



November 2021

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



Our Northern Territory Floral Emblem, Sturt's Desert Rose, *Gossypium sturtianum*, is currently flowering beautifully at Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Among many of the more common pink flowering plants, is this lovely, more unusual white variety.
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 February 2022.

The deadline for the February newsletter will be 23 January 2022.

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

ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

It is important to watch for up-to-date flyers or contact leaders for details as arrangements may change.

Wednesday November 10 at 7.00pm – ASFNC Monthly Speaker Night at Olive Pink Botanic Garden

Jimmy Cocking will talk about - **'Working together - land management collaborations across Australia's desert country'**

Over the past decade some significant collaborations have developed across Australia's arid lands to bring indigenous land managers, scientists, governments, businesses and conservation groups together. Jimmy Cocking has been involved and working with some of these exciting initiatives through his role as ALEC Chief Executive for the past 13 years.

Sunday November 21– ASFNC Planning Meeting 2-00 pm at Olive Pink Botanic Garden.

All Members welcome to attend.

Sunday December 5 - Christmas breakfast at Old Telegraph Station. Gates open at 8am.

Please bring a plate of yummy food to share. Also you need to bring your own drinks and chair or rug to sit on.

Always a special place to chat and reminisce on the grass in the shade of the river gums.

AUSTRALIAN PLANTS SOCIETY - ALICE SPRINGS

apsalicesprings@yahoo.com.au

APS AS Field Trip "What's flowering along the road to Simpsons Gap?"

Sometimes it looks like there is not much to see, but on closer inspection there may be a lot.

Come on an early morning ramble along the road to Simpsons Gap. This will involve stopping in a few places and a walk and cuppa at the water hole.

Meet at National Parks Visitor Centre - **7.30am, Sunday 14 November 2021**

Contact: Suzanne Lollback - suzaloll2@bigpond.com

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	Claire Norman	0448 341 795
Members	Lee Ryall	0417 401 237
	Rosalie Breen	0458 155 141
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 controller – position vacant



Don't confuse this with the Desert Rose. This is Native Hibiscus (Radyera farragei). We saw lovely specimens of it on the roadside of the Old South Road.

**The Presentation of the 2021 Australian Natural History Medallion to Peter Latz
31 October 2021 at Olive Pink Botanic Garden**



Marg Friedel, Vice President ASFNC, Ian Coleman, Curator Olive Pink Botanic Garden, Peter Latz and Barb Gilfedder, President of ASFNC. - Suzanne Lollback

Background to the Australian Natural History Medallion

The Australian Natural History Medallion is awarded each year to the person judged to have made the most meritorious contribution to the understanding of Australian Natural History.

Such a person may have:

- assisted notably in the protection and understanding of Australian native flora and/or fauna;
- discovered and/or described new Australian species of plants or animals;
- devoted considerable time and care to the study of any branch of Australian natural history, including palaeontology and geology.
- engaged in the dissemination of knowledge through the publication of articles or books or by photography or pictorial art or any other means accepted by the Award Committee



The Australian Natural History Medallion has been awarded almost every year since 1940. Previous winners include Charles Mountford, J B Cleland, Dom and Vincent Serventy, Jean Galbraith, Graham Pizzey, David Lindenmayer and John Woinarski. So, Peter Latz is in illustrious company.

The Australian Natural History Medallion is administered by The Field Naturalists Club of Victoria. It is usually presented to the successful nominee at the November General Meeting of The Field Naturalists Club of Victoria, in Melbourne. But these are unusual times, and so the Victorian Club delegated Barb Gilfedder, as President of the Club that nominated Peter, to present the citation and Medallion in Alice Springs.



Part of the crowd of witnesses who attended the presentation.- Suzanne Lollback



AUSTRALIAN NATURAL HISTORY MEDALLION

For furthering interest and knowledge in Australian Natural History

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12th October 2021

Australian Natural History Medallion, 2021.
Awarded to Peter Latz,
Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club.

As usual with this presentation, the committee was faced with a difficult choice from a strong field. However, Peter Latz stands out for his lifelong work which has become a bridge between Aboriginal and European botanical and environmental cultures. During his 40 years as a botanist for the Northern Territory herbarium, Peter identified many plants previously unknown to science, and by working with nine different aboriginal groups, he was able to include cultural knowledge, which would otherwise have been lost, in their scientific descriptions. He also translated many of the names into those nine languages.

He conducted the survey of Kings Canyon to determine whether it should become a National Park, and identified many previously unknown plants there; he has also had several plants named after him.

He has worked on improving some varieties of bushtucker, and studied the effects of fires on these foods.

He is also an expert on desertification, and has published two influential books, *'Bushfires and Bushtucker'* (updated in 2018), and *'The Flaming Desert'* (2007).

As well as all this, Peter has continued to volunteer in various capacities, including advising on weed removal, native plant care and arid land management.

His own land is a working example of the best kind of management, and a favourite destination for Field Naturalist excursions.

We are delighted to present the 2021 Australian History Medallion to Peter Latz.

Nicola Williams,
Chair, ANHM Awards Committee



The Australian Natural History Medallion is a national award conferred annually under the auspices of the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria Inc
P O Box 13
Blackburn Vic 3130



It had rained most of the day and was many degrees cooler than on previous days, so everyone scurried for jumpers and jackets. Fortunately, the weather did not deter about 90 people from attending and, as the formalities started, the rain stopped.

Fran Kilgariff, Chair of the OPBG Board, read a message to Peter from the local Custodians. Then Marg Friedel, who MC-ed the event, gave a brief background to the Medallion before Barb Gilfedder read the citation and presented the award.

Peter spoke about the spiritual and scientific understanding of the land, about sharing knowledge, and about fire and termites. Acknowledging the Medallion, he humbly said, "I just happened, luckily, to be the right man in the right place at the right time and I am so happy and that you lot have helped me get here. Thank you!"

Margaret read excerpts from written accolades by people who were unable to attend, in which they thanked and congratulated Peter and shared anecdotes. Speeches from members of the audience followed in a similar vein. These certainly made interesting listening and were a fitting tribute to Peter.



*Peter receiving the medallion from Barb Gilfedder.
Anne Schmidt*



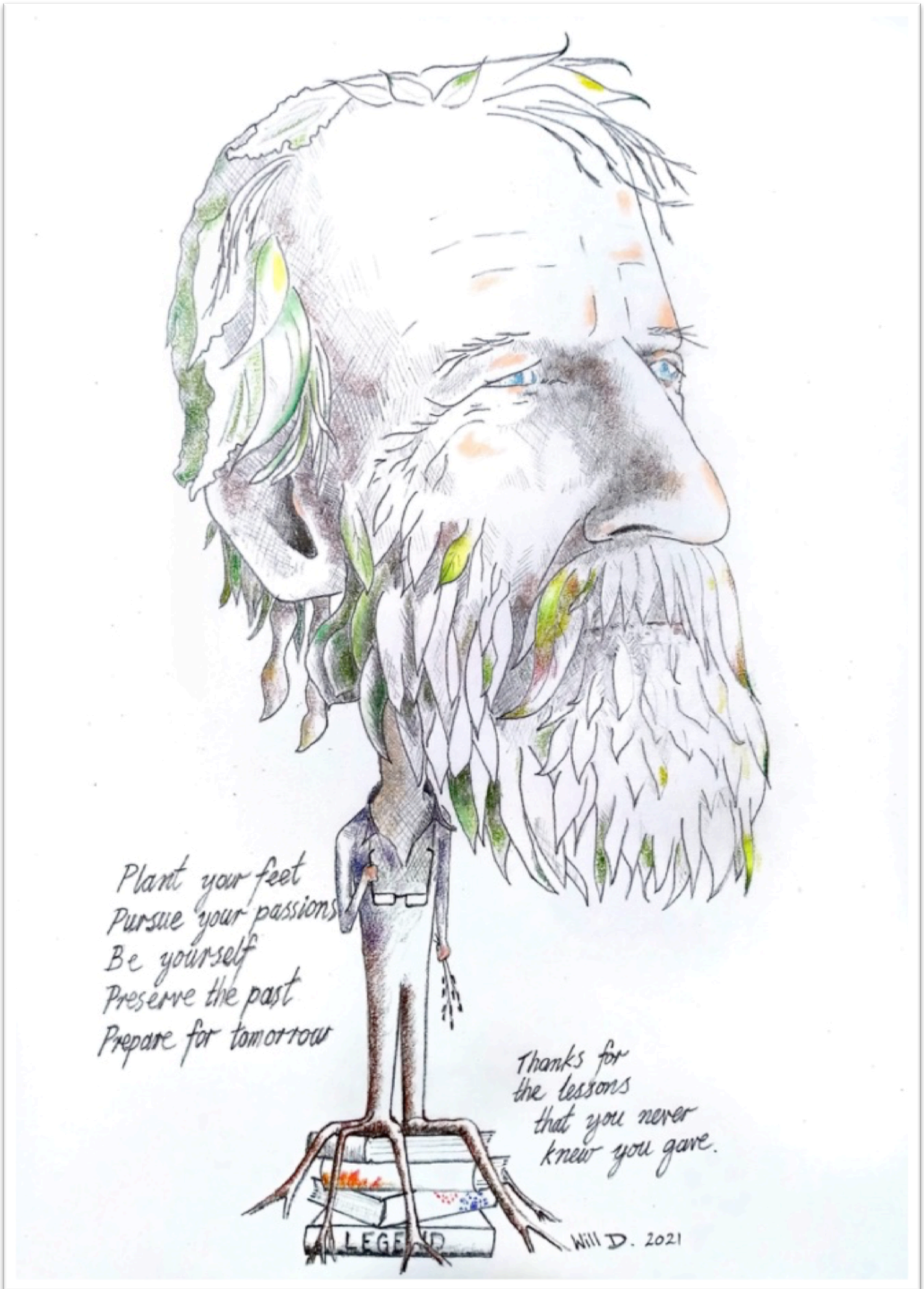
*Marg Friedel explaining Will Dobbie's drawing to Peter.
Suzanne Lollback*

Thank you from Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club to

- The Victorian Field Naturalists Club.
- Michael LaFlamme for researching and writing the nomination of Peter Latz for this award.
- Ian Coleman, Curator of Olive Pink Botanic Garden for co-hosting the event and doing so much organising.
- Peter Yates and Pamela Bladon who donated the use of 3 shade shelters, erecting and dismantling them, *because they liked Latzy*. Also Arid Lands Environment Centre and Peter & Lisa Nunn who offered shelters, although they were not used.
- Fran Kilgariff, Chair of OPBG Board for reading the message from the Custodians.
- Mandy Webb for checking people in and Lynn Day for selling books and calendars.
- Claire Norman who had to prepare the fruit platters from scratch, because Coles had run out of platters. Also Suzanne Bitar and Jan Black and others who helped serve them.
- The photographers, Suzanne Lollback, Anne Schmidt and Mike Gillam, and to Mischa Baka and Rebecca for the videoing.
- The Australian Plants Society Alice Springs and Landcare Central Australia for displaying their banners.
- All the people who shared their anecdotes and gave their congratulations to Peter, both spoken and written.
- All Members and Friends of ASFNC for their support...and thank you to everyone who came.

The video can be seen at <https://youtu.be/h5yDJIEkFs0>.

Another development from this event is a Peter Latz Wikipedia biography page, compiled by Chris Watson and relying heavily on Michael LaFlamme's great work for the ANHM nomination. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Latz_\(botanist\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Latz_(botanist))



Will Dobbie's contribution to a folder of mementos presented to Peter Latz. Above the ear are leaves of *Ipomoea polpha* subsp *latzii*; hanging behind the ear are pods of *Acacia latzii* and across his forehead are seedheads of *Panicum latzii*. three of the twelve species named after him.



Ewaninga Siding Trip

23 October 2021

Activity leader and report: Neil Woolcock

Participants : Neil and Leigh Woolcock, Margaret Friedel, Barb Gilfedder, Connie Spencer. Rosalie Schultz, Max and Sue O'Callaghan

We met at the information board opposite Old Timers at 7:30am on a pleasant Saturday morning, consolidated into three vehicles and then headed to the Old South Road turnoff. Ewaninga Siding is off to the right, roughly 22km down the road that is now sealed for about 20km. The turn-off to Ewaninga Siding from the South Road is marked by a small and easily missed sign. The siding and fettlers' cottages are about 500m from the road on a good access track.

Fettlers carry out repairs to railway lines. On the old Ghan line, the sidings and fettlers' cottages were apparently spaced about 30 miles apart, so presumably the fettlers at each siding were responsible for the maintenance of the line 15 miles each side of their base.

At the Ewaninga siding are the original fettlers' cottages, plus some more recent additions that were added by the Ghan Preservation Society when they fixed up the track from Alice Springs and ran trips down to Ewaninga. Great plans and ambitions that sadly have been abandoned.



Three photos from almost the same spot, showing the progression of the decay and abuse. The first is 2005 – the last 2021.



On the rail track in front of the cottages is a tanker rail truck, well graffitied.



Behind the cottages and near a well picked over rubbish tip pit is another tank. This one has been raised on an earth mound, and is near a concrete floor, which has a borehole marked as 'water'. Was the tank cleaned out of fuel and then used to store water?

On one end of this raised tank you can just make out the words VACUUM OIL.

Marg Friedel did some research on Vacuum Oil on her return to town :-

"I'm assuming that this tank dates from the time when oil was the fuel used to turn the water into steam (not too much wood out there). That would mean that the tank might be as early as 1929, when the line opened. According to Wikipedia, Vacuum Oil merged with Standard Oil in 1931 and went through various name changes, but Vacuum persisted as part of the company name until at least the 1950s. Steam engines were replaced by diesel electric engines in 1951. Maybe old Vacuum tanks were used for the diesel??"

Check out more information on Vacuum Oil on the website provided by Marg Friedel

<https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/articles/2513>

Max O'Callaghan has clarified that "the train engines were coal-fired until 1956 or thereabouts" (the internet said 1951), when they switched to diesel. It makes sense then if the old oil tank, originally used for transporting oil, was repurposed to hold fuel for the generator that provided line power to the fettlers' cottages.

For those who may be wondering about the **Chinese Characters** someone has painted on the tank, they read "jie ke", pronounced 'Jeeay ker', and could be how you might write the Chinese sounds to make 'Jacob' in Mandarin. Jacob it seems has an admirer.

Today sadly all the buildings are rapidly falling into serious disrepair due to vandalism and the weather.

See it soon or it will be gone!

Left: Ewaninga – a coloured photo which is not there any more – showing fettlers in the 1930s. (photo dated 9.7.2005)



Another board at the front of the cottages headed "EWANINGA, The Heritage Times, Old Ghan Railway" now has no evidence of having ever had any photos on it other than blank spaces. When I was there in July last year and photographed this board, splotches of red could still be seen. Other similar signs from other Old Ghan sites such as Rodinga, Bundooma and Engoordina can be found on the web. I've tried to track down who made this board and whether I can get copies of the photos, but no luck so far. I have made contact with a few historians and we will see if they can come up with any answers.

Ewaninga Reserve – rock carvings

After an hour or so wandering around Ewaninga Siding we headed about 6km further south to the turn off to Ewaninga Reserve claypan and the extensive displays of petroglyphs. Pictured right is a recently installed second viewing platform. This allows visitors to get a better look at some of the artwork without the risk of damaging it. After walking the short circuit track to the clay pan and back to the cars we enjoyed morning tea in the shade of some eucalypts on one of the wooden picnic benches. Nearby a central netted dragon was keeping a close eye on us.



Middle: Central Netted Dragon at Ewaninga rock carvings (photo Leigh Woolcock)

Bottom: This *Dodonea viscosa* subsp. *angustissima* was the most noteworthy find for Barb at the Ewaninga Siding tip.



I am at Deep Well

An excerpt from 'I am at Deep Well' by poet Roland Robinson. Robinson was a fettler at Deep Well towards the end of the Second World War, working in the Civil Construction Corps.

...I am at Deep Well where the fettlers' car travels towards the cool blue rising wave, that is the Ooraminna Range, and starts those pure birds screaming from the scrub to swerve, reveal their pristine blush in wings and breasts, to scatter, settle and flower the desert oak. Here I have chosen to be a fettler, work to lay the red-gum sleepers, line and spike the rails with adze and hammer, shovel and bar, to straighten up and find my mates, myself lost in the spinifex flowing down in waves to meet the shadow-sharpened range, and know myself grown lean and hard again with toil. Here, in the valley camp where hills increase in dark blue depths, the desert hakea stands holding the restless finches and a single star.

The full poem originally appeared in Roland Robinson's collection 'Deep Well', published in 1962 by Edwards & Shaw, Sydney. It also appeared in an anthology 'Australian Verse from 1805: A Continuum', edited by Geoffrey Dutton and published by Rigby, Adelaide in 1976. I recommend reading the full poem if you can locate either collection and learning more about Roland Robinson – a most interesting man.

<https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/robinson-roland-edward-16981>.

Marg Friedel



In April Lisa Nunn presented the first of two talks on Great Australian Wildlife-Watching Locations. In October she gave the second, starting with a helpful reminder of the sites she'd introduced us to previously (See the May issue for the report on that first talk.)



Then it was on to new areas: **Kutini-Payamu (Iron Range) National Park**, Queensland, adjacent to the eastern coastline towards the top of Cape York; and the **Mitchell Plateau**, on a similar latitude, in Northern WA. They fit in to 'less accessible, more remote', so planning a 4WD (or at least AWD) camping holiday to appreciate them would be the thing.

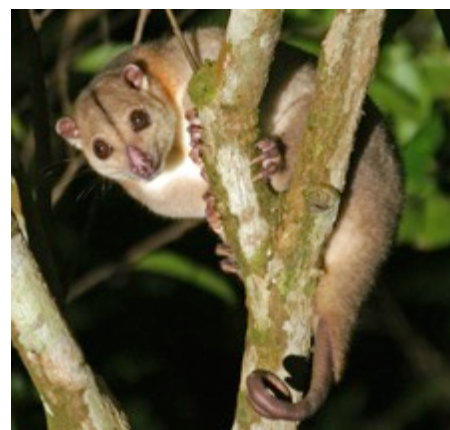
QUEENSLAND

For **Kutini-Payamu (Iron Range) NP**, try for four or five days. There are four camping sites (one on the coast and three in the **rainforest**) you can head for. Lisa gave a generous refreshing wander into country and habitat that has felt very distant with travel restrictions, for sometime. She gave us samples of what can be seen – necessarily limited samples from all that is there, but often startling. Wildlife from Papua New Guinea crossed in the distant past via a land bridge, so surprise species exist here that are not seen elsewhere in Australia. Birds do come across seasonally from PNG, too. McIlwraith Range (KULLA), further south in the cape, is a home for many of these species, but is closed as a NP. In neighbouring parks, though, you can see some of the species (often not imagined as living in Australia).

Settle in to your campsite and, in eucalypt woodland at Mt Tozer, go searching for local colour. Look out for yellow spotted monitors (*Varanus panoptes*) roaming, and Brush Turkeys with purple collars (*Alectura lathamii*). In lower land forest, especially if out at night (bring the spotlight!) you can see large, red-eyed Papuan Frogmouths (*Podargus papuensis*). Watch out for crocodiles too (*Crocodylus johnstoni* and *C. porosus*): the swimming opportunities are sadly limited.

The Rose-crowned Fruit Dove (*Ptilinopus regina*) – deep pink cap with narrow yellow stripe - lives in the rainforest in the park. Also a fruit eater is its neighbour, the tiny green (but with coloured blobs around the eyes) Double-eyed Fig Parrot (*Cyclopsitta diophthalma*). It's the smallest of the Australian parrots. There is the much larger Red-cheeked Parrot (the male has a rose-pink face and a reddish upper mandible) (*Geoffroyus geoffroy*) also common in PNG and Indonesia. The Fawn-breasted Bowerbird (*Philonorhynchus cerviniventris*) is found only in these environs. You may see the (significantly sized) Giant White-tailed Rat (*Uromys caudimaculatus*) and the Green Python (*Morelia viridis*) (middle). Juveniles are yellow. These pythons show up wonderfully well in torch light, but can be seen in the day, too, arranged in various positions, anticipating prey or planning something else or just relaxing. The White-lipped Tree Frog (*Litoria infrafrenata*), a green frog, is the world's largest tree frog. There are a lot of 'biggs' here! The big, the magnificent -- the blue and black Magnificent Riflebird (*Ptilorus magnificus*), with the metallic flap at its throat, and a disturbingly alien appearance when it presents a weirdly artful arrangement of its feathers during courtship dances, for example – and the clearly resourceful. The male Palm Cockatoo (*Probosciger aterrimus*), presenting with sharp black feathered crest and red cheek patches, uses an alternative ploy in courtship, fashioning sticks and then using them to beat on tree trunks and branches rhythmically like a drum (grasping it with their left foot, I discovered).

There are other colourful birds in the rainforest - Yellow-billed Kingfishers (*Syma tortoro*) with their orange head, Eclectus Parrots (*Eclectus roratus*) with a dark green male, the female red-purple/blue (left) - also found in the Solomon Islands, PNG and Indonesia, and once thought to be two different species.



You are likely to see the shy but easily spotted Spotted Cuscus (*Spiloglossus maculatus*), and possibly the Grey Cuscus (*Phalanger Mimicus*) (page 10, right), type of possum with a strong curled prehensile tail – in the rainforest.

A tip: The NP is not far from Lockhart River, and there are cabins next to the airstrip, so travelling in by air is one way of getting to the wet season tours that operate when the road is closed.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Now out of the Queensland rainforest and over to the **Mitchell Plateau in the Mitchell River NP**. While there is little intact fauna in the arid lands we are living on here, the shrinking refuge that animals have retreated to in SW WA is mirrored in NW WA. The escarpment country is good for wildlife. There's some mirroring of the Arnhem Land escarpment on the Mitchell Plateau, with species similar to those found in Arnhem Land, often endangered, having habitat still.

It's 800 km from Kununurra, so going for more than one night is advisable. At least three is the strong recommendation.

Camp at the Mitchell River campground and you are on a track to the Mitchell Falls (left), an 8 km return walk with other waterfalls along the way. It's close to the edge of the escarpment. There's rock art from distinct periods of art and different styles. 'Clothes peg figures' and 'Bradshaw' figures with elaborate headdresses are there.

Reptiles are about. Watch for Mertens' Water Monitor (*Varanus mertensi*) and diverse goannas. You'll find a diverse group of Geckos, including the Gracile Velvet Gecko (*Oedura gracilis*) and Giant Cave Gecko (*Pseudotochea dactylus cavaticus*). There are several different species of Dtella (a type of Gecko) to find in this location too, including the Northern Spotted Rock Dtella (*Gehyra nan*).

Cane toads (*Bufo marinus*) reached this area two years ago but there is still a lot to see and Lisa named many examples.

There's a good number of carnivorous marsupials: two are the Red-cheeked Dunnart (*Sminthopsis virginiae*), and Northern Quoll (*Dasyurus hallucatus*), which has declined significantly in the NT. The nocturnal Golden-backed Tree Rat (*Mesembriomys macrorus*) is a fruit eater, and possessor of a particularly long tail, 29 – 36 cm as against an 18 – 34 cm body. It has not been seen in the NT since 1960.

White-quilled Rock Pigeons (*Petrophassa albipennis*), brown, with a white wing panel showing when flying, roost up on cliff tops, but will be on the ground in the morning and evening. Partridge Pigeons (*Geophaps smithii blauwii*) (middle) will also be foraging on the ground. Their relatives can be found in Katherine and in Pine Creek where they sport red facial skin, but here it is yellow.

Keep an eye out for the bright green Magnificent Tree Frog (*Litoria splendida*) and the Superb Dragon (*Diporiphora superba*) (right) – with a superbly long tail. Shrubs above clumps of spinifex, on rock shelves, are favourite spots for the dragons.

The Black Grasswren (*Amytornis housei*) - a sister species to the White-throated Grass Wren (*Amytornis woodwardi*) of the Arnhem escarpment, only lives in this particular escarpment area. You can see them hopping in groups, on rocks. The Kimberley Honeyeater (*Territornis fordiana*) is common here too.

Living in caves and crevices are the endemic Scaly-tailed Possums (*Wyulda squamicaudata*), with their hairless tails. The Monjon (*Petrogale burbridgei*), a rock wallaby that is the smallest wallaby in the world, being the size of a large Brush-tailed Possum, can be seen at Little Mertens Falls – half an hour from the campsite.

The previously deep King Edward River crossing has been made shallower, drawing in many more people to this park, so this location is not as 'remote' as it once was. However, Traditional Owners are now managing a firmer permit system. APT has a 'wilderness camp' you can visit as part of Kimberley Tours. There is a helicopter pad at the campground and falls. (Note: The road off to Kalumburu is in poor condition.)

Last point: Remember to take a spotlight for the night viewing.

Lisa's talk had humour and depth and breadth of knowledge. We knew we were in good hands. The talk answered many practical questions about managing a trip as well as piling on reasons for not delaying and getting out there and coming face to face with the country, the creatures and all else besides. Thanks for rounding off the get-away plan, Lisa.



Lisa gave suggestions for references

Books you may want to refer to:

Finding Australian Birds – Dolby and Clarke. (CSIRO pub)

A Complete Guide to Reptiles of Australia – Wilson and Swan. (CSIRO pub)

The Mammals of Australia – ed by Van Dyck and Strahan (New Holland pub) Note: better for SE Tasmania, not so useful here.

Website

<https://www.mammalwatching.com/places/tags/australia/>

Australian Mammal Watching – very good. Put in your destination and you'll see comments from people who have been there.

Blogs

<https://www.mammalwatching.com/blog/>

Mammal watching - Jon Hall

<http://sunshinecoastbirds.blogspot.com/>

Sunshine Coast Birds - Greg Roberts (trip reports, noting birds, but also other wildlife)

<https://timothydolby.com/>

Bird guiding across Vic and Australia – Tim Dolby

Facebook Australian Mammal Watching Facebook page – very good

Sclerolaena bicornis – a harvest for ants.

By Barb Gilfedder



A common Chenopod around Alice Springs, Goatshead Burr, *Sclerolaena bicornis* occurs in all mainland states, even a few specimens in Victoria, although it is most common in arid areas. The photo below shows it as almost a monoculture on the edge of the Intertexta Forest.



Almost all parts of the plant are covered with white hairs, thickest on the two-spiked fruiting bodies except at the ends of the sharp spikes. Close examination explains where the common name comes from. This species often occurs on plains or claypans with a mixture of other chenopods.

Walking over an area next to the road into Simpsons Gap, I found the ant nest, pictured below left. Surrounding the central entrance was a thick solid ring of *Sclerolaena bicornis* seed husks. The bottom picture is a close-up. The fruit had obviously been dragged to the nest, the seeds eaten by the ants and the empty woody seedcases discarded.



The ants at another nest close by, pictured right, were still



collecting the complete seeds, the ones closest to the entrance, that they were industriously transporting underground. The ones further from the entrance were more discarded husks.