

OBJECT: To foster an interest in nature

February 2021

ISSN: 1836-2761



FIELD NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA INC. GPO BOX 708
JAMISON CENTRE ACT 2614

FIELD NATTER

February 2021 newsletter No monthly meetings until further notice



Meet the Kookaburra family



Contents

Final score and other home news	2
Wasp stories	3
The Royal Zoological Society of NSW Whitely Awards: Some gift ideas for books for children	4
Snakes alive	4
Recent observations	5

Final score and other home news

Remember our battle Kookaburras versus Wood Ducks? Well the final score was Kookas 2 - Woodies nil. The kookaburras raised two beautiful youngsters. Originally when they left the box the whole family moved away across the valley, but now they are back and coming for food again.

It was fascinating to observe the adults feeding the young. They came down to the deck rail for meat and then gave a gurgling chuckling call before flying off to a very high branch. More chuckling and laughing and then a swoop down into the nest box. Remarkably we saw that they could make all their calls even while holding a beak full of food!



Aren't I beautiful?



And here I am with mum / dad who looks a bit tatty after all the effort of feeding me.



So life goes on and sometimes provokes us into thinking about what is NOT around now. I love spiders and a few years back we had lots of beauti-

ful Golden Orb Weavers producing their enormous glowing webs.

My visiting sister-in-law drew a picture of me captured in a gigantic web and wrote:

*There was an old prof of Queanbeyan
On Orb spiders particularly ke-an
He set off one day
To admire their display
Since then he has never been se-an.*

We also had lots of Saint Andrew's Cross spiders with their intricately patterned and symmetrically marked webs.

Then there were leaf-curlers – those spiders who put a curled-up leaf in their web as a home.

Today the giant webs are gone and a leaf-curler is rare. However, just recently we have got back to that stage where you walk through bushes and crash in to webs made by little spiders and strung across the path. Web stuff in the hair, round the glasses. Need to carry a stick in front.

However, we also now have Vertically Refined Wheel-Web spiders. (See my favourite spider book *Spiderwatch* by Bert Brunet) These medium size spiders, (probably *Eriophora transmarina*, females can be 30 mm long) produce a most beautiful symmetric web usually often several feet off the ground. Brunet says they use 20 m of silk, which is extremely strong but only 0.005 mm in diameter. One in our garden arch (so that is what arches are for) had about 30 rings in a geometric delight. Perhaps the appearance of more spiders means a few more insects are around. Maybe more bats next.

So it is things that are not there, or rarely there, that can excite. Just recently I noticed that we have Cottony Cushion Scale, *Icerya purchasi*, on our "butterfly bushes" (not buddlejas). They turn up every few years always on these bushes.



Observations

If you see a small blob of cotton wool, which turns out to be waxy and a bit sticky then you too have found them. Turn one over and use a magnifying glass to see body parts. These insects are famous—actually infamous—because the nymphs can cause great damage to citrus crops. In the 19th century they reached California and threatened the citrus growing industry there. So, in a famous early example of biological control, in 1888–89 the vedalia ladybird was introduced as it preys on the destructive pest and their burgeoning citrus industry was saved. (Personally I refuse to buy fruit imported from the USA.) (nzfactsheets.landcareresearch.co.nz will get you to an excellent article on cottony cushion scale.)

The female *Icerya purchasi* is a hermaphrodite but there are some genuine males. If that all sounds

weird try the Case Moth which has an elaborate larval case or bag as shown in the photo below.



Ah, what an amazing and strange world we naturalists live in !

Colin Pask

Wasp stories

It was such a serendipitous sighting and wonderful experience.

The ground on the edge of the veggie garden had only been cleared of unmentionable invasives a few days. Of course my initial reaction was ‘Blue Banded bee’, yellowed with pollen but that was only a for few seconds.

When I first saw it, it was apparently eating or puddling soil.

The wasp flew over the ground making a loud buzzing noise. Then I realised it returned to one spot. The spot had a pile of dampish soil beside it.



The wasp went into the hole it had obviously made possibly coming up with more grains and then this process stopped.

Perhaps the last journey was to lay an egg on the hapless victim it had already manoeuvred into the hole.

The solitary wasps’ larvae feed on buried victims. Do they remember where they’ve laid their eggs or even need to?

Intriguing.

Editorial comment

This is a Bembix sand wasp and is most probably digging a burrow to lay eggs.

Not all wasps are parasitic. Sand wasps are solitary hunting wasps. Adult sand wasps feed on nectar and are ground nesters. Females dig a long burrow in sandy ground as a nest for the young. They provision their nest with different insect prey, mostly flies. Males dig a shorter burrow as a sleeping chamber.

Wasp story #2

This wasp was first noticed on 16 January and it seems to be one of the Flower Wasps from its behaviour.

Here is was visiting many of the *Scaevola* flowers in my back yard.



I think of it as a Twitchy Wasp as it was always active and shuffling its wings like a Black-faced Cuckoo Shrike.

Today it or another individual was briefly on a *Correa glabra* bloom some 3 m away from the *Scaevola*.

Wasp Story #3

I upset some of the paper wasps that are building on the garage’s back door. I was stung on the face by one when I surprised them by opening the door from the inside.

In spite of applying ice cubes and then an ice pack the resulting red swelling is ogre-like rather than worth a photo.

Rosemary Blemings

The Royal Zoological Society of NSW Whitley Awards: Some gift ideas for books for children

Books are one of the most delightful gifts to give and to receive, and reading books about nature to small children is one of the loveliest ways of encouraging developing minds to be curious about our environment and all the extraordinary creatures with which we share it.

The Whitley Awards are awarded by the Royal Zoological Society of NSW each year and recognise the best publications that profile the unique wildlife of the Australasian region. In 2020 the Whitley Medal was awarded to *Hawkmoths of Australia: Identification, Biology and Distribution* published by CSIRO Publishing and authored by Maxwell S Moulds, James P Tuttle and David A Lane.

In addition to an overall Whitley Medal winner, Certificates of Commendation are also awarded to a range of categories including children's books. Four of the five winning books are published by Walker Books, including one by local author Nicole Godwin.

Each one would make a delightful gift for any small children and aspiring naturalists.

The commended titles



One Careless Night By Christina Booth, published by Walker Books. *One Careless Night*, tells the hauntingly beautiful story of Australia's last thylacine (Tasmanian tiger).



Searching for Cicadas by Lesley Gibbes and illustrated by Judy Watson, published by Walker Books. This lovely story about a child and their grandfather searching for cicadas is part of the award-winning narrative non-fiction Nature Storybooks series.



Young Eastern Brown snake at
The Pinnacle



Jelly Boy is by local Canberra author Nicole Godwin, illustrated by Christopher Nielsen and published by Walker Books. An unconventional, every-kid picture book that has the potential to inspire the next generation of readers to protect our oceans.



Australian Baby Animals by Frané Lessac published by Walker Books. A classic showcase of Australian baby animals and their families for very young children from a consummate author/illustrator.



Windcatcher - Migration of the Short-tailed Shearwater by Diane Jackson Hill and illustrated by Craig Smith published by CSIRO Publishing. Follow the amazing 30,000 kilometre annual migration of the short-tailed shearwater. A short-tailed shearwater flies from the edge of the Southern Ocean to the rim of the Arctic Circle – and back – every year. This remarkable 30,000 kilometre journey is driven by seabird law.

Rhiân Williams

Snakes alive

This morning (17 January), as I was walking down the path towards my clothes line, out of the corner of my eye I saw something moving. At first I thought it must be a blue tongue lizard as I have had them in my back yard previously. However, on closer, albeit, fleeting inspection, I saw that it was a snake. It was only a young one, perhaps 40 cm long; light greyish brown and paler underneath. It disappeared under some shrubbery as I approached so I didn't get a very good look at it. Don't know what species it is, or whether it is venomous, but all the same I was rather thrilled to have a snake in my yard. My guess is that it has come from Mt Arawang, which is only a couple of streets away from my house, and is probably just moving through.

Deidre Shaw

Recent observations

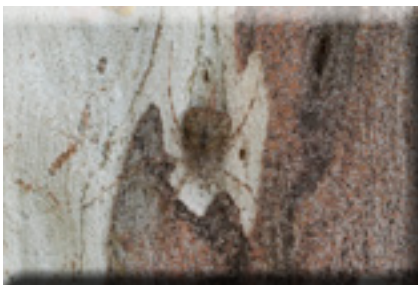
First off, I'd like to agree with Colin's observation about the absence of spiders. Three years ago I had an abundance of large orb-weaving spiders in my yard but for the following two years these were absent. Also absent were the leaf-curling spiders that had also been in abundance.

Over the past few months however, these spiders are making a reappearance.

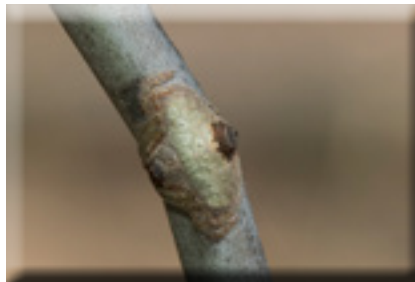
In November, it was still quite light when I noticed an orb-weaver busily working on its web, seemingly, in a quite open space. Once it got dark I went out with my torch and found 22 orb-weavers of various species, including an Enamelled Spider, though they were all quite small.

Still on spiders, on my forays in search of interesting subjects to photograph I found two spider species I hadn't seen before, though both were now being reported on Canberra Nature Map (CNM).

The Two-tailed Spider is well camouflaged so it is no wonder I had not been noticing it until I found three pair on trees at the Hawker oval. A few weeks later I found several more pair while out walking through Cook.



The very interesting Wrap-around Spider is also difficult to spot as it does exactly as its name implies.



Nevertheless, I found four of these in the last few months. The last one I found was attempting to feed on a lady beetle for lunch, but that was not the only spider I found trying to eat a beetle.

This Black House Spider was determined to defeat the Eucalyptus leaf beetle, trying to attack it from various directions. I'm not sure it succeeded.



Like the spiders, there was also a paucity of insects during 2019 but with the recent rain these also seem to have increased this season.

A couple of visits to The Pinnacle Nature Reserve resulted in finding eight or nine species that were new to The Pinnacle's list of species. This included two that rare or uncommon visitors to the ACT.

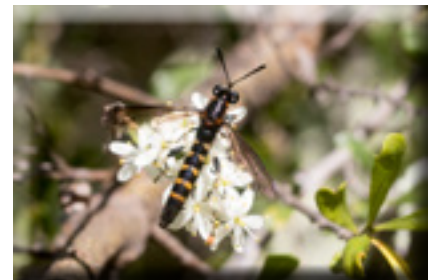
The first was a false click beetle: *Hemiodus* sp. Not only was this

a first for the Pinnacle, but it is the only sighting reported on CNM.

There were many males but the only female I found had four males trying to mate with her at the same time, with another waiting on a nearby branch.



The second was a Mydas fly; quite large compared with most flies and quite beautiful.



Also quite large for its species is the Botany Bay Weevil. When the ship Endeavour arrived at Botany Bay in 1770, they were one of the first Australian insects to be collected.

I found several of these at The Pinnacle; and indeed one found John B and attached itself to his sleeve. I also found them in Tuggeranong near the start of the track to Red Rock Gorge. They can look quite stunning and almost terrifying.



Alison Milton



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

president@fieldnatsact.com

Email: secretary@fieldnatsact.com

Website: www.fieldnatsact.com

Treasurer: treasurer@fieldnatsact.com

Membership: membership@fieldnatsact.com

Newsletter Editor: editor@fieldnatsact.com



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

Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra
GPO Box 708
Jamison Centre ACT 2614



Membership application or renewal

Surname: 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:

How did you hear about FNAC? Please circle: Friend

Other Please specify:

Subscription (Single/Family \$25) Donation: \$.....

Subscription renewals are due on 1 July each year

Pay by post (include completed form)

Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra
GPO Box 708
Jamison Centre ACT 2614

Bank transfer (renewals only: form not needed)

Account name: Field Nats
BSB: 325 185
Account number: 03545251
Reference: Your name