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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

President's Report	Page 2
Cover photo story	Page 2
Kellerberrin visit	Pages 3,4-5,8-9
WA Reptile Park Visit	Page 6 & 7
Julimar CAFA	Page 9 & 10
Members Gallery	Page 11
Landscape Expedition Gibson Desert	Pages 12-14
Did you know...	Page 14
Fungi Foray	Page 15
Environment Matters	Page 16

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

by Sharon Richards

May to August has been another busy time for the Naturalists Club, I think busy has become the norm! In May the Club visited the Western Australian Reptile Park in Henley Brook. It was quite a privilege to be able to handle the beautiful pythons and hear the dingos howl in unison with the emergency sirens going past!

The June weekend away was a highly successful trip out to Kellerberin. The opportunity to see the rare black flanked rock wallaby was only one of the many highlights. This trip is covered more extensively later in the Newsletter so I'll leave you to read more details from ?

Our AGM in July saw a few changes to the Committee and Patrons. This year we saw the resignation of Neville Marchant. Neville has been a dedicated Patron to the Nat's for many years and I'd like to thank him for that commitment, we will miss him. With the resignation opens an opportunity and now we are very fortunate that Wayne Clark has agreed to become our newest patron, his many years of experience working with the different environmental groups will be of great benefit to the Club. Following the AGM Greg Warburton provided a fascinating presentation about John Gilbert, an oft forgotten English naturalist and taxidermist who worked with James Drummond and spent time in and around the South West of WA. Thanks Greg for bringing this man to the fore, it was a really interesting and enlightening presentation.

A late change to the program meant that in August we had the opportunity for Desrae Clark to share her experience of a Landscape Expedition to the Gibson Desert area. Desrae's story highlighted the rustic accommodation conditions which many might have balked at as well as the wonderful array of wildlife they had the opportunity to see during their research. Sadly these expeditions are no longer conducted by Landscape, although I do think you need to be made of pretty tough stuff to have been a part of one, well done Desrae!



Above: Scan the QR Code to sign the On-Line petition

The Cover Photo Story

by Finn Ruoss

For Mother's Day we went to Dryandra. We saw four echidnas. I saw a baby numbat. We saw nine bush stone curlews. We went on lots of bush walks. We went to the village. We also had a picnic at Congelin campground. The most common bird we saw was the rufus tree creeper. The village has a cool new playground with a fun flying fox.

Cover photo::Finn and Sadies Ruoss making sure an echidna crosses the road safely

Photo: Brian Foley

Kellerberrin Visit by Desraé Clarke

The Nat's contingent of members to the Kellerberrin and surrounding areas had an early start destined to meet in the township at 9am. Member, Ric Newman of the area, had also asked well-known wildlife carer, Kathy McEnany, and local farmers who overlook the area to be visited, Eva and Alan Cole, to join the group.

Once everyone had enjoyed a coffee at the rondaveau the trek was begun to Nangeen Hill Reserve to meet Merredin DBCA Officer, Jazmin Lindley. Jazmin does not normally work on a Friday so we were extremely appreciative of her giving time to view the rare and endangered Black-flanked Rock Wallaby (*Petrogale lateralis lateralis*) population at Nangeen Hill Reserve. The granite outcrop of gigantic boulders and caves, is north-facing capturing the winter warmth for the animals. During the summer they move into the caves to escape the intense heat – a typical 'rock wallaby' environment.



Above: 'Wallaby on the Rocks' Black-flanked Rock Wallaby (*Petrogale lateralis lateralis*)

Photo: Jazmin Lindley

The population had been studied by the late scientist, Jack Kinnear, since the 1970's. He developed fox baiting at Nangeen Hill, one of the first sites of fox baiting in Western Australia; this research led to 'Operation Foxglove' the precursor to today's state-wide baiting Western Shield program. The fox baiting saw Wallaby population numbers gradually increase during the 80's, 90's and 2000's. However, in 2011 population crashes were experienced across each of the wheatbelt Rock Wallaby populations for reasons not entirely apparent but, perhaps, the presence of bait-shy foxes in addition to overgrazing of the immediate foraging habitat of the species.

Nangeen Hill population has since then gone from 7 to over 100, plus, individuals. The program was so successful it has since been used as one of the two source populations of Rock Wallabies with 65 animals translocated to Kalbarri National Park in 2016-2018. This population's success is mostly attributed to the 5km long predator-proof fence that protects the reserve and its inhabitants from foxes and cats since 2013.

Kellerberrin Visit... (cont)



Above: Black-flanked Rock-wallaby

Photo: Jazmin Lindsay

The other four reserves of rock wallaby populations in the wheatbelt are also fox-baited fortnightly but remain unfenced.

Although this species does not require a water source, it obtains its moisture requirements from dew on the rocks and in the vegetation on which it grazes. There has been much revegetation of the Reserve as overgrazing had been a major issue prior to the fence being constructed due to the rock wallabies 'fear factor' of the foxes restricting the wallabies to only grazing within 20m from the outcrop. Although they now forage to each corner of the reserve, revegetation of the overgrazed habitat is a long process. The area is of an extremely poor soil type, is subject to erosion and there is competition from rabbits feeding in the area. As quick as seedlings can be planted the rock wallabies are feeding on them hence the need for an extensive enclosure fencing to temporarily keep the wallabies off the revegetation while it establishes itself.

Young are born at any time of the year and the Reserve is monitored fortnightly by DBCA officers. With the predator-proof fence keeping foxes and cats away, the rock wallabies other main predator is the Wedge-tailed Eagle. A large eyrie at the top of a Salmon Gum a kilometre distant has the occupants keeping a watch over the Wallaby population; we were also observed from on high!!

(cont. Page 5)

Right: The unusual pads of the Rock-wallaby that allow it to climb near-vertical rocks

Photo: Jazmin Lindsay



Kellerberrin Visit... (cont)

Feral cats have a constant presence at the other wheatbelt rock wallaby sites. Eradicat is a new cat specific 1080 product which is currently being looked at as another tool to be used in the fight to protect this endangered species. Regular fox baiting has proven to be very successful.

Echidnas can also be a nuisance. If the animal digs its way into the enclosure from the outside it gives entry to the fox, cat or rabbit. So fortnightly checks on the fence are critical with often a log placed across a persistent hole under the fence. It is amazing the strength of an echidna and how heavy of an item they can shift.

The predator-proof enclosure is a simple set-up with a fence, floppy top to prevent cats climbing in, and two hot wires powered by solar panels and two batteries.

It was a wonderful few hours of amazing education of this rare species. Many photos were taken but the little creature blends into the terrain and its extremely fast movement can make photography quite difficult.

Kokerbin Rock Reserve

The group moved on to this interesting Reserve that has picnic and toilet facilities available. Several members briefly explored the area prior to lunch and a General Meeting. While chatting Jazman gave out a recent Wheatbelt NRM publication on the flora of the Wongan Hills/Ballidu region.

Following lunch a beautifully constructed and an extremely deep well with a lining of rocks was visited prior to wending our way back to Kellerberrin.

Members then returned to their various accommodation around the Kellerberrin area to spruce up for dinner. A number of members were staying at 'The Prev', an historical Federation-style complex at the base of Kellerberrin Hill, accommodated a number of members. The Prev would be familiar to a number of members having been used as a base for our weekend away in August 2016. Past Patron Dr. Neville Marchant led that excursion.

Today has been a wonderful beginning to the weekend with a happy evening get-together in the dining room of the Kellerberrin hotel.

Saturday 17th June 2023

Ric Newman's Duranilling farming property

Together with Kathy, Ric brought his local farming friends, Glenice Bachelor, Neville Tiller and Eric Chandler to join the group. The interaction between everyone was just fantastic.

Glenice is very well-known in the area of conservation and is currently on the board of the State NRM, Eric is a wealth of knowledge on orchids and birds and Neville is very interested in all areas of conservation.

We walked through remnant vegetation, an area that Ric said had *never* been grazed. The ancient trees, that resembled a species 'wandoo', had magnificent nesting holes of many different sizes to fit Pardalotes, Owllet Nightjars, Owls, etc. It would be wonderful to visit the area at night as Ric said he knows the area if well-used by owls.

On return to the vehicles everyone sat around, eating their lunch, while Ric spoke about his farm and the revegetation that he has achieved while still farming the property for a living. His map showing the revegetated areas over the entire property is just incredible.

A copy of the Nat's publication, '*A guide to Exploring Toodyay – naturally*' was given to Ric for his assistance with the visit, and the many finer details, was most appreciated.

Alan and Eve Coles farming property, Mt Stirling and Mt Caroline

Members were then asked to find their way to the interesting and historic farm of Alan and Eva Cole. Alan had prepared information on the area as follows.

'The first explorers in the area were the group led by Ensign Dale. They went to the top of Mt Stirling and Mt Caroline and took bearings on other hills further east before heading south-east to a fresh water lake south of Kwolyin.

The next was James Drummond, the former government botanist, who spent about three months in the area in 1847 collecting plant samples to send to Kew in the UK.

(cont. Page 8)

May Excursion to the West Australian Reptile Park, Henley Brook

by Sharon Richards

The West Australian Reptile Park in Henley Brook is not quite what you'd expect - in many ways it is much more.

A strong family business, It was first established in 2003 by Gane Doyle a man with a lifelong passion for reptiles which he has passed on to his son and grandson, both also Gane Doyle and both still strongly involved with the running of the park. Consisting of approximately 25 acres of native bushland it provides a home for a multitude of different animals in the suburb of Henley Brook.

In the numerous sheds you can find an array of reptiles including, of course, our beautiful bobtails and blue tongues, we had the opportunity to see these creatures up close despite the cool autumn day. There was quite an assortment of both venomous snakes, cute skinks and bearded dragons. Many were moving in their cages to follow the warmth of the sun's rays.



Above: How far can it go? Olive Python with Peter Macgill and Sharon Richards.

Photo: Rob and Beth Boase

A real treat, and in fairness the reason many of us visited the Park, was being able to handle an assortment of pythons, all seemed quite content to be passed between various keen members of the Nats Club! A woman, rarely seen in the Perth Hills these days, a carpet python, often seen in and around the Toodyay area and the largest of our west Australian pythons from the North of WA an Olive python, who liked to be the tallest in the room, or be in the highest spot. It was a truly fascinating time being so close. The opportunity to feel and observe how these beautiful creatures managed to move so easily, their muscles contracting as they slid across your arm, or in Peter's case, around your neck!

Once we had had our time with the pythons it was outside to explore some other enclosures with fresh water crocodiles of varying sizes, basking in the autumn sunshine.

WA Reptile Park Visit... (cont)



Above: The Reptile Park has its own 'Dingo Rock' - complete with two beautiful pure dingos . Photo: Rob and Beth Boase



Above: Members talking to Gain during afternoon tea . Photo: Rob and Beth Boase

Kellerberrin Visit... (cont)

The first pastoralists in the area were the Parkers who set up an outstation near Mt Stirling in 1860. Agricultural settlement started about 1907.

From the site the Lockhart River can be seen coming from the south east and the Yilgarn River from the north west.

The junction of these two systems can be seen to the west and Caroline Gap can be seen further west between Mt Stirling and Mt Caroline.

To the south west can be seen what Drummond described as ‘a beautiful grassy valley walled on one flank by an abrupt breakaway of rocky cliffs’. (Nangeen Hill).

At the site is a natural water hole or gnamma; it appears to be the only water hole in the area which fits the description Drummond gave to the one he used describing it as an excellent water supply surrounded by an area of granite. It is overseen by a stone ‘head’ which has significance according to an elderly Aboriginal man who worked on the property.’

A number of the group then left to trek home while others chatted over a coffee with Eva and Alan as a finale to a great weekend.



Above: General view of the confluence of the Yilgarn, Lockhart and Salt Rivers, and Mt Caroline and Mt Stirling Photo: Wayne Clarke



Above: Club members meandering toward the confluence.

Photo: Wayne Clarke

Kellerberrin Visit... (cont)



Above: The confluence of the Yilgarn, Lockhart and Salt Rivers below the Cole property.

Photo: Wayne Clarke

Julimar Conservation And Forest Alliance (JCAFA) (cont. Page 10)



Above: Max the chuditch was attracting lots of attention while Desraé Clarke (white jacket) was collecting more signatures.

Photo: Wayne Clarke



Above: Max the chuditch and his 'Minder' (Elaine) - having a break from the hordes..

Photo: Bridget Leggett

Julimar Conservation And Forest Alliance (JCAFA)

by Sharon Richards



Above: These Avon Descent competitors wouldn't have had much time to take in the sign - but the spectators certainly did.

Photo: Greg Warburton

Over the last few months the JCAFA team has been channelling a lot of effort and time into developing a resource document to provide the basis for a proposal for Julimar to be classified as a National Park. A number of different experts and enthusiasts have been contributing and Bridget has been drafting into a workable document. We had a meeting with David Newsome who provided valuable insight into the way forward. We still have a way to go but it's coming along nicely. At the same time, we have had wildlife motion cameras set up in Julimar and to date we know we have seen woylie, phascogale, black gloved wallaby, chuditch and sadly feral pigs, cats and foxes. All the data will be collated and shared in a readable format towards the end of the project, but it's been a very informative exercise so far.

JCAFA and other Naturalist's Club members were present at both the Moondyne Joe and Fibre Festivals, lots of signatures were gathered and our message was well received.

In early August Mark and Jacquie organised the Julimar Forest Fungi Foray, which was a huge success. Over 30 participants attended and the Nat's Club was very well represented amongst them. The data is still being collated, but there were at least 30 different fungi identified on that day. On August 12th the team divided to share the message. In Toodyay at the International food Festival, we had a great information display, a walking chuditch, who delighted the youngsters and met with foreign dignitaries and a banner displayed alongside the river for all the participants to see, it was an amazing effort. At the same time 3 other JCAFA members were busy at Parliament House attending a Wafa rally about stopping mining in WA Forests. Again much support was had, even a possum signed in support! The e-petition is now available and will run until early January. To aid the promotion we have had business cards and new posters printed. Each JCAFA team member has a list of contacts to share the petition with and this is well underway. We've already had very positive responses from the West Australian Forest Alliance, Bird Life and Hike West all of whom have shared on through their networks. The next big opportunity to promote our cause will be at the Toodyay Agricultural Show so any support and ideas are welcome. I can't say enough to thank both the JCAFA team and all other Naturalists' Club members for all their monumental efforts over the last little while.

We've achieved so much, and it couldn't have been done without you.

Member's Gallery



Above: A bush picnic.

Below: What surprises there are in the bush

Photos: Ric Newman



A Landscape Expedition to the 1,890,000 ha Gibson Desert Nature Reserve - 1998

by Desrae Clarke

Photos: Wayne Clarke

August 18 1998 - Two weeks prior to leaving on the research expedition, participants attended a debrief. They were also asked to read *'Spinifex and Sands'*, the diary of the Hon David Carnegie, the English explorer of 1896.

Wednesday 2 September - The group - consisting of Graeme (Tub) Liddlelow, CALM Senior Technical Officer from Manjimup, Per Christianson, Consulting Research Officer, Mike, our driver and special cook, Marianne Lewis, CALM Liaison Officer, Ross Carrick (New Zealand), Christine Crafter and Bill Scutchings (South Australia), Kaye Vaux (Ongerup - 84!), Ross Bedford (Bunbury), Wayne and I - met at the UWA (University of WA) car park to leave in an OKA and a utility to drive along the Great Northern Highway.

The first overnight stop was at Nallan Station (vicinity of Cue) in shearer's quarters. A roster to assist Mike with preparation and cleaning-up after meals was begun.



Above: The sign says it all - and the dirt begins



Above: The OKA loaded up and on its way

Thursday 3 September - The blacktop was left just out of Wiluna and on to the Gunbarrel Highway to Carnegie Station Homestead - 1320km from UWA car park! Three Bustards were sighted as we arrived.

Friday 4 September - The early departure continued on the true Gunbarrel Highway necessitating frequent 'bone shaker' breaks! Arrival at the Eagle Bore Research Centre, 88km north of the Highway and 'home' for the next seven nights, was at midday. We all found camping pads to set up our 'bedrooms' Lunch was organised and there was a 'safety brief' by Tub - it was then straight to work!!

Two tracks, of 30 and 32kms in length, required 'grading' with railway line hauled behind the OKA to record, each morning, overnight animal activity. Another chore was that of preparing the 'trap-lines'

The 'trap-lines' are about 30 metres of soft wire netting, approximately 25cms in height, held upright by small steel pegs. Along the length of the netting are domestic plastic buckets and lengths of polypipe, the latter 15cms in diameter and as long as the buckets are in height; both buckets and polypipe are dug into the earth with the tops level with the surface and covered with lids. The lids are removed and the polypipe and buckets cleaned of water, spiders, etc. The netting is checked and adjusted as required. Trap-lines were 1 to 10 and 11 to 20.

The small critters scurry through the vegetation, hit the netting, run along it to then drop into the receptacle. There was only time to check a small number before nightfall.

Saturday 5 Saturday - It was a freezing start at 5.30am to breakfast, complete roster duties and leave the Centre by 6.30am to check the graded tracks for animal activity. Two people sit on the front of the vehicle and call to the scribe, inside, the activity. The movement that first day; 1 fox, 8 dingoes, 1 cat, 30 kangaroos, 8 rabbits and 5 camels. The opened trap-lines were checked and the remainder had lids removed, etc.

The bush showers were a welcome end to a busy day; the water was heated over the outdoor fire.

As an aside, the 'Landscape Expeditioners of 1999 found a large Carpet Python housed beneath one of the shower's wooden floor slats!

Landscape Expedition, Gibson Desert Nature Reserve (cont)

Sunday 6 September - A sample from a trapline is as follows: Jewelled Gecko, Dunnart, Sandy Inland



Above: Eagle Bore Research Centre



Above: Installing the trap-lines

Mouse, house mouse, Gwardar and a Legless Lizard. The tracks also yielded interesting animal activity. After lunch we drove to Spinifex Drive to set up two flora quadrats of 50 metres square. One area was burnt ground, from a lightning strike two years earlier, and the second area was unburnt. The burnt area supported 25 species while the unburnt area held five that included the dominant plant of spinifex.

Monday 7 September - Thunder and lightning woke everyone at 4am! Gear was covered except our swags that were reputed to be waterproof. The trap-lines were checked but the fauna movement on the tracks had been washed out.

Two more quadrats were measured. On our return the swags were checked - to be found *very wet!* Two tarpaulins were set up to keep them dry.

Tuesday 8 September - Rain had again obliterated the fauna markings on the graded tracks. The traplines were checked. A fox had attempted to dig out a trapped Dunnart.



Left: One of the large number of eremophilas found right through the Gibson Desert

A visit was made to the Eagle Bore that supplied our water. A Crimson Chat was sighted feigning a damaged wing; its nest was obviously nearby.

A Kalgoorlie CALM team arrived to complete a fresh meat 1080 aerial baiting program for eradication of feral cats. They joined us for dinner - 18 people sat down! Horizon fires started by lightning strikes were extinguished by the rain.

Wednesday 9 September - The trap lines were checked, tracks dragged and monitoring of vegetation plots completed. An enormous, obsolete

Boodie mound, in the vicinity of the Centre, appears to be used by a fox.

Thursday 10 September - The traps were closed with lids ready for the next annual visit by Expeditioners. Sites on Brain Street, 40km from the camp, were checked by Tub; the tracks were overgrown and washed out. In preparation to leave Friday the camp building, refrigerator, cupboards, etc, were cleaned.

Landscape Expedition, Gibson Desert Nature Reserve (cont)

A *Varanus tristus*, living behind the fridge, was disturbed.

Friday 11 September - A group photo was taken beneath the Centre's un-named eucalypt, with departure from Eagle Bore Reserve at 7.15am to travel to the Empress Spring in the Great Sandy Desert.

With assistance from an Aboriginal of the area, the Spring was discovered 1896 by the Hon David Carnegie, the English explorer. Birds Australia (WA) requested CALM to complete a Bird of Prey count. Wayne and Per observed the rare Black Falcon while travelling from the Reserve!

En route the utility had a flat tyre and a fuel filter was a nuisance with the Izuzu. The track had been gouged by large vehicles in wet weather giving an average speed 30kmph. Passing into the Great Sandy Desert the average speed dropped to 22kmph!



The Spring has a very narrow entrance, then a narrow, jagged rock passage, down a steep incline to eventually find the water - ten metres from the surface!

We set up our tents, had a BBQ tea then a welcome 'early to bed'.

Saturday 12 September - Leaving the Empress Spring the road improved as it is obviously regularly maintained. The OKA arrived Laverton at 12.45pm to await the Izuzu. Its fuel problems were finally cured with the fitting of a new filter for the group to arrive Coolgardie for an overnight stay.

Sunday 13 September - Coolgardie was left at 8.15am to reach the UWA car park late afternoon - 1,650km from the Gibson Desert Nature Reserve.

What is a desert?

The distinguishing characteristic is 'an arid climate with a variable and unpredictable rainfall pattern'.

DID YOU KNOW...

... that **Rainbow Lorikeets** are Declared Pests in Western Australia. **It is essential then that any lorikeets in the wild outside the existing Perth range be immediately reported so they can be safely retrieved or removed.** The population of Perth birds are believed to be from an 'accidental' release - established from fewer than 10 escaped or released caged birds in 1968.

They are a menace to local native bird species, harassing and bullying them out of their feeding and nesting sites - and they cause over three million dollars in damage to commercial fruit crops in Perth each year.

In the WA 2022 Aussie Bird Count the Rainbow Lorikeet was more commonly sighted than any other species (19,930); followed by New Holland Honeyeaters (19,837) and then the Galah (16,713).

What's probably lesser known is that **a fauna possessing (or pet keeper's) license is required from DBCA to keep rainbow lorikeets as pets.**

You can report sightings to the DPIRD Pest and Disease Information Service on (08) 9368 3080 or by email to padis@dpiird.wa.gov.au.

The Forest Fungi Foray

by Sharon Richards

AUGUST is a great month to get out walking in the bush to see the wildflowers, but there is something else emerging, too, after the rains...a whole array of amazing fungi.

This month the Julimar Conservation and Forest Alliance (JCAFA) team, Mark and Jacquie, organised a great excursion to Julimar Forest to see what fungi we could find. Over 30 keen enthusiasts, with the Toodyay Naturalists' Club very well represented and some from far afield, made their way to Munyerring Springs Road and down to the Julimar Brook area.

Fungi are not plants or animals, but rather form their own part of the living kingdom. Fungi don't eat like animals or photosynthesize like plants, they thrive in all sort of environments including the oceans, fresh water, soils and the human body. Some fungi contribute to our wellbeing, They may be the basis for medicine - think penicillin - others relay messages between trees, and help break down plant matter. A world without fungi would mean no forests as we know them today.

Julimar Forest provides a wonderful habitat for fungi as it has many intact ecosystems, plant communities and a vast fresh water system.

In small groups and going off in different directions, the order of the day was to meander slowly and take time to see what was emerging through the leaf litter and on the fallen trees.

To not disturb the specimens mirrors were used to see what lay underneath - some fungi have gills, others have spores. To determine this helps with more accurate identification.

We found singular earth stars (puff balls) emerging straight from the ground with some as big as a tennis ball. There were bright orange bracket fungi protruding from fallen hakea trees providing a vibrant splash of colour. From the leaf litter we discovered colonies of little orange mushrooms and beautifully patterned brown caps.

In one very short morning's visit, and in a very small area of the forest, we recorded over 20 different species suggesting there would be many more to find.



Left: The bright orange Bracket fungi with a mirror being used to see the underside, so as not to disturb the specimens.

Photo: Sharon Richards

ENVIRONMENT MATTERS



Above: Twins making this mother's life uncomfortable

Photo: Bec Creeper

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