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GPO BOX 249
CANBERRA ACT 2601

FIELD NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA INC.

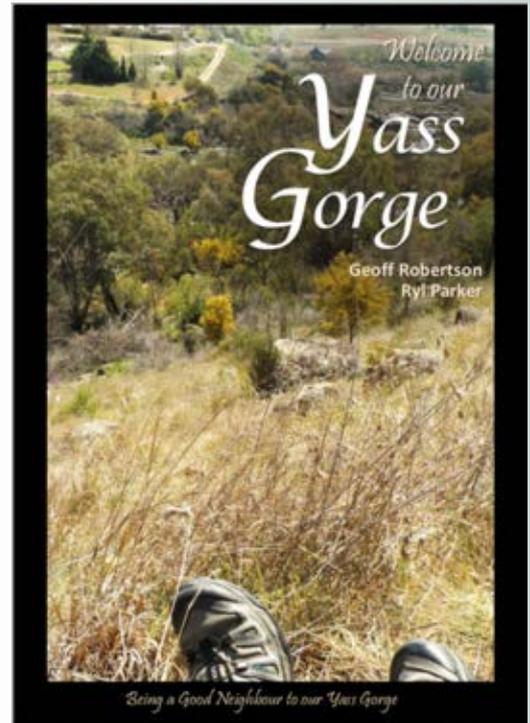
FIELD NATURALIST

MEETING—Thursday 7 February 2019
7:30 pm Australian National University
Jan Anderson Seminar Room, R.N. Robertson Building, Biology Place, ANU, ACT
details back page

Yass Gorge

Speaker: Geoff Robertson

At our next meeting, Geoff Robertson will talk on a new book *Welcome to our Yass Gorge*, which he co-authored with Ryl Parker. The book will be launched in Yass earlier that day. This 70 page book tells the fascinating story of Yass Gorge, a natural history and cultural asset in the centre of Yass. In recent times, much has been learnt and adapted to recover our natural assets. Yass Gorge is a great example of what is being achieved. Our rediscovery of nature, with its fascinating landscapes, rare and threatened ecological communities, fauna and flora, and the importance of applying Traditional Aboriginal Land Management Practices to its management, is little understood by the broader community. The book attempts to excite and inform the broader public and decision makers about our natural treasures in the heart of urban communities. It is written in a simple style and half of the book is illustrations and images. These images will be used to explain why Geoff is excited by Yass Gorge and the broader applications of what is happening in the Gorge to our conservation and recovery efforts throughout the Canberra region.



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From the Editor...

Hi all, hope you all had a relaxing break over the Christmas period and are looking forward to a great 2019. We all know it has been HOT, HOT, HOT... so hope you have found ways to keep cool.

Over the past few years the monthly excursion have been sparse or nonexistent so this year I would like to see these reinstated. Even if you are not prepared to lead a trip, perhaps you could suggest one to the committee or myself and we can find an organiser.

I'd also welcome any photos or items of interest for inclusion in the monthly newsletters.

Let's make 2019 a reinvigorated year for the ACT Field Nats.

Alison Milton

Little things can inspire

Earlier this morning I discovered this little victim on the concrete driveway being a source of protein for small black ants.



Once the temperature moved closer to the forecast 28 degrees it seemed that ant activity had ceased.

I hear a courier van arrive with our Doorstep Organics order and opened the window to thank the driver.

I apologised that she had to negotiate the over hanging Agonis branches. She had, she said, also hesitated because "I've just seen a lizard!".

I explained about the dead skink on the driveway and how it was providing food for the ants.

"Well you've also got a live one" she exclaimed. The sheer delight from her brief experience was written all over her face... a reminder that there are numerous ways anyone can be glad about the nature all around us.

Rosemary Blemings

Editor's note: This season I have noticed an extraordinary large number of skinks in my yard.

Comic explainer: forest giants house thousands of animals (so why do we keep cutting them down?)

Interview with David Lindenmayer, Professor, The Fenner School of Environment and Society, Australian National University

Giant eucalypts play an irreplaceable part in many of Australia's ecosystems. These towering elders develop hollows, which make them nature's high-rises, housing everything from endangered squirrel-gliders to lace monitors. Over 300 species of vertebrates in Australia depend on hollows in large old trees.

These "skyscraper trees" can take more than 190 years to grow big enough to play this nesting and denning role, yet developers are cutting them down at an astounding speed. In other places, such as Victoria's Central Highlands Mountain Ash forests, the history of logging and fire mean that less than 1.2% of the original old-growth forest remains (that supports the highest density of large old hollow trees). And it's not much better in other parts of our country.

David Lindenmayer explains how these trees form, the role they play – and how very hard they are to replace.

The first Koel

For many, Christmas celebrates the first Noel, but for my area of Higgins, this year sadly brings the first Koel (breeding).

Koels arrived in my part of Higgins some years ago but I had not seen any signs of successful breeding – until today.

Over the past few days I've heard calls that I thought might be a Koel chick begging for food. Today I tracked the calls to a tree in my neighbour's yard and over the course of the next few hours confirmed, not one, but two Koel chicks being fed by Red Waterbirds. The adults have only been occasional visitors during the last couple of months, with at least two males and at least three females.



Alison Milton

French food waste law changing how grocery stores approach excess food

Heard on All Things Considered: Eleanor Beardsley/NPR

Every morning at a supermarket called Auchan in central Paris, Magdalena Dos Santos has a rendezvous with Ahmed “Doudou” Djerbrani, a driver from the French food bank.

Dos Santos, who runs the deli section of the store, is in charge of supervising the store’s food donations. She sets aside prepared dishes that are nearing their expiration date.

Opening a giant fridge, Dos Santos shows what else the store is giving away – yogurt, pizza, fresh fruits and vegetables, and cheese.

However, giving leftover food to charity is no longer just an act of goodwill. It’s a requirement under

a 2016 law that bans grocery stores from throwing away edible food. Stores can be fined \$4,500 for each infraction.

Food waste is a global problem. In developing countries, food spoils at the production stage. Well-off nations throw it away at the consumption stage. Grocery stores are responsible for a lot of that waste. France is trying to change that with its 2-year-old law.

Out back on the store’s loading dock, Djerbrani plunges a thermometer into a yogurt. “I take the temperature of dairy products to make sure they’ve been kept refrigerated,” he says.

Djerbrani loads the food into his van and drives it across town to a church, which will distribute it to poor families.

Gillaine Demeules is a volunteer with the St. Vincent de Paul charity. She’s getting ready for the weekly food handout.

“Tomorrow, we’ll give people soup, sardines, pasta and whatever fresh items they deliver us today,” she says. “We never know what they’re gonna bring.

Editor: Something to learn from. Perhaps we should be looking at introducing similar laws – as should all countries.

During a conversation whilst dog-walking prior to 34°C and on the edge of Flynn’s ovals we looked north towards Mt Rogers Reserve.

A man and two young people were walking towards us 150 m away. A large plastic container was being carried and, bizarrely, a duck zig-zagged along the path and sometimes into the grass. We thought the duck was evading capture.



The dog and I began to resume our walk but were stopped by “Hi Rosemary!” from the man. It was Matt from the next street.

He showed that the container sheltered nine ducklings, saying they’d spotted the duck family walking across grass near their place.

Inspiring holiday care

The duck wouldn’t have a bar of going in the car so they were shepherding the family towards Ginninderra Creek some 800 m away.

The ducklings were still downy. The adult called from time to time. It was a Pacific Black Duck, *Anas superciliosa*.

What’s the story behind this family’s appearance so far from the creek?

Black duck sometimes nest in trees near water whereas the equally common Maned Duck may select tree hollows some distance from water. When the eggs hatch the brood ‘float’ down to the ground and the parents lead them towards water.

Where was this family’s nest? Had they escaped from a garden? Why only one parent? Had they come up the hill from the creek?

I worried that the adult’s feet would be scraped raw by waddling on the path’s concrete. Perhaps it felt the same and its zig zags were to reach the softer

grass...but that proved too far from the ducklings.

This represents the countless good news stories of people’s kindness towards other species bewildered by being too close to humans.

Matt added later that they were about to set off for the beach when the ducks came into their lives.

“After we saw you we worked out that if we walked faster, mother would do a short flight to catch up to us.

We also found that the magpies were very aggressive with her, in about 3 different spots. Lucky they didn’t prey upon the chicks when they were coming up the hill.

They were very happy to get together again in the water, and we saw mother take 3 big gulps of water straight away. She must have been very thirsty and probably tired.

Great fun for the kids, and a great lesson.”

Rosemary Blemings

The Pinnacle: a treasure trove of observations

The Pinnacle Nature Reserve is my closest reserve but I had been neglecting it of late. However, over the past few weeks I have made quite a number of visits and observed many interesting sightings. One of the main instigators of my visits was to observe nesting Kestrels, though by the time I went back the chicks had fledged and I had a delightful few hours photographing an adults and the two chicks, often quite close to the Kama property fence line.



I happened upon a trio of Noisy Friarbirds that appeared to have fledged not long before as they were still very near the nest, with one parent not pleased at my presence.

Following up on advice by John B on another Friarbird nest, Willie Wagtail and Leaden Flycatchers nests all close by the dam, I found all three species had fledged but, for the first time, I spotted long-necked turtles in the dam. I revisited the dam a few days later thinking the hot weather may bring visitors seeking to quench their thirst. I was disappointed in the regard but spotted a young Wedge-tailed Eagle hovering just near the dam. Was it planning to land for a drink, but spotted me and changed its mind?



My wanderings located a flowering Blackberry bush, so after helping Warren find its exact location he drove me to the dam once again, which led to a close encounter not quite wanted. We had talked about snakes near the dam, in what Warren called Snake Gully, but said this year they seemed to have moved to the flat area further away.

With no activity of note at the dam I walked across to the eastern side and began to walk up the slope towards Mt Painter, having heard a report that the eagles were frequently seen there. Stopping at a fairly clear piece of ground I scanned the sky for raptors, then noticed a beautiful large skink make its way to a piece of wood just inches from my feet. I managed a photo but there was still some grass in the way so I quietly took a few steps round in an attempt for a clearer view. Looking back, I was shocked to see not the skink, but a large Brown Snake where the lizard had just been. I realised that it was now between me and where I had just been. Where had it come from? How close had I been to it? Waiting for it to reappear in more open ground for a better photo, I saw what I'm sure was a second snake as it seemed smaller and lighter in colour. Time to find a walking track or road. Enough off-track walking for today.

My visits had also resulted in many sightings of various insects and Eucalypt leaf beetles, so I made some trips back to check the progress of various caterpillars. On one of these I spotted a Sacred Kingfisher. When it flew at me screeching I assumed it had a nest nearby. The next day I joined John B and Suzi Bond on a butterfly walk. We hadn't gone far when I spotted a Chequered Copper butterfly, and then many more. Suzi commented that she had not previously seen such a high concentration of them. This has been a very good season for grassland butterflies, but we didn't only find butterflies. We found quite a number of Fiddler Beetles feasting on a flowering plant, but excitingly, three beetles that I initially thought were Fiddler Beetles but realised the markings were quite different. Canberra Nature Map identified this as *Chlorobapta frontalis* and commented that while it was common in some coastal regions it was rare in this area.



I had also found nests of the coconut ant which is also a significant find as it is vital to the Small Ant Blue Butterfly, a rare and significant species for Canberra, so much so that Canberra Nature Map hides even the location of ants or butterflies.

I then found significant bird droppings beneath a tree hollow that John thought might be the kingfisher nest. I went back the next day and two hours of patient sitting while the Kingfisher finally trusted me, proved to be true.

Alison Milton

Activities

13 Feb 2019: Webinar: Reviewing national environmental assessment legislation | Lessons from Canada

There are many parallels between environmental assessment systems in Australia and Canada with both operating within a federal system of government. In Australia, several groups such as the Australian Panel of Experts in Environmental Law, are calling for a major overhaul of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC Act).

This webinar will provide an opportunity to learn more about Canada's reforms and to consider how Australia needs to reshape its legislation. With recent criticism by the New Zealand Productivity Commission and others of the Resource Management Act, there may also be some lessons for over the ditch.

27 Feb 2019: ACT Mulligans Flat Woodland Sanctuary Twilight Tour

EIANZ ACT Division members and guests are invited to a twilight tour of Mulligans Flat Woodland Sanctuary.

13 Mar 2019: ACT Ecology Forum

The EIANZ is convening a one-day forum featuring a range of presentations about environmental policy and practice relating to ecology. For more details on the Webinars above <https://www.eianz.org/events/category/australian-capital-territory>

Identify backyard weeds

Learn how to identify common backyard weeds such as wild brassicas, mallow and, dandelion. Sarah Aylott will guide you through using common plants that are probably growing very close to home. Learn about key features to look out for in each weed and how to incorporate weeds into your everyday diet. The exact location of this workshop will be confirmed closer to the date as it depends on the best place for foraging in March. For more details see: <https://www.canberraenvironment.org/workshops/2018/identifying-weeds>

Canberrans urged to protect gang-gangs from threatening disease

Blake Foden

Canberrans are being urged to help stop the spread of a potentially lethal bird disease, as conservationists look to protect the iconic gang-gang cockatoo and learn more about its breeding habits.

ACT government senior environmental planner Dr Michael Mulvaney said there was no effective treatment for the condition.

At least one breeding gang-gang in Canberra has beak and feather disease. The disease is highly likely to be lethal to the bird and its nestlings.

Because gang-gangs usually returned to the same trees to breed, Dr Mulvaney said the government would attempt to disinfect the affected bird's hollow before the next breeding season.

He said the diseased bird could spread the virus by contaminating food and water, urging Canberrans who left food and water out for birds to take three simple steps.

"It's important to clean feeding trays or platforms every day with vinegar or soap, and to stop feeding or watering if you notice a bird with beak and feather disease," Dr Mulvaney said. "And the water should be changed daily because it's a virus that gets spread quite easily.

Dr Mulvaney also called on bird lovers to boost the government's limited knowledge of gang-gangs' breeding habits using the Canberra Nature Map website.

Citizen scientists across the ACT have so far lodged 156 photos involving about 40 hollows in areas including Red Hill Nature



Reserve, Mount Majura, Gossan Hill, the Botanic Gardens and the Australian National University.

Gang-gang chicks are recognisable by the "red mohawk" streak of forming feathers on the tops of their heads.

Sightings and photos of adult gang-gangs at nesting hollows can also be reported and should include information on whether they were seen looking into the hollow or going in and out.



Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra Inc.

Who are the Field Naturalists?

The Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra (FNAC) was formed in 1981. Our aim is to foster interest in natural history by means of meetings and regular field outings. Meetings are usually held on the first Thursday of each month. Outings range from weekend rambles to long weekends away. Activities are advertised in our monthly newsletter. We emphasise informality and the enjoyment of nature. New members are always welcome. If you wish to join FNAC, please fill in the member application below and send it in with your subscription to the FNAC Treasurer at the address below.

President: Rosemary Blemings, et al

president@fieldnatsact.com

Email: secretary@fieldnatsact.com

Website: www.fieldnatsact.com

Treasurer: treasurer@fieldnatsact.com

Membership: membership@fieldnatsact.com

Newsletter Editor: editor@fieldnatsact.com



Monthly meeting venue: Jan Anderson Seminar Room, R. N. Robertson Building, Biology Place, Australian National University

Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra
GPO Box 249
Canberra ACT 2601



MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION OR RENEWAL

Family name: First name:

If a family membership, please include the first names of other members of the family:

.....

Postal address:

Suburb: State: Postcode: Home phone:

Work phone: Email address:

Subscription enclosed: \$.....(Single/Family \$25) Donation: \$.....

How did you hear about FNAC? Please circle: FRIEND? OTHER? Please specify: