



April 2021

## Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club Newsletter



*Micromyrtus flaviflora*, Yellow Myrtle, grows in sandy soils, west and south of Alice Springs, into the north-west corner of South Australia and across the arid centre of Western Australia. The straggly shrub is only up to 1.5 metres high. Simon Brown, Ranger at Watarrka, who sent in this lovely photo, tells us it flowered for a couple of weeks and then you would never have known it had been there. Thanks Simon! More flower photos on page 6.

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 2021  
The deadline for the April newsletter will be 21 April.  
Please send your contributions to Barb Gilfedder: [bjfedders@gmail.com](mailto:bjfedders@gmail.com)

### ALICE SPRINGS FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Watch for more trip details that will be sent out just before the trips.

**Sunday April 11** – Harvest time at the **Desert Fruit Company**, a date farm located about 60km down the Santa Teresa Road. Wendy and Ian Mann have organised for ASFNC to visit, hear about and tour the plantation from Kim Mackay and then eat lunch under the shade of the palms. Leaders - Wendy and Ian Mann  
[wikks@aussiebroadband.com.au](mailto:wikks@aussiebroadband.com.au) or 8952 7808

#### **Wednesday April 14**

General Meeting at Olive Pink Botanic Garden at 7.00pm. **Lisa and Pete Nunn** will introduce us to some of the best Australian wildlife watching locations.

**Saturday April 17 - The Dolomite Walk.** This 2.5 km circuit track, offers a walk along a timbered gully and through spinifex covered hills. The Ellery Creek Dolomite Circuit crosses rocks that originated on the floor of an ancient inland sea. Signs along the way explain more about this area's intriguing geological history and local plant life. Leader – Neil Woolcock 0428 521 598

#### **Wednesday May 12**

General Meeting in the gazebo at Olive Pink Botanic Garden at 7.00pm. **Joe Schofield** will give us an update on all the exciting things happening at Newhaven Sanctuary.

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### AUSTRALIAN PLANTS SOCIETY - ALICE SPRINGS

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

#### **Wednesday 7 April 2021**

**7.30pm Monthly meeting at Olive Pink Botanic Garden**

#### **Wednesday 5 May 2021**

**7.30pm Monthly meeting at Olive Pink Botanic Garden**

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### **JOIN IN and follow us on Facebook!**

Our Facebook group, Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club has 130 members. It is a great place to post photos of all the wonderful fauna and flora you see. Any group member can post and comment on the sightings or help you identify them.

So much around after the recent rains

### Alice Springs Field Naturalists Club

#### Committee Members

<b>President</b>	Barb Gilfedder	8955 5452
<b>Vice-President</b>	Margaret Friedel	0417 849 743
<b>Secretary</b>	Connie Spencer	0429 966 592
<b>Treasurer</b>	Neil Woolcock	0428 521 598
<b>Property Officer</b>	Rosalie Breen	8952 3409
<b>Member</b>	Lee Ryall	0417 401 237
<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 - Robyn Grey-Gardner 8952 2207





## Spencer Valley Wander – February 27<sup>th</sup> 2021 – Report and photos Barb Gilfedder

A continuing success story, the Landcare group who care for Spencer Valley, continue to work hard to keep the main triangular floor of the valley free of Buffel Grass. They need to be continually vigilant as Buffel seed can blow or flow down from Spencer Hill where they are not allowed to work. They are however, continually rewarded with new species appearing after any rain. Rain in December, Summer rain, encouraged the native grasses to grow. The annual ones germinated from seed and the perennial ones got a new burst of life. The mainstays in this area are the Oat Grasses, *Enneapogon polyphyllus* and *Enneapogon avenaceus* and also Rolypoly, *Salsola australis*.

Rosalie Breen and Sue Morrish led seventeen interested Field Naturalists, Australian Plants Society and Landcare people around the triangular path, slowly, because we kept seeing interesting things to share. At the entrance, just over the drain, under the shade of trees was a nice little stand of Sidas. Peter Jobson thought they were *Sida phaeotricha*, Hill Sida, but was a little concerned that the velvety covering, particularly on the new growth, did not have the usual rusty look of this species. This is where Suzanne found the small Crested Tooth-grinder Grasshoppers that I talked about in last month's newsletter. In the same area was *Rhagodia spinescens*, Spiny Saltbush. Male and female flowers are on different plants, so this must have been a female plant with juicy red berries.

Next stop was to look at a large female Golden Orb Spider, *Triconephila edulis* in a Wild Orange, *Capparis mitchellii*. A grisly string of past meals decorated her strong web. We couldn't see the male, but he is minute compared to the female. Interesting that the species name *edulis*, means edible. I was told that she is not normally eaten in Australia, but may be in more northern parts of her distribution range in Asia.



The erect habit of Hill Sida, sprawling Spiny Saltbush and the large female Golden Orb Spider.



We saw several other interesting plants. Sue Morrish said that the *Sarcostemma*, *Cynanchum viminalis* ssp. *australe* was looking much healthier since the December rain. It is described as a succulent, dense tangled subshrub or vine. This one at the base of Spencer Hill was using a Witchetty Bush to clamber up. Another plant of interest was *Commelina ensifolia*, Wandering Jew which was nestled under other shrubs. It is often found in more exposed locations.



*Sarcostemma* using a Witchetty Bush for support, Wandering Jew sheltering among other herbs, Tall Oat Grass ripening

The Landcare group is permitted to remove Buffel from the hill on the other side of the valley. They are being very careful and wary of causing erosion problems. They have started on a small gully and been rewarded with clumps of Kangaroo Grass, *Themeda triandra* and its bigger cousin Tall Oat Grass, *Themeda avenacea*. They have also turned their attention to clearing Buffel from around a beautiful Ghost Gum, *Corymbia aparrerinja*. (Below)  
 Thanks to Connie, Rosalie, Sue and all the Landcare team!



**Identification on the Scorpions** from Patrick Nelson

Here are two shots taken at night near the airport way without the UV light. (See March 2021 newsletter) The first is *Lychas buchari*, the other *Urodacus* sp, according to my Facebook expert. Seems to me that *L.buchari* has eyes that are close to each other; *Urodacus* has a more chunky front end. They are about both about 50mm long.  
 Thanks Patrick!





## Field Nats trip – (not) Serpentine Gorge

14th March 2021 - report by Neil Woolcock, photos by Marg Friedel (page 5) and Rosalie Breen (page 6)

Jane and Peter Bannister were planning to meet us in the Serpentine Gorge car park. For others the meeting point was Flynn's Grave at 8:00am.

It was a grey morning after a rainy night and this obviously put many would be attendees off. Only the hearty turned up. Apart from me (who had to be there), the only others who arrived were Rosalie Breen, Marg Friedel and Connie Spencer.

By this time the rain had stopped briefly and it was a lovely, cool and fresh morning with interesting clouds all about.

We decided to continue. Being just the four of us, we all jumped into my car and off we went. Past Jay Creek we passed a sign on Larapinta Drive saying the roads from Glen Helen to Hermannsburg, and Hermannsburg to Kings Canyon were impassable, but nothing about Namatjira Drive to Glen Helen. Encouraged by this we turned into Namatjira Drive and pressed on. There were a few patches of water in floodways but nothing serious until we reached the Hugh River which was flooded across the road. The depth was only 20cm and it was quite passable, but I felt uneasy about continuing as it had started drizzling again and there were serious black clouds to the west. I didn't know if more water might be coming down from the catchment further upstream. Whilst pondering what to do Alice Goddard and friends (all guests) in two vehicles pulled up behind us. They had left a bit late to meet up with us at Flynn's Grave. I decided not to go on and told Alice and friends that the Field Nats Serpentine activity was now over, but of course they were free to cross the Hugh and continue on if they chose to do so. Some children travelling in their party had meanwhile got out of the cars and were having fun splashing about in the water.

We decided that going back and having something to eat at Standley Chasm seemed a good idea.

Marg, Connie, Rosalie and I drove down the track beside the Hugh River for about 1km until we reached an impassable section. It was clear that the river had been up 2 or 3 metres from its current height and had recently roared through this part of its course. Lots of sand had been shifted and piled up, and was saturated and very soft as Connie and I discovered when walking on it. Connie had had the sense to take off her shoes. On Friday night I'd sat under our back patio and experienced a fantastic show of lightning and thunder to the north and west, but only a smattering of rain. Now I know where the rain was falling.



Upstream from Namatjira Drive, on the track to Birthday Waterhole, the Hugh was still flowing freely after a big flood. A lot of sand had been shifted by the flood and was quite treacherous, as Connie (and Neil) discovered when they sank into it.

We headed back to Namatjira Drive to discover that Alice and friends were still playing in the river.

We said goodbye and that we'd see them at Standley Chasm, then headed back east. As we neared the Larapinta Drive

intersection Connie told us about a limestone cave sinkhole near the old windmill. We stopped to have a look. The sinkhole is about 10m wide and 5m deep, with a much deeper small cave at one side (see [photo](#)). There is an interesting patch of rock on one side. Layers of mudstone topped with limestone. The geologists amongst us will surely find it interesting.

We wandered in light rain on past the sinkhole to the windmill that looked like it had been hit by a hurricane. I seem to recall it having several intact vanes recently, but not now. The ground is strewn with bent and twisted blades. Past the windmill is a lot of old stockyard infrastructure, probably from Owen Springs Station. We kept on towards what looked like an old dam, then drifted up towards a pile of gravel higher up the slope. This turned out to be from where a bulldozer had dug a pit for some reason. Not big, but appreciated by some vibrant Sennas that were benefiting from the trapped water.



Neil and Connie inspecting the sinkhole at old Limestone Bore.





View westward from alongside the rocky outcrop, our final destination

From there we could see an Ironwood growing in a rocky outcrop, so we pressed on further. This turned out to be a very interesting patch of limestone with resurrection ferns and grasses, lichens and lots of other interesting stuff. Not finished yet, we drifted on a bit higher past a very inviting looking valley to the crest and the view down into the plain beyond. This whole area is well worth exploring some more by the Field Nats. Perhaps an excursion later in the year is warranted.

We returned to the car and headed to Standley Chasm where we caught up with Alice and friends again. We ordered 4 BLT's on Turkish bread, with 3 coffees and a very large vanilla milkshake for Rosalie. It took some effort but she conquered it eventually.

Then back to the cars at Flynn's Grave to end a very enjoyable morning of discovery.

I received an SMS from Peter and Jane Bannister saying they had started walking into Serpentine Gorge when the skies opened up. Seems we were lucky to have only had lovely, gentle rain to keep things cool and fresh on our wanderings.




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### More Plants from Watarrka by Simon Brown



*Brunonia australis*, *Scaevola parvibarbata*, *Ptilotus schwartzii* and *Goodenia gibbosa*. This last one is the only local *Goodenia* that puts out stolons so a good diagnostic characteristic, and hence the common name Colony *Goodenia*. Thanks Simon!



## A Morning in Limestone Hills - 6 March 2021

Report by Meg Mooney, Photos by Bec Duncum

### Plants

In early March Connie Spencer led a great excursion to limestone hills around 30 kilometres along the Ross River road. As well as lovely views of the Heavitree Range, a group of 17 Field Naturalists saw an interesting collection of *Ptilotus* species and other flowering herbs and grasses as well as some beautiful Supplejack trees, *Ventilago viminalis* and lots of Bull Spinifex, *Triodia longiceps*. Peter Jobson, Connie and Barb Gilfedder helped identify the plants.

*Triodia longiceps* is a hard spinifex, particularly spiky. Peter Latz comments in *Bushfires and Bushtucker*: 'This is a particularly obnoxious plant and is usually given a wide berth by Aboriginal people.' As far as I know the only other plant we saw that is mostly restricted to limey soils is *Eremophila christophori*, with lovely spikes of blue flowers.

There were some big old Supplejacks, *Ventilago viminalis*. These plants start off as vines and eventually become sturdy trees, often with several intertwined trunks with scaly bark.



This handsome Supplejack tree marks the beginning of the path up the hill.

My favourite *Ptilotus* on this trip was *Ptilotus clementii*, or Tassel Top, with large round nodding heads. Some of the long pale yellow spikes of *Ptilotus nobilis* were beautifully silhouetted against the sun. *P. sessilifolius* and *P. obovatus* can look quite similar. They both have sessile leaves, hugging the stems, and round purplish pink flowers. Peter explained the flowers of *P. obovatus*, usually a little smaller, have 10 or less florets and those of *P. sessilifolius*, have more than this.

Another interesting plant we saw was *Melhania oblongifolia*, which looks like a *Sida* and like them is in the hibiscus family. The flowers are yellow like *Sidas* but the seed capsules have attractive orange-brown papery cups.

There was some discussion about *Enneapogon cylindricus*, with long thin spikes. Apparently a particular feature of this grass is that if you break off the stalk at a joint, you will see a little ring of hairs on the broken stalk.



*Ptilotus clementii* and *Triodia longiceps*: *Melhania oblongifolia*: *Enneapogon cylindricus* and *Ptilotus nobilis*



## Geology

The limestone we were walking over and the Heavitree Range that we had great views of, were formed from salts and sands, respectively, deposited by inlets of sea hundreds of millions of years ago. At this time 'Australia' was part of a supercontinent called Rodinia and consisted of the western two thirds of what is now Australia, west of a line drawn north-south through Broken Hill.

A huge basin in central Australia, called the Amadeus Basin, was inundated by sea off and on from around 850 to 300 million years ago, from when there were only algae and bacteria to the time of the first fish. To begin with the sea, which was at times as big as the Mediterranean, was shallow with a sandy bottom, rippled in places. This sand was eventually buried, compacted and cemented into a rock called sandstone, which ended up forming the Heavitree Range – I'll explain that below.

Then the sea alternated between shallow tidal lagoons, like the present day Coorong in South Australia or the Dead Sea, and times of deep water, depositing lime salts and silts which were buried and compacted to form layers of grey limestone and pink siltstone, together called the Bitter Springs Formation.

Colonies of cyanobacteria often grew in the shallow lagoons. These organisms formed mats with sticky surfaces which trapped mud and calcium carbonate from the sea. The colonies grew upwards through the trapped mud and salt to make more and more layers, eventually forming laminated mounds or columns. These columns, called stromatolites, vary from being as thin as a pencil to metres wide, and up to a metre tall, and are preserved in the limestone rocks.

We didn't see any stromatolites but they are common in the Bitter Springs Formation. We did see etching and grooves typical of limestone, caused by rainwater, which mixes with carbon dioxide in the air to form a weak carbonic acid, trickling along cracks in the limestone and dissolving it.

After they were buried deep in the earth's crust, the sandstone, limestone and siltstone layers were folded in a mountain-building event caused by compression deep in the Australian crustal plate. In this process, the grains of that bottom sandstone layer were welded together to form a very hard rock called quartzite.

The layers along the northern edge of the Basin were dragged up in a one-sided fold called a homocline, so they are vertical or dipping steeply, with the layers getting younger to the south. On that tall range to the north we could see the Heavitree Quartzite dipping steeply towards us. The Bitter Springs Formation is not a very strong rock and crumpled into a mess of folds, which you can see at Ellery and on the road into Trepkina Gorge. This formation is less resistant to erosion than quartzite and forms low hills like the ones we were walking on. Siltstone is an even 'softer' rock and has mostly been eroded to gullies.



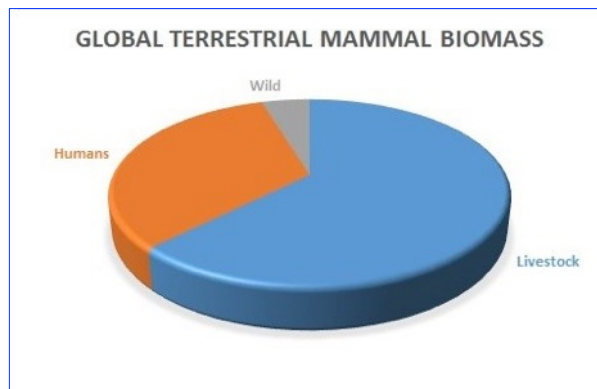
Limestone rock, etched and grooved; the view north from the hill, *Tridodia longiceps* and an *Acacia bivenosa* in the foreground.



## Ha Tinh Langurs: proactive conservation by poor Vietnamese farmers.

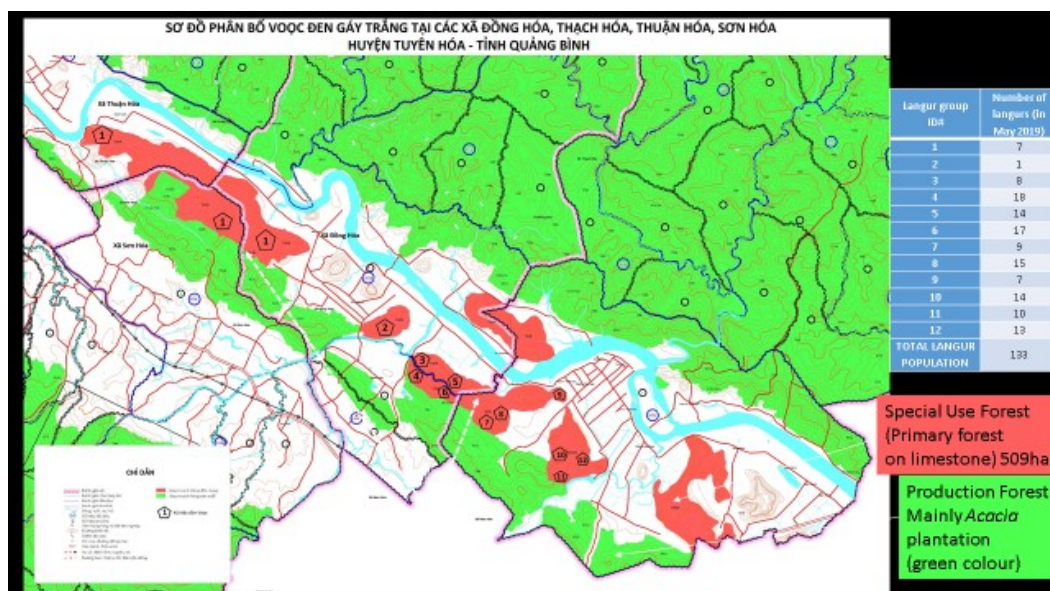
Presentation by Jocelyn Davies, Report by Lee Ryall  
 Photos courtesy of Mt Nguyen Thanh Tu (Tu Vooc) and Centre for Indigenous Knowledge Research and Development, Dong Le, Vietnam.

On 11 March, Jocelyn Davies told us the story of poor Vietnamese farmers who were working to save the Ha Tinh Langur (*Trachypithecus hatinhensis*) population that lives in limestone mountains in central Vietnam. Wild fauna make up a tiny proportion of the global mammal biomass, and preservation of these species increasingly requires a conscious and dedicated effort. In Vietnam ensuring the survival of this species depends not just on government regulation and policing, but principally on the goodwill and active protection of the local people who are at the same time struggling to eke out a living from their farms.



Ha Tinh Langurs are black, with extensive white cheek stripes and a crest of black hair on their heads. They weigh around 7 to 9 kilograms, and grow to around 55 cms (body length). Their babies, born after a 120-day gestation period, are startlingly and beautifully orange. They are endangered as a result of hunting by poachers, both for sale to Vietnamese people who regard it as prestigious to eat wild animals and for the Chinese medicine market. Their existence is also threatened by declining habitat from expanding farms and from industrial activities such as limestone mining, and the push to develop the country in general. Incidental hazards such as fires add to the precariousness of their situation.

The river Gianh winds through the steep limestone structures of the Annamite mountains, and the Langur live on the forested slopes. Many forests in Vietnam are fast being replaced by rapid-growing introduced *Acacia* species whose timber is harvested for woodchips. The land right up to the base of the mountains is used for farming and building purposes, and farmers are planting harvestable grasses right into the lower slopes.







Members of the Langur conservation group with a forest ranger from Tuyen Hoa District and backdrop of Langur habitat. Mr Tu Vooc is in the centre wearing a grey scarf. On his left is Mr Hue Chau, Deputy Director of CIRDC, the local NGO where Jocelyn worked as an Australian volunteer in 2019. At the far right of the group is former hunter turned conservationist, Mr Hong.

Tu Vooc, a border guard who had observed the Langurs when he was a child and realized how catastrophically their numbers were declining, began the work of watching over the Langurs and protecting them, particularly from hunters. Others joined him, and his group comprises mainly subsistence farmers, although Jocelyn mentioned Hong, a hunter who became a Langur conservationist after seeing a Langur mourning over the body of its dead mate, killed in a trap.

The group monitors poaching activity in the area and has been rewarded by seeing the numbers of Langurs rise. In May 2019 they counted 133 Langurs, a big increase from the 30 that Tu counted ten years earlier. The first survey by ecologists, in July 2020, counted 156 Langurs in 22 groups, ranging in size from 2 to 13 individuals with 32 sub-adults and 13 juveniles. Jocelyn's work as a volunteer in Vietnam was to mentor staff from a small local NGO, the Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Development, in undertaking research. She was amazed at the strong commitment of the poor farmers in this area to protection of the Langurs and conservation of their habitat.



Great to see the Ha Tinh Langurs now attracting photographers rather than hunters.