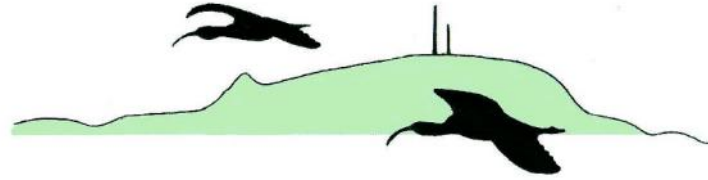


ORANGE FIELD NATURALIST AND CONSERVATION SOCIETY Inc



NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2024

**Thursday 8th February, 7.30 pm.
Annual General Meeting followed by Show
and Tell from members.**

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

**Committee Meeting
Thursday 8th February, 6.30 pm.**

**Excursion
Sunday 11th February, 7.00pm.
Picnic at Orange Botanic Gardens
followed by spotlighting in the gardens.**

**Annual General Meeting
Thursday 8th February, 7.30 pm.**

Come to the AGM to hear President Geoff's 2023 report. All positions will be declared vacant so please think about nominating or becoming a member of the general committee.

At the AGM Honorary Life Membership of the Society will be awarded to Dick and Jenny Medd. This is to recognise their involvement and support of the Society for the past 42 years. Their commitment to understanding and protecting the biodiversity and environment of the local area has been significant.

The AGM will be followed by a '2023 Show and Tell' of members' photos. If you wish to show any of the photos you have taken in 2023 you can send up to 6 to orangefieldnats@gmail.com. Please include the photographer's name, the subject of each photo and the location where it was taken.

Alternatively, Helmut has suggested that you bring a folder containing up to 6 high resolution image files (no smaller than 1920x1200 pixels). If image quality really matters, then HD projection using the full 2.6m projection screen accompanied by live commentary will work well.

By sending or bringing images you agree to them being placed on the OFNCS website, in the newsletter or used on our Facebook page. You will be acknowledged appropriately.

**Next Excursion – 11th February 7.00 pm
Picnic at Orange Botanic Gardens followed
by spotlighting in the gardens.**

Come and discover some of the things there are to love about the gardens at night. Nigel has seen Brushtail Possums, Squirrel Gliders (actually gliding) and Tawny Frogmouths. Some people will have spotlights but please bring your own torch or headlamp.

Meet at the Wisteria House, which is on the right just before the Function Centre. The toilets will be open.

BYO everything – food, drink, utensils, and chairs. Please wear sturdy footwear, long sleeve shirts and pants and insect repellent. A jumper might be a good idea if the weather is cool. If the weather is stormy the excursion will not go ahead.

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.

**Christmas Get Together
Sunday 17th December at the ELF
Text and photos Rosemary Stapleton.**



This was a friendly afternoon with lots of chatting, catching up with old friends and getting to know newer members of both groups. Penny added a bright touch among the spread of food by bringing in some gladdies from the Community Garden.



On behalf of ECCO Neil welcomed everyone and thanked the secretaries of both organisations, Nick and Rosemary, for their work during the year. On behalf of Field Nats Rosemary wished all a safe and relaxing festive season and hoped for positive outcomes for the environment in 2024, including with Orange Council projects. Thanks to all those who helped set up the room and clean up afterwards.

OFNCS Committee News

At the December meeting a program of varied talks and excursions was planned. The topics of talks include Kookaburra research, a Spotted Quoll breeding program, molecular research on orchids and finally one on reptiles in the Central West. Our winter talks will transport us to Kakadu and India but sadly we won't be visiting there for the excursions. Excursions will be to many of the local national parks and reserves and hopefully it will be third time lucky for a visit to see the orchids at Wambool Nature Reserve in October.

Orange Field Naturalist and Conservation Society was formed on 23rd October 1974, with the first field trip on 3rd November. During the year stories from these 50 years will be included in the newsletter. The Committee will be organising an event to mark the occasion.

March Talk and Excursion

Talk - Thursday 14th March, The recovery of nature at Glen Davis with Eric Tanner.

Excursion - Sunday 17th March, Capertee Valley and Glen Davis. This will be a full day trip with an earlier start than usual.

Eric Tanner, an OFNCS member, will talk about how nature is reclaiming the area where shale oil mining occurred at Glen Davis. Mining ceased in 1952. Having lived there at the time of mining Eric knows the area well. He will lead the excursion to the panoramic Capertee Valley, the river and on to Glen Davis to see what remains of the shale oil works.

Spring Creek Reservoir Quarterly Survey 31st December 2023.

Report by Rosemary Stapleton, photos by Nigel Sethack.

Rather than a still sunny day the last day of 2023 was cloudy with a cool easterly breeze. Not the ideal birding conditions for the quarterly bird count at Spring Creek. Despite this weather the total number of species that Cilla and I saw was forty-four.

Highlights were a pair of Blue-billed Ducks, a threatened species, just before they disappeared into the reeds at the northern end. A group of about 20 Australasian Grebes scampered across the water when they saw us. It was good to see that the Great Crested Grebes had returned while later a pair of Darters circled gracefully overhead. An unusual sighting by Cilla was a European Greenfinch, an introduced species that is not often seen around Orange. Evidence of breeding was observed in juvenile Dusky Woodswallows and Red-browed Finches.



Recently fledged Dusky Woodswallows being fed by an adult at Spring Creek Reservoir. Photo Nigel Sethack.

We met Nigel Sethack who had been out well before us with his camera. Some of his notable recent sightings were a Nankeen Night Heron and hundreds of Tree Martins. However, he hadn't spotted anything unusual that day that we could add to the list.



Nankeen Night Heron seen and photographed by Nigel Sethack earlier in December at Spring Creek Reservoir.

Vale Pixie Errey

The Society recently heard the sad news that long standing member Pixie Errey passed away on Monday 11th December. Pixie, and her husband David, were among the founding members of OFNCS, with David elected to the Committee in February 1976. David passed away in 2012, however Pixie maintained her interest and membership for 43 years until 2018, even after moving away from Orange.



Pixie and David Errey enjoying morning tea at Mrs Muttons Corner on an excursion to Gosling Creek Reserve, 12th March 2005. Photo Murray Fletcher.

They were regulars on OFNCS field trips. David and Pixie were both wonderful naturalists and always ready to share their knowledge and experience and encourage others in the love of the natural world. Pixie knew her plants but also enjoyed just being out in the bush amongst plants. As far back as 1978

the Errey's were lobbying NSW National Parks, on behalf of OFNCS, about the conservation value of the Hervey Range and Wanda Wandong Creek State Forests. They wrote a detailed submission on the creation of a national park which entailed many trips to the area. It took a long while for these areas to be recognised as Goobang National Park which was gazetted in December 1995. The Erreys took over responsibility for Streamwatch in 1996 and continued with sampling for many years. Pixie was a meticulous record keeper which, being a biologist, was most helpful in identifying macroinvertebrates. Growing up at Cliefden near Carcoar Pixie also had an extensive knowledge of that area and of the Cliefden Caves and Belubula River.

Information contributed by Jennifer Kenna, Jenny Medd, Murray Fletcher and Jane Paul.

Congratulations Nick King

Field Nats member Nick King is the first recipient of Orange Council's newly created Environmental Citizen of the Year Award. This award was for his years of dedication to preserving and caring for the environment.

Nick has joined many excursions, the Spring Creek quarterly bird surveys and was a volunteer in post-fire fauna surveys in the SCA. With his wife Jenny, he attended the founding meeting of OFNCS in October 1974 and has been a member ever since. He was on the committee from 2010 until 2022 and was Vice President for 4 years from 2018. He is also on the committee of the Canobolas Conservation Alliance.



Nick, introducing Oscar, his grandson, to bird watching with Cilla during a survey at Spring Creek on 5th January 2019. Photo R Stapleton.

The ECCO Facebook page continues "Nick King is a passionate advocate for the environment and tower of strength in multiple community organisations across Orange. He is

a veritable quite achiever with a long list of accomplishments.

Nick was one of the founders of ECCO back in 2006. ECCO has been active in Orange for more than 17 years, with Nick performing the role of Secretary for much of this time. He's written hundreds of submissions and has been the coordinator and principal writer of the Earth First column in the Central Western Daily for more than a decade. Nick has supported the establishment of school kitchen gardens and organised dozens of ECCO public events.

Nick has also been actively involved in the Central West Environment Council (CWEC) and the ELF Community Garden Group for many years. He recently took on the role of CWEC President and while CWEC has a geographic focus that extends well beyond Orange, much of its work impacts directly and indirectly on the Orange LGA."

Nick has also been very involved in organising or participating in Clean Up Australia Day, National Tree Day and planting days in Orange, the ECCO stand at the Farmers Markets and at Sustainable Living Week as well as a member of the Council's Community Environmental Sustainability Committee.



Nick King with his Environmental Citizen of the Year Award. Photo ECCO Facebook.

As ECCO says "Nick just gets on and does it. He doesn't look for thanks or acknowledgement, he just acts when he sees a need or a gap to fill. And he does it all with good nature, a wry sense of humour, and a natural gift for mentoring and uplifting others."

Gaanha bula Mt Canobolas Update

The rain has been appreciated by the vegetation on the mountain with new shoots on many plants and the mosses and liverworts not desiccating as they usually do in summer. In mid-December, the purple of Fringe Lily and Wahlenbergia flowers were bright spots of colour while the delicate flowers of Pale Vanilla Lillies could be seen along some of the road verges. The clusters of Leptospermum flowers attracted flower wasps, different flies, Pintail beetles and an occasional Assassin Bug.

The southern loop section of Federal Falls walking track is still closed for maintenance until 4pm 8 February 2024. A solid fuel fire ban is also in force until further notice.

Canobolas Conservation Alliance Update

Report by Jenny Pratten.

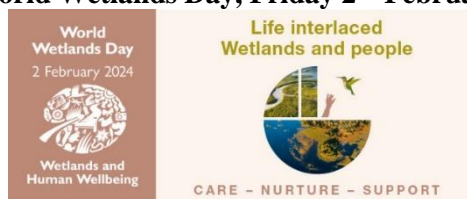
2023 has been a quiet year for CCA with Orange City Council's plans to build 70km of mountain bike trails through the Mt Canobolas SCA stalled.



The CCA AGM, followed by a brief Ordinary Meeting, will be held by Zoom at 7:30pm, Monday 12th February.

Dates for your Diary

World Wetlands Day, Friday 2nd February.



Take a walk at a local wetland that day, and any other day, to celebrate how important wetlands are for biodiversity as well as people.

Bats in Backyards, a Saving our Species Programs

which monitors bats around Wellington and communities further north. Brian Williams passed on this link:

<https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/research-and-publications/your-research/citizen-science/get-involved/bats-in-backyards#:~:text=Bats%20in%20Backyards%20is%20a,more%20to%20better%20protect%20them>

2024 Cowra Woodland Bird Survey dates are February 17/18, April 6/7, July 27/28, and October 19/20. Contact Sue Proust for more information or to register for surveying at sueproust@bigpond.com

Mycology May is happening again but in a slightly different format. And the LLS is starting to plan activities for another **Biodiversity Month** in September. Details will be in future newsletters.

Sightings around Orange

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

Things with Wings

On Boxing Day Nigel Sethack was surprised to see a flock of 10-15 **Striated Pardalotes** fly onto a dead tree for a forage at Gosling Creek Reserve. Nigel thought most, by their colouring, were youngsters. He said they stayed for some time until a Yellow-faced Honeyeater decided enough was enough.



Juvenile Striated Pardalotes. Photo N Sethack.

Nigel was at Gosling Creek again on 28th December and photographed the **Pallid Cuckoo** fledgling below. It was being raised by a Dusky Woodswallow.



Pallid Cuckoo fledgling. Photo N Sethack

A flock of over 100 **Magpie Geese** were seen at Gum Swamp, Forbes, by Cath and Rosemary Stapleton. On 5th January they were at the eastern side of the pond where the original hide was as well as roosting all over many of the dead trees. On 27th January they were scattered around the pond to the north, and some might have been nesting. One was pulling grass around them and stamping on it while another was sitting on what might be a nest. Two adults and a juvenile **Nankeen Night Heron** were also flying through the trees.



Magpie Goose possibly sitting on a nest. Photo Cath Stapleton.

South of Forbes on the Lachlan Valley Way, on the 27th, we drove past a farmer ploughing with a total of over 80 **Black Kites** following the tractor or landing in the paddock.

On 29th January Brian Williams reported sightings of an extremely rare arid area species and a very unusual species for this area. He emailed '**Grey Falcons** spotted at Vittoria near the closed rest area. Pair calling. Male is knocking over my poor sweet Noisy Miners. Last visual was of him flying off with a Miner. The Miners are not happy; however, the **Sparrowhawks** have almost taken all my **Crested Pigeons** and the **Goshawks** have cleaned up the mudlarks. **Maliyan (Wedge-tailed Eagle)** has been taking out the sulphur crests but not nearly enough of them.'

Insects

Hawk Moth larvae. This caterpillar (below) caught Jenny Medd's eye on a paddock stroll on 26th January. It would have been close to 8cms long & more than 1cm across; with the "spike" at less than 1cm. It was un-missable on the ground in the shade of a large tree!



When asked Murray Fletcher replied and said *'Looks like a privet hawk moth larva, Psilogramma menephron. At that size, it would be full grown and has dropped to the ground where it will burrow in to pupate in a small cavity in the soil. The adult moth is a beautifully mottled largish creature, mostly grey with some brown touches.'*

Animals

Fruit Bats – those of us living on the southern side of Orange continue to see the fruit bats flying over just on dusk, some only 10 - 20m above the ground. Alison has seen some make a stopover at one of the eucalypts near the corner of Racecourse Rd and Barrett St, which she presumes is flowering. The fruit bats are still in Cook Park and along Ploughmans Lane.

Creature of the Month – Smart Birds

Text by Rosemary Stapleton.

How smart are birds?

The intelligence of birds was noted in several of the Research News items in the Summer 2023 edition of Australian Birdlife, the magazine of BirdLife Australia. I was particularly interested in a study that *'recorded the 'escape responses' of Magpie-larks to dogs in urban parks in Melbourne when they were approached by dogs, either leashed or unleashed, with both sets of dogs walking quietly, close to their owners. When approached by a dog restrained by the leash, the Magpie-lark simply walked a short distance away, but when the dog was unleashed (though not unruly) the Magpie-lark flew well away.'* The study was done by Victoria and Deakin Universities.

As a regular walker around Ploughmans Wetland, where there are always Magpie-larks, it is good to see that most dog walkers have their dogs on leashes. I wonder if the birds here are as intelligent as those in Melbourne.

I also had a smart bird experience with a Magpie in my back garden last week. Catherine found a dead Cowboy Beetle, *Chondropyga dorsalis*, at our front door. I decided to take photos to see if it could be identified (thanks Murray).

That day there had been a Magpie in the back garden, moving around in the shade all day. It was unusual and it was obviously quite hot. It

was not concerned when I went outside so I thought it was probably a 'tame' bird, perhaps fed by someone. It watched me photograph the beetle and then I put the beetle under one of my tomato plants. When I came inside, I looked out and saw that the Magpie had quickly retrieved the beetle and was busily eating it!



Cowboy Beetle. Photo R Stapleton.

It made me wonder how it realised the beetle was food, but I guess they must have good eyesight and maybe it was familiar with the species of beetle.

On the farm we occasionally had Magpies that would bathe under a garden sprinkler so turned one on here as I thought that might cool down the Magpie. Initially it walked to the edge of the spray and looked for things in the ground but after 10 minutes it decided to almost sit on the sprinkler and bathe (below). It then jumped in the nearby birdbath to finish off and seemed much less distressed. It hasn't been back since.



Australian Birdlife also had a note on smart Palm Cockatoos from North Queensland. In the last few years it was found that they use sticks or seed pods as musical instruments to beat out unique rhythms to communicate with other cockatoos.

Recent observations by an ANU researcher have *"found that each drumstick is individually crafted by the cockatoo with each bird having its own preference for the design of its*

drumstick. Individual birds have preferences for the shape their drumstick, patiently trimming their length or width with their powerful bill.” They also found that

“neighbouring cockatoos don’t copy each other, but rather that the craft is probably taught by fathers passing the knowledge on to their sons.”



Just a few of the Magpie Geese at Gum Swamp, Forbes. Photo 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.

EFT payments to: BSB 802 129: Account 100014678: O F N & Cons Soc Inc.

Please be sure to identify payments with your name and send confirmation to

orangefieldnats@gmail.com

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Concession rate (printed newsletters) – \$25

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This Newsletter is produced for OFNCS by the Editor, Rosemary Stapleton. Views expressed herein are not necessarily those of the Society. Items should not be reproduced without permission of the Editor.

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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