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Inc. PO Box 8663, Alice Springs, NT 0871

June 2007



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## Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club 2007

### MEETINGS

7.30 pm on the second Wednesday of the month.  
Venue: Olive Pink Botanic Garden, Tuncks Road

**Wed 13th June.** Rick Davies from CSIRO. Endangered plants in the Australian arid zone.

**Wed July 11.** Peter Belbin on conservation in East Timor

**Wed 8<sup>th</sup> August.** AGM. Surprises in store from Bob Read.

**Wed September 12th.** Mike Green.

### TRIPS / ACTIVITIES

**Sat. 9- Mon 11 June.** Ruby Gap. Contact Rhondra Tomlinson on 8953 1280

**Sat 16 June.** Day walk up Mt Everard. Contact Rosalie Schultz.

**Sat 23 June.** Celebrate the dawn of the Winter Solstice on Spencer Hill. Meet at Gosse Street playground at 6.45 am. Contact Rosalie Breen who has some exciting ideas for the top. On 8952 3409.

**Sat 30 June - Sun 1<sup>st</sup> July.** Over night walk. Larapinta trail Stage 9 from Serpentine Chalet Dam or Ochre Pits to Ormiston Gorge. To be confirmed. Contact Rosalie Breen on 8952 3409

**Fri 6-Sat 7 July.** Alice Springs Show. Members' help needed in our stall.

**Thurs 12 Jul - Sun 15 July.** Kings Canyon and overnight Giles Walk. Contact Bob Read 8952 1935

### GUEST SPEAKER REPORT

#### **ECHO PARAKEET RECOVERY PROGRAM**

Patrick Hodgins, 'Bird Ranger',  
Alice Springs Desert Park  
9<sup>th</sup> May 2007

By Bob Read

The Echo Parakeet is a parrot endemic to Mauritius. Like too many other island species it was reduced to near extinction. Introduced species, particularly the closely-

related Indian Ringneck and the Indian Mynah, have out-competed it. The native vegetation on which it depends has been reduced to 1% of the island's area. Most of the island is used for sugar cane production, and much of the remaining area has been invaded by weeds.



Echo Parakeet

Photo: Patrick Hodgins

The Echo Parakeet feeds almost exclusively on native trees, eating buds, shoots, leaves, flowers, seeds, bark, sap and especially fruit. Originally it occurred over most of the island, but is now restricted to some 50 km<sup>2</sup> of remnant forest in the Black River Gorges region.

Patrick participated in a population recovery program. Parakeet nests were monitored, and nestlings that were not thriving were removed and hand-reared.

Once fledged the birds are moved to cages before being released. After release they are still given supplementary feeding from special feeders that they have been trained to use. Unfortunately with time the Indian Parakeets and Indian Mynahs learnt to use these.

One of the problems of hand-rearing is to avoid habituating the birds to humans. Birds that are tame are easy targets for poachers and the illegal bird trade. One such bird was rescued from a market in Port Louis, and later disappeared, possibly poached a second time. After release the birds are discouraged from going close to humans by throwing sticks at those that land near people.

A major fear is that the birds might hybridise with the Indian Ringnecks, which are in the same genus. This has not been observed to date.

It would be desirable to have a second population of Echo Parakeets as an insurance against some future disaster wiping out the Mauritian population. The relatively nearby island of Reunion, which has similar vegetation, and formerly had a similar species of parakeet which is now extinct, appears to be an obvious location. Unfortunately Reunion is French territory, and the difficulty of moving birds from one country to another has so far prevented this happening.

Work is proceeding with removal of feral plants and revegetation, and there is some hope that eventually the Parakeet may be able to survive without human support. The story is certainly an illustration of the difficulty and the expense of recovery programs to bring species back from the brink and a reminder of the benefits of action such as preservation of habitat before that stage is reached.

## **TRIP REPORT**

### **RINGWOOD STATION**

Part One . A collaboration  
Easter Long Weekend  
6<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> April 2007

by Rhondra Tomlinson

The Date Farm at 9.00am was the meeting time from where we headed off along the Ross Highway and before we reached Jessie Gap we had sighted a flock of budgies and a large lizard on the road. We turned off onto the Ringwood Station Road and not long past the Todd River Station turn off there was a thump, thump heard from the back of Bill's vehicle. This sound soon revealed a broken axle on the trailer he was towing.



The broken trailer

Photo: Rhondra Tomlinson

To start with it was decided to leave the trailer on the side of the road and continue on as it was about 60km to go to Ringwood Station Homestead and try to phone from there for the trailer to be transported back to Alice Springs.

Liz was giving us an interesting demonstration of a donkey call and not long after we sighted a dingo. (Not sure if there is any connection).

Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike we saw just before arriving at Ringwood Homestead and a flat tire for Jim. No one was home so we decided to have lunch under the Gidgee Trees. After lunch we headed for a hilltop stop with a 360° view.

We saw water in the distance and of course with Rosalie on board it was an instant attraction and must see what lurks there in yonder.

We walked around looking for birds, insects, plants, water 'wiggles' and algae. All cameras were trained on Colleen as she netted samples for Rosalie and didn't fall in. A great find being the Fairy Shrimp.

See Rosalie's article in the May 07 Newsletter.



Colleen and net

Photo: by Rhondra Tomlinson

The trailer was still to be sorted so Bill, Helen and Liz decided to try the homestead again and if not they would return to Alice Springs and then join us the next day after all had been dealt with.



Ringwood Station

Photo: by Rhondra Tomlinson

As it was getting late a camp site was the next priority. We were gingerly guided along the partial track by the river bank by Bob navigating and Colleen's skilful driving. The open Gidgee clearing was ideal for our 1<sup>st</sup> night's camp. The dry river bed was not far away and the woodlands were ideal for bird and plant people to explore.



Rhonda's tent

Photo: Rhonda Tomlinson

Around the campfire we agreed to, what is unusual for the Field Nats and that is to a "late start" in the morning. 9.30am we made our way back to the road and along to the Telstra Tower where we were to meet Bill, Helen and Liz. En route Bob said to Colleen to stop and then he repeated his request and all of a sudden he leapt out of the vehicle and binoculars to his eyes. He conferred with some other bird watchers and the final decision is that a Grey Falcon was sighted.



Ringwood Station

Photo: Rhonda Tomlinson

Stopping at the Tower we again had the opportunity to explore some more water off in the distance. Walking toward the swamp we passed Eremophila's that had been well pruned by the cattle and were now growing back as quite thick shrubs which normally can be quite scraggy. Jenny and Colleen were having some interesting discussions about lots of plants and Rosalie with Colleen's help again found lots of water creatures. The quiet was interrupted by the Brown Singing Lark which passed overhead several times. We had also been heralded by one at the previous wetland area.

Bob measured the salinity level using electrical conductivity in the pools near the Telstra tower. 315 microSiemens in a shallow puddle, 200 in a deeper pool.

We were ever so pleased to see Bill, Helen and Liz and that they had had the trailer taken back to Alice Springs

to be fixed at a later date. Now we continued on to our lunch stop under the Coolibah Trees with some very interesting mud patterns along the waterway/road. Some were side tracked to look at the machinery at the bore not far from our resting spot.



The 4WD'S

Photo: Rhonda Tomlinson

We passed through some red sand country with some beautiful very large yellow flowers making a very impressive colourful scene.

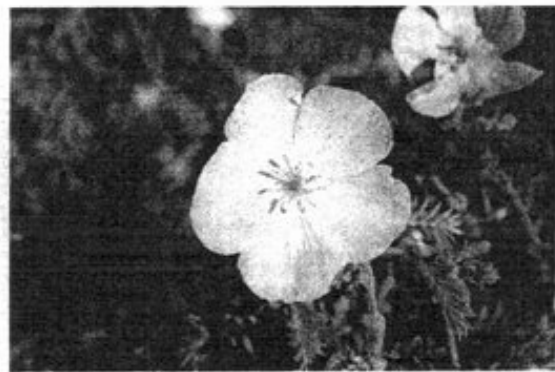


Photo: Jenny Purdie

A quick stop for a banded white face which proved to escape the pursuing party. See how well the cars were parked and the 6<sup>th</sup> car was behind the tree in front.



Blooms on sand dunes

Photo: Rhonda Tomlinson

This beautiful plant *Tribulus hystrix* (Sandhill Puncture Vine) produces a bur like the three-cornered Jack. Not recommended for bare feet.

We decide the Collins Range foot hills would be our next camp but suddenly coming over a hill we were confronted by a large body of water which drew our attention.



Water Hole

Photo: Rosalie Breen

We travelled further along the Collins Range foothills and found our 2<sup>nd</sup> nights camp amongst the Coolibar Trees. Campfire chatter over we headed to a peaceful night under a starry blanket.

#### Bird list

See Bob's list in the May Newsletter.

#### Butterflies

Chequered Swallowtail  
Lesser Wanderer  
Meadow Argus  
Small Grass Yellow  
Double-spotted Line Blue  
Caper White

#### Dragonflies

Wandering Percher  
Blue Skimmer

#### Grasshoppers

Spur-throated Plague Locust, very common  
Australian Plague Locust, only in wetland  
Leopard Grasshopper, widespread  
Variable Stropis  
Copperwing  
Common Toadhoppper, on rocky hillsides  
Common Urnisa, very common and widespread  
Australian Spthingonotus, in sandy creek bed.  
Gum-leaf Grasshopper, among eucalypts next to the Todd  
Peakesia sp. (not in book)  
2 others I cannot identify.

The vegetation notes from Barb and Jenny.

A couple of swamp areas were visited where there were still significant amounts of water. *Marsilea* sp (Nardoo) was common and other species included *Alternanthera* (Joyweed), *Streptoglossa* (Mint Bush), *Eragrostis* (Lovegrass) and other grasses, *Muehlenbeckia florulenta* (Lignum) and some sedges. Clumps of *Teucrium racemosum* were flowering beautifully.

The red sand dunes were spectacular with the large flowers of *Tribulus hystrix* (Sandhill Puncture Vine) creating a brilliant display of yellow. Other sand dune species found were *Acacia dictyophleba* (Sandhill Wattle), *Trianthema pilosa*, *Paractaenum refractum* (Bristle-brush Grass), *Triodia* (Spinifex) and *Abutilon* (Lantern Bush)



Bristle-brush Grass

Photo: Jenny Purdie

At the Arookara Range the, as yet unnamed, *Eremophila* sp "Arookara Range" was easily found but was not in flower; however other species were including a pink flowered *Eremophila latrobei* (Latrobes Desert Fuchsia), several *Ptilotus* spp (Pussytails or Mulla Mulla), *Haloragis gossei* (a Raspwort), *Dipteracanthus australasicus* and on the top of the range the compact subshrub *Heliotropium filaginoides*. The *Eremophila latrobei* had an unusually large leaf almost like that of *Eremophila maculata*.



*Eremophila latrobei*

Photo: Jenny Purdie

In other areas *Cullen cinereum* (Annual Verbena) was very common, and higher than the cars near a new bore against the Arookara Range. *Tribulus terrestris* (Caltrop) was also common. Other species encountered were the



red flowered, shiny leaved *Eremophila latrobei*, *Tephrosia supina* with a bright orange pea flower, *Portulaca intraterranea* (Buttercup or Large Pigweed) with a large yellow flower, *Schenkia australis* a tiny delicate herb with 5 pink petals, *Cuscuta victoriana* a fleshy dodder scrambling over small herbs, *Ipomoea muelleri* (Native Morning Glory) was common near the Collins range, *Crotalaria novae-hollandiae* (New Holland Rattlepod) large *Eucalyptus coolabah* subsp. *arida* (Coolabah) trees in the creek beds some with small pools of water at their base and large stands of *Acacia georginae* (Georgina Gidgee) with many young plants up to about 1 m high.



Coolabah

Photo: Jenny Purdie

Still lots more! to come next month and thank you to all who have contributed.

## ORMISTON POUND WALK

5<sup>th</sup> May 2007

By Rosalie Schultz

The Pound Walk was a great alternative offered with forecast temperature of 32 degrees. Stage 9 seemed a little ambitious.

Bob led a team of nine, namely Gavan and Rosalie B, Connie, Lisa, Liz, Barb, Rosalie S, Rhonda. We did a reverse Pound Walk, beginning with the majestic walk through the gorge. Following the heavy rains at the end of the wet, there were trickles of water still trickling through the gorge. We didn't see many birds. Perhaps they had gone to other waterholes and were not so dependent on the water in the gorge after the recent rains. Buddha peas were growing vigorously in the riverbed. These are attractive plants, with bright green pinnate leaves, and yellow and tan flowers. Possibly pests, by how densely they were growing in places.

Bob pointed out a tiny brown tree frog - *Litoria rubella*, perhaps 2cm long. This elegant creature has a dark strip along the head, through the eye and along the side of the body, and a broad dark stripe along the spine. They are well-adapted to desert conditions, breeding after summer rains. Tadpoles become frogs after only 14 days, and can leave the water even before they lose their tails.

The colours of Ormiston Gorge make it are in one of my favourite sites of Central Australia. Shades of pink, rose, red and purple, crimson and orange, softened by grey and white, shaped by stripes and swirls and veins in smooth rocks. It's like walking on enormous musk sweets.



Ormiston Pound

Photo: Rosalie Schultz

Emerging from the gorge we caught breath-taking views of the hills around. The landscape was striking in the diversity of plants, and the diversity of shapes and forms in the rocks and hills. There was so much to see, the colours and shapes were so fascinating.

Acacias we noted and discussed and compared were:

*Melleodorum* - sweet-smelling acacia - notable for the distinctly bright green new leaves growing beyond the older grey, from a crust left as their sticky surface dries. The globular flower heads poke right out, individually on stems. It didn't seem very sweet smelling when crushed in your hands, but sometimes the delicate sweet wattle smell wafted out as we walked past.

*Monticola* - the red minnirichi wattle - with it's fascinating peeling red bark, roundish leaves and globular individual flower heads

*Spondylophylla*, the flying saucer wattle, also unique for the curry scent coming from its leaves.

What would a walk be without a good laugh? We had a few, with one of our team searching in a bird reference book for the checkered swallowtail - butterfly. Then the lead walker tucking themselves away behind a boulder, out of sight of the trail, to enjoy sandwiches, while the rest of us caught up.

More flowers I saw?

*Ptilotus* - the nodding *ptilotus* - *Pt clementii*, with smiling yellowish flower-heads, that nod off - distinguishing them from the *macrocephalus* with the flowers smiling upwards.

Other *ptilotus*, all in flower, were the widespread soft purple - fading to pink *sessifolius* (crimson fox tail) and the bright pink button *schwartzii* or horse mulla mulla.

Those plants with long hanging leaves were everywhere. First the *Eremophila longifolia*, less distinctive when not in flower, but still an elegant desert bush. I saw a conkerberry (*Carissa lanceolatum*) with it's soft and delicate leaves, and little black berries hanging over me as I sat in the riverbed watching Gavan eat his

sandwiches. White latex from broken stems and leaves is the other characteristic feature of this tree. Widespread was the whitewood (*Atalaya hemiglauc*) with grey bark and deeply veined leaves. Finally we saw the supplejack (*Ventilago viminalis*) with intertwining trunks and darker, rough and flaky compared with the smooth, pale the whitewood.

A range of hibiscus flowers, growing like chest-high weeds along the trail as we descended at the end. Hairy 3-lobed leaves, solitary pink flowers with purple throats and 5-lobed white styles. Was it the *Hibiscus solanifolius*? This was distinct from the *Gossypium australe* because of the shape of the leaves and the unbranched style of the gossypium.



Ormiston Pound

Photo: Rosalie Schultz

As we climbed up and then down the ridge at the end, the sun was high in the sky. Perhaps passing through the shady gorge in the cool early hours was the wrong move. It was hot and sunny when we finished, with the last hour quite exposed (as forecast).

Birds we saw that I noted included:

Grey-headed Honeyeater – with its black mask and yellow breast

Willie Wagtail

Black-faced Cuckoo Shrike- churling calls up the gorge

Budgerigars

Red-tailed Black Cockatoos

Mistletoebird

Whistling Kite, and Black-shouldered Kite seen along Namatjira Drive

Other plants

*Cassia glutinosa* – narrow leaved and sticky cassia

*Convolvulus* – bindweed

*Cymbopogon ambiguus* – lemon-scented grass, with dense hairy clusters of seeds

*Erythina vespertilio* – the bean tree, or batwing coral tree, with distinctive leaves and corky grey bark, provided shady relief from the sun along the pound

*Grevillea wickhamii* – Holly grevillea in magnificent flower

*Heliotropium*

*Indigofera basedowii* with elegant large grey leaves

*Indigofera leuchotricha*

*Lysiana exocarpi* – harlequin mistletoe

*Olearia ferresii* – bright bush daisy

*Plectanthrum intraterraneus* – mint smelling, acorn leaves and purple spikes of flowers

*Rostellulia ascendens*

Certainly plenty more that I didn't note or record (but will next time).

## IMPRESSIONS OF HAMILTON DOWNS YOUTH CAMP

May 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>, 2007

By Rosalie Breen



Meat House - Old Hamilton Downs Youth Camp Photo: Rosalie Breen

Tea and talk round the barbecue fire

Walking along the creek to see cycads growing on the red north wall

Lonely and fading ancient rock petroglyphs.



"The petroglyphs"

Photo: Rosalie Breen

Sitting halfway up the hill watching the sunset colour the Chewings Range  
 Cooking and washing up in the kitchen.  
 Following yellow or red flagging tapes on our walks  
 Lots of prickly grass seeds in socks for visitors not well prepared.  
 Following cattle pads back to the homestead.  
 History in words and pictures, and Morgan's stories.  
 Old buildings.  
 Sleeping on mattresses on the bunk beds in the cottage.  
 Morgan's friendly hospitality and leading walks  
 Little frogs a-leaping around the waterhole, tadpoles in the water.  
 Whirlygigs a-whirling on the water surface.  
 Admiring the moon, the planets, the vastness of the stars.  
 Planting trees  
 Lunch in the shade of the veranda with views of river and ranges.  
 Collecting eight more walkers for Sunday, to add to our nine.  
 Long rest stops for the leaders, shorter for the rear guard.  
 Limbo under the fences.  
 Discussing plants and grasses.  
 Bird watching. (including Red-tailed Black Cockatoos)  
 Photographing a big green stick insect wavering in the "breeze".  
 Stopping on the way to explore an eroded flood plain.  
 Finding three different mistletoes.



Mistletoe

Photo: Rosalie Breen

Shadows in the early morning around the buildings.  
 Butterflies and the butterfly expert from Brisbane.  
 Big gnarled Ghost Gum with its wrinkled white skin and life's scars.



Old Hamilton Downs Youth Camp

Photo: Rosalie Breen

### WEST ACROSS THE RANGE FROM OLD STATION MACDONNELL

Sunday 27 May 2007  
 by Bev Dawson

Eight people met 8 am at the Old Ghan Railway Station. Connie was our leader. We set off on a road heading west, did a slight detour around a large patch of water blocking the dirt road, from the heavy rain in the area the previous week. Then we started up the hill on a very stony 4WD track. At the top we could also see water in the swampy area just to the north.

We continued on the track going up and down right along the hilltop, always thinking that the current uphill would be the last; but there was always another. The track remained very stony or gravelly all the way. Not many birds were seen along the ridge top but we saw many kangaroos jumping across the slopes which led to a southern rocky ridgeline. Some appeared very light in colour, in fact Kay was sure one was an albino. Also saw butterflies, grasshoppers and big black ants - one of which was struggling to take a large "leg of grasshopper" home for dinner.

After about 3 1/2 km we think we got to the Rifle Range fence and had morning tea with a few flies and then returned along the northern base. On the ridge we saw Wild Current Trees, and lots of Caustic Vine. Along the base we saw Mistletoe, a large Wild Orange Tree and Ptilotus flowers. Liz spotted a Brown Falcon in a tree, staying there til we were almost up to it.

We were also on the flight path and had many planes flying overhead to the airport landing strip which was in full view.

The weather had got quite hot when we arrive back at 12.30 after an enjoyable walk. Thanks to Connie.



## **ANNOUNCEMENT**

### **NOTICE OF AGM**

The Annual General Meeting will be held at Olive Pink 7:30 pm August 8th.

I would ask all members to seriously consider standing for a committee position. With the possible exception of the Newsletter Editor, none of the officer's positions are very onerous. We generally have about 4 committee meetings a year. The committee has been stable for some years, and it would be good to have some new faces.

#### **Secretary**

We need a Secretary to replace Connie who is standing down after a commendable period of service. The job is not very difficult, requiring keeping minutes, collecting mail, sending one letter a month, and a bit of filing.

Bob Read, President.

### **TRIP PARTICIPANTS.**

Please give plenty of time to the group leader in announcing your intention to participate. Last minute announcements can cause difficulties.

## **PHOTO CORNER**



Shady stop, Ormiston Gorge

Photo: Liz Carpenter



Looking east, Ormiston Pound walk

Photo: Liz Carpenter

Copy deadline for articles for the next newsletter.

Friday 29th June 2007



Old Hamilton Downs Youth camp

Photo: Rosalie Breen

**PHOTOCOPYING**

**COURTESY**

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