



May 2017

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



Grevillea wickhamii (Holly-leaf Grevillea) was caught flowering on the Standley Chasm creekline walk. Photo by Rhondda Tomlinson

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 June 2017. The deadline for the next newsletter will be 23 May 2017.
Please send your contributions to Barb Gilfedder: bjfedders@gmail.com

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

Wed 10 May Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club GENERAL MEETING at the Lecture Theatre in Higher Education Building at CDU at 7.00pm. Speaker - **Andrew Crouch** – “At this meeting, we will be discussing some of the general practical aspects of **bird observation and identification**, then looking at and listening to a number of the species commonly seen in and around Alice Springs. We will start with an emphasis on the easier ones, but noting that the greatest asset for a beginner is having someone more experienced to call on, those of you who are well advanced with your bird identification can assist, and maybe pose some challenging questions as well. Anyone who has a particular bird in mind can let me know in the meantime (andrew@crouchfam.com) – I will try to prepare some specific materials in advance. Andrew Crouch.”

Sat/Sun 13/14 May N’Dhala Gorge overnight camp. Meet on the left of the Ross Highway just past the Heavitree Gap Tavern/Service Station, opposite Pitchi-Richi, at 1pm. Driving time is less than two hours so this should allow for stops along the way and still means we reach the campground well before sunset (6pm). The park is accessible by 4WD only. The turn off to the park is 90km east of Alice Springs on the Ross Highway with 11km of 4WD track into the park. There are three double parking bays, each with a table and a bbq, so numbers will be limited to six vehicles. The camping fee is \$3.30 per person. There is a pit toilet but you must BYO water and firewood, generators are not permitted. In the morning after breakfast we will take a fairly easy walk into the gorge. The following link is to the N’Dhala Gorge Nature Park fact sheet: https://nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/200043/n-dhala-gorge-nature-park-factsheet-map.pdf – Leaders: **Wendy and Ian Mann**, email - wikks@gotalk.net.au

Sat 27 May Hike along the Perentie and Warrigal Mountain Bike Tracks. Distance - approximately 8 km. Time with stops - 3.5 to 4 hours. Interesting rock formations along the way. Meet 8 am at the Trail Station, Alice Springs Telegraph Station. Bring morning tea. Have lunch at the Trail Station when we return if you wish. Contact/Leaders: Rosalie Breen T: 8952 3409 E: rosalie.breen@email.com or Connie Spencer M 0429966592 E: constans@bigpond.net.au

10/11/12 June Hugh River Camp 2 nights – Colleen O’Malley

Wed 14 June ASFNC General Meeting – Will Dobbie – Pest Animal Management in central Australia

AUSTRALIAN PLANTS SOCIETY ALICE SPRINGS

Contact: apsalicesprings@yahoo.com.au

Wed 3 May APS Meeting 7:30 pm at Olive Pink Botanic Garden. Speaker: **Connie Spencer** “Collecting plant specimens for identification purposes” Connie will discuss selection, documentation and pressing plant specimens. Also **Ian Coleman** would like to discuss and gather ideas for the **OPBG Comprehensive Design Plan**.

Sat 3 June Afternoon outing to Old Man Plains Research Station (formerly part of the Owen Springs Pastoral lease) and now run by Department of Primary Industries and Resources - two small fenced areas to exclude cattle and rabbits. After 35 years there are interesting cross fence comparisons in terms of the vegetation. Limited to 8 vehicles. Need reasonable ground clearance. Spare seats available. Meet 1 pm Information Bay opposite Old Timers Home. Distance approximately 80 km. Leader **Gary Bastin. Essential to contact: Connie Spencer M: 0429966592 E: constans@bigpond.net.au if attending.** (Taking the place of the June meeting)

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Committee Members

President	Barbara Gilfedder	8955 5452	Public Officer	Rhonda Tomlinson	8953 1280
Vice-President	Lee Ryll	8953 6394	Property Officer	Rosalie Breen	8952 3409
Secretary	Pamela Keil	8955 0496	Committee Member	Pauline Walsh	0416 094 910
Treasurer	Neil Woolcock	8955 1021	Committee Member	Robin Grey-Gardner	8952 2207
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Deadly Treadlies Moonlight Ride

Saturday 8 April 2017
By Connie Spencer

Cyclists – Shirley Goodman, Wendy and Ian Mann, Jim Lawrence and yours truly.

Billy Boilers – Margaret Lawrence and Rhondda Tomlinson

We mounted our deadly treadlies at 7pm and cycled along Larapinta Drive (using the bicycle path) to Flynn's Grave. At this point my bicycle light stopped working, but not to worry, a nearly full moon and head torch provided sufficient light. From Flynn's Grave we cycled along the newish Alice Springs Desert Park Bicycle Path to Blain Street – a distance of about 5 km and all downhill!

It was a very pleasant ride, slow enough to carry on a conversation with whomever you were riding beside at the time. Although it was about 3 days off a full moon, the moonlight wasn't as bright as we expected but that didn't matter. We stopped for a while near the hill at the Blain Street end to discuss the old explosives storage area but didn't venture around to the entrance on the other side of the hill. The entrance is sealed but nevertheless a good conversation piece.

Arriving back at the Lawrence's house around 8 pm, the supper providers were so busy chin-wagging they hadn't as yet got the billy boiling! Never mind, it soon was and we all had a delicious supper.

Thanks Jim and Margaret and to fellow cyclists for a lovely evening.

Tim Low at NT Writers' Festival

The NT Writers Festival in Alice Springs runs from 18 - 21 May.

There are workshops, book launches, presentations, panels, poetry readings and discussions. I would like to bring Field Naturalists Club Members' attention to two presentations by Tim Low, biologist and author of the best-selling books *Where Song Began* and *The New Nature*.

Sat 20 May - Presentation by Tim Low - Birds and us at Olive Pink Botanic Garden gazebo at 10.00-10.45 am

"When ravens snatch food scraps from rubbish bins, and bower birds decorate with trinkets, they are continuing a relationship to humans that goes back more than 40,000 years". Tim Low, talks about Australian bird-human relationships across time.

Sun 21 May - Presentation by Tim Low – Reading the Past at Olive Pink Botanic Garden gallery at 3.00-4.00 pm

"In central Australia rare plants have survived millions of years of drying in the outback by hiding on cool south facing cliffs - often those that appear in Albert Namatjira's paintings. Ferns survive in gorges, and on the edge of the Simpson Desert grows Waddywood, the rare and sacred tree that has spines left over from when it was chewed by the megafauna. All of these plants tell us about a past that was very different, as do some of the animals around Alice Springs." Tim Low takes us on a journey that will become an important part of his next book.

To find out more about the NT Writers Festival, the rest of the program and how to buy tickets for these events, go to <http://www.ntwriters.com.au/festival> or visit Red Kangaroo Bookshop.

Interested in Native Plants?

Learn, Help & Enjoy

with Peter Latz and
Connie Spencer AM

Come to:

- The launch of the Garden Landcare Group
- A tour of the Garden

Find out about:

- Gardening with local plants
- Restoring natural areas

Join the:

- Garden's Volunteers,
- Native Plant Growers Group
- Garden Landcare Group

**10am Sunday
28th May**

Olive Pink
Botanic Garden
Alice Springs

**Please come along
on the 28th May
(morning tea provided)**

For more information:
www.opbg.com.au or 8952 2154

FABULOUS FUNGI OF TASMANIA

By Jenny Purdie

Steve and I spent most of March travelling around beautiful Tasmania. On our many (short) walks through the rainforests we discovered the wonderful array of fungal species which grow in that state. Fungi come to the fore in autumn and winter so we were a little early for them but we still managed to find a good variety.

Fungi belong to their own Kingdom so are neither plants nor animals. Fungi absorb their nourishment from the rotting vegetation on which they grow. The fruiting body is the part we see above the ground

but it is only about 25% of the organism, the rest is the hyphae or microscopic threads which wind their way through the soil, wood etc. It has been estimated that Tasmania may have as many as 1000 fungal species with more than 600 named. Fungi provide food for native mammals, reptiles and invertebrates and are the decomposers and recyclers of the rainforest, releasing nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrogen back into the environment to be used by other species.

Fungi often occur with mosses, lichens, liverworts and ferns in the lower storey of rainforests in a “hobbit-like” environment. With the aid of books, a brochure, Barb Gilfedder and some great websites, I have attempted to ID the fungi we photographed and if anybody is better than me at this, I would be happy to be corrected on any mistakes I may have made.



Aseroe rubra



Australoporus tasmanicus



Austropaxillus muelleri



Byssomerulius corium



Clavulinopsis sulcata



Clitocybe clitocyboides



Ganoderma australe



Grifola colensoi



Gymnopilus junonius



Lycoperdon perlatum



Laccaria sp.



Hygrocybe mavis



Mycena sp.



Mycena viscidocruneta



Omphalotus nidiformis



Omphalotus nidiformis (underneath)



Russula persanguinea



Thelephora terrestris



Stereum hirsutum



Trametes versicolour

Thank you Jenny, for a great display of fungi photos! (Ed.)

Fire Management on Central Australian Aboriginal Land 2017

12 April talk by Ben Kaethner, CLC Environmental Management Co-ordinator. Report by Lee Ryall

Ben started his talk with some background: the area covered by the CLC is 780,000 sq km, which supports some 20,000 people, representing 15 language groups, in remote NT communities. The rainfall across this area is least in the south-east, and highest in the north-west, where the fire risk is also the greatest. Of course this area covers a range of habitats from acacia woodlands to sparsely vegetated savannah.



One of the aims of the service is to support the Traditional Owners in their management of fire across their lands, and to ensure that they have a voice in its management. Aboriginal Fire Management Committees such as the Warlu Tanami Fire Service have been established as one means of ensuring that Traditional Owners can contribute to the work plans in this way.

The service uses three main techniques for fire lighting:

1. On ground burning. This is a culturally appropriate technique, which is able to include those who want to be involved. In addition, it provides the opportunity for participating elders to train young fellas and pass on this knowledge.
2. Aerial assisted burning. This technique, supporting on ground burning with helicopters, is also culturally appropriate and enables access to remote and otherwise inaccessible areas.
3. Aerial incendiary burning. This is the most efficient technique, using potassium permanganate 'bombs' that ignite after they hit the ground, and is becoming more acceptable to the Traditional Owners. Participation is limited because helicopter space is limited.

Planning Aids

Planning aims to create a more diverse fire regime, that is, one with smaller fires, burning at cooler times. A number of mapping systems are used to help in this process.

The NAFI - North Australia and Rangelands Fire Information Site (<http://www.firenorth.org.au/nafi3/>) maps fires and fire history for different regions. The risk of fires in the coming season for any particular area is defined by a combination of the fire history and the rainfall figures. In working out the level of risk, the management service uses three different mapping systems: MODIS (as if viewed from 250 m), Landsat (as if viewed from 30m) and GIS mapping which can give a very detailed view. The maps are colour coded for different terrains and vegetation densities. This sort of visual display is excellent for engaging Traditional Owners in the planning process.

The 2017 Situation

Ben talked about the risk of major fires for the forthcoming 2017 season, comparing it to the 2011 season. Although the rainfall for this season has been very much above average, particularly in the central and western regions of the Northern Territory, a look at the fire history across the region indicates that in most areas, the fuel load will be lower than in 2011 because the country has been burnt more recently. Such analyses indicate which areas are at higher risk of burning intensely, and will guide decisions about burning for management. Ben pointed out that the heat of the fire (affected by factors such as fuel type and load as well as wind) is a crucial factor in managing fires to minimise release of carbon into the atmosphere, and in the protection of specific areas such as mulga stands. Cooler, smaller fires also affect animal life less. In fact, the viability of areas as hunting resources is one of the indicators of a successful fire management program.



Burning mosaic



Creekline walk Standley Chasm, 22 April

Photos by Rhondda Tomlinson, Rosalie Breen and Connie Spencer

Rosalie's thoughts

Colleen's creek line walk was advertised as a rambling, pottering walk. And it was. There were so many different plants to stop and admire that progress was rather slow. It was interesting to listen to Colleen and Meg and Connie discussing every new treasure, each of them contributing new information or stories.



I enjoyed the rocks of the creek bed. Plenty of time to observe the conglomeration of different colours and textures, as we needed to watch our every step negotiating the rough terrain. We discovered "Perentie Rock" (right). So nicknamed by me for the black pattern created from algae drying on the surface of the stones (I presume), very similar to the netted marks of this big lizard. One area of this creek bed, which is part of Section 4 of Larapinta Trail, was fairly flat and many boots had flattened the path to resemble a cobbled walkway (below).



It was shaded in the creek but above where the sun lit glowing red and yellow of the higher cliffs. These are rusted quartzite which make up the rugged Chewings Range.

My favourite section is the Bowerbird side track along a low meander, which is, not surprisingly, a bowerbird hangout. There was one old bower which looked as if it had been shifted a few times, a couple of heaps of sun bleached white treasures of cycad nuts, bones and other things, and in the bower itself some green glass. Another newer one was further on. We saw one male but he wasn't trying to impress us. On this flat, native grasses grow among the trees as do ferns. The grasses have died down creating a carpet of yellow, very comfortable looking resting spots, for humans or euros? It was very pretty.

Connie Spencer - This is one of my favourite creeks to wander along although I do wish I had gone with Colleen in January when there were little waterfalls, rock pools, ferns, moss and lichen. These were just some of the features in her "show and tell" at our February meeting. Nevertheless, there is always something to catch your eye and to marvel at. I'll leave the rocks, birds, spiders and other insects to those more knowledgeable than me to write about and stick to what I know best – plants!

The first shrub that caught our attention was a flowering *Dodonaea viscosa* subsp. *mucronata* (Hill Sticky Hopbush). It is one of those shrubs that you don't usually notice when in flower as they are rather insignificant. However when in seed their colourful papery fruits are highly visible and attractive. This time it was the number of bees (not native bees) buzzing around the shrub that attracted our attention. (top right, next page)

Another plant that caught my eye was *Exocarpos sparteus* (Slender Cherry, Broombush) – a broom-like shrub to 2.5 m high (bottom left). This is a fairly common shrub in central Australia and not a plant that you would get too excited about but it was flowering and looked bright and lush against the drying ground covers and rocks.



And then there was *Apowollastonia stirlingii* subsp. *fontaliciana*. (left) Now, there's a mouthful. Its common name is Sunflower Daisy. This is a small roundish shrub under a metre in height and width with yellow daisy flowers on long stalks. It is a very tough plant looking green and robust even in dry times. The leaves are extremely rough to touch. However, it is not the shrub itself that intrigued me but the name.



I've long assumed this shrub to be *Wedelia stirlingii* (albeit with smaller leaves) and a shrub that the Olive Pink Botanic Garden Growers have been propagating and selling for several years. In September 2016 I was fortunate to be able to tag along with a group of 40 plus botanists on a tour of the Standley Chasm area and learnt from the botanist himself, A. E. (Tony) Orchard, that he had called it *Apowollastonia stirlingii* subsp. *fontaliciana*. To cut a long and complicated story short, *Wedelia* as a genus no longer exists in Australia and the eight species formally within it have been transferred to a distinct genus *Apowollastonia* Orchard. This reflects the fact that they come closest to the genus *Wollastonia* in most characteristics and *Apo*, a prefix from Greek meaning apart, off or away. There are two subspecies within *Apowollastonia stirlingii* - *stirlingii* and *fontaliciana* with the main difference being in the leaf shape and size and also occurrence. *Apowollastonia stirlingii* subsp. *fontaliciana* is confined to the MacDonnell Ranges near Alice Springs, hence the name from the Latin *fons* (spring) and *alicia* (latinisation of Alice) and *ana* (place of origin). That's your botany lesson for today!

Thank you to Colleen and Meg for leading this thoroughly enjoyable walk. It is always fun to be able to bounce our little bits of knowledge off each other.



Hairy Caterpillar

Remember this little hairy caterpillar photo by John Tyne that was in last month's newsletter, taken on the spider evening at OPBG. Don Herbison-Evans identified it as *Ochrogaster lunifer* <http://lepidoptera.butterflyhouse.com.au/noto/lunifer.html> He said "The DNA people still seem to think there is only one species in *Ochrogaster*, see http://www.boldsystems.org/index.php/TaxBrowser_Taxonpage?taxid=76918 despite the variations in nesting habits". Thank you, Don!