

March 2022

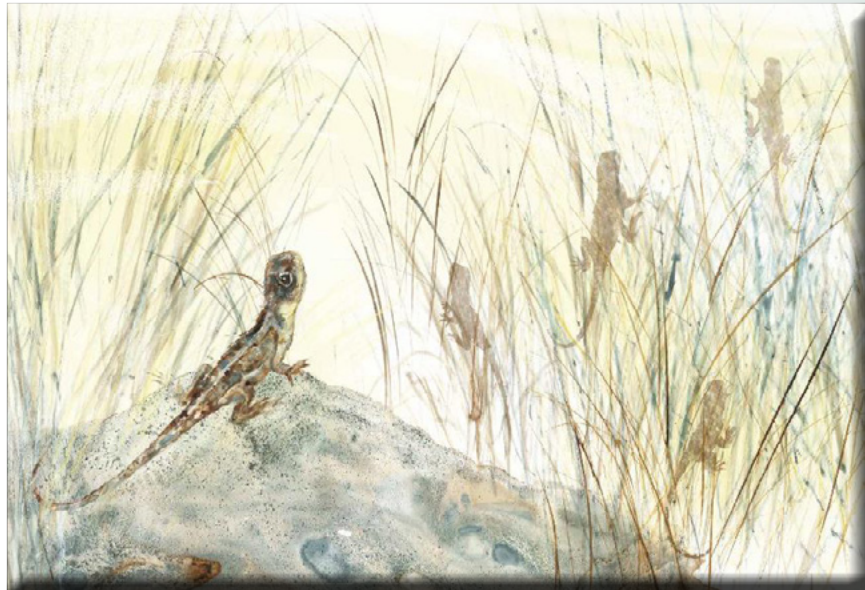
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FIELD NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA INC. GPO BOX 708 JAMISON CENTRE ACT 2614

# FIELD NATTER

## March 2022 newsletter No monthly meetings until further notice



*The Last Dragon: new book.*



*A positive outcome of January's hail storm: seating made from fallen trees at The Pinnacle Nature Reserve.*

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## Bird banding: A recovery story

In December I visited Bruce Ridge and observed a White-winged Chough family, including a couple of begging juveniles, fossicking their way along the roadside and into the bushland. I photographed one that had a band on its leg and reported it and the band number to the Bird and Bat Banding Scheme.



It took a while but in February I received a report on the bird. It had been banded at Gossan Hill on 7 August 2003: a male at one year of age. The time between the banding and my sighting was 18 years, 4 months and 16 days. The bird had moved a distance of: 0 km with a bearing of 0 degrees (basically, just across the road to Bruce Ridge).

Intrigued, I looked up the expected life span of White-winged Choughs to find that in the wild, the maximum was suggested at 16 years. With the banding taking place at one-year of age, this meant my bird was at least 19 years old. Noting this in my thank you reply I received the following further update.

*I've just had a look on the ABBBS database for the oldest White-winged Chough recovery. It showed the average time between banding and recovery is 3 years and 2 months, and the record for the longest time is 18 years and 8 months. Your sighting comes very close to the record we have, so definitely a good recovery!*

*Thanks for the additional information, and apologies for not realising what a good recovery this was.*

Well I was 'choughed' at this information, that not only was it well past the average recovery reporting time but that it was the second oldest banded bird recovery on record. It had been here all this time and no-one else had managed to photograph and report it in that time.

**Alison Milton**

## A breeding success

In mid-January I discovered a praying mantis egg sac in a Lavender bush, just moments after it had been deposited.



About a week later I found a Bollworm caterpillar half 'buried' into the egg sac, feasting on the eggs. I removed the grub (didn't kill it), collected the egg sac and placed it in a glass jar inside. I wasn't sure if the remaining eggs would survive. Growing up as kids in Queensland, we would often find Praying Mantis egg sacs and put them in a jar to hatch. We'd poke holes in the lid for them to breathe and often

find that when they hatched they had amazingly managed to get through the small holes. A little bit wiser now, I covered the jar with a piece of stocking.

Just over a month later I checked the jar to find a mass of baby mantises. The next day I took them out to release back onto the Lavender plant, while taking photos. There had to be hundreds.



I know not all of them will survive but I hope a great many do. At least I saved them from the caterpillar to give them a chance at life.

**Alison Milton**



## Eric the caterpillar's amazing journey

The presenter's on my radio station of choice, last week talked about the discovery of a caterpillar at Binalong that was subsequently named Eric. When found, Eric was infested with parasitic eggs that were painstakingly removed with tweezers and Eric then placed in a jar, hoping it would survive. A few days later Eric spun a cocoon and the wait is on to see if he/she will emerge as a butterfly (A Tailed Emperor) or so it has succumbed to the parasites. Eric now has a Facebook page is you wish to follow his story to see if he survives. This may be trial you don't want to pursue, as just hours after I read about this story and visited the Facebook page, it has been updated with many subsequent posts, not all relating to Eric. However, for those who may wish to pursue this trial, Eric's story can be found here (<https://www.facebook.com/ericssamazingjourney>).

**Alison Milton**

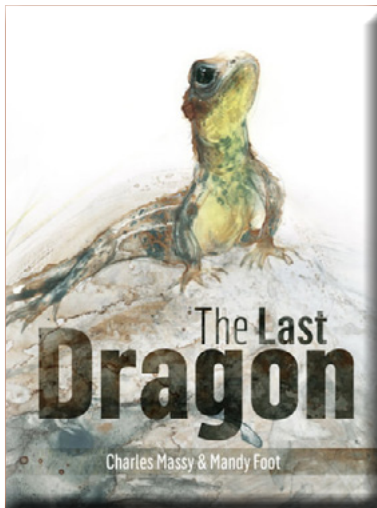


## Charles Massy's The Last Dragon

I've just been blown away by this little miracle as advertised in FoG's January–February newsletter.

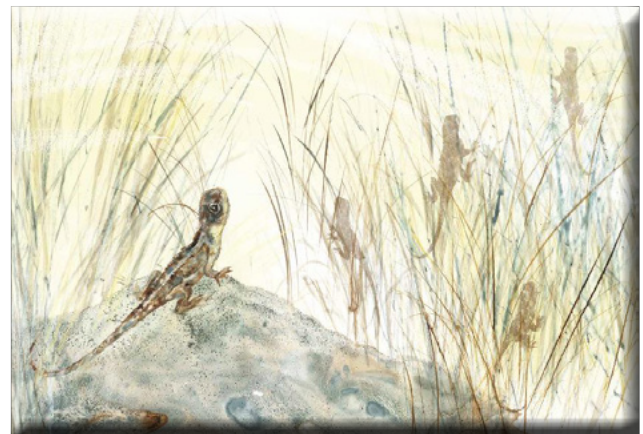
The Last Dragon by Charles Massy & Mandy Foot. Canberra, NLA, 2021 (around \$18 through Booktopia + postage).

The Last Dragon is a perfect introduction to the once extensive native grasslands of southern Australia through the journey in search of other lizards undertaken by Timpo, a Monaro Grassland Earless Dragon. Wolfie, a spider with whom Timpo shares a burrow, is the little dragon's wise guide. The lives of grassland flora and fauna are woven into a gentle tapestry of Monaro habitats as Timpo travels across the treeless, bouldered plains of Ngarigo country in SE NSW.



The illustrations' natural tints reveal the depth of the creators' observations from this unique landscape and the habitats to which natural temperate grassland animals have adapted over millions of years.

The final six pages reveal more background information about *Tympanocryptis osbornei* and the



disturbing story of post settlement impacts on the very specialist grasslands between 'Canberra and the High Country'.

For those already devoted to caring for grasslands, land caring sites and for diverse special places *The Last Dragon* is a delightful story to share with young people who have a sense of curiosity about the nature around them.

Let's hope for more creations; print, photographic, film, paintings, theatre or video that celebrate the vast yet intricate grassy ecosystems around us.

We all owe so much to Australia's natural grasslands yet there are hundreds of other species, with equally intriguing life cycles, that we can explore by actually or virtually kneeling down to respectfully seek out the native grasses and wildflowers with a hand lens at the ready.

**Rosemary Blemings**



## Mount Mugga Mugga Nature Reserve

On 16 January 2022, NPA's Brian Slee led a circumnavigation of Mount Mugga Mugga, a prominent peak on the skyline from the leafy inner-south suburbs of Canberra and core of the Mount Mugga Mugga Nature Reserve. The 148 Ha nature reserve is a protected area connected with Red Hill, Isaacs Ridge and Callum Brae nature reserves to its north, south, and east and it contains important remnants of Yellow Box-Red Gum Grassy Woodland. There are some magnificent trees, but the understory is weedy and the area has been severely defaced by an abandoned horse park and quarry, roads, fences and high tension power lines.

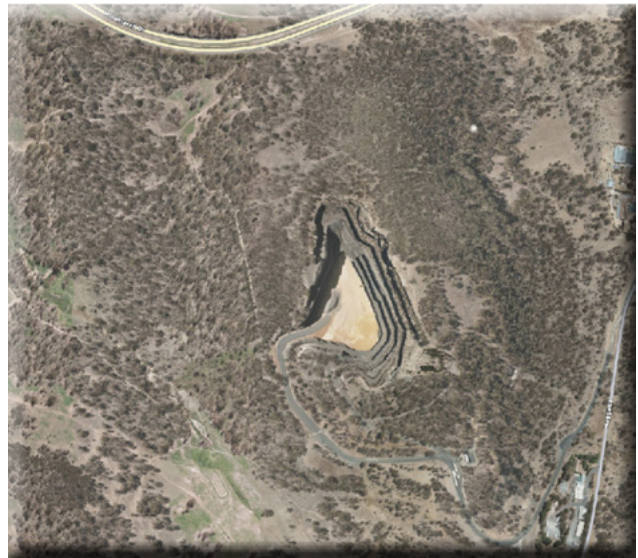


*Bare benches in the abandoned quarry on Mount Mugga Mugga, rain threatening*

Whilst operational, a large government quarry on Mount Mugga Mugga excavated Mugga Mugga Porphyry for use as construction gravel for road surfaces, and in concrete. It was operated by the Commonwealth Department of Works during the 1950s and '60s when Canberra was growing quickly after World War 2. Early days of quarrying date back to 1929 when the Federal Capital Commission called for tenders for 3 magazine buildings in the Woden District, still there today. Explosions from the quarry were heard and regularly rattled buildings in nearby suburbs such as Griffith, which the author well remembers having spent the first 20 years of his life there.

The Mugga Mugga *blue metal* appears blue or mauve grey in mass. The rock, a lava flow, is veined with calcite, light green epidote, and deep red hematite. The lava is dated at  $414 \pm 9$  Mya.

We were piped into the reserve by a melodious Grey Butcherbird. We heard Gang Gang Cockatoos but saw few other birds. Common Brown and Cabbage White butterflies clustered in moving bursts of colour but were too preoccupied for photo shoots.



*An aerial photograph of the fenced off quarry and access road*



*Daunting Verbascum and thistles on Scrivener Hill in adjacent O'Malley*

There is a huge amount of work ahead for park care groups associated with these reserves, the Verbascum, thistles and St John's Wort are rampant.

**Kevin McCue**



## Bluetts Block excursion and naming clarification

Thank you all for making Friday's walk so enjoyable and Field Natterish. My head was spinning with all the ideas it devised about recording the time we spent at Bluetts.



As there were eucalypt discussions going on Lesley has kindly sent a record from August 2016. (Both the Native Plant Society and CBR Ornithologists' Group have Wednesday walking groups).

Another pleasant surprise was this post from Jean Casburn on the Bluetts Facebook page:

*At the front gate of Bluetts Block, Alice Wells and I came upon all these unexpected cars, and wondered who has come into Bluetts? As it turned out approximately 22 members of Canberra Field Naturalists Association were out for a walk to see what they could find on Bluetts Block.*

It was inspiring for me that we met Jean, Alice (Wells), Con Boekels and Maddie as they are the core activists behind the campaign to have Bluetts declared part of Canberra's reserve system... I'd only 'seen' them via Zoom previously.

Since then literally hundreds of people have joined the FB Group and the ranks of those amateur naturalists, citizen scientists and professional



ecologists who have contributed to the species list for Bluetts and the directly threatened Deferred Block 12 for which the developers have sought an Environmental Impact Study exemption.

### Blewetts or Bluetts?

Rainer Rehwinkel provided some clarification on the spelling of the name with the following:

*Aubrey Blewitt owned a block that included part of the now Bluetts Block (in fact, the deferred zone was the only part of Blewitt's block that is now part of Bluetts Block). Somehow, Blewitt changed to Bluetts in some misspelling by ACT Government officials. The conservation Council has been discussing coming up with a new name for the reserve when it is declared, possibly of Ngunnawal origin.*

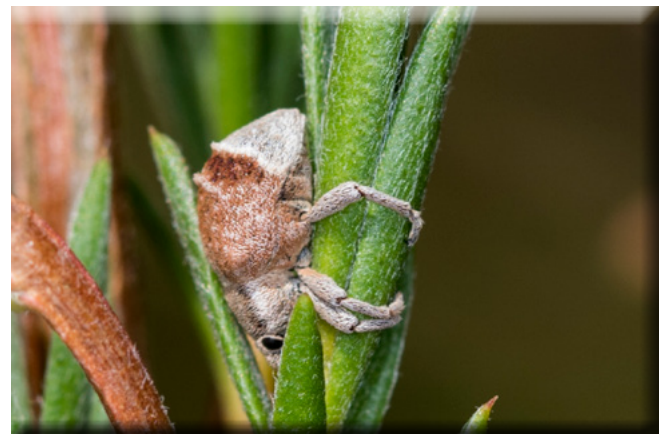
By the way, geographical names do not have apostrophes.

### Rosemary Blemings

#### Insect life

While many Field Natters were discussing the various plants and Eucalypts, my passion is for insects and particularly beetles, so I was scouring all the young saplings.

I reported 22 species to Canberra Nature Map. These included three spiders, one hoverfly, one leafhopper, two moths, one ant, two grasshoppers, two true bugs, three weevils, two Acacia leaf beetles and four Eucalyptus leaf beetles. One of the weevils is a species I have not seen before.



There was also a Plant bug and Shield bug for which I didn't think the photos were good enough to report.

Looking at Canberra nature Map, there have been 650 species reported for this area, 181 of which are plants. This does not include reports that have not been confirmed by a Moderator, so there are likely to be quite a few more.

**Alison Milton**



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 Blemings I

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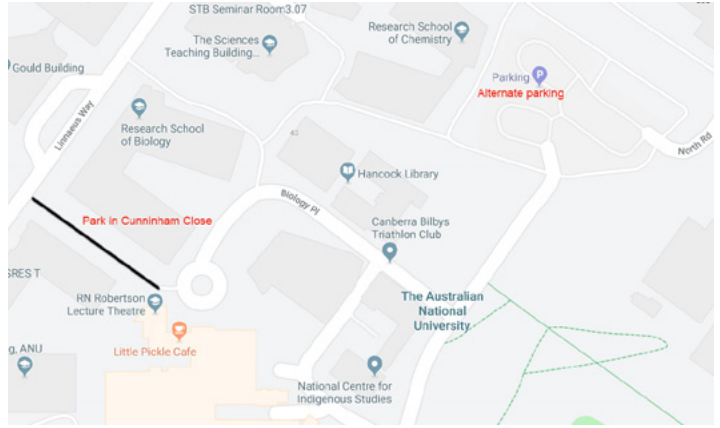
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**Monthly meeting venue:** Jan Anderson Seminar Room, R. N. Robertson Building, Biology Place, Australian National University

**Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra**  
**GPO Box 708**  
**Jamison Centre ACT 2614**



### Membership application or renewal

Surname: ..... First name: .....

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

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*Subscription renewals are due on 1 July each year*

**Pay by post** (include completed form)

Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra  
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**Bank transfer** (renewals only: form not needed)

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