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GPO BOX 249
CANBERRA ACT 2601

FIELD NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA INC.

FIELD NATTER

MEETING—Thursday 1 February 2018

7:30 pm Australian National University

Jan Anderson Seminar Room, R.N. Robertson Building, Biology Place, ANU

details back page

Please note the new meeting room details. See map on back page.

Why bees are so important

Speaker: Julie Armstrong

Come and hear from Julie Armstrong of ACT for Bees about why bees are so important in the ecosystem and how to create Bee Friendly gardens to attract a range of native bees and other beneficial insects to support the health of our gardens and local environments. ACT for Bees is collaborating with a range of groups towards Bee Friendly Canberra and as a part of this initiation teamed up with the Australian National Botanic Gardens for National Pollinator Week in November 2017 for The Wild Pollinator Count. We would like to share our discoveries and encourage you to join us this year for this event. Looking forward to meeting with you and hearing more about your group and your observations about pollinators 'in the field'.



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Feed the birds: stop the demonising and tell us how to do it properly

It's maligned in Australia but if some simple rules are observed, bird feeding is a great way to connect with the wild world. There's a sulphur-crested cockatoo that visits my balcony daily. She lives in a hollow tree nearby, and every day at around 7.30 am, she flutters up to the railing outside the living room windows of my third-floor apartment. She lets out a polite, low croak to let me know she's there, and I come out and give her a handful of birdseed.

Interacting with birds is really good for us, mentally and physically.

Holly Parsons, Birds in Backyards coordinator

The sulphur crested cockatoo is a glorious bird – and it has proven seriously popular in Guardian Australia and Birdlife Australia's Bird of the Year poll – but I fully expect this disclosure to earn me some scolding. In Australia, feeding the birds is a much-maligned pastime, a practice decried by everyone from conservation groups and local councils to state wildlife services. The NSW Office of Environment and Heritage warns against feeding birds due to the detrimental effects of malnutrition (from eating inappropriate food), the potential for the spread of disease and the likelihood of them becoming pests. Some councils issue fines for feeding in certain circumstances. And the public is very happy to get behind this sentiment; bird feeding is one of those topics that gets people unexpectedly hot under the collar.

But whether you should feed birds not only depends on who you ask, it also depends where you live. In the UK, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds actively encourages the practice, selling guides on bird feeding and a huge range of food,

including seed, suet balls and mealworms, for different kinds of birds. The practice is similarly supported in the US, where some 45 million people feed birds.

Bread, mince and honey are some of the worst things to feed birds – and creating a bird-friendly garden can be preferable to direct feeding.

I am not the only person in Australia who chooses to feed native birds. Darryl Jones, the deputy director of the Environmental Futures Research Institute at Griffith University, says there are millions of us: between 35% and 57% of households around Australia actively feed birds.

That is, around half of Australia spends money on food specifically for wild birds, despite repeatedly being told not to.

“Australia is the only place in the [western] world where people are told unofficially or officially that it's a bad thing, and yet people still do it. This is where it all started for me,” Jones says. His forthcoming book, *The Birds At My Table*, swoops directly into this controversial topic.

“In the UK it's not only encouraged but there's endless amounts of information so if you want to know what to do, any [birding or conservation] organisation will tell you. You can't do that in Australia at all, because if you ask anyone they will say you shouldn't be feeding the birds.”

For many Australians, particularly those of us in urban areas, birds are their only regular interaction with wildlife. The joy that comes from this interaction suggests a clear yearning for a more meaningful relationship with nature – one which draws into sharp focus the artificial distinction between humankind and the natural world.

Holly Parsons, who coordinates *Birds in Backyards*, an offshoot of Birdlife Australia, believes the positive relationship humans develop with wildlife is critical to understanding why people feed birds.

“You can't discount the value of that connection to nature that people get from feeding birds,” she says. “More and more research is coming out now about how important it is for our wellbeing, by being able to interact with birds and plants in the urban landscape. It's really good for us, mentally and physically.”

Parsons says bird feeders are often motivated by environmental concerns too. “We have done so much damage to the natural environment, feeding birds is people's way of giving back.”

Grainne Cleary, a researcher at Deakin University who led the Australian bird feeding and watering study, on which Jones also worked, says the most important thing their research showed was how much pleasure people got from feeding birds. A passionate advocate for widespread change in the way we view our interactions with wildlife, Cleary believes the time has come to stop demonising bird feeders and to provide sufficient information for people to do it responsibly.

“When I asked people the question, ‘why do you feed these birds?’ the biggest reason that came back was enjoyment,” says Cleary. “You're not going to stop people doing something they enjoy, especially when the bird enjoys it too. So it needs to be managed, it needs to be investigated.”

Cleary, who is from Ireland, says she was surprised to find bird feeding so frowned upon in Australia.

So are birds becoming dependent on their human friends?

“There’s not a shred of evidence that that’s the case anywhere in the world,” Jones says. “It’s [a theory] based on absolutely nothing ... the only place that it actually happens – where birds are actually dependent on food provided – is in very extreme situations such as where food is provided for birds that no longer migrate away from wintry areas.”

These are rare exceptions, a result of generations of changed behaviour under specific conditions, and certainly not the case in Australia, Jones says. The amount of food that a bird gets from hand-feeding forms only a fraction of its diet. “We’re providing a cup of tea and a Tim Tam and that’s it. The birds are coming to visit us and we really love that, but we’re not keeping the ecosystem functioning by the food that we put out there.”

Of far more concern, the researchers argue, is the potential spread of disease and possible malnutrition that can happen with hand-feeding—through dirty feeding and watering stations, or birds eating inappropriate or spoiled food. Bread, mince and honey are some of the worst things to feed birds, and yet they are some of the most common food items that feeders will put out.

Bird feeders care deeply for the animals they interact with, says Jones. “They would love to do the right thing. They are really concerned about whether what they’re feeding is wrong or right, but they can’t get information.”

Jones argues that from a conservation perspective, engaging with the bird-feeding community is critical. “For lots of people this is genuinely a profound connection with nature. That’s really important. This is how we encourage people to care about nature.”

A shift in thinking about our relationship with wild birds speaks to the possibility of a different kind of relationship with the wild, non-human world in general. What would a world look like guided by the idea that civilisation is not separate from the natural world; that it is a two-way relationship? Or a world in which our urban spaces were cultivated to be shared with wild animals, plants and birds, and the development of infrastructure was underpinned by a firm sense of responsibility and a respect for non-human life and habitat?

Parsons says her advice is always that creating a bird-friendly garden is preferable to direct feeding. “It’s a great way to connect with nature, it’s a great way to put nature back in your space, by providing food for birds naturally.”

Birds in Backyards provides a lot of information on how to create a bird-friendly garden, including tips on selecting native plants, how to garden in small spaces such as apartment balconies, and how to provide for a range of bird needs, including shelter, food and nesting materials.

Birdlife Australia is also developing a bird-feeding policy that it hopes will provide some of that much-needed information for enthusiasts.

“It’s an incredible privilege and profound experience to have truly wild animals to come and visit you at home, but treat it suitably, be a responsible host,” Jones says.

“We think we’re feeding birds for the birds’ sake, but we’re feeding birds for our sake,” he says. “It’s about us. The birds don’t need us at all, but we need them.”

Tips for responsible bird feeding

Make sure all feeding and watering stations are scrupulously

clean every day, to prevent the spread of disease.

- Provide plenty of water, especially in summer.
- Help with habitat: create a bird-friendly garden or get involved with your local community environmental organisations to help regenerate local green areas.
- For carnivorous birds such as magpies, ravens and kookaburras, wet or dry dog or cat food is suitable.
- For nectar-feeding birds such as rainbow lorikeets, nectar substitutes are available from some pet stores, but birdseed is also OK as seeds naturally form a substantial part of their diet.
- At the duck pond, offer cooked rice instead of scraps of bread.
- Consider wild bird nutrition and health the way you would that of your own pet. Just because they will eat garbage, it doesn’t mean they should.
- Don’t feed birds food intended for humans, such as bread or mince.
- Don’t leave spoiled food on feeders.
- Don’t feed honey to rainbow lorikeets or other nectar-eaters as it can develop lethal levels of harmful bacteria very quickly when left out in the sun.
- Don’t feed too much or too often. You’re providing “a cup of tea and a Tim Tam”, not a three-course meal.
- Don’t literally provide a Tim Tam, or anything else that contains fat, salt or sugar.

The magpie is the Australian Bird of the Year

BirdLife Australia releases its top 10 list for the Bird of the Year title. The bird that stalks people, is the subject of community warning systems, will swoop children in playgrounds and has definitely scarred some eyeballs, is the Bird of the Year.



The white ibis came second.

This is the top 10 from the Guardian Australia's BirdLife poll:

The poll was open on the Guardian Australia website until 9 December.

What's so good about a magpie?

Given most of us have probably spent some time avoiding the bird, why does it deserve to be number one?

"Interestingly, the magpie and the ibis, voted one and two, would probably also win the least favourite," Mr Dooley said.

He thinks the magpie does have something to offer.

"They're incredible birds and they have an amazing vocal range, they're one of the most complex vocal birds of any bird in the world," Mr Dooley said.

"It is so evocative - that kind of carolling.

The Fascinating Grass Carrying Wasp

Rosemary sent me this photo of a native bee hive in Melba.



As reported late last year, I converted an old wooden letterbox into a native bee hive. I was disappointed to find that it had been inhabited by a colony of black ants but after hosing it out a few times this seemed to discourage them from coming back and it now seems to have a few new inhabitants. While I have not actually seen them as yet, research indicates that the new inhabitants are Grass Carrying Wasps scientifically known as *Isodontia mexicana*.

The *Isodontia* genus belongs to the thread-waisted wasp group that is characterised by a long thin

structure connecting their thorax to a skinny abdomen. These delicate-looking little wasps have a black body and brown wings and are about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch long. They are related to the much larger cicada killer wasps.



When the adults emerge from their cocoons in early summer, they mate, and the females search for a suitable cavity in which to build their nests. This may take the form of a hollow branch or cavity between rocks. You can see the females flying with pieces of trailing grass, and they line the nest cavity with this. They then go out and collect tree crickets or katydids and paralyse them with a sting. These are stuffed into the nest where the females lay eggs, and the resulting larvae feed on the hapless prey. The larvae then spin a papery cocoon and pupate. Adults emerge in 2 to 3 weeks.

Alison Milton

Easily side-tracked....by butterflies & wattles

After the 41 degree heat of 7 January I went to the Mt Rogers Fraser carpark to cut the grasses around the new Mt Rogers sign engraved on a boulder. It was already warm and humid though we'd had ineffectual showers with yesterday's cool-change-that-wasn't. I also sheared round about six yellow 'button' daisy, *Chrysocephalum apiculatum* plants and a few *Stipa* grasses in the hope that TCCS brush-cutters would ignore that area.

Nearby two Cootamundra Wattle were being visited by many small butterflies. My brain registered 'Grass Blues' until other observations kicked in... these were darker and larger than Grass Blues and why would grass habitat butterflies be obsessed with wattle trees?

Once home and with Suzi Bond's 2016 *Field Guide to the Butterflies of the ACT** to hand I concluded the butterflies were Stencilled Hairstreaks, *Jalmenus iclinus*. Both Suzi and Michael Brady give *Ictinus Blue* as an alternative name in their respective Field Guides.

Between conversations that explained my latest eccentricity to bemused Mt Rogers regulars early-walking their dogs to beat the heat, I took a few photos with the compact Canon: mtrogerslandcare.blogspot.com

The butterflies have a projection on their wing margins near pronounced orange and black spots.



Two of the butterflies were in copulating mode. Another was very still and stationary for some time, preparing to lay eggs perhaps? Most of the butterflies approached and seemingly searched the trees landing only briefly. When they did land their wings were open for a split second showing iridescent patches on the grey-brown wings.

There's a large ant nest near the trees with meat ants active. I realised there were meat ants on the trees' branches. This triggered memories of



wattle-ant-insect larvae associations, symbiosis and interdependence.

Both Field Guides mention Stencilled Hairstreaks' associations with meat ants. *"...colonies can only establish on larval food plants located near Meat Ant nests.....The [butterflies'] larvae feed during the day either singly or communally. The larval attendant ants are Meat Ants (*Iridomyrmex purpureus*).” The Imperial Hairstreak is similar to the Stencilled Hairstreak but small black ants attend the Imperial Hairstreaks' larvae.

I should have thought to also look for larvae – caterpillars in the trees. Both butterfly species rely on wattle species as larval food plants. Are there larvae on the Hickory Wattles, *Acacia implexa*, currently in flower? Are these beautiful, approximately 3.5 cm butterflies, threatened by the authorities' penchant for having wattles removed as 'fire hazard' vegetation?

And so much for the reputation of Cootamundra Wattles, *Acacia baileyana* as a native pest-plant species. Here was further evidence of Mt Rogers' population of Cootamundra wattles being a vital habitat species at all stages of life despite invasiveness when the seeds are stimulated into mass germination.

Rosemary Blemings

A question

If moths are nocturnal, why are they attracted to light?

Observation

The other evening, my family was driving back from Deakin to Belconnen when we saw a sulphur-crested cockatoo get hit by a car on Lady Denman Drive. We stopped and got out to see if we could help the bird.

The bird was lying face down, more or less, on the ground by the side of the road. The impact with the car had damaged one wing but was also ending its life. It gasped heavily as we stayed beside it. In a couple of minutes, it was dead.

However, before it died, I realised that a flock of about 20 cockatoos had landed in a tree a few metres away and were watching the scene. They were quiet and looking down at their flock member.

Several times, I looked up from the dying bird to the flock, so surprised was I at this encounter.

Suddenly two of them flew over the dead bird and back to the tree. Then they were all still again.

We didn't see what the birds did after that as we quickly drove off.

Update on the heritage-listed cork oak in the bus bay at Lilydale Railway Station

In July last year, the Victorian Minister for Public Transport directed Public Transport Victoria (PTV) (on whose land the cork oak stands) and the Yarra

Ranges Shire Council to protect the tree and ensure its survival.

Subsequently, PTV wrote to me about their plan to close the bus bay by the tree. Work would commence soon and they understood it was time-sensitive. So I had some expectations when I visited the tree in December on my trip to Melbourne for Christmas.

Nothing had been done. I wrote to the Minister again and copied in the five stakeholders involved, including the National Trust and the Yarra Ranges Shire Council. The Council's arborist has since contacted PTV about the delay, noting that the tree is in very poor condition.

The cork oak is the only surviving plant from the station's garden, established sometime after the station began operating in 1882.

Lucy Bastecky

Cockatoo behaviour

Lucy's report above reminded me that I've heard cockatoos mate for life. Quite a few years ago I came across a dead cockatoo on the road, obviously hit by a car. It was so sad to see that another cockatoo kept flying down to it as if hoping to revive it and fly away together. This perhaps leads into the following article.

Alison Milton

Endangered superb parrots dying in 'catastrophic' strikes on NSW road

By Clare Sibthorpe

Environmentalists are concerned motorists are hitting and killing flocks of highly endangered parrots feeding around a New South Wales road.

Ecologist Saan Ecker estimated more than 100 superb parrots had been found dead on a road off Barton Highway, near the town of Murrumbateman, in recent days.

Yesterday she saw dozens of the dead birds surrounded by live ones, and said several motorists had alerted Wildcare of similar sightings in the area.

"It was quite a catastrophic sight," Dr Ecker said.

"For every dead body was one or two live birds sitting between each and getting hit as well."

"Obviously it is normal for birds to become roadkill but not to this huge scale."

Dr Ecker said superb parrots' tendency to mourn the death of their own by gathering around the bodies, combined with their camouflage and motorists' carelessness had proven a recipe for disaster.

"These birds are so ignorant to traffic that you literally have to drive five or 10 kilometres per hour not to hit them, and they just look like leaves when you come across them."

She urged drivers to be cautious, remove any dead birds from the road and report injured ones to Wildcare on 02 6299 1966.

"As humans, in rushing to get to work, we forget we really need

to take into consideration these other species, especially one that is heading to extinction."

Superb parrots seasonally migrate over inland eastern Australia before settling in southern areas, including the ACT, to breed and nest.

In recent months they have been flocking to the region in larger numbers, but ecologists believe this signals a larger movement than usual, rather than a recovery of the species.

The ACT Government is exploring ways to save and protect the parrots, which have been forced to compete with more aggressive birds for nesting hollows because 95 per cent of their woodland habitat has been cleared.

Activities

Sunday 11 February 9:00 am: Butterfly Walk at the Pinnacle

Meet at the entrance to Dungowan Street, Hawker. The walk will be led by butterfly expert Suzi Bond and will be the first walk we've run that specifically looks at butterflies, so it should be a real voyage of discovery! Wear sturdy footwear and clothing suitable for the weather and bring along your camera and/or binoculars if you have them, and some water to drink. We'll be going off-track for some of the walk, so there may be some rough ground, but it's generally easy walking and we'll certainly be taking it slowly. This walk is in conjunction with the Friends of the Pinnacle.

Important notice: Editor contact details

For those who may not be aware, I retired from work in May 2017, therefore my former work email address will no longer work. If you wish to submit items for the newsletter please use my home email address apm56@optusnet.com.au (also on the back of each newsletter). Thanks.

Alison Milton
Editor

Great Barrier Reef: rising temperatures turning green sea turtles female

New research has found that rising temperatures are turning almost all green sea turtles in a Great Barrier Reef population female. The scientific paper warned the skewed ratio could threaten the population's future.

Sea turtles are among species with temperature dependent sex-determination and the proportion of female hatchlings increases when nests are in warmer sands.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, California State University and Worldwide Fund for Nature Australia examined two genetically distinct populations of turtles on the reef, finding the northern group of about 200,000 animals was overwhelmingly female.

While the southern population was 65%-69% female, females in the northern group accounted for 99.1% of juveniles, 99.8% of sub-adults and 86.8% of adults.

"Combining our results with temperature data show that the northern GBR green turtle rookeries have been producing primarily females for more than two decades and that the complete feminisation of this population is possible in the near future," the paper said.

The temperature at which the turtles will produce male or female hatchlings is heritable, the paper said, but tipped to produce 100% male or 100% female hatchlings within a range of just a few degrees.

"Furthermore, extreme incubation temperatures not only produce female-only hatchlings but also

cause high mortality of developing clutches," it said. "With warming global temperatures and most sea turtle populations naturally producing offspring above the pivotal temperature, it is clear that climate change poses a serious threat to the persistence of these populations."

"Knowing what the sex ratios in the adult breeding population are today, and what they might look like five, 10 and 20 years from now when these young turtles grow up and become adults, is going to be incredibly valuable," Jensen said.

The research was facilitated through the Great Barrier Reef Rivers to Reef to Turtles project by the World Wildlife Fund Australia.

The chief executive of WWF Australia, Dermot O'Gorman, said it was yet another sign of the impact of climate change, following recent research that coral bleaching events were occurring far more frequently.

"We've had two years where we've had mass bleaching events on the Great Barrier Reef," he told Guardian Australia. "That's a very visible sign of the impact of climate change. But this is an invisible change. We can't see the impact it's having on a turtle population until a study like this shows some long-term trends."

O'Gorman said more urgent action on climate change was clearly needed but conservationists were taking some practical measures, including trialling the use of shade cloth on known nesting beaches to lower the sand temperature, and reducing by-catch in the fishing industry.

Collared Sparrowhawks at Botanic Gardens

Back in October I had been watching a Collared Sparrowhawk nest at the Australian National Botanic Gardens. Both adults were visible and at least one kept returning to the nest but there was no sign of any chicks. I didn't get to the gardens much during November/December during which time there were reports of nesting Brown Goshawks rearing two chicks, not too far away from the Sparrowhawk nest.

I finally got back to the gardens in January and going back through my photos realised that I had actually first seen the Sparrowhawks at the end of August. However, by January I had assumed that any breeding activity would have been over. That is, until I met a girl who has been studying Fairy Wrens as part of her PHD. She told me that there were two Sparrowhawk chicks in a nest up the back of the ANBG.

Therefore I headed up to the nest and there were indeed chicks. One adult came in to feed them and looking at my photos on my computer later on I realised that there were actually four chicks in the nest; one quite a bit less advanced than the other three.

Posting this sighting on-line, there was initially some question as to whether this was actually a Collared Sparrowhawk given that it had nested in a Eucalypt (supposedly usual) and that they were so close to the nesting Goshawks. This however, was later resolved and the identification of Sparrowhawks was confirmed.

While I had only just been informed of the chicks, they were actually not that young. I went back a couple of

times and the three advanced chicks were not far off fledging. The third time I went back (seven days after my first visit) two chicks had fledged and flew back to the nest when an adult came in to feed them.

Perhaps because there were so far up the back of the ANBG and it could be quite a hike, there were very few other photographers.



Blotched Hyacinth Orchid

In December 2017 we observed 3 delightful specimens of Blotched Hyacinth Orchid *Dipodium punctatum* at the Brooks Hill reserve near Bungendore.

The book *Woodland fauna: a field guide for the Southern Tablelands* by Sarah Sharp et al says

“flowering in Summer”, “found rarely in woodland” and “frequent on the Southern Tablelands”

Colin & Johanna (Pask)

Raffle prizes needed

Pam has been doing a wonderful job of running the FNAC raffle at general meetings for, what was that? perhaps more than 15 years!!

Well done Pam.

However, the raffle needs prizes and for that Pam needs you. Yes you!

Time to go through your cupboards for all those little items you no longer use or want and bring them along to donate as raffle prizes. As the

saying goes, ‘One man’s junk is another man’s treasure’ (or woman as the case may be.



Important notice: change of venue

Please note that our meeting venue has changed this year. We are now meeting in the Jan Anderson Seminar Room in the R.N. Robertson Building. Map on the back of the newsletter as usual but the following may help to initially locate the venue.



View of the R.N Robertson Building

The main carpark is off North Road (accessed via Barry Drive) or Sullivans Creek Road (near the Hancock Bldg). If driving from the south Daley Road leads to North Road. The internals around Union Court are drastically different if you've not been to this part of the campus in the last six months as a result of the ANU's building program.

Look for Agapanthus and the spectacular windows.

The Jan Anderson Seminar Room is on the left some 12 m into the foyer. The Pickle Cafe is to the right in the same foyer.

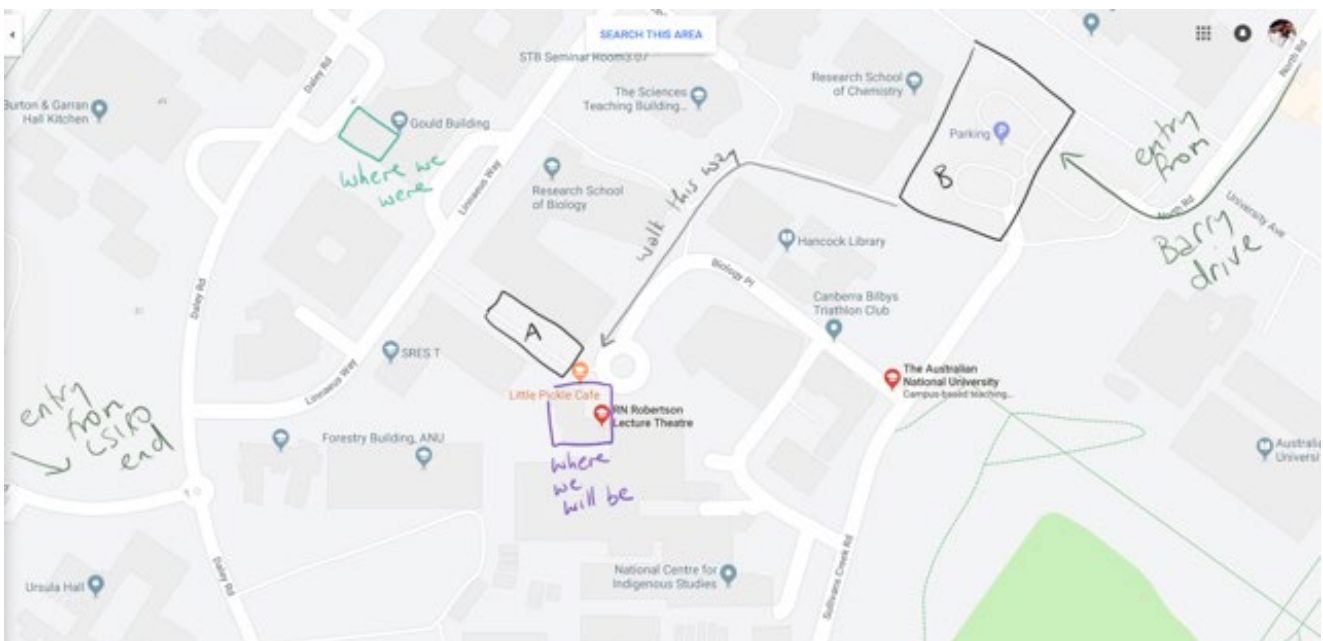


There may also be evening parking in Cunningham Close off Linnaeus Way.

If unsure, it may be useful to go and look for the venue during daylight hours before the meeting.



View of the building via a different approach from Sullivans Creek road.





Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra Inc.

Who are the Field Naturalists?

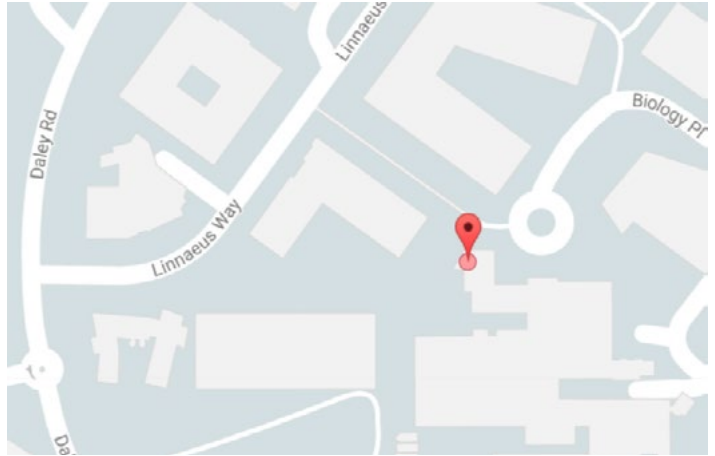
The Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra (FNAC) was formed in 1981. Our aim is to foster interest in natural history by means of meetings and regular field outings. Meetings are usually held on the first Thursday of each month. Outings range from weekend rambles to long weekends away. Activities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

Email: fieldnaturalist@yahoo.com.au

Website: under construction

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



Monthly meeting venue: Jan Anderson Seminar Room, R.N. Robertson Building, Biology Place, Australian National University. Parking off North Road accessed from Barry Drive.

**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: