



July 2010

Alice Springs Field Naturalist Club Newsletter



Valley in the Train Hills

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

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Look - New Meeting Venue and Start Time.

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NEXT NEWSLETTER

The deadline for the next newsletter is **Friday 22th July**. Please send your contributions to Barb Gilfedder - fedders@octa4.net.au as Emily will be on holiday.

MEETINGS

Wed 14 Jul: 7.00pm at CDU Higher Education Building Lecture Theatre, **Ashley Sparrow**
“Landscape ecology in Antarctic dry valleys”

Wed 11 August 7.00pm at CDU Higher Education Building Lecture Theatre

Members' evening. Please bring your photos of natural history, field trips, plants, birds, animals etc. to share, either on a disk or memory stick. Alternatively bring an interesting item.

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Incorporated Annual General Meeting.

If you would like to nominate yourself or another member for a committee position please contact a committee member.

Annual membership fees will also be due at this meeting. Please help your Treasurer by renewing promptly.

Australian Plant Society

Wed 7 July 7:30 pm Olive Pink Botanic Garden – Speaker: **Michael Barritt**, Senior Ranger Parks and Wildlife on ***Significant Plants of the West MacDonnell Ranges.***

Wed 4 August 7:30 pm Olive Pink Botanic Garden – Speaker: **Andy Vinter**, about a Landcare project he is currently working on.

FIELD TRIPS / ACTIVITIES

Fri 2 & Sun 3 July **Alice Springs Show.** Don't miss the Australian Plant Society site. There will be a beautiful display of native flowers, a poster display “After the rains” with lots of photos and a plant stall with a big range of unusual and interesting native plants to buy for your garden, including some rare sedges.

Sun 11 July **Day walk** on the southern side of Heavitree Range starting near The Little Sisters Camp. Return the same way. Walking is mostly on tracks, some a little rough and rocky but not difficult. There is no real destination – just wander and check out the scenery and plants for as long as we like. Contact Connie Spencer on 8952 4694 for information on time and place to meet.

Sat 17 July **Bird watching trip** with Mark Carter to the vicinity of Kunoth Bore on the Tanami Road. Meet at 6.40 am sharp, at the end of Sargent Street on the North Stuart Highway. Contact Barb Gilfedder 89 555452.

Sun 8 August **Walk** along Bridle Path at Standley Chasm. Contact Colleen O'Malley on 0420 719778 for more details.

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June Speaker - Dr. Chris Palmer, Entomologist, Parks & Wildlife Service
Effect of Climate on Terrestrial Insects at Simpsons Gap
by Sue Fraser

Chris conducted this survey over a period 18 months at Simpsons Gap from October 2006 to March 2008. This period covered two consecutive summers and one winter. Malaise and pitfall traps (sampled monthly) were the methods used for collection of the insects, and Chris identified 12,392 insects over the course of the survey.

The purpose of the survey was to determine insect biodiversity, when plant pollinators are present, what determines their presence, what aspects of climate are acting on what insects, and what food is available at certain times of the year for vertebrate predators.

Chris showed us graphs which corresponded to rainfall, humidity, hours of sunshine and the number of insect species present at particular times of the year.

Species more common in the warmer months included, wasps, velvet ants, termites and silverfish, while those active in the cooler months included webspinners and wasps (*rhopalum*). One wasp in particular (*braconidae*), a parasitic insect, was present in varying numbers every month throughout the survey. Rainfall dependent species included winged ants, the Two-spotted Line-blue Butterfly, the Inland Sandskipper Butterfly and wasps (*bembicinus*). Annual species included winged termites, the Ant-lion Lacewing and the Green Lacewing.

The presence of one species Chris found particularly intriguing, was a lacewing (*stenobiella*). This insect was present in the first nine months in lesser numbers, and then was more prevalent in the second nine months of the survey.

In conclusion, Chris's survey found there was a continuous turnover of insect species present. Many species were highly seasonal and predictable, boom and bust numbers applied to less species and plant pollinators and predators were present all year. As with all studies, so many more questions and wonders are raised, just waiting for a scientist such as Chris or an amateur Field Naturalist to unravel.

Thank you Chris for a most informative and interesting presentation.

Chris's next project is to study the distribution of land snails. We will look forward with great anticipation to the results of this study and his next presentation.

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Club Badge Now Available

Don't forget a club badge is now available through, Central Uniforms and Embroider Shop 2/24 Parsons St, Phone 8952 2458. Members are invited to visit the shop to choose a shirt or take in your own garment. Costs will be \$6.00 for embroidery on a shop shirt or \$6.50 for sewing onto your own garment or \$6.50 for a badge. Please ring Rosalie 89523409 for arrangements or enquiries.

Olive Pink Botanic Garden - grasses

Connie led a walk around OPBG on 29 May looking for grasses after the summer rains. We were all surprised by the number of species we found and had fun trying to identify them all. I have left them in the order that we found them, because that might jog memories of walking a circuit of the garden starting at the main building and heading in an anti-clockwise direction towards the river.

Ones that we think were planted have a plus sign +
Introduced species in red and an asterisk *.
Unsure identifications in Blue

*Buffel – *Cenchrus ciliaris* (Introduced)

Purple Plume Grass - *Triphus mollis*

Button Grass – *Dactyloctenium radulans*

+Native Lemon Grass – *Cymbopogon ambiguus*

Erect Kerosene Grass – *Aristida holathera*

*Sabi Grass – *Urochloa mosambicensis* (Introduced)

Limestone Oat Grass – *Enneapogon cylindricus*

+Kangaroo Grass- *Themeda triandra*

Warrego Summer grass – *Paspalidium jubiflorum*

Eragrostis species (Possibly **E.barrelieri* an introduced species, but no smell)

Queensland Blue Grass – *Dichanthium sericeum*

Woolly Oat Grass - *Enneapogon polyphyllus*

Silky Brown Top – *Eulalia aurea*

Golden Beard Grass – *Chrysopogon fallax*

Silkyheads – *Cymbopogon obtectus*

+Spinifex – *Triodia* species (back of Blakeman garden)

Native Oat Grass – *Enneapogon avenaceus*

Native Millet – *Panicum decompositum*

*Natal Grass – *Melinis repens* (Introduced from South Africa)

Small Burr Grass, Sock Grass – *Tragus australianus*

Neverfail – *Eragrostis setifolia*

Mallee Lovegrass – *Eragrostis dielsii*

*Mossman River Grass – *Cenchrus echinatus*

Mountain Wanderie – *Eriachne mucronata*

+Soft Spinifex – *Triodia pungens*

Hillside Spinifex – *Triodia brizoides*

Cotton Panic Grass – *Digitaria brownii*

Comet Grass – *Perotis rara*

Woollybutt Grass – *Eragrostis eriopoda*

+ Creek Windmill Grass – *Enteropogon ramosus*

+ Rock Nine-awn Grass – *Enneapogon oblongus*

+ Clustered Lovegrass – *Eragrostis elongata*

+ Curly Wiregrass – *Aristida inaequiglumis*

+ Desert Bluegrass – *Bothriochloa ewartiana*



Mallee Lovegrass – *Eragrostis dielsii*



Small Burr Grass, Sock Grass – *Tragus australianus*



Queensland Blue Grass - *Dichanthium sericeum*

Train Hills Trip 5-6 June 2010

JENNY PURDIE -The trip to the train hills turned out to be yet another botanical bonanza with the countryside cloaked in beautiful wildflowers. There were carpets of white (*Rhondanthe floribunda*) and yellow (*R. charsleyae*) daises which I just could not drive past without stopping to photograph. There were many bushes of Cassia (*Senna spp*) with their bright yellow flowers and some of the beautiful grey-green Gidyea trees (*Acacia georginae*) were in flower, as were the Ironwood trees (*A. estrophiolata*). Annual Verbine (*Cullen cinereum*) and *Malvastrum americanum* competed for space along the roadside in many places.

Some low sand dunes along the road to our destination also yielded some interesting flora including Serrated Goodenia (*Goodenia cycloptera*), Spiny Fanflower (*Scaevola spinescens*), Buttercup Pigweed (*Portulaca intraterranea*), a *Swainsona* species with clusters of purple pea flowers on long stems, a prostrate *Euphorbia* species, a Rattlepod (*Crotalaria novae-hollandiae*), and the grasses Erect Kerosene Grass (*Aristida holathera*), Woollybutt (*Eragrostis eriopoda*), Purple Plume Grass (*Triraphis mollis*) and Bristle-brush Grass (*Paractaenum refractum*).



Buttercup Pigweed - *Portulaca intraterranea*



Green Pussy tails - *Ptilotus macrocephalus*

The lower slopes of the rocky hills were covered in the appropriately named Large Green Pussy tails (*Ptilotus macrocephalus*) and scrambling up the valleys we encountered the blue-flowered Cattle Bush (*Trichodesma zeylanicum*), Wild Geranium (*Erodium cygnorum*) - much larger plants than I had previously seen, a Joyweed (*Alternanthera sp.*), *Dipteracanthus australiscus*, Native Fuchsia (*Eremophila latrobei*), Witchetty bush (*Acacia kempeana*), *Polycarpaea sp.* and

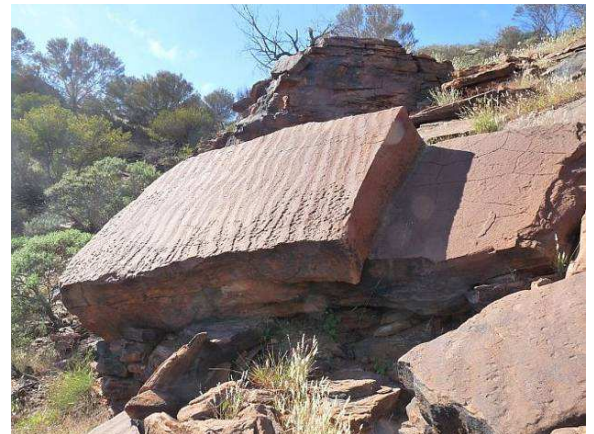


Wild Geranium - *Erodium cygnorum*

several flourishing grasses including *Eriachne*, *Eragrostis* and *Paspalidium* species; unfortunately the Buffel Grass (*Cenchrus ciliaris*) was also prolific.

Down on the flat near the creeks, in deep red sand, the vines Native Morning Glory (*Ipomoea muelleri*) and Silky Cowvine (*I. polymorpha*) occurred in thick carpets but only the morning glory had a few flowers. Here we also encountered Sandhill Canegrass (*Zygochloa paradoxa*) and a surprising lone Dolomite Fuchsia-bush (*Eremophila christophori*) – not its usual habitat.

ROSALIE BREEN - One of the exploratory walks led us up one valley with intriguing sentinel rocks on the skyline. On the way I spotted what could have been a galvanized roof of a hut. Closer it proved to be a large rectangular slab of sandstone with clear surface ripple marks. It had broken from the rocks above. The ripples indicated its origins – sands deposited in a lake or inland sea, with the ripples preserved under a deposit of fine clay.



Further up was a big surprise. The saddle itself between our valley and the next, was a roughly circular flat depression in the sandstone startlingly white against the red rocks above. The rocks surrounding this bowl were weathered into interesting curves and shapes, exposing fresh



colours of white, pinks browns and rust. Above, those craggy rocks which had lured us up initially. Just like a miniature Rainbow Valley. It would be the same Hermannsburg Sandstone presumably. (No Bob to ask). Fascinating!

BARB GILFEDDER - As we drove out through Heavitree Gap two Red-tailed Black Cockatoos flew past. This was the start of an exciting bird-focussed trip for me.

On the way down to Train Hills, birds were everywhere; flocks of Budgerigars and Cockatiels swooping across the road; these were in evident in all habitats over the three days we were travelling; of course raptors were never far away, mainly Brown Falcons and a few Wedge-tailed Eagles soaring in the distance; Black-faced Wood-swallows were common as well as a few Honeyeaters and Red-backed Kingfishers.



Brown Falcon

As we arrived at the Hills, a Spotted Harrier flew over quite low, the first of several that we saw over the weekend. We set up camp in a fairly open area with native grasses and smaller shrubs and a few larger Ironwood trees. A flock of Masked Wood-swallows kept up a constant chirping, while Crimson Chats and Zebra Finches flew backwards and forwards from the shrubs to the ground to feed; White-winged Trillers, mainly immature birds, were plentiful too. I thought they would have migrated by now but, I guess while food is plentiful there is no need to move on. A Hobby was hunting the area and a couple of Australian Magpies kept everything stirred up. The Magpies didn't get much sleep; we heard them constantly warbling through the night. Also at that site were Australian Ringnecks, Peaceful and Diamond Doves, Yellow-

throated Miners, Singing and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters and Willie Wagtails.

The Gilfedders added an extra day to the weekend and headed down to North Bore on the Sunday. At a small roadside dam on the way, hundreds of Zebra Finches were scurrying between one small bush on its bank and the water while two Black Falcons, a Brown Falcon and another Spotted Harrier were trying to pick them off, then soared up arguing between themselves.

At Mac Clark Reserve there were fewer small birds but several Nankeen Kestrels were hovering and dropping on prey, I think mainly on grasshoppers, which were still plentiful out there.

Leaving North Bore, a small area appeared to have been flooded from the dam overflow. We spotted several Banded Plovers getting quite annoyed that we were there. We saw a couple of Australian Pratincoles, and then noticed a larger area of water in a shallow claypan a little way off the road. There were no trees around although we could still see the *Acacia peuce* stand in the distance, the tallest things around were clumps of Cane Grass. On the mud at the base of the clumps were beautiful Orange Chats, the males in full breeding plumage; Brown Songlarks hovered and then dropped to the ground; a Little Button-Quail took off and put a surprisingly long distance between itself and us; more Banded Plovers screamed at us as they herded small fluffy chicks out of danger; a flock of about thirty Australian Pratincoles took off on their slender wings. I walked all around the rather irregular claypan admiring all the daisies, sedges and even a few *Eremophila obovata* in flower. Then two rather fat pigeon-shaped birds flew in and quickly off again. I couldn't identify them positively against the low sun.



Claypan near North Bore

That night we camped on the sheltered side of a red sandhill. A lone Torresian Crow marched up and down the top of it, while Kestrels and Brown Falcons dived at it, and the flocks of Budgies and Cockatiels continued to fly past in formation.

Next morning we returned to the claypan and watched for a while from the car. The same bird species were present but this time a group of fifteen Flock Bronzewing came down for a drink. These were my unidentified birds from the previous evening, now unmistakable in the morning sun with their soft brown backs, grey wings and white face markings. This was the first time I had seen them in the Territory having previously seen one at Mount Isa sewage ponds and enormous wheeling flocks of them last year over the Diamantina.

CONNIE SPENCER – What an amazing weekend! It was not only botanical heaven but also geological and ornithological heaven! Barb, Jenny & Rosalie have covered each aspect so well that I'm at a loss for words! However, one of the plants that I kept remarking on whilst wandering, was Purple Plume Grass (*Triraphis mollis*). As the common name suggest the seedheads are purple and never have I seen it so purple. (There are some good examples of this grass at Olive Pink Botanic Garden). The other plant that intrigued me was the masses of Annual Verbine (*Cullen cinereum*), in Coolabah flood plain country. I've driven through this country several times over the years after good rains and have always remarked on the weeds that come up without ever bothering to stop and really have a look at what is really there. This time we stopped and it's not a weed after all but a native plant! Although driving past it looked like a monoculture, it wasn't at all. There were heaps of other species amongst the Verbine. It always pays to stop and have a look.



Purple Plume Grass - *Triraphis mollis*

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Larapinta Trail Foundation

The Larapinta Trail has become a world famous remote long distance walk. Visitor numbers have rapidly increased in recent years, as more and more people pass on their stories and experiences of walking the trail. The trail offers many different walking options that can cater for any type of walker, from half day short walks, right through to walking the entire trail, passing over some 220km of remote and rugged terrain.

As visitor numbers increase, the demands on Parks and Wildlife staff to maintain the trail to a high standard are put under pressure. As a result of this, various interested people are working on establishing the Larapinta Trail Foundation. This non for profit association will aim to assist in maintaining and promoting the trail, as well as undertaking other functions such as applying for funding to complete works on the trail. The Foundation will work closely with the NT Parks and Wildlife Service to ensure the long term goals of the Larapinta Trail are met. Any interested individuals that would like more information on the Foundation are welcome to call me on 8955 0310 for a chat. We would like to hold the inaugural AGM to elect a board and adopt the constitution soon, so please look in the public notices section of the Advocate in the coming months for further information. We would also be most interested in corporate sponsorship arrangements and donations of time and/or money to help maintain this fantastic walk.



Thanks for your time, Phil Cowan, A/Senior District Ranger, West MacDonnell National Park. Phill.cowan@nt.gov.au



Flock Bronzewing and a Cockatiel at Old Andado Swamp by Pete Nunn

INTERESTING SIGHTINGS

Please let Barb Gilfedder know of any interesting birds or animals seen locally for inclusion in this list.

Pallid Cuckoo	Often during June	Alice Springs Sadadeen area	Kaye Percy
3 Major Mitchell Cockatoos	May long weekend	Palm Valley entrance	Emily Findlay & Robbie Henderson
Flocks of Masked Wood-swallows, Crimson Chats, Budgerigars and Cockatiels and a couple of Australian Magpies who warbled all night	5-6 June	Train Hills	AS Field Naturalists group
Flock of 15 Flock Bronzewing, Flock of Australasian Pratincole, several Brown Songlarks, Orange Chats, Group of Banded Plovers including chicks.	6 June	Claypan near North Bore, Old Andado Road	Barb and Jim Gilfedder
Flock of about 50 Flock Bronzewing (see photo above)	June	Old Andado Swamp	Pete Nunn
2 Little Black Cormorant and 2 Black-tailed Godwit	14 June	Still at the Alice Springs sewage ponds	Barb Gilfedder
About 70 juvenile Straw-necked Ibis (A part of the flock in photo below)	19 June	On the road between Kiwirrkurra and Jupiter Well	Don Hadden, Bob Read, Barb and Jim Gilfedder
Grey Falcon	22 June	Near Kintore	Another GF sighting for Bob Read



ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED
Minutes of General Meeting held at Higher Education Building, Charles Darwin University
on Wednesday 12 June 2010

Open: President, Barb Gilfedder declared the meeting open at 8.10pm.

Present: 12 people attended with 5 apologies as per attendance book.

Minutes of previous Meeting: The minutes of the May meeting had been circulated as part of the newsletter. The Minutes were accepted as circulated.

Correspondence In:

Western Australian Naturalists Club	The Naturalist News – June 2010
NT Field Naturalist Club	Nature Territory – June 2010
Birds Australia	Pamphlet seeking donations
Chinchilla Field Naturalists Club	6 th ANN Get-together – places still available
McDouall Stuart Branch of Nat. Trust	Invite to 'How Stuart became Alice Springs' on 6 June at Hartley Street School
Heritage Alice Springs	Autumn 2010 Newsletter
Bill Low	Lecture info - forwarded to members

Correspondence Out:

Thank you to last month's speaker

Thank you to Robert and Wendy Kittle re Rifle Range Swamp Walk - (with a reply 'Welcome anytime').

Treasurer's Report:

There is a current balance of \$1526.25

Moved for acceptance by Jenny Purdie, Seconded by Marilyn Hall.

General Business:

- Araluen Redevelopment. Barb contacted the Alice Springs News about their article (see previous minutes). The information as printed was incorrect and a correction was made in the next issue.
- Rosalie Breen, Sue and Max O'Callaghan and Barb Gilfedder attended a meeting about the second draft Plan at which Tim Rollason discussed changes to the plan. He stated that the Museum would not be moved. There will be new displays at Desert Park. The specimens currently stored in the rehearsal area will have to be relocated but this will not happen until a suitable new location is found.
- It is pleasing to see a banner for the Museum has been added to the Araluen Information displayed on Larapinta Drive.
- Barb asked for names of people who would be interested in taking up Jochem's invitation to visit the nocturnal house for a behind the scenes tour.
- There will be a planning meeting in August. Details later. All interested members are invited to participate.

Outings/Trips

12/13 June Day or overnight trip to *Acacia latzii* with APS. Contact Connie

2/3 July Alice Springs Show. ASFNC does not have a stall but APS may appreciate any help we can give them with their plant stall.

11 July Walk on the south side of Mt Gillen. Contact Connie

11 Sept Eco Fair

Next Meeting: Wednesday 14 July 2010 Guest speaker - Ashley Sparrow

Note taker: Rosalie Breen.

Supper: Connie Spencer.

Meeting closed at 8.30 pm.