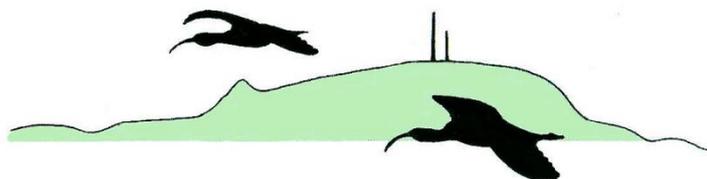


## ORANGE FIELD NATURALIST AND CONSERVATION SOCIETY Inc



NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2017

### NEXT MEETING

**Thursday, 9<sup>th</sup> November, 7.30pm**

**SPEAKER: Murray Fletcher  
and Vicki Glover**

**TOPIC: Birding in South America**

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

**No Committee Meeting this month**

### EXCURSION

**Sunday, 12<sup>th</sup> November**

**Federal Falls walk**

**Meet at Orange High Bus Bay at 9am**

**Bring morning tea and lunch**

**Visit the OFNCS website at**

**<http://www.orangefieldnats.com/>**

### Next Meeting

Murray and Vicki spent a month in South America from mid June to mid July. The main reason for going was to attend a bug conference in Brazil but this provided the opportunity to do some birding, both in Brazil and northern Peru. You have already seen some of our pics (see OFNCS newsletter, August 2017) but we have a few more to show you, particularly of the birds.

### Next Excursion

Our excursion on Sunday 12th will be to Mt Canobolas to do the Federal Falls walk. Those who feel they are unable to complete the full walk can do part of it and save their strength for the Nature Trail at The Walls picnic area where the heath flowers should be looking their best. The excursion will be led by Cilla who is planning to have lunch at the Walls.

### Xmas Party

With December fast approaching, it is time to reserve the date for the OFNCS Xmas Party

which will again be held in conjunction with ECCO. Since Peter Hedberg has sold his vineyard, we will be relocating our party to Orange Mountain Wines, Radnedge Lane, which is a bit further along the Escort Way towards Borenore. Our hosts will be Terry and Julie Dolle. Please note that you may not bring wine but Orange Mountain wines will be available at very reasonable rates for purchase on the day. A BBQ will be available for those who want to bring something to cook.

Details:

Date: Sunday 17th December

Time: from 5.30pm

### Last Meeting

*Summary by the editor*

*Images supplied by Ian Roth*

**Ian Roth** is a Board member of the Taronga Conservation Society Australia which currently has conservation projects in 21 nations around the world. Ian presented a two-part talk covering two of these projects, Saving the Sumatran Rhinoceros and the Bellingher River Snapping Turtle.



Ian at the Sumatran Rhino Reserve, Indonesia

Ian has visited a Rhino reserve in Indonesia where wildlife protection units protect surviving rhinos from poaching. They are also focussed on habitat preservation and restoration but one of their most important functions is to get the locals involved in protecting their rhinos. Locals still trap wild animals as bush meat and the snares they set in the jungle are a threat for wild rhinos, even

though they are not the target. Deforestation for oil palm plantations has also decimated the habitat for rhinos. There are reputable producers of palm oil based on sustainable practices and those producers are highlighted in a new exhibit at Taronga Zoo featuring Sumatran tigers. At the exhibit, there is a computer terminal set up for visitors to send emails to companies that do not produce palm oil in a sustainable manner. In the two months that this has been available, 10,000 emails have been sent. The exhibit highlights how close to extinction are several Indonesian mammals including the rhino, tiger, elephant, sun bear and pangolin.



Second calf born in captivity in Sumatra, named Delilah by the Indonesian President

One of the difficulties that have been faced by those working to save the rhino is that they are very hard to breed in captivity. Only two calves have been bred in Indonesia while three have been born at Cincinnati Zoo. However, the Cincinnati Zoo found that their rhinos were losing condition and tests revealed that the level of iron in their bodies was building up to potentially lethal levels. An explanation for this is that the rhinos in the wild in Sumatra are under constant attack from parasites both internal and external (leeches, ticks) and they have evolved a metabolic strategy to deal with this constant loss of blood. Taking them away from their natural environment and ensuring that they were "healthy" by not having parasites meant that their metabolism now worked against them. Even regular blood-letting by zoo vets did not solve the problem so the Cincinnati rhinos have been returned to Sumatra where they are now caged in very large enclosures in the jungle at the Sumatran rhino reserve.

The second part of Ian's talk covered the Bellinger River Snapping Turtle, *Myuchelys georgesi* which is only found in a 45 km section of the Bellinger River on the NSW North Coast. It was estimated that there were

between 1500 and 4500 turtles in the river before February 2015 when the population was decimated by a previously unknown disease which blinded the turtles. As they are dependent on their sight to find food, the turtles died, apparently of starvation, along most of their former range along the river. Desperate measures to identify the pathogen and locate its source were undertaken and it was discovered that the virus, as it turned out to be, was unlike any other that had been recorded and could not be found in any other local creatures, including man, that is in the region. In a parallel exercise to that conducted for the Tasmanian devil in recent years, clean captive populations were established. Because of the risk of individuals carrying the virus undetected and potentially spreading it through the captive population, the turtles were kept in separate tanks which were plumbed individually and operated under strict quarantine to exclude rodents and other potential disease vectors.

In these tanks, turtles were provided with sand in which it was hoped that they would lay eggs, and they did. The hatchlings are now growing readily into healthy adults but releasing them back into the Bellinger River carries risks because the original source of the virus has not been identified and they may once again be exposed to this disease when they are released back into the wild.

One interesting fact about these turtles is that they hibernate underwater and reduce their metabolism to the extent that they are able to maintain oxygen exchange by "breathing" through their cloaca.



Bellinger River Snapping Turtle

Ian ended his talk with a promotion of the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline **1800 084881** and the Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline **1800 675888** which are maintained by NSW DPI to receive notifications of potential incursions of exotic pests and diseases. Just as

in Indonesia, the community in Australia has a critical role to play in protecting our country's unique biodiversity and agricultural production from exotic invaders.

### Last excursion

A beautiful spring day saw us out at Spring Creek reservoir to assist Cilla with her regular bird count. Lots of musk ducks and hoary headed grebes and a regal great crested grebe added to the count. Cilla has entered the full details of the birds seen into Birdata.

### Creature of the Month

Blue ant  
*Diamma bicolor*



Adult female blue ant  
[photo: <https://davesgarden.com>]

Despite its common name, this creature is not an ant at all. It is the wingless female of a flower wasp of the family Tiphiidae. Although they are distributed widely in Australia, they are not often seen because they live underground seeking out the poorer quarters where the ragged people go (sorry, got carried away with Simon and Garfunkel there), seeking out beetle larvae and mole crickets into which they lay their eggs. They come to the surface briefly in late spring soon after reaching maturity to find a male before burrowing back into the soil again. The fully-winged males are smaller than the females and lack the attractive metallic blue-green colouring of the females. As with all wasps, the males are relatively harmless but the females can deliver a painful sting. With their

gaudy colouring, blue ant females attract attention and this can lead to stings, particularly of young children. The sting is not dangerous, except for those who are allergic to stings, but these beautiful insects should be left alone to get about their business.

### Members' Notes

*from the Editor*

Birdlife Australia's Great Backyard Bird Count has just ended (on Sunday 30th) with almost 2 million birds counted across Australia, up from 1.4 million in 2016. We did nine 20-minute surveys from our back porch and saw a total of 20 species of birds including having a small flock of superb parrots fly down the yard on most days.

It is possible to look at the results by postcode, so I checked what had been seen in the 2800 postcode area. There were 162 surveys submitted with 134 species of birds recorded. Depressingly, the birds reported from our area included a number of species that don't occur here such as the Yellow wattlebird, Black currawong, the Blue-breasted fairy wren and the Red-backed fairy wren. I presume Birdlife Australia has a strategy to weed out such records from their results.

### 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