

OBJECT: To foster an interest in nature

August 2013
ISSN: 1836-2761



GPO BOX 249
CANBERRA ACT 2601

FIELD NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA INC.

FIELD NATTER

MEETING—THURSDAY 1 August 2013
7:30 pm Australian National University
Gould Seminar Room, Building 116, Daley Road, ANU, ACT
details back page

Australia's iconic grass trees (*Xanthorrhoea* species)

Speaker: John Turnbull

Dr John Turnbull will discuss the ecology and utilisation of grass trees (*Xanthorrhoea* species). These iconic species occur in all Australian States and the ACT. With a unique structure and an interesting fire ecology they have been a valuable resource for Aboriginal peoples and the source of a variety of products in more recent times. John graduated in forestry from the University of Wales and ANU. He worked in forest research in Australia with CSIRO and internationally with the Center for International Forestry Research, World Bank and FAO. Now retired, he is a volunteer guide at the Australian National Botanic Gardens.



Contents

Review: Clouding the vision	2
2013 Indian Myna Conference	3
Platypus and water-rat sightings	3
Activities	4
National Science Week is 10 – 18 August	4
Monthly meetings	4
Notice of Annual General Meeting	5

Review: Clouding the vision

At the July meeting Dierk von Behrens and Rachel Marks gave a great presentation on cloud formations, with Dierk firstly presenting the scientific information on cloud types, sub-species and how they are formed. This was followed by Rachael's pictorial presentation of her (almost) one year of clouds. Rachael's one year project saw her take a photo of clouds every day for 270 days, (with one cloudless day forcing her to photograph the steam from her coffee cup instead), until her busy schedule meant she couldn't complete the full 365 days. The result: some amazing photos; taken mostly around Canberra; well composed and also showing some weather patterns predicted by cloud patterns.

Rachael and Dierk's passion for clouds reminded me of a fascinating cloud formation I witnessed back in 2005, while on the bus from Woden to Civic, heading home after a long day at work. When first spotted, the formation was off to the left over the horse paddock near the Mint. While most of the clouds were strata (after tonight's presentation and relying on primary school geography, I may be wrong on this point), this one patch was totally different. It was very textual and was like someone had woven a three dimensional tapestry with a gossamer thread.

The trees often blocked my view but I was drawn back to watching these clouds when possible.

Then I noticed that one part where the wisps of clouds flew off in a different direction it looked like the back of someone's head with long flowing straight hair – rather like mine. But when I looked again a little while later it was gone.

With nothing better to do I let my imagination run riot and speculated that perhaps 'they' had turned around.

Admittedly, I then began looking for a face (the face of God?) and began to make a body shape wearing a long flowing gown. Eerily, the next time I looked a face had formed and as I watched the facial features, eyes, nose, mouth, became more defined until the face was very clear.



With the long flowing gown, the figure had a spiritual look — as of an angel, Jesus, or perhaps even God himself.

Annoyingly, I didn't have my camera. If I did, and wasn't on a bus I could have taken a photo and sold it on E-bay for thousands of dollars, as "God in heaven looks down from above".

Afterall, if someone can find the Virgin Mary in a piece of 10-year-old toast, isn't it more logical that a figure in the clouds is that of God?

(P.S. this was just after the infamous Virgin Mary 'toast' was sold on E-bay for a substantial sum.)

Alison Milton

This PhotoShopped version is probably not going to fool anyone.

Recent clouds over Canberra



2013 Indian Myna Conference

CSIRO Discovery Centre, Canberra, 19th June 2013

A summation of speaker presentations at the 2013 Indian myna conference has been released. The conference had three themes: The Science on Mynas; Pest Management Principles; and The Control Measures and Approaches for Indian Mynas. The following is the wrap-up summary given by Ian Fraser at the conclusion of the conference. The full document is available from the Canberra Indian Myna Action Group web site (<http://www.indianmynaaction.org.au/documents/2013%20Indian%20Myna%20Conference%20Wrap%20up%20Summary.pdf>)

Ian Fraser's talk

All of us are here today because we're biased. Everyone is, but the important trick is to recognise our own biases and own up to them. We're biased in favour of species and ecological balances that evolved uniquely in isolation in Australia and, today, against one of many identified threats to that uniqueness. We're no longer isolated in Australia – we've not really been for about 5 million years in fact – and Australia is inexorably changing, but I believe that there is still a viable and identifiable Australian nature that is an important part of what makes the land special. I feel very privileged indeed to have had the luck to be born where and when I was, but with that privilege comes a weight of responsibility. I firmly reject the notion that homogenisation of the world is inevitable, even though at least we rarely now hear the dogma of the 19thC Acclimatisation Societies, that it is desirable.

It is not enough to wait until damage is apparently irreversible; originally we did that in Canberra with mynas, until the line suddenly flipped from “we can't be sure it's actually a problem” to “whoops, it is, but it's now too late to do anything”. Fortunately for us all, you are all living proof that we don't have to accept that capitulation either. In such a situation I think the precautionary principle requires us to adopt the French or Mexican legal position and make no presumption of innocence. The precautionary principle is a very important one in this context; while it doesn't always seem to be obvious, it is in fact the formal position of

government in Australia, since The Council of Australian Governments' 1992 InterGovernmental Agreement on the Environment stated, inter alia, that “lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation”. I don't believe that position has ever been rescinded; any move to do so should be most vigorously resisted.

Another frequently heard comment is “it's not their fault – humans are the real problem”. I would suggest firstly that that's a red herring – it's not about ‘fault’, which is an irrelevance as applied to animals. Secondly, while logically valid, it doesn't go anywhere with regard to resolving the problem; in fact it's usually an excuse for doing nothing, which is not an ethical option. I want coming generations of Australian kids – whether their parents were born here or not – to have the same opportunities for discovery and joy in living in a place that is special and different as I had. I would also observe that I think a very important aspect of the job you're doing here is its educational role, along with what the Californians would probably call ‘empowerment’; it matters a lot if people can be helped to better understand the importance of protecting our ‘Australianess’ and feel they can actually do something about it.

I thank all of you for what you're doing, and will do. It matters.

Platypus and water-rat sightings

A reminder to members to report all platypus (and water-rats) sightings. These are very important in helping to get a better idea of the current status and distribution of the species. Details of sightings can be reported on-line on the Australian Platypus Conservancy website (www.platypus.asn.au) or emailed to platypus.apc@westnet.com.au



Activities

August 9th, Visit Geoscience and Callum Brae

Please meet in the foyer of Geoscience at 2.00 pm. We will look at the displays and then move on to Callum Brae, which is close by, to observe the birds and plants. Arrive early and take advantage of the Cafe if you wish. GEOSCIENCE is located on the Corner of Jerrabomberra Ave and Hindmarsh Drive, Symonston ACT.

Saturday 12 October 2013: 9.30 am sharp to 12 noon (or later) Black Mountain Wildflower Ramble

Belconnen Way entry, just before Caswell Drive turnoff (look for the balloons).

Join wildflower lovers for the Burbidge/Chippendale tradition of celebrating the spring flowering with the 42nd annual Black Mountain wildflower ramble. Discover the surprising diversity of tiny orchids, bush peas, wattles and billy buttons with experienced guides. Following the tradition set by Nancy and George, this will be a social occasion with a morning tea break (BYO), relatively easy bush tracks and good company. It will be sponsored by Friends of Black Mountain, NPA, U3A, ANPS, ANBG Friends and Field Nats. Who knows what spring will bring this year in the 'jewel of the crown of Canberra Nature Park'. It's always fascinating to see how diversity and abundance differ. Our Patch field guide will be on sale for \$15 and some handouts provided. All welcome. Bring your friends especially those who are new to plant identification. BYO morning tea, hat, sunblock, water and stout shoes. **Please book:** friendsofblackmountain@gmail.com so we have enough guides. **Contact:** Jean Geue on 6251-1601.

National Science Week is 10 – 18 August

Such a rich choice, what to choose? A few examples on just one day.

Geoscience has an open day on Sunday August 18, 10 am - 4.00 pm

They have an interesting program and attract huge crowds.

Check it out on:

<http://www.ga.gov.au/education/public-events/open-day.html>

Canberra Deep Space Communication Complex Discovery Drive, Paddys River. Sunday, August 18th, 9:00 am to 5:00 pm

Take a close up look at the Canberra Deep Space Communication Complex. Learn about the amazing discoveries being made across the Solar System and beyond. Join a bus tour, take walking tours to the Big Dish, enjoy talks and films presented in our Visitor Centre. Bus tours start at 10 am.

See more at: <http://www.scienceweek.net.au/2013-space-open-day-2/#sthash.abGAEWKO.dpuf>

CSIRO Discovery, North Science Road, Acton, ACT August 18th - 1:30 pm to 4:00 pm

2003 Canberra Fires, 10 years after: What have we learned?

It has now been 10 years since the devastating 2003 ACT Fires. What have these fires taught us about fire behaviour, emergency management systems and householder reactions? How resilient is the ACT community in the face of forecast increased fire risk? How can landscape planning help in protecting the urban/rural interface? How will future fire management systems change?

See more at: <http://www.scienceweek.net.au/2003-canberra-fires-10-years-after-what-have-we-learned/#sthash.gsltGj6T.dpuf>

Monthly meetings

Month	Speaker	Topic
1 August	John Turnbull	Australia's iconic grass trees (<i>Xanthorrhoea</i> species)
5 September	AGM, members' night	Member's choice
3 October	Trish McDonald	Macquarie Island, rabbit, rat, mouse control during her time as station manager for the Australian Antarctic Division
7 November	Under construction	
5 December	Christmas party	

Notice of Annual General Meeting

Notice is hereby given to all members that the annual general meeting of the Field Naturalists Association of Canberra will be held on Thursday 5th September 2013 at the Division of Zoology and Botany, Building 116, in the Australian National University.

Business:

- a) To confirm the Minutes of the preceding Annual General Meeting.
- b) To receive from the committee, auditor, and servants of the Association, reports on the transactions of the Association during the preceding financial year.
- c) To elect the officers of the Association (President; Vice President; Treasurer; Secretary) and the ordinary committee members
- d) To appoint the auditor and determine his/her remuneration
- e) To conduct other business of which notice has been given

Nominations for election of members of Committee shall be made in writing and shall be delivered to an officer of the Association by Monday 26 August 2013. If insufficient nominations are received to fill all vacancies on the committee, the candidates shall be deemed to be elected and further nominations shall be received at the Annual General Meeting.

Nomination form

Nomination

I hereby nominate: _____

BLOCK LETTERS

A member of the Field Naturalists Association of Canberra Inc

For the position of _____

Name of Proposer: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name of Seconder: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Acceptance of Nomination

I _____ accept nomination for _____

Signature of Nominee: _____ Dated: _____

A moment of fame

Have you had a great experience or a subject of personal interest?? Been moved to write about it, either in prose or verse? Felt the urge to see your name in print? Or even just taken some great photo shots that you would like to share.

Everyone is due their 15 minutes of fame. Why not claim yours?

Field Natter welcomes contributions. Alternatively, send in a photo or two with a short paragraph about it/them.

The closing date for each issue is the last Monday of every month. Handwritten and posted material is acceptable, but email is preferred. We also welcome photographs, preferably as separately scanned items or digital images. We can scan original photographs. Email contributions to alison.milton@health.gov.au or phone 6289 2717 to discuss

Post: 20 O'Sullivan Street, HIGGINS, ACT 2615

Alison Milton, Editor



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 von Behrens ph: 6254 1763

Email: fieldnaturalist@yahoo.com.au

Website: under construction

All newsletter contributions welcome.

Editor



Monthly meeting venue: Division of Botany and Zoology, Building 116, Daley Rd, Australian National University. Park (the Xmas meeting is at the adjacent building 44 and will start at the earlier time of 6:30 pm)

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: