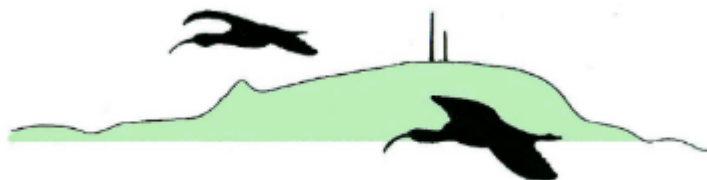


ORANGE FIELD NATURALIST AND CONSERVATION SOCIETY Inc



NEWSLETTER JULY 2026

Next Talk

Thursday 9 July – 7.30pm

Saving Our Species: The Bathurst Purple Copper Butterfly and Searching for the Bathurst Grasslands Earless Dragon

Online via Teams

at Nguluway Ngurang Seniors Village Hub
North Room **OR** online at home by request

Next Excursion

Sunday 12 July, 9.00 am
Bumberry section of Goobang
National Park

Next Talk – Thursday 9 July, 7.30pm.

Saving Our Species: The Bathurst Purple Copper Butterfly and Searching for the Bathurst Grasslands Earless Dragon

Speaker: Alison Cowie, Senior Threatened Species Officer, Northwest Ecosystems & Threatened Species Team at NSW DCCEEW.

Alison will talk about the SoS strategies for the butterfly that is listed as endangered and the dragon that is critically endangered at a NSW and Commonwealth level.



Paralucia spinifera. Photo: Stuart Cohen/DPIE

<https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/purple-copper-butterfly-paralucia-spinifera-fact-sheet-200458.pdf>

The team Alison works in looks after threatened species and ecosystems from the Central Tablelands all the way to the most western and northern parts of the state. The largest component of her job is implementing the Saving our Species program, which aims to secure threatened plants, animals and ecosystems in the wild for the next 100 years. Via this program, the team conducts on-ground actions including monitoring, weed control, feral animal control, population protection actions and community engagement. Many projects benefit from research partnerships with university groups.



Bathurst grassland earless dragon.
(Gavin Waters/DCCEEW)

<https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/publications/farming-dragons-productive-landscapes-can-protect-bathurst-grassland-earless-dragon>

You can come to the Hub and watch Alison's presentation as a projection and chat to other members

OR

you can watch it at home by requesting a Microsoft Teams link by emailing to orangefieldnats@gmail.com. You will be sent a link on the afternoon of the talk.

If you haven't used Teams before you will need to install Microsoft Teams or its browser plugin. It is best to do a test before the meeting and reconnect just before 7.30pm. You will be placed in a 'waiting room', and Tony Caine will let you in to the meeting when it starts at 7.30pm.

Next Excursion

Where: Bumberry section of Goobang National Park

When: Sunday 12 July, 9.00am

Leader: Rosemary Stapleton

Grade: 3 - moderate. No formed trails, some uneven surfaces with logs and slopes.

Meeting place: Orange High School Bus Bay
4WD or high clearance vehicles required.

We will travel from the high school to Manildra, for a toilet stop, then head west on the Henry Parkes Way. In total it is about 74kms to a large parking area, on the left, at the top of a ridge. After entering through the locked gate to the Staircase Trail we will head south through open Ironbark and Callitris forest.



Staircase Fire Trail. Photo R Stapleton.

We will make a few stops before we reach the Circuit Trail. Here the eucalypt species changes and there are more shrubs and spinifex clumps. If conditions have been wet, we will return to the Staircase Trail and drive south to its end where we will park and walk part way along the Tyrell's Fire Trail. Some of the shrubs may be flowering and if we are very, very lucky we may see a few Glossy Black Cockatoos. There is sure to be fungi around.

If time permits when we exit the park, we can cross the road to an area where there may be flowering orchids and bryophytes.

Meet at the bus bay at 9am sharp to carpool.

As it is winter come prepared for cold and wet weather. It will be a full day excursion. Bring morning tea, lunch, water, a chair, and any essential medications you may need. Sturdy footwear is recommended so please wear closed walking shoes and suitable clothing.



OFNCS at Staircase Fire Trail junction with the Circuit Fire Trail in July 2021 during Covid. Photo R Stapleton.

Last Talk: Thursday 11 June.

Southern Nevada Conservancy and Public Lands Alliance.

Speaker: Andy Hart.

Report by Andy Hart with minor edits by Rosemary Stapleton.

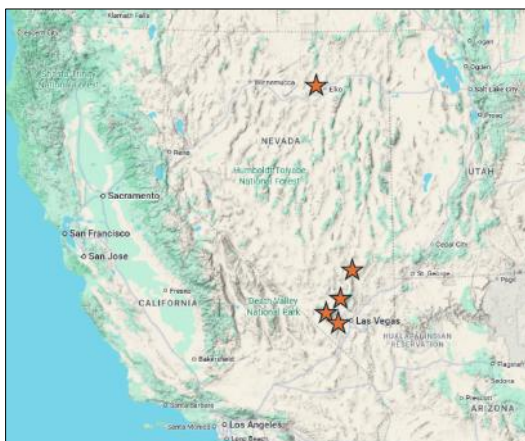
In his talk Andy spoke to the work of Cooperating Associations in the United States. One such association is the Southern Nevada Conservancy, for which he served as Executive Director from 2015-2019. Andy also introduced the Public Lands Alliance. This is a professional association of non-profit partners of public lands, and he served as a non-executive director from 2018-2021.

The talk started with some history of national parks in America. The first National Park, Yosemite, was created in the US in 1890. It was managed by the US Army until 1916 when the National Park Service was created. Seven years later, the first Cooperating Association was formed when rangers from Yosemite wanted to compile, publish, and sell a book on the natural history of the area. It was thought this would best be accomplished by a non-profit organisation operating within the Park under an official agreement. All profits were to be returned to the Park through spending on interpretive exhibits and programs. This organisation survives today as the Yosemite Conservancy. Southern Nevada Conservancy (fka Red Rock Canyon Interpretive Association) was founded in 1988 to support Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area. Visitation to this area was rapidly growing alongside the popularity of nearby Las Vegas, (population 3.04 million), in the state of Nevada.

Andy spoke of the complexities of public land management in the US which makes the role of connecting visitors to these special places by Cooperating Associations even more valuable. Difficulties include multiple Agencies within multiple Departments managing a myriad of land designations. They have varying missions and varying regulations and amenities. There is also the issue of checkerboard land (alternating sections of public/private ownership). This is a legacy of land grant incentives for building the transcontinental railways. Budgetary restrictions also impact management effectiveness. The Bureau of Land Management only receives about \$1 per acre in federal appropriations each year.

Cooperating Associations bring benefits of local community representation through governing boards. They can also be nimble with programming, staffing, and procurement. Another benefit is their ease of creating site-specific online and traditional media outreach. Cooperating Associations are given significant roles and access to federal facilities but are also restricted in some ways. Restrictions include a prohibition on lobbying, background checks of staff, and oversight of distribution of profits.

We were introduced to the basin and range geography of the state of Nevada. It lies between the Sierra Nevada and the western edge of the Rocky Mountains and is home to two of the four deserts of North America, the Great Basin, and the Mojave. The Southern Nevada Conservancy (SNC) aims to create opportunities to discover, understand and enjoy public land. The SNC supported five sites in Nevada.



Going down from the north (top of the map), the sites are:

- The California Trail Center in Northern Nevada, which tells the stories of the mass western migration in the US during the mid-nineteenth century. The perspective of the

first nations people of the area, the Shoshone and Northern Paiute people is included, and they actively participate in programs at the Center. The Center is managed by the Bureau of Land Management.

- The Desert and the Pahrnatag National Wildlife Refuges managed by the Fish and Wildlife Service.



*The Pahrnatag National Wildlife Refuge.
Photo Andy Hart.*

- The Spring Mountains National Recreation Area, where the SNC partnered with the US Forest Service.
- At Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area, their partner was the Bureau of Land Management.

At each of these sites, SNC operated interpretive retail stores and supported a wide variety of visitor outreach, education, and interpretive programs. They worked with the Fish and Wildlife Service to bring the Federal Duck Stamp Contest to Las Vegas. It hosted a screening of the documentary *The Million Dollar Duck* with a live Q&A with some of the film's artists. A duck stamp must be purchased by all hunters but there is no limit to the number issued. Many duck stamps are purchased by stamp collectors and conservationists. Hunters must also obtain locally managed hunting permits which can be restricted in number based on the health of the game bird population. The duck stamp is widely considered one of the most successful fundraising tools for public land conservation. It has raised over \$1 billion dollars which has been used to preserve 2.6 million acres of critical wetland and grassland habitat for migratory birds and waterfowl. To learn more Andy recommends watching *The Million Dollar Duck*.

Sandra asked if this habitat protection from duck stamp sales was sustaining bird numbers through hunting pressures. Andy said that in fact, game bird numbers have rebounded

significantly from lows during earlier periods of sustenance hunting in large part thanks to land purchased and preserved through the duck stamp program.

At the California Trail Center SNC helped to support the annual Trail Days gathering and reenactments. An original Peter Schuttler wagon, which was used in the westward migration, has been found and restored for display at the Center.



Restored wagon photo by Brad Dunn, 2019.

In the Spring Mountains, SNC played a key role in planning, safety, and emergency communications for visitors, having gained a huge social media following during a period of severe bush fires. Guided hikes and corporate volunteer programs were other popular forms of outreach.



A trail in Spring Mountains National Recreation Area. Photo Andy Hart.

At Red Rock Canyon, SNC supported an extensive range of visitor services. As an example, Andy played two videos from the 2018 remake of the visitor centre theatre film.

Cooperating Associations earn most of their revenue through operation of retail sales at stores within visitor centres.



A SNC retail store at Red Rock Canyon. Photo Andy Hart.

For many decades this was limited to book sales but today hats and t-shirts are one of the biggest selling items as well as plush native animals.



Some of the sales items available at SNC visitor centres that Andy brought along, including the puffin toy and a Kangaroo Rat plushie. Photo Rosemary Stapleton.

Cooperating Associations are still important publishers. They pick up local stories which may not have the breadth of interest for a big publishing house but would be of interest to many visitors to the sites where those stories come from. Andy showed one example that SNC published, 'Before the Gold', by Dean G Heitt. This tells the story of early gold mining in the area around the California Trail Center.

The Public Lands Alliance (PLA) was founded in 1977 as a way for Cooperating Associations to learn from each other and demonstrate collective strength. Today, PLA welcomes any non-profit with an official agreement to support public lands. This includes Friends groups and Foundations who become members as well as offering affiliate memberships to other entities

wishing to support this work. PLA acts as a voice to Congress and agency leadership for all members. It is continually aggregating data to show the impact this membership has. PLA also organises an annual convention and trade show where members can gather to celebrate, learn and work with creators of interpretive products on the latest trends for public lands visitors. The Alliance also acts as way to get quick uptake of national initiatives such as the National Parks Passport Book.

There were many good questions from the audience. Patrick asked about species differentiation due to elevation extremes in the Great Basin Desert. Andy was able to provide the example of sky islands and the plight of the pika (g. *Ochotona*), a small, native mountain-dwelling mammal. It is running out of elevation to find the cool temperatures it requires. At the other extreme he spoke to the Devil's Hole pupfish, trapped in a small basin water source left behind from wetter periods where it has evolved into a distinct species.

Paul asked about SNC's relationship with the indigenous communities. Andy explained there were good working relationship with Shoshone and Northern Paiute people at the California Trail Center. At Spring Mountains, SNC sponsors the annual Gathering for our Mountain which brought many Nuwuvi (Southern Paiute) people together for a weekend of song, reflection, cultural exchange, and pine nut harvesting. These nuts are an important historical food source collected from the mountains.

An example of support for science on Public Lands was SNC's full support for a Master's student at University of Nevada – Las Vegas to complete 3D photogrammetry studies of dinosaur trackways. This led to new insights into the gait and movements of a critter that walked through Red Rock Canyon over 150 million years ago.

Nigel asked about management conflicts arising from the wild horse and burro population. Andy replied saying this could be a very long conversation, or another presentation. Suffice to say they are protected by law, and management options are restricted by law. He agreed that these species do create conflict with native species, as well as cattle and sheep that have open-range grazing rights, and they impact habitat in several ways.

The talk finished with some thoughts from former NSW National Parks Ranger, Steve Woodhall about the retail operations at Australian National Parks. The disparity in visitor numbers compared to the US might be a challenge for the Cooperating Association model here.

Anyone interested to know more about any of the topics covered is encouraged to reach out to Andy Hart for a chat when he is at a talk or excursion. You can read about the impressive reflexes and defensive skills of *Dipodomys merriami* (Merriam's Kangaroo Rat) in the Creature of the Month article.

Last Excursion: Sunday 14 June.

The excursion to Wattle Flat Heritage Lands and Windradyne's Grave was cancelled due to the rain and forest thunderstorms.



Bruce Hansen (above) was the only enthusiastic person who came ready for any weather. Perhaps he was preparing for his participation in the Vinnies CEO Sleepout in Sydney on June 18, as an OCTEC Director? You can read about Bruce's motivation to raise awareness of homelessness and fundraise in the June 18-24 edition of Orange City Life. Please help Bruce reach his fundraising target by donating at <https://www.ceosleepout.org.au/sponsor?kw=bruce+hansen>

OFNCS Committee News

We welcome new member Netta Holmes Lee, from Larras Lee, who joined us on the May excursion to Neville SF.

We also welcome Hamish Alexander-Dawson, as a new NPWS ranger based in Dubbo. Hamish will take over the responsibility for Goobang National Park from Jack Fry. Unfortunately, Hamish won't be able to join us for the excursion to Bumberry.

At the last meeting the committee reviewed the use of WhatsApp as well as minor format changes for the newsletter and website. OFNCS has written to Orange Council requesting an update to the IT resources at the Seniors Village Hub. This would allow us, and other groups, to more easily host guest speakers from outside of Orange. The NPWS Guidelines for Assistance Dogs were also noted by the committee.

The Central Tablelands Local Land Services are once again starting to plan activities for Biodiversity Month in September. In previous years Field Nats have assisted with spotlighting nights and a workshop encouraging people to create more habitat in their gardens.

H5 Bird Flu detected in Australia

It was distressing to hear last week that this virulent strain of bird flu has been detected in continental Australia for the first time. A Brown Skua, a migratory seabird, was found near Esperance in southwest Western Australia, and has tested positive for avian influenza (H5). As this story continues as a news item, we hear that a few more birds have tested positive, including near Adelaide.

This means that this bird flu has now spread to every continent globally and killed millions of birds and many thousands of mammals. It was detected on Heard Island late last year where it has been estimated that over 13,000 southern elephant seal pups were found dead, more than three-quarters of all pups. Several penguin species were also affected.

A report on ABC News, with interviews, noted that *'It has the potential to wipe out wildlife and threaten livestock. It could have population level impacts on our species. Most at risk species are marine birds, fur seals and Australian sea lions. It is not yet present in our poultry or agricultural systems.'*

Go to [The Australian Government Agriculture Department](http://www.australianagriculture.gov.au) for information and advice on what you can do if you see multiple sick or dead birds or other animals. You are encouraged to report any dead or sick birds or animals showing [signs of bird flu](#).

- **Do not touch them.**
- **Avoid** contact.
- **Record** what you see.
- **Report** it to the **Emergency Animal Disease Hotline** on **1800 675 888** from anywhere in Australia.

August OFNCS Activities

Thursday 13 August Talk – currently waiting on Iberdrola to say if an ecologist involved in the two proposed wind farms is available.

Sunday 16 August Excursion – Canobolas State Forest and planned area for the wind farm, but it will depend on access to fire trails.

Dates for your Diary

22 July 7.30 pm. ECCO has invited MDBA Central West Community Engagement Officer, Peter Thomas, to be the guest speaker. Come along to the Seniors Village Hub and **hear feedback on what was heard from the consultations during the review of the Basin Plan.** The 'What we heard Report' is at this [link](#).

ECCO turned 20 in April! It is holding a **20th anniversary lunch on 18 July at the Lord Anson Hotel.**

2026 Cowra Bird Survey Dates: 24 – 26 July, 14 – 18 October. On the October survey weekend an updated Bird Routes of Cowra will be launched. Note that surveyors are asked to be at a get together on the Friday night to meet their survey team and get site instructions and maps.

Contact **Jayden Gunn** for more information or to register for the surveying at jayden.gunn@birdlife.org.au

Aussie Bird Count – 19-25 October 2026.

Sightings around Orange

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

Plants

On 18 June while walking beside Paling Yards Reserve Rosemary photographed (below) these tiny green spots and wondered if they were liverworts. Dr Chris Cargill has identified them as the **leafy liverwort *Enigmella thallina***. It is not often recorded perhaps because it is so small.



Fungi

The rain and 'warm' conditions have certainly been ideal conditions for fungi. Many are photogenic but there are too many to include them all here. They are also hard to identify! The LLS guide '*Fungi of the Central Tablelands and Central West NSW*' is a good start.



This is the introduced **Fly Agaric**, *Amanita muscaria*, which have been popping up everywhere. Alison Ford photographed these under a deodar in Kenna St on 5 June (above). There was a lone one at the DPI car park on 11 June and Eric Tanner saw some on 15 June.

The **Emperor Cortinar**, *Cortinarius archeri*, is an eye-catching purple fungus that is slimy. It was seen at Paling Yards and at Orange View in the SCA by Cath Stapleton on 21 June (below).



You will see on iNaturalist that there are lots of recent posts of fungi in Mt Canobolas SCA. On Sunday Cath and Rosemary were surprised to find about 14 or 15 different species in the first few metres of forest we walked into east of the parking area. There were lots of these orange jelly bells on fallen branches and several different types of bracket and 'crust' fungus.



Four different types of wood decomposing fungus on a fallen branch at Orange View. Photo Cath Stapleton.

There were also lots of agarics; mushrooms that usually have an umbrella-like shape with radiating gills (lamellae) beneath a cap (pileus). Cath used a mirror to see the gills (below).



And there were several patches of **Cannonball fungus** in all its stages of development.



Photo Rosemary Stapleton.

Things with Wings

When doing surveys for the Cowra Woodland Bird Program one of the surveyors records the bird calls. Recently she listened to her recordings from the April surveys and was surprised to discover the call of a **Regent Honeyeater**. The call has been confirmed by other birding experts so it was an exciting find

of this critically endangered species. Regents have been seen infrequently in the Cowra area.

Also, in the Cowra area three **Ground Cuckooshrikes** were seen between Cowra and Wyangala Dam by Warren Chad on 1 June. This was an easterly sighting of the species which is more often seen in drier western areas.

Two single **Superb Parrots** were heard on 20 May as they flew over Diamond Drive Reserve while ECCO members were weeding at the tree planting done there last year. Superb Parrots were also seen just south of Parkes on 30 May.

Animals

At Paling Yards on 18 June Andrew Rawson spotted this small young **Echidna** that had been taking advantage of the soft wet soil. It had many more cream spines than usual.



Photo R Stapleton.

At the ECCO weeding day Tony Caine found a tiny skink (below) hiding in the wood chip near one of the plants. It looks like a Garden Skink and was placed safely back in the grass.



Andy Hart had his first FrogID app recording, made on 3 June, identified. Andy said '*perhaps unsurprisingly, it was a **Common Eastern Froglet**. Sounds like we have a lot of these at Small Acres*'.

On 12 June Rosemary was surprised to spot this small **Highland Copperhead** (below) on a walk at Ploughmans Wetland.



Creature of the Month

Merriam's Kangaroo Rat *Dipodomys merriami*.

Article by Andy Hart.

Continuing our virtual field trip to the desert southwest of the United States this month, let's learn a bit more about *Dipodomys merriami* – Merriam's Kangaroo Rat.



Dipodomys merriami, copyright Roy Purcell.

Named for its hopping form of motion, this small member of the genus averages about 25cm in length. More than half of that being their long, tasseled tail. Native to the Mojave and Sonoran deserts of the southwestern US and northern Mexico, this critter is well adapted to life in a

hot, arid environment. Like many desert mammals, it is primarily nocturnal.

Very territorial, they typically live in single adult burrows dug at the base of shrubs where the soil is looser. Perhaps most impressive is their lack of need to consume liquid water. They are such efficient users of water, they get all they need from the seeds they eat, mostly mesquite and creosote. They produce very dry waste and maintain a cooler temperature in their nostrils allowing for moisture in their breath to condense and be reabsorbed.



Dipodomys merriami, copyright Scott Olmstead.

As prey for owls, hawks, foxes and snakes, kangaroo rats require an array of defensive tactics. Their large feet can be used to produce drumming noises as a warning signal. They are also known to kick sand in the face of predators and have impressive reflexes, able to leap away from a striking snake. Night-vision trail camera technology has in recent years allowed for recordings of this behavior to be widely available online.

References:

- Purcell, R, "Portraits of Nature" 2001 KC Publications, Inc.
- Cinkoske Madison, C, "Red Rock Canyon: The Story Behind the Scenery" 2012 KC Publications, Inc.
- https://animaldiversity.org/accounts/Dipodomys_merriami/

Committee Member of the Month –
Rosemary Stapleton,
Secretary and Newsletter Editor.

- What was your first memory of a nature experience?
I grew up on a farm on the headwaters of the Brunswick River, near Mullumbimby. I walked almost 2kms to primary school and was always late getting home. I would

wander up the creek looking for special rocks such as agates and quartz crystals.

- Who inspired you to become involved in nature?
Initially it was my parents who were always interested in gardening, growing orchids and the original bits of bush left on the property. In the last 30 years my inspiration has been the scientists I've met and the many opportunities there are now to be a citizen scientist and to record and photograph nature.
- What specific aspect of nature are your most interested in?
Birds; I did my first 'proper' bird survey on our Cudal farm in May 1991 and then regular surveys from Quandialla to Condo and up to Dubbo for many years. I also joined the Cowra Woodland Bird Program in 2003 and have done many surveys there. However, I've become a lapsed bird surveyor since the 2018 fire on Gaanha bula Mt Canobolas. I'm now looking at the ground to see orchids, bryophytes, shrubs, insects, fungi and many other small things.
- What is your favourite bit of bush/ natural place you like to visit?
It is hard to name just one as I love going to all the local parks and reserves, but I guess since 2018 it is now Mt Canobolas SCA because it is close and has so many unique aspects. I also wish I could go back to see the wonderful birds and landscapes in South Africa, Namibia and Botswana.



This is me (left) with Themba and another BirdLife South Africa Community Bird Guide. We're in a coastal forest at iSimangaliso World Heritage Area near St Lucia on the east coast of South Africa. Photo D Stapleton.

- What was your most memorable Field Nats talk or excursion?

The last month's talk and excursion. Whatever the topic or location they are always enjoyable and I usually learn something new. While not an excursion my involvement in Field Nats led me to being involved in the post fire surveys in the Mt Canobolas SCA. Luckily it coincided with my retirement in 2018.

- What is your favourite song about nature and who is it by?

A classical piece, The Planets by Gustav Holst (1874-1934) or to relax the Lake Eyre music from the ABC TV series on the lake.

- If there's one thing you could change for nature's benefit, what would it be?

My high-level goal would be reducing climate change but locally getting rid of feral animals and weeds. The damage they do is terrible.



The stunning Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area in Nevada. Photo Andy Hart.

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Orange Field Naturalist & Conservation Society acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land, including the people of the Wiradjuri Nation. We recognise their continuing connection to lands and waters. We pay our respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and to Elders past, present and emerging.

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