

February 2007

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

**MEETING THURSDAY FEBRUARY 1  
8:00 pm Australian National University**  
Meeting details back page

# CLOUDS

and how we can use them  
**KENN BATT**

Kenn Batt joined the Australian Bureau of Meteorology in early 1975 and has since worked as a meteorologist in most Australian States and Antarctica. For much of his 32 years in the weather game he has been an aviation, severe weather and marine forecaster. In more recent times, between 1989 and 2001, he

worked as a marine and severe weather forecaster based in Sydney, NSW. He then worked as the Aviation and Defence Weather Services Manager for NSW/ACT for about 3 years before moving to Canberra as Meteorologist-in-Charge of the Australian Capital Territory Meteorological Office. The talk will focus on

the different cloud types, how they form and what they can be telling us about the weather around us.

*Ken Batt for February is a wonderful speaker. He is a mix of speaker and actor and gave a wonderful talk to the National Gallery in 2006.*

#### EDITORIAL

Rosemary has been busy and apart from This month's talk we have some interesting speakers in March and April—topics are 'Water dragons in March and The Planet h/eaters: a global warning in April. Also in this and future issues I plan to include an item that comes from 'the right side of the brain'. This month is from Rosemary von Behren's recent exhibition.

So think of contributing anything artistic sometime this year

Chris

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FIELD NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA

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**Book reviews — *Burn – the epic story of bushfire in Australia* and *Ten Thousand Acres – a love story***

**Maureen Bell**

I have read two books of interest to field naturalists over the holidays.

The first is Paul Collins's *Burn – the epic story of bushfire in Australia* (Allen & Unwin, 2006), published before the report of the Coronial Enquiry under Maria Doogan.

This substantial book (420pp incl. index) attempts to cover the history of bushfire in Australia since white settlement, along with their causes (Collins is scathing about the pyromanic mentality of settlers and graziers until recently) and results. It also discusses controversial issues including 'controlled' burns for fuel reduction, Aboriginal firestick farming, and the role of arsonists and how to deal with them.

His central thesis is that care for (i.e. non-interference with) the environment and landscape, rather than people and assets, is paramount -

"Without ecological integrity, without wilderness (that is, nature in its natural state, not changed, manipulated or adulterated by humankind for its own purposes), biodiversity is threatened, the land degenerates and species become extinct. This is not just an ecological problem. It is also a cultural and spiritual issue..."

Perhaps he is just a couple of centuries too late for his 'unchanged nature' ideas?

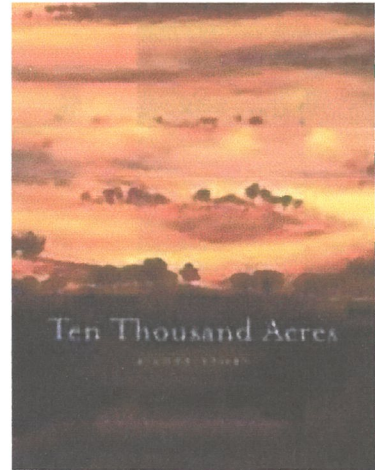
Collins has done a lot of research for this book but it badly needs editing - pages and pages of personal stories are interspersed with comment in a barely organized fashion - and rather too much is made of the 1939 Victorian fires and the subsequent Royal Commission under Stretton. And Collins, naturally, is highly selective of his reference sources.

Although he does make some suggestions for dealing with our vulnerable situation ("asset protection zones" at the urban or agricultural/bush interface, water bomber aircraft), Collins' view is that we just have to learn to live with fire in a country where fire is endemic.

The second book I read is Patrice Newell's *Ten Thousand Acres – a love story* (Penguin, 2006)

This is a very personal account as Newell writes with passion, and more or less in diary form, about her bio-dynamic farm and the feelings she has for it and its ecology. She talks about the plants, birds, cattle and wild-life which for the past 20 years have nourished her emotionally and intellectually.

Exquisitely designed, every page is a sensuous delight with beautiful and original prose, meticulously labeled photos of plant specimens and atmospheric photos of the homestead Elmswood, the property and partner Philip Adams's statues.



## WE TURN 25

Taken at the Christmas party, where Philip and Maureen Bell and Patricia Woolcott cut a ceremonial cake made by Rosemary Blemings to celebrate 25 years.

Maureen and Philip were definitely foundation members, and Patricia joined soon after.

## AUSTRALIA DAY

Celebrate Australia Day at breakfast

Corroboree Park

Paterson Road and Corroboree Park Streets Ainslie

8:00 am Jan 26

Bring everything including chairs, food and friends



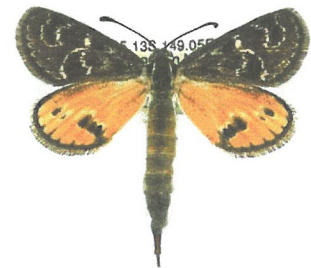
## Golden sun moth near Canberra centre

There have been many sightings of large numbers of *Synemon plana* this spring. It calls to mind the spring of 1982 where, after a similarly dry winter and spring very large numbers were also flying. Now, as in 1982, adult males are seen in all sorts of places where they were not expected and where, if the wetter seasons after 1982 are any guide, they will not be seen again during more normal conditions. After our experiences in 1982 and some other dry winters this was expected but it is great to have it confirmed.

The normal for this order is for the larval foodplants of a species of moth to frequently be limited to a single species or genus of plants.

The evidence for *Synemon plana* on *Austrodanthonia* (*Austrodanthonia* is a genus

of 28 grass species found in Australia, New Guinea and New Zealand.) is the result of hundreds of observations, in the ACT, NSW and Vic. and the observations range from larvae dug from largely *Austrodanthonia* grasslands, pupal shells protruding from dead tussocks which, when dug, showed obvious larval feeding to the usual observation of populations confined or adjacent to *Austrodanthonia* containing grasslands but never in pure, eg. *Themeda*, stands. The only suggestion of wider feeding is a record of Chilean needle grass which on the face of it, as an introduced species, is unlikely. Some plausible explanations have to do with the rapid invasion of an *Austrodanthonia* grassland by Chilean *Synemon plana* belongs in a group of 6 fairly closely related species. There is no information on the foodplant of one of these but the remaining 5 have all been associated with



*Synemon plana* Walker, 1854 (Castniidae), Female - ACT, Belconnen from CSIRO entomology 1990

(Continued on page 5)

# Barking up a Gum Tree



Scribbly Gum 50 x 50 cm



Ghost Gum 60 x 60 cm

The above reproductions are of paintings done by our own Rosemary von Behrens from her recent exhibition at Belconnen Gallery

## Outing- Black Mountain Possums- Friday 2nd Feb 8pm

The February meeting was intended to be spotlighting insects, but with so few insects around we will focus on possums. Black Mountain is one of the best places to see possums in Canberra, with our last trip there finding 23 possums in a few hours. Please note the unusual starting time for this spotlighting field trip. The main possum species you can see on Black Mountain are ring tails, brush tails and sugar gliders. The ring tailed possum is rarely seen in Canberra suburbs but reasonably common in Canberra Nature Parks on the edge of suburbia. Other animals we may see include insectivorous bats, owls and spiders. Other things of interest are the white barked Eucalypts which can look ghostly at night. Meet at the top of Black Mountain, at the end of Black Mountain Dr. Make sure you bring a torch and binoculars. Also, as Canberra can get cold at night bring warm clothing and wet weather gear if required. The walk is about 2 ½ hours and can be steep in parts and gravel can be a bit slippery, so bring good shoes. Ring Benj on 0409 544557, or if that is not working try Benj's parents on 62544 556 if necessary, otherwise just turn up. Benj

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR INDIAN MYNAS

In November last year Bill Handke, president of Canberra Indian Myna Action Group, gave a lecture to Friends of the Australian National Botanic Gardens entitled Indian Myna Control. The ANGB Theatre was not only full but overflowing so it seems there is now widespread recognition that this pest species is out of hand. I took a few notes, as follows: One of the world's most invasive species, Indian Mynas are long-lived, i.e. 12 – 15 years, and one pair may produce eight juveniles per year. They are presently estimated at the rate of 250 per square kilometer in Canberra and are now in all suburbs. Near Woollies in Gunghalin there is a roost housing 3 – 5000 birds each night. It apparently all began in 1968 when about 100 birds were released here because someone missed their 'companionship'. Bill stated the case against this species, the main objection being the one we are all aware of:

Indian Mynas remove nesting holes from native birds and aboreal mammals, threatening Superb Parrots, Crimson and Eastern Rosellas, Sugar Gliders, Possoms, etc. and also harass Natives in other ways. He also cited quite a number of possible health hazards, as well as fire risks where they nest in roofs.

CIMAG has introduced a program to tackle the Myna problem by trapping on private property and the last count I heard was that over 7000 had been humanely removed. It is hoped to keep numbers in check in this way until such time as research programs can provide the means to extract these pests from public places. It would be good to have CIMAG's aims and methods publicized through Field Natter and/or to invite Bill to give his presentation at a FNAC meeting. A few of our members are already trapping. Over to FNAC Committee!

**Phyl Goddard**

### NEWS IN BRIEF

The Wildlife and Botanical artists have advised us about two meetings they have coming up: Monday 12th February

#### **Corroboree Frogs**

#### **and other amphibians and reptiles**

Dr. Murray Evans  
And Monday 12th Mzrach

#### **Insects of the ACT region and Friends of Grasslands (FOG)**

Kim Pullen, Geoff Robertson and Alan Landford

Both meetings are being held at the Hughes community Centre commencing at 7:30 pm

## Golden sun moth near Canberra centre (continued)

(Continued from page 3)

*Austrodanthonia* with the same sort of evidence available for *S. plana*.

The evidence for *S. plana* on *Austrodanthonia* is very strong and it would be a pity to misapply conservation measures on the basis of untested assumptions.

Cheers,

Ted Edwards.

(Ted Edwards is recognised as an expert on Golden sun moths and this email follows sightings of the moth in such central locations as Haig Park and the Limestone centre strip)

[*Synemon plana*, the golden sun moth is a diurnal moth native to Australia. It is a medium-sized moth with clubbed antennae. The clubbed antennae are a notable feature of *Synemon plana*, most other moths have brushy antennae. ]

Information contributed by Dierck von Behrens)

### **NEXT COMMITTEE MEETING**

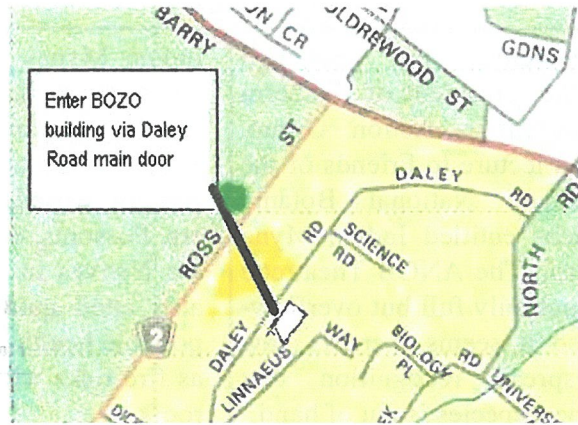
**Next Meeting Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> February 2007  
at Bob & Helen's 8/23 Temperley Street  
NICHOLLS**

**Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra**

**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:** Benj Whitworth, tel w 6272 3192 h 0409 544 557  
**Secretary:** Rosemary Blemings, tel 02 6258 4724  
**Website:** [www.geocities.com/fieldnaturalist/index.html](http://www.geocities.com/fieldnaturalist/index.html)  
**Newsletter editor:** Chris Bunn <chris\_b@webone.com.au>  
 Tel 02 6241 2968. Member contributions welcome.



**Monthly meeting venue:** Division of Botany and Zoology, Building 116, Daley Rd, Australian National University. Park (occasionally the adjacent building 44). Meetings start at 8 pm and are followed by refreshments.

**FIELD NATURALISTS ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA INC.**  
 GPO Box 249  
 CANBERRA ACT 2601

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**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 \$20) Donation: \$.....

How did you hear about FNAC? Please circle: FRIEND? OTHER? Please specify: