

*OBJECT: To foster an interest in nature*

July 2020

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

# FIELD NATURALIST

## July 2020 newsletter No monthly meetings until further notice



**King Penguins on South Georgia. See Kevin's account of his adventure to the Antarctic Peninsula.**



**The Arboretum from the Cork Forest in June**

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## Local observations

Lucy Bastecky

Charles and I continue to appreciate and be alert to the sounds of birds wherever we are. Some observations:

1. About two weeks ago, we were outside Sonoma bakery in Braddon and heard then saw four Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos fly overhead in a north-easterly direction. Their distinctive cry catches at my heart every time as though they are saying "take care of us, we are disappearing".
2. We have seen Silver-eyes again in our garden and Charles identified one in a bush as we were walking past that I thought at first was a sparrow.

About the sparrows, we had a consistent group living in our garden up until some months ago. They have vacated and we don't quite know why but are very happy they've gone. Their calls disturb me because I know they are taking over habitat whenever I hear them. Anyway, we placed a statue of an owl in a deciduous shrub in the part of the garden they inhabited to deter them. It didn't seem to work at all when the hibiscus was in leaf. However, the other day I wondered if the clear sight of this predator in the leafless shrub had led to their going elsewhere. However, I reasoned it may also be deterring the Silver-eyes that are usually here. So we've taken the owl down and will see what happens.

3. Yesterday, a juvenile crimson rosella was in our main bird bath. Away from this one and by the camellias it feeds on, the resident red wattlebird has another bird bath - we call it a baptismal font owing to its size. The wattlebird drops in and out, in and out, leaving

splashes of water around the bird bath.

4. This morning this black and white moth was on the outside of our kitchen window. You can see Charles in the background. Possibly a Cryptic bark moth but can anyone verify this?



Lastly, a note about faith and nature. Pope Francis's first encyclical was *Laudato Si - On care for Our Common Home*.

At the moment, there is a renewal of interest in it, coinciding with the five year anniversary since it was published. A broad range of activities and relationships are being undertaken and formed respectively within parishes in the Belconnen area and beyond that have a focus of the encyclical's call for justice for the poor and the earth and its creatures. I am a part of that group and having a special interest in education, will be meeting a young woman who is studying to be a teacher at ACU. She has developed material on topics related to the encyclical. These include: sustainability, water scarcity, conscious buying, social justice and being active vs passive.

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Alison Milton

I have a few observations to include. The first is from earlier this year and is, in the words of Roger Farrow, 'a hit in the local entomological world'.

In January I photographed an insect clamouring over rocks at the edge of my backyard fish pond and posted the photo on Canberra Nature Map. I had no

idea what it was and it seems neither did anyone else.

At first it was mistaken for a webspinner, but then Roger sent the photos to some of his contacts.



Eventually, one contact suggested that it was a larvae of Staphylininae (s.l.), most likely some Xantholinini. His comments included: *The level of sclerotization and pigmentation is extraordinary and beyond anything I have seen, but I think is approached by some large xantholinine larvae (Thyrecephalus?). These characters and the very limited exposed abdominal membrane suggest it is active in the open (unlike most staph larvae) and might have some odd epigeal habits.*

My second observation was this month when I decided to take the new cute little bus to Ginninderry with the intention of heading to Shepherds Lookout on foot.

However, I didn't end up going very far as dark clouds gathered to the west and threatened a storm in which I didn't want to get caught. Nevertheless I did make an interesting find.

A long stretch of flowering *Hypochaeris* attracted numerous hoverflies. I counted at least 200 with almost every flower providing a feed for one, two

## Observations

and sometimes three flies on a single flower.



While I'd not seen so many hoverflies on a single flower before, this was not my interesting observation.

There were a number of Acacia trees along the roadside, with each one attracting numerous flies. On one tree however I photographed a fly that seemed to be hanging in an odd position.

I then realised that the fly was dead and found three others.



I also found a fifth dead fly that had distinctive white bands that I hadn't before seen on a fly.

Looking at the photo more closely on my computer I realised that the bands were three dimensional and quite looked like ice or snow. At least one of the other dead flies had similar bands but were more deteriorated.



I posted the images on Canberra Nature Map for an explanation, which I received. The white bands are a fungi, which I presume caused the death of the flies.

A few days later I took my dogs on a long walk which took us up past the Holt golf course, where I watched four Noisy Miners in a tussle.



This was the second time in the last few months that I have observed this behaviour.

I was amused to see that one bird simply seemed to be observing at close quarters rather than joining in.



The last observations were from Red Hill on Friday. I was checking out some old fallen logs and the associated debris for coconut ants and spotted some movement on the ground.

It was a female Bat-like Peacock Spider: a late or early season sighting and considered very rare or threatened in the ACT so I was quite pleased.



In one piece rotting wood was a very small colony of Snout-nosed Termites. Not rare but I thought this guy looked very cute.



## Sydney observation

I'm in Sydney with family during covid and found this beautiful small creature as we were pruning a lily pilly hedge last weekend. The contrast of the black with the small red details is striking in real life.



### Robyn Black

*Editor: I think this may be a jewel beetle Lampromicra aerea, also known as a Red-legged Bug.*

## Grotesque or clever?

Sonja and I decided to visit the Antarctic Peninsula and nearby islands by ship. In late February we flew to Santiago de Chile and after a break there and a circuitous but interesting journey we joined our 200-passenger ship at Ushuaia, the southern-most port of Argentina; a frontier town. We were unaware of the pending pandemic. After a 2-day voyage south we encountered icebergs and islands and met up with some of the unique birds of this environment, the penguins. We saw five species, missing only the largest of them all, the Emperor, which apparently prefers the sea ice around the continental coastline. It is a very black and white and blue world down there but the stiff and formal King Penguin dons some yellow and orange to brighten up the surroundings. We got ashore as often as possible by zodiac, onto the peninsula and surrounding islands; our tour guides as keen as us to explore the land and animal life. One of the things we couldn't help noticing in the rookeries was what appeared to be a bright yellow discarded rag, obviously a favourite food for the equally strange scavenging Sheathbill.

From my year on Macquarie Island in the late 1960s I recognised all of the penguins except one. The Gentoo, a curious very formally attired penguin was half the size of the metre-tall regal King but larger than the aggressive Adelie, the smallest of these flightless birds. In March, young penguins still had down feathers, the brown blobs in the King Penguin rookery were well hidden standing around in creches waiting for food delivery and unable yet to go to sea. Their largest colony on South Georgia, our last port of call, numbered several thousand birds so you can imagine the noise, and the smell!



*Thousands of King Penguins on South Georgia*

I was particularly pleased to see Chinstrap Penguins, not one you'll see in the Australian sector of Antarctica, which are about the same size



*A Gentoo Penguins and with Sonja for size comparison*



*Chinstrap penguin*



*Adelie penguin*

as the Gentoos. These two species are often seen together although they seemed to nest apart, their nest collections of rocks often gleaned from their neighbours and jealously guarded. The aptly named Macaroni Penguin chooses nesting sites in the most challenging of places, atop high cliffs with a steep rocky path to the sea. This bird is indistinguishable from the Royal Penguin In the Australian sub-Antarctic—I prefer the pasta version of their name.

The last we glimpsed was the Rockhopper Penguin, a smaller version of the Macaroni, which is very adept at hopping around on the rockier parts of the coastline and so not often spotted. It too is unafraid and can be quite aggressive.

All but the King Penguin have a diet including Antarctic krill, an orange-red 50 mm long prawn-like crustacean, which breed under the floating icebergs in their billions. Should climate change destroy these environments the impact on penguins and other biota in Antarctic waters will be enormous.

It didn't seem to matter where they nested; all penguins were constantly harassed by Skua Gulls and Giant Petrels on land, and Leopard Seals and Fur



*King Penguins*

Seals, even Orca at sea. It was funny watching the Gentoos chasing the Skuas across the beach though this could have the unintended (?) consequence of exposing their egg or chick to the Skua's partner.



The gracious Albatross and acrobatic Petrels are for another issue, as are the seals and whales. The yellow rag, we subsequently learned, was the discarded stomach liner of the Gentoos Penguin. Apparently parts of the krill are poisonous to the penguin, which stores the poison in the liner until it is full. At this stage it is disgorged and replaced by a new liner. Grotesque adaptation or clever?



Yes, the coronavirus caught up to us, the Falkland Islands closed by the British Government, Argentinian ports closed by the Argentinian Government and Machu Picchu impossible to get to. A charter flight from Montevideo to Sydney via Santiago was eventually brokered after much waiting around and then 17 days of quarantine in run-down 2-star hotels.

**Kevin McCue**

## Tidbits and such

### Videos by Matthew Higgins

You might be interested in my short film ‘Wedge-tailed Eagles: Audax 2020’. The YouTube link is <https://youtu.be/OyZCrLvb4E8>

My latest short video, ‘Wild Black Range’, is now on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/Ti4FBWdmtDY>

On the soundtrack, birdcalls meet Beethoven (with thanks to friend Gabrielle Hyslop on the piano playing the beautiful Moonlight Sonata).’ So have your volume up.

### Books

*The Bird Way* by Jennifer Ackerman

A revelatory book about the avian world – the second by the acclaimed American science writer – shows why it makes no sense to view birds en masse

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/jun/16/the-bird-way-by-jennifer-ackerman-review-an-enthralling-study>

Three new Australian novels that examine the current world from fictionalised animals’ perspectives have just been published. The authors were interviewed together by Natasha Mitchell on ABC RN’s Big Weekend of Books on 21 June at midday (<https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/specialbroadcasts/the-animals-laura-jean-mckay-james-bradley-chris-flynn/12296128>).

They each wrote their book unbeknownst to the others. It is an interview well worth listening to that includes poignant vignettes of encounters with animals.

*Mammoth* (Chris Flynn, UQP)

Chris Flynn’s third novel is an ambitious adventure back in time that recounts the folly of humanity—as told by the fossil of a 13,000-year-old mammoth.

<https://www.booksandpublishing.com.au/articles/2020/02/28/146552/mammoth-chris-flynn-uqp/>

*Ghost Species* (James Bradley)

An exquisitely beautiful and deeply affecting exploration of connection and loss in an age of planetary trauma.

<https://www.penguin.com.au/books/ghost-species-9781926428666>

*The Animals In That Country* (Laura Jean McKay)

Out on the road, no-one speaks, everything talks.

[https://www.amazon.com.au/Animals-That-Country-Laura-McKay/dp/1925849538/ref=asc\\_df\\_1925849538/?tag=googleshopdsk-22&linkCode=df0&hvadid=381358386178&hvpos=&hvnetw=g&hvrnd=9488055154344427648&hvpon=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=&hvdev=c&hvdvcmdl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=9071966&hvtargid=pla-899931905675&psc=1](https://www.amazon.com.au/Animals-That-Country-Laura-McKay/dp/1925849538/ref=asc_df_1925849538/?tag=googleshopdsk-22&linkCode=df0&hvadid=381358386178&hvpos=&hvnetw=g&hvrnd=9488055154344427648&hvpon=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=&hvdev=c&hvdvcmdl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=9071966&hvtargid=pla-899931905675&psc=1)

### Articles

*Putting the squeeze on Canberra’s nature parks*

<https://conservationcouncil.org.au/putting-the-squeeze-on-canberras-nature/>

*Restoring a gem in the Murray-Darling Basin: the success story of the Winton Wetlands*

[https://theconversation.com/restoring-a-gem-in-the-murray-darling-basin-the-success-story-of-the-winton-wetlands-140337?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=Latest from The Conversation for June 22 2020 - 1657115953&utm\\_content=Latest from The Conversation for June 22 2020 - 1657115953+CID\\_af5d0f71b0ee4ba27c697587e056ab2d&utm\\_source=campaign\\_monitor&utm\\_term=Restoring a gem in the Murray-Darling Basin the success story of the Winton Wetlands](https://theconversation.com/restoring-a-gem-in-the-murray-darling-basin-the-success-story-of-the-winton-wetlands-140337?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Latest from The Conversation for June 22 2020 - 1657115953&utm_content=Latest from The Conversation for June 22 2020 - 1657115953+CID_af5d0f71b0ee4ba27c697587e056ab2d&utm_source=campaign_monitor&utm_term=Restoring a gem in the Murray-Darling Basin the success story of the Winton Wetlands)

## Field Naturalists Association of Canberra Prize 2019

The recipient of the 2019 Canberra Field Nats Prize is Corben Hart.

Corben studied biology, with a specific focus in ecology and evolution, at the Australian National University from 2017 to 2019. He had originally intended to study genetics and medical biology, however, found he was more interested in ecology and field biology after taking a two week course to the Daintree rainforest. This started his path into the nature science side of biology. Over the following two years he pursued subjects that tied into these fields with an array from both animal and plant studies. A primary interest has been the dynamics with which ecosystems are held in a fine balance in order to maintain stability. In

particular, the importance of small invertebrates such as insects with their role as both consumers and prey to the entire food web. Corben hopes to study more in ecology as he sees it is more important for the future understanding of our impacts on the environment as well as how we can help maintain them in a healthy state. He is proud and thankful to have had his studies acknowledged by the Field Naturalists Association.

Corben is currently in Denmark taking a year away from studying with some of his family. We look forward to meeting Corben at some stage. Won't it be interesting to hear about his ecological observations whilst in Denmark?

**Rosemary Blemings**

## Subscription renewal

Just a reminder that subscriptions are now due on 1 July each year and therefore on 1 July 2020. Fees are \$25 and can be paid as a bank transfer to the account listed below or by sending a cheque to the new Field Nats P.O. Box 708, Jamison Centre, ACT, 2614.

### **Bank details**

Account name: Field Nats

BSB: 325 185

Account number: 03545251

Reference: Your name

As the new system has taken a while to settle down please take 1 July 2021 as your renewal date if you have renewed your subscription since January 2020.

If you feel this unduly penalises Field Nats, donations to the Field Nats' Conservation Support Fund are always welcome!



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.

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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  
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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:

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

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