

ORANGE FIELD NATURALIST AND CONSERVATION SOCIETY Inc



NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER 2025

Next Talk

**Thursday 11 September, 7.30pm.
NPWS Parks and Reserves in the western
Central West - management and highlights.**

**Speaker - Jen Dodson, Ranger,
NPWS West Branch.**

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

Next Excursion

**Sunday 14 September, 9am.
Barton Nature Reserve.**

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Jen is the ranger covering reserves from Eugowra to Condobolin. They vary significantly in size, habitat, biodiversity, and the cultural heritage they protect. They include Nangar and Conimbla National Parks with which we are familiar. Other examples further west are the small Kiacatoo Precinct of the Lachlan Valley National Park (see photo) and the large Tollingo and Woggoon Nature Reserves 40-50km from Condobolin. These last two reserves are among the largest and easternmost sand plain mallee remnants in New South Wales. The long unburnt old growth mallee in them provides habitat for the endangered Malleefowl.

Jen will discuss some important cultural and historical sites, native species, visitation and ongoing park management and future works.



The Lachlan River flowing beside River Redgums in the Kiacatoo Precinct of the Lachlan Valley National Park. Very different to Nangar and Conimbla NPs. Photo Rosemary Stapleton.

**Next Excursion - Sunday 14 September,
9am. Barton Nature Reserve.**

This reserve of 546 ha is 20km west of Orange with a previous life as a timber reserve. In 1972 it was dedicated as a Nature Reserve to protect a visually and ecologically interesting sandstone landscape on the lower western slopes of Mount Canobolas. It provides an important refuge for wildlife in an area extensively cleared and developed for agriculture. The reserve is dissected by three creeks with sandstone cliffs and outcrops. It supports dry sclerophyll forest and woodland communities, providing habitat for a diverse range of flora and fauna, including threatened species and communities. These are particularly valued in relation to breeding opportunities in tree hollows.

There is no public access to the reserve so the excursion will be led by NPWS Ranger Jack Fry who is arranging access via private land. We will be parking near the reserve

boundary and walking into the reserve through the bush. It will be a grade 4 walk as there are no internal management trails or formed tracks. The walk will be over rough surfaces and up some steep slopes.

Meet at the Orange High School bus bay at 9am to carpool. 4WD vehicles are required. This will be a full day excursion so please bring lunch, water, and any essential medications you may need. You will need to carry your things in a pack as we will be lunching away from the vehicles. Please wear closed walking shoes and suitable clothing.



*Creekside habitat in Barton Nature Reserve.
Photo Dick Medd.*

**Last Meeting - 14 August, Wildlife First Response Training for NSW Firefighters.
Speaker – Mick Armstrong, NPWS.**

Report by Bruce Hansen, images from Mick Armstrong.

In his role, in NPWS, Mick oversees the planning, coordination and delivery of fire management programs and operations across the western region of NSW. Following the devastating 2019–20 bushfire season, the NSW Bushfire Inquiry acknowledged the need for an increased focus on wildlife response in bushfires and other natural disasters. The Inquiry proposed that the government develop and implement a policy for injured wildlife response, including guidance for firefighters on handling injured wildlife. The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service is leading the implementation of this recommendation.

Mick shared some of his background, noting he began as an Army Engineer working in fire, bomb disposal, and emergency management, before moving to the DPI Emergency Management Unit where he focused on biosecurity and incident management and training. He is now with National Parks undertaking firefighting, training and incident management.

Mick started off by providing the background to emergency management starting with the four pillars of emergency management, the combat agencies and their functional areas, and how this is coordinated through the SERM Act and the AIIMS (Australasian Inter-Agency Incident Management System).



The four pillars of Emergency Management.



SERM Act 1989 (State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989)

*Combat Agencies (grey)
Functional Areas (colours)*

Mick then spoke about how the hierarchy of the wildlife response will work with technical advisers liaising with the incident management teams and the field teams known as WERT (Wildlife Emergency Response Teams). He then outlined the guidelines and training on how to respond to animals that have been injured by a fire or flood. This is provided to members of the WERT who may be

firefighters, NPWS staff or other emergency responders, as well as members of organisations such as WIRES. He presented the team member Handbook that simply and clearly outlines what to do and demonstrated some of the equipment in the Wildlife Car Rescue Kit.



The Wildlife Care Rescue Kit.

Mick concluded his talk by discussing Assets of Intergenerational Significance (AIS). These are things of “Exceptional environmental or cultural value” approved and determined by the Minister, such as the wallabies (pictured) and the *Prostanthera gilesii* from the SCA. He said how this wildlife rescue and other planning will help protect these assets from disasters or help them recover from disasters.



Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby.

At the end of Mick’s talk, I then spoke of my experience as a Rural Fire Service Volunteer who attended the training in Dubbo earlier this year. After questions Mick was thanked for his talk. Judging by the number of people who stayed and talked many found it very interesting.

Last Excursion - Sunday 17 August.

Mingham Springs.

Report by Rosemary Stapleton.

Unexpectedly the sun warmed our backs as members gathered at the bus bay. We welcomed Chia to her first excursion as we car-pooled into 4WD’s. Instead of the clouds and light rain that was forecast it was a stunning day at Mingham Springs. On our way to Mandagery Nature Reserve the deep yellow of flowering *Acacia vestita* bathed many of the slopes that had been cleared for farmland.

Our first stop was at the gate of the reserve where Dick Medd, excursion leader, acknowledged the Wiradjuri history and Elders of the land we were on. He gave an overview of the reserve and our route to the gorge at Mingham Springs which is on vacant Crown Land. The Eucalypts must have been flowering here as several Honeyeater species were calling as were Spotted Pardalotes.

Some of us wondered why several mature live Eucalypts inside the reserve had been cut down as they were too far from the trail to be a risk of falling and blocking it. Was it by wood collectors? As we drove to the morning tea stop at the top of the hill occasional spikey branches of *Acacia paradoxa* reached into any open car windows. In the shrub layer the *Leucopogons* were starting to flower.

Dick picked an excellent spot to stop for morning tea as right beside the car door Catherine spotted a small patch of flowering *Caladenia caerulea* (Blue Fairy).



Caladenia caerulea. Photo Cath Stapleton.

Some of the group sat and chatted over a cuppa near shrubs of *Grevillea floribunda* with their velvety orange flowers and some carnivorous plants. Those keen on orchids explored nearby. There were lots of Greenhood orchid rosettes, identified as *Diplodinium nanum* (*Pterostylis*

nana) when Nigel found a patch with flowers. Orchid leaves, of at least five other species, some with flower buds, were also spotted.

After 30 minutes we drove to the boundary of the Reserve, parked, and headed down a track in the vacant Crown Land to the Mingham Springs gorge. Initially the track was dominated by *Callitris* and scattered shrubs. In many places the ground was covered in a thick blanket of coral lichen and large patches of sundews. A long-legged Crane Fly, family Tipulidae, had been snared by one plant.

Just as we came to more open Eucalypt woodland the next items of interest were some strange Dark Vegetable Caterpillar fungi, *Drechmeria gunnii*.



A Dark Vegetable Caterpillar.
Photo Nigel Hobden.

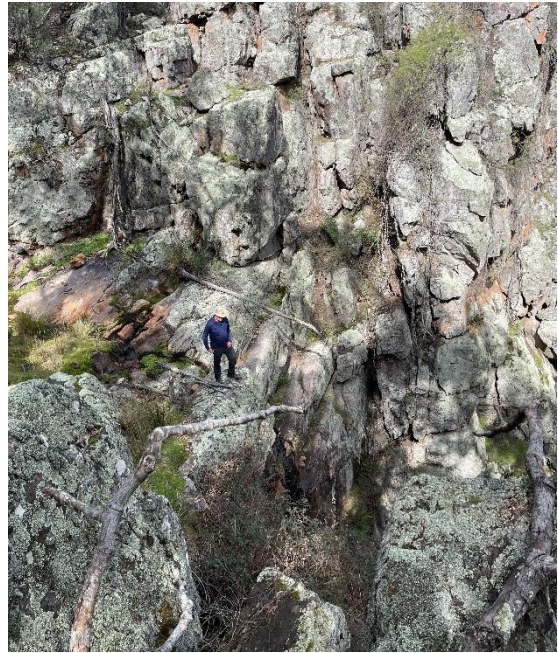
We crossed to the northern side of the dry creek but as we walked there were occasional pools of water until we reached a large flat rock platform before the top of the gorge. There were few bird calls in this area although Catherine spotted a stunning male Golden Whistler. Nigel and Hai discovered a patch of *Chiloglottis* leaves with buds, which were probably *C. trapeziformis*.



A cluster of Chiloglottis leaves. Photo Hai Wu.

Dick led us down the slope to look back to the head of the gorge where the King Ferns had been seen before. Much to his disappointment instead of ferns the bottom of the gorge had been taken over by Blackberry bushes. We all

found comfortable spots for lunch and were serenaded by tunes from Penny on her recorder. Nigel explored the other side of the gorge, while others sat and enjoyed the peace of being in a beautiful place.



Above: Nigel exploring the start of the gorge and overlooking blackberries not ferns. Photo Tony Caine. Below: Tony contemplating the view. Photo Chia-Chi Liu.



After lunch Nigel guided some of the group further along the gorge to see the waterfall and valley where the King Ferns fortunately still thrived in abundance, sheltered by the gorge walls. [Dick was thrilled!]



A clump of King Ferns further down the gorge. Photo Nigel Hobden.

Others explored the rock wall upslope of the gorge that was covered in lichen and had drying mosses growing in crevices. Riccia liverworts were found on the rocky platform. Other liverworts and mosses, some with fruiting bodies, and a hornwort were on the eroded creek bank.



Tiny dark green hornworts with even smaller pale Riccia liverworts with moss fruiting bodies at the top right.

Photo Rosemary Stapleton.

Discoveries kept being made on our way back. Nigel found flowering Mosquito orchids (*Acianthus collinus*) and Hai found some orange button fungi.



Orange button fungi. Photo Hai Wu.

As we walked back it was an opportunity to chat and look at our surrounds from differing perspectives. Penny delighted in *'the small things like the busy little ants creating awesome homes'*. Sandra commented that she was viewing the logged stumps differently following the Chainsaw Course she had done as a NPWS volunteer. And Tony imagined the deformed growths or burls on a tree as furniture knobs.

After a group photo we headed out of the reserve and back to Orange. All would have agreed with Tony who commented *'gorgeous*

day, interesting walk and gorge and lovely group of people'.



Rosemary, Penny, and Hai looking at the burls, or furniture knobs, on a dead Eucalypt.

Photo Tony Caine.

As we were a few weeks early for the spring orchid and shrub flowers some, such as Nigel, will head back to the Nature Reserve. He called it a *'floristic gem'* and is keen to *'explore further over spring and summer to discover the beauty'* [of the coming seasons].

OFNCS Committee News

OFNCS made submissions to two NSW Government Upper House Inquiries last month. One Inquiry was into the proposal to remove all restrictions on access to public land for a vast range of activities. This included four-wheel driving, mountain biking, shooting, and hunting in land such as national parks, reserves, and Crown Land. Our submission argued that current restrictions should be maintained as much of this land has been set aside to protect biodiversity and uncleared habitats.

The other Inquiry was into what was called *'conservation'* hunting, which is a greenwashed term for recreational hunting, again in land such as national parks and reserves. OFNCS objected to this proposal citing evidence that uncoordinated hunting is known to be ineffective in controlling feral animals. It would also probably put at risk the safety of the public when they were visiting these locations.

At the August meeting the committee agreed to do further work on a system of grading

excursions. This is to ensure OFNCS is undertaking their duty of care to members and participants. People who come on excursions will also be encouraged to complete an information sheet noting any health or medical conditions and their emergency contacts. This will be kept in the person's backpack and only accessed if an injury or accident occurs.

At the Sustainable Living Expo, on September 21, Jenny will be promoting the value of living sustainably to help protect biodiversity. CW LLS Biodiversity Month activities that OFNCS are involved in are spotlighting, led by Nigel, on September 9 and 12. Nigel and Rosemary will also be assisting in an afternoon workshop – *Biodiversity begins at Home - How to nurture a wildlife friendly garden*. This will be facilitated by Sally Bourne, Landscape Designer, and gardener on Sunday 20 September.

October Talk and Excursion

Thursday 9 October – The Hotspots Program and Fire and the Environment.

Speaker – Bruce Hansen, Environmental Co-ordinator, Hotspots Program, RFS.

Sunday 12 October – Copperhanna Nature Reserve or Pennsylvania State Forest.

CWEC Meeting

3 August 2025

Report by R Stapleton.

centralwest
environment
council

Representatives from ten groups joined by Zoom. CWEC will write to Murray Watt, the new Federal Environment Minister, outlining the many environmental issues in the Central West as well as urging him to quickly update and strengthen the Federal environment laws.

There was discussion on the delay in approving the 10-year Water Sharing Plans for all inland rivers. This is the first time the Environment Minister, as well as the Water Minister, have had to agree to the new plans. One of the problems is thought to be that climate change may not have been taken into account in the draft plans.

The Upper House Inquiries that related to removing access restrictions on public land and the 'Conservation' Hunting Bill were discussed. Other than CWEC writing to these Inquiries it was agreed to highlight to the Environment Minister the damage by feral pigs

citing the orchid species on Mt Canobolas that has recently been listed as critically endangered, partly because of pig destruction.

Lithgow is a very active group who take action on coal mining, waste incineration and supporting appropriate renewable energy projects. It was distressing to hear that three swamps in their area have been lost due to subsidence from coal mining. Along with the Mudgee groups the challenges of convincing their communities that the environmental impacts of coal mining extensions were much greater than the impacts of wind and solar developments were highlighted. Bev Smiles also highlighted the difficulties of manoeuvring around the legislation for communities to voice concerns over mining developments so as not to lose their right of appeal against decisions made on these developments.

NCC has been looking at the Central West Orana Conservation Investment Strategy of offsets for transmission lines and renewable projects.

Rylstone had no good news about stopping the Bowdens lead mine. However, they have found Koalas in the area and are encouraging Mid-Western Regional Council to develop a Koala Management Plan. Groups that were concerned about local council management of roadside vegetation should follow-up with their council and encourage them to develop or update their roadside management plans.

New Holland Mouse – Part 2

After reading last month's Creature of the Month article on the New Holland Mouse, life member Jennifer Kenna emailed to tell off her experience with the mouse in 1997. She wrote:

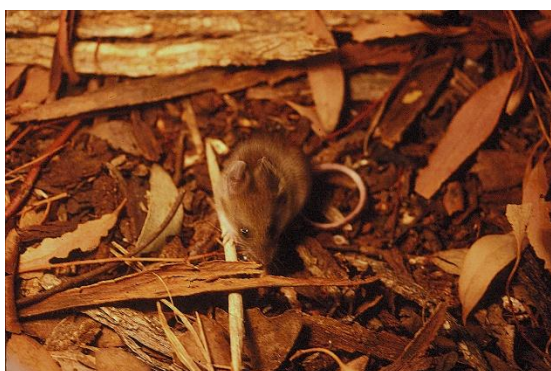
'I was a rep. on the NPWS advisory team and was invited to go on the biodiversity survey in 1997. I spent about a week at Goobang and was there when they first trapped the New Holland Mouse. We trapped the mouse with peanut butter sandwiches because they did not make such a mess in the traps as rolled oats and peanut butter.

After trapping one nobody could identify it, so the survey leader took it to Sydney to the Australian Museum. Immediately, after photographing it, much to the horror of the survey leader, they killed it.

The museum couldn't identify it either, so they sent it to the South Australian Museum because they had more expertise in small animals. That museum couldn't identify it either, so after some time they identified it with blood samples as a New Holland Mouse. They said that the reason it looked different to the nearest relatives in the east was because it moved up from Victoria and evolved as it moved over time.

We were hoping that we had found a new species so for want of a better name we called it Goobang Mouse.

The section of the park where we did our trapping was the main area east of the Renshaw McGirr Way. We did go to the Bumberry section but briefly. From memory we stayed at a property somewhere near Baldry.'



A 1997 'Goobang Mouse'. Jennifer said of her photo 'it isn't very clear as they put litter in a very large plastic bag to make a better pic.'

Thanks, Jennifer, for sharing this piece of history.

Gaanha bula Mt Canobolas Update

Once more snow and wild weather hit the mountain last Friday and Saturday. However, the creeks are flowing well, and the rain will help the shrubs that flower in the spring put on the best show since the 2018 fire.

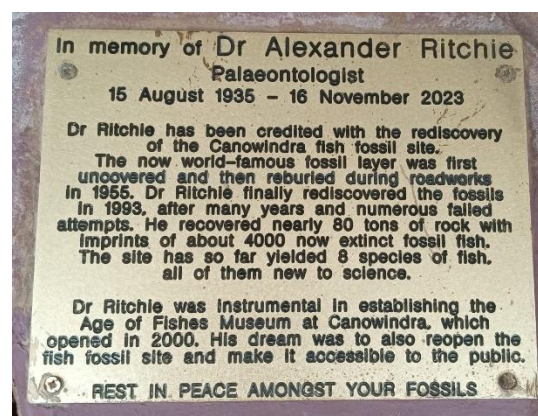
Recently you may have heard a conversation on ABC Central West Radio discussing why so many trees and branches had fallen or broken off on the mountain. Ranger Jack explained that it was a 'perfect storm' with the weight of snow breaking branches, the soil being wet from rain and many trees that had died as a result of the fire falling over due to high winds. He emphasised the importance of the process in creating hollows for threatened species such as the Greater Glider and Powerful Owl.

Alex Ritchie plaque at Age of Fishes Museum.

Story by Murray Fletcher, photos by Vicki Glover.

On 15th August, Vicki and I visited Canowindra for the unveiling of a plaque to commemorate the contribution made by Dr Alex Ritchie to establish the Age of Fishes Museum in Canowindra. Alex was Curator of Palaeontology at the Australian Museum from 1968 to 1983. His research demonstrated that fish fossil beds in Greenland, Australia and Antarctica proved that these parts of the world were once joined together. He spent two years searching in Antarctica and the Devonian fossil beds he found in the Warren Range led to the naming of Mt Ritchie in his honour. However, the highlight of his career was clearly the Australian part of this story based on the discovery near Canowindra of a large former lake bed from the late Devonian period (416 – 359 million years ago) which had dried up, trapping around 4,000 fish representing several long-extinct species in the drying mud. At that time, there were no terrestrial scavengers, so the fish were gradually covered over again by silt with minimal disturbance. The site was first uncovered in 1955 by roadworks but its significance was only realised when Alex rediscovered it more than three decades later.

The site is now listed as part of Australia's National Heritage because of the scientific importance of the discovery. The Age of Fishes Museum is the direct result of Alex's commitment to tell the story of the site to the wider community.



Alex Ritchie died in November last year and the unveiling of the plaque was timed to correspond with what would have been his 90th birthday. Staff and volunteers of the Museum told of their experiences working with Alex and read stories and anecdotes

received from palaeontologists around the world who had known and worked with Alex during his professional career. Others told of the infectious enthusiasm which Alex brought to their lives. Alex's son said a few words of thanks on behalf of his family. We also heard from Dr David McGrath who, with his wife Aleysa, own the original fossil site at "Kalang" and intend to develop it as an educational and tourism feature, which will have huge benefits for the Central West of NSW.



Staff and volunteers of the Age of Fishes Museum present anecdotes and memories of Alex Ritchie beside the pile of fossil-bearing rocks on which the plaque is mounted.

Dates for your Diary

September 7 is Threatened Species Day.

Biodiversity Month Activities – happening during September. Register at [Biodiversity month | NSW Government](#). You can use the filter to search for the Orange events.

BIGnet (Bird Interest Group Network) – is a collective of bird clubs in NSW and the ACT that come together every 6 months. They are meeting in **Cowra on 13/14 September**. An evening 'Bird in the Club' event, on the night of the 13th, will focus on the impact of SGARs (Second-generation Anticoagulant Rodenticides) such as Ratsak. Details have been emailed to members.

Capertee Bird Festival 19 – 21 September 2025

For more information and to register, visit www.caperteevalleybirdfestival.com.au

Cowra Woodland Bird Surveys – the last 2025 date is 18–19 October. All survey weekends start with a briefing and get together on the Friday night. If you are interested, please

send an email to Rhonda Vile at rhonda.vile@birdlife.org.au

2026 Cowra Survey Dates - 14 – 15 February, 18 – 19 April, 25 – 26 July, 17 – 18 October.

The **Aussie Bird Count** is on again from **20-26 October 2025**. Check out [the 2024 Results – Aussie Bird Count](#).

Sightings around Orange

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

Plants

What a difference some rain makes. On several visits to Ophir following the April excursion, when it was very dry, Rosemary has photographed some rejuvenated liverworts and a hornwort. These were not visible in April. Dr Chris Cargill, a liverwort scientist from the National Botanic Gardens, has identified eight possible liverwort species, all of which are common. Their identification would need to be confirmed from samples.

Birds

Great to hear **Hooded Robins** were spotted at several of the Cowra Woodland Bird surveys sites on 26/27 July.

On 1 August Cilla did a morning walk up Cullya Road and said it 'felt really quite spring-like....no more wintry deathly silence....birds singing everywhere...wood-ducks in the trees....honeyeaters chasing each other around.'

Seven **Flame Robins** were bouncing around in the low grassy area surrounding the summit of Gaanha bula Mt Canobolas and seen by Cath and Rosemary on 24 August. A **Grey Currawong** was also spotted.



*A male Flame Robin, a threatened species.
Photo Rosemary Stapleton.*

Nigel had a surprise seeing four **Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos** in a *Banksia integrifolia* in his backyard upon returning home from the August excursion.



Nigel's great photo of one of the Cockatoos feeding in his garden. Photo Nigel Hobden.

In mid-August Jenny Medd had a visit to one of their birdbaths by a pair of **White-naped Honeyeaters**. Jenny emailed to say 'gorgeous little birds but even flightier than our spinebills! The photo [below] was taken back in March 2018 - and we've certainly not seen them every year since! The **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters** are also back and there's a pair of **Black-faced Cuckooshrikes** hanging about, maybe nesting.'



A **Fan-tailed Cuckoo** was calling at Ophir Picnic Area on 25 August.

An unusual sighting at Ploughmans Wetland on 30 August was six **Black Swans** seen by

Neil Jones (below). A check of the birding databases shows this species has only been recorded here once before in March this year.



Creature of the Month

***Pyrrosia rupestris* – Rock Felt Fern**

Text by Alison Downing, photos by Hai Wu. First published as a Plant of the Week article at the Downing Herbarium, Macquarie University.

On a bush walk on 21 June near the Glow Worm Tunnel in Gardens of Stone National Park, Hai Wu noticed some unusual deep green rounded pads growing closely appressed to rock and wondered if they might be thallose liverworts. After some investigation, it appears that these are actually fern fronds (leaves) of the appropriately named Rock Felt Fern, *Pyrrosia rupestris*.



The vegetative leaves of the Rock Felt Fern.

In the photographs, the smaller, rounded leaves are vegetative leaves but the longer leaves will eventually develop *sori*, circles of clustered *sporangia* which contain *spores*, on the undersurface of the leaves. From this photograph, is possible to see wiry rhizomes extending out from under the leaves.



The longer leaves that will develop sori.

The Rock Felt Ferns grow on rocks and trees in rainforests and wet sclerophyll forest gullies along the east coast of Australia but are remarkably adapted to hot and dry conditions. If they grow in cool, moist, dark conditions they will use the C3 photosynthetic pathway, the most commonly occurring pathway for plants in temperate regions of the world. But if they are exposed to high light, high temperatures and sporadic desiccation, they have the ability to switch to CAM photosynthesis, where stomates remain closed during the day to limit water loss and open only at night. CAM is used by cactus and succulents, many tropical grasses, and epiphytic orchids. It is possible for one plant to be rooted at the base of a tree where the fern leaves will use C3 photosynthesis, while those in the crown will use CAM. In other words, one plant, two photosynthetic pathways.

Worldwide there could be up to 100 *Pyrrosia* species, widely distributed across Asia and the Pacific with a disjunct distribution (separated geographically at considerable distance) in Africa and Madagascar. Although most are drought tolerant, only five, including Rock Felt Fern, are known to utilise the CAM photosynthetic pathway.

With thanks to Hai Wu, OFNCS member, and Brian Atwell, Macquarie University.

Dick Medd has since noted that these ferns are not often found west of the Great Divide and have only been recorded in the Warrumbungles and at Kaptur. He has wondered if they might occur on Gaanha bula Mt Canobolas, maybe lurking at Federal or Hopetoun Falls areas for example, or around The Walls.



*Lunch above the gorge at Mingham Springs.
Left to right: Bruce Hansen, Chia-Chi Liu, Dick Medd, Penny Todman and Tony Caine.
Photo Nigel Hobden.*



*Mingham Springs excursion group in Mandagery Nature Reserve. Photo Penny Todman.
Left to right front row: Hai Wu, Sandra Chrystall, Cath Stapleton, Bruce Hansen.
Back row: Tony Caine, Nigel Hobden, Chia-Chi Liu, Kerrie McGann, Dick Medd, Rosemary Stapleton.*

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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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