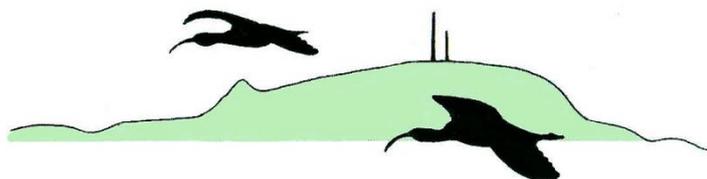


ORANGE FIELD NATURALIST AND CONSERVATION SOCIETY Inc



NEWSLETTER MARCH 2019

NEXT MEETING

Thursday, 14th March, 7.30pm

SPEAKER: Dr. Col Bower

TOPIC: Rising from the Ashes – the Orchids of Mt Canobolas

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

All welcome

EXCURSION

Sunday, 17th March

Mt Canobolas SCA

Meet at 9am Orange High School Bus Bay

Please Note

Meeting Venue: for 2019 we will be meeting at the Senior Citizens and Pensioners Centre.

Membership Payments: annual membership is due and you can now pay by EFT. See account details at the end of the newsletter.

Wanted: an Editor for this newsletter!

Next Meeting – Rising from the Ashes – the Orchids of Mt Canobolas

Dr Col Bower, consultant botanist and orchid specialist, will speak on how the 2018 wildfire has brought the orchids of Mt Canobolas back to life.

Col says that for the last 25 million years or so fire has been an integral part of the Australian environment. As a consequence our flora and fauna has adapted many ways to not only tolerate fire, but also to take advantage of it. This is evident in many native orchid species whose flowering is stimulated by fire. Some are so dependent on fire they only flower in the season or two after a summer wildfire and not at all, or rarely, in ensuing seasons. The February 2018 wildfire on the mountain provided an opportunity to monitor how the

local orchids responded. Between late October and December 2018, Col led a group of local volunteers to search for orchids in blackened parts of the State Conservation Area (SCA).

In his talk Col will describe the ‘stunning’ results. Not only were 23 spring flowering orchid species identified but two were new species that had not been recorded previously.



Gastrodia sesamoides (Common Potato Orchid & a friendly weevil) on Mt Canobolas [Photo: Rosemary Stapleton]

Next Excursion – 17th March

Col will lead a walk on Mt Canobolas to look at the recovery of plants following the fire. While the spring flowering orchids have finished there may be a slight chance of finding autumn flowering Greenhoods if they have not been affected by the dry. We may also go to an area of heath where plants are responding in different ways.

AGM News

The Annual General Meeting was held on 14th February. Long standing committee members Murray Fletcher and Jane Paul retired from their positions. Murray had been Newsletter Editor for 16 years as well as being Secretary and President for a number of years.

Jane had been Publicity Officer in recent years and previously a member of the Conservation Committee. Both made unique contributions to

the Society and we hope they will continue to participate in OFNCS activities.

President's Report from Geoff Selwood – lots happened during the year starting with the fire on Mt Canobolas. The best thing to come out of the ashes was the great exhibition of orchids, found by Col Bower, Dick Medd and a band of volunteers. Some of these orchids had not been seen since the 1983 fire.

During the year there was the display at the Regional Museum and later, members became involved in advocacy about the Draft Plan of Management for Mount Canobolas. The main objection was the possible investigation of a mountain bike track that had been proposed by Orange City Council.

Once again there were interesting speakers and excursions throughout the year. Thanks to all committee members for their hard work and assistance over the year; especially Murray Fletcher for 16 years as Newsletter Editor and Jane Paul as Publicity Officer.

Next year there may be ups, such as the chance of a fantastic show of orchids in the spring. However, there may be downs like the ideas being put forward for development on Mt Canobolas, the Kings Plains open cut mine and the hot topic of climate change. We will all need to assist a new editor of the newsletter and start a drive to attract new members.

2019 OFNCS Committee - most committee members were reelected. Nick King has agreed to be Vice President and we welcome Jenny Pratten as Publicity Officer and Katie Boyer as a committee member.

The Committee for 2019 is:

- President: Geoff Selwood
- Vice-President: Nick King
- Secretary: Rosemary Stapleton
- Treasurer: Dick Medd
- Assistant Treasurer: Jenny Medd
- Newsletter Editor: vacant
- Website Administrator: Helmut Berndt
- Public Officer: Paul Meeth
- Publicity Officer: Jenny Pratten
- General Committee Members: Peter Toedter, Katie Boyer, Cilla Kinross.

As you can see no-one took on the role of Newsletter Editor. The newsletter is an important way the Society keeps in touch with

members and partner organizations. If you are interested in helping out, have any news, photos or an article please get in touch via orangefieldnats@gmail.com and they will be passed on to the Editor.

Rather than have a speaker following the AGM members were invited to bring photos or items for "Show and Tell".

Dick Medd showed photos of *Prostanthera gilesii*, a plant endemic to Mt Canobolas, and talked about the post fire monitoring of it. Along with Jenny he also brought back memories for some long-standing members by showing a few photos of excursions from the early days. These included photos of visits to Brown's Creek Mine in 1983 (a big group in the photo below, including children; no hard hats!);



to the Cadia heritage site pre-restoration and the more recent 2018 excursion; an excursion to the Canowindra Fish Fossil site with Dr Alex Ritchie (well before the museum was built);



and a delightful photo of the late Herb May seeking enlightenment from his bird book.

Hai brought some photos of flowers he had seen on the mountain to have them identified. More photos of the changes on the mountain since the fire were shown by Rosemary. She

also made comment on some of the current environmental challenges we are facing by showing photos of large River Red Gums being cleared near Condobolin and a dust storm near Quandialla.

Report by Rosemary Stapleton & Jenny Medd

Last Committee Meeting

Members of the committee have been active over the last few months:

- Spreading mulch at Bloomfield Bushland
- Meeting with council staff at Spring Creek Reservoir to discuss its environmental importance especially for birds, including the threatened species that use it.
- Making submissions on the draft Travelling Stock Route Plan and the Macquarie-Castlereagh Water Resource Plan.
- Doing monitoring on Mt Canobolas.

OFNCS continues to be a member of the Central West Environment Council and supports the formation of a Friends of Mt Canobolas Group.

Last excursion - Heifer Station Creek TSR, 14th February

(see last page for photos). Report by Jenny Medd & Rosemary Stapleton

A quick drive out of town took us to this TSR that is unique because of the large number of Eucalypt species that are found there. Although we had hoped to add to the vegetation list from previous excursions to this TSR (notably in May 2018, reported in the June Newsletter), local weather conditions over summer and grazing regimes presented less than ideal growth for plant diversity and identification. However eagle-eyed Hai Wu spotted a twiner that Dick had a senior's moment with before Col correctly identified it as *Glycine tabacina*. Walking further along the creek than before, revealed a more significant population of *Eucalyptus stellulata* (Black Sallee) than previously noted; with encouraging seedling regeneration of many of the eucalypt species evident.

Like the plants, the bird list (14 species) was similar to our May visit with the addition of a White-faced Heron and several Australian White Ibis which were feeding along the creek. Like elsewhere in the Orange area small flocks of Musk Lorikeets were buzzing through the treetops.

We took in some history of the TSR by looking at the 'holding paddock' and the ingenious methods used to join and strain the fencing wire many years ago.

It has been suggested that Local Land Services, who now manage these TSRs, should be advised that the woodland along the creek and up to the access track, fits the 'Tablelands Snow Gum, Black Sallee, Candlebark and Ribbon Gum Grassy Woodland Endangered Ecological Community' and should really be fenced off for conservation.

Frank and Elaine McRae, the current lessees of this TSR, who have also recently purchased more of the land bordering the reserve, joined the walk and contributed to discussions regarding the vegetation, management, history and heritage of the reserve.

Mt Canobolas – an update 12 months on

Over 30 people came to the February ECCO meeting to hear Steve Woodhall, NPWS Ranger, speak on this topic. Many of us know what a unique area Mt Canobolas SCA is but it was good to have Steve outline it again:

- It is an isolated sub alpine remnant in a highly cleared landscape and has very different vegetation to other bushland in the Central West.
- There are 800+ species recorded in/around the park with 50 plant species at the limits of their distribution and 8 threatened fauna species including Greater Glider, Scarlet Robin, Dusky Woodswallow and Eastern Bentwing Bat. It has 2 endemic species – *Eucalyptus canobolensis* and *Prostanthera gilesii* and 3 Endangered Ecological Communities. The invertebrates have been poorly surveyed however a Planarium Worm and Velvet Worm appear to be unique.

Steve said the February 2018 fire burnt 70% of the conservation area, which was similar to the 1982 fire. The south western and south eastern parts of the SCA are the only parts that weren't burnt. Fire damage to trees varied but in all areas that were burnt the shrub or understory layer was completely burnt as were the heaths and fringing lichen communities. These will probably take many years to recover.

While the SCA has been closed due to the danger of falling trees and to allow the tracks to be cleared and burnt infrastructure replaced

it was good to hear this has been almost finished. All were pleased to hear Steve say the SCA will open on Saturday 9th March 2019.

He went on to talk about all the work that has been happening, or is planned, to monitor the post fire recovery of the mountain:

- 24 monitoring sites were established and vegetation surveyed in November 2018
- The searches for spring flowering orchids that was done by volunteers had good results, with some orchids responding well to the fire and several new species found.
- Fauna surveys are to take place in late March 2019 at 12 of the vegetation monitoring sites. In December recordings of Microbats were made at 20 sites.
- Volunteers from OFNCS and ECCO have done 350 volunteer hours
- NPWS has been funded \$30,000 to have baseline vegetation and fauna surveys done and it is hoped they will be funded on a year by year basis for 3 years and then again in 10 yrs.
- Other more detailed monitoring is occurring for several important species and some current investigations may confirm more endemic species for the SCA.
- A key focus will be control of blackberries and other weeds, which will start in March.

Steve gave a brief outline of the steps involved with the draft Plan of Management. There had been an extraordinary response by the public to the draft Plan with 641 submissions received. The proposed mountain bike park development was the most contentious issue raised. As the March election is close the process of finalising the plan of management will have to be dealt with by the incoming government.

The meeting discussed the formation of a Friends of Mt Canobolas Group, which would be under the auspices of the National Parks and Wildlife volunteer program. Suggested projects for the group could be ivy removal and bush regeneration near The Teahouse, flora and fauna searching, spotlighting or birding. Steve stressed that any projects could not involve work that staff would do as a normal part of their work. When the group has been formally set up details will be included in future newsletters.

Dates for your Diary

27th March - ECCO Meeting – Guest speaker from Newcrest Mines to speak on the issue of

the management of tailings from the Cadia mining process.

30th March – Earth Hour at Cilla’s place from 6.30pm. A combined ECCO and Dirt Music event so come to watch the stars and also enjoy music.

6th April - planting morning at Ploughman’s Valley Wetland. 10am start children welcome (with a parent). Meet at the shelter and remember to wear a hat, long sleeves, sturdy footwear, sunblock and garden gloves. A BBQ will follow the planting so, for catering purposes, RSVP by 30th March to Lindy Glover at croucher_glover@bigpond.com

13th & 14th April - Cowra Woodland Birds Autumn Surveys. Come join in the surveys, birding and social activities. Contact Malcolm Fyfe on malcolmfyfe85@gmail.com

Sightings around Orange

If you see anything interesting please email orangefieldnats@gmail.com or post it on Facebook.

Eastern Banjo Frogs have been heard in November and December along Towac Creek in the SCA and confirmed by the Australian Museum Frog ID app. It can now be added to the SCA species list.

Lobelia pedunculata (photo below) was another new species for the mountain that was identified by Dick Medd when he visited a spring fed soak area in the SCA in late February. Common Eastern Froglets *Crinia signifera* were also heard there.



Spotless Crakes – seen at the western end of Spring Creek Reservoir by Colina and Bernie and at Ploughman’s Wetland by Rosemary.

Latham's Snipe have also been seen at Spring Creek by Hai and at Ploughman's Wetland by Nick, Neil Jones and Rosemary.

The impact of the dry can be seen by looking at the water levels in these wetlands as they are falling quickly. At Spring Creek Reservoir boulders and spits are becoming exposed and are roosting sites for birds, such as this Royal Spoonbill. Up to 20 **Freckled Ducks** have been there and 30 **Australian Shovelers**, a species not often seen on the reservoir.



McPhillamys Gold Project, Kings Plains, Blayney

In February committee member Peter Toedter provided an update on this large project to the OFNCS Committee. He has attended meetings of the local residents group, the Belubula Headwaters Protection Group (BHPG) who are lobbying to either stop the mine or at least ameliorate its impact.

Peter outlined that the proposed mine would process 7 million tonnes (MT) per annum for 10 years from an open cut that will only be marginally smaller than the open cut at Cadia. This would be about 800 tonnes of ore per hour, 24 hours a day.

In Peter's opinion there are major concerns with the project as it is right next to the Belubula River and its requirements for water may impact on spring fed creeks that run to the headwaters of the river. He also has concerns about the quantity of waste rock, the siting of the large tailings dam and the possible effects of accidental spills of contaminated water on the river and aquifers.

If you are interested look at the Preliminary Environmental Assessment at <http://www.regisresources.com.au/McPhillamys-Gold-Project/mcphillamys-gold-project.html>

The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is due in June and Peter encourages all those

concerned about local environmental issues to make a submission as there will be dust, noise, water interference, traffic and visual impacts. The residents group will be developing a submission guideline.

Creature of the Month -

Eastern Water Skink, *Eulamprus quoyii*.

[Photo: Rosemary Stapleton]



This little reptile was sunning itself on a rock in Heifer Station Creek when we visited for the excursion. On checking later, the consensus was that it is probably an Eastern Water Skink.

The Australian Museum website (<https://australianmuseum.net.au/learn/animals/reptiles/eastern-water-skink/>) says these skinks have a long tail and their back is olive-brown above with scattered small black spots on the body and tail. They also have a narrow pale golden or yellow stripe that runs from their eye down the side of their body. The lower flanks are creamy yellow with numerous scattered small black spots. Most are around 28 cm long.

Males and females mate in spring and as many as nine live babies are born in summer. They create nests in moist soil under objects. Females lay about five eggs each, sometimes in communal nests which hold dozens of eggs. Eggs look like mini chicken eggs but are soft and rubbery. They become enlarged as they absorb moisture from the surrounding soil.

As they are prey for many birds, they will disappear like lightning if they sense any threats. Perhaps this one was too fast for the Heron we saw at the creek. They are also prey for big lizards, snakes, turtles and cats.

The Museum says these pest-controlling hunters can survive easily in your garden. By including logs, sticks and leaf mulch in your garden you can help to protect them.

Heifer Station Creek Excursion, 14th February 2019 [Photos: Jenny Medd]



L to R: Jenny Pratten (at back), Hai Wu, Elaine McRae, Dick Medd, Col Bower, Nick King, Frank McRae & Rosemary Stapleton. The discussion: are these *Eucalyptus rubida*, *E. canobolensis*, or an intergrade? The specific tree under discussion is featured below (top and base). Either way these trees form great hollows and habitat for birds and other animals.



Subscriptions

Payment of Annual Subscriptions is now due. 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.

EFT payments to

BSB 802 129: Account 34715S1:

O F N & Cons Soc Inc:

Please be sure to identify payments with your name.

Send confirmation of payment to orangefieldnats@gmail.com

Subscription rates:

Single member – \$25

Concession rate (emailed newsletters) – \$12.50

Each additional family member – \$5

Concession rate (printed newsletters) – \$25

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

This Newsletter is produced for OFNCS by the Secretary Rosemary Stapleton. Views expressed herein are not necessarily those of the Society. Items should not be reproduced without permission of the Editor.

Orange Field Naturalist & Conservation Society, PO Box 369, Orange, 2800 or orangefieldnats@gmail.com