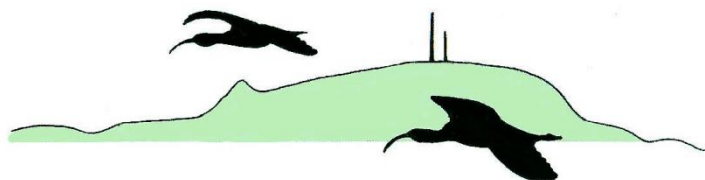


ORANGE FIELD NATURALIST AND CONSERVATION SOCIETY Inc



NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2017

NEXT MEETING

Thursday, 14th December, 7.00pm
TOPIC: Planning Meeting for 2018.
Please bring your ideas and contact details for speakers and excursions

VENUE: Orange Community Information and Services Centre.
(Next to Senior Citizens Centre. Enter from Woolworths carpark.).



XMAS PARTY

Sunday, 17th December
Joint Party with ECCO
Orange Mountain winery
Radnedge Lane, Borenore
5.30 pm to whenever

Bring something to cook on the BBQ or just come for drinks and nibbles
NB: you cannot bring alcohol (and you don't need to because you can purchase excellent wine from Orange Mountain winery).

Visit the OFNCS website at
<http://www.orangefieldnats.com/>

Last Meeting

Birding in South America with Murray and Vicki. Summary by the editor
All photos by Vicki Glover except where indicated.

We had never visited South America before so when the International Auchenorrhyncha Society selected Brazil as the location for its

triennial congress in 2017, Vicki got to work researching where else to go on the continent before we went to the Congress. A British company, Naturetrek, had a ten-day organised birding trip into the Brazilian Amazon and the Pantanal Wetlands and this sounded perfect. I was a little reticent about two Australians joining a group of what I presumed would be 8–12 avid British twitchers but, as it turned out, there were only four of us and one of the others was from Melbourne!

The first five days were at Cristalino Lodge in the upper parts of Matto Grosso state. Two flights, a long bus trip and 20 minutes in a boat got us there from Sao Paulo. The lodge itself was comfortable but, disappointingly, there was very little wildlife that visited the vicinity of the lodge. Our guide was also a bit remote although he clearly knew the local birds well. From the lodge, we travelled each day by boat early in the morning either to watch for birds and animals from the river or to access a walk in the forest. Here we saw our first Macaws, Toucans and Piping guans. We also saw a Brazilian tapir that chose to swim across the river while we were heading back to the lodge. We also saw a Southern Black Tamarin and Red-handed Howler monkeys which make an amazingly mournful distant chorus at 3am.



Female (left) and male Bare-faced Curassow at South Wild Lodge

From Cristalino Lodge we flew to Cuiaba and headed out into the Pantanal. This involved two hours on a bus followed by half an hour in the back of a truck traversing an atrocious road to reach South Wild Lodge.

This was a wonderful place where we could sit on the shaded verandah with our bird books, binoculars, water bottle, notepad and camera spread around us and watch what came to visit. A family of capybara was there at all times mowing their lawns, a pair of Southern Caracaras (family Falconidae) strutted about as if they owned the place, small birds included Vermilion flycatcher, Cattle tyrant, two species of kiskadee, several species of woodpeckers, woodcreepers, kingfishers and raptors. A short stroll from the verandah and you could climb a tower and peer into the nest of a pair of Jabiru (the real ones, genus *Jabiru*) and a pair of Hyacinth Macaws were using a nesting box in a nearby tree. The river beside the lodge was full of cayman which are not a threat to humans because they only eat fish. We also had Giant River Otters in the river and, a short distance down the track beside the river was an Ocelot hide. Here visitors can sit at night and wait for ocelots to come in looking for bits of meat which they put out for them a few times a week. They had got used to the lights and weren't bothered by people taking photos.

On top of all this, they put out seed and fruit each day which brought in the brilliantly coloured cardinals, a range of pigeons, Toco Toucan, a pair of Bare-faced Curassow with their amazing haircuts and Chaco Chacalaca, which is an approximation of the noise they make at dawn - similar in some ways to the morning calls of our Red Wattlebirds. We were a little sorry to leave South Wild Lodge but they only had four bottles of wine and we had polished those off so it was clearly time to move on. We flew back to Sao Paulo for an overnight stay and then flew to Lima, Peru.



National Bird of Peru, Andean Cock of the Rock,
[photo: <http://www.travelwithkevinandruth.com>]

The second part of Vicki's research had found "Birding North Peru" which is run by a couple in Auckland. They organised a guide and driver to take us on a two week tour of birding sites in Peru to show off the various habitats available in the country. Peru is about

15% of the size of Brazil (which itself is slightly larger than Australia) but both countries have almost double the number of bird species that we have here. Having a knowledgeable guide like Henry is essential. With the help of our driver Elvis (no kidding!) and Henry guiding, we sought out the rare and hard-to-find species that you otherwise would never see - like the rare Peruvian plantcutter, the Short-tailed Pygmy-tyrant (the smallest passerine in the world), Ecuadorian Piculet, Many-coloured Rush-tyrant, Peruvian Thicknee, Andean Cock of the Rock (National bird of Peru) and the majestic Andean Condor (it was soaring a long way above us but was still clearly twice the size of the Black Vultures flying with it).



Rufous-crested Coquette, one of the many species of hummingbirds in Peru

As well as all that, we also saw the many species which were easy to find - like a bewildering array of hummingbirds, several species of spectacular aracari (part of the toucan family Ramphastidae) and the gorgeously coloured tanagers. We didn't go into the high Andes but stayed below about 1500 metres as well as spending a couple of days at Chiclayo near the coast to see Blue-footed Boobies, Peruvian Pelicans, Killdeer and a number of other coastal species.

Along the way, we saw some colourful butterflies, lizards, a poison arrow frog, a venomous coral snake, 3-toed sloth, Sechuran foxes (which are largely vegetarian), a superb Guyaquil squirrel and a large (is there any other sort?) tarantula (see Creature of the Month).

After leaving Peru, we hadn't finished birding because the congress venue, a former catholic complex in the hills above Rio de Janeiro, is used by the University of Rio for its bird courses so a comprehensive bird list was available and we added a number of other species to our list of first timers, including Black-collared aracari which wasn't on their

"comprehensive" list. Finally returning to Rio for our flight home, we were delighted to discover the air full of Magnificent frigatebirds - always a special sight.



Spot-billed toucanet feeding in a date palm at the Congress venue

Overall, I saw 372 lifers in the four weeks and Vicki would have seen more than 400 because she did all the walks and I didn't.

And yes, the congress was excellent with friends and colleagues from all over the world in attendance. It was interesting that even the Brazilians were unaware that they had a national bird and we were all surprised to learn that, despite the many spectacular species they could have chosen, the national bird of Brazil is the Rufous-bellied thrush.



National bird of Brazil, Rufous-bellied Thrush

Last Excursion

Our excursion on Sunday 12th November was to Mt Canobolas where some members did the Federal Falls walk while others did the Nature Trail at the Walls [see photos at end of newsletter].

Creature of the Month

Tarantula - Family Theraphosidae



Tarantula in Peru [photo: the editor]

No species of spider embodies arachnophobia more than the tarantula, the large hairy spider that James Bond (Sean Connery) had crawl over him in *Dr No* (or Shane Warne had to hold in "I'm a Celebrity - get me out of here"). However, the name tarantula is applied to all members of the family Theraphosidae, most of which are large and hairy but some of which are relatively small. Most of them are harmless to humans.

There are more than 700 species in the Theraphosidae family with 57 genera in South America, 26 in North and Central America, 31 in Africa, 20 in Asia and five in Australasia, where they tend to be called "bird-eating spiders" in preference to "tarantulas". *Selenocosmia* has 36 species distributed from Asia through New Guinea to Australia. The best known Australian species is *S stirlingi*, the barking spider, a name which reflects the sound it makes by rubbing its palps together to deter predators. This is a desert-dweller distributed across inland Australia and we once received a request from the Broken Hill Bowling Club for advice on how to get one out of the bathroom so that they could avoid having unwashed bowlers in the dining room.

NOTICES

1. Subscriptions.

Payment of Annual Subscriptions is due following the Annual General Meeting in February. Please send your cheque or money order made out to "OFNCS" to the Hon. Treasurer, Dr Dick Medd, OFNCS, PO Box 369 Orange NSW 2800.

Subscription rates:

Single member – \$25

Each additional family member – \$5

Concession rate (emailed newsletters) – \$12.50

Concession rate (printed newsletters) – \$25

Note: concession rate is for *bona fide* pensioners and students only



Floral display on the Walls Nature Trail [photo: Helmut Berndt]



Members at the Walls Picnic Area [photo: Helmut Berndt]

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