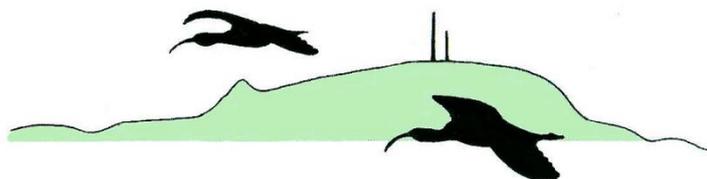


ORANGE FIELD NATURALIST AND CONSERVATION SOCIETY Inc



NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2018

NEXT MEETING

Thursday, 13th December, 7pm
2019 PLANNING MEETING

**VENUE: Home & Community Care
Centre (HACC Centre),**
286–290 Lords Place
(corner Lords Place & March Street - enter
from Lords Place)

XMAS PARTY

Sunday, 9th December from 4pm
"Third Crossing", Ophir Road
See below for details of what to bring



[OFNCS website](#)

Next Meeting

Each year, we take advantage of the December meeting to start sorting out the program for the following year. This will involve suggestions from members for speakers and excursions and who will follow these up. All members are invited to attend **from 7pm** and put forward your suggestions for what you would like to hear and do in the next twelve months.

Xmas party

This will be on Sunday 9th December which is actually the Sunday **before** the meeting. We are gathering at Cilla Kinross's place (Ophir Road, last entrance on the right before Third Crossing) commencing at 4pm.

Again we will be having our Xmas party in conjunction with members of ECCO.

Cilla is also hosting a meeting of the Central West Environment Council (CWEC) that morning and we will have the company of some members of CWEC as well.

You are encouraged to be self-sufficient, bringing everything you need to enjoy a BBQ on the deck, including your own chairs. Cilla has offered to "lay on my favourite beetroot burgers [*which will be an interesting sight*], make a couple of salads and a dessert and we can take it from there. Musical instruments encouraged!"

Last meeting

Speaker: **Colleen Farrow**

Topic: LLS cat tracking program.

Summary by the editor

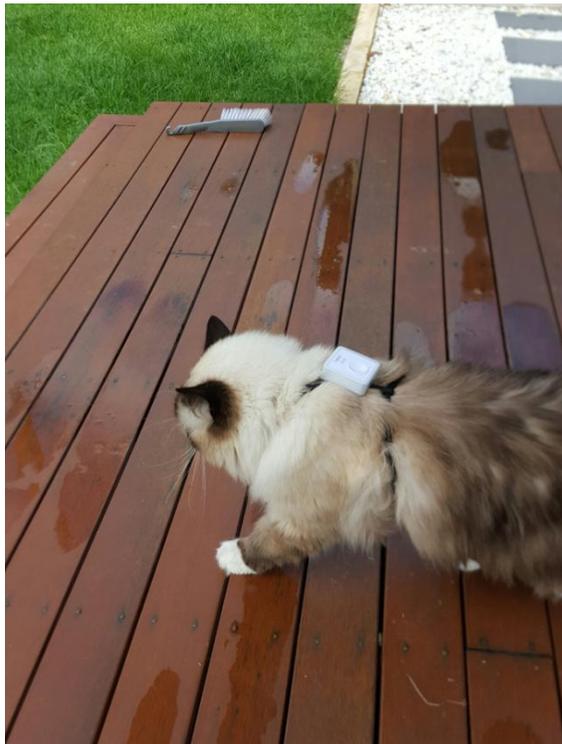
Colleen Farrow is a Senior Land Services Officer with the Central Tablelands Local Land Services and she reported on a project they have been running for about a year in Lithgow, Mudgee and Orange to track the night-time activity of domestic cats.

Driving the project was the knowledge that cats kill an estimated 61 million birds each year and have been implicated in the extinction of seven mammal species and a suite of ground foraging birds from across NSW. It was developed primarily as an educational project where owners were encouraged to spy on their cats to get a better idea of what they get up to at night. Not all owners were prepared to be involved, either not caring what their pets did or, more likely, not wanting to know that their pet moggy was out on a killing spree each night when they thought he spent the night asleep on the back door mat.

Colleen explained the process of meeting and involving cat owners, getting ethics approval for the project and what worked and what didn't. The trackers were mounted on the cats' backs using a small harness which some cats didn't like. To get ethics approval, the harnesses had to be easily released to avoid cats becoming tangled up on fences. However, this meant that cats could easily remove them and a number of tracking devices were lost.

The project demonstrated that most cats regularly wandered up to two blocks from their

homes and many were found to explore up to half a kilometre away on a regular basis.



Mr Snickers out and about in Lithgow with his tracker mounted

LLS also conducted pre- and post-project surveys to gauge any change of attitude by cat owners to limiting their cat's nocturnal wanderings. The results of these surveys were quite positive with more owners prepared to lock their cats inside during the night and, while others were not prepared to do so, they did express increased concern about the impact of their cat on native fauna and about their pet's safety.

The increased risks to cats wandering at night are a greater chance of becoming another fluffy road pizza and getting into altercations with other cats assisting the spread of diseases like Feline HIV via scratches and bites. Cats are actually more relaxed being restrained at night because they are not threatened by other cats invading their territories.

Last excursion 11th November 2018

Report by Rosemary Stapleton

Nine members, including the young and not so young, met at the bus bay and headed to the mountain to help the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) set up plots for the monitoring of vegetation following the fire. Ranger **Steve Woodhall**, who had invited OFNCS to help, met us at the locked gate on Towac Valley Road and let us through to the

Federal Falls Picnic Area. As we would be in a closed area of the SCA we were given a safety induction, signed a volunteer register and donned our hi-viz gear.

Steve explained that 24 sites had been selected to monitor how the vegetation recovers following the February fire. The sites will be in four different vegetation communities and spread across two fire intensities. Some are in unburnt parts of the SCA. Fauna will also be monitored at some of these sites. NPWS staff Steve, Lesley and Clare, along with several OFNCS members, set up nine sites on Saturday. **Dick Medd** and **Col Bower** provided helpful local knowledge of the pre-fire vegetation.

As Steve had decided to do some of the more difficult sites in steeper sections of the park on Sunday, the three fitter OFNCS members joined the two site teams. The rest of us and **Tracy Sorensen** walked to the west of the Federal Falls Picnic Area looking at the plants, birds and insects and for any signs of other fauna. For most of us it was head down looking at the flowers and trying to see orchids. Amongst numerous groups of *Microtis* orchids (not in flower) we managed to find several *Diuris* orchids and a few scattered patches of *Chiloglottis valida* (Large Bird Orchid) although none was in full flower. **Vicki** did a great job recording their location and other details so NPWS could enter them on Bionet.



Jumping bull ant watching me carefully
[photo: the editor]

A short way down the track **Murray** came across a very active Jumping Bull Ant's nest and spotted several butterfly species. A wombat scat was on a rock on the track which showed evidence of dung beetle activity so a sample was collected. Murray identified the insects in it as probably a species of *Aphodius* (dung-feeding scarab beetles) as well as two types of smaller beetles from the family Staphylinidae or rove beetles. A range of birds

was around with Crimson Rosella investigating nest hollows in the burnt trees and Yellow-faced Honeyeaters calling loudly.

We stopped for a relaxed lunch at one of the shady picnic tables and 3-year-old **Tristan** enjoyed running around the well cropped grass. He later told his grandparents he had been out 'orkward hunting'. As the site teams had not returned, some of us went to the Walls Lookout to see the significant fire damage but also to see if there were any flowering orchids. After lunch some headed home while others set up another monitoring site or looked for orchids at Spring Glade. Very few orchids were seen although a snake skin found by **Catherine Stapleton** was more evidence of snakes being in the park. At present there are no records of snakes in the SCA and this skin will join the one found by the Medds earlier in the week. Unfortunately, they will probably be difficult to identify. Just as difficult was the sighting of an immature Robin and after some debate it was agreed it was a Flame Robin rather than a Scarlet Robin. It is interesting that the Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds notes that Flame Robins are frequently seen in areas following a fire and their presence declines as the vegetation recovers.

During the excursion we were shown a flowering Fitzgerald's Spider Orchid (*Caladenia fitzgeraldii*) that had been found earlier in the week by **Jenny Medd**. It was a stunning example of a rarely seen orchid that is dependent on fire for flowering.

Thanks must go to the members who walked up and down some steep slopes setting up sites while the rest of us enjoyed a leisurely time looking at nature.

Orchid Searches on Mount Canobolas

Report by Rosemary Stapleton

Photographs by Jenny Medd

Following the fires on Mt Canobolas in the 1980s, some orchid species were seen flowering but which have not been recorded in recent years. They are fire-dependent and flower following a fire.

As much of the mountain was burnt in February it was an ideal time to see if the orchids were flowering again this spring. NPWS gave local botanists, **Col Bower** and **Dick Medd**, permission to look for the orchids. OFNCS members were invited to participate in these searches which started on 28th October. Once again, everyone had to

undergo a safety induction, sign a volunteer register and wear hard hats and hi-viz vests.

The first search found lots of Leopard Orchids (*Diuris pardina*) flowering. It was a great day as a few examples of Fitzgerald's Spider Orchid (*Caladenia fitzgeraldii*), Brown-clubbed Spider Orchid (*Caladenia phaeoclavia*), Musky Caps (*Stegostyla gracilis*) and Sun Orchids (*Thelymitra* sp.) were found. However, the biggest cheer from Col was for the person who found the one plant of the Canobolas Leek Orchid (*Prasophyllum* aff. *odoratum*). At the end of the afternoon it was suggested that no-one in the group knew how to walk in a straight search line as people tended to converge on Col when they heard his excited shout as they wanted to see what had been found.



Canobolas leek orchid [Photo: Jenny Medd]

Some subsequent searches haven't found a lot of orchids while others have found different species. There have been just two spikes of Greenhoods found as they have finished flowering and died down. The two Onion Orchid species (*Microtis*), with minute flowers, have been found everywhere as well as lots of patches of *Chiloglottis valida*. There have been a few patches of leaves of Helmet Orchids (*Corybas*) and some plants of Bearded Orchids (*Calochilus*). Potato Orchids

(*Gastrodia sesamoides*) (see Creature of the Month) have been found, with a number in one spot prompting Col to enthusiastically say 'we're in Gastrodiaville!' The other Leek Orchid (*Prasophyllum brevilabre*) has also responded to the fire and has been found flowering. Sun Orchids have been spotted occasionally although, as they are self-pollinated, the flowers have rarely been fully open to show their beautiful purple colour. The emerging shoots of the Blotched Hyacinth Orchids (*Dipodium punctatum*) have started to appear and will flower in summer.

After a week the *Diuris pardina* became less obvious as it was at the end of its flowering time and was replaced by the brighter yellow of the flowers of the Tiger Orchid (*Diuris sulphurea*). These have been found in burnt and unburnt areas suggesting they are not fire-dependent.



Brown clubbed spider orchid [Photo: Jenny Medd]

Even though most of the park is still closed for safety reasons, when you drive to the summit you can still see how the plants are flowering and growing and bringing colour and life back to the fire damaged landscape. The yellow of Yam Daisies, Bulbine Lilies and Buttercups is scattered among the white of Milkmaids, the pink of Trigger plants and, of course, the green, grey and reddish tinge of the eucalypt shoots.

By the end of November most orchid species will have finished flowering and we will have to wait another year to search for these delicate and intriguing flowers.



Fringe lily flowering on the mountain
[photo: Rosemary Stapleton]

Woodlands Birds Workshop

On 14th November, a workshop focussing on the Woodlands Birds of the Orange region was held jointly by the CT LLS and Birdlife Australia. Our trainer was **Chris Timewell** who is with Birdlife Australia and came up from Castlemaine in Victoria for the day. Attendees included several OFNCS members and members of the public and ranged from experienced birders to enthusiastic novices. First thing we did (following a welcome breakfast) was to introduce ourselves and say what our favourite bird is. This wasn't an easy choice to make but we all managed to come up with something different. **Nigel Hobden** didn't play fair because he has just spent some time in Zimbabwe and nominated two birds, the Lilac breasted roller and the Brown snake eagle. The youngest attendee nominated the Kingfisher as his favourite. After an hour or so of presentation, Chris led us across the road for a wander through Hinton Reserve. Towards the western end of the reserve, the woodland is dominated by Noisy miners so we only saw larger parrots and Grey Butcherbirds. Nigel explained the artificial hollows that have been created there by OCC. We scored a few smaller birds towards the end of the walk. Bird of the day was the Dollarbird, the closest thing we have in Australia to Nigel's favourite bird.

Birdlist for the day (in the order we saw them) was Noisy miner, Crimson rosella, Eastern rosella, Grey butcherbird, Superb parrot, Rainbow lorikeet, Galah, Australian king parrot, White faced heron, Mallard, Sulphur crested cockatoo, Crested pigeon, Laughing Kookaburra, Sacred kingfisher, Dollarbird, Grey fantail, Superb fairy wren, Striated pardalote, Yellow faced honeyeater, Red wattlebird, Black faced cuckoo shrike, Australian magpie.

Creature of the Month
Cinnamon Bells or Potato Orchid
Gastrodia sesamoides



Text: Jenny & Dick Medd. Photo: Jenny Medd

Known to occur on Mount Canobolas, Cinnamon bells or Potato orchid is a rarely seen terrestrial orchid and not easy to spot, so it's been exciting to find specimens in several locations this spring. Being a leafless saprophyte it has a thin fleshy brown flowering stem with drooping cinnamon-coloured flowers that are white inside. It is found usually growing in accumulated litter in moist areas of forest from lowland to subalpine habitats throughout southeastern Australia.

Flowering occurs from August/September to January and, although it has been suggested that it is enhanced by fire the previous summer, the Mount Canobolas sightings have been in both burnt and unburnt areas. Its underground rhizoids are rich in starch and reputedly formed an important part of the diet of aboriginal people; the roasted tubers giving rise to the potato reference in its common name.

Information sourced from:

Jones, D.L. (2006) *A complete guide to Native Orchids of Australia*. Reed New Holland, [ANBG website](#), [Plantnet](#), and [Wikipedia](#)

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

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Concession rate (emailed newsletters) – \$12.50

Concession rate (printed newsletters) – \$25

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



Searching for orchids on Mt Canobolas [photo: Rosemary Stapleton]



November OFNCS Excursion - Steve Woodhall (right) trains OFNCS volunteers prior to site setup for post fire vegetation monitoring [photo: Rosemary Stapleton]



Woodlands Birds Workshop - Nigel Hobden shows one of the artificial nesting hollows in Hinton Reserve [photo: Doug Stapleton]

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