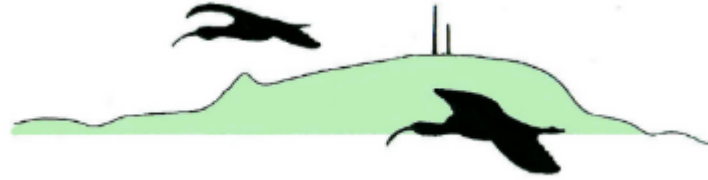


ORANGE FIELD NATURALIST AND CONSERVATION SOCIETY Inc



NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2024

2025 Planning Meeting

Thursday 12 December – 7.30pm AEDST

Face to face at the **Environmental Learning Centre (ELF)**,
Showground, Leeds Parade.

Christmas Get Together with ECCO

Sunday 15 December 4.00 - 6.00 pm.

Also at the ELF.

2025 Planning Meeting

7.30pm, Thursday 12 December at the ELF.

This meeting will be to plan the calendar of talks and excursions for 2025. All are welcome so please bring along ideas of what you would like to do next year.

Christmas Get Together with ECCO

Sunday 15th December 4.00 - 6.00 pm.

Come and share some Aussie festive spirit and relax with ECCO members at the ELF.
(Hats and decorations are not required unlike the Summer Hill Creek Second Crossing crocodile log. What great local creativity!)



BYO everything – nibbles and food to share and your own drinks, glasses and utensils.
We'll share an anniversary cake.

If the weather is hot or stormy, we can sit inside or if a great day we can relax outside on the deck or under the oak tree. The ELF has a kitchen and toilets.

Last Talk

Thursday 14 November – Reptiles of NSW.

Speaker Dr Ross Sadlier.

Report by Dick Medd, photos from Ross Sadlier.

In his presentation on *Reptiles of Conservation Significance in Western NSW*, Dr Ross Sadlier explained that working with NPWS, the first task involved in conservation planning was to actually map what was then known of species location and identify each species status, both State and nation-wide. He initially focused his concern on about 50 of the recorded (roughly 110) species in Western NSW, noting precise numbers of threatened species are currently difficult to ascertain. As his talk unfolded it became abundantly clear that knowledge of conservation status of reptiles has changed little over 30 odd years and considerable research is required. Four (potentially seven) species are of national significance with either their entire or >50% of their distribution occurring in the Western Division of which over 30 species are significant at the State level. Some 18 species are of Regional Significance. Some, classified as endangered, have undergone a recent decline in abundance, distribution or have specialised habitat requirements. Others are considered rare because of restricted distribution or dependence on localised or specialised habitats. Some are reliant specifically on the Western Division, such as the nationally significant Barrier Ranges Dragon (*Ctenophorus mirrityana*) (Photo below).



For some poorly known or threatened species like the Eastern Deserts Fat-tailed Gecko (*Diplodactylus ameyi*), Western Bluetongue (*Tiliqua occipitalis*), Woma Python (*Aspidites ramsayi*), the nationally significant Five-clawed Worm Skink (*Anomalopus mackayi*), cryptic species like the Smooth-snouted Earless Dragon (*Tympanocryptis cf intima*) or species with disjunct or outlying occurrences, e.g. Death Adder (*Acanthophis antarcticus*), improved knowledge of habitat and distribution is required to secure the species long-term.



Woma Python (Aspidites ramsayi).

Many other species are of State significance because they appear to be intrinsically rare, with limited distributions, for example: Stimson's Python (*Antaresia stimsoni*), Narrow-banded Shovel-nosed Snake (*Brachyurophis fasciolatus*), Blacksoil Whipsnake (*Demansia rimicola*), Mallee Black-headed Snake (*Parasuta spectabilis*), Western Brown Snake (*Pseudonaja mengdeni*), Ringed Brown Snake (*Pseudonaja modesta*), Mallee Worm-lizard (*Aprasia inaurita*), Jewelled Gecko (*Diplodactylus elderi*), Bardick Snake (*Echiopsis curta*) and the Marble-faced Delma (*Delma australis*). Likewise, more research is needed to identify key sites and habitats for their long-term persistence.



The Narrow-banded Shovel-nosed Snake (Brachyurophis fasciolatus), is rarely seen in NSW.

To illustrate vulnerability due to population decline, Ross chose two aging populations of turtle in the Murray/Darling system. The more widespread Macquarie River Turtle (*Emydura*

macquarii) has declined by two thirds over nearly four decades while the Broadshell Turtle (*Chelodina expansa*) has remained stable. Lack of recruitment is suspected due potentially to nest predation, primarily by foxes. Again, Ross highlighted the importance of long-term studies to sensibly interpret dynamics in abundance and distribution of often encountered boom-bust cycles.

Apart from geographic distribution patterns, Ross highlighted four **reptile communities** of State significance viz: the *Triodia* Mallee of the Centralwest and Southwest of NSW with eight reliant reptile species; the Strezlecki dune system of Northwest NSW, also with eight reliant reptile species; the Mitchell Grass plains of Northwest NSW, with two reliant reptile species; and the Rock ranges of Centralwest and Northwest NSW, with four reliant reptile species.

For all of these species and communities, Ross stressed the value for raising public awareness to elicit reporting of sightings and the use/need for centralised apps for photographs and to collate and store responses of sightings. Knowing the animal and what and where to search is vital to quality reporting. Improving data feed-in would ultimately direct more targeted ground-truthing surveys of land systems, facilitate predictive mapping and inform conservation actions.

Other parts of his presentation touched on the difficulties for the public to keep up with taxonomic developments and name changes. Many species are being subjected to modern genetic studies to unravel variability; one offshoot being that distribution of some species has been more clearly defined in terms of habitat and landform systems. Bewilderingly, many previously single species are now regarded as up to 6 or more different species. For example, his research into unravelling the east Australian Tree Skinks (*Egernia striolata* group) led Ross to formally split-off and name the Mount Kaputar Rock Skink (*Egernia roomi*). His field studies suggest it is restricted to an extremely narrow band of rock habitat above 1,000 m altitude. It only occupies retreat and sheltering sites near cliff edges or in areas of extensive outcropping rock, resulting in its Critically Endangered threatened species listing. Being a cool-adapted species constrained to 'an island in the sky' it is threatened by niche conservatism and thus

vulnerable to several processes, including anthropogenic climate change.

The analogy of islands in the sky led to some brief observations on the two snakes and 16 lizards recorded for Mount Canobolas. One-third of the species are based on historical records with some such as the Sand Goanna (*Varanus gouldii*) and the Weasel Skink (*Saproscincus mustelinus*) occurring respectively at the eastern and westernmost limits of their range. Other species can only be distinguished by cryptic morphological characters, complicated by apparent north-south disjunctures in distribution, notably gapped/broken by the Hunter and Goulburn River valley systems.



The Weasel Skink (Saproscincus mustelinus) is found in Mt Canobolas SCA.

Ross fielded many questions from the audience, giving generously of his experiences and broad understanding of associated subjects. A walking encyclopedia indeed!

OFNCS was thus privileged to benefit from Ross Sadlier's extensive knowledge of reptiles, having been the collections manager in herpetology at the Australian Museum for some 40 years. He continues his work with the museum as a Senior Fellow and is the Principal of Outwest Reptile Consulting Services.

Last Excursion and Picnic **Sunday 17 November - Mt Canobolas SCA.**

Unfortunately, the walks and picnic were cancelled due to the forecast of very strong winds and severe storms. With many dead trees on the mountain, due to the 2018 fire, it would not have been a good place to be in those conditions.

OFNCS Committee News

Welcome to new member Sue Sharrock.

Good company and excellent food at Groundstone meant the 50th anniversary dinner on November 1 was enjoyed by all. A group photo is at the end of the newsletter.

A big thankyou to Jenny Pratten for all the organising. Jenny also added a special touch by making up a small spray of flowers for each table setting and a large vase of flowers. I have since been told they were made up of plants from the Medd's garden and the Koolewong Arboretum. In a small way we were joined by Chris, Dick and Jenny.

Geoff Selwood chaired the formal part of the night and welcomed guests Bev Smiles, CWEC Secretary, and Jack Fry, NPWS Ranger. Terry Korn, a NCC Board member and Patron of Dubbo Field Nats, was also welcomed. Jennifer Kenna related stories from the early days of the society. Nick King launched the book '*50 Years 1974 - 2014: A History of the Orange Field Naturalist and Conservation Society*', by Jenny and Dick Medd. Nick's speech is copied below. At the end of formalities Neil Jones, President of ECCO, commended Field Nats on its long history and proposed a toast to the Society. In response we all raised our glasses. Thanks also to Helmut for being the official photographer.



Jennifer Kenna (standing) sharing some OFNCS stories. Photo Helmut Berndt.

A copy of the book was provided to principal current OFNCS members at the dinner and the room was quiet for a while as everyone flicked through their copies. All agreed it was an excellent publication and congratulations and thanks were made to Jenny and Dick.

Launch of '50 Years 1974 – 2024, A History of the Orange Field Naturalist and Conservation Society'

Nick explained that he had been asked to speak on behalf of Jenny and Dick because they were unable to be with us at the dinner. His speech to launch the book follows.

'Dick tells me that much of the information contained in the book has been sourced from information which was archived by past

OFNCS President Jennifer Kenna, especially in the form of newsletters, which have been meticulously threaded together by Jenny Medd with the assistance of Dick. On behalf of us all, I would like to pay tribute to Jenny, who, despite being seriously ill has managed to pull together a fascinating chronicle of the fifty years in which OFNCS has been in existence. Jenny also has asked me to make sure that Dick is also acknowledged for all the work he has done in upgrading basic word documents to produce a more attractive publication. I would also like to give a special thanks to Jennifer Kenna for making sure all this valuable history has been preserved.

The book's contents captures and records, speakers, excursions, names of office bearers, campaigns and events which have made up the 50-year journey of the Field Nats. It has not been possible to include everything. Some compromises have had to be made, but what Jenny has done is to provide us with a record, which when read will trigger memories of past happenings for many of us. For example, on 3rd May 1976 Ian McArtney gave a talk on "Reptiles and Amphibians". (Nick related how Ian brought along some reptiles, and one was released which caused some excitement. He remembers the 7th September 1975 excursion to Koolewong Arboretum as it opened his eyes to the benefits of revegetation projects).



Geoff Selwood watching on while Nick King launches the History Book. Photo H Berndt.

OFNCS only survives and functions because of its members, and especially its elected members. They are faithfully recorded and acknowledged within the pages of this book.

We are all aware that the Society was founded on a vision by Chris Pratten fifty years ago. The book provides a testament to the fact that the society has sustained Chris's vision over the past fifty years.

A major feature of the book is the excellent collection of photos commemorating many excursions and events going back to the seventies. Many members here tonight will be able to look back on pictures of themselves when they were young and beautiful. These photos will also revive memories of the enjoyment we had then and continue to experience when interacting with nature.

Many here tonight have been involved in campaigns for conservation of nature against the forces of darkness. We know that such involvement has varied results. Wins are few and far between and are worth celebrating. The battles undertaken by the OFNCS have been recorded. Rest assured there will be many more in the next fifty years.

Reading the History of the Orange Field Naturalist and Conservation Society reminds us that much has been done by many remarkable people in the interests of nature and the environment. Reading this book will also be an inspiration for us to continue what was started fifty years ago.

So, with a huge special appreciation to Jenny Medd for her dedicated effort, and sincerest well wishes for the future of the society, I declare "A History of the Orange Field Naturalist and Conservation Society" LAUNCHED.'

Free copies for the principal current members who were not at the dinner will be brought to the December and February activities. If you would like your copy posted, please email orangefieldnats@gmail.com to organise how we can get it to you.

If anyone would like additional copies or copies for non-members the cost is \$25 plus postage if needed.

Gaanha bula Mt Canobolas and Col's post fire orchid monitoring

Photos Rosemary Stapleton.

The NSW Saving our Species program asked partners to share their favourite NSW nature-based destination. Nigel Hobden has recommended Gaanha bula Mt Canobolas and it is listed as one of five nature-based destinations in NSW that tourist should visit. Check out this [link](#).

Anyone visiting the eastern slopes of the mountain in early November would have found the heath in full bloom. *Calytrix tetragona* was in the foreground at Orange View (below) with the dense orange pea flowers of *Mirbelia oxylobioides* as a backdrop.



Later in the month on the slope north of the Spring Glade carpark the *Kunzea parvifolia* was flowering and the rocky areas, with shallow soils, had patches of the tiny Canobolas Bluebell that Col is researching and *Wahlenbergia multicaulis*. These areas also had 'forests' of Sundews. Elsewhere the *Pimelea ligustrina* flowers had been battered by the strong winds on Sunday 17th.



Kunzea parvifolia at Spring Glade.

Col was out doing post fire monitoring of orchids on November 11 and sent this update:

'I've completed the monitoring for both Caladenia fitzgeraldii and Paraprasophyllum canobolense, except for final follow up of the fates of flowers and fruit. Both species have had better than average years for flowering and fruiting, likely due to fairly regular rainfall throughout the year. Thirty-nine C. fitzgeraldii initiated flowering, of which two aborted in the bud stage and 27 were taken by macropods, while four were pollinated and developed seed pods. As of last check (19/11), one of the seed pods had been eaten, probably by a kangaroo, one had shed its seed, one was brown and still retained some seed and the last was still green

and unsplit. This is the best result in five years of monitoring. While predation is high, the fact that three pods are likely to produce seed is good since each potentially contains several thousand seeds. As in all years, a number of new plants were discovered. These usually show up beyond the margins of known colonies, often as flowers or large conspicuous leaves. This year eight new C. fitzgeraldii plants were marked, bringing the total number of tags to 197. C. fitzgeraldii plants produce a new leaf annually and flowering is correlated with large leaf widths.

By contrast, P. canobolense plants are dormant in most years, producing no leaves or flowers. Mass leaf growth and flowering occurs after fires. However, a proportion of plants will produce flowers and/or leaves in good seasons. There are two kinds of leaves; thin lax leaves in non-flowering plants that I term 'maintenance leaves' and thick erect 'flowering leaves' through which an inflorescence emerges in flowering plants. This year, out of 89 plants examined, 14 produced maintenance leaves and a further 10 flowering plants were found. Eight of the flowering plants were new untagged individuals, all but one close to known colonies. The fate of the flowering plants will continue to be monitored until the seed has been dispersed.'

February OFNCS Activities

The **OFNCS AGM** will be held on Thursday February 13 at 7.30pm at the usual venue, the Nguluway Ngurang Senior's Hub, North Room. There will be a committee meeting at 6.30pm.

The other February activities will be decided on at the December Planning Meeting.

Malleefowl Monitoring

Report by Nigel Hobden.

On the Saturday morning following the Field Nats 50th Anniversary celebrations Kylie and I were up at 5am and heading to West Wyalong to participate in the NSW Malleefowl Recovery Group's survey of Malleefowl mounds. Arriving at West Wyalong Sports Club we met the team of Local Lands Service personnel from the Wagga area and Graham from the South Australian Malleefowl Recovery Team. Graham delivered an insightful talk and showed wonderful slides of Malleefowl activity. One photo taken along a

highway in South Australia showed as many as 50 Malleefowl on the roadside feeding during the drought of 2019/20. Graham went through a training program on what we would be looking for, assessments of Malleefowl mounds and the range of measurements we would be taking, their habits, life cycle and signs such as tracks. Following the conclusion of the training we headed out onto private property in the mallee vegetation about 15 to 25 kilometres outside of West Wyalong to areas where Malleefowl mounds have been recorded using Lidar technology and through previous monitoring activity.



Nigel wondering if this road sign would be as close as he would get to a Malleefowl.

Photo Kylie Tomlinson.

Before we split into teams to scour the mallee, we visited a known active mound to hopefully see Malleefowl and obtain a first-hand sight of an active mound. We were initially disappointed that after creeping up to within 20 to 30 metres of the mound there were no parent birds in sight. However, it was fascinating to see the amount of earth and leaf litter moved from the surrounding areas, approximately 200 to 300 square metres, that had been used to build the mound. Malleefowl are nature's earth moving machinery of the mallee. The leaf litter is the compost to assist with warming the mound, along with the sun's heat. We returned to our vehicles then drove along a rough track near the mound. To our surprise an adult Malleefowl had returned to the mound to inspect and maintain it after our brief visit.



The active mound with incubating eggs.

Photo Nigel Hobden.

We spent the rest of the afternoon checking mounds before retiring early on Saturday night after a dinner with all participants. On Sunday we were up early and headed out in our small groups of 2 or 3 participants to inspect and record between 15 and 20 mounds per group. Finding the mounds via some four-wheel driving and hiking in through the often dense mallee vegetation. The mounds were scattered throughout various sections of mallee. No more fully active mounds with incubating eggs were found. Many mounds were unattended, presumably the result of the previous year or even decades since the last form of activity had taken place. A few mounds had shown signs of recent scratching and restoration. Fingers crossed that more Malleefowl are looking to pair up and breed. A thoroughly enjoyable experience and I'm already itching and looking forward to participating again next year.



Fresh scratchings of a mound being formed.

Photo Nigel Hobden.

Dates for your Diary

Spring Creek Bird Survey, 9am Thursday February 2, 2025. If the weather is hot Cilla may decide to start earlier and if the forecast is unfavourable the survey may be postponed to the next day.

Cowra Woodland Bird Surveys – the dates for 2025 are the weekends of 8-9 February, 12-13 April, 26-27 July and 18-19 October. All survey weekends start with a briefing and get together on the Friday night. Contact **Jayden Gunn** for more information or to register for the surveying at jayden.gunn@birdlife.org.au

Clean Up Australia Day Sunday March 2. Locations where clean ups will be held around Orange will be publicised closer to the date.

Biodiversity Month – September 2025. The CT LLS has reviewed the 2024 Biodiversity Month activities and has decided to organise similar activities in 2025.

Sightings around Orange

If you see anything interesting, please email orangefieldnats@gmail.com or post it on Facebook.

Plants

On 11 November Cath Stapleton spotted a Potato Orchid spike of *Gastrodia sesamoides* when walking along Mt Canobolas Road on the way to looking at *Diuris sulphurea* spikes. There were lots of *D. sulphurea* seen in post fire surveys, but few had been noticed recently.



Diuris sulphurea spike on Mt Canobolas Rd.
Photo Rosemary Stapleton.

Animals

Little Red and Grey-headed Flying-foxes have returned to the camp on Ploughmans Lane in smaller numbers than in previous years. Nigel Hobden, in his Council role, undertook a count of them last week for the National Flying-fox Monitoring Program.

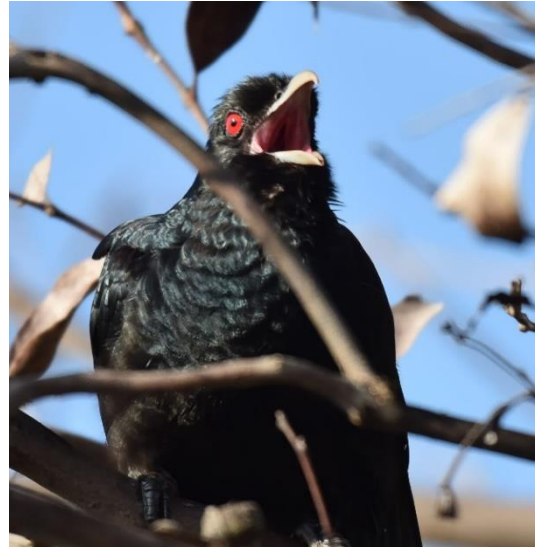
The Flying-foxes were heading south over Ploughmans Wetland, near the picnic shelter, on November 10 at 8.30 pm when Cath and Rosemary were doing a recording as part of Frog ID Week. The calls of four frog species were recorded and have been verified. They are *Litoria peronii*, Peron's Tree Frog, *Litoria verreauxii*, Whistling Tree Frog, *Limnodynastes dumerilii*, Eastern Banjo Frog and *Crinia signifera*, Common Eastern Froglet. These were part of 17,800 submissions from across Australia during FrogID Week. Highlights for the FrogID team were recordings from previously unrecorded areas in Outback Queensland and over 3,000 new users signing up to the app.

A **Blotched Bluetongue**, *Tiliqua nigrolutea*, was lucky to escape being squashed part way up Old Canobolas Rd on November 13.

Perhaps it was moving away from the recently burnt area on the eastern side of the road.

Things with Wings

The **Pacific Koel's** are still around, and Nigel Hobden photographed the one below in his garden on November 12. The female is quite different with cocoa-brown upperparts with white spots and chestnut-buff underparts with darker bars.



On November 4 at 6.20 pm a small flock of 10-12 Woodswallows were calling and circling over Bowman Avenue, west of Wentworth Golf Club. They appeared to be mainly male **White-browed Woodswallows** and just one **Masked Woodswallow**.



On November 21 Nigel Sethack photographed this male Leaden Flycatcher (above) as well as a female at Spring Creek Reservoir.

Feature of the Month

Animal Licks

Text and photo by Dick Medd

Fancy a lick?

Animal licks, so called because animals like to lick the salty deposits, known as *geophagy*, are a feature of nature. Most will have noticed them and most interpret them as nature's way of satisfying the cravings of animals for salt. Salt consumption for animals is essential for wellness and healthy development, body functioning and to maintain balanced fluid levels. In fact, all animals and humans need salt in their diet to survive. For example, salt is present in sweats, tears, and blood, which makes it a vital component for replenishment. Hence it is quite normal for animals to innately crave salt to meet their need for sodium; and so too the many other metabolic requirements for a suite of minerals.

Licks can be wet (as in mineral springs) or dry (as pictured) and vary considerably in mineral content and composition. Generally, licks may be a supplementary source of essential elements such as phosphorus, sulphur, potassium, sodium, calcium, iron, magnesium, manganese, zinc etc. as well as trace elements like selenium, cobalt and molybdenum, in variable concentrations. Demand for these elements, and hence visitation to and duration at licks, varies with seasonal temperatures, thermoregulation, animal life-stage and reproductive state. Lactating females may have higher requirements, for example. To a degree, some animals can also regulate their loss of some minerals and so adjust behaviour in response to their mineral demands. Visitation is also governed by available forage quality and its ability to provide dietary fulfillment. Time spent at licks is also a trade-off between cravings and safety against skulking predators.

But there is also a twist. Some animals require edaphic minerals, not for nutrition, but to improve stomach/rumen function and nutrient absorption, or to detoxify harmful compounds lurking in plants. Plants synthesise an arsenal of secondary compounds, alkaloids being just one example, that are deployed as defences against herbivory. Koalas for instance have evolved to detoxify nasties in eucalypt leaves, without supplements. But other animals need a mouthful of clay as medicine!

Mineral lick sites thus play a critical role in the ecology and diversity of organisms that visit these sites, but little is still understood about the many dietary benefits.



An extensive animal lick site in Nangar National Park.



OFNCS 50th Anniversary Celebration Dinner, at “Groundstone”, 1st November, 2024.

Left to Right:

Front: Elaine Selby, Bernie and Colina Huxtable, Paul Meeth, Alison Ford, Bev Smiles, Geoff Selwood, Rosemary Stapleton, Neil Jones.

Centre: Jenny Pratten, Terry Korn, Christine Jacobs, Jennifer and Len Kenna, Nigel Sethack (slightly behind), Bruce Hansen, Jane Paul, Suzanne Bower, John and Heidi Zimmer.

Back: Eric Tanner, Andrew Rawson, Patrick Driver, Doug Stapleton, Nigel Hoben, Cilla Kinross, Marita Sydes, Jack Fry (behind), Col Bower, Nick King, Helmut Berndt.

Photo Helmut Berndt.

To join please pay by **EFT to:** BSB 802 129 Account 100014678 OFN & Cons Soc Inc

Please identify payments with your name and send confirmation of the payment to

orangefieldnats@gmail.com

If you do not use EFT, you can pay by cash at a meeting or at Orange Credit Union.

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Single member – \$25

Concession rate (emailed newsletters) – \$12.50

Each additional family member – \$5

Concession rate (printed newsletters) – \$25

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

This Newsletter is produced for OFNCS by the Editor, Rosemary Stapleton. Views expressed herein are not necessarily those of the Society. Items should not be reproduced without permission of the Editor.

Orange Field Naturalist & Conservation Society acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land, including the people of the Wiradjuri Nation, and we pay our respects to Elders past, present and future.

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