

February 2012
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OBJECT: To foster an interest in nature

MEETING—THURSDAY 2nd February
7:30pm Australian National University
Venue details back page



The Lure of the Lyrebird

Don and Gwen McGregor



John Gould's early 1800s painting of Superb Lyrebirds

By use of movie camera, still photography and sound recordings the McGregors have managed to cover the complete history from nest, egg, chick (feeding of) fledging and male display and mimicry. The presentation includes anecdotal comments (to support or disprove many current theories) and climaxes with excellent footage of the male presenting his full concert.

The male's display (movie) includes the sound track of 21 mimicked birds.

Bring along friends to what should be a great start to the year



OUTING Sunday February 5, 6:00 pm

Molonglo Gorge

As February can be hot, the committee decided on a late afternoon/evening picnic. The Molonglo Gorge Recreation Area is situated on a picturesque section of the Molonglo River at the western end of Molonglo Gorge. Conveniently located off the Sutton Road, near the Pialligo/Yass road end. Remember to bring all your picnic gear including insect repellent.

The walking track for the first 1/2 km is difficult, so most will only want to venture a short way along the track.

Contact Chris Bunn 6241 2968

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FIELD NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA INC. GPO BOX 249
CANBERRA ACT 2601

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Yankee Hat Excursion, Sunday 2nd December, 2011

Leader: Dierk Von Behrens

Report from Shirley and Warwick Daniels

Sunday morning dawned cold, windy and overcast with early showers forecast but becoming fine later. Before our small intrepid party set out Dierk gave us a brief talk on the history of the construction of the car park – a reflection on environmental vandalism redressed after consultation.

As we set out the overall impression was how green everything looked, the huge numbers of kangaroos and the weeds: scotch thistle, verbasicum, roses and blackberry to name just a few. Dierk managed to remove some as we walked along the track using an ingenious combination hoe walking stick.

The granite outcrops close to the car park, surrounded by native raspberries and *Lomandra longifolia*, are ideal habitat for Cunningham's Skinks but because it was so cold when we set out we did not see any.

We stopped on the bridge to listen to a variety of frogs calling from the creek and as we left the board walk there were a lots of flowers in bloom. Some of the more prolific were Bulbine sp, a variety of peas, native forget-me-nots, *Ajuga australis*, growing in small swathes under *Eucalyptus pauciflora* and lots of *Leptospermum sp.* with its white flowers looking like summer snow.



Bulbine sp



We enjoyed lunch at the rock overhang, studying the ancient art work and listening to the many bird calls. Dierk gave some very impressive calls of his own with at least one response from the birds, who were obviously listening to us. We also saw wallabies closer to the rock

over hangs.

On the way back Warwick took us to see an unusual insect. It varied in colour from light brown to white, matching the two colours of the bark on the trunk of *Eucalyptus pauciflora*. We watched them for a while as they were interesting to observe. They did not fly but moved sideways like crabs, settling when they reached the bark that best suited their colouring. They were about the size of a one cent piece.

Blue patches were now appearing in the sky. Perhaps, if it was warm enough, we may find a skink. I looked around one granite outcrop but did not see any. The others were more patient, looked further, waited and were indeed rewarded. A number of Cunningham's Skinks, (*Egernia cunninghami*) were there in all their glory. As the sun was well and truly out now we were also lucky enough to see, and not run over as we left the car park, a Blotched Blue-tongue Lizard, (*Tiliqua nigrolutea*). It was great to be able to make use of our brand new book by Ross Bennett, Reptiles and Frogs of the Australian Capital Territory produced by the National Parks Assoc. of the ACT Inc. 2011.



Native raspberry



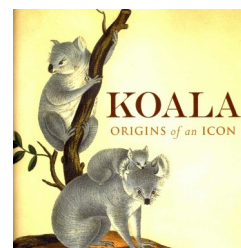
It varied in colour from light brown to white, matching the two colours of the bark on the trunk of *Eucalyptus pauciflora*.

BOOK REVIEWS

Koala: Origins of an Icon by Stephen Jackson

Jacana Books, an imprint of Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, NSW, 2007.

Review by Dierk von Behrens



This cute, cuddly cousin of the wombat, successfully coexisted for millennia with Australia's Aborigines, but was brought to the brink of extinction by the fur trade as late as 1927. In 1924 alone 'the colossal total of over two million were exported from the eastern States.'

As one of the joint custodians of *Black Ridge* - a 1922 ha private conservation property adjoining *Mt Clifford Nature Reserve* (located some 100 km South of Canberra in the extension of the Tinderry Ranges) - I was naturally attracted to the book that describes the fate of these iconic animals that are now so highly regarded. Why? We have a thinly scattered population of them on the property and have been studying their strange bark-chewing behaviour, only so far documented on the Monaro, since 1992. Initially very few people, including scientists, would believe us. We were eventually able to visually demonstrate it with the aid of **Chris Allen**, the NSW National Park Service and infrared cameras installed last year. To view the evidence, please google: 'bark chew koalas *Canberra Times*.'

Bark chewing behaviour is not described in **Jackson's** otherwise comprehensive and engaging tome, which comprehensively tackles the fascinating evolution, ecology and behaviour of the species, its Aboriginal dreamtime status, discovery by Europeans, and its transformation both into a cultural ambassador and from cartoon character to chocolate bar icon. The work also discusses the politics and costs of managing koalas, threats to them, focusing on habitat loss and, finally, discusses the highs and lows of the conservation controversy surrounding this extraordinary animal with its two thumbs on each hand.

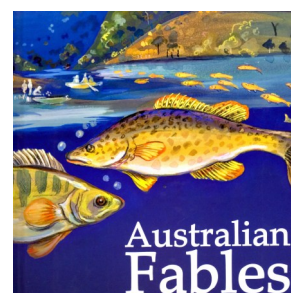
The book achieves its aims of highlighting both the variety of complex issues associated with the koala that are not normally discussed, as well as this animal's important role in Australian culture.

'Ultimately' the author concludes 'let us aspire to the conservation of the forests of Australia for future generations ... No doubt the animal with the spoon-shaped nose will have an important role to play in this endeavour.'

In their own, limited way the co-owners of *Black Ridge* and our bark-chewing koalas are doing their bit.

I recommend that all those interested in Australian nature read this authoritative work.

Australian Fables written by Ron Jenz, illustrated by Anneke Nes 2009 Brolga Publishing, PO Box 12544 A'Beckett St Vic 8006, ISBN 9781921221880 (hbk.)



Reviewed by Dierk von Behrens

Fables, parables and allegories have long traditions, often, as in this case, involving the personification of animals. They are forms of literature that encourage recipients to look below their surface for hidden meanings.

Cultures embody their assumptions in different stories whose mythic structures reflect their societies' attitudes to life. This illustrated children's book courageously aims to do that for Australia. Does it succeed? Can it be recommended?

To reveal their allegorical meanings, the attitude needs to be disengaged from each story. This book contains 30 single page stories, illustrated on facing pages. At the bottom of each page each alleged allegorical meaning is spelled out *in bold italics*.

To judge this work, therefore, it is necessary to examine the stories, their relationship to the allegorical meanings on the one hand and to the paintings on the other, the paintings themselves and the relationship of the allegorical meanings to Australian culture.

Judging the stories

The first story is of a young pair of mallee-fowls who are too lazy to learn from their parents how to build a mound to incubate their first clutch of eggs and have them stolen by a fox and some crows. The last egg is shattered by a trail-bike. The naturalists among us may be concerned about the anthropomorphic learning from the parents, when we know that the chicks are totally independent from birth and do their mound-building and maintenance by instinct. In this story, however, the inaccuracy can be forgiven, when we look at the attitude it seeks to convey: **Hold fast to the words of your ancestors**.

This homily reminds me of a **Goethe** dictum that has long helped guide my life: 'What you have inherited from your forebears, acquire it in order to possess it!'

Other stories are of birds, reptiles, mammals - including humans, insects, a corroboree frog and even an earthworm. They vary in quality and appeal. The naturalist in me, however, balks when a hovering hawk 'with a thrashing of wings and a

snapping of beak, dives in picking them [the currawongs] up in its talons, leaving the baby fairy-wrens behind, ...' There are only three small hawks that truly hover: the nankeen or Australian kestrel, the black-shouldered and the letter-winged kites. None of these would be capable of attacking a currawong, let alone currawongs. In any potential strike by a larger, hawk, such as a peregrine falcon, there would certainly be no prior thrashing of wings or snapping of beak that would alert the prey; picturesque description indeed, but false!

Moral: '**He that steals honey should beware of stings.**' (18)

More disturbing still, in *The Cicada That Chimed* we read: 'the cicada made the shrill mating call that is well known to humans. *She* called for a mate but none came.' Anyone reading or hearing this would be misled. '*Male* cicadas can collectively produce extremely loud noises, up to 100 decibels, from about 20 metres ... away. They produce sound by clicking a lid-like structure on each side of the abdomen, which in some species is amplified further by a pair of air sacks in the abdomen.' '*Male* cicadas have a pair of drum-like *tymbals* at the base of the abdomen and loud sounds are produced when the 'head' of the drum is repeatedly moved in and out through the frequent action of powerful muscles, rather in the way that sounds can be made by pushing the lid of a tin can in and out.' A sex-change would have saved the story from such criticism – the advantage of using a scientific adviser!

Moral: '**Undue haste may not produce the required response.**'

Relationship of the stories to the claimed allegorical meanings

This also varies in its effectiveness – from fine, as in the Mallee-fowl story; to potentially good, though sexist, (if errors in the story were eliminated) in the fairy-wren, currawong and hawk story; to questionable in the Cicada story, where the moral applies more to the authors themselves than to that particular story.

Relationship of the stories to the paintings

On the whole, the relationship is sound, but children and naturalists can be very critical. In *The Crocodile That Needed a False Tooth* (26), 'There was a wrenching sound as the crocodile's *fourth* tooth on one side of his lower jaw broke off.' Every alert child would look across at the painting and begin counting. It is clearly the *seventh* tooth (and possibly even the *eighth*) that has broken off in the pictured crocodile. A good editor would have substituted '*seventh*' for '*fourth*' before printing.

Worse still is the inexcusable lack of correspondence between story and picture in *The Devil And The Tiger Cat*' (58). Painted on a limb above the Tasmanian Devil is the now extinct, *striped, ground-dwelling Tasmanian tiger* or thylacine (*Thylacinus cynocephalus*) – not the *spotted and spotted-tailed* arboreal **tiger cat** or tiger quoll (*Dasyurus maculatus*).

The paintings themselves

While colourful and initially engaging a more careful study of the pictures shows a degree of confusion between reasonably naturalistic representation achieved for koalas, mallee-fowls and lyrebirds, for instance, ranging to distinct caricatures such as the three main kookaburras (10), the tiger shark (12), earthworms (14) and emus (38). The latter are reminiscent of Pro Hart.

The *large* tree illustrations, though mostly meant to be eucalypts, uncharacteristically all have sinuous branches (5, 7, 9, 11, 17, 19, 21, 23 etc.). Just some of the *small* trees (43, 45, 63) have the more angular structure typical of gums, though not only the expected range of olive green colours that might be expected in Australian fables.

The hair on *The Wombat With Stomach Pains* looks like the quills of an echidna (49).

Relationship of the allegorical meanings to Australian culture

With the exception of *Bells call others but themselves enter not into the church* (54), the morals/mottos/attitudes are all appropriately secular. *A true friend is the best possession* (40) and *They are rich who have true friends* (44) reflect the Aussie spirit of mateship, while the first part of *Life is not meant to be easy but sometimes it becomes easier* harps back to Malcolm Fraser's phrase in which 'wasn't' replaced 'is not'. Others, such as *What is not wisdom is danger* (30) and *Self-preservation is the first law of nature* (56) while accompanying very Aussie stories are international warnings. It is only *We should clearly know our position before we assume our place* which accompanies *The Corroboree Frog That Joined The Dance* story (32) that I would regard as potentially embodying a conservative, hierarchical mentality, which I might not wish to propagate.

Summary

This publication is a courageous attempt at Australianising the fable tradition, one that would have greatly benefited from use of a good editor and a scientific advisor. The book is worthwhile, if critically read to and discussed with the younger generation.

First ever rehabilitated Koala released on the Monaro

By Dierk von Behrens

Decades ago, well before we settled in Canberra after our return in 1973 from an overseas posting to lecture on Australia in Germany, I saw my first koala on the Monaro – up an electricity pole on the side of the Cooma-Nimmitabel road. Young koalas, once weaned, scatter to find their own habitat. **Nat Magay**, proprietor of CWC Auto Services in Ainslie Village, also reported one in a pine tree on his property off Macs Reef Road years ago – again without an exact date.

Earlier this year we had heard of the rescue of a wandering koala from **Chris Allen**. (We have been working with this NSW NPWS research leader on the bark chewing behaviour of koalas – an activity first discovered by **Garth Dixon** on *Black Ridge*, a jointly owned conservation property.) The animal was being chased up the flyscreen of a house by the resident dogs at Chakola, kilometres from *Mt Clifford Nature Reserve* – the closest intact forest. NSW Wildlife Rescue came to its aid, in particular **James Fitzgerald**, who has generously established comprehensive native wild-life rescue facilities on his 800 acre property off Peak Hill Road in the ranges extending well to the East of *Black Ridge*. There, in a specially built koala enclosure containing four tree-stems set in the ground, he nursed the undernourished animal back to health - by regularly feeding it with bunched branches of eucalypt leaves. He favoured *Eucalyptus mannifera*, (the bark of select trees of which are the ones chewed by koalas of the Monaro population). A veterinarian had examined the rehabilitee and pronounced him ready for release – the sooner the better!

Though we had selected a potential site on *Mt Clifford Nature Reserve*, the more stress-free option of a ‘soft release’ was decided on: the enclosure is opened and the captive allowed/encouraged to climb out.

On Wednesday 30 November a range of visitors from as far away as Seattle, Sydney, Bega, Canberra and Cooma converged on *Hammershill* - James’s property. We were feasted to a country barbecue by L.A.O.K.O. Inc. – Looking After Our Kosciuszko Orphans. We had picked up the first box of 2012 Calendars for them. Members’ photos illustrate the range of rescued native animals, from koala to Wedge Tail Eagle, Wombats, joeys and Ringtail Possum to Eastern Grey Kangaroo. At just \$10 they help Wildlife Rescue (6456 1313) defray costs. Helping save wildlife, they make appealing presents!

Fed in the enclosure around 6.30 pm, the koala promptly went to sleep! Before leaving we inspected the five acre fenced Rescued Macropod Enclosure and witnessed the supplementary feeding using horse pellets of many Eastern Greys (*Macropus giganteus*), two Red-necked Wallabies (*Wallabia rufogrisea*) and - much shier in the background - two light grey shaggy Wallaroos (*M. robustus*). On the way home we photographed a Tawny Frogmouth (*Podargus strigoides*) besides the Jarangle Road.

As predicted by **James**, the koala woke up at Ten pm. Coaxed out, he sniffed the base of two trees, climbed up the third and had disappeared by the morning.

Australian Naturalists’ Network (ANN) 2012 Get-Together

Dear Canberra Field Natters,

As you are aware, the Field Naturalists’ Association of Canberra will be hosting the Australian Naturalist Network (ANN) Get-Together from October 13 to 21st this year. Every two years ANN has a Get-Together in a different State. Previous Get-Together locations and hosts were:

- | | | | | |
|----|------|-----|------------------------|--|
| 1. | 2000 | NT | Alice Springs | ASFNC (C=club) |
| 2. | 2002 | TAS | Launceston | LFNC |
| 3. | 2004 | WA | Darling Range | DR branch WAFNC |
| 4. | 2006 | VIC | Harrietville/Jindabyne | SEANA {South East Aust Nat Ass} |
| 5. | 2008 | NT | Mary River | NTFNC |
| 6. | 2010 | QLD | Chinchilla | CFNC |
| 7. | 2012 | ACT | Canberra | FNAC As you can see, it is now ‘our turn.’ |

(Continued on page 7)

RABBIT CONTROL AT MULLIGANS FLAT

Dear Field Naturalists

We thought many of you would find this story from Peter Mills, Ranger in Charge, Mulligans Flat, very interesting. He describes the use of dogs in controlling rabbits at Mulligans Flat in December last year.

I am sure most of you were in withdrawal last week as we had closed the reserve to go about the intensive work of removing as many rabbits and hares as we could find. We employed Steve Austin and his four legged springer spaniels Bolt, Dina and Jenny. Steve was heavily involved in training handlers and dogs for the rabbit removal work on Macquarie Island World Heritage Area.

Our days usually began at around 4.30am and ended at 8.30pm and I apologise now if we made too much noise. We very quickly developed a system with Steve and whichever dog was working. Two Rangers and Steve carried shotguns for euthanising rabbits/hares that did not immediately run down a burrow. One other Ranger followed in a quad bike with burrow-poisoning gear. When a rabbit was detected the dog immediately stopped and stared, if we could shoot the animal the closest inline shooter would carry out the task. I must admit the practice at the Sporting Shooters Range paid off here as Steve was impressed at our accuracy.

The main task of using dogs for detection is to find isolated hidden burrows that the pesky little creatures use. Over the five days we found sixty hidden burrows that were poisoned using 'Phostoxin' and 13 rabbits and two hares were shot. Feral animal research tells us that there is what one could call an average number of rabbits living in each burrow, we have settled upon about three rabbits per burrow. All up we can approximate that probably about 150 - 180 rabbits were euthanased.

During the week we estimate that we walked about 12 to 15 kms per day and the dog ran about 40 kms per day. It is quite amazing to see the dedication of the dogs and their enthusiasm to the work. Steve has trained the dogs to trot along up to 25 metres in front of him running backwards and forwards continually watching Steve for commands. Steve not only controls the dogs with silent and audible whistle commands but is able to indicate using his hands pointing to a particular clump of grass or

logs or rocks. He also uses spoken commands to encourage the dog. After a day the dog gets to know the areas Steve wants checked out and automatically learns to check them out with no commands. In some places the grass was so long we did not see the dog running about under our feet and this is where we see the name 'Springer Spaniel' come to the fore. The dogs springs up out of the grass with flying floppy ears (so cute I must say), sees Steve and checks that he is still there. Steve also knows where the dog is as it 'springs' up, then it can be two whistles go left or three whistles go right or four to come back.

All the Rangers got to know Steve and how he works the dogs to detect rabbits/hares. We also befriended the dogs and they are smart, learning to come and sit on your feet for some well earned attention. Looking back on this process of utilising dogs to detect rabbits and hares we know that we covered most of the sanctuary and likely left a few hidden burrows, rabbits and hares that were missed on the run.

We have walked much of the sanctuary in fine detail and are reasonably well aware where a few may have escaped detection. Steve has been invited back for three days sometime in late February and we do expect that it will take a few more short visits to get the last rabbit and hare. While on this job Steve trained the dogs to ignore our local lizards and echidnas.

Rangers will continue to employ all the usual trapping, spotlight shooting and baiting methods.

We did learn from Steve that the rabbit program on Macquarie Island has been very successful finding rabbits occupying Penguin burrows, the dogs live on Macquarie Island for at least five years until they have been clear of rabbits and none sighted for two years. Every summer several dog handlers travel back to the island and up the intensity of rabbit detection. They have terrain difficulties with high grassy cliff like slopes leading down to the sea in many places. We are confident that using dogs is another very useful method we can use in our rabbit and hare program.

When Bettongs are reintroduced into the sanctuary we are confident that the dogs can be quickly trained to ignore their smells in the same way the dogs ignore sea birds, penguins or seals. Steve is off to Mornington Sanctuary in the Kimberley this week to hand over a trained dog that the Australian Wildlife Conservancy has purchased to detect feral cats killing small mammals.

(Continued from page 5)

Most of the 76 interstate registered 2012 participants are arriving from Western Australia, Tasmania and Victoria. The FNAC is a small association, and will need your **HELP** as a local resident. Help to register the participants on October 13, help "guide" people to the right place, perhaps transport a few without cars, travel on a bus to point out features, collect lunches, chat, entertain, and so on. If you are a member of FOG, COG, STEP, ANPS, Herps, perhaps you can rope in a friend to help. We would like our visitors to have an enjoyable experience.

There will be a few spaces on buses for locals, others will have to car pool/use own transport. If you use the bus, prepared meals, and so on then the cost of these will have to come out of your pocket. Chinchilla has forwarded \$2,000 to assist with our commitments, and we are expected to pass on an amount to help the next club. The volunteering will be for the love of meeting our interstate friends, getting to know about them and their clubs, and perhaps joining in on the next Get-together in 2014 wherever that may be held.

Please think about what you can do, and which activity you would like to join and help make a success. Below is our current activities plan. This plan has yet to be completely finalised and may change.

OCTOBER	DAY	ACTIVITY/LOCATION	STATUS
13	Saturday	Registration Program explanation	Yowani
14	Sunday	Mt Ainslie State Circle/geology Arboretum/STEP Lunch Black Mountain?	depart Yowani TBA Where?
15	Monday	CSIRO ANBG CSIRO Optus Theatre 6 pm	booked spoken/sent email booked
16	Tuesday	Mulligans Goorooyaroo Reptile Centre	booked booked booked
17	Wednesday	Deep Space Communications Tidbinbilla	booked booked
18	Thursday	Geoscience Callum Brae Stromlo eve	booked walk/look Emailed tba
19	Friday	National Institutions in groups/choices/ltd numbers NLA, NMA, NGA etc. Nat Wildlife Collection Nat Archives - Waterhouse ANU Stromlo historical?	 OK OK
20	Saturday	Brindabellas Bulls Head/Mt Franklin? Evening Dinner	 Ideas?
21	Sunday	Campbell Park Grasslands	

I hope that you have had an enjoyable and relaxed Christmas/New Year break and look forward to see you at our next meeting, or to hear from you with ideas about ANN 2012, and how you would like to help. Many thanks.

Rosemary von Behrens
ANN 2012 Get-Together Co-ordinator

January 2012



Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra Inc.

Who are the Field Naturalists?

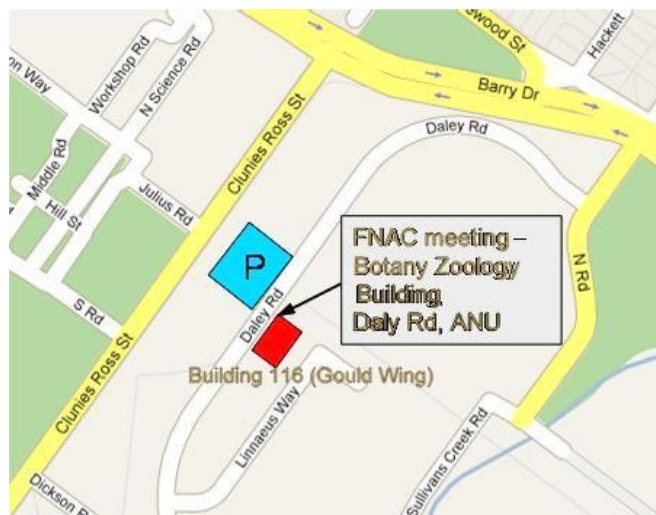
The Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra (FNAC) was formed in 1981. Our aim is to foster interest in natural history by means of meetings and regular field outings. Meetings are usually held on the first Thursday of each month. Outings range from weekend rambles to long weekends away. Activities 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: Chris Bunn (02)62412968/0417407351

Email: fieldnaturalist@yahoo.com.au

Website: www.fieldnatscanberra.com

All newsletter contributions welcome.



Monthly meeting venue: Division of Botany and Zoology, Building 116, (Gould wing) Daley Rd, Australian National University. Park (occasionally the adjacent building 44). Meetings start at 7:30 pm and are followed by refreshments.

Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra

GPO Box 249

Canberra ACT 2601



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 \$25) Donation: \$.....

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