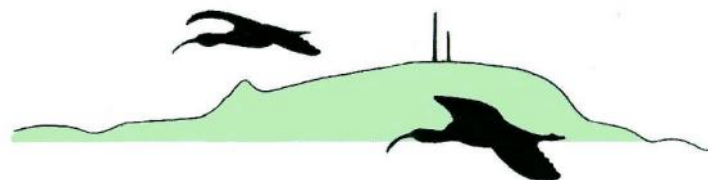


ORANGE FIELD NATURALIST AND CONSERVATION SOCIETY Inc



NEWSLETTER APRIL 2025

Thursday 10 April, 7.30 pm.
The ecology and conservation of the
threatened Large-eared Pied Bat
(*Chalinolobus dwyeri*) and
Eastern Cave Bat (*Vespadelus troughtoni*).

Speaker Lachlan McRae, Fauna Ecologist.

Face to face at Nguluway Ngurang
Seniors Village Hub, North Room
(Opposite side of carpark to Harris Farm)

Committee Meeting, 6.30pm

Excursion
Sunday 13 April
Ophir Reserve

Next Meeting

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Seniors Village Hub.

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(*Chalinolobus dwyeri*) and
Eastern Cave Bat (*Vespadelus troughtoni*).
Speaker Lachlan McRae, Fauna Ecologist.

Lachlan is undertaking research for his PhD, at Macquarie University, on the Large-eared Pied Bat (*Chalinolobus dwyeri*) and Eastern Cave Bat (*Vespadelus troughtoni*). These are two of Australia's threatened insectivorous bat species. Critical gaps in our knowledge of their ecology and responses to threats persist, hindering effective conservation efforts. Lachlan will talk about his project that combines an ecological and genetic approach to improve understanding of the ecology and habitat requirements of both microbat species. It also includes looking at aspects of habitat use, roost selection, movement patterns, diet, and gene flow across the geographic range of both species. The results will ultimately inform appropriate conservation management practices.



Microbats at a roost site. Photo Denis Marsh.

Next Excursion
Sunday 13 April. Ophir Reserve.

One of Lachlan's research sites is at Ophir Reserve, as it is one of only four currently known breeding maternity sites in NSW for the Large-eared Pied Bat. The excursion will be to Ophir Reserve and led by Denis Marsh. Denis is Secretary of the Board of Management of the Ophir Reserve and an OFNCS member.

This will be a half day excursion to see the habitat of the microbats. It will start with a short walk for people with moderate fitness to a site that was a roosting site. It is close to the picnic area and unfortunately excessive disturbance by visitors has meant that the microbats have sought out other roosts. Denis may take people with a higher level of fitness and walking ability to a second site where a **torch** may be required to get around. People who are not at this fitness level can wander along the creek.

Meet at Orange High Bus Bay at 9.00 am.
Car pooling is encouraged.

BYO everything – food, water, and drinks for morning tea and lunch if you wish to stay after the walks. Please wear sturdy footwear, long sleeve shirts and pants and insect repellent. A jumper might be a good idea if the weather has cooled by then.

Last Talk – 13 March, 7.30 pm.

From geology and rocks to lapidary and jewellery.

Speaker - Kathy Selwood, skilled lapidary sculptor, and member of the Orange Lapidary & Mineral Club.

Report by Rosemary Stapleton.

Kathy's interest in rocks and minerals started at school. Her lapidary skills were obvious in the prize-winning sculptures she brought along. Kathy had been invited to the world's largest Gem and Mineral Show in Tucson, Arizona, as the secretary of the Gem and Lapidary Council of NSW. Her trip also included visits to some geologically interesting national parks.

Kathy wowed us with photos of the amazing scenery, varied geology, and the vast scale of valleys in these national parks. The Tucson Show was in late January 2025, so she was expecting snow and winter conditions but instead encountered summer temperatures, severe drought and not much snow. Lake Mead Reservoir, created by Hoover Dam on the Colorado River, was exceptionally low as was the Colorado River when seen from a lookout on the edge of the Grand Canyon. One wondered how the large cities that relied on this water were managing.



*Low water level very obvious in Lake Mead.
Photo Kathy Selwood.*

In Zion National Park the eroded bedding layers of limestone, mudstone and sandstone seemed to flow across the valley while pine trees tried to find a foothold on the steep cliffs and slopes (see photo at the end of the newsletter). In Bryce National Park the only remnants of snow were in the shaded areas, and this meant the geology could be clearly seen. The tall, slender rock spires, called hoodoos, a Native American Indian name, were stunning. Kathy explained that they are formed by two weathering processes: that of frost wedging with 200 freeze/thaw cycles each year, and

erosion from rain. Where internal mudstone and siltstone layers interrupt the limestone, the rock is more resistant to the weathering.



*View of hoodoos and layering at Rainbow Point (2,778 m) in Bryce National Park.
Photo Kathy Selwood.*

Monument Valley was a contrast where the landscape was very bare, with no trees and little grass. Kathy found the only points of interest were the buttes and mesas. These once again showed the geology and impact of erosion but in a very dry environment (see photo at the end of the newsletter). After visiting the vast landscape of the Grand Canyon, it was on to the Tucson Show.

This in itself was of a vast scale where there were 52 sites dedicated to rocks and their crafting. Another large building was for displays of fossils and minerals. The Show lasts for three weeks and is so large Kathy was advised that you needed a guide, who knows the sites, to direct you to your areas of interest. She managed to visit eight of the sites and showed photos of a 172-carat diamond, a tourmaline crystal and sculptures that were on display, as well as some of the material that was for sale.

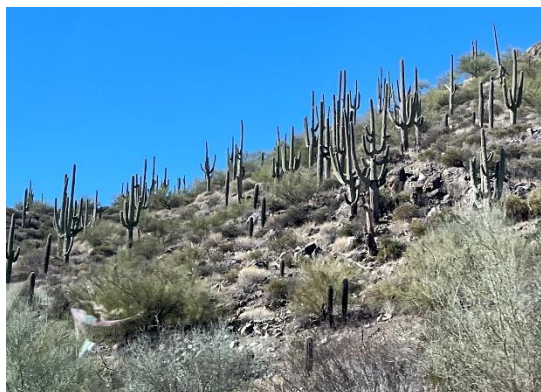


*Amethyst for sale at Tucson.
Photo Kathy Selwood.*

Like Australia there are significant restrictions on the collection of rocks and minerals in the USA. Collecting is not permitted in national parks and elsewhere the landowner's permission is required. Most specimens come from mining areas, although she did explain

that perhaps some of the rocks and minerals for sale may have been illegally collected and exported from countries such as Burma. Many of the samples from the Middle East were described as coming from Persia as President Trump has banned imports from certain countries.

After the Show, the last areas Kathy visited were the Painted Desert and a 100,000-year-old petrified forest where the huge trees had broken into blocks. The surrounding rocks were ancient wood chips. And south towards the Mexican border, in Saguaro National Park, there were ancient Saguaro cactus, where the first new arms only grow once the cactus is around 50 years old.



Ancient Saguaro cactus. Photo Kathy Selwood.

To finish Kathy spoke about the samples of rock, carved sculptures, and jewellery she had brought along. Her prize-winning sculptures were made from local marble purchased from landowners. There were many questions about how she visualises the finished product and she said, '*the rock tells you what it wants to be and if it looks like a snake, it will be a snake*'. Her tools range from angle grinders to dentist drills and to be prize winning there can be no scratches.



Eric Tanner, Christine Jacobs, Hai Wu, Sandra Chrystall with Kathy Selwood and her prize-winning sculptures. Photo R. Stapleton.

The process of creating jewellery was explained by Kathy, such as a beautiful pendant made from the gemstone Larimar, from the Dominican Republic. Kathy described some of the samples she had purchased at the Tucson Show and admitted to being only just under the luggage weight limit when she flew back home!

Kathy's talk generated lots of questions, either about the wonderful landscapes she visited or because of her knowledge and skill of her lapidary work. Thanks to Kathy for stepping in at short notice and giving Field Nats a different perspective of rocks.

Last Excursion – 16 March.

Canobolas State Forest.

Report compiled by Tony Caine.

A great turnout — nine of us in two 4WDs and a small Mazda CX-3 (a mighty little wonder!). Guided by Nigel, we ventured up the dry, dusty trails of the State Forest to the south of Gaanah bula Mt Canobolas. The roads became narrower and more eroded, but we made it intact to our destination off Gum Ridge Road, where we backed the cars off the road and parked.

The landscape, like much of the Central Tablelands, was parched and in need of a good drink.

Jane stayed with the cars, looked around and found a number of small grass trees—*Xanthorrhoea*. She later commented '*To see those trees after losing their bark, the brilliant white trunks, the yellowish, the greys and pinks, was a sight to marvel at and one I have never seen before*'.



Preparing to walk through the magnificent forest trees. Glen Griffith, Bonny Campbell, Nigel Hobden (behind the car door) and Penny Todman. Photo Tony Caine.

The rest of us found *Xanthorrhoea* of various ages, heights, and formations, some even with recent flower spikes in situ, before starting up the steep and slippery slope with the intention of exploring the ridge to see what we could find. The climb through the most tranquil tall sclerophyll Eucalypt forest, with a snow grass (*Poa*) understorey, was fantastic. Despite the dryness, we saw flowering Cassinias across the forest.

First, we climbed, then we started to battle with the blackberries. Not all bad, as there were many berries perfect for a passing nibble.



Tony and Sandra couldn't resist the blackberries. Photo Rosemary Stapleton.

Reaching the ridge gave us views west to Cudal, even allowing us to see Nangar National Park from a different perspective (photo back page). To the northeast Mt Towac blocked our view of Gaanha bula, not even the towers were visible. Progress along the ridge was problematic — old barbed fences and blackberries made it impossible to continue.

A gentle stroll back down to the cars allowed Bonny, Hai, Rosemary and Nigel to wander, looking for fungi and other things. Orange recorded 32 degrees, but under the canopy, it felt like 25 degrees. Glen and Nigel discussed the makeup of the forest—a few of the hollow-bearing trees were probably well over 100 years old alongside the many younger trees likely dating back to the 1985 fire. Some of the older trees showed signs of stress and age, with only a thin upper canopy. Even the younger trees were beginning to form hollows suitable for nesting and dens.

The birds were quiet or too high in the canopy to identify. All that were seen were two Grey Fantails and a Yellow-faced Honeyeater. A White-throated Treecreeper was calling. Hai spotted some *Fomitopsis maculatissima*, a

bracket fungus on one of the older fallen trees and a butterfly that he later had identified as a Spotted Brown, *Heteronympha paradelpha*.



The Spotted Brown that stopped still long enough for Hai to photograph.



Lunch time in the forest garden. Left to right Hai, Glen, Bonny, Jane, & back Penny, Tony and Rosemary. Photo Sandra Chrystall.

After lunch, we re-embarked, and to everyone's delight, Glen and Nigel guided us through the Radiata stands and logged areas to (re)visit the giant Yellow Box on Coolamatong Road. With a 100m flat walk, we all made our way to the tree, where it took eight of us to wrap around its trunk. Sandra noted that it seemed to be in better condition than it was 10 years ago. Its surroundings were definitely in better shape, with grass and Blackwood Wattles (*Acacia melanoxylon*) thriving. <https://youtube.com/shorts/QE1nO3Vpg-U?si=Vgkds09h7gPcJQKI>

Dick Medd notes the Eucalypt is in the Coolamatong Forest Preserve. In the 1989 Research Note No. 47 by the Forestry Commission of NSW, it notes this tree as 'one exceptional specimen of Yellow Box, 39 m tall, DBH 2.1 m and crown width 32 m'. (DBH = diameter at breast height). I wonder what its measurements would be now.

Summary: Magnificent trees, so still and quiet. Great company. What a pity we have lost so much to the miles of *Radiata* monoculture and the associated blackberries.

OFNCS Committee News

At the March meeting Geoff Selwood made a presentation to Dick and Jenny Medd for the contributions they had made to Field Nats for about 30 years. Geoff thanked them and highlighted that in addition to what people had seen they worked tirelessly behind the scenes. Examples were Dick submitting successful applications for local species to be listed as threatened and Jenny managing the archives and compiling the history book.

The gift was a painting of a pair of Superb Fairy Wrens (now called Dick and Jenny Wren) done by member John Hansen. These are Jenny's favourite birds, and they were surrounded in the shadow box by samples of *Acacia meiantha* and *Eucalyptus canobolensis*. These are two of the species that Dick has had listed as endangered. Geoff stressed that both specimens had been collected legally.



Jenny and Dick Medd with the shadow-box painting of the wrens. Photo Helmut Berndt.

Dick replied and said Field Nats had been a family to them and while it had its ups and downs over the years it was time for them to hand the baton on. Through the Society they enjoyed nature and worked to preserve it. They had also enjoyed the company of members.

May Talk and Excursion

Thursday 8 May – Managing National Parks and Reserves on the Western Slopes.
Speaker - Jen Dodson, NPWS Ranger.

Sunday 11 May (Mother's Day) – Mogong Creek Trail, Nangar National Park.

Gaanha bula Mt Canobolas Update

While ranger Jack Fry has been seeking feedback on restoration and repair of Yuranigh's Aboriginal Grave Historic Site he

has sought community views on the dual naming of the SCA. If approved, it will now be called Gaanha bula Mt Canobolas State Conservation Area. The OFNCS committee has supported this change. Some people who dropped in on Jack on Friday suggested that this was a very long name, and it should perhaps be just Gaanha bula SCA.

Ongoing work to repair the tracks in the SCA could be seen on the last excursion where the white dots along the track on Mt Towac (below) were bags of rock fill that had been dropped in. Jack said these have now been spread.



Southern side of Mt Towac. Photo R Stapleton.

In mid-March Andrew Rawson, OFNCS member and CCA Chair, spent a day in the SCA with James Sheahan Catholic High School Year 11 Geography students. It was part of their Earth's Natural Systems topic. Erica Kerridge, from the school, thanked OFNCS for the guidance provided beforehand and Andrew's contribution. She said, '*the students gained valuable insights that enhanced their learning in a meaningful way*'.

Dates for your Diary

Cowra Woodland Bird Surveys – the 2025 dates are the weekends of 12–13 April, 26–27 July and 18–19 October. All survey weekends start with a briefing and get together on the Friday night. New surveyors with some birding experience are always welcome and will be teamed with experienced surveyors to learn the ropes. Please email Jayden Gunn at cowrabirds@birdlife.org.au or 0409 679 360.

Also, part of the Cowra Woodland Program is a **planting weekend at Spring Forest** on May 31-June 1. Volunteers will plant and guard 600 seedlings to create more habitat for declining woodland birds in a paddock adjacent to the Mugga Ironbark and heath of this very large remnant area. It is double what was planted last

year. If you are interested, contact David Taylor at email: david@taylorcology.net

Mycology May activities. Details will be emailed.

Art Exhibition - The Hansen brothers, Nick, John and Sean are having an art exhibition at the new 'A Thousand Words Gallery', 68 Adelaide St, Blayney. The exhibit will officially open on Friday evening **May 23 and run until Sunday June 8**. Further details will be posted on the gallery's website in the near future. <https://athousandwords.gallery>

Capertee Valley Tree Planting Weekend - May 2-4. You can obtain further details and book your place via the Eventbrite webpage at this [LINK](#). Or please contact Iain Paterson (0429 300 234 iain_paterson@live.com.au).

Sightings around Orange

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

Things with Wings

A pair of Red-capped Robins (below) posed for Nigel Sethack in Nangar NP on 14 March.



On 16 March at 7.15pm Nick King spotted small groups of Pacific Swifts, also called Fork-tailed Swifts, flying before a weather front, probably feeding. They totalled about 50 flying from south to north at about 2-300 feet high. On similar dates there were reports of much larger flocks from coastal areas.

Have you ever heard of a maintenance behaviour in birds called **anting**? It is where birds collect insects, usually ants, and place them directing onto their feathers, mostly beneath their wings. On Saturday 31 March Doug and I watched **Common Starlings**, in their shiny new plumage, doing this. In a few places there appeared to lots of tiny ants

crawling among the kikuyu lawn, perhaps because of the rain. The starlings were collecting several ants in their beaks and then rubbing it under their wings. Sometimes they'd fall over. There was lots of bickering among the group.



*The anting Starlings with inset of tiny ants.
Photo Rosemary Stapleton.*

The possible reason for this behaviour is to rub chemicals from the ants onto their feathers to help control parasites. HANZAB¹ notes that ants are usually discarded after use and that starlings have been recorded anting with other species including House Sparrows and Common Mynas.

1. Higgins, P.J., J.M. Peter & S.J. Cowling. (Eds) 2006. *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds, Volume 7: Dunnock to Starlings*. Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

Orchids



On 29 March John Zimmer followed up Heidi's sighting of an orchid, *Eriochilus cucullatus*, beside the Bridle Path at Clifton Grove. He sent the photo above and said, 'it was a solitary plant and quite inconspicuous'. He noted that it is characterised by its downward pointing pale sepals resembling "Parson's Bands" or collar.

Animals

On an afternoon walk on 30 March Rosemary saw two **Rakali** having a set to at Ploughmans Wetland. At the shallow end of the large wetland, one was swimming as fast as it could to the reeds as it was being pounced on by the other one. As usual just when I needed a camera, I didn't have one.

Creature of the Month: Calula Marble Man *Article by Dick Medd.*

Kathy Selwood's admirable lapidary skills prompted me to write of the supposed extraordinary discovery in 1889 of a petrified 'Body of a Marble Man'; a relic brought to our attention by Denis Marsh when we last visited the Calula quarry.

Theories abounded for and against the Marble Man being a fossil, or nothing more than a fraud; a palpable hoax.

In an era when the bush telegraph fuelled the only tangible medium of the time (newspapers), theories, stories, speculation, rumours and more, flurried around the country: from Broken Hill to Brisbane, through Victoria to Tasmania and South Australia, onto Perth and all in between – even across the ditch to New Zealand. [And miraculously many more petrified human specimens suddenly materialised from around the country.]

No amount of evidence from either a Government Geological Surveyor nor an Analytical Chemist, or medical men such as Dr Souter who first examined the specimen in Orange, reputable sculptors, a palaeontologist, or the reports of Sub-Inspector Ford's painstaking investigations could quell the conspiracy theories. The matter even made it into parliament for adjudication! None championed the petrification phenomenon more passionately than one Dr Charles W. McCarthy M.D., F.R.C.S.I. of Elizabeth Street, Sydney (in a litany of letters printed at the time in the Sydney Morning Herald [SMH]). And Harry Stockdale, one of many to financially exploit the specimen, wrote a book "The Legend of the Petrified or Marble Man" with press extracts for and against, published in 1889.

Reasonings for the anatomical abnormalities of the Marble Man flourished. Explanations for the missing arms, large head, scalping, missing eye, deformed toes, uneven numbers of ribs,

and the pitting of the surface of the body, knew no bounds.



(image from: PIX 1938)

The origins of the marble and how it might have become petrified similarly garnered much speculation. Indeed, the subject 'being' itself aroused the imagination, some postulating it was a politician who, growing weary of the baubles, sought retirement in the cloisters of a marble quarry. Or a bushranger, once shackled (hence the wasted leg) who escaped and hid and died in a cave. Others imagined an Aboriginal, while most considered it of Caucasian type. Sculptors postulated the use of castings as templates, or the specimen being a disinterred plaster model palmed-off with the inference of it being an artificial fraud; maybe even a cast from Pompeii. Opinions against the supposition of it being a chiselled marble image varied equally as vigorously.

By 1892 the Marble Man had made it to exhibition in the Great Hall of Sydney University. The SMH reported the exhibition programme informed visitors that, "*This curious specimen is alleged to have been found near Orange, N.S.W. If it be genuine, as it has been alleged, then it takes the antiquity of man*

back to the Silurian period, when until this discovery of the "marble man" -- the highest known forms of animal life were scorpions and fish, so that man would have appeared on the earth ages before even birds, not to speak of monkeys and all the lower mammals.

The "marble man" came in for his share of attention, and no wonder, for his career has been very human after all. First the object of curiosity, then of fame then accused of fraud and covered with shame and contempt, overwhelmed with pecuniary difficulties and even imprisoned for fraudulent insolvency, and finally "white washed" and quietly put on the shelf." [and to this day its whereabouts are unknown!]

PS. Sub-Inspector Ford's investigation reported he was "...thoroughly convinced that the marble figure was made at Croaker's old public-house, at Cow Flat, by G. F. Sala, and that the marble was obtained from Bell's quarry [Caloola], about two miles from Cow Flat. I have obtained the following information, that Joseph Bell conveyed from his marble quarry about five months since a large piece of marble, about one ton weight, to G. F. Sala's residence (Croaker's old public-house) at Cow Flat, and put it in out of the dray half way into the back kitchen through the

door, and Bell states that some ten or twelve weeks afterwards he saw that a man had been modelled out of it by Sala, and that he used acids, and whilst Sala was making the figure that his son Fred was always on the watch and would at once whistle if any person came in sight, and that Sala would then come out of the kitchen and shut the door. "

Ford's report went on to tell how the 'marble man' had been boxed, then transported by Sala from Cow Flat to Orange, where Sala claimed it had been excavated from his part-owned Calula quarry. It resided at Dr. Souter's residence in Anson Street, Orange, and he retained the same for nearly a week for examination. Sala then took it away and exhibited it in Summer Street for two or three days and then took it to Sydney. Ford concluded he was now more fully convinced than ever that the marble or petrified man never was at Calula.

PPS. ...Let the mystery end as it will, it will be at least satisfactory to know the correct story, and the whole story ... [especially as dis- and mis- information continues to be believed more so than factual content]

For some humans, the appetite of gullibility is insatiable.



Looking southwest from the ridge top in Canobolas SF towards Nangar; Penny Todman, Nigel Hobden, Glen Griffith and Hai Wu. Photo Sandra Chrystall.



*Top - Bedding strata in Zion National Park.
Bottom - Buttes and mesas of Monument Valley. Photos Kathy Selwood.*

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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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