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GPO BOX 249  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

FIELD NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA INC.

# FIELD NATURALIST

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

## Annual General Meeting



A brief AGM. Please don't stay away because it is our AGM. We would WELCOME any new people onto the committee so please speak up at the meeting OR tell someone beforehand. We need a few more hands on board.

*I heard the Field Naturalists are about to hold their Annual General Meeting and are looking for committee members.*

### Kamchatka, the Russian Far East

Speakers: Adrienne Nicholson and Cecelia Melano.

A volcanically active area, part of the Pacific "Ring of Fire". A small group visited Kamchatka in August 2013, all with an interest in exploring the natural world. Walks up and down volcanoes; into and out of volcanic craters; over cinder cones; across ash beds and recent lava flows. Wildflower meadows; birch and larch deciduous forests; heathlands and tundra (bear country); rivers and lakes; towns and villages. Something for everyone.



### Tasmanian molluscs and the two-way street of Bass Strait

Speaker: David Dedenczuk.

Many Tasmanian molluscs also have counterparts on the Mainland - maybe they are better described as Mainland temperate water molluscs that extend as far south as Tasmania. As the Eastern Australian Current grows ever stronger, the southeastern Australian molluscan fauna is changing. Tropical molluscs and other invaders are heading south. Here's a chance to have a look at, and to discuss, an assortment of the mollusc fauna from the far south, that in future years may be completely changed.

*Circomphalus disjecta* - Wedding cake venus - Black River Beach 2010



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# Choose your children's books with care

Dierk von Behrens

"Give me a child until he is seven and I will show you the man," has been attributed to the founder of the Jesuits, St Ignatius Loyola and to Francis Xavier, its co-founder, though these attributions have been questioned. Still, the truth is that something fixed early in the mind of children is unlikely ever to be discarded.

On 28 December 2007 the Christian Science Monitor ran a story that alleges "terrorism experts say radical groups are targeting teenagers as young as 14."

No matter which cultural traditions one is borne into or gets to inhabit after birth, stories are important and have a powerful influence on our beliefs and values. These however, powerfully affect—if not fully determine—our actions. Hence, they deserve careful attention and critical examination. My recommendation is: choose your children's books with care!

My latest contrasting examples follow:

***How Echidna Got its Quills*, by L & G Adams, illustrated by Barry Olive**

This 1979 book is in the SRA Australian Legend Series. Unfortunately, it has used a Literature Consultant – Maurice Saxby – instead of, or at least in addition to, a Science Consultant. The latter should have been expected from a publication published by Science Research Associates Pty Ltd! The lack shows.

The alleged legend goes as follows: *When the Great One saw the world was empty he made creatures to fill it and gave each of them 'something to keep it from harm': strong teeth to Dingo, swift wings to Eagle, sharp claws to Native Cat, great jaws to Crocodile, eyes that could see in the night to Owl, long legs to run swiftly in flight to Kangaroo, but had nothing left to give to the Echidna.*

In the early echidna drawings in this book the animal looks somewhat like a young, naked echidna, known as a puggle: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SGleaTJoy1U>

The other hungry animals hunt this echidna. It continues to almost miraculously escape until it reaches a mountaintop, pleads to the Great One and is equipped with bone-splinters that turn into quills – bone turning into modified hair? These it then uses to defend itself.

Unfortunately, the quality of the illustrations is poor. The Dingo looks like a fox, in another place like an attacking tiger; the Native Cat (quoll) looks generic. Worst of all, however, the Python has two huge upper fangs like an elapid (venomous front-fanged snake). Every naturalist will be appalled. This is no way to teach children.

The story itself is unbelievable: this short-legged, defenceless animal keeps getting away from its ferocious adversaries – even from the Eagle, who 'tore at his skin and hurt him'. It jumps 'onto a huge log that lay almost right across the billabong' and ran across it towards the other side, is shaken off half way, by what turns out to be Crocodile, lands on the croc's head, but is missed by its jaws! Don't waste your money!

A much finer, more traditional and credible explanation of how echidnas acquired their quills is the Noongar legend – free on the Internet: <http://www.crackerjackededucation.com.au/resources/why-the-echidna-has-quills/> This dreamtime story, at least, does not invoke a metaphysical Great One and the illustrations don't attempt bad realism.

The second book is:

***Ali the Bold Heart*, sensitively written by Jane Jolly and beautifully illustrated in watercolour by Elise Hurst**

This 2006 Limelight Press publication 'is based on the true story of an Iranian refugee, who performed as a magician in his own country.'

When life in Ali's home becomes dangerous he travels to a new land he thinks will be safer. There, Ali is locked up in a place surrounded by wire as sharp as tigers' teeth. He entertains caged others with his magic. Everyone is amazed.

Left alone in the empty compound during a sandstorm one evening, brave-hearted Ali looked up at the tiger's teeth and wailed. Can his magic bring him a better life?

The facts and empathetic values embodied in this moving children's story make me - a former immigration officer and citizen of Australia since 1956 -embarrassed at the depth to which my Department and my country have sunk!

Track down and buy this book! Read it with your children, nieces, nephews and grandchildren. Let's return Australia to the paths of humanity and civilisation!

## President's report 2014

The Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra's objective is to foster an interest in nature. I feel that through our monthly talks we are succeeding in doing just that. Following our 2013 AGM we heard from Trish McDonald about the rabbit, rat, and mouse control on Macquarie Island during her time as station manager for the Australian Antarctic Division. Leo Joseph, CSIRO Australian Wildlife Collection, spoke about the faunal connections between Australia and New Guinea.

Our 2014 monthly series of talks began very well with a talk by Andrew Claridge (NSW NPWS) on the work of a wildlife officer. Among other examples he discussed the fascinating research into the Spotted-tail Quoll (*Dasyurus maculatus*) and the various techniques – advantages and disadvantages – which help in this i.e. trapping, radio tracking, movement operated cameras. Ric Longmore spoke in detail about snakes in the ACT region; only one of our nine snakes isn't venomous i.e. an elapid. Laura Johnson, a previous recipient of the Field Naturalist Prize, in 'Koel, calm and collected' looked at the ability of the Red-wattle Bird to recognise the Koel as an unfamiliar enemy. Stephen Utick explained the Camellia Ark Strategy and the conservation of Australia's rare camellias as none can now be imported. Dr Alex Ritchie related his intriguing story of the discovery, excavation, storage, and identification of the rich fossil fish site in Canowindra NSW. Dr Catherine Gross discussed 'Fairness and Justice in Environmental Decision Making' and welcomed comments from the floor. We look forward to hearing from our members David Dedenczuk (Tasmanian molluscs), Adrienne Nicholson and Cecelia Melano (Kamchatka, Russian Far East) at our AGM.

Our outings, unfortunately, were poorly attended and finally cancelled due to the lack of an organiser. We did, however, piggy-back on several walks advertised by the Friends of the Pinnacle (FOTPIN).

The 2013 FNAC \$250 prize was awarded to Tobias Hayashi. We have also donated \$1,000 each to the ACT Conservation Council and the Environmental Defenders Office. We are members of these organisations, they work on our behalf and rely on donations. We will also assist the Friends of Black Mountain with their brochure when it is finalised and are working on ours.

Our meetings are advertised within the ANU faculties of Biology, Evolution, Ecology, Genetics (BEEG) and the Frank Fenner Foundation. *The Chronicle's* Billboard has been a great help and occasionally *The Canberra Times*. Our newsletter Field Natter and our members also spread the word to their various contacts and like-minded organisations.

I would like to particularly thank all members of our committee, without whom the Field Nats could not function, for their reliable and dedicated help during the year, especially Bob Lehman as treasurer and emailer, Rosemary Blemings for the Newsletter send out, articles and meeting promotion, Alison Milton our newsletter Editor, Pam Fenning for conducting the raffle, Shirley and Warwick Daniels for supper.

To those members who can no longer attend meetings or who are ill I wish you good health and hope you keep in touch via the newsletter. We welcome contributions.

Rosemary von Behrens  
President

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## ***FNAC's financial support for two ACT organisations***

At its July 2014 meeting the FNAC Committee decided to donate \$1,000 to each of the two following named organisations within the ACT to assist with the environmental and conservation work with which they are involved:

- Conservation Council of the ACT and Districts; and
- Environmental Defenders Office.

It appears the current Australian Government has discontinued its support for both organisations.

## Income and Expenditure Statement for Year Ended 30 June 2014

	2013 \$	2014 \$
<b>Income</b>		
Membership subscriptions	1,650.00	1,275.00
Raffle	289.00	350.50
Tea money	40.00	44.90
Donations	565.00	130.00
Petty cash return	0.00	0.00
Transfer credit (term deposits)	757.65	390.89
Interest received (cheque account)	59.00	17.25
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,360.65</b>	<b>2,208.54</b>

	2013 \$	2014 \$
<b>Expenditure</b>		
Affiliation fees	77.00	50.00
Bank fees	0.00	0.00
Depreciation	0.00	0.00
Govt. FID and debit tax	0.00	0.00
Newsletter printing	476.80	428.00
Committee meeting printing	0.00	0.00
Postage	564.00	390.00
Post office box rental	156.00	173.00
Presentations (speakers and ANU)	0.00	20.00
Raffle prize	0.00	0.00
Donations	1,000.00	0.00
Student prize vouchers	0.00	500.00
Registrar General's fees	0.00	0.00
Insurance	350.00	370.00
Website hosting	161.00	0.00
Secretary's / Presidents' stationery	0.00	100.00
Sundry expenses (Assistant Secretary)	0.00	0.00
Treasurer's stationery / common seal	0.00	250.00
Auditor payment	0.00	0.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,784.80</b>	<b>2,281.00</b>
<b>Income exceeds Expenditure by</b>	<b>\$575.85</b>	
<b>Expenditure exceeds Income by</b>		<b>\$72.46</b>

**Bob Lehman**  
Treasurer FNAC (Inc.)



*Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra Inc.*

All correspondence to:

**Treasurer,  
G.P.O. Box 249,  
CANBERRA CITY ACT 2601**

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Manager  
St. George Bank  
Market Place  
30 Hibberson Street  
Gungahlin ACT 2912  
11/07/2014

Dear Sir,

**Transfer of Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra Inc. (FNAC) Funds from St. George Bank, Gungahlin to Beyond Bank, Gungahlin**

This is formal notification to you that the FNAC, at its most recent Committee meeting earlier this month, determined its funds should be transferred from St. George Bank, Gungahlin to Beyond Bank, Gungahlin.

The FNAC is an organisation primarily involved with natural environmental understanding, research and management and being aware of human activities within that environment. Too often decisions are made by organisations within the community to the detriment of the natural environment, often preventing people from gaining a clear understanding of the complexity and beauty to be seen, and the multitude of interactions between the many ecosystem types to be found within that natural environment.

Our research of St. George Bank, which is under the "umbrella" of Westpac, indicates that some support is given to the environment. Certainly the St. George Bank provides support to sporting teams and for children of differing ages, both of which are commendable. Some support has also been given to land-care projects. Unfortunately, the mining of coal and coal-seam gas appears to be a funding priority for St. George Bank and Westpac. There are several other much less environmentally detrimental approaches that can be used to achieve the same ends. However, we had to look towards banks such as Bendigo Bank, Bank Mecu and

Beyond Bank to find examples of banks which give the environment much stronger support.

Based upon information available to the Conservation Council of the ACT and Region, a number of organisations under its "umbrella" have moved their funds from existing banks to other banks which provide strong environmental support. This is continuing to take place at present. The Conservation Council certainly gives affiliated organisations encouragement to so move their funds. After all, our natural environment is important, and Federal, State and Local Governments, Banks, Large and Small businesses, Community Organisations and Individuals should be helping to take effective care of those natural environments.

The FNAC's Committee has decided, after a careful review of the banks already mentioned, to place its funds with Beyond Bank because of its objectives towards supporting environmental initiatives and individuals and groups that have obvious and effective aims to improve, or maintain, some feature of the natural environment. Also, of interest to the FNAC is the possibility of being selected for financial support to assist in any environmental initiatives with which we are involved that appeal to Beyond Bank.

Currently the FNAC has two accounts with St. George Bank:

1. Cheque Account (040000013) **(\$7,904.51)**
2. Short-Term Deposit (Matured on 06/07/2014) **(\$12,562.87)**

**Total of the two above accounts - \$20,467.38.**

Please arrange for the transfer of the funds in those two accounts to Beyond Bank either by:-

1. A Bank cheque made out to the Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra Inc. to enable the FNAC's Treasurer to take it to Beyond Bank; or by
2. A Bank transfer in the FNAC's name to Beyond Bank.

It must be said the staff at St. George Bank have always been pleasant, helpful, knowledgeable and courteous. It has been a pleasure to work with them.

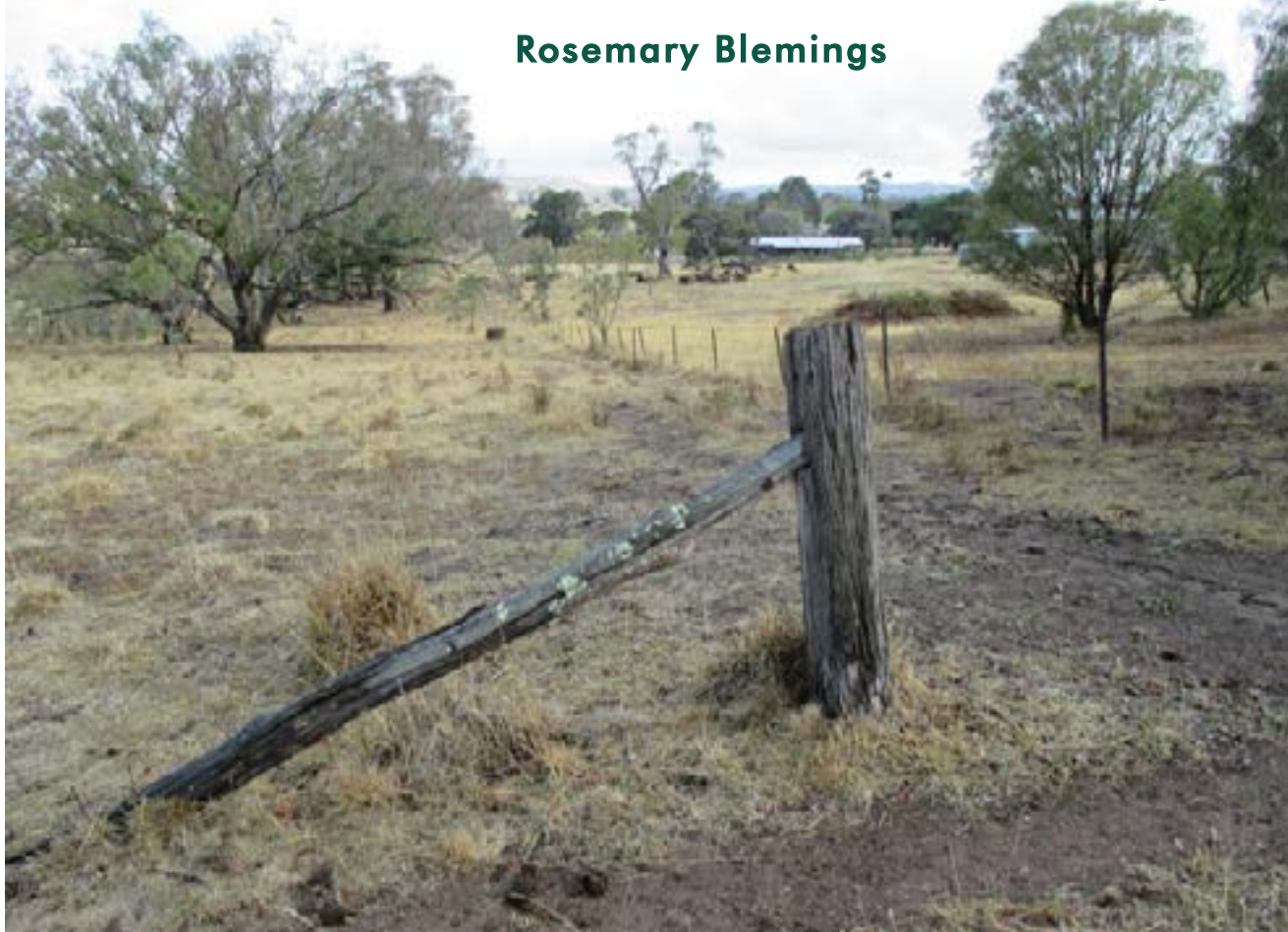
Grateful thanks to you.

Sincerely yours

Bob Lehman, Treasurer; Rosemary von Behrens, President; Tony Lawson, Secretary; Rosemary Blemings, Asst. Secretary; and Dierk von Behrens, Committee Member. (Five relevant signatures were provided.)

# Pause, observe, think, save – consider fence posts

Rosemary Blemings



This lichened strainer and its post may not be as old as I need for my musings but the timber icons have a certain symbolism. Like tombstones they are engraved with messages for the observant and the thoughtful. Its purpose removed by the passage of time, wires long rolled up and recycled, the post is surrounded by drought-desiccated paddock, unpalatable tussocks and the bare tracks erosion caused by cloven hooves.

Perhaps cattle have rubbed against the post's roughness for years leaving a few hairs behind, which birds used to line their nests. Did sheep ever graze in the paddock and leave their softer, longer wool fibres for even more luxurious nest-linings?

In the splits and cracks of the rotting timbers there's ample space for invertebrates and their larvae. Over decades their tunnelling, gnawing and rasping reduces wood to dust that can be blown or

washed away to add nutrients and cellulose to soils. It takes a misty morning of dewdrops to reveal how many spiders have woven intricate webs within cracks and across holes. On the sunny side the webs are rainbow jewels as light shines through the droplets.

Bracken and other fungi play their parts in decaying the posts' timber. The range and intensity of their colours is only surpassed by similar variety in the woodlands and the leaf litter of the forest floor. Fungal enzymes break down timber cells making nutrients available to living plants.

Some posts have hollow centres where decay has created a cylindrical, vertical refuge for lizards or skinks quick enough to scale up a metre of post and disappear from Kookaburras' alert watchfulness. The shaft of each centre is surrounded by annual rings eroded to indistinctness by weathering of the softer tissues.

Chasms of decay, with the shaft as a hollow hub, make spoke-like patterns across surfaces, which were once smoothly, though laboriously cut by hand.

Scarlet robins adopt fence-posts as vantage points for their own style of alert foraging. Watch-dive-grab-return yields insect victims for pairs far too preoccupied with feeding to bother about the presence of admiring people. Willie wagtails perch on the wire waiting for insects to fly past or stir on the ground.

It takes so little rain to resurrect lichens' processes and stimulate the organisms' varied colours. Away from the sun's heat and desiccation the lichens proliferate on the south-facing surfaces. On timber, enzymes from the lichens break down the wood cells releasing nutrients that wash into the soil. Nothing is wasted in nature.

The rustic pastels recall times, before we became besotted with the gaudy, artificial colours of plastic modernity, when dyes were drawn from natural sources including lichens. How could an artist's palette do justice to this diversity? Although their bark has long gone the fence posts show an infinite variety of textures that a sculptor might work for weeks to replicate.

The patterns caused by microcosmic light and shade effects seem like the strata of ancient rocks. Wind, water, frost and heat affect timber and rock similarly though in decades rather than millennia. Some posts show gouged rectangles that were prepared for rails in days predating the availability of wire. Gouged is a disrespectful word given the skill and experience required for creating fences from the timber available to early settlers and farmers.

As chain-saws only came into use after WW2 observations lead to thoughts of the sheer strength and tenacity required of timber-workers and fencers. As we now mourn the destruction of the woodlands shouldn't we also consider the contribution made by eucalypts whose lives were cut short to provide fence posts, rails and strainers for people's enclosures? These trees didn't live long enough to provide hollows, centuries of nourishing nectar or camouflage and shelter from their leaves. They've allowed generations of rural folk to fence for managing stock's grazing and to protect their homesteads.

Whilst pondering the origins of fencing consider that it might be said that fencing stole land as farming began and gave power to usurpers. Enclosure in England took common land from



the people though the barriers were hedges rather than fences. Around the ACT, farms sealed the fate of Indigenous people, excluding them from Country: the grasslands that had supported them for millennia. But, without fencing settlers' young people couldn't attend school as shepherding the family's sheep was more important. Fence-posts, supporting specific wire and mesh types protected families' vegetables and fruits.

As Strathnairn joins other properties in replacing fencing from previous centuries let's hope the posts' timber is revered for links to history and heritage, its beauty, its sculptural forms, its utilitarianism and contribution to our lives for many more decades. It's still too precious to be burnt which, in any case, would unnecessarily add carbon to an already saturated atmosphere.

## Friends of Grasslands

### *'Grass half full or grass half empty? Valuing native grassy landscapes'*

A forum, organised by Friends of Grasslands (FOG) to celebrate grasslands and grassy woodlands — their beauty and complexity, ecology and productivity, science and management.

Thursday 30 October – Saturday 1 November at CSIRO Discovery Centre, ACT

To express interest in attending one, two or all three days, and/or to offer a poster or paper, contact [president@fog.org.au](mailto:president@fog.org.au), or check [www.fog.org.au/forum2014.htm](http://www.fog.org.au/forum2014.htm) for more details.

Month	Speaker	Topic
7 August	AGM Adrienne, Cecelia, David	Cecelia on Kamchatka David on Tassie Shells
4 September	Dr Adam Slipinski	Beetles
2 October	Ken Hodgkinson	Grasslands and their care
6 November	Danswell Starrs	Freshwater fish ecology
4 December	Christmas party	



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 **Phone:** 6254 1763

**Email:** fieldnaturalist@yahoo.com.au

**Website:** under construction

All newsletter contributions welcome.

**Email:** alison.milton@health.gov.au

**Editor**



**Monthly meeting venue:** Division of Botany and Zoology, Building 116, Daley Rd, Australian National University. (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: