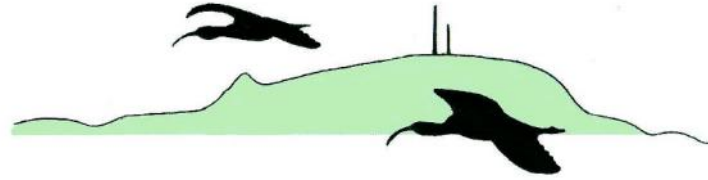


ORANGE FIELD NATURALIST AND CONSERVATION SOCIETY Inc



NEWSLETTER MAY 2022

NEXT MEETING

Thursday 12th May, 7.30 pm.

By Zoom

***Riccia*: research, adaptation and diversity
in a remarkable liverwort.**

Speaker – Dr D. Christine Cargill

Australian National Herbarium, Centre for
Australian National Biodiversity Research.

Field Activities

No regular excursion has been organised for
the Sunday following the talk.

**On 20th and 21st May a limited number of
members may be able to join scientists
doing bryophyte research in Mt Canobolas**

**SCA
OR**

**You may have already registered for one of
the Fungi Forays organised by the LLS in
that week.**

Details below

Next Meeting –12th May, 7.30 pm.

By Zoom

***Riccia*: research, adaptation, and diversity in
a remarkable liverwort.**

Speaker – Dr D. Christine Cargill

Australian National Herbarium, Centre for
Australian National Biodiversity Research.

The liverwort *Riccia* is the most diverse genus within the liverwort complex and one of the most common, widespread, and easily recognisable of the terrestrial liverworts, occurring in all climatic zones. *Riccia* is a common component of biological soil crusts (BSC), particularly in the arid and semi-arid regions of Australia. Its thalloid habit, typically growing in rosettes or extensive mats, makes up one of the many cryptogams that are important soil stabilisers in these environments. Despite their importance, very little is known about the

actual species which make up these BSCs or their exact functions in soil stabilisation or nutrient cycling. Many species of *Riccia* also exhibit drought and desiccation tolerance characteristics providing insights into early land plant evolution.

This presentation will give some insights into the many strategies this liverwort has developed to survive in tough dry conditions of the Australian environment. It will also give a glimpse into some of the diversity within the genus and the current research that Dr Cargill is currently carrying out on this remarkable liverwort.

The Zoom link will be circulated to OFNCS members a few days beforehand.



The liverwort above is *Riccia cartilaginosa* [previously called *Riccia marginata*] and was photographed on Mt Canobolas by Hai Wu in June 2020. The photo was sent to Alison Downing who passed it on to Christine for identification. Christine commented ‘*it’s quite a widespread species – even radiating into inland Central Australia*’.

Dr Cargill’s bio is at <https://www.anbg.gov.au/biography/cargill-christine.html>

Activities in May – note a week later than usual. Rather than hold an excursion members have the opportunity to be involved in a number of activities with scientists.

**Bryophyte Activities in Mt Canobolas SCA.
Friday 20th & Saturday 21st May**

Dr Cargill will be conducting research and collecting bryophytes in Mt Canobolas SCA with several other scientists. This includes Dr Alison Downing, who spoke to us about bryophytes last year. The scientists have the relevant licences and NPWS have approved this research.

As the focus is on research and collecting a very limited number of members will be able to participate in these all-day activities. They will be off the trails in the SCA so you will need to be able to walk in rocky areas. 4WD's will be needed to access the southern part of the SCA.

If you would like to join this activity, please register by emailing orangefieldnats@gmail.com. Details will be emailed closer to the date.

**Fungi Forays organised by Liz Davis,
Central Tablelands Local Land Services.**

Details have been emailed to members and I hope you have registered as I understand most sessions are fully booked. Surveys in Mt Canobolas SCA are on Sunday 22nd May and on other days at Cowra and in Goobang National Park. Contact Liz at liz.davis@lls.nsw.gov.au to see if places are available.

For all these activities you will be responsible for the Covid safety of yourself and others who come along. Please do not attend if feeling sick or if you have been a close contact in the week beforehand.

Last Talk: Continental Odyssey – a journey to Africa and return. Speaker Nigel Hobden.
Text by Dick Medd, images Nigel Hobden.

Nigel Hobden presented not just a travel log, as his title “A Continental Odyssey” suggested, but an immersion into life as a volunteer on a Zimbabwean wildlife conservation reserve for two months. Inspired by Tony Park, the author of many books set in Africa and particularly Zimbabwe, Nigel set out on his safari experiences at Imire Rhino and Wildlife Conservancy.

His literally hands on experiences were more than just an escape as he learnt to work with many animal species, live and work with the guides to care for the animals, and learn the skills of protecting animals, particularly against very real threats of poaching. Even the parks signature species, white and black rhinoceros, had to have their tusks removed to thwart poachers. Warned that white rhinos are more placid than the unpredictable black ones, he stored the advice to head for a waterhole if charged. That advice seemed quite hollow after witnessing a black rhino wading into a lake!

With a real flare for photography, Nigel kept himself well occupied and challenged with the array of animals, birds, reptiles, scenery, daily life on the reserve and visits to the local village and school. Not simply sharing great animal photos he embellished his commentary with insights into their habits and idiosyncrasies, gleaned from working with them on a daily basis.

Supplementing stills of large animals and suites of antelopes Nigel had some entertaining movie clips of Sable butting, elephants mud bathing and crossing the Chobe River with just the tips of trunks above water. A highlight for him was being trusted to unshackle a fully grown elephant.



Nigel with some ‘small’ elephants.

In between horse riding, feeding animals (including hands on butchering of carcasses), learning the tricks of tracking poachers, he helped prepare and grow food for volunteers. He also had a few spare moments for some sight-seeing. Safaris tours around places of interest, included waterholes and sites of traditional rock artwork, combined with serendipitous hours spent in a bird hide and side trips to Hwange National Park and into Chobe NP in Botswana. His excuse for visiting Victoria Falls (stunning photos), ostensibly to cross into Zambia to have his passport stamped and to allow for renewal of his visitor's visa turned a tad harrowing ... but he survived and resumed his adventures in Zimbabwe.

Nigel's credentials as a horticulturalist became known along the way. He then taught the locals how to establish a nursery for growing eucalypts in raised beds and planting on. Plantation forests of gums are particularly favoured throughout southern Africa, so handy knowledge and skills to pass on.

A treat for those who attended came via his brilliant photos of the many gorgeous birds including the renowned Secretary Bird, the Marabou Stork (which he labelled as the ugliest bird in Africa), several kingfisher and hornbill species along with numerous eagles including one of his favourite images of a Brown Snake Eagle (below).



Nigel clearly grew as a person from the experience which he so passionately shared with us. He concluded that he can't wait to repeat the whole experience should the opportunity present. Many thanks Nigel.

Last Excursion: Exploring Ophir Reserve.

Text by Dick Medd, with additions by Rosemary Stapleton. Images by Helmut Berndt.

Despite clashing with Easter nine members and guests turned up to Ophir Reserve on another great autumn day. New member, Denis Marsh, who has been on the Ophir Management Board for more than a decade, kindly shared an outline of the history of the reserve and its management and the current state of affairs.

Denis outlined the national historical significance of the reserve for not only being the location of the first official discovery of gold in 1851, but the rush that ensued. The population rose by hundreds, coming from all corners of the globe and classes, seeking their fortunes. A canvas 'city' quickly appeared. It could thus be claimed as the instigation of Australia's multicultural society. A brief feel for the times can be viewed (including relevant paintings) by visiting:

<https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/stories/eureka-rush-gold/diggings>

The reserve, first gazetted in 1923 covered 6 ha, grew to 28 ha by 1936 and has since been extended to 562 ha by subsuming various leasehold land parcels. Management of the reserve has had a chequered history and the current management board struggle for funds to maintain the reserve.

Many shrubs were among the Dianella at the historic Ophir Cemetery. The only flowers seen were a Goodenia and a few delicate Wahlenbergia. After this brief visit we met with local grazier, Tom Ostini, who kindly joined us to share knowledge of 'a well' and of the Inn that existed up until the late 1930's. The foundation outline and remains of the Inn's three fireplaces are still visible, just. Martin took delight in discovering various remnants of broken crockery. Tom relayed the anecdote that one bloke had a metal detector so sensitive that he pinged a piece with flecks of gold leaf in its glazing decoration!

Of considerable interest was the 'well', now protected with a metal mesh covering. Originally dug to 48 ft deep by smashing up a column of basalt, its hexangular outline is clear. Denis had earlier explained that the Ophir gold, mainly alluvial deposits, lay in the gravel beds of a massive ancient river, later overlaid by basalt of Mount Canobolas Volcanic Complex kindred. The driving mission for the 'well' was to gain access to the gravel layer, which apparently failed, being stymied by water inflow. Pretty useful later apparently, as a water source for the yet to be built Inn.



Tom Ostini explaining the history of the inn.

We then descended via a pretty rough track, to a spot near Tinkers Point by the river. Morell Zimmer shared some Easter bunny chocolate and after a quick lunch we strolled upstream enjoying very tranquil river scenery among the sheoaks to view the frequented Peregrine Falcon's roost. While we didn't catch a sight of

the falcons Rosemary did add to her list of bird sightings for the day.



A tranquil pool on Lewis Ponds Creek.

Rosemary noted that the birding was rather quiet with only Magpies, Magpie Larks and Red-rumped Parrots flying over when we first meet. The Cemetery was also quiet, perhaps because of the Noisy Miners. The only other birds there were Eastern Rosellas and a distant Pied Currawong. When looking at the well Jane spotted a Willie Wagtail. It was hard to hear bird calls at lunch time sitting beside the creek as it was bubbling over the rocks. Denis mentioned that it had a good flow as Orange City Council had been releasing well treated effluent into the creek rather than sending it to Cadia. How low would it have been without this water?

There were a few more birds as we walked along the creek to look at the Peregrine Falcon roost in some tall cliffs. Superb Fairy Wrens were flitting around recent flood debris. Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, Silvereyes and Thornbills were feeding in a willow and the Sheoaks. Unfortunately, they were just a little too far away to identify the species. Likewise, a robin, with a slightly red breast that was with them, probably a Scarlet Robin. White-throated Treecreepers and a Grey Shrike Thrush were heard.

I sensed folk did enjoy the freedom to be out and about in nature as a group, blending as Rosemary said, ...*"local history and nature"* ... Denis needs a special mention for his, largely thankless, dedicated volunteering into the reserve's upkeep over many years. And thanks again Denis for sharing your knowledge and insights of the reserve.

OFNCS Committee News

The main business for OFNCS has been done by Dick Medd in organising surveys and liaising with ranger Jack Fry about them. He has

also finalised a bird checklist for the SCA. Please welcome new member Jodi Burnstein.

A meeting of the Central West Environment Council was held on 1st April and a report written. OFNCS continue to provide in principle support to the Wyangala Counterpoint Group and the Belubula Headwaters Protection Group. Some members also supported the recent Coal/Climate Action Rally in Bathurst.

Mt Canobolas Update

Text by Rosemary Stapleton.

Arboreal Mammal Survey

NPWS have agreed to fund the first survey of arboreal mammals in the SCA. These were planned for early May, weather and Covid dependent, and done by consultants who regularly survey in the Blue Mountains and surrounds. The consultants have also offered to provide free training for volunteers in the future so the arboreal mammal survey can be replicated by OFNCS.

Lichen Wall

OFNCS has agreed to fund the lichen wall construction and signage on the summit of Mt Canobolas.

In reply to details of the lichen wall that was mentioned in the April newsletter Bernie Huxtable emailed to relate some of the history of the walls on the summit: *'I was on the Mt Canobolas Trust, and we desperately needed money to spray blackberries. The State Govt. gave us \$50 K, but it had to be spent on the summit - hence we had that bluestone wall constructed. There was a second proviso that there had to be a prominent sign saying that these works were authorised by the Premier's Dept NK Wran, Premier - so we had such a sign there for months. I can't remember the date, but Wran was premier, and I suspect an election was looming. Gilbert Watts was chairman of the Trust'*.

After some detective work on Trove into Trust appointments and NSW elections it is likely that the grant was made before the 7th October 1978 election.

NPWS Activity

The Summit continues to be closed for the NPWS redevelopment. The alerts on the NPWS website also say Towac Way will closed from Monday 2 May to Friday 13 May 2022 for upgrades.

This closure affects access to:

- Federal Falls campground
- Federal Falls walking track
- Towac picnic area
- The Walls lookout and picnic area
- Mount Towac walking track.

Orange View Lookout remains open. Hopefully the recent rain won't delay or extend this closure.

Spring Creek Bird Survey

Text by Rosemary Stapleton, photos Nigel Sethack.

Thirty-eight species were recorded on the quarterly bird survey of Spring Creek Reservoir on 2nd April. Coots ruled the water and predominated. There were very few ducks or grebes on the water, however lots of Wood Ducks were grazing on an adjacent paddock. The only grebe was an immature Great Crested Grebe. The other evidence of breeding was several immature Dusky Moorhens. There were lots of ibis roosting in trees on the far bank and some little Black Cormorants, potentially in the area where Nigel Sethack had recorded them nesting a month or so ago. In a few places these cormorants were fishing in groups of 5 or 6.

At the dam wall the wind was really brisk or as Cilla said Antarctic! We retreated to the steps of the boat shed for a break and warmed up in the sun before walking back. There were martins, swallows and Dusky Woodswallows hawking for insects over one of the large pine trees that was out of the wind. Every now and then they would roost in rows on the nearby powerlines. We didn't record any Eastern Rosellas and only spotted the White-browed Scrubwrens when they came out of hiding as we walked back.



Yellow-rumped Thornbill. Photo Nigel Sethack.

Cilla's highlight was the Double-barred Finches. For me the small groups of Yellow-rumped Thornbills showed their character and

flashed their bright yellow rumps as they flew up from the road. The Silvereyes were also showing their subtle hues with the dusky russet along their sides. We met up with Nigel Sethack who was photographing the birds. Once again, he managed to capture some lovely images.



A curious Silvereye. Photo Nigel Sethack.

At the western end of the reservoir there were 14 species. The only species not already seen were an Intermediate Egret, a Hoary-headed Grebe, and a lone Australian Reed Warbler. It must have been one of the few who had not headed away on migration to warmer tropical climes.

Canobolas Conservation Alliance Update

Report by Jenny Medd.



Committee members held a Zoom meeting on 25th April, mainly to discuss Orange City Council's release of their Drafts for a Community Strategic Plan, Draft Budget and related Integrated Planning and Reporting documents. These can all be accessed at <https://yoursay.orange.nsw.gov.au/budget-2022>.

"Mountain bike trails" continue to get a mention in the Strategic Plan, with an unexplained commitment of \$1,500,000.00 for the "Mt Canobolas Mountain Bike Trail Centre" appearing for the financial year 2023/24 in the Capital Program/Summary/Live (General Fund) in the Draft Budget. The Alliance has provided a brief submission guide to encourage members and friends to question these plans.

NOTE that the deadline for making a submission, comment or completing an online survey on this item in the budget is **19th May** at the above website.

The Orange Mountain Bike Club's progress with trails in Glenwood State Forest was noted,

including their success in obtaining grant monies for the construction of their “Trail of Awesomeness.” This demonstrates that trails in the state forests are acceptable to the bikers.

Although the coming government elections are Federal level rather than local or State, it presents an opportunity to address broader concerns relating to the purpose of our conservation areas and the issue of cultural heritage, both highlighted by our campaign.

Orange City Council still do not appear to have held any further discussions nor made any further plans to progress their response to the SEARs document and have not updated the website page, so we remain uninformed in watch-and-wait mode! Meanwhile keep an eye on the SaveMtCanobolas website.

Dates for your Diary

2022 Cowra Woodland Bird Surveys,

Dates for 2022 are 23/24 July; 15/16 October.

Julian Reid is now the contact at

0405 922 505 or julian.reid@anu.edu.au

21-22 June 2022 – Listening to the Lachlan Conference, Forbes. Details [here](#).

2022-2023 dates for Snipe counts are

September 24, November 26, and January 14.

Sightings around Orange

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

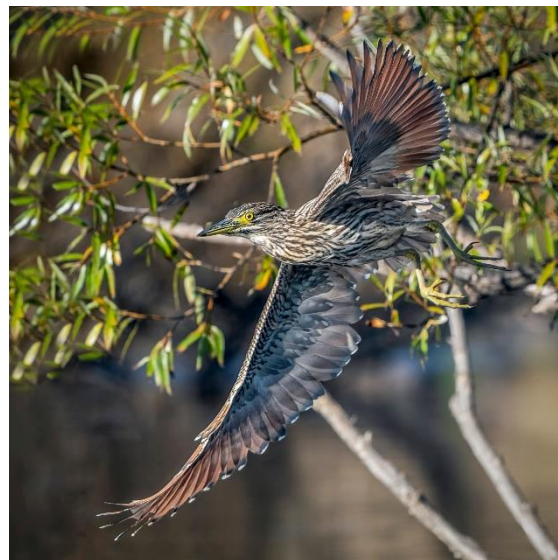
‘Things with Wings’

Spring Creek Reservoir Birds in April.

Nigel Sethack is a regular visitor to the reservoir to photograph the birds.



Musk Duck and duckling. Photo Nigel Sethack.



Juvenile Nankeen Night Heron. Photo Nigel Sethack.

Mal Carnegie mentioned in a presentation on Lake Cowal, to BirdLife Southern NSW, that there have been many reports of Australasian Bittern this year however most have turned out to be Night Herons like this. All a result of the excellent breeding conditions in the wetlands of the catchments of the western rivers.

Nigel had also noticed an Australasian Darter nesting however it appears that the nest failed.

Birding near Conimbla National Park.

The Stapleton's headed for the Ironbark Picnic Area in Conimbla National Park on 22nd April to look for the midge orchids we had seen last year. There was some great birding along Barryrennie Road just after the cleared farmlands. We followed 3 Hood Robins along the road and when we pulled off into a track there were Turquoise Parrots, about 8 Diamond Firetails, Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters, and a huge flock of White-browed Woodswallows circling overhead and making a racket. An Olive-backed Oriole was feeding on the grubs that were eating the kurrajong leaves.



Olive-back Oriole. Photo Cath Stapleton.

Further along the road to the NP, again in the cleared areas, were Jacky Winters, Southern Whiteface, and Double-barred Finches. Seeing five species listed as threatened in 30 minutes made up for the disappointment of no midge orchids. It was also good to see the ironbarks flowering well.

Plumed Whistling Ducks – a few ducks are still at the sewage treatment works on the Eugowra Road at Canowindra.

Fungi

Hai Wu was out and about on the weekend following the rain and found what is probably *Russula persanguinea* (below) at the Falls lookout on Ophir Rd and on the Fern Tree Gully walk in Mt Canobolas SCA. The top of the fungus is a deep crimson colour.



He also saw some coral fungi on the Fern Tree Gully Trail and has sent photos to be identified. He thinks it may be *Ramaria xanthosperma*. The rain has certainly improved the prospects for the Fungi Forays in a few weeks.

Creature of the Month - *Litoria verreauxii*, Whistling Tree Frog

Description from the Australian Museum FrogID app. Photo Canobolas Public School.

As no-one offered an identification of the frog photo in the April newsletter, I emailed it to the Australian Museum FrogID Team. They replied and said 'This is a beautiful Whistling Tree Frog (*Litoria verreauxii*). This species can vary in their appearance quite a bit, from brown to bright green, or in this case, a beautiful combination of both!'

Litoria verreauxii is a medium-sized species of frog reaching up to 3.5 cm in body length. It has a dark brown, light brown, or green back with

two wide, brown, longitudinal stripes along the middle, starting between the eyes. There are sometimes dark brown patches on the side. There is a dark brown stripe from the tip of the snout to the arm, and a cream-coloured patch underneath the eye.



Whistling Tree Frog, photo Canobolas Public School.

This frog species is found in southeast QLD, along the coast and ranges of NSW, the ACT, and the eastern half of VIC. It's peak calling period is between June and November.

I've heard them in several places around Orange lately. If you want to hear the call, go to <https://www.frogid.net.au/frogs/litoria-verreauxii>

Belubula Headwaters Protection Group (BHPG) Update.

Peter Toedter attended the BHPG meeting held at Blayney on Tuesday, 6 April 2022.

Here is a brief summary for those not familiar with the issue, as it has dragged out for several years.

Regis Resources Ltd. is proposing to start an open cut gold mine and processing plant at Kings Plains, north of Blayney. The project is called the McPhillamys Gold Mine. It is situated at the headwaters of the Belubula River. The proposed tailings dam actually sits over the main stream. There are many problems with the proposal. It affects the surface water flow, the groundwater, the riparian and general environment, and numerous other concerns. It is proposed to bring water along a 90km pipeline from Centennial Coal mines near Lithgow to provide water for processing the ore. This water is polluted and has been rejected by Sydney Water for their use. At the end of mine life, about ten years, the tailings dam will be a potential problem for an eternity and the open cut void will deplete nearby ground water for an

estimated 500 years and then be an everlasting lake of polluted water.

The original Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) of several thousand pages was found wanting by both governmental agencies and by concerned members of the public. An amended EIS was produced by the company, again thousands of pages, but it has still not satisfied all concerns.

The meeting of the BHPG on the 6th brought things up to date. On the surface not much seems to have advanced, but both parties are busy. The main hold up is that Regis cannot obtain enough surface water licences to make up for the water that will be taken by their activities from the flow to the Carcoar Dam.

The Department of Planning and Environment (DPE) and the Department of Natural Resources Access Regulator (NRAR) seem to be giving Regis an inordinate amount of time to work something out. This is stalling the whole process as the matter should have gone to the next step by now which is for the DPE to refer the proposal to the Independent Planning Commission of NSW (IPC) so that it can be scrutinised by them and hold a public enquiry where any shortfall of the proposal can be raised. The IPC can give the go ahead with attached conditions or it can deny the proposal. This was supposed to have happened about a year ago, but it is now imminent. It is time that that the whole proposal is finalised as it has put a lot of people's plans and livelihoods in limbo,

as well as being a threat overhanging the environment.

Is this structure at Ophir?



This photo was in the last newsletter and Jennifer Kenna sent through the names of some of the people in it. Col Bower helped with the children. No-one can remember who the person with the pack is. The other adults are, from left to right, Garret Barry, Jack Clifford, and Col behind the wall. Col thought the boy in the red skivvy was his eldest son Ben and the other two kids looked rather like Helmut's two boys.

Denis Marsh doesn't recognise the structure from Ophir however it has been suggested it may have been removed at the time Cabonne Council managed the land.



Summer Hill Creek in flood at The Falls after heavy rain, Saturday 30th April 2020. Photo Hai Wu.



Above - The Sheoaks along Lewis Ponds Creek at Tinkers Point, Ophir and, below, the cliffs where the Peregrine Falcons roost. Photos Rosemary Stapleton.



To join please send your cheque or money order made out to "OFNCS" to the Hon. Treasurer, Dr Dick Medd, OFNCS, PO Box 369 Orange NSW 2800.

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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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