



# 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 — SEPTEMBER 2005

MEETING

Thursday 1<sup>ST</sup> September - 8 pm

## **Canoeing in the wilderness between Canada and the USA**

with Prof. Esther Gallant

The Boundary Waters is a land of waterways encompassing the north-eastern National Forest in the state of Minnesota and the south-western part of the Province of Ontario. Over a million acres have been set aside here as wilderness, accessible only by canoe or kayak including ponds, lakes streams and rivers. Esther will show images from several trips to this area in her home state and tell about the historic importance of the area to the Indians and the 17th century fur trade.

**Next month** (October 6) will be Professor Arthur Georges talking about the "The Okavango Delta" in Botswana. Next month is our annual meeting (see notice) as well as a short talk from Geoff Robertson about the Conservation Council



**The Boobook** is the most common owl in Australia. It is identified by its plumage, which is dark chocolate-brown above and rufous-brown below, heavily streaked and spotted with white. The bill is grey with a darker tip, and the feet are grey or yellow. The facial disc is chocolate brown. Tasmanian birds are smaller and more heavily spotted with white, while birds of the Cape York rainforests are slightly larger and darker. Young Southern Boobooks are almost entirely buff-white below, with conspicuous dark brown facial discs. They are seen in a variety of habitats from dense forest to open desert. Closely related species are found in New Zealand, New Guinea and Indonesia. They are better known by their sound; the well known 'morepork', repeated at intervals

**Photo taken on the August Stirling Park outing by Damon (see report below)**

Janet  
Paul

## OUTINGS:

### Outing- Callum Brae 2pm Sunday September 4<sup>th</sup>

Meet about 400m down Narrabundah Lane from the Mugga Lane end, just beyond the old Mugga Lane zoo. There is a stile. One of Canberra's newest Nature Parks and it is an interesting grassy woodland that faces North, so hopefully there will be some flowers. The site has a lot of interesting birds, even Regent Honeyeaters were seen last year, Peaceful Doves; Shining, Horsfield's and Pallid Cuckoos, Dusky and White-browed Woodswallows, Little Corellas, Mistletoebird, Speckled Warblers, Diamond firetails, and Southern Whiteface. Some of the migrants listed above, may not have arrived yet. Wow that list really is amazing.

The walk is relatively easy. Bring water and wet weather gear. Call Benj on 62544 556 if you need more info.

### 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. Please advise Benj Whitworth if you want to attend (6254 4556) and pay a deposit, only 12 places are available. Benj will be in WA, so will hand over organising of the trip to another FNAC member ASAP.

## OUTING REPORT

### FIELD NATURALISTS VISIT STIRLING PARK, YARRALUMLA 7th AUGUST 2005.

Thanks to Benj seven of us have discovered a wonderful area of residual stringy bark and brittle gum forest within .5 km of Parliament House. We started walking north, 'cross-country' and in the opposite direction to his proposals but soon found there were many tracks and paths leading through the various habitats and vegetation types.

*Hardenbergia violaceae* were closest to being in flower but there were many *Cryptandra* with tight buds. *Bulbine bulbosa* and Blue devils *Eryngium rostratum* were flushed with new growth. *Plantago varia* is quite widespread; a more subdued green. It's the time of year when the obvious presence of native grasses makes us optimistic. Many species are represented and the new season's wild oats or exotic grasses are only small, having germinated with the rain's help.

In most areas all three storeys are well represented with ancient Eucalypts catching the photographers' attention. Regrowth is common with some lerp infestation damaging leaves.

*Acacia pravissima* is common in some areas and a few Cootamundra Wattles are glorious yellow already. Several *A. genistifolia* showed their delicate creamy flowers. Cassinias, *Chrysocephalum apiculatum*, *C. semipapposum* and *Dianella revoluta* have noticeable populations and a few old flowers remained on *Xerochrysum viscoides*.

The endangered Button Wrinklewort *Rutidosia leptorhynchoides* are in the woodlands. A dog-walker proudly pointed this out when we said who we were. He also showed us clusters of lichen-covered rocks near which Aborigines held wedding ceremonies. (There's also one of those 'sewerage' chimneys in the park- this one's made of Yarralumla? bricks- and signs indicating the sites of workers' accomodation from the early days of Canberra's establishment, Westlake).

Maybe the park has been rather left alone for some time. Briar roses may have been sprayed but years of birds' donations have resulted in populations of Cotoneaster, Privet, Pyracantha

and Hawthorn. There's even a patch of Broom. But there seemed to be few lower-growing invasive weeds deeper in from the Park's edges. I'm not sure what the Park's size would be but we heard at least 5 Striated Pardalotes calling from separate locations, only managing to see one of these strident vocalists. Almost as 'noisy' were Weebills, but their foraging movements made them less cryptic. Yellow-rumped Thornbills, Grey Fantails mixed with them. Two Speckled Warblers were there, as Benj advertised, quietly checking out the ground under shrubs and low trees. Much larger silent foragers were a pair of Grey Currawongs. We saw them before seeing their Pied cousins. Belconnen is full of these noisy predators so this was a pleasant reversal. It's possible both female Whistlers were seen. I was too fleeting with the first to check out its markings.

### Rosemary Blemings

#### NEW MEMBERS

Welcome to Paul and Janet Edstein of Waramanga and Debbie Saunders of Lyneham

#### NEWS AND EDITORIAL

## Snippets from the last committee meeting

*Newsletter mailout.* After some earlier concerns, Philip Bell has established a workable routine for the Newsletter-mailout. This was based on teamwork & networking with Chris (editor), Pamela Finger (database expertise), Paula Harwood (membership updates, printing payments), Philip & Maureen (labelling & mailout) & ACME printers. Philip would plan for 4-5 residual copies of each edition.

*Overdues.* We felt that members were adequately reminded but having each member's status printed on monthly labels was feasible. Paula would send a list of unfinancial members to Rosemary who would contact any for whom a reminder was appropriate.

*Prizewinner's membership policy.* When FNAC is notified of the prizewinner's name we would purchase the book voucher as before but invite the recipient to attend a meeting to collect her/his prize and also offer a year's membership as part of the prize.

*Committee members.* An invitation to join the committee would be included in the September

Newsletter together with a nomination form. Nominations were required for President, Secretary and super-organiser representing known vacancies at this stage.

It was suggested that Presidents, Treasurers & Secretaries hold those positions for a two-year term rather than indefinitely as at present. This would require constitutional change & would therefore be put to members for discussion.

Pam Fenning suggested our move to the Gould Building's seminar room meant that suppers were no longer such a pleasant focus for networking and camaraderie after the meetings. We would try having a small table in the foyer area for supper supplies meaning that a trip to the kitchen was only

A Boobook Owl (see photograph) was mostly unperturbed in a dense young Eucalypt & hadn't been seen by the vocal Ravens. A pair of Gang Gangs searched for food in a Eucalypt planted behind Hunter Street, cleverly spotted after we'd examined one rather dishevelled caterpillar and another tiny 'pillar silk-swinging on top of what seemed to be some sort of ball!

Nearing the cars 160 minutes after we began our stroll another strong call came from a male Superb Parrot flying hastily north from Empire Circuit towards the Yacht Club. Could it be the same lone male I'd seen at the Botanic Gardens a few weeks ago?

As Stirling Park is bounded by Empire Circuit, Hunter Street and Alexandria Drive it's impossible to get lost. Someone mentioned that certain public figures had plans to build a new Lodge here. It's far too good an area for non-green humans let alone politicians.



Please join us

necessary for hot water.

Pamela offers to lend a table for this trial. If successful we would consider buying a suitable table.  
*Website* We'd try to ensure Paula had details of the next speaker & outing for addition to the website ASAP after the previous meeting.  
*Nametags.* It was important to keep them going as a way to bridge the introduction gap, especially for new members or visitors.

#### **We need a new auditor**

Our auditor for many years is unable to continue.

An auditor is required to go through our financial paperwork once a year, to see that everything is being done properly, and to sign a piece of paper to that effect. The auditor doesn't need any qualifications and can be any person who is not an officer of the association and has not prepared or helped to prepare the accounts. We are encouraged to appoint an auditor from outside our membership, however at this stage we can't be too fussy. Our 'Rules' say that "if a casual vacancy occurs in the office of auditor during the course of a financial year of the Association, the Committee may appoint a person as the auditor and the person so appointed shall hold office until the next succeeding annual general meeting". We need to move quite quickly as the audit should be completed at least 14 days before the audited statement of accounts is presented at the annual general meeting i.e. by September 22nd. If any of you know anyone who might be able to help, please contact Paula Harwood [paulaharwood@hotmail.com] or any member of the Committee asap.

### SPECIAL REPORT

#### **Amazing studies on Eclectus parrots done at the Australian National University**

Eclectus parrots, found in the rainforests of Cape York Peninsula in far north Queensland and in New Guinea, are one of the world's most spectacular parrots. The males are a vibrant green and the females are a stunning vermilion. They look so different that for a long time the different sexes were mistakenly thought to be separate species. In the bird world, the males usually have brilliant plumage to attract mates or fend off rivals, and the females have drabber colours to help them hide when nesting.

Robert Heinsohn, son of our member George, and who works at the ANU Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, wrote up a proposal and sent it off to the Australian Research Council, explaining why he wanted to go and study Eclectus parrots up on Cape York Peninsula. They are big parrots — about the size of a sulphur-crested cockatoo — and they nest in tree hollows about 30m off the ground, located on the remote point of Cape York. His application was successful and led to an eight study.

What he discovered during his study was that Eclectus parrots are radically different from other parrot species. Most parrot species are monogamous, with pairs sharing feeding and rearing of chicks. However, the female Eclectus can mate with up to five males, and all signs point to multiple fathers of the chicks.

He also discovered that unless threatened - by a climbing scientist or a predatory scrub python - the females rarely leave their nesting hollows. Good nesting hollows are scarce, so females virtually never leave the nest. They use their red colouring to warn that a hollow is occupied and fight to the death with other females (and other species) to defend their hollow.

The females sit in the hollows for a month before laying eggs (usually September) and do all the incubation and brooding of the chicks, depending on the males to bring food. Even after the chicks have fledged, the females still guard and occupy the hollows. Good hollows are hard to find, many are subject to flooding and those closer to the ground are exposed to predation of the eggs and chicks by pythons.

The green males spend most of their time foraging for rainforest fruits in the tree canopy and their green colouring makes them less conspicuous.

Robert, using a spectrometer to bounce light off feathers, was able to build up a computer image of how the parrots appear to each other and to their predators. They were able to get precise measurements of the colour spectrum of patches of feathers. The first discovery was that the head and cheeks were the brightest patches of red on the female parrots — which fitted in with the theory of the red colouring being used as a warning that the nest hollows were occupied. The males were a surprise. Their green had a lot of ultra-violet and this may be connected to how the females select a mate. Do they choose the brightest, showiest male?

In a study done a few years earlier Rob and others investigated the extraordinary patterns of sex allocation in Eclectus parrots. These birds are extremely unusual as they are one of the few birds with nestlings that are easily sexed. They lay two eggs per clutch, but often only fledge one young. In their study the sex ratio of 209 fledglings did not differ significantly from parity. However, when two young are fledged together they are very likely to be of the same sex, and some females produce long unbroken runs of one sex (the maximum was 20 males) before switching to the other sex. Statistical simulations show that these runs of same-sex clutches defy expectation and also show that the sex bias must occur mostly at fertilization. This control over sex allocation in Eclectus parrots is one of the most extreme reported from any bird species.

If males are predominantly the helping sex, it may be adaptive for breeding females to produce males when they need help in reproduction and territory defence, and females when group size is large enough and any further helpers detrimental.

*Information from The Canberra Times and "Extreme bias in sex allocation in Eclectus parrots" by Robert Heinsohn, Sarah Legge and Simon Barry in Proceedings of the Royal Society (1997). All are based at ANU.*

*P.S -Where does the word Eclectus come from?*

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

**NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN TO ALL MEMBERS THAT THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of the Field Naturalists Association of Canberra will be held on Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> October at 8:00 pm at the Division of Zoology and Botany, Building 44, in the Australian National University.**

**Business:**

- a) To confirm the minutes of the last preceding annual general meeting.
- b) To receive from the committee, auditor, and servants of the Association reports upon the transactions of the Association during the last preceding financial year.
- c) To elect the officers of the Association (President; Vice President; Treasurer; Secretary) and the ordinary committee members
- d) To appoint the auditor and determine his/her remuneration
- e) To conduct other business of which notice has been given

**Nominations for election of members of Committee shall be made in writing (see below) and shall be delivered to an officer of the Association by Monday September 26. If insufficient nominations are received to fill all vacancies on the committee, the candidates shall be deemed to be elected and further nominations shall be received at the annual general meeting.**



I hereby nominate \_\_\_\_\_

A member of the Field Naturalists Association of Canberra Inc

For the position of \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Proposer \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Seconder \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Acceptance of Nomination**

I \_\_\_\_\_ accept nomination for \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Nominee \_\_\_\_\_ Dated \_\_\_\_\_



**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