

OBJECT: To foster an interest in nature

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## The Secret Astronomical Reason for the British Colonisation of North America"

**Dr Duncan Steel**

Our speaker is Dr Duncan Steel, a physicist and a Visiting Researcher at the Australian Centre for Astrobiology at the University of NSW. He has worked in the planetary and space science field for 35 years. He has written four books, *Rogue Asteroids and Doomsday Comets* (1995), *Eclipse* (1999 & 2001), *Marking Time* (2000) and *Target Earth* (2001). Asteroid 4713 Steel is named for him, as



is a lunar-roving robot in one of Arthur C. Clarke's science-fiction novels. [ <http://theconversation.edu.au/profiles/duncan-steel-8821>] There are twelve other minor planets for which he was the formal discoverer which are named for his relatives ....' [ <http://aca.unsw.edu.au/profile-main/59> with slight modification]

Dr Steel has written numerous book chapters and encyclopaedia entries, over 500 articles for newspapers and magazines, done over 1000 radio interviews for the ABC alone, and appeared in dozens of TV documentaries and current affairs programs. He has also prepared various classified Defence reports, refereed many publications and given many public talks in countries as diverse as the USA, Japan, UK, Ireland and of course Australia.

You may have heard or seen him on the radio or Television last month during the Transit of Venus. Captain Cook also had secret orders when he set out in his small ship "HMS Endeavour" to observe the Transit of Venus in 1769.

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

**FIELD NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA INC.**

## Presidential Musings

Although I left Bendigo many years ago I have remained a member of their field naturalists club. The following is an extract from their latest newsletter.

Why bother about biodiversity when this destruction is due to government action. OK protect people, protect property but also protect the environment



### The burning of our forests

A forest near Bendigo has become a 'bird and mammal desert' The sort of forest-care shown in the photo has led to the destruction of virtually every small area of bird habitat for feeding or nesting. The shrubs suppressed almost to extinction and now the fire-sensitive eucalypts are being severely burnt as well.

Even though the relatively fire-resistant Red Ironbarks suffer extensive charring of their bark and survive fire reasonably well. Yellow Gum has much thinner bark and is more severely damaged if the cambium layer becomes so hot that the sap boils. Then the bark dies and falls off completely, which often leads to the death of the tree after only one such event. Yellow Gum, Red Stringybark, Red Box, Grey Box, Yellow Box & Long-leaf Box are also all much more fire-sensitive than Red Ironbark so the species composition of this forest will be changed by such a fire regime which frequently and regularly scorches the trees to the tops of their canopies. The eventual result, if any trees at all are allowed to persist, will be a pure Red Ironbark forest.

Even after a patchy fuel reduction burn, the usual practice is to 'Black Out' the burnt area, which means burning everything that remains to prevent the spread of fire within or from the burnt area. Nothing is protected for the benefit (or survival) of native fauna, which is all threatened by the single-minded focus by the State Department on shrub destruction.

The only improvement is regional environment groups are now being given opportunity to participate in a fire operations planning consultation process in the coming months

Extract from Whirrakee June 2012 Author Rod Orr

## *OUTING: Friday 13 July, 10.30 am at GeoScience*

Geoscience provides public access to the foyer and reception, where you can see a superb collection of world-class minerals, rocks, fossils, geoscience maps and historical equipment. Geoscience is located on the corner of Jerrabomberra Ave and Hindmarsh Drive, Symonston

For further information please ring Rosemary von Behrens on 62541763 if attending.. Again this is part of checking of facilities for ANN in October

## What does being declared vulnerable really mean for koalas?

Chris Bunn

As a follow-up to last month's article about saving koalas I have looked into what does a declaration of vulnerable really mean?

In late April 2012, and after considering scientific advice from the Threatened Species Scientific Committee, the Commonwealth environment Minister Tony Burke listed the Queensland, New South Wales and Australian Capital Territory koala populations as vulnerable under national environment law.

### Why this approach to species listing?

Some regions have seen their koala populations decline over a number of years, while others have relatively high populations. For example, koala populations on Kangaroo Island and in parts of Victoria are considered too large to be sustainable for their habitat and need to be managed through supervised translocation and sterilisation.

At the other end of the spectrum, koala populations in some parts of coastal Queensland and New South Wales face an increasing threat from urban expansion, disease, habitat loss, vehicle strike, and predation by dogs. Koala populations in these areas may also be more susceptible to the effects of drought and climate change.

Due to the wide variations in population size, health and status, the Threatened Species Scientific Committee recommended that blanket or a one-size-fits-all approach to koala species listing would be inappropriate and did not recommend a listing of the whole or national koala population.

The Committee recommended that koala populations in Queensland, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory were most at risk and required listing under national environment law to ensure the species sustainability. The Committee recommended that protecting koalas in these areas provided for the best conservation outcome for the koala.

### Recommendations for listing the koala: Senate inquiry and Threatened Species Scientific Committee

The Senate inquiry recommended in September 2011 that the Threatened Species Scientific Committee review its 2010 advice to the minister not to list any koala populations as threatened in the light of its findings, and that the environment minister consider options to improve the conservation status of the New South Wales and Queensland koala populations to ensure a resilient population is maintained.

The inquiry recommended that improvements in the implementation of the principal national conservation plan, the National Koala Conservation and Management Strategy 2009-14 be addressed, and it made recommendations for further research activities to improve koala population data reporting.

The Committee reported again in November 2011. It found that the koala faces stark conservation challenges across much of its distribution, and is approaching the loss threshold of 30 per cent across Australia for listing as threatened at the national level. The overall figures, however, do not reflect the serious decline and vulnerability of the New South Wales and Queensland populations.

Of the five eligibility criteria relevant for conservation listing, the koala approaches or meets only that criterion relating to the extent of population decline over a three generational period (in the koala's case, 20 years). The data available for this assessment remain extremely patchy, inconsistent and incomplete. The Committee considers that, at the national level, the koala's decline over the last 20 years approaches but does not meet the required eligibility threshold (loss of 30% of total population size). Accordingly, the Committee advises that the koala is ineligible for listing as threatened at the national level.

### The impact of species listing for the koala in Queensland, NSW and the ACT

Federal listing of the Queensland, New South Wales and Australian Capital Territory koala populations will strengthen the protections that are already in place for this iconic species. But this doesn't mean that all activities in these areas will now require federal environmental approval.

At the householder level, minor activities, such as cutting down a single tree on private land in an area where koalas are listed under national environment law as vulnerable, are highly unlikely to require federal environment approval. At the planning level, sustainable development that takes into account koala protection can continue, even in urban and peri-urban areas with koala populations.

At the industry level, only projects likely to have a significant impact on the koala population in Queensland, New South Wales and Australian Capital Territory will need to be assessed under national environment law.

Any development or project activity that is deemed to have an unacceptable impact on the koala populations will not be approved under national environment law.

The new protections do not mean that anyone accidentally killing or injuring a koala has committed an offence under national environmental law. For example, it is not an offence if you accidentally hit one with your car or if your dog

*(Continued on page 4)*

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attacks one. In most instances like these, national environment law will not be triggered, with some exceptions, such as on Commonwealth land. State and territory laws may also apply if you kill or injure a koala.

The federal government is developing guidelines to assist landowners and landholders, business and industry that will clarify whether a development will need federal environment approval.

#### **Making a referral**

Under national environment law it is the responsibility of the landholder, owner, business or individual to determine if any new activity or development requires referral under national environment law. To get a decision on whether your project or development requires national environment approval you are required to submit a referral that describes what activity you intend to carry out, where it is to occur and what the likely environmental impacts are.

#### **In the ACT?**

There are no known wild koalas left in the ACT though they occasionally wander through from small populations in neighbouring parts of NSW (Namadgi — A National Park for a National Capital NPA 2011). In a 1968 publication by the then Department of the Interior, it was thought they probably persisted in low numbers in remote parts of the ACT.

Interesting koalas can be declared vulnerable in the ACT when they are already likely locally extinct.

Published in 2008 by the previous government, NSW to their credit do have a Koala recovery plan. It aims to “updating and facilitating the implementation of existing legislation to improve outcomes for conservation of koalas and their habitat; identifying areas of koala habitat and prioritising on-ground management actions; identifying research actions; and increasing awareness in the community, as well as within local, state and Commonwealth government bodies regarding the management and conservation of koalas.

## **Calender**

### **Conservation Council ACT Region Conference: Our Future Our Environment**

When: 21 - 22 September 2012

Where: Fenner School, ANU Canberra

Our Future, Our Environment seeks to initiate and support environmentally sustainable policies and practices.

On the cusp of the Centenary of Canberra, the theme is future-oriented, encouraging government, business, education and community leaders to express a vision of where we should or could be heading in the next decades or century with regard to achieving the highest quality environment for Canberra and the surrounding region.

This conference will provide participants with the means to network and share environmental best practice with each other addressing questions on issues facing the future of the ACT Region.

Issues addressed at the conference include:

community engagement, water, transport, energy, waste reduction, climate change, sustainable growth, indigenous knowledge, planning, environmental legislation, biodiversity, the political cycle, heritage

**Call for presentations and early bird tickets close 31 July. So get in quick!!!**

**Member groups with five or more attendees receive a significant discount!**

For more information, visit the council's website: <http://www.consact.org.au/2012-conference> or contact them at: [communications@consact.org.au](mailto:communications@consact.org.au) or 6229 3200

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### **Eric Rolls Memorial Lecture**

*A Meander Down a River or Two: How Water Defines Our Continent and Its Future*

**Tuesday 17 July, 6 pm, free**

In association with the Watermark Literary Society

In this second lecture in honour of author Eric Rolls, acclaimed environmental scientist Professor Richard Kingsford explores the challenges of managing our rivers.

You need to book at:

<https://register.eventarc.com/8605/eric-rolls-lecture>

## Photoecology Exhibition: Mulligans Flat

Photoecology is an initiative that aims to bring people together to explore the natural world through photography.

### When

24 July 2012, 6:30pm - 12 August 2012, 3:00pm

### Location

CSIRO Discovery  
Clunies Ross Street  
Acton ACT 2601  
Australia

**The Photoecology Exhibition will be opened by Ian Fraser on Tuesday, 24 July at 6:30 pm.**

### About the event

Photoecology is a new program that spans the boundaries of art and science. It encourages community members in Canberra to explore and appreciate nature by experiencing it first-hand through photography. There is a strong focus on participation and learning by doing.

During the program, participants learned about photography and participated in a number of field trips over the course of a year.

The result is an exhibition of printed works that conveys both the experience of group members through their individual lenses but also the collective experience.

Photoecology projects use photography to take a different look at the environment we live in and are part of and interactions between living things, including us, and the environment.

For the inaugural Photoecology program, community members came together to learn about photography and explore Mulligans Flat Nature Reserve through photography.

The reserve is one of the many natural areas around Canberra that are almost literally at our doorsteps. We hope that the images give a sense to viewers of how six individuals experienced one place as well as a sense of the collective experience of the group.

Viewers are challenged to think about how this place functions not only as a place to enjoy and recreate in but also as a living ecosystem and as an artistic subject.

<http://www.csiro.au/Portals/Education/Programs/Discovery-Centre/Discovery-Events/Photoecology-Mulligans-Flat.aspx>



Emerging from the peppermint forest Jean Geue leads a group of happy walkers on last month's outing along the Yerrabi track. One of the many features on this enjoyable walk was the colourful lichens on the rocks at Mount Boboyan (below). Bird life was sparse, but the changing plant life more than compensated.

Jean provided some interesting comparisons with earlier photographs both before and after the 3003 fire.



Dear FNAC Members,

In October this year [13<sup>th</sup> -21<sup>st</sup>] we will be visited by some 75 interstate Field Naturalists for the biennial Australian Naturalist Get-Together. As noted in the February 2012 Field Natter it was our turn and this was agreed by the FNAC committee in 2010.

Would you like to meet new people, find out what is happening in other Field Naturalist groups, converse with interesting people and discover their natural passions?

This letter is to give you the opportunity to consider several options:

To **volunteer** and help your Association as outlined below and/or

To **enrol** as a participant in all activities or on particular days.

In our next Newsletter you will be given the opportunity to ENROL as a participant and costs will be explained. There will be room on the buses for FNAC members who wish to journey with our guests. It will be first in best dressed.

To VOLUNTEER because we need your assistance. Would you please look at the program and see where your interests lie? It is time to slot names next to activities so we know where we stand.

How can you help?

Can you stand near an entrance and welcome and direct people where to go?

Can you sit behind a table and answer questions and ensure that participants are registered and have the required information sheets?

Can you encourage people to look at exhibits in Discovery, eat the food, help themselves to tea and coffee?

Is your favourite park or destination on our list? Are you prepared to walk with a group in the Botanic Gardens, Black Mountain, Mulligans or Tidbinbilla and help guide them?

Is your specialty Plants? Birds? Geology? Reptiles? Can you volunteer for one of those days or visits?

Can you chat to our visitors and inform them about our city and it's many activities?

Are you also a member of FOG, COG, ANPS, HERPS?

Can you rope in a friend to help you?

Australian Naturalists Network Get-Togethers are eagerly anticipated. Participants keep coming back for more. Our participants are from WA, VIC, TAS, and QLD. Please help us ensure they have a favourable impression of Canberra, enough to erase the negativity up "on the hill". The 2014 Get-Together will be in Hobart, Tasmania!

We are not asking you to turn up every day. We are a small association and the committee would really appreciate whatever help you can offer on a day or days suitable to you.

Rosemary von Behrens on behalf of the ANN2012 committee. 02/6254 1763

### **Native Truffles – lecture and hunt**

Date– 21/07/2012

10:00 am – 1:00 pm

Two of the world's top authorities giving a lecture and hosting a field trip to find some of our thousands of native Australian truffles, all for a gold coin donation? Sounds like a bargain and experience not to be missed. We meet at the National Botanic Gardens and watch a fascinating illustrated talk by Jim Trappe and Andrew Claridge about the importance of these strange looking (and mostly inedible unless you're a potaroo) fungi. Then we drive (in your own vehicles) to Mulligans Flat where Jim and Andrew will walk us through the bush and show us how to find native truffles.

Where: Australian National Botanic Gardens Theaterette. Main Building, Clunies Ross Street, Acton

## Australian Naturalists Network October 13—21 **DRAFT**

OCT	DAY	ACTIVITY/LOCATION	INFORMATION	TIMES
13	Saturday	At leisure/recommendations to be sent. Registration Welcome, Program explanation <b>ANN Committee thinktank</b> Welcome reception	Yowani Dick Southcombe Yowani	am 4:00 PM  early evening
14	Sunday	Geology, Mt Ainslie, State Circle, plus TBA Nat Arboretum [mostly exotic] Lunch provided. SC Club Boat trip, explanation	dep Yowani/CMV Open 2nd Sundays NMA if cold/wet	all day  4 - 5 pm
15	Monday	Aust Nat Botanical Gardens CSIRO Theatre pm CSIRO Discovery Dr Gavin Young - fossils Dr John La Salle - Atlas Living Australia Ian Fraser, renowned ACT Naturalist/ or on Thursday?	OWN LUNCH sandwiches/tea/coffee/oj	am+ 6 - 10pm
16	Tuesday	Mulligans/Goorooyaroo Nature Reserves Reptile Sanctuary, Gold Crk Lunch provided.	1 bus/then swap	am+ pm
17	Wed	Deep Space Communications Tidbinbilla Nature Park Lunch provided.		all day trip
18	Thurs	Campbell Park - birds Bus 1 Callum Brae Res - birds Bus 2 GeoScience. OWN lunch. Evening talks - +TBA Don Macgregor - Lyre birds	walk/look walk/look CSIRO	early am early am am+ 7pm
19	Friday	Breakfast at the ANBG National Institutions - buses on circuit <b>in groups/choices/ltd numbers</b> Nat Lib Aust - 2 groups x 20 Nat Wildlife Collection - 2 x 12 Nat Archives - Waterhouse Natural History Prize Nat Museum Herbarium - Cryptogam max 15 Bring OWN lunch.	Floresco open other TBA	early am
20	Saturday	Brindabellas OR Namadgi Parks Evening Dinner Cba Inst Tech Bring OWN lunch.	7 pm	3/4 day evening
21	Sunday	At Leisure ANN Committee?		



## 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:** Chris Bunn (02)62412968/0417407351

**Email:** fieldnaturalist@yahoo.com.au

**Website:** www.fieldnatscanberra.com

All newsletter contributions welcome, material published does not necessarily reflect the views of the club



**Monthly meeting venue:** Division of Botany and Zoology, Building 116, (Gould wing) Daley Rd, Australian National University. Park (occasionally the adjacent building 44). Meetings start at 7:30 pm and are followed by refreshments.

### 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: