

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. Enter off Linnaeus Way.

NEWSLETTER - FEBRUARY 1998

Welcome back. We hope you had an enjoyable Christmas and New Year. We have an exciting start to our program. One MEETING and two OUTINGS. Read on.

FEBRUARY MEETING WITH FIELD VISIT FIRST - Thursday 5 February 1998 Regenerating native grasslands with Sarah Sharp

1. Field visit with light picnic tea first - meet at the Museum site at Yarramundi Reach at 5.30pm for a light (and brief) picnic tea. There are outdoor seats and toilets.
Around 6pm Sarah will lead us on a walk around a grasslands burn site where she has been working to control exotic grasses such as Wild Oats and to promote native grasses such as Kangaroo Grass.
2. Meeting, 8pm, ANU BoZo Building, Linnaeus Way - Sarah will show us some slides and talk about the grasslands work she has been doing over various sites and what she has been able to achieve.

Guests: Interested members of other groups have been invited to attend, including SGAP, COG, FOG and Park Care groups. Inquiries to Philip Bell, tel/fax/ans.mach. (02) 6253 1117: Email: pmbell@pcug.org.au

OUTING: February 15, 1998. A Sunday barbecue and bird watching experience. Please meet at John Knight Park around 5 pm. Bring your own tucker, waterbag and binoculars.

ADVANCED NOTICE

We already have speakers booked for March (Malcolm Gill on bushfire on the urban/rural interface) and April (William J Lines, environmental writer re his new books "False Economy; a history of aust agriculture" and "A long walk in the Australian bush"). Janette Lindsay on El Nino and climatic variability - date to be set. Well done Phillip Bell - our meetings organiser.

COOLEMAN RIDGE PARKCARE GROUP

In December Phillip Bell reported on our outing to Cooleman Ridge. This is an update from Naarilla Hirsch. "Cooleman Ridge Parkcare Group has been actively working with grasses on the Ridge as well as clearing weeds and planting trees and shrubs. In the last quarter of 1997, 160 grasses and 208 herbaceous plants were planted on the Ridge. The group has obtained seed collecting permits and is hoping to collect grass seeds over the summer. In preparation for this activity, Leon Horsnell led a grass identification walk on the Ridge. The group has prepared a discussion paper on a management plan for the Ridge and is currently obtaining comments from members on this."

.and let me play among the stars.

Lean back in your seats and journey with us to 'play among the stars'.

We were enthralled by the marvels of computer animation which whisked us through the heavens from the deep, 'extensive and sinuous canyons and valleys' of Mars to brilliant Jupiter, the largest of the planets with a volume some 1300 times greater than Earth - its intriguing great red spot, its curious bands, its four major and very different satellites; Io, red and highly active; Europa, icy and smooth; Ganymede and Callisto, icy and cratered. Onwards to Saturn with its fascinating rings and its own satellites. Then to the nether regions of our solar system - Uranus, Neptune and finally Pluto.

We saw the 13 constellations and noted the prominent stars, which have been friends and guides to navigators and travellers over great time.

'All I ask is a tall ship, and a star to steer her by.' (John Mansfield - Sea Fever)

Navigation may use man-made satellites nowadays, but their and our fascination with the heavenly bodies will never wane.

We heard those 'mind blowing' figures of the number of galaxies and stars in the universe, the vast distances and the rate at which the universe is expanding.

This absolutely fascinating trip lasted 45 minutes in the planetarium at the Downer Club at Dickson and followed a great value smorgasbord dinner at the club. We were also to have viewed the real sky through their telescopes but heavy cloud cover beat us. Our thanks to Pam Fennig for arranging this great December outing for about 25 of us at a bargain price of \$10

Harry Beardsell.

WETLAND HYDROLOGY & CONSERVATION SCHOLARSHIP

The Department of Geography, University College London seeks applicants for the Ted Hollis Scholarship in Wetland Hydrology & Conservation. The first Hollis Scholar will be appointed from the beginning of the 1998/9

academic session (September 1998). Suitably qualified graduates, in particular those from less developed countries may apply. The Scholarship is a lasting tribute to Dr G.E. (Ted) Hollis. Ted was a member of academic staff between 1971 and 1996. During this time he was responsible for pioneering research on the **hydrology, management and conservation of wetland ecosystems**. This research took him to such diverse areas as the North Kent Marshes (UK), Kakadu National Park (Australia), Lake Ichkeul (Tunisia), the floodplains of the Senegal River and the Hadejia-Nguru Wetlands (northern Nigeria).

The details of the Scholarship are available on the WWW at:

<http://www.geog.ucl.ac.uk/~jthomps/hollschol/hollschol.html>

SNAKES.

Our back yard suffers from "benign neglect" which is why small lizards scurry out of our path, tadpoles float bloatedly in the swimming pool, snails knock off my zucchini flowers, and we are visited by the occasional snake which, thankfully, disappears of its own accord.

I thought it timely then to acquaint you with the snakes that are resident in the ACT. For this information I am grateful to the ACT Parks and Conservation Service and their pamphlet "Living with Snakes".

Rosemary von Behrens.

WHICH SNAKE SPECIES ARE IN THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY?

There are approximately 3000 species of snakes in the world, 140 of which are found in Australia. Ten species are known to inhabit the ACT, although only three of these are likely to be found in suburban gardens. The eastern brown snake is seen most frequently. Red-bellied black and black-headed snakes are seen only occasionally. Each of the ten species found in the ACT is described in the following notes.

THE HORSE RIDING ISSUE

The eastern brown snake (*Pseudonaja textilis*) is light brown to grey-brown above, with a light brown to cream coloured belly marked with orange spots. Young snakes have a black patch on the head and another on the nape. Black bands along the body may be present. This species inhabits dry forest, woodland and grassland, and occasionally enters suburban gardens. Length: average 1.5m, maximum 2.2m.

The red-bellied black snake (*Pseudechis porphyriacus*) is black with an orange or red belly. It usually lives near water in swamps and streams. Length: average 1.2 m, maximum 2.5m.

The black-headed snake (*Unechis dwyeri*) is light brown with a cream belly. The top of the head is black. It inhabits dry forests and woodlands. Length: average 0.3m, maximum 0.6m

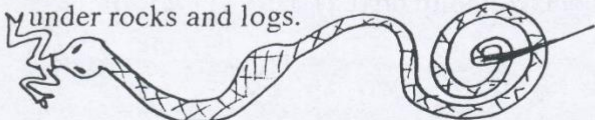
The common tiger snake (*Notechis scutatus*) is brown to almost black with often indistinct light crossbands and a cream belly. The species inhabits swampy areas of mountain forests, for example the Orroral Valley. Length: average 1.0m, maximum 1.5m.

The copper-head (*Austrelaps superbus*) is dark to light grey with orange flanks and a yellow or cream-grey belly. It is common in the mountain forests southwest of Canberra, for example in Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve and Namadgi National Park. Length: average 1.0m, maximum 1.5m

The white-lipped snake (*Drysdalia coronoides*) is light brown to reddish with a cream belly. A white streak extends from the nasal area passing below the eyes to the neck. The species inhabits wet areas of mountain forests. Length: average 0.36 maximum 0.6m.

Only a few specimens of the death adder (*Acanthopis antarcticus*), little whipsnake (*Unechis flagellum*) and bandy-bandy (*Vermicella annulata*) have been recorded in the ACT. One species of blind snake (*Typhlina negrescens*) occurs in the ACT.

Blind snakes are small, non-venomous, worm-like animals which burrow in loose soil under rocks and logs.



For at least 8 months that I know of there has been a series of meetings and consultations between various concerned people about requests from the 'equestrian fraternity' to have access to increased areas of The Pinnacle, Mt Painter and Aranda Bushland, in south Belconnen, for riding their horses.

Groups and individuals involved have included:

Residents who use these areas for walking, birdwatching and dog exercising (where permitted).

Canberra Nature Park personnel
Environment A.C.T.

The Pinnacle Environment Group
National Parks Assoc.

Friends of Mt Painter

The Equestrians

Friends of Aranda Bushland

The Conservation Council



These meetings have been held, generally, in an atmosphere of rational discussion, mention of points of view and hope that a win/win situation about fair access and environmental concerns can be achieved. When Philip Bell represented FNAC in discussions about our group's perceptions of the Government's consultation processes he was able to tell Tina Van Raay that, in general, consultation processes were felt to be at least satisfactory.

As you can imagine several individuals who have attended the 'riding' meetings are members of the above groups and also environmentally-oriented groups such as FNAC, COG, SGAP and Friends of Grasslands. As often happens at meetings, attendees were asked who they are, their reasons for attending and they usually also stated which groups they belong to. The principal bureaucratic representatives attending have been Geoff Wells and Dr Colin Adrian.

The main points discussed were the feasibility of keeping Aranda Bushland as an area where horse riding is excluded and varying some routes on The Pinnacle to preserve the most sensitive areas and those most prone to erosion. It seemed agreement/compromise was close as October drew to a close.

However at the last meeting of the series there seemed to be a turn-around without a clear

reason being given and the Final Draft Management Plan for Canberra Nature Park has been printed without the exclusion of horses from Aranda Bushland. In addition a horse riding route along the eastern perimeter of Mt Painter reserve has been suggested.

The Friends of Mt Painter were dismayed at this since huge amounts of effort have been expended on the long process of eradicating weeds from the denuded area. You can also imagine the feelings of the Friends of Aranda Bushland who, fresh from the deserved success of their book "Our Patch" Field Guide to the Flora of the A.C.T. as photographed in the Aranda Bushland, now find another battle on their hands. Most of the residents of Weetangera and Hawker are unaware of the drama that has been unfolding about The Pinnacle which has, over decades, been replanted with thousands of trees and shrubs.

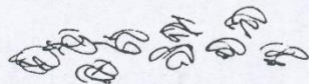
Several members of the three groups (PEG, FOMP and FAB) met with The Minister for the Environment, Mr Humphries and his environmental adviser, Vicki Dunne on 22 January 98.

It appears that, although the Final Draft Management Plan has reached the stage of beginning its legal journey there will be opportunity for concerned environmentally-oriented groups or individuals to resume the debate, make submissions and revive the consultative process over the proposed horse riding routes.

The Friends of Aranda Bushland are preparing a detailed case for excluding horses for a hearing with The Administrative Appeals Tribunal. We wish them the success they deserve as they go to these lengths to protect a unique area.

As individuals and members of FNAC we have experienced, I feel, very positive relationships over the years with Canberra Nature Parks personnel, the Parks and Conservation Service, Environment A.C.T. We share many similar goals and concerns. We hope we can continue to work together with them and kindred environmental groups in maintaining and improving the open spaces that give Canberra its magnificent setting.

Rosemary Blemings.



HORSE AND WEEDS RESEARCH

The two research papers which CSIRO weed specialist Richard Groves has provided to me amount to this:

a) The horse is almost a perfect weed spreading device - almost 100% of weed seeds ingested by a horse pass through with no loss of viability over 2 - 10 days. They are then deposited in a manure which is an ideal growing medium.

b) The Australian environment is the ideal place for weed spreading by horses to have maximum impact - because of the extreme variability of our seasons. During drought (as now and in early 1980s) large quantities of stockfeed (hay and wheat) are moved large distances (up to 1000 kms) to feed stock (including horses) in this district. Scientific analysis of this stockfeed shows it to be laced with a cocktail of noxious weeds from all over eastern Australia.

When you put these two pieces of science together, you have a perfect recipe for destroying the quality of weedfree bushland, especially when you add soil disturbance. The final draft of the Canberra Nature Park management plan for Mt Painter and for Aranda bushland proposes to put these new trails onto steep grades. This may also be an issue for new trails recommended for parts of the Pinnacle Nature Park.

Research papers:

1. "Seed transmission through the digestive tract of the horse" RS St John Sweeting & KA Morris ex Proceedings of the 9th Australian Weeds Conference, August 1990
2. "Drought feeding and the dispersal of weeds" AG Thomas, AM Gill, PHR Moore, F Forcella ex Journal of the Australian Institute of Agricultural Science, 1984

Phillip Bell

**FNAC members attending the horse riding meetings have been wearing different hats. FNAC is not directly involved. If you would like to help FAB, FOMP, PEG - then please contact Phillip on (02) 6253 1117. RvB

NATURE COURSES

CIT Solution's Adult Community Education

Bush regeneration (with Alison Elvin)
This course outlines the principles of plant ecology, species identification, regeneration techniques, species and communities, sole conservation techniques and management.

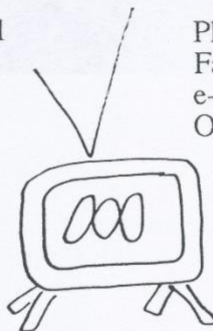
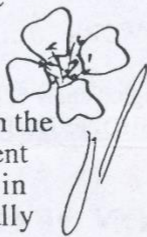
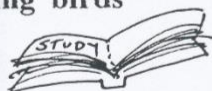
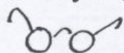
How to identify plants (with Ann Myers)
An introduction to botany, plant morphology and the use of keys to identify plants in the ACT

Wetland ecology.(with Alison Elvin)
This course guides the participants through the complex role that wetlands play in catchment ecology; the range of wetland types found in this area; the flora and fauna species typically found in each wetland type; the history of wetland degradation and the current status of wetlands.

Phone: 02-6207 4444 or 02-6207 4441
Fax: 02-6207 4343
Email: cit.solutions@cit.act.edu.au

ANU Continuing Education Courses

Canberra's amazing birds
(McComas Taylor)



From Gondwana to Australia
(Ian Fraser)
Sex and the single flower (Ian Fraser)

Phone: 02/6249 2892 or 6249 2888
Fax: 02/6279 8066 or 6249 5938
Email: enrolments.cce@anu.edu.au

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is open to everyone. Classes are held on ABC TV or ABC radio or by work book. They ring to check how you are going.

Introductory Entomology

The unique continent: The nature of the Australian environment

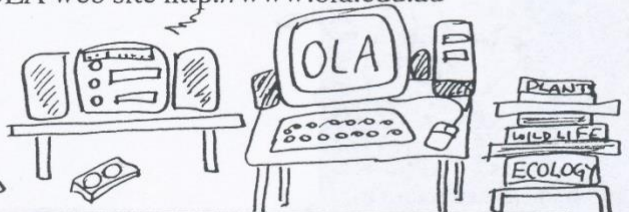
Wildlife Management



Park and Wildland Management

Limnology

Phone: 03/9903 8955
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e-mail: cls@ola.edu.au
OLA web site <http://www.ola.edu.au>



ODDS'N'ENDS

ACT Birdwatchers Hotline - Ring 6247 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, birds, picnic areas. Bookings essential for guided tours. Ring 6237 5120. To join Friends of Tidbinbilla ring 6237 5120 or collect registration form from Visitor Centre.

Murrumbidgee River Corridor - Ranger guided walks: book on 6288 4930; Gen Enq 6207 2425

Namadgi National Park - Bookings essential for popular walks. Ring 6237 5222

Canberra Nature Park - Information Line 6290 1057

ACT Government Shop Fronts - changing displays and pamphlets available on topical issues.
Environment Centre -

NEWSLETTER

Any contributions happily received; large or small, reports or pictures, anything that may interest others. Do volunteer to write up meetings and outings. Thank you to all contributors. It makes my work much easier.

Contributions can be handed in at meetings to Rosemary von Behrens or sent to:
121 Springvale Drive Weetangera ACT 2614 or e-mail vbehrens@actonline.com.au
Tel/Fax 6254 1763

Deadline is 10 days before the first Thursday in the month.

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.

POSTAL ADDRESS:

SUBURB: STATE: POSTCODE:

PHONE: HOME: WORK:

SUBSCRIPTION ENCLOSED: \$..... Single/Family \$20; Concession \$12 (pensioners and F/T students).
How did you hear about FNAC? FRIEND SHOPFRONT OTHER

FIELD NATURALISTS ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA INC.

TO FOSTER AN INTEREST IN, AN AWARENESS AND AN UNDERSTANDING OF NATURE.



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