

*Field Natter*  
Newsletter of Field Naturalists Club  
of Canberra



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

Meeting Thursday June 5, 2008 at 8:00 pm

(details on back page)

# Christmas Island

Daniel Mantle

Dan will cover the geology (very briefly), the birds, the marine wildlife, and of course the crabs and the those Crazy Ants. However, he is principally a birder and geologist so these, he advises, will naturally be the strongest part of his presentation .

Christmas Island has a unique natural topography and is of immense interest to scientists and naturalists due to the number of species of endemic flora and fauna which have evolved in isolation and undisturbed by human habitation.

While there has been mining activity on the island for many years, 65% of its 135 square kilometres (52 sq mi) are now National Park and there are large areas of pristine and ancient rainforest.

(extract from Wikipedia)



Red Crabs *Gecarcoidea natalis* migrating, on Christmas Island, Indian Ocean

## June Excursion 2-5pm, Sunday June 8 Botanical Gardens

More detail will be provided at the June meeting or phone Benj, Rosemary (phone on the back page) or Phil on 6251 5837

### Editorial Notes

We are all sorry to hear about our beloved President continued ill-health. We all wish you better days Benj.

Thanks to Philip Bell, next month's Field Natter has been partially prepared by him and July will be completely his effort.

Chris Bunn

## BOOK REVIEW

**NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION. Field Guide to the Native Trees of the Act.**

Canberra: National Parks Association of the ACT, (2007 second edition). Small octavo, paperback, 98 pp, colour photographs, line drawings, maps.

This field guide describes 62 trees indigenous to the Australian Capital Territory. In this little book the trees have been divided into three main groups eucalypts, acacias and the rest. With this book you can identify trees easily with colour photographs, botanical drawings, location tips, thumbnail maps for less common trees, and a key. It also provides some information commonly planted species not native to the ACT, a glossary and an interesting reference to the meaning of generic and specific names. It retails at around \$27.50.

### **Species of the Month    Dragon lizard    Jacky lizard    *Amphibolurus muricatus***

**Dragons** are a family of diurnal lizards which are predominantly terrestrial with some arboreal habits. They are characterised by their triangular shaped head and enlarged body spines. Largely insectivorous they will also feed on flowers and other plant material.



The jacky lizard has a body length of 100 to 120 mm, its colour is pale grey to dark brown with a series of large angular blackish patches along the middle of the back. During late Spring to early Summer it lays around 8-12 eggs, in a prepared hole, hatching around 75 days later.

This animal is normally encountered either along rock ridges, perched on fallen timber or standing timber on the ground. If cornered, it will adopt a threatening posture with mouth agape, displaying a bright yellow colouring of the interior of the mouth.

The jacky lizard is common throughout much of the ACT with the exception of cleared grazing land and the urban area. It ranges from Mulligans Flat to the dry forests of the southern ranges, especially when there is a dense understory.

# The meaning of the word Quoll

The term **quoll** is used of any of a number of small spotted marsupials of the genus *Dasyurus* of Australia and New Guinea. The rare **western quoll** is found only in south-western Australia. The **northern quoll** is found in a few areas of northern Australia. The **spotted-tailed quoll** is found in Tasmania and parts of Victoria, New South Wales, and southern Queensland. The **eastern quoll** is found in Tasmania and is rare or extinct on the mainland. Where does the word **quoll** come from? On his voyage of discovery in 1768–71, Captain James Cook had detailed contact with the indigenous people of Australia only when the *Endeavour* had to be beached for repairs at the site of present-day Cooktown. During their seven-week stay Cook and his crew had contact with the local Aboriginal people, the Guugu Yimidhirr. It was here that both Cook, and his botanist Joseph Banks, collected a number of terms from the language of the Guugu Yimidhirr, including **kangaroo**. Another word they collected was **quoll**, and our earliest record of this word is in Joseph Banks's *Endeavour Journal* in 1770, where he writes: 'Another [quadruped] was calld [sic] by the natives Je-Quoll: it is about the size and something like a polecat, of a light brown spotted with white on the back and white under the belly.' Although Joseph Banks had collected the Guugu Yimidhirr word for the creature, the word **quoll** disappeared from the record for another 150 years. The animal was called a **native cat**, because the early settlers saw some kind of resemblance between this animal and the European domestic cat!



Submitted by Maureen Bell from  
the OUP word of the month

**Quoll** reappeared in strange circumstances in 1924 in a *Dictionary of Australian Words and Terms*, prepared by Gilbert H. Lawson. There are six Australian words under the letter Q and one of them is: 'QUOLL —Aboriginal name for native cat.' Where Gilbert found this word remains a mystery. There is silence for another thirty-seven years, when the word appears briefly in a reference to 'baby Quolls' in the October 1961 issue of the *Victorian Naturalist*, and then in 1963 in the June issue of *Wildlife Australia*: 'Just as all wombats are wombats, implying their distinctive status as pure Australians so each species of the spotted hunters is nothing else but a **quoll**.' The third reference in the 1960s is in *Nightwatchmen of Bush and Plain* (1968) by David Fleay: 'In those early days ... we domesticated **quolls** ("native cats")'. David Fleay (1907–98), the author of *Nightwatchmen*, was an extraordinary Australian naturalist who was a pioneer in the captive breeding of endangered Australian animals. For example, he was the first to breed a platypus in captivity, at Healesville Sanctuary in 1943. When we checked the authors of the articles that mentioned the **quoll** in the journals from 1961 and 1963, we discovered that both articles were written by David Fleay. This means that all of the references to the **quoll** in the 1960s are from David Fleay.

All of this suggests that it was in fact David Fleay who popularised the term **quoll**, and was responsible for it replacing the absurd term **native cat**.



**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:

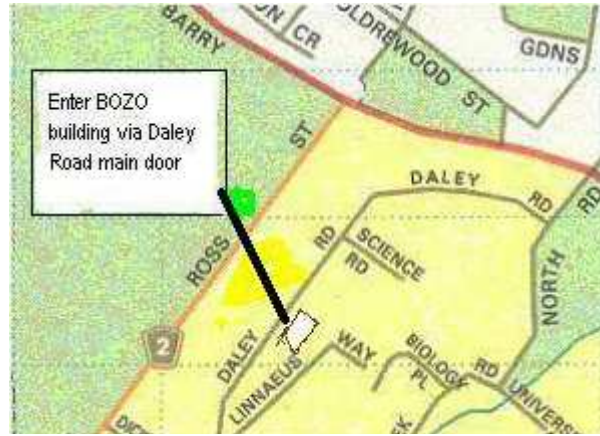
**President:** Benj Whitworth, tel w 6272 3192 h 62544556

**Secretary:** Rosemary Blemings, tel 02 6258 4724

**Website:** [www.geocities.com/fieldnaturalist/index.html](http://www.geocities.com/fieldnaturalist/index.html)

**Newsletter editor:** Chris Bunn <chris\_b@webone.com.au>  
Tel 02 6241 2968. Member contributions welcome.

Published and distributed by Philip Bell



**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.**

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Print Post Approved  
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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: