduction by Community Engagement Ranger Jennifer Kreusser, followed by presentation by Dr. Jodi Rowley, Curator - Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, Sydney Museum.







**ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED**  
**Minutes of the general meeting held at the Higher Education Building**  
**Charles Darwin University – Wednesday 14 March 2018**

**Open:** The Vice President, Lee Ryall declared the meeting open at 8:20 pm following a presentation by Pam Keil on Migratory Waders and Shorebirds. Thank you to Rosalie Schultz for taking notes and Jill Brew for supper.

**Present:** 16 members, 2 visitors and 8 apologies as per attendance book.

**Minutes:** The Minutes of the February 2018 general meeting as printed in the newsletter were accepted by the meeting.

**Business Arising from Planning Meeting:**

- Planning meeting held Sunday 4 March. Minutes sent to membership 9 March 2018.
- Pam has managed to get current newsletter (March 18) on website. Having problems with past newsletters.
- Planning meeting agreed to a donation of \$1000 to Australian Wildlife Conservancy (Newhaven Reserve). General meeting in favour.

**Treasurer's Report:**

Balance of all funds (including petty cash) end January 2017 \$4,194.05

*Activity February 2018*

**Income:**

Bank interest .31 .31

**Expenditure**

Nil

(Petty Cash \$30.15)

**Total** of all funds (including petty cash) end February 2018 \$4,194.36

Report accepted by the meeting.

**Correspondence In:**

Birdlife Australia seeking a donation.

**Past Events:**

- Sun 11 March – wander along a service road in West MacDonnell National Park. Colleen O'Malley, Rosalie Breen and Connie Spencer in attendance.

**Future Events:**

- Sat 17 March 6pm – launch of Olive Pink Botanic Garden Design Plan. ASFNC members invited.
- Sun 18 March – Bird count at Alice Springs Sewage Ponds with Pam Keil.
- Sat 24 March – OPBG native plant sale.
- Sat 7 April – 3-4 km walk with Meg Mooney. Meet quietly at 6:45 am 43 Kilgariff Cres.

**Next Meeting:** Wed 11 April 2018 – *Want to learn more about frogs and the latest Frog ID App?* Speaker: Dr Jodi Rowley, Curator of Amphibians and Reptiles at Sydney Museum, talking via Skype. Introduction by Jennifer Kreusser, Community Engagement Ranger, NT Parks and Wildlife. Thanks to Rosalie Schultz for organizing. Visitors invited.

Scribe – Lee Ryall     Supper – Margaret Lawrence

**Sightings:**

- Group of 9 Little Woodswallows near Serpentine.
- Nankeen Night-heron seen in town.
- Fairy wrens seen in Sadadeen Swamp
- Masked Lapwings at CDU.
- Eastern Brown Snake at the Steiner School

**Close:** The meeting was closed 8:40 pm.

*Minutes compiled by Connie Spencer*