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GPO BOX 249
CANBERRA ACT 2601

FIELD NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA INC.

FIELD NATURALIST

MEETING—THURSDAY 5 November
7:30 pm Australian National University
Gould Seminar Room, Building 116, Daley Road, ANU, ACT
details back page

How Australian birds got English names

Speaker: Ian Fraser

Recently Ian Fraser co-authored with Jeannie Gray *Australian Bird Names; a complete guide*. In this talk he outlines and explores the various sources of the names we take for granted – Indigenous words, old English ones, names from other languages, names that arose spontaneously among early colonists and others deliberately coined by professional ornithologists. History, etymology and quite a bit of fun.



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Magpie update

Last month I wrote about the conquest that one of my local magpies made over three new female arrivals. Since I wrote that there have been some developments.

There has been some confusion over the three remaining males in the park. At first I was seeing all three but then it seemed the fourth one was back again, but I wasn't paying much attention to the individual identities. At the same time I was seeing the females in my street less often and not seeing the male at all.

The being the October long weekend when I've noticed the chicks tend to fledge, I made a round of most of the known magpie nests to see who were fledging. On the Saturday there was no sign of any of the new females down the street and I wondered if they had ditched their new male and taken off looking for better breeding, since there were again

four magpies in the park. However, on Sunday I thought I saw at least one of the park magpies flying up into the trees with food in its mouth. The next day, my dog Teenie insisted on going in the opposite direction for our daily walk and I entered the park from the other end, closer to the trees.

Again the magpies were flying up into the trees with food. It was then that I realised that the conquering male had brought his harem back down to the park and they had a nest with young chicks. It seems that the three losing males have moved on after occupying the park for about four years. While the chicks of two families fledged this weekend, the new park family were late starters and their chicks are still quite small. While it's sad to say goodbye to the three males, it's good to have some young chicks in the park again.

Alison Milton

Field Nats prize 2014

At the Field Nats' November meeting we're looking forward to meeting Xenia Weber. Xenia won the Field Naturalists' Prize for 2014 and Bob attended the ANU's awards ceremony.

'Xenia won three awards at ANU's Awards Ceremony, was the top 2nd Year environmental studies student and was assisting in a study of kelp along Tasmania's eastern coast.'

Please help us welcome Xenia at the meeting and I'm sure we will hear more about her Honours research when she accepts the \$250 prize. By November she will have finished writing up her work and may have time to browse the Co-op Bookshop before spending her voucher!

How many white winged choughs does it take to sit on a nest?

Spotted just outside the Australian National Botanic Gardens gate to the Black Mountain Tower walk, a family group of 10 white-winged choughs all gathered around a nearby nest. Interestingly, two birds are actually sitting ON the nest.



A rare opportunity

I heard that the Australian National Botanic Gardens were this year taking a rare opportunity to open their research orchid glasshouse to the public since many (or all) of the orchids were in bloom. I managed to get there for a visit. The first thing that struck me as I waked through the door was the perfume. Wonderful!

There were rows and rows of flowering dendrobium orchids, mostly variations (of perhaps the king orchid) in white or yellow. There were also a number of varieties of the pink rock orchid, though one of these had yellow flowers. On checking my photos when I got home I found that this yellow variety was badly infested with aphids. Nevertheless, it was a spectacular display and a rare privilege.

Mystery tree dieback

Trees die – that’s a fact of life. But is the death of an entire iconic landscape of *Eucalyptus* in the Cooma–Monaro region of New South Wales natural?

For over a decade, large stands of *Eucalyptus viminalis*, commonly known as Ribbon Gum or Manna Gum, have been gradually declining in health, and now stand like skeletons in huge tree graveyards.

In our recently published survey we found the affected area to cover almost 2,000 square km, about the size of the area burnt in the devastating Ash Wednesday bushfires in Victoria or more than the area covered by the 2003 Canberra fires.

Within this area, almost every Ribbon Gum is either dead or showing signs of severe stress and dieback, with thinning crowns full of dead branches. Other tree species seem to be surviving, but this smooth-barked gum with its characteristic ribbons of peeling bark, once the dominant tree of the Monaro, now seems set to disappear from the landscape.

Why do trees die?

Dieback is not an unusual phenomenon in Australia. Rural dieback first achieved widespread notoriety in the New England area of NSW during the 1970s and 1980s. This dieback was attributed to agricultural practices such as grazing, fertilisation and understorey clearing that upset the balance of insects and their predators.

The resulting insect population explosion led to repeated defoliation, which over several years, exhausts the trees’ ability to recover. In the case of the Monaro dieback, the ultimate cause of death seems to be an infestation of the (native) *Eucalyptus* weevil (*Gonipterus* sp.), which have been observed in large numbers on the few surviving trees.

Although dieback is often associated with insect attack, it seems that the underpinning reasons are much more complex.

In our study, Ribbon Gums appeared to be uniformly dead or showing signs of severe dieback regardless of their local environment. Areas that had been fenced off or with no other major disturbance might have been expected to be more resilient to dieback, but were as badly affected as those in paddocks that had been fertilised or grazed.

Dieback in an area that has been grazed. Catherine Ross

Similarly, absence or presence of recent fire or pasture improvement made no difference to the trees’ health. Asking graziers to change their practices, or fencing out reserves doesn’t appear to be effective in saving the Ribbon Gum.

Dieback in a nearby area that has been grazed and part of a reserve without other major disturbance. Catherine Ross

The Millennium drought may also have played a role, given that the onset of the dieback coincided with a significant drop in rainfall.

Large dieback events are being observed more frequently in Australia and around the world, and have often been attributed to severe droughts.

In Western Australia, it has been reported that jarrah, banksia and tuart woodlands experienced widespread collapse due to extreme temperatures and drought, causing a permanent shift in species distributions.

The Monaro region has a harsh climate, with extremes of temperature and very low rainfall due to the rain shadow of the Snowy Mountains. Ribbon Gums normally grow in wetter areas and the Monaro is at the edge of their climatic range, so the Millennium

drought and ongoing climate change may have pushed the trees beyond a critical threshold.

A vision of future forests?

Whatever the cause, the size and impact of dieback is comparable to the heightened bushfire threat in Australia – but unlike expected recovery after a fire, species lost to dieback may never regenerate. This potential impact should raise significant alarm, but to date, the Monaro dieback has received relatively little attention or no action.

What is also particularly concerning is the speed at which this dieback occurred, leaving other species little chance to adapt. There is no evidence that other tree species will naturally fill the gap, and attempts to replant local species have been largely unsuccessful, so we may need to introduce replacements.

Species from more arid areas may be needed to tolerate the predicted future climate and provide some of the ecosystem function that has been lost – but how do we select which species to introduce?

The Monaro with its dead hulks of trees may be a stark vision of the future, especially for those thousands who pass on their way to the ski fields during ever shorter snow seasons.

However, it also emphasises the need to better predict and prepare for dieback events, particularly where a dominant species is on the edge of its range. We need to determine what species and active management practices we need to replace our missing tree icons.

We will have to decide what values we place on trees and forests, and plan how we want the landscape to look in 100 years’ time.

Submitted by Rosemary Blemings

What modern chicks are eating

This year I volunteered to help out at the Bush Friendly Garden at Floriade for a couple of afternoons. Not having done this before and not being an expert on all things, at first I felt a bit like a duck out of water trying to answer questions from visitors. At this point I often referred them to the Parks and Gardens representative, Phil, who was no doubt inundated by questions. However, I then tried to hang close by while he provided answers and soon was able to field many questions myself. I learned a lot. So even if you don't feel fully qualified it is worth considering volunteering next year.

But speaking of ducks out of water ... well, not quite, but on my last day I took a wander by the lake. While in most previous years, the swans have proudly paraded their goslings, I haven't seen any the last couple of years, but this year had a new surprise. Not one, but two water hen couples were rearing their new chicks in a bed of reeds near the water's edge. The chicks of the first couple were a little more advanced, floundering their way among the reeds to be fed by mum (or dad).

The second family were a little less advanced, with mum still sitting on the nest and one or two chicks occasionally popping their head(s) out through mum's feath-

ers. One more adventurous chick dropped down to water level to explore its surrounds before making its way back up to the warm and safety of mum's belly.

In the meantime the family next door had about five chicks wandering about the reeds but all gathered near when mum (or dad) found a special treat to feed them.

I watched this activity for a while, taking what photos I could, but it was only through my camera lens that I suddenly realised what they were being fed. What! What was this? A Chup-a-chup! Was mum really feeding her chicks on a lollypop. Naturalists would no doubt be horrified by this but mum had found a discarded Chup-a-chup lollipop and was studiously feeding her young. No

doubt not the approved diet for native birds, but they seemed to be revelling in it.

But just as a discarded Chup-a-chup shows that careless dumping by humans can lead to non-natural and perhaps unhealthy diets for our native birds, the foreground behind the water hens showed a discarded water bottle floating in the water. I had thought to crop this out of the photo for aesthetic reasons but decided to leave it in to further demonstrate the careless way that humans dispose of anything they can't be bothered to dispose of properly.

Alison Milton

Mum feeding her babies a Chup-a-chup



The 2015 Floriade Bush Friendly Garden



News from the Australian National Botanic Gardens

The following two stories from Rosemary von Brehens are very timely, This year I have spent a bit more time at the botanic gardens than in previous years being partly due to joining the garden's photographic group, and just recently, participating in some events organised by Australian photographer Steve Parish. If you haven't previously heard of him, he produces a lot of calendars featuring Australian landscapes, plus much more.

Rosemary's observation of the competing water dragons was intriguing as during the photo workshop lunch break

on Sunday, we also saw these water dragons. Presumably they are competing for the attention of a female for breeding. However, I happened to have taken my camera out with me so got these photos to complement Rosemary's story.

I also have been watching the growth of the duckling family and photographing their progress for the last month or so. I've also included a couple of other photos taken at the gardens this week.

Alison Milton

Gippsland Water Dragon habits - Looking for an intruder

Downhill from the Australian National Botanical Garden café is a pond habited by frogs, ducks, and water dragons where one can see nature close up. We observed the following behaviour by a male Gippsland Water Dragon, which was stalking another. It scuttled along for a metre, remained perfectly still for a few seconds then raised its head several times in a jerky manner, stopped, then scuttled another circuitous distance and repeated the performance approximately four times until the quarry (a smaller water dragon) was close and flushed from its position – then the race was on. We lost sight of the two when they dived into a large dense bush. I was informed they were two males.

Several years ago we observed another water dragon chase an intruder that dared to eat butterflies in its domain. That time, however, the chaser performed pushups before rushing the other dragon.



Two water dragons going to battle



Alarm warning

Wood duck parents were grazing on the lawn below the pond with their six dappled ducklings. It was a peaceful scene until an unknown bird and several rosellas screamed an alarm. The parents' heads rose immediately and they stood tall while listening for a few seconds before rushing to the base of the casuarinas where the whole family hunkered down. They had been clearly visible on the green grass, now they were camouflaged on the brown litter.





October outing

Leader: Tony Lawson

Location: North-eastern corner of Mr Painter and north-western corner of Aranda bushland, straddling both sides of Bindubi Street

Attendees: Tony Lawson, Rosemary and Dierk von Behrens, Bill Murphy, Judy Harrison

This corner of Cook is gently undulating, has a scattered tree cover and an interesting low shrub layer. It is dissected by a bike path, equestrian trail and walking path and has good views of Mount Painter and the Arboretum.

On the TAMS map it is called the Wildflower triangle and is adjacent to Bindubi Street. Aranda bushland is accessible via an underpass. We may have been small in number but we had a lovely 'ramble'. Bill has a keen eye for observing even the smallest of plants.

Thank you Tony for alerting us to this reserve. This list is just a sample of what can be seen.



www.tams.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/390605/MTPAINTER.pdf

Plant list.

Leucopogon fletcheri

Acacia dealbata

Acacia genistifolia

Acacia decurrens

Melichrus urceolatis

Indigofera australis

Cheilanthes austrotenuifolia

Wurmbea dioica

Lomandra longifolia

Lomandra filiformis

Cryptandra amara

Lissanthe strigosa ?

Exocarpi cupressiformis

Hovea heterophylla

Hibertia ripera

Hardenbergia violacea

Eucalyptus rossii – scribbly gum

Eucalyptus polyanthemus – red box

Eucalyptus macrorhyncha – red stringy bark

Eucalyptus meliodora – yellow box

Eucalyptus mannifera – brittle gum

Other critters

Frill-necked lizard

Rabbits

Grey Currawong

Pied Currawong

Magpie Lark

Sulphur-crested Cockatoo

Crimson Rosellas

Red Wattle-bird

Grey Fantail

Magpie

Thornbills ?

What am I? *Lissanthe strigosa*, (Peach Heath) perhaps?

Rosemary von Behrens

Activities

Saturday 7 November - visit Black Ridge

Black Ridge is a large property located between Bredbo and Chakola. Right now it is just glorious. Hopefully the rain won't knock the flowers off all those blooms. Please let Rosemary on 6254 1763 know if you are interested as 4WD's are needed to get where we want to go and car pooling may be necessary. Normal car access to front gate is OK, thereafter not. If the tracks are wet and boggy we will have to walk several K's. Bring lunch, sturdy shoes, sun screen etc. You know the drill..

Month	Speaker	Topic
5 November	Ian Fraser	How Australian birds got English names
3 December		Christmas party

All in

As world leaders meet in Paris for the United Nations climate summit, we will gather in Australian cities and walk alongside millions of people in hundreds of major cities around the world. By coming together we can show that our government is out of step with the Australian community and the rest of the world.

We will march to show that we want an end to fossil fuels and a planned transition to 100% renewable energy.

We will march to demand our politicians back all communities that are building a better, safer and fairer future for all.

We will march because from here on in, we're all in.

We're all in – are you?

As Australians, we're all in because we're more powerful when we stand together.

We are Indigenous peoples, farmers, firefighters, union members, teachers, people of faith, health workers, grandparents and grandchildren. We are thinkers, innovators, superheroes, dreamers and doers.

A world free of dangerous global warming, and the poverty and inequalities it brings, is within our reach. Together we can show the world Australians care, and we're all in.

If you want a new economy that works for people and the planet, make sure you're in.

If you want to show the world that Australians want to do our bit, make sure you're in.

Join your community in a colourful, vibrant, fun and united display of people power. Sign up to make this moment as big and powerful as it needs to be.

Why we're marching - people power leading the way

We have a vision for a better Australia. One that runs on clean energy, and a fairer economy. Climate change hurts people. It hurts our health, our economy, our jobs, our food, water, environment and communities. And those who did the least to cause the problem feel the impacts first and hardest, like our brothers and sisters in the Pacific.

The good news? The momentum for clean energy is unstoppable. We have the technology. We have the solutions. All that's missing is political will.

And the Australian people are leading the way. We are already taking action in our communities to protect the things we love. Over 5 million people power their homes with solar, farmers and traditional owners are saying no

to mining on their land, and millions of Australians are calling for leadership from their politicians to support a planned transition away from coal and gas.

And so this November we will march alongside millions around the world to make the public pressure for our leaders to join us in building a better, safer and fairer future for all, inescapable. Canberra takes part in world-wide climate action rally on November's last weekend and this is just before the crucial Paris talks.

Please join other concerned locals by attending this rally and march in significant numbers from noon on Sunday 29 November. There is an urgent need to show our politicians that policy prevarications, inadequate counter-measures, approving new coal-mines and sanctioning coal seam gas extraction on prime Australian land is the opposite of what is required for the planet's liveable climate and the future of all species. Meet towards the lake end of Parliament House lawns. Meeting up with 900 series bus routes to the Albert Hall stops and walking over is a viable option.

For further details contact the Conservation Council and 350.org organisers for the Canberra March. Phone 6229 3208.

Rosemary Blemings



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 von Behrens **Phone:** 6254 1763

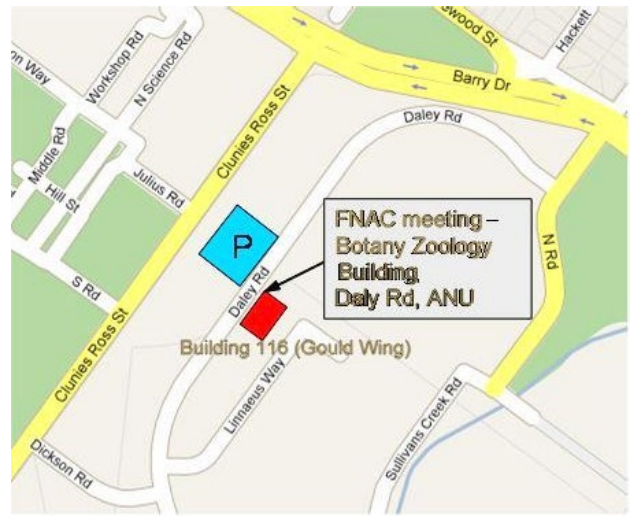
Email: fieldnaturalist@yahoo.com.au

Website: under construction

All newsletter contributions welcome.

Email: alison.milton@health.gov.au

Editor



Monthly meeting venue: Division of Botany and Zoology, Building 116, Daley Rd, Australian National University. (The Xmas meeting is at the adjacent building 44 and will start at the earlier time of 6:30 pm.)

Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra
GPO Box 249
Canberra ACT 2601



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: