

November 2008
ISSN: 1836-2761



FIELD NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA

FIELD NATTER

OBJECT: To foster an interest in nature

MEETING THURSDAY November 6
8:00 pm Australian National University
Meeting details back page

Golden Sun Moth

Anett Richter from the University of Canberra will present some of her research findings on the golden sun moth in the ACT at this month's meeting. See page 4 for information about the GSM project and next Saturday's event



Shy Albatross (*Thalassarche cauta*)
Photo Steve Lee

FNAC AGM and October Meeting

The following members were duly elected for 2008-2009:

President	Benj Whitworth
Vice President	Chris Bunn
Secretary	(Tony Lawson took this on at the next committee meeting)
Treasurer	Bob Lehman
Assistant Treasurer	Paula Banks
Public Officer	Chris Bunn
Committee members	Debbie Saunders Tony Lawson Philip Bell George Heinsohn Margaret Kalms Sylvie Sampson Rosemary Blemings*
Conservation Council Reps.	Tony Lawson*, Dierk von Behrens

Following the AGM the general meeting was a members' night. Firstly, Debbie Saunders spoke of the plight of the endangered Swift Parrots as continued logging of old-growth forests threatened their breeding grounds in Tasmania.

Alan Ford then spoke to evocative and interesting photographs of desert plants, while Lyndal Young showed photographs of a strange bubbling phenomenon at the base of rain-dampened tree-trunks. Her attempts to investigate this were thwarted by scientists' reticence to comment but Ian Fraser suspected that this phenomenon was caused by the sap foaming.

Finally, Sybil Free and Helen Carse gave personal accounts of their trip to the Northern Territory to join other naturalists at the Australian Naturalists' Network Get-together.

The out-going committee was thanked for their work. The Members' Night speakers were especially thanked for bravely agreeing to give presentations to their peers.

At the subsequent committee meeting it was confirmed that Pam Fenning would be able to continue as principal Raffle Co-ordinator, and Helen Lehman was able to be principal Tea & Coffee Co-ordinator.

With the Conservation Council ACT Region (note the name change) now being managed by an elected Board there was no need for Quarterly General Meetings and for our representatives to attend other than at each AGM.

* The Committee confirmed that with Tony taking on the role of Secretary, his role as a representative would be assumed by Rosemary, with Dierk as a the second FNAC voting representative at the Conservation Council AGM.

Rosemary

NOVEMBER OUTING

FNAC / FOG Wildflower Wander, Goorooyarroo NR (10:00 - 3:00 pm, Sun 9 Nov)

The Field Nats are joining up with FOG again to visit Old Joe Hill, in Goorooyarroo Nature Reserve on Sunday 9 November to check out the flora and fauna. The Reserve is a grassy woodland ecosystem. It forms part of the area being studied by researchers at the ANU and CSIRO. As part of the research they have fenced off parts to keep out kangaroos and thereby allow the vegetation to regrow. This has already made a significant difference.

The ANPS Wednesday walkers visited the Reserve in September. You can find a report and a plant list at <http://nativeplants-canberra.asn.au/Uploads/Goorooyarroo399.pdf>.

Bring your own lunch. You can find a map of the reserve at http://www.tams.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0012/13305/cnpmapgoorooyarroo.pdf.

Meet at the entrance on Horse Park Drive that is closer to Gungahlin. For further details contact **Tony on 6161 9430** or tony.lawson@fog.org.au.

Field Nats Eden trip: Whale watching and a whole lot more

There was no difficulty in finding whales when we arrived in Eden on the Friday afternoon of our weekend stay. From Eagle Heights, the central high point in Twofold Bay, you could see the whales off Boyd's Tower waving their tails and making huge splashes in the water.

Those gathered on Friday night started the weekend with a shared BBQ meal at our accommodation which had stunning views over the northern section of Twofold Bay and out to sea. We had to go to bed at a reasonable time to catch our boat the Cat Balou at 8.00 am on Saturday. Our departure was marked by one of the local fur seals (*Arctocephalus pusillus*) laying on the harbour breakwater.

It wasn't long before we spotted our first Humpback Whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*). What was of great interest was that this whale was feeding! Contrary to the conventional wisdom that the whales make their journey to Queensland and back to Antarctica without eating, Ros and Gordon Butt of the Cat Balou regularly see whales feeding in the Eden area. And boy what big mouths they have (as you can see from the photo page 5). While there were shoals of small fish in a frenzy (presumably because of the proximity of the whales) it is likely that what the whales were actually feeding on were the zoo-plankton that the fish were also eating. Following this amazing start to our cruise we saw plenty of backs, lots of blows (as in 'thar she blows!'), fins and flukes (tails) as well as some very big and somewhat alarmingly named peduncle slaps, where the whale literally slaps the back half of its body down onto the water. All in all the whales seemed to be having a very good time, in fact 'a whale of a time'.

The action was not confined to the sea either. We had very good views of flocks of Short-tailed Shearwaters (*Ardenna tenuirostris*), Shy Albatross (*Thalassarche cauta*) (see photo page 1) and Black-browed Albatross (*Thalassarche melanophris*).

Our boat was also hosting a whale researcher, usually based in Hawaii, who is working on Humpback whale identification in the Pacific. One of their main goals is to photograph the whales' flukes (tails) as they come out of the water. Each fluke is different and is used to identify the animal. So far some 3,000 Humpbacks have been identified this way out of an estimated 10,000 Humpbacks using the east coast 'Humpback highway'.

All up we were able to approach about six whales (including multiple contacts with two large whales) and saw many more at a distance from the boat. On the way back in more seals were spotted floating on the ocean surface. The ocean off Eden is certainly a busy place at this time of the year.

After our amazing ocean trip we settled down to some more traditional Field Nat pursuits on land. Our first stop

was **Boyd's Tower**, originally built by Ben Boyd as a lighthouse for his whaling boats but never lit, and the remains of the **Davidson whaling station** at Davidson Point, in the southern part of Ben Boyd National Park.

In this area the vegetation identified included Silvertop Ash (*Eucalyptus sieberi*) forest with *Casuarina* and *Pittosporum* prominent. In the under-storey we saw *Melaleuca*, *Pittosporum undulatum*, *Westringea fruticosa*, *Myoporum acuminatum* (Northern boobialla) and *Myoporum boninense* (Broad leaved boobialla). *Bursaria* was seen on the shore and *Solanum aviculare* (Kangaroo apple), *Cissus antarctica* (Water vine), mauve flowered *Glycine*, *Goodenia ovata* and *Acacias* were also identified.

Also near Boyd's Tower is a remarkable geological feature where shearing, compression and an anticlinal fold can be seen in the rocks that date back to 360 million years (see photo page 5) The notable birds were three Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos (*Calyptorhynchus funereus*) and Varied Sitellas (*Daphoenositta chrysoptera*) (at Boyd's Tower) and a Superb Lyrebird (*Menura novae-hollandiae*) crossing the road on the way back from Davidson's. Davidson's also proved to be a good birding spot with Eastern Whipbirds (*Psophodes olivaceus*), Brown Gerygones (*Gerygone mouki*) and White-naped Honeyeaters (*Melithreptus lunatus*) amongst the many birds spotted.

The Pinnacles is another outstanding feature of the northern part of Ben Boyd NP, where striking cliffs of white and red stone have been weathered into interesting formations. The coastal forest here included the introduced *Pinus radiata*, as well as *Persoonia*, *Hakea*, *Banksia serrata*, *Casuarina*, *Callitris endlicheri* and heavy limbed Eucalypts with reddish flakey bark, (possibly *Eucalyptus botryoides*) commonly known as mahogany gum on the Victorian Coast.

Panboola Wetland Sanctuary is an impressive community work in progress, located next to the village of Pambula. Plantings include: *Melaleuca* sps, *Leptospermum*, *Eucalypts*, *Acacia*, *Lomandra*, native grasses and *Ranuncula* in wet spots (probably natural).

Some birds seen here included the New Holland Honeyeater (*Phylidonyris novaehollandiae*), Eastern Great Egret (*Ardea modesta*), Purple Swamphen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*), White-faced Heron (*Egretta novaehollandiae*), Black Swans (*Cygnus atratus*), and several species of ducks.

Many thanks to Sylvie Sampson for organizing such an enjoyable and productive weekend, and to the gods who provided such great weather.

Leonie Andrews and Sybil Free

Help wanted for a Golden Sun Moth monitoring project

Friends of Grasslands (FOG) is about to undertake a project to monitor populations of the threatened Golden Sun Moth in the Canberra region and they are looking for volunteers to help with the monitoring. A workshop to learn what is involved in the monitoring has been organised for **Saturday 1 November from 10: to 3:00 pm, at the University of Canberra**. Further details are given on the accompanying flyer (or as an attachment) If anyone is interested in helping out, please contact me or better still one of the organisers - Sarah Hnatiuk (her details are on the flyer).

We may organise another workshop for those who cannot make the one on 1 November.

Even if you want to help but not to go to the workshop please contact us - we have at around 2 dozen sites, which each require 4 visits and there are up to a dozen plots on each site, so there is plenty to be done.

You will also learn something about one of our endangered species at both the local and national level and also about the grassland habitats that they live on.

So give it a go.

Tony Lawson

I have seen a drongo in Canberra

While on a walk out at Kellys Swamp on the afternoon of the 19th October I was fortunate enough to see, along with a few other passerbys, a spangled drongo hawking for insects. This bird is listed as a rarity by COG, although it was also reported being sighted in 2007.

The name is originally from the indigenous language of Madagascar, where it refers to the local species, but is now used to refer to all members of the family.

The spangled drongo is not a stupid bird. It is not a galah. One book describes it thus: 'The spangled drongo catches insects in the air, chasing them in aerobatic flight'. There is one odd story about the drongo, however: unlike most migratory birds, it appears to migrate to colder regions in winter. Some have suggested that this is the origin of the association of 'stupidity' with the term drongo. .

So what is the true story of the term drongo? There was an Australian racehorse called **Drongo** during the early 1920s. It seems likely that he was named after the bird called the 'drongo'. He wasn't an absolute no-hoper of a racehorse: he ran second in a VRC Derby and St Leger, third in the AJC St Leger, and fifth in the 1924 Sydney Cup. He often came very close to winning major races, but in 37 starts he never won a race. In 1924 a writer in the Melbourne *Argus* comments: 'Drongo is sure to be a very hard horse to beat. He is improving with every run'. But he never did win.

Soon after the horse's retirement it seems that racegoers started to apply the term to horses that were having similarly unlucky careers. Soon after the term became more negative, and was applied also to people who were not so much 'unlucky' as 'hopeless cases', 'no-hopers', and thereafter 'fools'. In the 1940s it was applied to recruits in the Royal Australian Air Force. It has become part of general Australian slang.

Buzz Kennedy, writing in *The Australian* newspaper in 1977, defines a drongo thus:

A drongo is a simpleton but a complicated one: he is a simpleton [of the] sort who not only falls over his feet but does so at Government House; who asks his future mother-in-law to pass-the-magic-word salt the first time the girl asks him home.... In an emergency he runs heroically in the wrong direction. If he were Superman he would get locked in the telephone box. He never wins. So he is a drongo. (ANU—Australian National Dictionary Centre)

Chris Bunn

Learning more about our flora and fauna –useful web sites (final) Tony Lawson

University of Canberra

CSIRO

I don't have many links for these seminar programs. I usually find out indirectly about interesting ones. CSIRO is a very large and diverse organization so there are potentially many venues for their seminars.

One UC group that offers interesting seminars is the Institute for Applied Ecology. They meet on Tuesdays from 3:30 to 4:30. See: <http://aerg.canberra.edu.au/seminars.htm> .

Australian Academy of Science

Last year they had an interesting series of lectures on 'The Origin of Species: the Australian connection'. Their lecture program can be found at:

<http://www.science.org.au/events/publiclectures/index.htm> .

Bird Taxonomy or something new to warble about

Earlier this year, the second edition of Les Christidis and Walter E. Boles (C&B*2), *Systematics and Taxonomy of Australian Birds*, was published. The study produced a new list of Australian birds, reflecting additions to the list as the result of new arrivals in Australian waters or on Australian land (including Australian Islands), as well as some lumping and splitting of species and consequent changes in common and/or scientific names (and in some cases both).

Birds are classified in ascending order into Sub-species, Species, Genus, Family and Order, and some birds have changed each of these categories. For example, emus were classified to the Order Struthioniformes, along with ostriches, but now they are placed in the Order of Casuariiformes, along with the Southern Cassowary, because they are now seen to be more closely related to cassowaries than to ostriches. Some names have been changed because it is now thought that the species found in Australia is different to a similar species seen overseas. To distinguish them the prefix Australian is often added. For example the Clamorous Reed-Warbler is now called the Australian Reed-Warbler. In taxonomy, if there is any dispute about the name then the earliest use of a name takes priority. In the case of species splits such as the reed-warbler, if the overseas species was named first then it will retain the old scientific name and the newly described Australian species will require a new scientific

name. In the case of the Australian Reed-Warbler it is *Acrocephalus Australia* (it is customary to write the Genus and Species names in *italics*).

By far the greatest changes, however, are in the numerical (not to be confused with taxonomic) order of the birds. (Just to confuse you we have now used the term 'order' in three different ways, to keep you on your toes and to make taxonomy seem more complicated and difficult.) The numerical order is supposed to reflect similarities between and within families of birds. For example, the pigeons and doves have been moved right up in the new order, to just after the grebes. While within the honey-eater family (Meliphagidae), the Regent Honeyeater is now placed amongst the wattlebirds – and now has the same Genus name *Anthochaera* as the wattlebirds, and the chats and Gibberbird are now placed in the middle of the honeyeaters!

In July this year the main bird society in Australia, called *Birds Australia*, agreed to adopt the C&B*2 list of birds, and the local bird society, COG, followed suit soon after. I recommend that the FNAC uses the new list too. (It has been used in the write-up of our field trip to Eden, where we were lucky enough to see a large variety of bird life. For those of you that want to see the new list and the reasons for the changes in classification, it can be found on the Birds Australia website at <http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au:80/birds/checklist.html> .

Tony Lawson

OCTOBER WEEKEND PHOTOGRAPHS from Kevin Squair, Leonie Andrews and Girt Ozols



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:

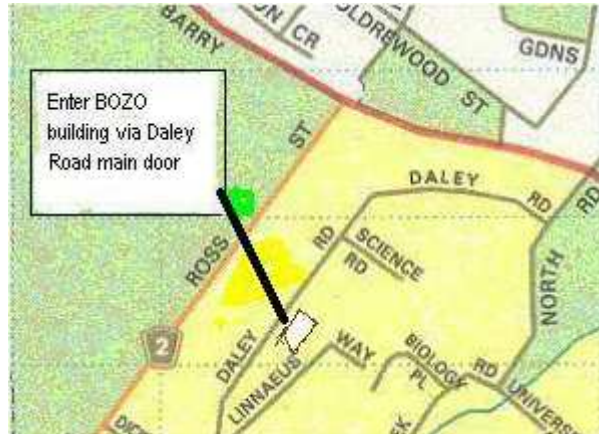
President: Benj Whitworth, tel w 02 6272 3192
mob:0448049195

Secretary: Tony Lawsons, tel 02 6161 9430
fieldnaturalist@yahoo.com.au

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 Bob Lehman



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.

GPO Box 249
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Print Post Approved
PP 233744/00022

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: