



FIELD NATURALISTS ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA

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

NEWSLETTER — March 2006

MEETING

Thursday March 2nd - 8 pm (details back page)

Invasive Species — a global challenge

— Dr Mark Lonsdale Assistant Chief of CSIRO Entomology.

One of CSIRO's weed and pest experts Dr Mark Lonsdale is the new Chair of a global project, the Global Invasive Species Programme, which is combating the threat of invasive pest species world wide.

"Invasive species such as weeds, foxes, rabbits and marine pests cost Australia billions of dollars each year. The cost worldwide is too high to calculate," says Dr Lonsdale.

"In many countries invasive species impact on economic development, human health, native species and agriculture. In developing countries invasive species pose a serious threat to the health and wellbeing of billions of people."

Worldwide, invasive species have become one of the most significant drivers of environmental change but Mark believes their impact can be reduced.

"Invasive species are an international problem which requires an international solution," says Dr Lonsdale.

"By combining regional knowledge from around the globe the GISP aims to conserve biodiversity and sustain human livelihoods by minimising the spread and impact of invasive species."

As the new Chair of GISP, Dr Lonsdale sees opportunities to tap into a growing pool of international knowledge which he believes will have benefits for Australia, such as techniques to control pests which have not yet arrived here.

GISP was established in 1997 and is currently funded by the World Bank. It has created an international network of governments, research organisations and trade industries with the common goal of addressing the invasive species problem.

Dr Lonsdale's past work includes researching the impact of invasive weeds and their biocontrol, environmental risk assessments, and assessing the ecological implications of genetically modified organisms.

OUTING:

Field trip- Tidbinbilla- Sunday March 5th 2:30 pm

Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve is a forty minute drive West from Canberra City. The nature reserve was almost completely burnt during the 2003 bushfires, but is now recovering well. We will be car pooling, aiming to arrive at Tid visitors centre at 2:30pm. We will visit the wetlands area to view Platypus and waterbirds (more information on Tidbinbilla below). Walking is easy. Afterwards we will have a picnic afternoon tea/dinner, so BYO. Contact Benj Whitworth on 62544 556 for car pooling/attendance.

Tidbinbilla

Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve is a forty minute drive west from the Canberra City. Visitors to Tidbinbilla will experience a valley rich in indigenous and natural heritage and discover many unique plants and animals. The name Tidbinbilla is derived from the Aboriginal word, 'Jedbinbilla', a place where 'boys were made men'. Tidbinbilla has recorded the highest density of artefacts found in the ACT. Tidbinbilla has a stunning array of plants and animals. The broad habitats include wetlands, grasslands, dry forests, wet forests and sub-alpine. These different habitats support a wide range of wildlife including lyrebirds, kangaroos, possums, wombats, echidnas, platypus and emus, which were introduced into the area. Tidbinbilla also plays an important role in captive wildlife management, in particular the breeding programs for the endangered Northern Corroboree Frog and the Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby.

More information can be found at:

<http://www.environment.act.gov.au/bushparksandreserves/parksandreserves/tidbinbilla>

Further contact Benj Whitworth 62 544 556

NEWS AND EDITORIAL

Conserving the ACT's lowland native vegetation: which way forward?

Wednesday 15 March 2006 1:30pm to 5.30pm You are invited to a **free public forum** to discuss how to protect the ACT's native woodlands and grasslands for the long-term. **To attend, you need to register.** The forum is hosted by the Conservation Council of the SE Region and Canberra. Venue: Optus Theatre, CSIRO Discovery, Clunies Ross Street, Black Mountain, ACT. Afternoon Tea will be provided and parking is available at venue.

While the ACT still has some large areas of high quality lowland vegetation, over seventy-five percent of native vegetation in the Canberra area and Murrumbidgee Valley has been cleared, and continues to be cleared for urban and infrastructure development. This Forum aims to have a broad ranging discussion on how we can best conserve lowland vegetation in the ACT for future generations. Speakers will discuss approaches to native vegetation protection in different jurisdictions, what lessons can be learned, what systems could be appropriate for the ACT.

To book, please contact the Conservation Council, Ph 02 6247 7808, or e-mail: ccserac.marketing@ecoaction.net.au.

Forests Forever Ecology Camp Annual Easter camp in the heart of East Gippsland's forests April 14th-17th 2006

Be guided by expert ecologists through magnificent forests, be awed by their beauty and complexity and be outraged by their destruction. In the evenings camp by the Brodrigg.

As well as a choice of short and long walks into the forest, there will be a drive/walk tour, a self guided walk, evening botanical entertainment under the stars, organic farm tour, how to save forests (from your own home) and more.

Bring camping gear, friends, food and transport (maybe fuel as well, as the nearest shop is 25 km away) but please, no four legged friends.

We provide: tour guides, firewood, solar power, toilets, info tent and marquee, fruit.

Camp is based at Ellery Creek Track in Goongerah.

This camp is organised by Environment East Gippsland in conjunction with the Wilderness Society. All proceeds go towards saving these forests.

For bookings and further information:

Email: ffec2006@optusnet.com.au, or visit: www.eastgippsland.net.au,

or phone Alison on (03) 94171351 or Liz on (03) 9315 3333

Costs: 4 days \$60 (\$35 concession), or \$20 per day (\$15 conc). Accompanied Teenagers 1/2 price, under 12 yrs free.

Book early - numbers limited.

Welcome

New member:

Mrs Sybil Free, 2/49 Dooland Court, Nicholls ACT 2913

Transport

The Conservation Council is beginning a campaign for a light rail system in central Canberra. A draft Light Rail plan has been developed and the first consultative meetings with key stakeholders and interested parties are taking place.

Interested people should look at the next issue of Sustainable Times due out in a couple of weeks (see website or email us to receive a PDF version), or if you would like to comment on our draft "Light Rail vision for Central Canberra" please email Adrian Whitehead adrian@ecoaction.net.au

OUTING REPORTS

Farrer Ridge Report

On a warm, cloudy, early morning, Field Nats had a walk with Farrer Ridge Park Care group. I was a bit embarrassed when I was the only Field Natter who turned up. In November when I was organising field trips I thought Farrer Ridge would be a good spot, and knowing that there was a Park care group, I thought it would be courteous to advise them and ask them to come along to talk about their site. By coincidence the date I selected they were holding a short, 1 hour, working bee, and naturally it made sense to combine. I have no intention for Field nats to become another Parkcare group.

In any case, the Farrer Ridge group didn't seem to mind, and enthusiastically showed me their maps, the work they had done, and three albums of photos they

wish to turn into a Southern ACT plant field guide. After introductions Wendy led the way and we pulled Verbascum (a weed with a tall 'spike-head') for about an hour.

Then they offered to show me and Rebecca Blundell, the new Parkcare coordinator who had also turned up, the signposted walk. This was enjoyable and we saw the plants I mentioned in the original add. It also allowed me to ask Rebecca about the Landcare organisation and insurance.

The Farrer Ridge group were very open and friendly. They suggested that our members may be more interested in walking Farrer Ridge in September, when it is full of flowers, and they could provide a Guide if we wanted one.

Benj

Reptile Walk- Murrumbidgee- Dec 2005.

After a cool and cloudy week I was worried that the weekend would be too cold for a reptile walk. But the opposite was the case. So hot, that it seemed as if nobody had come, but it turned out they were waiting in another car park. Paul and Janet showed visitors their beautiful photos of birds from Kioloa. We walked into Stoney Creek Nature Reserve to the North of Casuarina sands. Only 12 months before the area was almost a sand desert two years after the fires and drought. But the substantial spring rains meant ground vegetation was high, over 1m high in many areas. The path which was clear and easy the year before, was overgrown and Dierk forged a path through the 'jungle'.

The aim was reptiles. After reaching the most stoney area we had seen none. Nevertheless, peregrines, pelicans and planes had been spotted. Some good stands of paper daisies (*Bracteantha viscosa*) and Chamomile sunray (*Rhodanthe anthemoides*) (possibly) were present. Pam turned back and I wondered if she would 'make it out'. Geoff and Paul checked under rocks and found some lizard eggs, our first sign! It was thought these may be grass skink eggs (*Lampropholis delicata*) (Cogger, 2000). Their eggs hatch in Feb-March (Swan, 1990).

Geoff clambered up the cliff like a nimble rock wallaby and spotted what may have been a White's

skinks (*Egernia whitii*), a medium sized skink, grey in colour, with white spots circled by dark lines, on its side. They occur in dry forest, woodland and heath. It has live young and couldn't have been the parent of the lizard eggs. Apparently they defecate at a defined site (like rhinos) and eat ants, spiders, beetles, bugs and other insects (Swan, 1990).

Meanwhile Dierk, Grahame and Nicola had seen a young Gippsland water dragon (*Physignathus lesueurii* ssp. *Howitti*) dive into the river. Although Paula and I could not find the dragon we saw a beautiful blue dragonfly. The heat was sending everyone to sleep, and we dozed and chatted by the river.

Geoff discovered our last reptile. A beautiful Blue tongue lizard (*Tiliqua*), large and docile and it enabled us to investigate closely. We decided to head back, assuming the heat would retard most reptiles. The day finished with a relaxing chat at Casuarina sands, followed by a beer.

Benj

References

- Cogger, H. G. (2000) *Reptiles and amphibians of Australia, 6th edition*. Reed New Holland, Sydney.
Swan, G. (1990) *A field guide to the Snakes and lizards of NSW*. Three sisters, Winnmalee.

Executive (back page)
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SPECIAL REPORTS

SUPERB PARROTS & THEIR A.C.T. SUMMER

From Rosemary Blemings

Superb Parrots *Polytelis swainsonii* have caused a stir this summer by being seen in a wide range of Belconnen suburban situations and being present in larger numbers than previously noted.

These literally superb but threatened parrots nest in Blakely's Red Gum hollows in the Borrowa, Harden, Yass regions. Once young are robust enough some family groups disperse SE, arriving in the Fraser area by mid December. Mt Rogers becomes a hot-spot especially for creched young awaiting their parents' return from foraging. Keening levels rise in anticipation of regurgitated Acacia and grasses' seeds.

Usually, after 7-10 days around Fraser and Mt Rogers in the daytime, young would then fly into the suburbs as families seeking un-harvested fruit such as Loquats and Prunus and seeds. In 2005-6 Superbs have been sighted in nearly all Belconnen suburbs with Cook, Aranda, Hawker and Latham; Field Natters contributing to the records. They were observed repeatedly near the Belconnen Fruit Markets where lerps infesting Eucalypts were noted as their food sources. Early birds would apparently call others to the bountiful trees.

At one stage a group of well over 100 was recorded, whereas 30, in previous seasons were exciting. They've been seen as far south as Kambah. The last record from Mt Rogers was on 1st February.

Questions emerged: Has their breeding season been particularly successful? Have more

survived the journey to the A.C.T? Have most of the region's Superbs come here rather than being seen in other places? Where do they go after leaving the A.C.T?

Fortuitously, Joe Forshaw was COG's speaker for February and provided background information and answers. There is a non-discrete population of Superbs around the Wagga area, a remnant of larger numbers along that part of the Murrumbidgee's catchment. Some of these birds may have flown here, especially from around Junee where fires may have driven them out.

The breeding season, aided by good rains and growth, has been very successful and began early. Many parents have raised 3-4 chicks as opposed to 2-3 in



Superb parrot (photograph G Dabb - COG)

other years.

Several years' cumulative effect of wheat-transport trucks being covered, has significantly reduced the incidence of road-kills amongst nature-strip-feeding parrots. Opinions were divided on whether normal populations had remained in the Boorowa area or whether some had flown here.

It is normal for the Superbs to return to their breeding habitats after 'summer in the A.C.T.' There was good news. Populations of both the Superb and Regent Parrots have increased in the last decade thanks to timber-management strategies, landholder awareness, public education and two-decade-long studies of these two *Polytelis* species.

Species of the Month- Gippsland Water Dragon (*Physignathus lesueurii* ssp *Howitti*)

Other names: Water dragon

Description

Dragons (Family Agamidae) often have large spines on their head, tongue is broad and only just forked (2). The GWD is Olive green/brown with black bars across tail. Black stripe from eye to ear (1) (tympanum exposed 2). Head, body and tail with a crest/keel of spiny scales (2,1). Tail compressed vertically (1,2 4). Length 90cm (tail ~ 2/3rds) (1, 4). Subspecies- GWD may differ from the Eastern water dragon by the latter being grey (not brown), more of a red belly (1) with less of a bright yellow/orange and blue throat, although unclear (2). Although Komodo Dragons are called dragons monitor lizards are not closely related (5). Mature males may have a brighter orange/yellow & blue throat than females.

Distribution

Eastern Water Dragon (EWD) on ranges and slopes of Eastern Australia (2, 4). Gippsland Water Dragon, a subspecies occurs from Naranderra (near Wagga) across to Nowra (including ACT), South to just below Vic border (1, 2).

Habitat

Along rivers. Riparian vegetation.

Food

Insects, fruit, berries, frogs (1, 2, 4) and terrestrial vertebrates (2).

Water

Associated with rivers/creeks.

Life cycle

Winter behaviour?? Unsure. The Mountain dragon (3) may shelter in a burrow (captive) and perhaps the Water dragon is the same.

8-20 eggs laid in a burrow, filled in by female (1). Hatchlings about 15cm long (1) remain near the burrow entrance for some time (4). In (3) Mountain heath dragons lay ~Nov & hatch about Feb/Mar (~4 months).

Behaviour

Diurnal, arboreal, semi-aquatic (1, 2, 4). Often heard before seen, along water courses jumping into water to escape, then swimming away, sometimes submerges underwater (1, 4). Males fight, starting with head and body bobbing (Benj).

Status

Common along well vegetated watercourses.

References

- 1 Swan, G. (1990) *A field guide to the Snakes and lizards of NSW*. Three Sisters, Winmallee. NSW
- 2 Cogger, H, G. (2000) *Reptiles and amphibians of Australia 6th Edition*. Reed New Holland, Sydney.
- 3 Green, K. and Osborne, W. (1994) *Wildlife of the Australian snow-country*. Reed, Sydney.
- 4 *Handbook of Australian animals*. Bay Books, Sydney, NSW.
- 5 Steel, R. (1996) *Living dragons: A natural history of the World's monitor lizards*. Readers Digest, Sydney, NSW.



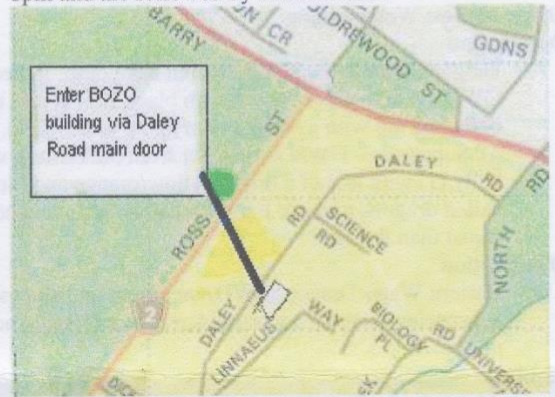
There are two subspecies: *P. l. lesueurii* (Eastern Water Dragon) and *P. l. howitti* (Gippsland Water Dragon). *P. l. lesueurii* possesses a dark band behind its eye; *P. l. howitti* lacks this and instead has dark bands on either side of its throat, which is blotched with yellow, orange, or blue. Both subspecies are light greenish grey in overall color with black bands running down back, tail and legs.

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
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 8pm and are followed by refreshments.



FIELD NATURALISTS ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA INC.

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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: