



October 2019

## Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



These luscious-looking Quandongs are currently fruiting just at the entrance to Olive Pink Botanic Garden. *Santalum acuminatum* trees occur West and South of Alice Springs but the species is currently listed as vulnerable. The small trees are not fire-tolerant and often grazed by stock, particularly camels.

Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month (except December & January) at 7:00 PM. Meetings are held at the Olive Pink Botanic Garden Visitors Centre.

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## NEWSLETTER

The next newsletter will be November 2019.

The deadline for the next newsletter will be 23 October 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.**

**All general meetings are now held in Olive Pink Botanic Garden Visitors Centre**

#### Wednesday 9 October

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

Speaker will be **Sue Morrish** – Celebrating 10 years of Buffel Removal in Spencer Valley with Landcare.

This will be followed by light refreshments and a short general meeting.

#### Friday 11 October

**Alice Springs Community Garden.** Bruce Simmons will host a tour of the Garden on **Friday 11 October at 5pm.** Ian and Wendy envisage this lasting about an hour, and Ian and will bring nibbles for anyone who would like to stay a little longer and chat afterwards (BYO refreshments) Entrance from Burke Street, East Side.

#### Saturday 19 October

Walk from Old Ghan Museum along the ridge – Leader: Connie Spencer

#### Wednesday 13 November

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

Speaker will be **Dr Margaret Friedel** sharing a recent trip to the Cocos, Keeling and Christmas Islands.

This will be followed by light refreshments and a short general meeting.

### AUSTRALIAN PLANT SOCIETY ALICE SPRINGS

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

#### Wednesday 2 October at 5.30pm

Doug McDougall will present a Buffel Control Tour of Olive Pink Botanic Garden.

This tour will be showing members and guests what the Olive Pink Botanic Garden has done to help control Buffel Grass. It will show some of the different methods to remove Buffel and look at how to identify Buffel at its different growth stages. Meet at the Visitors Centre.

#### Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Committee Members

<b>President</b>	Barbara Gilfedder	8955 5452
<b>Vice-President</b>	Lee Ryall	0417 401 237
<b>Secretary</b>	Kimberley Morgan	0402 527 195
<b>Treasurer</b>	Neil Woolcock	8955 1021
<b>Property Officer</b>	Rosalie Breen	8952 3409
<b>Public Officer</b>	Anne Pye	0438 388 012

#### **Committee Members:**

Anne Pye	0438 388 012
Margaret Friedel	0417 849 743

#### **Other Club Responsibilities:**

Newsletter – Barb Gilfedder [bjfedders@gmail.com](mailto:bjfedders@gmail.com)  
Facebook Organiser – Position vacant.  
Website - Robyn Grey-Gardner 8952 2207

### SUBSCRIPTIONS TO ASFNC

**Payments for 2019-2020 are now due.**  
**Thank you if you have already paid**

If not, please pay by cash or cheque at a meeting or by post ...or by direct deposit.

Family \$30, Concession \$25,  
Individual \$20, Concession \$15,  
Life membership - Ten times normal fee.

Email Newsletter Only for interstate Members who have previously had full Membership \$10.

Westpac bank details:- BSB No. 035303  
Account No.100981. Please include your name as reference on the transaction.

September speaker – Colleen O'Malley  
**Twice in a lifetime Opportunity – Kakapo**  
**Breeding season**

Report by Rosalie Breen

Colleen recently was able to volunteer again for the Recovery Program during a breeding season of the endangered Kakapo, this time on Whenua Hou Island, a small island just east of Stewart Island on the south end of New Zealand. Anchor Island off the west coast was the other island study area for this season. Previous breeding seasons showed that island hatched birds could successfully raise chicks as first time mothers and that artificial insemination was feasible. Even though her major job was the cook, Colleen was able to join in the activities of research and monitoring of birds during an extraordinary season.

Kakapo are endemic to New Zealand and are critically endangered. In 2018 there were only about 184 birds. They are long lived and the biggest parrot in the world, weighing up to 4.8 kg. They are flightless but clamber up trees using their bills and sharp claws. Also nocturnal, they roost under cover during the day. They feed on tubers, fruit and leaves, ranging over 30ha to forage. They only breed every 2-4 years. Breeding is triggered by Rimu masting. They use a Lek mating system with females lured to cleared bowls by the booming of competing males. A softer chinging sound is used to indicate more definite location.

To ensure protection of the birds three weeks of preparations are needed before going to the island, everything taken was cleaned, everything washed, bodies, clothes etc. and then some time spent in quarantine checking for any plant seeds etc. Workers fly from Invercargill in a little plane, landing on the beach at Whenua Hou. So many people are needed for the work of Kakapo Recovery organized by New Zealand's Department of Conservation. The CEO manages the activities on three islands. Then there are scientists, rangers, vets, technical officers and volunteers. Each has a different skill to contribute to the whole operation. Four scientists came from Germany as they are the world experts in collecting semen from parrots.



Sinbad is a valuable male because he has the Fiordland genes



Rugged Whenua Hou Island to the South of New Zealand is only approachable by light plane, which lands on the beach, when the tide and weather conditions are favourable.



Part of the boardwalk, installed to protect the low vegetation and make for easier and faster access.

The first activity was to search for the nesting birds and set up sensors and cameras and a monitoring tent close by. The birds each have a radio transmitter which allows individual identification and sends recordings back to base, with a 'ding-dong' signal to alert rangers if a mother leaves her nest. This signal sends a scurry of rangers through the vegetation to attend to measuring the chicks or for egg transfer. Kakapo are very tolerant of intervention and don't seem to notice if they, for example, have a change in egg numbers or chicks or even different chicks. Nests are not sophisticated, just a scrape under a log, or even a discarded Petrel nest. One gets the opinion they are not highly intelligent and have survived previously only through lack of predators. Since animals such as cats, stoats and rats were introduced into New Zealand, they have become endangered.



Above: Semen is tricky to collect and health checks are done at the same time. Below: A field microscope is used to check the collected semen before it is spermacoptered to the chosen female.



Collected eggs are kept in perfect conditions in an incubator and monitored carefully.

Across the island is a network of transmitting equipment / electronics and also a system of boardwalks for rangers to be able to move easily and quickly, and carry equipment, and to protect the vegetation especially moss type plants. The vegetation is mainly temperate rain forest and heathland.

We heard of the famous Sirocco, famous because he is the spokes-bird for publicity about the Kakapo Recovery Project, touring and appearing on TV and other media. Sinbad, his brother, came from West Fiordland region so is carrying the Fiordland genes which, through artificial insemination, can then be introduced into the gene pool to increase diversity. To arrange artificial insemination, scientists first need to select the right male - locate him, get him out of the tree, chase and grab him. We saw a video of Sinbad practicing mating on someone's hand to get him in the mood. Health checks are made, semen collected and examined under a field microscope. Then it is quickly transported via a drone to the designated female with the right gene makeup. All birds have been DNA sequenced so breeding can be managed to ensure conservation of important genes and minimising in-breeding. We watched another video of the "spermacopter" manoeuvring through the treetops setting off on its mission. After breeding, males spread out individually all over the island, taking no further part in family life.

Because many of the female Kakapos are a little clumsy in the nests, the eggs are collected and incubated artificially. Care of the eggs is another specialist job, keeping perfect conditions including temperature, humidity, regular turning, candling and labelling. This year's breeding season began early, in December, which allowed some double clutches. Generally two eggs are laid per clutch but a record of five this year was reached. After hatching, a vet nurse oversees monitoring, care and feeding of the newly hatched chicks. Feeding is an art, with encouragement, stimulation and appropriate noises. The hatched chicks are returned to the nest after a week if the mother is experienced, a little older if the mother is not. Recording charts in the main headquarters display treatments for each mother, chick and egg progress and the jobs of each worker.



Newly hatched chicks are wet when hatched but soon fluff up and keep each other warm. They are returned to the nests after about a week.

This year's breeding season was remarkable. It was the first time the Rimu has ripened on Whenua Hou in 17 years to produce high value food for the growth of the chicks, the health of the parents, and ensure an early start of the breeding season to produce many eggs.

This year's success was 252 eggs and 72 chicks fledged on the two islands compared to 34 chicks in 2016.

The artificial insemination project was successful too, and included two chicks with the rare Fiordland genes. One sad note though, an outbreak of the fungal infection, Aspergillosis, resulted in deaths of 4 adults, including Hoki. She was actually the first hand-reared Kakapo chick and a great mother. Eight chicks also died. In the future, the hope is to reintroduce Kakapos on to Stewart Island or other islands once they are made predator free.

Visit Kakapo Recovery website or FaceBook, for more information or to donate.

**Right: Colleen holding a male Kakapo - Moss. Note she is holding tight to the big clawed feet and has a protective cover on her lap.**

Many thanks, Colleen! What a great experience! We wish you all the best with your new home and job in Gundagai. Ed.



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### **Grey Mistletoe – *Amyema quandang* var. *quandang***

This beautiful Mistletoe is flowering in Olive Pink Botanic Garden on a Gidgee tree (*Acacia georginae*), its favourite plant host. Look for it near the Blakeman Garden.



## A Short break – Lake Eyre, Coober Pedy, Painted Hills and Painted Desert

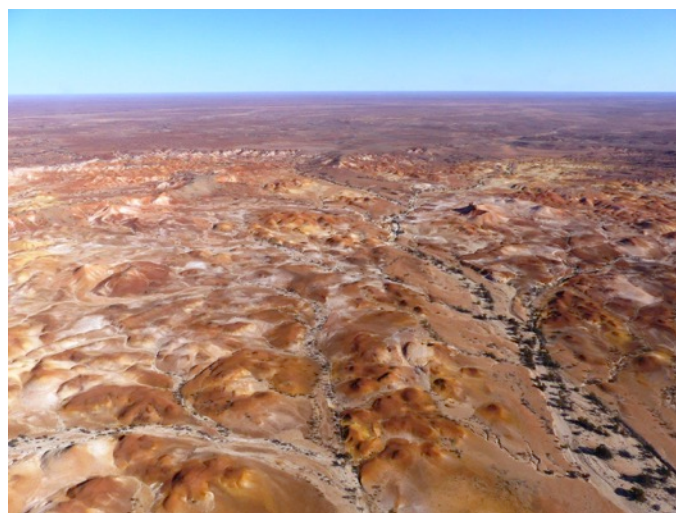
Johannes Ammerschlaeger

The first week of September I went to Coober Pedy, mainly to see Lake Eyre in flood, which happens only every 10 years or so. Unfortunately I was a bit too late, as the water has started receding already. Therefore not much birdlife was there (I was hoping to see Pelicans), because once the flooding stops, the water gets more and more salty. Fish can't survive in the salty water, and when they die the food source for the birds is capped and they will move on.



There is just one ground access point to the western side of Lake Eyre, and that part had dried up already, which I could see from the air. I took a scenic flight from Coober Pedy over the Lake. On that flight we stopped at William Creek and also at the Painted Hills, which are located west of Coober Pedy on Anna Creek Station- the biggest cattle station in the world. Those hills and sand dunes are only accessible by air, and just beautiful in their colours.

Top: Two views of Lake Eyre.  
Left and bottom right: Views of the Painted Hills.  
Bottom left: Anna Creek Station.



I also did a day trip to the Painted Desert, 150 km north-east of Coober Pedy. Again, after crossing the dead flat Moon Plain, very interesting and colourful sandstone and silt formations appeared, well worth a visit. Just north of Coober Pedy I visited the Breakaways, with their famous two rocks "Salt and Pepper" aka. "Two Dogs". It is especially beautiful late in the afternoon.



Coober Pedy itself is quite special and quirky. I had a good look around, including the opal fields and a working mine. Everything was even drier than normal years, so far they had 6 mm of rain this year! Not much plant life at all, but I noticed on my way back to Alice that the Acacias and Cassias/Sennas along the road had just come into flower (they weren't 5 days earlier). Overall, it was an interesting short break for me. (Thanks Johannes! Wonderful photos! Ed.)

Top: Painted Desert.  
 Middle: The Breakaways.  
 Bottom: Two view of quirky Coober Pedy – The Opal Bug and diggings from the air.





## Standley Chasm – Grass removal

*Paspalum conjugatum*, Johnston River Grass, a feral grass, was identified in the Standley Chasm Spring area in March this year. It is the only place in the Southern half of the Northern Territory that it has been collected from. The photos on the left show the lushness of it and its ability to form a monoculture. Two photos show Peter Jobson and Rosalie Breen making a start on removal in April. Nova Pomare, General Manager at Standley Chasm has since got her Prisoner group to remove most of it. See photos on the right. It will be an ongoing operation. I'm sure a few different native plants will soon fill the space. See May 2019 newsletter for more background information.





## SOME BITS AND PIECES FROM TASMANIA

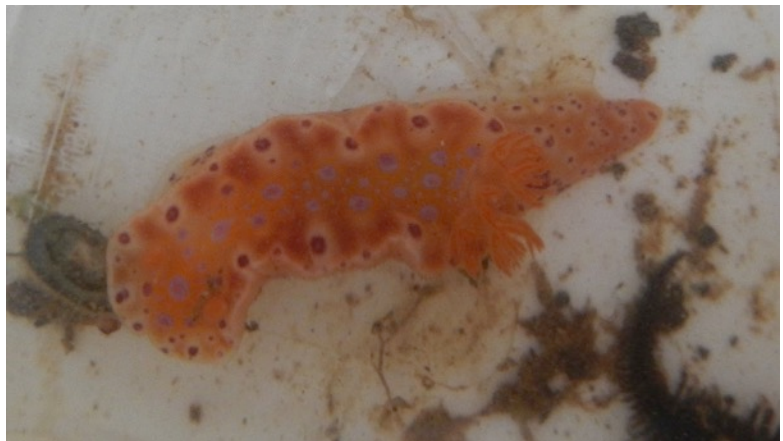
From Rhondda Tomlinson, September 2019



*Hygrocybe lewelliniae* seen at Paton Park Scout Camp near Burnie. Easily recognised on account of its dry, all lilac fruit body.



The tiny orchid is *Corybas diemenicus* – Stately Helmet Orchid and the white fungus is *Tremella fuciformis*. The wood inhabiting fruit bodies of this frilly white gelatinous species can form large clumps to 15cm long and 6cm thick. Both of these seen at Westmoreland Falls near Mole Creek.



The Elephant Snail, *Scutus antipodes* is a grazer and related to Keyhole Limpets. This Nudibranch is *Ceratosoma brevicaudatum*. Both these were sighted on a reef walk near Penguin.



**ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED**  
**Minutes of the general meeting held in the Visitor Centre**  
**Olive Pink Botanic Garden – Wednesday 11 September 2019**

**Open:** 8:45 pm following talk by Colleen O'Malley on *A second chance of a lifetime: volunteering on Whenua Hou for the biggest Kakapo breeding season on record*. Thank you to scribe, Rosalie Breen. Thank you to Kimberley Morgan for supper.

**Present:** 21 members, 4 visitors and 4 apologies as per attendance book.

Thank you to Kimberley Morgan for agreeing to be the Club Secretary.  
Anne Pye has briefed Kimberley regarding keeping club records.

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

**Business Arising:**

- Letter of reply from Minister Lauren Moss (Tourism, Sport & Culture) dated 04/09/19 re: Land for Wildlife funding letter, tabled. Barb had forwarded to Bill Low and Kate Stevens and they will follow up with the suggestions.
- Barbara Gilfedder visited Standley Chasm on 09 September. Manager Nova Pomare has got the prisoners removing feral Johnston River Grass (*Paspalum conjugatum*) from the spring area. Results very pleasing. Barb showed photos of the progress. Nova is aware it will be a long-term effort.

**Treasurer's Report:** Presented by Neil Woolcock

<b>Balance</b> of all funds (including petty cash) end of July 2019	\$2,339.40
<b>Income</b> for August 2019	
Membership	290.00
Donation (Beth Hanson)	10.00
Interest	.18
<b>Expenses</b> for August 2019	
Transfer money from August cash Membership payments to petty cash	15.00
Peter & Lisa Nunn Kite Project	500.00
(Petty Cash - \$39.85)	
<b>Total of all funds (including petty cash) end of August 2019</b>	<b><u>\$2,139.58</u></b>

The meeting accepted the Treasurer's report.

**Correspondence:**

- Various emails addressed to ASFNC have been forwarded to the membership.

**No General Business**

**Future Events:**

- Saturday 14 September, 6:00am Gosse St Playground, Old Eastside – Meet with Rosalie Breen (8952 3409) on Spencer Hill to greet the sun and say goodbye to the full moon. Admire the changing, colourful sky.
- Friday 11 October, 5.00pm - Meet with Wendy and Ian for a tour of the ALEC Community Garden.
- Sunday 27 September – join the National Birdlife Twitch-a-thon for 3 hours. Contact Pam Keil [pamelakeil@yahoo.com](mailto:pamelakeil@yahoo.com)
- Jill Brew will co-ordinate a stargazing activity presented by Andrew. Participants will contribute a percentage of the total cost, \$150. Several Members interested.
- February General Meeting – Peter and Lisa Nunn will give a presentation about their Letter-winged Kite Research.

**Next Meeting:** Wednesday 9 October 2019 – Speaker, Sue Morrish on *Buffel Busting in Spencer Valley*.

**Scribe – needed.** Supper – Sue O'Callaghan.

**Sightings:**

Ian Mann watched Willy Wagtails fiercely attacking a Grey Falcon in a tree at his home. He was concerned for his chooks. Neil and Leigh Woolcock had been watching a Stubble Quail in their garden for a few days, only to see it pounced on by a Kite. Pam Keil was watching a Black Swan with two cygnets at the sewage ponds when an Eagle took one. Swamp Harrier also there.

**Meeting closed** at 9:10pm.

Minutes compiled by Kimberley Morgan