January – February 2023

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter

Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo, *Calyptorhynchus banksii*

Jenny Purdie spotted this beautiful male Red tailed Black Cockatoo feeding on Green Plum, *Buchanania obovata* near the Visitor Information Centre in Katherine.

Female Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos have yellow spots on the head, neck and wings, and orange-yellow barring on the breast and undertail.

These beautiful birds are common around Katherine and while they, like other cockatoos, are generally arboreal, they will often feed on the fallen fruit of *Terminalia* and *Buchanania* trees scattered around town.

Jenny said that they often get them at home, but capturing images of them flying is very difficult, so to get such a great photo of this male was quite special.

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Coming events:

Speaker night:

Date: 8/02/2023
Time: 7.00pm
Location: Olive Pink Botanic Garden
Topic: How to map frogs - Citizen Science, iNaturalist and the Atlas of Living Australia
Speaker: Clare Pearce

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club planning meeting:

Date: 12/2/2023
Location: Olive Pink Botanic Gardens
Time: 4.00pm
Topic: Planning the calendar for 2023 – all ideas for presenters and field trips welcome

Frogs on Friday

See page 3 for details

CONTENTS

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club – Committee updates:

First up, I have an apology to make.

My husband and I have always had fantastic jobs that have shaped our lives and where we live. We moved to Central Australia two short years ago, following the needs of our work. My deepest apologies, but unfortunately we are once again on the move, following the jobs, and the storms, all the way up to the damp and sweaty Top End.

I have valued my time with the Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club, and hope to stay in touch, but there is a limit to remote communications even in this modern age and I feel that I will not be able to continue to support the ASFNC in my role as President from 1500km away.

Our final move date is still unknown but David needs to be in Darwin to start work by mid-April at the latest. I'll stay active on the ASFNC Committee as long as I can, and am happy to continue with putting the newsletter together, but I will need to resign as President once our moving date comes closer.

I have always been of the opinion that everyone has something special to offer a community organization such as ours. You don't need to be an expert naturalist, a world renowned botanist or even someone who is fascinated by frogs to take on the Field Nats, you just need to turn up and cheer on your fellow travelers.

Become part of a great team, get involved and come along to our next planning committee meeting on Sunday.

Frogs on Friday – with the Simpsons Gap Rangers

The very popular Frogs on Friday sessions are back, so save the date!

There's been heaps of rain, and the weather is still warm, so save the date for Frogs on Friday.

Come along and meet the Rangers, and the frogs, of Simpsons Gap, learn about the delicate balance of Central Australian wetlands and meet some of the inhabitants.

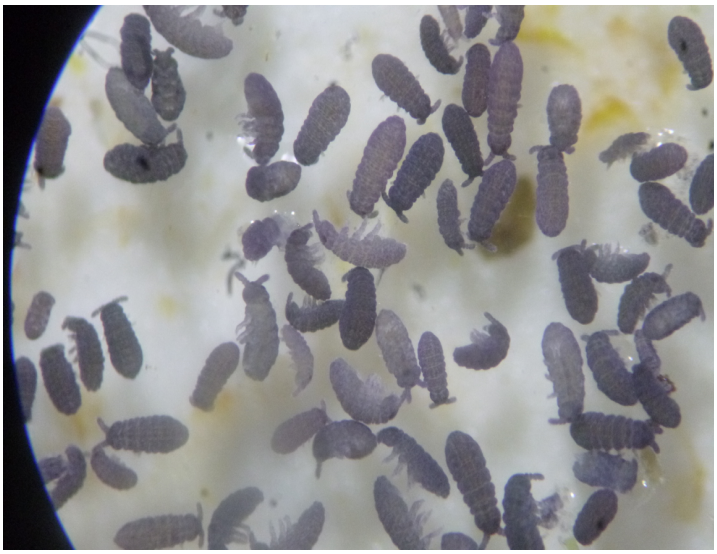
These events will be advertised in the Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Facebook page, so make sure you give it a like.

Dates: 17th and 24th February and 3rd March
Location: Simpsons Gap
BOOKINGS ARE ESSENTIAL and places are limited. The link for booking, and event times, will be on the NT Parks and Wildlife Facebook page closer to the date.

Look at what the rain brought-Collembola – Springtails!

Rosalie Breen

I found these tiny, rarely longer than 3mm, soft bodied animals, belong to the sub phylum Hexapoda. They account for around half of all other micro-arthropods. The ones I found are cylindrical in shape, have a head with a pair of short antennae, a thorax with six legs and a segmented abdomen, but no wings. Two black dots on head looked like eyes. Collembola have a forked spring like appendage (furcula) attached to the underside of the abdomen, this held in place until it is released to instantly cause the animal to jump – hence the name Springtails. Being so small, a microscope is needed to get a good look. I did not see any jumping.



These animals are found in the soil and leaf litter or around decaying wood, and after good rains large numbers are washed out and gather together to form grey rafts, bit like scum, on the surface of water in puddles or other waterbodies - at my place in a bucket catching the overflow from the roof gutter which was full of decomposing leaf litter, or in the birdbath at Barb's home, and a bit of a mystery as to how they got there. They seem to have waterproof skin, so float. Also have another appendage which helps them stick to the water's surface, giving them the name Collembola from Greek words *calle*, glue and *embolon* piston. They feed on mostly bacteria, fungi, and organic matter both plant and animal. Found (if you can find them) in great numbers playing an important role in decomposing litter, keeping the environment dynamic. When it is hot and dry, as it generally is in Alice Springs, the springtails burrow into the soil and virtually hibernate until everything is wet from solid rains, when they emerge and are dispersed to new habitats in the run off.

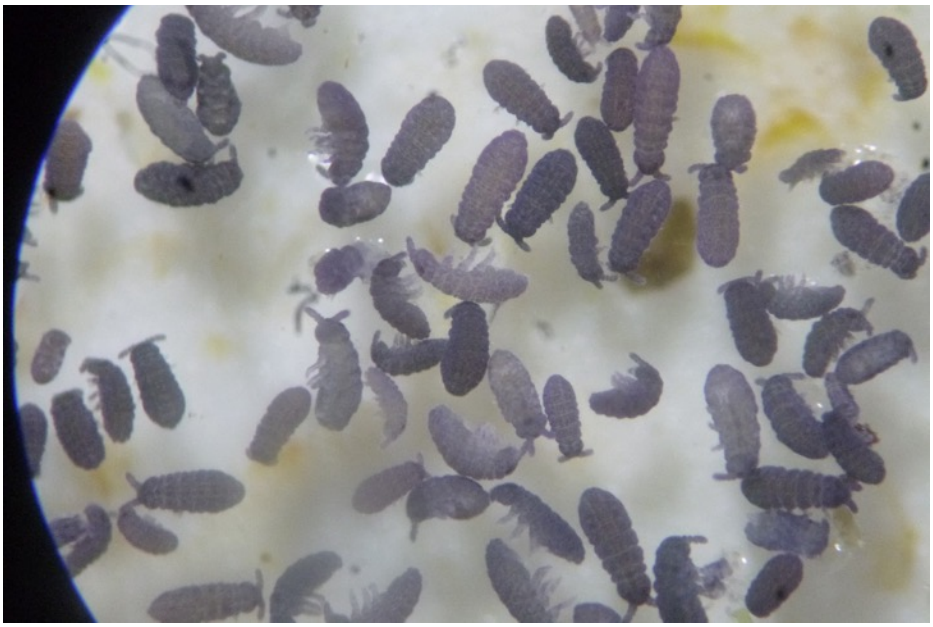
A springtail, showing its furcula

A raft of springtails in Barb Gilfedder's birdbath

A grey raft of springtails in a bucket in Rosalie Breen's garden

Penny Greenslade, who has collected and studied Collembola, including around Central Australia, has suggested those present here would belong to the family Brachystomellidae probably genus *Setanodosa* with the species undescribed. Thanks, Penny, for your assistance, and to locals Margaret Friedel and Bill Low.

Much of my information comes from the book The Waterbug Book by Gooderham and Tsyrlin - a great reference for freshwater Macroinvertebrates.



Collembola as viewed through a field microscope.

Lots of rain awakens the native land snails too, from their aestivation, or dormancy during hot and dry times which is most of the time here of course. So recently I was delighted to meet some *Sinumelon* species, probably *expositum,* nonchalantly strolling on the footpath in Chewings St. and in the garden at home. On the footpath one full sized snail was being followed by a smaller version about one third of the size. The network of silvery trails on the concrete path, remnants of their mucus secretions which protect their movement, is a giveaway for their presence. (Check FN Newsletter April 2011 for info. on snails)

Sinumelon sp. (*expositum*?) out for a walk after the recent rains

Two rare events to add to the joy of all that rain.

Alice garden gastropods and the Atlas of Living Australia

The richness of the Central Australian ecology never fails to fascinate. From the toughest of tiny herbs clinging to vertical rock walls in windswept gorges to aquatic life darting away under a roof of algae there is so much out there that we have to search to see. Finding an expert in the field, or a handy textbook full of information on a particular topic, can be difficult at times.

Luckily there are some amazing resources available literally at our fingertips that can assist with identification and information.

We found this tiny, empty, stripy snail shell on our driveway one morning recently after heavy rains. Unsure of what it might be I went to one of my first points of call, the Atlas of Living Australia, selected 'explore your area' in the search and analyze option and entered Alice Springs as a search. The Atlas brought up records of 2051 species within a 5km radius of Alice Springs, 28 of which were molluscs.

From there it was just a hop skip and a jump through the different mollusc species on the list until I came to the species profile for *Pleuroxia adcockiana*, or Adcock's Sculptured Snail, sometimes called the Blue horned Desert Snail.

We headed for the Atlas again when another tiny gastropod popped up in the garden, this time in fairly large numbers on my cabbages.

The Atlas was able to tell me that this particular critter was most likely *Milax gagates,* the Black Keeled Slug or greenhouse slug.

The Atlas species profile contains a wealth of information including a detailed description, images and a species distribution. For *Milax gagates*, this included the unwelcome knowledge that my cabbage eater was an introduced species originally from Morocco, Tunisia and Southern Spain.

Such an exotic start for my tiny and very unwelcome guest!

https://biocache.ala.org.au/explore/your-area#-23.6980|133.8807|12|Molluscs

Irrarnte - Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos

Calyptorhynchus banksii

Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos are large, long-lived and gregarious cockatoos often seen in flocks flying high at sunset, returning from feeding areas to roost in large trees near rivers. Jenny Purdie has sent in some beautiful photos of a pair of Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos, taking off from the ground where they had been feeding on fallen *Buchanania obovata* fruit.

Male Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo

Female Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo

As their name suggests, Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos are mostly black with red tail feathers. The male has bright scarlet panels on their tails while the females have yellow spots on their heads, neck and wings, and orange-yellow barring on their breast and undertail. Juvenile birds of both sexes will also usually have orange-yellow barring on their tail feathers, with males transitioning to red as they mature. Their enormous, and enormously strong bill allows them to crack open the hard seed cases of trees such as Eucalypts and Terminalias. Up here in the NT they are often seen feeding on recently burnt ground where seed is easy to find.

Like other cockatoos, Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos have zygodactyl feet, meaning they have two toes facing forward and two backward. This makes it easy for them to grasp objects with one foot while standing on the other. You may also be interested to know that several websites I looked at said that black cockatoos are almost exclusivly left-footed!

Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos are endemic to mainland Australia with five distinct subspecies in eight separate populations across the continent. They nest at the base of hollows high up in a tree and lay two white eggs.

Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos and humans have had a bit of a chequered relationship over the years. They have been considered an agricultural pest in some areas of Australia, and they have also been a target for the illegal wildlife trade. The south-eastern Australian subspecies is considered threatened with extinction and a recovery program is in place, but overall the species is considered of least concern with a decreasing population.

Arrernte bird names - file:///C:/Users/islah/OneDrive/Documents/Downloads/ar0148_thipe_akerte.pdf