ORANGE FIELD NATURALIST AND CONSERVATION SOCIETY Inc

NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER 2024

Next Talk
Thursday 12 September – 7.30pm
Note change of speaker.

Adventures in Orchid Research: Taxonomy and Conservation of Australia's orchids.
Speaker Heidi Zimmer

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

Excursion
Sunday 15 September
Note change of location.
Killonbutta Nature Reserve
Meet at Orange High School Bus Bay at 9am.

Due to unforeseen circumstances our speaker and excursion location have had to change from those advertised in the last newsletter.

Next Meeting
Thursday 12 September – 7.30pm.
Adventures in Orchid Research: Taxonomy and Conservation of Australia's orchids.

Speaker - Heidi Zimmer, Orange Field Naturalist and Conservation Society member.

Heidi will give an overview of current Australian orchid research, including morphological and molecular taxonomy, and applied conservation research.

Next Excursion – Sunday 15 September - Killonbutta Precinct, South-West Woodlands Nature Reserve.

Like Cookamidgera, Killonbutta was a State Forest that was declared a Nature Reserve in January 2011. It is 11 km west of Molong, 10km north of Manildra and is 1515 ha surrounded by cleared pastoral land. OFNCS last visited in 2017.

The reserve is dominated by Black Cypress Pine, *Callitris endlicheri*, often occurring in single species stands or in conjunction with eucalypts. It does have areas of Ironbark and heath, where common orchids can be found. If the Ironbarks are flowering, there may be interesting birds. The reserve is a remnant of the semi-original vegetation and acts an important connective island for flora and fauna to other patches of vegetation. There has been no substantial fire in the forest for over 70 years.

We will focus on the northern section of the reserve and do short walks to two of the small granite outcrops as well as drive along one of the fire trails stopping to wander through areas of heath. Unfortunately, there are areas where people have dumped rubbish.

Meet at Orange High bus bay at 9.00am to organise car-pooling. 4WDs are not required. The excursion will finish just after lunch. Please bring water, lunch and anything else you need to have with you. Please wear sturdy footwear, long sleeve shirts and pants.

A patch of health where Leucopogon and Acacia shrubs as well as Caladenia caerulea, Blue Fairy orchids, were beginning to flower on 22 August 2024. Photo Rosemary Stapleton.

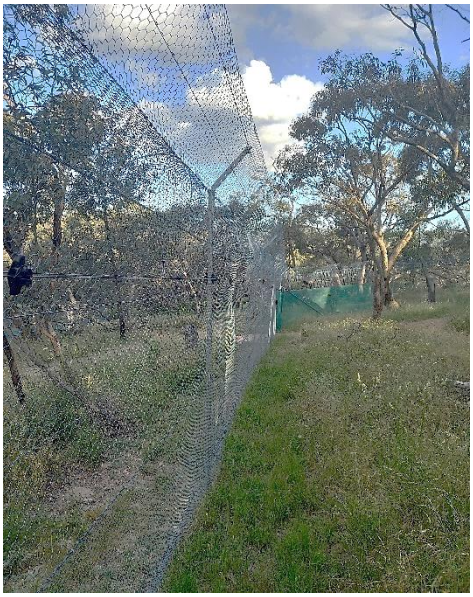
<u>Last Talk</u> – Thursday 8 August, Conmurra Sanctuary – conserving local endangered wildlife. *Speaker Joel Little. Report by Rosemary Stapleton, photos from Joel Little.*

Joel was introduced to us by Nigel Hobden who explained they had met when Joel worked at Bathurst Regional Council as an Environmental Officer. Joel started by noting that the land and environment had been shaped by at least 20,000 years of Wiradjuri culture and 200 years of European settlement.

Joel's interest in nature started when growing up in Bathurst. When 15 a newspaper article alerted him to the work being done with sanctuaries by Dr John Wamsley, of cat skin hat fame. As no suitable employment was available in Bathurst Joel set off to Warrawong Sanctuary in South Australia and a meeting with John Wamsley that changed his life. After volunteering at several sanctuaries building fences Joel was offered a job and eventually worked with animals such as the Eastern Quoll. At one of the sanctuaries he met his future wife Andrea, a German backpacker. Some years later they realised that better paying jobs were needed for them to achieve their dream of living in the bush and this brought Joel back to the Central West.

In 2013 their dream became a reality when the 67 ha property at Walang came up for sale. As it had lots of wildlife, they quickly saw its ecotourism potential. Conmurra has poor soil derived from Devonian granite and an elevation of 800 - 1,000m. Its habitats range from high mountain woodland to lowland forest and is linked by vegetation to Wambool Nature Reserve to the south.

As Joel still had the idea of a sanctuary in the back of his mind, he started investigating how to establish one. He soon found out that private conservation did not fit neatly into the complex licencing requirements in NSW. Instead of having one very large, fenced enclosure a compromise was reached of having large enclosures for a few species. With a focus on local and endangered species these fox and cat proof enclosures are between 3,000 – 8,000m².



The serious fencing at Conmurra.

A rocky knoll was ideal for a Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby enclosure. Other areas were fenced for Long-nosed Potoroos, Rufous and Brush-tailed Bettongs and Southern Brown Bandicoots. The fences (above), over 2.4m high, meet the same requirements as zoos and are needed to prevent digging, chewing, climbing, and jumping animals from either getting into or out of the enclosures. The enclosures are large enough for the animals to live almost as in the wild. Most of the time they forage for their own food and the enclosure size also helps reduce disease risks and keep animals happy.

Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby at Conmurra.

Joel showed photos and videos of the species and talked about the behaviour and breeding they had observed and learnt about. Their first Rock Wallaby was the last remaining animal in a population that is now locally extinct. At Conmurra a female joined him, and they have now produced four joeys. We could all relate

to Joel's description of the Bandicoots being the gardeners of the bush as we watched the video of one munching on a witchetty grub. Their scratching and digging creates a soft spongy soil surface. This was common prior to colonization, but the soil is now compacted by hooved stock, such as sheep and cattle.

A Southern Brown Bandicoot eating the witchetty grub it had dug up at Conmurra.

Joel explained embryonic diapause, the temporary suspension of development of an embryo, as a strategy many Australian animals have developed to cope with the great seasonality of the Australian climate. He wondered why Eastern Grey Kangaroos don't do it.

Finally, he spoke of their hopes to establish a program for Spotted-tailed and Eastern Quolls and Brush-tailed Phascogales. The need for a rehabilitation centre was highlighted during the devastating 2019 bushfires when the only rehab centre was at Western Plains Zoo. Joel is currently building one at Conmurra with the help of WIRES funding.

An Eastern Quoll, one of the animals for a future program at Conmurra.

The goal of the breeding programs they have established is to get the animals back into the wild. Joel explained how their connection to other sanctuaries allows them to exchange animals and ensure a range of genetics for each species. It also prevents overpopulation in their enclosures. They contribute to conservation of threatened species by being part of wider programs. The sanctuary is funded by their Airbnb ecotourism business as well as grants and occasional consultancy work. Stays are a minimum of 2 nights, and they are usually booked up 3 months in advance.

Some members may well make a booking after being inspired by Joel. As Penny said, '*it was lovely to hear from someone who has been able to follow their dream*'.

<u>Last Excursion</u> – Sunday 11 August, Sunset Walk at Conmurra Wildlife Sanctuary.

A group of fifteen people met on Sunday evening, 11 August, at 5.15pm outside the Conmurra Wildlife Sanctuary Airbnb facility for an introduction by Joel, one of the owners of the Sanctuary. Conmurra is located about 20 mins east of Bathurst down Timber Ridge Road, which intersects with the Great Western Highway. Tours of the Sanctuary are not open to the public, only through booking accommodation at the Airbnb facility.

Joel and their dingos. Photo H Berndt.

Joel introduced us to the Sanctuary's Dingoes: Kimba, a white male, and his dominant female companion, Kela. There is no dominance of an Alpha male in a dingo pack; a female matriarch selects where the pack will hunt and what they will hunt. We learnt via demonstration that dingoes not only howl but they do also bark. After meeting the dingoes, we walked along a track to a point where there were Acacia trees surrounded by Long Leafed Box (*Eucalyptus*

goniocaylx), the dominant vegetation community on the site.

Here we were asked to turn off our torches, head lamps and mobile phone lights and let our eyes adjust to the ambient light and look at the silhouettes of trees to see if we could pick out gliders. Within a minute the first of several Kreffts Gliders were spotted scurrying up and along branches of the Acacias, looking for a feed. Joel mentioned that he has observed the Kreffts Glider regularly between August and December in this area of the property and considers the location where we spotted them, as a glider highway. Observing the gliders, a free ranging species on the site, was a joy experienced by all.

One of the Kreffts Gliders seen at Conmurra. Photo Helmut Berndt.

We then entered the first of two secure enclosures, feral animal free and fencing to deter feral animals, where Joel scattered some peanuts in their shells about. Soon, we saw our first Brush-tailed Bettong or Woylie (*Bettongia penicillata*).

Brush-tailed Bettong. Photo Nigel Hobden.

Brush-tailed Bettongs, a nocturnal species, are similar in size to the introduced rabbit. Due to their small size in the wild they are easy prey for feral foxes and cats (hence the exclusion fencing); their main threats, especially including land clearing, have seen their extermination from almost all their historical range over the past 150 years. Brush-tailed Bettongs primarily feed on fungi, supplementing their diet with bulbs, seeds and insects. Bettongs build a nest made of grass, bark and foliage, which is well hidden at the base of a tussock or shrub, leaving the nest to forage between dusk and dawn.

Moving onto the next enclosure, we met a very friendly Rufous Bettong (*Aepyprymnus rufescens*) and due to the slightly windy conditions that had developed during the evening, two flighty Brush-tailed Rock Wallabies (*Petrogale pencillata*). The Rock Wallabies disappeared quickly within the 1-hectare enclosure, and then we caught a glimpse of a shy, Long-nosed Potoroo (*Potorous tridactylus*).

A Rufus Bettong checking Helmut's camera. Photo Nigel Hobden.

The walk concluded at around 7.15pm back in front of the Airbnb accommodation, where a round of applause for Joel was offered. Everyone concluded that they had had an informative and interesting stroll through the bushland of Conmurra Wildlife Sanctuary. After farewells and goodnights members departed for their journeys back to Orange.

Long-nosed Potoroo. Photo Nigel Hobden.

OFNCS Committee News

Friday 1 November is the date for the 50th Anniversary dinner.
Mark the date in your diary.

Invitations will be sent to you soon. It is being organised by Jenny Pratten. Jenny Medd has completed the book on the history of the society with Dick undertaking the formatting and design. One copy will be provided to the principal current members. Additional copies or copies for non-members will be $25 plus postage if needed.

On August 6 staff from Licencing and Approvals, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water - Water, visited Orange. They met with people and organisations who had made submissions on Stage 2 of the Blackmans Swamps Stormwater Harvesting Scheme. OFNCS had written a submission highlighting the detrimental impact of this scheme on the ecology of Summer Hill Creek. Rosemary Stapleton represented the Society at the consultation.

October Talk and Excursion

Talk – Thursday 10 October - Managing Biosecurity and Emerging Threats by a staff member from Biosecurity and Food Safety, NSW DPI. *(Editor's note: Having joined a webinar on the deadly strain of Avian Influenza that has been spreading in other countries this should be an interesting talk.)*

Excursion – Sunday 13 October – Wambool Nature Reserve. This is an orchid hotspot. The plan is to take a comfortable walk around the fire trail loop. Swee, on a return visit to Orange, went to the reserve last weekend and found lots of flowering *Bunochilus* (Swee's photo below). It looks as if it is one of the hard to identify species.

CWEC Meeting
4 August 2024
Report by R Stapleton.

Nigel and I represented Field Nats at this Zoom meeting along with reps from seven other groups. Many of the usual issues of biodiversity, mining, water and energy were discussed.

In relation to biodiversity the NSW government is not prepared to adopt all the recommendations of the Henry Review of the Biodiversity Conservation Act. There will be some legislative changes and changes to the LLS. They have not agreed to have no-go zones for developments that impact on any Endangered Ecological Communities. Groups have been asked to highlight local no-go zones and request that they are safeguarded. Some positive changes related to rehabilitation of mining areas.

This CWEC meeting occurred before the decision on the tailings dam for the McPhillamy's Mine. It was also before the legal decision about the Lue silver/lead/zinc mine where the court found that the transmission line to the mine should have been considered in the developer's application to the Independent Planning Commission. Extensions to coal mines around Mudgee are still being put forward by the companies. The small community of Wollar, that has been seriously affected by surrounding coal mining is holding a celebration of their ongoing existence called Wollar Alive on 21/22 September.

The Central West Orana Renewable Energy Zone (CWOREZ) Community Fund of $70m has been launched. Mudgee, Dubbo and Wellington communities are in the zone and can apply for funds for job creation focused projects. Bev Smiles and a rep from the Burrendong Arboretum are on the committee. Lithgow is busy responding to the Coalition's proposal to place a nuclear reactor there. Groups from all 7 communities across Australia where reactors have been suggested are joining forces.

A report from an Independent Panel on Connectivity of Darling/Barka flows has just been released. It has positive outcomes about how the water should be managed in future. In Orange the Council has received a $200,000 grant to investigate water purification.

Gaanha bula Mt Canobolas Update

In the middle of August there were very few signs of spring when I visited the mountain. What a difference 10 days makes! On a return visit on August 28 there were moths, butterflies, midges and even the ants seemed to be active. The *Leucopogon* shrubs are flowering and at The Walls there was even some open flowers of *Phebalium*. Many of the heath plants are in bud including *Pultanaea polifolia* near the Fern Gully gate.

Col Bower has started his annual monitoring of the Canobolas Leek Orchid and *Caladenia fitzgeraldii*. One of the *C. fitzgeraldii* colonies has over 35 leaves visible and at this stage there is no evidence of them being nibbled or dug up by animals so far.

NPWS has erected a new information sign at The Walls. It features the critically endangered *Prostanthera gilesii*, the Velvet Worm and the recently named liverwort *Riccia epecenia*.

New sign at The Walls. Photo R Stapleton.

Vale Dr. David Goldney

Text by Cilla Kinross with OFNCS additions.

On 15th August 2024 the Central West lost a true friend of the environmental movement, Dr. David Goldney. David was originally from Adelaide but did his doctorate in Queensland and arrived in Bathurst with his wife Joan in 1972 to take up a position with the then Mitchell College of Advanced Education (now Charles Sturt University).

David was a respected environmental scientist with many publications to his name, but his contributions to society went much further than that as he spear-headed many projects and NGOs to help further conservation ventures in the region. He received his AM in 2018 for "significant service to tertiary education in the field of environmental science, and to conservation through resource management committees". He was knowledgeable in all aspects of wildlife ecology, but with a specialised expertise in mammals, particularly the platypus. He was also a visionary landscape ecologist and worked tirelessly to bring together land managers in the region to stabilise landscapes.

I have known David since 1991. He was my PhD supervisor, mentor, consulting and academic colleague and friend. I would never have received my doctorate without his guidance. We worked closely on many projects such as 'Disappearing Islands' and the conference and proceedings 'Biodiversity Dreaming'. We had many memorable field trips, including one where he was hospitalised after an encounter with a platypus spur and another in the Hunter where he drove himself to hospital after a heart attack!

He will be sorely missed by myself and judging by the large number of people at his funeral, he was also very important to many others.

David Goldney, on the excursion on 15 September 2019, speaking about the Bathurst landscape. Photo Cilla Kinross.

David's involvement in Field Nats was as a guest speaker nine times between 1978 and 2019. His last talk was titled '*Some observations on 200 years of European stewardship of the Central Western Region of NSW*'. In his talk David took us through the history of the Central West Region and outlined the deterioration of the landscape since Europeans settled in the area. On the excursion he took us to sites to the west and

north-west of Bathurst to highlight this impact on the landscape. David was also an expert witness for CWEC in the Land and Environment Court case about the introduction of rowing on Spring Creek Reservoir.

David, with OFNCS members, in some of the changed landscape at Cashens Lane, near Bathurst, September 2019. Photo R Stapleton.

Dates for your Diary

2024 Cowra Woodland Bird Surveys – the last dates for this year are October 19/20. Contact **Jayden Gunn** for more information or to register for the surveying at jayden.gunn@birdlife.org.au

Dubbo Field Naturalist and Conservation Society - Tuesday **17 September** at 7pm **Col Bower will be speaking on 'Orchids of Central Western NSW'** in Dubbo. DFN have changed the date of their visit to Orange. It is now on **20 October** and Col has agreed to take them to the Mt Canobolas SCA to look at its special orchids.

Biodiversity Month is September.

There are still spaces in some of the events being held for Biodiversity Month. This includes the **Spotlighting** nights on **6 and 20 September**, with one at the Botanic Gardens and the other at Gosling Creek/Hinton Reserves.

Burrendong Arboretum is celebrating their 60th anniversary on Sunday **22 September**. It will be a great opportunity to visit this garden of unusual native plants.

The Orange **Picnic for Nature** is on Saturday **20 October** at Gosling Creek Reserve. It is being organised by ECCO and OFNCS.

Register for BirdLife Australia's **Aussie Bird Count** which is being held from **14-20 October**. You can do a 20-minute survey of birds anywhere, in your backyard, local park or somewhere in the bush or a reserve.

If you'd prefer frogs, then **Frog ID Week** is from **8-17 November**. This is run by the Australian Museum and uses the free FrogID app, where you can record the frogs calling around you and help count Australia's frogs.

Sightings around Orange

If you see anything interesting, please email orangefieldnats@gmail.com or post it on Facebook. It has been a quiet month.

Things with Wings

A group of 11 **Blue-billed Ducks** were at Spring Creek Reservoir on 18 August. The males had very blue bills which made them easy to recognise.

It's that time of year again for Cilla and all **Peregrine** watchers of the CSU water tower. Diamond laid the first egg of the season at 12.08pm on 27 August. Cilla is waiting for a second egg soon as it is usually laid approximately 60 hours later.

Photo from CSU webcam at https://falconcam.csu.edu.au/2024/08/27/first-egg-of-the-season-2/

Flame Robins are still being seen on Gaanha bula Mt Canobolas such as just east of the Federal Falls Picnic Area on 27 August.

Other Creatures

Hai photographed this striped Planarian Worm (below) on Mt Towac on 15 August.

On 19 August while doing some pruning of Acacias at Ploughmans Wetland Rosemary disturbed what was probably a **Highland Copperhead** sunning itself. It quickly uncoiled and slid into a hole under the cement path. So be alert when out in the bush now that the weather is warming up.

Plants

Nigel returned to Cookamidgera NR on 11 August and found plenty of flowers of *Pterostylis nana.* There were also *Caladenia caerulea* which he said is in flower all over the place. Swee also spotted it at Wambool NR and Rosemary at Killonbutta NR. Nigel also noticed flower spikes on what he thinks are *Glossodia major* leaves at Cookamidgera.

Caladenia caerulea at Cookamidgera NR. Photo Nigel Hobden.

Another orchid in flower, this time along Healey's Road to the south of Gooloogong, is *Chiloglottis trapeziformis.* Ruth Workman reported a mass of flowers there last year and on 28 August this year managed to capture this photo below with a pollinator at the flower.

Swee noticed that buds of *Chiloglottis valida* are appearing in Mt Canobolas SCA.

The Prostanthera are also flowering. Nigel found *Prostanthera decussata* (below) in Cookamidgera NR. Ruth Workman has also found Prostanthera flowering in Conimbla National Park.

Creature of the Month

Yellow-rumped Thornbill,

Acanthiza chrysorrhoa

Report and photos by Rosemary Stapleton.

Fancy falling for the deception of this little bird, that Nick King tells me is also called a Butter Bum!

It occurred in July when I was looking for Flame Robins that often perch along the fences on the northern section of the Scenic Drive near Gregra. I had stopped to photograph the seed pods of a Kurrajong at the entrance to a property. While doing this I noticed an old untidy nest of grass in the outer leaves at shoulder height. I called Catherine over to have a look. She had sharper eyes and noticed an entrance hollow in one side of the ball-shaped nest. We suspected the Thornbill as there is often a small flock of them hopping around on the mown area at the entrance to the property.

On checking my birding books, I discovered that Yellow-rumped Thornbills build a double-storeyed ball-shaped nest of grass and dried leaves in thick foliage in the outer branches of a tree. The top storey is an untidy 'false' cup-shaped nest while the 'real' nest is a domed chamber with a side or hooded entrance lower in the ball shape. Pairs may use a nest for many years refreshing it each year. On returning to get better photos (those below) on 12 August the false nest had had more fleece added (perhaps some mohair staples) and the entrance to the real nest had been cleared so it may have been in use. It is the only Thornbill species that builds such a nest.

Left is the false cup-shaped nest and on the right is the entrance to the 'real' nest where the eggs are laid and incubated. Photos Rosemary Stapleton.

The Birds in Backyards website says, '*The Yellow-rumped Thornbills sometimes breed co-operatively, with a pair being assisted by one or two helpers, which help to build the nest and feed the young*'. '*The function of the false nest is not clearly understood, with many theories being put forward, such as: deterring predators or parasitic cuckoos, a roosting place for male or fledglings, a 'practice' nest for the helpers or as a 'displacement' activity for males.* The species breeds mainly from July to December and can lay two to five eggs. Incubation is approximately 17 days, and the pair can have several clutches a year.

You have probably seen this small insect eating bird on the ground in open habitats, such as woodlands, forests, shrublands and grasslands with some trees as well as farmland, along roads and in parks and gardens. They are often near the Pumphouse at Ploughmans Wetland. It is quite distinctive with its bright yellow rump, black tail, white on black spotted crown, white eyebrow, and black eye stripe.

These birds can be seen in eastern and south-eastern Australia, including Tasmania, as well in southern parts of the Northern Territory and on the Nullarbor Plain in suitable habitat. While the Yellow-rumped Thornbill is not listed as threatened at a NSW or Federal level populations have declined around large cities where native vegetation has been cleared.

References:

Birds in Backyards - https://www.birdsinbackyards.net/species/Acanthiza-chrysorrhoa

Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds, Volume 6: Pardalotes to Shrike-thrushes.

Some of the August excursion group at Conmurra Wildlife Sanctury.

Left to right: Tony Caine, Penny Todman, Ian Roth, Christine Jacobs, Sandra Chrystall, Glenn Griffiths, James and Kylie Tomlinson, Martin Berndt, Olivia Berndt and Darcy Berndt (keeping his head warm). Photo Helmut Berndt.

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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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