



FIELD NATTER

FIELD NATURALISTS ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA

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

PRESIDENT: Rosemary Blemings Phone 02 6258 4724

SECRETARY: Janet Twigg-Patterson phone 02 6287 2086

ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: GPO Box 249, Canberra ACT 2601

WEBSITE <http://www.geocities.com/fieldnaturalist/index.html>

EDITOR: Chris Bunn chris_b@webone.com.au ph: 02/6241 2968

Meetings are held in the Division of Zoology and Botany, Building 44, in the Australian National University, on the first Thursday of each month, except January. Meetings commence at 8:00 pm and are followed by refreshments.

NEWSLETTER — MARCH 2005

MEETING: 8 pm March 3 in the BOZO Gould Building Seminar room.

Swift Parrots and volunteer surveys

Debbie Saunders Swift Parrot Recovery Officer

Debbie has been working as a member of the Swift Parrot Recovery Team for the past four seasons with the NSW Department of Environment and Conservation (previously known as NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service). Her work on the recovery program has involved undertaking ecological research, coordinating community surveys and education, providing advice to community groups and all levels of government, implementing recovery plans, managing databases as well as writing legislative submissions and technical reports for all areas where this species occurs on the mainland. She is also currently doing her PhD at CRES, ANU on the ecology and conservation of Swift Parrots. She has been involved with a wide range of wildlife research projects throughout Australia including mammal, bird, reptile and amphibian research and surveys and also had experience undertaking and assisting with conservation and environmental education projects in Papua New Guinea and Costa Rica.

Abstract

The Swift Parrot is listed as an endangered species under the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999* and a national recovery plan has been implemented since 1995. The species breeds in Tasmania and migrates to mainland Australia for the winter. Volunteer surveys are conducted throughout Victoria, New South Wales, ACT and South-east Queensland each year during the winter migration season, and over 7000 survey forms have been submitted since 1995. All of this information provides the recovery team with a basis for conservation measures throughout the winter range of this species. This presentation focuses on the winter habitats within the ACT and southern NSW. Within this area, key habitats used by Swift Parrots include Box Ironbark and Grassy Woodlands as well as coastal Forest Red Gum, Red Bloodwood and Spotted Gum forests. Information about the Swift Parrot

and the importance of ACT/NSW habitats for this species will be discussed, together with anecdotes about Swift Parrot antics observed by our volunteers whilst participating in the biannual surveys.

OUTING:

Brooks Hill; Sunday 6 March

Brooks Hill is one of those small reserves that quietly goes about its business of looking after the woodland flora and fauna on which it is located. Often passed on the Kings Highway, but not often visited. Brooks Hill is located between Queanbeyan and Bungendore. When travelling from Queanbeyan, the car-park for the reserve is located on the right hand side at the bottom of the last hill before the last flat stretch of about 4km in length, before Bungendore.

This is a joint COG and Field Naturalists trip, so there will be an opportunity to share some of their knowledge of the birds, with our knowledge of the plants and animals of the woodland. We'll meet at the carpark at 8.00am for a morning walk up the slopes of the reserve (along ye olde Kings Highway in fact), before completing the loop along a gravel track, past the small dam, and back to the carpark. It should be a pleasant 2-3 hours. Please bring a hat, binoculars and a drink, and it would be preferable (but not essential) if your interest was registered with the leader, Benj Whitworth 62544 556.

Also at Easter there maybe a joint trip to Black Ridge along with the Goulburn Field Naturalists. More of this later or contact Rosemary or Derck Von Behrens on 02/6254 1763

NEWS AND EDITORIAL

Well what a start to the year with that wonderful presentation by Simon Driver. If I remember only one thing it is that the size of the *observable universe* is about 14 billion *light-years* (A light-year is the distance that light travels in one year in vacuum). Well the goodies will keep on coming not only with the talk outlined above but in April we will have Prof. Rod Peakall talking on Orchids and in May we will enter the strange world of parasites with a presentation from a recently retired CSIRO scientist Dr David Spratt.

Chris Bunn

MARCH OUTING REPORT

DAWDLING IN DUNLOPBenj

A large turnout gathered at Dunlop grassland, with 22 people including 4 Dunlop Parkcare group members (and 4 Pams). Pamela Bourke from the Dunlop group gave an introduction to the sites they are involved with and the management and monitoring of the sites. Moving in, almost the first thing we saw was a Blue Devil (*Eryngium rostratum*) in full colour. A group of us admired the blue devils, Cindy, Chris Bunn, Nicola Clark and Pams Finger and Fennig. Although devilish when mature *Eryngium* are susceptible to grazing when young. Similarly, some very good examples of Kangaroo grass (*Themeda australis*) were present and they are also a favourite of grazing animals. With sheep present in the grassland it is hard to predict the future for these two species. Birds such as goldfinches and Indian Mynas were present on the edges of the grassland. Two blue/purple flowering New Holland Daisies (*Vittadinia cuneata* and *V. muelleri*) stood side by side allowing comparison of their features, the former being greyer, larger with long leaves and the latter being greener, smaller and 3 lobed leaves. Mandy Squair identified a butterfly as a Meadow Argus (*Junonia villida*) a brown/orange butterfly with two eyespots. People then separated a bit and I had discussions about pesticides with Dennis Lassam and about sedges with Richard L-S. A small tan moth was caught by Paula and Kim Pullen identified it as a Geometrid moth. Geometrids are a very diverse group of moths with many species. Diving and jumping by some could not catch an elusive small moth with red wings. Later on Graham Clark found a wolf spider down its tunnel.

Walking West towards the dam Pamela Finger found a nice patch of common everlasting daisies (*Chrysocephalum apiculatum*) and blue bells (*Wahlenbergia*). And just as Rosemary Blemings was wondering why she hadn't seen a convolvulus, she spotted one pink star-shaped flower (*Convolvulus*

erubescens). On reaching the dam some blue damselflies were seen in a mating embrace. The male clasps the female behind the head, flying above her, while the female lays eggs in the water. The males of some dragonfly and damselfly species can remove a previous males sperm from a female, either passively (flushing) or actively (scraping out), therefore a male gains by guarding his female until the eggs are laid. Red damselflies were also common. We were delighted to see blue dragonflies and black and gold striped dragonflies doing laps. Leaving the dam a young long-faced grasshopper was discovered in the wetter grass and investigated closely by Olga. Not long after an older long faced grasshopper and a very large preying mantis were found. Kim also showed us a yellow-winged grasshopper. He explained that locusts were just grasshoppers that formed large groups when adult. Although there are many hundreds of species of grasshoppers in Australia only 10 were considered pest locusts.

Moving back to the car park we made a detour towards a large, old, Blakely's redgum. A number of insects were found with Kim identifying an introduced weevil, a predatory beetle with large red spots on each wing, an assassin bug, and a shining green tenebrionid beetle. Returning to the car park discussion focussed around digital cameras until the heat became too much and the remainders retreated to their cars, satisfied with a jam-packed 2 hours.

Photograph of the distinctive Meadow Argus (*Junonia villida*) taken on Sunday. 'On the upperside of each wing two prominent eyespots, each broadly ringed with orange that may coalesce' from page 186 of Michael Braby's book Butterflies of Australia

ARGUS, in Greek mythology, a 100-eyed giant who was assigned by the goddess Hera, wife of Zeus, to guard Io, of whom she was jealous. Zeus, who favored his mistress Io, changed her into a heifer to protect her from Hera. The god Hermes, dispatched by Zeus to rescue Io, slew Argus by lulling his eyes to sleep with music and then severing his head. In one version of the story, Argus subsequently became a peacock; in another, Hera transplanted his eyes onto the peacock's tail.



Coming in March:

Within our grasp: Saving the great apes
Ian Redmond
Date: Thursday, 17 March 2005
Time: 6pm
Venue: Visions Theatre, National Museum of Australia
Enquiries:
T: 02 6125 8396
E: nihca@anu.edu.au

Who was François Péron?

(Nicola Clark and Margaret Kalms have tracked down information, to answer the query that arose in last month's newsletter)

François Péron was born in Cerilly France in 1775, the son of a harness maker. He enlisted in the revolutionary army in 1792 and was taken prisoner. During this time he lost an eye but he was able to return home safely in 1794. He began studying medicine but when he heard of the Baudin expedition he pestered long and hard to be included as part of the scientific team.

Nicholas Baudin's expedition to southern and western Australia, initially with two ships *Naturaliste* and *Geographe*, was one of the great events in the history of science. It was sponsored by the Imperial Institute of France to explore the poorly known Australian continent and provide new material to promote the standing of French science in Europe. In spite of controversy, mismanagement and appalling casualties, the expedition was successful. More than 100,000 specimens of animals were taken back to France. One of the scientists on that great journey was Francois Peron

It seems he was a typical 'absent-minded professor'. He was accident prone and kept getting himself lost when he went ashore, much to the despair and frustration of Baudin, the expedition commander.

And yet it was François Péron who lived to return to Paris and was given the task of writing up the scientific and narrative accounts of the expedition. Poor Baudin died of tuberculosis during the return voyage.

The name François Péron stands prominently alongside other Europeans in the history of Australian natural science. He is described as the first informed zoologist to land in Australia.

He was notable for using a contraption known as Regner's Dynamometer to measure the handclap of Tasmanian Aborigines (he concluded they had a weak one).

He collected an enormous amount of material and his extensive fieldwork and attention to detail (even with one eye) was ahead of its time. It is fitting that his name should be preserved as the name of the Peron National Park in the Shark Bay region (WA) as well as having several frogs (and much other wildlife) named after him.



During the early part of the nineteenth century Paris was one of the major centres of research into herpetology, consequently numerous Australian Frogs have French names Dumeril, Bibron, Le Sueur and of course Peron.

BONDI TRAMS

{This is from a publication from the Australian National Dictionary Centre, *Ozwords May 2003*, given to me from Maureen Bell. The 'we' refers to the editor}

We have recently been reading the magazine *Wild Life* that was published in Victoria by Sun-News Pictorial between 1938 and 1952. It contains much interesting information about popular names for plants and animals. A very common term used to describe the caterpillar of the cup moth is Chinese junk. In 1946 we find: 'Chinese junks are about again-not the quaint river craft of the Orient, but *Doratifera vulnerans*, the stinging caterpillar of the gum

leaves whose quaint shape and unusual coloring make the school children's name seem the most appropriate. "Six-stingers" and "Tanks" are other names preferred in some districts'. The article goes on to explain that these common names 'are both very expressive since the eight bunches of erectile spines (only six in some species) force themselves strongly to the attention if they come into contact with a tender arm or cheek, or even with the back of the hand, while their legless type of progression has much in common with the caterpillar track of an Army tank'. Do children still talk of Chinese junks, six-stingers, and tanks? I thought not, until I came across the following sentence in a 1996 book on Australian insects: 'The caterpillars are sometimes also known by other names such as slug moths, Chinese junks or Bondi trams'. The Bondi tram appears in the Australian phrase 'to shoot through like a Bondi tram', but we have no other records of the Chinese junk caterpillar being called a Bondi tram. Do readers have any evidence for this, or memories of it being used?

Surfing on the NET

Powers of 10

I found this one of the most 'mind blowing site on the Internet as well as very instructional. It begins as a view of the Milky Way Galaxy
Use the link below to view. No computer then take the address to the library, I don't think you will be disappointed

<http://micro.magnet.fsu.edu/primer/java/scienceopticsu/powersof10/index.html>.

THE ECONOMY IS A WHOLLY OWNED SUBSIDIARY OF THE ENVIRONMENT, NOT THE OTHER WAY AROUND. -GAYLORD NELSON
Former U.S. senator and governor of Wisconsin

Newsletter contributions welcome

Sightings, reports, travelogues, reviews, photographs, sketches, news, comments, opinions, theories — in fact anything relevant to natural history. Please forward material to chris_b@webone.com.au or 13 Burnside Street Watson ACT 2602. Any queries please phone 6272 5540

FIELD NATURALISTS ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA INC.

The Field Naturalists Association of Canberra was formed in 1981. The aim of the club is to stimulate interest in the natural history of the ACT through regular meetings and field outings. Meetings are usually held on the first Thursday of each month. Field outings are also planned each month and range from day outings to long weekends and camping. The emphasis is on informality and fun. New members are always welcome, especially family groups and young people. Information on activities is circulated in the monthly newsletter. If you wish to join FNAC, please complete the form below and send it with the appropriate subscription to: The Treasurer, FNAC, GPO Box 249, Canberra ACT 2601.

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