

# 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 2002

**MEETING:** Thursday, 7 February, 8 pm, hear about **greenhouse and climate change** - a talk by **Dr Janette Lindesay**, Education Manager of the Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) for Greenhouse Accounting. This CRC studies the terrestrial carbon cycle involved in global change.

I am sure you will recall the packed meeting which heard Janette's talk in May 1998 on El Nino. Many members enjoyed her talk so much they have been asking for more. So here it is. Janette will give us a Powerpoint presentation. If it is anything like the standard of her last FNAC presentation, get ready for a treat.

Janette has moved on to a new project: climate change, greenhouse and carbon sequestration. We will find out how she measures the carbon locked up in a forest.

**OUTING:** On February 10 a trip to CSIRO Discovery as it's been revamped (there's more on salinity and climate change, more interactive activities about food and the biodiversity exhibit has been dusted off.) **TIME:** 2-4 pm and then an Australian National Botanic Gardens stroll until it's time to listen to Tuggeranong Valley Community Concert Band (show tunes and light classical music) and share picnic space by the kiosk. **COST:** Discovery is \$6, \$3 for children and concessions. There's a parking fee at the Gardens and gold coin collection during the music by the Friends of ANBG.  
Rosemary Blemings

### FIREANTS continued....

A footnote to the Fireants story in the November newsletter: I read in the Lonely Planet guide to New Caledonia that the fire ant has allegedly contributed to the decline of the coffee industry there because of the reluctance of pickers to expose themselves to the stings of the ants. - Maureen Wright

THE VICTORIAN LAND FOR WILDLIFE scheme has an interesting Newsletter based on voluntary Nature Conservation efforts that have been growing for 20 years. Efforts are supported by the Natural Resources and Environment's Website where a list of Land for Wildlife Notes may interest FNAC members. The notes cover a wide range of related topics that include feral species, individual genera and species, trees and wildlife, wildlife benefits for your property, management... Visit [www.nre.vic.gov.au/notes/](http://www.nre.vic.gov.au/notes/) and see for yourself! - Rosemary Blemings

## BACKGROUND NOTES

on our February speaker  
**Dr Janette Lindesay**  
by Philip Bell

Janette started her science career in South Africa where she worked as a research scientist in the Climatology Research Group at Wits, while lecturing in climatology at University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. Janette moved to Canberra in the 1990s and took up the post of senior lecturer in the ANU Geography Dept. This was where she worked on that beautiful El Nino atlas we saw at the last meeting

"... a superbly illustrated synthesis of climate data and development in theories and dynamics pertaining to the ENSO phenomenon... an invaluable resource and data base for a wider readership, including researchers and students in atmospheric, oceanic and environmental sciences, secondary teachers of geography and science, and social and environmental policy-makers. Given its reasonable price, the book and CD-ROM are highly recommended for individuals as well as libraries involved in Holocene research." *The Holocene* 7,4 (1997)

Janette will talk to us about Australia's perspective in the world effort to control greenhouse and climate change and in particular the contribution we can make with forest policy.

Those who care to trawl the web on Janette's research contributions can read about her papers to numerous scientific conferences on

- sea levels,
- trends in maximum and minimum temperatures,
- ENSO influence across the Indian Ocean,
- low frequency, decadal and annual climate variability,
- plus her other research interests, including frosts in the Canberra region.

Come and hear about some science in the making, science vital to the future of our planet.



## NEW FEATURE TOWN AND COUNTRY NATURE NOTES.

Do you have a contribution?

Ros Stafford and Garth Dixon report the following: "An unusual visitor came to our studio at Warriwillah, Michelago in January. A Rosenberg's Monitor rested its chin on the edge of the concrete verandah then casually walked along the verandah closely watched by our dachshund pup from behind glass windows. Naturally it was well photographed and observed until it flopped down in the grass and disappeared when our backs were turned."

Ros and Garth were waiting to observe their hundredth bird species on Warriwillah and in mid September on a frosty morning they heard a lyrebird calling from down the hillside. Just before Christmas 2001 a pair were observed turning over leaf litter in their Kanga Valley.

### DO KOALAS EAT BARK?

November 8 and 9, 2001 found Stephanie (Houston Zoo), Jennifer (Toledo Zoo) USA; Fritz (Duisberg Zoo) Germany; John, Bill and Jane from the Australian Koala Foundation Brisbane; Chris (Eden-Monaro), Ros and Rosemary (ACT) at Black Ridge, NSW with their heads down gloved hands scrabbling within a metre of selected tree trunks, within a marked out patch, looking for scats. The patches chosen usually had one or more *Eucalyptus mannifera* trees or a tree with "chew" marks on them. One tree was chosen to be the centre of a 20 metre radius, all live trees within the circle were marked and examined. The findings were recorded, tree species noted and tree diameter at breast height was measured.

What did we discover? Macropod, possum, koala and baby koala scats in varying quantities, in different patches. Other trees within the patches were *E rossii*, *E bridgesiana*, *E rubida*, *E dives*. The joy and excitement generated by the discovery of baby koala scats was a joy to behold in itself and heavy rain did not diminish the enthusiasm. Without Ros Stafford's dedication to the koala cause this two day excursion would not have taken place. Did we actually see a koala? No, but ample evidence indicated their presence. Do Koalas eat bark? We believe they do, but a scientific examination of their scats should prove the point, and the Koala Foundation will tell all at a later date. One interesting point to note is that while they appear to prefer

examples of "chew-shapes" on a tree trunk. Sometimes massed.

*Emannifera*, they will select one mannifera over the other, even though both trees may be standing within a metre of each other. One tree has chews for several metres up the tree from its base, while its neighbour remains untouched.

## SNIPPETS ABOUT UNSUNG HEROES

by our President Rosemary Blemings

Members may have noticed an article in The Canberra Times of January 12th which linked bushfire-preparedness with invasive weed removal and the efforts of Parkcare & Landcare Groups around the ACT. Left until last was a comment by Jean Geue, "You get in, you weed the bush. It shows people you value it."

FNAC had a weeding session with the Friends of Aranda Bushland last August where the target weeds were Briar Rose and Hawthorn. Inspiring us were Jean, immediate past Convenor of FOAB, and Ian Falconer. Ian and Mary were 'hosts', with Jean Sunday 13 January when weeds were removed in the area of the Snow Gums by about 12 people of all ages. By this time the purple threat of already-seeded Viper's Bugloss/Paterson's Curse had become unobtrusive and we targetted St John's Wort.

Driving through the Glenloch interchange and past that area again today at 11:30 am I saw the familiar green car parked near the stiled entrance. Jean was there again, probably from the cool early hours, pulling the SJW as she has on numerous recent occasions. She is indefatigable in the destruction of threatening weeds, the protection and promotion of Aranda Bushland and in her reading and interpretation of material relevant to the preservation of the ACT's remaining natural heritage. Jean is both an example to us and of FNAC's members who not only enjoy our monthly learning journeys but also use leisure time in attempts to stem the damage to our fragile and beautiful environment.

□  
Rosenberg's  
Monitor  
17 Feb 2001  
(*Varanus  
rosenbergi*)  
Black  
Ridge



## THE LORE OF NAMES

A course by Ian Fraser

What's in a name? Well, for me it can be humour, colour, insight into the plant or animal itself, and a lot of history. In this course we begin with the folk lore of the origins of common names of Australia fauna and flora, and some strange lore is therein hidden! Then we look at the history of our modern system of naming beasts and plants, which is more interesting than you might think. I put some effort into demystifying proper names, so that you'll be able to approach them with a confident smile in future, and a fair show of knowing what they mean. We also spend some time on the jokes and blunders that are found in names. But, I think that the most interesting part is an odyssey, which comprises half of the course, wherein we trace the history of biology in Australia, from the first days of marine exploration to today, using many of the hundreds of Australian plants and animals named after them. Some of these people are famous, many more just played bit parts, but each one lives on in this way - and I think you'll be glad to meet them! Lots of slides. And I promise to disinter my sense of humour in time for the start of the course!!

DATES & TIMES: 4 Tuesdays, 5 - 26 February; 6.30 pm - 8.45 pm.

PLACE: Canberra Seniors' Club, Watson St Turner. (Across Barry Drive from the Environment Centre)

COST: \$70 for the 8 hours (including refreshments & GST). Cheques payable to Environment Tours.

BOOKING: Essential. Phone or email Ian Fraser, [ianf@pcug.org.au](mailto:ianf@pcug.org.au)

Environment Tours;  
Vertego Environmental Wordsmithing  
GPO Box 3268, Canberra, ACT 2601  
ph: 02 6249 1560 fax: 02 6247 3227

## DID YOU KNOW?

That an Australian Navy proposal, where the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was submitted on Christmas Eve 2001, with a two week comment period, concerns sonar and acoustic trials which can destroy cetaceans (whales and dolphins).

In 1979 the International Whaling Commission created an Indian Ocean Sanctuary part of which will be affected by the tests ie in the West Australian Exercise Area, Rottneest Island. Australia recognises that whale sanctuaries are essential to long term protection and management of cetaceans. Australia, however, is not the only country to have sonar trials as the following quotation shows.

"...The U.S. Navy's "Low-Frequency Active" (LFA) sonar program ... is designed to detect enemy submarines by flooding vast expanses of the oceans with sound. Leaving aside the military wisdom of this sonar -- which is still in dispute -- the environmental dangers are becoming increasingly clear.

Here's the problem: LFA noise is billions of times more intense than that known to disturb whale migration and communication. Whales and dolphins depend on their sensitive hearing for survival. To put it simply, a deaf whale is a dead whale. Deafening noise from the LFA system will interfere with the vital biological activities of marine mammals. Scientists fear that long-term exposure to LFA could push entire populations over the brink into extinction.

Inevitably, there will also be marine mammals unlucky enough to swim too close to LFA loudspeakers. Imagine an acoustic wave so powerful that, even at substantial distances, it can destroy your hearing, cause your lungs or ears to hemorrhage, or even kill you.

We've already seen a glimpse of the resulting carnage. Last year, (2000) whales from four different species stranded themselves and died on beaches across the northern Bahamas during a Navy military exercise. All but one of the dead animals examined by researchers had suffered hemorrhaging around the inner ear -- the telltale sign of acoustic trauma. The U.S. Navy's own report [*December 2001: Joint Interim Report Bahamas Marine Mammal Stranding Event of 15-16 March 2000*] concluded that it is "highly likely" that the stranding was caused by the use of mid-frequency active sonar". [Source: *An open letter from James Taylor, Pierce Brosnan and*

*Jean-Michel Cousteau* - Natural Resources Defense Council's website (<http://www.nrdc.org>.)

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) tested a sonar system in the Mediterranean in May 1996. Reports from Greece indicate that active sonar fatally affects whales and dolphins eg Twelve beaked whales were found beached in the same vicinity NATO was conducting their tests.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

Why does ANY Australian organisation find it necessary to deliver an EIS on Christmas Eve? Why is the resulting period for comment so short? Why must other species of life on the planet deliberately continue to suffer at the hands of the human species, isn't the NATO and US experience enough? What will we make of future mass strandings of whales or of those in the past?

by Rosemary von Behrens et al

## ROSENBERG'S DISAPPOINTMENT.

Termite mound observations by an amateur. by Rosemary von Behrens (The numbers of the notes also refer to my photographs which were taken at the same time).

1. 17 February 2001, a friend Helga Krugler and I came across a Rosenberg's Monitor near a termite mound situated on a ridge in a dry sclerophyll forest. It refused to move from this site which was great for our photo opportunity. Since then I have looked at the mound each time I passed.
2. 26 March 2001. At the second examination Ros Stafford and I noticed that a small saucer-sized "plug" had appeared on the downside of the mound. This indicated that eggs had been laid and the hole plugged. Front claw scratch marks were seen on either side of the plug and the downside slope on which the mound is situated had been swept smooth by the monitor's tail. (Photo Ros)
3. May/June/July. Rain came and went. The mound deteriorated and became pitted. Darker patches showed where the goanna had scratched the sides. A portion of the plug disappeared and the remainder 'slipped downwards'. I was convinced that something had eaten the eggs. The back of the mound also showed signs of deterioration.

termite tunnel maze enlarged.

4. In late September I noticed a host of termites, mostly small, in several patches. They appeared to me to be eating their way into the mound and were creating maze-like tunnels, but a termite expert Lee Miller, explained that they were in fact building up and out. Winter's eroded surfaces were being repaired. Then the termites 'disappeared' - sealed in no doubt.

6. Imagine my disappointment when on the 17 October I discovered a perfect horizontal hole the size of a 20 cent piece, approximately 15 cm deep, where the plug had been. No sign of young monitors, egg shells or termites, just a few small black ants tripping around. Eight months of watching and the reward was an empty hole. The mother monitor apparently comes back and releases the babies who had had a ready larder of termites.

7. 7 November 2001, the hole had been filled by the termites. Tidy critters. This poses another question. Do monitors continue laying their eggs in the same nest? Other mounds I have examined show no sign of monitor disturbance. I'm keeping the mound under observation. It's February once again. Next time, if there is one, I'll camp there come October but I wouldn't expect the adult to be as docile as it was in February. One thing I have learnt (from observation) is that when it comes to most animals it is unwise to get between them and where they are going, or them and their young.

(oops! No number 5. Apologies)



## FIELD NATURALISTS ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA INC.

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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