

July 2007



FIELD NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA

FIELD NATTER

OBJECTS: To foster an interest in an awareness and an understanding of nature

MEETING THURSDAY JULY 5

8:00 pm Australian National University

Meeting details back page

Water Dragons

Sean Doody
ANU

Sean is a research officer at the University of Canberra with an interest in evolutionary ecology, physiological ecology and conservation biology of reptiles and amphibians.

His talk relates to a project undertaken throughout 2003-05 set out to determine by what mechanisms do water dragons adjust their offspring sex ratios during range expansion and climate change. Results (including those from ANBG) showed that the piv-

otal temperature (the incubation temperature that divides the offspring sexes) is not adjusted to produce viable sex ratios throughout various climates, but rather lizards adjusted sex ratios by nesting in areas with different canopy openness indices

This is the talk originally planned for March that was 'washed out'
- editor



JULY OUTING - THE REPTILE CENTRE Australian Reptile Centre - Saturday 7th July, 10.30am

Following Sean's talk on water dragons, we will continue the reptile theme with a visit to the Australian Reptile Centre. The Centre's Director, Ross Bennett, has a vast knowledge of reptiles and will be on hand to answer our questions and introduce us to some of the animals that live in the Australian Reptile Gallery.

There is also a Prehistory Gallery which will take us on a journey through reptilian evolution.

A visit here is always good value but Ross has kindly agreed to let us in at the **reduced rate of \$6 per person**. This small contribution will help support the great work that the Centre does in educating people about a much misunderstood group of animals. The Australian Reptile Centre is signed off O'Hanlon Place in Gold Creek Village.

We will meet inside the entrance at 10.30am. See you there!

For further information please call Paula on 0428 654 044.

Species of the Month- Blakely's Red Gum (*Eucalyptus blakelyi*)

Benj Whitworth

Description

Medium sized tree (10-25m) (3, 4) with smooth bark and a patchy trunk, mainly grey, but also with white, brown and even red patches caused from shedding in large flakes (2, 3, 4, 5). Trunk is usually short and stout may be scaly at base. Leaves are often grey-green and eaten by insects (Photo). Adult leaves are quite big, up to 16cm long and 2cm wide (3), while juvenile leaves are rounder but also quite large. Buds have long conical caps and fruit have projecting valves (3, 4) (Photo).



Confusion species

Confused with Brittle gum but leaves are much bigger and buds have long protruding caps (Brittle are short and round) and Scribbly gum but has no scribbles or wrinkly-armpits.

Distribution and habitat

Red gums occur in the Tablelands and Western slopes (3). Yellowbox-Red Gum Grassy Woodland is generally found on the middle and lower slopes of hills in an altitude range of 600-900 metres, above the frost line of the valley floor (1, 4). The Woodland intergrades with Natural Temperate Grassland and Riverine ecosystems in the valley floors, while at higher elevations or more rocky sites it may intergrade with Brittle Gum Dry Forest (1).

Grassy Woodland provides shelter (10-30% shade or cover) for native grasses, herbs and scattered shrubs (1). Blakely's Red Gum is a medium sized tree (25m) and has hollows and nesting sites that are

used by animals. The leaves are eaten by many insects and often have lerps (Photo).

Physical requirements

Red gums occur in moderately fertile soils (3), not in dry rocky soils (1), where the annual rainfall is 400-800mm.

Life cycle

Flowers Oct-Dec (4). Flowers are pollinated by birds and insects and seeds are probably dispersed by wind.

Status and Threats

Yellow Box-Red Gum Grassy Woodland is an endangered ecological community. Lowland Woodlands provide habitat for two endangered plant species and eight threatened birds (1). Threats include clearing for agriculture or development, inappropriate grazing, dieback and lerps (4), weeds, and firewood collection (1).

References

- 1 ACT Government (2004). *Woodlands for wildlife: ACT lowland woodland conservation strategy*. Action Plan No. 27. Environment ACT, Canberra.
- 2 Eddy, D., Mallinson, D., Rehwinkel, R. and Sharp, S. (1998) *Grassland flora: a field guide for the southern tablelands (NSW & ACT)*. WWF, ANBG, NSW NPWS, EACT, Canberra.
- 3 Flora of NSW (2002) *Flora of NSW V2*. Harden, G. J. (ed), UNSW, Sydney.
- 4 NPA (1983) *Field guide to the Native trees of the ACT*, National Parks Association, Canberra.
- 5 Friends of the Aranda Bushland (1997) *Our patch- Field guide to the flora of the Australian Capital Region, as photographed in the Aranda Bushland*. Environment ACT/Friends of the Aranda Bushland, Canberra.



Reminder: Don't forget to bring along a 'prized possession' for our monthly meeting raffle

**FIELD NATURALISTS FIELD TRIP: MOLONGLO
VALLEY FROM COPPINS CROSSING
SUNDAY 10TH JUNE 2007 FROM 2PM**

Benj suggested a change of route when he discovered he couldn't lead the walk. It became a 'voyage of discovery' for us all. The weather was almost calm, sunny and reached 15 degrees. We walked in on a track north of Coppins Crossing and above the slopes leading to the river. Apart from the Casuarinas along the river we had strolled for at least an hour before having close-ups of native plants.

Typical of the grazed farmland in the area there were numerous patches of Saffron thistle, healthy Pater-sons Curse rosettes and Briar roses often with rose hips awaiting seed dispersal. Its edges imprinted with cattle tracks in its gritty soil, the sometimes blue-metalled track winds down to the Molonglo river's next major bend.

The obvious 'pongs' suggested that the sewerage system remains active although the fenced-off ponds contained only evidence of once-damp sludge with lush green growth around their edges. Was the bird on those sludge flats a Restless flycatcher? Several Welcome swallows hawking as we began to walk seemed to be going in & out of the sewerage system's 'chimney'. Perhaps there were insects to be gleaned therein.

One or two Common Grass-Blue butterflies were seen plus a Cabbage-white. A Willie wagtail's presence indicated that insects were normally plentiful. Perhaps the previous two days' gales had had an impact.

A brown hawk was sighted high in a dead tree near the river. Although it changed position once or twice, from the distance it could have been mistaken for a residual pine cone. Goshawks are one of the 12 raptor species for which the Molonglo valley provides hunting and home territory. A Black-shouldered kite gave a star display of its hunting technique by pausing to hover expectantly within sight several times during our meanderings.

Some Field Natters walked down towards the river's bend and also explored the complexities of the sand bars, islands and channels formed by the water. The effects of mid-stream Willows and edging Casuarinas could be seen in the silt build-ups around their roots. The large Casuarinas here seemed to have survived the fire's approach as though the ridges shielded the vegetation below. Goldfinches were recorded here as were Wood duck, a Pied cormorant and Thornbills. I heard a White-throated tree creeper at one stage but remained on higher ground within sight of the ponds' fence. Flame robins were using the mesh's diamonds as perches, dropping down on to the ground to gather insects they'd sighted from above. The male's colour, seen in the afternoon sun, is so unique even amongst the other colourful Robin-family representatives.

Cattle have wandered over and grazed these paddocks for decades. We automatically, it seemed, adopted the wandering habit and made our ways back to the cars at varying times and via different routes. Between the sludge ponds' fence and the

river there's a most amazing maze of Wombat tunnels, entries and holes. Some of the digging appeared to be quite recent. As we walked there was a noticeable improvement in the quality and purity of the vegetation in that native species were strongly represented.

These species are protected as cattle are fenced out of the narrow riverine zone. Bursaria, Kunzea, younger Casuarinas were among the shrub layer species with Lomandra, Red-leg grass, Blown grass, Sporobolus and the Yellow rush lily evident in the ground-cover layer. I suspect the Sporobolus may have been introduced to the region but it's probably more welcome than African lovegrass and other introduced species.

Blackberry clumps two metres across dotted the paddock landscape but in the absence of Bursaria afford vital shelter for the many small birds in these habitats. Wrens could be heard much of the time but flocks of Goldfinches, Sparrows and Silvereyes were noted by most of us at various times. The highlights as we moved car-wards through the fenceline hoping for White-fronted chats, were Diamond firetails and Red-capped robins. There were very good views of the Robins even though the male's red feathers weren't highlighted by the sun at this stage. True to their grassland preferences Eastern rosellas were also seen on this homeward stretch a species whose glorious colours are often taken for granted when we think of them as 'common' residents.

Thank you all for your contributions to this report and particularly to Grahame and Nicola for capably aiding our sightings and identification attempts.
Rosemary Blemings

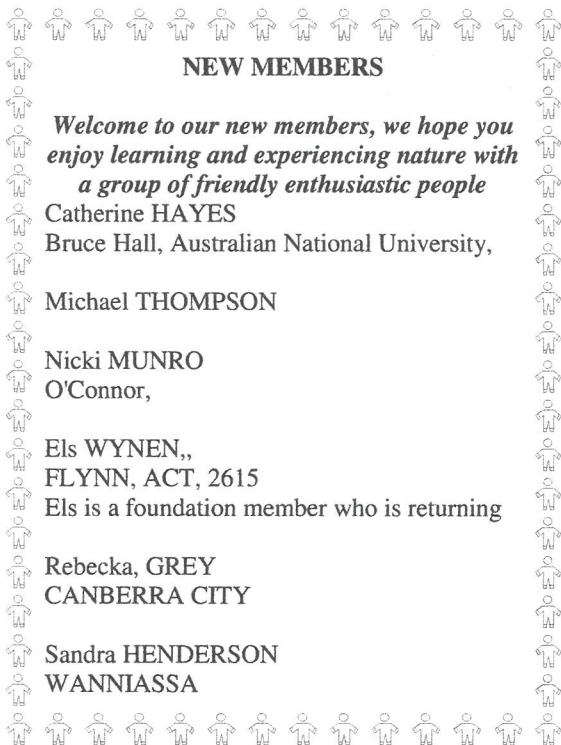


Above: Black-shouldered kite hovering

Below: The leader Rosemary

Photographs: Margaret Kalms





NEW MEMBERS

Welcome to our new members, we hope you enjoy learning and experiencing nature with a group of friendly enthusiastic people

Catherine HAYES

Bruce Hall, Australian National University,

Michael THOMPSON

Nicki MUNRO

O'Connor,

Els WYNEN,,
FLYNN, ACT, 2615

Els is a foundation member who is returning

Rebecka, GREY
CANBERRA CITY

Sandra HENDERSON
WANNIASSA

NEXT MONTH

Dr Barry Richardson, "JUMPING SPIDERS"

Dr Barry Richardson, from CSIRO entomology, is finding, describing and mapping the distribution of the jumping spider fauna of Australia. He is also working collaboratively on several projects related to the community ecology of insects.

Also coming up: In August our aim is to hold a *photography workshop* at the Botanic gardens. Our planned speaker for September is Sheila Cudmore talking about *orchids* with our field excursion that month to the Aranda bushland

Macquarie Island funding deal

The State and Federal Governments have reached agreement to pay for a rodent eradication program on Macquarie Island.

The World Heritage listed, sub-Antarctic island is being eroded by feeding and burrowing rabbits, and an uncontrolled rat population eats the chicks and eggs of endangered seabirds.

The Commonwealth and Tasmanian Governments will equally share the cost of the \$24.6 million pest eradication plan.

The State and Federal Governments have argued about the funding for more than a year, while the State demanded a bigger financial contribution from the Commonwealth.

Hail shredded trees

In addition to the damage caused to houses during the hail storm that passed through Canberra earlier this year I was amazed to see how much damage was done to the tree canopy in bushland areas such as the Aranda Bushland area where the ground was covered with hailstones and masses of leaves – quite a beautiful sight despite the damage.

Debbie Saunders



Caring for Land — An exhibition of Prints and paintings responding to land

6 June – 28 October 2007 Visitor Centre

Botanic Gardens

A SONG OF RAIN (part)

C. J. DENNIS

Because the breeze blew sou'-by-east across the
China Sea; Or else, because the thing was willed
through all eternity By gods that rule the rushing
stars, or gods long aeons dead, The earth is made to
smile again, and living things are fed.

*Mile on mile from Mallacoota
Runs the news, and far Baroota
Speeds it over hill and plain,
Till the slogan of the rain
Rolls afar to Yankalilla;
Wallaroo and Wirrawilla
Shout it o'er the leagues between,
Telling of the dawning green.
Frogs at Cocoroc are croaking, Booboorowie soil
is soaking,
Oodla Wirra, Orroroo
Breathe relief and hope anew.
Wycheproof and Wollongong
Catch the burden of the song
That is rolling, rolling ever
O'er the plains of Never Never,
Sounding in each mountain rill,
Echoing from hill to hill ...
In the lonely, silent places
Men lift up their glad, wet faces, And their thanks
ask no explaining --
It is raining -- raining -- raining!*

FIRST PUBLISHED 1915



Bungonia Gorge - view from Bungonia Lookdown Shoal-
haven River in mid distance Photo Lucinda Royston

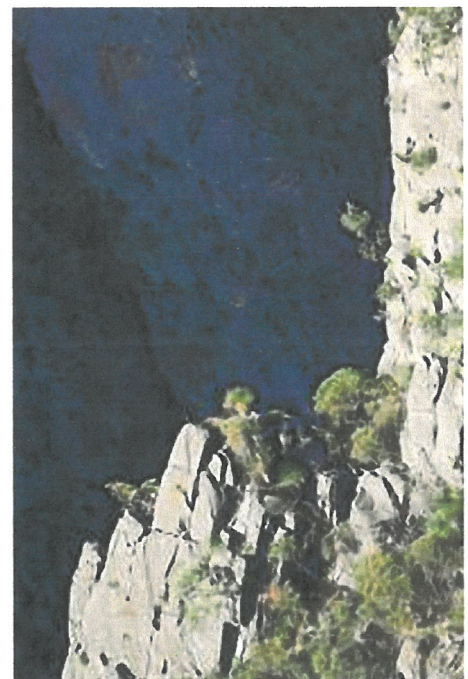
Photographs from the Bungonia Gorge outing in May

(Editors—note thank you for all the photos –sorry not all could be published



Bungonia Gorge - Field Nats members -
Green Hood - Pterostylis sp

Photo Lucinda Royston



Plants growing on vertical rock faces,
Bungonia National Park, NSW

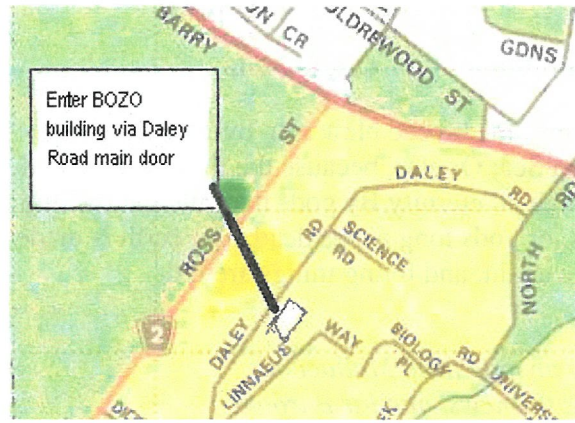
Photo Damon Banks

Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra

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: Benj Whitworth, tel w 6272 3192 h 0409 544 557
Secretary: Rosemary Blemings, tel 02 6258 4724
Website: www.geocities.com/fieldnaturalist/index.html
Newsletter editor: Chris Bunn <chris_b@webone.com.au>
 Tel 02 6241 2968. Member contributions welcome.
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Monthly meeting venue: Division of Botany and Zoology, Building 116, Daley Rd, Australian National University. Park (occasionally the adjacent building 44). Meetings start at 8 pm and are followed by refreshments.

FIELD NATURALISTS ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA INC.
 GPO Box 249
 CANBERRA ACT 2601

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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 \$20) Donation: \$.....

How did you hear about FNAC? Please circle: FRIEND? OTHER? Please specify: