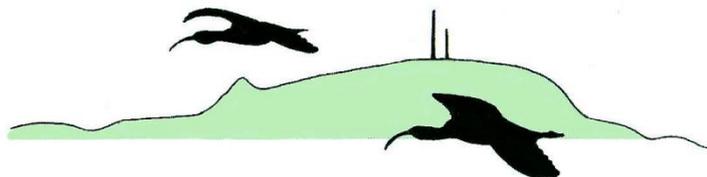


ORANGE FIELD NATURALIST AND CONSERVATION SOCIETY Inc



NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER 2018

NEXT MEETING

Thursday, 13th September, 7.30pm

SPEAKER: Andrew Bengsen

TOPIC: Feral Pigs

NEW VENUE: Home & Community

Care Centre (HACC Centre),

286–290 Lords Place

(corner Lords Place & March Street - enter from Lords Place)

No Committee Meeting this month

EXCURSION

Sunday, 16th September

Mt Canobolas

Meet at 9am

at the Orange High Bus Bay

Bring morning tea

[Save Mt Canobolas SCA website](#)

[Save Mt Canobolas SCA Facebook page](#)

[OFNCS website](#)

Next Meeting

Dr Andrew Bengsen is a Research Scientist with NSW DPI's Vertebrate Pest Research Unit at Orange Agricultural Institute. He works on the management of feral pigs and will enlighten us on the impact of these pests in the local region and what is being done about them state-wide.

Next Excursion

You may feel you have read this already and that is because you have. Last month's visit to Mt Canobolas had to be called off because of snow so we're trying it again this month. It's not that OFNCS members can't cope with a little snow (see photo at

end of newsletter) but the reason we were going to the mountain was to pick up rubbish exposed by the fire in February. There didn't seem much point to go up the mountain and find that the rubbish was now buried under snow.

So.....The next excursion is a special visit to Mt Canobolas to help clear some of the accumulated discarded rubbish that has been exposed following February's wildfire. The excursion will be led by **Dick Medd**.

Please note that you will need to wear sturdy footwear and suitable gloves for picking up broken glass and other sharps. Hard hats and high-visibility clothing are also required because the area is not yet safe for the public to enter. A number of helmets and vests will be available on loan from a local bushwalking club (helmets) and the Friends of Orange Botanic Gardens (hi-vis vests) but, if you have your own, please bring them along.

Museum Display

Our display in the Community Display Case is now on show (see photo at end of newsletter). Drop in and have a browse and watch the fabulous slide show featuring images of society activities since its inception. Congratulations to all those who contributed.

Last Meeting

Speaker: Tony Smith

Topic: Wildlife in eastern Russia

Summary by the editor

Images mainly from the internet

Tony spent two weeks exploring the Sea of Okhotsk in far eastern Russia in 2016. The sea is bordered on the west by Sakhalin Island and Russia, to the northeast by the Kamchatka Peninsula and to the southeast by the line of the Kurile

Islands. He started by providing some details of the history of the area, particularly Sakhalin which was Japanese from 1909 to 1945 when Russia invaded. Following the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Japanese realised they were vulnerable to being overrun by Russia from the North and surrendered.



Stellar's Sea Eagle in flight

Tony's home for the trip was the *Spirit of Enderby* which was a quite comfortable Russian ship. One positive was that there were only 55 passengers on board. Each day, the Russian guides gave informative talks, in English, on topics like Whales and Dolphins, movement of ice, the changing bird populations and exploration for oil and gas in the region. One of the best presenters was Katya, who is currently doing her PhD at the University of Queensland on communication between marine mammals.

Travelling to land each day on zodiac transport boats, they got close to a number of big bird colonies. One of these was on Iony Island in the middle of the Sea of Okhotsk where up to half a million Guillemots and Kittiwakes gather each evening.



Spectacled Guillemot on Iony Island

They also spent a lot of time watching Stellar's Sealions with their huge bulls which weigh about a tonne. They were hoping for a close encounter with a Grey Whale but had to settle for a curved back showing above the water. Views of Ribbon seals, Ringed seals and Spotted seals were better.

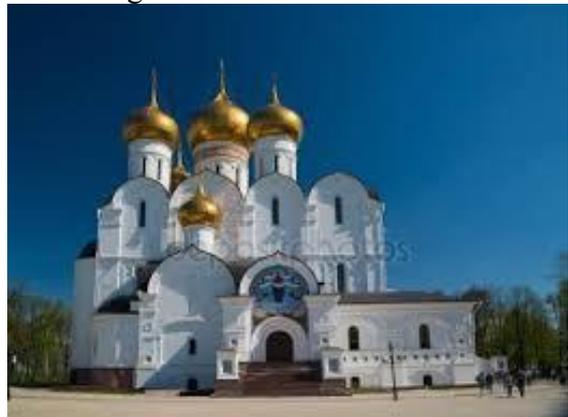
Tony was particularly keen to see the world's largest sea eagle, the spectacular Stellar's Sea Eagle with its 2.3 metre wingspan and weighing up to 9kg. He saw plenty of them. He also saw five species of Auklets and two species of Puffins, including the beautiful Tufted Puffin.



Tufted puffins

Tony also showed us some of the ducks he had seen and had a photo of a mangy looking Arctic Fox, presumably in the middle of its summer moult.

There were cultural elements to the trip too with visits to local communities in Okhotsk and a spectacular Orthodox Cathedral and former Gulag prison camps in the Magadan area.



Magadan Orthodox Cathedral

Tony ended with a short biography of Georg Stellar (1709–1746) who is regarded as the pioneer of Alaskan natural history and who has a number of significant

species named in his honour, Stellar's Sea Eagle being one of the most impressive.

Members' Notes

from Hai Wu.

White headed stilt
(formerly Black winged stilt)



I saw this stilt this morning [18th August] at Spring Creek dam. A few weeks ago, I also saw one at North Orange Wetland.

from the Editor

On Wednesday 15th August, there were at least 17 Yellow Tailed Black Cockatoos in the pine trees near the entrance to Orange Botanic Gardens. I counted 16 which flew out towards the west and there was at least one still calling in the trees.

Creature of the Month

Drop Bear

Thylarctos plummetus



Artist's impression [Wikipedia]

In 2012, an article appeared in *Australian Geographer* by Volker Janssen detailing a study using GNSS technology to track drop bears. Little is known about these elusive predators and most comes from Janssen's study plus information available on the Australian Museum website ([see the site](#)). Drop bears are about the size of a leopard or large dog and hunt by dropping onto their prey from the dense canopy of the eucalypt trees in which they hide. They occasionally attack bushwalkers targeting the last one in a line and are said to prefer foreign backpackers. They appear annually on 1st April and have been cited as the cause of a number of mysterious disappearances of people, including a party of schoolgirls at Hanging Rock in Victoria and former Prime Minister Harold Holt at Cheviot Beach in 1967.

Further reading:

Janssen, V. (2012). Indirect tracking of drop bears using GNSS technology. *Australian Geographer* **43**(4), 445–452.

PS. Drop bears are a myth

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



Members chatting in the falling snow at the Orange High Bus Bay [photo: the editor]



Jess Dowdell (Orange Regional Museum) with OFNCS members Cilla, Jenny, Peter and Rosemary with the Community Display Case featuring OFNCS [photo: Helmut Berndt]

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