

# FIELD NATTER

Field Naturalist's Association of Canberra

OBJECTS: To foster an interest in, an awareness and an understanding of nature.

## The Hobbit from the Isle of Flowers

Professor Colin Groves

Talk- 8 pm Thursday April 6<sup>th</sup> - details below

The announcement of a tiny Late Pleistocene human species on Flores, in Indonesia, caused an immediate sensation. There were also expressions of disbelief from some commentators, even a few scientists who should have known better. The question is not whether there was a dwarf species of human or not, but what its affinities might be. In this talk, Colin will briefly describe the remains of *Homo floresiensis* and discuss its evolutionary status.

### OUTING:

#### Field trip- Black Ridge- Sunday April 9th

Black Ridge is a property located between Bredbo and Cooma. It is mostly dry sclerophyll forest and is an extension of the Tinderrys. Flowers occur in Spring, but colourful barks should still be visible in Autumn.

Please meet at Kambah Village Shops (corner of Drakeford Drive and Marconi Crescent) for car

pooling at 8.00 am Sunday April 9th, OR at Rothlyn Road at 9.30 am. 4WD vehicles are preferred. Please ring Rosemary von Behrens if you intend going on 62541763.

Equip yourselves with the usual shoes, jackets, sunscreen, water and tucker. (Rothlyn Road is approximately 15 km south of Bredbo on the Monaro Highway at the bottom of a steep hill. A row of poplars is on the right, willows and country letter boxes are on the left; drive left and wait just past the gate).

#### Sawfly larvae at Tidbinbilla

Sawfly larvae of some species are green, some black, others brown or off-white. Some have brown heads, others black. Some have blunt tails, some pointed. Some have white tails, some black.

Different species feed on plants from different families. Different species vary in size, some growing

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Sawfly larvae at Tidbinbilla, snap taken on our field nats outing March 2006.



April 2006

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#### MISS YOUR LAST NEWSLETTER?

A couple of members have reported that they missed out on their newsletter last month. Did you miss out also?

Please let me know if your newsletter did not arrive by post last month.

Thanks - Philip Bell philip.bell@gmail.com



## Sawfly larvae at Tidbinbilla



Adult sawfly of the species *Perga dorsalis*.

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to a length of about 5 cms. Sawfly larvae are not true Caterpillars, but are the larvae of various species of wasps. They only have 6 legs, and most have a tapering final abdominal segment.

The common name 'Sawflies' is misleading. They are not flies. Sawflies are closely related to wasps. They got their common name because the female have their special egg-laying tool, like a saw, to cut through leaf tissue for

their eggs.

Five time in their larval life the sawfly larvae moult their cuticle and grow. Egg laying occurs in late summer / early Autumn and the colony of larvae eventually mature in October /November when they enter the soil to pupate.

Sawflies are in the same order Hymenoptera as ants, bees and wasps. Ants, bees and wasps are placed in suborder Apocrita. Sawflies are placed in a suborder Symphyta.

## FIELD NATURALISTS EXCURSION - Tidbinbilla Sunday 5th March 06 Janet Edstein

After meeting at Cooleman Court in Weston Creek, nine intrepid Field Natters set off for Tidbinbilla. On arrival we had a brief foray into the Visitors Centre. The Wildlife and Botanical Artists Group had an exhibition there. We admired Janet T-P's beautiful Chinese impression of wattle amidst other paintings. Pamela Finger also had a painting on display. From there we drove to the Wetlands enclosure. We strolled around the main enclosure and although it was pretty hot we had an enjoyable time sighting different birds. The water was quite low in the lakes. As a relative new-comer to identifying birds I am in awe of those who casually say after a fleeting glance "That's a White-naped Honeyeater" or "a White-eared Honeyeater" Thank you for all the identifications.

Benji spied the Bird of the Day, the Sacred Kingfisher. It was interesting listening to all the instructions about how to see this bird: "See the green bushes. Well, just up a little" ... "Count 4 dead trees with skinny trunks and go up" ... "see the big tree, go over a few green bushes" ... "follow where I'm pointing, just over my shoulder". Eventually all nine of us sighted this wonderful bird resplendent with its light tan chest and blue-green wing plumage, perching for quite a while on a small branch. Its mate was just nearby.

We met up with two rangers who suggested that we go to the other lake to sight platypus. And we did. Well just a hump of a back and lots of ripples denoting the platypus' underwater search for food. We also sighted one brown snake and numerous saw-fly grubs here.

Thank you to Paula for suggesting this excursion and to Benji for the organisation. It was a great day out.

### BIRD LIST

Emu

Black Swan

Dusky Moor-Hen

Black Duck

Coot

### MARCH '06

Sacred Ibis

Welcome Swallow

Chestnut Teal?

White-naped Honeyeater

Pelican

Sulphur-Crested Cockatoo

Spotted Pardalote

Sacred Kingfisher

White-eared Honeyeater

Grey Teal

Musk Duck

Magpie Goose

Superb Fairy Wren

Crimson rosella

Willy Wagtail

Black-faced Cuckoo Shrike

Pee-Wee



# Species of the Month

Prickly lettuce  
Rosemary Bleminings

Following on from Mark Lonsdale's talk on March 2<sup>nd</sup> I've chosen Prickly Lettuce *Lactuca serriola* a weed of roadsides and degraded land that's widespread in Southern Australia and was, presumably an accidental import. This year, in the ACT, it has germinated and grown en masse.

Compass plant is another common name because some plants tend to orient their leaves 'in one plane'. The leaves are prickly though not to thistle-extent. Gloves are required when handling the stiff, usually upright, stems. Small pale yellow flowers open in succession at the top of the (up to 1.5m) stems. When cut the stems exude milky sap.

In past years, on Mt Rogers, I have removed the inflorescences and also hacked-off plants at ground level in January. I aimed to reduce numbers by reducing seed-set and the plants' chances of re-growing by March. This summer I was beaten by the heat and the sheer density of the infestation. No doubt, seeds are viable in the soil for several years.

As a member of Asteraceae seeds are dispersed by wind and probably insects once they touch-down. Prickly lettuces are not confined to the ACT's open spaces and Nature Reserves, they are common in gardens and on nature strips. Since life-style demands have reduced residents' garden-care options, annual, quick-growing weeds

like Prickly Lettuce have benefited. Presumably this year's "good" crop will mean further

increases in the weed's incidence.

Tim Low suggests Prickly Lettuce has originated in Egypt and Asia Minor. If harvested when "soft and oblong" the leaves are an excellent vegetable high in vitamin A. He cites breeding experiments indicating Prickly Lettuce as the ancestor of cultivated lettuce. 6500 year old Egyptian paintings show lettuces resembling this weed. It's grown in Sudan as an oil-seed crop.



Prickly Lettuce

Low, Tim (1985) *Wild Herbs of Australia & New Zealand*. Angus & Robertson, N. Ryde.

*If harvested when "soft and oblong" the leaves are an excellent vegetable high in vitamin A.*

Welcome to our new member

Maurits Zwankhuizen

906/2 Marcus Clarke St,  
Canberra City ACT 2601

NPA(ACT) is organising a Symposium, **Caring for Namadgi - Science and People.**

**When:** 5-7 May 2006

**Venue:** Vikings Town Centre Club (the old Tuggeranong Sports Club), Cnr Athllon Drive and Rowland Crescent, Tuggeranong, near the bus exchange.

The Symposium aims to involve the general public and to bring together scientists and historians from different fields and organisations to deliver papers which will stimulate discussion about scientific research relating to Namadgi and its management. The Symposium will cover several themes including the park's natural history, its water supply, bushfire management, climate change, Aboriginal and European history, and the challenges that lie ahead. The theme "nature reserve or theme park" will also be considered.

Speakers include local identities, Ian Fraser, Matthew Higgins, scientists, Alec Costin, Roger Good, staff from Environment ACT's Wildlife Research and Monitoring Unit and from the ACT Parks and Conservation Service.

NPA is funding the symposium and the daily registration fees are set at \$10/person. You can register online for all or part of the Symposium and pay at the door.

You can access the registration site as well as the draft program of speakers on the NPA website, [www.npaact.org.au](http://www.npaact.org.au)



## FIELD NATURALISTS MEETING MARCH 2006 DR MARK LONSDALE

### INVASIVE SPECIES – A GLOBAL CHALLENGE

Mark is the new Chair of a global project, The Global Invasive Species Programme established in 1997. The program aims to bring together existing networks, knowledge, research, countries' scientists, experts in the field and achievements in efforts to combat the threat of invasive pest species worldwide.

*Invasive alien species* (IAS) have moved from one geographic area to another in which they did not occur. Another definition was of the word *biosecurity* which, in the Australian & New Zealand context, means protecting the economy, environment and human health from the negative impacts associated with pests, diseases and weeds.

Currently biosecurity is sometimes confused with bioterrorism.

Examples of the impact of IAS involved huge losses associated with pests of agriculture and forestry, livestock damage in the U.S., The CRC for WEEDS quote of a \$4 billion annual bill from weeds problems in Australia and the \$40 million costs of controlling 'woody invaders' in South Africa. Mark knew we would know where these woody invaders originated!

Habitat destruction, IAS and climate change are a lethal cocktail as threats to ecosystems, individual species, countries' economies, food production, lifestyles....

Feral animals and weeds constitute: the top 5 threats to threatened species, the top 3 threats to threatened ecosystems, the top 3 threats to wetlands and riparian zones.

Amongst other foci the 'Quarantine continuum' involved efforts to keep species out, preparedness before species arrived, understanding how species arrive. Fewer IAS do enter Australia than we think.

31% of 'our' weeds came from the Americas, 27% from Europe, 10% from Asia, 26% from Africa and 2% from Australasia.

Africa would be the source of the next generation of weeds with fewer coming from Europe. Richard Groves had worked extensively on these origins and also provided more sobering figures,

Ornamentals constituted 65% of weed entries, Unknown 20%, Agricultural 7%, contaminants 2% and other 6%.

Importers, particularly small businesses, had gone through phases of vying with each other to import new species.

Between 1947 and 1985 grasses and legumes imported into northern Australia for pastoral-improvement had resulted in 463 'entries' of which only 4 were useful.

Species often have time-lags before they

emerge as serious weeds. *Mimosa pigra* is a classic example of this & Mark showed photos illustrating its post-lag-time, total invasion of the N.T.'s Adelaide river flood plain between 1978 and 1981. 25% of weeds took 100 years to achieve their present notoriety. 51% took 200 years and 18% took 300 years. The Asian buffalo had significantly contributed to this *M. pigra* spreading process.

Coincidentally the summer edition of *Natural Heritage* has an article on a biological control moth whose caterpillar feeds on the leaves. Another tiny moth has also joined six earlier releases as destructive agents working against the infestations which smother native plants & grazing areas.

Pest species such as Honey bees in the U.S.A., wild pigs and the Nepalese Bulbul were cited as increasing the spread or production of weed seeds. Gamba grass had been introduced into Northern Australia. Its rate of growth produced a higher biomass which contributed to hotter fires than animal or other plant species could survive and affected food webs.

Australia's Biosecurity System underpins market access and production, protects biodiversity, the environment and human health. Specific relevant National Strategies for plant and animal health, invasive species and weeds had been developed.

The perennial problem remained of how to prioritise spending and attention amongst all the competing claims for research funding or control efforts. Only recently had IAS attracted anywhere near the funding that the seriousness of the problem warranted.

Mark linked the complexities IAS managers faced with our interests by suggesting roles for naturalists:

- Our knowing the biota is crucial in identifying aliens and assessing changes in areas we are familiar with
- We would notice new species and awakening species
- We would notice changes in abundance or distribution of existing species

We could make series of collections of invasive species over time. Genetic changes revealed through studies of these, might show 'sleeper-weed' development.

*From Rosemary Blemings*



## Book review - Philip Bell, Feb 06

Bill Bryson: *A Short History of Nearly Everything*, Black Swan paperback, 2004  
I am sure all you field natters heard about Bryson's book when it was published by Doubleday in 2003. It got an unbelievable number of rave reviews. I imagine every field natter would like to have a copy in their library. It covers in some way probably all the variety of things that field natters are interested in - cosmology, geology,

plants, the animal kingdom, evolution etc. And every sentence that Bryson writes is touched with clarity and humour and speaks directly to the interested lay person, not the specialist.

Well the good news is that the *Short History* is now being remaindered. I saw the big hardback in Dymocks today, originally priced around \$76 down to \$54. But *more enticingly* I snapped up the Swan paperback at Belconnen Markets for \$12. What a bargain!

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## *Sustainable transport and light rail—follow up comments from Philip Bell*

Thanks to members who read my article and gave comments. Urban transport planning is so confusing to those who haven't studied its ins and outs. And the field is full of special pleadings.

What I failed to spell out in my February newsletter article was the *partial nature* of light rail as a way to more sustainable transport for Canberra. Light rail only operates economically *between* major centres of attraction - and the city then reshapes itself around and along the routes in between. So a dispersed city like Canberra - which is by its very nature environmentally wasteful for transport - can be gradually reshaped by its light rail network into a sustainable city - over a long period of time.

But what about the short term?

Such a huge proportion of the city's public and private moneys are being poured into

an infrastructure so that everyone can drive their own personal car everywhere and park it easily. All the legal, health, policing, road building, insurance, land hogging, asphalt and concrete wasteland making, personal vehicle purchase and maintenance financing and

a zillion other costs still have to be continued if people are still living in their remote burbs and have to find a way to get to the attractive light rail corridor. So light rail needs other systems in place to make it work for everyone in a dispersed city like Canberra. This supplementary solution is something I did not cover in my February article. Solutions are emerging now - so that people in a city like Canberra living in the remote burbs could get rid of one of their cars and still find it easy

to get around. If people are interested, I will write about this in a future piece for Field Natter. For those interested to find out for themselves, have a look at ADART on the web - and use your imagination as to how this recently perfected technology could be integrated into a light rail service Canberra to make it work well.

*Light rail only operates economically between major centres of attraction*



**Field Naturalist's  
Association of Canberra**

**Who are the Field Naturalists?**

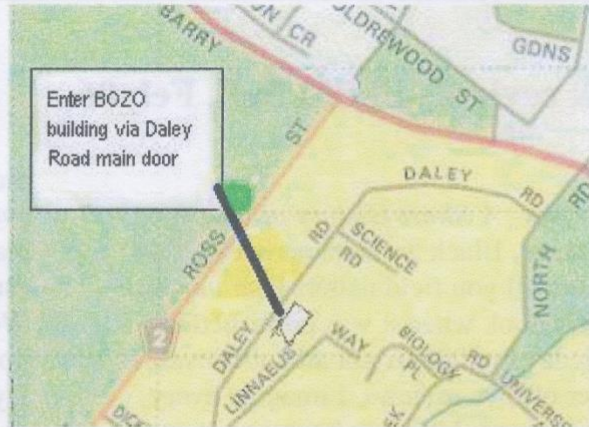
The Field Naturalists Association of Canberra (FNAC) was formed in 1981. Our aim is to foster interest in natural history by means of meetings and regular field outings. Meetings are usually held on the first Thursday of each month. Outings range from weekend rambles to long weekends away. Activities 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:** Benj Whitworth, tel 02 6254 4556

**Secretary:** Rosemary Blemings, tel 02 6258 4724

**Website:** [www.geocities.com/fieldnaturalist/index.html](http://www.geocities.com/fieldnaturalist/index.html)

**Newsletter editor:** Chris Bunn <chris\_b@webone.com.au>  
Tel 02 6241 2968. Member contributions welcome.



**Monthly meeting venue:** Division of Botany and Zoology, Building 44, Daley Rd, Australian National University. Park in Linnaeus Way. Meetings start at 8 pm and are followed by refreshments.

**FIELD NATURALISTS ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA INC.**

GPO Box 249  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

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**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 \$20) Donation: \$.....

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