



July 2019

## Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



*The landscape at Newhaven was predominantly brown and creamy coloured grasses because they have had little rain over the last six months. However the cooler weather had brought a rainbow of colours to the fleshy Samphires.*

Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month (except December & January) at 7:00 PM. The June Meeting will be at the Lecture Theatre in CDU Higher Education building. Visitors are welcome.

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## NEWSLETTER

The next newsletter will be August 2019.

The deadline for the next newsletter will be 23 July 2019.

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

### ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB



#### **PERMANENT CHANGE OF MEETING VENUE.**

**From July all general meetings will held in Olive Pink Botanic Garden Visitors Centre**

#### Wednesday 12 July

**ASFNC Monthly get-together** at 7.00pm at OPBG Visitors centre.

**Presentation by Kate Stevens " The genetic consequences of broad scale habitat loss on the Grey-crowned Babbler in their southern-most range"**

Presentation followed by tea, coffee and a brief general meeting

#### Wednesday 14 August

**ASFNC Monthly get-together** at 7.00pm at the Visitors Centre at Olive Pink Botanic Garden.

This meeting will start with the **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING** of the **Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club** at 7.00pm. All Committee positions will be declared vacant and new elections conducted. Please think seriously about whether you can help the club in this capacity. If you are happy to stand for any position please let a current Committee Member know, or come along and volunteer on the night. It would be good to have some new enthusiastic people on the Committee. None of the positions are arduous.

The AGM will be followed by our annual **Members' Night**. Please bring along something interesting to share. Maybe some photos on a USB stick or in an album, a natural history item, a relevant book or magazine article – the list is endless. If time, Barb will show photos taken at Standley Chasm since the January fires.

### AUSTRALIAN PLANT SOCIETY ALICE SPRINGS

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

Australian Plants Society do not have a July meeting because they are very busy with their great stand at the show. Make sure you visit their stand, have a chat or just sit and relax. They will have merchandise for sale and will be selling plants on behalf of Olive Pink Botanic Garden.

**IMPORTANT NOTE** – Bec Duncum will be collecting flowers / foliage for their wonderful show plant display on the morning of Thursday 4th July. If anyone has something native to our local area, flowering in their garden can you please let Bec know at the aps email above (or even better, cut some off and place in a bucket of water and bring out to the show grounds. Anyone who'd like to assist with this job will be showered with gratitude!)

#### Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Committee Members

<b>President</b>	Barbara Gilfedder	8955 5452	<b>Treasurer</b>	Neil Woolcock	8955 1021
<b>Vice-President</b>	Lee Ryall	0417 401 237	<b>Property Officer</b>	Rosalie Breen	8952 3409
<b>Secretary</b>	Anne Pye	0438 388 012	<b>Public Officer</b>	Anne Pye	0438 388 012

**Committee Members:** Robyn Grey-Gardner 89 52 2207, Margaret Friedel 0417 849 743

**Other Club Responsibilities:** Newsletter – Barb Gilfedder, Minutes Secretary – Connie Spencer, Facebook Organiser – Colleen O'Malley, Website - Pamela Keil 8955 0496 and Robyn Grey-Gardner 8952 2207



## Newhaven visit – 8-10 June 2019

Report and photos by Barb Gilfedder and Rosalie Breen

**Saturday:** Only 6 of us braved the beginnings of winter weather and the mass of flies to take another look at Newhaven Sanctuary on the June long weekend. In fact the weather warmed dramatically over the weekend and the flies increased with it. We kept fly nets within reach.

Newhaven is one of the areas run by Australian Wildlife Conservancy and has obviously been a hive of activity since I was there last in May 2017. (There was a Field Naturalists trip there last year, but I was unable to attend.)

We detoured briefly down the Hamilton Downs Youth Camp road to check on the one known yellow-flowering *Eremophila latrobei*. Some of the ground had a lovely covering of green, new herbs developing from the recent rain. Connie has taken cuttings from the yellow flowering *E. latrobei* in the past and successfully propagated them for Olive Pink Botanic Garden plantings and sales. This time, although we knew we were in the right area and saw several *E. latrobei* bushes, none were flowering and all looked rather cattle-chewed, we were not able to be sure which was the yellow one.



Moving on we stopped at Tilmouth Well for fuel and then at the Newhaven turnoff for lunch. We have stopped here previously and admired the small stand of *Anthobolus leptomerioides* plants. (right) Last time these small leafless shrubs were covered in tiny green flowers, this time they were just bundles of yellowed sticks.

We stopped a couple more times to look at plants, but everything was pretty dry. Just through the Siddeley Range we explored a bit further. *Corymbia deserticola* trees were standing out strong and healthy and their urn-shaped gum nuts littered the ground. (right and below)





**Sunday:** We were planning on checking out the Lakes tour and Dunes tour. Newhaven loan booklets to of self-guided tours, so tourists can get around the place, see the sights and not get lost, which is a great idea. Joe Schofield, Manager at Newhaven came down for a chat. He offered to take us inside the small feral-proof area where Mala are currently held. It had to be completed in a hurry last year when Mala from Watarrka were in trouble. Fire had reduced most of their vegetation cover at Watarrka and numbers there had dwindled from 200 to less than 30.

We had time to walk along the Mulga Walk a little way. The colours tell the story of the dryness.



Sue was keen to see flowers, but with everything so dry that was a bit of a challenge. However along here we found *Acacia inaequilatera* (below) and *Hakea divaricata* (right) flowering well, so that was exciting.



Later in our travels we found the same plants flowering elsewhere and even found seedpods on some of the *Ac. inaequilatera* bushes. (right) I hadn't seen these seedpods before so found them especially interesting.





Then we drove further to Susie's Lake. This is an almost completely circular claypan surrounded by ancient *Melaleuca glomerata* trees. We have seen it full of water in the past with frogs, tadpoles and nesting birds around. This time it was, as expected, completely dry. The ancient *Melaleuca glomerata* bushes still looked magnificent and native grass clumps were creating circles in the sand. There were still a few birds around, a Red-capped Robin and a pair of Hooded Robins.



We had seen other birds on the way to Newhaven:-

- Pied Butcherbird near Bunnings;
  - Black-breasted Buzzard when we turned onto the Tanami Road;
  - Black Kites and Whistling Kites near Kunoth Well;
  - two Wedge-tailed Eagles enjoying roadkill;
  - another Pied Butcherbird at Tilmouth;
  - a Willy Wagtail at the camp and a Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater on the Mulga Walk;
- Later we also saw flocks of Zebra Finches, Crested Pigeons and Galahs around the camp, no doubt attracted by the permanent water available there.



## Mala Returning Home

The Rufous Hare Wallaby or Mala, *Lagorchestes hirsutus* is a rabbit-sized marsupial with reddish-orange fur. You can see them in the nocturnal house at the Alice Springs Desert Park. Adults stand about 30cm in height and weigh between 0.7–2.0 kg. On average, females tend to be slightly larger than males. The scientific name means ‘shaggy hare dancer’, referring to its shaggy coat and zig-zag take-off across the ground if disturbed. Mala are in need of protection being an endangered animal. They have been extinct in the wild since 1991. They once ranged over much of Australia, but now only about 400 remain in semi captive populations.

A paddock had been established for them at Watarrka, but late in 2017 a wildfire destroyed much of the vegetation cover. Numbers were decreasing rapidly as aerial predators were picking the small Mala off. So Newhaven Wildlife Sanctuary came to the rescue. The stage one fence enclosing 9,390 hectare was almost complete but not feral-free, so a sub-enclosure of 143 hectares was created as a temporary refuge just for the Mala. The fences are 1.8m high, electrified and with skirts on each side to prevent digging under. Twenty-seven Mala were brought from Watarrka and later some were translocated from AWC Sanctuary at Scotia in NSW. Newhaven plan to allow the Mala to move into that larger area stage one at a later stage.

After fence construction, the next job was to eliminate feral animals including cats, foxes and rabbits within the areas. This involved a combination of Warlpiri rangers, expert in tracking and capturing cats, and feral control officers using modern technology to trap with soft jaw traps and cages, and to bait, supplemented with motion detector cameras and the rangers’ knowledge of cat behaviour. The entire area was declared predator free towards the end of 2018.

The next step was intensive monitoring to confirm its feral-free status. This was a mammoth four month job, every two weeks sweeping the fence perimeter road and then inspecting for tracks for the next four days and analyzing infra-red camera data lead to success. The refugees from Watarrka arrived and settled in well. Another 60 were brought across from the AWC sanctuary at Scotia to help with gene diversity of the species. They have a drinking site and feeding bowls with guinea pig pellets to act as an initial supplement to their diet of grass seeds and shoots of newly emerging plants. This is especially important while the area is so dry. There are plenty of Mala tracks inside the fenced area. We didn’t see any Mala as they are nocturnal but Joe showed us a ‘wangku’, a day shelter dug under spinifex clumps where they spend the daylight hours.

It is so fitting that the little Rufous Hare Wallabies have come home to Newhaven because on Warlpiri and Luritja land on the southern boundary is a dreaming site, the birthplace of the Mala and from where they moved out over Australia.

As Field Naturalists we felt very privileged to be taken into the Mala paddock by Joe Schofield. Many thanks, Joe!

*Below: Mala tracks and a Mala ‘Wangku’ day shelter.*





**Monday – Lake Bennett.** Before leaving Newhaven we decided to have a look at the eastern side of Lake Bennett and the salt water spring. We stopped at the red sand hill area on the way (below left) and wandered under the Desert Oaks , *Allocasuarina decaisneana* and past smaller *Acacia ramulosa*, *Acacia ligulata*, *Aluta maisonneurvii*, *Grevillea stenobotrya* and *Stylobasium spathulatum*. Everything was dry but we delighted in the marble-sized seeds of the *Stylobasium* scattered around its base. It was obvious why its common name is ‘Pebble Bush’. (Below right)



Lake Bennett seemed not as sparkling white as I remembered it (below left), but the Samphires, various *Tecticornia* species, around the edge were sparkling with oranges, greens, reds and purples. They are difficult to identify. Peter Jobson tells me that the best way is to study the seeds under a microscope (below right and front cover).



The salt spring (below) was the only place we saw water over the weekend and the white crystals forming around small puddles showed its salinity. A lone Red-capped Plover patrolled the edges.



We stopped briefly on the way home to find a couple more flowers – *Coleocoma centurea* and *Frankenia cordata*.

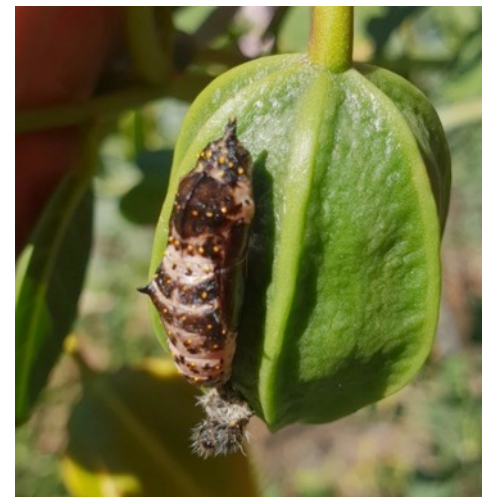
All six of us enjoyed the trip, a first visit for Sue and Max while Barb and Jim are losing count, maybe 12th. Thanks Newhaven, a wonderful place and great to see it developing as a new haven for endangered animal species.



**Anne's Caper White Butterflies** – Photos by Anne Pye



The Caper White Butterfly, *Belenois java*, is widespread across Australia and is one of our very common ones in central Australia. Its host plants are mainly in the Capparaceae family, so with many *Capparis spinosa*, Native Passionfruit bushes and *Capparis mitchellii*, Wild Orange trees around, they well catered for. The eggs are laid in spaced groups on the leaves. They start off white and then turn orange. The young caterpillars are pale yellow with black heads and covered sparsely with white hairs. They feed voraciously in groups, completely demolishing one leaf before they move onto another.



Their life is spent eating for about three weeks and they grow to about 3cm in length. These mature caterpillars are chocolate brown with raised yellow spots and a fringe of white hairs on either side of the body. Then they pupate on the host plant (this one chose the fruit but they are often on the stems) having shed their skin several times while growing. The pupa is white with black markings and about 2.5cm long.

The adult butterfly usually emerges in about 2 weeks. Males and females are similar with black and white markings and some yellow mainly under the wings. Females have wider black borders on the upper side of the wings.

The caterpillars can completely denude a tree of leaves, but the trees have a capacity to regrow from the base and quickly recover.

*Thanks to Don Herbison-Evans of Coffs Harbour Butterfly House for much of this information. Ed.*



## Congratulations Sue Morrish and Rosalie Breen

Sue and Rosalie and other landcarers are celebrating ten years of Buffel Grass removal in Spencer Valley. This is an area between East Side and the Telegraph Station that is well used by dog walkers. The main delight of Buffel removal is seeing native trees growing well without fear of fire and a big range of native herbs that emerge after rain, then the birds that follow. Currently a big flock of Red-tailed Black Cockatoos is enjoying the *Tribulus sp.* seeds. These two were waiting for the Galahs to finish theirs, first.



This was one of the small herbs that intrigued me with its winged papery fruits. Identified by Peter Jobson as *Salsola australis*. *Erodium cygnorum* were responding well to last month's rain and *Hakea lorea* was flowering. (Below)





## Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club: General meeting at CDU – 12 June 2019

### Minutes

Meeting opened 8:30pm after Megg Kelham's talk on Malaysian Borneo.  
Thank you to Simon Brown for supper. Thank you to Margaret Friedel, scribe for talk.

**Present:** 16 Members, 1 Visitor and 9 apologies as per attendance book,

**Minutes:** The minutes of the May 2019 general meeting as printed in the newsletter were accepted by the meeting.

### **Business arising from the General meeting Minutes:**

- Progress on Johnston River Grass removal at Standley Chasm. Barb is waiting to hear how Nova got on with efforts to acquire funds and labour to help with this.

### **Treasurer's Report:**

Balance of all funds (including petty cash) end of April 2019	\$2357.65
Income for May 2019	
• Interest	.18
Expenditure for May 2019	
• Post office Box	\$130.00
• Cards and printing	\$ 72.00
(Petty Cash - \$24.85 – nil expenses)	
Total of all funds (including petty cash) end May 2019	<b><u>\$2155.83</u></b>

The meeting accepted the Treasurer's report.

### **Correspondence:**

- National e-deposit service – Announcement of new national system for collecting, curating digital publications. Our newsletter is always sent to the library, which we are to continue to do for the moment.
- Various emails addressed to ASFNC have been forwarded to membership.

### **General Business**

- Simon Brown has resigned from ASFNC Committee – just too many things on, frequently out of town. Barb thanked Simon on behalf of ASFNC for his contributions including providing supper tonight
- 10 Bird brochures @ \$5 each to be purchased to give to speakers. Moved Barb, seconded Marg Friedel. All in favour.
- Marg concerned at Land for Wildlife loss of funding. Rosalie to email Kate Stevens re letter ASFNC could write in support.
- Meeting venue under review. Marg to find out whether CDU lecture theatre to remain free. Barb to find out whether we would be responsible for locking up the Olive Pink after a meeting there.
- Archival Bird Watching newsletters donated by Vicki Gordon when she left Alice Springs. Barb to find out whether APS library at Olive Pink will accept them.

### **Recent Events:**

- Heritage Market, Saturday 25 May. Thank you to people who have volunteered to help at joint APS AS and ASFNC stall. Market seemed quieter than last year, although our stall was busy. Thanks to Bec Duncum and Parks and Wildlife for loan of display board which worked really well. We may need to look at buying our own. Thanks to Rosalie Breen for her 'Nature Table and to Barb Gilfedder for the bird quiz.
- Newhaven camp – 8-10 June – Only 6 Members went but all really enjoyed the trip. Area is currently very dry. Many thanks to Joe Schofield for taking us into the stage one feral-proofed fenced area and the Mala paddock and for talking to us about the project, the fence, maintaining the feral-proof area and caring for the Mala.

### **Future Events:**

- 29 June – Behind the scenes at ASDP with Lisa Nunn.
- 5-6 July Show – Plant Society has stall, with flowers to see and plants for sale.
- 20 July – Day trip to Alcoota fossil dig site with Adam Yates. Members only, limited to 10 – Contact Barb if interested.
- 13 November Marg Friedel: Cocos Keeling and Christmas Islands.

**Next Meeting** - Wednesday 10 July – Kate Stevens of Land for Wildlife, talking about Grey-crowned Babbler.

Scribe- Rosalie Schultz, Supper- Jill Brew.

Apologies for July meeting: Marg Friedel, Leanne Johnston.

**Meeting closed 9pm**