

April 2021

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

FIELD NATTER

April 2021 newsletter No monthly meetings until further notice



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Some interesting spiders I have encountered recently in the ACT

Our nature reserves and homes always have surprises in store for those with time to look.

The common Redback spider is not as ferocious as it looks, not that I would handle them of course.

A friend asked to borrow our wheel barrow leaning against a wall of the house. When I pulled it out to pump up the tyre and give it a clean I removed a messy spider web with several egg sacs from the wheel hub and out popped this beauty. She didn't seem to mind being moved to safety though the egg sacs ended up entwined in the webbing.



A golden orb weaver and its larder were waving about in the breeze at head height atop an enclosure we have built in the Aranda Bushland. She has a very mask-like appearance. If anyone knows what the sock of goodies contains please let us all know.



The last four photographs are all of orb-weaving spiders seen in the Aranda Bushland. No face-height webs in the grassland but the spiders seem to have taken a fancy to the wool-bags we use for bagging weeds.

The first three belong to the *Backobourkia* sp. the top one a *Backobourkia* heroine according to Michael Mulvaney, a convenor with Canberra Nature Map. I did SMS him about the name to make sure he wasn't pulling my leg. They are beautifully adorned.



The last photo shows a spider that retreated quickly along the web and threw herself into a flower head (verbascum?) to hide when my phone/camera got too close. Can't say I enjoy walking into such a web (with spider) whilst walking through the bush.



Kevin McCue

Puddles the Platypus

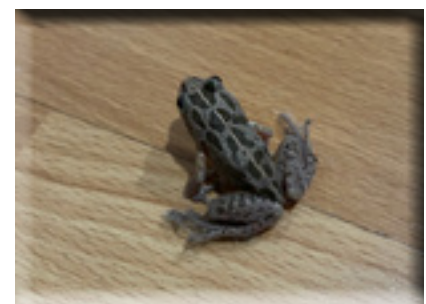
From the Australian Platypus Conservatory newsletter



Puddles will debut this year just in time for this egg-laying mammal to claim her place as the rightful Aussie replacement for that feral impostor, the Easter Bunny. Created by renowned Melbourne-based confectioner Chocolatier Australia, Puddles will be available from various major retail outlets, including Coles supermarkets, in the lead-up to Easter. Puddles will then become a standard item in the Chocolatier range with 25% of profits to be devoted to platypus conservation.

My latest amphibian visitor

I really don't know why they come into the house - but it's safely back in the garden.



Limnodynastes tasmaniensis: Spotted grass frog (also known as Spotted Marsh Frog)

Not heard any calls yet.

Robyn Black

Identifying Australian caterpillars

Identifying caterpillars can be extremely difficult and confusing as Lucy recently found. She sent a photo to a friend to be identified and received the response that the spike on its abdomen identified it as a hawk moth. Sadly, this wasn't correct as it is actually a sawfly larvae.



Lucy said she can hardly believe the extraordinary variety of caterpillars she has seen looking through the images on the link to the Coffs Harbour Butterfly House web site sent to her. This

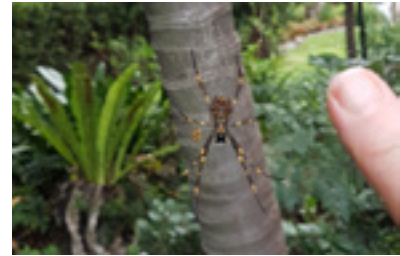
is a good place to start to identify caterpillars and their adult moth or butterfly.

The site is run by Don Herbison, a moth moderator for Canberra Nature Map. So little is known of caterpillars and their adult counterpart, that Don often asks if the caterpillar has been taken into protective custody to rear to an adult.

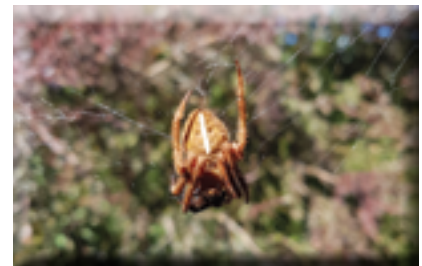
However, found on her exterior brick wall at home was a magnificent hawk moth: *Hippotion scrofa*, Coprosma Hawk Moth.



Lucy included a whopper spider found on a walk in green and hilly Wollstonecraft (Sydney)...



and an *Eriophora* sp., Garden orb weaver that is living in her leptospermum Starry Night.



Alison Milton

recrafted from Lucy Bastecky's email

A very small window to avert disaster – save sharks and save our oceans

Sharks are critical to the health of our oceans. They are what are known as an indicator species – their existence at the top of the food chain keeps every species below it in harmonious order. According to Chris Fischer, founder of OCEARCH, a non-profit organisation that helps scientists research the ocean, *To put it simply, sharks are balance keepers: if we lose our sharks, we lose our oceans.*

So for anyone who loves the ocean the news that populations of sharks and rays have declined more than 70% since 1970, mainly because of over-fishing, should be very worrying. The scientists conducting the research have said that the collapse is probably even more stark, because of incomplete data from some of the worst-hit regions and because fishing fleets had already significantly decreased shark and ray populations as fishing had exponentially increased in the decades before the research began.

There is a very small window to save these iconic creatures, said Nathan Pacoureaux, a marine biologist at Simon Fraser University in Canada and the study's lead author. The study found that more than three quarters of shark and ray species are now threatened with extinction, jeopardising marine ecosystems and the food security of

people in many nations, including many of Australia's closest neighbours. *Action is needed immediately,* the authors wrote.

So what can we do?

One really simple thing is to join the Australian Marine Conservation Society Shark Champions program. It's free and can be found at: <https://sharkchampions.org.au/>

Once there you can take the pledge to Give Flake a Break, which commits to avoid buying flake (the name most commonly given to shark or ray species sold in fish shops) and if you do choose to eat fish to commit to choosing only sustainable seafood instead.

Your choice will make a big impact

By taking the pledge and voting with your wallet, you are showing decision makers that you do not support the sale and consumption of endangered sharks.

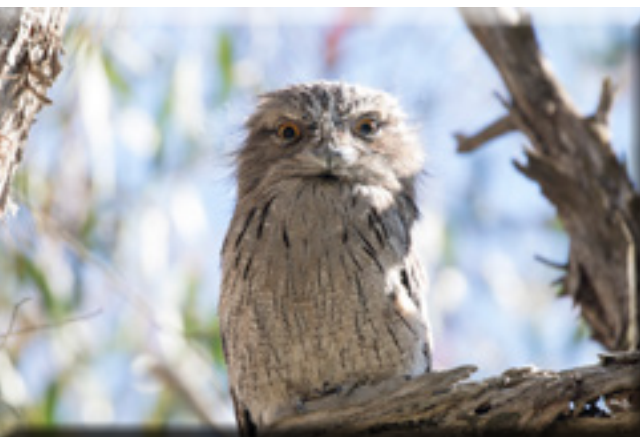
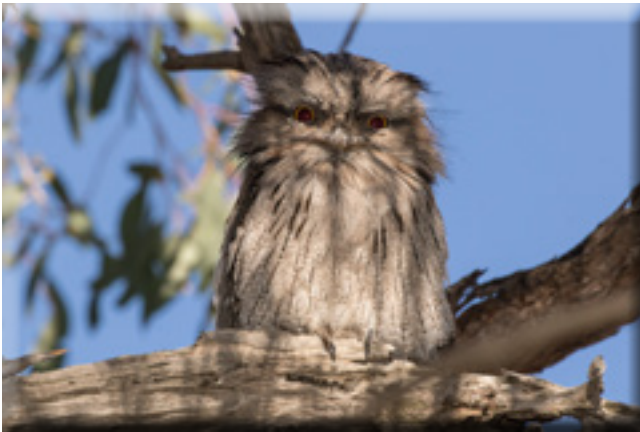
Your action will show support for fixing fishing practices in Australia, protecting and supporting the recovery of endangered species.

Rhian Williams

The Pinnacle observations

It's been an exciting few weeks for news from The Pinnacle Nature Reserve in Hawker. I hadn't been to the reserves for quite some time but arriving at the Dungowan Street entrance I was looking at some bird and suddenly found a Tawny Frogmouth in my binoculars, sitting on a limb of a low tree and right out in open view, easily seen by the naked eye, if I had been looking. Then a second one. Both were wide awake and looked straight down at me for some wonderful photos. Both were still in position when I returned several hours later in the afternoon and both still wide-eyed and awake. Due to their scruffy appearance we think they are juveniles.

The resident pair were known to nest here last year but we didn't think they had been successful. It now seems that they were.



I've been back a few of times since and they are both still in almost the same position but the last time they have begun taking the typical posture of a tree stump, becoming least able to place, unless you know they are there.

The second exciting news is regarding Gang Gang breeding. Some people have commented that they have been hearing Gang Gangs lately and that this used to be common at The Pinnacle but over the past years numbers had almost disappeared.

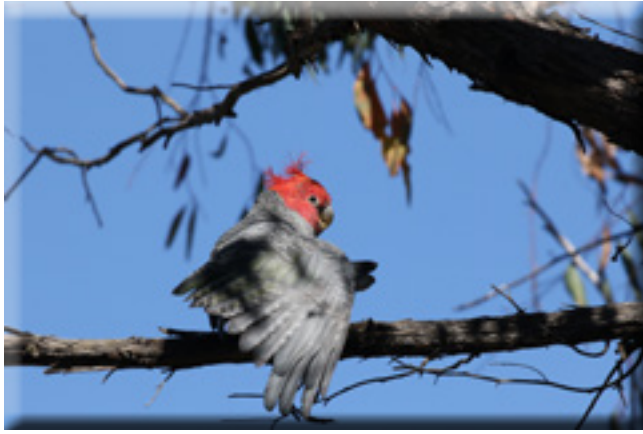


There was a known nest behind Weetangera that was being monitored by those conducting Gang Gang breeding sites. The pair produced one male offspring (nick-named Nigel). The last time it was sighted the parents were unsuccessfully trying to get it to fly. The next day it couldn't be seen and putting the probing scope into the hollow, showed that a possum had taken up residence. It was assumed that the possum killed the chick before taking possession of the hollow.

However, over the past few weeks a trio of two males and one female have been seen regularly along one of the main tracks. The second male seems young. Is this Nigel?

I'd also heard, but not seen them the day I discovered the Tawnys so this week I went back with the specific purpose to find them. Taking a high track in the woodlands I almost immediately began to hear a Gang Gang. For the next two hours I watched and photographed a family group of seven birds noisily feeding in the canopy of a gum tree. There were three males, three females and one young male.

While I was engrossed and waiting patiently for opportunities to get photos with a clearer background I became aware of someone else on the track watching them. This turned out to be keen birder, Barbara, who conducts regular bird surveys



at the Pinnacle and one of those who had been observing the trio family. Barbara told me that she had just seen the trio 10 minutes prior and that the young male had more red on his head than the one I was watching. This means that we have TWO young Gang Gang males this breeding seasons. That is indeed exciting.

I haven't yet been able to find and photograph the second juvenile male for a definite confirmation as they had moved on when I went to find them and the weather turned the next day, but I will keep trying.

Alison Milton

Activities

27 March: Native plant sale: Australian National Botanic Gardens

The Australian Native Plant Society plant sale will resume this autumn but with revised arrangements. All pre-purchased tickets have been taken but you don't need a ticket after 10:30 am, though numbers will be monitored.

30&31 March: 9:30 am, National Arboretum STEP Garden

It's been decided to offer two dates as numbers for those able to attend were divided as to preferred date. Meet at the STEP Garden after parking. Parking fees apply.

Robyn and Andy are Field Natters and are each active volunteers at STEP and have agreed to introduce us to the STEP gardens, the habitats provided by the planted local regional species.

Please wear sturdy footwear and clothing suited to the expected forecast. Bringing a snack is optional but drinking water is a must. You may wish to bring a 'picnic' lunch to enjoy surrounded by local plants and expansive views.

Toilets are in the main function and Visitors' Centre with lunch at the cafe there another option afterwards.

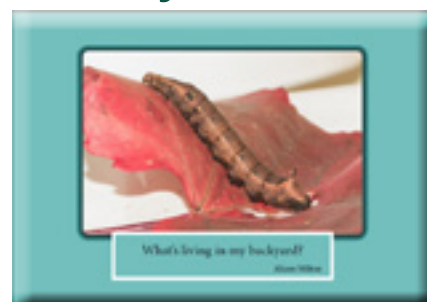
Your guests are most welcome. It doesn't matter which day you chose for exploring STEP but it would be helpful if others who intend to come RSVP to 0402 760 397.

What's living in my backyard?

My book, *What's living in my backyard?* should soon be available from the Australian National Botanic Gardens bookshop.

I finally contacted the bookshop owner and he has agreed to stock the book but is still working out the retail price so I can't give you details as yet.

Alison Milton





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

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
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Bank transfer (renewals only: form not needed)

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