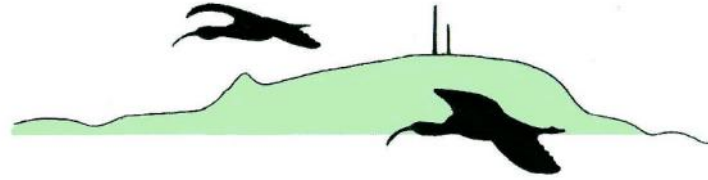


ORANGE FIELD NATURALIST AND CONSERVATION SOCIETY Inc



NEWSLETTER MARCH 2023

NEXT MEETING

**Thursday 9th March, 7.30 pm.
Bush Safety and use of technology**

Speaker Geoff Selwood

Face to face at Rural Fire Service

1385 Forest Road

(past the hospitals & opposite Gosling Creek Reserve)

Excursion

Sunday 12th March, 9.00 am.

Putting bush safety into practice

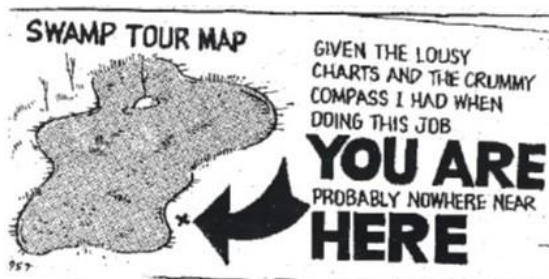
Kinross State Forest with Geoff Selwood

Membership is now due. No change was made to the membership fees at the AGM. Details of the fees and payment methods are at the end of the newsletter.

Next Meeting - Thursday 9 March, 7.30 pm
Bush safety and use of technology.

Speaker Geoff Selwood, Rural Fire Service.

Geoff will talk about ways of keeping safe when out in the bush and how to respond if an emergency occurs. He will give us an overview of how we can use tech to do this..... and not be like this cartoon.



This topic has been prompted by several members getting into sticky situations in 2022 due to the wet conditions which were quite different to what they were used to.

Prior to the meeting please download, to your mobile phone, the **Avenza maps app**. To use this app you will need access to your email on your phone.

Please also download the **Emergency plus app** and **Google or Apple Maps**. Geoff will also tell us about the new RFS and SES apps.

Next Excursion – Sunday 12th March,
Putting bush safety into practice, Kinross State Forest, with Geoff Selwood.

Meet at 9.00am at Orange High Bus Bay. Geoff will take us to Kinross State Forest to use the apps he talked about on Thursday night. The forest has been cleared but Geoff will end with a wander in some native bush.

The excursion will finish by lunchtime so just bring some morning tea. Please wear sturdy footwear, long sleeve shirts and pants and insect repellent. The roads are nearly all drivable for normal vehicles however high clearance vehicles may be needed to get to the bush areas. Car pooling can be arranged at the bus bay or at the forest.

At the meeting and on the excursion 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.

Annual General Meeting – 9th February.

The AGM took a few minutes to start because of the attraction of the stunning double rainbow we could see across the carpark.



Photo Ann Tracey.

After the apologies and minutes were accepted Geoff Selwood presented his President's Report:

'Good evening fellow members. I believe that the Society has had a much better year than last year. We have had a great line up of guest speaker and excursions. We have navigated through the attempts of Government, Councils and organisations that would prefer to chase the short-term dollar rather than look at the long-term effect their ideas will have upon the landscape.

Therefore, what have we been up to in the past 12 months?

- *Assisted the CCA with hopefully stopping the Orange Council and their friends from carving up Mt Canobolas.*
- *Sent in many submissions in respect of water and the effects of mining on the head waters of river systems.*
- *Doing and setting up of surveys of Mt Canobolas (Gaanha Bula) and surrounding areas to advance our knowledge of what flora & fauna resides there.*
- *Sandra Chrystall's great idea of having a quiz in the Orange City Life paper, which not only gets people thinking of what the plant or animal is but also promotes the Field Nats.*
- *Ensure that the lichens and their importance on Mt Canobolas (Gaanha bula) was promoted with the upgrade of Mt Canobolas.*

What are we going to do this coming year?

- *We have a great list of guest speaker and excursions for the next 12 months. I would like to thank the members who have contacted people who have offered their valuable time to come along and share their knowledge with the group.*
- *Continue to add to our knowledge of the mountain.*
- *Continue to give support to other organisations that are trying to put some sensible points forward to stop the great push for the short-term dollar.*

I would like to thank Rosemary for her never-ending work as our secretary who spends a large percentage of her time both writing submissions and putting the monthly newsletter out. It would have to be one of the best newsletters around.

Dick Medd for his never-ending ways of surveying the mountain to enlarge our knowledge of the flora and fauna of Mt Canobolas (Gaanha Bula).

Sandra Chrystall for her idea and work for the Orange City Life quiz. I also thank other members of the committee who have contributed in other ways.

Thank you all for the work and contributions that have made Orange Field Nats the organisation we are today.

After the acceptance of the Treasurers Report Denis Marsh agreed to be the returning officer for the elections. The members of the 2022 committee were nominated, seconded, and elected unopposed. A new member of the committee is Ken Mills.

The election results were:

- President: Geoff Selwood
- Vice-President: Nigel Hobden
- Secretary: Rosemary Stapleton
- Treasurer: Richard Medd
- Assistant Treasurer: Jenny Medd
- Newsletter Editor: Rosemary Stapleton
- Publicity: Jenny Pratten
- General Committee Members: Helmut Berndt, Alison Ford, Peter Toedter, and Ken Mills.

Nigel Hobden will continue as Public Officer and Helmut Berndt as Website Administrator.

Once the AGM formalities were over Rosemary facilitated a presentation of recent photographs submitted by members. They showed the diversity of nature and landscapes that members have an interest in. We also saw photos of nature from Queensland and New Zealand.

The Show and Tell started with a series of photos that had been taken each November from the same point in the SCA. The 2018 photo, by Cath Stapleton, showed the bare ground and devastation of the fire. Rosemary's photos from subsequent years, showed the healthy growth that has occurred. Jenny Medd's photos were of mosses and fungi, while Ann Tracey encouraged us to visit North Stradbroke Island to see the marine life. Ann also had some local photos and the one below shows what you can manage with a mobile phone!



Feathered Horned Beetle, TSR at the end of Kangarooie Lane. Photo Ann Tracey.

Nigel Sethack and John Hansen's photos of birds were stunning as were Jake Hansen's ones of reptiles!



Musk Duck mother and ducklings, Spring Creek Reservoir. Photo Nigel Sethack.



This glowing Kea, at Milford Sound, was one of John Hansen's photos of New Zealand birds.



*An Australian Coral Snake - (*Brachyuropsis australis*) taken in the Pilliga Forest. Photo Jake Hansen.*

Col Bower's photos focused on plants and highlighted the importance of rural cemeteries and reserves in a heavily cleared landscape. Tony Caine then shared his experiences of a rally to stop Santos drilling gas wells in the Pilliga. Cilla Kinross and Rosemary Stapleton focused on the variety of nature in the local area. This included a video of a Jacky Lizard signalling for a mate with tail flicks, foot raising and head bobbing.



Diuris tricolor, a threatened orchid found at Wollar Cemetery. Photo Col Bower.

Helmet Berndt showcased the redevelopment of the Mt Canobolas summit. And once again Nigel Hobden wowed us with his photos of

landscapes and a storm. Nigel's photo of the Milky Way is at the end of the newsletter.

Thanks to all those who supplied photos. When asked everyone agreed we should do it again next year....so keep your cameras ready.

Last Excursion – Sunday 12th February, Spotlighting on Fern Gully Fire Trail.

Report by Jenny Medd and Nigel Hobden.

We couldn't have asked for a more pleasant evening to meet at Orange View Lookout on Mt Canobolas for our first excursion for the year. Members enjoyed their picnic, relaxing, and chatting as the sun went down behind the telecommunication towers. After a brief introduction to spotlighting and Greater Gliders, we car-pooled to the limited roadside parking by the Fern Gully Trail. We split into two groups of six to venture along the trails to the north and south of the main road with torches and spotlights.



One of the Greater Gliders seen on the excursion. Photo by Helmut Berndt.

Soon after the sun had disappeared it wasn't long before the night life started to emerge. While we only walked relatively short distances over 45 minutes or so, both groups were rewarded with Greater Glider sightings. On the northern track, it was only one glider (no-one attempted to count the microbats!).

However, the group walking along the southern trail had only walked a matter of

metres before eye shine from within the canopy was picked up in the head torches. After catching a second pair of eyes using one of our spotlights, and a little deliberation, we were able to confirm we were observing a pair of Greater Gliders. Binoculars are very handy items to have when the Eucalyptus trees are quite tall. After a few minutes of observation, the group moved on and we then had the pleasure of watching another Greater Glider emerging from a hollow. All up the southern group scored five Greater Gliders, a Ringtail and a Brushtail Possum.

A successful and most enjoyable outing!

OFNCS Committee News

At the February Committee meeting it was decided that if an excursion was cancelled due to the weather it would be held on the following Sunday, if convenient. It was also decided that the starting time of excursions could be earlier than 9am for excursions to locations that are a long way from Orange.

Dick Medd outlined plans for Glider Training and for Velvet Worm surveys. The committee has also agreed to sponsor the nature photography section at the Orange Show.

A submission was lodged with the Independent Planning Commission objecting to the proposed McPhillamys Mine near Blayney. The main reasons for our objection were:

- destruction of an endangered ecological community and habitat of threatened species
- its impact on springs, groundwater and the Belubula River as well as potential impact along the wastewater pipeline from a coal mine and power station at Lithgow
- long term safe management and restoration of tailings dam containing toxic chemicals.

Thank you to those members who have made their own submissions.

We welcome Ken Mills to the committee. Ken has a background in the Visual Arts and Education. He said, '*a posting as a teacher to Moree in the mid-1980s started a long association with Indigenous Culture and since then my curiosity about Aboriginal perspectives expressing the interrelationships of land, culture and sustainability has continued.*' After a chance meeting on the

mountain Ken is now doing much more than walking the tracks and is getting to know the landscape and all that calls it home. Ken has started with learning to identify the plants, with a particular interest in plants that were probably used by the Wiradjuri when visiting Gaanha bula.

April Talk and Excursion

Mark these dates in your diary.

Thursday 13th April - Flood. Drought. Plague. The circle of life at Wellington Caves, with speaker Ian Eddison. There will be a committee meeting at 6.30pm.

Sunday 16th April – excursion searching for autumn orchids in Nangar National Park, with Col Bower.

Mt Canobolas Update

Late summer is the time for grasses to dominate the tracksides as Ken found on his recent walks. The storm rain has refreshed the vegetation and helped some of the new plantings at the summit survive. However, this heavy rain has again caused more erosion at Spring Glade carpark. It is good to hear that NPWS will soon be repairing and upgrading this car park and improving drainage.

Canobolas Conservation Alliance Update

Report by Jenny Medd

The latest CCA Newsletter has just been distributed, as has a membership renewal reminder. Since our fight has not yet been resolved, it's hoped that old members will maintain their membership. Any new members will be warmly welcomed.



The Agenda for OCC's meeting scheduled for 21st February included a comment in "Outstanding Actions" that Cr Duffy's request from the 6th December 2022 meeting for a briefing on the Mountain Bike Trails proposal, to be held in March/April, is still to be arranged.

CWEC Report

*Rosemary Stapleton,
OFNCS CWEC Rep.*

centralwest
environment
council

The CWEC AGM was held on 5th February and was followed by a general meeting. Cilla Kinross presented her President's Report

having stood down after 10 years in this role. The meeting paid tribute to her exceptional service to CWEC and the environment.

Nick King was elected President and Bev Smiles, from Inland Rivers Network, as Vice President/Secretary. Cathy Merchant was returned as Treasurer. Cilla will remain as Public Officer and Social Media Officer. The meeting agreed there would be no change in the membership fees.

The key regional issues of pumped hydro and mining were discussed. The membership of groups that have projects in their area have been divided over their support, or not, of several pumped hydro projects. The issues they considered were any environmental damage and whether the projects production of green energy was greater than the fossil fuels that would be used to create this energy. As a result, BCCAN (Bathurst Community Climate Action Network) have decided to oppose the pumped hydro project at Yetholme.

Those present unanimously agreed that CWEC's position would be that pumped hydro projects would be supported only if they did not cause extensive environmental damage and used renewable energy.

Mining projects of immediate concern were the McPhillamy's Gold Mine and the Bowden's Lue Lead Mine. It was decided CWEC would oppose these projects and have a speaker at the IPC hearing for each project.

Some groups were helping to organise candidate forums for the NSW elections. Questions that could be asked of candidates were about the expansion of coal mining, water issues, renewable energy, protection of biodiversity and better planning. NCC and Healthy Rivers Dubbo are organising a tour of the Macquarie Marshes for politicians and media to highlight inland water issues.

BCCAN reported that they are looking for a building for an Eco hub which like-minded groups can use for meetings and workshops. This will be like the Lithgow Transition Hub. It was agreed to encourage NCC to organise another Picnic for Nature as several groups found the 2022 picnic helped to recruit new members and spread their message in the community. Mel Gray has also offered to run a simple session to help groups build social

media capacity through the simple Canva graphics program.

Dates for the other 2023 CWEC meetings are 7 May and 6 August by Zoom. The face-to-face meeting will be on 5 November, possibly in Bathurst.

Dates for your Diary

Clean up Australia Day Sunday, 5th March.

8.30 am start at John Lomas Skate Park. The clean up will be along the creeks in that area. A BBQ will be held at Elephant Park around 1pm. Please wear appropriate footwear, clothing, and gloves.

Earth Hour, 25th March.

2023 Cowra Woodland Bird Surveys,

Dates for 2023 are April 15/16, July 15/16, October 14/15, and February 17/18 2024. Contact Julian Reid on **0405 922 505** or at julianr@homemail.com

Mycology May 2023 - Fungus Connections: Biodiversity, Farming & Food.

Preliminary details from Liz Davis, CTLLS.

<https://www.trybooking.com/CERVE>

When you register your interest you will receive an email with a link to a survey that will support Liz to create an event catered to your needs & interests.

There will be workshops on soils, fungi in focus, surveys, various food talks & tastings & more. Events will be throughout the month of May, but pencil in the 2nd week of May with final dates TBC. Liz is tentatively looking at: May 9th & 10th Fungi in Focus workshops, 11th Ag stream, 12th NRM stream & Café Champignon on evening of 12th, 14th Mt Canobolas Fungi Survey, 20th Watershed Landcare Ferntree Gully Fungi photography. Alison Pouliot will launch her new book, *Underground Lovers: Encounters with Fungi*, at the Botanic Gardens during Mycology May.

The Field Nats May excursion will be the Mt Canobolas Fungi Survey on Sunday 14th.

Sightings around Orange

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

Things with Wings

Australasian Grebes – the Medds have been watching a pair of grebe's nest on the dam in

front of their house. Two adults were there for nest building and incubation, but one has gone since the 2 chicks hatched. Sadly only 1 chick has survived and it is fascinating to watch the little stripey thing being fed and climbing under the adults wings when you get too close.



Australian Grebes. Photo Jenny Medd.

Great Crested Grebe – this is away from Orange, but I can't resist including Nigel Sethack's photo (below) of Great Crested Grebe chicks being feed out near Booligal. Nigel said *'There must be so many fish in those waters. Every time the Grebe dived it came up with a fish in its beak. Other species included Glossy Ibis, crake, terns, grebes, herons, egrets, ducks, waterfowl and the occasional Black Kite flying overhead.'*



Cowra Bird Surveys. The surveyors were encouraged to join a WhatsApp group to share sightings. And there were some good ones; 15 **Turquoise Parrots** at Spring Forest, **Glossy Black Cockatoos** at Koorawatha Falls, a variety of raptors and **Black-chinned Honeyeaters** and **Crested Shriketits** at several of the 90 sites surveyed. The app was also good for new surveyors to seek ID advice.

Plants

Dipodium punctatum, the Purple Hyacinth Orchid. Hai spotted this orchid (below) at Lake

Canobolas on 24 February. He drove to the back of the dam and walked about 150m along the bush trail. Dick Medd commented that the flowers are fairly late, and the species is known from around the lake area.



***Cryptostylis leptochila*, Small Tongue or Spotted Tongue Orchid.** At the end of January Nigel Hobden visited Hassan's Walls, near Lithgow. He had received a copy of '*Plants of Hassan's Walls*' and thought 'wow this is a place I should visit'. He found a nice cluster of this orchid (photo below) which is recorded in the book as rare within the reserve. Nigel commented '*The views are magnificent. It is woodland, based on the sandstone geology and has some amazing gems. As such it will be on my list of locations to explore further.*'



Animals

Nigel also saw several reptiles at Hassan's Walls. They were identified as a Mountain Dragon (*Rankinia diemensis*) and a **Black Rock Skink** (*Egernia saxatilis intermedia*) (photo below).



Microbats

Jenny and Dick Medd have had some visits to their house recently from little microbats. They managed to photograph the one below before safely removing it.



Jenny used the Australian Museum's '*Ask an Expert*' to see if it could be identified. Jenny received the details below which includes some useful links.

'The Mammalogy Team responded with, "It's a *Vespadelus*, not sure of species we would need an accurate forearm length which is asking a bit much, there would be three or more species of *Vespadelus* at Orange but it might be *V. darlingtoni* or *V. regulus* but I can't be sure."

Please see the following links for more information:

<https://bie.ala.org.au/species/https%3A//biodiversity.org.au/afd/taxa/384017d4-3375-45c5-acd5-f6cb7a19627b>

V. darlingtoni:

<https://australian.museum/learn/animals/bats/large-forest-bat/>
<https://bie.ala.org.au/species/https://biodiversity.org.au/afd/taxa/afed9681-a273-41b6-95e5-9f11ad4bff71>

V. regulus:

<https://australian.museum/learn/animals/bats/southern-forest-bat/>
<https://bie.ala.org.au/species/https://biodiversity.org.au/afd/taxa/ef70e7c7-a3ca-4476-ac64-c2cbdc663562> *V. regulus* has been identified on nearby Mt Canobolas.

If you were interested in learning more about bat identification, you can see the following link. It is a little north of your location but the information about bat families is still a great resource to use:

<https://www.gbwildlifecarers.org.au/forms/Microbat%20Identification%20Key.pdf>

Creature of the Month...or Chasing Ghosts.
Australian Painted Snipe, *Rostratula australis*.

Article and photos by Warren Chad (Chaddy) from Condobolin, who is one of the bird surveyors at Cowra and an enthusiastic bird photographer.

The Oxford English Dictionary describes an enigma as “A person or thing that is mysterious or difficult to find or understand.”

The Australian Painted Snipe, (*Rostratula australis*), certainly falls into this category. A medium sized wader, it is a bird of marshy swamps and decaying wetlands. Highly nomadic, these birds occur over most of the Australian mainland but in only very low numbers. It is estimated that there may now only be as few as 350 of these birds left in Australia. Their stronghold is the Murray/Darling Basin. Permanent wetlands like The Macquarie Marshes and Fivebough Swamp are two of the places where these birds tend to turn up with any regularity. However, this means maybe only every few years so recordings are only very sporadic and intermittent.

They move around in response to seasonal conditions and when they are present they are very hard to detect and observe due to their beautifully camouflaged plumage and habit of freezing when approached. They like areas of low, thick vegetation in shallow water, hiding by day and emerging at dusk to feed during the hours of darkness on worms, water bugs and small invertebrates. When flushed they fly silent and fast before dropping quickly back into cover. Like their relatives the Latham's Snipe your first encounter is usually when you have flushed the bird and then are only able to get a glimpse as it disappears into the distance. From all my encounters which are not many I have noticed that Painted Snipe fly silent when flushed while Latham's give a distinct loud call as they fly off. This can be a valuable identification tool if you didn't get a good look at the bird. If it didn't make a sound as it flew off it would be worth investigating further as it may be a Painted Snipe.

They have not been studied in any great depth and so very little is known about where they go and what they do. However, it is known that like the Emu the males are responsible for incubating the eggs and providing most of the care for the chicks. Females will mate with a

male, lay eggs in a nest then leave him to it while she goes off with other males.



CHADDY 66

Female Painted Snipe. Photo Warren Chad.

In the Lachlan Shire they occur very occasionally and only in very low numbers, generally after flooding and tend to prefer the Lake Cowal and Wallaroi Creek systems here around Condobolin where I live. Lake Cargelligo and associated environs is another local area where I have encountered these birds on a few occasions. It then stands to reason that they should also occur anywhere along the Mid and Lower Lachlan as the habitat actually gets better as you travel West towards the Hay Plain where the Lachlan River ends. Lake Brewster and anywhere around Booligal and the Great Cumbung should hold Painted Snipe when conditions are right.

Along the Wallaroi Creek near Lake Banar, south of Condobolin, during and just after flooding I have encountered these birds on four occasions in the last ten years. They are very quiet and unobtrusive and easily overlooked if you aren't on the ball. They tend to hang out in flooded billabongs as water levels drop in areas covered with Lignums, Sedges and low growing water plants. I have had up to sixteen birds on one occasion but usually am lucky to get only a handful. They tend to stay in these places for up to two months, only moving on as the habitat dries out. Once you have found them you can then find them easily each time you visit as they don't tend to move around much. When conditions return to normal and everything dries out these birds just evaporate and I may not see them for several years.

These enigmatic little birds are considered one of the Holy Grail birds of Australian birding, much sort after by birders but rarely seen due to their shy, cryptic nature, esoteric habits and ability to remain hidden and undetected. But

they are slowly becoming extinct and really need help to bring them back from the brink.

Recently a group of scientific researchers headed up by Dr Matt Herring (of Bitterns In Rice fame) have been tasked with doing research on Painted Snipe. They have been running a crowd funding appeal over recent months and have reached their goal of \$120,000.00. So now the real work can commence. The aim of the group is to capture twelve birds and fit them with GPS trackers so we can finally find out where they go and when. The more data that can be collected will give us a greater understanding of these birds and what needs to be done to save them.

But it's not that simple. Just finding the birds will be the really hard part so the general public are now some of the most important players in this game. I would ask that all birders, farmers and anyone with the remotest interest please keep your eyes out for these birds but more importantly and critically please document your findings and get them to Matt and his team so they can start their important work. This year around the whole Murray/ Darling Basin the conditions are perfect for Painted Snipe so this research may well get off to a great start here and now in early 2023.

You can log your reports on Birddata and ebird or follow Tracking Australian Painted Snipe when they launch their new website in the near future.



*The less colourful male Painted Snipe.
Photo Warren Chad.*

Alternatively, you can email reports to Matt Herring, mherring@murraywildlife.com.au or Birdlife Australia support@birdlife.org.au . You can also take part in an ongoing Painted Snipe nationwide survey at birdlife.org.au

For anyone along the Lachlan you can give any sightings to me Warren Chad at chaddy@westserv.net.au or call me on 0417453814. Any sort of photo, good or bad will also be a great help. Even if you are not positively sure of the ID please get in contact as it still may be very important information.

With a little help from everybody we can all help to save this enigmatic little waterbird.



Enhanced photo of the Milky Way at Darby's Falls. Photo Nigel Hobden.



Picnicking at Orange View before spotlighting. Glen Griffiths, Ken Mills, Sandra Chrystall, Tony Caine, Penny Todman, Patrick Driver, Alison Ford, Marita Sydes, Dick Medd & Nigel Hobden - insisted on lining up for the photo! We were later joined by John and Morell Zimmer, and Helmut Berndt, although Tony & Penny weren't able to stay for the spotlighting. Photo by Jenny Medd.

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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Please be sure to identify payments with your name and send confirmation to orangefieldnats@gmail.com

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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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