



March 2020

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



Sunshine and shadows, rocks and gum trees, water and reflections - what an iconic central Australian photo! Taken on an early morning walk along the recently flowing Todd River, just up from Wigleys Waterhole, by Anne Pye. More photos on page 9.

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 April 2020

The deadline for the April newsletter will be 23rd March.

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

ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Saturday 7 March

Walk along the **Woodland Trail**, Simpsons Gap. Meet 6:40 am at Flynn's Grave car park or 7:00 am at the Woodland Trail shelter. Walk will be to the 3 km mark and back, roughly 2 hours with stops. You are welcome to continue on if you wish to. Contact Connie Spencer on 0429966592 or connie.spencer32@gmail.com for further information.

Wednesday 10 March

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

Barb Gilfedder will be showing photos from some historic trips to Henbury Station taken between May 2012 and May 2014. The presentation will be followed by a light supper. All welcome!

Saturday 14 March – Walk the first few kilometres of the beginning of Stage 4 of Larapinta Trail along the creek line from Standley Chasm road. Please contact Jill Brew jillinalice@westnet.com.au or 0437 223 203

Sunday 5 April – Dolomite walk from Ellery. Meet at 8:00am Flynn's Grave car park. Short, interesting, one hour walk focussing on geology and looking at the response of plants to recent rain. Possible swim afterwards. Please contact Neil Woolcock neilwool48@gmail.com or 0428 521 598

Wednesday 8 April

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

Peter Jobson will be talking about interesting plants, including the Joshua tree, that he encountered on recent trip to Arizona.

AUSTRALIAN PLANT SOCIETY ALICE SPRINGS

apsalicesprings@yahoo.com.au

Wednesday 4 March

APS AS Monthly Meeting at Olive Pink Botanic Garden at 7.30pm.

Speaker: **Connie Spencer** "From Sugar Maples to Fungi - a sample of the flora of SW Quebec".

Sunday 15 March - APS AS Bradshaw Walk at Telegraph Station 8am. Planning Meeting at café 10am.

Saturday 21 March – APS AS Show working bee

Saturday 4 April 8.00am Olive Pink Botanic Garden Native Plant sale – see Page 9.

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Committee Members

President	Barbara Gilfedder	8955 5452
Vice-President	Lee Ryall	0417 401 237
Secretary	Kimberley Morgan	0402 527 195
Treasurer	Neil Woolcock	8955 1021
Property Officer	Rosalie Breen	8952 3409
Public Officer	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
Facebook Organiser – Position vacant.
Website - Robyn Grey-Gardner 8952 2207

Olive Pink Botanic Garden Recycled Container Collection now open For Field Naturalists Club Members

Please bring your recyclable bottles and cans with you when you come to Field Naturalist Society meetings at the Olive Pink Botanic Garden. The Garden collects the 10cent deposit and uses the funds to help protect River Red Gums in a section of the Todd River, and restore the part of the River adjacent to the Garden. Collection opportunities are only available at Field Nat and APS monthly meetings.

Thank-you for your support!

Serpentine Chalet Camp

15 and 16 November 2019

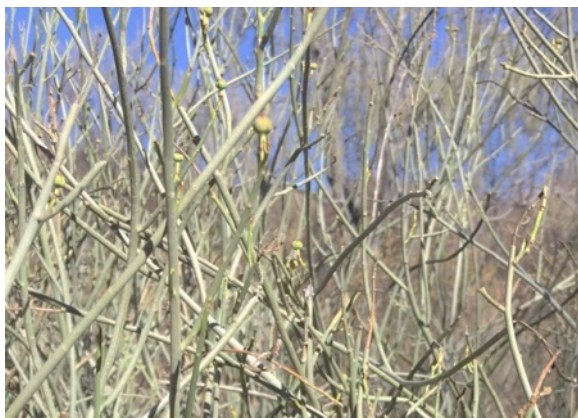
Connie Spencer

Serpentine Chalet (ruins) and dam are situated between Serpentine Gorge and The Ochre Pits in the Tjoritja/West Macdonnell National Park. The plan was to head to the campsite late afternoon, camp overnight and walk to the dam in the cool of the early morning.

The temperature forecast was for 14-35 degrees centigrade. Ironic how 35 feels hot in November but come February it's a cool change! I ventured out late Friday afternoon and whilst driving along Namatjira Drive, a flash of pink caught my eye. Sure enough, *Gossypium sturtianum* (Desert Rose) was pushing its way through large clumps of dried Buffel Grass. Due to the very dry conditions the road verges hadn't been mowed for some time, and therefore, *Gossypium australe* (Native Cotton) and *Acacia victoriae* (Victoria Wattle) were making a come-back. It was sad to see burnt *Hakea divaricata* (Fork-leaved Corkwood) trees but encouraging to see resprouting around their bases.

The Chalet (about 1 km off Namatjira Drive) built in 1958/59, was a very welcomed stopover in its day, as the road to Ormiston and Glen Helen was rough and deeply rutted with steep creek crossings. Reliable water was a big problem for the Chalet until construction of the dam upstream began in 1959. Nevertheless, the venture was relatively short-lived and closed in 1968. Even with the dam, I suspect that during the long drought of the 50s' and 60's water would still have been an issue. The fires of January 2019 devastated much on the flora, but, seeing the stark bare bones of the landscape has a certain awesomeness about it. I hadn't taken much notice of the shape of the hills and rock formations in the past, which now are so prominent. The tank bases on top and pumping equipment at the back of the hill are quite visible now.

It was perfect weather to camp out (even had a little fire) and in the cool of the morning I walked to the dam about 2 km further along. Whilst much of the country has been burnt, I came across unburnt patches containing *Acacia aneura* (Mulga), *Ac. estrophiolata* (Ironwood) *Atalaya hemiglauca* (Whitewood), *Capparis mitchellii* (Native Orange), *Grevillea striata* (Beefwood), *Psyrax latifolia* (Native Currant) & *Ventilago viminalis* (Supplejack) just to name a few. Of particular interest to me was a vigorous clump of *Euphorbia sarcostemmaoides* (False Caustic Bush) looking every bit to me like the more familiar *Cynanchum viminalis* subsp. *australe* (Caustic Vine). Luckily, I had a photo of the fruit, so Peter Jobson was able to identify it for me. The flowers and fruit of the two plants are quite different.



Photos from the top...Serpentine chalet campsite: *Gossypium sturtianum* among the Buffel; the stark landscape, burnt January 2019; *Euphorbia sarcostemmaoides*, habit above, fruit to the left.



The last 500 m or so on from the Larapinta Trail is a bit more challenging. You make your own way up a rocky creek bed with large boulders to scramble over and eventually come to the dam – a very substantial and solid structure. There was a little water in the dam but mostly a build-up of sand. The creek was gently flowing leaving pleasant rock pools along the way. The birds were happy and chirping away and the fresh greenery of a *Crotalaria* sp., *Trichodesma zeylanicum* (Cattlebush) and *Capparis spinosa* subsp. *nummularia* (Wild Passionfruit) made for an idyllic spot to sit and contemplate whatever - apart from the friendly flies!

Alas, it was time to leave and walk the 2 km back to the car, pack up and head for home. Initially, I had two other “takers” but in the end they were unable to make it. Not to worry. I thoroughly enjoyed my outing and regret that others were not able to share this special place of history and beauty, despite the fires.



Seismic array in the bush

This is what you might come across while walking in the area around the Telegraph Station. After our visit to the Joint Geological and Geophysical Research Station in Schwarz Crescent and reading Megg Kelham’s comprehensive report in the February newsletter, you will now identify it as one of the field seismic monitoring stations comprising the Alice Springs Seismic Array, which send their data back to the Research Station for analysis and to the International Monitoring System network all around

the world. The unit comprises a GPS (the little white ball), the well head and the bore hole which houses the detector some metres below, and the “pill box “ or power box for the monitoring unit.

Pictured right is a seismometer, the very sensitive equipment that is installed at each of these stations. Multiple seismometers are deployed within a few kilometers of each other on the Telegraph Station, Bond Springs and Undoolya Stations. An array is better able to pick up the small vibrations from a particular source than a single seismometer and can be used to work out with greater accuracy where the waves originally come from and what has caused them – earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, exploding meteors and nuclear explosions can be distinguished from each other.



Australian Ringneck

Iain Campbell recorded this bird, Australian Ringneck on the most days of his surveys over sixteen years - see the following article. This Ringneck is enjoying the berries of Ruby Saltbush, *Enchylaena tomentosa*.

Photo: Mat and Cathy Gilfedder





Iain Campbell

Iain Campbell's 16-year record of bird observations

Marg Friedel and Don Franklin

Bird photos by Mat and Cathy Gilfedder

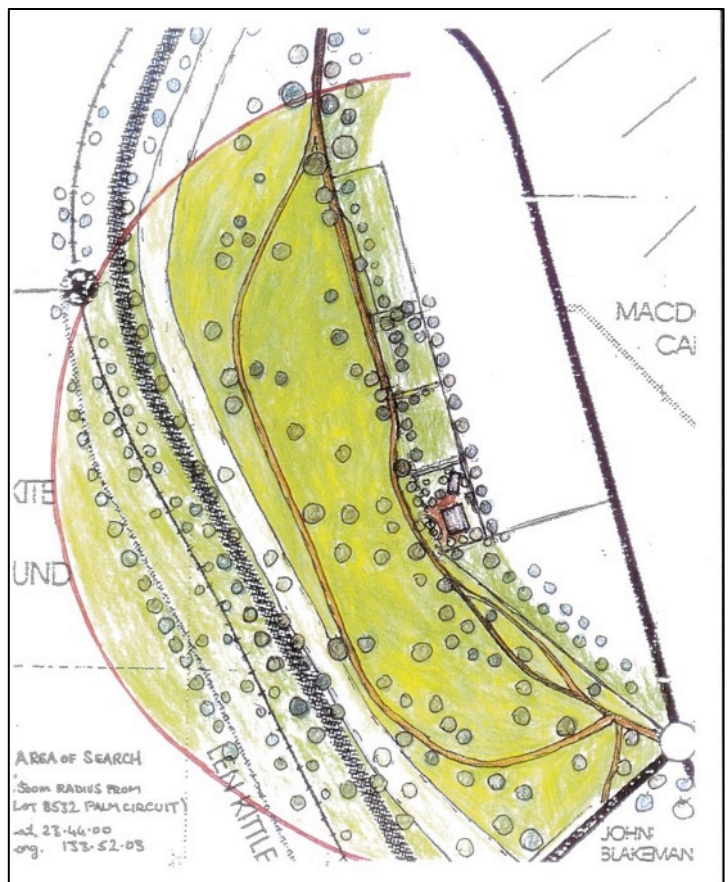
Many Alice Springs people will remember Iain Campbell as an accomplished artist and teacher, and quite a contingent will also know that he was a keen bird observer. From July 2001, Iain began recording the birds around his and Mandy Webb's home on Palm Circuit, where it fronted the Todd River. He soon developed a routine of writing down the birds he saw or heard when he got up at first light, and then watching from particular vantage points around the house and garden for an hour or more. Before long he added in extra observations when he had a chance, sometimes continuing until well after sundown.

With advice from Birdlife Australia, he began surveying a larger area, which he called 'the circuit', from August 2002 – see Iain's map. He persisted with it only until November 2002 and very occasionally after that until July 2003, when it then became more routine. He named and photographed individual trees: the Tree Martin Tree, the Majestic Gum, the Fishbone Tree and so on, which pinpointed his observations. He followed various tracks within the area and, depending on other commitments, could spend two hours or more recording there and at home. There were rare occasions when he spent over 3.5 hours 'birding' in a day.

From November 2009, he introduced a third survey area, involving a walk along Len Kittle Drive ('LKD') – see Iain's map. From that time his routine was variable, always including home observations, sometimes including part or all of the circuit area, and sometimes but not always including LKD. Because he was walking alongside Blatherskite Park he began recording birds there too, although they were not characteristic of the home or circuit areas. By now, statisticians amongst ASFNC Newsletter readers may be seeing some red flags.

Back in 2017, not long after Iain died, Mandy and a number of friends thought it would be important to make something of Iain's extraordinary efforts over 16 years to record the birds and their behaviours in and around the Palm Circuit area. After making initial enquiries, Marg Friedel approached Andrew Silcocks at Birdlife Australia and Don Franklin, ecologist and natural historian based in far north Queensland. Andrew manages the Bird Atlas and the Birdata project, while Don has very diverse interests that luckily included birds and statistics – Don had already co-authored a paper on Newhaven birds.

With his team of volunteers, Andrew undertook the entry of Iain's daily bird observations, which for our purposes simply meant presence. Marg meanwhile made a first pass at categorising Iain's survey methods. Andrew provided the bird data in June 2019, which enabled Don to test Marg's categories, after missing data were resolved. When Don confirmed that Marg could simplify the survey categories, she was able to complete her data entry. Meanwhile Don refined the bird data set, discovering anomalies and removing the Blatherskite Park species. He could finally start investigating what the birds were doing. For example, was there any evidence for shifts in species assemblages over time? Was there evidence for changes in time of arrival or departure of migratory species?



Map of Iain's circuit (area east of Todd River) and Len Kittle Drive survey section. Home area is highlighted in red.

Sadly, it was not possible. The data couldn't be analysed by conventional methods because of the declining time spent on one survey component (home) compared to another (circuit), when they were done together (see Figure 1). Don tried 'list length analysis', which might have provided some control for variation in survey effort, but there were too many inconsistencies in space and time. So, after a great deal of work, the plan to write a scientific analysis of Iain's data had to be abandoned.

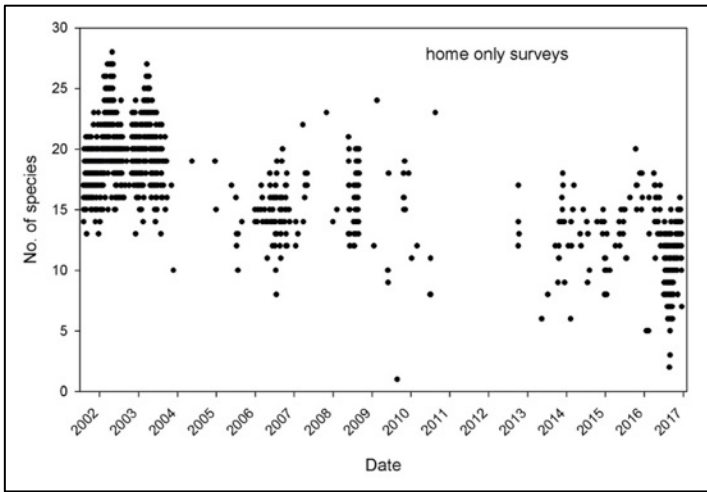


Figure 1a. Number of species detected over time on days when Iain only surveyed around his home.

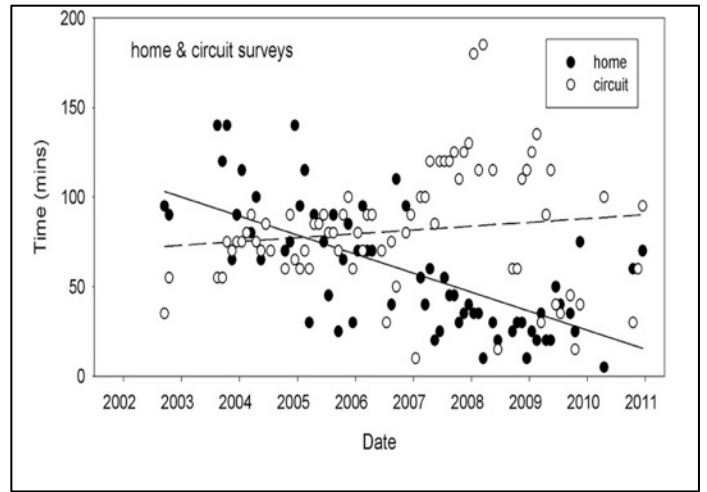


Figure 1b. A sample of times spent surveying on days (2002-11) when Iain surveyed a combination of around his home (solid circle) and the circuit area (open circle).

Rather than leave it there, with no record of Iain's endeavours, here is a summary of what we can report from Iain's amazingly detailed notes.

For the purposes of this article Don added the Blatherskite Park species back in. All up Iain listed 103,334 records of 106 species* at an average of 20.1 species per day (see Table 1 and Figure 2). Nineteen of these species were water birds or associated with irrigated lawns (the Blatherskite Park species). Five species not native to the Alice Springs area were recorded (and retained in analyses): Rock Dove (*Columba livia*; 249 days), Barbary Dove (*Streptopelia roseogrisea*; 142 days), Spotted Dove (*S. chinensis*; 2,816 days), and Long-billed Corella (*Cacatua tenuirostris*; 371 days), the latter comprising a small flock of presumed aviary escapees that were resident south of Heavitree Gap. The Sulphur-crested Cockatoo (*Cacatua galerita*; 4 days) is also likely to be an aviary escapee.



These young Ground Cuckoo-shrikes hung around Iain's patch for a while in 2007

Table 1. Species list, including Blatherskite Park species, and number of days recorded

Species	No. days	Species	No. days
Australian Ringneck	5127	White-winged Triller	122
Galah	5125	Red-browed Pardalote	104
Magpie-lark	5081	Black-shouldered Kite	98
White-plumed Honeyeater	5076	Pallid Cuckoo	85
Crow & Raven species	5049	Yellow-rumped Thornbill	68
Crested Pigeon	5034	Black-chinned Honeyeater	65
Yellow-throated Miner	4424	Grey Teal	63
Black Kite	4391	Singing Honeyeater	61
Western Bowerbird	4225	Ground Cuckoo-shrike	58
Willie Wagtail	3856	Australian White Ibis	57
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	3661	Pacific Black Duck	46
Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater	3487	Glossy Ibis	40
Pied Butcherbird	3439	Jacky Winter	40
Striated Pardalote	3023	Crested Bellbird	37
Tree or Fairy Martin	2823	Peregrine Falcon	36
Grey-crowned Babbler	2822	Brown Quail	33
Spotted Dove	2815	Red-capped Robin	19
Whistling Kite	2560	Black Swan	19
Little Corella	2308	Mulga Parrot	18
Weebill	2261	Black-fronted Dotterel	15
Sacred Kingfisher	2183	White-necked Heron	14
Rainbow Bee-eater	2077	Tawny Frogmouth	14
Zebra Finch	1713	Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo	11
Mistletoebird	1704	Wedge-tailed Eagle	9
Masked Lapwing	1646	Grey-fronted Honeyeater	8
Peaceful Dove	1424	Little Black Cormorant	7
Australian Magpie	1289	Common Bronzewing	7
Brown Honeyeater	1111	Stubble Quail	6
Black-faced Woodswallow	1062	Yellow-billed Spoonbill	6
Straw-necked Ibis	1011	Banded Lapwing	5
Grey Shrike-thrush	997	Brown Falcon	5
Budgerigar	902	Pied Honeyeater	4
Nankeen Kestrel	884	Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	4
Red-backed Kingfisher	754	White-backed Swallow	4
Cockatiel	725	Major Mitchell's Cockatoo	4
Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo	646	Black-eared Cuckoo	4
Grey-headed Honeyeater	617	White-fronted Honeyeater	3
Australian Wood Duck	606	Royal Spoonbill	3
Channel-billed Cuckoo	561	Australian Pelican	3
Australian Hobby	511	Chestnut-rumped Thornbill	3
Collared Sparrowhawk	503	Hooded Robin	2
Long-billed Corella	370	Grey Fantail	2
Diamond Dove	346	Great Egret	2
Southern Boobook	263	White-browed Babbler	2
Brown Goshawk	250	Black Honeyeater	2
Rock Dove	249	Crimson Chat	2
Variiegated Fairy-wren	193	Varied Sittella	1
White-faced Heron	179	Hardhead	1
Brown Songlark	166	Masked Woodswallow	1
Black Falcon	160	Little Egret	1
Rufous Whistler	144	Square-tailed Kite	1
Barbary Dove	142	Inland Thornbill	1
Rufous Songlark	133		

* Sharp-eyed readers may notice Table 1 has only 105 species, not 106 as stated above. Iain only recorded Fairy Martins in 2016 although Chris Watson assures us that they were present in other years. Tree Martins and Fairy Martins are difficult to distinguish and so we assumed some misidentifications and lumped the two species together in the Table.

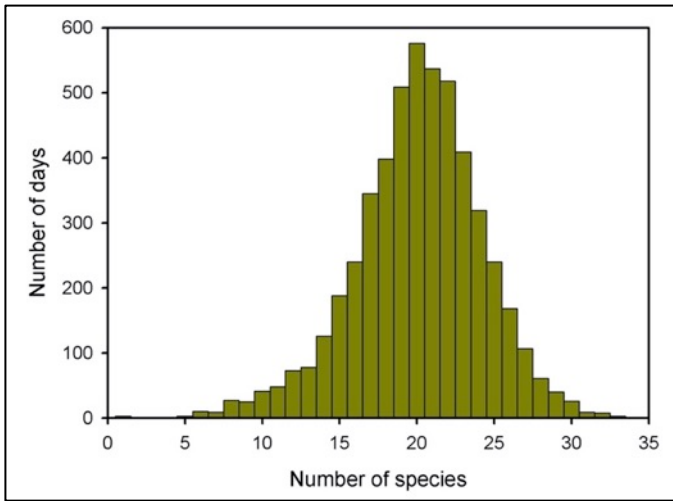


Figure 2. Number of species recorded in a day.



The Sacred Kingfisher, *pictured*, is an example of a migratory species. Don created Table 2 to see if there was any evidence for a change in the time of its arrival or departure. However, this analysis is affected by the same problems mentioned above: did Iain spend longer on some days than others, or using one survey method rather than another, and thus increase his chances of spotting the birds? Marg could confirm that Iain had been observing for eight days or more before the first sighting or for eight days or more after the last sighting, so first and last dates were potentially correct. An exception perhaps was 5 October 2011, when Iain had only been recording from 2 October so he could have missed an earlier sighting. Note that variable time spent observing or the survey type could still have affected the outcome a little.

To help interpret Table 2, Don explains that, in season, Iain recorded this species about every second or third day, so he (Don) used that as a basis for identifying outliers, e.g. 2002-03 Last date lists four 'outlier' dates.

Table 2. Sacred Kingfisher: first and last dates for each season.

Season	First date	Last date
2001-02	17 Sept.	23 March
2002-03	1 Oct. (also 8 Aug.)	24 Feb., then 28 Feb., 8 March, 31 March, 8 April
2003-04	20 Sept.	5 April, then 16 May
2004-05	1 Oct.	17 March
2005-06	19 Sept.	6 March
2006-07	8 Sept. then frequent from 18 Sept.	5 April
2007-08	19 Sept.	8 March
2008-09	20 Sept. then frequent from 4 Oct	3 April then 10 April
2009-10	17 Sept. then from 27 Sept.	often to 17 May then 31 May, once in June, twice in July; see also next season
2010-11	7 days from 19-29 Aug., then frequent from 9 Sept.	five times in April, last 27 April
2011-12	5 Oct.	28 Feb, then 17 & 20 March, 1 June
2012-13	30 Sept.	26 Feb. then 3 April
2013-14	27 Sept.	19 March
2014-15	18 Sept.	4 April
2015-16	19 then 27 Sept.	21 March
2016-17	25 Sept.	no record

Given all the provisos above, it looks as though Sacred Kingfishers arrived mostly in the second half of September, with no clear trend over time. Departure times were more variable and ranged from mostly early March to late April, once again with no trend over time. The obvious exception is the wet period from the start of 2010 to March 2011, when it appears at least some individuals remained in the area all year. A total of 770 mm rain fell during 2010 and 292 mm to March 2011, and very little subsequently, so it seems that the Sacred Kingfishers' presence around Alice Springs is mostly predictably seasonal but rainfall (affecting resource availability) may override the usual patterns.

Marg and Don are grateful to Mandy for the opportunity to analyse Iain's data, and to Andrew and his team of volunteers at Birdlife Australia for entering the bird data. Andrew retains a full set of project records for entry into BirdLife Australia's Birdata database. Iain's records also include detailed daily observations of bird behaviour, which were beyond the scope of the current project.



Soft sand, water in Wigleys, interesting rock pools, green grass and washed boulders.



A few of our members are part of a walking group who love getting out really early in the mornings to explore interesting tracks around Alice. It was a special treat for them to wander along the Todd River bed after the recent rains. Thanks Connie and Rosalie!



Plant Sale
Saturday 4th April 2020

Gate opens 7.45am
 Sale from 8.00am
 until sold out

**Olive Pink
 Botanic Garden
 Tuncks Road**

Olive Pink
 Botanic Garden
 Alice Springs

SOME AFRICAN BIRDS Part 2 Jenny Purdie and Steve Sinclair

We spent 7 weeks in Africa – Zambia, Namibia and South Africa – in August/September 2019. Most of the time we were in National Parks where we got to see a good number of birds. As you are not permitted to get out of your vehicle, except in a few designated places, most of the birds were photographed out the vehicle windows.

(See the February 2020 newsletter for part 1, part 3 still to come.)



Verraux's Black Eagle



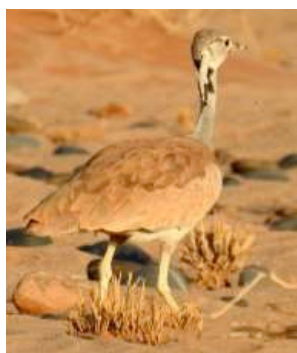
Kori Bustard



Northern Black Korhaan



Red-crested Korhaan



Ruppell's Korhaan



Blacksmith Lapwing



Three-banded Plover



Laughing Dove



Mourning Collared Dove



Namaqua Dove



Red-faced Mousebird



Lilac-breasted Roller



Giant Kingfisher



Malachite Kingfisher



Pied Kingfisher



African Hoopoe



ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED
Minutes of the general meeting held in the Visitor Centre
Olive Pink Botanic Garden – Wednesday 12 February 2020

Open: Barb Gilfedder declared the meeting open at 8:45 pm following presentation by Lisa and Pete Nunn about their Letter-winged Kite Research Project. Thank you to scribe, Pam Keil. Thank you to Jill Brew for supper.

Present: 27 Members and 8 Visitors as per attendance book

Apologies: 3 apologies

Minutes: The Minutes of the November 2019 General Meeting as printed in the newsletter were accepted.

Business Arising:

Nil

Treasurer's Report:

Balance of all funds (including petty cash) end of October 2020 \$2,434.96

Income for November, December & January 2020

- Membership 300.00
- Bank Interest .63

Expenses for November, December & January 2020

- AU Host website domain renewal 39.99
(Petty Cash - \$39.85)

Total of all funds (including petty cash) end of January 2020 **\$2695.60**

The meeting accepted the Treasurer's report.

Correspondence:

- AU Host website domain renewal invoice for the club's website. Barb clarified the club pays for two items: 1. Domain (our address) \$39.99 for 2 years. 2. Basic Web hosting which is where the club's files live is approximately \$100 for 3 years, therefore they are not synchronised. The invoice for the Domain was paid.
- Email from Victorian Field Naturalists Club re their Natural History Medallion calling for nominations and asking for donations. Jill Brew suggested we ask Michael LaFlamme if he would like to update the nomination he previously wrote for Peter Latz. Barb will follow-up.
- Various emails addressed to ASFNC have been forwarded to membership.

General Business

- Books belonging to ASFNC. Peter Jobson has gone through the box of books which are now in the OPBG library. Barb invited any members who might like to help OPBG to catalogue the books to speak with Ian Coleman.
- An Application for a community grant from Alice Springs Town Council was made by Neil Woolcock. Neil submitted a grant for 4 radios and an updated first aid kit. The closing date for grants is 24/02/20.

Past Events:

- 15 November, Serpentine Chalet camp and walk was hosted by Connie Spencer. Connie was the only one who went and found it enjoyable.
- 30 November, end-of year breakfast, Telegraph Station. Well attended and enjoyed by all.

Future Events:

- Sunday 16 February 2.00pm Planning Meeting at OPBG.
- Sunday 23 February 7.00am Sewage ponds shorebird count. Run by Birdlife Central Australia. They appreciate helpers, counters or scribes from ASFNC. Necessary to have completed online induction. Lisa will post date to Facebook page. Barbara will email club members a reminder.
- Wednesday 19 February, 15:00 a second visit to the Joint Geological & Geophysical Research Station, Schwarz Crescent, organised by Ian Mann. 5 interested to attend. Barb will send email reminder to members.

Next Meeting:

Wednesday 11 March. Barb requested members to put forward suggestions for a Speaker. Nil suggestions. Barb requested members to volunteer for Scribe, no offers. Ian Coleman volunteered to bring supper.

Sightings

Following the meeting, sightings included:

Several Members have sighted Major Mitchells around Desert Park;

Small groups of Budgies have been seen close to town;

Bev Grey said Channel-billed Cuckoos arrived 2 days before the rain;

Rosalie Breen reported a lone Pheasant Coucal in breeding plumage in the Eastside.

Meeting closed at 9.15pm

Minutes compiled by Kimberley Morgan