

OBJECT: To foster an interest in nature

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GPO BOX 249
CANBERRA ACT 2601

FIELD NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA INC.

FIELD NATTER

MEETING—Thursday 3 October 2019

7:30 pm Australian National University

Jan Anderson Seminar Room, R. N. Robertson Building, Biology Place, ANU, ACT
details back page

Southern Tablelands Ecosystem (STEP)

Speaker: Jennie Widdowson

Jennie is a senior guide at Canberra's arboretum, leading and developing walks and also helping to train new guides. Volunteering her time for the Arboretum's forests led to her becoming an active member of the STEP garden's regular workforce where the community celebrates accumulated and shared botanical knowledge. We'll see STEP's story revealed through photographs and anecdotes. Jennie is also an active contributor to Canberra Nature Map, where she has uploaded over 1,400 photos, with a significant number of these being of plants and insects found at STEP.



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Franklin 'Workshop in the field' 16 July 2019

Flemington and Wells Station roads and two suburban Franklin streets frame a 22 hectare space, perhaps awaiting a suitable Ngunawal name, and currently known as the North Mitchell or Franklin Grassland. If they glance up at all, passengers might wonder why the expanse of winter beige rank grass has not been built on.

The area has been spared development because it provides habitat for the rare Striped Legless Lizard *Delmar impar* and the Olive Legless Lizard *Delmar inornata*. Also, in 2012, populations of the endangered Ginninderra peppercress *Lepidium ginninderrense* were discovered here by Nicki Taws (of Greening Australia). Prior to that, the Lawson Grasslands 6 km away were considered the only site in the world where the small plant existed.

Geoff Robertson MC'd this Workshop-in-the-Field he had organised to assemble grassland experts, landscape restoration proponents, citizen scientists and land management specialists to share experiences, knowledge and suggestions for how to develop the site as a special place. Geoff Robertson created a Concept Plan for this site. Other Friends of Grasslands members were the organising team for the Workshop.

In a two-hour walk through the site, participants saw the ephemeral wetland at the south-west corner, the weedy woodland at the entry point, patches of good grassland ground cover towards the south, and the dam at the north-east side. Guest speakers included Suzanne Orr MLA, who said this area is a

community asset and she wants it seen as that. Peter Hazell of the Mulloon Institute, showed us how to look for steps – from large to very small – in the landscape, directing rainfall runoff and catching seeds and nutrients as well as moisture. Then Donna Hazell, of NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust, an expert on plants around wetlands, pointed out the drainage lines through the site and the values of the ephemeral wetland at the south-west fence line. She also explained how the thick *Phalaris* growth there offers protective structure for frogs, lizards, etc. It doesn't like dry soil and overgrazing. Its deep roots build up soil organic matter at depth.

On marginally higher ground farther on we found grassland forbs including *Tricoryne elatior*, *Chrysocephalum apiculatum*, a few Blue Devils and surprisingly plentiful beiged-off Lemon Beauty Heads. These reminded us of native species' usual need for 'good drainage' as they were often on gravelly patches with only lichens and sparser mosses as companions. Later we found *Asperula conferta*, Common Woodruff, that was present in clayey places scattered among the other habitats. Guest speaker Karissa Preuss of the Ginninderra Catchment Group pointed out that this site is an opportunity for urban learning of the value of grasslands.

Clare McInnes, ACT Manager of Environmental Offsets, also a guest speaker, said this site is a category 1 offset for the development on Dudley Street in Yarralumla – that is, it has highest priority for protection. Greg Baines (ACT Parks &

Conservation) spoke of 13 years of monitoring at Franklin, with changes in the grass species including the Themeda in the lower-lying areas. Kangaroo Grass (*Themeda*) is a good coloniser and provides biomass as food and cover for fauna.

In the concluding discussions, suggestions included an asphalt path around the grasslands; nature-play raw materials in the woodland to stimulate imaginations; signage to explain why the grassland will have no paths nor shrubs and trees among the wildflowers and native grasses; that the debris piles at south-east could be set aside for cyclists to create BMX-style tracks (away from the grassland). Such a play area might be a challenge for some ecologists to swallow, but perhaps it can be a 'sacrifice' area to conserve other species?

Equally exciting from this final discussion were the varied prospects for inter-agency co-operation, sharing of skills and the inevitable costs of bringing people closer to their own neighbourhood's nature; trying to respectfully utilise the grassland asset for the community's needs simultaneous to preserving Franklin Grassland's natural treasures.

Jennie Widdowson, our October speaker, will explain the origins of the STEP garden at the Arboretum. She will show photographs of Franklin flora among her collection of the floral treasures the STEP volunteers have planted and nurtured in creating a Botanic Garden of the region's native plants among the forests.

Rosemary Blemings

Little penguin rehabilitation jumpers

In the early 2000s there were a number of oil spills near Phillip Island at the entrance to Port Phillip Bay. The Little Penguins get the oil on their feathers and then try to clean it off by preening. The ingested oil makes them sick or even die. So the Phillip Island Wildlife Clinic appealed to knitters to craft jumpers to put on the penguins to stop them ingesting the oil prior to washing. The penguins then spend time recuperating at the clinic before release back into the wild. This meant 96% of the 438 penguins treated in 2001 were saved.



Phillip Island Nature Park has been extended and now has the capacity to house more oil-covered penguins for rehabilitation. So the Penguin Foundation is appealing for another 1400 little jumpers. They have to be made to a precise size (18–20 cm completed length, 11 cm from side seam to side seam). The pattern for 8 ply yarn, wool preferred, is available from the website Knits for Nature, penguinfoundation.org Completed jumpers need to be posted to the Penguin Foundation, P.O. Box 97, Cowes, Vic. 3922.

Any unsuitable jumpers – wrong size or with embellishments such as buttons or frills, are used to dress toy penguins sold by the Foundation to raise funds for their work.

Further information is available from: info@penguinfoundation.org.au or check

<https://penguinfoundation.org.au/assets/Uploads/The-benefits-of-using-penguin-jumpers-August-2019.pdf>

Maureen Bell

Easy astronomy app

After hearing a radio program on astronomy I downloaded the free app, SkyView, onto my phone. Point your phone at the sky and it tells you what you are seeing. Available for Android or Apple and delightfully easy!

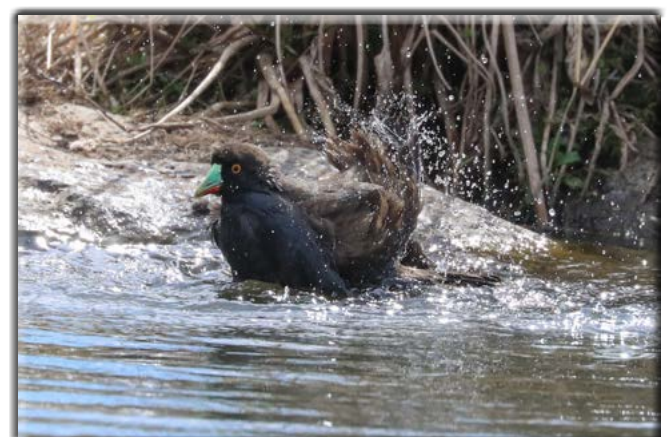
Maureen Bell

September sightings

The latter part of this month has excited Canberra's bird watchers with the sighting of at least two rare bird sightings, both within the same week in fact.

At Valley Ponds in Gungahlin a single Black-tailed Native Hen was spotted by our own Rosemary Blemings. I went out there the next day. To my surprise there was only one other bird on site (Bill Graham). After wandering around for an hour I was about to give up when Bill, on the other side of the larger pond gestured to me, with hand signals, that he had sighted it to the northern end of the pond.

Yes! It was with three Purple Swamp Hens. I took some photos but I was anxious to move on to Canberra's most exciting visitor. I returned to Gungahlin four days later to find the hen still in residence and got some better photos of it taking a bath.



But for the more exciting news, a Northern Shoveller had decided to visit the Jerrabomberra Wetlands. This was reportedly only the 12th reported sighting of this Northern Hemisphere duck within Australia, and explained why there were very few birdos seeking out the native hen.

Some photos taken of the Australian Shoveller showed very similar feather colouration of the wing feathers. Only the body feathers were very distinctly different.

So after taking my shots of the native hen I took the tram to Civic and then a bus out to Jerrabomberra where I located the Shoveller on the far bank of Kelly's Swamp. Most photos I'd seen were also of this view. It did then eventually venture in to the water to feed for quite a while, but it was still some distance away. Reportedly, in the very early morning hours there were so many birdos that the car park and bird hides were packed to ridiculous capacity.

I'm glad I didn't arrive till around midday but even then there were 10 or so birdos coming and going.

My photos were ordinary and I was busy for the next few days so didn't get back again until four days later. This time I arrived early (around 9:00). By this time the excitement had died down (or at least most birdos had already come, seen, and left) so I only saw about six other birdos come and go.

Meanwhile I sat on a log and waited. The duck occasionally ventured into the water for a short time when disturbed by other waterbirds, but retreated back to the bank.

Eventually, my patience paid off as at around midday it again entered the water then spent around 20 minutes making short flights up and down, witnessed (as far as I know) by only myself and one other, also doing lots of wing flapping. It seemed to be showing off to the other shovellers following one in particular. Richard took video while I took lots of still shots. Exhilarating.



As it happened, Richard lives in Palmerston so gave me a lift back to Gungahlin, where I got the additional shots of the native hen taking a bath. Incredibly, I also found a Masked Lapwing also



taking a bath in the same pond. While classed as a water bird I don't think I've ever seen them in water previously.



If you flicked through the photos quickly, it looked like the lapwing was signalling in semaphore.

Alison Milton

Activities

Saturday 12 October 2019–9.30am: 48th Black Mountain spring wildflower ramble

Belconnen Way entry just before Caswell Drive turnoff - watch for balloons or banners. Celebrate the spring flowering on beautiful Black Mountain with a social ramble for wildflower lovers in the tradition established by Nancy Burbidge, and continued by George Chippendale. Discover the surprising diversity of tiny orchids, bush peas, wattles and billy buttons on easy bush tracks with experienced guides and good company. All springs are not the same. The pattern remains but timing and abundance vary with the weather. Friends of Black Mountain welcomes all comers, be they experts or those who have never slowed down to see the somewhat cryptic diversity. We plan several guides, with helpers, who will take different directions. Please allow time to park and walk to the meeting point.

BYO morning tea, water, hat, sunblock and stout shoes. **BOOKING ESSENTIAL** to ensure we have enough guides. Contact friendsofblackmountain@gmail.com or Cathy 0406 976 751 or Libby 6296 1936.

Tuesday 15 October 4–5pm: Climate Liaison Group Meeting, 14/26 Barry Drive, Lena Karmel Lodge

This is a working group consisting of Member Groups, and broader community groups, who are engaging on Climate Change campaigning, policy and advocacy. Please indicate your intention to attend by email to director@conservationcouncil.org.au

Fri 29 November to Sunday 1 December: Snipe catch plans

6–10 January 2020

We have 4 more satellite transmitters to deploy, and like last year, will involve the construction of a wetland in the education room at the Wetlands and 24 hour GoPro monitoring of any birds that we fit satellite harnesses to. We would also like to try to catch another bird with a geolocator if we should be so lucky. We may or may not undertake a catch in between but that will depend on how the November catch goes. The January catch is timed to suit the arrival of our Japanese partners from the Wild Bird Society accompanied by some of their Young Rangers (in a similar style to when we visited there last year). This is really exciting and we will be holding some meet and greet activities amid other things. If you are interested and available to come along and help with either or both catches, can you please email Lori Gould (Lori.Gould@woodlandsandwetlands.org.au) your availability and I will put together a roster. I will send out more detailed information closer to the time.



Raffle prizes needed

As always, we need prizes for our monthly raffle. This is our only fund-raising event and is funded through members' generous donations, mostly consisting of items no longer needed or wanted at home. Fresh garden produce is also highly prized.

Please go through your cupboards for all those little items you no longer use or want and bring them along to donate as raffle prizes. As the saying goes, 'One man's junk is another man's treasure' (or woman as the case may be), and if you are a gardener with fresh produce to donate, this would be greatly appreciated.



Pinnacle bird walk

Once again, John Brannan led his annual spring bird walk at the Pinnacle Nature Reserve. After a fairly quiet start through the woodlands we did see a number of interesting birds including a Grey Butcherbird, a pair of Golden Whistlers, and various thornbills. We located the White-winged Choughs nest but they perhaps don't yet have eggs as there wasn't a bird sitting on the nest. The choughs themselves headed off further to the east as we approached.

We found Eastern Rosellas and Red-rumped Parrots possibly nesting and heard Noisy Friarbirds, who had arrived at the Pinnacle within the last week. Some Friarbirds may stay and nest if we get more rain in the next month, but most will head off into the Brindabellas.



Heading back from the Pinnacle itself I found a second pair of Golden Whistlers so fell behind the group to take photos. I tried to catch up but by then the group was well ahead, no doubt just heading back to the cars rather than stopping for more sightings. Perhaps just as well.

Nearing the eastern edge of the woodlands I heard lots of birds and spotted Pardalotes and a pair of tree creepers, one of which was carrying a grub while still making its way up tree trunks. Perhaps it had a nest nearby so I decided to stay a while. Then to my delight a Rainbow Bee-eater flew in for a brief visit and a photo shoot, before heading off again.

No doubt it was just passing through to areas better suited to its nesting needs, but a wonderful sighting nonetheless.



Then the friarbirds began calling so I followed their call and found a pair of them. Nearby was a small stand of young Acacias so I inspected them for insects finding an Acacia leaf beetle and what I thought was a weevil. However, through my camera lens the weevil turned out to be a beetle with deer-like antler horns. I'm excited. I've not been able to find anything like it on Canberra Nature Map and the closest species I've found is a feather-horned longhorn beetle, (photo taken on the Gold Coast but with different colouration). A new recorded species for the ACT? I'm still awaiting full identification.



I then also found a wonderful flowering example of *Clematis microphylla* ss. *Leptophylla*. Warren reported that a few other plants have also been found but my sighting was yet another new location. Exciting news as it is a beautiful plant and a native, especially when there is not a lot flowering at the Pinnacle at the moment.

Alison Milton

When goannas meet

The Australian National Botanic Gardens Photography Group went to the Eurabodella Botanic gardens this last weekend. Unlike our local botanic gardens it doesn't seem to have the same number of beautifully flowering plants as it is planted with only local species. However, there are other interests.

I found a Red-bellied Black Snake in a gully near the frog pond. Also present were the familiar Superb Fairy Wrens but I also found a male Variegated Fairy Wren, not found in Canberra.



There were many Whip birds. I have often heard these on various bush walks and they always sound like they are way up among the trees but I recently realised that they are mostly ground dwellers. With this in mind I tracked on down and managed to photograph it feeding and also giving its distinctive call.

Lots of small tree frogs inhabited the Lomandras however, my most exciting sighting was yet to come.

One couple had come down the day before and also arrived at the gardens ahead of the main group and had found a goanna making its way across the grounds.

Jealous, I hoped to also find the goanna but never hoped to find my actual sighting.



After lunch, I was venturing out on my own when I did indeed spot the goanna. I was following it and taking photos, but I think it also knew I was there so often stopped for long periods before proceeding.

Suddenly, I realised that there was an even bigger goanna approaching from the opposite direction and thought it would be an interesting meeting.

The two met, did a little nose-to-nose interaction before going into a long tussle between the two.



They were very close and rolling down the hill, getting closer, so I eventually decided to leave before one of them decided to retreat in my direction. Nevertheless I took around 400 photos. So hard to decide on the best ones. Hope you like these.

Alison Milton



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 Blemings, et al

president@fieldnatsact.com

Email: secretary@fieldnatsact.com

Website: www.fieldnatsact.com

Treasurer: treasurer@fieldnatsact.com

Membership: membership@fieldnatsact.com

Newsletter Editor: editor@fieldnatsact.com



Monthly meeting venue: Jan Anderson Seminar Room, R. N. Robertson Building, Biology Place, Australian National University

**Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra
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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: