



ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

July 2009 Newsletter



Holly Grevillea (*Grevillea wickhamii*). Photo E. Findlay

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Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month (except December and January) at 7:30 PM at the Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Visitors are welcome

Postal address: P.O. Box 8663 Alice Springs, Northern Territory 0871

MEETINGS

Wednesday 8 July - "*Birds and fire in mulga*" - Adam Leavesley, (scientist with Bushfires Council)

Wednesday 12 August - Annual General meeting and members' night. See Further Details inside.

Wednesday 9 September – Star Gazing with Stuart Traynor

TRIPS/ ACTIVITIES

11-12 July 2009 Hugh Gorge and Birthday Waterhole with two options-

1. Arrive early on Saturday morning, leave vehicles at Birthday Waterhole and do an over-night walk to Hugh Gorge. (Section 5 of Larapinta Trail).

2. Arrive later on Saturday and camp at Hugh Gorge (or arrive early on Sunday morning) and do a day walk into Hugh Gorge and back and then ferry Trail walkers back to Birthday Waterhole.

(Note, so far no takers for the walk from Birthday to Hugh Gorge)

Sat 18 July 2009 Dawn on Spencer Hill. Leader Rosalie. Meet 6.40am Gosse St playground. (Note Time Change)

Mon 3 August 2009 Camping trip, possibly to Wallace Paddock (Mordor), subject to landowner's permission and depending on interest

Sun 9 August 2009 South side of Mt Gillen, Leader Connie

Sat 22 August 2009 Murray St walk,

NEXT NEWSLETTER

The deadline for the next newsletter is **Friday 24th July**. Please send your contributions to Bob Read – rread1@bigpond.net.au (Emily is on holidays).

June Speaker – ‘Anpererrentye: relationships between bush foods, creation laws, people, country and all things’

By Shirley Goodman

Thank you to Fiona Walsh from CSIRO for this informative but conceptually challenging presentation.

Fiona is an ethno-ecologist based in Alice Springs who has been learning about bushfoods from Aboriginal women of Central Australia. Whilst there is financial incentive for bushfoods to be developed on a commercial basis, these women, who hold expert knowledge about bushfoods, are concerned that the place and relationships that individual bushfoods have in Aboriginal culture are remembered, considered and respected.

Amongst Fiona’s colleagues, or perhaps more accurately teachers, is Veronica Perurre Dobson, a well known Arrente woman who has extensive knowledge of plants, their use and their place in her culture. Veronica was unable to attend the evening in person but she was the presenter in the short film we saw. In the film Veronica talked about how *merne* (or bush food plants) have a connection with the cultural domains of *Altyerre* (Creation Laws), *Apmere* (Country) and *Arrente tyerrtye* (People). She used three plants to illustrate this relationship. The knowledge that is held in connection with these plants provides guidance and rules for many aspects of life including care of country, relationships between people, stories and ‘all things’.

Ahakeye, (Bush Currant) provides a good example of a plant with strong connections with *Altyerre* or Creation time. This includes knowledge about skin, laws, paintings, song, dance and stories. The tree itself is treated with respect and there are rules as to how the fruit should be collected.

Akatyerre (Desert Raisin) is not only eaten by people but is also food for Emus and Bush Turkeys which in turn are another important source of food for Aboriginal people. As such, the growth and regrowth of *Akatyerre* must be carefully facilitated, often by burning. *Akatyerre* is particularly connected with *Apmere* or country, and has guidance relating to the burning of country, care of water places and tracking.

Finally, Veronica chose to talk about *Yalka* (Bush Onion) because it has a strong



relationship with *Arremte tyerrtye* or people. From this comes rules about trade and social activity as well as knowledge about healing.

I found the information difficult to comprehend as it involves concepts with which I am unfamiliar and which I am culturally ill equipped to understand. However, it is fascinating to be given a glimpse of a different way of viewing things and a different understanding of plants and their active place in Aboriginal culture.

Fiona pointed out that her collaborators have extensive knowledge of the past and current distribution, quality and quantity of bush foods. This has often been affected by grazing, weeds (especially buffel grass) and erosion. Acute observation of changes in vegetation and of flowering and fruiting patterns are all a great resource, the potential of which is probably not yet fully appreciated.

For a better introduction to this topic, I suggest that you look up this link which leads to a power point of Veronica giving a similar presentation – we had the film version!

The research by Fiona, Veronica Dobson and Josie Douglas is funded by Desert Knowledge CRC, CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems and Charles Darwin University (Alice Springs).

http://www.desertknowledgecrc.com.au/publications/downloads/DKCRC_Anpererrentye-Relationships-between-Bush-foods-Creation-Laws-People-Country-and-All-things-illustrated-by-three-plant-species.pdf

3 special acacias: a trip to Andado Station, 6th to 8th June 2009

By Rosalie Schultz

Connie and Stan, Rosalie and Gavan, Barb and Jim, Bob, Shirley and I, set off in 4 sturdy vehicles to Andado Station to seek out 3 special acacias.

Acacia pickardii - common names Birds Nest Wattle (Woinarski 2007) and Mount Gason Wattle (Moore 2005) - was the first of the special acacias. We found it when we walked over a saddle near where we camped on Saturday night. This scraggy desert tree survives only in 3 small locations. Surrounding vegetation included two trees that look somewhat similar to me. These are the Fork-leaved Corkwood (*Hakea eyreana*), with similar thick furrowed bark and angulated pointy leaves, and the Dead Finish (*Acacia tetragonophylla*) with similar phyllodes, spiny with long sharp points. The overall desolation of the surrounding area was striking and grim. Rugged desert dwelling chenopods (*Sclerolaena* and *Tecticornia*) were evidence of the harshness of the region.

From a distance the *Acacia pickardii* appeared dark coloured. They are identified by their gnarled knotted trunks, and phyllodes ending in black barbs. Seedlings have never

been observed, but they can spread by suckering to form clumps. Galls on the trees are common, and are produced by thrips. These resemble pods, especially to hopeful observers. This tree is described as “extremely rare” and “vulnerable” because only 3 populations are known, the one we visited near the Mac Clark Reserve, one near Mt Gason and one north of Lake Etamunbanie. The classification is based on the small population size (estimated to be no than 1000 mature trees); the very restricted area of occupancy (all populations under 2 km²); and only three locations (Woinarski et al 2007). Fire may have had a role in limiting the area where this tree grows, and rabbits may affect spread (Woinarski et al 2007). Connie who has visited the site 18 times over the past 21 years noted signs of cattle in the patch, which had not been there on previous visits. Contrasting the harshness and paucity of the flora were plentiful bird observations at the camp and on the walk to the *A pickardii*. Birds sighted or heard were Wedge-tailed Eagles (“wedgies”), Zebra Finches (“zebbies”), a female Red-capped Robin, Chiming Wedgebill, and Cinnamon Quail-thrush. Likewise, the geology was abundant. Some of us couldn’t resist the stones and returned to camp with collections of gems. Of particular note were specimens of chalcedony, “a microcrystalline translucent variety of quartz” (Macquarie Dictionary 2005).



Next stop on Sunday afternoon was the Mac Clark Reserve, home of the legendary *Acacia peuce* or Waddy-wood. Like the *A pickardii*, *A peuce* has 3 populations. It is classified as endangered because of its severely fragmented populations, and continuing decline in number of locations and number of mature individuals, with overall occurrence less than 500 km² (Woinarski et al 2007). The species is threatened by lightning strikes, cattle grazing, trampling and rubbing. Waddy-wood is a tall elegant tree, whispering in the breeze like the desert oak. Mature trees have wispy hanging branches, some sweeping the ground. Juvenile foliage is rigid, sharply pointed and outward-directed, and it invites us to imagine that this is a defence against browsing megafauna (Woinarski et al 2007). Sadly it seems less of a deterrent to cattle and all populations are now fenced to protect them from further damage from cattle. Unlike the *A. pickardii*, the *A. peuce* has been grown from seed and mature trees now grow at Olive Pink Botanic Gardens. Older trees are believed to be 500 years. The wood is very dense and I guess

that Aborigines must have known of these fragmented populations and walked hundreds of kilometres through inhospitable desert to seek the valuable wood.

Surrounding gibber plains shone in the sun, and we noticed that each tree was surrounded by an area with no stones. Birds in

the Mac Clark Reserve were few, but I recorded Black – faced Woodswallows and Banded Whiteface. We stopped at a sand dune to play on the way to our 2nd campsite. This steep and stark red feature was home to a remarkable number of birds. We enjoyed watching the attractive blue White-winged Fairy-wren and the distinctive Orange Chats (females are yellow). Bob glimpsed the Eyrean Grasswren at some distance, but the rest of us missed them. Plants growing on the dune were also robust and healthy-looking. These included *Tribulus hystrix* with stunning yellow flowers but an ugly burr (common name is Sandhill puncture vine), fine specimens of the umbrella bush *A. ligulata* in glorious flower and the ornamental Green Birdflower *Crotalaria cunninghamii*.

Chiming Wedgebills chimed until late into Sunday night, but quietened down under the full moon in a magical cold night. The final special acacia was the *A. desmondii*. We visited a wonderful valley near Atherrita bore, and counted 10 *A.*

desmondii trees in the valley. The trees were up to 4m tall, with bright dense green phyllodes and a yellow sheen from the stems. None was in flower, and one was only 60cm tall. Many appeared to have sizable dead segments in their foliage, although overall they looked healthy. The trunks were dark coloured and fibrous, sometimes as stringy as the minniritchi bark on other local trees. Many had several trunks.



Interestingly *A. desmondii* isn't mentioned in any of my books (Woinarski et al 2007, Moore 2005, Urban 2001). The valley was magnificent, and inviting for further visits. Other plants we enjoyed included Ironwood, Coolabah, *Eremophila freelingii*, a range of Sennas and a *Streptoglossa odora* – strongly odorous, densely hairy, solitary magenta florets terminal on branches.

How privileged we were to view these 3 special acacias, surviving on the desert edge. Populations we saw are likely to be remnants of widespread subtropical flora that was splintered during the ice age. What of their future as we prepare for imminent and dramatic human-induced climate change? Our infinitesimal lives are seen in context as we wonder at these rugged desert-edge trees.

References

- Woinarski J, Pavey C, Kerrigan R, Cowie I, Ward S 2007. Lost from our Landscape: Threatened species of the Northern Territory. NT Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts, Palmerston NT.
- Moore P 2005. A Guide to Plants of Inland Australia. Reed New Holland, Sydney.
- Urban A 2001. Wildflowers and plants of Inland Australia. Paul Fitzsimmons, Alice Springs.

On the Woodland Trail

Saturday 13 June 2009

By Connie Spencer

It was a brisk June morning, especially at 7:30 am, when Kaye Percy, Rosalie Breen and I met at Flynn's Memorial. When no other punters had arrived by the due departure time, the three of us set off to Simpsons Gap National Park to walk part of the Woodland Trail with Kaye in the lead.

Upon leaving the trailhead shelter we walked across an open plain for a few 100 meters before entering a copse of Acacia Bush (*Acacia victoriae*) and Weeping Emu Bush (*Eremophila longifolia*) along the bank of Rocky Creek. The big old River Red Gums (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) in the creek were flourishing having been rejuvenated by the rains late last year. To me this is the best they have looked since they took a hammering in the 2002 wildfires and dry years since.

On leaving the creek the trail takes you along the base of hills with a panoramic view of Simpsons Gap and Rungtjirba Range to the north. We encountered flowering Holly Grevillea (*Grevillea wickhamii*) on this section of the walk with a lone Ghost Gum (*Corymbia aparrerinja*) like a sentinel high on top of the range.

Next we were in superb Mulga woodland where recent light rain had brought out a couple of resurrection plants – the Woolly Cloak Fern (*Cheilanthes brownii*) and the Mulga Fern (*Cheilanthes sieberi*). The trail continues through the Mulga across a couple of shady gullies where it is always nice to rest and listen to the birds. Kaye saw some Weebills and we heard the Grey Shrike-thrush and a Bellbird calling in the distance.

After the Mulga woodland we ventured into a dense stand of Ironwood (*Acacia estrophiolata*) and hence to an open grassy plain with scattered Witchetty Bush (*Acacia kempeana*) and Needlewood (*Hakea leucoptera*) all the while with amazing views of Simpsons Gap and the ranges.

At the 5 km mark we turned off the Woodland Trail and headed up Rocky Creek to Rocky Gap. The sandy creek bed with plenty of moisture in it from recent rains provided a great array of small mat forming plants to grab our attention. This is when you realize how little you know and how much you still have to learn! The banks had great displays of Sticky Blue-rod (*Stemodia viscosa*) and dense stands of Inland Teatree (*Melaleuca glomerata*).

After a spell on the sand bank in Rocky Gap we continued on up the creek for about 1.5 km. This involved quite a deal of rock hopping or should I say boulder hopping as there were some massive rock formations in the creek. Some of these formations had clear rock pools teeming with Zebra Finches and a few of the less common Painted Finches. What a delight to just sit quietly beside one of these pools and watch the Finches swarm in and out until a bird of prey appeared on the scene and that was the end of that. We continued on up the creek to another even more impressive rock bar where Kaye declared lunch.

On our return journey, instead of going back through Rocky Gap we headed up and over a low saddle in the range and joined the Woodland Trail again. The rather brisk early morning turned out to be a 26 degree day! Thank you Kaye and Rosalie. For those of you who couldn't make it, you missed a great walk!

Annual General Meeting Notice from the President.

A reminder that the AGM is coming up in August. We usually make this a social evening and invite members to bring along interesting images or specimens.

As always committee positions will be vacant, and it would be nice to have some volunteers to replace some of the long-standing committee members.

I have decided not to stand again as president. I have held this position for nearly 13 years and feel that it is time I stood aside. An orderly hand over would be in the best interests of the Club, rather than having to react quickly to a suddenly arising situation.

NT Landcare Awards now open

Entries are now open for the 2009 Northern Territory Landcare Awards.

The Landcare awards recognise those who have demonstrated excellence in caring for our precious land and

water resources. Nominate yourself, your organisation, school or community - anyone can apply. Winners will receive \$1000 and an entry in the national Landcare awards.

Application forms available from www.nt.gov.au/landcare or by calling 8941 0905. Reward those working to protect our environment.

NT Threatened Species Art & Photography Competition 2009

The Threatened Species Network is seeking artists and photographers to enter this year's NT Threatened Species Art & Photography Competition.

The theme is 'threatened species, their habitats and their threats in the NT.' It is open to all ages and for all mediums with significant prizes on offer. Individuals as well as community groups and schools are invited to submit works. Entries close 24 August 2009.

Works will be on display at the Darwin Entertainment Centre Gallery from 7 - 10th September with an official opening and winners announced by Ms Alison Anderson MLA. A selection of winning entries will then be on display at the Alice Springs Desert Park.

Please contact TSN for more details on (08) 8941 7554 or savannas@wwf.org.au

Urban trees capture carbon better:

ABC News Website Posted Fri Jun 26, 2009 9:00am AEST Updated Fri Jun 26, 2009 1:56pm AEST

An Australian National University report has found street trees are more effective than native forests at capturing carbon because of their relative youth.

The study was commissioned by the ACT Government as part of refining its climate change strategy.

It is the first time carbon stocks and carbon storage rates have been measured for an entire state or territory.

ACT Environment Minister Simon Corbell says the findings will influence the Government's tree-planting plans.

"The report concludes that the urban trees are better sequesterers [sic] than native trees in places such as Namadgi," he said.

"This is because trees and highly effective absorbers of carbon when they're young, between 25 and 45 years of age. "Older trees sequestered carbon at a slower rate, although they stored ever increasing rates of carbon."

Biodiversity Crashing Australia-wide

ABC News Website Posted Wed Jun 10, 2009 9:40pm AEST

Australia has the worst record for mammal extinctions and near-extinctions of any developed nation in the world.

And according to the latest national audit of Australian biodiversity, the nation is still losing plant and animal species on a continental scale. The Australian Terrestrial Biodiversity Assessment 2008 has been finished for nine months, but is yet to be officially released.

Environment minister Peter Garrett's office says it is out for peer review, but forest ecologist David Lindenmayer has told Radio National Breakfast that government attempts to turn back the tide of species losses are not working.

"Biodiversity is not doing well in Australia, and it's continued to do very badly for quite some time," he said.

"We are seeing massive crashes of mammal populations in northern Australia now, and we're not seeing those in southern Australia because essentially mammals have gone from huge areas of woodlands, and we are starting to see the bird populations crash."

According to Mr Lindenmayer, not even 10 per cent of mammal population numbers that existed in northern Australia 10 to 15 years ago are left. In Victoria there are huge crashes in the number of birds.

The Government has implemented a national biodiversity conservation strategy to try to reverse the trend. The strategy is designed to make governments, community, and industry better able to manage and protect the Australian environment over the next decade.

Yet Mr Lindenmayer says the level of government investment for environmental conservation remains critically low.

"Clearly the amount of investment to try and turn this around is not enough," he said. "The critique of that national strategy has been withering."

Mr Lindenmayer also says that the \$2.25 billion Caring for Country national environmental program, meant to protect Australia's ecosystems, will not fix environmental problems.

Mr Lindenmayer suggests a trust or a levy similar to the Medicare levy is the solution. "A levy that spits out a substantial amount of money year in year out will tackle these kinds of problems."

Mr Lindenmayer also backs calls for land protection and feral animal removal programs.

"These programs need to be sustained and prolonged to reverse the trends," he said.

ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED
Minutes of General Meeting held at Olive Pink Botanic Garden
on Wednesday 13 May 2009

Open: President, Bob Read declared the meeting open at 9.00pm.

Present: 18 people attended.

Apologies: Jenny Purdie

Minutes of previous Meeting:

Accepted as circulated in newsletter without amendment

Matters Arising:

None

Treasurer's Report:

Opening balance of \$3669.05.

Interest of \$3.04

Closing balance of \$3672.09.

Donations to Olive Pink Botanic Garden (\$500) and to Birds Australia (\$500) are still to be finalized and should show up on the next report.

Correspondence In:

Western Australian Naturalists Club The Naturalist News - May

NT Field Naturalists Club Nature Territory – May

Aust. Rural and Outback Awards Invitation to nominate people for awards.

Westpac bank Monthly statement

Correspondence Out:

None

General Business:

- Request for a volunteer to do a written report on the nocturnal visit to Desert Park. Thank you to Rhondda for volunteering.
- Rhondda requested that the Western Australian Naturalists Club be added to our Newsletter mailing list. (To date she has been forwarding a Newsletter.)
- It is time for a committee meeting to plan trip for the second half of the year.

Outings/Trips

- For May and June mostly as per newsletter.
- Connie is co-ordinating the three day trip to Mac Clark Conservation Reserve over the Finke long weekend June 6-8. There will be a limit of 6 vehicles – on a first come best dressed basis. This is a 600km round trip and areas of bulldust are to be expected. Members were requested to let Connie know by email if they intended to go.
- May 16 Junction to Wigley Waterhole – meet Sargent St sign at 7.30am
- **Extra walk –13 June.** Kay volunteered to lead a 'Woodland Tail' – this will be a ¾ day walk. Meet at Flynn's Grave at 7.30am
- June 21 walk at Ellery Creek. Meet at 7.30am at Flynn's Grave

Sightings:

- Kay saw 5 Plovers on the oval on her way home to Sadadeen
- Rhondda regularly sees two Red-tailed Black Cockatoos at morning tea time. Others reported regular sightings of flocks at Heffernan Road and near Jim's Place on the Stuart Highway.
- Vicki saw a dead Wood swallow being harvested by a Butcher bird
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Next Meeting: Wednesday 10 June 2009

Note taker: Shirley

Supper: Connie

Gate:

Meeting closed at 9.20 pm.