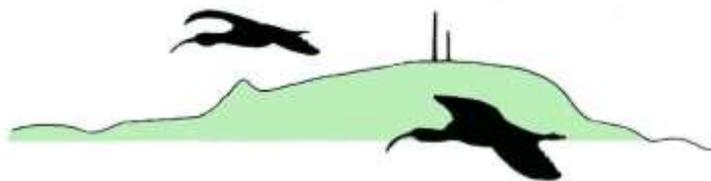


## ORANGE FIELD NATURALIST AND CONSERVATION SOCIETY Inc



NEWSLETTER MAY 2019

### NEXT MEETING

Thursday, 9<sup>th</sup> May, 7.30pm  
**SPEAKER: Dr. Murray Fletcher**  
**TOPIC: Exploring Central Australia**

**NEW VENUE: Senior Citizens and Pensioners Centre**  
**(On opposite side of Woolworths carpark to Harris Farm)**

All welcome

**EXCURSION**  
**Sunday, 12<sup>th</sup> May**  
**Cookamidgera Reserve**  
**Meet at 9am Orange High School Bus Bay**  
**See details below**

### Please Note

**Membership Payments:** annual membership is due, and you can now pay by EFT. Updated Account details are at the end of the newsletter.

### Next Meeting: Exploring Central Australia, Dr Murray Fletcher

In September/October last year, Murray and Vicki spent five weeks on the road to attend a 3-day conference in Alice Springs. As this was their first visit to Central Australia, they took the time there and back to visit places in South Australia and the Northern Territory that they had heard about but not seen. Along the way, they photographed some beautiful creatures and plants. The talk will cover the areas between Port Augusta and Alice Springs.

### Next Excursion: Cookamidgera Reserve

As we can't go to Central Australia, we plan to head west to Cookamidgera Reserve, 50kms south west of Manildra. However, if the reserve is suffering from the extreme dry there may be a change to the location for the excursion. A decision will be made at the meeting on Thursday night and members emailed.

### Last speaker: Dr. Barbara Mactaggart **Swampy Meadows in the Central West**

*Report by Cilla Kinross, photo Rosemary Stapleton*

Barbara is a consultant ecologist who studied swampy meadows for her PhD. Barbara described the swampy meadows and how they have been formed in valleys, which have been cut by erosion and filled with accumulating sediment and organic matter since the last Ice Age. They were once very common in the landscape of the Central Tablelands. Their form varies considerably from very broad valley slopes to narrow gullies. This variation is due to changes in climate and/or disasters (usually after European management). There are several stages during the changes, but the primary stages are the 'cut' (degradation and erosion) and the 'fill' (accumulation). The cut stage is quick, but the fill stage can take centuries.

Swampy meadows differ from shrub swamps having primarily grassy vegetation. They are important as they are more closed than incised gullies where there is output of resources. So, they keep the water in the landscape longer. They are also important for biodiversity, although the swamp vegetation itself is not highly diverse. But they are part of the whole ecosystem that provides habitat for a diversity of species.

What happened to them? Since European settlement, they have been cleared, drained, burnt, sprayed and grazed, as in the paddock adjacent to Neville State Forest that we saw on the excursion.



This has led to system collapse and loss of agricultural productivity. Water can no longer reach the flood plain as it is too low in the stream bed, which may now be bounded by steep banks.

How to restore them? This is very hard. No prescription is available as each site will vary. But one general principle is that you need to create a lower energy landform. You can put in barriers to help slow the water. Barriers could be rocks, logs, or debris. And plant grasses in the bank. Concrete plumes have been used in their management, but less so now. Rocks put into the stream bed work well. Coir logs are good for head cuts. To be realistic, however, some cannot be restored, especially in high discharge areas.

### **Last excursion: Swampy Meadows in Neville State Forest**

*Report by Jenny Medd, photos Jenny Medd and Rosemary Stapleton*

Following Barbara Mactaggart's talk at our Thursday evening meeting, her former Ph.D. supervisor, Andrew Rawson, currently an Adjunct Associate Professor at C.S.U., Orange, agreed to lead the excursion to view the swampy meadows that survive in Neville State Forest. With 18 participants to make the trip, Rosemary very capably sorted the group into 6 of the 4wd vehicles. As well as several current OFNCS members, we were joined by Nikki Bennetts from the Forestry Corporation, a family from earlier days of the Society and a few others who were especially interested in swampy meadow restoration.

Andrew shared a wealth of information about the meadows, reiterating much of what Barbara had spoken about. He also added his expertise on soil analysis to the discussions. Dick Medd was inevitably called upon to confirm or identify plant specimens during the day.

Our first stop was at the same area we visited back in September 2015 when Lisa Paton was heavily involved in the 'Neville Forest Project' hoping to link into the Great Eastern Ranges, Kanangra to Wyangala project. In the main drainage line along Kentucky Road the incised valley suddenly widens into an extensive reed bed of *Phragmites australis* heading the *carex* swampy meadow. A couple of Barbara's piezometers were located and the restoration

area she showed with a photo of the coir rolls was also inspected.



Above: Hai Wu looking at a piezometer used to monitor swamp water levels.

After a late morning tea break, we continued to drive down Kentucky Road to briefly view the changing swamp and gully/creek line which disappeared into cleared farming land beyond the Forest.

Andrew was keen to show us a second swampy meadow "just over the hill", which turned out to be even more interesting. Unfortunately, the track crossing over the higher end of the swamp defeated plans to make a circuitous return to the main road and at that point two vehicles elected to return home. This second swampy meadow (photo below) included a substantial area of 'Gypsywort' (*Lycopus australis*), along with several specimens of tree ferns, much to Dick's delight. Neither of these species had been seen elsewhere in the vicinity. A little patch of *Pterostylis* rosettes was also discovered.



After a late lunch break, one more vehicle headed homewards, but the remainder of the group were enjoying the day too much to call a

halt and spent another hour or so botanising. Andrew was keen to confirm the identify of a stand of *Eucalyptus rossii*, which revealed some stunningly beautiful old trees (photo below), along with an understorey of several small shrubs and creepers which hadn't been evident elsewhere. Some were included in earlier plant lists (*Acacia buxifolia*, *Hibbertia obtusifolia*, *Hardenbergia violacea* and *Hovea heterophylla*), but one extra, *Acacia gunnii* was also spotted.



The presence along a ridgeline of tall examples of *Eucalyptus rubida* also required confirmation needing a further stop before we finished up. Once again, plenty of botanical discussion ensued. The question of the existence of a recommended field guide to the region was raised, causing some degree of mirth, which Dick, as our "living field guide" took in good spirit.

One further stop by the roadside before we finally called it a day, was to allow Dick to show us the remnant dead tree in which is embedded a stone, presumably an aboriginal artefact, which Lisa had pointed out to us back in 2015. The birds were very quiet during the day with very few seen, however at this last stop a stunning Spotted Harrier was cruising over the nearby paddock.

A huge "Thank you!" goes to Andrew Rawson who gave up his day to lead our excursion, which turned out to be so well supported and so interesting and enjoyable. More excursion photos on page 7.

## **Mt Canobolas Update:** **Post Fire Surveys - Part 2**

*This report on the fauna surveys is a combination of a thank you email to volunteers from Steve Woodhall, NPWS Ranger, and reflections from Katie Boyer, one of the volunteers. Photos Rosemary Stapleton and Nella Smith.*

Steve said:

'Thank you to all who came and helped out with the fauna survey at Mount Canobolas. While the weather wasn't typically autumnal (i.e. it was cold, windy and at times very wet), we had a successful survey effort. Your extra willing hands allowed us to get a lot done.

Anne (Kerle) is still pulling the report together, but some of the highlights for me were;

- Powerful Owl – a threatened species sighted in the park for the first time.
- Greater Gliders (food for the Powerful Owl).
- *Antechinus agilis* in both burnt and unburnt areas.
- Over 500 trap nights – a big effort in that terrain.
- Ringtail Possums – lots of them and varying ages including young ones indicating post fire breeding.
- Planarian Worms – our fluorescent yellow friends were found in both burnt and unburnt sites.
- Great company, everyone pitching in with enthusiasm and chatting over dinner at the end of the day.

I'd like to put in a special thanks to Lesley Forward one of our rangers in Dubbo for all her efforts in pulling the survey equipment and team together. ☺'



Above: Some of the volunteers working hard to clean the traps at the end of the fauna surveys.

Katie's reflections on the fauna surveys.

Having moved to Orange 2 years ago and looking out of my kitchen window at Mount Canobolas every day, watching a column of smoke rise up from it last year was heart breaking. But recently I got to join in with the fauna survey teams trying to determine who still lives on our mountain after over 70% of the SCA was decimated.

Little did I realise as a very new member of OFNCS that I'd get such an opportunity so early on! Also, little did I realise how all able volunteers were eagerly sought after to share the load of climbing the slopes at dawn and dusk each day - not just extra eyes and ears, but legs and 'grunt' were most definitely needed to cover as much ground as possible. Our four teams located, measured and marked sites, set and checked the small mammal traps twice daily, and hiked in the dark with spotlights and playback equipment to find the bigger crepuscular and nocturnal fauna.

Despite the hard work and occasional weather challenges, the adventure of living up the mountain for a week was an absolute pleasure and privilege. Not only did I get to continue to do some grass roots ecological study - pioneering too, as believe it or not, this has been the first formal survey of Mount Canobolas' wildlife - I learnt many new skills and honed a few others. The biggest plus? I now feel much more of a connection to the view from my window of my new backyard. A backyard that is showing promising signs of recovery.

My thanks to the team for so generously sharing their knowledge and experience. I can't wait to see the collated results of the survey.



Above: A relatively relaxed Antechinus – one of a small number that were caught, measured and then released at the site where they were found.



Above: The first of 2 Planarium Worms found, this one at a site that had been burnt. *Photo Nella Smith*



Above: *Armillaria luteobubalina*, commonly known as the Australian honey fungus, is a species of mushroom in the family Physalacriaceae. It is widely distributed in southern Australia & was found at Federal Falls Picnic Area. *Photo Nella Smith*

**Editor's Note:** The survey work on Mt Canobolas has continued. Future newsletters will have more results of the fauna surveys as well as details of a visit by Dr Mandy Reid, Collection Manager, Malacology, Australian Museum Research Institute, who was looking for Land Snails and Velvet Worms.

**OFNCS Committee News:**

The Committee met on 11<sup>th</sup> March and the main items of business were:

- An update on surveys done on Mt Canobolas. The Committee agreed to fund a repeat vegetation survey to be done in the last week of April. This will document the exceptional changes in vegetation that have occurred since the NPWS survey in November. Results will be shared with NPWS.

- Excursion protocol – the possible need for a review was raised by a member
- Welcome letter for new members – draft accepted
- OFNCS brochure – a postcard-sized brochure will be developed.

**Central West Environment Council Report:**

*Report by Rosemary Stapleton, OFNCS Representative to CWEC*

OFNCS is a member of the Central West Environment Council (CWEC), which is a regional co-ordinating body of conservation and environmental groups. It has direct links to the Nature Conservation Council. The CWEC AGM was held in Bathurst on 7th April.

Representatives from Bathurst, Mudgee, Dubbo, Rylstone and Orange (3) environmental groups attended as well as a representative of the Inland Healthy Rivers Network and the Belubula Headwaters Protection Group.

It was inspirational to hear about all the work being done by these groups but also depressing that so many battles were having to be fought on so many fronts. The major concerns were the impacts of mining and the management and supply of water.

Mudgee and Rylstone groups have had a focus on the expansion of coal mines and their impact on water and the habitat; with the Belubula group being concerned about the McPhillamys mine at Kings Plains. Evan Leitch presented on this proposal. Submissions on many of the Water Sharing or Resource Plans were made by most groups and all expressed concern about the management of the scarce water resource we have and movement of water between different parts of catchments.

Individual groups have taken action on local issues, such as street trees or urban and recreational developments such as bike and go-kart tracks. Some have linked to National campaigns around issues such as climate change and extinction.

Some groups have been involved in monitoring species such as Malleefowl and Glossy Blacks by Dubbo FNS. They are working with NPWS and in future years may extend their Glossy Black counts to Goobang NP. OFNCS has been involved in surveys on Mt Canobolas.

The meeting agreed to be involved in a deputation to the new Minister for Energy and the Environment advocating for Mt Canobolas and no bike track. This suggestion was made by Nick King.

At the AGM the office bearers were re-elected with Orange well represented with Cilla as President, Nick as Secretary and Paul Meeth as Treasurer. After lunch some of us went to Mt Panorama to look at the site of the proposed Go Kart Track. Bathurst members explained how this would impact an area of land sacred to First Nation people and open to the public for passive recreation so that it is only available for daily exclusive use of Go Karts.

**John Austin**

The Society recently heard the sad news that John Austin had passed away in early April. John was OFNCS President over 5 years (2012-16) and in 2015 filled in several times as Newsletter Editor. Before coming back home to Molong he was a member of Murrumbidgee Field Naturalists.

John had a keen interest in visiting and protecting our natural heritage. He often came on excursions and led several to Killonbutta Nature Reserve, his nearby bit of bush which I suspect he often visited. He was the Society's representative at mountain bike trail meetings with Orange City Council in 2015 and 2016 and argued strongly against the development of the bike track on Mt Canobolas.



Above: Cilla Kinross, Jane Paul and John Austin on an excursion to Killonbutta in August 2012. *Photo Jenny Medd*

Over the years John developed his knowledge of plants and more recently became interested in

birds. When he moved to his block on the edge of Molong he propagated and planted lots of natives. He was particularly happy with how well the acacias grew and also enjoyed watching the birds that visited. Often fellow birders would get messages with a fuzzy photo of his latest find, either his favourite Little Eagle, a Diamond Firetail or Boobook Owl. One species he did not like were Indian Mynas and he was frustrated that they had reached Molong.

We have missed John's presence over the last few years and were pleased to hear that he accomplished his dream to travel the world again last year... and still send us nature photos and jokes. Rest in peace John.

#### **Dates for your Diary**

**2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> May – Stop Adani Convoy** will be in Bathurst/Orange overnight. Watch the press for details.

**4<sup>th</sup> May, 9.30 – 1.30 - Bush Regeneration Techniques Workshop.** Daroo Central Tablelands Landcare will be holding this workshop at Wentworth Reserve, Orange, (near the golf course). Join Bruce Hansen as he takes you through a range of activities and techniques which are all designed to regenerate the urban bush environment. Book at: <https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/bush-regeneration-techniques-tickets-59810013360>

**AND** don't forget to bring a notebook, wear a hat, sunscreen, a pair of sturdy shoes and to dress for the weather.

**Orange Regional Museum – The Art of the Scientific Illustration** featuring stunning images and fascinating scientific specimens from the NSW Biosecurity Collections. Explore techniques used by scientists and artists over the last century and learn why these works were created. This exhibition is open daily until Sunday 30 June.

#### **Sightings around Orange**

If you see anything interesting, please email [orangefieldnats@gmail.com](mailto:orangefieldnats@gmail.com) or post it on Facebook.

**Orchids** - Parsons Bands have been found in another location on the mountain and at Abercrombie Caves. Different Greenhood orchids have been seen by Col Bower in several locations but often just the leaf rosettes and not flowers.

**Birds** – a pair of Pied Honeyeaters were seen in the burnt Exocarpus just inside the SCA boundary on Old Mt Canobolas Rd on 5/6 April. In the same area there was a flock of about 40 Dusky Woodswallows, including juveniles, hawking along the slope.

Several birders have flushed Quail when walking to do bird surveys in the bush around Orange View. They flew too quickly to identify which is unfortunate as no Quails or Button-quails have been recorded for the SCA.

#### **Spring Creek Reservoir Quarterly Survey, 27<sup>th</sup> April.**

43 species were seen with the highlight being at least 13 Freckled Ducks, who are continuing to use the reservoir as a drought refuge. The water level continues to fall and Cilla commented that it is lowest she has ever seen it in all the years she has been surveying. Another nice find was a female Red-capped Robin hawking from the fence in the heavily grazed paddock opposite the gate. I wonder if a pair that will breed in this area again this year?

#### **Creature of the Month:**

*Report and photo by Murray Fletcher, wasp found by Nikki Bennetts*

#### **Tricoryna sp. A parasitic wasp**



This beautiful little wasp was photographed in Neville State Forest on our excursion. It has been identified by Dr Ken Walker of Museum Victoria who provides the following information.

The species is an endoparasite of ant larvae. The female lays her eggs on plant material. The first instar larvae attach themselves to foraging ants and are carried back into the ant nest where the wasp larvae transfer to ant immatures. The heavily sculptured front end provides protection from ant stings and bites when the adult wasp emerges in the ant nest.

