

September 2007

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

MEETING THURSDAY September 6th  
8:00 pm Australian National University  
Meeting details back page



FIELD NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA

FIELD NATTER

# Terrestrial Orchids

Sheila Cudmore

Sheila is an orchid enthusiast with an interest in Terrestrial orchids over 20 years. Terrestrial orchids are the only orchids that grow naturally in the A.C.T. and the surrounding districts.



1—*Liparis nana* 2—*Liparis nana*  
3—*Pterostichia ovata* 4—*Dactylopsidium aegyptium* 5—*Dactylopsidium aegyptium*  
6—*Pterostichia ovata* 7—*Dactylopsidium aegyptium* 8—*Dactylopsidium aegyptium*  
9—*Dactylopsidium aegyptium* 10—*Dactylopsidium aegyptium*  
11—*Dactylopsidium aegyptium* 12—*Dactylopsidium aegyptium*  
13—*Dactylopsidium aegyptium*

### NATURE

Poetry and prose together,  
All gone before and yet to be,  
Are mirrors cracked and garish paints  
Next curl of leaf and bend of tree.  
Ciao  
Moz

## Field trip- Gossan Hill- Sunday 9th Sept 2pm

Gossan Hill is a small reserve in Bruce. It is across the road from Bruce Ridge. Technically it is a stringybark forest and scribbly gum forest. However, substantial parts of the site have been burnt in the past and bulldozers have created 'fire hazard reduction' but despite all this the plants have recovered well and it looks like this will be a good flowering season. Being a North and East facing slope it flowers earlier than most CNPs and already purple Hardenbergias and Hoveas are in flower. There should be Daphne heaths and Cryptandra in flower and hopefully some orchids. Birds are also very good at this site, often with gang gangs, king parrots and choughs and also speckled warblers on the Northern edge. Meet at the corner of Purdie St and Haydon Dr, Bruce. Parking is easiest along Purdie St. Meet at 2pm and the walk should be a few hours. Bring good walking shoes, binos, camera, For further information, contact Benj Whitworth on 62544 556.

## Species of the Month- *Porphyrio porphyrio* Purple Swamphen

A common yet often ignored species found in reed beds around our lakes. This bird looks unusual and its behaviour is also pretty bizarre.

### Description

A large crane-like bird (1) with a bright red 'frontal shield' (2) on its face, purple neck and chest and blackish wings and belly.

### Distribution and habitat

Eastern and Northern Australia. There is a separate population in SW WA, which looks slightly different, being bluer in colour and smaller Frontal Shield. In the ACT the distribution is actually not very wide, it isn't found at many sites, but it is very common around the main lakes (3). The Purple Swamphen lives, feeds and breeds in reed beds. It rarely flies and rarely swims, preferring to clamber adeptly around the reeds. I saw one swimming yesterday and it looked very ungainly. When running it looks insane and makes me think of an 'out of control' Volaceraptor. A similar but even more bizarre swamphen lives in South America, around lakes there.

### Feeding

Although swamphens may eat herbs, seeds, fruit, eggs, small vertebrates, and invertebrates (2) I have mainly seen them eating reeds. They bite reeds off at the base, hold it in their foot, and then eat the bases, in multiple bites.

### Breeding and life cycle

In the COG Annual Bird Report (3) it says they breed from Oct to Feb (3), while book 2 says it breeds all year, mainly Aug to Feb, although that is Australia-wide. I saw one on a nest yesterday (25<sup>th</sup> August) at Lake Ginninderra. I was really surprised to read that swamphens actually live in groups of 2-10, the dominant male mates more successfully and a number of females will lay in the same nest at the same time (2). All incubate but the dominant birds, the most. A nursery nest is also used, where the chicks roost, and are led out to forage, often by subordinate adults (2). This really surprised me as I thought they lived in pairs.



Photo © Bar

### References

1 Slater, P., Slater, P. and Slater, R (1996) *The Slater field guide to Australian Birds*, Lansdowne, Sydney.  
2 Readers Digest (1986) *Readers Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds*. Readers Digest, Sydney.

3 COG (2007) *Annual Bird Report: 1 July 2005 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2006*. Canberra Bird Notes, COG. Canberra.

### Errata

'Benj would like to point out an error in his article on Hardenbergia, last month. The flowering time for this species is meant to be late Winter to early Spring.'

*Our baby magpies will have the cosiest nest in Canberra! It's nest-building time and this magpie has just gathered a beakful of beautifully carded fleece for lining the nest. She returned several times for more.*  
Maureen Bell



### NATURE

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Ciao  
Moz  
(Maurits.Zwankhuizen)

## August outing Report - Weetangera cemetery

*Rosemary Blemings*

I thought I would try to record our unusual Field Trip on Sunday 12th by these two acrostics based on the amazing CATERPILLARS which gave us a 'guard of honour' on the short walk from cars to cemetery.

**C Cemeteries** around our region are often hotspots for biodiversity, revealing in their remnants, the floral & faunal treasures we have lost through farming and building...but not, alas, this one. It's been a sheep-paddock for so long that seedlings and saplings have been eaten well before they could contribute to the groundcover, shrub-layer or new woodland. A few wisps of *Microlaena* could be seen growing from palatable tussocks. 'Thick scrub and heavy timber' was felled to prepare the 2 acre site.

**A Application** was made to the NSW Government of the day for a site for a church and cemetery because Parkwood church, dating from 1865, was 5 miles away from Weetangera. Two acres were approved and dedicated in 1873. There are 23 marked graves, 12 of which belong to the Southwell family. The headstones of Thomas and Eliza Southwell have recently been painstakingly restored. CVA volunteers have also worked at the cemetery to 'clear it up'... perhaps the most recent of sporadic attempts to care for the place in the last 50 years.

**T Traffic** raced past on William Hovell Drive at 80kms. Only a minute proportion of drivers would know of the cemetery's existence. It's probably just as well as the little site has received its share of vandalism and trashing over the last 50 years.

**E Eeriness?** Passing through an arch of hardy, 'ancient' conifers planted beside the cemetery's gateposts there was a pause as male and female cones were examined on the separate trees. As an entrance-effect it's not unlike those used in Narnia-like fantasies. It's certainly a different world beyond these iconic trees. Just inside the cemetery is a cairn which used to have a brass plaque commemorating the church.

**R Revelations** from research were a highlight recalling the teamsters' weeks-long hauls to and from Sydney with bullock drays and on roads we can't comprehend.

Both Hall and Bungendore were significant centres in earlier times. The Schumack's Weetangera property was where the suburb and Cook are now.

**P Pillar** of the Weetangera Methodist Church, Sidney William Kilby, is buried beneath the first grave we reached. He began his association with the church as a child. Then in the 1880's money was raised to repair the building and Sidney worked as a volunteer. He was important to the church for 60 years leading the singing there for much of that time. Kilby Park is a property near Parkwood that remains in 'family hands'. ABC radio's David Kilby is a descendant of this family.

**I Ingenuity** played a huge part in the lives of settlers. The Eucalypt slabs of an unused church from near the end of the present Ginninderra Drive were numbered before being 'carted in one day' to be reassembled as Weetangera's first church in the 1870's. The 20 feet by 12 feet building had Stringybark rafters, floor joists and roof. The roof was later replaced by galvanised iron which went, with floorboards, windows, doors and roofing timbers, to be used in a new church being built in Queanbeyan.

**L Lyall Gillespie** includes much detail of the pioneering Southwell family in his 1988 book *The Southwell Family...* Samuel Shumack wrote *...Tales and legends of Canberra pioneers* in 1967. Lyall refers to Weetangera as a name derived from Wittanjirra and mentions that General Legge found a stone axe-head at Weetangera in *Aborigines of the Canberra Region* of 1984.

**L Luck** was out to some extent because Benj planned the trip's timing hoping we'd see a mass, pre-dusk assemblage of Sulphur Crested Cockatoos. Many were around, foraging in Land's End's paddocks and drinking at the dam, but not the hundreds he'd seen on other occasions. One of the SCC did have plumage with a blush of pink, however.

**A Another** future for Weetangera Cemetery is possible, perhaps, if we could implement a wish we might have made. Would that funds could be made available to the lessee to spare the cemetery from grazing, to try revegetating with local forbs and grasses and to care for this European-heritage-area with the same blend of attention that Hall cemetery receives.

**R Raptors** were represented by a Brown Goshawk which upset some of the Cockatoos. A fox was sighted in the adjoining paddock and a Kookaburra in the remnant 'woodland' to the west of the cemetery. Was death itself a predator of the fledgling communities? The graves and historic accounts introduce harrowing stories of loss, accidents, house-fires, premature death in the face of harsher times, lack of medical knowledge and help. Yet, contrasting with the deaths of infants and children, many of the headstones record long lives.

**S Sussex** was the southern English county from which Thomas and Eliza Southwell emigrated in 1838. From Camden they moved to Palmerville which was where Giralang meets Ginninderra Creek in modern Belconnen. Eliza died after the birth of her ninth child, Mary Ann took over the running of the household, aged 15. Thomas married Mary Croxton and they, initially, had a house of slabs and bark roof on the property he called Parkwood in 1854. Thomas was one of the early teamsters as well as running the 'largely self-sufficient' property with his children's help. There were at least 20 children in Thomas' family eventually.

## Book review - *Wild Solutions* Rosemary Blemings

This unprepossessing book may be of interest to other FNAC members. I came upon it by chance at the library..

Beattie, Andrew & Erlich, Paul *Wild Solutions* Melbourne University Press, 2001.

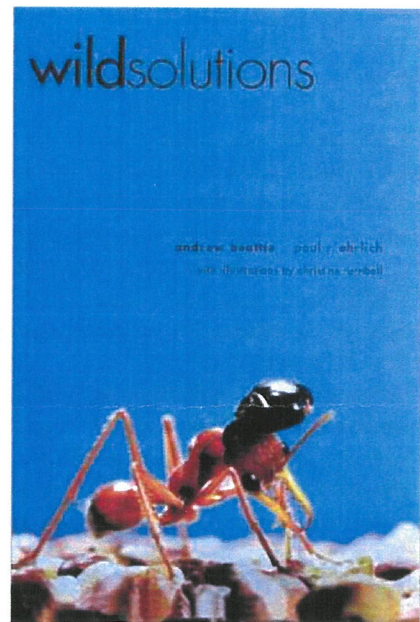
In *Wild Solutions* Beattie and Ehrlich discuss the benefits of hundreds of individual species of viruses, bacteria, fungi, roundworms, earthworms, amoeba-like animals, corals, rotifers, spiders, tardigrades crust, molluscs, insects, lichens, algae as well as vertebrates and flowering plants. These organisms illustrate the extraordinary diversity within ecosystems and reveal the significance of 'ecosystem services' that support life on earth, usually in an unobtrusive way.

Examples are also given to show how industrial innovations, chemical applications and countless therapeutic discoveries have emerged as a result of chance discovery, study, research into unexplored habitats and unknown species biochemistry.

The hope is that the destruction of biodiversity can be halted in time for future invaluable relationships to be discovered and for the biological wealth of the Earth to be valued, appreciated and protected.

The illustrations by Christine Turnbull are line drawings of scientific precision and bring an attention-demanding element of mystique to the text.

The cover illustrates an ant clutching a victim ant's head. Field naturalists will be reassured by knowing something of ants' behaviour readably presented afresh by two exemplary biologists.



### Australian Naturalists' Network 5th Get together 10-18 May 2008 Northern Territory

The Northern Territory Field Naturalists Club Inc. (NTFNC) cordially invites naturalists to participate in the fifth ANN Get-Together, which will be held in the Mary River region of the Top End, Northern Territory.

The Mary River region has an abundance of wildlife and a diversity of landscapes. It is situated about half way between Darwin and Jabiru (Kakadu National Park). During the course of the week, the NTFNC will be organising (these are included in fees):

- Evening entertainment, in the form of presentations from Top End naturalists/scientists or movies/DVDs.
- A group dinner/BBQ
- Seven one-day trips with leaders/guides and transport provided (day trips are anticipated to cover the area bounded by Fogg Dam/Territory Wildlife Park to the west, Point Stuart to the north, and the northern section of Kakadu National Park to the east). Exact locations will depend on weather and road conditions at the time. These will include:
  - o An indigenous cultural experience
  - o Wetland cruise
  - o Visit to Territory Wildlife Park
  - o Visit to rock art sites

A more detailed program will be supplied towards the end of 2007 to those who have returned an Expression of Interest (EOI) form and deposit. On the basis of previous ANN Get-Togethers, it is expected that interest in the event will exceed the number of places available (maximum 90). In order to reserve a place the EOI and deposit of \$200 should be sent to the NTFNC club ASAP, and no later than 1<sup>st</sup> October 2007. The total cost of activities for the week being organized by the NTFNC is not expected to exceed \$1000 (and may be as low as \$850). A final account for each participant will be forwarded in October, with payment of the balance being due on 15<sup>th</sup> December. Fees payable to the NTFNC **will not** cover the cost of food or accommodation. **You must book your accommodation and arrange food independently of the NTFNC.**

**For full details see:** <http://www.geocities.com/ntfieldnaturalists/ann2008firstnotice.pdf>

## 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 4<sup>th</sup> October, 2007 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 24. 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 \_\_\_\_\_

### BLOCK LETTERS

A member of the Field Naturalists Association of Canberra Inc

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

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

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

Name of Sec-  
order \_\_\_\_\_

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

### Acceptance of Nomination

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

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

### Letter to the editor

#### PRUDENT PLANNING FOR OUR CLUB'S FUTURE

- Philip Bell

I put a proposal in the context of BOZO's support for our club in providing our meeting venue for free now for over 20 years. In recognition, we donate an annual prize for BOZO's most promising second year natural history student. The \$150 prize money is but a tiny fraction of our club's savings with our free venue. We all hope that our BOZO hosting will continue indefinitely.

My proposal is to strengthen our relationship with BOZO by ensuring we can afford a more valuable prize over the long term. This can be achieved by allocating to the annual prize the earnings of our club's accumulated savings of \$10,000 in fixed deposit. This will take the prize "off budget" for the club.

But savings kept in fixed deposit over time are ravaged by inflation, both capital and earnings in today's dollars. The prize's value can be protected by investing our nest egg more prudently. Following conservative ACT Public Trustee guidelines we should invest in real assets in a diversified managed fund. Both our capital and its earnings will grow to outstrip inflation.

For more information and Public Trustee investment guidelines - Google the FNAC googlepages web page: <http://fnac.net.googlepages.com/home> (not to be confused with our main web page which lists current club activities:

<http://www.geocities.com/fieldnaturalist/> )

Inquiries welcome, tel 62515837 or philip.bell@gmail.com



**Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra**

**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:** Benj Whitworth, tel w 6272 3192 h 62544556

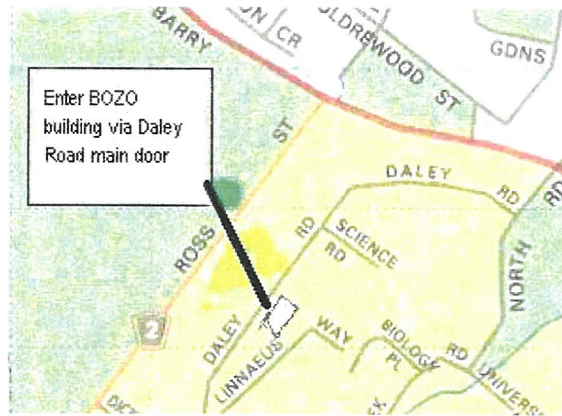
**Secretary:** Rosemary Blemings, tel 02 6258 4724

**Website:** [www.geocities.com/fieldnaturalist/index.html](http://www.geocities.com/fieldnaturalist/index.html)

**Newsletter editor:** Chris Bunn <chris\_b@webone.com.au

Tel 02 6241 2968. Member contributions welcome.

Published and distributed by Philip Bell



**Monthly meeting venue:** Division of Botany and Zoology, Building 116, Daley Rd, Australian National University, Park (occasionally the adjacent building 44). Meetings start at 8 pm and are followed by refreshments.

**FIELD NATURALISTS ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA INC.**

GPO Box 249  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

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**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 \$20) Donation: \$.....

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

