

# FIELD NATTER



## FIELD NATURALISTS ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA

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

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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 2000

### WELCOME BACK

to Field Natter, the Field Nats, and our various activities for 2001. We hope you had an enjoyable and safe Christmas and New Year, and wish you the best for the centenary celebration of this our wonderful country - including all that blooms, grows, twinkles, flies, creeps, crawls, crumbles, bites and just is.

**MEETING:** Thursday, 1 February, 8pm, hear about the natural wonders of Canberra's hidden valley a talk by Ray Polglaze on the lower Molonglo.

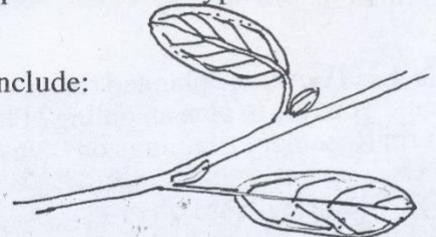
The Lower Molonglo stretches from Scrivener Dam through to the Murrumbidgee - with abrupt left and right turns through the open valley between Belconnen and Weston. Near the Bidgee, the Molonglo cuts a deep gorge with rocky slopes and dramatic cliffs.

Most of this area is inaccessible except to bushwalkers. I think of it as Canberra's hidden valley.

On the slopes above there are pine forests, grasslands and Black Cypress and Eucalypt woodlands. River She-oaks line the watercourse.

Threatened species in these river, woodland and grassland habitats include:

- Pink-tailed Legless Lizards,
- Pomaderris pallida plants,
- Brown Treecreepers and
- lichens.



There is potential habitat for Painted Honeyeaters and Macquarie Perch. There are fossils here more than 400 million years old.

These nature conservation values raise many management issues. There is the challenge of limiting human disturbance of vulnerable sites in an interesting area with spectacular scenery close to the suburbs of Canberra. How can we manage fire, grazing and regeneration when we know so little about the ecology of threatened species in this area?

How can we integrate planning, monitoring, reporting and consultation so as to support effective management of such an area?

Many of these issues have been raised with the Planning and Urban Services Committee of the ACT Assembly. This committee has the task of recommending both boundaries and management plans for the proposed Lower Molonglo River Corridor Nature Reserve.

In 2000, Ray prepared submissions to this Committee on these issues for the National Parks Association and the Conservation Council.

Ray moved to Canberra from Perth some years ago and works here as an environmental consultant. In Perth he served as president of the WA Junior Naturalists. Their web address is:  
<http://www.wanats.iinet.net.au/youngnat.html>

I first met Ray at a meeting convened by the Conservation Council and the National Parks Association to discuss community responses to the 1996 draft management plan for Canberra Nature Park.

Ray successfully identified the two major shortcomings of the draft plan. These were:

1. its failure to recognise the conservation first rule of the Land Act as the principle guideline for the plan and
2. failure to recognise the need for individual management plans for each of the almost 30 reserves within Canberra Nature Park.

We can look forward to an interesting talk from Ray on the many issues close to the hearts of Canberra naturalists. Thanks to Ray for providing an overview of his talk.  
Phillip Bell

**OUTING:** None planned for this month. Would you like to plan an outing? Please inform Rosemary Blemings on 02/6258 4724

**CONTRIBUTIONS TO THIS NEWSLETTER** will be gratefully received by the Editor. In the meantime, however, I scrounge where I can.

**RAFFLE DONATIONS** are also most appreciated. Please bring items to the meetings.

**HOT WEATHER.** In Canberra at 4 pm 24 January it's 40°C (hottest January temperature for years) but in White Cliffs NSW it's 48°C and humid. "Cool" in White Cliffs is when it gets below 30°C at night for sleeping. One family in northern South Australia (after 3 weeks of heat wave conditions) live underground during the day, and sleep on the back of a truck at night - too many snakes around to sleep on the ground.

## DATES FOR THE DIARY.

**ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION AND BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION ACT 1999 - WORKSHOPS.** The Environmental Defenders Office will present two workshops on the Commonwealth environment laws, the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. The workshops are being hosted by the Australian Centre for Environmental Law - ANU.

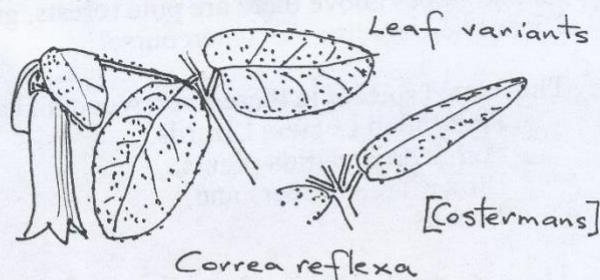
When: Wednesday, 31 January, 2001  
3 - 5 pm  
Wednesday, 7 February, 2001  
5.30 - 7.30 pm

Where: Faculty of Law  
Australian National University  
Cost: \$11.00

For further details or a registration form please contact the EDO office on 02/6247 9420

**FRIENDS OF GRASSLANDS AGM 10** February; 10 March Ginini Flats grasslands. More details from Geoff and Margaret on 02/6241 4065

**SGAP ONLINE** - fascinating articles  
wysiwyg://55/http://farrer.riv.csu.edu.au/ASG  
AP/index.html



The following two articles are taken from the **HERPDIGEST**, an online newsletter [[asalzberg@herpdigest.org](mailto:asalzberg@herpdigest.org)] which contains articles on reptiles and amphibians from around the world. I acknowledge and thank them and their sources. Articles taken from **HERPDIGEST** Vol 1 #24 and Special Vol 1 #24a

## FOUL CANE TOADS THREATEN AUSTRALIAN PARK (Kakadu National Park) January 19, 2001

Story by Marie McInerney, REUTERS NEWS SERVICE

ADELAIDE - One of Australia's foulest pests - the prolific and poisonous cane toad - is set to invade the country's world-renowned Kakadu National Park and could lay waste to its native species. Wildlife officers also fear the ugly toads will disturb hundreds of traditional Aboriginal communities in the country's so-called Top End, killing off their customary food sources and forcing them to rely more and more on "white fella food".

The toads, introduced to Australia from South America in 1935, are expected to arrive in the World Heritage listed Kakadu in coming weeks or months after an unrelenting advance over several thousand kilometres (miles) from the east.

"The short-term impact is disaster," leading Australian amphibian specialist Mike Tyler told Reuters. "I can assure you that large numbers of creatures are going to die and I think it's fanciful to believe everything will recover and we'll all learn to live with cane toads," he said. The toads, which can grow to the size of dinner plates, carry two sacks of poison behind the head which, when bitten by other animals, can kill within minutes.

It is accepted that the toads, brought to Australia in a bid to kill off a beetle in northern canefields, have made it to Kakadu's southeastern corner and will be inside the huge park by the end of the wet season in March or April. Northern Territory wildlife officer John Woinarski told Reuters animals which eat toads, including snakes, goannas (lizards), turtles, marsupial cats, and even crocodiles were most susceptible to the toxic pests. "The fear is that with the arrival of cane toads the populations of those species will crash, at least temporarily, so the mainstay of Aboriginal sustenance is removed," he said.

But Woinarski said the prognosis was "not all gloom and doom", with evidence suggesting the toads' impact was relatively temporary, and that within five years most species - perhaps bar the quoll, or native cat - will have learnt either to avoid them or to eat them without being poisoned. "It's right that people are worried but the weight of scientific evidence suggests there will be an impact but

hat, by and large, things will recover within two or five years."

Tyler disagrees and says the toads will find ideal conditions for the first time since they arrived in Australia, rather than suffering dehydration for much of the year as they do elsewhere. "There's abundant ground cover, there's water throughout the year at many of the billabongs (ponds), and added to that, you've got the most fabulous insect life in terms of food. That is a formula for disaster," he said.

The early-century biological warfare plan which saw the cane toad, or *Bufo marinus*, brought to Australia was doomed to failure as the beetle it was meant to hunt could fly. Efforts to kill off the cane toads proved as futile with the female able to lay as many as 35,000 eggs a year.

## GALAPAGOS ISLANDS OIL SPILL STATE OF EMERGENCY DECLARED BY ECUADOR An Appeal For Help.

In the third week of January, a tanker with 240,000 gallons of fuel went aground on San Cristobal Island, Galapagos. Despite the best efforts to contain the load, fuel began escaping and spreading throughout the ocean and onto the shore. Staff members at the Charles Darwin Research Station are working with the National Park Service to coordinate activities to deal with this emergency situation.

Programs to treat and care for the affected animals, efforts to predict and monitor the spread of oil, and research activities on the spill's effects need your support today. This will no doubt be a long-term project, but there is an urgent need for immediate help, particularly to finance the enormous expense of this operation. Limitations of supplies and monitoring efforts mean that more animals will have to struggle alone against this man-made disaster and the odds are stacked against them. Funds are greatly needed. We come to you, asking for your support, as you know how important it is to protect these islands.

Please feel free to make a gift, noting that it is to help the Oil Spill Efforts. You can place a donation online at [www.galapagos.org](http://www.galapagos.org) <<http://www.galapagos.org>>, via mail (CDF, Inc., 100 North Washington Street, Suite 232, Falls Church, VA 22046), via fax (703-538-6835), or on the phone (703-538-6833). Thank you for your continuous support. Charles Darwin Foundation, Inc.

# 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: .....

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PHONE: HOME: ..... WORK: .....

SUBSCRIPTION ENCLOSED: \$..... Single/Family \$20.

How did you hear about FNAC? FRIEND  OTHER

## FIELD NATURALISTS ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA INC.

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



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