

December 2019  
ISSN: 1836-2761



GPO BOX 249  
CANNBERRA ACT 2601

FIELD NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION OF CANNBERRA INC.

# FIELD NATURALIST

**MEETING—Thursday 5 December 2019**  
**6:30 pm at Weston Park, Yarralumla**  
details on page 3

## **FNAC Christmas party**

**6.30 pm at Weston Park, Yarralumla**



*Santa is relaxing in the forest on the walk from the Yarralumla Nursery to the Governor-General's residence.*

## Contents

Enclosed yabby traps update	2
Membership payments	2
The Pasture Day Moth	3
FNAC Christmas party	3
Jean Geue: a champion of Australian native plants	4
Echidna watch	5
Magpie watch	6
Activities	6
30 years of landcare	7
November sightings	7

## Enclosed yabby traps update

### Update on banning enclosed yabby traps that drown platypuses, turtles and rakali

On 17 September 2019, the ACT Government passed legislation to ban possession and use of enclosed yabby traps in all ACT waters. The legislation extended the ban from public waters to private waters as well. The ban is expected to come into effect in December 2019 and will be accompanied by public information and a trap exchange program.

The Victorian Government successfully implemented a ban in all waters from 1 July this year.

The Governments of NSW, SA, NT and Qld have not committed to a ban. The traps are already banned in Tasmania.

With the complete ban achieved in the ACT, greater attention has turned to achieving the same in NSW. This work has been guided by the Australian Platypus Conservancy (APC) and Dr Tom Grant of the Platypus Conservation Initiative at the University of NSW, with help and support from many others. The FNAC Committee has written to Minister Marshall about the need for a ban (fishery regulations are under his portfolio of Primary Industries).

The Committee is collaborating with the APC and Dr Grant to support Megan Fabian (National Manager) and Patrick Medway (CEO) of the Australian Wildlife Society, who are meeting with the NSW Minister Kean (Environment) on 13 November 2019 in support of a ban in public and private waters in NSW.

At present, the NSW Department of Primary Industries – Fisheries has only committed to ‘implementing an education program later this year to coordinate the transition of allowed fishing gear from ‘Opera House’ style yabby traps to open-top, pyramid-style yabby nets’ and to ‘a comprehensive promotion and educational campaign for fishers, as well as the handing out of the new style nets to recreational fishers across

NSW.’ The transition of traps to nets is outlined to go from September 2019 to the end of summer 2020 (letter dated 6 Sep 2019). The letter does not refer to a ban.

Without a commitment to a time line to introduce a ban, the action in NSW is inadequate and falls far short of Victoria and the ACT. This means that it is likely that more aquatic air-breathing animals will drown due to these traps than if there was a ban on the way. In summer, if a lactating female platypus is drowned, her young starve and die back in the burrow.

Minister Gentleman has advised the FNAC Committee that he is working with his state and territory counterparts to gain agreement to banning the sale of enclosed yabby/shrimp/minnow traps throughout Australia. National agreement is needed for this. So there is a long way to go yet. Your letters to any of these jurisdictions (Qld, SA, NT and NSW) asking for a ban on possession and use as well as sale would be most helpful.

Finally, close to home, I would like to acknowledge the support and collaboration of the Conservation Council ACT Region on the ACT ban and working to achieve a NSW ban.



**Lucy Bastecky**  
Committee Member

## Membership payments

The committee has decided to change the membership year to the financial year 1 July to 30 June.

Members can pay by cheque, cash or Internet banking. If you opt to use Internet banking please ensure you include your name in the reference.

Account name: Field Nats

BSB: 325185

Account number: 03545251

Reference: Your name

We have decided on a pro-rata member payment to 1 July 2020.

\$12.50 for memberships due December 2019 to March 2020

\$6.25 for those falling due Mar 2010 to June 2020.

**Kevin McCue**  
Treasurer

## The Pasture Day Moth

In August of this year I was walking in one of my favourite spots down by the lake when I came across the following caterpillar hard at work digging a hole in the dirt. I stopped to watch as it very patiently went into a little hole and then emerged with a mouthful of dirt about the size of a match head.



There were quite a few caterpillars all engaged in different stages of activity. Some were quite advanced into their holes and only the tips of their 'tails', with 'eyes' to frighten off predators were visible. Others were obviously very house proud and were 'sweeping' their cleared area to make sure it was immaculate after each mouthful of dirt was deposited. Others were a bit more haphazard – with housekeeping more on a par with my own – happy to just keep digging and depositing and not wasting time in obsessively cleaning their patch.

I had only seen this behaviour once before and not in this spot. The previous time I did not have a camera whereas this time I did. So I took photos and even filmed the activity. I had to go home via the old CSIRO Entomology building. As I was passing I decided to pop in and see if they could identify it.

I was very saddened to discover the Government no longer allows CSIRO to offer this service. However, the very helpful person on reception gave me the number of a person who runs a business dealing with European wasps and who offers insect identification on the side. He very helpfully let me know it was the caterpillar of the Pasture Day Moth – a native species. The person on reception was also very curious to know what it was and was delighted when I sent her an email giving her the heads up.



According to Wikipedia: *the pasture day moth, Apina callisto (synonym Amazelo callisto), is a species in the moth family Noctuidae, which is, as its name implies, active during the day, making it unlike most other noctuid species. It is found in most southern areas of Australia, ranging from lower Queensland to Tasmania.*

It normally hatches out after spring rains and I guess this year, like all of us, it is still waiting for them to come.

**Rhiân Williams**

## FNAC Christmas party

**6.30 pm at Weston Park, Yarralumla**

Sunset is 8.06 pm and was pretty through the trees last year. There's parking at the end of Pescott Lane across the road from Yarralumla Play Station.

There is a shelter and tables nearby but it may be in use, so please bring any chairs, tables and rugs in case we need to find an alternative base. As in previous years please be prepared to bring everything you'll need for a BBQ-less meal and to take any rubbish home with you!

Equally please be prepared for the forecast weather and possible mosquitoes. If the weather is likely to be inclement please keep in touch....0402 760 397.

**Rosemary Blemings**

P.S. Last year we discovered the Pescott Lane on the Directories' and Google maps is a spelling error for Edward Edgar Prescott, 1872–1956: a botanist, horticulturalist, homologist and seed tester in Victoria.

## Jean Geue: a champion of Australian native plants

Jean joined the Field Nats in 1998 and has been a colourful and engaged contributor at our meetings until recently. Many other groups have benefitted from Jean's love of local habitats, nature and the interactions between humans and other species for decades:



During a long life spent in various regions of Australia before settling in Canberra Jean has spent most of her waking hours involved with Australia's unique flora and their habitats. It is hoped that the following examples of Jean's involvements will illustrate that her passion for Australian plants links all species and ecologies to each other in the minds and through the actions of the diverse landcaring communities of the Canberra region.

Jean and Gaffa's garden in Aranda evolved into a habitat garden, an extension of neighbouring Aranda Bushland that illustrates a deep understanding of the local web of life, the needs and habits of all species. Jean knows that suburban gardens have essential roles in supporting native animals through their structure and vegetation.

As Convenor of Friends of Aranda Bushland (FOAB) Jean was involved in the team's years of hard work rescuing the dry Sclerophyll forest and associated native grassland from decades of weed incursions. The FOAB efforts continue with the annexing of former grazing land between the bushland and Glenloch Interchange and the removal of vigorous, prolific environmental weeds.

In order to target invasive species, thorough knowledge and surveying of species in and native to the area was imperative. In 1997 FOAB published *Our Patch: Field Guide to the Flora of the Australian Capital Region as*

*Photographed in the Aranda Bushland*. Jean was one of the core volunteer members involved in the guide's production. Decades passed before there were companions to this ahead-of-its-time, identification guide.

The photographs in the guide predated digital photography. Jean was at the forefront of producing quality images recording the flora of Aranda Bushland. The location of each native species and individual specimens is vital to the understanding of present populations and how past, present and future impacts affect both species and their ecosystems. Jean's extensive collection of photographs constitutes a significant botanical and environmental record. These images are especially important as records of the ground orchids for which Aranda Bushland has become famous during 'good' seasons.

Jean was instrumental in creating the social and community record of the Friends' activities and spectacular invasive species success stories spanning over 20 years. Caring for special places is a continuation of and a reconnection to the Indigenous peoples' millennia of custodianship and stewardship of Country.

Indigenous people created Songlines and Pathways handing down knowledge to each generation through stories, dance and signals in the landscape. Jean was instrumental in the preparation processes for and installation of signage that interpreted the natural world and its plants as modern travellers followed trails from the Snow Gums and grasslands north to the forested Aranda Bushland itself. Jean also publicises Aranda Bushland and its wildlife through the brochures she helped to produce and regularly distributes to all and sundry!

Jean initiated the Friends of Black Mountain in 2001 though the group later went into recess. A reinvigoration occurred in 2012 when caring for the for the much-studied flora and fauna began its current journey of strategic weeding action and inspired the participation of a new cohort of volunteers from all over Canberra.

Jean repeated many of the patterns of her involvement with Aranda Bushland when creating the 'ginger group' to re-energise ParkCare volunteering on Black Mountain. Again Jean's photos of native plants, local fauna and the volunteers-at-work lead with collaborations for informative signage and attractive brochures.

Vegwatch is another project in which Jean has participated. Vegwatch involves surveying the region's plant communities augmenting existing records of species and recording new sightings. Such records are vital to researchers and continue the fine reputation of citizen scientists.

Aranda Bushland is to the west of the iconic Black Mountain Nature Reserve with the two Canberra Nature Park components separated by the Gungahlin Drive Extension in spite of strong protests about the widening of Caswell Drive. Jean was active in advocating against the size of the highway dividing the two Canberra Nature

Park reserves she cared about so deeply. In particular Jean knew that colonies of orchids on Black Mountain would be destroyed by the planners' directives for the widened road.

With her long memory of Canberra's reserves, flora, planning processes and having witnessed constant threats to ecological communities Jean has, over several decades, challenged herself to produce the detailed submissions necessary for preserving the rights of nature and conserving the often-fragmented populations of native plant species in the region.

As a member of the Australian Native Plants Society's Wednesday Walkers Jean's enthusiasm for taking photographs of Australian plants and their habitats generated multiple contributions to the society's journal that records the activities and field trips members have enjoyed. Her photographs inspired many other members to bring their cameras and perfect both macro plant and landscape photography.

Jean has been a strong supporter of Friends of Grasslands for decades. Native grasses may lack the same visual appeal as Australian wildflowers to some people but Jean has promoted the essential nature of Natural Temperate Grasslands species to all ecosystems, especially local woodlands and forests, and ensured that those in the

community are shown that human life is dependent on grassy habitats.

Floral photographs and action shots of volunteers have featured in annual displays of ParkCare activities at the Jamison Shopping Centre. Jean has organised this event for years ensuring the display panels explain to the broader community how native plants and their habitats are restored and cared for by landcaring volunteers in the Belconnen and north-west Canberra areas.

Jean has organised the Chippendale Walks on Black Mountain also for many years. The walks introduce the public to the diversity of spring flowers in the reserve with Jean co-opting other volunteering botanists who also have her inimitable communication skills and enthusiasm for wildflowers.

In volunteering at Weed Swap Jean has given out hundreds of free native plants to those who have removed environmental weeds from their suburban gardens. These events have reached community members who would otherwise be unaware of native species' values, beauty and hardiness. Jean's experience as a local gardener is the basis for recommending suitable plants to novice gardeners.

**Rosemary Blemings**

## Echidna watch

Ancestors of Australia's amazing echidna, one of the world's three egg laying mammals, lived with the dinosaurs. How did our echidnas survive so long when dinosaurs did not? Can they still survive in our environment today? Although first studied 200 years ago, large gaps remain in our understanding of their life in the wild.



These shy, secretive monotremes were once spread across Australia, but no-one knows how many are around today. Over the last five years sighting reports from Echidna Watch participants have given scientists a baseline of data against which to study trends in echidna habits and sur-

vival. Scientists need your help to find out where and how many echidnas are still being seen.

Are they becoming threatened? After evolving for



110 million years it is time to explore and reveal the secrets of their survival. Every time you go into the bush keep an eye open for echidnas – fill in the survey form and become part of Echidna Watch ([http://www.echidna.edu.au/monotremes/echidna\\_watch.html](http://www.echidna.edu.au/monotremes/echidna_watch.html)).

For additional information contact: Echidna Care Inc, Post Office Penneshaw, Kangaroo Island, SA 5222

Your observations count. Please help!!

## Magpie watch

Everyone needs (at least a little bit of) nature everyday for their wellbeing... and, increasingly, people are realising this.

During early morning activities on a day heading for 33 degrees there was a raucous magpie chase from back to front of our block. Maybe it was a parent magpie giving a strong message to one of this year's young?

A few moments later I went out of the front door to raise the outdoor blind so cooler air could enter the house for a while.

Two magpies flew with determination from the Yellow Box opposite, over my head and over the roof to the cables above the backyard. Had we not had a 40-year relationship with the local magpie families I might have feared I was being attacked.

Two other magpies then blundered their way onto the guttering and peered down at me. Their flight style and black eyes showed them to be juveniles; there was one quiet begging call.

As one 'baby' landed on the concrete by the front door I reached indoors for the jar of porridge oats and scattered some gently. The other juvenile flew away to the back yard.

I took a photo from inside as the magpie gingerly selected crushed grains of oats.



Magpies are absolute treasures to us. Over our years of living in Flynn we've been able to observe their behaviour, their family dynamics and try to identify which signature tunes belong to which individuals.

I've not deduced whether the current pair for which the block is shared habitat have one or two young as they have only occasional dust-ups with the cohort in the next territory to the east.

As the 2019 breeding season has proceeded we've noticed that porridge oats are disdainfully ignored as the magpies search for animal protein to build their peak condition and then for the dependent young.

Consequently it's been months since a magpie bailed me up at the front door asking for oats to be scattered there.

For the past 2-3 weeks juveniles have been brought onto the block by their busy parents. The learning-by-example process of 'feeding yourself' requires infinite patience and is insistently noisy. They've also tested out the bird bath water for drinks.

Today's brief episode shows that the juveniles have been told "she keeps oats (at the door) so fly over and demand some".

As I took the photo I mused again at the brilliant system that, over a few weeks, converts an egg into a perfect feathered adolescent.

Moments later I looked out of a rear window to see another juvenile probing the dried up grass for a hapless invertebrate and taking a drink as it passed the bird bath.

We're so fortunate to have wildlife around us and the time to observe how they have adapted to our take-over of the ACT's woody grasslands.

**Rosemary Blemings**

## Activities

### **20 Nov-8 Dec 2019: Australian National Botanic Gardens Photography Group exhibit**

Open all day during the gardens opening hours, the ANBG Photography Groups are exhibiting a range of photos for exhibit, and sale at the Visitors Centre of the gardens until Sunday 8 December. The group has some wonderful photographers so please visit to admire these works. Also available are various cards and other items for sale. Christmas is coming and these would make wonderful cards, especially for overseas friends and relatives. A portion of all sales goes to the gardens.

## 30 years of landcare

On 9 November I attended the celebration of 30 years of landcare in the ACT, held at the Yarramundi Cultural Centre. The opening speech by Wally Bell giving the Indigenous background to the area was moving.

I was shocked however, to learn that legislation to protect the ACT's many nature reserves was only introduced post self government. I was aware through the Canberra Bushwalking Club, that Namadgi National Park was declared in 1984, but had then taken it for granted that the other local nature reserves were established around this time or earlier (actually I hadn't thought about it at all).

When I was younger I was busy working and only moved to Belconnen in the mid-1980s. Life, relationships etc had a different focus and even after I got my first dog in the early 1990s, I walked them locally and didn't get up to my local Pinnacle Reserve very often. It wasn't until I joined the Friends of the Pinnacle that I became more aware and involved and in a lot of ways regret not being aware of these areas much earlier (not having a driver's licence is perhaps a poor but valid excuse).

Of course, since my retirement two years ago, I have had much more time to explore The Pinnacle

and other areas around Canberra, particularly from a photographic point of view.

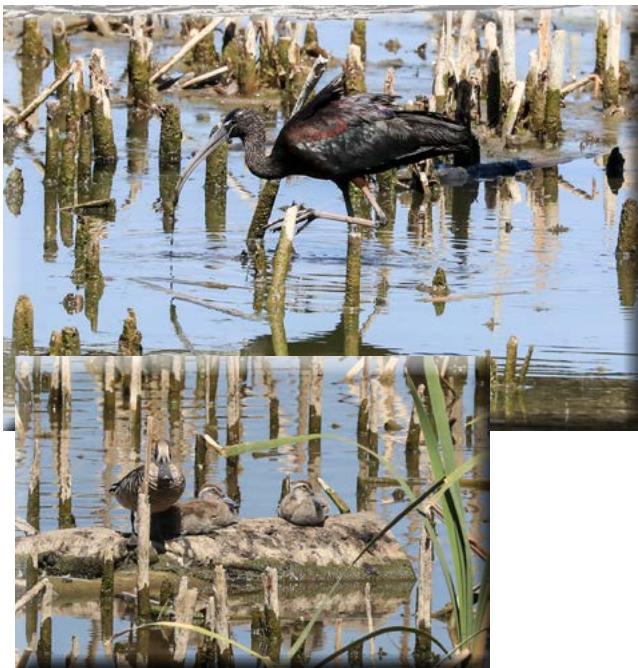
Thinking about this, while not saying I had no interest in nature at an early age, I didn't have a mentor or companion for pursuing this interest. This leads me to think that we really need to encourage children from a very young age to take an interest in the natural environment around us.

Following this celebration of landcare groups was the 2019 landcare awards. The Friends of the Pinnacle (FotPin) were nominated in two categories but did not receive an award. However, a very active member of FotPin and an active member of COG, was also nominated for an individual award. John Brannan did not win the award but gained a Highly Commended, behind Rainer Rehwinkel, who won the individual award. While not winning, this is a high accolade for John who does a lot for FotPin, including leading biennial bird walks at the Pinnacle, organising plantings, and being a member of the committee for many years, among other things for actively promoting FotPin.

**Alison Milton**

## November sightings

I have been quite busy this month so haven't been out and about as much, however, I visited the Jer-rabomberra Wetlands and managed to sight the Glossy Ibis that has been visiting for a week or two.



Back among the reeds, a family of Pink-eared Ducks were looking after their eight ducklings.

Meanwhile, a turtle was relaxing on the end of a log.



While it's unusual to see a turtle during the day, it is even more unusual to find one right next to the path away from the water.

**Alison Milton**



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](mailto:secretary@fieldnatsact.com)

**Website:** [www.fieldnatsact.com](http://www.fieldnatsact.com)

**Treasurer:** [treasurer@fieldnatsact.com](mailto:treasurer@fieldnatsact.com)

**Membership:** [membership@fieldnatsact.com](mailto:membership@fieldnatsact.com)

**Newsletter Editor:** [editor@fieldnatsact.com](mailto: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: