



FIELD NATTER

Field Naturalist's
Association of
Canberra

June 2006

Field Naturalist's Association of Canberra

Birds of Canberra

Geoffrey Dabb—our speaker for June 1

Meeting details are on the back page

'This talk is based on a presentation to a seminar held in March by Birds Australia on the theme 'Birds in the Urban Environment'. Strong public support for a new Sydney-based project to record backyard birds has focused attention on Canberra's own long-running project along the same lines. It is possible to suggest some conclusions about (a) what kinds of birds you are likely to see in your backyard (b) what birds are different in Canberra backyards from Sydney ones (c) what birds are moving in (d) what birds are not coming out of the nearby woodlands (if they're still there) . '



Geoff Robertson receives thanks and a strange package from President Benj for a great presentation and for filling in at short notice with a talk on the Reptiles of Canberra region.

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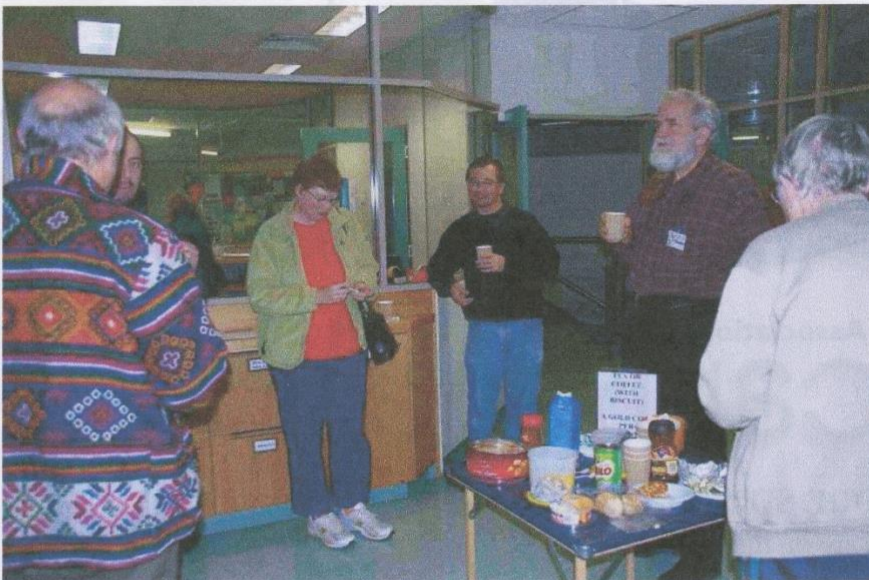
Walk - Sunday 4th June Collector

For the June Field trip we will be visiting Garth Dixon's place near Mt Collector, 2km from Collector. This was originally a 300 acre property although part of the property has been placed under a Conservation agreement, and this should show its quality. It has an abundance of birds and although it is not the best time of year to go there should still be plenty to see, including revegetation works carried out in the

past. The site can be traversed by 2WD vehicles and we may split into two groups those that want to walk and those that want to drive, so is accessible to everyone. Car pooling will leave from Canberra at 10:30, and bring your lunch. Contact Benj at work on 6272 3192 if you want to go, or at home 62544 556 although I am moving out. Benj

As usual for this time of year, we have quite a few renewals coming in. No new members this month but a pleasant surprise of a \$30 donation.

This is greatly appreciated by the committee and after a few exchanges of emails the committee decided for the donation to be used for purchasing a colour printer



Discussions and a relax after last month's meeting

Walks in the wind,
Runs in the rain,
Makes dry oceans in the sun.
Counts time, stops clocks,
Swallows kingdoms, gnaws rocks.
What is it?

(answer page 5)

New Conservation Action Group formed

by Dierk von Behrens and Rosemary Blemings

This high-powered, dynamic group is led by such committed and highly regarded conservationists as Bruce Lindenmayer, who drafted the submission that resulted in the reservation of Mulligans Flat, Jenny Bounds, well regarded ornithologist and former President of the Conservation Council and Ian Fraser, Canberra's best-known naturalist, Environment Tours operator and author.

What is their concern?

As might be expected, they want to promote the protection and conservation of native wildlife.

Well yes, but what is the particular threat that needs action?

It is: "The demonstrated adverse impacts of the **Indian Myna**" according to the first meeting of the interim committee. This bird is also known as the Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*), but, so as not to confuse it in the public mind with the native Noisy Miner (*Manorina melanocephala*), the organisation will be known as the **Canberra Indian Myna Action Group**.

Common or Indian Mynas were brought to Melbourne in 1862 to control insect pests in market gardens. Even though they weren't successful at this, they were taken from Melbourne to many other places in Australia, including north Queensland, where it was thought they would control insect pests of sugar cane. Cane Toads were introduced to Queensland for the same reason and have also become pests. Common Indian Mynas have established feral populations in many parts of the world.

Dr Chris Tideman, at the ANU, has been working on this pest for years. He says: "They destroy biodiversity by driving animals out of hollows like parrots, sugar gliders, animals that need hollows to survive." Chris has developed an excellent web-site: <http://sres.anu.edu.au/associated/myna/index.html> and has been much quoted on the internet. Do look him or his URL up and/or google the scientific names.

The action group's initial strategy includes building membership, supporting other communities to establish similar groups, and raising funds for activities. The Field Naturalists are a specifically mentioned part of their membership and alliance building drive.

Those of you interested in finding out more, joining the email list, and or concerned about the threat these highly intelligent pests pose to both our native mammals and birds are strongly encouraged to contact Bill Handke, the interim president, on 6231 7461 or on handke@grapevine.net.au. In the meantime please forward any location-observations of large, or increasing numbers of Mynas to Rosemary Blemings 6258 4724 or roseble@tpg.com.au and these can be checked against any database of infestations.

Species of the Month - Scribbly gum (*E.rossii*)

Description

Small to medium sized tree (up to 20m) (3, 4) (depending on soil nutrients) with a white trunk often with grey stripes/splotches. Trunks can be patched extensively with yellow at certain times of year (i.e. when bark is shed during fast growth after rain). The outer stems of the branches are often red. The branches have 'wrinkled armpits' or creases underneath, between the trunk and the branch. Scribbly gums have 'scribbles' on the trunk which are created by the larvae of a moth. These 'scribbles' are only revealed when the old bark is shed from the tree (2, 4, 5).

Confusion species

Mainly confused with Brittle gum, especially when young. Brittle gums have no armpit wrinkles or scribbles (2, 4, 5). Brittle gums have protruding fruit valves and powdery white trunks which may have orange/red patches before shedding (4). Snow gums have scribbles but have much larger, shiny leaves.

Distribution

The NSW Slopes and Tablelands to the coast. From Tenterfield to Bombala, West to Coonabarabran (3).

Habitat

Scribbly gums often occur with Brittle gums in dry forest mostly on ridges and dry hill slopes in sunny positions (1 pg 13, 2, 4). This open forest provides shelter for a well-developed shrub layer and herbs (1).

Physical requirements

Often in dry, rocky, shallow and infertile soils (1, 3, 4).

Life cycle

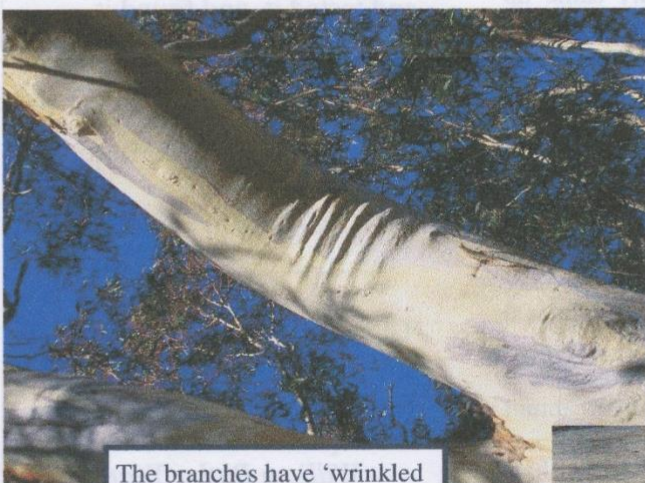
Flowers Dec-Feb (4). Flowers are pollinated by insects and birds. Seeds are dispersed by wind.

Status and Threats

Common. About 30% of this ecological community remains and is protected in Canberra Nature Parks on Canberra ridges (1 pg 14). Threats include clearing for development. Clearing for forestry and agriculture (in the past) (1). Fire.

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.



The branches have 'wrinkled armpits' or creases underneath, between the trunk and the branch.



Photograph taken on the April excursion to Black Ridge showing the new bark of the Scribbly gums



Atlantic expeditions uncover secret sex life of deep-sea nomads

New research from the Mid-Atlantic Ridge Ecosystems program (MAR-ECO), found that contrary to previous scientific understanding of deep-ocean pelagic fish they are not nomadic wanderers but may gather at deep ocean features such as ridges and seamounts to spawn. Even slight disturbances to the deep ocean seafloor could lead to a loss of biodiversity and therefore widespread bottom trawling could have major impacts on deep-sea life.

The new findings were presented at an Ocean Sciences Meeting in Honolulu on 21 February 2006.

Read the whole story here: http://www.mar-eco.no/mareco_news/2006/sex_life_of_deep-sea_nomads

It is a fascinating tale of deep-sea life and why we need to allow time to discover these unknown worlds before they are destroyed forever by bottom trawling

Submitted by Rosemary Blemings

Primary Animals — Primary Australia

The geologic time scale is the framework for deciphering the history of the Earth and is divided into three eons. Two of these, the Archean and Proterozoic, are collectively referred to as the Precambrian. The Phanerozoic (the third and present eon), began approximately 550 million years.

Even though life began more than 3.5 billion years ago, all time before the Cambrian (named after Cambria, the Roman name for Wales, where rocks of this age were first studied) was simply designated PreCambrian.

But recently the International Commission on Stratigraphy came up with an official name for the 80 million or so years immediately preceding the Cambrian: the Ediacaran period. Periods are identified by a specific layer of rock somewhere in the world. The base-line for the Ediacaran is a postglacial carbonate layer in the Enorama Creek section of the Flinders Ranges in South Australia.

The Ediacaran Period covers the time when multi-celled life forms started to take hold on Earth.

One of the most remarkable Ediacaran locations is in China where many fossil soft-shelled organisms have been found. The most exciting are known as bilateran fossils – extremely small animals with bilateral symmetry, whose descendants include everything from worms to us.

Ediacaran fossils exist in the South Australian Museum, but when I found them a number of years ago they were just in an obscure cabinet without the true recognition they deserve.

However, Russian geologists are unhappy their own title - the Vendian - which was coined in 1952, was not chosen.

The decision was taken after a fifteen-year long period of consideration by expert geologists.

Compiled by Christopher Bunn from various sources

Quotations

When the moon shall have faded out from the sky, and the sun shall shine at noon-day a dull cherry red, and the seas shall be frozen over, and the icecap shall have crept downward to the equator from either pole . . .

when all the cities shall have long been dead and crumbled into dust, and all life shall be on the last verge of extinction on this globe; then, on a bit of lichen, growing on the bald rocks beside the eternal snows of Panama, shall be seated a tiny insect, preening its antennae in the glow of the worn-out sun, the sole survivor of animal life on this our earth -- a melancholy bug.

- - - William Jacob Holland
"The Moth Book" 1903

Some primal termite knocked on wood; and tasted it, and found it good.

That is why your Cousin May fell through the parlor floor today.

- - - Ogden Nash

This great purple butterfly, In the prison of my hands, Has a learning in his eye Not a poor fool understands.

- - - William Butler Yeats
"Another Song of a Fool"

Outing - Mount Budawang Lookout Sunday May 7

Nicola Clark

It wasn't until late in the week that I summoned up the courage to contemplate the idea of creek crossings along logs and scaling steep rocky slopes but the promise of seeing potoroos won me over in the end. Having gone to a good deal of trouble to arm myself with a suitable Nordic walking stick (it wasn't a whip, Chris) I was somewhat disappointed that we were going to take a simpler route straight up Mount Budawang thus rendering the walking stick unnecessary.

Five of us met up in Braidwood, and fortified with coffee and croissants we drove to the track-head, quite a feat as the Mongarlowe Bridge was closed. That neck of the woods was pretty unknown to most of us and its difference from the local Canberra habitats made it immediately interesting, in fact Benj had to hurry us along as progress was of the usual Field Nats slowness. Nothing to do with being entirely up hill!

Benj had brought a field guide which was not very useful for identifying the flora although we could have done with an expert on ferns, these were numerous and along with the flowering Banksias varied according to habitat changes. Well, the ferns were of several different species, with Gristle ferns (*Blechnum cartilagineum*) in large stands and Rough tree ferns (*Dicksonia antarctica*) scattered along the path. The banksias seemed to be of only two main species (*Banksia spinulosa* and *Banksia serrata*) but these varied in size according to the type of habitat.

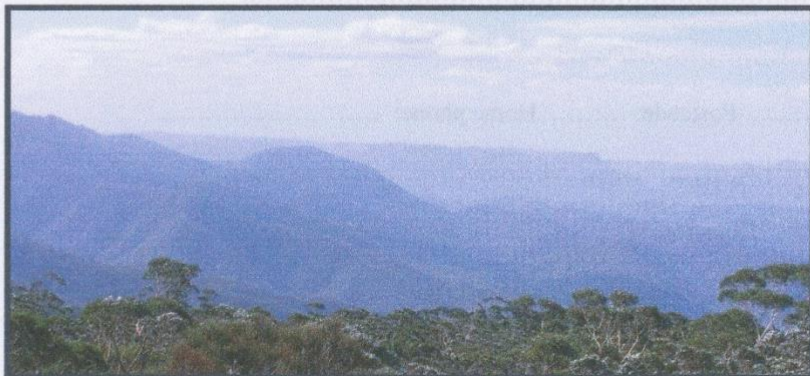
Initially the walk was through fairly dense and damp rainforest/wet forest with Black wattle (*Acacia mearnsii*) in flower and a lone Persoonia in fruit but neither of the two purported Mycologists were able to identify any of the considerable variety of fungi. Birds were easier as there were so few. An early highlight was a lone Wedge-tailed Eagle perched high in the tree tops before flying off. The next highlight, just as we had abandoned all hope, was a male Lyrebird in perfect plumage trotting along the path in front of us just fast enough to make photography impossible.

Lastly at the very top (1138 metres) and defending, by now a dwarf Banksia (*Banksia serrata*), from the wind I imagine, was a New Holland honeyeater.

The view, when we actually got there - it took us two hours - was spectacular, as was the icy gale force wind. We sat crouched in the heathland surrounded by dwarf and prostrate Banksias, Allocasuarinas, various heath species and *Leptospermums* and ate our well deserved lunches looking over Pigeon house, the Castle and Brush and Belowla islands out at sea.

We made our way down more quickly as the roaring gale and the promise of torrential rain dampened our field naturalist enthusiasm somewhat but not entirely. We saw and heard a few more birds, investigated a strange red 'rust' on many plants, and Graham pointed out gliding possum landing marks on numerous tree trunks. A 2m tall Hop Goodenia (*Goodenia ovata*) with its large ovate leaves and yellow flowers was a good find and sporadic Epacrids with red tubular flowers, which Benj thought were *Epacris longiflora*, were found in wetter patches. In a very damp spot was an interesting patch of fungi.

This rather unusually untouched area deserves much closer inspection and Benj is to be congratulated for taking us there - I blame the lack of potoroos on the wind. Another visit in spring could be very interesting especially now I know it is not as difficult as I first thought.



The next highlight, just as we had abandoned all hope, was a male lyrebird in perfect plumage trotting along the path

Bird List

- Wedge-tailed Eagle (*Aquila audax*)
- Crimson Rosella (*Platycercus elegans*)
- Laughing Kookaburra (*Dacelo gigans*)
- Superb Lyrebird (*Menura superba*)
- White-throated Treecreeper (*Cormobates leucophaeus*)
- White-browed Scrubwren (*Sericornis frontalis*)
- Brown Thornbill (*Acanthiza pusilla*)
- Striated Thornbill (*Acanthiza lineata*)
- Red Wattlebird (*Anthochaera carunculata*)
- Yellow-faced Honeyeater (*Lichenostomus chrysops*)
- White-naped Honeyeater (*Melithreptus lunatus*)
- New Holland Honeyeater (*Phylidonyris novaehollandiae*)
- Eastern Spinebill (*Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris*)
- Eastern Yellow Robin (*Eopsaltria australis*)
- Grey Fantail (*Rhipidura fuliginosa*)
- Pied Currawong (*Strepera graculina*)



Sand

**Field Naturalist's
Association of Canberra**

Who are the Field Naturalists?

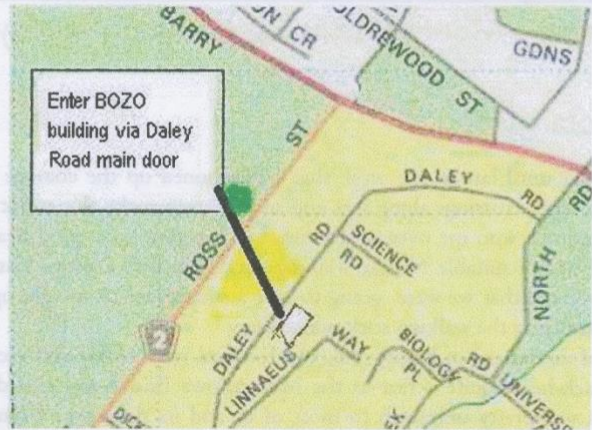
The Field Naturalists Association of Canberra (FNAC) was formed in 1981. Our aim is to foster interest in natural history by means of meetings and regular field outings. Meetings are usually held on the first Thursday of each month. Outings range from weekend rambles to long weekends away. Activities 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 02 6254 4556
<natureboy1@mail.com>

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.



Monthly meeting venue: Division of Botany and Zoology, Building 44, Daley Rd, Australian National University. Park in Linnaeus Way. Meetings start at 8 pm and are followed by refreshments.

FIELD NATURALISTS ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA INC.

GPO Box 249
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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 \$20) Donation: \$.....

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