



November 2017

## Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



*This Spider Wasp, Family Pompilidae was on our verandah. She has paralysed the Huntsman Spider, which is several times bigger than herself. She lays an egg into the spider's abdomen, then drags it to a hole she has excavated. When the wasp larva hatches it has fresh spider to live on. The wasp can drag the spider along and even up vertical walls. Amazing to watch! Photo: Barb*

Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month (except December & January) at 7:00 PM at Higher Education Building at Charles Darwin University. Visitors are welcome.

### CONTENTS

Meetings, Trips/Activities/Contacts... p2;  
APS Todd River stroll...p3; Red Centre Bird Festival 2017...p5  
Ooraminna Pinch and Hells Gate...p6

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

**Web site:**

<http://www.alicefieldnaturalists.org.au>

**Email:**

[contact@alicefieldnaturalists.org.au](mailto:contact@alicefieldnaturalists.org.au)

[Follow us on Facebook](#)

## NEWSLETTER

The next newsletter will be February 2018.

The deadline for the next newsletter will be 23 January 2018

Please send your contributions to Barb Gilfedder - [bjfedders@gmail.com](mailto:bjfedders@gmail.com)

### Please contact leaders if you intend going on any field trips.

- Sun 5 Nov **Sewage Ponds** with Birdlife Central Australia. Following Andrew Crouch's talk at September Meeting, look at birds at sewage ponds. Meet at birders gate at 7.00am. It is essential that everyone attending has completed the Power Water Induction Course on-line. Leader Barb Gilfedder. [bjfedders@gmail.com](mailto:bjfedders@gmail.com) or 89555452
- Sun 5 Nov **Spencer Hill Evening Walk.** Watch the sunset and the moonrise with Rosalie Breen. Meet at Gosse Street Playground at 6.00pm. Bring a snack and also a torch for the descent. [rosalie.breen@email.com](mailto:rosalie.breen@email.com) or 8952 3409
- Wed 8 Nov **ASFNC General meeting**— CDU Lecture Theatre – 7.00pm. Speakers: **Charlie Carter and Deb Clarke.** Charlie and Deb spent 6 weeks as volunteers at Melaleuca in South Western Tasmania in February and March 2017. It is a special place for scenery, walking, history, plants, birds and animals. It is the last remaining breeding area for the Orange Bellied Parrot, and the breeding season and monitoring were in full swing during their time there.
- Sat 18 Nov **Trephina night stroll** with Pam Keil. Meet at the day use car park, Trephina Gorge at 7.00pm. Contact Pam for car pooling, etc. You may wish to get there early and spend the afternoon or day there. Contact: [pamelakeil@yahoo.com](mailto:pamelakeil@yahoo.com) or 8955 0496  
If you wish to camp at Trephina, get there early enough to set up camp before the walk.  
The camp is not part of the ASFNC trip.
- Sat 2 Dec **End-of-year shared breakfast at Simpsons Gap** picnic ground. Make your own way there for 8.00am. Bring a plate of finger food to share, your own drinks, a chair and a picnic table if you have one. There is some seating there. Come early and walk down to the waterhole or up Cassia Hill if you wish. The really adventurous can cycle out there along the bike path!

### **Proposed activities for beginning of 2018 – to be confirmed.**

- Sat 10 Feb Botanical and Bird drive with Pam Keil. Either Santa Teresa Road or Tanami Road.
- Wed 14 Feb ASFNC General meeting – Speaker: Pam Keil. Identifying Migratory Waders and their migratory habits.
- Sun 18 Feb Breakfast of the other side of Ellery Big Hole. Swim or float across keeping your breakfast, camera, etc. dry. Leader: Colleen O'Malley. Meet Flynn's Grave at 7.00am.
- Sun 4 Mar Planning Meeting, OPBG, 2.00pm

### AUSTRALIAN PLANTS SOCIETY ALICE SPRINGS

**Contact:** [apsalicesprings@yahoo.com.au](mailto:apsalicesprings@yahoo.com.au)

- Wed 1 Nov APS AS Meeting** at Olive Pink Botanic Garden visitors centre at 7.30pm. Barb Gilfedder will show pictures taken out at Newhaven Sanctuary over the last 14 years

#### **Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Committee Members:-**

President	Barbara Gilfedder	8955 5452	Committee Member	Pamela Keil	8955 0496
Vice-President	Lee Ryall	8953 6394	Committee Member	Robin Grey-Gardner	8952 2207
Secretary	Anne Pye	0438 388 012	<b>Some other Club Responsibilities:-</b>		
Treasurer	Neil Woolcock	8955 1021	Newsletter	Barbara Gilfedder	
Property Officer	Rosalie Breen	8952 3409	Website	Pamela Keil	
Public Officer	Anne Pye	0438 388 012	Minutes Secretary	Connie Spencer	0429 966 592
			Facebook organiser	Colleen O'Malley	



## APS excursion - SUNDAY AFTERNOON TODD RIVER STROLL - Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> August

With Peter Latz and Ken Johnson

### Report by Rebecca Duncum

*Also printed in APS Oct/Nov 2017 Newsletter*

Our small group set off to observe the work of two local Landcare groups, one working on the eastern bank of the Todd River alongside Olive Pink Botanic Garden (OPBG) and the other working on the same bank from Stott Terrace to Wills Terrace. The work done alongside OPBG only started earlier this year and it is obvious that there is a lot more work to be done but as we later observed the benefits are definitely worth the effort.

Our riverine habitats were once the most biodiverse areas in central Australia but are now the lowest due to the arrival of Buffel Grass and Couch Grass. After their initial introduction, these grasses quickly spread after large rains in 1974.



The casual conversations during the walk included the following points:

- Although Buffel Grass is the main target species, other weeds including trees like Rain Tree and Albizia are becoming more common and need to be addressed. Smaller weeds include Mexican Poppy, Dicanthium and Lovegrass. We also observed palm tree seedlings growing in the middle of the river, just downstream from a large collection of mature trees on the grounds of the Chifley Hotel.
- We looked at a small area just next to the path where no Buffel Grass was growing but there was plenty of low saltbushes. Peter explained that Buffel doesn't like salty areas and therefore doesn't grow there. We observed the hill behind this area (on the OPBG property) and noticed a few larger trees such as Whitewoods and a Native Orange but totally lacking in smaller shrubs, outcompeted by the Buffel Grass. Peter said that this hill would once have been covered in a diverse range of species such as Sennas and small daisies.
- We saw a lot of Couch Grass still surviving along the river, Peter mentioned that there is a fungus attacking it which is reducing its vigour and allowing some of the natives to grow through.
- Ken talked about the general lack of respect for the riverbanks, with people driving on them and the high fire frequency. One of the main reasons for removing Buffel Grass is to decrease fires, particularly fire intensity, and allow the natives to have a chance of regenerating.
- Greening Australia was granted a special clearance to undertake regeneration work within the sacred sites along the riverbank. Landcare has taken over this rehabilitation work and is covered under the same clearance.
- Ken's first Buffel removal effort was in 2010 when he sprayed 1500L of glyphosate over the area. This was timed after a big rainfall event which spurred on the growth of the Buffel. The regular efforts and maintenance has meant that he can now tackle the occasional Buffel seedling that pops up with a mattock or shovel. Ken said that due to the shape of the site (long and narrow), there are lots of 'edges' to be invaded by feral species so constant monitoring is the key to maintaining the successful eradication.





- We stopped at a 'high rise for bats', a large old River Red Gum, with a thick girth and many large tree hollows created by fallen branches. Peter explained that trees like this are essential for housing microbats which come out to feed in the evening. Of course, these trees are vital as nesting sites for parrots too.
- After the initial spray and decrease in Buffel grass, the Small Yellow Button (*Chrysocephalum apiculatum*) started to appear straight away.

Within 7 years, the area being managed by Ken has again re-established an amazing diversity of plant species, including

Common Name	Botanic name	Common Name	Botanic name
Summer Grass	<i>Urochloa piligera</i>	River Red Gum	<i>Eucalyptus camaldulensis</i>
Perennial Yellowtop	<i>Senecio magnificus</i>	Whitewood	<i>Atalaya hemiglauca</i>
Plumbush	<i>Santalum lanceolatum</i>	Ironwood	<i>Acacia estrophiolata</i>
Small Yellow Button	<i>Chrysocephalum apiculatum</i>	Cooba	<i>Acacia salicina</i>
Bluebell	<i>Wahlenbergia</i> sp.	Dead Finish	<i>Acacia tetragonophylla</i>
Apple Bush	<i>Pterocaulon sphacelatum</i>	Desert Boobialla	<i>Myoporum montanum</i>
Wild Passionfruit	<i>Capparis spinosa</i> subsp. <i>nummularia</i>	Bush Hibiscus	<i>Radyera farragei</i>
Cattlebush	<i>Trichodesma zeylanica</i>	Beefwood	<i>Grevillea striata</i>
Acacia Bush	<i>Acacia victoriae</i>	Inland Teatree	<i>Melaleuca glomerata</i>
Silver Cassia	<i>Senna artemisioides</i> subsp. <i>artemisioides</i>	Silky Glycine	<i>Glycine canescens</i>
Old Man Saltbush	<i>Atriplex nummularia</i>	Variable Daisy	<i>Brachyscome ciliaris</i>
Fork-leafed Corkwood	<i>Hakea divaricata</i>	Colony Wattle	<i>Acacia murrayana</i>



*Senecio magnificus*



*Hakea divaricata*



*Radyera farragei*



*Chrysocephalum apiculatum*

#### Why do the weeds win?

Usually because they leave their predators (pests, diseases etc) in their home country.

Well done to all involved in helping to improve the health of OUR river.

## Red Centre Bird Festival 2017

Report by Lisa Nunn

This event ran from Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> to Sunday 23rd September. The festival's 9th year continued to be hosted largely by Birdlife Central Australia and Alice Springs Desert Park, with the addition of a couple of photography workshops by Mark Carter Birding and Wildlife. 13 events over the 5 days made for a fairly packed schedule. A couple of highlight events in detail:

About 70 people came out to see John Young give an update on the progress that has been made in searching for Night Parrots. He also talked about looking for Buff-breasted Button-quail nests on Cape York, and showed the first ever photograph to be taken of a living bird of this species.

The evening finished up with some of his favourite photos from 40 years of wildlife photography, and social drinks.



*Photos from the top:-*

*John Young giving an update on the Night Parrot - Lisa Nunn;*

*No shortage of Zebra Finches at Owen Springs – Andrew Crouch;*

*Male Orange Chat at the sewage ponds- Andrew Crouch;*

*Spectacular sunset at the sewage ponds – Lisa Nunn.*



Around 100 people attended events hosted by Birdlife Central Australia, including visitors from Europe and Canada. We even received a few euros in the donation tin! As usual, many people took advantage of the opportunity to explore the normally difficult-to-access sewage ponds site. This year a Sunday afternoon event was trailed at the ponds. Thirty attendees were treated to a spectacular sunset over the water as smoke created a fiery sky. Banded Lapwing, Australian Pratincoles, Orange Chats and Gull-billed Terns were some bird highlights. The Owen Springs Tag-along Tour earlier in the day was again booked out, and enjoyed by all.

Thanks to all those who donated their time to make the festival a success. We hope to see you at some events next year!







Jim climbing the steep, three metre wide Ooraminna Pinch.

## Exploring “The Ooraminna Pinch” and “Hells Gate”

These two sites ‘The Ooraminna Pinch’ and ‘Hells Gate’ are within a kilometre of each other in the Ooraminna Range. They were a part of an historic route from South Australia to the Centre. North of here, at Ooraminna Rockhole the road divided going to Alice Springs and to Arltunga.

**History** (from Northern Territory Library Service Occasional Papers No. 11 “Pioneers of the old track. Oodnadatta –Alice Springs 1870- 1929 by Graeme Bucknall)

*The first bush track, hereafter designated the “TRACK” from Northern South Australia to the MacDonnell Ranges, used by packhorse, dray and wagon, was plotted by the teamsters hauling the equipment and supplies for the construction of the 1870-1872 Overland Telegraph Line from Port Augusta to Port Darwin.*

*In 1891 the railway was completed to Oodnadatta, but for the next thirty-eight years, (until the railway was completed to Alice Springs in 1929) the teamsters and travellers still had a journey of almost 600 kilometres to the Alice Springs Telegraph Station, traversing some of the worst terrain on the Overland route to Darwin.*

The track followed the Finke and Hugh Rivers through James Ranges, Lawrence Gorge and Temple Bar Gap to Alice Springs.

*...from the beginning, camels were able to leave the Hugh River at Francis Creek (Maryvale Station) and travel the 100km or more of waterless country on a shorter route through (Ooraminna Range) and Heavitree Gap.*

*Due primarily to the 1887 discovery of gold at Arltunga, and the great increase in “traffic” it was obvious that wells on the 100km waterless track from Maryvale to the MacDonnell Ranges would cut days from the travelling time to Arltunga and Alice Springs. In 1888, to meet this need, a government well-sinking party under a man named Ryan put down a well, known ever since as ‘Deep Well’. To give access on this route to the next water at the Ooraminna Rock Hole, Ryan’s men made a cutting in a ‘jump-up’ in the Ooraminna Range known as the ‘Pinch’. This cutting was so inadequate that a complaint to the minister responsible by a teamster named Harding, resulted in some authorised repair work. On 30 April 1895 the Alice Springs Telegraph Master, F.J.Gillen, sent a memo to Adelaide, stating: Ooraminna Gap completed in ten days, wages seven pounds 10 shillings (\$14.20) – A thorough good job. (They also chipped out foot grips in the surface for the horses’ hooves.) Thereafter this shorter route became the first major alternative to the track along the Hugh River.*



*The Arltunga gold brought an estimated 200 prospectors to the fields in 1888.... The almost constant shortage of water in Arltunga compelled miners to use dry-blowing to separate the specks of gold from sand and stones...*

*Hope was renewed when...the first boiler for the battery was installed in 1897. However this boiler blew up in 1901.*

*The Government acted quickly in securing a replacement boiler. A 'Cornish' boiler was despatched by rail to Oodnadatta...the boiler was mounted on its own undercarriage.*



Leigh, Neil and Bob on the rocks above the Pinch. - Rosalie

Forty horses were used to pull the new boiler, teams of twenty rotated every day or half day on the good sections, while in hard sections all forty were used together. They covered an average of three miles (five kilometres) a day – taking about five months from Oodnadatta to Arltunga.

Hauling this load over the Pinch would have been an amazing feat. Graeme Bucknall describes how Ted Hayes from Undoolya and he discussed how it may have been done, using maximum horsepower by using all the horses, hooking half of them in tandem and chocking the wheels every few metres.

### **Rosalie Breen Report**

The ranges around the Pinch area are rugged and much weathered Sandstone showing colours and patterns similar to Rainbow Valley.

The Devils Wall is a long, thin, vertical, irregular ridge of resistant rock running east west for quite some distance, with a creek worn gap at Hells Gate where the track could breach it. Most impressive it was. It was a lure for some of the group who couldn't resist climbing - the challenge and the view. Getting to the top was a persistent sideline of the trip. Leigh, Neil and Bob are seen on the rocks above the Pinch. Diane just had to emulate Rosalie Shultz's feat of a previous bushwalk and stand on the end of the west wall at Hells Gate, and Jim L. and Liz went up to investigate a white breakaway.

It was discussed which side of the gate was Hell. It was decided that south was Hell because the road leading to Santa Teresa, probably closer to Heaven, was on the north side.



Above: Diane atop the west side of Hells Gate  
Below: Climbing up the Devil's Wall







## Barb Gilfedder - Flora and Fauna

The drive down what we now call the Old South Road looked very dry with the Buffel Grass browned off. A few *Senna pleurocarpa*, Chocolate Bush, were flowering on the sides of the road as well as the occasional *Capparis mitchellii*, Wild Orange and *Atalaya hemiglauc*, Whitewood. Just after the off-road racetrack on the right, we turned left towards the Pinch bore. A few *Eremophila sturtii*, Turpentine Bush, were covered in their tiny pale pink flowers. It was lovely travelling through patches of red sand and stately *Allocasuarina decaisneana*, Desert Oaks. Close to the Pinch Bore there was a large old Wild Orange (left) and a smaller one near Hells Gate. Their many-stamened flowers are stunning. (below)



Alongside the track between the Pinch and Hells Gate the *Eremophila freelingii* were in their frequent drooping, sad state although a couple of plants had put out a few flowers. The main joy flowerwise was a few *Sedopsis filsonii*, Pink Rock-wort plants (left). One was where we sat for morning tea, on the rocks at Hells Gate and other plants were seen by the more adventurous climbers. How these little plants manage to look so healthy and flower so beautifully when everything else looks stressed amazes me.



Our birdlist for the trip was Galah, Magpie Lark, Willy Wagtail, Little Crow, Fairy Martin (nests right), Rainbow Bee-eater and Black-faced Woodswallow.



A Ring-tailed Dragon (left) attracted our attention. Until recently his scientific name was *Ctenophorus caudicinctus*, but now it is *Ctenophorus slateri*. (I don't suppose the change concerns him or that he is even aware of it.) Jim first noticed him run under a small rock near the top of the Pinch. The Dragon posed nicely for us, when Jim lifted the rock and exposed him. The patterning and tail rings are barely visible. Thank you Lisa Nunn for the ID.

Many thanks to Neil Woolcock for organizing this trip and gaining permission from the pastoralist. Thanks to Rosalie Breen and Jim Lawrence for photos.



**ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALIST CLUB INCORPORATED-**  
**Minutes of the Planning Meeting held at OPBG**  
**Sunday 8 October 2017 at 2pm**

Present: Barb Gilfedder, Rosalie Breen, Neil Woolcock, Leigh Woolcock, Colleen O'Malley, Anne Pye, Pauline Walsh, Robyn Grey-Gardner, Pam Keil

Apologies: Ian and Wendy Mann, Lee Ryall, Lisa Nunn, Connie Spencer, Meg Mooney

Minutes of the previous meeting were read and accepted by the members.

Business arising from the minutes

- Barb is happy to continue printing thank you cards for Rosalie to send out – and to print the hard copies of the newsletter when Lee Ryall is unable to do it.
- Colleen is happy to continue managing the club Facebook page and in February will post something about a potential bulk order for Club embroidered badges after Rosalie has provided her the relevant information. Colleen also to continue posting meetings on Alice Springs Community Calendar.
- The revised Constitution has been finalised and lodged with the Dept of Business.

Any other business

- Anne needs to follow up again with the Dept of Business about the refund due for the overpayment of the fee when the new Constitution was lodged.
- Neil will chase up about getting Pam removed and Anne added to the extra signatures for the club bank account. Neil also to find out how to continue paying account on line, but with two signatures.
- Barb reported a problem with the newsletter not being regularly posted to the club website and having all the newsletters in the archive section. Pam said she would try and get it up to date over the school holidays. Colleen is happy to take over the posting to the website after that, provided Pam shows her how to do it.
- Colleen wants to redesign the club website and offered to do it in the new year.
- Pam agreed to bring the club computer and the Secretary's box of material to the next meeting on Wednesday.
- It was agreed that the newsletter should only be available from the club website and not from Facebook as a continued incentive for out of town members to retain their membership.

The rest of the meeting was spent organising the talks, trips and activities program for the rest of 2017 and for early 2018.

An end of year Xmas breakfast will be held at Simpsons Gap at 8am Sat 2 December – byo plate of food to share and a chair to sit on.

Meeting finished 3.30pm

Minutes written by Anne Pye.



# Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club

## Minutes – General Meeting – 11 October 2017

After presentation by Peter Jobson on Botanical websites.

Thank you to Peter Jobson who also offered to write up his own talk for our newsletter.

Present: 13 Members and 3 Visitors as per attendance book

Apologies: Anne Pye, Connie Spencer, Margaret and Jim Lawrence, Neil and Leigh Woolcock, Dick Kimber, Robyn Grey-Gardner.

Minutes of the September General Meeting were attached to the last newsletter. These were accepted.

Business arising from the minutes.

Neil was able to get permission to do the Pinch trip. He hopes to be able to lead it still.

### Treasurer's Report:

Balance of all funds (inc. petty cash) end of August	\$3,377.52
Activity in September	
Income received	
Membership	\$115.00
Bank interest	\$0.26
Bank withdrawals	Nil
<u>Petty cash</u>	
Petty cash opening balance	\$30.15
Expenditure in September	nil
Petty cash balance end August	\$30.15]
Total of all funds (inc. petty cash) end September	\$3,492.78

### Correspondence:

- Bill Low – Talk this Thursday – forwarded to Membership.
- Demi Cox – calling for nominations Young Achievers Award – forwarded to Membership.
- Robert Foster – from Field Nats in Thunder Bay, Canada visiting central Australia, inquiring about trips. I was able to tell him about a night walk at Trephina on 18 November.
- I also forwarded an advertisement in Advocate about a meeting yesterday re a new facility for Alcoota fossils in CBD. Several members took advantage of the info session.
- Megg Kelham re a possible speaker, but he is leaving town shortly so unable to accommodate.
- Rebecca Duncum – she has purchased more copies of APS journal about central Australia, so contact her if we would like more.
- No reply from Jayne Brim-Box re Salt Springs visit.

### Past Events

Planning meeting last Sunday. Minutes will be included in November Newsletter. Nine members attended.

Excellent discussion with good suggestions for speakers and trips, although some not yet placed in calendar.

### Future Events:

- Sat 21 October - **The Pinch and Hells Gate.** Meet at Information Bay opposite the Old Timers at 7.30am. Drive about 15kms down Old South Road and then about 10km to a bore and yards. Stop there for a 4km round trip walk to the Pinch and Hells Gate, or if temperatures high drive to the Pinch and have a 2km round trip walk to Hells Gate. 4wd advised. Bring lunch. Leader: Neil Woolcock [neilwool48@gmail.com](mailto:neilwool48@gmail.com) or 0428 521 598.
  - Sun 5 November - **Sewage Ponds** with Birdlife Central Australia. Following Andrew Crouch's talk at September Meeting, looking at birds at sewage ponds. Meet at birders gate at 7.00am. It is essential that everyone attending has completed the Power Water Induction Course on-line. Leader Barb Gilfedder
  - Sun 5 November - **Spencer Hill Evening Walk.** Watch the sunset and the moonrise with Rosalie Breen. Meet at Gosse Street Playground at 6.00pm. Bring a snack and also a torch for the descent.
  - Sat 18 November - **Trephina night walk** with Pam Keil. Meet at the car park, Trephina Gorge at 7.00pm. Contact Pam for car pooling, etc.. You may wish to get there early and spend the day or afternoon there. If you wish to camp at Trephina get there early enough to set up camp before the walk. The camp is not part of the ASFNC trip.
  - Sat 2 December - **End of year event** – Shared breakfast at Simpsons Gap, from 8.00am.
- Next Meeting
- November meeting – **Charlie Carter and Deb Clarke will talk about their time volunteering at Melaleuca, Tasmania.**  
Scribe: **Margaret Friedel** Supper: **Sue O'Callaghan**

### Sightings:

- Pam Keil – Little Eagle and Black-breasted Buzzard flying together over Tanami Track.
- Juvenile Grey Falcons in Bev Gray's garden. Some members asked if they could have been Black-shouldered Kites as GF very rare.
- Margaret Friedel – Whistling Kites holding their wings out to dry like Cormorants.
- Goanna picture on Pauline's camera looked like Black-headed Goanna *Varanus tristis*, fairly common in suburban areas.