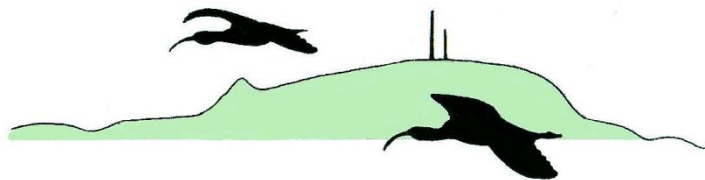


ORANGE FIELD NATURALIST AND CONSERVATION SOCIETY Inc



NEWSLETTER MARCH 2018

NEXT MEETING

Thursday, 8th March, 7.30pm
SPEAKER: Cilla Kinross
TOPIC: The Wildlife of Hawai'i

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

No Committee Meeting this month
All members are welcome

EXCURSION

Sunday, 11th March
Boshes Creek Flora Reserve
meet at 9am
at the Orange High Bus Bay
Bring morning tea.

Next Meeting

Cilla has recently visited Hawai'i which is a collection of volcanic islands in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Although the fauna has been augmented by numerous foreign incursions over the last few centuries, helped by mankind and his trade, the original native wildlife is largely unique, a result of the isolation of the Hawai'ian islands from other landmasses.

Next Excursion

Our next excursion will be to Boshes Creek Reserve to do a pre-burn survey of the *Acacia meiantha* there. Cilla has organised our visit with Forestry who are planning autumn hazard reduction burns to start in the second quarter of the year - from April onwards. They plan to start in the east and move west depending on the weather. We will revisit later in the year to assess any impact on *A. meiantha*.

Last Meeting

The last meeting was our AGM and the following were elected to the committee:

President - Geoff Selwood

Vice President - Helmut Berndt
Secretary - Rosemary Stapleton
Treasurer - Dick Medd
Assistant Treasurer - Jenny Medd
Newsletter Editor - Murray Fletcher
Website Administrator - Helmut Berndt
Publicity Officer - Jane Paul
Public Officer - Paul Meeth
Committee - Ian Roth, Nick King, Cilla Kinross, Peter Toedter.

Following the AGM, we had brief talks from **Colleen Farrow, Jill O'Grady** and **Casey Edwards**, all from the Central Tablelands Local Land Services (LLS).

Colleen is a Senior Land Services Officer (NRM) in the Orange office and outlined the role of the LLS which covers approximately 31,365 square kilometres of the region, most of it Wiradjuri Aboriginal country and including the major towns of Bathurst, Blayney, Cowra, Lithgow, Molong, Mudgee, Oberon and Orange. The area includes properties that make up 4.2% of NSW's annual value of agricultural production, includes almost 10% of NSW's agricultural business and contains 3.2% of NSW's agricultural land.

The role of LLS is to work with the community to improve primary production and manage our natural resources. The Central Tablelands LLS hold numerous workshops each month which can cover a number of topics or needs.

Colleen also has input to conservation activities of LLS and runs a number of projects including conservation of the Purple Copper Butterfly, off park fox control in Jenolan Caves and Wollemi/Glen Davis for the Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby, Scattered Paddock Tree project, Black Gum protection and revegetation project in Lithgow, Koala habitat project, Booroolong Frog project in Essington Forest (Sewells Creek), Regent Honeyeater revegetation in the Capertee Valley, *Eucalyptus* Identification workshops in Oberon, a Woodland bird workshop in Cowra and a 'Conservation in Action' conference in Bathurst.

One interesting project is the launch of a floating island for Gosling Creek Reservoir. This is intended to provide migratory birds

with a stopover point and habitat. Coupling this with revegetation of riparian land on the edges of the reservoir will create habitat for a range of additional species such as the Superb Parrot.



Floating island in Gosling Ck Reservoir

Jill introduced herself as a Senior Land Services Officer (Sustainable Land Management) and works out of the Bathurst Office. She has only just begun with LLS.

Casey is Land Services Officer (Biodiversity) with the Orange office and ran through all the services provided by the Central Tablelands LLS. She also explained some of the areas in which they provide advice to farmers and graziers, such as changes to the Native Vegetation laws, Land categorisation and the land management framework, allowable land clearing activities for private landholders and public authorities, changes brought in by the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 and the Crown Land Act and the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust.

Last Excursion

Our last excursion, which was planned to be a walk on Mt Canobolas, was cancelled due to the devastating fire which was raging through much of the SCA over that weekend and for most of the following week. See Jenny Medd's report below.

Mount Canobolas SCA Update

from Jenny Medd

After the "Red Alert" was published in February's newsletter in late January 2018, a small group of citizens met and commenced planning for a defence of the Mount Canobolas State Conservation Area (SCA) Steve Woodhall met with Jenny Medd, Nick King, Andrew Rawson, Jane Paul, Peter West and Sue Wakefield (NPWS Regional Advisory Committee). In addition, Cilla Kinross, Neil Jones, Murray Fletcher, Robert Alford (ex-

Canobolas Parklands Trustee) and Andrew Kennedy (NPWS, R.A.C.) have been involved in discussion although unable to attend that meeting.

A verbal report on these activities was presented to the OFNCS Committee and the AGM on 8th February. This Newsletter report now provides a further update for the wider membership. The fire which flared up on the evening of Saturday 10th has altered the focus somewhat but plans are being considered for how best to direct our efforts in the short term and on into the future.

Prior to the fire, Jenny received approval from the OFNCS Committee to write on behalf of the Society, while Nick has written with the approval of ECCO, and to date letters have been sent to:

- Fiona Buchanan at NPWS, Bathurst, requesting a briefing meeting with representatives of our groups as soon as convenient. [This meeting not likely to occur until the draft Plan of Management is ready for discussion.]
- Gabrielle Upton, NSW Minister for the Environment, requesting a meeting to discuss the SCA and its management, either here in Orange or elsewhere at her convenience. [Forwarded automated acknowledgement with message text to OFNCS Committee & others involved 12/02/2018]
- John Barilaro, Minister for Regional Planning and Western NSW, expressing our concerns and requesting he advocate against detrimental changes to the Plan of Management. [Automated acknowledgement received 13/02/2018]
- Penny Sharpe, Shadow Minister for the Environment [No response as at 28/02/2018]
- Mehreen Faruqi, Greens M.L.C., same as for J. Barilaro. [Dr Faruqi's brief, personal, positive response was shared on 21/01/2018]

If anyone wishes or is prepared to send similar letters, as individuals, please contact Jenny or Nick if a copy of the letter (circulated to the Committee) is needed as a guideline, although it shouldn't be copied *verbatim*.

Other activities, again mostly planned prior to the fire have included the following:

- Nick has talked with the CWD who are happy to provide media exposure when action arises. In the meantime, efforts are being made to keep the SCA, the mountain and NPWS in the media with positive

articles, e.g., for the “Earth First” column (see items published on Friday 2nd and 9th February).

- Nick also prepared a letter, distributed with assistance from Vicky Fletcher, to National Party members meeting at the Ex-Services Club on Saturday 10th February (also reported in the CWD).
- Robert Alford met with his friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Richard Colless, to seek facilitation of the meeting with Minister Upton. Unfortunately, Mr Colless was not prepared to be helpful.
- Jane Paul took our concerns to the local Bushwalkers Club meeting early in February, and on February 15th their President, John Eisman, met with Nick, Jenny and Neil Jones to further discuss the issues. Although the Club is still Bathurst-centric, we expect they will add their support to advocate for protection of the SCA.
- Helmut Berndt has been approached to seek assistance from the Camera Club to collect and collate photographs of the mountain with a view to publishing a “coffee-table / picture” book on the mountain. Lots of considerations and details are yet to be worked through, so anyone with an interest in helping should please contact Jenny. If you have quality photographs that you’d be willing to share, do contact either Jenny or Helmut. [Note that a small group of people in Millthorpe have done just this for their town!]
- Andrew Rawson is working on both contact with the local indigenous people and considering the scientific opportunities that might be realised in light of the aftermath of fires since this earlier meeting.
- Cilla Kinross, as Chair of CWEC, has approached the National Parks Association for advice [22/02/2018].

To recap, only two days after our 8th February meeting, at which the decision had been taken to revise the planned Sunday excursion to visit Towac Creek, fire broke out on Mount Canobolas. With almost all the SCA burnt, threatened and endangered species most likely included, it will be decades before the sub-alpine habitat recovers to something akin to what we already knew was worth fighting for. However, we know that what remains is still worth fighting for; in fact it will be even more vitally important that the SCA receives all possible help to regenerate and that we save this area for the future.

The following issues will need to be considered:

- Approx. 70% of the park has been burnt. The main unburnt areas are south of Gum Ridge fire trail and the Pine Ridge area east of the inholding (i.e. Devils Hole) and the south east corner of the park around to the Indigo fire trail on the southern end of the inholding. For the moment, no one can go into the park area due to safety concerns and until the NPWS, RFS, Police and Fire investigators have finished their work of clearing debris and securing the area, which could potentially take months. A full assessment of the damage to infrastructure, which is covered by government insurance in a Treasury managed fund, is underway. The cost of labour involved, particularly contract jobs, is a separate issue.
- The cause of the fire is still being investigated.
- Ideas are already being considered to establish a photographic record of the current state of the SCA, with continued monitoring of the recovery over a long period of time. Helmut is already liaising with Steve, with the first round of photographs planned for the beginning of March.
- We should never underestimate the resilience of the Australian bush to recover. What we are used to seeing up there is the result of the 1982 fire, which was very severe, and looking at the vegetation before this fire, we can see how it was recovering. Sub alpine environments can take a very long time to fully recover (~100yrs ?), but the 35 years since the last major fire had just brought the vegetation back into “fire threshold” where NPWS would be happy for fire to be brought back into the vegetation (although not such an intense and widespread fire).
- No doubt there has been an impact on the fauna, and the isolated nature of the park will make it difficult for some species and recovery will be slow. The loss of hollows will have quite an impact if many of the old trees have burnt and fallen. Please note that the local WIRES branch has been proactive in social media asking people to report injured fauna so a rescuer can assist whenever it is feasible.
- Preparations are proceeding for a Park Recovery Plan which will look at issues and required works over the next 5–10 years,

including weed control programs, feral animal control programs, repair of infrastructure (walking track steps, bridges, signs, etc), threatened species impact assessments, vegetation recovery monitoring and fauna surveys. Note that the opportunity will exist to get into areas for blackberry control and to try and prevent it from coming back as dominantly as after the 1982 fire.

- Funding for the Park Recovery Plan will be important so lobbying by interest groups to get enough long term funds for a proper recovery effort will be important and undoubtedly our help will be needed. The park will need active management over the next 5–10 years to mitigate negative impacts post fire, but don't lose hope.
- We may start to see some negative comment against NPWS in the media from those with agendas now the direct fire risk has been reduced. Supporting comments in the media would be appreciated. [Nick King is always happy to receive 500 word articles which can be published in the CWD under the "Earth First" column.]

An update sent to the Committee by Geoff Selwood on 17/02/2018 advised:

- The areas where *Prostanthera gilesii* (listed as Critically Endangered) once lived received a very hot fire with nothing remaining above ground. We don't know if the species can reshoot from underground roots so it is very fortunate that the propagation group of the Friends of Orange Botanic Gardens have around 40 plants grown from cuttings which they have offered to supply if necessary.
- The *Xanthoparmelia* lichen areas (a listed Endangered Ecological Community) also received a hot blast, although some did not get quite as hot as others; so some have been lost, and others are as ok as can be expected. We don't know how quickly this community might recover, if at all. It might be centuries old.
- Of course, some blackberry survived this and other weeds will be a major problem most probably in the 2019–2020 season.
- The scorch height is all over the place but the entire area will not be fully assessed for some time. Steve Woodhall has since advised that the tree canopy suffered more crown scorching than crown fire, which means the forest will look even worse in two months as leaf drop continues. While

the grasses have already responded to recent showers, it will not be until spring that more obvious recovery is likely to be seen.

- *Eucalyptus canobolensis* (listed as Vulnerable) stands received a variety of heat; Steve later advised that some of the already established monitoring plots had in fact not burnt at all.

Steve has also addressed a meeting called by ECCO on February 28th to which all OFNCS members were invited. As well as reiterating much of the background to the mountain, including its geological origins, its environmental and cultural values, Steve outlined the known fire history and the hazard reduction burns that have occurred in the park. A series of "Linescan" photographs of the February 2018 fire's progress, taken from a helicopter dedicated to monitoring and recording the outbreak, were especially graphic, as were a small selection of photographs taken by NPWS staff on the ground. Moving on to the issue of the proposed mountain bike trails within the SCA, Steve again reiterated some of the background before discussing the new Plan of Management, with considerable participation from the audience.

Note that:

- The new Plan of Management itself will be a briefer, strategic policy document, intended to be viable for the next 20 to 30 years and will become law when accepted.
- It will be accompanied by a second more substantial document consisting of Planning Consideration Details, which is not legislated, but can be amended as a simple policy change within NPWS, without going through the Minister.
- Release of both documents for public exhibition and comment is now expected to occur at the end of April. It will be vitally important that individuals as well as groups put in a submission within the 90 day exhibition period.
- NPWS has already met with Orange City Council who has been given prior access to the draft documents.
- We expect both ECCO and OFNCS will also receive a prior briefing, although official confirmation has not yet been received.

Steve advised that it may well be another month before he can provide significant updates on the Recovery Plan that he hopes will be established.

Both Cilla and Andrew Rawson were approached by Prime-7 TV for interviews which were due to go to air on Friday 2nd March, which was too late for comment in this edition of the Newsletter.

Members' Notes

from Jenny Kenna



Not that I'm skiting, but how often do you see 2 Painted Snipes, female.....fantastic.

and this from Rosemary Stapleton on 26 January. It should have gone into the last newsletter



Checking out the Crake at Ploughmans Wetland with my scope was worth the effort. There was a Spotless Crake there, although this was an adult and I think the one I had seen a few days before was a juvenile. I was surprised to see another bird, bigger than the Spotless Crake and it turned out to be an Australian Spotted Crake. Sadly the storm came that afternoon and the water level is much too high now for these birds to stay around.

Australian Naturalists' Network

2018 Get-together, 29 Sept - 8 October.

The South East Australian Naturalists' Association cordially invites field naturalists from across Australia to attend the 10th ANN

Get-together to be held in Victoria in Spring 2018. The gathering will take place midway through Victoria's wildflower season beginning at Halls Gap in the Grampians on the afternoon of Saturday 29 September. We will then travel through part of the Western Victorian Volcanic Plain to Warrnambool for an overnight stay. The final four nights will be at Anglesea on the Surf Coast near Geelong with the Get-together concluding with breakfast on Monday 8 October.

Registration is now open with only 90 places available. Information is available on the ANN website at:

<https://australiannaturalistsnetwork.wordpress.com>

Contacts are **John Gregurke** (0408 353671) and **Geraldine Harris** (0407 663109)

Email jgregurke1@bigpond.com or gedharris49@gmail.com

Creature of the Month

Cunningham's Skink
Egernia cunninghami

Image and text by Jenny Medd



Cunningham's skinks have been residents at Dick and Jenny Medd's property for some years. This juvenile has often been spotted recently on the front verandah but usually scuttles for cover long before a photograph can be considered.

These skinks are one of the larger, prickly lizards, growing to around 25cm in length, with significant variations across their range in both colour and patterns. They do however exhibit quite distinctive rigid points on their scales mostly along the dorsal surface from the back of the neck down to the tip of the pointed tail. Found across a large area of southeastern Australia, they are protected in all states, and listed as endangered in South Australia. They favour rocky areas, sheltering in crevices and under large slabs of rock. Largely vegetarian, they also feed on a variety of invertebrates.

There is a good population of *E.cunninghami* to be found at Borenore Caves Reserve.

More information can be found at:
<http://reptilepark.com.au/animals/reptiles/skinks/cunninghams-skink/>
and
<https://australianmuseum.net.au/cunninghams-skink/>

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



Jill O'Grady and Casey Edwards talk to us about LLS on 8th February

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