

OBJECT: To foster an interest in nature

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GPO BOX 249
CANBERRA ACT 2601

FIELD NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA INC.

FIELD NATURALIST

MEETING—THURSDAY 3 March
7:30 pm Australian National University
Gould Seminar Room, Building 116, Daley Road, ANU, ACT
details back page

My Wildlife Art- a fabulous Journey

Speaker: Catherine Lidden

After many years of teaching I took the plunge into poverty and concentrated on what I am passionate about, animals and the natural world. I would like to explain why I took this plunge and how my art (and life) changed entirely. My compositions can be seen as 'different' as I like to get 'up close and personal' especially in my portraits, cutting out any distractions and allowing the image to fill the frame. I use pastel pencils to capture the essence and personality of my animal subjects. After an initial surge of travelling around our beautiful country in a motorhome with my husband and a Dalmatian, we have settled down at Fullerton where I can work in relative peace- as long as the chooks don't get out or the wallabies get in!



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FNAC Conservation Support Fund

The *FNAC Conservation Support Fund* has been established to support organisations that advocate for the conservation of the environment on our behalf, and to support other groups that pursue conservation activities the FNAC cannot accomplish itself.

During past years, despite having limited funds, the Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra Inc. (FNAC) has provided financial support for the Conservation Council ACT and the Environmental Defenders' Office. Both organisations have provided magnificent support, both directly and indirectly, towards environmental conservation. They are strong advocates in that regard.

FNAC has also provided financial support for other groups' conservation activities, including: the Corroboree Frog Project – Tidbinbilla Nature Park; The Amphibian Research Centre; the Friends of Black Mountain brochure; the Southern Tablelands Ecosystem Park; the ANU 2nd Year Environmental Education Student Prize; the Friends of the Australian National Botanic Gardens; the Capital Woodland and Wetland Conservation Trust – Mulligans Flat; and the ACT Reptile Centre.

Within itself, FNAC doesn't have sufficient funds, or the people who are freely available to offer time and commitment, to embark on environmental projects of any relatively large scale.

The *FNAC Conservation Support Fund* gives FNAC members the opportunity to donate money towards environmental conservation activities, and to make suggestions of such activities to be supported.

Possible future donation recipients: Conservation Council ACT; Environmental Defender's Office; Southern Tablelands Ecosystem Park; Frog Watch; Mulligans Flat (fencing); various nature parks' funding; ANU Student Prize; and other donation recipients to be suggested by FNAC members.

Donor Information: For those wanting to donate money to the *FNAC Conservation Support Fund*, you can take one of the following actions:-

- a. Give your money directly to the FNAC Treasurer at a FNAC monthly meeting;
- b. Send a cheque via Australia Post to FNAC Treasurer Bob Lehman, 8/23 Temperley Street, NICHOLLS, ACT 2913; or
- c. Go to your bank, or use your computer at home, to transfer funds to the FNAC's Account with Beyond Bank. Details required are:

Account title: Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra Inc.

BSB Number: 805-022

ACC. Number: 03545251

Member Name and/or Donor: Your First and Family Name (Please make it legible. This name is vital to enable the FNAC Treasurer to credit the donation to you.)

Money involved: In Australian Dollars.

Note:

Some Banks will want to charge you between \$25 and \$50 to make a money transfer from your bank to Beyond Bank.

1. No charge will be made between Beyond Bank branches. You can present money at any Beyond Bank branch and it will be placed into the FNAC account if you use the above information provided.
2. Bank money transfers usually take one to two days to arrive in the FNAC's *Beyond Bank* account.
3. The FNAC Treasurer will provide you with a receipt for all donated monies.
4. Your FNAC Membership can also be paid via one of the options listed above.

Vale Benj Whitworth

3 October 1974 - 13 February 2016

Benj was well known around Canberra with his love of native plants, trees, birds, grasslands and the Pinnacle. He died peacefully at his place when his heart finally gave up. Gone too soon at 41.

As those who knew him and have shared field trips with him would know he has battled heart problems for many of his 41 years. There can be little to comfort his parents and sisters right now but we can send a note to express our appreciation for the major contributions Benj made to Field Nats through several years as President and even more as a Committee member.

Benj put his professionalism as an ecologist into action through membership of FNAC, Friends of Grasslands and COG but these involvements were based on love of and respect for 'the bush' that began in childhood. The natural history that Benj learned from the outdoors, and The Pinnacle in particular, was regularly shared and often informed his comments and submissions about land management in local reserves.

Benj's love of The Pinnacle, its species and their habitats was a significant impetus for the re-forming of a Parkcare Group for The Pinnacle about 10 years ago. I hope that he has been able to see how the reserve's hectares have been restored to their potential as an accessible showcase of regional native grassland, sclerophyll forest and grassy woodland through the efforts of FOTPIN members and partnerships.

Benj was one of the earlier locals to begin commenting on the too-frequent hazard reduction burns in the reserve's Stringybark forest. He was able to base these observations on hundreds of

hours spent among the reserve's wildlife as a Hawker resident and ANU student.

Benj was also very keen on our going out to witness the April Honeyeater migration and led several field trips for that purpose. He was President of the Canberra Finch Club whilst a student at ANU.

Field Natters held several interpretive walks through The Pinnacle reserve with Benj as a catalyst before his ill-health dictated a more restricted lifestyle.

Benj has made contributions to Friends of Grasslands sharing his passion for grasses and forbs before native grasslands achieved their current recognition through FOG's work. He also contributed perceptive observations of local birds to the COG email-line.

Vale and thanks Benj for all those years of sharing your knowledge and applying science to our understanding of living in our region.

There is to be a commemoration of Benj's life at the Australian National Botanic Gardens on Friday 26th February at 12.30. This will be at the Crosbie Morrison Amphitheatre where, hopefully, the Gardens' birds and the Water Dragons will help us commemorate natural history personified.

We're sure Benj's family would appreciate copies of any photos Field Natters may have of time spent with Benj. Please send them to Rosemary Blemings, 3 Wyles Place, Flynn, 2615 and I'll pass them on.

Rosemary Blemings

Southcoast sightings

On our recent stay at the south coast, I saw/heard quite a few birds, most of which I would not see in Canberra. They were:

- three yellow-tailed black cockatoos living in a quiet cul-de-sac on the edge of Moruya that has a row of old eucalypts and cypresses.
- King parrots feeding in a sprawling cotoneaster at Broulee
- heard the eastern whip bird in the foreshore bush at Broulee
- kookaburras near Candlagan Creek, Broulee
- red wattlebirds aplenty
- crested terns banking and diving for fish in the bay near Broulee Island
- white-breasted sea eagles off the coast at Narooma; and
- heard the Powerful Owl in the bush by Candlagan Creek overnight

We also saw an orchid butterfly that fluttered around our garden every afternoon.

Lucy Bastecky

Beautiful amber fossil flower reveals plant history of New World

This perfectly preserved prehistoric flower embedded in amber is thought to be a long-lost relative of modern plants including sunflowers, coffee, peppers, potatoes and mint.

Its discovery in a mine in the Dominican Republic represents the first evidence that this major group of plants – the asterids – comprising some 80,000 species, had reached the New World by between 15 and 45 million years ago, the estimated age of the fossil amber.

“It’s the first example of an asterid in the New World,” says Lena Struwe of Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey. “It tells us the plants were there in the Mid-Tertiary, 20 to 40 million years ago. It also tells us that these plants were very similar to their modern day relatives, and allowed us to give our discovery a species name – *Strychnos electri*.”

The plant is thought to be related to the strychnine tree from which the strychnine poison is extracted. Asterids account for a third of all flowering plants. We knew that the other two main groups – the rosids, including roses and beans, and the monocots, mainly orchids, grasses and palms – had already reached the New World by that time, says Struwe.

Amber spyglass

The amber specimen is just under 2 centimetres long. Its five petals flop outwards from the rim of the trumpet-like horn of the flower, with five corresponding anthers – the male parts which make pollen – pointing upwards. The central shaft pointing upwards is the style, the female part of the plant, with

a stigma at its summit to capture pollen. Some pollen is preserved in the amber, but Struwe says it is too

degraded to enable cross-pollination with modern relatives. “I doubt there’s anything still viable in the pollen grains, so I don’t subscribe to the Jurassic Park idea,” she says. Struwe says the structure is very similar to that of flowers from other modern-day relatives, which include tree-climbing lianas and savannah trees. But it’s difficult to know what the rest of the plant looked like, or how big it was. “We don’t have any leaves or stems,” she says.

George Poinar of Oregon State University in Corvallis, who found the samples while exploring the amber mine, says the habitat may have been humid and tropical. “Based on a range of insects and other plants found in the amber,” he says, “I think the forest was tropical and humid, rich in lianas, shrubs and large trees.”

Although insects are the life forms most often found in amber, many ancient plants have been preserved this way too, including orchids and carnivorous plants.



Activities

Bee Farm excursion. Details to be confirmed.

Month	Speaker	Topic
3 March	Catherine Lidden	My Wildlife Art- a fabulous Journey

Gross: a personal but stolen ‘ant-farm’

Some time ago I indulged myself and removed a piece of verbascum, greater mullein, Aaron’s rod *Verbascum thapsus* from The Pinnacle Nature Reserve.

The sculptural form and texture of the piece fascinated me. I’ve found I’ve been drawn to the beiges, browns, rustic colours and subtle greens of the bush as I’ve aged! These colours and textures are especially evocative on trees’ barks and branches and trunks.

Although dead and very much younger the stem base of the Verbascum lay on the ground awaiting the attention of microbes



of decay that would return its chemicals to the soil as nutrients.

Since I have several bowls (also acquired for their beauty and appeal) near the laptop the Verbascum stem-base was placed in a bowl.

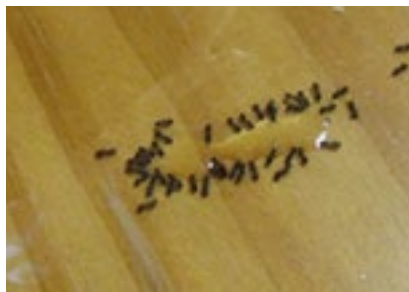
After several days I began to notice tiny black ants visited the laptop and made their ways around the table and among the litter of work-space papers. I

concluded that they had been moved from The Pinnacle to Flynn inside the Verbascum sculpture.

Presumably the ants raid the keyboard and run across the screen in search of particles of detritus just as larger species of ants clean up our neighbourhoods’ carcasses, bird-poo and other edibles on ants’ menus.

They really appreciate drops of water on hot days and treats such as the smear of honey.

They are much better behaved than the larger black ants that annoy us in the kitchen from



Ants indulging in a smear of honey

time to time. There is a slight nip if the ants find themselves on my arms or hands but I move them back to nearer their nest.

There was a time recently when there were a few much larger, winged ants around the table. Perhaps they were intending to leave home and establish new colonies as queens. Perhaps they were unrelated and had wafted in from outdoors. If so they

might have been attracted by the Verbascum ants’ pheromones.

My house-proud daughter would consider my ant pets extremely gross but I think they’re providing a service. So far it’s a very simple way of having companions at the desk even though I shouldn’t have removed anything from the nature reserve in the first place.

Of course there are several species of ants outside, including very small black ones. I suspect that what passes for a backyard is actually a hollow structure based on myriads of ant tunnels, nests, labyrinths and mazes. It’s best not to think that we’re not walking on solid ground.

Over the years Ajay Narendra and Robert Taylor have convinced us that there’s plenty of scope for investigating ants’ worlds in our next incarnations. I believe there are close to 100 species on Black Mountain alone.

I recently came across copies of Densy Clyne’s *All About Ants*. Her 2010 gathering together of brilliant photographs explains much about ants, their natural history and their diversity.

The book, the stolen nest and being able to walk in ‘the bush’ are all part of the joys of having time away from the treadmill of modern life.

Rosemary Blemings



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.

President: Rosemary von Behrens **Phone:** 6254 1763

Email: fieldnaturalist@yahoo.com.au

Website: under construction

All newsletter contributions welcome.

Email: alison.milton@health.gov.au

Editor



Monthly meeting venue: Division of Botany and Zoology, Building 116, Daley Rd, Australian National University. (The Xmas meeting is at the adjacent building 44 and will start at the earlier time of 6:30 pm.)

Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra
GPO Box 249
Canberra ACT 2601



MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION OR RENEWAL

Family name: First name:

If a family membership, please include the first names of other members of the family:

.....

Postal address:

Suburb: State: Postcode: Home phone:

Work phone: Email address:

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

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