



March 2022

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



This enormous moth is one of the Emperor moths in the family Saturniidae, *Opodiphthera engaea*. The common name is Mistletoe Emperor Moth. This male moth (notice his feathery antennae) along with several females, was photographed by Roberta Ferrari along Ragonesi Road. More photos on page 8.

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 April 2022.

The deadline for that newsletter will be 23 March 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 9 March at 7.00pm – ASFNC Monthly Speaker Night at Olive Pink Botanic Garden. **Marg Friedel** will present a video of a talk she gave over 8 years ago, at the Desert Knowledge Precinct. **“A million Years of change: wind, flood and fire in the Simpson Desert.”** She will answer questions afterwards.

Saturday 12 March - Drive and explore around Limestone Bore, along Larapinta Drive where the Hermansberg Road and Glen Helen Road part company. Half day, so bring morning tea and wear a hat and strong shoes - Meet 7.00am at Flynn's Grave. Leader - Neil Woolcock. 0428 521 598

Friday 25 March - Frog Friday – Simpsons Gap. Meet at the picnic area at about 6pm to eat your picnic tea. Then wander down to the gap when it gets dark to visit the frogs. There are several different species and we may well find other things of interest. Bring picnic tea, torch, mosquito repellent and wear closed shoes. Leader - Clare Pearce. 0434 340 338

Wednesday 13 April at 7.00pm – ASFNC Monthly Speaker Night at Olive Pink Botanic Garden. There will be a talk by **Angus Duguid** on **Native fish**.

AUSTRALIAN PLANTS SOCIETY - ALICE SPRINGS

apsalicesprings@yahoo.com.au

Wednesday 2 March 2022 7.30pm Olive Pink Botanic Garden - **Annual General Meeting**, followed by a slide show by **Bec Duncum** — **“Flora of south-west Western Australia”**. Bec will talk about her holiday amongst the wildflowers of south-west Western Australia. This is a floral paradise. It will be a great night.

Wednesday 6 April 2022 7.30pm Olive Pink Botanic Garden - **Peter Jobson** — **Introduction to plant nomenclature**. Peter will talk about how plants are given their scientific names.

OPBG LIBRARY

A few excess books from the reference library at Olive Pink Botanic Garden are available at meetings for all Members of ASFNC and APS AS to choose for their own libraries. A small donation would be appreciated. Leftovers will go to the recycling centre.

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club

Committee Members

President	Barb Gilfedder	8955 5452
Vice-President	Marg 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



Gossypium sturtianum

Sturt's Desert Rose

Have the bees been busy pollinating the *Gossypium sturtianum* flowers in your garden?

APS AS would love for you to collect the seeds for them for seed sales.

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February Speaker
“Eat, Drink, Sleep, Walk”
Presentation by Anne Schmidt

Write-up by Barb Gilfedder
Anne gave us a personal and very entertaining account of the solo walk on the Larapinta Trail that she did in June 2021.

Anne had previously walked all parts of the trail, some several times and some in both directions. Starting bushwalking quite young, she had walked with her parents, Marg and Jim Lawrence and many friends since and loved the experiences.

She was keen to do the whole walk on her own, before new regulations came in. She wanted the freedom of choice and more flexibility than would be allowed with the new system. She does support the new fees and realizes that more regulations are necessary with more walkers using (and sometimes abusing) the trail.

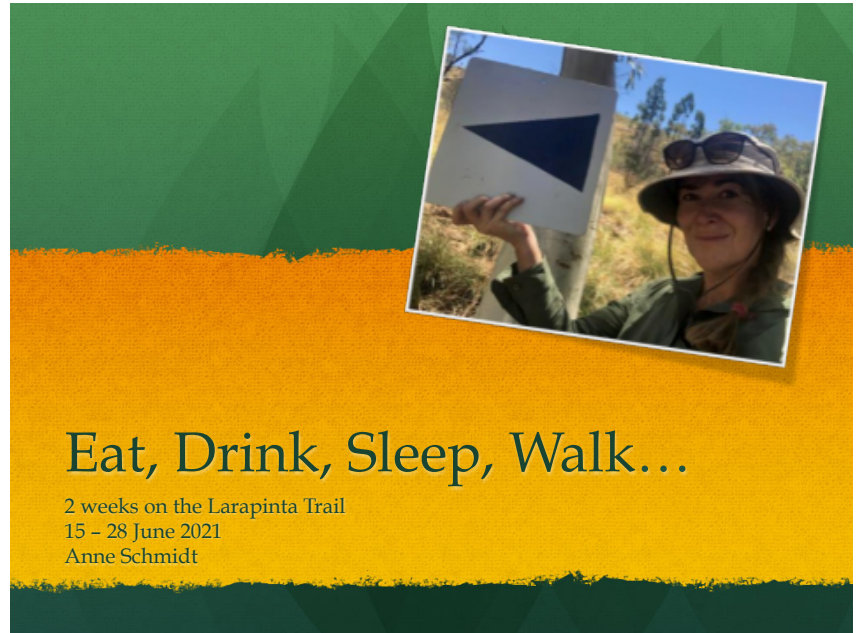
Good preparation was vital. Her pack had to contain all her personal things, sleeping and camping equipment, a water filter, water and food for several days, maps, GPS messaging device and a book. It was heavy. Extra food, changes of clothes, extra toilet paper, etc. was divided between four drop boxes to replenish her supplies along the way. These were dropped off at various accessible trailheads and an extra one in Hugh Gorge.

Anne started the talk by reading her journal from the first day. It sounded tough and reflected her uncertainties and worries as well as excitement at having started. She walked 18.6km on the first day, starting from the Telegraph Station and camping at Fairy Springs. Not using her tent that night, she kept warm sleeping in thermals and had frost on the outside of her sleeping bag in the morning.

The first two days she was disappointingly walking mainly through Buffel grass, although she admired the views and this pretty little stone bridge.

She praised the Friends of Larapinta Trail group several times in her presentation. They are a key body of volunteers working with Parks and Wildlife, promoting and helping improve and maintain the trail.

[Photos: Supplies laid out beforehand, for backpack nearest the front and four drop boxes; a neat stone bridge on Section 2.](#)



Anne went through her whole walk with us, showing us maps of each section, where she walked on each day and the distance. The distance varied from 9km on the shortest day to 22km on the longest. In the early sections she looked over her shoulder at Mount Gillen, amazed by how far she had walked away from it, while in the later sections imposing Mount Sonder kept drawing her closer. She had picked out several photos from each day of what had impressed her, a sunset, a plant, always a view and a taste of the weather.



I was interested in the photos of many of her camping spots. They were usually just a small level scrape on the ground. Here she installed a small ground sheet, blow-up mattress and sleeping bag. If rain looked possible she added her tent with its covering fly and kept dry.



Her most uncomfortable night was sleeping on a convenient table under a Corkwood Tree (Day 7). The wind blew all night and was incredibly noisy. The next morning she was up very early and back on the trail for a 22 km day.

Photos: Top- Mount Gillen gradually disappearing into the distance as Anne walked away and Mount Sonder gradually coming closer as she neared the end of the epic walk.

Three camps – without the tent at Fringe Lily Creek; the best camp using her tent near Serpentine Gorge; and her most uncomfortable night at Ghost Gum Flat.



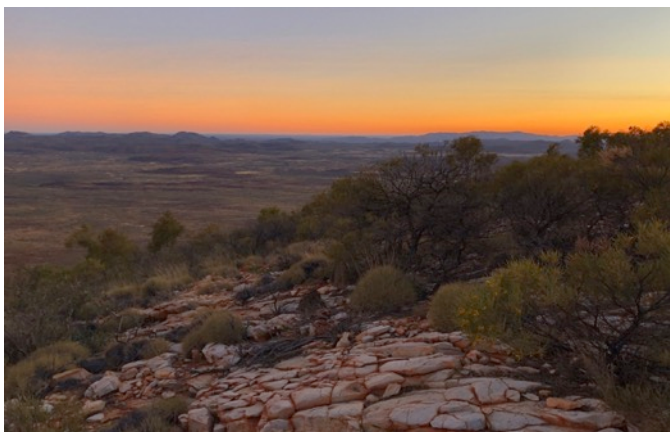
It was Winter when Anne did the walk and she certainly experienced a few extremes of weather. I already mentioned the frost on the outside of her sleeping bag on a few mornings; one day it rained; and another it was so cold she kept her sleeping thermals on as well as her normal clothes.



She encountered a bit of wildlife. This Carpet Python was near one of her drop boxes and a young dingo played with her at her Ellery North camp until an older one advised it to keep its distance.



Of course there were other people on the trail to chat to. She expected to have company at Ellery Creek because it is so accessible but she had it to herself. Nearing the end, with Mount Sonder looming closer, she met a lovely couple and spent about 40 minutes whingeing to them about having to climb it, to complete the journey. She had already climbed it twice that year. She thought they looked familiar, but it was only later she found out they were John and Monica Chapman, renowned bushwalkers, who have written guides to most of Australia's iconic trails. They were on the Larapinta Trail updating their book. She now dreads seeing the revised version in case it talks about the grumpy lady they encountered. Of course she did climb Sonder and enjoyed the wonderful views enhanced by the rising sun.





Some of the flowers along the way –

Photos clockwise from top left: Anne with *Ptilotus incanus*; Macdonnell Ranges Hakea- *Hakea grammatophylla*; a garden-like area near Standley Chasm containing Holly-leaf Grevillea – *Grevillea wickhamii*, Showy Indigo – *Indigofera basedowii* and Halls Creek Wattle, *Acacia cowleana*; an everlasting daisy, Hill Sunray – *Anemocarpa saxatilis*; Large Pink Mulla Mulla, *Ptilotus exaltatus*; Bush Banana – *Marsdenia australis*; and Spearwood – *Pandorea doratoxylon* near Brinkley Bluff.



Anne had some final advice for would be walkers.

1. Manage your nutrition- eat healthy and don't wait until you are starving.
2. Manage your hydration – drink plenty of water.
3. Look after your feet.

When she finally completed the walk. She rang her husband to tell him, but gave instructions to not pick her up until the following night. She needed that extra day of reflecting and relaxing before returning to the real world.

Well done, Anne, and thank you!

Cycles of Life

By Rosalie Breen

Mid afternoon walking out of Central Clinic on 2nd February, still rain in the air, a little body on the footpath! Oh poor thing. But what is it – it can't be a Little Button Quail here surely? I picked it up and took it home. On Barb's suggestion I rang Adam Yates, who filled me in.

All the growth in the last months has created a seed eaters heaven for the Little Button Quails, leading to an increase in the local population. They hide in the grasses, only being flushed out by a close walker.

BUT...

Along came all that rain. The Todd flowed, roared, rose, flooding out the surrounding cover on the banks and in the riverbed. The quails had to escape the deluge. Must run from the water. Some unfortunate ones ran into town and were reported seen on the streets, where I found my bird. Near Mega Fauna Adam found one too, alive needing drying out. Hopefully it will recover with his care.

Thanks Adam for your explanation. Thanks little bird. Your death gave me the chance to examine and marvel at the colour patterns of your feathers and beauty of your perfect little body.



New Zealand Tui *Prothemadera novaeseelandiae*

Some of you will remember Don and Llana Haddon. They lived in Alice Springs for a while. Llana was working as a remote area nurse and Don taking great photos of our Australian birds. They have been back in their home country of New Zealand for quite a few years, returning for short periods to central Australia for Llana to do relief nursing. Unfortunately Covid has put a brake on their plans to do this recently. However Don sent us photos of this beautiful iconic New Zealand bird, the Tui.

Wikipedia tells me, "The Tui is a boisterous medium-sized bird native to New Zealand. It is blue, green, and bronze coloured with a distinctive white throat tuft. It is an endemic passerine bird of New Zealand, and the only species its genus." It is related to our Honeyeaters.

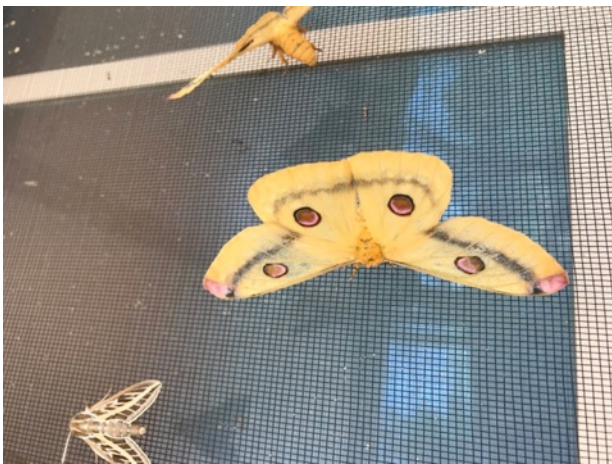
What a beauty! Thanks Don! Stay safe Don and Llana!



More photos of the Emperor Mistletoe Moth, *Opodiphthera engaea*

The caterpillar of this moth is mainly black with white hairs that are attached through red lumpy bits (verrucae). They feed exclusively on Mistletoe species. They pupate in cocoons usually attached to the main stem of the Mistletoe. The Atlas of Living Australia distribution map shows they have mainly been seen around Alice Springs and also in inland Queensland and New South Wales. The photo below also includes one of the Hawk Moths, possibly *Agrius convolvuli*, Convolvulus Hawk Moth, which looks considerably smaller, but that is maybe just because it is further away as the books tell us it has a wingspan of about 8cm. The Emperor Mistletoe Moth being 11cm for females and 9cm for males.

Thank you for the photos Roberta Ferrari and to Bill Low for passing them on.



...and another moth

While I am talking about moths, I found this one on the verge outside our house. (Don't you love its feather duster hair-style.) It is much smaller than the Emperor and was very active, waving the end of its abdomen around. I am told it is a female and was probably releasing pheromones (come-hither chemical smells) to attract males, which the males pick up with their large feathery antennae. I was told that my photo was probably *Ochrogaster lunifer*, the bag-shelter Moth or Processionary caterpillar, but notice the marginal row of whiter dots on the wing. *O.lunifer* does not have these and the moths are generally darker.

A few weeks later I found this very hairy caterpillar on a small *Melaleuca faucicola* bush. Don Herbison-Evans of Lepidoptera Butterfly House in Coffs Harbour thinks it might be *Epicoma argentata*, which is in the same family as the Bag-shelter Moth Thaumetopoeinae. I now think that Moth and caterpillar may be both the same species, *Epicoma argentata*, not common around here. I will put the photos on iNaturalist and see if any of the experts agree.



So many people – so interested in our native grasses. 27 February 2022

by Barb Gilfedder



Ian Coleman and Doug McDougall of Olive Pink Botanic Garden invited OPBG Friends, Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club members, Australian Plant Society members and Landcare groups to wander around the garden to look at and try to identify the plethora of grass species that are growing so beautifully after the rains. There was a great public response with about fifty people looking, listening, discussing and learning about the grasses. Very few of these grasses have been planted. OPBG staff has made a tremendous effort over many years to control invasive introduced grasses. Their main targets have been Buffel Grass, Couch Grass and more recently the feral *Eragrostis* species. Native grass seeds have been waiting dormant in the soil for this great rain event.



Doug did a fantastic job pointing out different grasses and naming them. Other experts that were there, helped. Doug had the grass photo sheets that I had written and updated over the years. I am now getting Peter Jobson, Chief Botanist in the NT to go through the photographs and notes again, before I distribute them to interested people. Thank you Doug and OPBG!

Shield Shrimps enjoying the puddles.

Leigh Woolcock sent in this great shot of a Shield Shrimp, *Triops australiensis*, that she found in the flooded area near the Transport Museum. It is the only species of Shield Shrimp native to the Australian mainland.

Named after the formidable carapace that shields its head and upper body, *T. australiensis* can grow up to 7.6 cm long, and it uses its long, segmented tail and mass of 60 or so legs to propel itself through shallow water. It also breathes through these legs – its sub-class *Branchiopoda* means ‘gill-legged’ – and in the females these legs bear ovisacs for carrying their tiny eggs. They’re most often found in pools and lakes that periodically dry up, which suggests that their eggs need to be completely desiccated for some time before the larvae inside can develop and hatch when they get wet again.

Thank you Leigh!

