

OBJECT: To foster an interest in nature

May 2021

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

FIELD NATURALIST

May 2021 newsletter
No monthly meetings until further notice

28 April outing

Theodore axe grinding grooves: Leader Kevin McCue

See details on page 4.



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Unprecedented Koel fledgling season

Some of you may know that Jack Holland has been keeping a survey of Koel fledglings for several years. Probably not good news, but his latest report shows the ACT has had an unprecedented number of Koel fledgling this season, and a late and prolonged one. His report (in part) follows:



I've now counted close to 270 definitely different fledglings (over 3 times the highest count previously), as well as at least 30 fledglings that may also be different but I'm unable to tell due to insufficient information (often just the suburb is available), so I expect at least 300.

And the reports of new ones keep coming. After I thought they'd gone with the cool morning on Tuesday, yesterday I still had 4 fledglings in my immediate area, including one new that I had heard for a couple of days but hadn't yet been able to find. During a more patient look this morning, a Red Wattlebird finally showed me the spot from where the loudish persistent begging was coming from, as it fed it from above a nest. A look with binoculars just now confirmed it was a Koel chick based on the barred shortish tail and the golden crown. This is the first time ever I've found one first still in the nest of the many fledglings I've seen, including the around 20 this season, with at least 5 still present in March.

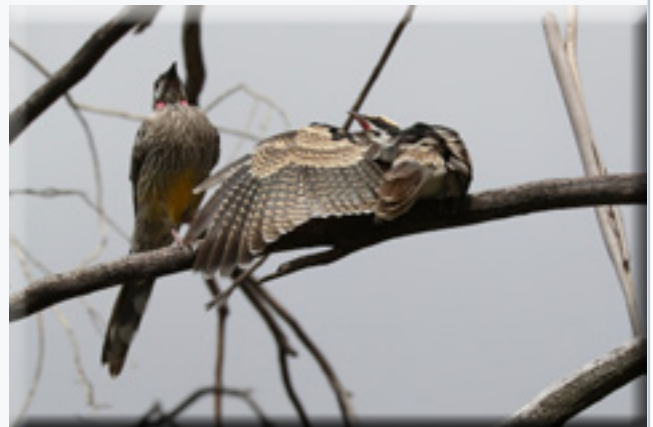
Previously I've only ever had 1 fledgling still around on 1 March, illustrating just how late this season is, with many new ones still found when most have usually departed north around now. I had been concerned about one that up to a couple of days ago struggled to fly more than 20 m, but the new one still in the nest above has at least 3 weeks of growing up to do before it will be anywhere near ready to do so.

The adults, at least in my area seem to have already gone, with a couple of brief calls about a week ago being the only ones I've heard in March.

So if you do have any sightings of Koel fledglings I would be very grateful for the date, suburb (with preferably street name or location within the suburb), host species feeding the fledgling (the third ever example of the Noisy Friarbird local host has just been confirmed), and if possible tail length which is a good guide to how long ago it may have fledged.

This report was written a month ago but there was not room in the newsletter to include it. Since then reports have continued. Jack himself, last recorded a chick in his backyard on 5 April, however more reports continue to trickle in, with a begging chick reported in McGregor and a non-begging chick in Fraser.

On 10 April I was in my backyard in Higgins and thought I heard a begging chick. I tracked it down and photographed being fed by Red Wattlebirds. Jack counted this as number 316. These last sightings are very late for the season.



This is now more than three times to number of fledglings reported in the previous season. I don't doubt that there has been a significant increase this season but wonder whether some of it can be attributed to more people being involved in spotting and reporting. If there is a tendency for the same population to return to Canberra each season, just how many fledglings can we expect next season.

Anyone finding a Koel fledgling can email Jack at jandaholland@bigpond.com Perhaps there won't be any more this season but you can keep this in mind for future years.

Alison Milton

Five remarkable stories of flora and fauna in the aftermath of Australia's horror bushfire season

Will Cornwell, Casey Kirchoff, Mark Ooi

Around one year ago, Australia's Black Summer bushfire season ended, leaving more than 8 million hectares across south-east Australia a mix of charcoal, ash and smoke. An estimated three billion animals were killed or displaced, not including invertebrates.

The impact of the fires on biodiversity was too vast for professional scientists alone to collect data. So in the face of this massive challenge, we set up a community (citizen) science project through the iNaturalist website to help paint a more complete picture of which species are bouncing back, and which are not.

Almost 400 community scientists living near or travelling across the firegrounds have recorded their observations of flora and fauna in the aftermath, from finding fresh wombat droppings in blackened forests, to hearing the croaks of healthy tree frogs in a dam choked with debris and ash.

Each observation is a story of survival against the odds, or of tragedy. Here are five we consider particularly remarkable.

Greater gliders after Australia's largest ever fire

The Gospers Mountain fire in New South Wales was the biggest forest fire in Australian history, razing an area seven times the size of Singapore. This meant there's nothing in history scientists could draw from to predict the animals' response.

So it came as a huge surprise when a community scientist observed greater gliders deep within the heart of the Gospers Mountain firegrounds in Wollemi National Park, far from unburned habitat. Greater gliders are listed as vulnerable under national environment law. They're nocturnal and live in hollow-bearing trees.

How gliders survived the fire is still unknown. Could they have hidden in deep hollows of trees where the temperature is relatively cooler while the fire front passed?

And what would they have eaten afterwards? Greater gliders usually feed on young leaves and flowers, but these foods are very rare in the post-fire environment.

Finding these gliders shows how there's still so much to learn about the resilience of species in the face of even the most devastating fires, especially as bushfires are forecast to become more frequent.

Rare pink flowers burnishing the firegrounds

The giant scale of the 2019-20 fires means post-fire flowering is on display in grand and gorgeous fashion. This is a feature of many native plant species, which need fire to stimulate growth.

Excitingly, community scientists recorded a long-dormant species, the pink flannel flower (*Actinotus forsythii*), that's now turning vast areas of the Blue Mountains pink.

Pink flannel flowers are not considered threatened, but they are very rarely seen.



Individuals of this species spend most of their life as a seed in the soil. Seeds require a chemical found in bushfire smoke, and the right seasonal temperatures, to germinate.

Rediscovering the midge orchid

Much of Australia's amazing biodiversity is extremely local. Some species, particularly plants, exist only in a single valley or ridge. The Black Summer fires destroyed the entire range of 100 Australian plant species, incinerating the above-ground parts of every individual. How well a species regenerates after fire

determines whether it recovers, or is rendered extinct. One of these is a species of midge orchid, which grows in a small area of Gibraltar Range National Park, NSW.

All of the midge orchid's known sites are thought to have burned in late 2019. The species fate was unknown until two separate community scientists photographed it at five sites in January 2021, showing its recovery.

Like many of Australia's terrestrial orchids, this species has an underground tuber (storage organ), which may have helped part of it avoid the flames' lethal heat.

Don't forget about insects

Despite their incredible diversity and tremendous value to society, insects tend to be the forgotten victims of bushfires and other environmental disasters.

Many trillions of invertebrates would have been killed in the fires of last summer. A common sight during and after the bushfire season was a deposit of dead insects washed ashore. Some died from the flames and heat, while others died having drowned trying to escape.

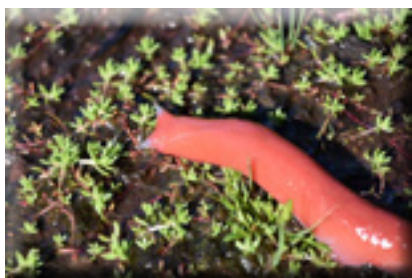


One dead insect deposit — one of hundreds that washed up near Bermagui, NSW on Christmas Eve — included a range of species that have critical interactions with other organisms.

This includes orchid dupe wasps (*Lissopimpla excelsa*), the only known pollinator of the orchid genus *Cryptostylis*. Transverse ladybirds (*Coccinella transversalis*), an important predator of agricultural pests such as aphids, also washed up. As did metallic shield bugs (*Scutiphora pedicellata*), spectacular iridescent jewel bugs that come in green and blue hues.

The unlikely survival of the Kaputar slug

Creatures such as kangaroos or birds have a chance to flee bushfires, but smaller, less mobile species such as native slugs and snails have a much tougher time of surviving.



The 2019–2020 bushfire season significantly threatened the brilliantly coloured Mount Kaputar

pink slug, found only on the slopes of Mount Kaputar, NSW. When fires ripped through the national park in October and November 2019, conservationists feared the slug may have been entirely wiped out.

However, park ranger surveys in January 2020 found at least 60 individuals managed to survive, likely by sheltering in damp rock crevices. Community scientists have spotted more individuals since then.

But the slug isn't out of the woods yet, and more monitoring is required to ensure the population is not declining.

Continuing this work

While community scientists have been documenting amazing stories of recovery all across Australia, there are still many species that haven't been observed since the fires. Many more have been observed only at a single site.

The Snowy River westringia (*Westringia cremnophila*), for instance, is a rare flowering shrub found on cliffs in Snowy River National Park, Victoria. No one has reported observing it since the fire.

So far these community scientist observations have contributed to one scientific paper, and three more documenting the ability for species to recover post-fire are in process.

Recovery from Black Summer is likely to take decades, and prepar-

ing a body of scientific data on post-fire recovery is vital to inform conservation efforts after this and future fires. We need more observations to continue this important work.

[The Conversation, 16 March 2021.](#)
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I have been following the post fire regeneration at several sites along the Nerriga Road. Australian plants are well adapted to fire and there has been a complex regrowth of plants from seed, epicormic buds, underground stems and corms and bulbs etc, in this area, so I find nothing 'remarkable' about this response that is 'normal' in Australian plants.

The most interesting spectacle has been the appearance of fire dependant ephemerals whose seed lies dormant for decades until there is an intense fire burning off the shrubs and other competitors, followed by rain that stimulates their germination. These plants grow rapidly for one or two seasons producing copious seed, by which time the shrubs are starting to grow back and become competitive and they then disappear. A good example is the pink flannel flower, *Actinotus forsythii* that we have never seen before in two decades of plant surveys at Nerriga.

Roger Farrow

Activities

Wednesday 10:00 am 28 April: Axe-grinding Grooves 'in a paddock' at Theodore

Meet at the locked gate on Christmas Street, Theodore at 10 am. The grooves are on a small sandstone outcrop in the centre of the paddock a short walk from the locked gate. The purpose of the exercise is to map the extent of the sandstone if we could as its not shown on the geology map. It would mean people walking in a chosen direction to the edge of the sandstone with someone who can tell it's then no longer sandstone. Maybe the cardinal directions would suffice. Bring a compass and GPS if you have one.

Afterwards we will have coffee/tea/bonox at the cafe 'Coffee on the Go' in the Calwell shops.

If you are interested in carpooling we could suggest meeting at the National Rock Garden off Lady Denman Drive (via the traffic lights east of the Parkway and the Arboretum entrance road.

Please send an expression of interest in attending to Rosemary Blemings (0402 760 397) so we can keep in touch about the weather and other influences.



2021 Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra Annual General Meeting

The 2021 Annual General Meeting is due to be held in June. Negotiations are still underway to procure a room for the meeting, or an alternative venue should this be required.

In the meantime, the Minutes of the last AGM (2019) are published below.

There was no AGM in 2020 due to Covid-19.

Minutes of the Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra Annual General Meeting - 7:00 pm 1 August 2019

Jan Anderson Seminar Room, RN Robertson Building,
Biology Place, ANU, ACT

Present: Rosemary Blemings, Alison Milton, Adrienne Nicholson, Sonja Lenz, Kevin McCue, Bob Lehman, Helen Lehman, Jenny Marsh, Bill Murphy, Margaret Kalms, Dierk von Behrens, Rosemary von Behrens.

Apologies: Maureen Bell, Lucy Bastecky, Rhian Williams, George Heinsohn, Johanna Pask, Colin Pask.

President's report: Rosemary Blemings wrote a comprehensive report for 2018 – 2019 outlining the year's meetings, outings and individual member's contributions to the successful functioning of the Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra. Thank you Rosemary. The acceptance of her report was Moved: Rosemary von Behrens, Seconded: Helen Lehman. Agreed by all present.

Treasurer's report: Bob Lehman presented the audited financial statements for the year 2018–2019 to the meeting.

Treasurer's comment on the audited financial information

1. Certificate by Committee
2. Independent Audit Report by Sandi Jack
3. Income and Expenditure Statement for Year Ended 30 June 2019
4. His resignation as Treasurer after 12 years of dedicated service.

Moved: 'that the Treasurer's Report be accepted' by Bob Lehman, Seconded: Sonja Lenz. Accepted.

Rosemary Blemings moved a very sincere thank you to Bob for his 12 years of service as Treasurer and all the extra tasks he had acquired. Accepted by acclamation. Kevin McCue presented Bob with an imaginary bottle of wine.

Returning Officer: Dierk von Behrens was appointed Returning Officer. He moved a 'Thank you' to the outgoing committee, which was seconded by Alison Milton, agreed to by those present, and then declared all positions vacant.

The following were duly elected and thanked. The AGM was declared closed at 8:00 pm.

| Position | Person | Nominated | Seconded |
|------------------|--|----------------------|--------------------|
| President | Rosemary Blemings | Kevin McCue | Alison Milton |
| Vice President | To be nominated by the committee at c' meeting | | |
| Treasurer | Kevin McCue | Rosemary Blemings | Bob Lehman |
| Minute Secretary | Rosemary von Behrens | Adrienne Nicholson | Dierk von Behrens |
| Committee 1 | Jenny Marsh | Margaret Kalms | Alison Milton |
| Committee 2 | Margaret Kalms | Helen Lehman | Adrienne Nicholson |
| Committee 3 | Rhian Williams | Alison Milton | Bob Lehman |
| Committee 4 | Lucy Bastecky | Rosemary Blemings | Jenny Marsh |
| Committee 5 | Bill Murphy | Dierk von Behrens | Sonja Lenz |
| Committee 6 | George Heinsohn | Rosemary von Behrens | Helen Lehman |

| Extras | | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|-------------|--------------------|
| Newsletter Editor | Alison Milton | Volunteered | Gratefully by all. |
| Public Officer | Dierk von Behrens | Kevin McCue | Bob Lehman |



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
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Jamison Centre ACT 2614



Membership application or renewal

Surname: 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:

How did you hear about FNAC? Please circle: Friend

Other Please specify:

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

Subscription renewals are due on 1 July each year

Pay by post (include completed form)

Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra
GPO Box 708
Jamison Centre ACT 2614

Bank transfer (renewals only: form not needed)

Account name: Field Nats
BSB: 325 185
Account number: 03545251
Reference: Your name