

December 2018
ISSN: 1836-2761

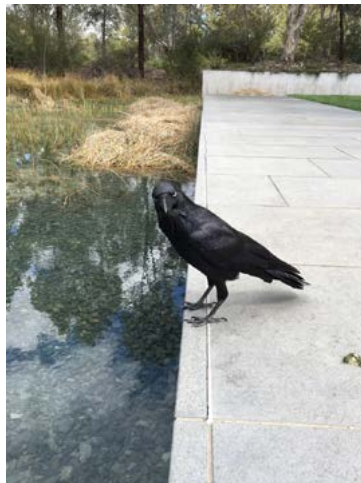


XMAS party—Thursday 6 December 2018
6:30 pm Weston Park picnic area off Pescott Lane, opposite the mini train “Play Station”.

FNAC Christmas party

Please note the change of venue and start time of 6:30 pm

Weston Park picnic area off Pescott Lane, opposite the mini train “Play Station”. See notice inside for further details.



On a recent visit to the National Library this very confident and curious raven was keen to check out the contents of our picnic lunch.

Rhian Williams

Contents

Letter to the Editor: Feeding birds response	2
World’s oldest figurative painting	2
Conservation issues: logging of the Corn Trail	3
Little eagle report	3
Turtle rains	4
National Botanic Gardens activities	5
Homeless possums	6
Activities	7

GPO BOX 249
CANBERRA ACT 2601

FIELD NATURALISTS’ ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA INC.

FIELD NATTER

Letter to the Editor: Feeding birds response

Many thanks for your letters, Bill and Alison

We have until a recent incident, never fed our visiting birds, they seemed to do okay by themselves. In this past long dry winter though we did set up a watering point, the source of much pleasure as birds large and small come to drink and/or bathe. We regularly see flocks of mixed small birds, Silvereyes, honeyeaters, pardalotes, thornbills and wrens, the Red Wattlebird prefers a separate pool near the water tank. We do keep a weather-eye out for cats.

Then one day a pair of King Parrots came to our window sill and asked for a feed. They begged and pleaded through the window until we brought out some sunflower seeds - the first time we had succumbed. They have repeated the pantomime, looking through the window with pleading eyes and squawking (talking) only twice since so it hasn't become a ritual. One time the male stood aside as the female fed but as soon as she had eaten half the seed he headed her off the table and finished the meal. They were relaxed about



our presence just a metre away until all the seed was gone.

We wondered if they visit us only when their normal human fast food provider was away but how did they choose us – we were in the kitchen and hadn't previously been introduced.

A dear elderly friend bemoaned the lack of small birds that had frequented her garden - but a beautiful Spinebill was a regular visitor to her Pincushion Hakea just outside the kitchen window and though we pointed it out she just couldn't see it any more.

Other Aranda residents leave breadcrumbs in the small park nearby or seeds near the bus stop beside a busy road and it is surprising to see that the magpies eat both without threatening the White Cockatoos or Crested Pigeons doing likewise.



Once on a working party with the Gudgenby Bush Regeneration Group we watched a Wedge-tailed Eagle being attacked by a Brown Falcon, several magpies and ravens until it climbed above their comfort zone, we did feel sorry for it.

Kevin McCue and Sonja Lenz

World's oldest figurative painting

The world's "oldest figurative painting" has been discovered in a Borneo cave, with analysis suggesting that the animal drawings are at least 40,000 years old. Three beasts believed to be wild cattle adorn the walls of the Lubang Jeriji Saléh cave in the East Kalimantan province – and they are 4,500 years older than depictions of animals that adorn cave walls on the neighbouring island of

Sulawesi. There is still room for doubt, scientists say, although the work suggests that figurative art may have emerged in south-east Asia and Europe at about the same time, and remained in step when it shifted from depicting animals to the human world.

Guardian 8 November 2018

Conservation issues: logging of the Corn Trail

Inexplicably, the native forests of the south coast continue to be logged, resulting in lost endangered species habitat despite local community opposition. Buckenbowra State Forest was converted to Monga National Park in 2004, as part of the Regional Forest Agreements and surrounds most of the Corn Trail. However, along the southern side of the bottom quarter of the Corn Trail there are two logging compartments. Friends of the Forest (Mogo) is working hard to inform local groups in Braidwood and Canberra about the planned logging of the Corn Trail. The harvest plan has been published for compartment 517 and Forestry have confirmed they will log this in 2019.

An information session will explain issues that arose from the logging of the hills next to the Mogo Tourist village and from these lessons the likely impact of logging next to the Corn Trail.

There'll be plenty of time for questions and campaign ideas from the Braidwood community.

Other local Braidwood people interested in preventing this are welcome to attend and encouraged to bring their own meal or snacks on the night to eat while we hear about this proposal and what we can do.

Braidwood Arts Centre Tuesday 4 December 7:00 pm

If you are not able to come please:

1. Share the attached information and ask our group to give your group a presentation or if you can discuss and act on the issues.
2. To keep up to date please see our Facebook page. You can view the short wildlife video David Gallan created for the campaign that is pinned to the top.
3. Put in your people's choice vote for Dave Gallan's spotted tailed quoll photo taken in Monga National Park near the Corn Trail. In October 2018 the photo won Highly Commended for the prestigious Wildlife Photographer of the Year, Animals in their Environment, Natural History Museum award. <http://www.nhm.ac.uk/.../5311/home-of-the-quoll.html>
4. We are interested in people who want to help survey the logging compartment for rainforest, birds and other species (spotted tailed quolls) and register their sightings as the desktop review needs to be redone soon as it is nearly two years old. We want all the species registered on the bionet.

Little eagle report

The Little Eagle Research Group released information that has led to several recent media items at the links below, the best of which is the first, i.e. the ACT Government entry on its threatened species web page.

Highlights of the released information included:

1. a map of movements of the Black Mt juvenile 'B6' tagged in the nest last December, which has spent a substantial part of the year in the sugar cane fields near Bundaberg, but has recently returned south and spent its first birthday near Leongatha in Victoria;
2. the described movements of four breeding males wearing GPS packs around Canberra; and
3. a new record for the highest number of nests in which an egg has been laid, counted in a single breeding season. The previous record was six last year but has been broken again this year; and
4. delightful video of a chick, including it being fed with small pieces of rabbit.

Little Eagle breeding season is not over, so further adjustment is expected to things like counts of active nests, and described movement behaviour. For obvious reasons the locations of nests are not revealed, only interstate maps are provided.

ACT Government - https://www.environment.act.gov.au/cpr/conservation_and_ecological_communities/threatenedspecieslist/little-eagle

Win News - <https://www.facebook.com/WINNewsCanberra/videos/353211992107430/>

ABC Radio (starts about 40 min in) - <https://www.abc.net.au/radio/canberra/programs/afternoons/afternoons/10471390>

Don Fletcher

Turtle rains

Warm rains from late September through to early December bring the turtles out. They are the Eastern Long Necked turtles – *Chelodina longicollis* – also known as the Eastern Snake Necked turtle. They have spent the winter buried deep in leaves or underneath logs – dormant. Like all who have endured the harsh and bitter time of cold, the warmth and the rains will lure them out and turn their attention to that most ancient and enduring of activities – searching for a mate.

It is indeed an ancient quest for the turtle, for, in some form or another, turtles have been around for over 250 million years. Their ancestors were among the first vertebrates to survive on land in the Jurassic period. Giant turtles ruled the oceans during the Cretaceous period, which began around 145 million years ago. At the same time, flowering plants were racing to colonise much of the earth's surface and were evolving a partnership with insects that enabled both to flourish, and which continues to this day. The turtles on land that wandered among the world's first blossoms and flowers have descendants who outlasted the giant dinosaurs.

Perhaps the turtles have survived because they do most things cautiously and slowly, as befits a creature whose sole defence against predators is to exude a foul smelling liquid from scent glands found in their groins and 'armpits'. These noisome spurts, which saturate whatever they touch with a stench that lingers for days, can be sprayed up to a metre and have earned the eastern long necked turtle the nickname of the stinker. But it is no defence against vehicles. As the turtles cautiously attempt to journey across roads in search of mates or new watercourses to call home, they risk being smashed by speeding behemoths,

which must stir lingering genetic memories of the long since vanished giant dinosaurs.

Like all reptiles, the turtle's metabolism can operate with relatively low oxygen and low blood pressure levels – essential to surviving periods of winter torpor. This also means, that, even when horrendously injured, they can take many days to die. Vets will euthanase the badly injured turtles but they can sometimes repair a cracked shell with araldite. For those that are not injured, it is but a moment's careful work to carry them to the other side of the road and assist them on their way. A good deed made much more pleasant if one carries a thick pair of gardening gloves to shield one's hands from the smell.

Scientists have shown that the eastern long necked turtles can determine direction and orientate themselves to north. Just as we determine north based on our internal body clock, that lets us work out the relative position of the sun given the time of day, so too can the eastern long neck. This enables them to confidently traverse their home range, an area of about 6 square kilometres, seeking out the permanent and ephemeral water sources.

In the event of drought they can travel long distances, up to 25 kilometres, searching for a new home. If none is to be found they bury themselves in the mud or soil of a dried up watercourse and await the coming of rains. They can survive on land for up to a year. During this time they will not eat for they have sealed their mouth with mucous to stop the loss of precious fluid. Their survival is greatly aided by having 3 bladders – one for urine and two for water, which act, much as a camel's hump does, by giving them an on-board drinking source for times of scarcity.

The turtles can live for up to 50 years, with some reports of them achieving an enviable 80 years and they are found in most slow moving water bodies such as swamps, dams and lakes across the south east of Australia.

As with all reptiles they continue growing throughout their lives, with an adult capable of reaching the size of a dinner plate or around 25 centimetres in diameter. Females reach sexual maturity between 10 and 12 years and males between 7 and 8 years. When ready to mate they will begin their courtship on land but will finalise their romantic pursuit in the water. After mating, the female will use the strong claws of her hind feet to dig a circular hole close to the bank of her resident waterway, where she will bury 6 to 23 eggs. It is much safer for eggs to be laid on land, as they are less vulnerable to predation, although many will still fall prey to foxes who lay waste to the carefully constructed nests.

The embryos within the turtle eggs begin almost immediately to adhere to the eggshell. This means once they are laid, they cannot be moved, for to do so would kill the turtle developing within. Unlike bird eggs where the embryos do not adhere to the shell and which are rotated regularly to ensure even distribution of heat, turtle eggs spend four months in one position solely reliant on the heat of the nest to incubate them.

The nests are artfully assembled and can even provide a safe place for hatchlings to overwinter if the cold weather arrives early. The hatchlings are about the size of a ten-cent piece, or a penny in the old money – hence the term penny turtles – and often have orange to red underbellies. After they have used their egg tooth to ratchet their way from their eggshell they will quickly

seek the shelter of water. Sadly during periods of prolonged drought the soil can become too hard for the babies to dig themselves out.

The eastern long necked turtle is aptly named. The adult turtle has a neck that is about 15 centimetres. There have also been instances of turtles whose necks have been up to 25 centimetres, or the same length as their shells. This long neck gives them a unique hunting advantage. They swim up to insects, tadpoles, small frogs or yabbies or anything that has had the misfortune to fall upon the water and instantly whip their neck out like a snake and seize their next meal. As they do this they also drop their mouth creating an inrush of water that sucks in their prey.

Turtles play a particularly vital role in keeping down mosquito and midge numbers by consuming their larvae. Having their neck and head tucked into their shell also means that they appear to be coyly gazing at you with an air of restrained disbelief whenever you pick them up and carry them to a place of safety.

So please slow down and take care not to hit these most remarkable creatures. And, if you can do so safely, please take a moment to stop and pop them safely off the road. The mosquitoes won't thank you but the turtles will.

TurtleSAT – A Citizen Science Initiative

Australia's freshwater turtles are under serious threat, and they need our help for survival! Mounting evidence now suggests that many turtle species are declining across vast areas of Australia

due to widespread drought, fox predation and human activities.

To ensure their survival, some important evidence needs to be gathered, and it needs to be gathered quickly.

What data are needed?

- Where do turtles live?
- Where do they breed?
- Are there important breeding 'hotspots'?
- What are the major causes of turtle decline?
- Do the causes of decline differ throughout Australia?
- How far do they disperse?
- Are there important 'source' populations that help to populate other areas?

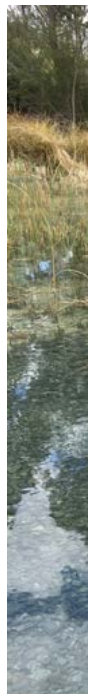
Your help is needed!

Australia's turtle populations and land managers need your help in answering these important questions so there can be appropriate safeguards put in place to protect turtles into the future.

You can assist by recording where you see turtles, where you see their nests, where turtles are seen or killed on the road, or evidence of turtles (such as skeletal remains).

To find out more and register to become involved please visit:

<https://www.turtlesat.org.au/turtlesat/default.aspx>



National Botanic Gardens activities

10 am–3 pm Sunday 2 December 2018: Bush Blitz is coming to the Australian National Botanic Gardens

Bush Blitz, Australia's largest nature discovery program, is holding a fun, educational event at the Australian National Botanic Gardens on **Sunday 2 December**. Through this event we hope to raise awareness of taxonomy and Australian biodiversity as well as Bush Blitz and the wonderful Australian National Botanic Gardens. We would be really grateful if you could spread the word through your networks. Join Bush Blitz scientists on their search for species, learn how to identify the amazing plants and animals that call the Australian Capital Territory home...and SO MUCH MORE!

Visit bushblitz.org.au for details. Please let me know if you have any questions.

We hope to see you (and your members, colleagues, friends and family) there!

22 November to 9 December: Perspectives; ANBG Photography Group exhibition

The Australian National Botanic Gardens Photography Group are exhibiting a selection of photos at the Gardens. The exhibited photos; a selection of cards and prints are for sale. A proportion of all sales go the ANBG so why not pop along and pick up some wonderful Christmas cards at very reasonable prices.

Homeless possums

Sometimes we speak as if developers are responsible for habitat loss. While they control new buildings, many ordinary people are in charge of renovations, some of which impact on our wildlife.

A few months ago we had our gutters and fascias re-done. I told our builder that we knew there were possums in our roof space. I was concerned that if he sealed all around the house, the possums would be trapped inside our roof and cause mayhem!

The builder offered to get me the names of pest controllers! I asked him to set up a possum box as he was making them homeless. The pest controllers take the possums far away to an uncertain future. Adult possums don't fare well in other possum's territory.

My husband went with me to Bunnings to buy a possum box, but didn't find one. This seems strange to me as an Australian. There were quite a few models of bird boxes, and homes for worms and bees, but not for possums, one of our most common animals.

After the work was finished, I was worried that the possums were homeless and there was a mother and baby! There was public sympathy for this mother and baby as they featured on ABC weather pics!

I was grumpy with my husband for not taking this issue seriously. He said nonchalantly, to the effect that the possums would find another home. But I felt



responsible for them because I knew they lived in our house.

I could hear the possums thumping on our metal roof and I saw them on our back verandah. But where were they sleeping?

We looked around our garden in the big trees. No sign of them. We looked around the outside of our house, no sign. We looked under the house, but had to block that off so the possums didn't climb up our cavity walls back into the roof.

Finally I found them! They found a safe and cosy place in our garage roller door. Lucky for them, we don't use our roller door as it doesn't have a remote and is a hassle to use.

Our possums are safe now.

Margaret Kalms

Editor's comment

I'm not surprised that Bunnings doesn't sell possum boxes as I know many people consider them a pest and do their best to get rid of them. There are however, instructions on the website for building one.

So while many people consider them a pest I'm inclined to agree with Margaret that I embrace their presence. I have had possums visiting for many years and my own neighbours have told me that they have found a possum roosting in their roller door (only installed after they moved in a few years ago). Fortunately, they also felt inclined to leave it, though as they do use their roller door often, so had contemplated installing a possum nesting box nearby.

Activities

FNAC Christmas Party 2018: 6.30 pm, Thursday, 6 December 2018; Weston Park picnic area off Pescott Lane, opposite the mini train 'Play Station'.

The clean, modern picnic site is well set up with 2 gas BBQs, 2 shelters with 4 bench tables and seats, (3 more not sheltered), drinking water with 3 outlets, toilets and playgrounds nearby, set in beautiful parkland with views of Black Mountain and Yarramundi Reach, with possible sunset. Easy access for wheelchairs. Plenty of free parking at the end of Pescott Lane.

Bring: A plate of food and some drink to share, and as usual, the picnic ware you'll need; some seating or picnic rugs; mosquito repellent and a hat.

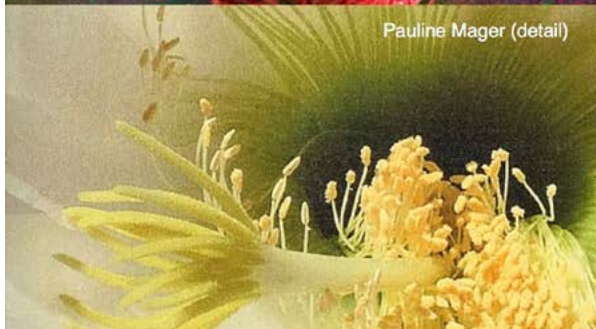
RELAX and enjoy a special end of year celebration meal with members at Weston Park.

This is our venue for Christmas this year because we no longer have access to the outdoors location by the Gould Building. While there are rubbish bins provided, people might like to take their rubbish home as a way of being 'a good naturalist'.

Look forward to seeing everyone there!



Margaret Kalms (detail)



Pauline Mager (detail)



Kalpana Choudhary (detail)

Down the Garden Path

10 November - 7 December 2018

Opening 3pm, 11 November

Yarralumla Gallery and Oaks Brasserie
Cottage 1, Weston Pk Road, Yarralumla



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

president@fieldnatsact.com

Email: secretary@fieldnatsact.com

Website: www.fieldnatsact.com

Treasurer: treasurer@fieldnatsact.com

Membership: membership@fieldnatsact.com

Newsletter Editor: editor@fieldnatsact.com



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: