

Field Natter
Newsletter of Field Naturalists Club
of Canberra



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

Meeting Thursday May 1, 2008 at 8:00 pm

(details on back page)

TIBET

In 2007 *Steve Lee and Leonie Andrews* visited Tibet. In the cities they saw the fascinating Tibetan culture, beyond the cities lay a vast and beautiful landscape, incredible geology and interesting plants and animals. Leonie's talk will touch on all these aspects of their Tibetan visit and prove that even your car breaking down can be a great opportunity for the keen field naturalist!"

Tibetan villagers undertaking a ceremony for a good harvest.

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May Excursion 2-5pm, Sunday May 11th Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve

Since our last outing to Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve there have been many changes - from the continued post-fire recovery of plant and animal populations to the recent opening of the Sanctuary on April 13th. The Sanctuary is on the site of the old wetlands area and is enclosed by an electric fence to protect the native wildlife from introduced predators. In addition to the abundant wildlife that chooses to live there, Tidbinbilla is home to some captive native species that are threatened or no longer occur in the ACT, including koala, brolga and brush-tailed rock wallaby. Volunteer Interpreters will be happy to show you around the new area and it is likely that there will be free ranger-guided activities on the day. The exact meeting time and place will be confirmed once the ranger-guided activities for May have been announced. Further details will be available at the May meeting or from Paula (call 6154 0818 between 7-10pm). Bring warm clothing, a waterproof jacket (if rain is a possibility), a hat, comfortable walking shoes, water and afternoon tea.

Thanks and have a good trip,
Paula

Editorial Notes

Due to technical problems with my ISP provider and time running out for me this issue again is a 4 pager.

WANTED— An editor for the July *Field Natter* as I will be overseas on holidays. My contacts details are ph 6241 2968; 0417407 351 or if it is functioning chris_b@webone.com.au

WEBSITE TO EXPLORE Following the bird flu there has been a lot of interest in tracking bird movements in 'real time' using satellite tracking. One international collaborative site to explore concerning bird movements in China is to use a shortcut to: <http://www.werc.usgs.gov/sattrack/poyang/index.html>

Chris Bunn

Seeking to influence - a community advocacy workshop

SAT 24 MAY (8.30am - 1pm) ***Seeking to influence - community advocacy***, a workshop at Havelock House, Turner. The workshop is for Friends of Grasslands (FoG) members and others, to improve their advocacy skills.

The objectives of the workshop are to improve FoG members' understanding about, support for and participation in advocacy, to develop others similarly and to provide an opportunity to share experiences, and to strengthen future advocacy efforts. The aims on the day will be to define and demystify advocacy, to learn about alternative approaches, and to consider examples and future opportunities. The target audience is both FoG members and members of other conservation groups with an interest or role in advocacy.

Trish Harrup and David Shorthouse will both be speaking at the workshop.

Further information will be provided to intending participants before the day, and two case studies will be presented on the day. The workshop fee is \$10. Morning tea will be provided. Please contact Bernadette O'Leary [bernadette.oleary@fog.org.au] for further details, or Janet Russell [janet.russell@fog.org.au] to register. Numbers are limited to around twenty, so please register early.

SPECIES OF THE MONTH

COMMON BRUSHTAIL POSSUM

Most common brushtail possums have a grey back and sides with a grey or yellowish belly. The chest may be stained reddish brown by the secretions from its sternal scent gland.

Dark colour phases occur in the higher rainfall areas e.g. Tasmania and New Zealand. Adult males weigh 2.7 kg and females 2.35 kg.

Their scientific name *Trichosurus vulpecular* translates as hairy tail little fox.

Behaviour

Both male and female are solitary, rarely sharing their daytime den with other adults, but the male's territory may overlap with several females. Unlike ringtail possums no mutual grooming occurs. Their home range and territory is centred on their den tree and tends to be exclusive except in city parks. In the forest a possum may have several den trees and change den trees frequently. Several possums may use an individual den on different nights. They are strictly nocturnal with all feeding, travelling and courtship occurring at night. They identify and mark the boundaries of their territory with scent from their chin, sternal and anal glands. These secretions stain fur reddish brown. Territorial interactions between a male and a female tend to be mild, but between two males aggressive fighting and chasing occurs. Vocal communication consists of hisses and deep guttural coughs and grunts. In Australian forests population densities of 0.2 to 4 possums per hectare have been recorded. In New Zealand forests the densities are much higher with up to 11 per hectare being reported and in one area of logged forest combined with pasture land 25 possums per hectare were described.

Habitat

Brushtail possums are at home in the open eucalypt forest and woodlands, especially where large old trees provide hollows suitable as daytime dens. Sometimes they den underground in tree stumps or rabbit warrens. In arid areas they are often found far from trees or water and use termite mounds or rock holes as den sites. In Tasmania and New Zealand, where there are no foxes, possums often move out of the forests at night to feed on pastures.

They are adaptable intelligent animals and in urban areas use roof space in houses and sheds as dens.

Diet

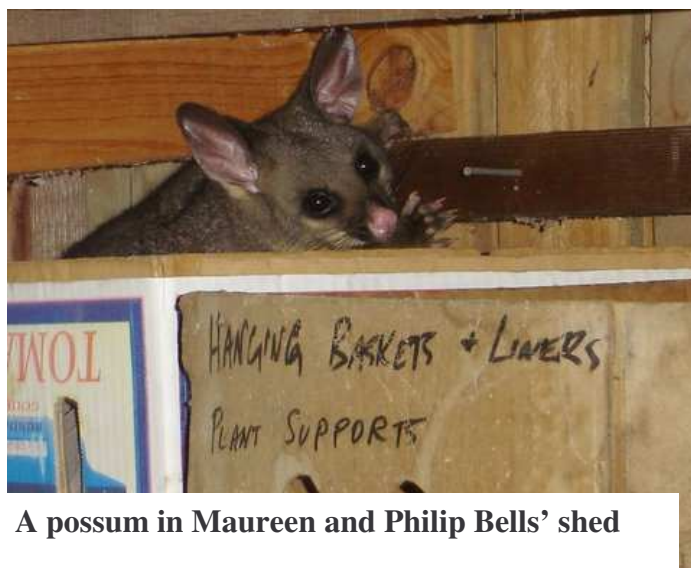
In marked contrast to the koala, brushtail possums thrive on whatever vegetation is available. Eucalyptus leaves form an important part of their diet, but they have adapted to several introduced species, including pasture and ornamental plants. They have been observed to eat fungi, snails and eggs, while

in captivity they can be maintained on a mixed diet including dog cubes.

Life cycle

Females may become sexually mature when one year old. It takes only 16-18 days from mating to birth. Most young are born between March and May, but there may be a second breeding period in the Spring. Twins are very rare even though the pouch has two teats. The Joey remains attached to the teat for 80 days, stays in the pouch for up to 6 months and are carried on the back until weaned around 8 months.

After leaving their parents home range they move up to several kilometres away. Most often the ideal conditions of den sites, food and few other possums present are not available and they die (often in Australia through predation). Adults may live for up to 13 years but the average life span is probably about 5-6 years.



A possum in Maureen and Philip Bells' shed

New Zealand

Several introductions occurred into New Zealand in the 19th century providing good genetic diversity for the possum to quickly adapt to their new environment. How the numbers exploded is demonstrated in the Caitlins forest in the South island. Forty-two possums were released in 1894-5 and 18 years later trappers took 60 000 skins from the district. Currently the population estimate is 70 million possums. They are causing major forest damage and carry the dangerous disease bovine tuberculosis.

Compiled (with some extra material) with permission from a pamphlet produced by the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club



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:

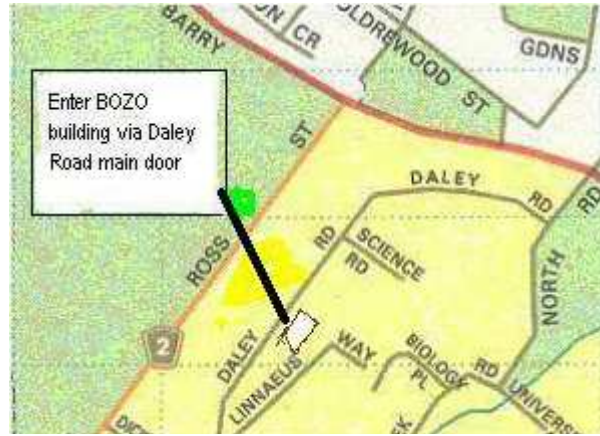
President: Benj Whitworth, tel w 6272 3192 h 62544556

Secretary: Rosemary Blemings, tel 02 6258 4724

Website: www.geocities.com/fieldnaturalist/index.html

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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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 \$20) Donation: \$.....

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