

# Field Natter

## Newsletter of Field Naturalists Club of Canberra



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

### Christmas meeting Thursday December 6 at 6:30 pm

**INSIDE THIS ISSUE:**

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### EXCURSION REPORT NOVEMBER 4, HALL

Christian and Benj arranged the November excursion to a small, but great site in Hall with many flowers still in bloom and some good bird sightings.

Sybil Free kept a non-inclusive list and a number of us took photographs.

On Sybil's list were:

Reptile- bearded dragon. Insect— Robber fly

Birds - Dollarbird, Yellow rump thornbill, Rufous whistler, Noisy friar bird, Sacred kingfisher, Pardalote, Crimson rosella, Currawong, leaden flycatcher, gerygone

Plants - Chrysocephalum, Fringe Lily, Bluebell, Brachyloma daphnoides (Daphne heath), Exocarpus (Cherry Ballart), Astraloma, Dillwinia sericea, Pimelia curviflora, Hibbertia, Orchid (Thelymetra?), Red anther wallaby grass, Trigger plant (Stylidium armeria), Goodenia, Diuris sulphurea (Donkey orchid), Dodonea viscosa and Gompholobium huegulinii. (more photos 3)

Not exhaustive by any means, just those Sybil jotted down.



# OUTINGS

## Field trip- Brindabellas- an introduction. Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> December

This month we will visit the Brindabella range. We will meet at the Australian Federal Police station in Weston on the corner of Unwin Pl and Streeton Dr at 10am and then car pool from there. Although not essential, 4WD vehicles are preferable as the dirt road can be rough and slippery when wet. Then we will drive up Brindabella Rd (40 minutes), take note of the changing vegetation, from lowland grassy woodland, through tall forests, into snowgum forest and right at the top of the Brindabella Range at Piccadilly Circus we will stop at a small alpine grassland. Driving along the top of the range (the top of Australia) we will have views of the mountain ranges to the East and West, with a quick stop at Bulls head for great views, then head on to the end point at Mt Ginini (1762m) where we can have lunch. This is a good spot for snowgums, alpine heath and grassland. On the way back we will stop off at Franklin chalet, one of the alpine huts, where we can do a quick walk for flowers and discuss human history in the mountains. If the flowers are no good we may do a quick detour into the Brindabellas in NSW. Otherwise we will head back to Canberra and should be back by 5pm. Things to bring include good walking shoes, wet weather gear and warm clothing (as it is always a lot colder than in Canberra and the weather can change quickly), suncream, hat, camera (for views), ID books. The sites selected for walking are 'easy', but those more adventurous can also take more difficult walks. For further information, contact Benj Whitworth on 62544 556. **Please note the different day (Saturday).**

**Benj Whitworth on 62544 556.**

## Australia Day Long Weekend - update

We have a good number of members booked onto the Kangaroo Valley weekend away but there are still places left. Further details can be found in last month's newsletter. Alternatively, you can talk to Paula at the December meeting or call her on 0428 654 044.

Our Treasurer, Bob, is handling the money for this trip. Accommodation for Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> and Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> January costs \$60 per person. If you are not able to pay at the December meeting, please send

your cheque (with an explanatory note) to Bob by December 7<sup>th</sup>. Cheques should be made payable to "Field Naturalists Assoc. of Canberra" and posted to GPO Box 249, Canberra ACT 2601.

For those of you coming on this trip, Paula will coordinate car-pooling and provide you with further information in the new year (including directions).

## Volunteer Interpreters needed at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve

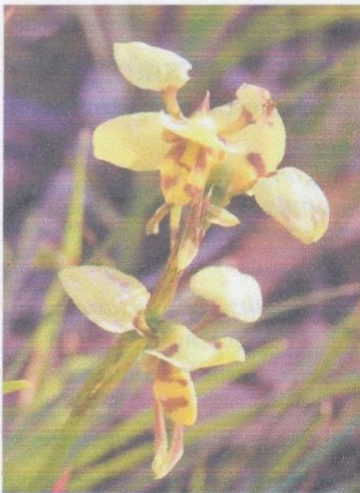
Many FNAC members will be aware that the wetlands area at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve (TNR) has been closed for several months. The redeveloped area will be opening at the Tidbinbilla Extravaganza on March 30<sup>th</sup> 2008 and will provide new opportunities for visitor experience and education. The ACT Government has formed a partnership with Conservation Volunteers Australia to introduce a Volunteer Interpreter Program at the Reserve. Under this Program, trained volunteers will be positioned at interpretation stations along trails in the new wetland area, offering informal education to visitors. From July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008, CVA will also manage the TNR Visitor Centre and Volunteer Interpreter duties will extend to the Visitor Centre.

Volunteer Interpreters will help visitors to better understand and appreciate the natural world. They will have a chance to develop their own knowledge and to share this with others. A uniform and travel allowance will be provided, as well as a range of benefits to recognise and reward their commitment including a formal qualification, discounts and social events. Anyone 18 years and over can apply to join the Program but good communication skills and spare time will be essential. Volunteer Interpreters are asked to make a two-year commitment, to spend at least 144 hours per year volunteering and to regularly participate in training. The initial training will take place over a six-week period during February and March and will be delivered by experts, including TNR staff. There will be quizzes and assessments and a final exam but the aim is to provide applicants with the skills and knowledge to pass these and graduate as a Volunteer Interpreter. Upon successful completion of the initial training, graduates will receive their uniform and badge and can begin volunteering.



FNAC member, Paula Banks, is the Volunteer Manager for this exciting new Program. Anyone interested in becoming a Volunteer Interpreter is encouraged to attend an Information Session - these will be held regularly until the end of January. Call Paula on (02) 6247 7770 or email [vip@conservationvolunteers.com.au](mailto:vip@conservationvolunteers.com.au) for details. Be quick - applications for the first intake will close on February 1<sup>st</sup> and places are limited. Whether you want an active role or just to visit, Paula hopes to see you all out there!

Paula Banks



From the November excursion ;  
donkey orchid; robber fly and  
fringed lillies



## Species of the Month— Benj Whitworth

### Bogong Moth (*Agrotis infusa*) Noctuidae

#### Description

See photo. Medium sized brown-grey moth (2.5-4cm) with dark spots on wings.

#### Life cycle

**Mating and laying:** In general the moths mate and lay eggs (up to 2000) in Autumn on the slopes and plains mainly of Victoria, NSW and Southern Queensland (1, 3). The eggs hatch in June (4).



**Caterpillars:** The caterpillars grow slowly over winter, feeding by cutting stems and seedlings mainly of broad-leaved plants (2, 3) at ground level (1) and eating underground, and this has given them the alternative name of 'cutworms'. This characteristic means they are considered a pest by farmers, particularly by cotton growers (3).

**Moths and migration:** In late winter/spring the caterpillars pupate in the ground and moult into moths. A small proportion of moths gain sexual maturity and stay in the region of birth, often having multiple generations over the warmer months (3). The moths feed on nectar (1). However, most moths don't attain sexual maturity and migrate to the SE highlands to aestivate through the summer, in caves and crevices at about 1200 metres (1,4). This is quite an amazing achievement for such a small species, to migrate over long distances and in such huge numbers. The migration path also brings the moths into contact with major human populations, primarily Canberra, but they can be blown off course to Sydney (this year) and Newcastle (in the past) (3,4). In fact in 1988, when new Parliament House was opened, the moths found the new building ideal as a stop over point in their migration, becoming quite a problem for cleaners, staff and politicians. This led to a number of

strategies to reduce their impact, such as turning-off lights, mesh over vents, spraying (which has discontinued due to chemical residue bio-accumulation), and employing cleaners (see 3).

#### Uses

Local aboriginals used to congregate in their hundreds (up to 500) for collection of Bogong moths and this event was important ceremonially with corroborees and initiation rituals (4). The moths were found clustered like roof tiles in caves and crevices at the top of mountains, and they were scraped off the walls with a stick into a bark coolamon (carrying dish) or net made from Pimelia or Kurrajong fibre (4). They were then roasted quickly on a hot rock and either eaten right away or mashed and turned into a moth 'cake' to be eaten later (4). Early settlers recorded that after weeks eating the moths the aboriginals looked fat and their skin 'shone' as the moths contain up to 20% fat and 27% protein (4), important for their migration (1).

Predators include bats, pygmy possums, currawongs, ravens and foxes (3, 4).

#### Status, threats and impacts

Common, although may be adversely impacted by climate change. Considering the importance of this species to farmers and the cost of ensuring the moths don't impact on humans during their migration, I am surprised by how little is known about this species and how little is on the web. For example: distribution (based on 1950s research), how they migrate, where they migrate from and to (especially WA), bio-accumulation of pesticides and arsenic, what triggers sexual development, all seem poorly understood or based on conjecture. The information in the references seems to vary for no apparent reason, so I have taken my best guess.

#### References

- 1 ANIC (2006) *Bogong moths Fact sheet*. CSIRO, Canberra, Website- <http://www.csiro.au/resources/ps1qn.html>, Updated 15/05/06.
- 2 Australian Museum (2003) *Bogong moth factsheet*, Australian Museum, Website [http://www.amonline.net.au/factsheets/bogong\\_moths.htm](http://www.amonline.net.au/factsheets/bogong_moths.htm), Updated 2003, Accessed 19/11/07
- 3 McCormick, W (2006) *Bogong moths and Parliament House*, Research Brief no.6 2006-07, Science, Technology, Environment and Resources Section, Parliamentary Library, Canberra.
- 4 Flood, J. (1996) *Moth hunters of the ACT: Aboriginal traditional life in the Canberra region*, Flood, Canberra.

## THE BLACK AND WHITE OF IT

by Kay Hahne, October 2007

Have you ever wondered why there is a White Rhino and a Black Rhino, when to my eyes and probably yours too, both beasts are shades of grey? Did you even realise there were two different species of rhinoceros? During our last two visits to southern Africa we were privileged to see Black Rhinoceros

*Diceros bicornis* at the Etosha Pan in Namibia in August 2005 and White Rhinoceros *Ceratotherium simum* in South Africa and Zimbabwe in September 2007



So where does the black and white come in? The story goes like this: the White Rhino has a broad, square, wide mouth. The Afrikaans word for "wide" sounded like "white" to the English speakers, and thus the name White Rhino stuck. To differentiate between the two species – and you will note that they are in two separate genera as well – the other one was called Black. Now there is logic for you, two grey mammals called black and white!

The wide, straight-edged upper lip of the White Rhino is suited to cropping short grass (to within 1 cm of the ground), thus it is a grazer. However, the Black Rhino has a triangular upper lip which is slightly prehensile and hooked over the lower lip. This is ideal for grasping leaves and twigs of shrubs

and small trees. Thus it is a browser, and is sometimes called the Hook-lipped Rhino. Even in the distance you may be able to tell which species it is by position of the head: down to the ground eating grass, or lifted a bit as it grabs twigs. The Afrikaans name for the White is "Witrenoster" and the Black is called "Swartrenoster".

Both have two horns, a long front one on top of the nose tip, and a much shorter one back of it and above the small

eyes. It is not a good idea to be on foot and come face to face with a Black, as they are much more aggressive than the White and may even charge vehicles! The Black may be smaller, only 1.6 m at the shoulder and 800-1100 kg, but it is much more dangerous than the larger White. The White stands 1.7-1.8 m at the shoulder and males weigh up to 2200 kg. They are generally much milder mannered and are quite sociable, living in family groups. But both species have a lot of weight to throw around if provoked!

Unfortunately poaching of these magnificent beasts in the past has reduced numbers. Poaching is not quite so rampant these days, as awareness has grown and animals were transported to protected reserves, but still illegal activity persists in some areas. The White Rhino has steadily increased so that Kruger National Park had a popu-

lation of 8,000 in 2006.

The horn is used in some countries as a fever-suppressant, an aphrodisiac, or for ornamental dagger handles.

You probably can not guess what is somewhat related to rhinoceros. No, not hippos or elephants, but Zebras are in the same Order Perissodactyla. So now you have some new Trivia questions and answers!

### References:

- Caulton, Mark & Jean. 2007. Oral communication from our Pelican Safaris tour leaders.
- Skinner, John with illustrations by Penny Meakin. Revised 1999. *Struik Pocket Guide: Mammals of Southern Africa*, Struik, Cape Town.

### AGM: ELECTION OF OFFICE-BEARERS 2007-2008

- President: Benj Whitworth  
 Vice President: Chris Bunn  
 Treasurer: Bob Lehman  
 Assistant Treasurer: Paula Banks  
 Secretary: Rosemary Blemings  
 Public Officer: Chris Bunn  
 Committee Members: Philip Bell  
 George Heinsohn  
 Paula Banks  
 Janet Edstein  
 Margaret Kalms  
 Newsletter Editor: Chris Bunn  
 Conservation Council Representatives: Tony Lawson  
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 George Heinsohn  
 Speakers organiser:  
 Outings co-ordinator: Sylvia Sampson  
 Raffle organiser: Pam Fenning  
 Tea & Coffee organiser: Janet Edstein, Pam Fenning



## Field Naturalists' 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 w 6272 3192 h 62544556

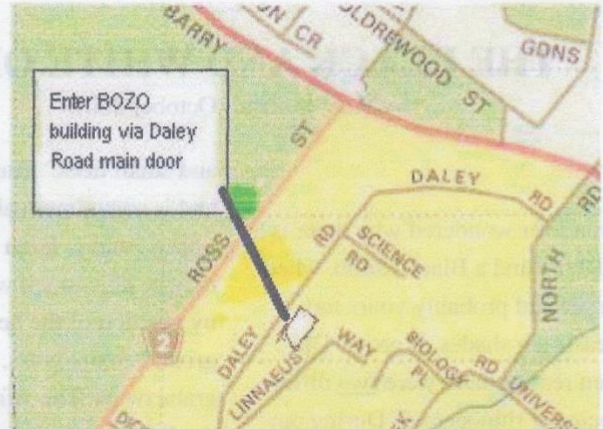
**Secretary:** Rosemary Blemings, tel 02 6258 4724

**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.

Published and distributed by Philip Bell



**Monthly meeting venue:** Division of Botany and Zoology, Building 116, Daley Rd, Australian National University. Park (occasionally the adjacent building 44). 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: