



March 2016

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



This photo is of an expanse of green in central Australia that isn't Buffel Grass. Connie Spencer took it out at one of the Ilparpa claypans late in January. The grass is Brown Beetle Grass, *Leptochloa fusca ssp muelleri*. See more grasses that aren't Buffel on page 8

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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NEWSLETTER

The next newsletter will be April 2016.

The deadline for the next newsletter will be 23 March.

Please send your contributions to Pamela Keil pamelakeil@yahoo.com

Please **send photos and text separately** as combining them causes formatting issues.

ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

- Thursday 3 March** Walk part way along southern side of Heavitree Range from West Gap end and back. Meet on road to Sewage Ponds (2nd left off Commonage Road) at **6:15 am**. Note the later meeting time. Contact Connie Spencer 0429 966 592 constans@bigpond.net.au.
- Saturday 5 March** **Mystery Tour from Spencer Valley.** Wander in the hills to the north, mostly cross country, and discover some interesting human interventions in the bush and wonder about them. We can also appreciate the birds, plants etc. Meet at Gosse St Playground 6.30am. Phone Rosalie Breen 89523409 or rosalie.breen@email.com
- Wednesday 9 March** **Meeting** 7.00pm at Charles Darwin University Higher Education Building lecture theatre. Presentation by Andy Vinter **"Tackling the prickly problem of invasive cacti in Alice Springs"**. He will have his Landcare and Batchelor Institute hats on for the talk.
- Thursday 10 March** **Walk** in Spencer Valley and Telegraph Station. Meet Gosse Street playground at 6.15am. Contact Rosalie Breen on 8952 3409 or rosalie.breen@email.com
- Sunday 20 March** **Ellery event.** Meet at Flynn's Grave at 7am, expect to be back there between 11 and 12. Swimming and geology discussion. – Meg Mooney moon3@iinet.net.au
- Sat 9 - Sun 10 April** **N'dhala Gorge** overnight camp and morning walk. Contact Ian and Wendy Mann on 8952 7808 or wikks@gotalk.net.au
- Wednesday 13 April** **Meeting** 7.00pm at Charles Darwin University Higher Education Building lecture theatre. Presentation by Rex Neindorf of Alice Springs Reptile Centre
- Sunday 17 April** **Combined ASFNC/APS stall** at Heritage week market at Old Telegraph Station 9.30am – 1.00pm

AUSTRALIAN PLANTS SOCIETY

Contact: APS Secretary jude.pringle@nt.gov.au

- Wednesday 2 March** **APS Annual General Meeting** at 7.30pm at Olive Pink Botanic Garden, followed by a presentation on 'identifying local native grasses' by Rebecca Duncum and Peter Jobson.
- Wednesday 6 April** **APS Meeting** at 7.30 at Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Presentation 'Weedy Grasses' by Peter Latz
- Saturday 16 April** **APS/OPBG Plant Sale.** Volunteers needed to help.

BIRDLIFE CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

Contact: birdlifeca@gmail.com

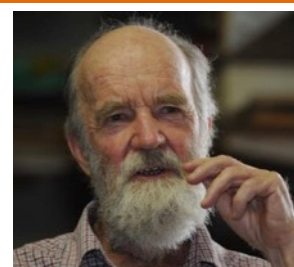
- Sunday 6 March** **Social Birding,** Meet at Sewage Ponds gates at 7.30 am.
- Wednesday 23 March** **Meeting** 7.00pm in Education Room at Alice Springs Desert Park

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Committee Members

President	Barbara Gilfedder	8955 5452	Public Officer	Rhonda Tomlinson	8953 1280
Vice-President	Lee Ryall	8953 6394	Property Officer	Rosalie Breen	8952 3409
Secretary	Charissa Allan	0400 343241	Committee Member	Connie Spencer	8952 4694
Treasurer	Neil Woolcock	8955 1021	Committee Member	Claire Meney	0448341795
Website and Newsletter	Pamela Keil	8955 0496.			

CONGRATULATIONS GAVAN!

Linguist Gavan Breen was honoured with one of the Country's highest recognitions – an Officer of the Order of Australia for distinguished service to the Indigenous community through the preservation of languages, to the development of orthographies, and to education. Only 45 of these Officer awards were announced this Australia Day.



Lisa and Pete Nunn “ The Wildlife of Southern Africa” Report by Lee Ryall

One of the most heartwarming features of Lisa and Pete's talk was the familiarity of the landscape - grasses yellowing from lack of water, sparse and slightly stunted trees, and orange red rocks rising from the plains. The Namib Desert seemed like a place we knew, so their photos evoked the roughness of the sand in riverbeds, the lure of the waterholes and the dry smell of the air. There were salt pans sprouting thousand year old dead trees, a testimony to the low levels of human inhabitants. Pulling up in a 4wd and camping under a group of trees seemed awfully familiar, except that getting up in the night was to risk bumping into an elephant.

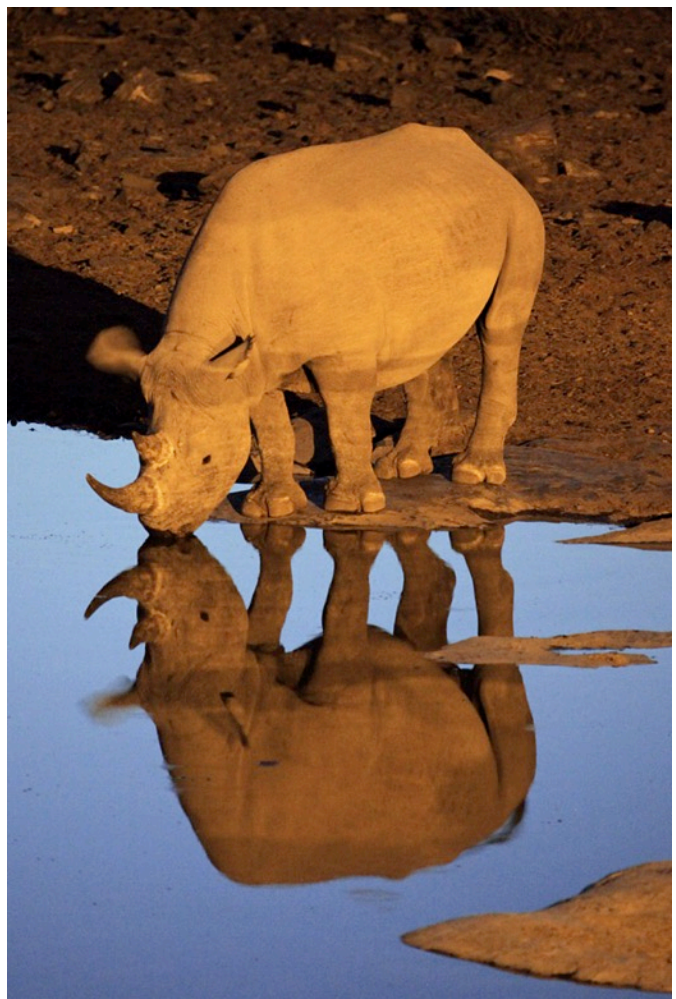


Top: Grassy Namibian Plain
Middle: Flamingos
Bottom: Black Rhino enjoying a drink



Their trip took them further north, away from the thousands of elegant flamingos in diet-induced shades of Vogue pink, away from the shipwreck coast with its 80,000 tightly packed and odoriferous fur seals, inland to the dune country, and past the spectacle of the Spitzkoppe rock archway (above).

Here, the awareness of being surrounded by all sorts of large, possibly predatory, un-Australian animals made watchers sigh with relief that Okaukuejo rest camp in Etosha National Park was fenced to shut the people away safely. Outside the fence, daintily striped Kudu, Springboks and Wildebeest came to drink at a waterhole. A Sandgrouse dipped his absorbent belly feathers to take water back to his nest. And at night, Black Rhinos and Brown Hyenas visited. At another rest camp, a Honey Badger clung to the side of the bin, muscles tensed as he gripped the lip, about to curl into a treasure trove, uncaring of the circle of watchers.





In the dunes, a Sidewinder Snake with eyes on top of its head vibrated itself down into the sand to await its prey. Further north, with a little more water around, Impala and Elands appeared. A lion lay down with a zebra- beaming all over his battle-scarred face, bursting with pleasure at his kill. Giraffes stretched into the trees in front of a flaming sky. Elephants wallowed, slithering with mud, which would later cake in the heat and break off, leaving them dusty dry. A Cheetah watched her two long-legged cubs at play.

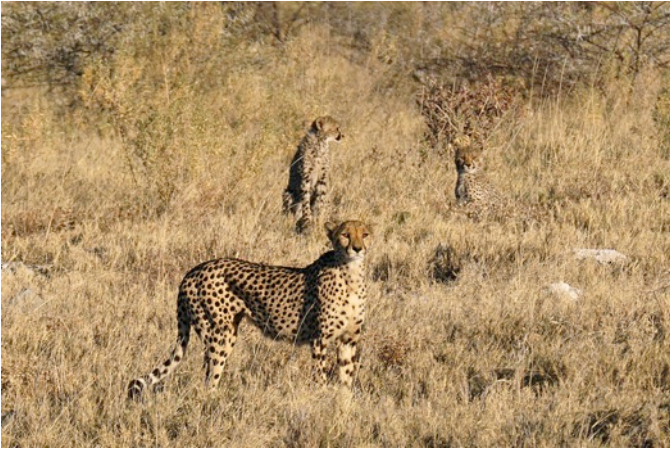


Top: Zebra and Impala give way to the Elephants at the waterhole.
 Above: Lilac-breasted Roller.
 Left: African Fish Eagle.
 Bottom Oryx in the Namib Desert.



Astonishing birds abounded. Sociable Weavers had constructed a gargantuan structure a bit like a large haystack up a tree. Hundreds of birds live inside these communal nests, while Pygmy Falcons hang around in hopes of a meal. The spindly Secretary Bird runs around chasing prey such as lizards and snakes and then often stamps its victim to death. Marico Sunbirds shone iridescent green and crimson. Hornbills, Waxbills, Lilac Breasted Rollers and delicate Wattled Cranes were just some of the delights which make this trip a bird-watcher's paradise. Verreaux's Eagle Owl contrasted with the petite Southern White-faced Owl, and raptors were ever-present- the African Fish Eagle, and a variety of vultures. The tiny Red-billed Quelea, not unlike a Zebra Finch in appearance, is the most abundant bird species on earth with up to 1.5 billion birds, all found entirely in sub-Saharan Africa. Watching, we became so used to seeing wildly exotic creatures that it was a shock to see Bee-eaters and Barn Owls, which might have been perching above the Todd.





Turning east towards Botswana, Pete and Lisa took a plane ride over the delta of the Okavango River, and their photos showed the long fingers of water, lush with green. Dark channels marked the regular swimming paths of hippopotamuses. The hippos' colour varies from a pinky grey to black, and they travel with an entourage of birds (oxpeckers) and crocodiles. Elephants appeared tiny from the air, standing by the edge of one of the many islets.

Besides the well-known large mammals- the big cats, White and Black Rhinos, Zebras, Elephants, Wildebeest, Hippos and antelopes including Kudu, Impala, Bushbuck and Oryx, Namibia boasts many lesser known creatures such as the African Wildcat - about the size of a feral cat in the Australian desert- which looks like a rangy tabby. There are also Ground Squirrels, Banded and Yellow Mongooses, the tiny antelope, the Damara Dik Dik, with its tapir like nose and the ultra-cute Rock Hyrax, resembling an overgrown guinea pig.



In Botswana the camping was up close and personal with the animal life. Elephants tramped unheeding through the trees. Africa's smallest carnivore, the Dwarf Mongoose lurked in the shadows as well as Spotted Hyenas, some of them three times the size of dingos. Near a small shopping centre, not dissimilar to a remote community shop, Pete and Lisa encountered African wild dogs, and watched and followed as they found their way back to a joyous reunion with their pack.

Massive elephant herds roam parts of Botswana. We were treated to some startling images of ugly Maribou storks scavenging an elephant carcass. Baboons searched through elephant dung after tasty morsels. In Botswana, Lisa and Pete encountered a fortified toilet block, its plumbing protected from pachyderm ravages.



Without all of their beautiful photographs, it's difficult to convey the whirlwind hour-long trip we experienced into three African nations (the trip finished at Victoria falls in Zimbabwe). There was a lot to absorb and an abundance of images burned their way into our brains. For me, one of the lasting images was of a Meerkat, staring brightly at the camera, barely as tall as Lisa's face in the background.

Photos From top: Cheetah with cubs; Spotted Hyena; African Wild Dogs; Damara Dik Dik; Meerkat with Lisa.

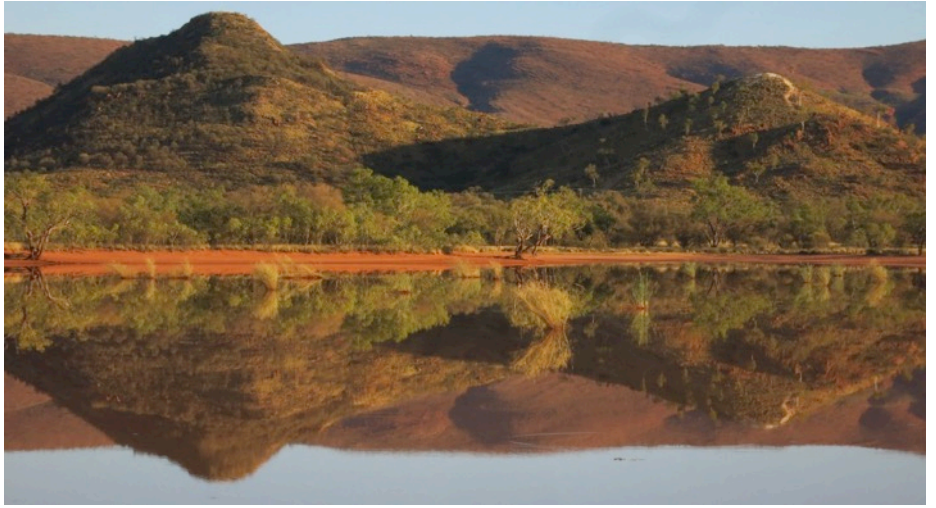


ILPARPA CLAY PANS

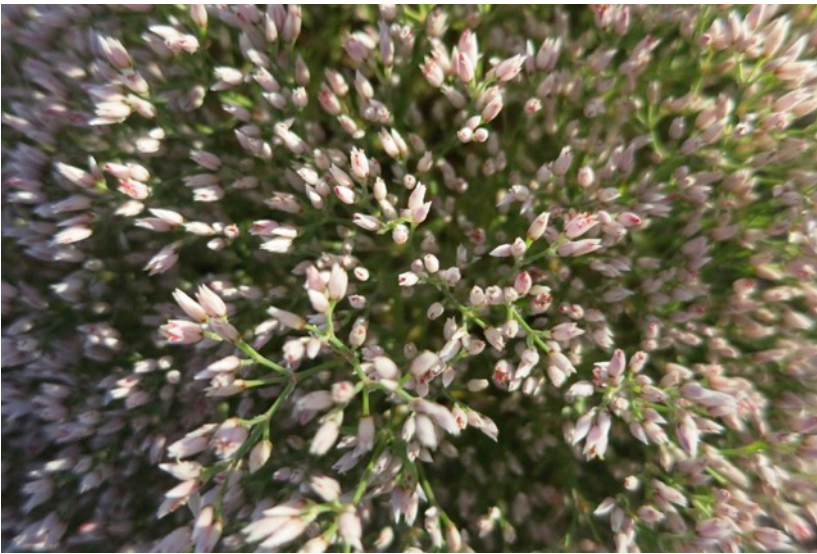
Report Jenny Purdie

Photos Barb Gilfedder

On Sunday 7th February Connie Spencer lead an approximately 3km walk around the Ilparpa clay pans. A small group comprising Barb Gilfedder, Rosalie Breen, Rhondda Thomlinson and myself accompanied her. All you other APS and Field Naturalists members who slept in missed an interesting 1.5 hours!



The walk was more of a leisurely stroll than a walk and involved lots of stops to look closely at the ground vegetation. There was still plenty of water in most of the clay pans but they were drying out around the edges.



The first stop was when Connie noticed lots of little pinkish clumps which turned out to be *Polycarpaea breviflora* which covered several large patches of ground. (pictured above)



Then we got into the grasses, which had started to dry off but were still partly green. Some had shed their seed. Although there was plenty of Buffel Grass the native grasses were holding their own in many places. The picture at the bottom of the previous page shows the expanse of *Leptochloa fusca ssp muelleri* – **Brown Beetle Grass**, now yellowing since Connie’s front cover photo.

OTHER GRASSES

OTHER SMALL PLANTS

<i>Aristida holothera</i>	Erect kerosene Grass		<i>Alternanthera sp,</i>	
<i>Dactyloctenium radulans</i>	Button Grass		<i>Calandrinia stagnensis</i>	A Portulaca
<i>Enneapogon polyphyllus</i>	Woolly Oatgrass		<i>Enchylaena tomentosa</i>	Ruby Saltbush
<i>Enneapogon. avenaceus</i>	Native Oatgrass		<i>Fimbristylis dichotoma</i>	Eight Day Grass (a sedge)
<i>Enteropogon acicularis</i>	Curly Windmill Grass		<i>Marsilea sp</i>	Nardoo
<i>Eragrostis dielsii</i>	Mallee Lovegrass		<i>Ptilotus polystachyus</i>	Long Pusstails
<i>Eragrostis australasicus</i>	Swamp Canegrass		<i>Rhodanthe charsleyae</i>	Small Yellow Daisy
<i>Eragrostis eriopoda</i>	Wollybutt		<i>Sclerolaena bicornis</i>	Goathead Burr
<i>Eragrostis setifolia</i>	Neverfail		<i>Scleroleana lanicuspis</i>	Woolly Copperburr
<i>Oxychloris scariosa</i>	Winged Chloris			
<i>Sporobolus blakei</i>	A Dropseed Grass			
<i>Tragus australasicus</i>	Small Burr Grass			

Thank you Connie for a very pleasant couple of hours and thank you Peter Jobson for helping us ID most of the plants we encountered.

Some of the above listed grasses were pictured in last month’s newsletter and there are more on page 8.



Above *Ptilotus polystachyus* Long Pusstails
 Left: *Dactyloctenium radulans* Button Grass

Part 2 - Summer rain makes grasses grow

More native grasses to watch out for amongst the Buffel



Eragrostis dielsii,
Mallee Love Grass



Seed heads of *Eragrostis dielsii*,
Mallee Love Grass



Eragrostis setifolia
Neverfail



Seed heads of *Eragrostis setifolia*,
Neverfail



Tragus australianus
Small Burr Grass



Themeda triandra,
Kangaroo Grass



Seed heads of *Themeda triandra*, Kangaroo Grass



Oxychloris scariosa
Winged Chloris



Monochather paradoxa
Bandicoot Grass



Seed heads of *Monochather paradoxa*, Bandicoot Grass



Sporobolus blakei



Seed heads of *Sporobolus blakei*



ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INCORPORATED
Minutes of the general meeting held at the Higher Education Building
Charles Darwin University – Wednesday 10 February 2016

Following a presentation by Lisa & Peter Nunn on *Wildlife photographed on their recent African trip*
Thanks to Lee Ryall for note taking and Sue O'Callaghan for supper

Meeting opened at 8:30pm with a welcome to visitors.

Present/Apologies as per attendance book

Previous minutes accepted by the meeting.

Business arising from the minutes

- Arid Lands Environment Centre have added ASFNC to their mailing list for *The Devil's Advocate & Thorny News*. Members to advise Barb Gilfedder if they wish to receive a copy.

Correspondence In/Out

- Thank you letter to Bruce Pascoe
- A few subscription renewals following an email reminder
- Letter received from Micha Marion re change of address and complimenting us on newsletter.
- Letter from Victorian Field Naturalists asking for donations towards the Natural History Medallion. Members agree to a donation of \$50 - \$100. Neil to check previous donations and send same amount.

Treasurer's Report

Balance 31 October 2015 including petty cash	\$1,526.41
Income to 31 January 2016	2,760.57
Expenditure to 31 January 2016	109.48
Balance 31 January 2015 including petty cash	<u>\$4,177.50</u>

Treasurer's report accepted by the meeting.

General Business

- Pam Keil to show Barb & Rosalie how to put newsletter on website when she returns.
- Second Flora Brochure "*Central Australian Flora Trees Large Shrubs Grasses and Sedges*" – a companion to Forbs and Small Shrubs is nearing completion thanks to Jenny Purdie, Bec Duncum & Barb Gilfedder. It is hoped that it will be ready for release by Alice Springs Showtime. Total cost \$7568. Olive Pink Botanic Garden investing \$5000. Barb Gilfedder moved that ASFNC invest \$1300. All in favour.
- After discussion on the Newhaven *Return of the Mala Appeal*, members agreed to a \$1000 donation.
- Alice Springs Heritage Week open day at the Alice Springs Telegraph Station Sunday 17 April 2016 –members agreed to hold a joint stall with Australian Plants Society to promote our Associations. Jim Lawrence to provide shade shelter.

Past Outings/Activities

- Weekly early mornings walks recommenced on Thursday 14 January with between 3 and 8 participants.
- Sunday 7th February a wander around the Ilparpa Claypans looking at grasses with 5 participants.

Future Outings/Activities

- APS tour of Peter Latz's block, Sunday 14th February
- Planning meeting Sunday 21 February 2 pm at 33 Battarbee St.
- ASSP Shorebird Count Sunday 28 February 7:30 am
- Early morning walks continue. See February newsletter.
- Alcoota public weekend 21 & 22 May 2016. See Lee Ryall for further information.

Sightings

- Leigh Woolcock saw a juvenile Perentie in their garden in Larapinta.
- Ian & Wendy spied a Bearded Dragon sunning itself on their letterbox in Eastside
- Barb spotted a Firetail Skink in her garden in Araluen
- Neil Woolcock had a baby Western Brown snake in the pool skimmer box. Larapinta
- Marg Lawrence spotted a Wedge-tail Eagle flying over her garden in Araluen
- Sue O'Callaghan has 3 Channel-billed Cuckoos roosting in her garden in Araluen
- Lisa Nunn reported that there are several bird species breeding along the Santa Teresa Road.

Next Meeting – Wednesday 09 March 2016. Speaker: Andy Vinter on *Tackling the prickly problem of invasive cacti in Alice Springs*.
Note taker – Rosalie Breen; Supper – Marg Lawrence.

Meeting closed: 9 pm