

OBJECT: To foster an interest in nature

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

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MEETING—Thursday 2 May 2024 7:30 pm Australian National University

Slatyer Room (up the stairs),
R. N. Robertson Building, Biology Place, ANU
details on the back page

Refreshments before
the meeting. Please
bring your own cup.



Sub-Antarctic Islands

Speaker: Kevin McCue

In a previous talk, Sonja and I embarked on a voyage south from Bluff, NZ to Macquarie Island (Aus) via the Snares and Auckland Island. This talk about the return half of the voyage north back to Bluff takes us via Campbell Island, the largest of New Zealand's sub-Antarctic islands and the romantically named Antipodes and Bounty Islands to the human-occupied Chatham Islands. The bird and marine life is stunning, in sheer numbers too, but beauty and diversity a la Galapagos. The albatross species alone justifying the expense of the trip, then add many more seabirds, seals, whales and weather.



Contents

Mulligans Flat outing	2
Backyard observations	5
Activities	5

Mulligans Flat outing

Kirsty led a group of 15 members through the northern end of Mulligans Flat on a trail along the ACT/NSW border. Google Maps shows it as being in Little Mulligans.



Photo: Kevin McCue

We started from the car park at the Trailhead to the Northern Border Campground. I wasn't previously aware of this car park or of a campground within the area. Even before leaving the car park we were serenaded by a Grey Butcherbird, with distant Sulphur-crested Cockatoos and Galahs and Eastern Rosellas flying over head. There was of course, at least one obligatory kangaroo.

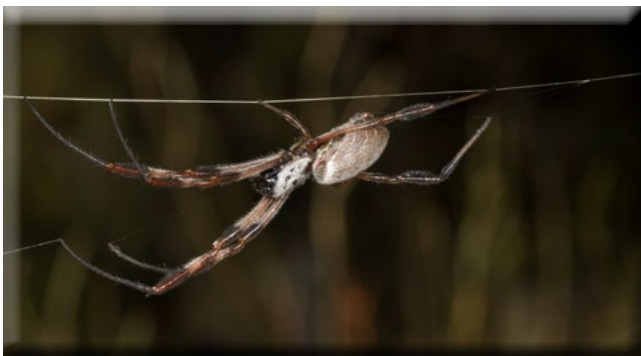
Entrance is via a style or a step-through gate, depending on your preference.

Despite a forecast of clouds and a possible shower, it was a bright sunny day, just perfect for an outing.

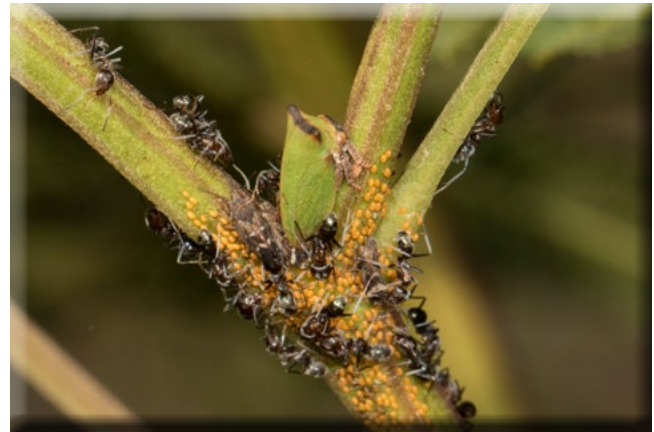
It was an easy, slow going walk with members spread out over a fair distance as each indulged in investigating their own area of interest.

Those investigating plants were the leaders of the pack, but my particular interest is in insects and invertebrates so a small group of us brought up the rear as we stopped to photograph our finds.

One of the first interesting finds was a Golden Orb Weaver spider. A bit further on we found another one with a smaller male nearby.



It is rather late in the year for the leaf beetles but I did find two small Acacia beetles and two species of leafhoppers, plus a couple of horned plant hoppers.



Leaf and plant hoppers are often attended by ants in a symbiotic relationship. However, looking at the photo on my computer I realised there is a lot more going on in this photo than I first thought. Besides the attendant ants, there are three other insects that by their apparent appearance I would have classed as leaf hoppers, but they have antennae. Then there are the yellow dots along the stem of the tree. My first thought is that they are mites, but they could be eggs or scale. I am hoping for an answer through Canberra Nature Map but if anyone can shed any light I'd be grateful.

A more interesting sighting was a Tau Emerald Dragonfly sitting calmly in a Eucalyptus. The cool air was probably the reason it wasn't flying around and sat perfectly still for many photos.



There are a number of tunnels built under the main road for animals to navigate under the boundary fence. These usually also included reed-filled pondage and we heard calls of the Common Eastern Froglet (*Crinia signifera*). Also among the reeds was a Superb Fairy Wren flitting about.

A two-tailed spider was nicely camouflaged on the trunk of a Eucalyptus and on the same tree were two tiny wasps, looking very much like winged ants.

Speaking of ants, there were a number, particularly of course, the meat ants that seem to be so prevalent in Canberra. One nest must have found a juicy morsel to feed on as there was a large column of ants heading down the track.

Excursion report



At our turn around point where we stopped for a snack, we spotted colourful pasture day moths (*Apina callisto*), which had everyone asking, “What is it?”

However, the two most exciting finds were a sighting of a Fan-tailed Cuckoo and another spider. We weren’t able to get great photos of the cuckoo due to its location behind a tree branch and even when it was sitting pretty on a bare branch, it was into the sun so mostly just a silhouette.

For me however, it was the jewel or Christmas spider. While the spider is reasonably common and I have photographed it a number of times and also photographed and even hatched, its egg sac, this was the first time that I have seen the spider actually on the egg sac. Whether it was guarding it or had just finished laying eggs, I’m not sure.



While there was a lot of interest in the birds, plants and invertebrates, a lot of people overlook some of the less obvious such as the variety of galls on the Eucalypts and Acacia trees.



Photo: Kevin McCue

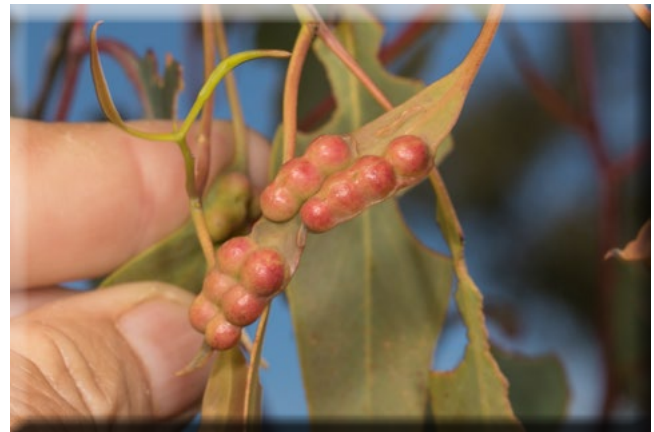


Photo: John Stein

Kevin made comment on the ground we were walking on with this comment:

Spare a thought for the shale we saw in outcrop along the walk, deposited about 430 ± 5 million years ago. We were treading on ancient rocks to be sure. They were originally approximately flat, deposited in an ancestral Pacific Ocean but are now strongly tilted and uplifted, well above sea level. The Earth’s surface has been in constant motion, vertically and horizontally but that is of no concern to the birds we saw happily eking out a living or passing through on migration elsewhere.

Amongst these rocks was something a little different, perhaps a chert, another hard metamorphosed sedimentary rock favoured by the original inhabitants of this country for making tools. This sample had been worked, maybe not enough to



Photo: Kevin McCue

be used as a scraper, but exciting evidence of the aborigines who walked this same path some time in the last 20 thousand years.



Photo: Kevin McCue

They no doubt admired the moths shown here, adopting their colours and patterns for their own use.

Then there were the not so obvious lichens.

It's amazing just how much there is to see if you are paying attention and how much can be missed if you are focused on only one aspect of nature. We often forget about the geology and lichens but they are all a part of what makes up this wonderful country we live in.

While probably not complete, this is a list of our sightings for the day.

Birds

- Australian Magpie
- Australian Raven
- Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
- Buff-rumped Thornbills (heard)
- Crested Pigeon
- Crimson Rosella
- Eastern Rosella
- Fan-tailed Cuckoo
- Galah
- Golden Whistler

- Grey Butcherbird
- Grey Fantail
- Grey Shrike-thrush
- Magpie Lark
- Noisy Miners
- Pied Currawong
- Red Wattlebird
- Scarlet Robin (heard)
- Sulphur-crested Cockatoo
- Superb Fairy Wren
- Weebill
- White-eared Honeyeater
- White-plumed Honeyeater (possibly)
- Yellow-faced Honeyeater*
- Yellow-rumped Thornbills

** Regular flocks of 30 to 40 individuals emitting chip chip calls, in typical fitful migrating flight flying, landing and gathering in foliage, flying, landing, in one direction along border ridge.*

Plants

- Acacia dealbata (Silver Wattle)
- Acacia parramattensis
- Chrysocephalum apiculatum (Common Everlasting)
- Eucalyptus blakelyi (Blakely's Red Gum)
- Eucalyptus macrorhyncha (Red Stringybark)
- Eucalyptus rossii (Inland Scribbly Gum)
- Eucalyptus mannifera (Brittle Gum)
- Exocarpos cupressiformis (Cherry Ballart)
- Typha orientalis (Bulrush)
- Xerochrysum viscosum (Sticky Everlasting)

Others

- Three grasshoppers
- Two leaf/planhoppers
- Two Acacia beetles
- One weevil
- Two wasps
- One dragonfly
- At least three moths
- Four butterflies (Common brown, Meadow Argus and White Cabbage, Common Grass Blue)
- Three spiders
- One frog (heard calling)
- At least two species of ants
- At least two species of lichen
- A variety of galls; and
- A variety of plants including paper daisies and heath among the Acacias and Eucalypts, reeds in the pondage, Kangaroo Grass and much more.

Now that I know about this new area and the tracks, I look forward to coming back in spring or summer when the beetles and other insects should once again be active, to record the various species and other invertebrates. Perhaps I'll make it a FNAC outing.

Thanks Kirsty for the interesting walk.

Alison Milton

Backyard observations

Since the very low rainfall over the past few months, Charles and I have noticed an increase in birds coming to our various birdbaths.

A daily newcomer has been the Australian Raven. We enjoy its distinctive call and it's quite visible and audible in the upper branches of the 50-year-old oak tree belonging to our neighbours on their side of the perimeter of our property.

Gwen and Charlie have just celebrated 70 years of marriage and this month of May, Charlie turns 100. They planted the oak tree from an acorn.

We keep our birdbaths filled with fresh water and in addition to the Australian Raven, daily visitors are Magpie Larks, Crimson Rosellas, Eastern Spinebills, Australian Magpies, Pied Currawongs, Superb Fairy Wrens, Crested Pigeons, Red Wattlebirds and Common Blackbirds. There are a couple of other species of small native birds but I am not sure what they are.

We haven't seen or heard the Satin Bowerbirds as we did recently but I saw a Grey Butcherbird on the power-lines of our neighbour's property the other day and have been hearing it recently. From time to time, we hear Laughing Kookaburras in the near distance.

I was walking past Macgregor Primary School a few weeks ago and saw a man staring up into a stand of eucalyptus trees not far from the bridge across the creek. On enquiring, he pointed out two Tawny Frogmouths high up in the branches. He told me there was another pair in a tree in the bushland over Florey Drive and I was fortunate to see them.

Walking around Lake Ginninderra this morning, Charles and I saw many female Superb Fairy Wrens on the ground.

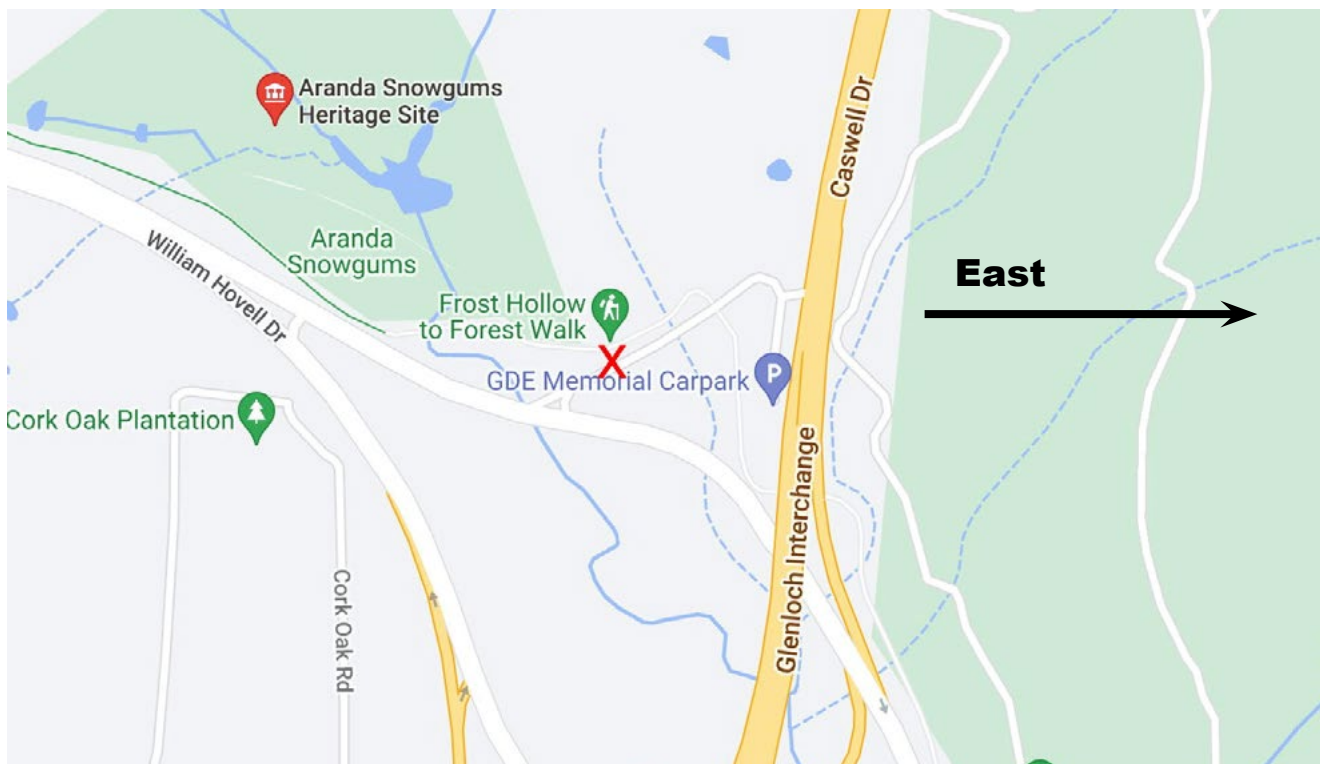
Our enjoyment of bird life continues to grow and we love providing water for them.

Lucy Barstecky

Activities

9:00 am 23 May: Ian Loiterton Walk in the Aranda Bushland

Join Kevin as he leads us along this new Aranda track. Meet at the stile on Caswell Drive. Access is via William Hovel Drive city bound left lane.





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 you would be warmly welcomed.

President: president@fieldnatsact.com

Email: secretary@fieldnatsact.com

Website: www.fieldnatsact.com

Treasurer: treasurer@fieldnatsact.com

Membership: membership@fieldnatsact.com

Newsletter Editor: editor@fieldnatsact.com

Outings Coordinator: outings@fieldnatsact.com

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/FieldNaturalistsAssociationCanberra>

Membership application or renewal

New applications and renewals can be done through the membership page on the web site:

<https://fieldnatsact.com/membership>

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

Subscription renewals are due on 1 July each year

Bank transfer (*renewals only: form not needed*)

Account name: Field Nats

BSB: 325 185

Account number: 03545251

Reference: **Please include your name**

If you are unable to make the payment through the web site you can contact the Membership Secretary at the email address opposite, or in writing to the address listed.

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



Monthly meeting venue: Slatyer Room, R. N. Robertson Building, Biology Place, Australian National University

