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CANBERRA ACT 2601

FIELD NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA INC.

FIELD NATTER

MEETING—Thursday 6 February 2020
7:30 pm Australian National University
Jan Anderson Seminar Room, R.N. Robertson Building, Biology Place, ANU, ACT
details back page

Queensland Bladder Cicada and wildlife and botanical artists

**(What is the connection between the Queensland Bladder Cicada
and award-winning wildlife and botanical artists?)**

Speaker: Julia and Alan Landford

Julia will take us on an exploratory journey that links science, the natural world, conservation and the diverse ways artists' creativity reveals the intricacies, beauty and wonder of flora, fauna and habitats in Australia and the world's biodiversity hotspots. As Founding Director of NatureArt Lab Julia, who is an artist herself, organises courses presented by the region's finest artists and photographers, together with workshops, creative sessions for children, events and nature tours that aid individuals' interpretation of the natural world. Alan, a CSIRO scientist, will explain how the Queensland Bladder Cicada came to be in Canberra and the strong links between the National Insect Collection, scientific illustration and intricate paintings by Julia and her colleagues.



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Field Nats' Christmas gathering

It seems irreverent to be writing in January about Field Nats' joyful gathering at Weston Park for our Christmas party. Some members made the decision not to attend because of the severe winds that lashed the region in early December but we found relative calm under a shelter surrounded by trees and near the shores of Lake Burley Griffin.



As ever people shared a smorgasbord of delicious fresh and cooked food with Bill and Vicky contributing glorious cherries from their compact garden.

We also shared decades of anecdotes with Maureen contributing tales from the very earliest beginnings of FNAC when she and Philip took the girls on camping and other Field-Natting trips in the style they'd learned as members of the illustrious Field Naturalists' Association of Victoria.

Sophie recounted some of those early FNAC moments with Maureen and Dierk, especially when they'd gone exploring to 'the coast' staying at ANU's research base at Kioloa.



Johanna and Colin spoke of an echidna coming to drink at their habitat garden's watering point in Queanbeyan and, if I remember correctly, an Eastern Brown Snake on another occasion. Natural

history tales from their travels and lives overseas also sparked interesting comparisons.

Several Silver Gulls waited for food scraps giving Jenni the chance to compare with the gulls' Perth equivalents. The pecking-order was evident but were there age and sex differences between the seemingly uniform and elegant birds we wondered?

Janet and John were so glad that being retired had given them time to come to our meetings. The Xmas gathering was even better as it provided time to 'get to know' more of us by sharing experiences from immersion in nature.

Kevin brought listeners up to date with the National Parks Association ACT project where members are part-funding and participating in tracking research on Rosenberg's Monitors in Namadgi National Park.

Sonja and Adrienne shared other NPA news and Adrienne later crafted the very long pine needles scattered on the floor into shapes as she explored their potential from her basket weaving and textural imaginings.

En route Alison and I spotted a herd of goats among the blackberry infestation near the Parkway underpass for the Arboretum and Lady Denman Drive. What happens when the eaten blackberries regrow? Would this seemingly-simple weed management strategy take off beyond Lake Burley Griffin?

Most excitingly Alison showed us copies of the photo books she'd had made of the mini-beast habitat that her garden in Higgins offers: Bees, Hoverflies and Wasps. Alison's presentation at the AGM meeting came to life again with her second photo-book showing the sheer diversity of species a young, observant person can find in suburbia.



A group of Scouts assembled and then vanished on explorations for a couple of hours. Were they living the quotation from Peter Wohlleben '...the best way to protect nature is to ensure people experience it'?

Rosemary Blemings

Bathtime

Rosemary mentioned above that Johanna and Colin had an echidna come to visit them for a drink, however Sue McIntyre had a much more interesting encounter.

We all know of the terrible devastation to our wildlife due to the recent bushfires that have ravaged much of eastern NSW in the past few months. This has affected not only those within the fire zones, but also those closer to home with extreme temperatures also affecting our local wildlife.

Many people have been putting out extra containers of water and I even spotted a plastic shell container placed near the Higgins ovals full of water for the birdlife.

One of the more unusual observations however, was a photo posted on Canberra Nature Map by Sue McIntyre. This showed an echidna taking a very welcome cooling dip in her birdbath. No doubt a very unusual sighting.



I just love this photo and thank Sue for allowing me to share this with you all.

Alison Milton

Further wildlife devastation

As is the bushfires weren't enough, Canberra finally had its first day in months where the air quality was declared below hazardous levels, back to our usual pure clean air. However, Mother Nature had a new trial in store us with a massive hail storm that raged through from Kippax in the West to Gogong in the East bringing with it golf ball sized hail stones shredding trees, roofs, glasshouses etc. What I hadn't considered was the affect on our wildlife, and maybe would not have been aware of this if my neighbours and I hadn't found an injured Red-rumped parrot.

We managed to catch it and take it to the Kippax vet clinic. Checking on it later I learned that it had a badly injured wing and they decided that they couldn't save it. In total, they had 40 birds brought in to them, some from as far away as Braddon, and often, just for them to be euthanised. They still had 20 birds, filling all the cat cages, waiting for wildlife carers to come for them.

In the meantime, I learned that just one other wildlife carer had 60 birds under their care. In addition, vets visited the resident flying fox colony in Commonwealth Park, where numerous bats had to be euthanised as their wings were shredded by the hail. While there, they were brought various other birds from people finding them injured in the park. Others reported finding dead birds.

This is something I had never previously considered when hearing reports of massive hail storms. No doubt birds weren't the only creatures affected and those taken to vet clinics were most likely only those found in suburban streets. How many more in the various nature reserves that weren't found as severe weather is preventing visitation of many of these areas.

Black Mountain would no doubt be the most affected reserve and the botanic gardens was hit so hard that it had to close and may not be fully open for a few weeks.

Alison Milton

Echidna Watch

While looking at Sue's echidna visitor, it might be time to remind readers of the Echidna Watch Survey.



The December newsletter included a call to report sightings of echidnas for Echidna Watch.

Unfortunately there has been widespread abuse in using the Echidna Watch on-line form, so it is being temporarily disabled. Therefore please report your echidna watch information via the [pdf form](http://www.echidna.edu.au/monotremes/echidna_watch.html) provided on their website (http://www.echidna.edu.au/monotremes/echidna_watch.html) instead.

Study finds 'Rollie Pollies' remove heavy metals from soil

Turns out a little bug we don't think of much is one of the best protectors of soil ever imaginable.

Turn over a brick or a board lying in the yard and underneath you may find a collection of pill bugs scurrying about. Also known as 'rollie pollies' or wood-lice, these grey-coloured creatures can be found in many dark, moist environments feeding on decaying matter.

Actually, these critters are not bugs at all. They are crustaceans and more closely resemble crabs and shrimp, not insects. They are characterised by their ability to roll up into a ball when they feel threatened.

Breeding or collecting pill bugs may be an important practice for homesteading and gardening. The guts of these pill bugs contain a number of microbes that help the critter feed on dead, organic matter. By releasing mass quantities of pill bugs into a mature garden, one can be assured that dead plant matter is being properly broken down and returned to healthy soil.

Pill bugs play an important role in the cycle of healthy plant life. They return organic matter to the soil so it can be digested further by fungi, protozoans and bacteria. This process produces a natural supply of nitrates, phosphates and other

vital nutrients that plants need to thrive now and in future growing seasons.

One very unique feature of these crustaceans is their ability to safely remove heavy metals from soil. For this reason, they are important for cleaning up soil pollutants such as lead, cadmium, and arsenic. In coal spoils and slag heaps, pill bugs also come in handy.

When they take in heavy metals like lead and cadmium, they crystallize these ions in their guts. The heavy metal toxins become spherical deposits in the mid gut. With this special cleanup capability, pill bugs survive in the most contaminated sites where most creatures can't.

The magic of the pill bugs can reestablish healthy soil and prevent toxic metal ions from leaching into the groundwater. This means pill bugs are protecting well water from becoming contaminated while stabilising soils.

When asked what happens to the heavy metals when the bugs die, Brian Rosenberg says that the heavy metal ions are turned into crystals in their gut. The crystals are unlikely to be water soluble, as the ions are, thereby fixing them so they don't enter the groundwater or be taken up by plants

Article provided by Rosemary Blemings

Raffle prizes needed

As always, we need prizes for our monthly raffle. This is our only fund-raising event and is funded through members' generous donations, mostly consisting of items no longer needed or wanted at home. Fresh garden produce is also highly prized.

Please 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), and if you are a gardener with fresh produce to donate, this would be greatly appreciated.



Important notice: March newsletter

Just to let members know that I will be away from 17 to 24 February. I will be without access to my usual software and most likely, without Internet access. Therefore I will only have ONE day on my return to produce the March Field Nats newsletter.

This is doable but means that if you have any stories or content to add, I won't be around to send out a reminder, so PLEASE, PLEASE, if you have anything to add, just send it through to the Editor email address or my personal email (apm56@optusnet.com.au) and I will get to it when I return and include it in the newsletter.

Hope you all find something interesting to report so that we have a bumper March issue.

Alison Milton

Editor: ACT Field Naturalists

Activities

Saturday 29 February 3–11 pm: Singing for their supper – a musical fund raiser for wildlife affected by the bushfires: Hall Pavilion

Join us for an evening of musical entertainment featuring Canberra Shanty Club and Friends to be held at the Hall Pavilion with all funds raised donated to help feed wildlife affected by the bushfires.

The bushfires have come on top of every area in New South Wales being currently drought declared and at the end of what has been our hottest and driest year on record. There are now grave fears that a significant number of Australia's unique flora and fauna species will have been pushed to the brink of extinction. There is an environmental and ecological catastrophe unfolding around us. Our environment and our native species desperately need our help.

Many small, locally based wildlife carer groups are putting food and water out in fire and drought ravaged areas and this will most likely need to continue until the 2020 spring rains, which will hopefully come this year. This fund raiser is to help raise the much-needed funds to enable this work to continue now and for as long as is needed.

For more information please visit: <https://www.facebook.com/events/191873741867266/>

Come along and sing for their supper and lend a helping hand!



Refugees

In the few years that I've been actively bird watching I've noted that each year there are a few vagrant, rare avian visitors to the ACT that send excited bird watchers off in a frenzy to catch a glimpse (myself included when possible). In my amateur bird watching status, it seems that this year there have been more sightings than usual, but also that the visitors are not merely passing through for a day but staying for a week or more. For example, this year there have been sightings of three sandpipers: common; sharp-tailed and pectoral. The Common Sandpiper has been present for a few months now.

The Great Crested Grebe has been an occasional visitor but this season it has been reported from at least four locations. While there were multiple reports from West Belconnen Ponds, it seemed to only stay one day before moving on, however, the sightings from Jerrabomberra Wetlands and two Lake Burley Griffin locations found it there for more than a week.

There have been other sightings but one of the more recent ones has been of a Regent Honeyeater



at Justice Robert Hope Park in Watson, which was resident for a week or more, feeding on a flowering Yellow Eucalyptus. A second sighting was seen in Hughes.

No doubt most of these birds are refugees from the drought or the more recent NSW bushfires.

Alison Milton

Recommended movies

Two recommended movies in which members may be interested.

Biggest Little Farm: city couple find an investor that enables them to buy a clapped out farm and turn it into something wonderful in tune with nature. Filmed over a period of 7 years at least. Problems and solutions.

Fantastic fungi: I've just seen the trailer but it is also a documentary and really gets into the underground network.

Rosemary von Brehens



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

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Treasurer: treasurer@fieldnatsact.com

Membership: membership@fieldnatsact.com

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Monthly meeting venue: Jan Anderson Seminar Room, R. N. Robertson Building, Biology Place, Australian National University

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: