

OBJECT: To foster an interest in nature

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FIELD NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA INC. GPO BOX 708
JAMISON CENTRE ACT 2614

FIELD NATTER

September 2022 newsletter No monthly meetings until further notice



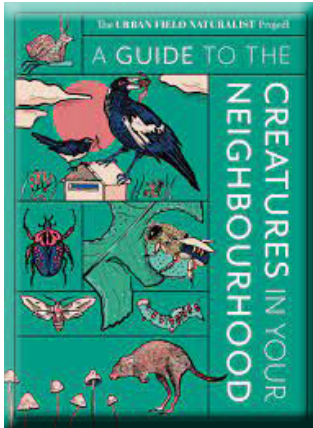
Satin Bowerbird enjoying a bath

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Field Naturalists visit The Pinnacle

As Field Natters arrived at Dungowan Street for our walk through The Pinnacle Nature Reserve, I showed my copy of *A Guide to the creatures in your neighbourhood* just published by *The Urban Field Naturalist Project*.



The 270 page book is complementary to an exciting online collaboration of the same name, and ...is dedicated to helping people notice and appreciate wildlife in urban environments.

As we moved slowly through The Pinnacle Reserve, we found ourselves living the realities of field-natting and, through our shared stories, re-creating the joys presented by nature even on a windy, wintry but sunny day walking along well-watered access tracks and among vegetation celebrating La Nina hydrated soils.

Between us we were prepared, in the naturalist tradition, with field guides, binoculars, frog and bird apps, a range of outdoor experiences and were dressed and shod for the expected weather. We brought curiosity, knowledge, appreciation of other species to combine with the book's suggested naturalist's methodology:

slow down, observe, record, ask questions, share.

The northern edge of The Pinnacle, mostly sclerophyll forest, is an urban interface with,

mostly large, Hawker homes and their gardens.

A dollop of bird poo observed on the track revealed that the donor had eaten Cotoneaster berries, but how far do Currawongs or Silver-eyes fly after eating their meals of berries in suburban gardens?

Before the Friends of the Pinnacle began to restore the reserve there were hundreds of berried weeds and thousands of thistles taking space, soil nutrients and rainfall from the native species.



Although in winter mode, each storey showed the enormous efforts of the Parkcare volunteers who have brought the reserve back to its potential over the past 10 years. The Friends of the Pinnacle's website www.fotpin.org.au is rich with details of the reserve's species including their systematically documented weed management program. We were constantly impressed with the results as we walked through Stringybark Forest, open grassed areas, boulder fields, past gullies up to and south-west down from the Pinnacle's 704 m summit.

The 360° views give an inspiring perspective to the reserve as part of the ACT's hills and ridges; spaces that became Canberra Nature Park.



The Pinnacle's views to the south are impacted by Whitlam and Denman Prospect as new suburbs seen on agricultural land and the once pine-forested space to the east of Bluetts Block, (which FNAC visited on 18 February 2022).

For some of us our walk lasted over three hours defining what it is to be Field Naturalists according to the book and our own lives.

We slowed down to savour each moment of being immersed in nature.

We observed, in the *Eucalyptus macrorhyncha* forest, thickets of *Bursaria* and *Cassinia* grown rangy and tall since the last hazard reduction burn and the two La Nina years. Cassinias are vital to insects and the birds that forage for them.

Leafless Indigo, *Indigofera adesmiifolia* plants are a common feature of the forest edge. Deeper in and in other sections of the reserve, *Indigofera australis* is more common and will flower purple soon.

The shrubs partly hide the newer bush paths made or adapted from roos' cross-country trails which lead to patches of orchids.

The bark of many Stringybarks showed scratch marks especially around holes, fissures and hollows where claws helped possums, gliders and possibly bats with numerous journeys to and from their homes.

Everlasting daisies, *Xerochrysum viscosum*, have extended their range. A few flowers still showed the yellow bracts that attract pollinators.



The summit's Stringybark icon has succumbed to a fickle south easterly wind during that last January hail storm. We'd observed several other trees felled in a tornado-like line, the dead leaves on their crowns facing NNW.

The Cypress Pines and Cherry Ballart are two other fascinating and evergreen trees that stand out among the eucalypt varieties. The latter is a saprophytic species producing berries whereas the *Callitris* pines are regularly checked by Yellow-Tailed Black Cockatoos for the edibility of their cones.

The *Kurrajong* saplings around several eucalypts showed how birds effect the successful distribution of seeds and the juveniles' intriguing leaf form diversity.

The pale purple flowers of a *Hovea heterophylla* caught the sunlight but there wasn't even a sign of *Swainsona sericea* leaves on the other side of the forest track.

A mixed feeding flock of small birds caught our attention, with a White-Throated Treecreeper the catalyst for John's investigations as we neared the cars. Another walker said she'd seen Double-Barred Finches.

We asked questions

Our curious brains were challenged to identify Eucalypts and Acacias in the reserve's east as there were public planting events in the 1980s–early 90s before local provenance was deemed necessary and on what was by then cleared and over-grazed land.

Species lists on The Pinnacle's website might help identify the reserve's eucalypts.

Why are wallabies usually solitary compared with kangaroos' familiar mobs?

Who ate the *Brachychiton* seeds from their boat-shaped pods? Where are the parent plants?

There are many more Kurrajongs in the reserve now than 10 years ago.

What was the fenced enclosure for? It was part of an experiment about treatment for restoring Native Grassland.

Later arrivals into the ACT's avifauna were discussed: Galahs, Crested Pigeons, Rainbow Lorikeets, Corellas and Koels. Steve Wilson's book, *Birds of the ACT: Two centuries of change*, uses historical records to document and explain the changes.

An old Common Myna research nest box led to the story of Roger the rotund possum (see elsewhere in Field Natter).

The preference for *Bursaria* shown by Copper and Skipper butterflies was recalled.

The 'Dungowan tree' gave us an opportunity to easily see Mistletoe flowers. It's a magnificent Eucalypt that always has birds in it, but it lost several branches also in the last hail storm.

The 'Dungowan tree' hasn't been given a species name but is thought to be over 200 years of age.

Stringybark Eucalypts were a source of vital materials for settlers' first huts, houses and walls and roofing. One old tree had been ring-barked by hungry or trace-element-starved horses when the Kama paddocks were over-grazed decades ago.

The powerful calls of a Grey Butcherbird generated memories of the species. The quieter, Miss Piggy and Cappuccino Pardalote calls began discussions of how to link birds' calls to their callers.

The Lower Molonglo Gorge's distant cliffs reminded us of the river's erosive power over millions of years, carving a way to its confluence with the Murrumbidgee River in the west. There were discussions about the cliffs and shared knowledge

unravelling the complexities of the ACT region's geology as we encountered several significant and beautiful rocky outcrops.

A secretive Wallaby was admired but quite hard to see.

We discussed the new suburbs' impact on wildlife habitats when dismayed by the reserve's development-impacted views.

We recorded our impressions and our experiences.

The moisture stimulated colours of multiple lichen and moss species on and among boulders and rocks were recorded by the photographers among us.

Many photos were taken. They will jog our memories and lead to comparisons for those who were revisiting.

John has also contributed some photos. Each tells stories and activates the memories of our 'day out'.



A guide to the creatures in your neighbourhood devotes many pages to how curious people do the nature journaling of their time in nature through a range of media. There's a collection of stories of their interactions with individual species and diverse habitats.

The book's authors conceived *The Urban Field Naturalist Project* explaining the benefits and realities of giving ourselves time to observe, ponder, learn and share the messages from nature that reach our senses.

There's more about the online project at:

<https://www.urbanfieldnaturalist.org/>

Rosemary Blemings

Changes mooted for the FieldNats website

We have been given a quote for hosting our website by BluePackets, a local ACT company who host the NPAACT website. Their price is \$132 per year incl GST.

Darryl has very generously offered to do the migration and recommended we take this opportunity to do a major upgrade of the software and re-design the site as part of this step.

The migration will not be a trivial step and Darryl will need suggestions from members as to what information they want to see there and how it should look and feel.

Volunteers required!!

If you would like give your ideas on a redesign or to be a part of a small consultative group please contact Kevin (mccue.kevin@gmail.com) with your ideas or interests.

Kevin McCue

Roger the Brushtail Possum

Some time ago I was given a bird nesting box by the ANU when a researcher was doing work on what birds inhabit urban areas. The deal was I could have the box for nothing provided once a month for two years I reported in on the occupants of the box.

The occupants were many and varied but sadly no native birds took up residence, although I had two lots of Common mynas, which were removed by the ANU for nothing; and a swarm of wild bees, which I had removed. However, the most interesting was the baby brush tail possum that I named Roger.



Roger was quite young and small when he first took up residence in the nest box and I would occasionally see him entering or leaving the box. He was a very well mannered possum and didn't have parties on my roof at night so I quite enjoyed having him around and made no effort to move him on.

However, in the fullness of time he did move on. He simply grew up and got too big and rotund to squeeze through the hole in the nest box – much and all as he tried. Eventually he had to admit defeat and find himself a new home.

Deidre Shaw

A tale of survival

I photographed a magpie in our yard a month ago and never expected to see it again because its lower beak is missing. However yesterday there it was again seemingly healthy and happy, with a glossy coat. Growing up as a kid in Canberra it is what we used to call a Black-backed Magpie. I surmise it is a male, the white nape feathers are very white. I have never seen this before and can't imagine how it lost its beak, let alone how it survives.



Kevin McCue

Activities

Tuesday 13 September – 10:00 am: Gossan Hill Nature Reserve and Flea Bog Flat, Bruce

Meet at the end of Clews Place (turn off Jaeger Circuit) in Bruce for an easy walk through the Gossan Hill Nature Reserve and optionally, the nearby Flea Bog Flat. The area is noted for its geological and cultural heritage and high plant diversity. We'll see evidence of the gossan (come along to find out what it is) and hopefully lots of flowering plants, birds and insects, and maybe even some early orchids. Please let Janet and John Stein know if you are intending to come so that we have an idea of numbers and can let you know of any last-minute changes. Email: JanetStein01@gmail.com.

Tuesday 4 October: private property at Wamboin

Jo Walker has invited us to explore her property at Wamboin, close to the ACT. More details on time and meeting place will be included in the next newsletter.

Month	Excursion	Leader
13 September	Suggestions please?	TBA
4 October	Jo Walker's property at Wamboin	Jo Walker
8 November	Suggestions?	Alison Milton
December	Suggestions?	
7 December	Xmas party – location suggestions?	

A recce of previously proposed Fetherstone Gardens and Naramag River Reserve indicated that there is not much of interest at either location at the moment.

Thank you to John and Janet for providing an excursion for September. Suggestions for November and December are welcome.

New observations

Winter did not seem so bad this year until the last couple of weeks. Nevertheless the insects became quite sparse, no doubt going into hibernation or simply waiting for the next stage of their metamorphosis.

I have often wondered about where beetles go during winter. Do they simply die and re-emerge as caterpillars? However, recently chasing a sighting of an Azure Kingfisher along Ginninderra creek near Charnwood, I didn't find the bird but decided to follow the creek back to Lake Ginninderra. This took me past the filtration ponds in Evatt where I found a pair of Eucalyptus beetles hibernating in the folds of a eucalyptus leaf. Not having my macro lens, I collected the branch to take home to photograph for Canberra Nature Map. Afterwards I taped the small branch to the eucalypt in my front yard, where I had found the same species of beetle. One beetle immediately took off up the branch, but the other stayed put in the seclusion of the folded leaf.

I have checked the leaf regularly since and the beetle is still resident and doesn't seem to have ever come out to eat during its seclusion.

With winter approaching its end, I'm seeing signs of the re-emergence of moths around my back porch

so perhaps the beetles in the nearby reserves will also start to soon re-emerge.

Moving away from insects, over the past few years I have seen the occasion Satin Bowerbird visit the birdbath in my back yard. Despite my neighbour saying she has regularly more than one, to date I have only seen the one, or so I thought.

This afternoon I looked out my study window to see a bowerbird on the bird bath but by the time I got my camera and went outside, it was just in time to see it fly into trees, that did not give a good camera view. I did see however, that it was a young male just beginning to develop the blue feathers down its chest.

A few moments later I noticed another bird at the birdbath and this one did not have the mottled featherage so was clearly a different bird.

I am now gathering blue trinkets to leave by the bird bath to see whether the developing male will be interested in collecting them to perhaps build a bower somewhere nearby.

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 I

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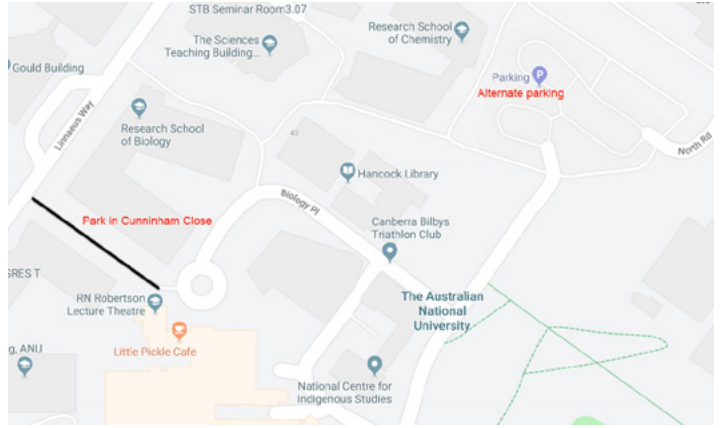
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Website: www.fieldnatsact.com

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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Membership application or renewal

Surname: First name:

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

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Postal address:

Suburb: State: Postcode:

Home phone: Work phone:

Email address:

How did you hear about FNAC? Please circle: Friend

Other Please specify:

Subscription (Single/Family \$25) Donation: \$.....

Subscription renewals are due on 1 July each year

Pay by post (include completed form)

Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra
GPO Box 708
Jamison Centre ACT 2614

Bank transfer (renewals only: form not needed)

Account name: Field Nats
BSB: 325 185
Account number: 03545251
Reference: **Please include your name**