



April 2020

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



This caterpillar of the Willowherb Day-flying Moth, *Phalaenoides tristifica* was found eating Tar Vine, *Boehavia* sp., alongside the locally more commonly seen Striped Hawk Moth caterpillars, *Hyles livornicoides*. More pictures and notes on Page 5.

All organised meetings, presentations, activities and trips are currently cancelled due to health restrictions. We will let you know when we restart. We encourage you to get out into the bush, if you can, as lots of things are happening – plants, insects, birds and animals are busy and active.

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NEWSLETTER

The next newsletter will be May 2020

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

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

You can also send any photos or reports of anything that you think other Field Naturalists may be interested in, to Barb anytime and she will forward to the Membership.

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

Sorry... we have to adapt to the moment.

We regret that we have had to suspend all ASFNC meetings, activities, walks and other trips.

I would encourage you to get out as much as you can with your family or one close friend as lots of things are happening in the natural world. It is good for physical and mental health to look at nature's wonders and easy to social distance.

Many of our local parks and reserves are closed. The Alice Springs Telegraph Station and Simpsons Gap remain open and some walks at Ellery and Ormiston are available. To check if a park or reserve is open go to

<https://nt.gov.au/leisure/parks-reserves/plan-your-visit>

Olive Pink Botanic Garden is open for a wander around, although the Desert Park is now closed.

The PLANT SALE at Olive Pink is CANCELLED, however people will be able to download a plant list <https://opbg.com.au/>. They can order plants on this mobile number 0421 898 329. At this stage OPBG anticipate plants will be delivered.

March Speaker – Barb Gilfedder

"A Northern Territory cattle station - three years respite" Four Field Naturalists trips to Henbury Station 2012- 2014

In 1875 Parke and Walker applied for a lease for the area, naming it after their [family estate](#) in Dorset, England. A log cabin was built along the banks of the Finke River in 1886, which became the homestead and still stands today ([arrowed](#)). Marg Friedel tells me it was built of Casuarina logs which are extremely hard wood.

Ross Morton and Sally Williams purchased Henbury, now 5273 square kilometres, in 1982 and lived there for more than 30 years.

Then, in 2011 it was sold to RM Williams Agricultural Holdings as a carbon sink. This was for an experimental exercise that it was hoped would become a model for carbon sinks in arid regions. The property, which formerly had 17,000 head of cattle, was destocked, allowing native vegetation to regenerate. The property was to be protected as part of the [National Reserve System](#). By restoring native vegetation, R.M. Williams Agricultural Holdings planned to sequester carbon and then sell carbon credits. If successful, it would have been the first company to use the carbon market to fund a conservation project. The sale was not popular with other pastoralists and many other people had their doubts about the feasibility of the project.



I had a memory of a Google Earth photo, that Angus Duguid had shown us once, that had intrigued me. It was a place called Duck Swamp, a little group of connected clay pans in the eastern part of Henbury (right). The Field Naturalists Club was lucky to get permission from the new Managers to visit and explore. Henbury homestead is 125 km South of Alice and Duck Swamp another 50km on station tracks. On different trips we saw the system full of water, part filled and completely dry. (lower pics show both extremes). Each claypan has a different character and exhibit a different range of plant species. Some are circled by Red River Gums and some by Coolabahs.



The Finke River is 600 km long but doesn't reach Lake Eyre. The Aranda name is Larapinta which means Salty river. It passes diagonally north-west to south-east through Henbury Station. There are many permanent waterholes all the way along, some only accessible by helicopter. Over the trips we visited Harts Camp Waterhole, Snake Hole, Salty Snakes Tail, Weener Waterhole and Jakes Spring (bottom right) and Three Mile Waterhole. It was wonderful to see clear water in them and little fish swimming around in it. Rosalie Breen and Joan Powling made an exciting discovery of a rare Charophyte at Harts Camp waterhole (right). Also there we found a wonderful crop of Red River Gum seedlings extending for many metres along the high water mark (below).





There are nine native fish species in the Finke River some of them endemic to it. Field Naturalists were lucky to accompany Wetland Scientist Angus Duguid, Leader of NT section of Lake Eyre Basin Rivers Assessment, Max Rittner, Water Advisory and Regulatory Officer, Michelle Rodrigo, Lake Eyre Basin Communications Officer and David Schmarr, Research Scientist with SA Inland Waters & Catchment Ecology on one of their fish surveys in October 2013. Visiting a number of waterholes, fyke nets were set in the afternoon and checked the following morning. Fish were identified, measured and counted before being returned to the water. A different spectrum of fish species occurs in different waterholes depending on their salinity. On one trip Pete and Lisa Nunn found Inland Dotterels well camouflaged not far from the track and a Little Eagle (pictured) nesting at Duck Swamp, taking some excellent photos.



Of course, along the way we found many interesting native plants and displays of wild flowers, a few insects and different species of snail. On one trip some keen geologists discovered a patch of Stromatolites, part of an outcrop of Bitter Springs Formation formed in the Amadeus Sea, which covered central Australia 850 million years ago.(bottom left)

R. M. Williams Agricultural Holdings went into receivership in July 2013. Henbury Station was put back on the market in August 2013. In July 2014, it was acquired by Ashley and Neville Anderson and David Rohan under the trading name Henbury Unit Trust Pty Ltd for between A\$7-8 million. The cattle returned to munch on the vegetation and muddy the waterholes.

However, approximately 20% of the property is now protected under a special conservation covenant. The covenant includes *Running Waters*, which is one of the largest permanent waterholes in central Australia, as well as habitat linking Finke Gorge National Park and Owen Springs Conservation Reserve. I do not know how well this is being respected.



I feel privileged to have visited and enjoyed places on Henbury Station during its 3 years of respite.

This presentation was originally given at the ANN conference in Hobart in 2018.



Caterpillar observations – Barb Gilfedder

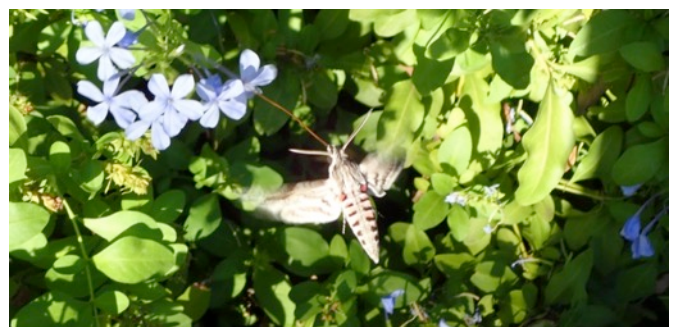
1. The caterpillar of the Willowherb Day-flying Moth, *Phalaenoides tristifica*, pictured on the cover and below left, was identified for me by Don Herbison-Evans of the Coffs Harbour Butterfly House. When mature it will burrow into the soil to pupate developing a pupa but no cocoon. The adult moth has a 7-8cm wingspan and is mainly black with white markings on the wings. (Below right - Picture from Coffs Harbour Butterfly House, courtesy of Karen Biggelaar). The body has bands of orange and black hairs. Specimens have been caught in all states except Western Australia.



2. On the same *Boehavia* sp. I found the more common 'Yeperenye' caterpillars, Striped Hawk Moth, *Hyles livornicoides*. These caterpillars come in a range of colours from green, orange, brown and black, and have a distinctive spike on their tail end. Look for the trailing ground cover with mauve flowers on your nature strip or any ground around here that isn't swamped with Buffel. The 'Yeperenye' caterpillars are an important sacred Aboriginal totem in central Australia. They were also eaten by Aborigines after they have been starved for a few days and then roasted. The green one was on the verge of Larapinta Drive and Rosalie Breen found the orange one feeding on Munyeroo, *Portulaca olearacea* in Spencer Valley. (Below)



Connie Spencer sent me this picture of the adult Striped Hawk Moth that she found in her garden (below left), and then I saw one in our garden (below right) feeding on nectar from the Plumbago flowers. It was hovering like a small Humming Bird, its wings moving so fast they are just a blur, but it was able to uncoil and direct its extremely long proboscis, (the thin red line in the photo) into the throat of each flower, never landing.





3. We went out to the Intertexta Forest early one morning, hoping to find one of the other 'Yeperenye' caterpillars that we have seen there before, the Eremophila Hawk Moth, *Coenotes eremophilae*. There were lots feeding on the young shoots of *Eremophila longifolia* that had regrown well since the fires. These caterpillars have a strange way of clinging onto a vertical stem and leaning back with the top part of their bodies. I think it might be a threat-response pose. I have also seen them previously at Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Jane Bannister tells me she has found them on *E. longifolia* in her yard as well as on *E. polyclada*. The adult moth has mottled brown wings.

Picture from Coffs Harbour Butterfly House, courtesy of the Australian Museum.



4. Another 'Yeperenye' Hawk Moth caterpillar loves eating my sweet potato vines and I know also enjoys grape vine leaves, hence the name Vine Hawk Moth, *Hippotion celerio*. Here are photos of a young one and a more mature one. The mature ones can also be black. *The photo of the adult is from Coffs Harbour Butterfly House, courtesy of Otto Rogge Photography.*



5. Megg Kelham sent me this photo querying the webbing around the base of an Acacia tree. I immediately thought of the processionary caterpillar, *Ochrogaster lunifer*. During the day, they hide communally in a webbing nest either at the base of a tree or in a bag constructed in the branches of a tree. They feed at night on the leaves and can completely defoliate a tree. A few days later my husband Jim spotted a line of 30 of these moving across our yard. They had eaten everything on a small *Acacia jennerae* and were searching for another food plant. They look invitingly fluffy but the hairs can cause skin rashes, so avoid touching them. We destroy them in our garden because of the damage they do but enjoy watching their long processions out bush. As a gardening tip check out the base of your Acacia and Senna trees and keep watching for those caterpillar lines.





At 0700 on a gorgeous cool Saturday morning Connie, Rosalie, Peter and myself met up at the shelter of the Woodland Trail, Simpsons Gap, for a walk. We set off across the flat start of this trail, and with dew sparkling on everything. It was like fairyland, so beautiful. A carpet of Mulga ferns under some Mulgas, and a lot of lichen, a strange grey-green colour, showing up on the soil

in the damp of the early morning. Many grasses had come up since last week's rain, a lot of Button Grass, Eight-day Sedge, Five-minute Grass, Silky Browntop near the river bed, and Wanderie.

Before we got to Roe Creek, we saw a big stand of *Eremophila longifolia*, (Emu bush) many of which had been stripped of leaves. It looked as though it must have been the work of caterpillars, but there was no sign of them, their droppings or their webs, so we had no clues as to what had happened there, but a little further on there were a lot more of the same plants all in good health. There was a mass of Buffel and a carpet of *Tribulus eichlerianus*, (Caltrop) near the creek crossing, a patch of *Cuscuta victoriana* (Dodder) growing on some Caltrop, the first I have seen this year, such a strange plant.



There were so many small plants emerging, far too many to name, but of note some beautiful *Ptilotus xerophilus*, (Large Green Pussy-tails) flowering, a lovely growth of Woolly Cloak Fern together with more Mulga Fern and we saw *Sidas* and *Abutilons*, but not flowering, and plenty of *Cleome viscosa* (Tickweed) which was flowering. On a rocky slope an *Eremophila acrida* flowering, the first time I have seen this species, but Connie knew it, very sticky leaves.



Our progress was snail's pace, with so much of interest to look at, to identify, discuss, photograph and enjoy.

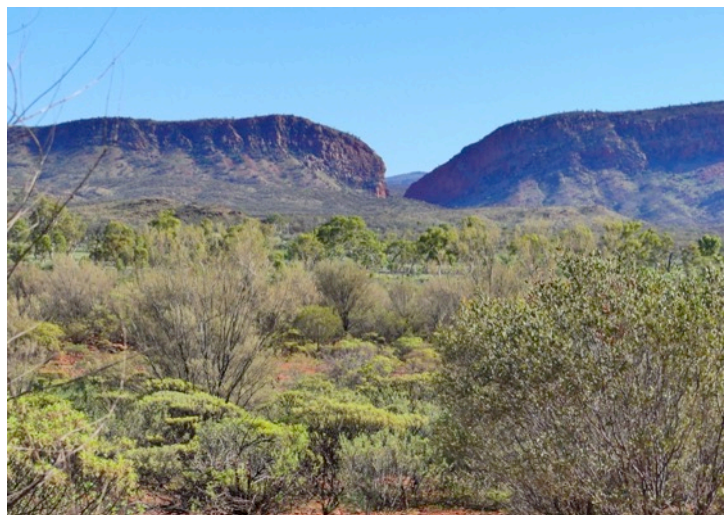
As we climbed up a rocky ridge with a constant backdrop of cicadas calling, we had wonderful views of Simpsons Gap, and Hat Hill, and long very clear views of the Range. Just as we turned around at the top of this ridge, there was a glorious flowering *Grevillea wickhamii* (Holly Grevillea) - this felt like the icing on the cake.

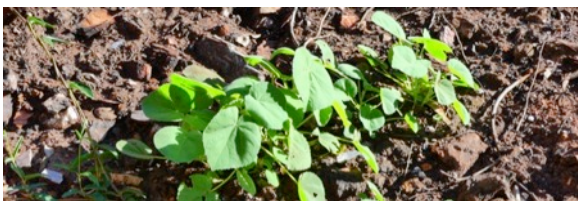


Birds seen or heard during our walk: Australian Magpie, Galah, Red-browed Pardalote, Rufous Whistler, Sacred Kingfisher – lovely views of one, Magpie Larks, Singing Honey-eater, Pied Butcherbird, Willie Wagtail, a small flock of Budgies flying overhead, Ringneck Parrots, Zebra Finch, Red-tailed Black-cockatoos, and a really perfect view of a male Hooded Robin, perched on the top of a dead tree calling. Interesting that we saw no raptors at all, presumably there is little food for them after such dry weather.

We ended up back at the shelter at 9.45. The day had certainly heated up and the flies hadn't let up for one moment, but what a delightful morning birding and botanising in such congenial company, all of us enjoying the wonders of our local landscape.

Photos: Mulga ferns, Dodder, Holly Grevillea, view of Simpsons Gap and *Eremophila acrida* by Peter Bannister and Connie Spencer





From the top: A carpet of Tickweed, Showy indigo, Orange Spade Flower and Desert Lantern Bushes, Photos by Connie Spencer.

Creek Walk – Standley Chasm area - 4 March 2020

Report by Jill Brew

Gillian, Megg, Connie, Kimberley and Jill, with attendant flies, walked up the creek (start of Stage 4 of the Larapinta Trail) to see the level of regeneration after last year's fire.

Walking was easy, and naturally there was no foliage to brush past.

There was some cool deep shade in spots in narrower parts of the creek. The south-facing slope, on our right walking in, was showing more regeneration than the opposite slope.

Walking along the creek, it was heartening to see the fresh growth emerging.

The most obvious and striking was yellow flowered Tickweed, an unfortunate name, (*Cleome viscosa*) right from the start of the walk, near the road, and with a marked spread of it further along the creek a bit past the 1 km mark.

Macdonnell Ranges Cycads (*Macrozamia macdonnellii*), near the base of the slopes, had long new fronds giving some balance to the blackened stumps.

Button Grass (*Dactyloctenium radulans*) Silky Brown Top (*Eulalia aurea*) and some Lemon-scented Grass (*Cymbopogon ambiguus*) were flourishing. A few samples of an unidentified sedge were also present. There was the spreading Caltrop (*Tribulus* sp.) with its yellow flowers, and Tar Vine (*Boerhavia* sp.). There was Round-leaf Wattle (*Acacia strongylophylla*), a couple of Cassias (*Senna* sp.) looking lively and some regenerating Broombush (*Exocarpos sparteus*).

Beefwood (*Grevillea striata*), noted for its fire and drought tolerance, was shooting out from its base. Spearwood (*Pandorea doratoxylon*) was reviving and Cattle Bush (*Tricodesma zeylandicum*) with its broad green leaves (it's actually seldom grazed) was dotted in the creek bed and up the south-facing slope.

Showy Indigo (*Indigofera basedowii*) was looking very much at home, even luxuriant in leafy rounded clumps. (It's noted as being found in gorges and at the base of rocky hills.) It's not surprising that Connie said it was a good home-garden plant.

The Desert Lantern bushes (*Abutilon leucopetalum* and *A. otocarpum*) were starting to flower and the odd Orange Spade Flower (*Hybanthus aurantiacus*) were there if you looked.

A quick excursion, but full of interest. Thanks to Connie for sharing her knowledge with us.

SOME AFRICAN BIRDS Pt 3 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 of the vehicle windows.

(See the Feb 2020 newsletter for part 1 and Mar 2020 for part 2.)



Little Bee-eater



White-fronted Bee-eater



Magpie Shrike



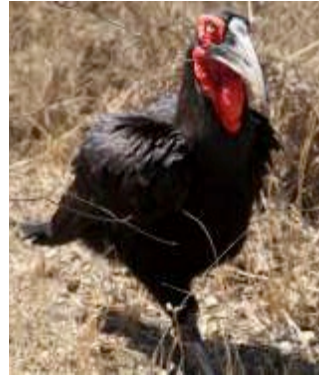
Cape Sugarbird



African Grey Hornbill



Crowned Hornbill



Southern Ground Hornbill



Red-billed Hornbill



Yellow-billed Hornbill



Crested Barbet



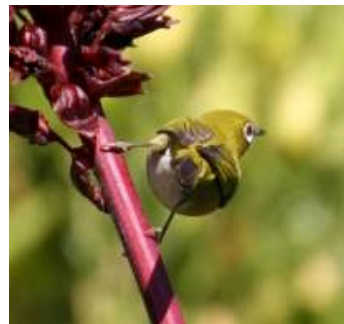
Chinspot Batis



Crimson-breasted Shrike



African Paradise Flycatcher



Cape White-eye



Glossy Starling



Mocking Cliff Chat



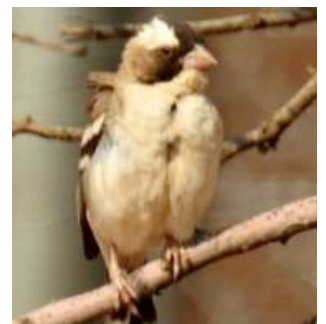
African Black Sunbird



Orange-breasted Sunbird



Southern Masked Weaver



White-browed Weaver



Sociable Weaver



African Pied Wagtail



Blue Waxbill



Red-billed Queleas



ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED
Minutes of the general meeting held in the Visitors Centre
Olive Pink Botanic Garden – Wednesday 10 March 2020

Open: Barbara Gilfedder declared the meeting open at 8.30pm following a presentation by Barbara Gilfedder about Henbury Station. Thank you to Ian Coleman for supper. Jose Petrick, called for volunteers to help clean the St Mary's chapel mural.

Present: 18 Members as per attendance book.

Apologies: 4

Minutes: The Minutes of the February General Meeting attached to the last newsletter were accepted.

Business Arising:

- Michael Laflamme is keen to re-write and add to his previous nomination of Peter Latz for Natural History Medallion, since he helped in re-publishing Peter's Bushfires book and has more material.
- Neil raised a motion to donate \$100 towards the Natural History Medallion. Seconded by Connie and carried by the majority of those present.
- Gillian Terry, a new member, who has worked in libraries, is willing to help with OPBG/ASFNC/APS library. Members showed their appreciation

Treasurer's Report:

- | | |
|--|------------|
| • Balance of all funds (including petty cash) end of January 2020 | \$2 695.60 |
| • Income for February 2020 | |
| • Membership | \$35.00 |
| • Bank Interest | \$0.20 |
| • Expenses for February 2020 | |
| • Nil | |

(Petty Cash \$39.85.

Expense of \$18 for lodging the 2019 annual tax return by Anne Pye.

Balance of \$21.85.)

Total of all funds (including petty cash) end of February 2020 **\$2 712.80**

The meeting accepted the Treasurer's report.

Correspondence:

- Various emails addressed to ASFNC were forwarded to membership.
- Insurance bill from Austcover. \$460 passed to the Treasurer.

General Business

- Kimberley Morgan received feedback from Nick Tyllis, Rosalie Schultz and Jim Lawrence regarding planning for the Finke River head walk. Members made comment at the meeting. She will meet with Jim Lawrence to plan and welcomes other members contribution.
- Marg will follow-up the possibility of a talk from Chris Pavey to be presented as an extra talk, not on a normal meeting night.
- Connie Spencer encouraged members to participate in club activities more regularly.
- At the next meeting, the Club will sadly farewell Member Johannes Ammerschlaeger.

Past Events:

- 16 February 2.00pm Planning Meeting at OPBG.
- 23 February Sewage ponds shorebird count.
- 7 March 7.00am – Woodland Trail - Connie Spencer.

Future Events:

- Saturday 14 March, Jill Brew. Walk first few kms of beginning of stage 4 of Larapinta Trail along creek line from Standley Chasm road.
- Saturday 14 March, Landcare Buffel Busting.
- Sunday 15 March, APS. Bradshaw walk 8:00 am.
- Saturday 4 April, OPBG. Plant sale 8:00 am
- Sunday 5 April, Neil Woolcock. Dolomite walk from Ellery.

Next Meeting:

Wednesday 8 April - Johannes Ammerschlaeger to show slides from a trip to Fleurieu Peninsular.

Supper: Michele Beech

Sightings:

- Neil Woolcock sighted 2 black Dingos near Ellery Creek.
- Margaret Lawrence sighted 4 Mistletoe Birds in her garden near Larapinta.
- Helen Miller had 5 young Butcherbirds in her garden

Meeting Closed: 8:57pm