



July 2017

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



Flowers of *Acacia inaequilatera* are stunning on their colourful stalks. It is the most common Acacia on parts of Newhaven Reserve and the small trees were covered in flowers in early June. More about this species on page 3.

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 August 2017.

The deadline for the next newsletter will be 23 July 2017.

Please send your contributions to Barb Gilfedder: bjfedders@gmail.com

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

FIELD NATURALIST CLUB ACTIVITIES

- Wed 12 July** Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club **GENERAL MEETING** at the Lecture Theatre in Higher Education Building at CDU at 7.00pm. Speaker - **Dr Claire Treilibs** – 'Conservation Ecology of Slater's skink in central Australia'.
The CDU entrance 2 now has a security gate. If you drive right up to it, it should open automatically.
- Thurs 13 July** **AZRI Library.** Bid Rose, the AZRI Librarian will show us around. The library was recently under threat of closure, but has had a 12 month reprieve. Meet at Information bay opposite the Old Timers at 8.15am for an 8.30 visit. Leader: Rosalie Schultz rosalieschultz20a@gmail.com
- Sun 16 July** **Lake Lewis.** Morning drive to Napperby Lakes (Lake Lewis) with Bill Low. Meet at 9am at Tilmouth Well along Tanami Road, approximately 190km from Alice Springs. You may prefer to drive to Tilmouth on Saturday, dinner and camp at Tilmouth Roadhouse.
Vehicle numbers are limited so essential that you contact Barb Gilfedder with your plans. bjfedders@gmail.com
- Sun 23 July** **Ormiston Pound Walk.** Come and join Doug McDougall on this spectacular walk. It has some steep climbs and a water crossing so a reasonable amount of fitness is needed. BYO sun protection, water and lunch.
Meet at John Flynn's Grave Car Park at 7.15; drive 135km to Ormiston Gorge;
Meet at Ormiston Gorge Café at 9.00 - 9.30am. Ormiston Pound Walk Circuit will probably take about 5 hours.
Back in Alice Springs about 4.00pm. RSVP by 21 July 2017. Leader - Douglas McDougall, mobile: 0412 762 470
Email: stenocarpus75@gmail.com
- July 29/30** **Old Hamilton Downs overnight - Xmas in July** – Wendy and Ian Mann.
- August 5/6/7** **Long Weekend - Ruby Gap trip.** High clearance 4WD essential; 300 km round trip, limited vehicles, 8 km walk through Glen Annie Gorge to Fox's grave. Camp for two nights; bring own camping gear, food and water; spectacular scenery. Leader Jocelyn Davies, contact by email only jocdav26@internode.on.net and head email "**Ruby Gap trip**".
More information at <https://nt.gov.au/leisure/parks-reserves/find-a-park-to-visit/ruby-gap-nature-park>.
- Wed 9 August** Alice Springs Field Naturalists **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING.** All Committee positions will be declared vacant and a new Committee elected. Please contact an existing Committee Member if you are interested in serving.
Also speaker, **Ian Coleman** will talk about the "**OPBG new design plan**". There will also be a short general meeting.

AUSTRALIAN PLANTS SOCIETY ALICE SPRINGS

Contact: apsalicesprings@yahoo.com.au

There will be no Australian Plants Society Meeting at Olive Pink Botanic Garden in July.

- 7/8/9 July Alice Springs Show. The **APS STALL** will be in the usual spot with a gorgeous display of local flowers and foliage, as well as a sale of local native plants propagated by the Olive Pink Growers Group. If you would like to help, please contact becduncum@y7mail.com or 0414 758 125.

FRIENDS OF ILPARPA CLAYPANS [FaceBook.com/IlparpaClaypansLovers](https://www.facebook.com/IlparpaClaypansLovers) **Email:** ilparpaclaypanslovers@gmail.com

If you are interested in the preservation and conservation of the Ilparpa Claypans, come to one of our regular events
ACTION GROUP – 10am on the first Saturday of every month at the Gazebo table, Bean Tree Café, Olive Pink Botanic Gardens
WALK AND TALK - 5pm to sunset on the last Tuesday of every month at the Western Claypan.

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Committee Members

President	Barbara Gilfedder	8955 5452	Public Officer	Anne Pye	0438 388 012
Vice-President	Lee Ryall	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
Website	Pamela Keil	8955 0496	Newsletter	Pamela Keil / Barbara Gilfedder	

Telegraph Station Walk

– Perentie and Warragal Mountain bike tracks – by Caragh Heenan

It was a lovely walk through the hills north of Alice Springs. Once away from town a little, the Buffel Grass made way for fields of Kangaroo Grass. Due to the lack of rain recently, there wasn't much green growth around, but the bright orange and yellow of the rocky hillsides made up for it. There were plenty of honeyeaters around, as well as a Hooded Robin perching in the distance. The walk wasn't difficult, but it certainly made the tasty treat at the Telegraph Station cafe afterwards feel like it was well-deserved. Thanks to the Field Nats for organising a delightful morning walk!



...and from Rosalie Breen. Warragal is an aboriginal word for wild dog or dingo from a Pamma-Nyungan language subgroup Wiradjuri who belong to the Wagga Wagga region in NSW. Dingo is the more common word used throughout Australia. They are quite often seen around the Telegraph Station.

The Perentie, *Varanus giganteus*, is a monitor lizard but known in Australia as a goanna. It is Australia's largest lizard and one of the largest in the world. It lives on the ground, mostly in rocky areas but can be found in sandy places too. They have sharp claws for digging to provide a shelter or for laying eggs or to find food, which can include insects, lizards, birds, rats and they are very useful eliminators of feral house mice and rabbits. In winter you will not find them as they hibernate in a burrow. Goannas have strong legs to run fast over short distances, and they can climb trees (look up). Their respiratory system is well adapted too so they can run fast to hunt down their prey. Like other monitors they have large eyes with moveable lids and forked tongues which can 'taste' the air, and a long non-fragile tail. I have met a few in the bush and they just drift away. (as I quietly do).
Nic Gambold and Deborah Metters' book "Reptiles and Frogs of Alice Springs" is my source of information.



Acacia inaequilatera by Barb Gilfedder

This is a tough little character that I associate with Newhaven, as it was the first place I encountered it. I believe its name comes from the fact that the leathery blue-grey phyllodes are divided unequally by the main vein. They also have a stiff spine at the end. We were thrilled on a recent visit to Newhaven to find it in full flower – beautiful rich golden yellow globes on purple-brown stalks (see cover page). The flower buds are the same purple-brown colour. It can be a small tree to about 4 metres or an erect shrub. The bark is thick and corky, particularly in older specimens. This species is associated with red sand and Spinifex. The common name is Fire Wattle, which possibly refers to the new growth, which is very showy.

Photos from top left:- flower buds; new growth, corky bark and erect tree covered in flowers.

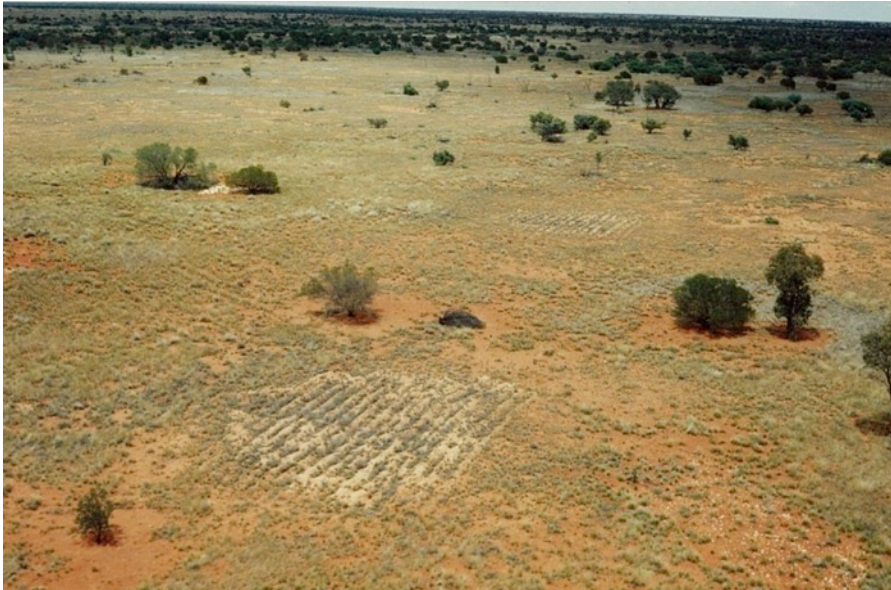


Pest Animal Control in Central Australia

An overview presented to ASFNC, 14th June 2017, by Will Dobbie, Research Officer – Wild Dog Management, Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

Report by Marg Friedel

Speaker Will Dobbie has a long association with central Australia, starting work here in 1985 in rangeland production, followed by rabbit control in Uluru-Kata Tjuta NP and later on pastoral properties, feral horse management, and natural resource management with the Tjuwanpa Rangers of Hermannsburg. After a five-year detour to work on rabbit control in Queensland, he returned last year to work on wild dog management. In providing the following overview, Will emphasised that he was presenting other people’s work as well as his own.



Rabbit warrens ripped in 1996 to capitalise on the initial success of rabbit haemorrhagic disease or calicivirus. Photo: Will Dobbie

Rabbits

A suite of methods is available for rabbit control, and imposing more than one kind of treatment is often recommended for achieving the best outcome. The ripping of rabbit warrens is the most effective form of control but it’s expensive over large areas. Other physical control methods include fumigation of burrows, poisoned oats and trapping, depending on the scale of the infestation. Several biocontrol agents are available in central Australia, including the myxomatosis virus (spread by mosquitos and fleas) and several forms of rabbit haemorrhagic disease or calicivirus (spread by flies and direct contact). All can potentially become less effective over time as rabbits develop genetic resistance, and which strain is likely to be more successful here is unknown. There is evidence that RHD has aided several threatened species of small mammal due to reduced competition for food (by rabbits) and a decline in rabbit-dependent predators.

Wild dogs

In the Territory, most wild dogs are dingos. Lesser numbers are free-roaming domestic dogs or hybrids. Dingos are legally protected but can be baited when they impact on young cattle. The NT pastoral industry estimate wild dogs cost the industry \$60m a year, from fatal attacks, non- fatal injuries and the cost of control programs. Poison baiting using 1080 is the most effective and acceptable method of control over extensive areas, using ‘wet’ meat baits injected with 1080. Commercial ‘dry’ baits also available but are less palatable.

Research amongst NT pastoralists shows that baiting doesn’t consistently reduce calf damage. The amount of alternative prey available is a key factor. Hybridisation with domestic dogs may be facilitated by baiting when a pack can no longer defend its territory against intruding dogs. Whether a reduction in dingo numbers will lead to an increase in cats and foxes, and greater impacts on native fauna, is the subject of hot scientific debate. Fewer dingos can also result in greater kangaroo numbers. Hybrid dogs can be larger than dingos, which average around 15-18 kg. There is evidence that dogs over 21.5 kg will rely on larger prey and hence larger hybrids are more likely to attack cattle. Will is working with government agencies and pastoralists to work out the most cost-effective way to manage wild dogs.



Dead camels and dry waterhole. Photo Jayne Brim-Box

Australian Feral Camel Management Project

The Australian Feral Camel Management Project (AFCMP) was a partnership of 20 organisations, supported by the Australian Government, that was contracted in 2010 to reduce the density of feral camels, with the primary aim of decreasing the threat to the ecological and biodiversity value at 18 sites in remote Australia and a secondary objective to protect vegetation, and therefore soils, on pastoral lands.

Camel populations were doubling every nine years and the damage they were doing was increasingly problematic. Indigenous communities were being targeted by thirsty camels and infrastructure such as fences and waterpoints were being destroyed. Damage to sensitive and rare habitats threatened native fauna, waterholes were fouled and plant species such as quandongs were being locally eliminated.

The project concluded that no single management method was likely to reduce the feral camel density to a level where their impact is acceptable to all stakeholders. Aerial culling is the most effective management method for rapid population knockdown in remote areas, but mustering and ground culling can also assist with population management in certain situations. There are major logistical and economic barriers to commercial use of camels. Any management program should take into account the needs of landowners and communities.



Camel damage at Janganba Waterhole, Nicker Creek, southern Redcliff Pound, Western Desert 2014.
Photo: Marg Friedel

For more information on the project, see

https://www.nintione.com.au/resource/ManagingImpactsFeralCamels_FinalReportAFCMP.pdf.

Feral horses

Australia has more feral horses than any other country. They breed up in good years and suffer during drought, dying from starvation and eating poisonous vegetation. The land, vegetation and native fauna suffer too, since horses can access remote areas where cattle will not graze. In drought times, it is more humane to shoot horses than leave them to a lingering death; transporting them to market is not possible when they are in poor condition.

Will's research shows that, in better times, horses can be trapped on accessible waters, provided that remote natural waters are barred with temporary electric fences. Using profits from this exercise, one station hired helicopters for subsequent mustering into temporary yards and made a profit of \$20,000 after selling the horsemeat into European markets. By contrast, a neighbouring station conducted aerial shooting to control a similar number of horses at a cost of \$200,000.

Thank you for an excellent summary Will.



Mustering feral horses from the air north of Watarrka National Park in the early 1990's. Photo: Will Dobbie.



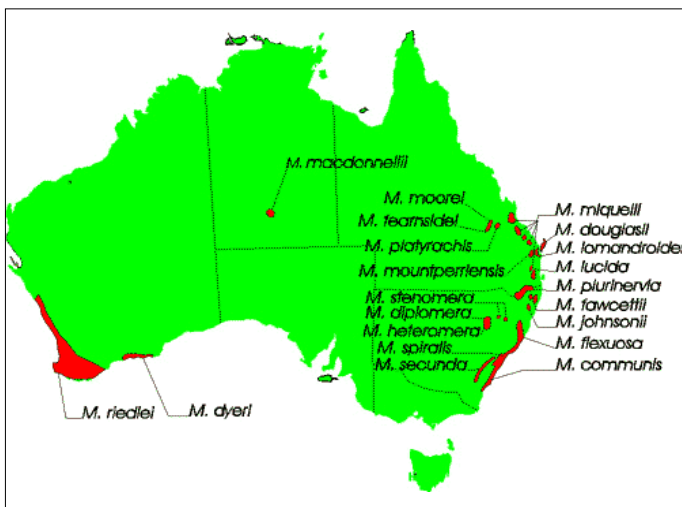
Livistona mariae palms at Palm Valley

Reading the past around Alice Springs

An illustrated talk by Tim Low as part of the NT Writers Festival on Sunday 21 May 2017

Report and photos by Barb Gilfedder

Tim Low has written several excellent natural history books. He describes himself as a naturalist as well as a scientist. That way he says he can put forward ideas and speculate on possible explanations on how things are, rather than having to stick to scientific findings. I spend a lot of time looking at small things in the central Australian landscapes, taking macro photos of flowers or individual grasshoppers, snails and frogs. Tim probably enjoys this too but he also looks at the big picture, which I found so refreshing.



Distribution map of Cycad species

Usually, he said, he gives talks about books he has already written and then has a pile of them to sell afterwards. However in this case he was talking about a book that he has not yet written and for which is still gathering ideas and information.

It will be a book about Australia, talking about each State and Territory, and trying to home in on their individualities and characters, as well as the links between them.

He recognizes Australia as a land that has dried out. Seventy per cent of its landmass is regarded as the outback, fairly flat and featureless. However the area around Alice he regards as the most exciting part of the outback because it is so different from this. It has rugged ranges, covered with small, tough shrubs and indented with small niches of sheltered crevices, some with rock pools or seepages. He is amazed that a dry, spinifexed rocky slope can be such a short distance from a damp, lush, green, ferny area that makes you think you are in a rainforest. It is significant that the folds in the central Australian mountains run east-west, giving hotter, more exposed northern slopes and cooler more shaded and sheltered southern slopes.

Starting with things that are said to be old, he talked about *Livistona mariae*, Palm Valley Palm or Red Cabbage Palm, that lives in river valleys near Hermannsburg. Its closest relatives live in Mataranka over 1000 kilometres away. A genetic study reached the surprising conclusion that the separation between the two populations happened less than 32 000 years ago, not millions of years ago. Seed must have been transported between the populations by birds or Aboriginal people.

Tim finds distribution maps very interesting. He talked of the Cycads. Our *Macrozamia macdonnellii* is most closely related to Cycads that occur near the Queensland coast, with a DNA study showing that separation between the central and eastern species happened recently, sometime between 3.5 million years ago and 200 000 years ago. As with the palms, this finding does not find the traditional thinking that central Australia's palms and cycads have been isolated for a very long time. The young dates imply that the outback was much wetter than it is today only a couple of million years ago.



Acinotus schwartzii clinging to the sides of Standley Chasm.

Flannel Flowers, *Actinotus schwartzii* grow clinging to sheer cliff faces, in Standley Chasm and a few similar sites in the Ranges. Its two closest relatives grow, one in eastern Australia and one in Carnarvon Gorge in central Queensland. Also growing on the cliff faces is *Cremnothamnus thomsonii*, Cliffside Daisy. It is the only member of its genus.

Other plants in central Australia restricted to mountainous locations include Wedding Bush *Ricinocarpos gloria-medii* and Mount Sonder Beard-Heath *Leucopogon sonderensis*. They also have their nearest relatives living far away, nearer the coast, which means they represent survivors from a wetter climate in the past. Blady grass *Imperata cylindrica* is in a different category. It is very widespread in Australia but found mainly near the coast, with a few populations in central Australia, centred on springs in the ranges.

Tim then moved on to animals and found similar examples. *Sclerocyphon fuscus* is a small beetle, whose larvae are called Water Pennies. They look a bit like Trilobites or Chitons and cling to the underside of rocks, generally in flowing water. The beetles are pretty small, sometimes flying over streams, but mainly living in the mulch beside them, not travelling far. Close relatives, that they separated from about 3 million years ago, live in the Grampians and just North of Adelaide, not a short distance to hike or fly. They are like the palms and cycads in implying that the drying out in central Australia happened very recently.

The Central Rock Rat, *Zygomys pedunculatus* is an endangered species. It is only found in central Australia and its distribution has shrunk right back to the Macdonnell Ranges. Previous to 1971 there was a more scattered central Australian population. Their bones have also been found at North West Cape on the coast of Western Australia, from a population that was probably eliminated by feral cats. For the species to have been at North West Cape and also central Australia, there must have been connecting rocky landscapes that don't exist anymore. Sand may have blown over some rocky outcrops, and others have eroded away. The species has survived in the Macdonnell Ranges because they are exceptionally rugged. These ranges protect delicate plants from desert heat, and protect native rodents from cats.

The Waddy Wood trees, *Acacia peuce*, near Old Andado, look out of place as big trees against an almost featureless outback landscape. They are extremely prickly when young. This is regarded as a defence against the megafauna that have been extinct for 50 000 years. (Peter Latz says that it is still an excellent defence against being eaten by feral camels.) Other small populations of Waddy Wood grow near Boulia, on the other side of the Simpson Desert. Were these once part of a single population, before the Desert formed?



Above: *Cremnothamnus thomsonii*; Below: Central Rock Rat. Photo K.May and M.Barritt



Above: *Acacia peuce* look out of place against an almost featureless plain. Right: Prickles on a young *Acacia peuce*.



Tim has spent his few days in central Australia, travelling in the Macdonnell Ranges, out to Alcoota, the fossil megafauna dig site and revisiting Old Andado, to gather more evidence for his book. He had encounters with Grey Falcons, Kultarrs and Camels.

His last line "What are the plants and the animals – the snails, the fish and the frogs telling us?"

UMBRAWARRA GORGE NATURE RESERVE by Jenny Purdie

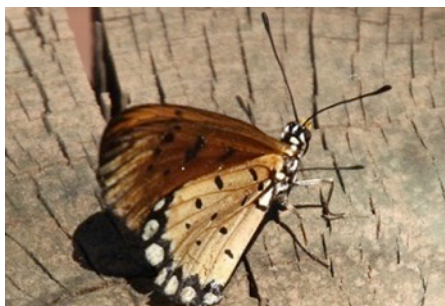


For more than 30 years I have been driving the Stuart Highway and passing the turnoff to Umbrawarra Gorge (just south of Pine Creek) but never had the time to drive the 20 kms in to have a look. I have now rectified that and what a beautiful place it is. An easy walk meanders along close to Stray Creek until you reach the gorge itself and then you have to rock hop and swim if you want to go further. We did rock hop a short distance but didn't swim, however still saw some beautiful scenery, flora and fauna.

Just before we got to the reserve we came across a flock of Partridge Pigeons who were unconcerned with our presence even when we got out of the vehicle. We saw lots of butterflies, dragonflies and a Ta-ta Lizard (*Amphibolurus gilberti*).



Partridge Pigeon



Photos by Jenny Purdie and Steve Sinclair.



I had to brush away a small white spider sitting in the middle of a purple *Osbeckia australiana* flower before I could photograph the flower properly.

Other vegetation included some magnificent large Paperbark Trees (*Melaleuca leucadendron*), a *Calytrix* sp. with a white flower, Plumbush (*Santalum lanceolatum*), Fernleaf Grevillea (*Grevillea pteridifolia*), two species of fern, and several colourful forbs – Blueheads (*Spermacoce stenophylla*), Lindenia (*Hemiarrhena plantaginea*), Thecanthes (*Thecanthes punicea*), a Sundew (*Drosera indica*) and a *Xyris* species. The best find, however, was a delicate little Bladderwort (*Utricularia fulva*) growing along the bank of the creek.



This great little nature reserve is well worth a visit and the best time is early to mid-Dry Season while the creek is still running. There is a small camping area with tables, fire grates and a toilet.

Thanks Jenny – Looks a pretty place to explore.

Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Incorporated
Minutes of the general meeting held at the Higher Education Building
Charles Darwin University Wednesday 14 June 2017

Open 8:15 pm following a presentation by Will Dobbie on *Pest Management in central Australia*
Thank you to scribe Margaret Friedel, to Rosalie Schultz for supper and to Connie for taking minutes.

Present 23 members and 1 visitor as per attendance book.
Apologies Claire Meney, Lee Ryall, Anne Pye and Jill Brew

Minutes The minutes of the previous meeting held 10 May 2017 were accepted by meeting as printed in the June 2017 Newsletter

Treasurer's Report presented by Neil Woolcock

Balance of all funds (including petty cash) as of end of April 2017	\$2,774.89
Plus income May 2017 (membership)	17.50
Less expenditure May 2017 (lodgement of financial return)	<u>17.00</u>
Balance of all funds (including petty cash) end of May 2017-06-16	<u>\$2775.39</u>

Treasurer's report accepted by the meeting.

Correspondence in/out

- Copy of letter Australian Plants Society Alice Springs Inc sent to Ken Vowles re closing AZRI Library received from Peter Jobson. Rosalie Schultz has also objected in writing to the closure. Copy of letter to be forwarded to Rosalie Schultz, Margaret Friedel & Charlie Carter. Colleen O'Malley to write a letter to the Minister on behalf of ASFNC. Rosalie Schultz to look into an outing to the library.
- Sarah Fairhead 'Lake Eyre Basin Forum' on 20 June 2017 at Desert Knowledge Precinct between 8am and 1pm. Colleen to add to FaceBook page.
- John Greguerke re ANN in Victoria 2018 – forwarded to members.
- Land for Wildlife Significant Tree Register now on line – forwarded to members.
- Lisa Nunn – Request for support (possible loan) to design and print a brochure on central Australian birds. Members agreed in principle, but will wait financial details before making a commitment.

Other Business

- Alice Springs Show on 7 and 8 July. If anyone would like to help on APS AS stall please let Barb know and she will pass on to Bec Duncum. APS AS are releasing a new poster at this event on some yellow daisies of central Australia.
- Barb ordered 100 ASFNC magnets in the amount of \$32 to give to subscription payers and possibly sell. Rhondda Tomlinson has resigned as ASFNC Public Officer as she is moving to cold Tasmania. The committee thanked Rhondda for her service to the club and presented her with life membership to ASFNC to make sure she doesn't forget us! Members gave a round of applause.
- Replacement Public Officer. Anne Pye, who has also been a Field Naturalist for many years has agreed to take over the position of Public Officer. Many thanks, Anne.

Past Events

- 13&14 May - N'Dhala Gorge overnight with Wendy and Ian Mann. Written up in June newsletter
- 18-21 May – Writers' festival. Barb went to one of Tim Low's talks which was excellent. Write-up in next newsletter.
- 27 May – Five members hiked the Perentie and Warragal mountain bike tracks lead by Rosalie or Connie.
- 3 June - APS AS outing to Old Man Plains Research Station. 18 in attendance.
- 10,11,12 June – Five members went to Hugh Gorge led by Colleen O'Malley

Future Events

- 16 July – trip to Lake Lewis. Meet at Tilmouth Well Roadhouse at 9.00 am. Limited vehicles – please book with Barb. Possible to camp or book accommodation at the roadhouse, if you don't want too early a start.
- 23 July – Ormiston Pound walk with Doug MacDougall – details in next newsletter.
- 29 and 30 July - Hamilton Downs Youth Camp for *Christmas in July* – leaders Wendy and Ian Mann.
- 5-7 August – Jocelyn Davies unable to get permission for Horseshoe Bend in spite of several phone calls and emails, but could lead a trip to Ruby Gap. Expressions of interest please. Three Members expressed an interest.
- August meeting Wed 9 August – AGM and also a talk by Ian Coleman on OPBG new design plan.
- September meeting – Andrew Crouch, by popular request, will continue his talk about central Australian Birds. Both Barb and Lee away for this meeting. Neil Woolcock offered to chair that meeting.

Next Meeting Wed 12 July 2017 – Speaker: Claire Treilibs on *Conservation Ecology of Slater's Skink in central Australia*
Scribe – Colleen O'Malley and Supper – Pauline Walsh (if she is back)

Sightings

- Neil Woolcock saw a Woma python on the Binns Track near Mac Clarke Conservation Reserve.
- Jim Lawrence reported several camels on the Great Central Road that were not gun shy.

Meeting closed at 8:55 pm