



June 2021

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



Pretty pink native plant, flowering now at the Ilparpa claypans. Do you know what it is?
Answer on page 2. Photo Barb Gilfedder.

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 July 2021

The deadline for the July newsletter will be 23 June.

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.

Please let leaders know if you are attending, so they can notify you if details change.

Saturday June 5, 9am Geology of a Wigleys Waterhole – Meg Mooney There will be just a short walk down to the creek below the car park, where there is a dolerite dyke among the rocks, and also maybe to the main waterhole. Meet at MVR at 9am and people could sort out lifts in high clearance 4 wheel drives if needed. Should be back at MVR by late morning, midday at the latest. We'll be looking at the overall geological history of metamorphic and igneous rocks. moon3@iinet.net.au

Wednesday June 9 at 7.00pm.

General Meeting at Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Anett Weisheit will talk about the Geology of the Larapinta Trail.

Saturday June 19 - Todd River walk

A loop from the corner of Schwarz Cres north along the Todd River bank on the east next to Spencer Hill, cross to the St Philips side and back to where we started. Leader Sue Morrish suemorrish@iinet.net.au

Sunday June 20 – Afternoon walk at Conlons Lagoon (Rifle Range Swamp) TO BE CONFIRMED – Barb Gilfedder

Wednesday 14 July at 7.00pm

General Meeting at Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Steven Morton will be talking about a new book, soon to be launched "Australian Desert Life - a book by Steve Morton and Mike Gillam".

Sunday July 18 – Ellery Big Hole – walk up to the saddle for lunch – Leader Marg Friedel

Saturday July 24 – Alice Springs Desert Park to see the annual wildflowers in the sand country habitat with Steven Priestley. Normal entry fees to ASDP apply. Leader Barb Gilfedder

AUSTRALIAN PLANTS SOCIETY - ALICE SPRINGS

apsalicesprings@yahoo.com.au

Wednesday 2 June 2021 7.30pm - Monthly meeting at Olive Pink Botanic Garden at 7.30pm

Presentation by Ian Coleman "*Mparntwe caterpillars and plant associations in OPBG*".

Sunday Jun 13 – Intertexta Forest – Peter Jobson

July 2-3 Alice Springs Show – don't miss the wonderful display of flowers at the APS AS site. Plants for sale too.



Front cover photo is *Polycarpaea breviflora*

This small bushy annual was found flowering in the sandy, open ground between the Ilparpa Claypans and Ilparpa Road, surrounded mainly by native grasses. Barb Gilfedder

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

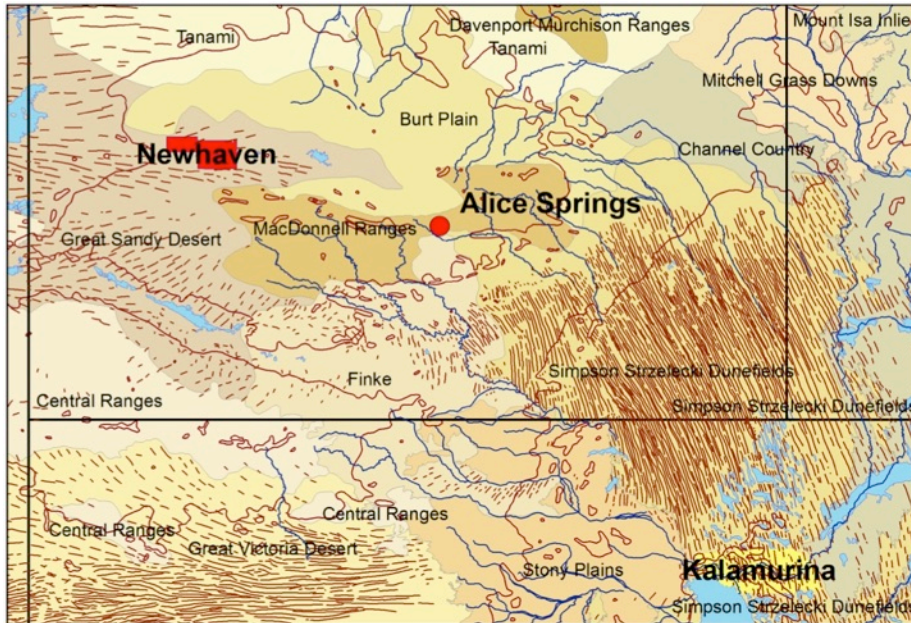
Other Club Responsibilities:

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

Newhaven Wildlife Sanctuary - An introduction to its natural values, history, and conservation programs

A talk presented on 12 May 2021 by Joe Schofield, South East Regional Operations Manager for Australian Wildlife Conservancy. Report by Marg Friedel. Maps and figure by AWC. All photos Josef Schofield/AWC.

Joe Schofield and his partner Danae Moore lived at and cared for Newhaven Wildlife Sanctuary on behalf of the Australian Wildlife Conservancy, from August 2007 to mid-2019. When they left Newhaven, Joe and Danae moved to Alice Springs and continued working for AWC, Joe as Regional Operations Manager. During their time at Newhaven, they hosted field trips for ASFNC members and are warmly regarded as a result. What better person than Joe, to tell old and new ASFNC members about Newhaven – ‘a place of exceptional diversity’?



Where is it?

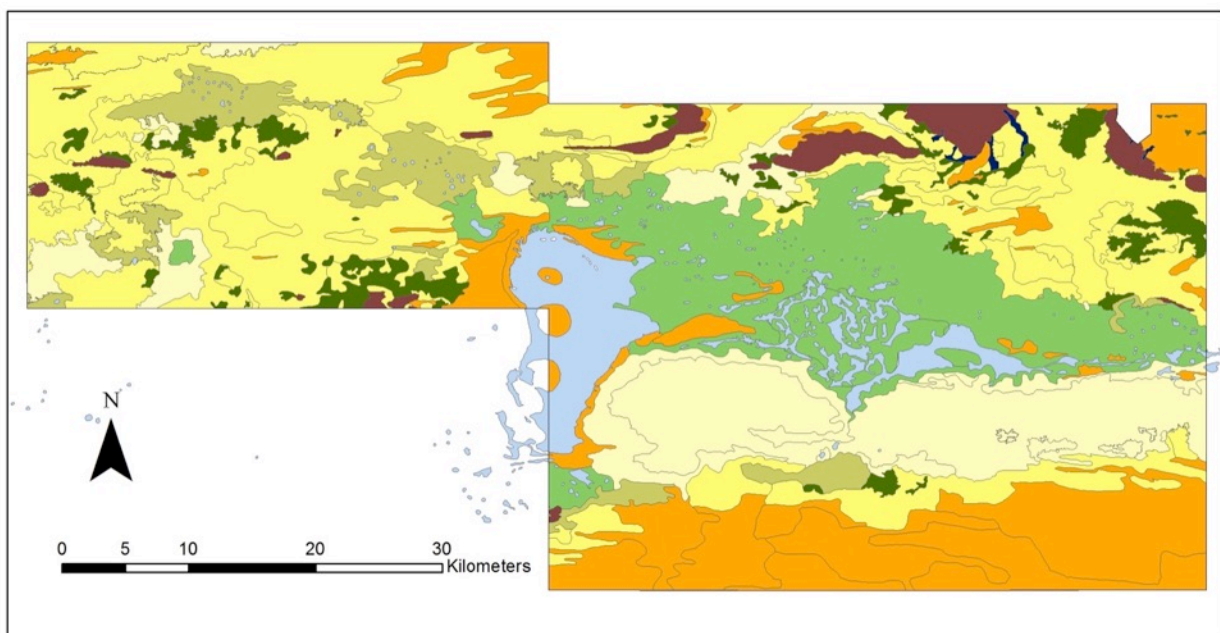
Newhaven is located near the intersection of three bioregions: Great Sandy Desert, Burt Plain and MacDonnell Ranges, giving it a rich diversity of habitats. It sits within the Great Sandy Desert bioregion, most of which occurs in Western Australia but includes the Lake Amadeus system of the Northern Territory. Big sandplains are a feature, unlike the mulga dominated Burt Plain bioregion.

Some statistics

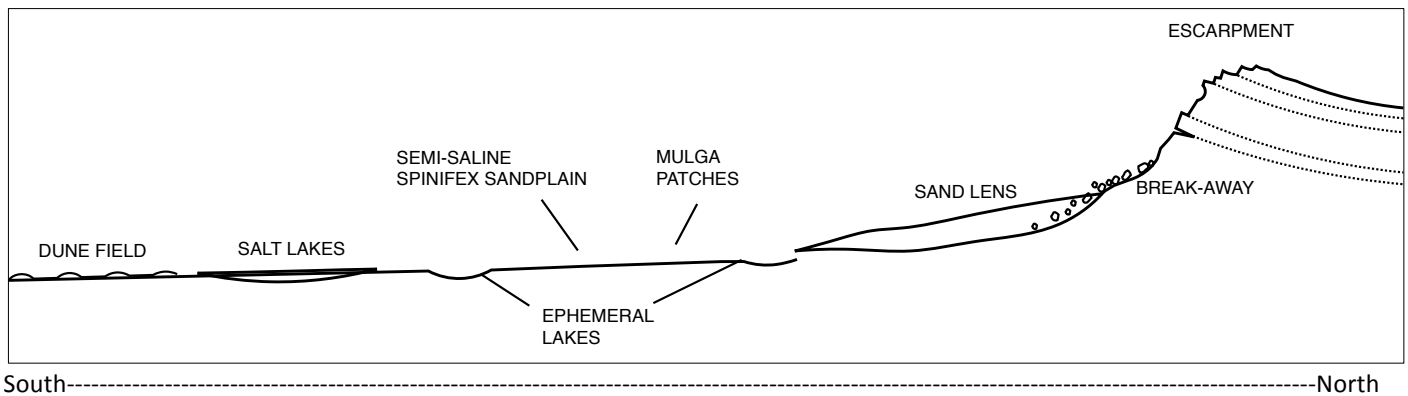
Size: 262,000 ha.
Bioregion: Great Sandy Desert
Plant communities: 23
Plant species: 631
Mammal species: 29
Bird species: 174
Reptile species: 84
Frog species: 6

Vegetation communities and wildlife

Newhaven encompasses eight major vegetation communities and within these at least 23 different ecosystems have been identified that are either threatened or poorly protected elsewhere. In the eastern portion, the vegetation occurs in distinct east-west bands, reflecting the underlying geology.



- Newhaven boundary
- open saltbush flat
- hard spinifex sandplain
- calcrete grasslands
- ranges
- waterbodies
- semi-saline spinifex sandplain
- spinifex dunefield
- mulga woodlands
- watercourses



Taking a north to south transect, we first encounter quartzite ranges. While they are a small proportion of the area, they offer thermal protection, fire protection, water shedding and shelter for Black-footed Rock-wallabies, Dusky Grasswrens and other species. Permanent water can be found there. Not surprisingly, they are culturally significant too.

Hard spinifex (*Triodia basedowii*) sandplains follow. Hard spinifex is slow to regenerate after fire and so is relatively easy to manage, and threatened species are not dependent on it. It supports various overstoreys, including bloodwoods, blue mallee and mixed acacias.

Beyond these are the semi-saline soft spinifex (*Triodia pungens*) sandplains, intermixed with ephemeral lakes, and very important because they hold water, are consequently productive and hence are core habitat for threatened species, for example the Great Desert Skink, Brush-tailed Mulgara and Rufous-crowned Emu-wren. *T. pungens* is stoloniferous and very flammable but recovers within a few years of fire. Plants to be found there include *Melaleuca*, *Calandrinia*, and *Pluchea ferdinandi-muelleri*.



The surrounds of the ephemeral salt lakes support gypsum communities and associated wildlife, including the Painted Dragon and potentially the Night Parrot. These salt lakes lie along an ancient drainage line that runs from east to west through the Sanctuary, culminating at Yunkanjini (Lake Bennett).

Further south on the transect are calcrete grasslands, dominated by ghost gums and including a number of fire sensitive habitats, previously home to Burrowing Bettongs. Their warren remnants are still visible but more recent rabbit invasions led to warren ripping and introduction of buffel grass as a stabiliser under past management. Buffel grass establishment was further enhanced because the grasslands were also grazed preferentially by cattle.

Open saltbush flats are another saline community, one which has also been heavily grazed in the past by cattle and horses. Despite being reduced to a dustbowl at times, the flats are now recovering and vegetation is re-establishing.



Patches of acacia woodlands, commonly mulga (*Acacia aneura*) shrublands but also other acacia species-dominated woodlands and grasslands, are found here and scattered elsewhere, most often associated with run-off from the quartzite ranges. They are fire sensitive and important habitat for Robins, Thornbills, Babblers, Grey Honeyeaters and Redthroats, as well as the Pygmy Mulga Monitor.

Further south, the hard spinifex sandplains recur, bordering the spinifex dunefields. The dunefields are extensive parallel dunes that extend to the southern border of the Sanctuary and beyond, supporting stately desert oaks and sometimes Princess Parrots on their nomadic flights.



People

Newhaven is Ngalia Warlpiri - Luritja country and traditional ties remain strong. Alex Coppock, owner of the Newhaven pastoral lease, first went out to the area as a teenager in the late 1950s and ran cattle there for about 40 years. The abundance of feral camels drew Birgit Dörger and Jurgen Huecke to Newhaven in 1987 to undertake the first scientific study of wild camels, maintaining the study for 20 years. Alex eventually negotiated with Birdlife Australia to set up a conservation reserve, which was subsequently transferred to Australian Wildlife Conservancy for co-management with traditional owners' engagement.

Joe emphasised that effective conservation was not simply conservation of the environment. Engagement of people's hearts and minds was fundamental, requiring a sense of purpose and connection to place. Local people are actively involved in management and decision making, and children are learning through participation with family and non-indigenous staff.



Activities

Key activities for AWC at Newhaven are conservation land management e.g. prescribed burning, weed control and feral animal control; biodiversity monitoring and research; and operational logistics, e.g. maintenance of bores, power and roads.

Newhaven will be the site of the world's largest feral cat and fox-free area, enabling the reintroduction of at least 10 nationally threatened and locally extinct mammal species. The current safe-haven is 9,450 hectares and both the Mala and Red-tailed Phascogale have been successfully reintroduced. The fenced area will eventually protect up to 100,000 hectares supporting populations of Greater Bilbies, Golden Bandicoots, Burrowing Bettongs and Central Rock Rats.

Monitoring and research will be critical to success, enabling reviews of what worked and what didn't, and adjusting future work plans to ensure better management.

Newhaven lease was purchased for \$600,000 in 2000, but AWC now focuses on developing partnerships with traditional owners in outback areas or with private land owners elsewhere and currently manages thirty-one Sanctuaries across the country – a total area of 6.5 million ha. That way AWC will continue to achieve its mission of 'The effective conservation of all Australian animal species and the habitats in which they live'.



Thank you Joe for a very interesting and visually beautiful talk! We look forward to hearing more, later in the year, about conservation management activities at Newhaven.

Mount Zeil Wilderness Camp

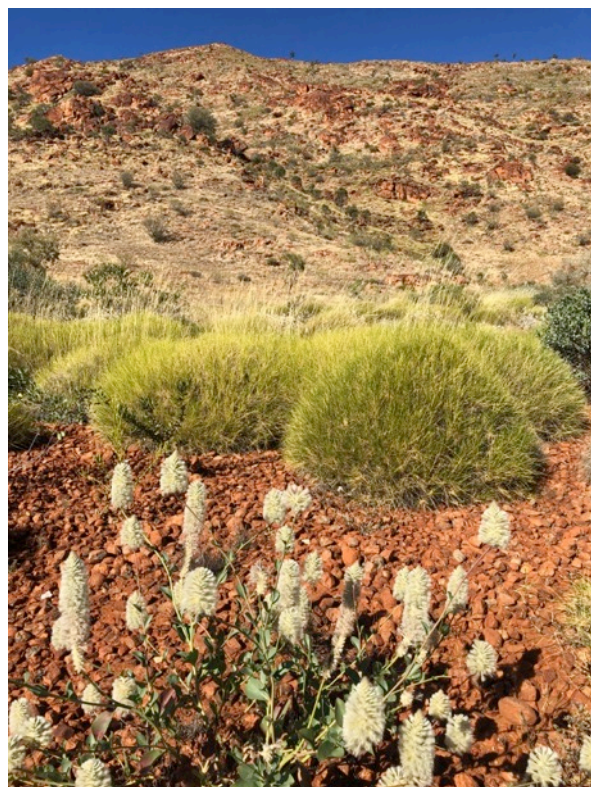
April 30-May 3 – Report by Jocelyn Davies

Mount Zeil rises 900 metres above the plain to 1530 metres. From the north, the view encompasses the full side of the mountain: few trees, but a healthy coating of spinifex and some dense shrubs in the run-on areas at the foot of steep rock slabs that are scattered around the slopes. In a deep gully at the mountain's base a tiny trickle of water fed small pools. Kate Stevens and I watched the splash of Zebra Finches bathing while the green flash of small flocks of Budgies swished past us.

Kate and I were the only Field Nats who managed to visit Mount Zeil on the Field Nats trip on the May Day long weekend. Some others who had thought they would join us could not come at last minute. What a pity! It was so lovely there.

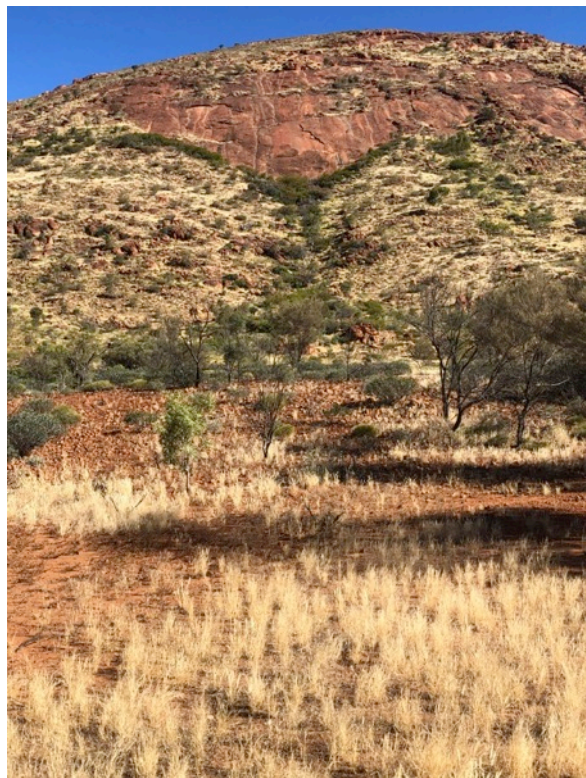
I was thrilled to see and hear so many birds, about 30 species. My favourites were the Grey-headed Honeyeaters with their delicate lemon breasts, those chunky Dusky Grasswrens hopping round the mountain boulders, Spinifex Pigeons flushed off their nests by my clomping through the spinifex (and hopefully back in their place soon after), Rufous Whistlers and Hooded Robins flitting in the mulgas, curious about my presence; calls from a Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo, and of Owllet Nightjars at dawn and dusk, and the loud chatter of the Budgies and Cockatiels coming and going from their nest hollows above my swag which I'd laid out in the bed of the sandy creek and which was soon, like the creek bed itself, coated with the confetti of their poo.

I was camping in Mount Zeil Wilderness Park, which is being set up by the Connellan family, close to 200km from Alice along the Tanami track and then the Papunya Road. The family used to own Narwietooma Station pastoral lease and now have a small sublease at the north side of Mount Zeil. They have designated about 15 camping sites, spread out widely along the creek, each with a fireplace and long-drop toilet. A vehicle track towards the base of the mountain ends in a parking area about 1.3 km walk to the mountain slopes through Mulga, Woolly Oat Grass and Beefwood and the seemingly inevitable Buffel-lined drainage lines. They are also running a small shop, and a biodynamic garden (which I didn't see) and sell some produce to Food for Alice at the Community Garden on Saturday mornings (presumably when they are doing a run to town for other reasons). They are being careful to protect trees and habitat near the camps, have planted some trees (Whitewoods at my camp), and supply good mulga firewood to campers as part of the \$20 pp per night camping fee (which they kindly discounted 20% for this Field Nats trip).



Sammy and Misty who I met at Reception when I arrived, told me they haven't started to publicise the place yet to attract more visitors. Mine was certainly a lovely uncrowded time, especially on the two nights I was there by myself after Kate had to go back to Alice.

I headed for the mountain on Sunday morning, wanting to climb up to some of those awesome rock slabs. After the first steep and strenuous pitch, the climbing was quite easy going and I found that I'd wended my way half way up the mountain in a couple of hours. The views into gullies and up the ridges were of piled up granitic boulders and slabs but I found there was always a relatively easy way to pass through them. There aren't any walking tracks on the mountain, so it's not straightforward, but it's not very difficult either if you are accustomed to bushwalking off track. The Hard Spinifex was a bit cruel though when I fell into it one time and I'm still feeling the lumps on my thighs and bum from where it pierced my trousers. Such lovely Sennas of many leaf forms in lovely flower, Curry Wattles and Minni-ritchi Wattles, Holly Grevilleas and abundant diverse grasses! On the other hand it was disappointing that even half way up the mountain, occasionally I would see a clump of Buffel Grass. I had not set out to climb so high up the mountain that day but was thrilled that I had, as the whole structure of its ridges and valleys was clear from the high point on the ridge where I ate my lunch, and quite hypnotic. In the early afternoon, I started down by a different route, leaving plenty to explore for next time.





Photos: *Ptilotus xerochrysum* 'like hundreds of candles' – Sue Morrish; *Buffel Grass* still dominating the valley– Marg Friedel; Beautiful view across the hills, happy *Eremophila freelingii* in the foreground - Mandy Webb.

Walk at Whitegums

Saturday 8th May. Report by Sue Morrish

Quite a large group of us gathered at Whitegums, near Honeymoon Gap, to go on a guided walk with Keith to look at his beautiful work controlling the Buffel Grass on the lower slopes of the ranges there. As we walked up the first slope the afternoon sun was lighting up the masses of *Ptilotus* like hundreds of candles. Keith has made and named a series of short walks, so we followed the signs to lots of beautiful views across the hills, including looking over the Iwupataka Land Trust to the east.

I took more photos than botanical notes, so can only say that:

- the *Eremophila freelingii* looked uncharacteristically happy on the slopes, under the Mulga
- I learnt that there are more *Enneapogon* than just the two oat grasses I see in Spencer Valley
- There were some eye-catchingly beautiful *Scaevola* up higher on a rocky hill we went over as we headed back to the house
- A controlled burn that was done on a low rocky hill had really worked out well, with follow-up spraying reducing the Buffel Grass longer term.

Jocelyn and I couldn't help pulling out the odd clump of Buffel here and there, and made promises to ourselves to return with mattocks for a working bee sometime in the future. It would be a fitting way to say thank you to Keith for his amazing progress on freeing the site from his Buffel 'competitor'.

A big thanks to Keith and Stella from the Field Naturalists for having us to Whitegums!





Plumed Whistling-Ducks highlight of Sewage Ponds visit – May 22, 2021

Report by Barb Gilfedder: Photo by Andrew Crouch.

Six ASFNC members and five visitors took advantage of this organised trip to Alice Springs Sewage Ponds. Among the visitors was Andrew Crouch who was back in town from Adelaide for Heritage week and was pleased to revisit one of his old haunts. Two birding scopes gave everyone better views of some of the birds and helped identify them. At this time of the year the migratory waders are away at their other homes, some, many kilometres away in the northern hemisphere where they breed. There were still plenty of resident birds to find, observe and discuss. The flock of about 70 Plumed Whistling-Ducks were roosting on a bank, then stood up and looked a bit suspiciously at us, as we got closer. They took off and whistled as they flew to land on another bank a bit further away.

I made a list of 32 different species seen.

Emu	Hoary-headed Grebe	Red-kneed Dotterel	Willie Wagtail
Plumed Whistling-Duck	Crested Pigeon	Black-fronted Dotterel	Magpie-lark
Black Swan	Spinifex Pigeon	White-winged Tern	Little Crow
Pacific Black Duck	Eurasian Coot	Black Kite	Australian Reed Warbler
Grey Teal	Pied Stilt	Whistling Kite	Welcome Swallow
Pink-eared Duck	Red-necked Avocet	Little Corella	Tree Martin
Hardhead	Masked Lapwing	White-winged Fairywren	White-backed Swallow
Australasian Grebe	Red-capped Plover	Yellow-throated Miner	Zebra Finch



Insects of interest

This Stick Insect (right) discussed in our May newsletter, was confirmed to be *Tropidoderus gracilifemur* by the Atlas of Living Australia. Margaret Friedel first thought it may be *Podacanthus typhon*, which it is very similar to, however that species evidently only occurs around the coast and has small spikes on its thorax. The beautiful *Tropidoderus gracilifemur* has been collected several times in central Australia.



The Pyrgomorph Grasshopper (below right) that was photographed by Pat Nelson in the Dulcie Ranges is *Greyacris picta*.

Bob Read commented, "I have not seen this near Alice, but have seen it at Newhaven. Note tegmina (forewing) appears black, and is very finely veined, too fine to be resolved in this image. No surprise to find it in the Dulcie Ranges as it mostly occurs north of Alice. There is a third species of Pyrgomorph in the Centre. Recorded from Ooldea SA in 1901, Barrow Creek in the 1890's and one at Yulara posted on iNaturalist last year. It must be lurking somewhere.



Because Pyrgomorphs are mostly short winged, they are relatively easy to photograph. If you find any, especially if look a bit different, try to get good views of the head, from above and in profile".

NEW FROG PHOTOGRAPHIC GUIDE (advertisement)

The 'Photographic Field Guide to Australian Frogs' aims to provide a detailed and wonderfully illustrated guide for adult frog identification. Frogs can be subtly different and often lack consistent features for identification. Species recognition may require gaining an overall impression or appearance based on a variety of subtle differences such as shape, size, behaviour, habits, call and habitat. This is referred to as 'jizz'. However, relying on jizz for identification presents a problem – it requires prior experience or a reference for comparison. The 'Photographic Field To Australian Frogs' overcomes this limitation by providing detailed *comparative* photos of key identification characters. For those less familiar with frogs, a 'dichotomous key' is provided to quickly identify genus or groups of similar looking frogs. Like so much else in the book, this key is illustrated using in-life examples.

In contrast to other published frog guides the book provides *individualised* distribution maps depicting geographical features that separate similar taxa such as rivers, mountains, or towns. These maps are supported by detailed text documenting when similar species overlap, abut or even areas where hybrids have been recorded. And for those taxa where call is vital, parameters are provided such as dominant frequency, pulse rate, pulses per note and the number of notes per call.

Overall, this book is a field guide to Australian frogs unlike any other. Wonderfully detailed, extensively comparative, superbly illustrated and, most notably, useful for identifying Australian frogs. The 'Photographic Field Guide To Australian Frogs' is available from early June. You can purchase online from CSIRO Publishing (<https://www.publish.csiro.au/book/7951/>) or order your copy at all good bookstores.

Mark G Sanders is professional field naturalist, ecologist, and fauna surveyor with more than 25 years of experience. He is a well-known wildlife photographer and currently runs an environmental consultancy conducting surveys across Australia.



PHOTOGRAPHIC FIELD GUIDE TO AUSTRALIAN FROGS

MARK G. SANDERS



Roland E. (Puntj) Hall by Bob Read

I was saddened to hear that Puntj died 16/5/21.

Long standing members ASFNC members may remember him on excursions over ten years ago. He had the sharp eye of one who had grown up in the bush. He did not care for scientific names, but was possessed with curiosity and powers of observation. Like many who grew up in the bush he was quiet and reserved, and uncomfortable with large groups of people, but a good friend to those who knew him well.

He had read extensively and had an extensive knowledge of McDouall Stuart's explorations. After a trip to Stuart Pass he was able to relate some rock we had seen to an entry in Stuart's journal.

He was born at Adelaide House in Alice Springs on 22 August 1932. At the time his father was working in Mount Isa, and his mother sent a telegram "Punch has arrived" to let him know that it was a boy (their other child was Judy). The name stuck, I have never heard him called anything else, but he changed the spelling to "Puntj" while working in the APY Lands. This was the Depression, and Puntj's father (Rex Hall) worked on various projects. One was cyaniding at Tanami which came to a disastrous end when the truck caught fire between Tanami and the Granites. The family was saved by Rex walking 30 miles (50 km) for help.

After that Rex was a contract water driller, and the family travelled with him, living in bough sheds. In the earlier years the rig was steam powered. Puntj's mother (Maggie Hall, nee Nicker) carried a bag of nails, and at each camp would select a "kitchen tree", the nails being used for hanging billies and frying pans. Puntj's mother not only supervised his correspondence lessons, but taught him the bush. She herself had lived in the bush most of her life, growing up at Glen Maggie north of Alice.

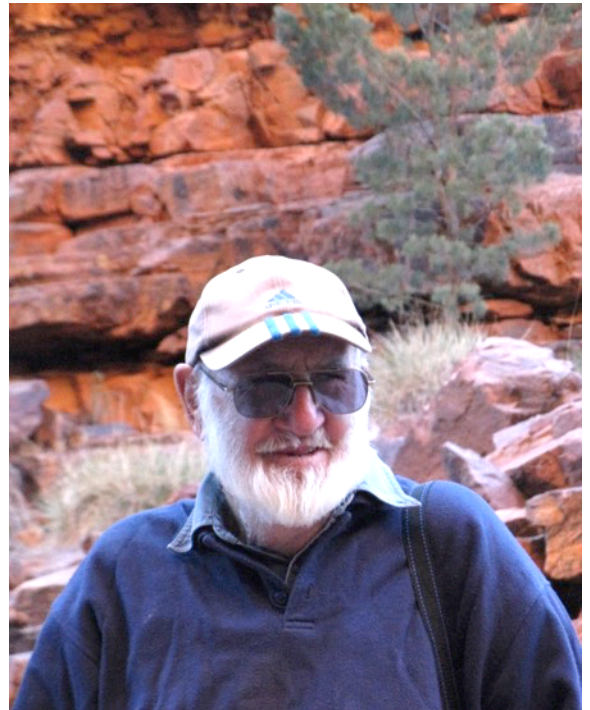
The RSL has a photo from this period, of Puntj aged about 10 in bib and brace overalls on his father's rig. Another of Puntj's photos shows him and his sister at the top of the rig derrick, obviously before over protective parenting.

In 1947 Rex was granted the Ooratippra pastoral lease in a land ballot. The station had little infrastructure, and for years the family lived in bough sheds. This was in the days of open range methods using a bronco panel when beasts had to be roped individually. On visits to town the family would camp in the prickly acacia scrub on the north of town where Braitling is now.

At about age 21 Puntj left Ooratippra, working at a variety of jobs including drilling and droving. One contract was cutting mulga fence posts for a shilling each.



Puntj at the Senior Cits in 2019. He had been restoring a rocking chair that had belonged to his grandparents at Glen Maggie.



Puntj on a Field Naturalists trip to Mordor Pound in 2009

In 1961 he married Marilyn and returned to Ooratippra for a while, but left before his father sold up in 1966.

In the 1980's when I first met him, Puntj was working in the Pitjantjara Lands and across the border in WA. During this period he did a great deal of useful work drilling bores and cleanouts. The small cable rig he used was able to get to places that would have been very difficult for the much larger and heavier modern rigs. He finally retired from drilling about 1995, doing some station caretaking jobs in his latter years.

Puntj was always happiest in the bush. To the surprise of some he was happy to accompany me on bird watching trips. I was very fortunate to be able to make a trip to Ooratippra with Puntj. He showed me an old yard that had been on an open plain in the 50's now in thick scrub over 2 m high, the rig still sitting at the last bore he drilled on Ooratippra, a Supplejack tree growing up through it. He could remember when Possum scratchings were common through the Sandover floodout. Today there are none.

One remarkable coincidence was while caretaking at Ooratippra he helped with the final de-stocking 50 years to the day after he and his father he had taken delivery of their first cattle at Connor Well and then walked them to Ooratippra. We now know that the country is too poor to support continuous grazing.

He will be missed by those who knew him, one of the last of the old cable drillers, one of the last to have grown up barefoot in a bough shed and one of the last to remember Alice and the pastoral industry in the years soon after WWII. Some interviews with Punch are held by the National Library at <https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/3426205>

Our thoughts are with Marilyn and family.