

October 2011
ISSN: 1836-2761



FIELD NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA INC. GPO BOX 249
CANBERRA ACT 2601

FIELD NATURALIST

OBJECT: To foster an interest in nature

THURSDAY 6th October AGM & Members' Night 7:30pm Australian National University

Venue details back page

The AGM will be followed by a 'pot-pourri' of presentations from members.

Have your say on Silver Foxes!

The Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities has received an application and draft environment assessment report under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 to include *Vulpes vulpes* (Red fox, silver fox) on the live import list to allow imports for private keeping as pets and potential breeding for commercial sale.

Under the EPBC Act, the draft environment assessment report from the applicant must be published on the department's website for public comment and relevant state and territory ministers invited to comment. The report is available for comment, closing on **20 October 2011**. All comments received will be provided to the applicant to address in finalising the assessment report. They will also be taken into consideration by the department in making a recommendation to the minister.

The reason for seeking importation is that the applicant argues that the silver fox can be a unique pet unlike our current red fox (although they are the one species). The application is available at: <http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/wildlife-trade/invitecomment/vulpes-vulpes.html>



Please forward any written comments to:

Director
Wildlife Trade Regulation Section
Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities
GPO Box 787
Canberra ACT 2600

Taken from an email
submitted to Natchat
by Chris Bunn

Email: exotic.species@environment.gov.au

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President's report by Chris Bunn

This year the club celebrated its 30th birthday in July. Due to wonderful organisation by Bob Lehman around 30 people (one per year!) celebrated a night out at the Thai Chiang Rai Restaurant. Thanks Bob for a very successful night.

During the year we have once again had a variety of speakers and excursions. As can be seen from the table our club covers an extraordinary wide-ranging list of topics. This is our strength and should be an attractant for potential new members interested in natural history.

Month	Presenter	Topic	Planned excursions
October	Members	Short talks	Spring outings
November	Linda Broome	Mountain pygmy possum and climate change.	Goorooyarloo nature reserve
February	Kim Pullen	Insects of the ACT	Catching insects at night
March	Ian Fraser	A bush capital year	Naas valley
April	Peri Bolton	The evolution of Australian snakes	Canberra Reptile Centre
May	Chris Cargill	Cryptogams	Truffle hunt at Mulligan's Flat
June	Pat Wright	Who's the Smartest: Plants or Animals?"	Viewing Oceans movie
July	Mark Spain	Getting the lowdown on zero emissions	Cryptogam herbarium
August	Terry Korodaj	Native fish strategy	Westborne Woods
September	John Hyslop	Surveying in Antarctica	The Pinnacle

We are a small club, but a club with many members helping along the way. Special thanks to Margaret Kalms and then Paula with the newsletter; Bob Lehman for the website, newsletter distribution, and finance; Tony Lawson as secretary and stalwart of Natchat; Pat and Warwick for the supper support; Pam for the monthly raffle; Alan as our door keeper; Rosemary Blemings and the rest of the committee for organising speakers and outings. Also I will pass on our thanks to BOZO for their ongoing support in providing meeting facilities. But don't forget we need volunteers for next year.

Next year we have ANN. ANN refers to the Australian Naturalists Network. This group of Field Naturalists from all the States and Territories meets every two years for a GET-TOGETHER. We were asked to host the 2012 gathering. After some deliberation the ACT FNAC Committee agreed and plans are well underway. The FNAC will need your help and support during October 2012, if not before, to usher our visitors in the right directions, to host a BBQ, set up lectures, maybe transport individuals, drive a small bus, and so on. Rosemary von Behrens as convenor has already put in a huge effort and plans are well advanced. It will be a great time to meet people with similar interests from all over Australia.

OCTOBER OUTING – Orchid Walk with Jean Geue

Details of the October Outing were not available at the time of printing but will be announced at the meeting and via the website.

COMING BACK FROM THE DEAD by Chris Bunn

Recently I was reading about the demise of the famous Passenger Pigeon in North America. The last bird, a female called Martha, died at 1:00 pm on Tuesday 1 September 1914. And when the last pigeon died so did the last of its parasites. One of these was later known as *Columbicola extincta*. Apart from being a fossil how could an animal be named as extinct? It seems that thirty years after the host went extinct; a feather louse was described from three preserved individuals in a German museum. This louse was identified as *Columbicola extinctus*. However there is a happy ending. In 1999, *C. extinctus* was identified as really being *Columbicola columbae*, a species that commonly occurs on other pigeons. Another louse *Campanulotes defectus* was also described as unique to Passenger Pigeons. In 2000, *C. defectus* was found to have been misidentified and was really *Campanulotes flavens*, which still occurs on Australian Bronzewing Doves. The problem was likely that the source specimen was mislabeled from an Australian collection. The original collector was poor at managing the collection and his successor may have been no better.

However, if parasites are host-specific, then parasites will also become extinct if their host species is close to extinction.

Extinction can be rather difficult to prove, especially in the case of insects that are relatively small, may have very limited population information due to limited numbers of field investigators or expertise in identification, not to mention that insects may be less than charismatic in the public mind. Proving extinction may be a challenge. Different data sources indicate different numbers of species that are considered extinct or endangered. Furthermore, some species that still appear on the list may have been rediscovered; therefore, the data with regards to extinction especially among insects is in a state of flux.

One species once listed as being extinct has come back to life. The Lord Howe Island Stick-insect (*Dryococelus australis*) was formerly abundant on Lord Howe Island, but was eradicated by rats in the 1920s. The species was thought to be extinct, until freshly dead remains were found by climbers on Balls Pyramid during the 1960s. In February 2001, a survey of Balls Pyramid led to the discovery of a small population of *D. australis* on a precipitous terrace 65 m above sea level. Two adults and one nymph (all females) were located feeding on an endemic tea-tree (*Melaleuca howeana*). An accumulation of plant debris at the base of the shrub, kept moist by water seepage, provided the insects with damp hollows suitable for use as daytime refugia. All evidence indicated that the species was confined to this single small terrace. A second survey, in March 2002, located a total of 24 *D. australis*. Twelve individuals were in the same shrub as that occupied the previous year, and 12 were dispersed among five nearby, smaller shrubs. Ten individuals were able to be sexed - eight females and two males. Melbourne Zoo now has a captive breeding program with several dozen breeding adults with the aim of reintroducing the phasmid onto Lord Howe Island.

Current thinking suggests that the organisms presently alive represent only 5% to 10% of those ever to have existed. The unsaid consequence of this is that 90% to 95% of species have gone extinct. Because the true number of species is still far from being known, extinctions rates can only be estimates. Based on the fossil record, the average lifespan of a species is typically a few million years though some may remain for many millions of years. Human activities are causing species to be lost at estimated rates of 100 to 1000 times faster than background.

Information mostly obtained from the internet.



Photo: Lord Howe phasmid
(OzAnimals.com)

Notice Board

Many FNAC members are also strong supporters of other groups. Here are a few of the activities that other groups are running during October:

Breakfast with the Birds

Discover the birds that call the Australian National Botanic Gardens home and enjoy breakfast in Canberra's most popular garden cafe, Hudsons in the Gardens.

When: Saturdays and Sundays until 9th October

Time: 8.00 am

Where: Depart from the Visitor Centre

Cost: \$30

Bookings: Visitor Centre | 6250 9540

In addition, the usual **ANBG Lunchtime Talks** will continue during October. These are held in the Theatrette at the Botanic Gardens from 12:30 to 1:30pm every Thursday from February to November. For further details of these talks go to www.friendsanbg.org.au/calendar.html

STEP

The Southern Tablelands Ecosystems Park is being planted out on Block 100 in the National Arboretum Canberra.

STEP has a regular Working Bee on Thursday mornings from 8-11am. More help is always welcome. If you interested in helping please contact Tony Lawson at tlawson@home.com.au or 6161 9430. The Arboretum is open on Sundays during Floriade so you can check out our work then.

Ginninderra Falls Public Meeting

Monday, 31 October, 5.30 - 7.30pm

The Murrumbidgee-Ginninderra Gorges National Park Working Group will hold a public meeting on Monday, 31 October at 5.30 pm to explain why it believes a new national park with its centrepiece as Ginninderra Falls, is needed. Many of you will have visited the Falls Park when it was open because of its unique flora and may be interested in these developments.

Venue: ACT Legislative Assembly's reception room, South Building, London Circuit, Civic. Ginninderra MLA Meredith Hunter will host proceedings, starting at 5.30 pm with light refreshments followed by a panel of experts speaking and answering questions at 6.00pm. The meeting will end at 7.30pm.

Friends of The Pinnacle

SUNDAY 9 OCTOBER - 9am

Community Planting Day

Meet at the Dungowan St entrance in Hawker at 8.30-9.00. Bring gardening gloves, trowel, bucket (for watering), hat, sturdy footwear, suitable clothing, water (for yourself, not the plants). Please contact John Brannan on 6258 6038 or john.fotpin@gmail.com to register your place.

SATURDAY 15 OCTOBER- 9am

Wildflowers and Grasses: Third Saturday walks with Rosemary Blemings

Focusing on emerging wildflowers and grasses found at the reserve. Meet at the Dungowan St entrance in Hawker. 1.5-2hrs easy walk. Contact Rosemary on 6258 4724 for more information.

SUNDAY 23 OCTOBER- 8.30am

Guided Bird Walk: an introduction to birds and their nests at the Pinnacle NR with John Brannan. Meet at the Dungowan St entrance in Hawker. 2.5 hrs approx. Bring binoculars, hat, suitable clothing, sturdy footwear, water, sunblock, morning tea. Contact John Brannan on 6258 6038 or john.fotpin@gmail.com for more information.

<http://fotpin.hussat.com.au/walking/spring-2011.html>

Anthropocene or AnthropObscene?

Dr Bryan Furnass' interesting lunchtime talk at the ANBG on 8 September dealt with the pressing problem of "The Anthropocene and its discontents".

The Anthropocene is a term coined by 1995 Nobel Prize winner Professor Paul Crutzen for an age that encompasses the period of industrialisation leading to the present substantial deterioration of the global environment.

On passing, Bryan shared with us some reactions that this proposed new term has elicited: "The Anthropocene?" said someone, "No way, that should be The Anthro-Stupid", only to be corrected by somebody else: "Wrong! The Anthro-Bloody-Stupid!"

Moved by these disagreements I feel compelled to share the following letter that appeared in The Canberra Times on 7 May 2010:

Obscenity of people [letters editor's title].

Humans have changed our world drastically, ushering a new geological age: the Anthropocene Epoch ("Humans behind new geological age: Research", *ANU Reporter*, Winter 2010, p7). This period may include the sixth largest mass extinction in the Earth's history. A more fitting name for this new age would be the Anthropobszene.

Jorge Gapella, FNAC member



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: Chris Bunn tel: 02 6241 2968 mobile 0417407351

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

Website: www.fieldnatscanberra.com

Newsletter Editor: Position vacant

All 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 7:30 pm and are followed by refreshments.

STILL LOOKING FOR A NEWSLETTER EDITOR!

Since Margaret retired from the position, I have been filling in as Newsletter Editor. Putting the newsletter together only takes around four hours once a month however, since my two-year old started skipping his afternoon naps, it's difficult to find even that amount of time. In addition, I'll be returning to full-time work in February.

If you are hesitant about taking up a regular commitment, please note that I am still happy to be the back-up Editor, so will fill in for you if you are unwell, away etc.

Please think about it!

Paula Banks

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: