

OBJECT: To foster an interest in nature

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GPO BOX 249  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

FIELD NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA INC.

# FIELD NATURALIST

## MEETING—THURSDAY 7 December 2017

7:30 pm Australian National University

Gould Seminar Room, Building 116, Daley Road, ANU, ACT

details back page

## FNAC Christmas party

**Please note the change of venue and earlier start time of 6:00 pm**

Old Seminar Room - Tea Room off Linnaeus Way, ANU. FNAC Xmas parties are BYO everything, bring food to share and if someone would please bring a tablecloth or three that would be great. Please be prepared to take home all empties, rubbish, food scraps. (In other words leave the area as we found it!)



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## Campaign to ban platypus death-traps; further updates

The September and October newsletters contained articles on the need to ban opera house style yabby traps; a campaign on which Lucy has been very active. The following correspondence between Mick Gentleman and Geoff Williams of the Australian Platypus Conservancy, are reprinted with the permission of Geoff. Thanks should also go to Lucy for her tireless efforts on this worthy issue.

*Letter from Mick Gentleman MLA, Member for Brindabella, to Mr Geoff Williams, Australian Platypus Conservancy*

Dear Mr Williams

Thank you for your email of 1 August 2017 regarding the use of yabby traps in the ACT.

The ACT Government recognises that yabby traps are the cause of unintended deaths of species other than the target species and the use of these traps is prohibited in all ACT public waters. While they are allowed to be used in private waters (e.g. farm dams) it is actually an offence in the ACT to be in possession or use any enclosed yabby trap in or beside public waters.

In order to raise awareness of the dangers to wildlife, the ACT Government uses every opportunity to educate the public about the illegalities of the use of these traps. We have called on retailers to display an education flyer at the point of display. Many of the smaller retailers removed the items from sale once they understood that the use of these traps is a real threat to non-target animals.

The ACT is not a member of the Australian Fisheries Management Forum as we are a small land locked jurisdiction. However, we would fully support any recommendation that resulted in the reduction of death of platypus and other non-target native species. I understand that before NSW can make this change they need to undertake public consultation, which they are planning to do.

While the use of the traps is illegal, the fact that the sale of the traps can still occur is the main issue.

As a small jurisdiction surrounded by NSW, we would support a national solution as 'going it alone' is unlikely to reduce the use of these items.

Thank you for raising this matter with me. I trust this information is of assistance.

Mick Gentleman MLA  
Minister for the Environment and Heritage

*Geoff William's response to the Letter from Mick Gentleman MLA*

Dear Minister,

Thank you for your letter of 24 August 2017 (ref: 17/21748). Your thoughtful and considered response on this issue is much appreciated and is a welcome change to the pro forma replies typically issued by some ministerial offices.

However, I would still make the following points:

1. Current ACT policy as outlined in your letter – i.e. prohibition of enclosed yabby traps in public waters and community education – clearly is not addressing the problem effectively, given that reports of non-target wildlife dying in yabby traps continue to occur quite frequently.
2. A complete ban on enclosed traps in all ACT waters (both public and private) is the only solution that directly and completely resolves the key problem: i.e. the widespread confusion as to where traps can and cannot be legally deployed.
3. A decisive solution would clearly be popular: most ACT citizens do not approve of platypus being killed unnecessarily and even peak recreational angling bodies (in both NSW and Victoria) now support a total ban on use of opera house traps. The only sector of the ACT community that might in theory be opposed – the relatively small number of people who own private farm dams and therefore can use enclosed traps legally – will still have access to safe alternative techniques for yabbing.
4. The fact that the ACT is a "small jurisdiction surrounded by NSW" is no reason for failing to do the right thing. The implementation of an immediate total ban would be good policy for the ACT in its own right and would set a shining example for other jurisdictions.

Failing this, we suggest that the ACT should publicly announce its in principle support for complementary action to match any decision by NSW to introduce a complete ban following the forthcoming consultative process in that state. Ideally, relevant ACT managers should now liaise with their counterparts in NSW Fisheries to ensure that future restrictions on trap usage are consistent across the two jurisdictions in terms of practical detail and timing.

Again, I hope that as Minister you will act to address this most shameful and unnecessary problem once and for all in the ACT.

Many thanks for your continued attention to this matter.

Best wishes, Geoff Williams OAM (Director), Australian Platypus Conservancy

## Caring for land, caring about land: an anecdotal six-pack

1. On 7 September Martin Royds showed how they'd reversed the decline of their Braidwood property by reading the landscape, learning about each of their animals, restoring water flow across the property to rehydrate soils, rejecting set grazing methods, studying Indigenous and others' holistic land management and letting nature heal herself after four generations of unsuitable farming methods.
2. On 5 October Jennie Curtis took us on their ten year journey towards healing their 7 trees and 25 acres of degraded paddock at Bywong. With cooperative neighbours they fenced stock out of the creek creating a chain of ponds, planted shelter-belts and mixed-storey boundary vegetation, developed a native grassland garden and a very productive market garden.
3. Alex James teamed up with Jennie to bring us the story behind the region's Small Farm Network. Practical farming techniques, workshops, animal husbandry, demonstration events, farm visits, weeds identification and management are offered to those with hobby farms, small farms and other niche acreages. This has the effect of bringing contemporary agriculture to newcomers and building communities of caring country people.
4. Charles Massy's Call of the Reed Warbler was launched in October. Charlie brings together accounts of farmland rehabilitation, the development of regenerative farming practices around Australia and from examples world-wide. He explains how thousands of landholders are increasingly avoiding the use of artificial fertilisers and herbicides through respectful, biological management of grazing animals and allowing natural processes to restore fertility, soil-health and resilience.
5. On Tuesday 24 October there was a demonstration at ANU in protest at hundreds of truck journeys reaching a property in Oakey Creek Road, Wallaroo, NSW and within the Murrumbidgee River corridor. A score of irate landholders had had enough of materials from the ACT entering and being dumped in their neighbourhoods. This is one instance of inappropriate land use that is slipping through the cracks of jurisdictions' regulations and responsibilities for water supplies and quality. Anger is brewing amongst those who care for land over planning regulations relating to NSW land around the edge of the ACT.
6. I recently read an article from *The New Internationalist* entitled Automating the farm: self driving tractors and the internet of cows – welcome to the world of precision agriculture. Machinery use, the application of fertiliser, herbicides, fungicides and water are all responses from data collected by drones and robots. Whereas the landcarers mentioned above thrive on knowing their land, understanding water, plants and animals these US farmers will escalate the treatment of their vast acreages as a commodity.

**Rosemary Blemings**

## Gulf of Carpentaria mangrove die off

*Apologies to Bill Murray. I just came across this hand-written piece he gave me back in August(?), which must have gotten lost.*

Because mangroves are critical habitat for many important commercial species, the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries is spending \$95,000 on mapping and analysis of the large scale mangrove die back in the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Dieback between Karumba and Burketown is one of the most significant ever recorded. There

has also been large scale mangrove deaths on the Northern Territory side of the gulf.

It has been noted that the dieoffs occurred at the same time as the mass bleaching event on the Great Barrier Reef.

So is this related or just coincidence.

**Bill Murray**

*Source: Nautilus Magazine August 2017*

Month	Speaker	Topic
7 December		Xmas party



# A very different, successful meeting: FNAC's November BYO

Thank you to the 18 loyal and engaged FNAC members who accepted the challenge of November's BYO meeting when our speaker gave notice of "not being ready". We had several apologies including Jenni's and Maureen's.

Congratulations on creating your own meeting so smoothly and engagingly by bringing curiosity, perceptive questions and appreciation of our presenters' efforts.

Dierk and Rosemary had supper all set up. Rosemary vB cajoled the technology into accepting a range of inputs with Alison's assistance.

Bob efficiently circulated the latest in members' lists and financial statements.

Helen was on hand with a welcoming smile.

Pam sorted out the prizes, including Margaret's fresh herbs and organised the ticket sales in her inimitable and financially beneficial way.

Adrienne again brought the range of NPA publications. Perhaps we were tempted into being ready for Christmas giving.

Margaret promoted Peter Dombrovskis' exhibition at the National Library as an absolute must for everyone, especially those who treasure Australian habitats.

Dierk, George, Jorge, Bill and Vicky were foremost in providing insightful comments, anecdotes and stimulating questions to enhance each presentation.

Alison followed on from the ANBG wildlife she's included in the *Field Natter* by bringing recent photos of Gang-Gang Cockatoos, an Owllet Nightjar, Wattle blooms and the Tawny Frogmouth family many have been following. Even more special were her cautious encounters with Eastern Brown snakes, the Scarlet Honeyeaters who graced the ACT with Grevillea-foraging this Sprummer and the delightful sequence "Can Echidnas climb walls?"

Adrienne showed a suite of photos of the amazing Pasture Day Moth caterpillars digging their pupal tunnels into rock-hard, compacted soil. The soil was on the edge of a bush trail. How does something as soft as a caterpillar gouge these pencil-diameter holes, bringing grains of substrate one by one to the surface?

We were also introduced to the Tailed-Emperor butterfly's caterpillar. It had

laid eggs on a Kurrajong leaf. Search Tailed-Emperor images and you'll see the extraordinary creature Adrienne showed us...a monster straight from the movies but in miniature.

Kevin brought us up to date on the NPA's publishing efforts. He and Sonja foreshadowed a new book on Rosenbergs Monitors in the ACT. Mt Ainslie's goannas have been in the news again. Matthew Higgins has wonderful images but what is happening to these magnificent reptiles in Namadgi and other wild places? Surveys that NPA is involved with may bring some answers about the species' distribution and habits locally.

Lauren followed on from her photographs in the *Field Natter* by showing us more images of the minute Peacock Spiders she had found, studied and photographed. Her short video was a highlight, celebrating the achievements from citizen scientists' persistence in observing tiny jewels whilst increasing our knowledge of the world of invertebrates.

Lucy updated us on the campaign against the cheap 'opera-house' yabby traps that kill hundreds of platypus, water rats and turtles each year. Lucy read out a strongly-worded letter from Geoff Williams of the Australian Platypus Conservancy to Minister Gentleman. It's clear that the Minister's response was purely, bureaucratically wishy-washy and bore no relation to the significance of the threat to such uniquely Australian and iconic animals. Geoff will be speaking at Field Nats in August 2018. We agreed to move the AGM to accommodate such an important guest's presentation.

Lucy brought us culture by reading a poem by Roland Robinson (1912–1992) called *The Tea-tree and the Lyre-bird*.

Rhian introduced us to the amazing work of Levon Bliss in the U.K. He had access to specimens in the Museum of Natural History's invertebrates collection. By showing a short video of Levon's Ted Talk, we were taken into the intriguing and stunning world of micro-photography. Enlargements that technology makes possible brought out incredible colours and the textural diversity of the animals' exoskeletons. The magnified and printed images of these mini-beasts create new art forms and the ultimate in wonder for those who've seen them. Search through [microsculpture.net](http://microsculpture.net) and be 'blown away'!!

Rosemary vB gave an account of the prize-giving at Belconnen Library. Students assembled there to meet

Jackie French and receive prizes organised by the ACT Children's Book Council. Our interest came through Rhian organising the inaugural Bettong Prize for the Best Australian Nature Storybook, sponsored by the Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra, for a book that promotes understanding of natural history.

Rosemary contributed photographic studies of a long-fallen *Eucalyptus blakeleyi* in Aranda Bushland. The images showed the effects of erosion exposing the tortured roots as soil gradually washed away. Diverse colonies of plants and animals took advantage of the spaces created by the fall, establishing new communities and micro-habitats. I couldn't help thinking of the roots' shapes as a natural sculpture and its being very much part of the health of the bush when others only see untidiness or firewood.

We also watched with much delight an echidna searching for food (ants) among the leaf litter at Black Ridge filmed by Rosemary only metres away.

Rosemary B attempted to explain the complex Ginninderra Falls situation in SW NSW and NW of the ACT, off Parkwood Road. Brochures were handed out. They were produced to show that the developers have submitted plans to Yass Valley Council to have the zoning of land near the falls altered so dwellings can be built closer to the falls and Ginninderra Creek than is ecologically sound.

## In addition

In the November newsletter, Rosemary B wrote about the ACT government's the Nature Play Passport, which offers young people the chance to go on missions to discover what occurs in the iconic reserves around the ACT. She raised the suggestion of creating a similar passport, listing of organisms that can be found in backyards and nearby 'pocket-parks' so that Passport owners don't feel they have to go to the suggested reserves Bob and Helen have already successfully adapted the passport idea for their grandchildren to be out and about and observant in their backyards.

Therefore please send suggestions to [rosemary@blemings.org](mailto:rosemary@blemings.org)

Invertebrates, fungi, lichens, fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals, cloud shapes, weather events, water flows, soils, geological marvels ....

**Rosemary Blemings**

# What are we missing?... and more

Once again I have been pursuing rare avian visitors to the ACT. We have had the Scarlet Robin and a few other notable sightings (though due to transport I have not been able to pursue). However, I have been able to locate and photograph the Crimson Chat at Campbell Nature Reserve. This however has led me to several questions. While brightly coloured, the Chat is such a tiny bird I wonder just how much we miss due to size. For example, at the Jerrabomberra Wetlands we see all the usual suspects: pelicans, ducks, moor hens, snipes, etc, but it is only after someone says "Have you seen the Ballion Crake?" and then when looking for it you realise that it is such a tiny bird that you have probably overlooked it.

The same is true of the Crimson Chat. When I first saw it (thanks to another photographer) I was amazed at its tiny size and wondered. If this is the only Crimson Chat at this site (which it seems to be) is it just coincidence that it is so close to the walking track (or are there others further back); how did anyone spot it in the first place; and how do we manage to keep finding it. What else do we miss because of size and that there may only be one around and not conveniently close to a track?



Also, most of those I met were only interested in the Chat and missed the mating Robber Flies; a Robber Fly feasting on a beetle; and more interesting, a pair of mating Robber Flies, but one of them was also feasting on its prey while mating. A fleet of inappropriate thoughts went through my head but perhaps the least offensive was "Seriously, this guy is having a feed while doing the deed?" However, not to be sexist, a Canberra Nature Mapper suggested that it was actually the female having a feed.

From Campbell Park I headed back to the Pinnacle where I had found a Kestrel nest (thanks to previous info from John Brannon), where the Kestrels seem to be catching quite a few snakes to feed to their young. Perhaps at least one has fledged as I saw three birds on Monday; one with a snake with at least one screaming to be given a share. However, they are obviously still feeding young in the nest.

Going back two days later at least one adult is still catching snakes to feed to a chick in the nest.

Moving away from birds there are two large gum trees in a park just behind my house. A couple of the hollows have long been taken over by European Honey Bees. However, this year one of these hollows seems to have so



many bees that they are visible filling the entire entrance of the hive. I'm sure they are about to swarm to find a new hive.

Also, a month or so ago I found a number of mud cocoons in the dead bark on my plum tree. Two cases were broken; one with a dead fully formed Fiddler beetle that had failed to emerge alive; the second with a live larvae. There were also two unbroken casings. I took all inside and checking every few days or so saw that the live larvae continued to mature and transform. Today I checked the larvae with perfect timing. It had completed the metamorphosis and taking it outside to photograph, I witnessed it turn round in the casing and emerge into the world. An amazing experience.



**Alison Milton**

## Nature Art Lab

Nature Art Lab offers participants the opportunity to learn new skills, meet new people and immerse themselves in art inspired by nature. Select a series of courses to suit your interests, and consider developing your foundation skills through a better understanding of colour theory, drawing skills or use of water-based mediums such as watercolour or gouache.

M16 Artspace, 21 Blaxland Crescent, Griffith, Canberra  
<https://www.natureartlab.com.au/>



Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra Inc.

### Who are the Field Naturalists?

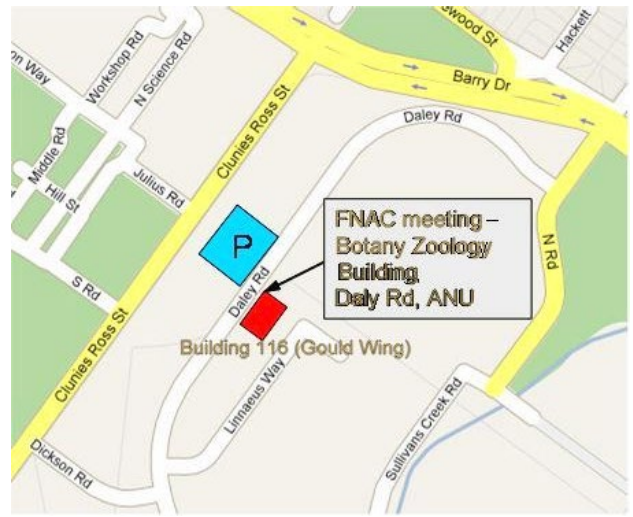
The Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra (FNAC) was formed in 1981. Our aim is to foster interest in natural history by means of meetings and regular field outings. Meetings are usually held on the first Thursday of each month. Outings range from weekend rambles to long weekends away. Activities 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

**Website:** under construction

**Editor:** Alison Milton All newsletter contributions welcome. **Email:** apm56@optusnet.com.au



**Monthly meeting venue:** Division of Botany and Zoology, Building 116, Daley Road, 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: