

April 2020

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FIELD NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA INC. GPO BOX 708 JAMISON CENTRE ACT 2614

FIELD NATTER

April 2020 newsletter No monthly meetings until further notice

As you will be aware by now, there will be no monthly meetings until further notice but hopefully we can still have an interesting monthly newsletter and vibrant front cover. I'd like to feature a photo or photos from a different member on the front cover each month.

As naturalists we don't need to be too constricted by the social distancing recommendations. We are lucky to have many nature reserves with at least one in close proximity to almost everyone and most also with at least some easy walking tracks. Therefore I'm sure some of you could get out there with your camera without coming into contact with too many people, and take a snap or two to send me for the front cover. Photos can be of birds, insects, plants or simply a scenic shot.

However, if you are unable or unwilling for any reason, then there is always your own backyard. My own roses are blooming better than I think they ever have.

I'd also appreciate any stories with or without photos for the newsletter itself. Let's make the most of the current situation.



On Friday, I made my first ever visit to the Dickson Wetlands where I encountered this lovely Sacred Kingfisher.

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B&Bs for birds and bees: transform your garden or balcony into a wildlife haven

Judith Friedlander: Post-graduate Researcher, Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney (an extract only)

Just like humans, animals like living near coastal plains and waterways. In fact, cities such as Sydney and Melbourne are “biodiversity hotspots” – boasting fresh water, varied topographies and relatively rich soil to sustain and nourish life.

Recent research showed urban areas can support a greater range of animals and insects than some bushland and rural habitat, if we revegetate with biodiversity in mind.

Urban regeneration is especially important now, amid unfathomable estimates that more than one billion animals were killed in the recent bushfires. Even before the fires, we were in the middle of a mass extinction event in Australia and around the world.

Losing animals, especially pollinators such as bees, has huge implications for biodiversity and food supplies.

My team and I are creating a B&B Highway – a series of nest boxes, artificial hollows and pollinating plants - in Sydney and coastal urban areas of New South Wales. These essentially act as “bed and breakfasts” where creatures such as birds, bees, butterflies and bats can rest and recharge. Everyday Australians can also build a B&B in their own backyards or on balconies.

City living for climate refugees

I spoke to Charles Sturt University ecologist Dr Watson about the importance of protecting animals such as pollinators during the climate crisis. He said:

The current drought has devastated inland areas – anything that can move has cleared out, with many birds and other mobile animals retreating to the wetter, more temperate forests to the south and east.

So, when considering the wider impacts of these fires we need to include these climate refugees in our thinking.

Many woodland birds such as honeyeaters and parrots have moved in droves to cities, including Sydney, over the last few years because of droughts and climate change, attracted to the rich variety of berries, fruits and seeds.

I also spoke to BirdLife Australia’s Holly Parsons, who said last year’s Aussie Backyard Bird Count recorded other inland birds – such as the white-winged triller, the crimson chat, pied honeyeater, rainforest pigeons and doves – outside their usual

range, attracted to the richer food variety in coastal cities.

What’s more, there have been increased sightings of powerful owls in Sydney and Melbourne, squirrel gliders in Albury, marbled geckos in Melbourne, and blue-tongue lizards in urban gardens across south-east Australia.

With so many birds and pollinators flocking to the cities, it’s important we support them with vegetated regions they can shelter in, such as through the B&B Highway we’re developing.

The B&B Highway: an urban restoration project

B&Bs on our “highway” are green sanctuaries, containing pollinating plants, water and shelters such as beehives and nesting boxes.

We’re setting up B&Bs across New South Wales in schools and community centres, with plans to expand them in Melbourne, Brisbane and other major cities. In fact, by mid-2020, we’ll have 30 B&Bs located across five different Sydney municipalities, with more planned outside Sydney.

The NSW Department of Education is also developing an associated curriculum for primary and early high school students to engage them in ecosystem restoration.

If you have space in your garden, or even on a balcony, you can help too. Here’s how.

For birds

Find out what bird species live in your area and which are endangered using the Birddata directory. Then select plants native to your area – your local nursery can help you out here.

The type of plants will vary on whether your local birds feed on insects, nectar, seed, fruit or meat. More tips

Plant dense shrubs to allow smaller birds, such as the superb fairy-wren, to hide from predatory birds.

Order hollows and nesting boxes from La Trobe University to house birds, possums, gliders and bats.

Put out water for birds, insects and other animals. Bird baths should be elevated to enable escape from predators. Clean water stations and bowls regularly.

For native stingless bees

If you live on the eastern seaboard from Sydney northward, consider installing a native stingless beehive. They require very little maintenance, and no permits or special training.

These bees are perfect for garden pollination. Suppliers of bees and hives can be found online – sometimes you can even rescue an endangered hive.

Also add bee-friendly plants – sting or no sting – to your garden, such as butterfly bush, bottlebrush, daisies, eucalyptus and angophora gum trees, grevillea, lavender, tea tree, honey myrtle and native rosemary.

For other insects

Wherever you are in Australia, you can buy or make your own insect hotel. There is no standard design, because our gardens host a wide range of native insects partial to different natural materials.

Building your insect hotel

Use recycled materials (wooden pallets, small wooden box or frames) or natural materials (wood, bamboo, sticks, straw, stones and clay).

Fill gaps in the structure with smaller materials, such as clay and bamboo.

In the wood, drill holes ranging from three to ten millimetres wide for insects to live in. Vary hole depths for different insects – but don't drill all the way through. They shouldn't be deeper than 30 centimetres.

Give your hotel a roof so it stays dry, and don't use toxic paints or varnishes.

Place your insect hotel in a sheltered spot, with the opening facing the sun in cool climates, and facing the morning sun in warmer climates.

Apartment-dwellers can place their insect hotels on a balcony near pot plants. North-facing is often best, but make sure it's sheltered from harsh afternoon sunshine and heavy rain.

An unexpected find

Published 3 March 2020

by Alistair Bestow

A bushfire swept through our Scottsdale Reserve on Nugunnuwal country in NSW at the start of February. The fire impacted much of our revegetation work, some old growth trees were lost, and the high country was also partially burnt. Staff and volunteers have been on the ground assessing the impact of the fire and surveying for wildlife... little did they know they would find a first recorded species for Scottsdale.

Reserve Manager Phil Palmer filmed this short video.

It was shaping up to be a normal day, a good normal day of course as it was at Bush Heritage's Scottsdale Reserve after all. The morning was spent recording waypoints of fire-affected, and non-fire affected planted trees on Railway Tunnel Hill following the recent bushfires in the region.

The afternoon was also set to continue to be normal – windy and sunny – and the next set of waypoints to be recorded were near the northern end of the reserve. Trundling along the main north-south track in the reliable but ageing Scottsdale Landcruiser (the one with the numberplate byline 'NSW Towards 2000'), I passed some fire-affected trees.

A 'growth' half way up a planted tree caught my eye. I reversed and disembarked. Not 15 metres from the track, about three metres up a fire-affected, brown-leaved eucalyptus was the distinct backside of a koala. He was alive and looking in rude health.

I telephoned Phil Palmer the Scottsdale Reserve Manager, and unusually the telephone was not engaged. He immediately requested that I not take my eye off the koala for a moment until he arrived. About a minute later a very excited Phil arrived armed with his camera phone. Lo and behold it turned out to be the first confirmed record of a koala for the reserve (and my first proper look at a wild koala).

Several other volunteers were diverted from their tree de-guarding duties and came along for a look. Fortunately for all the humans, the tree was only about six metres tall, and the koala seemingly had a comfortable branch at about the mid-height point, giving us all great views.

Phil and Scottsdale Field Officer Kim Jarvis couldn't contain their excitement and departed the koala tree to collect some branches of fresh eucalyptus leaves, while I stayed on guard. The newly picked eucalyptus branches were tied in place at about eating height. The male koala became more alert with the whiff of fresh leaves at its nose, and it was not long before it was enjoying an afternoon snack. It appeared quite unperturbed by all the attention.

The koala was still there in the late afternoon, when two more volunteers came to visit – it remained on the same branch in the same tree. As I write this, I hope it's moved to a more suitable, tastier tree than the one in which it was found.

So in the end it was not a normal afternoon at all. Far from it, it was one of the best I have had at Scottsdale.

Photographer Timothy Lindner captures beauty of underground caves in Flinders Ranges

ABC North and West SA By Shannon Corvo: Posted 25 Feb 2020

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-02-25/photographer-timothy-lindner-captures-beauty-of-flinders-ranges/11994910>

Yellow, green and purple colours cover an underground cave wall which is lit up by a phone torch, illuminating a moth.



Some underground caves in the Flinders Ranges boast a wide range of brightly-coloured patterns and nocturnal creatures.

Not many people are lucky enough to see the beautiful patterns in the underground caves of the historic Flinders Ranges, but for Pitjantjatjara man and keen hobby photographer Timothy Lindner, the opportunity came in 2017 when a friend took him underground near Blinman, about 510 kilometres north of Adelaide.

“We walked over the edge of a hill, down a creek, and all of a sudden there was a big cavity in the creek,” he said. “Walking in there and looking at the ceiling, there were big domes that reminded me of being in a cathedral or something.”

Mr Lindner, who normally uses a middle-of-the-range DSLR camera, was not expecting to be shown the cave, and had to rely on his phone and its torch function to capture what he saw there.

“There were gold colours, yellow colours and then, in amongst that, you had like, stalactites or stalagmites,” he said.

“As the sun shone through the opening, even the lighting in there was different — that little bit of sunlight coming into the cave was reflecting the colours.”



Mr Lindner said he had been exploring old mines and caves in outback South Australia since he was a boy.

“I grew up with Aboriginal kids over at Yalata (200 kilometres west of Ceduna),” he said. “We didn’t have any TV and we never listened to the radio so we were always out on foot, going out for a day exploring, getting witchetty grubs or climbing down wombat warrens.

He said he began taking photographs of his finds when he was younger, but did not really get into it again until 2010.

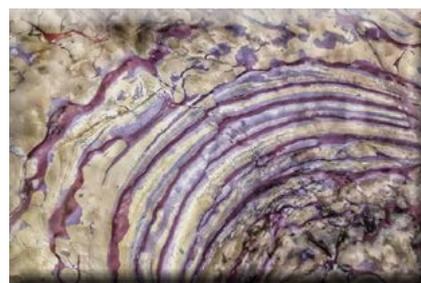
Senior collections manager for earth sciences at the South Australian Museum, Ben McHenry, said rock and sediment in the Flinders Ranges was created more than 540 million years ago.

Mr McHenry said during the 19th century, people were mining near Blinman — for copper, lead, manganese, and iron — which are partly responsible for the bright colours in Mr Lindner’s photographs.

“In these photographs, with these wonderful colours, that’s actu-

ally the effect of groundwater leaching out of these wonderful minerals that people were mining for,” he said.

“They’ve probably been coloured by groundwater passing through the sediments, picking up the ore minerals and redepositing them in various sedimentary layers.”



Mr McHenry said it would be better if the rocks and sediments were left alone as they are not worth much.

“Why not leave it alone and let other people enjoy it?”

More of Mr Lindner’s photography can be found on his Instagram account [@born_free_photography](https://www.instagram.com/born_free_photography).

Rare bristlebirds rescued in Chinook helicopter mercy dash during East Gippsland bushfires

ABC Gippsland By Sarah Maunder. Updated 28 Feb 2020

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-02-28/bristlebirds-rescued-in-chinook-mercy-dash-during-bushfires/12001212>

It was a daring mission to rescue some of Australia's rarest birds from the ferocious East Gippsland bushfires.

Nothing quite like this had been done before.

The rescue team needed to get in, take a few bristlebirds for safe keeping, and get out.

There are only three populations of bristlebirds left in Australia: one on the Queensland border, one in New South Wales and a third, tucked away in a tiny, far-east corner of Victoria.

When a huge fire threatened the town of Mallacoota on New Year's Eve, biologist Rohan Clarke watched the news in fear.

"That little corner of Victoria is really important in terms of biodiversity," Dr Clarke said.

"It's got really rich species numbers, and because it's jammed right in that corner, it gets a little of the humid weather from NSW, so it's got species that don't occur anywhere else in the state."

In early February, Dr Clarke flew by military Chinook to Mallacoota with a small team of colleagues, some experts from Wollongong University, and representatives from DELWP and Parks Victoria.

Their goal was to rescue at least 15 of the 160 bristlebirds that live in that tiny pocket of Howe Flat.



The group originally planned for five days of catching, but the continuous threat of bushfires reduced the mission to just a day and a half.

"There were literally planes water-bombing the fire only a couple of kilometres away while we were working," Dr Clarke said.

In the end, the rescue team were able to take 15 bristlebirds back to Melbourne Zoo, to keep them safe in case the population left behind was wiped out by fire.

General manager of Threatened Species Programs at Zoos Victoria Craig Whiteford said all the birds were stressed and carried a heavy parasite load.

"Unfortunately we lost three of the birds over the first few days, but since then the remaining birds have settled in well. Our vets have done a fabulous job keeping everything in order," he said.

"We think that the three birds that died had a fungal infection in

the lungs, and this fungus is just everywhere.

Once the bushfires in East Gippsland are completely extinguished, the 12 remaining bristlebirds will be returned to eastern Victoria — as long as their population and habitat has not been destroyed.

No other threatened species in Victoria had an insurance population flown out of the bushfire-affected areas, but extraction missions were considered for other animals.

"The Long-footed potoroo is one that we had our eye on fairly early, but it seems they are recovering, or at least being found on the fireground. That's based on intelligence from Parks Victoria," Mr Whiteford said.

"Another one is the eastern ground parrot, that's one that we are concerned about.

The 12 bristlebirds at Melbourne Zoo are now living in a specially designed aviary away from the public.

The birds will be held at Melbourne Zoo at least for another month.

"The fire is still really active. We can't put them back until the fire is completely out," Dr Clarke said.

"If the fire burns and get worse, fortunately we have this insurance population."

Raffle prizes needed

Looking for something to do while we are all under advisement to limit our outside activities?

Now would be the perfect time to go through all those cupboards to clean up and clear out unwanted items that just might be perfect for raffle prizes, once we are able to hold meetings again.



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 708
Jamison Centre ACT 2614



MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION OR RENEWAL

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