



April 2022

# Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



I was intrigued by this Blistered Grasshopper PYRGOMORPHIDAE: *Monistria pustulifera*. She was enjoying one of my *Eremophila* bushes. I wondered what the red flash was on her side.

Any ideas? Barb Gilfedder

Turn to page 2 for the explanation.

Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of the month  
(except December and January) at 7:00pm  
at the Olive Pink Botanic Garden.

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## NEWSLETTER

The next newsletter will be May 2022.  
The deadline for that newsletter will be 23 April 2022.  
Please send your contributions to Barb Gilfedder: [bjfedders@gmail.com](mailto:bjfedders@gmail.com)

### **ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB**

**It is important to watch for up-to-date flyers or contact leaders for details as arrangements may change.**

- Friday 1 April 2022**      **MEMBERS ONLY walk along Todd River bank with Ken Johnson and Peter Latz.** Ken has been keeping this area Buffel-free for many years and its present diversity is a real credit to his persistence. Meet at 4.50pm for a 5.00 start opposite Casa Nostra on Sturt Terrace.
- Saturday 9 April 2022**      **Maloney Creek Fossil Hunt** – Meet up will be in the information bay opposite the Old Timers. Contact Leader - Lee Ryall 0417 401 237, [ryall.lee8@gmail.com](mailto:ryall.lee8@gmail.com) for details.
- Wednesday 13 April**      **ASFNC Monthly Speaker Night** at Olive Pink Botanic Garden **at 7.00pm.**  
There will be a talk by **Angus Duguid** and **Tim Fernando "Fish Ecology in Central Australia"**.
- Wednesday 11 May**      **ASFNC Monthly Speaker Night at 7.00pm.**at Olive Pink Botanic Garden  
A presentation by **Ken Johnson, Todd River Management Group.**

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### **AUSTRALIAN PLANTS SOCIETY - ALICE SPRINGS**

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

- Saturday 2 April 2022**      **Explore the clay pans off Ilparpa Road 7.30 am - 10.00 am.**  
Meet at the car bay opposite Old Timers on the South Stuart Highway. Bring morning tea.
- Wednesday 6 April 2022**      **Propagation workshop 7.00 pm, Olive Pink Botanic Garden.** Bec Duncum will take you through some hands-on procedures for propagating plants. Numbers may be limited so **RSVP** early.
- Wednesday 13 April 2022**      **Seed collection workshop 5.30 pm - 6.30 pm at Olive Pink Botanic Garden.** Doug McDougall will lead a workshop for APS AS and Field Naturalists prior to the Field Naturalist meeting (7 pm) — bring a snack.
- 31 April - 1 May 2022**      **Visit to *Acacia latzii* site — to be confirmed**

### **Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club**

#### **Committee Members**

<b>President</b>	Barb Gilfedder	0407 6688 68
<b>Vice-President</b>	Marg Friedel	0417 849 743
<b>Secretary</b>	Connie Spencer	0429 966 592
<b>Treasurer</b>	Neil Woolcock	0428 521 598
<b>Property Officer</b>	Claire Norman	0448 341 795
<b>Members</b>	Lee Ryall	0417 401 237
	Rosalie Breen	0458 155 141
	Peter Bannister	89 524310
	Clare Pearce	0457 035 472
<b>Public Officer</b>	Anne Pye	0438 388 012

#### **Other Club Responsibilities:**

Newsletter – Barb Gilfedder  
[bjfedders@gmail.com](mailto:bjfedders@gmail.com)  
Facebook Organiser – Meg Mooney [moon3@iinet.net.au](mailto:moon3@iinet.net.au)  
Website controller – position vacant



**GRASSHOPPER ANSWER:** These beautiful grasshoppers only have rudimentary wings and don't fly – well, a few have full sized wings but I have never seen that. In fact they have 2 pairs of rudimentary wings, a patterned brown pair, like wing covers and a red pair underneath that is not normally seen, although I am told they sometimes flash the underneath ones as a warning. In this photo the smaller male is just showing a red wing.

In the cover photo the female has damaged the wing cover so the red wing is showing all the time.  
Barb Gilfedder

## Limestone Bore Revisited

Saturday 12 March 2022

Report and photos by Neil Woolcock and Connie Spencer

Flynn's Grave 7 am roll call – Leigh & Neil Woolcock, Max & Sue O'Callaghan, Jane & Peter Bannister, Suzanne Lollback and Connie Spencer.

Destination: Limestone Bore just off Namatjira Drive about 500 m from the Larapinta Drive intersection. A derelict windmill marks the spot.

*There are many Limestone Bores on different stations, including a better known one off the Tanami Road. Ed.*

First stop was just past the Jay Creek crossing on Larapinta Drive to photograph a mob of horses enjoying the abundant green feed.



“...in places waist high in Buffel Grass.”

Whilst driving parallel to Jay Creek we were in awe of the amount of water that had flowed during the rains of January/February noting the debris was on the high side of the road.

Next stop Limestone Bore where we left the vehicles and made our way slowly through rampant Buffel grass to a sinkhole and cave. Every step was taken with caution as you couldn't see anything underfoot. From there we wandered past the windmill with Peter and Max stopping to have a discussion about the workings of the windmill in days past.

Continuing on following an old station track, in places waist high in Buffel grass, past old Owen Springs Station cattle yards. Despite the dominance of Buffel grass, there were many large areas of native grasses.

Of note was *Aristida contorta* (Bunched Kerosene Grass), *A. holathera* (Erect Kerosene Grass), *A. inaequiglumis* (Unequal Three-awn) and *Enneapogon polyphyllus* (Woolly Oat-grass). On the higher, gravelly ground there was *Ptilotus helipteroides* (Hairy Mulla Mulla) and a *Maireana* sp. (one of the Bluebushes) (below).





*Aristida inaequiglumis* Unequal three-awn, *Enneapogon polyphyllus* Woolly Oat-grass and a Native Hibiscus species.



The track from the windmill continues but we were heading towards a rocky outcrop to our right, so abandoned the track and headed cross country. At times we had to walk through tall Buffel grass, but always came out into clearer patches where other grasses and plants were thriving. There were thriving specimens of *Eragrostis eriopoda* (Wollybutt Grass), as well as, *Tripogon loliiformis* (Five-minute Grass), *Tragus australianus* (Small Burr-grass) and a sedge *Fimbristylis dichotoma* (Eight Day Grass) to name a few. We passed several small native hibiscus plants, a 5m long trail of processionary caterpillars (left), and a dry clay pan that was full of water when we last visited back on 14 March 2021 after heavy rains that year.



Several large healthy *Abutilon* sp. - one of the Lantern bushes were flowering near the smooth, flat rocky outcrop. After this point the hill becomes a bit steeper up to a ridge line that affords lovely views both further west down the valley and also back towards the windmill. (left)

Using the old windmill as guide, we headed back to the cars where we had morning tea before heading back to Alice Springs at around 11 am.

*Read about the first visit in our April 2021 newsletter. Ed.*



## Hard work creates patches of paradise on Schaber Road

20 March 2022

Report by Barb Gilfedder,

Photos by Mandy Webb and Barb Gilfedder

I always find it interesting to look around the gardens that others have developed, loved and maintained. On Sunday 20 March a dozen of us gathered at the Simmons five-acre block on Schaber Road. Around the house Bruce and Meg have planted some lovely trees, long enough ago that they are now providing dense shaded areas. Bruce admitted that although all are Australian native, they are not all local natives, not pure enough for Peter Latz! We admired a large patch of *Eremophila ovata* that Meg said she thought started as just one small plant. When it has adequate water, it sends up new shoots from the roots gradually extending the area it covers and just about always has pretty mauve bells on display.

Bruce, Meg and Jenny have worked hard removing all Buffel Grass from the block and have been rewarded by reviving an extensive native seed bank held in the ground. We basically walked a circuit of the block admiring a wide range of native grasses and lots of other plants that have grown from this seedbank with the recent rains. Bruce dragged along a dustbin with him so he could weed as he went and was keen for us to identify plants and also weeds. He started by pouncing on a couple of small Buffel seedlings. We pointed out a few *Malvastrum americanum* plants. (right) This weed is originally from America but quite widespread in central Australia. It produces lots of seeds and can spread through an area quite quickly. They joined the Buffel in the bin.

We admired lovely stands of *Panicum decompositum*, Native Millet (Foreground, top photo) and *Digitaria brownii*, Cotton Panic Grass, several different *Enneapogon* species, Oat Grasses, *Triraphis mollis*, Purple Plume Grass, *Enteropogon ramosus*, Creek Windmill Grass, several *Urochloa* species, *Eragrostis eriopoda*, Woollybutt Grass, and lots more, as well as several *Eragrostis* plants we thought may well be introduced. These later were added to the bin too.

The whole block slopes towards the back, the front being mainly sand, while the lower back is alluvial. Bruce calls this the prickly patch and sure enough one of the extremely prickly

Copperburrs, probably *Scleroleana convexula*, is keeping other plants and people at bay. Jenny says she has declared war on it and slowly it is relinquishing its grip. She also says she removes some Mistletoe that threatens trees and even *Enchylaena tomentosa*, Ruby Salt Bush when it clambers up and threatens to smother smaller shrubs.



A pretty fluffy grass, standing erect on its own, was quickly identified by Rosalie Breen as *Melinis repens*, Red Natal Grass. (left) This was confirmed later by Peter Jobson and will be added to the bin. I must admit I had not seen it looking so grey before, while young it is a very pretty red but it is native to southern Africa and here is an easily spread weed. Well done for recognising it, Rosalie!

Right - A sea of different grasses catches the late afternoon light on Bruce and Meg's block.





Completing that circuit of Simmons' patch, we then moved over the road to Franca and David Frederiksen's block. Franca greeted us at the gate.

She was full of praise for Bruce who has been the driving force removing Buffel from their mainly sandy block, too. The area near the gate has been Buffel free for some years and the native shrubs and grasses are looking fantastic. A large clump of sculptural *Eragrostis eriopoda*, Woollybutt Grass was showing its features beautifully. We did find more of the *Melinis repens*, which Bruce will also dispose of.

An area nearer the house and windmill is Franca's current project. They returned from Christmas holidays to find it a mass of Buffel. For a few hours every day, she says she is out there removing it, visitors and house-guests encouraged to join the eradication campaign. First priority is to mattock out any that is seeding. The rest can be dealt with later. She said it is so exciting to come across native plants in between the Buffel clumps and treasures them. Plants like *Acacia murrayana*, Colony Wattle and *Solanum chenopodium*, Wild Tomato will benefit from the exposure. The weeds are wheelbarrowed into piles and will gradually compost down. Franca is already growing pumpkins in one of the piles.



Bruce has also spread his Buffel busting activities along the Schaber Road verges, and was very keen that we were aware and didn't park our cars on the replacing natives.

Well done Simmons and Frederiksen! Your efforts are inspirational. Thank you for inviting Field Nats to see the results!

Photos from the top:

The group at Frederiksen's gate;  
 ...sculptural clump of *Eragrostis eriopoda* showing the woolly plant base;  
 Piles of Buffel mattocked out of the home paddock;  
 Small plants in the centre are *Solanum chenopodium*.



March Speaker: Marg Friedel – March 9<sup>th</sup> 2022

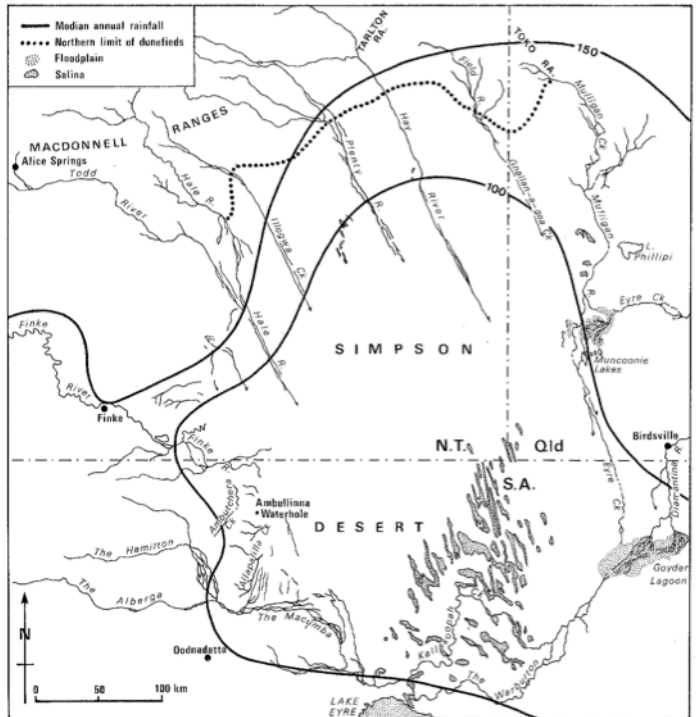
## A million years of change: wind, flood and fire in the Simpson Desert

A presentation previously given in November 2013.

Report by Jill Brew

Marg Friedel gave an overview first, with a long look back at the geology of the Simpson Desert, then followed with some finely detailed personal observations in recent years. The rivers of the region – including the Diamantina, Warburton, Macumba, Hale, Todd, Plenty and Hay – and the finger lakes and Goyders Lagoon (charismatic names!) all had a part to play.

At the end of her talk, Marg posed the question of how the Simpson Desert will respond to future climatic changes. Based on its past behaviour – deduced by researchers acknowledged in her talk – the desert and its dune structure, supporting life, will change but still be there. She'd given us a picture of the development of the Simpson Desert dune field, and its million-year history. Floods of magnitude hard to comprehend (gamma ray images confirm them) have swept and inundated it; winds during extreme aridity have stripped it of sand and soil deposited by earlier floods or wind; fire has raged over it, burning plants that anchor soils, precipitating loss; and yet it has still maintained itself, and its resilience. A cycle may be of 100,000 years but the evidence shows repeated eventual return to the same peaks and troughs of dune magnitude - correlating with warmer and cooler climatic periods - and continuation of plant life and animal life.



Simpson Desert area, showing main geographic features, median annual rainfall and northern limits of dunefields. Purdie (1984)



Camp 6 on three occasions - April 2010, August 2011 and June 2013.

Overall, the dunes/desert came across to me as a heaving living entity going through episodic stages and coming through intact at the end. Its 'pedogenic episodes' (soil formation episodes) can be tracked and deduced by various intriguing methods, and that was a fascinating part of the talk. The cycle works through: soils eroding down during cold arid glacial periods, depleting the dunes, they blow and scatter, and then build up dunes again over a persistent clay core during warmer, moister interglacials. The positions of dunes are thus more or less stable, and don't migrate. Backup comes from source bordering dunes along rivers (like lunettes downwind from salt lakes) that can provide replenishment. Fires can be thwarted somewhat by little sheltered niches of refuge under crests of dunes, that protect some plant and animal species and help speed recovery.

From the wide angle of a million years Marg took us to a close-up view in contemporary times, witnessing just how the desert responded to heavy rain and floods (immediately after, in April 2010, and a year after that, in August 2011) and then to a dry period (June 2013). From pre-history to the almost-present – and being reminded of the local astonishment at the volume of deluge in 2010: it fell into place! We stepped into a special time not long ago. Off on journeys with Marg.

Those three journeys for close personal observation produced informative delightful photos shared in the talk. We saw flood waters in 2010 and the green aftermath, 'peak dry biomass' in 2011 before wildfires started a month later, and the post-fire country in a low rainfall time in 2013. We were drawn into closer examination of the abundance of life after the rains, and also the creatures (like hopping mice and ants and other insects) that maintained themselves even after the wildfires and dry period.



I was struck by the contributions of people like Cecil Madigan (whose 1939 Old Andado-to-Birdsville track the group attempted to follow), and researchers Marg drew on for information on the life history of the Simpson Desert dunes, soil horizons in dunes, evidence of pre-history monster floods in the Simpson and other aspects of the makeup of the region. That Aboriginal people moved into central Australia and adapted and survived in extreme arid conditions before changes to climate brought more benign conditions, gave another unexpected angle and acknowledgment.

I was impressed by the very high value of the interest Marg had in her subject and how questions arose for her during the journeys that prompted further questions about the country, and changes. (Do some plant species come and go over longer periods of time than others? What makes some types of Corkwood more able to survive fire than others?). The photos brought us close to floods and scoured areas, the proliferation of plants, birds and animals in 2010, the story of glutted birds of prey pigged out on rodents in 2011, the black burnt stripes marking the dunes, and the silent desert in 2013, two years after the fires – almost denuded of birds and animals.

Representative of inevitable cycles, and not indicative of ruination. That was a reassuring message!

Thanks to Marg for re-showing her presentation. (Mistakes in information are my responsibility.)

To view Marg's presentation go to:-

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xy7FuYLGvU>



Photos on this page from the top:

'Rat high rise'. Long-haired rats were abundant in August 2011.

Wildfire in Simpson Desert dunes. Image from Google Maps.

Thryptomene (*Aluta maisonneuvei*) was resprouting after fire.

Birdlife was prolific in April 2010. Photo courtesy of Chris Watson.

Corkwood (*Hakea eremaea*) in the northwest of the desert, was resprouting after fire.



## Our desert fig by any other name...

### **FICUS DESERTORUM - A NEW FICUS SPECIES**

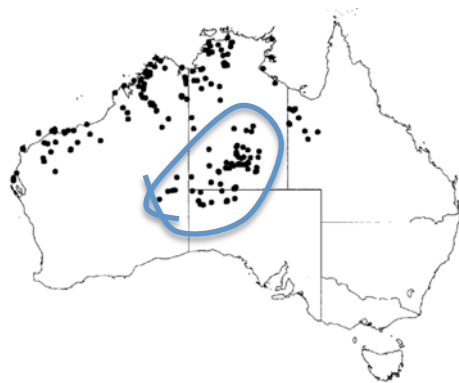
By Barb Gilfedder and Jenny Purdie

In July 2021 Botanists Brendan Wilde and Russell L. Barrett published a paper in *Telopea* (a Sydney plant systematics journal) describing the new species, *Ficus desertorum*. It is described as having stiff lanceolate, dark green leaves with a paler under surface. There are many parallel, though often obscure, veins arising from the mid rib. The leaves are covered in minute white hairs and there are slightly sunken regions between the veins on the under surface. The leaf stems continue on from the midrib.

A rather dramatic statement declared that this new species, seen on Uluru, "has been hiding in plain sight for years". This somewhat infers that the plant has never been noticed before!! Not true!



**Fig tree growing in rocks at Emily Gap . This central Australian variety is to be called *Ficus desertorum*.**

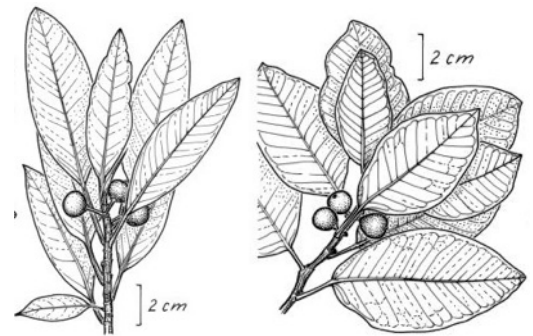


Looking at the distribution pattern of *Ficus brachypoda* (left) (from Researchgate), it is obvious that there is a break

between collections made in the north and west of Australia and those collected in central Australia. These botanists have decided that the central Australian ones are different enough to be a separate species, which is fine. We amateur botanists take exception to the implication that we have not seen it or been aware of it.

The *Ficus* has been a well-known species for many years but previously called *Ficus brachypoda*. In fact this plant has undergone many name changes since it was first described by Hooker in 1847 including *Urostigma brachypodum*, *U. platypodum*, *U. lachnocaulon*, *U. vitellinum*, *Ficus lachnocaula*, *F. vitellina*, *F. platypoda*, *F. eugenioides* and *F. obliqua* and with several varieties attached to some of these specific names.

These drawings (right) are from the NT Flora website and show two forms of *Ficus brachypoda*. The central Australian form with the narrower leaves on the left, now to be called *Ficus desertorum* which occurs from Tennant Creek south to the SA border; the top end form, on the right, is to retain the name *Ficus brachypoda*. The fruit of both change colour from green to yellow to red as they mature.



**'New' species, *Ficus desertorum* is on the left, *Ficus brachypoda* on the right. Previously they were different forms of *Ficus brachypoda*.**

Incidentally at the time of writing, NT Flora website have not acknowledged the "new" species.