

October 2012
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OBJECT: To foster an interest in nature

MEETING THURSDAY OCT 4th
7.30 pm Gould Wing, Building 116
Daley Road, Australian National University.
map and Field Nats details back page

Topics:

- ◆ AGM***
- ◆ Organising details for the Australian Naturalist Network Get-Together in Canberra October 13th to 21st [ANN2012]. If you are involved please attend, we want to make this a success. Thank you to those of you who have written pieces on our destinations and those who have volunteered to help and even paid for the privilege.
- ◆ FOOD - Join us for sandwiches and other goodies as we decide what to feed our ANN2012 participants. Be game, be a guinea pig, give us your views.

***The current committee will continue to operate in their old positions until the November meeting and ANN2012 is wrapped up, BUT we must elect a new one at this meeting.

Outing: Sunday October 7, Mulligans Flat 10 am.

It is possible to become geographically embarrassed at Mulligans. There are many exclusion paddocks for PhD research we can traverse if we don't miss the arrows. We wish to explore short and long walks, as far as Gorooyaroo, time them and have lunch on the logs back at the central shed. Please park near the Amy Ackland Drive entrance, wear appropriate clothing and bring your lunch and drinks. Rosemary von Behrens 6254 1763

NEXT MONTH: Thursday November 1st.

Speaker **Bill Gammage**, author of *The Biggest Estate on Earth*. Early writings have commented on the park-like appearance of the country - wide grassy plains and open woodland. Are there more trees now than there were when Europeans first came to Australia? How did Aboriginal people tend the land? This will be a fascinating talk, definitely an entry for your diary now.

The AGM

How can you help your Field Naturalist Association? Do you want it to continue? Please think about joining the committee. The committee positions are: President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, General Committee positions, and within those we need a Newsletter editor, Webmaster, Public Officer and meetings organiser. We need more members to keep the cogs working and to bring new ideas.

FIELD NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA INC. GPO BOX 249

CANBERRA ACT 2601

FIELD NATTER

Field Nats Outing 9 September 2012 Summary

Black Mountain Circuit. This is a relatively easy walk with very few stairs around the girth of the mountain. It is a narrow stoney path which can be accessed from three points. One is adjacent to the car park at the top near a lookout. The walker quickly descends a textured non-slippery concrete path to link up with the cross track. The other two entrances are accessed from the car park half way up the mountain. A quick trip would take an hour or less and it appears to be used by people who are into exercise. Field Naturalists, however, can dally a while and examine the environment in which they find themselves, emerging 2.5 hours later across from the car park on the west, having begun on the eastern slopes.

Jean Geue has had a long association with Black Mountain. She was particularly interested in the old and new signs. The old signs appeared to be more appropriate; the writing was larger and the information more relevant about the object highlighted, for example lizards, compared to the new signs which had a general comment and mentioned several items.

Birds observed were: Grey Shrike Thrush, Crimson Rosellas in a *Eucalyptus polyanthemus*, White-winged Choughs, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, White-throated Tree Creeper, Golden Whistler, Grey Fantail, Yellow-rumped Thornbill. A swamp wallaby was well-camouflaged in the downhill distance.

Observed plants were: *Exocarpis cupressiformis*, *Hardenbergia violacea*, *Acacia buxifolia*, *A genistifolia*, *A gunnii*, *Stypantra glauca*, *Phyllanthus hirtellus* [Thyme Spurge], *Hakea decurrens*, *Leucopogon fletcheri*, *L attenuatus*, *Pimelea linifolia*, *Grevillea alpina*, *Cassinia longifolia*, *C quinquefaria*, *Pterostylis nutans* [Green hood orchid], *Dodonaea sp*, *Dianella revoluta*, *Eucalyptus macrorhyncha*, *E rossii*, *Helichrysum collinum*, *Joycea pallida* [Red-anthered Wallaby Grass], *Hovea heterophylla*. An incomplete list obviously.

Jorge Capella left his bicycle at the Botanic Gardens and walked up to our meeting spot. He returned the same way and joined us for a stimulating discussion on Floresco's Cafe terrace. Other intrepid Natters were Maureen Bell, Judy Harrison, George Heinsohn, and Dierk and Rosemary von Behrens.

European Wasps

The Canberra Times has published a map recording where European Wasp nests have been found during the past 6 years in the ACT. Look up: canberratimes.com.au

Our **September speaker, Dr Denis Anderson**, was interviewed in June by Fairfax's Sci-Tech journalist Peter Spinks.

<http://www.theage.com.au/technology/sci-tech/this-mite-be-the-bees-worst-enemy-20120626-20z6u.html>

This mite be the bees' worst enemy

June 26, 2012

Peter Spinks

Fairfax Science Columnist

"If the bee disappears from the surface of the Earth, man would have no more than four years to live," Albert Einstein once said, referring mainly to honeybees pollinating the flowers of at least a third of the wild and farmed plants that humans eat.

Although bees have not disappeared yet, the insects that collect nectar and pollen and make honey and wax are in precipitous decline: populations in the US and Britain, for example, have halved over the past 25 years.

Reasons for the decline range from the prevalence of chemicals, particularly common crop pesticides, to the destruction of flower-rich habitats and the rise in electromagnetic radiation from mobile telephone towers and transmission lines.

The biggest pest threat is from the evil-sounding Varroa destructor, an oval-shaped, reddish-brown mite that sucks the blood from bees and transmits virulent diseases, such as deformed-wing virus.

The pinhead-sized bloodsuckers have decimated bee populations worldwide, including in neighbouring New Zealand and Papua New Guinea, but have not arrived yet in Australia.

"If they enter this country, the mites will completely wipe out our wild honeybees, which means crop growers will lose their largest and free source of pollination, worth more than \$1 billion a year," says bee pathologist Denis Anderson of CSIRO Ecosystem Sciences in Canberra.

The mites will also reduce the number of managed honeybee colonies, he explains. "This means keepers will pay more for scarce paid pollination services

— costs that would flow through to consumers." In addition, most of Australia's horticultural and agricultural crops, worth billions of dollars, rely on bees for pollination.

That Australia is one of very few countries to remain free of the dreaded mite is the result of good luck and good management, Dr Anderson says. "Varroa mites could enter the country in a variety of ways and, on several occasions, our quarantine authorities have been lucky to intercept them before they got through."

Despite efforts to tighten quarantine controls, Dr Anderson believes it is inevitable that the mites will get into Australia. So the race is on to find revolutionary ways of disabling them before they wreak havoc on wild and domestic bee strains.

Among other things, Dr Anderson and colleagues have been sequencing the mite's genome, or genetic make-up.

"Biotechnology can knock out critical genes that the mite needs for its survival. If this is achieved, then control might be possible," he explains. "Our work could assist research being carried out in Britain on a shoestring budget, which is still a long way from completion."

Once the genome sequence is complete, researchers will create and scour databases of all the Varroa genes in a bid to identify those that can be used to disable the mites before they do their damage.

Looking for exotics

While the hunt is on for ways to halt the mite in its tracks, scientists want to improve quarantine procedures.

Australia's national port surveillance program, although currently inadequate to deal with the threat, is being strengthened. Surveillance for honeybees and bee pests and parasites that are exotic to Australia forms part of the national sentinel hive program, which is co-ordinated by Plant Health Australia.

The program, established in 2000, has been growing steadily, Dr Anderson says. "It operates on the premise that most of the important exotic pests and parasites will enter Australia on live honeybees from another country — particularly

through bee swarms arriving on vessels at our sea ports," he explains.

An exotic swarm arriving this way could, if it went unnoticed, swarm off the vessel and set up home on land. "If it was a swarm of European honeybees, then it would be impossible to tell apart from our local European bees," he points out. "If the swarm was carrying exotic parasites, such as the Varroa mite, those parasites would spread to colonies near the port, and then on to colonies further away."

The national sentinel hive program places special hives at sea ports around Australia and monitors them every two months for signs of exotic pests and parasites that may have arrived in a bee swarm from overseas.

The program's success depends on how many hives are at each port and the number of ports targeted. "The more of each, the higher the chance of success," he says. "At present, only a few hives are based at a few strategic ports — just three hives cover Melbourne and Geelong, for example — and there are not enough funds to expand the current program."

This is why the state government has set up Bee Force, a pilot project to improve Victoria's capacity to detect incursions of exotic bee pests. Now on trial in Melbourne and Geelong, the project involves local amateur beekeepers who run sentinel hives.

"This encourages community involvement and expands the number of sentinel hives that can be used for surveillance, thus keeping costs to manageable levels," Dr Anderson says. "If the trial Bee Force program proves successful, it could be extended to other port areas."

THANK YOU to THE AGE online.
theage.com.au

Images European, Asian honey bees, mites.
<http://www.scienceimage.csiro.au/mediarelease/honeybees.html>

The money for research and eradication of the Asian honeybee in Queensland runs out in 2013.
http://asianhoneybee.net.au/?page_id=6

Must watch: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHCPfBWvw5Y>

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

Who are the Field Naturalists?

The Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra (FNAC) was formed in 19081. 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 emphasize 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.

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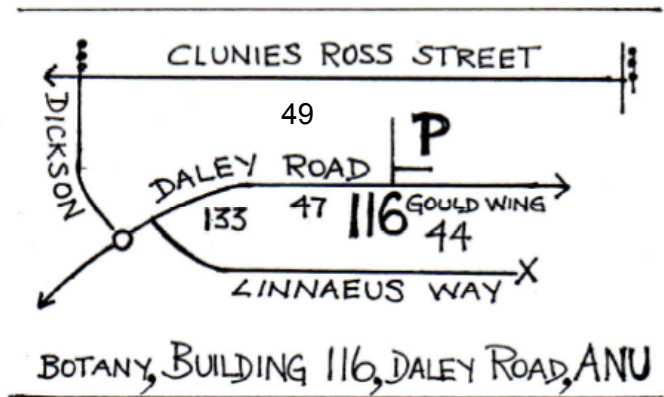
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Member contributions welcome.

Distributed by Rosemary Blemings and Robert Lehman

Monthly meeting venue: Division of Botany and Zoology, Building 116, Daley Road, Australian National University. Park occasionally at the adjacent buildings 44 & 49. Meetings start at 7.30 pm and are followed by refreshments.



MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION OR RENEWAL

Family name: First name:

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

.....

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How did you hear about FNAC? Please circle: FRIEND? OTHER? Please specify: