

September 2017
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GPO BOX 249
CANBERRA ACT 2601

FIELD NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA INC.

FIELD NATURALIST

MEETING—THURSDAY

7:30 pm Australian National University
Gould Seminar Room, Building 116, Daley Road, ANU, ACT
details back page

Organic/non-industrial farming

Speaker: Martin Royds

Located near Braidwood NSW, Martin Royds 450 ha farm (named Jillamatong after the local mountain) is home to a holistically managed cattle grazing enterprise and other cottage industries (truffles, yabbies, garlic, and native grass seeds).

The pastures are carefully managed to build healthy soil and contain many different plants so that the cattle can select exactly the plants they need to eat. The cattle are moved every few days to fresh pasture and are provided with a free choice supplement bar so that they can freely select additional trace minerals or other nutrients. This frequent, gentle handling means that the animals are used to being moved around by people and so they don't become significantly stressed when the time comes to leave the property.



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President's report Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra Inc. 2016-2017

In 2016–2017 we continued our system of having four Vice Presidents, four people rotating the responsibility of chairing the monthly meetings at the ANU. The aim of spreading the load and stresses round the group has been a success thanks to the commitment of all members.

Our monthly meetings have presented new information, challenging ideas, brilliant images and emissions-free journeys to members and visitors:

- Suzi Bond showed her explorations for the first book on locally seen butterflies.
- Bryan Lessard re-enthused us about entomology and the importance of flies.
- Matthew Higgins gave insights into the Mt Ainslie Rosenberg's monitors.
- Brian Hawkins revealed inspiring stories of species discovery by Bush Blitz.
- We look forward to two presentations on Australian farming and one on local wildflowers.
- Undaunted by presenting to fellow members:
 - Glenn Cocking explored his passion for moths by describing local favourites and bringing specimens from his collection.
 - Erin Walsh traced the history of scientific illustration linking her professional work in interpreting science to her creativity of drawing and painting animals in nature.

Glenn and Erin each created great conviviality by providing regalia for us to admire and to contemplate after their presentations.

Outings

We held a meander around the ANBG in February. Sharing our observations and knowledge but very glad to have Cecilia as an interpreter as she is an ANBG guide as well as being a FNAC member.

More recently Cecilia again lead a walk as we tried out the ANBG's Bushland Walk into the habitats of Black Mountain as seen from the southern and lakeside slopes.

Jenni is offering another Spotlight Walk on Mt Majura. Sugar Gliders were the focus last time though never separated from the numerous other nocturnal natural history wonders.

Two of us had a wander around West Belconnen Ponds in Dunlop. We saw numerous waterbirds, broad rural views, vistas to the ranges in the west

and Ginninderra Creek a kilometre away. FNAC shared a memorable walk on The Pinnacle visiting amazing wildflowers in the Kama 'offset'.

In the *Field Natter* we've promoted other groups' outings and regular public presentations hosted by the Conservation Council at the Sustainability Hub in Turner.

There is a need for a members' sub-group to organise regular outings for FNAC or to build sharing outings-networks with other groups

Your committee members have fitted FNAC into their busy lives:

Rosemary vB has literally been our key to entry to Building 116 and has ensured that the computer technology is ready to cooperate for presenters. She has also written up and circulated Minutes in a concise and timely manner.

Kevin and Margaret have each chaired meetings allowing the Rosemarys to enjoy listening and learning. Dierk has kept us in touch with other organisations' activities and events and kept 'the kettle on' when Shirley and Warwick were away from providing delicious suppers that encourage conviviality.

Bob Lehman has sent the necessary documentation to the authorities as Public Officer but, more obviously, has continued to refine his very sound system of managing FNAC's finances. This includes championing the FNAC Conservation Support Fund that allows for the accumulation of members' donations towards specific natural history projects. Thank you to all members who contribute to this fund. Thank you Treasurer Bob!

Committee members have taken it in turn to host our enjoyable and productive meetings. Lucy has brought her passion for and observations of nature to meetings and to these discussions. She has actively sought out speakers and made research and other connections to other organisations on FNAC's behalf. Lucy's currently pursuing the issue of yabby nets, the design of which traps and kills platypus.

Rhian has pursued her passion for the communicating of natural wonders by researching children's books that connect children with the natural history and species that surround us. FNAC will offer the Bettong Prize for the creation of a Children's book in our region later this year with more details given in the July *Field Natter*.

AGM President's report

Bill and Vicky have joined Lucy and Rhian in showing FNAC how re-energising it is to have newer members in the group. They've all contributed their observations, brought their life-experiences and spread invigorating messages about natural history to and from their networks. George regularly provides insightful comments and anecdotes from his long involvement in mammalian research and through links, shared with Kevin and Sonja, to our region's National Parks Association.

Adrienne has ensured that our libraries are up to date by bringing NPA-published books to meetings. Pam contributes to the finances of FNAC by steadfastly organising the informal and best-odds-in-town-raffle at each meeting.

Alison brings all of this together by expertly editing the monthly *Field Natter*. Bob circulates the newsletter by email and Rosemary B mails out the copies collected from Instant Colour Press in Belconnen. Alison has drawn her keen observation skills, her passion for photography and her innate curiosity together into countless stimulating

articles in editions of the *Field Natter*. I'm not alone in thoroughly enjoying the emailed colour copies but also love having the black and white hard-copy in hand to refer to each month.

The Field Naturalists' website has not moved far despite the help of Darryl Seto. I've not given sufficient time to bringing our ideas together onto the site.

The ANU's Field Naturalists' Prize of \$300 is awarded annually. The awards ceremony was on 28 July. This year's Field Naturalists' Prize winner is Callum Bryant. We look forward to meeting Callum when he accepts his prize at a future meeting.

Thanks to our members for supporting our efforts. There have always been insightful questions for our speakers at the end of or during their presentations. These questions and comments confirm that presentations are greatly appreciated by Field Natters who retain their sense of wonder at nature and the curiosity to continue learning and sharing.

**Rosemary Blemings (nominal) President
July 2017**

Backyard observations



This cockatoo came to visit my bird feeder but appears to have a huge hole in its chest. Observed a few days later the wound seems to be healing.



I was amazed that on close inspection of this cockie's photo it had a hole in the back of its tongue.



A tribe of about 36 (non-breeding) magpies moved into the neighbourhood about 12 months ago. These two are part of that tribe. Perhaps they are now trying to determine breeding partners.



Call for ban on enclosed yabby traps

Enclosed yabby nets kill platypuses, turtles and water rats

The Conservation Council ACT Region and FNAC recently co-signed a letter to two NSW Ministers (Primary Industries and the Environment). We expressed support for a ban on possession and usage of opera house style yabby nets. The text of the letter and accompanying photos are below.

The Hon. Niall Mark Blair, MLC
Minister for Primary Industries
Minister for Regional Water
Minister for Trade and Industry

Dear Minister

The Field Naturalists Association of Canberra (FNAC) and the ACT Conservation Council support a ban on possession and usage of opera house nets and other enclosed yabby traps in both public and private situations. This would enhance the good work you and your department are putting in to improving local fish habitats in freshwater and saltwater areas across NSW.

Platypuses, water rats and turtles drown in the opera house traps because they can't escape. The traps are one of the major threats to platypuses. Once a platypus enters the trap, death is certain.

The platypus is now a near threatened species according to the global authority, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The IUCN notes that a detailed and

systematic assessment undertaken in NSW in 2006, based on community knowledge, concluded that there had been no sharp overall decline, but there were more locations showing decline than increase. Given the low numbers of platypus there have been reports that there have been local declines or even disappearances.

It is also an iconic animal for both NSW and Australia and is protected under legislation.

The opera house traps are imported and sold in Australia for as little as \$5. Holiday-makers use them in rivers and creeks in summer. This is when the platypus young are still dependent on their mother for her milk, and so if a mother enters the trap, her young die as well.

These traps are also used by people in waterways in urban fringe areas.

About 100,000 traps are sold annually, which indicates the scale of the problem. As well, people lose or abandon the traps and so they continue to be 'killing machines' until they are pulled out of the water, if ever.

This means that when a ban comes into place, there will be a significant lag time before this style of net is no longer a threat. The sooner the ban therefore, the better.

As you would be aware, alternative traps to catch yabbies are available for recreational fishers.

NSW is a very important state with regard to its protection of its flora and fauna. Not only is NSW a leader in this area but it also has potential to impact on its near neighbours, particularly



the ACT. If NSW takes action then it supports measures taken in other places to protect this iconic species.

We seek your support for a ban on possession and usage of opera house nets and other enclosed yabby traps in both public and private situations.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter and we look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Lucy Bastecky, Committee Member
of the FNAC

Larry O'Loughlin, Executive Director,
Conservation Council ACT Region

Myths about platypus deaths in yabby traps – the facts

The ongoing issue of wildlife deaths in enclosed yabby traps (such as opera house traps) has led to a lot of community debate and discussion. In hopes of reducing confusion, we'd like to try to clarify the facts surrounding ten common myths about opera house traps.

MYTH 1. There's no real problem – it's all been made up by anti-fishing activists and greenies.

Unfortunately this problem is a very real one. Numerous respon-

sible persons have reported finding dead platypus, Australian water-rats/rakali or turtles in enclosed yabby traps. In many cases, these incidents have been documented photographically. The peak representative organisations for recreational anglers in Victoria (VRFish) and NSW (Recreational Fishing Association of NSW) both believe that a problem exists and officially support a total ban on use of opera house traps.

MYTH 2. If a platypus can get into a trap, it must be able to get out again.

Research by the APC has shown that a platypus consistently tries to escape from an opera house trap by searching for an opening in the trap's outer surface. It doesn't look for an exit in the middle of a trap (where the exits are effectively located at the end of inward-pointing funnels) and so doesn't have any realistic

chance of escaping from an opera house trap before drowning (in less than 3 minutes).

MYTH 3. Very few platypus are killed each year – it's no big deal.

Since 2010, 40% of all platypus mortality records reported to the APC have been animals found dead in opera house traps (or home-made versions). In Victoria alone, 11 platypus have been found dead in traps from January to August 2017. The true death toll will of course be much higher, given that most trap-related deaths are (for obvious reasons) never reported.

Similarly, recent community-based studies in Western Australia and Victoria both found that well over 40% of water-rat/rakali mortality records were animals found dead in yabby traps.

MYTH 4. Yabby trapping has been going on for a long time and it's not getting any worse

Opera house traps have emerged as a major new threat over the past decade or so due to a massive increase in sales of very cheap traps that are imported from overseas. Industry sources indicate that up to 100,000 new opera house traps are sold each year, meaning that huge numbers are now being deployed, both legally and illegally, across Australia.

MYTH 5. Current fishing regulations protect the platypus

Fishing regulations generally restrict the use of enclosed yabby traps to private waters where platypus are not expected to occur, such as farm dams. However, this doesn't protect the animals because huge numbers of traps are set illegally in platypus waters mainly because of ignorance of the rules. It's also worth noting that current fishing regulations allow legal usage in places where other air-breathing animals (such as freshwater turtles and water-

rats/rakali) can drown in yabby traps.

MYTH 6. Platypus only occur in running water, so there's no risk when traps are set in dams or lakes.

Platypus make use of a wide range of lakes, ponds and dams. The deaths of 5 platypus in the Labertouche Creek system near Melbourne in May actually occurred in a farm dam that was connected to the creek.

MYTH 7. Opera house traps that have a ring fitted around the entrance are safe for platypus.

Most opera house traps now have metal rings (typically measuring 7.5 to 10 cm in diameter) fitted around their entrance – unlike older versions that had a flexible cord around the entrance. However, the size of these rings still allows a platypus to enter (see Myth 8), so the rigid ring doesn't make the trap platypus-safe.

MYTH 8. Platypus can be kept out of traps by making the entrance holes smaller.

A platypus's streamlined shape means that it is very good at getting through small openings. Research has shown that adult females weighing up to about 1 kilogram can move through a rigid 55-millimetre square grid (equating to a 7-centimetre ring in terms of perimeter). Much smaller grids or rings are needed to reliably keep out juvenile platypus, (which can weigh as little as 300–400 grams). It's hard to see how a trap can be designed that will both reliably exclude platypus and still encourage large yabbies to enter. This will be particularly difficult to achieve in Queensland, where red-claw yabbies can grow up to a whopping 600 grams and often achieve weights of 300 grams.

MYTH 9. Traps can be made safe by putting a hole in the roof so wildlife can escape

Well, yes... and no. Extensive research by the APC in Victoria and Dr Tom Grant in NSW has shown that inserting an escape hatch in the roof of an opera house trap does result in a safer trap. However, the findings also indicate that a percentage of the platypus entering modified traps are still likely to drown because they fail to find the exit in time. So, while traps fitted with an escape hatch are less dangerous for wildlife than the current design, it's wrong to conclude that modified traps are 100% platypus-friendly.

MYTH 10. The opera house trap problem can be solved through public education

Well, yes... and no. Trap-related deaths could undoubtedly be reduced through better public awareness of the risk that enclosed yabby traps pose to wildlife, along with better knowledge about where traps can and can't be legally set. It would also be a big help if the relevant rules in different states and territories could be brought into line with each other. At the same time, it's important to recognise that community education is never going to be a complete solution. Some persons (such as children) may not even know that fishing regulations apply, other persons may have heard about the issue but fail to understand the practical detail, and still others may choose to always put their own interests above those of wildlife.

We conclude that banning use of opera house traps (and other enclosed designs) is by far the best option to protect wildlife, especially as safe and perfectly workable alternatives (such as folding or fixed-wall lift nets) are available to catch yabbies.

Australian Platypus Conservancy
Email: platypus.apc@westnet.com.au

Breeding season and other observations

Spring is in the air and with it the inclination for birds to begin their breeding season. Now with more time at hand I have been out and about and discovered two nesting swans; a possible robin nest and a possible thornbill nest. The robin and thornbill nests are both at the Pinnacle Nature Reserve and very close to each other.

- I observed a female Scarlet robin with twigs in her beak, continuously visiting a tree hollow; but not seen on subsequent visits so may be a practice nest;



off with his beak firmly against my camera lens;



- on my way to Jerrabomberra Wetlands I watched a swan at the Kingston Foreshore, plucking reeds and throwing them behind her, then climb onto her mound and pull the plucked reeds up to her mound;

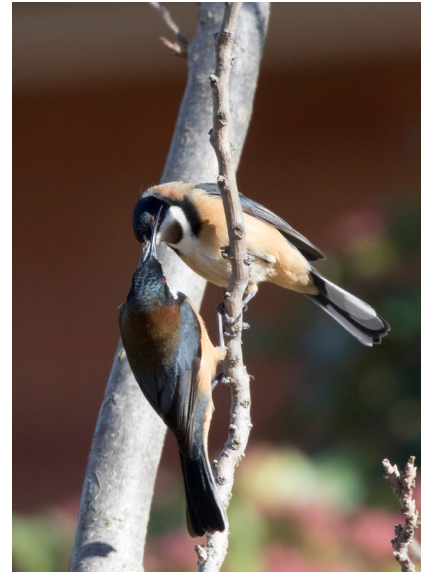


- on another visit I watched a yellow-rumped thornbill enter a tree hollow (I'm not sure if they nest in hollows, but it was there for quite a while.);
- at Yerrabie Pond in Gungahlin I found a nesting swan. The male came up on shore and watched me till I realised there was a nest and started to leave. He saw me

- closer to home, I have three Eastern Spinebills flitting about. I was lucky enough to get a series of photos of two males in the midst of a beak contest.

Other observations

I have already included a previous report on the cockie with the hole in its chest and the fighting magpies.



In addition, my camera club had an excursion to Shepherds Lookout followed by coffee at Strathnairn.

Just at the gate to Strathnairn we spotted an echidna. Being photographers all 14 of us got out our cameras. This little fellow was not fazed in the least and wandered right up to us within touching distance.



Alison Milton

You never know...

You just never know what you'll find in suburbia: *Solenogyne dominii* on a Charnwood nature strip opposite my normal bus stop in Flynn. I first came across clusters of these Asteraceae on Mt Rogers near a well worn track through grassy woodland 'after the drought broke'. They still persist there but, as on the nature strip, the rosettes are easily confused with Flatweed rosettes until the latter gain height. Note the rounded serrations on the leaf edges as another difference in case you've time to find these odd little 'daisies' near you.

Rosemary Blemings



Activities

There are NO FNAC activities scheduled. As Rosemary mentioned in her President's report, we need volunteers as leaders or suggestions for excursions. Please consider what you can do or suggest as an outing and contact Rosemary Blemings. We need your support to keep these outings happening.

The following are outings that may interest you but are not FNAC excursions.

7 October 2017: Walk the Border, ACT – A Watershed Walk

Walk the Border is a new event, which will be both an historic event and assist as a fund-raiser. The ACT's border is 306 kms long and crosses a variety of the ACT's ecosystems, from ones that are nationally threatened to ones that have been severely modified since European settlement.

The walk is being led by Conservation Council president, Rod Griffiths, who will be joined by a range of other fund-raisers, who can join the walk for part of a stage or any number of stages.

The walk is planned to take 21 days commencing on 7 October 2017 from Hall, following the border in a clockwise direction. The route will take in some of the ACT's roughest and most beautiful country and the source of the ACT's water supply. Yet many of the stages will involve easy and accessible components allowing for varied involvement by participants.

The walk will be exciting, challenging, and will allow those participating to experience parts of the ACT less travelled, and for the wider community to gain a better understanding of the heritage and environmental diversity of the ACT.

Contact info@conservationcouncil.org.au for more information or if you would like to help.

14 October; 9:30 am to 12 noon: Early morning ramble: 46th Black Mountain spring wildflower ramble

Meet at Belconnen Way entry just before Caswell Drive turnoff - watch for balloons. 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. BYO morning tea, water, hat, sunblock and stout shoes. **BOOKING ESSENTIAL** to ensure we have enough guides. Contact friendsofblackmountain@gmail.com or Libby Viccars 02 6296 1936.

Environment exchanges 2017

Environment Exchange events are held monthly to provide for informed, in-depth discussions on environmental issues in the region. Member groups are encouraged to attend and to publicise the events to their members and supporters. The Conservation Council 'Environment Exchange' series is held at the Renewable Energy Hub, 19–23 Moore Street, Turner (just off Barry Drive). All events are scheduled from 12–2:00 pm starting with a light lunch (donations welcome). Proceedings commence after people have gathered some food and we try to finish just after 1.30 pm but allow time for people to continue to mingle. We have moved the events to Tuesdays rather than Thursdays and have adjusted for public holidays.

The next events in our series are:

- **Tuesday 26 September:** Special event — Ben Ponton, Director-General, Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate to speak to us on environment, planning, sustainable development issues in the ACT **BOOK NOW**.
- **Tuesday 31 October:** Biodiversity Offsets – are they working in the ACT? **BOOK NOW**

Month	Speaker	Topic
7 September	Martin Royds	Organic/non-industrial farming
5 October	Alex James and Jennie Curtis	Small Farms network
2 November	Meredith Cosgrove	Photographic guide to ACT native plants
7 December		Xmas party



Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra Inc.

Who are the Field Naturalists?

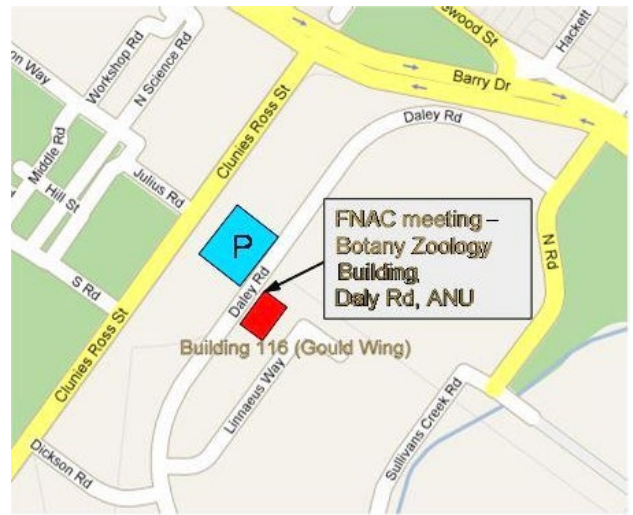
The Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra (FNAC) was formed in 1981. Our aim is to foster interest in natural history by means of meetings and regular field outings. Meetings are usually held on the first Thursday of each month. Outings range from weekend rambles to long weekends away. Activities 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

Email: fieldnaturalist@yahoo.com.au

Website: under construction

Editor: Alison Milton All newsletter contributions welcome. **Email:** apm56@optusnet.com.au



Monthly meeting venue: Division of Botany and Zoology, Building 116, Daley Road, Australian National University. (The Xmas meeting is at the adjacent building 44 and will start at the earlier time of 6:30 pm.)

Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra
GPO Box 249
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: