February 2016
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FIELD NATTER

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

MEETING—THURSDAY 2 February 2017
7:30 pm Australian National University

Gould Seminar Room, Building 116, Daley Road, ANU, ACT
details back page

Butterflies of the ACT

Speaker: Suzi Bond

Suzi Bond will be providing an overview of the butterflies of the ACT, including what sorts of species occur here, what their distribution is, and how our knowledge of butterflies in the ACT has changed over time. She will also focus on what has been happening with the current butterfly season, with the Australian Painted Lady dominating so far, and what butterflies to look out for during the rest of the season.

Copies of Suzi's new* Field Guide to the Butterflies of the ACT *will be on sale at the meeting and she will be happy to sign them.

Contents

To paint or not to paint? Part 1

Or more accurately said, what to paint? We all know about 'writer's block' don't we? Unfortunately this 'blockage' can often occur with painters as well. I am to participate next year in an exhibition about the ACT Nature Parks. An embarrassment of riches can be found in our parks, but which section, landscape, object or detail is deserving of my attention at this particular time. I think, investigate and waver. 'Any old thing' just doesn't qualify. Exotic and native assume equal weight depending on the time of year and just joyous happenstance. So where am I to devote my time?

On 3 February 2016, while searching for inspiration I wandered over The Pinnacle Nature Reserve and came across a growth on an Acacia that could only be described as plain ugly but I found it to be ugly-beautiful and utterly fascinating. This was a complicated gall on a young slender acacia that was struggling to find a path through the gall twists and turns in order to continue growing at the end of this small branch. It's not unlike a fungus stem gall I found on an American website called 'poop' gall – but even more so (http://waynesword.palomar.edu/pljuly99.htm#fungus).

I returned several months later to discover that it had died and lost its gloss. A further visit in winter found it smashed on the ground, too many pieces scattered over a wide area for it to have been a strong wind.

There are several other Acacias loaded with similar dead galls but none so beautiful as this was in full flight.

So what caused it? Roger Farrow in *Insects of South-Eastern Australia* has a photograph of *Witch's broom gall* on a Hickory Wattle caused by an unidentified fungus. The twig growth on this Pinnacle gall is stunted in comparison but perhaps that is where it was headed. If created by a fungus, which insects might have inhabited the swollen and knobbly gall tissue? Ants did appear to be tending the gall. Perhaps they were looking for sugary secretions. Close examination of the photos show several white 'eggs' attached by long threads. Other visible white objects may influence the gall production.

Humans have taken advantage of specific galls. In *Wild Food in Australia* by A B and J W Cribb 'Bloodwood apples' refer to the *rounded galls, 2–5 cm across, produced by the plant of the rough-barked eucalypts known as bloodwoods. The galls are produced by the plant as the result of stimulus supplied by the feeding larva of an insect of the genus Cystococcus.* Aborigines ate the insect at the centre, which is reported to have a sweet taste."

The Trees for Life website informs us that: *Galls have a range of causers, including viruses, fungi, bacteria, insects and mites, and they appear on*

Ants and eggs on threads

more than half of all plant families. Usually the gall causer in some way attacks or penetrates the plant's growing tissues and causes the host to reorganise its cells and to develop an abnormal growth. The chemistry behind this is not fully understood, although it is thought to be due to complex interactions between hormones and other chemicals. Galls have such recognisable forms that the causer can often be easily identified from the growth alone. http://treesforlife.org.uk/forest/forest-ecology/plant-galls/

White bugs on gall

Dr Ros Blanche (Australian Plant Society, Tasmania) in *Insect induced plant galls* adds physical damage and nematode worms as a causal agent. *In many cases the stimulus appears to come from the saliva of the larva – while in others it seems to be chemicals injected when the adult insect lays its eggs.* The galls can appear on stems, leaves and flowers. In Australia eucalypts and acacias are more likely to have galls than other groups. Rosalind Blanche has produced an ebook titled *Life in a gall,* which is available from CSIRO Publishing at http://www.publish.csiro.au/book/6814

The study of plant galls is called cecidology, and a specialist is a cecidologist. I am neither and am still debating whether this topic would provide a suitable topic for a painting. Look at the Pinnacle photographs and wonder at this fascinating example of nature.

Rosemary von Behrens

Insect migration

I've sometimes heard people scoffing at movie scenes or TV ads that involve people sitting (or fighting) on top of moving trains, or insects clinging to moving vehicles. The critics proclaim that these scenes are not realistic as the forces of nature would blow them off of the respective vehicles. Well, I can now tell you that this can happen (though perhaps not quite as above).

While stopped at a traffic light on a bus to work one rainy morning I noticed an insect climbing into view on the outside of the bus window. It appeared to be a small moth about the size of a hover fly.

It wasn't raining hard and thinking about those sceptics who say it isn't possible to cling to a moving vehicle I watched with interest as the bus started moving. To my surprise the insect still clung to the window. I then watched it constantly until I reached my stop.

Perhaps it was able to withstand the wind pressure in the suburbs with lower speed limits, but what would happen once we left the suburbs and hit higher speed limits. Amazingly, it still clung on.

Each time the bus stopped it crawled a little further up the window but once the bus started again it tenaciously clung on with its head into the wind. Even the occasional rivulets of water down the window (with at least one direct hit) failed to dislodge it.

It was still bravely clinging to the window when I finally got off the bus at Civic, having survived the 15–20 minute journey from west Belconnen.

I hope it made it safely to whatever its final destination, but insect migration by bus? That's new!

Alison Milton

Summer insects

Summer is a time when we spend more time outside and pay more attention to insects, especially those ever present infuriating flies. However, if paying attention it can also be a time of fascinating observations as these two stories show.

SPECIES: Possibly *Amenia imperialis*. Snail parasitic blowfly

This fly was new to me and co-operative enough to stay still whilst I fetched the camera.

It's possibly *Amenia imperialis,* Snail parasitic blowfly.

Our garden would have no shortage of snails for the flies to lay eggs on though they are very good at hiding away.

The photo may show hessian as an almost-attractive textural feature but in reality the fly was resting on one of the woolsacks that had been used to take greenwaste to CSG for mulching and composting.

I'm hoping Bryan Lessard will be able to identify the fly during his presentation on Flies on 2 March. With that in mind, perhaps other Field Natters would like to bring photographs for Bryan to identify.

We've had thousands of those tiny fruit flies in the garden in recent weeks. They're small enough to crawl through fly-wire squares but not clever enough to find their way out again once the lights go off!

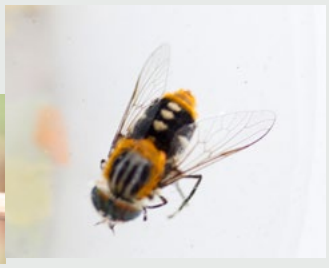
Rosemary Blemings

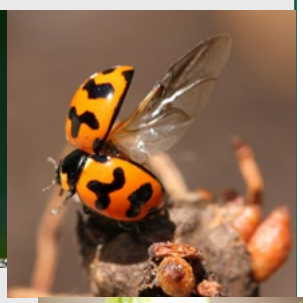
Insects in my garden

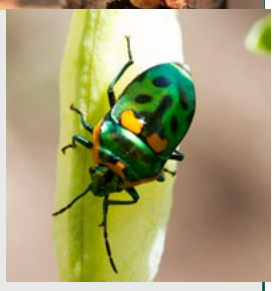
Having some time off over the Christmas period, I spent a lot of time in my back yard, not so much gardening, as observing various insects. This started when I noticed a lacewing on my bean vines so raced inside for my camera and macro lens. That started a daily passion for the weeks to follow.

My observations also found several varieties of flies: two March flies; a flesh fly, sheep blow flies and very tiny ant flies, that as the name suggests, look like winged ants; and of course, hover flies.

March flies







I also found several spiders including a Knobbed orbweaver and Jovial jumping spider; grasshoppers; jewel beetles, caterpillars; moths and cockroaches, among others.

Of course, I was not able to identify all of my sightings so placed photos on the Canberra Nature Map web site and let the experts do the work for me, though some still remain unidentified. It was a fascinating learning experience also, researching Google and Canberra Nature Map to try to identify the species before leaving it the experts, but insects are so hard. Much harder than birds.

Alison Milton

The one tree

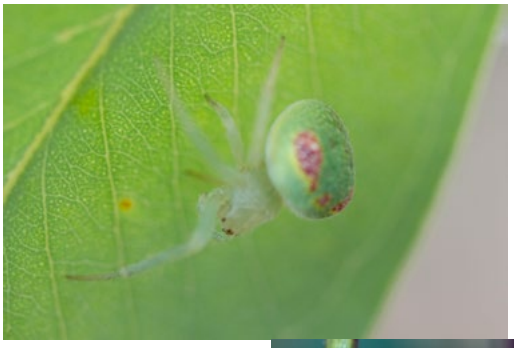
In the Lord of the Rings they had the One ring, the small park in Higgins has The one tree.

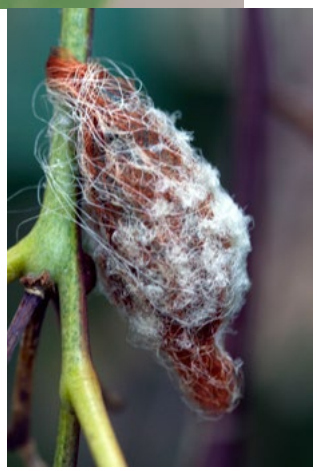
While walking the dogs one morning and aware of this season's profusion of Christmas beetles, I decided to inspect a small (perhaps 2–3 m tall) gum tree but noticed several clusters of sawfly larvae, a weevil, and what I thought at first was a case moth I determined to return with my camera and macro lens (and again a few days later). I was not prepared for the profusion of life I would find on this one small tree.

Returning with my camera I began to photograph the insect life (but was constantly frustrated by the wind so the photos were not always very well focused). Nevertheless, I couldn't believe that I spent about two hours constantly discovering something new.

I was fascinated by clusters of small bugs that seemed to always attract numerous meat ants. I thought at first that they were predating on the insects, but closer observation it appeared not to be the case. On my return a few days later, these bugs had grown and I realised that they were in fact the larvae of a leaf hopper (the adult of which I had also seen and also of great interest to the ants). Some research revealed that they produce a pheromone and it is no doubt in this that the ants are interested.

In total, I think I observed around 14 species on this one small tree, which included an interesting green spider that I found dangling from a web on my arm (after delving too deeply into the shrubbery).





What I at first thought was a case moth is in fact spider eggs (according to Canberra Nature Map). When I went back the second day, there was a second 'pod' of eggs. Canberra Nature Map didn't mention what kind of spider had laid these eggs.

I found a few weevils and other bugs, but perhaps on the more creepy side, I discovered a hairy gum moth caterpillar, only when I felt it crawling from the top of my T-shirt on to my arm. Once again, no doubt from delving too deeply into the shrubbery. I quickly brushed that off before photographing it but then wondered what else I might have lurking in my hair or down my back. Ugh!

And then there were the meat ants. Very interesting up close through the camera lens.

Alison Milton

Nesting activity

From November I began observing the nesting behaviour of three species in a big sprawling gum tree near the end of Belconnen Way (and near home) after seeing Willie Wagtails harassing magpies, indicating a nearby nest. I found where they were building their nest but then also spotted a Magpie Lark nest (from which two chicks fledged just days later) and Black-faced Cuckoo Shrikes also building a nest in the same tree.

Soon after the fledging of the Magpie Lark chicks mum was back on the nest for a second brood but sadly the nest was blown down during the big storm on Christmas eve, with the two newly hatched chicks being consumed by ants and maggots by the time I walked by.

In the meantime the Willie Wagtails successfully raised at least one chick, while three chicks were visible in the cuckoo shrike nest. Two of the chicks fledged on New Year's Day while the third had fledged by my next visit.

By this time the Magpie larks had begun building a new nest for their third brood of the season and a crested pigeon had begun to build a nest in an adjoining tree.

On one visit I was amused to see a juvenile Red wattlebird sitting on the rim of the Magpie lark nest. They don't seem to be sitting on eggs yet.

Once the cuckoo shrike chicks had fledged I hadn't expected to see them again as they spread their wings further afield, but a few days later I saw two of the chicks following 'mum' as she collected food. I didn't see the third chick and wondered if it had survived.

However, a couple of days later while walking the dogs I spotted all three chicks back in the breeding tree. Going back later with my camera, I only had a few minutes before having to head out to another appointment. I didn't immediately see or hear the chicks so was about to head home again when I did hear a chick calling. I was then lucky enough to see mum about to feed one chick. Amazingly, she actually had, not one, but two dragonflies in her beak for her lucky offspring.

Alison Milton

Activities

Thursday 16 February 10:00 am – Mid-month meander at the ANBG

Meet at the Australian National Botanic Gardens' bus stop from 9.45 am. Be dressed for the expected weather, bring water to drink, snacks, binoculars and any form of light-weight camera, especially those that will take shareable images. If you would like to hire one of the ANBG's scooters please contact the Visitor Centre 6250 9540. We will meander around the gardens observing and photographing everyday natural objects and phenomena as the depicted splodge of bird poo. I envisage a collection of images that might readily be seen in the suburbs. The images would be of the type achievable on smart phones and I-pads.

Purpose: Field Natters would build a collection of images. To these we would add short captions explaining what's seen, what is going on, consequences and repercussions based on our accumulated citizen science – natural history. These vignettes could then form the basis of a blog or an app that would help people become interested in what has sparked their curiosity as they are walking the 'burbs or walking to school, exercising their dogs and outdoors in parks and city spaces. Throughout the collection there would be links towards further information, interest groups and agencies.

Clean-up crew: seeing ants collecting bird droppings & taking the morsels to their nest shows the value of ants as recyclers & detritus removers

Rationale: Field Naturalists have been accumulating and disseminating information for decades. As most of us grow older(!) utilising our images and interpretations to tempt people into re-engaging with nature and the outdoors could make a contribution to their well-being alongside field guides, Canberra Nature Map, brochures and guided walks in the region's reserves.

Afterwards: Field Natters could give a gold coin to hear Dr Illiana Medina's 12.30 one hour presentation in the Theatrette: 'One flew over the cuckoo's nest: the amazing arms race between brood parasites and hosts'. This explores the co-evolution of complex defences in avian brood parasites and their hosts. And/or have lunch in the gardens' café.

The ACTION 81 bus leaves the ANBG for Civic at 14.16. In the morning its times are no use but it's quite a pleasant walk from Barry Drive's ANU bus stops for those who need the exercise as well as the Meander!

Contact: Rosemary Blemings 6258 4724 rosemary@blemings.org

Sunday 5 February 10:00 am – 3:00 pm: World Wetlands Open Day

Jerrabombera Wetlands are hosting an exciting and fun-filled open day to celebrate World Wetlands Day 2017. There will be a huge variety of stalls and activities for the whole family including ranger guided walks, children's activities, reptile displays, art exhibitions, Indigenous cultural activities, food and lots, lots more.

Entry is by gold coin donation with most activities free of charge. All proceeds go towards conservation efforts at Jerrabombera Wetlands.

For further information contact Lori Gould on 0439 030 058 or email lori.gould@woodlandsandwetlands.org.au

Month	Speaker	Topic
2 February	Suzi Bond	Butterflies of the ACT
2 March	Bryan Lessard	Flies
6 April	Matthew Higgins	Rosenberg monitors
4 May	Glenn Cocking	Moths
1 June	Brian Hawkins	The Bush Blitz scheme
6 July	Megan Dixon	Molonglo Catchment Group
3 August	Members chance to shine	AGM
7 September	Martin Royds	Organic/non-industrial farming
5 October	TBA	
2 November	Meredith Cosgrove	Photographic Guide to local native plants
7 December		Xmas party

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 .

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Editor: Alison Milton All newsletter contributions welcome. **Email:** apm56@optusnet.com.au
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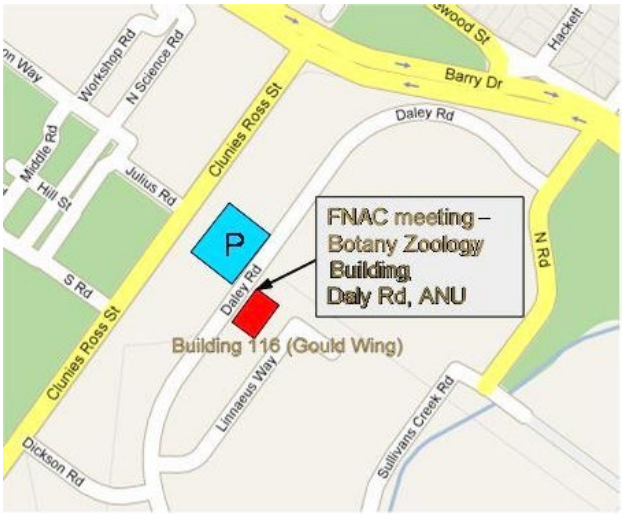

Monthly meeting venue: Division of Botany and Zoology, Building 116, Daley Road, Australian National University. (The Xmas meeting is at the adjacent building 44 and will start at the earlier time of 6:30 pm.)

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: