

February 2015
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GPO BOX 249
CANNBERRA ACT 2601

FIELD NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION OF CANNBERRA INC.

FIELD NATURALIST

MEETING—THURSDAY 5 February 2015
7:30 pm Australian National University
Gould Seminar Room, Building 116, Daley Road, ANU, ACT
Details back page

Crabs of Christmas Island

Speaker: Daniel Carmody

Daniel Carmody is a ranger at the Australian National Botanic Gardens. He will be speaking to us about the Christmas Island crabs. Christmas Island has 14 species of land crabs. The most conspicuous of these is the Christmas Island Red Crab (*Gecarcoidea natalis*). They live in preferred shady sites all over the island and only migrate when sexually mature. The breeding migrations provide the images which fascinate us.

Do come along to hear Daniel speak and stay for supper and a chat afterwards.



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2014–15 silly season sightings and observations within 15 kilometres of Flynn, ACT

The original Yellow Box across the road lost a branch. This interested Cockatoos almost immediately. They and Galahs often try to beak hollows out of the cut branches' centres. Now the tree is losing its bark again...the strips will make excellent mulch.

Next-door's 4 m tall Hakea has had enough. No more occasional visits from Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos. Will there be seedlings from the splitting capsules?

Somewhere nearby Sparrows have a nest. The adults have been criss-crossing our garden since spring taking gleaned food to the incubator and nestlings. Until a flock of Silvereyes searched today the sparrows have been the only small birds regularly taking insects from the garden. They're learning to hover for spiders under the eaves.

For two weeks Crimson rosellas have spent hours taking the capsules from the 40 year old tea-trees in the behind-garden. Above and beside the house over-height eucalypts have hosted a Currawong nest. The big predators have foraged in our garden during incubation and the chicks' young lives. Once fledged their begging is much less appealing than magpies' 'feed-me' pleas. It's taken two weeks for the currawongs to grow up for foraging elsewhere.

The magpies' family abandoned our garden for their nesting period. Only recently have they deigned to return twice. They know that young birds need protein and that the occasionally-offered porridge oats isn't adequate. The known signature calls of various adults have been heard so they are still in the neighbourhood. The oldest pair still forage on the nature-strip across the road finding invertebrates amongst the flatweed infestation

and the Chilean Needle Grass I have tried to eradicate.

One Pee-wee pair reused last year's nest site 500 m away but there must be another belonging to the pair that forages amongst the grass species that pass for 'lawn' in the backyard. Why do Pee-wees and Magpies adopt constant inter-species conflict?

A real raptor, Sparrowhawk or Goshawk perched on the electricity cable for a few minutes one day. Healthy ecosystems need top predators. In the rain a few years ago I watched, from the kitchen window, the demolishing of a Crested pigeon by one such.

Kookaburras have been heard around here and on Mt Rogers 800 m up the hill. I was lucky enough to capture feeding one day with both adults attending the begging juvenile.

King Parrots returned last week, their ringing calls a welcome relief from the ubiquitous calls of Koels staying close whilst cuckolded others raised their chick(s). Red Wattlebirds spent over a week in an apricot tree six doors down the street. The owners were away and were less likely to make use of the fruit than their predecessors.

Across the easement that takes walkers to Mt Rogers through Flynn, a Loquat tree had a poor season. Previously the loquats had attracted Superb Parrots, which at first, took their harvest to creched young on Mt Rogers. Later the young came here too and the swift Green-leeks' flights across the suburb happened throughout the day as families sought out other unharvested fruits in nearby gardens. Has the local presence of increasing numbers of Rainbow Lorikeets deterred the 'Superbs'? COG's email line has reported over

100 Superb Parrots gathering near Belconnen Golf Course 7 kms away. Are the parrots assembling in flocks prior to leaving the ACT? Will any of these birds remain to form the over-wintering groups we've noticed in the past 2–3 winters?

In Fraser, friends have reported a Satin Bowerbird eating the grapes that drape over their deck rails. Once the sighting was better known the SBB's presence was claimed by other householders in the area to the north of Mt Rogers. A great sighting as I'd rather expected the SBBs to have given up on north Belconnen gardens as having too little shrubbery and too many 'they never hunt' cats.

So far there hasn't been the annual defoliation of our *Hibbertia scandens* by Grape vine moth caterpillars. But three moths were fluttering around this morning so I've probably spoken too soon. Orchard Swallow-tails have been flying through in recent days searching for Orange and other citrus blossoms. Meadow Argus and Common Brown butterflies have been numerous, with the occasional Cabbage White visiting the Rocket's flowers along with Honeybees. When there's been rain, the resulting moisture and heat stimulated choruses of Cicadas, particularly in the vegie garden.

This spring-summer has been a Christmas Beetle spectacular. There are specimens to be had from under eucalypts far and near. Are the Christmas beetles at a point in evolution where they develop a mechanism for recovering from being helplessly on their backs and food for ants? Or do they just erupt in such numbers that losing a proportion that can't turn over, fly off and resume feeding isn't a species survival problem?



Less than a kilometre away an area of garden was covered in forest-litter with the prospect of its hosting a traffic-noise-screen of trees and shrubs. After rain an amazing forest of fungi sprang up. Presumably the fungi were *Coprinellus disseminates*. It's a grey-beige fungus, quite common and the fruiting bodies lasted less than 48 hours before heat, other fungi and decay-factors removed the effect. Tiny white fungi have taken over part of the Begonia's pot right beside me as I write.

As the bus took me into Civic the other day a squadron of Ibis was flying over the city's centre. Who else noticed them? They fly over Flynn occasionally 15 kms from Canberra's CBD. On the COG email-line the Commonwealth Park Flying Foxes made the news again eliciting wise advice from ACT Wildlife Carers about bird and bat safe fruit-tree netting. The carers are trained to handle bats injured by nets. www.actwildlife.net

Some of my most beautiful moments of the 'Silly Season' have been far from silly as there have been numerous sightings of families, individuals, friends and regulars outdoors and enjoying the unique natural world the ACT offers. They have taken time to re-

connect with each other, rebuild relationships interrupted by the hectic pace of life and distance. Even bussing to watch the dedicated showmanship that underlies exhibition that is the Summernats Super-Cruise offered a chance to observe human animals in all their diversity.

Regardless of the ethics of a petroleum-dependent community it's inspiring to see people going beyond the numbness of screen-based entertainment and satisfying their curiosity. They may even have moved from having what Ian Leslie in *Curi-*

ous: the Desire to Know & Why Your Future Depends on it, calls Diverisive curiosity (the search for something novel) towards Epistemic curiosity (the quest for knowledge) and Empathetic curiosity (seeing things from others' perspectives). Field Natters have all three qualities.

We don't have to regularly travel thousands of kilometres to find novelty and interesting experiences, which in turn, make us smarter, more creative and more content as we explore what our world is really about... and what makes us 'tick'. (in another summer-read Tim Low's *Where Song Began* sheds new light on Australian birds by taking the reader on world-wide journeys).

For those of us who have been lucky enough to travel perhaps now is the time to stay home and enjoy some of the superb photographic records of others' journeys and the natural worlds they discovered. Alternatively, join Flickr and enjoy others' photos on your laptop. Col Ellis has some magical photographs of his travels in his *gallerytwentyseven* at Higgins shops for Belconnen residents and the Bus Depot Markets.

Rosemary Blemings 21.01.15.

A family enjoying Mount Rogers



Some good news about koalas on the NSW South Coast

By Chris Allen, Office of Environment and Heritage

The survey assessing koala distribution and abundance in the coastal forests of south-eastern NSW has achieved the milestone of assessing 1000 grid-sites across 35,000 hectares of national park, state forests and private land. This is probably the largest survey ever undertaken for this species.

At each survey grid-site the litter under 30 trees was searched for evidence of koalas; that's 30,000 trees that have been searched since the project started in July 2011.

The koala population in this area is important. With a population of between 50–100 koalas, it is the only known koala population in the coastal forests between Newcastle and the Victorian border.

With only 10% of the sites yielding koala evidence the data has been hard-won! Nevertheless the project has been able to highlight key koala areas and has guided the planning for a substantial fuel reduction program undertaken by national parks that has reduced the potential of wildfire impacting on the population.

The project has also been able to demonstrate that koala numbers have increased in recent years, in the core area in Mumbulla.

The koala is an iconic threatened species whose recovery is being funded under both the Saving our Species program and a separate Australian Government Biodiversity Fund program.

This survey is one component of the Corridors and Core Habitat for Koalas Project, managed by the South East Ecosystems and Threatened Species Team's Chris Allen and NPWS Far South Coast Region.

The survey has also identified key browse species and established the foundations for a monitoring program that can guide many aspects of the management of the population.

Source: *Saving Our Species Update: Issue 2, November 2014*



The prize with a sur-prise

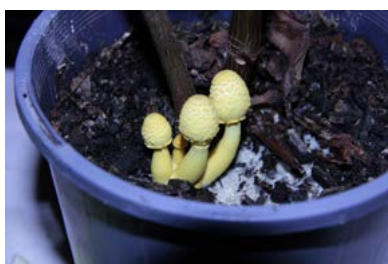
Field Naturalists who attend the Thursday night meetings know that not only do they get to hear great speakers and learn some interesting facts, but that they also have the opportunity to win various raffle prizes. Chances are good of winning a prize or maybe even more than one.

Prizes are donated by members but I've found you may get even more than you expect.

At one of these meetings I won a begonia plant donated by Rosemary Blemings. I keep this begonia in my dining room by

the window. It is thriving with constant new growth. Then just days before Christmas I got a very pleasant surprise.

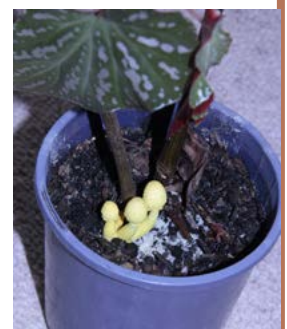
I went to water the plant and found the soil had sprouted fungi and since fungi are one of my passions, I was delighted.



I shall watch with interest to see if the fungi continue to sprout.

Thank you Rosemary for this lovely gift. Perhaps other members would like to donate prizes for the monthly raffle. You never know what hidden delights the recipients might receive.

**Alison
Milton**



Summer sightings

I had a few weeks leave over the Christmas/New Year period so had the opportunity to watch the bird activity at my birdbath each morning.

There had not been a lot of activity during the Winter months but with the arrival of the hotter Summer days the activity increased with daily early morning visits by various birds. I watched in amusement as one crimson rosella tried for a morning bath but each time it landed on the birdbath a wattlebird kept coming back for another dip. In fact there were three wattlebirds vying for the privilege.

Other visitors were magpies, sparrows and crested pigeons. While all of these would hop into the bath and have a good splash the sulphur crested cockatoos would merely sit on the side and have a drink. I never once saw one of these hop into the bath for a splash. Perhaps they thought the bath too small.

Then this afternoon there was a heavy downpour and I heard a loud racket of screeching cockatoos in my front yard. Four or five birds had landed in the gum tree outside and were deliberately hanging upsidedown with wings flared delighting in the rain running through their feathers. These birds obviously prefer a rain shower to a bird bath. It was delightful to watch as birds left and others came to take their turn at a cleansing shower.



Living compost

Over the Christmas break I decided to dig out my compost bin and had some interesting finds. While many people may cringe at finding white curl grubs, my mum had always told me that these were a sign of a good compost (no doubt as long as they weren't in the lawn). As usual I did see some of these grubs but not as many as usual, perhaps because of the time of year. Instead I found a number in various stages of transforming into Christmas beetles.

A few weeks later I spotted a very small skink lizard and an empty eggshell. Unusually, I had already found two other lots of skinks eggs while gardening. I then two unhatched eggs. The empty eggshell was still moist with egg embryo indicating that the lizard had hatched very recently.

I carefully put the two unhatched eggs into some soil for safety until I had finished digging. I then carefully sifted through the soil looking for the eggs to return them but didn't find them as readily as I had expected. Just then I spotted yet another very small skink, but saw that its tail was still encased in the egg shell. My God, it had just hatched and I missed the experience by seconds. I then found the second egg: empty. It too had hatched as I was digging through the compost. How wonderful.

Furry friends

Over the last years I have occasionally seen a large furry caterpillar, but perhaps only two or three times. This year I have seen this caterpillar five times; or should I say I have seen five caterpillars of this type.

A Google search revealed this caterpillar to be the larvae of the White stemmed gum moth.



The first sighting was of the caterpillar on the road outside my house. I grabbed a stick and flicked it to safety on to the footpath. Just a few days later I was picking gum leaves for my leaf insects when I spotted another caterpillar in the fronds of the gum leaves. This was far enough away that it was unlikely to be the same caterpillar and it could be found in these leaves for at least a week afterwards.

I next found an empty casing where a caterpillar had shed its skin, then glancing up, I spotted the caterpillar climbing a Chinese elm tree beside the pathway next to my neighbour's yard.

Sadly, the next two specimens I saw were dead, having been perhaps trodden on or run over.

Alison Milton

In the wilderness

Okay, perhaps the Snowy Mountains isn't quite the 'wilderness', but I found myself quite unexpectedly, in just this location over the Australia Day long weekend. The quest: in search of wildflowers.

My new(ish) neighbour is a horticulturist seeking information on local native plants, so had joined the Canberra Native Plant Society. She casually mentioned their Australia Day weekend excursion to the Snowys, which led to an invitation to join her, which I eagerly accepted. Since she (we) were camping, there was no problem in booking a spot with less than a week's notice.

Vanessa and I arrived at the campsite at Island Bend just after 7:00 pm, where two couples had already set up camp. Others were staying at the Sawpit camp site, and had just left, after 'happy hour'. We arrived and set up our tents just ahead of the rain, but the next morning the rain cleared enough for the walk from Guthega to the suspension bridge, and a little beyond, looking at, and identifying the various native plants along the way.

Some of us (just) managed to beat the rain back to the cars, while others got a little wet. Back at the campsite we watched the rain and thunder calculating how close th, and listened to further rain (and strong winds) throughout the night.

The next morning wasn't any better, and the organiser cancelled the planned trips to Rainbow Lake and Mount Stilwel, but we did get in one good walk.



Special thanks

A special thanks goes to Warwick Wright for taking on the Speakers Program this year and preparing the monthly list.



Activities

Excursion to Monga National Park: Sun 8 February 15

This excursion will be longer than our usual morning stroll as we are going past Braidwood to the edge of the escarpment to visit Penance Grove. We will see the tallest growing moss in the world along with beautiful old tree ferns, and a glen of plum wood trees (*Eucryphia moorei*). The grove has a board walk so has good access. Bring lunch, sensible shoes, repellent and binoculars, etc. Further details at the meeting of Thurs 5 February 2015. **Contact:** Warwick Daniels 6231 0852 **Email:** wda68126@bigpond.net.au

The Conservation Quilt (‘conversation quilt’)

Here is a challenge for all you creative souls, and surely the Field Naturalists must have some. The Conservation Council is creating a conservation (conversation quilt). **Wouldn’t it be good to have the Field Naturalists represented!**

If you have a creative spirit and the skills, please don’t leave this to someone else. Please contact Rosemary Blemings if you are interested or able to let your creative juices flow and design and create a square to add to this quilt.

Here is your chance to be representative of this organisation.

Further details follow and more information can be found on the Conservation Council web site at:

<http://conservationcouncil.org.au/the-conservation-quilt-conversation-quilt/>

Each member group of the Conservation Council ACT Region is invited to make a quilt block for the Conservation Quilt. The blocks will be made into a quilt to celebrate conservation in the ACT and hang in the offices of the Council. The quilt will be launched in mid 2015 in conjunction with

World Environment Day. We are confident most groups will have a quilter in their ranks.

The blocks

Member groups or individual supporters are asked to construct a quilt block that represents their particular interests and/or achievements. Fabrics can include cotton, wool or synthetics and any embellishments that can be firmly attached. Each block should consist of two layers: the top layer of design/patter and a bottom layer of a solid cotton backing. The blocks may be traditional pieced quilting, art quilting (which uses many different techniques to create images and scenes on cloth) or modern quilting which again uses a different palette and style. There are thousands of images on the web of different styles and images which can provide inspiration. The blocks can be either

33 cm by 33 cm or thirteen inches square; or

33 cm by 43 cm or 13 inches by 17 inches.

Month	Speaker	Topic
5 February	Daniel Carmody, Ranger ANBG	Crabs of Christmas Island
5 March	Naarilla Hirsch, Don Beer	The new Asteraceae garden at the ABG: Rationale and plantings
2 April	Mary Lovett	The Pilbara Area of WA – the ancient landscape and unique flora
7 May	John Turnbull	Casuarinas: taxonomy, biology, and uses



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.

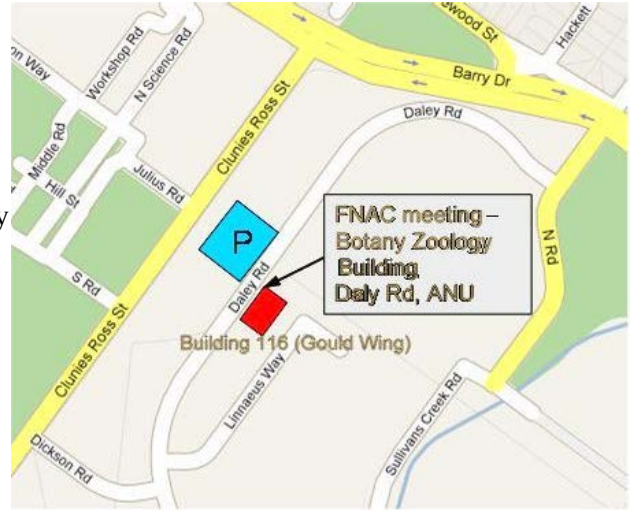
President: Rosemary von Behrens pH: 6254 1763

Email: fieldnaturalist@yahoo.com.au

Website: under construction

All newsletter contributions welcome.

Editor



Monthly meeting venue: Division of Botany and Zoology, Building 116, Daley Rd, Australian National University. Park (the Xmas meeting is at the adjacent building 44 and will start at the earlier time of 6:30 pm)

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: