

ORANGE FIELD NATURALIST AND CONSERVATION SOCIETY Inc



NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2025

Next Talk

Thursday 13 February – 7.30pm AEDST

Annual General Meeting & Show and Tell of photos & items of natural interest

Face to face at Nguluway Ngurang Senior
Citizens Centre North Room
(Opposite side of carpark to Harris Farm)

**Committee Meeting
Thursday 13 February, 6.30 pm.**

**Picnic & Spotlighting
Sunday 16 February, 6.30pm AEDST**

**Picnic dinner at the Mud Hut, Homestead
Close, Clifton Grove then spotlighting in a
local reserve.**

Annual General Meeting, 7.30pm at the Senior Citizens Centre, Thursday 13 February

It's that time of year again for the AGM. President Geoff will give his report on our 50th anniversary year. All positions will be declared vacant so please think about nominating or becoming a member of the general committee.

As was noted at the anniversary dinner 'OFNCS only survives and functions because of its members, and especially its elected members'.

OFNCS membership is due. Please see the end of the newsletter for payment details or bring cash on the night.

The AGM will be followed by a Show and Tell of photos that were taken in 2024. Or if you have an item of natural interest, please bring it along to tell others about it. Remember it is illegal to collect anything from national parks or reserves unless you have approval and a scientific licence.

If you wish to show photos you can send up to 6 to orangefieldnats@gmail.com. Please include the photographer's name, the subject of each photo and the location where it was taken.

Alternatively, Helmut has suggested that you bring a thumb drive containing up to 6 high resolution image files (no smaller than 1920x1200 pixels). If image quality really matters, then HD projection using the full 2.6m projection screen accompanied by live commentary will work well.

Picnic Dinner and Spotlighting 6.30pm, Sunday 16 February

Meet at 6.30 pm at the Mud Hut, Homestead Close, Clifton Grove for a picnic dinner. It is BYO everything so please bring all you need for your dinner and a chair.

Between 8 and 8.30 pm we'll drive to Ironbark Road and the entrance to a bushland area adjoining the Clifton Grove rural residential subdivision for a spotlighting walk. We may see a few macropod species, Brush-tailed Possums and we are keen to know if any Glider species are present.



*Bushland reserve at Clifton Grove.
Photo Rosemary Stapleton.*

The 2.5km walk along the winding fire trail will take an hour and a half, pausing only briefly to observe animals where eye-shine is

detected in the bushland. It will be along an uneven and at times rough track. A very steep section has loose surface rock. Please wear sturdy shoes and bring a pocket torch or head lamp for walking on the uneven ground. Wear appropriate clothing for the dedicated weather.

Spotlights will be provided, and binoculars would be an advantage. You may wish to bring a camera for night photography if you are equipped with one.

Last Meeting, 12 December 2024

This December Planning Meeting mapped out a varied program of talks and excursions for 2025. Talks confirmed are ones on microbats, the results of post fire monitoring of orchids in Mt Canobolas SCA and bird art.

Excursions will be to local reserves, such as Ophir. A few that will be further away are to Conimbla National Park, a bush block near Koorawatha and Hassans Walls.

Christmas Get Together with ECCO Sunday 15 December.

Lots of members of both groups shared a pleasant afternoon at the ELF. As Murray said, *'there was a happy, friendly vibe in the room'*.

The conversations were interrupted by a few formalities. The 50th anniversary of Field Nats was again marked by the cutting of a cake by Rosemary and Nick. Reports are that the cake was delicious!



*Rosemary and Nick cutting the cake with Penny Todman watching on.
Photo Murray Fletcher.*

On behalf of ECCO Neil Jones presented an appreciation award to Roger Smith, who

retired from his position as Natural Resources Coordinator at Orange Council in early 2024. Roger was always willing to work with the community on environmental projects, such as Ploughmans Wetland.



*Members (L-R) Tony, Eric, Christine, Murray, Vicki, Alison and Andrew applauding Roger.
Photo Rosemary Stapleton.*

OFNCS Committee News

Welcome to new members Karelle Taylor and James Dawson.

It has been good to have a summer break however Rosemary has been busy writing submissions. One was on the Draft Lachlan Unregulated Water Sharing Plan. The other was commenting on the wetlands that have been added to Water Sharing Plans. Addition of these wetlands was a recommendation of the Natural Resources Commission. Both gave feedback on the proposed rules and on the need to protect creek and wetland habitat for the threatened and migratory species that use these areas.

March OFNCS Activities

These have yet to be confirmed. The talk will be on Thursday March 12 with the excursion on Sunday March 15.

Spring Creek Reservoir Bird Survey

January 2, 2025.

Report by Rosemary Stapleton.

With Cilla unable to come it was great to have regular surveyor Nick there as well as newbies Helmut, Tony and Penny. Despite having more eyes than usual the count of 37 species was lower than usual. Tony made a good sighting of a Dusky Moorhen with several fluffy young hiding among the willows in one of the shallow bays. There were some immature European Goldfinches and Red-browed Finches feeding on the grass seedheads along with Double-barred Finches. The best waterbird sighting was a raft of 20 Great-crested Grebes in a bay

on the western side, many more than are usually seen.



What's that asked Nick? Spring Creek bird surveyors. L to R – Helmut Berndt, Nick King, Rosemary Stapleton and Penny Todman. Photo Tony Caine.

Superb Fairywrens were doing well with groups seen all along the track as were Yellow-faced Honeyeaters. There were also lots of Grey Fantails visiting. We were excited to see two small flocks of Superb Parrots fly over and hear and see a Sacred Kingfisher. Other species not often seen were four Pelicans, a juvenile White-winged Triller and a Nankeen Night Heron. Sadly, there were no raptors or thornbills.



Luckily this juvenile White-winged Triller sat still long enough for Helmut to capture this beautiful photo.

The only duck species seen on the main reservoir were Musk Ducks, with a few of the males doing their splashing display to attract females. The only other duck species were two Wood Ducks on a nearby dam. After the survey two male Blue-billed Ducks were seen in the far western reaches of the reservoir.

We wondered if the two fishermen in kayaks, (who waited until we had walked down the track before they launched), had disturbed the birds as they motored all the way to the southern end of the reservoir.

Despite this disturbance Nick summed up the survey as '*good to have quality not quantity*'. First timer Tony said '*it was good to be there for the first survey this year. Lots of birds and keen to see the final list and do some research in the bird book. All new to Penny and me but pleased that at least we spotted some of the interesting ones, even if we did leave the identification to the others. We'll make this a regular part of our year. Thanks for the invite.*'

CWEC Report

Rosemary Stapleton,
OFNCS CWEC Rep.

centralwest
environment
council

On February 2 representatives from nine member groups across the Central West joined the CWEC meeting. The Blayney Eco Hub was welcomed as a new group member and was represented by Sally Neaves.

At the AGM Nick King was again elected President, Bev Smiles Secretary and Cilla Kinross Treasurer. Jada Parsons, from Dubbo Field Nats, was elected as the new Vice President.

Raising environmental issues during the Federal election campaign would be a key focus for many CWEC groups. Lithgow Environment Group has moved their focus to campaigning against the Coalitions proposal to place a nuclear power plant at Mt Piper. CWEC agreed to develop three key questions to be put to candidates when the election date is announced. Topics suggested were nuclear power, climate change (covering renewables and water) and the delay to amendments in the Commonwealth Environment Laws. Mining remains a key issue in the Central West.

Exciting news was that the Blayney Eco Hub will be hosting the annual Nature Conservation Council Regional Conference, for two days in

June or July. While the focus is likely to be on mining it will also be an opportunity for local groups to showcase what they do. This could be to lead field trips on the second day. The conference usually attracts over 100 people.

As roadside vegetation provides key corridors in a largely cleared landscape a small working group will investigate local council Roadside Management Plans. It will also suggest how councils can be encouraged to develop and implement these plans.

Renewable projects were also discussed. In the CW Renewable Energy Zone projects are being pushed ahead with poor consultation and engagement. Bev reported that in the Gulgong Coolah area the impact is huge. Groups from Orange will link with Bathurst and Blayney groups as they have been considering the wind farms being proposed in Sunny Corner State Forest and Oberon. BCCAN is considering recommending that replacing native vegetation corridors should be a condition of approval to mitigate threats, particularly for the Yetholme Purple Copper Butterfly.

Several groups have made submissions on Water Sharing Plans. The ongoing expansion of coal mines has been the focus of Mudgee Environment Group, including a campaign to save The Drip.

Canobolas Conservation Alliance

Report by Jenny Pratten

CCA held its AGM on December 2 by Zoom. Once again Dr Andrew Rawson was elected President, Helmut Berndt Vice President and Jenny Pratten Secretary/Treasurer. The five committee members also agreed to continue. CCA membership fees for 2025 were set at \$5.

The Alliance remains vigilant in case the new Orange City Council (OCC) re-invigorates the mountain bike project. It will continue to speak with councillors over the coming year to ensure that the project remains unfunded and will advocate strongly for its removal from OCC's budget papers.

Congratulations to Neil Jones

Neil received the 2025 Environmental Citizen of the Year Award at Orange Council's Australia Day Ceremony. Many people will

know of his long-standing advocacy for the environment and his willingness to speak up to achieve better environmental outcomes.

Neil founded ECCO (Environmentally Concerned Citizens of Orange) in 2006 and was president for many years, only retiring last year. He leads the Ploughmans Wetland Care Group which helps maintain the wetland area and the plantings. This group also endeavours to encourage responsible fishing and highlights the dangers of irresponsibly discarded fishing lures and hooks. Another major focus for Neil is on encouraging cat and dog containment strategies so that their impact on the environment is reduced.



Fellow environmental advocate Nick King, Neil Jones with his award and Libby Jones in Cook Park after the Australia Day Ceremony. Photo Rosemary Stapleton.

When asked about his award Neil said, 'Anything I have achieved is through the support of friends and other carers and our working together for our community and the environment that we all care about so passionately.'

Dates for your Diary

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. ECCO will again be at the skate park.

Orange Edible Garden Trail, March 15-16. This self-guided weekend will showcase the diverse ways residents of Orange are growing food. Check out their [website](#) or Facebook.

Sightings around Orange

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

Plants

Several summer flowering orchid species have been spotted in the last two months.

Scattered flowers of *Dipodium roseum*, the Rosy Hyacinth Orchid (below), were seen along parts of Mt Canobolas Rd and adjacent bush in late December – early January. At a lower altitude many spikes of the darker *Dipodium punctatum*, the Blotched Hyacinth Orchid, were seen along the road and in the bush near Lake Canobolas. These were both plentiful in the first few years after the 2018 fire but not many have been seen in recent years. (Editors comment – can you believe its is seven years since the fire?)



Dipodium roseum. Photo Rosemary Stapleton.

The other species seen was *Spiranthes australis* or Austral Ladies Tresses. It is a spiral orchid that grows in wet sites and soggy margins often among tussocks and sedges.

On January 5 Hai spotted some flowering in a wet spot beside the road at Wambool Nature Reserve. He was going to go for a walk in the reserve but decided the ground was too hot so returned to the road and had this lucky find.

Later in the month John Zimmer found them in the wettish area on the upslope side of the track in the bushland reserve at Clifton Grove. Catherine and Rosemary went to see them on January 27 and thought there may have been around 50 plants scattered over about 100m. The flowering had almost finished and most of the flowers on the spikes had been pollinated. If you ever go looking for them be warned the flowers are tiny and can easily be missed.



Spiranthes australis from the roadside near Wambool Nature Reserve. This shows the wonderful spiralling of flowers around the spike. Photo Hai Wu.

Animals

Back in October Peter West was alerted to a **Greater Glider** that had become tangled in barbed wire on a fence NE of Orange near Clifton Grove. It had died but the body was collected and sent to the Australian Museum. This was interesting news as it appears there may be a sub-population in that area. On a spotlighting search in the locality in December a pair of **Greater Gliders** were spotted.



Greater Glider. Photo Nigel Hobden.

The number of **Little Red and Grey-headed Flying-foxes** at the camp on Ploughmans Lane has gradually increased. Nigel Hobden reports that there are babies, so it is important that they are not disturbed. Hopefully they will not be too affected by the heat. These species can look similar however Nigel said the Grey-headed tend to like their own personal space whereas the Little Reds tend to be in groups and closer to the tree trunks.



Grey-headed Flying-foxes social distancing at Ploughmans Lane camp. Photo R Stapleton.

At the Christmas Get Together Roger Smith related how he had watched a Rakali feasting on a Yellow Belly at Lake Canobolas near the wall. He said it was still there when they walked back across the wall.



Rakali at Lake Canobolas. Photo Roger Smith.

Things with Wings

Nick and Jenny King have recently built a fishpond in their backyard. They have enjoyed watching all the different birds coming to it. A pair of **Pacific Koels** visited as well as a **Diamond Firetail**.

Brian Williams, at Vittoria, kept a watch on this **Brown Goshawk** nest and on December 17 took the photo below of two chicks about to fledge. He said this number was down from last year when four fledged.



Brown Goshawk fledglings. Photo B Williams.

Brian was also watching a **Little Eagle's** nest and it is the first time he has seen them with a chick.



Little Eagle adult at nest. Photo B Williams.

On December 19 Dick Medd saw a flock of 30+ **Superb Parrots** wheeling over their house at Nashdale. He commented that no doubt they were checking out the pod laden acacias!

A pair of **Lathams Snipe** were at a muddy edge at Ploughmans Wetland on January 6. Rosemary also flushed one a few days later. Maybe with the drier days the water level will fall more and other species will come to feed on the mud flats.

Helmut Berndt photographed a **Dollarbird** at Bloomfield Park in January. Catherine Stapleton also noticed one that had been hit and killed by a vehicle at the double lanes near Swinging Bridge Vineyard on December 19.

Creatures of the Month

Christmas Beetles

Report and photos by Rosemary Stapleton.

In recent years there has been debate about whether Christmas Beetles are in decline. Citizen scientists have been encouraged to report any sightings on iNaturalist and try to identify them using the [Australian Museum Christmas Beetle App](#). I took up the challenge this year after seeing a dead beetle at Ploughmans Wetland.

Christmas Beetles are relatively large scarab beetles from the Family *Scarabaeidae* Genus *Anoplognathus*. There are 36 species in the genus, with 21 species found in NSW. They are often a little shiny and all have slightly different characteristics such as size, colour, shape, features of their legs or hairiness. The ones we found were almost 3cm in length. The app has excellent graphic images of each species from top and bottom, and front and back. The glossary is useful and will help you get around all the technical terms used to describe different parts of a beetle (rather than those I have used above). The Australian Museum website also has a [step by step guide](#) to identifying the beetles. The larvae of the beetles live in the soil and eat the roots of grasses.

ABC Radio ran a [story saying that the beetles](#) had made a huge return this summer with over 12,000 reports posted by Christmas Eve. In the story one scientist suggests this might be due to recent changes in weather patterns but another says there is no evidence of this change. It might be due simply to more public attention being brought to them.

When walking near Old Canobolas Rd on January 1 Catherine found several dead Christmas Beetles. Then a few days later two of the smaller eucalypts at Ploughmans Wetland were covered in beetles feeding on the younger leaves. We could see the result as jagged chunks had been taken out of the leaves by their strong jaws. I decided to try using the app and posting on iNaturalist to see if my identifications were correct. So far only two of my four posts have been confirmed.

At Ploughmans Wetland we found the Washerwoman, *Anoplognathus porosus* (photos below). The Beetle app says, 'this specific name means 'with holes' referring to the deep pigmented punctures on its elytra', or wing cases. These cover and protect the hindwings and abdomen.



The other species was from Mt Canobolas SCA and is the Emerald Tip Beetle, *Anoplognathus chloropyrus* (photos below). As its name suggests, this species has a green 'pygidium' or the last part of the abdomen that you can see when looking at its back end. Over the years there have been changes to its scientific name.



Note – you may see another beetle that looks like a Christmas Beetle, but it is the invasive Argentinian Lawn Scarab (right). It is a pest as its larvae eat the roots of turf grasses. There were some at our house in early February 2024. They are a little smaller than Christmas Beetles and have thinner back legs.



So be sure to download the app to your phone so you are prepared for next summer.

Information from:

<https://australian.museum/learn/animals/insects/christmas-beetle/>
<https://backyardbuddies.org.au/backyard-buddies/christmas-beetles/>
<https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/pm/christmas-beetles-are-back/104761896>

Other Insects Sightings

In the second week of December a single *Callistemon sieberi* (River Bottlebrush) in a park in Orange had a flush of creamy white flowers. Nigel Hobden took photos and identified the myriad of insects and pollinators that it hosted. They included Punctate Flower Chafer (left), Long-nosed Lycid beetle (centre) and Callistemon Sawfly (right) pictured below. Other species were *Megachile ferox*, *Eleale simplex*, Launceston *Leioproctus*, Cloudy Mask Bee and Common Brown Butterfly.



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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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