

OBJECT: To foster an interest in nature

May 2020

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GPO BOX 708
JAMISON CENTRE ACT 2614

FIELD NATTER

FIELD NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA INC.

May 2020 newsletter No monthly meetings until further notice



Shining Bronze Cuckoo, Woodstock Reserve

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The briefest of visits to Hall Nature Reserve

I found these sad remains beside the car as I parked in Hall Street, Hall on 22 March.



My aim, after watering the native garden outside the Hall Museum, was to walk round the reserve to see how its species were faring after the last extreme months. This reserve is NE of the showground where, a week previously, Kay and I had watched some competitors in the National Sheepdog Trials. Through the step-through gate I began to come across a range of re-hydrated species showing robust and diverse shades of green. The sclerophyll woodland has been degraded by repeated harvesting of larger trees since the area was settled and even now parts are grazed to reduce fuel load. There are two dams and associated ephemeral wet areas with the open paddocks traversed by the busy route of the Centennial Trail through to One Tree Hill.

I noted flowering Mistletoes, a (?) Pultenea, Hibbertia, Solenogyne, Goodenia, Tricoryne, Lomandra bracteata, Native St John's Wort, Oxalis and Wallaby grasses, prolific Purple Wire grass, lush Kangaroo grass and Rock ferns.

The damp area where Chocolate lilies and orchids occur was lush but I didn't stop to check for individual species....

Why the rush through when I'd planned to sit somewhere for lunch?

As soon as I stopped for any reason I was assaulted by a swirling swarm of mosquitoes. They were determined and my short-sleeved arms received numerous bites.

An entirely novel bush walk just beyond the delightfully visitable and nature-rich village of Hall. I raced home and smothered myself with Calamine lotion.

Rosemary Blemings

Hall revisited

Shafts of sunlight on a perfect autumn day highlighted a Chocolate Lily and Little Dumpies during my wander through Hall Woodlands on Sunday 19 April.



The *Arthropodium fimbriatum* and *Pterostylis truncata* bloom surprises were joined by a solitary Billy Button flowerhead *Craspedia variabilis* and two separate *Stylidium* spikes. One of the latter was growing through an *Indigofera australis* plant momentarily fooling me into thinking the *Indigofera* was in flower.

There were also *Pterostylis* rosettes in several places. If normal moisture levels are retained perhaps there will be an orchid season to look forward to.

Rosemary Blemings

New FNAC PO Box

If you are in the habit of sending mail to the FNAC, please note that we now have a new PO Box number. The new address is

PO Box 708 Jamison Centre ACT 2614.

Arising from the dead

This stump may have been an *Acacia baileyana* or, if dead more than 2 years, a hawthorn. If a Cootamundra wattle it was likely cut down by the ACT Government prior to the April 2018 Mt Rogers Hazard Reduction Burn as the stump was drilled to inject herbicide. Landcarer volunteers don't inject like that.



The toadstool has taken advantage of the situation by decaying the wood cells and, with current conditions has produced a fruiting body. The toadstool's height allows the spores to be blown away by the wind with the timber protecting the 'stem' from trampling.

Hopefully a grass blade is also visible. A seed has found its way into a crack in the drying stump and is also pushing up to the light and fresh air. Imagine the task ahead for the grass plant's roots unless there is much more decay present under the visible stump; more sawdust than tough timber.

Rosemary Blemings

Book launch

FNAC member, Rhian Williams is celebrating the release of her very first picture book; *Ten Little Figs*. <https://www.rhianwilliamsauthor.com.au/>

It's a beautiful book that tells the story of a little child who adores figs, but so do all the Australian animals in the garden. One by one the figs disappear. But Daddy saves the day along with the last little fig. This joyous book is truly delightful to read aloud and the illustrations by Nathaniel Eckstrom have lots of gorgeous details for tiny readers aged from three to six to spot and explore.

Ten Little Figs is available from all good bookshops, many of whom are offering free delivery at this time or you can buy it online from the Australian online bookstore Booktopia <https://www.booktopia.com.au/?books>

Exciting local find

Like everyone else, I have been isolating as much as possible, however, I have still been keen to get out and about within the confines of recommendations.

Since The Pinnacle is within walking distance for me, I spent a day (eight ours as it turned out) walking to the reserve, exploring. I have to say that I have never seen so many people at the reserves before, especially on a week day. However, I kept mostly off track and out of sight of the many current visitors.

I did meet two FotPin volunteers who were doing some weed control, Christian and Warren. Thanks to Christian who pointed out the Wedge-tail Eagle circling above, then joined by a second. He said that the previous week there were joined by a third – juvenile – bird that the parents seemed to be teaching thermal waves etc.

The birds were quite high up so my photos weren't particularly good. However, I had also seen and photographed a yellow butterfly. At first I excitedly thought it was a Lemon Migrant that butterfly expert Suzi Bond had broadcast was now being seen locally as a rare visitor.

On looking at the photo on the computer at home I concluded that this wasn't the case and that it was simply a very yellow Cabbage White butterfly. I had photographed a yellow one previously. This sighting was confirmed as such.

Then a week or so later I received a surprise message from Suzi that this butterfly was in fact the first ever sighting in the ACT of a Macleays Grass-yellow butterfly. They are usually found much further north and have rarely been seen as far south as Sydney so this was indeed a significant sighting. Two week later someone found another two in Sherwood Forest but my sighting was still the first.



A very exciting find for myself and for the species recorded at The Pinnacle Nature Reserve.

Alison Milton

Backyard visitors

Flying blind

A Grey Shrikethrush tried flying through our window on Sunday 22 March.



Dierk rescued it and while attempting an examination it escaped and landed on our kitchen bin where it posed. After release outside and an unsuccessful attempt to cling to the bricks it remained on a 'patio' tile where it recovered.

A bird in a feeding flock called frequently and loudly attracting me and our visitor and I was lucky enough to see it run two meters and take off.

Rosemary von Brehens

On the grapevine...

After providing me with a nice crop earlier this year, my grapevine is now providing food for another of nature's creatures.

Checking the vine last week I counted at least 57 caterpillars of the appropriately named Grapevine moth. They are welcome to the remaining leaves prior to pruning.



Alison Milton

In the rainy gloom... special moments

It's British weather here in mid-Flynn, as forecast, and building up to get worse in the next 48 hours.

One of 'our' feisty, vocal Grey Butcherbirds arrived and perched on the phone-line singing in the open.

A Currawong watched from near the power-pole interested but deferential to the Magpies watching from the cables to the east of the pole.

One magpie then swooped the butcherbird off the phone lines and it flew onto the roof or onto one of the pipe vents. Its calls continued.

Two Magpies came down to assert their authority over the moss, Vittadinia, Microlaena infested backyard 'grass'. Their superb hearing found hapless invertebrates under the sodden moss and shorter grasses.

As the magpies moved on the butcherbird calls continued and I located it on the back fence where the yard beyond could be surveyed for any garden skinks hungry enough to defy the cold raindrops.



As I begin writing this it's now on the power-line near the house, then in shelter under the eaves by the actual connection point... A good, dry vantage point utilised for at least 10 minutes before it disappeared from sight and sound after another spell on the fence palings.

Only this anecdote and a terrible image, activating the flash and through the disgraceful kitchen window to augment my memory of 15 minutes of Rainy Day birdwatching.

Rosemary Blemings

Birdbath conquest

On ANZAC Day this year, Charles and I saw a Shining Bronze-Cuckoo land on one of our small birdbaths* and scare away the larger Pied Currawong. It had about two leaves in its mouth, which it promptly dropped into the water.† I thought at first it was going to soften up something to eat. I have seen a raven do this with a bit of old white bread.

We were fascinated, watching from a distance of about 12 metres from the garage window. We had never seen this bird before on our property over the nine years we have lived here. It was lovely and healthy, plump with good feathers. It gave us a nice rear view as well as it moved around the rim of the birdbath.

The cuckoo began to sip water as the currawong looked on from the ground at the foot of the birdbath pedestal. Several times, it made an attempt to scare off the cuckoo but the cuckoo was having none of that.

It was surprising because the currawong was the larger bird and had the ‘massive bill’ to quote ‘Birds of the ACT’.

The currawong even got back on the rim of the birdbath, attempting to ‘face off’ the cuckoo, but all the cuckoo did was lunge very briefly at the currawong and the currawong went back onto the ground.

Why is the cuckoo able to intimidate the currawong? Is it the muscle strength of its body or is it the weaponry of its beak, which doesn’t look much in comparison to the currawong’s?

After drinking to its need, the cuckoo flew off.

As to other welcome visitors, that same day we saw the return of a pair of King Parrots, regular cold season visitors to our immediate treed area.

They also fly into the massive English oak tree that is at the rear of our property but in the bounds of our neighbour’s property.

Without that great tree, we’d lose many avian visitors. In the heat of the summer day, it’s the go-to place for sulphur-crested cockatoos and galahs.

Seeing the Shining Bronze-Cuckoo was a real delight!‡

Lucy Bastecky

* About a metre away is a larger birdbath, which Red Wattlebirds and Crimson Rosellas use. However, it was interesting that both the currawong and the cuckoo preferred the smaller birdbath, preferred by smaller birds.

† The leaves were still in the birdbath the next day when I refilled it, but I tipped the water out before I remembered that I was going to inspect what type of leaves they were.

‡ Having closely watched the bird from the garage, when it left, I raced inside and it was easy to identify it because we’d had such a good look at it.

Backyard birds

Like Lucy and Rosemary, I too have had some backyard visitors, and like Lucy observed, this Currawong preferred the shallow birdbath rather than the deeper one further back in the yard.

This seemed like a young bird and it returned to the birdbath at least six times while I watched, taking a dip, then retreating to the same spot of grass on the far side of the lawn, before returning for the next dip.



A couple of times, it landed on my deck.



I have also had a Grey Butcherbird that has been present in the neighbourhood for several months now. I watched it land on my clothes line, then it swooped down and came up with a skink. I hope it leaves some; I like my skinks.



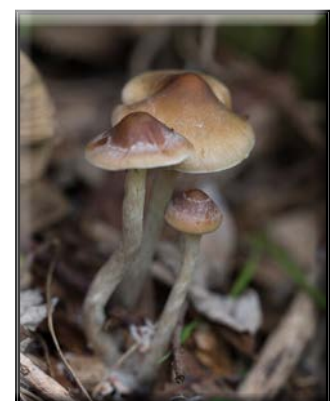
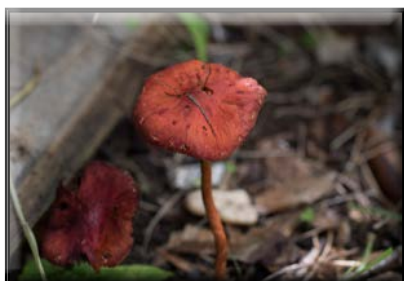
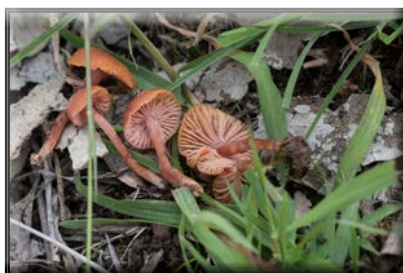
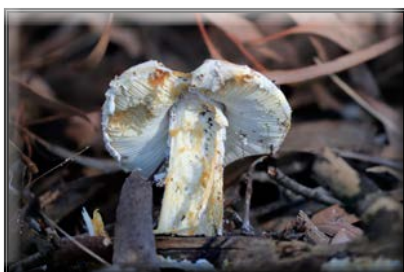
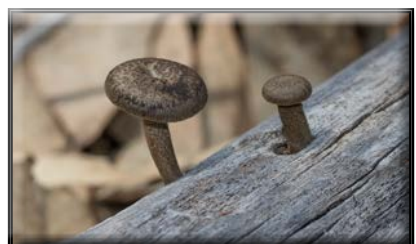
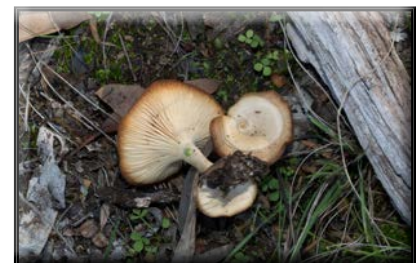
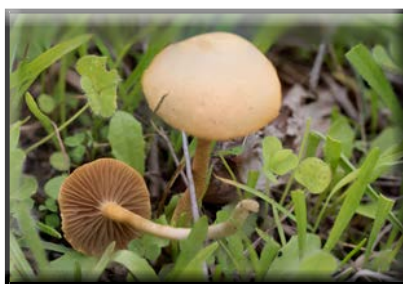
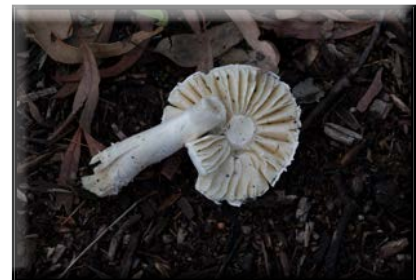
Alison Milton

After the rain

The rain over the past few months has been very welcome. The weeds may have grown wild, but there has been benefits as well. The Greenhood orchids at The Pinnacle are now in flower. The known spot near the Dowling track has lots of rosettes and seven in flower, but I found a much larger patch further up with the slope with at least 30 flowering orchids.

However, it has also sparked another interest of mine and produced a profusion of fungi. The following images were taken at home or within close walking distance as well as some from The Pinnacle.

Alison Milton



Nature Art Lab's latest offering: Nature Journaling

In February, Julia and Alan Landford introduced Field Natters to Nature Art Lab (NAL) and then surprised us by presenting NAL's latest initiative - Nature Journaling. We sketched ideas drawn from Alan's Queensland Bladder Cicada story, guided by Julia's explanations of proportions, shapes and conformation.

Julia and her colleagues have developed this concept of Nature Journaling into a new, exciting project - Reflections on Nature. In essence, it's designed to encourage anyone to venture outdoors and document and/or draw their experiences and share them online if they'd like to. The program is free. The goal is "to create a comfortable community of participants who support each other and learn together". An exhibition and book might ensue.

Reflections on Nature will be grounded in suggested visits to specific places chosen for their features or creatures - social distancing as required. There will be a structure to the program - at least four 'lessons' or opportunities to be involved, with two weeks in between each new program input.

That gives people time to get to the location (or research images and information related to that fortnight's key concept as an alternative to an actual visit), absorb their feelings and then - inspired by something they see, smell, hear or touch - journal about it. They might add sketches or draw detailed and finished drawings. It's up to each person as to how they want to engage with the program.

The proposed program will include:

- material on how to nature journal and different techniques to use so that anyone anywhere can embark on their own creative journey;
- suggestions and ideas for journaling for those who need or prefer to stay at home or work outside Canberra;
- information and instructional videos designed to develop skill; they will include:
 1. specific posts, for instance, on drawing insects, birds or the forest floor - i.e. the basic anatomy of the creature or plant that's the focus of the fortnight;
 2. what you could do with pen and ink, pencil or watercolours;
 3. what features to capture to make your image look realistic; and
- regular posts from the coordinator and from participants on their ideas and Output (i.e. a moderated blog).

Participants would have access to online forums and be able to ask questions of the coordinator/s and the

other students who will have their own experiences and expertise to contribute. The goal is to make the program interactive.

Nature Journaling participants may prefer to use captioned photographs, poetry, prose or embellished lists as the basis for their Journaling.

Over time each place, each habitat may offer visitors stories from the 21st century that explain, honour and respect its significance.

If the idea takes off, then the same format might be run in the following season - until there were four seasons' worth of journaling for a book or a diary.

The natural world is in and around our homes, backyards, nature strips, reserves, waterways or the residual open spaces of our suburbs. All these places can be just as good as the open country for immersing oneself in nature. Local nature, however, does offer low-emission, instant journeys into nature's melange of plants, animals and habitats that are just waiting to be noticed, researched and appreciated.

One of the benefits hoped for is that a participant who isn't already a keen protector of nature might feel inspired to give their time and energy to protect what they have discovered or just nature in general.

The broad concept behind Journaling through Reflections on Nature is to offer people a chance to explore nature, enrich their days and evenings by being creative and in touch with the natural world, build positive relationships through creativity and shared interests, and increase awareness of landscapes, changing weather patterns, habitats, species' inter-connectedness and the feelings associated with connecting with nature and being active outdoors.

A quote from the NAL website "Nature Journaling is proven to be beneficial in improving mental health, and is a great way to learn more about nature and care for ourselves and our local environment."

**Rosemary Blemings and Lucy Bastecky
with use of the program outline written by
Fiona Boxall, NAL**



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.

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Newsletter Editor: editor@fieldnatsact.com



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

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: