



FIELD NATTER

FIELD NATURALISTS ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA

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

PRESIDENT: Rosemary Blemings Phone 02 6258 4724

SECRETARY: Janet Twigg-Patterson phone 02 6287 2086

ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: GPO Box 249, Canberra ACT 2601

WEBSITE <http://www.geocities.com/fieldnaturalist/index.html>

EDITOR: Chris Bunn <chris_b@webone.com.au> ph: 02/6241 2968

Meetings are held in the Division of Zoology and Botany, Building 44, in the Australian National University, on the first Thursday of each month, except January. Meetings commence at 8:00 pm and are followed by refreshments.

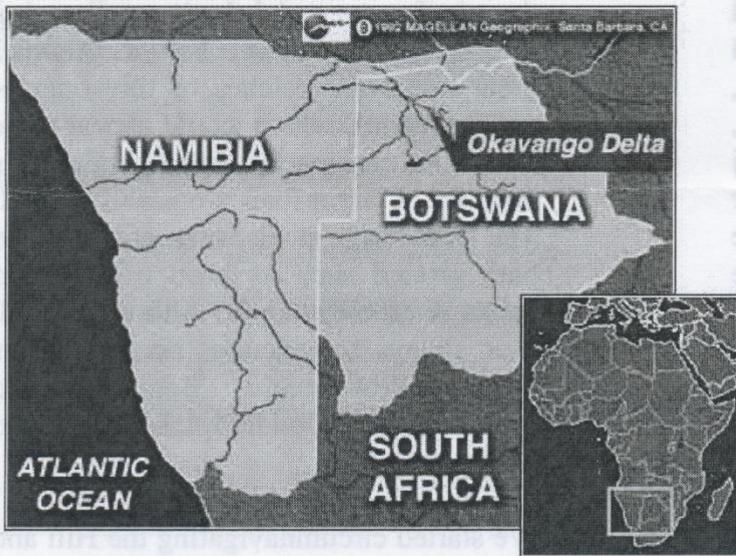
NEWSLETTER — OCTOBER 2005

MEETING

Thursday 6TH October – 8 pm

The Okavango Delta plus the annual meeting

with Prof. Arthur Georges



The Okavango Delta is one of the largest and most important inland wetlands of the world, covering 15,000 km², with 2500 species of plants, 65 fish species, 20 large herbivores and over 450 species of birds. With 6,864,000 hectares, it contains the largest Ramsar site in the world.

The Delta receives its water from the highlands of Angola and the Okavango River passes through Namibia before it enters Botswana in Ngamiland. The Delta includes swamps, grasslands, intermittently flooded areas and dry lands. The Delta is home to over 140,000 people, 50% of whom live in villages with less than 500 inhabitants, living off the goods and services the delta provides. Their livelihoods are

closely interwoven with the diversity of natural resources.

Increasingly, the Delta is under pressure. Increasing population numbers have led to the unsustainable use of a number of natural resources. Water resources are increasingly used for medium-scale irrigated agriculture, mining and domestic use upstream of and around the Delta. Unmanaged and uncontrolled expansion of human activities and the unclear ownership of resources are threatening the livelihoods of the Delta's inhabitants.

OUTING:

Field trip- Kioloa- October long weekend. Saturday 1st to Monday 3rd

Kioloa is the main Field station for the Botany and Zoology School (ANU). Kioloa, if you haven't been, is on the NSW South coast about 35km North of Bateman's Bay. Within walking distance from the Field station is a beach, coastal banksia scrub, forest, woodland, heath and a rainforest gully. We saw a great variety of plants in flower last year even though the area was in drought, so bring your coastal field guides. We also saw many birds last time. We have booked two new self-contained cabins that have rooms with two single beds in each. Each cabin has shower, toilet, and kitchen. We have booked the cabins from Saturday lunchtime to Monday lunchtime, i.e. 2 nights and 3 days and the cost is \$25 per person per night. Please bring your own food, as the shops are unreliable. This trip was excellent last time, it is a good way to meet members, and you can come and relax or join the walks with other members. We will be car-pooling. Any enquiries please contact Philip Bell on 6251 5837.

OUTING REPORTS

Percival Hill- an Antarctic experience

Sunday the 10th July was a very miserable and cloudy day. However, we were lucky for our Percival Hill walk (S Gungahlin) to enter the eye of the storm with sunlight sometimes peeking through, although the icy wind howled from the West all day. Ten eager, well-jacketed walkers headed in with anticipation. Not a lot was seen of note until we passed through a scribbly gum/brittle gum forest, which contained a few Applebox and reached the dam in the SW corner. We bumped into our first patch of birds, including red-browed finches, fairy wrens, Buff-rumped and Yellow-rumped Thornbills, Weebills, and Striated & Spotted Pardalotes. Chris, George, Paula, Jean, Pam and Benj examined some ants and discussed their life cycles, prompted, no doubt, by the great talk at Field Naturalists the Thursday before.

Moving closer to the dam we spotted Wood duck, Black duck, and Hardhead. Jenny Bounds thought a grebe in winter plumage might have been an Australasian grebe. Suddenly members started noticing dusky woodswallows hawking just above heath-like plants and around re-growth gums. They seemed to be everywhere and their beautiful circling flight was mesmerising, I think we counted at least 12. This species is a migrant and it is rare to find them here

during winter. Rosemary B got a quick glimpse of a speckled warbler until it flew off into a clash of birds and striated thornbills flew back and forth.

Plants included many species of heath, but only urn heath looked close to flowering. However, as we moved through the heath and into regrowth Gums (about 3-4m high) we stumbled upon the odd Cranberry heath (*Astroloma humifusum*) a small mat-forming sharp leaved heath with red flowers. The bright red tubular flowers were a stand out of the trip for me and I don't recall seeing this species in flower before. Another great find were patches of tiny orange-yellow fungus, which would appear to be *Omphalia chromacea*, although Fuhrer's book has it larger than, we usually saw it. The book says it "is very common on bare ground such as bush tracks, road banks & rabbit mounds. Although small, it is always conspicuous because of its bright yellow colour." Benj examined these with Phyl Goddard, Lisa, Philip and Maureen Bell.

We started circumnavigating the Hill and it felt and looked like an Antarctic expedition in freezing winds. Then we climbed to the 'pole'. This achievement pleased our intrepid explorers and they wandered North along the ridgeline chatting and then surprisingly ran into Rosemary vB wandering, apparently lost

and dazed, and was happy to be 're'united. Reaching the carpark we saw a lot of common birds we hadn't seen before (eg red wattlebirds, black-faced Cuckoo shrike), almost doubling the number of bird species we had seen on the day. Although it was still freezing and the sun was dimming, members

FIELD NATURALISTS' AFTERNOON VISIT TO CALLUM BRAE SUNDAY 4TH SEPTEMBER 2005

On one of a series of perfect Spring days 14 Field Natters assembled to explore this newly gazetted, 143 hectare Nature Reserve. Before we'd completed 'the introductions' two strident calls greeted us from a Striated Pardalote and Little Corella. Is there something about the structure of the Australian landscape that amplifies-beyond-logic the calls of certain tiny birds? After about 500m two of us were perplexed by a Cockatiel's call. Gill went back to the sound's origins finding that the Rainbow Lorikeet we'd seen earlier seemed to be the 'culprit'. A Long-billed Corella was also among the first birds seen. With *Cacatua sanguinea* and the Lorikeet it generated discussion about recent additions to the ACT's resident birds list.

Callum Brae has been a sheep-property in recent decades with the grassy-woodland nearest Narrabundah Lane being more lightly grazed than areas further from the road. Even so, although greening-up after rain, the ground storey appears to have been heavily cropped by kangaroos. Spring growth such as *Plantago varians*, *Bulbine bulbosa* and *Chrysocephalum apiculatum* shows the reserve's potential. The brightest yellowy-green belonged to Sundews where they were thriving in dampish places within a few metres of the creek line.

Perhaps the title of creek exaggerates the situation. There was plenty of water given late winter rain and the surrounds were damp or waterlogged. Erosion has damaged the banks. A longer study might have revealed spring growth of water-loving plants and the presence of invertebrate species in the turbid water.

At a dam near the SE corner of what was once the Mugga Lane Zoo's land at least three species of frogs were calling. The

didn't seem to want to leave and chatted, then gradually drifted off.

Bird list provided mainly by Jenny Bounds. Report compiled by Rosemary Blemings and Benj Whitworth.

Plains Froglet *Crinia parinsignifera*, The Spotted Grass Frog *Limnodynastes tasmaniensis* and the Common eastern Froglet *Crinia signifera* which Nicki expertly showed us.

The Eucalypts show they're affected by a range of stresses. For many their pinky-brown leaves illustrate the severity of lerp attack. There are some older saplings but the impression is that stock have eaten most of any regenerating seedlings. Some species are lush in comparison, their chemistry obviously deterring insects. The wonderful variations of form, sculptured shapes, bark texture, responses to damage and old wounds would appeal to the creativity of photographers and artists.

We meandered south and gently upwards towards an installation's fencelines. By this time the ground-cover showed heavier grazing with a consequent higher proportion of weedy species. One St John's Wort had coral-pinkish eggs under leaves indicating the presence of the bio-control beetle that locally has varying success rates. Beetles on the weed in full-sun positions have more impact, I'd heard. Apart from the mentioned saplings the shrub layer is represented by a few Cassinias. It will be interesting to see if removal of the stock will give better chances to shrub seeds that germinate in spite of the presence of kangaroos, hares and rabbits.

Trees beyond Callum Brae's border here were alive with numerous species of birds. For some, calls were recognised: Olive-backed Oriole, Diamond Firetail, and Kookaburra before they were seen. We enjoyed aerial displays from Dusky Woodswallows, pairs of White Plumed Honeyeaters and a distant raptor being harassed by ravens.

Quite rightly, the avian highlights for Benj were the Peaceful Doves. Following hearing their calls, most of us had excellent sightings thanks to their 'co-operation'! In the 1992 COG Atlas they are cited as rare residents/aviary escapees. Steve Wilson's 1999 *Birds of the ACT Two Centuries of change* says "Rare non-breeding resident in the ACT". It will be interesting to see if numbers of Peaceful Doves gradually increase as the two books suggest the ACT's winters were too cold for them and they were close to their 'environmental limits'.

Some of us remembered our first visit to Callum Brae, with COG, when there were

numerous birds near the eastern dam. Views of Queanbeyan showed how remnant vegetation and linkages of habitat are still threatened by residential or infrastructure development. A few waterbirds were added to our list at the dam but Spring obviously wasn't ready for the Kingfishers I remember seeing there before.

As we walked back to the cars the day cooled. Our bird's list was swelled by Noisy Friarbirds' presence in the trees by the carpark. The lure of 'the hunt' remains and our species list shows why the walk was enjoyable and rewarding.

Bird List for Callum Brae September 2005

Hardhead	Black Duck	Grey Teal
Australasian Grebe	Little Eagle?	Wedge-tailed Eagle
Kestrel	Peaceful Dove	Masked Plover (h)
Galah	Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Little Corella
Long-billed Corella	Rainbow Lorikeet	King Parrot
Eastern Rosella	Crimson Rosella	Red-rumped Parrot
Kookaburra	Tree Martin	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
Grey Fantail	Willie Wagtail	Superb Fairy Wren
Weebill	Red Wattlebird	Noisy Friarbird
Noisy Miner	Fuscous Honeyeater	White Plumed Honeyeater
Striated Pardalote	Spotted Pardalote	Diamond Firetail (h)
European Goldfinch	Starling	Olive-backed Oriole
Magpie-lark	White-winged Chough	Dusky Wood-swallow
Pied Currawong	Australian Magpie	Australian Raven

NEWS AND EDITORIAL

We have a new auditor

It is my understanding that Paula has arranged for a new auditor (Deb Saunders) subject to final approval by the committee.

Family and community event in Watson Sunday, 13 November 2005

'A Rare Patch' – Watson Woodland Revealed

- In the morning from 10am, join guided walks in the Woodland with botanist John Briggs and other experts.
- From 12pm participate in launching of 'A Rare Patch' - a community brochure on the Woodland
- Celebrate the formal naming of the 18 hectares as the Justice Robert Hope Park
- Listen to speakers on native woodland ecologies and progress on restoration work at our Woodland
- Bring a picnic to enjoy in the woodlands
- Where? Justice Robert Hope Park, off Antill St, near Prime TV (10 am –2pm [12 pm launch])

SPECIAL REPORT

A Visit to Namibia, 1-18 August 2005

By Kay Hahne (Part 1)

Australia is dry. Yes. But Namibia is very dry and desolate! Especially in the Namib Desert, which is along the western side bordering the Atlantic Ocean. To get you oriented, the other borders are South Africa to the south, Botswana to the east and Angola to the north. It used to be called German South West Africa, then in 1915 it came under South African rule. Now it is an independent country since 1990. We went on a wonderful guided environment tour with Mark and Jean Caulton of Pelican Safaris NZ (formerly of Durban, South Africa).

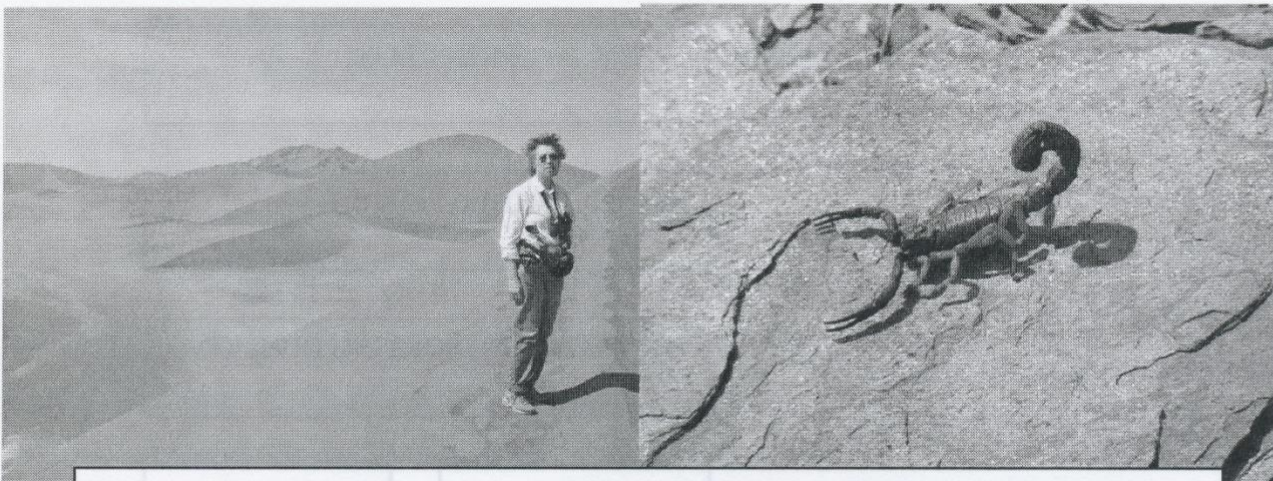
The Namib

This is the oldest desert in the world. It is long and narrow, extending about 2,000 km from the Orange River northwards up into Angola. It is only about 150 km wide. We spent some time near Solitaire and drove all the way to Sossusvlei where the tarred, pot-holed road abruptly ends ... only 4-wheel drives can extend about 5 km more. Sossusvlei is a bit like Eucla – it is on the map because there is nothing else around except drifting sand dunes! Here we drove past row after row of massive red sand dunes – up to 30 km long and 250 m high. In fact the tallest dunes in the world are found here. We climbed one, right on the sharp ridge. What a spectacular view from the top (or near it). I decided not to puff all the way to the top, especially since I was surpassed by all the other humans but the deciding factor was when this little shiny blue-black beetle came scuttling past at a speedy pace and left me for dead! You don't expect to see anything in this sea of sand, but these *Tenebrionid* beetles on long legs are common. They are called toktokkies or tok-tok beetles because they attract a mate by striking their abdomen on a pebble and make a 'tok tok' sound. We are still baffled at how these particular dune beetles can find a place to do this in amongst millions of small grains of sand!

The road itself was in a flat valley between rows of dunes – an ancient riverbed. Here we saw native saltbushes, a few tufts of grass, Ostriches, Ruppelle's Korhaan, plus black and white Pied Crows. The most exciting find was on our way out. Mark was determined that he would find us the endemic Dune Lark *Certhilauda erythrochlamys* so that I could claim that as my World Bird #1000. And find it we did, in spite of high wind, by clambering up and down over smaller dunes with clumps of tall grass. And there it was, in the end we didn't even need binoculars, it was so close. Later we celebrated with champagne – it's not every day you see your 1000th bird!! Mark dubbed me the 'Lark of the Dunes'. On our way back to the motel at Solitaire, we saw a Black Cobra cross the road (we were glad to stay in the vehicle), plus Oryx, a small Steenbok and a small herd of Springbok doing their famous 'pronking' by arching back, head down and leaping very high into the air. It was a sight to behold!

On our way to Walvis Bay, as we passed through the Sheltering Mountains, we got out to admire the desolate terrain and happened across a little drama unfolding. We noticed a large Western granulated thick-tailed scorpion *Parabuthus granulatus*, with orange-brown legs, two small, thin dark pincers and a huge thick black tail with a large stinger. He was circling around and eventually came upon a fat, juicy long-legged ground cricket. In due course the cricket was captured and immediately stung on the back between thorax and abdomen. As it was still kicking slightly, it was stung again, this time in the soft belly. We learned that scorpions with small pincers and mandibles had much thicker tails and stingers and were extremely poisonous. Those with large, strong pincers and mandibles (and better able to hold on to their dinner) had thinner tails and less powerful venom. So, we watched prey and predator in miniature.

(to be continued)



Kay near the top of large red Namib sand dune and a thick-tailed scorpion

FIELD NATURALISTS ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA INC.

The Field Naturalists Association of Canberra was formed in 1981. The aim of the club is to stimulate interest in the natural history of the ACT through regular meetings and field outings. Meetings are usually held on the first Thursday of each month. Field outings are also planned each month and range from day outings to long weekends and camping. The emphasis is on informality and fun. New members are always welcome, especially family groups and young people. Information on activities is circulated in the monthly newsletter. If you wish to join FNAC, please complete the form below and send it with the appropriate subscription to: The Treasurer, FNAC, GPO Box 249, Canberra ACT 2601.

FAMILY NAME.....FIRST NAME.....

If a family membership, please include the first names of other members of the family.

POSTAL ADDRESS.....

SUBURB.....STATE.....POSTCODE.....

PHONE: HOME..... WORK

SUBSCRIPTION ENCLOSED \$..... Single/Family \$20

How did you hear about FNAC? Please circle FRIEND OTHER Please state.....

FIELD NATURALISTS ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA INC.

To foster an interest in, an awareness and an understanding of nature.

If undeliverable return to:

The Secretary
GPO Box 249
CANBERRA ACT 2601

SURFACE
MAIL

POSTAGE
PAID
AUSTRALIA

Print Post approved
PP233744/00022

PRINT POST

NO. IN BUNDLE

POST TOWN OR SORTING DIVISION

STATE

POSTCODE