

# FIELD NATURALISTS ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA



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

**PRESIDENT:** Rosemary Blemings, Phone 06/258 4724 (h)

**SECRETARY:** Joyce Weeks Phone 06/296 2741

**ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE:** GPO Box 249, Canberra ACT 2601

**MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY:** Bob Ecclestone, Phone 241 4512 (h)

Meetings are held downstairs in the Division of Zoology and Botany, ANU, on the first Thursday of each month. Meetings commence at 8.00 pm and are followed by refreshments.

## NEWSLETTER - FEBRUARY 1996

**MEETING** - Thursday February 1st - Dr David Rentz, "Considering Katydid - another miracle of Australia's spectacular fauna." Dr Rentz arrived in Australia from the USA in 1976. He has been working with the CSIRO for 16 years and is the curator of Orthoptera (grasshoppers, crickets, locusts, katydids) in the Australian National Insect Collection. Please come along for a fascinating evening and stay for tea and coffee afterwards.

**OUTING** - Saturday February 17, Dr Michael Braby, will lead a butterfly and moth identification day visiting Tidbinbilla, Gibraltar Falls and Smokers Gap. Please meet at Kambah Village Car Park 8.30 am for car rationalisation. We'll meet Michael at Tidbinbilla. Bring lunch, drinks, and wear appropriate clothing. Binoculars and a hand lens, if available, will enhance your experience. Ring Michael on 246 4260 for more details.

**DECEMBER GET-TOGETHER** was very pleasant outside in the courtyard adjacent to our regular meeting space. The aromatic smells of barbecued meat permeated the area as people shared their food, drinks and stories. A rather unfortunate lizard whose mouth looked as though it may have once met a hot plate received extra attention and food. The tortoises remained in the pond. Edith Taylor from Sydney gave a short account of the Red Index, a list of endangered places, parks, which the public think are worthy of preservation and to which they can contribute. Vince Ford rounded off the evening in his inimitable style with slides of his favourite island. His aerial shots, like his plane ride, were rather stimulating. It's obviously a place worthy of an intensive visit.

**COURSES OF INTEREST.** Various educational groups often offer courses which may be of interest to Field Naturalists. Prices vary according to length and source. I shall draw them to your attention as they become available.

**Barren Grounds Bird Observatory (BAO) - near Jamberoo NSW**  
Ph: 042/360 195 are offering "Orchids in Autumn": "Bird Calls of the Bush": "All about Seeds" and "Birds with a Sweet Tooth".

**Canberra Continuing Studies Centre (private)**, Ph: 06/295 3679 or 295 3385 are offering "The invertebrates - Animals without backbones" with Dr Bob Taylor: "Understanding Birds" with Ian Fraser: "Plants - Learning by drawing" and "Wildlife Illustration" with Helen Fitzgerald: and "Botanical Illustration" with Robin Hill.

**TRIP OF INTEREST. Environment Tours** - Ian Fraser and Margaret McJannett have planned two 12 day Mighty River Murray Riverboat Tours in May/June/July. Numbers are restricted. Ring 249 1560 asap for details.

**MUSTARD COLOURED SPITFIRES** or Saw Fly Larvae were observed in a breakfast-bowl sized bundle on a Eucalypt tree. Any other colour variation from the usual black?

## FUNGAL STUDIES GROUP

by Dr Dorothy Schild

There has been good interest expressed in the macrofungi study group by members of the Field Naturalists and individuals from other groups. Last year we held a few meetings, and Heino Lepp and I have been available to identify the numerous macrofungi that have been growing in this wet, mild summer. We held our first meeting on 9 August and worked through the identification key in the book "*Common Australian Fungi*" by Tony Young. People brought along fungi to identify including *Laccaria laccata*, *Coprinus*, *Pleurotus*, and *Trametes cinnabarina*. Fun was had by all. On 19 August we held a fungal foray at the Botanic Gardens led by Heino Lepp and Judith Curnow. Though few fungi were found due to the unseasonably dry, warm weather an enjoyable identification workshop was held afterwards. A special meeting was held with committee members of Friends of Aranda Bushland on 29 August to inform them of our intentions for distribution studies and to seek their collaboration. The committee members were highly interested in our planned projects and were willing to help in whichever way they could.

Dierk von Behrens put in an application in September to the Conservation Council for funding for the establishment of a formal macrofungal study group. However, they received a very large number of applications and unfortunately ours was unsuccessful. We shall try again at the next round of funding. Many species of macrofungi have been growing during this Spring and Summer because of our wet and warm conditions. In my own backyard these have included: *Coprinus*, *Morchella elata* (edible), *Agaricus* (two types), *Marasmius oreades* (fairy ring fungus, edible), *Psathyrella*, and *Fuligo septica* (a slime mould, not a true fungus). Thank you to the keen collectors who have brought other interesting species to me for identification. Please continue doing so.

We are planning to hold another meeting on Wednesday 7 February at 7.30 pm at my house. Bring along 3 or 4 photos or slides of macrofungi for identification. The best way to take photos of macrofungi will also be discussed. All those interested please phone 241 6324.



## LAST CHANCE FOR A VISUAL EXPERIENCE - *Desert River, The Story of Rosy Dock* by Jeannie Baker.

This exhibition continues until February 19 at the National Library and consists of 21 collage constructions, created in the artist's studio. *Desert River* portrays the Finke River and the story documents how the innocent introduction of an exotic plant can lead to an infestation. Rosemary Blemings reviewed the book in our December 1995 Newsletter.

I was fortunate to hear Jeannie speak about her development as a collage artist. She thoroughly researches her topic and camped alone for some time, drawing and exploring the area where the Finke disappears into the desert. She believes that the river extends further than is indicated on the maps available. She does not use photographs in her work. For her book "*Where the forest meets the sea*" she lived alone for a month in the Daintree rainforest. The natural raw material selected for her work is bleached and then soaked for three days in a glycerine solution. She then paints it the appropriate colour. After listening to her, seeing the slides, the video and the collages, I felt that I too had visited the Finke. [Editor]

EARTH SANCTUARIES has another addition, this time in the mallee sand dunes of north-west NSW called Scotia Sanctuary. Its name is derived from *Eremophila scoparia* or 'Scotia Bush' which grows there in abundance. Accommodation possibilities are shearers' quarters, or the homestead at Tarara. Earth Sanctuaries are characterised by cat, dog, fox and rabbit proof fences. Where original animals are no longer present they are gradually reintroduced if they are not extinct. Numbats are now in residence at Yookamurra, near Sedan in South Australia. At Warrawong, at Heathfield in the Adelaide Hills, the first sanctuary begun by Dr John Wamsley, you can meet brush-tailed bettongs, eastern bettongs, rufus bettongs, long-nosed potoroos, tammar wallabies, red-necked wallabies, southern short-nosed bandicoots and the platypus.



## HOT SPOT HOLIDAY

by Phyl Goddard

In early November Babette Scougall, Beverly Hammond and I set off to explore two national parks of volcanic origin in New South Wales, the Warrumbungles and, about 150 km further on to the north east, Mt Kaputar in the Nandewar Range.

From a talk to FNAC by vulcanologist Dr Wally Johnson at the September 1993 meeting we heard that this continent has for 35 million years drifted imperceptibly northwards and over a stationary hot spot on the eastern edge where molten rock from time to time forces its way up through the earth's crust as a volcanic eruption. Thus a chain of volcanoes was formed stretching for 2,300 km from Northern Queensland to Victoria. The chain included the Warrumbungles and Mt Kaputar. The next eruption, according to Dr Johnson, would be in Bass strait - but we needn't hold our breath.

So we set off first to the Warrumbungles, a comfortable day's drive from Canberra, travelling on back roads, keeping a sharp lookout for superb parrots after Yass, noting the total lack of woodland left between here and the turnoff to the Park at Coonabarabran but reluctantly admitting that the fields of bright yellow Canola in juxtaposition with large areas of Paterson's Curse were rather spectacular.

We stayed in a quaint mud brick cottage just outside the Park with no electricity and only cold showers unless we cared to chop wood and light the fuel stove. We did several walks but the main aim was to do the Grand High Tops complete circuit where there are great views of Beloungery Spire, the Breadknife, Crater Bluff and Bluff Mountain. These pinnacles of trachyte mark the cores, or plugs, of volcanic action from about 13 million years ago. The composition of the molten lava was such that it cooled and solidified quickly, was very hard and dense, and tended to plug the throats of the volcanoes. Because the plugs are harder than the surrounding rock the latter has eroded more quickly, leaving the extraordinary skyline we know today. John Oxley and his party who explored the area in 1818 seeking an inland sea described the range as "most stupendous". Split Rock Circuit was another

fascinating walk with its massive rock walls, deep gorges and lovely views.

Over 180 bird species have been recorded, comprising birds of both moist east coast and dry western plains habitats. We kept a sharp lookout for the turquoise parrot but were unlucky this time. There were few plants flowering and area was very dry and overused.

In comparison Mt Kaputar NP 150 km to the north east of the Warrumbungles was a botanical delight - mountain violets and brachycome everywhere amidst a great variety of other small plants, shrubs and trees. To quote from a guidebook by Peter Fox: "There is a seemingly incongruous mix of fig trees, lilly pillies and a host of tangled rainforest vines alongside snow gums, snow grass and alpine daisies." And there is " ... an overlap between northern and southern plant species. Plants that usually live well away from each other elsewhere can be found side by side at Kaputar." Not only the flowers were colourful - one wet morning we encountered the most extraordinary slugs about 10 cm long, fat, and a brilliant orange all over.

We had travelled to Narrabri, calling in at Siding Spring Observatory and the Pillaga Scrub (great for birds) en route, and stopped in the town to ask a policeman about the road to Mt Kaputar (50 km, mostly unsealed, steep and narrow, caravans not allowed.) "What on earth do you want to go there for?" was the unexpected response - one forgets that we lovers of the untamed bush are very much a minority group! We were happy to have the whole Park practically to ourselves. We stayed in a cabin with mod-cons at Dawson's Spring (all accommodation for the trip well-traced and booked by Babette) and did several pleasant walks from there, including to the top of Mt Kaputar at 1510 metres, the centre of the Nandewar volcano, where there were extensive 360° views over the Nandewar Range and the plains around. An excellent but very steep walk was from Green Camp car park to the Yulludunida Crater - many plants flowering on this track - but there are 11 great walks to choose from and that's only in the southern section of the Park.

Mt Kaputar NP comprises 38,000 ha, ie most of the Nandewar Range and 80% of it is

declared wilderness. This compares with 18,175 ha of the Warrumbungle NP. Mt Kaputar was thrown up 21 - 17 million years ago and the Warrumbungles 13 million years ago so presumably this means it took the continent 4 million years to drift the 150 km northwards.

Although Oxley had viewed the Nandewars from the Warrumbungles he did not go there. Major Thomas Mitchell was the first white person to explore the area in 1832.

The holiday was nicely rounded off with an overnight stay in Dubbo and a visit to the Western Plains Zoo, well worth supporting for its work with endangered animals and also a pleasant place to wander spotting wild birds as well as the confined fauna.

#### AND RAINBOW BEE-EATERS ... LEON'S SECOND NAMADGI WALK - 12 NOVEMBER 1995.

by Rosemary Blemings (sent from her holiday in England, no less).

As someone remarked, Canberra residents have access to Spring for almost four months if they follow native flowers from Canberra Nature Park up into the high country. Leon was concerned that we'd be too early for sub-alpine spring flowers on this walk towards the ruined Boboyan homestead. No one felt disappointed, there was too much for 12 SGAP and FNAC members to see, share, marvel at and enjoy.

Our first deviation from the track took us through woodland and the full range of floral colour. Oranges, reds, yellows from species of *Daviesia*, *Oxylobium* and *Pultenea* seemed to dominate. *Pultenea* draped over the edges of banks or the track tempted the use of trowels, its ground-cover-habit appealing to native gardeners. *Bossea prostrata*, *Senecio lautus* and yam daisies introduced variant yellows with intrusions of donkey orchids, *Ajuga* and *Pimelia*.

Once in the more open grassed areas *Brachycome* daisies, *Viola betonicaefolia*, *Craspedia* and *Ranunculus* gave colour contrast to the striking tussocks of native grasses. Bulbine lilies were recognisable only from their new leaf growth here, whereas among west and north-west facing lichened boulders they flowered exquisitely

as though part of expensive planned landscaping.

At about this point we "lost" Michael Braby, so absorbed was he in the behaviour of day-flying sun moths, *Agaristodes* species. We saw at first hand the enthusiasm, patience and photographic games-of-chance that contribute to his superb photographs. He collected eggs, laid by his subjects, to study and nurture over ensuing weeks. He even trains his caterpillars to eat cape-weed. Does that mean capeweed, amongst noxious weeds, actually has some value? We particularly liked the aristocratic name 'Vanessa Bersham' (*Kershawi* sp) which belongs to Painted Lady butterflies. Common Grass Blues and Caper Whites were other frequent sightings. Michael suggested that searching for sodium was causing butterflies and bees to constantly visit a drying puddle alongside Naas Creek, a phenomenon known as "puddling" apparently.

Other questions remained unanswered: What would a perfect 22 cm diameter mushroom taste like?

Had Kookaburras left the remains of a hapless frog on top of a decaying fence post? What was the name of a delightful, lemon-yellow grasshopper some 10-12 mm in length?

Did the Satin Flycatchers have a nest nearby?

Jeffrey Clyde delayed his lunch to seek the nest. The pair had taken it in turns to allow us to watch them from the track but their nest remained hidden. Arching over the track a magnificent Eucalypt was host to several species, a decaying knot hole providing Striated Pardalotes with an ideal nest site. Deeper into nearby shrubs were several Brown-headed Honeyeaters staying still long enough to be identified and studied. Definitely a good birding area. Even as we lunched a raptor put on a display when snatching a victim from behind the old house.

A rocky outcrop just above the remains of Boboyan Homestead provided a spectacular lunch spot where we could imagine the housewife's "view from the kitchen sink". A rock skink, furtive in the face of this human invasion, occasionally emerged for its 25 cm length. There was another among the homestead ruins where Jan Simpson



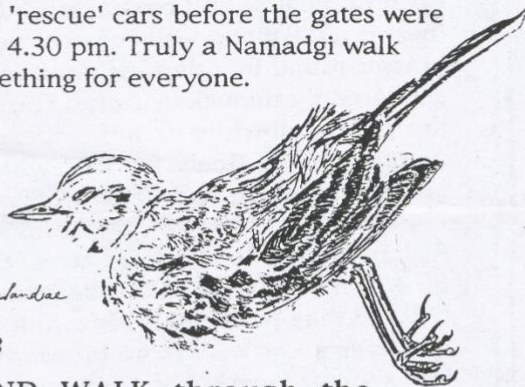
submitted her theories of the original layout. The magnificent stone chimney, decaying timbers, cast iron pot, pottery shards, a possible laundry and dairy at the end of a short path all contributed to our hypotheses. Elderberries, which would have brought English wine-making skills and hopes into this valley in the middle of last century, were one remnant of the exotic remains of a hard-won garden.

Naas Creek, fast flowing in its infancy, hinted at a completely different habitat, home to several species of ducks which resented our intrusion. Crystal clear water bending, swaying, almost swirling forests of water weed, was enticing though very cold.

Homeward bound, we made a detour to BRAYSHAW'S. The National Parks Association's work in restoration of this typical early homestead provides a glimpse of early pastoral history and stoic human endeavours. Newspapers covered and insulated the slab walls. Some articles were now plastic covered to protect the news-of-the-day and to show the ingenuity that eased the effects of climate and remoteness.

And the Bee-eaters? Unsuspecting insects, warmed by the asphalt below the Namadgi Visitors' Centre's trees, fell victim to the feathered flash of iridescent green as these busy migrants delighted those scrambling to return to 'rescue' cars before the gates were locked at 4.30 pm. Truly a Namadgi walk with something for everyone.

*Arthropus noviseelandiae*  
Richard's Pipit  
7/1/96 ROB



### WETLAND WALK through the Macquarie Marshes (NSW)

by Rosemary von Behrens

Fields of Buttercups zig zag their way across the marsh, Wavy Marshwort - five-petalled, fringed-lily-like, yellow heads bobbing as we clumsily disturb their peace and drag their stolons with us, mud squelching between our toes.

*Azolla* fern - a myriad shades of maroon and red and green carpeting the water and rising, where possible, to great heights - for an *Azolla* fern.

Mallee Ringnecks swing overhead, while White-browed and Masked Woodswallows dart, whirl and chase each other from tree to tree.

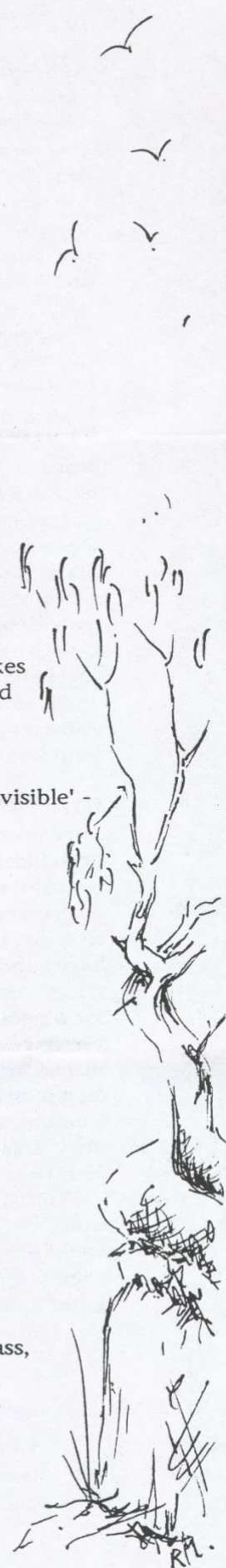
A Pacific Heron circled the stragglers among our group who photographed the Lignums, the Reed Warblers and the burnt, hollow base of a tree, which framed the woman in a natural setting. "Isn't this paradise?" asked the photographer.

Copulating Red-bellied Black Snakes watched the watchers and remained entangled.

Another snake slithered slowly and hid among dead leaves, its head poking out now it was 'invisible' - nineteen in all graced our path.

A rush of noise drew attention to the carp-infested channel: a large black bird, neck extended, white wings flapping, lumbered laboriously along the reed beds, until it gained momentum and flew along the channel - tree trunks dividing our view into small vignettes.

Black Swan, black snakes, green and gold Cumbungi, yellow Buttercups and Marshwort, white, creeping star-flowers, maroon, pink-red *Azolla*, dry, dusty, grey-brown earth, bedecked with dead leaves and grass, Coolibah and River Red Gum, Acres and acres of buff, pale gold, cream and green *Phragmites* : a fragile marsh paradise.



## FEBRUARY CHALLENGE

by Dierk von Behrens

December's Suggestion was: *the Hutchinsonian niche*. 'Like most successful ideas, it is also a simple one: the life of a species can be usefully described as the range of temperatures in which it is able to live and reproduce, the range of prey items it consumes, the season in which it is active, the hours of the day during which it feeds, and so on down a list as long as the biologist wishes to make it. The species is defined as living within the space defined by the limits of these biological qualities each placed in turn on a separate scale. The niche, in short, is an n-dimensional hyperspace.'<sup>1</sup>

**Naturalists' pursuits** This is an occasional item that features naturalist questions for *Trivial Pursuits*.

December's pursuit was: Which head of State this century was an internationally renowned naturalist - a respected taxonomist of an endangered group of taxa? One answer is: Emperor Akihito, a noted specialist on the taxonomy of Japan's endangered gobies (gobiid fishes).

February's pursuit: Name one of the founders of ethology.

**HYACINTH ORCHID** - *Dipodium punctatum* (?). We have a small patch on our bush block. They have been under my watchful eye since first emerging in dry soil near several Eucalypts at the edge of a clearing. Unfortunately only a few orchids have survived to produce fruit to date. New stems emerge and older ones disappear. They are obviously a delicacy. Kangaroos and wild pigs appear to be eating them. The pigs, I suspect, may eat their roots as well, as holes remain behind where orchids once were. Counting all stems each time we visit the story is as follows: 10th December 1995, 67; 26th Dec, 45; 30th Dec, 20; 20th Jan 1996, 17. This is a casual count as I have not numbered each plant. The total population would obviously have been larger than the original 67. A fence would obviously allow better study of this area. [Editor]

<sup>1</sup> Edward O Wilson: *Naturalist Island* Press/Shearwater Books, Washington DC, 1994, pg 236.

## RICHARD'S PIPIT (*Anthus novaeseelandiae*)

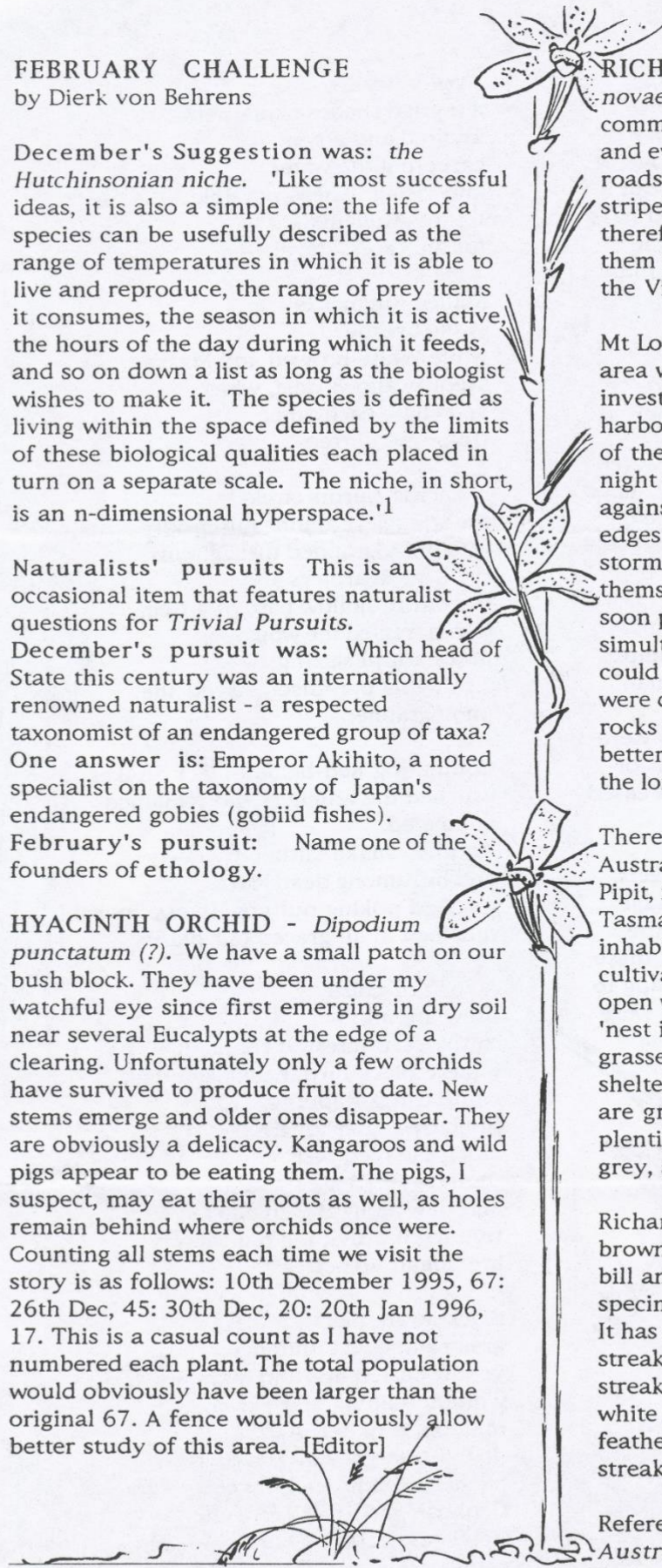
16-18 cm - This is a common bird usually seen flying in front of and eventually away from automobiles along roadsides, their characteristic white tail stripes identifying them immediately. I was therefore surprised and delighted to see them in large numbers around Mt Hotham in the Victorian Alps in January.

Mt Loch Car Park is a large gently sloping area with very rocky edges. Small hikers investigating the rocks discovered that they harboured hundreds of Bogong moths. Many of these were subsequently liberated. At night the moths 'suicide' in large numbers against car windscreens. Pipits frequent the edges of the car park. No sooner had a hail storm ceased than Pipits flooded the area themselves, beaks poked into small crevices soon produced moths and three birds simultaneously juggled moths until they could swallow them. Sometimes the moths were dipped in water or dropped on the rocks to be quickly snapped up again in a better position. The birds appear to teeter as the longish tail moves up and down.

There are 43 species of Pipits world wide. Australia has only one species, Richard's Pipit, found throughout the mainland and Tasmania. It is a ground dwelling bird and inhabits grasslands from inland plains to cultivated pastures, alpine meadows, also open woodlands and coastal sand-dunes. Its 'nest is a deep and well-constructed cup of grasses found in a depression usually sheltered by tussock or stone. The 3 - 4 eggs are grey, dull-white or buff-white, plentifully and finely freckled with deeper grey, slate-brown and umber.' (Pizzey)

Richard's Pipit is a slender streaked brownish bird. It has a slender pale-brown bill and long pale pinkish brown legs. My specimen's legs were more brown than pink. It has a long fawn eyebrow and two thin dark streaks on the sides of the throat, fine dark streaks on a fawn breast and prominent white edges to its tail. There are 10 tail feathers, the outer two on each side being streaked with white.

References: *A Field Guide to the Birds of Australia* by Graham Pizzey; 1981 Collins Sydney. Personal observation Rosemary von Behrens.



CONTRIBUTIONS NEEDED. Don't wait to be asked. If you see something unusual, or are interested in things natural, whether they move or not, chances are others would also like to know. Write it down or give me a call on 254 1763. Thank you to all those who do contribute. I love seeing other people's names under articles.

# Scorcher of a year rekindles fears of greenhouse mayhem

By GAVIN GILCHRIST  
Technology Writer, and agencies

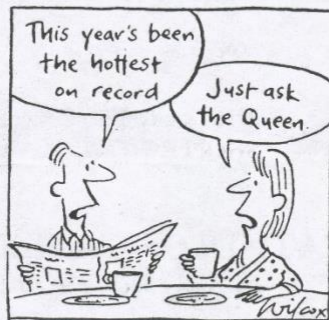
With 1995 in its dying days, global records compiled by British climate scientists show that it has been the planet's hottest year since reliable records began.

With 11 months' data from every continent and ocean, they are confident that it will emerge as the hottest year in the past 140, putting pressure on world governments to take more seriously the negotiations for the Climate Change Convention.

In a historic decision in Madrid last month, leading climate scientists said they believed they could detect human interference in the world's climate.

The United Nations-World Meteorological Organisation group said: "The balance of evidence suggests a discernible human influence on global climate."

The group's conclusion supports the greenhouse effect theory,



which says that the build-up of atmospheric pollution from the burning of oil, coal and gas, land clearing, and from farming, is changing the planet's atmosphere – trapping more heat and shifting weather patterns.

The British Meteorological Office's Hadley Centre and the University of East Anglia report that from January to November this year, world temperatures averaged 0.41C above the long-term trend over 1961-1990.

The hottest year on record was 1990, which was 0.36C above the trend.

The British scientists believe that even if the planet as a whole is unusually cold this month, 1995 will still emerge as the hottest. The 10 hottest years since 1860 have all been since 1982.

However, Australia this year has run against the global trend.

A senior meteorologist in the Bureau of Meteorology's climate section, Ms Rosea Kemp, said the national average temperature this year was below normal.

Sydney's average maximum for 1995 so far is 21.8C, 0.2C below normal, while the average minimum has been 13.9C, down 0.8C.

Bureau records show that Australia has been warming since the early 1950s by 0.1C-0.2C a decade although in south-west and central Queensland minimum overnight temperatures have been rising by as much as 0.4C a decade.

By the end of the next century, scientists forecast, global average temperatures will have risen 0.8C-3.5C and storms, floods and droughts will be more frequent.

THANK YOU TO "THE SYDNEY MORNING HERALD."

## ODDS'N'ENDS

**ACT Birdwatchers Hotline** - Ring 247 5530 for a current 5 minute recorded message on meetings, outings, bargains, interesting, rare or migratory birds to be seen in our area. Leave your own message.

**Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve** - Walks, bird hides, picnic areas. Bookings essential for guided tours. Ring 237 5120 To join Friends of Tidbinbilla ring 237 5120 or collect registration form from Visitor Centre.

**Murrumbidgee River Corridor** - Ranger guided walks. To book ring 288 4930

**Namadgi National Park** - Bookings essential for popular walks. Ring 237 5222

**Canberra Nature Park** - Information Line 290 1057

**ACT Government Shop Fronts** - changing displays and pamphlets available on topical issues,

## NEWSLETTER

Any contributions happily received large or small, reports or pictures, anything that may interest others. Do volunteer to write up meetings and outings.

Contributions can be handed in at meetings to:

Rosemary von Behrens  
121 Springvale Drive  
Weetangera ACT 2614

Telephone 254 1763 (H)\*\* or 2056122 (W)

Deadline for the next Newsletter is two weeks before the next meeting.

# FIELD NATURALISTS ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA Incorporated

The Field Naturalists Association of Canberra was formed in 1981. The aim of the club is to stimulate interest in the natural history of the ACT through regular meetings and field outings. Meetings are usually held on the first Thursday of each month. Field outings are also planned each month and range from day outings to long weekends and camping. The emphasis is on informality and fun. New members are always welcome, especially family groups and young people. Information on activities is circulated in the monthly newsletter. If you wish to join FNAC, please complete the form below and send it with the appropriate subscription to:

The Treasurer, FNAC, GPO Box 249, Canberra ACT 2601

FAMILY NAME: ..... FIRST NAME: .....

If a family membership, please include the first names of other members of the family.

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