

OBJECT: To foster an interest in nature

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GPO BOX 249  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

FIELD NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA INC.

# FIELD NATTER

## MEETING—Thursday 2 August 2018

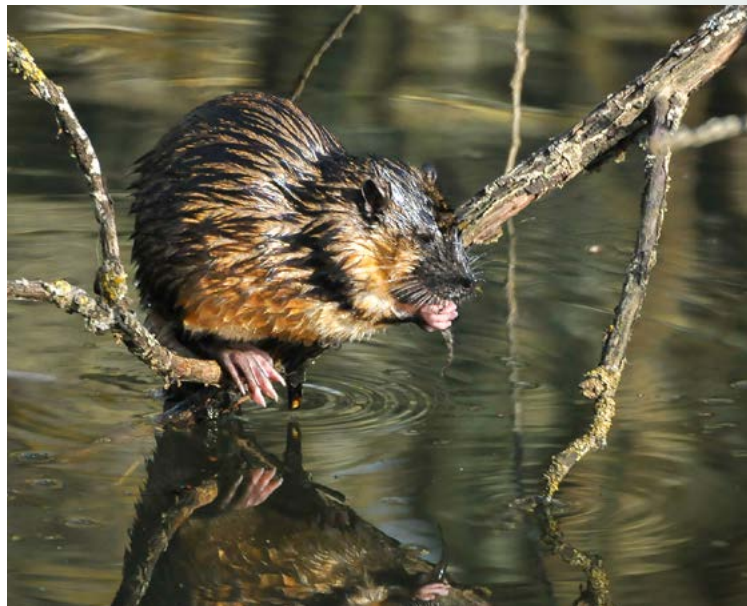
7:00 pm Australian National University

The Slayter Seminar Room, R.N. Robertson Building, Biology Place, ANU, ACT  
details back page

### Launch of survey of the native water rat, Rakali

Speaker: Geoff Williams

The Director of the Australian Platypus Conservancy, Geoff Williams, will present a talk about Rakali. Geoff has been studying platypus and Water-rats since 1994. Before helping to establish the Conservancy, Geoff was Director of Healesville Sanctuary and Assistant Director of Taronga Zoo. The talk will also mark the commencement of the Australian Platypus Conservancy's community based survey of the status and distribution of Rakali in the ACT region over 2018/19. Well-known ACT Parks & Conservation Service Manager Brett McNamara will officially launch this important 'citizen science' project in which FNAC and NPA ACT will be leading partners.



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# Understanding Rakali—Australia’s ‘otter’

The platypus is widely recognised as a uniquely Australian animal. By comparison, relatively few people know that the Australian water-rat (*Hydromys chrysogaster*) is a genuine native rodent that was a natural part of our environment long before its pest cousins - the black rat and brown rat - arrived with the early colonists. The water-rat (also known as rakali) is an extremely attractive mammal. Its thick coat of soft fur, dense whiskers, blunt muzzle, partly webbed hind feet, and furry tail, all help create a resemblance to a miniature otter.



Geoff’s talk will outline the biology and key conservation requirements of the Australian water-rat. He will also include tips on how to go about spotting this fascinating native mammal in the wild with the aim of encouraging more people to look out for and report sightings of the species.

The talk will also mark the official commencement of the Australian Platypus Conservancy’s community based survey of the status and distribution of the water-rat in the ACT region with support from the Norman Wettenhall Foundation. FNAC is a partner in this important ‘citizen science’ project.



As a top predator, the water-rat is a key component of aquatic environments. Currently, the species receives virtually no research attention and little community support. The main outcome of the survey will be the formulation of a practical tool for planning future conservation action by management agencies and environmental groups to help water-rats in the ACT.

The Public are encouraged to report all reliable sightings of water-rats – both past and future. Reporting forms will be available for completion at the talk to record when and where the species was seen (approximate dates can be provided, if necessary). Details of any subsequent sightings over the next year can be reported via the Canberra Nature Map (if accompanied by a photo) or directly to the APC (via email at [platypus.apc@westnet.com.au](mailto:platypus.apc@westnet.com.au) or website at [www.platypus.asn.au](http://www.platypus.asn.au)). All reports will be entered in the Atlas of Living Australia to help planning future conservation action for Rakali by management agencies and environmental groups.

The APC will also organise a number of special Rakali spotting sessions at known ‘hot-spots’ for the species in Canberra in May 2019 and the public will have the opportunity to participate in these events.

### Editor’s note:

I have had a number of sightings of water rats near the skate park at Lake Ginninderra and at the Jerrabomberra Wetlands. However, in recent months I have also sited them at two new (for me) locations at Lake Ginninderra: at the old Water Police jetty near Westfield and at the southern tip of the peninsula.



## Antechinus visitor

I read with interest the story in July FNAC newsletter about antechinus at Mulligan's Flat.

Last weekend (yes, the one when it was  $-6^{\circ}\text{C}$  in Canberra and surrounding areas), I joined my daughter Jocelyn, her children aged 11 and 4 years – seasoned campers all – and a friend of hers with children aged 7 and 4 years, for a weekend at the bush block Jocelyn has a share in. It is 40 hectares of dry sclerophyll forest above the Shoalhaven Valley at Tallong. The block has a one-roomed shack furnished with kitchen and sitting area, a few beds and a combustion heater, along with a separate small ablutions block, a summer gazebo for meals and a large open fireplace, rather stupidly sited many years ago at the base of two eucalypts.

In deference to my advanced years I was allowed to sleep on a bed in the shack rather than in a tent like the others. During the night I heard some scritch-scratch-scratching but was too far buried under my down doona and old ski-club sleeping bag to get out and investigate.

The next day I was cleaning the ablutions area then rejoined the others, only to be told that an antechinus – a dusky Antechinus, I would guess



– had been found in the corner of my cool bag and released without me getting a look at it. I suspect the other family, virgin campers and from South America, took fright at what they must have thought was a mouse.

Antechinus are insectivorous, occasionally eat small lizards, but I do not believe they eat human food. This one was probably seeking a warm nesting place away from the bitter cold outside.

**Maureen Bell**

## Winter feeding for bees



I came across Honeybee activity in this Ash tree in Flynn yesterday (warm sunshine at about 14.00 hrs). So something for ACT For Bees??

I was very surprised to hear and see the bees busy in the leafless tree. (Unreleased seeds-that-spin-down are also visible.) Google suggests the tree is *Fraxinus excelsior*.

Hardly Wild Pollinator Count timing but still fascinating to realise that these unassuming flowers have something to offer the bees in winter.

**Rosemary Blemings**

# The 2018 shortlist for the Environment Award for Children's Literature

Children's books have a profound effect in shaping who we become as grown ups. The stories we read and enjoy as kids, or the ones that are read to us, shape the adventures we take, the way we see the landscapes around us and help to build the foundations of our outlook on life.

The Environment Award for Children's Literature began in 1994 when a group of environmental educators asked the Wilderness Society to work with them to recognise and celebrate beautiful books by Australian authors that help children and others to see the importance of respecting and protecting our unique landscapes. One of those involved at the very beginning was our own Dierk von Behrens.

Previous winners of the Award have included celebrated and much-loved Australian writers such as Tim Winton, Colin Thiele, Wendy Orr, Renee Treml, Graeme Base, Jeannie Baker and Jackie French. A love of nature, a sense of curiosity about all things wild and a feeling of caring and responsibility for the environment are themes that are beautifully woven throughout all of the books that have been shortlisted over the years.

This year for the first time ever the Shortlist for the Award was revealed in Canberra. Brian the Bettong from Mulligan's Flat, fresh from his campaign to become the ACT Faunal Emblem, and a marvellous story time featuring books that had previously won the Award, as read by the wonderful storyteller Janine O'Dwyer, were part of a hugely enjoyable event at the Civic Library.

In 2018 11 books have been shortlisted and it is a selection of truly magical books: beautifully

illustrated picture fiction that children will want to turn the pages of over-and-over again; tales of young people who love nature and want to make a difference; and intriguing nonfiction books for exploring young minds.

## The 2018 Environment Award for Children's Literature shortlist

### Fiction:

*Ella Diaries #11 Going Green* by Meredith Costain and Danielle McDonald

*Pippa's Island 1: The Beach Shack Cafe* by Belinda Murrell

*Wombat Warriors* by Samantha Wheeler

### Non-fiction:

*A Is For Australian Animals* by Frané Lessac

*Exploring Soils: A Hidden World Underground* by Samantha Grover and Camille Heisler

*Rock Pool Secrets* by Narelle Oliver

*Coral Sea Dreaming: The Picture Book* by Kim Michelle Toft

### Picture fiction:

*Can You Find Me?* by Gordon Winch and Patrick Shirvington

*Tilly's Reef Adventure* by Rhonda N Garward

*Fluke* by Lesley Gibbes and Michelle Dawson

*Florette* by Anna Walker

The winner will be announced in October. In the meantime happy reading!



## Reflection-attacking bird species

There has been a lot of chatter on the COG Chatline over the past few days on bird species that have been observed attacking their reflections. The following is the latest list of such birds.

Spotted Pardalote (car mirror)

Crested Shrike-tit (car window)

Magpie-lark (car mirror and window)

Red Wattlebird (house window)

Noisy Miner (car mirror and window, building window)

Crescent Honeyeater (house window)

Brown Thornbill (car window)

White-faced Heron (building window)

Crested Pigeon (house window)

Eastern Yellow Robin (house window)

Buff-rumped Thornbill

Grey Shrike-thrush (house window)

Flame Robin (car window)

Willie Wagtail

Laughing Kookaburra (house window, car windscreen))

Noisy Friarbird (house window)

Scarlet Robin (car mirror)

Blue-faced Honeyeater (building window, Brisbane)

White-winged Chough and Apostlebird (car windows, mirrors, shiny hubcaps)



*Crested Shrike-tit, Lake Ginniderra: Photo by Lindell Emerton, by permission*

# Retirement: a 12 month review

I retired from full time work just over 12 months ago and it was suggested to me that I might like to write something about this.

While working, we had a 'bus ladies' group who all caught the same bus though our work places varied between Civic, Barton and Woden. We are all now retired, myself being the last of the group, and we all agree that we are now more busy than we ever were while working, for varying reasons.

For myself, it has meant that I have been able to spend more time indulging in some volunteer work and in a long term passion for photography.

I now make regular visits to the botanic gardens and Jerabomberra wetlands, but I also try to visit other nature reserves I've not previously visited. With more time at my disposal I became a lot more involved in posting my sightings to the citizen science web site, Canberra Nature Map. Through this I've learnt to identify birds that I have seen over the years but could not perhaps have named, and I have been ticking off my sightings in the Birds of the ACT booklet.

I have been able to pursue sightings of rare avian visitors to the ACT; to watch the progress of the nesting Collared Sparrowhawks at the botanic gardens, and hopefully the pair of Black-shouldered Kites at the wetlands, that look like breeding there this year—from a distance of course—the beauty of having a long distance camera lens.

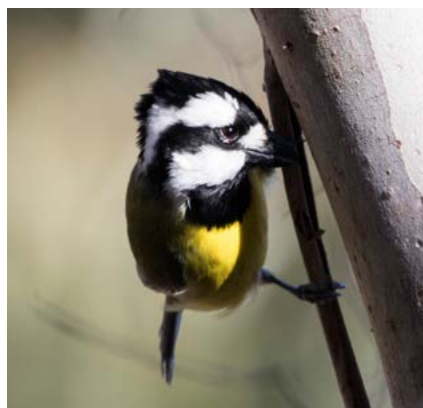
However, birds are not my only passion. I have also become much more aware of the smaller creatures, particularly insects. My garden is a mix of exotic and native plants but I noticed that the Correa plants on my nature

strip were a particular favourite with insects. So during the last Spring/Summer the first thing I did almost every morning was to go out and inspect the plants. It's amazing just how many different insects are in fact resident in our own back yard.

Posting sightings to Canberra Nature Map has definitely increased my knowledge and identification of birds, insects, moths etc and after the photo competition earlier this year, I was encouraged to become a moderator to confirm sightings in the beetles category, to which I eventually agreed, and this has continued to increase my knowledge and recognition.

With an increased observation of nature, has also come an increased observation of behaviour. For example, instead of just seeing caterpillars on my plants, I have sometimes collected them and watched while they transformed into various

*Some of my recent sightings have been the Crested Shrike-tit at Lake Ginniderra and two Bassian Thrushes at the botanic gardens*



*I've also observed cormorants catching fish or yabbies (with seagulls swooping trying to steal their prey)*

moths, or with macrophotography, observed the fine detail and colour of very small spiders or insects, and subsequent parasites clinging to them that are not visible to the naked eye. In particular, I hadn't realised just how scarce adult insects become during Winter as they go into their egg stages.

I have also been collecting blue bottle top lids as a gift to the Satin Bowerbird at the botanic gardens. On my recent visits I spotted around a dozen female or young males near the Sydney Gully and down towards where the male built his bower last year. One juvenile male has been cheekily stealing blue object from 'dad's' bower, then being pursued for their return. I learned last year that I can leave a blue lid near the bower, then wait while he comes out to retrieve to get my photos.

It has been a wondrous and eye-opening experience, which I hope to expand upon in coming years.

**Alison Milton**

# Two new peacock spiders identified in Western Australia

Sun 22 July 2018: Biologist Jürgen Otto and colleagues have named two species of the extraordinarily colourful dancing spiders

It is only a few millimetres in size, performs a dance as part of a courtship ritual and has striking coloured markings on its back that “look like a pharaoh’s headdress”.

But when biologist Jürgen Otto first spotted the peacock spider species he has named *Maratus unicip*, he didn’t immediately recognise how special it was.

“I didn’t think much of it because I’m partially colour blind,” he says. “But there was quite a reaction to photographs of it on the Internet, with people saying it’s beautiful.”

*Maratus unicip* is one of two new peacock spider species Otto and his colleague David Hill have named in a new paper published in the international spider journal *Peckhamia*.

Otto discovered the spider near Lake Unicip in Western Australia last year. He said the new species was notable for its courtship display in which the male dances – swinging its abdomen from side to side – while the female watches from a close distance.

The second species they have named *Maratus tortus* and was discovered by environmental consultant and educator David Knowles in 1994 near Walpole in Western Australia.

Knowles and Otto have returned to the site several times and were finally able to capture specimens of the spider last year.

Knowles had originally nicknamed the species ‘hokey pokey’ because of the male’s curious twisting dance.

“There’s no other peacock spider that has this kind of a display,” Otto said. “It looks almost like a Spanish bullfight, where the female is the bull and the male is the bullfighter.”

In the new paper, Otto and Hill say there are now 70 species of peacock spiders, the majority of which have been named by them during the past seven years.

Otto publishes images and videos of the spiders he finds on his website and on his Facebook and YouTube pages. Most of the spiders are found in Western Australia or south-eastern Australia. But they can be elusive.

“I tend to find them less common in bright sunshine. The best times of the day are in the morning and afternoon,” he said.



*Maratus unicip*, which was discovered by Jürgen Otto in October 2017. Photograph: Jürgen Otto

## Local Peacock spider man

While Jürgen Otto is seen as the Peacock Spider man, Canberra has its own local ‘expert’. Stuart Harris has discovered a few new species of his own, and one new genus.

Stuart recently spoke to the botanic gardens photography group about his discoveries and gave advice on where and how to find them.

Inspired by his talk and armed with his advice, I’m hoping to discover a few of my own this coming Summer; maybe not a new species, but interesting nonetheless.

**Alison Milton**

## Activities

### Black Mountain Symposium 2018. 24 August in the Discovery Theatre at CSIRO

The symposium is covering everything we've been able to find out about Black Mountain relating to its cultural history and values as well as its biophysical values. A series of background papers is being written for the symposium to underpin the presentations; some of the cultural papers/presentations are likely to be of particular interest to Canberra ICOMOS members (see second half of the attached list) and we'd love to see them at the event.

People can register for the symposium via the Eventbrite link at <http://www.friendsofblackmountain.org.au/SymposiumRegister>

## Eastern grey kangaroos in urban open spaces

There has been some discussion recently about eastern grey kangaroos being sighted in small urban open spaces where not previously seen. This prompted the following comments.

Historic accounts say the Limestone Plains (to the east of the Murrumbidgee) were kangaroo-free in the 1950s due to shooting. It is said that the owner of Bulga Creek sparked local interest by forbidding the shooting of 5 or 6 kangaroos that arrived on his property from west of the river; the only places there were kangaroos to shoot for dog food were on the west side of the river, but even there they were sparse by current standards. For example, in 1963, the first three kangaroos were seen in the new Tidbinbilla Fauna Reserve, according to the late Mick McMahon, whose account is backed by Department of Territories file records about proposals to sow lucerne crops and deploy salt blocks to attract some kangaroos in time for the public opening of the reserve.

By 1975, eastern grey were already present on Black Mt and Mts Ainslie–Majura. In 1976 six eastern greys arrived at Mt Taylor and numbers

grew over the next few years. Now they are widespread and abundant in Canberra Nature Parks and Wallaroos have become widespread.

About 5–8 years ago the first wallaroos colonised Mt Taylor in spite of hundreds of eastern greys present. There are small numbers of Wallaroos now in most of the larger units of Canberra Nature Parks but few people recognise the females.

An interesting question for the next 20–30 years is what will be the smallest grassy urban open space that can sustain a small permanent population of eastern grey kangaroos?

It is estimated that 13,500 motor vehicle collisions with kangaroos occur per year in the ACT, based on a random phone poll commissioned in 2015 by Parks and Conservation, which asked licenced drivers if they were driving a car that collided with a kangaroo in the last two years. The poll (available online at [http://www.environment.act.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0017/902402/Report-ACT-Government-Kangaroo-Culling-Study-June-2015.pdf](http://www.environment.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/902402/Report-ACT-Government-Kangaroo-Culling-Study-June-2015.pdf)) also asked

related questions including about whether passengers were injured and whether the collision was reported. The majority of collisions are not reported to police, insurers or rangers, which is one of the reasons why the estimates from those sources are lower (2,000 to 6,000 per year).

The rate of collisions per vehicle per year has been increasing slowly for decades. The kangaroo populations suggests that the collision rate per vehicle-year will continue to rise for many more years, and not only in the ACT, but in a region of NSW from Goulburn to Yass to Cooma. The cessation of shooting of female kangaroos in NSW a few years ago by the kangaroo industry may increase the likelihood of that outcome.

For Con's benefit, a list of hot spots for kangaroo motor vehicle collisions (based on ranger attendances per kilometre of road) can be found in the ACT Controlled Native Species Management Plan for EGKs. As I recall, Fairbairn Ave was the leader at the time the figures were collated, but you are right about Monaro Hwy. It was one of the extremely high locations too.



# AGM nomination form

## Notice of annual general meeting

Members are asked to think about volunteering for the committee or suggesting how they could help the Field Nats.

**NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN TO ALL MEMBERS THAT THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of the Field Naturalists Association of Canberra will be held on Thursday 6 September 2018 at 7.30 pm** in the Jan Anderson Seminar Room, R.N. Robertson Building, Biology Place, Australian National University, ANU.

**Business:**

- a. To confirm the minutes of the last preceding annual general meeting.
- b. To receive from the committee, auditor, and servants of the Association reports upon the transactions of the Association during the last 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 (see below) and shall be delivered to an officer of the Association by Thursday 2 August 2018. 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**

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 \_\_\_\_\_



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

**Email:** [fieldnaturalist@yahoo.com.au](mailto:fieldnaturalist@yahoo.com.au)

**Website:** under construction

**Editor:** Alison Milton All newsletter contributions welcome. **Email:** [apm56@optusnet.com.au](mailto:apm56@optusnet.com.au)



**Monthly meeting venue:** Jan Anderson Seminar Room, R.N. Robertson Building, Biology Place, Australian National University.

**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: