

March 2019

ISSN: 1836-2761



GPO BOX 249
CANBERRA ACT 2601

FIELD NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA INC.

FIELD NATTER

MEETING—Thursday 7 March 2019

7:30 pm Australian National University

Jan Anderson Seminar Room, R.N. Robertson Building, Biology Place, ANU, ACT
details back page

Natural history in the rainforests on Pulau Buton

Speaker: Stephanie Courtney Jones

Dr Stephanie Courtney Jones is a Conservation Wildlife Officer at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve working on threatened species recovery including the Northern Corroboree frog and Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby. Steph has worked on conservation and biological research projects throughout arid zones of Australia and Africa, to the tropical rainforests of South East Asia, with a wide range of animals both in captivity and in the wild. In this talk, Steph will tell the tale of the natural history in the rainforests on Pulau Buton, south east Sulawesi, working as a researcher in the Wallacea Region and what work is being done to conserve the unique biodiversity of Sulawesi.



Contents

Thanks to Pam Fenning	2
Raffle prizes needed	2
Threatened migratory birds detected at Port Stephens by citizen scientists	3
CSIRO eradicate African big-headed ant	3
World's largest bee rediscovered in Indonesia	4
Activities	5

Thanks to Pam Fenning

In mid-January Pam Fenning phoned to say that she wouldn't be renewing her Field Nats membership when it comes due in June 2019.

At the time Pam was finding it hard to cope with the heatwave. She'd also found a couple of meetings difficult. The room became too hot for her and she'd moved out into the foyer area.

Field Natters will know Pam for her quiet efficiency in managing the monthly raffles featuring our home-grown produce, pre-loved books and cupboard-lurkers.

We've heard accounts of Pam's travels on many occasions at meetings or in the car en-route to the ANU. Pam was a regular participant on Ian Fraser's Environment Tours for several years.

Being an octogenarian hasn't slowed down her touring and trips to distant places of natural significance.

Pam has regularly contributed insightful observations during that section of our meetings. This has shown Pam's eye for detail in whatever habitat she finds herself in.

We've often benefitted from fruit and vegetables expertly grown in the garden shared with Christopher who's absorbed decades of natural history from his bush block.

Walking the dog, Walking for Pleasure and Probus are a few of the pursuits that keep Pam active and fit. Her generosity and helpfulness has always extended well beyond the family whose origins were in the Yass area.

Thank you Pam for your 30 years of loyalty to and support of Field Nats..... a wonderful achievement."

Please support our new raffles organiser, Johanna, by bringing pre-loved items and produce for 2019's raffles.

Rosemary Blemings

Raffle prizes needed

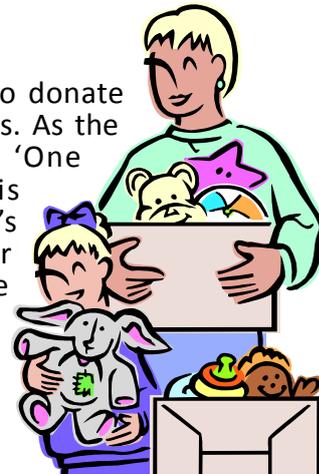
As Rosemary mentioned above, Pam has been taking charge of the monthly raffle for perhaps more than 15 years. She has done a wonderful job and deserves to take a rest and pass the baton on to someone else.

Johanna has agreed to take on this task for the near future.

However, the raffle needs prizes and for that Johanna needs you.

Time to go through your cupboards for all those little items you no longer use or want and bring

them along to donate as raffle prizes. As the saying goes, 'One man's junk is another man's treasure' (or woman as the case may be.



*Found this beautiful longhorn beetle at the Pinnacle
As yet unidentified.
Photo: Alison Milton*

Threatened migratory birds detected at Port Stephens by citizen scientists

Birdwatchers on the New South Wales mid coast have reported spotting record-breaking numbers of migratory and threatened waterbirds in an annual summer survey.

The Hunter Bird Observers Club recorded 3,773 individual waterbirds in one day in Port Stephens, north of Newcastle, in a survey undertaken by volunteers observing from a 'choreographed flotilla'.

Every year, millions of shorebirds fly between Australasia and the Arctic. But for many, this will be their last flight.

Notably, the survey detected significant numbers of the critically endangered eastern curlew.

Alan Stuart, the club's field studies manager, said Port Stephens had always been an important site for the eastern curlew, a migratory shorebird that spent summer months on the estuaries and mangrove swampland along Australia's eastern coast.

The Hunter Bird Observers Club was also celebrating healthy numbers of the Australian pied oystercatcher, another shorebird with an internationally significant population in the Port Stephens harbour.

He said the bird was listed as endangered in New South Wales, and the disturbance of its coastal habitat was contributing to a general decline in numbers.

During the one-day survey, Mr Stuart came across a new colony of little terns on an island in the harbour where they had never been seen before.

The migratory bird flies from eastern Asia to most parts of Australia in spring and summer, but is also considered endangered.

Mr Stuart said he saw several 'runners' — chicks that had not learned to fly yet who run and hide from danger.

*Extracted from ABC Newcastle
By Kerri Worthington*

CSIRO eradicate African big-headed ant

The invasive African big-headed ant has been eradicated from Lord Howe Island, helping to protect the unique World Heritage listed site.

Lord Howe Island is home to endangered Australian native animals like the Lord Howe Island Woodhen and plants only found on the island. Its rare ecosystem includes cloud forests, sea-cliffs, volcanic mountains and the world's most southerly coral reef.

CSIRO Researcher and exotic ant specialist, Dr Ben Hoffmann, was part of the team responsible for the eradication and said the program was one of the most significant invasive ant eradications in the world, comparable to ant eradications on Marchena Island in the Galapagos and in Kakadu National Park.

"Invasive ants pose a huge threat to Australia's diverse plant and animal life, our agriculture and our economy and it's estimated that governments

will spend around \$500 million over the next 10 years attempting to control or eradicate them," Dr Hoffmann said.

"Ants are among the most abundant and diverse fauna in the world, and play an important role in ecosystem health. However, invasive ants cause harm to local ant species, which can have devastating impacts to local ecosystems."

The African big-headed ant is listed as one of the 100 worst pests in the world, known for creating super colonies that out-compete and prey on native animals, reducing animal abundance by up to 85 per cent.

"The ant was most likely introduced to the island via materials shipped from mainland Australia."

The six year project also found there was no negative impacts to the environment by the broad scale use of ant baits.

World's largest bee rediscovered in Indonesia

Patrick Barkham

The world's largest bee with jaws like a stag beetle and four times larger than a honeybee, Wallace's giant bee is not exactly inconspicuous. After going missing, feared extinct, for 38 years, the world's largest bee has been rediscovered alive on the Indonesian islands of the North Moluccas.



A search team of North American and Australian biologists found a single female Wallace's giant bee (*Megachile pluto*) living inside a termites' nest in a tree, more than two metres off the ground.

"It was absolutely breathtaking to see this 'flying bulldog' of an insect that we weren't sure existed any more," said Clay Bolt, a specialist photographer who obtained the first images of the species alive. "To actually see how beautiful and big the species is in life, to hear the sound of its giant wings thrumming as it flew past my head, was just incredible."

The giant bee – the female can measure nearly 4 cm in length – first became known to science in 1858 when the British explorer and naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace discovered it on the tropical Indonesian island of Bacan. He described the female bee as "a large, black wasp-like insect, with immense jaws like a stag beetle".

Despite its size, the bee remained elusive, with almost nothing known about the female's secretive

life cycle involving making nests of tree resin inside active arboreal termite mounds.

The bee was not seen again by scientists until 1981, when Adam Messer, an American entomologist, rediscovered it on three Indonesian islands. He observed how the bee used its giant mandibles to gather resin and wood for its termite-proof nests.

Last year it was discovered that an entomologist had collected a single female in 1991 but his discovery was never recorded in a scientific journal. Also last year, a freshly collected dead specimen was spotted on an online auction site, but the rediscovery of a live female raises hopes that Indonesia's forests still harbour this species.

The bee's habitat is threatened by massive deforestation for agriculture, and its size and rarity make it a target for collectors. There is, at present, no legal protection concerning trading of Wallace's giant bee.

Robin Moore, a conservation biologist with Global Wildlife Conservation, which runs a programme called The Search for Lost Species, said: "We know that putting the news out about this rediscovery could seem like a big risk given the demand, but the reality is that unscrupulous collectors already know that the bee is out there."

Moore said it was vital that conservationists made the Indonesian government aware of the bee and took steps to protect the species and its habitat. "By making the bee a world-famous flagship for conservation we are confident that the species has a brighter future than if we just let it quietly be collected into oblivion," he said.

• *This article was amended on 22 February 2019 to clarify in the headline and text that the Wallace giant bee discovered on the North Moluccas islands is believed to be the first live specimen recorded by scientists for 38 years. Detail of two dead specimens that emerged last year was also added.*

Activities

Sunday 3 March 2019 Clean Up Australia Day at the Pinnacle

Come along and spend a morning cleaning up our favourite corner of Australia. Help us make the Pinnacle even more special. Gloves and rubbish bags provided. Just dress appropriately (hats, enclosed shoes) and bring some water to drink.

When: 9.00 am, Sunday 3 March

Where: Pinnacle Nature Reserve entrance on Springvale Drive opposite De Salis, Weetangera.

Contact: Email coordinator@fotpin.org.au or call John on 0405 331 405

Sunday 10 March, 10.30 am to 12:00 noon (or a little later) Butterflies on Black Mountain

In autumn we see not only how colourful butterflies are when they fly but also how well “camouflaged” they are when resting on logs or rocks. Will we see Imperial Jezebels, Australian Painted Ladies, Common Brown butterflies and/or others that are around in Autumn? We all love sunlight, and we owe many glorious and sweet-scented flowers, at least those of long tubular form, to the butterflies and moths that pollinate them. Join our local expert, Suzi Bond to see and hear about butterflies and the plants they like near the summit of Black Mountain.

It will be a generally easy walk with some steep sections and steps.

Copies of the *Field Guide to the Butterflies of the Australian Capital Territory* by Suzi Bond with Steve Holliday and John Stein will be for sale. Other booklets will be for sale, too.

Meet: Lookout Terrace slightly uphill from Telstra Tower on Black Mountain (see balloons). Bring: Friends and family. Binoculars to see the butterflies more clearly if you wish, water, snacks if you wish. ‘Gold Coin Donation’.

Wear: Sturdy walking gear, including hat and stout shoes.

Please book: Places are limited, so please email your name and phone number to friendsofblackmountain@gmail.com or phone Linda (0437 298 711). It helps us to have enough light refreshments, and to let you know if arrangements need to change (e.g. because of the weather).

13 April–5 May 2019 Canberra Heritage Festival Heritage Walks

This year’s theme is ‘Space’. Events explore some of the lesser known natural ‘spaces’ in the ACT as well as new aspects of some old favourites. Be one of the few lucky Canberrans to have truly explored Kama and Kinlyside or rekindle your passion for Mulligan’s Flat and Red Hill. Explore a fascinating mix of heritage; from an ancient geological site, to one of Canberra’s first water reservoirs, to a modern day street art Tardis.

This program involves guided walks at Red Hill, Kama Reserve, Mulligans Flat and Kinlyside Reserve during April 2019. For more information and to book on a walk visit the [Conservation Council web site](https://conservationcouncil.org.au/heritage-walks/) (<https://conservationcouncil.org.au/heritage-walks/>). Bookings open on 13 March.



*Eastern Bearded Dragon: a resident of Mt Rogers
Photo by Rosemary Blemings*



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: