



May 2021

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



This wonderful array of interesting native plants was captured by Margaret Friedel, while on the Dolomite Walk from Ellery Creek Big Hole. See story and more photos from page 6.

Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of the month
(except December and January) at 7:00pm
at the Olive Pink Botanic Garden.

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NEWSLETTER

The next newsletter will be June 2021

The deadline for the June newsletter will be 23 May.

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

ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Watch for more trip details that will be sent out just before the trips.

Saturday 8 May at 3.00pm – Walk at White Gums. Meet at White Gums (last drive on right along Ilparpa Road before Honeymoon Gap). This will be a walk around the valley slopes of the creek that runs onto Keith and Stella's land from the Mt Gillen ridge, probably about 1.5 km on a track, with short uphill. Keith has freed the valley slopes from Buffel and it is so very lovely to see what is there in its place. Keith can also talk about the various techniques and trials or accidents that have helped him along the way. Leader: Jocelyn Davies. Please text (SMS) on 0419 857 561. Do not ring or email, please.

Wednesday May 12 at 7.00pm.

General Meeting at Olive Pink Botanic Garden. **Joe Schofield** will give us an update on all the exciting things happening at Newhaven Sanctuary.

Saturday May 22, 9am Sewage Ponds Meet at birders entrance to Sewage ponds.

Everyone needs to complete the online safety induction and indemnity form.

<https://my.rapidglobal.com/Web/selfregistration/index/634/>

Wear closed shoes, hat. Bring drink, binoculars. Leader – Barb Gilfedder bjfedders@gmail.com

Saturday May 29, 9am Geology of Wigleys Waterhole. Leader – Meg Mooney

moon3@iinet.net.au

AUSTRALIAN PLANTS SOCIETY - ALICE SPRINGS

apsalicesprings@yahoo.com.au

Wednesday 5 May 2021

Monthly meeting at Olive Pink Botanic Garden

5pm for 5.30pm start – Doug McDougall, *"Flowering plants along the Todd River next to OPBG"*.

Wednesday 2 June 2021 7.30pm

Monthly meeting at Olive Pink Botanic Garden at 7.30pm

Presentation by Ian Coleman and Alyse Kent, *"Caterpillars and plant associations in OPBG"*.



JOIN IN and follow us on Facebook!

Our Facebook group, Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club has 130 members. It is a great place to post photos of all the wonderful fauna and flora you see. Any group member can post and comment on the sightings or help you identify them. So much around after the recent rains

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club

Committee Members

President	Barb Gilfedder	8955 5452
Vice-President	Margaret Friedel	0417 849 743
Secretary	Connie Spencer	0429 966 592
Treasurer	Neil Woolcock	0428 521 598
Property Officer	Rosalie Breen	8952 3409
Member	Lee Ryall	0417 401 237
Public Officer	Anne Pye	0438 388 012

Other Club Responsibilities:

Newsletter – Barb Gilfedder	bjfedders@gmail.com
Facebook Organiser – Meg Mooney	moon3@iinet.net.au
Website - Robyn Grey-Gardner	8952 2207

Visiting Desert Dates, Report by Megg Kelham

On Sunday 11th April 2021 a small convoy of Field Naturalists visited the Desert Fruit Company, 70 km south east of Alice Springs. The Company, which is co-operatively owned, has managed the Tamara Date Plantation, which was established by Jim and Trudi Luedi in 1990-91, since 2014. In addition to striving to sell “the very, very best” Australian dates, the Tamara Co-Op, as the co-operative arm of the Desert Fruit Company is known, also aims to be “an exemplar of sustainable and regenerative agriculture, an egalitarian and stimulating work environment and a profitable, remote business”. If the dates we tasted, the workers we talked to and the sheer abundance of this season’s crop (the biggest yet) are anything to go by, the Co-operative is well on its way to achieving its goals. As the following incomplete history of date farming in central Australia suggests, the challenges facing the Co-Op are not to be underestimated.



Field Nats inspecting some of the 700 stately date palms. The ripening fruit is protected in bags from birds. *Gordon Roberts*

Though date palms have been cultivated in central Australia since at least the 1880s when Baron von Mueller sent date palm seeds from the Adelaide Botanic Garden to the missionaries at Hermannsburg, the first attempt to grow dates commercially only occurred in 1952. This was when Vic and Sue De Fontenay established the “El Mima Date Garden” (now known as the Mecca Date Garden) one kilometre south of Heavitree Gap. In addition to collecting offshoots of date palms from local plants, the De Fontenay’s also imported twelve Deglet Noor offshoots from California, only nine of which survived. They also imported six Algerian Deglet Noor offshoots from South Australia, all of which appear to have survived. Unfortunately, though none appear to have had *Parlatoria* scale in South Australia, they were all found to have acquired the bug in the garden at El Mima. From here the scale spread throughout central Australia. Sadly most of the imported Deglet Noor palms died when the De Fontenay’s retired from the date cultivation business without being able to find a successor. Though date producing palms, many of which had been planted by Afghan cameleers, continued to grow throughout central Australia, none were harvested commercially.

A second attempt to commercialise central Australian date farming began in the mid-1970s when the Arid Zone Research Institute imported 50 date offshoots from California and planted 29 palms taken from the offshoots of palms growing at Dalhousie and Hermannsburg. Sadly, only 12 of the Californian offshoots survived. In 1976-1977 horticultural staff also planted 342 palms grown from imported American seed at the sewage ponds in Alice Springs. Eighty of these died. The remaining plants were then transplanted along De Fontenay Drive, before being removed ten years later, just as they reached date harvesting maturity. Like humans, date palms live for about eighty years, producing edible fruits from about fifteen years onwards.

Attempts to grow dates in commercial quantities continued in the 1980s when someone bought El Mima and imported more palms from California. Though slow to grow, these palms eventually fruited. Towards the end of 1990 Jim and Trudi Luedi, new owners of what was now the Mecca Date Garden used some of these palms to establish the date farm at Limestone Bore now owned by the Tamara Co-Op. The new date farm was the second in the area. In the mid-1980s Tim Micklem established the Arid Gold Date farm on 75 hectares of land near the old Deep Well railway siding. Despite successfully cultivating dates for several decades, Tim was unable to sell the farm before he retired. In a tragic echo of what happened to the De Fontenay’s palms when they retired in the 1950s, Tim’s palms are now also dying from lack of care. This is in stark contrast to palms at Limestone bore which, as the photos attached to this report show, are flourishing. The lucky person (not the Luedis) from whom the Co-Op purchased the plantation is currently living on a boat in Sydney Harbour.

In order to ensure its long-term sustainability, the Tamar Co-Op decided to divide the Luedi’s original agricultural lease into twelve blocks which they sold for about \$15000 each (I think). The lease subdivisions will be formalised in twelve years. Each of the twelve blocks is surrounded by a wildlife corridor. The majority of the remaining lease will also remain uncultivated because it is in a flood zone. Whilst workers are paid an hourly wage, all other profits are re-invested into the business in order to increase its sustainability. The company’s co-operative status also enables it to obtain grants to improve farm infrastructure. This has included building new sheds, installing a solar operated water system and buying the expensive machinery required to pollinate and pick dates when the palms get too tall for ladders.

In addition to creating a quieter and more habitable living space for lease residents, the investment in solar power has also enabled the Co-op to alter its watering regime, increasing plant productivity. One of the major drawbacks of date farming is the amount of water required to produce commercial quality fruit. Commercial date palms require 700 litres of water a day. Watering in one two hour hit, which is what used to happen, created localised flooding. Cycling irrigation so that watering occurs in short fifteen minute bursts throughout the day has stopped flood damage. Using hand made irrigation drippers instead of manufactured drippers has reduced water wastage and the man-hours required to monitor and replace the previous drippers which (as most of us know only too well) block and pop way too often. The water comes from a local aquifer.



Manager Kim Mackay explaining the cyclic irrigation system. Each palm requires 700litres of water a day. *Marg Friedel*



Packers/selectors sorting the dates. – Jude Mapleson

Productivity has also increased as a result of the Co-Op's recent decision to use foliage sprays to fertilise the palms. This needs to be done early in the fruiting season, also increasing productivity. Persistent use of fertilisers added to the soil has also caused the pH to increase to unhealthy levels. Foliage spray avoids this problem. The Co-Op is also growing Lucerne around the base of individual palms in order to reduce the pH level. When the Lucerne is cut it releases nitrogen into the soil, eventually reducing pH levels.

The Co-Op's aim to produce organic fruit has also seen them replace chemical fertilisers with home-grown bacteria and other organic products like fish emulsion and seaweed. As part of the project to be organic, the Co-Op is currently trialling the use of lady-bugs to kill the scale in the palms which continue to plague the plantation despite years of chemical treatments. In addition to sapping the energy of individual palms, the scale, which manifests as ugly white spots on individual dates, also reduces the commercial value of the dates produced.



Kim demonstrating the great machine that is used to reach the dates for pollination and picking – Marg Friedel

As part of the conditions which enabled the Co-Op to obtain a freehold lease, the Co-Op had to plant 1000 palms, 300 of which have subsequently died. In order to replace this lost stock, Co-Op workers have been learning how to remove and replant palm suckers or offshoots. Each sucker is a clone of the female plant from which it is taken. Though dates can be grown from seed, there is no guarantee that the dates which are eventually produced, will be commercially viable. The first attempt to plant suckers resulted in an 80% loss. Kim Mackay, the manager was certain that the survival rate will improve in the future.

Productivity is also improved by pollinating female date palms by hand, instead of leaving it up to the wind, which is how dates pollinate in the wild. 20 male plants are needed to fertilise the plantation's 700 mature females. Pollination takes place when the female flower is white. This is generally within three days of the female flower opening. Workers tie string around the male palms when they start flowering to ensure no pollen is lost when the male flower is cut from the tree. This year's pollen is mixed with last year's



The small male flowers spikes. Twenty male palms are needed to fertilize the 700 female palms.- Jude Mapleson

pollen to increase pollen spread. It is then stored in the fridge for use. Pollen is blown onto the female plant through a long tube. Once fertilised, the female flower is cut in half. This increases the size of the individual dates produced. Fertilised female flowers are then covered in white bags, which prevent the birds from eating the fruit. The bags also catch any fruit which drops before the harvest.

Dates are hand picked by pickers standing in a mechanical bucket like contraption. As soon as the dates are harvested they are taken to the sorting room where they are graded according to size and colour and packed into boxes for dispatch. Dates which show a black sooty mould must be thrown away. Mould can destroy an entire crop of dates if not discarded. Only fifty per cent of each crop is able to be sold as fruit. At the moment the rest is thrown away. In order to limit this waste, the Co-Op is seeking funds to establish a commercial kitchen in which they will use discarded dates to produce date chutney, vinegar, energy bars and other products. The aim is to use every date grown.

The Co-Op produces at least 12 different types of dates. These include the highly prized Medjool date, which was originally created for the King of Morocco for his personal use; a small honey date, some Deglet Noor and the Yellow Khalal Barhi, much beloved by the Aboriginal residents of Hermannsburg and the citizens of Qatar and Oman who considered a delicacy. Khalal Barhi, the only date that is yellow when ripe, is also the

only date which needs to be stored in a fridge. All other dates can be stored in jars for months, sometimes years. Sometimes dates are refrigerated in order to deter vermin.

Dates sold as edible fruit are packed into boxes which are then shipped all over the world. In recent years the Co-Op has shipped dates to people in Qatar and Lebanon. Each year the Co-Op commissions a local artist to design the box. This year's artist was Pip McManus. Pip was the first artist to include Arabic lettering in her design. (right) The Co-Op is now moving all sales on-line, to increase its marketability.



The Co-Op is also hoping to grow things apart from dates. Unlike Ti Tree, which gets no frosts, the Co-Op is in a frost zone. One possibility is to grow pistachio nuts because they are frost resistant. I for one, hope to taste a locally grown pistachio in the near future.

Thanks go to Wendy and Ian Mann for organising this lovely excursion; Kim Mackay, the farm manager for being such an excellent guide and Ruth Morley for giving each of us a small packet of Medjool dates to take home. Though I hate to be disloyal to the dates I grow in my own Alice Springs garden, the gift of an “Afghan” cameleer, I have to admit that the Tamara Plantation dates are amongst the best I’ve ever eaten.

The Ottolenghi recipe for savoury date chicken which was discussed over lunch can be found at: <https://ottolenghi.co.uk/recipes/roasted-chicken-legs-with-dates-olives-and-capers>

Other useful articles on date cultivation used to compile this report were:

Chlanda, Erwin “Time for a Date?” Alice Springs News 11th May 2015 and Nelson, Alec. Comments can be found at <https://alicespringsnews.com.au/2015/05/11/time-for-a-date/>

Kenna, G, (2009). Evaluation of Date Production in Central Australia Final Report. Available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/10070/671376> [accessed 22 April 2021]

McColl, C.R., 1993. Central Australian date industry: a strategy for development (No. 186). <https://territorystories.nt.gov.au/10070/408835/0/0>

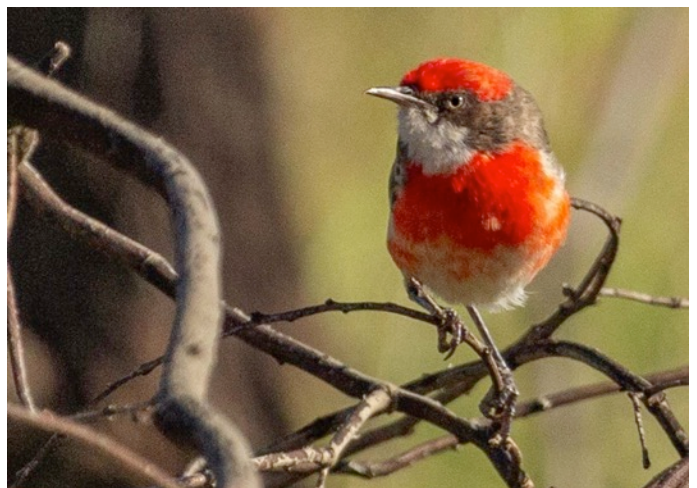
Sameera Sirisena, Ken Ng, Said Ajlouni The Emerging Australian Date Palm Industry: Date Fruit Nutritional and Bioactive Compounds and Valuable Processing By-Products <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1541-4337.12162>

Smith, Stuart Date Forum 2019 5th June 2019 Arid Zone Research Institute https://industry.nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/710135/date-forum-2019-azri-stuart-smith.pdf

Date farmers in Central Australia determined to fight cheap imports - Posted on July 28, 2019 <https://farmtable.com.au/date-farmers-in-central-australia-determined-to-fight-cheap-imports/>

Desert Birds thriving after the rain – Gordon Roberts

Gordon started early on the date farm trip in order to check out birds along the way. He sent in these lovely photos of a Masked Woodswallow and female and male Crimson Chats.





Wonderful colours along the Dolomite Walk - 17 April 2021

Report by Neil Woolcock

Google tells us:- *This 2.5 km circuit track offers a walk along a timbered gully and through spinifex covered hills. The Ellery Creek Dolomite Circuit crosses rocks that originated on the floor of an ancient inland sea. Signs along the way explain more about this area's intriguing geological history and local plant life.*

The walk is classified as 'easy', but our experience on Saturday would suggest it perhaps should also say that there are some steeper and rocky sections as well.

Dolomite is a dull, light brown rock comprised of calcium carbonate and magnesium carbonate.



The group met at Flynn's Grave at 8:00am on a cool and windy morning, then headed off to Ellery Big Hole. The Dolomite Circuit Walk leaves from near the shelter by the path leading down to the Ellery Big Hole waterhole, climbs in a relatively gentle way west up a valley towards a saddle where the track becomes quite a bit steeper and uneven. It continues over the saddle then heads back east, again being steep and uneven for some of the way before levelling out and eventually returning to the Ellery Big Hole Road near the campsite area.

Recent rains had filled the Big Hole and left a long waterhole on Ellery Creek. The Dolomite Walk track had been re-routed to skirt around the end of this long waterhole and involved a bit of clambering along the creek bed amongst high and lush growths of Buffel Grass. Once through that short stretch, the Buffel

thinned out and the track provided a great view down the length of the waterhole.

As we continued on, the Buffel dropped off almost completely and the walk rewarded us with many great views of the MacDonnell Ranges, and with a great diversity of grasses and plants that were all thriving after the recent rains. Large healthy Harnieria bushes with bright pink flowers were common and were the main source of colour in the early stages of the walk.

This was an unhurried walk of exploration and discovery. We took about 2.5 hours to do the circuit, getting us back to the carpark about 11:45am. We then headed down to the Big Hole where we had lunch on the grass in very pleasant sunshine. Four of the hardier members of our group then went for a swim in seriously cold water before we packed up and headed back to Alice Springs.



Plant paradise on the Dolomite Walk by Connie Spencer

Central Australian's wetter than usual summer season has made for some stunning bush walks and the Dolomite Walk did not disappoint. So many plants calling out "look at me, look at me"! The following is just a minute selection of the many highlights.

Our first discussion was over a grass in the Ellery Creek bed which, thanks to Marg, we determined to be Bunch Speargrass (*Heteropogon contortus*). Not a grass I am familiar with, as it is much more common in the Top end.

Once we were out of the creek bed and beyond the Buffel Grass we were in "plant paradise"! Dolomite Fuchsia (*Eremophila christophori*), my all-time favourite *Eremophila* with its mauve tubular flowers is very much at home on this walk as the common name suggests. The species name is after Christopher Giles, a surveyor on the overland telegraph line and later stationmaster at Charlotte Waters Telegraph Station. He collected plants for Ferdinand von Mueller who named many of Australia's plants. He was a friend of Ernest Giles but not a member of the immediate family.

Just a little further along we found Suzanne in "seventh heaven" as she had come across *Harnieria kempeana* subsp. *kempeana*. What a delight to find this small sub-shrub with its pretty bright pink flowers. It needs good rains, such as we have had, to come to life and flower. It is found in sheltered locations in southern facing slopes and in places lined the walking track. This plant is easy to propagate and does well in a container. I have found it temperamental as a garden plant.

Mulla Mullas have been outstanding this summer season – drying off and rejuvenating with each rainfall. We came across at least nine different species. The main ones were *Ptilotus clementii*, *P. xerophilus*, *P. nobilis*, *P. obovatus* and *P. sessilifolius*. To a much lesser extent we found *P. exaltatus* and *P. helipteroides* and *P. incanus*. We also came across *Ptilotus schwartzii* and had a discussion about looking a little like *Enneapogon oblongus* but on reflection, I now think it was *P. calostachyus*. For further information, refer to Barb's *A quick guide to central Australian Ptilotus species* in the November 2020 newsletter.

Abutilon/Sida species with their yellow buttercup-like flowers were out in force. I'm not prepared to go any further with these plants as I often can't even distinguish between the two genera let alone species!

As we got to the top of the ridge and headed down, there was a lot of Twin-leaf - *Zygophyllum*. The only one I was prepared to put a name to was *Zygophyllum tesquorum* with its delicate five-petalled white flowers.

And just to finish off our plant odyssey, we came across some very robust Bush Banana vines (*Marsdenia australis*) with plump fruit ready for the picking except we were in a National Park so obeyed the rules!



Suzanne Lollback



Suzanne Lollback



Suzanne Lollback

Margaret Friedel



Suzanne Lollback



Johannes Ammerschlaeger



Johannes Ammerschlaeger

Photos clockwise from the top.
Names on photos are the photographers.

Heteropogon contortus,
Eremophila christophori,
Harnieria kempeana subsp.
kempeana,
Ptilotus sessilifolius,
Marsdenia australis,
Ptilotus nobilis

An interesting sighting along the Dolomite Walk

Written by Barb Gilfedder

Marg Friedel sent in this photo of a dead but still beautiful Stick Insect. Her research led her to identify it as *Podacanthus typhon*, Large Pink-winged Phasma. At first we thought it had only been recorded along the coastal area from Queensland to Victoria. However, digging a bit deeper into the inaturalist, Atlas of Living Australia (ALA) records, we found a listed sighting of the species in the Northern Territory, down near the SA border in 2017 along with a photo.

For Rosalie Breen and I, it brought back memories of Anne Scherer, Education Officer at the Desert Park distributing Stick Insects to school classes as little research projects in the early 2000s. Anne assures me that the Stick Insect she distributed was *Eurycnema goliath*, Goliath Stick Insect, found near Tennant Creek. This one found on the Dolomite Walk is quite different.

I also asked Bob Read about the discovery. He said, *"I have not seen this species, but would not be all that surprised by the range extension. The photo looks like the ones on ALA. A lot of these things are seasonal and have been missed by earlier collectors. Conversely I think the Horn Expedition found a grasshopper no one has seen since. Last year someone posted a grasshopper at Belair (at edge of Adelaide, visited by the SA Nats since the 1880's). First record of a Praxibulus in SA. One never knows what will turn up"*.

Marg has listed the sighting, with photos and all the necessary details, on inaturalist (ALA) so it now needs two experts to confirm the identification.



Vale Nannette Helder

Nannette Helder was a surveyor, and a bushwalker, and a member of Alice Springs Field Naturalists. Her memorial service was held at Wallaby Gap on 23rd April, which was her birthday. Nannette would have been 59 years old. Nannette was described by friends and family as gutsy, determined, reliable, community minded and honest. Her generosity, as a walks leader, was praised. She didn't mind how good you were as a walker; if you had a go, she was encouraging and supportive. During Covid lockdown last year, she was particularly remembered for walks that were compliant with the rules and brought companionship, particularly for people who live alone. Nannette was also an active volunteer, helping parks staff with jobs along the Larapinta trail and elsewhere. Parks staff returned the support at her memorial, helping with access and logistics and safety.

Nannette was born and grew up in the Netherlands. Her mother said Nannette's love of the bush and camping started as a child, including a fascination for the sun, moon and stars. Through her profession, surveying, these fascinations came to shape her world. She was recruited to a remote NT seismic survey crew where she stood out, not just for her surveying capability and her strength in theory, but as an organiser of logistics and the survey team, able to take contingencies in her stride. She built a successful survey business in Katherine over 20 years, and raised her daughters Georgia and Zoe. They recalled her capacity to be whatever kind of mother they needed. Nannette was recognised in 2008 with the premium award for Spatial Science excellence Award in the Australasia-Asia-Pacific Region, the first female surveyor to attain this achievement.

Moving on from her business life, and moving to Alice, enabled Nannette to take long trips and adventures. She did do some surveying in Alice, working with Brian Blakeman, but she told me she was easily bored with the computer based formulaic process that most surveying has now become. Shortly after I met her, Nannette and I shared a bush adventure, driving from Alice west to Exmouth and Ningaloo Reef and then travelling south to camp on Dirk Hartog Island and walk along the lower Murchison River valley in Kalbarri National Park. We explored a remote ruined coastal lighthouse and she explained the fascination for lighthouses she had picked up from a family member. Her bushwalking style showed on the trip: even though we had a whole 4WD to spread our stuff into, Nannette's gear, including her food and her contributions to communal meals, were neatly stowed in her backpack.

Nannette was diagnosed only about 10 weeks ago with a cancer that was essentially untreatable. Her memorial brought together close to a hundred diverse, vibrant and interesting people of all ages. After the service, most people climbed the hill to Euro Ridge where Nannette's memory was again honoured as invited friends scattered some of her ashes.

RIP Nannette. Remember her in wild places.

Written by Jocelyn Davies

Great Australian Wildlife-Watching Locations

Report by Jill Brew

Lisa and Peter Nunn put in the leg-work. Lisa gave us the distillation – a selection of top places to plan spending time watching the wildlife, when next you get to south-east Tasmania, south-west WA or the Atherton Tablelands.

Of five general areas with sites for wildlife watching that she prepared, there was time for just these three to be dangled invitingly. Lisa hopes to cover the other two areas (Mitchell Plateau WA, Iron Range NP Qld) at a talk later in the year.

She gave detail on what you can expect to see, where you can stay to be close to the wildlife, and thoughtful extra comments and facts to give context and depth. That was

accompanied by a dazzling show of slides. Examples of just some of the wildlife she presented are included.



Pink Robin

SE Tasmania – Mt Field National Park, Maria Island and Bruny Island

All these are easy to get to from Hobart. There's the opportunity to see animals that are now extinct on the mainland. In Tasmania, fewer predators have given them greater survival rates.

Mount Field NP has waterfalls and tall forest habitat. The campground positions you to be able to observe foragers like Bennetts Wallabies (*Macropus rufogriseus*), Brush-tailed Possums (*Trichosurus vulpecula*), Pademelons (*Thylogale billardierii*), Southern Bettongs (*Bettongia gaimardi*), Eastern Barred Bandicoots (*Perameles gunnii*), and Eastern Quolls (*Dasyurus viverrinus*). These last three are extinct on the mainland. The Tasmanian Morepork/Boobook Owl, (*Ninox leucopsis*), an endemic closely related to the NZ Boobook, is there too.

You can find Platypus (*Ornithorhynchus anatinus*), in streams by the falls and campground, and at the higher levels of the park in Lake Dobson.

Among other special sights are King Billy Pines (*Athrotaxis selaginoides*), Black Currawongs (*Strepera fuliginosa*), Dusky Robins (*Melanodryas vittata*), Pink Robins (*Petroica rodinogaster*) and Glow-worms.



Maria Island

Maria Island is partially cleared, open and grassy, and partially forested. The ruins of the penal colony of the 19th Century come into view as you arrive by ferry. The old prison offers some basic rooms if you are that way inclined. There are no roads on the island, but it's not too far to walk to the village and campground. You can see Cape Barren Geese (*Cereopsis novaehollandiae*), the flightless Tasmanian Native hen (*Gallinula mortierii*), Wombats, Southern Brown Bandicoots (*Isodon obesulus*) and Tasmanian Devils (reintroduced, disease free and increasing in numbers) out in the grazing areas.

Bruny Island is prime for birdwatching. All of the endemic Tasmanian bird species occur there. Forty-spotted Pardalote (*Pardalotus quadragintus*) is one. The Swift Parrot (*Lathamus discolor*), which is critically endangered, only breeds in Tasmania (migrating to the

Australian mainland over winter). It is still losing habitat to logging. The mainland Sugar Glider, which is introduced, is noted as a pest, getting into nests and raiding for chicks. There are Long-nosed Potoroos (*Potorous tridactylus*) there – relatives of Bettongs, and Eastern Quolls (*Dasyurus viverrinus*) in two flavours : lighter caramel and dark brown (chocolate?) do very well. They feed off road-kill. You can approach them for closer viewing. There are no Tasmanian Devils on Bruny so the Quolls don't have to share.



Eastern Quoll

The Atherton Tablelands, Far North Queensland

The wet tropics, with one to two metres of rainfall annually, are home to rainforest species. Lisa's wildlife samples started to sound (and look) even more exotic and arresting: Olive-backed Sunbird (*Nectarina jugularis*), the Wompoo Fruit Dove or Pigeon (*Ptilinopus magnificus*) – a fruit eater that is purple, green and bright yellow in colour, Mountain Blue Butterflies (*Papilio ulysses*), Jungguy Tree Frogs (*Litoria jungguy*), endemic birds like insect-eating Macleay's Honeyeater (*Xanthotis macleayanus*) and Boyd's Forest Dragon (*Lophosaurus boydii*). The lakes and wetlands around Lake Barrine, in the Wet Tropics World Heritage area, were marked for exploration. Wildlife tourism is well established and growing, so there is related development. One accommodation place is Cassowary House, near Kuranda, where the fruit-eating seed-spreading Cassowaries (*Casuaris casuaris johnsonii*) are at home and at close quarters. Wary Lisa noted the 'dagger' on one toe of the Cassowary that has a disturbing reputation. The Musky (not 'musty' as at first hearing, but still with odorous aspect) Rat-kangaroo (*Hypsiprymnodon moschatus*) is present too. It's the most primitive of the macropod/bettong group (a link between arboreal possums and macropods?) and sports an extra toe that is opposable – helpful for climbing, perhaps – and has a scaly tail reminiscent of a rat's.



Cabin at Cassowary House



Musky Rat-kangaroo

The leaf-eating Lumholtz's Tree-kangaroo (*Dendrolagus lumholtzi*) has a very long tail, which is used for balancing, not for propulsion. It can actually walk backwards, not something within the capacity of other kangaroos. However, its apparent clumsiness in trees does translate to falls sometimes. If you would like to sip coffee while you view one, go to the Malanda Café and they will point one out for you. There are Platypus at Malanda, too.

Take out a spotlight at **Mt Hypipamee** and you can bring up Leaf-tailed Geckos, Long-nosed Bandicoots (*Perameles nasuta*), Herbert River Ringtails (*Pseudochirulus herbertensis*), and Green Ringtails (*Pseudocheirus archen*) – both possums. That's a taste. If you're after species of possums and gliders, you can find 14 in the area.

Staying at **Chambers Wildlife Rainforest Lodge** you can watch possums and gliders come into the feeders. There is wide diversity of owls in the area – half of Australia's owls are represented, including the Lesser Sooty Owl (*Tyto multipunctata*) and the dark-coloured Southern Boobook (*Ninox novaeseelandiae lurida*) in its rainforest form of 'Red Boobook'. The Golden Bowerbird (*Amblyornis newtoniana*), also present, must contrast nicely. The Green-eyed Tree Frog (*Litoria serrata*) prefers camouflage.

Near Julatten is Kingfisher Park Birdwatchers Lodge. You're most likely to see the Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfishers (*Tanysiptera sylvia*) in the area, between September and April. They use termite mounds for nesting chambers, and you can watch them nesting on the property. The Cane-toad-sized Northern Barred Frog (*Mixophyes schevilli*) is notable here too.

In the **Daintree River area** are Great-billed Herons (*Ardea Sumatrans*) and Black Bitterns (*Ixobrychus flavicollis*).

Back in **Cairns**, on the Esplanade you can see migrating shorebirds as well as mangrove specialists like Collared Kingfishers (*Todiramphus chloris*). Summer is the best time for shorebirds.



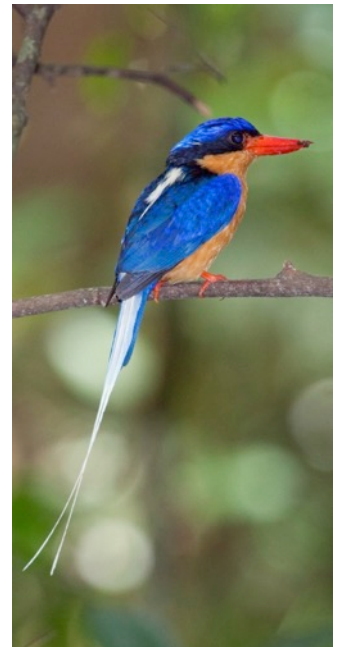
Boyd's Forest Dragon



Cassowary



Green-eyed Tree Frog



Buff-breasted Paradise Kingfisher

(WA South West Woodlands) Stirling Range, Dryandra Forest and Albany/Bremer Bay

The **Stirling Range Retreat** is a good base for birdwatching. Carnaby's Cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus latirostris*) also known as the 'Short-billed Black Cockatoo', or 'White-tailed Black Cockatoo' is a feature bird. Parrots here include the Western Rosella (*Platycercus ictorotis*) and Twenty-eight (*Barnardius zonarius semitorquatus*) - a form of ringneck with a yellow ring on the back of the neck and red on top of the beak. If extra colour is needed, there are Black-gloved Wallabies (*Macropus irma*), and the greenish Spotted-thighed Frog (*Litoria cyclorhyncha*).

Scattered pockets of intact wandoo woodland, dominated by *Eucalyptus wandoo*, are a safe haven for mammals that were once spread wider but have contracted to the south-west. It's believed that the flowering *Gastrolobium* plants are providing protection for native animals in the region. A toxin, fluoroacetate, a key ingredient of the poison 1080, accumulates in the plants. Feral predators eating a lot of native animals can ingest sufficient to kill them.

At **Tone-Perup Nature Reserve** you can rent a house/cabin and watch the wildlife, including Western Corellas (*Cacatua pastinator*), Tamar Wallabies (*Macropus eugenii*) and Western Quolls (*Dasyurus geoffroii*) – formerly also of the MacDonnell Ranges.

At **Dryandra Forest**, campgrounds and cabins are available. From here, you can watch for Western Grey Kangaroos (*Macropus fuliginosus*), and birds such as the Blue-breasted Fairywren (*Malurus pulcherrimus*) – 'stunning' in one description, Rufous Treecreeper (*Climacteris rufus*) and Elegant Parrot (*Neophema elegans*). At another level are the SW Carpet Python (*Morelia spilota imbricate*) Wackul in Nyoongar, WA Shingleback (*Tiliqua rugosa*), Short-beaked Echidna (*Tachyglossus aculeatus*), Brush tailed Bettong (*Bettongia penicillata*) – which has moved

from critically endangered, to endangered, and Numbats (*Myrmecobius fasciatus*) – termite eaters that are also endangered. If you drive slowly in the daytime you can see them.

The Albany area, with its coastal heath, has the Western Spinebill (*Acanthorhynchus superciliosus*), the Western Bristlebird (*Dasyornis longirostris*) – look for it at Cheyne’s Beach, and the Red-eared Firetail (*Stagonopleura oculata*), a grass finch. The Pygmy Possum (*Cercartetus concinnus*) and Honey Possum (*Tarsipes rostratus*) may be sighted too.



Numbat



Western Spinebill

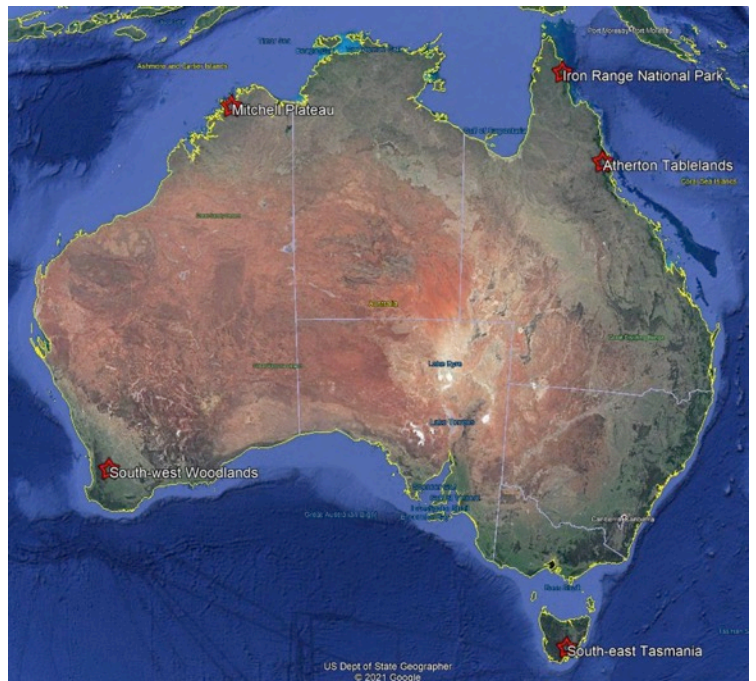
Changing tack, taking a day trip out by boat (70 kms from Bremer Bay) to **Bremer Canyon** will bring you in sight of Killer Whales (*Orcinus orca*), and, among other creatures, Common Dolphins (*Delphinus delphis*), Long-finned Pilot Whales (*Globicephala melas*), Yellow-nosed Albatross (*Thalassarche carteri*), and Wandering Albatross (*Diomedea exulans*). Video from the boat trip ended the talk on an exuberant, exultant note.

Questions at the end dwelt on wildlife protection :

- the toxin protecting native mammals, and its composition, and on baits specifically designed for cats.
- Climate changes resulting in lower rainfall in the SW and its expected longer term effects on what has been a refuge area.
- Bird strikes on wind turbines, and the possibility of blades being painted in two tones to reduce strikes (indications are that this is very effective, but not being taken up).

Many thanks Lisa! You have certainly whetted our appetites for more adventurous travel.

Lisa’s follow-up talk, looking at accessible wildlife on the Mitchell Plateau and in Iron Range NP, is expected to be in October.



Links to some wildlife-adjacent accommodation

- <https://parks.tas.gov.au/explore-our-parks/mount-field-national-park/mount-field-camping> MOUNT FIELD NP, TAS
- <https://parks.tas.gov.au/explore-our-parks/maria-island-national-park/maria-island-camping-darlington> MARIA ISLAND, TAS
- <https://www.cassowary-house.com.au/> near KURANDA, QLD
- <https://chamberslodges.com.au/> LAKE EACHAM, QLD
- <https://www.birdwatchers.com.au/> JULATTEN, QLD
- <https://www.perupnaturesguesthouse.com.au/> TONE-PERUP CONSERVATION PARK, WA
- <https://parks.dpaw.wa.gov.au/site/lions-dryandra-woodland-village> DRYANDRA, WA
- http://www.stirlingrange.com.au/retreat_info.html STIRLING RANGES, WA