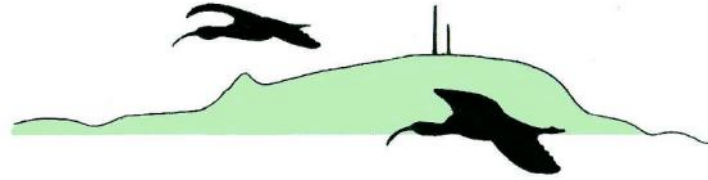


ORANGE FIELD NATURALIST AND CONSERVATION SOCIETY Inc



NEWSLETTER APRIL 2024

**Thursday 11th April, 7.30 pm.
Birds of Kakadu National Park and Darwin
with Nigel Sethack.**

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

Committee Meeting – 6.30 pm

**Excursion
Sunday 14th April - Exploring Bald Hill
with Col Bower.**

Meet at Orange High School Bus Bay at 9am.

Next Meeting

**Thursday 11th April – Birds of Kakadu
National Park and Darwin.
Speaker Nigel Sethack.**

Nigel's presentation of his trip to the Northern Territory in June 2023 includes many waterbird species and other bird species not seen in our cooler regions. He will be bringing along his photographic equipment and will discuss what he looks for in his bird and wildlife photography. This should be of interest to both non photographers and photographers alike. Nigel particularly likes getting action shots. His presentation provides quite a few of these along with some classic bird portrait shots.



'I'll take that fish!' Wetland action captured by Nigel Sethack. A Great Egret being challenged by a Whistling Kite.

**Next Excursion – Sunday 14th April -
Exploring Bald Hill with Col Bower.**

Col will lead the excursion to Bald Hill, which is in the State Forest due south of Mt Towac. It features open bare rock platform areas with heath and geologically different rock formations. We will also explore a large patch of native woodland to the east and have lunch in an open grassy area near a rocky ridgeline. While this has a moderately diverse collection of native plants Col says the trail is 'pretty rough'. It will be interesting to see if we can find some autumn flowering Greenhoods.



View north from Bald Hill to the summit of Gaanha bula Mt Canobolas. Photo Col Bower.

4WD's are essential and we will need to car-pool. Meet at Orange High bus bay at 9.00am.

BYO everything – food, water, and drinks. Please wear sturdy footwear, long sleeve shirts and pants as the blackberries are very vigorous in parts of the State Forest.

**Last Talk - Thursday 14th March -
The recovery of nature at Glen Davis.
Speaker - Eric Tanner.**

Text by Rosemary Stapleton.

Eric took us back in time to 1951 when, as an 11-year-old, he was sitting in a classroom at Glen Davis. He could look out the window to see the pipeline track from the shale oil processing plant but also the buttress of the sandstone cliffs which he and other boys would

explore on weekends. This environment at 'The Glen' inspired his lifelong interest in geology, ecology, and nature. He visits the area most years and shared with us his knowledge of the geology, history, and changes in the valley through facts as well as stories.

The shale oil deposits at Glen Davis developed in the Permian Period when higher sea levels created many lakes which were filled with algae and other creatures. The lakes later dried up and the algae was compressed into 1-metre-thick horizontal layers within coarse sand and gravel sandstone layers. The shale averaged 64 gallons per ton of crude oil or 1/3 its weight in oil. The heavy piece of shale Eric showed us could have been lit and would have burned like a candle.



*Panorama of Glen Davis as it is today.
Photo Christine Jacobs.*

The area was cleared for grazing and farming in the 1840's and fortunately the 'sharp end' of the valley at Running Stream was not touched. Wombats, lyrebirds, wallabies, and quolls were common, although the quolls often ate people's chickens. There were big brown and diamond snakes and enormous blue crayfish in the creeks. One interesting story was that the miners knew what is now known as the Wollemi Pine was nearby and their children would bring branches to school saying, 'Dad said these are rare'.

The natural paradise of the valley had a town of 2,000 placed on top of it when shale oil mining was proposed as a strategic defence strategy in the lead up to WWII. National Oil Pty Ltd was formed in 1937 by Sir George Davis (of Davis Gelatine fame) at the instigation of the Federal and State Governments. Mining commenced after 1938 and the first petrol was produced in 1939. The petrol was pumped via a pipeline to Newnes, then up to the main rail line at Newnes Junction. A coal mine at Running Stream provided coal for the refinery.

The town was well laid out, 'like Canberra', and included a migrant hostel resulting in seventeen nationalities in the community. As there was no regular local water source a pipeline from Oberon Dam was constructed and was still in use until recently.

The mine closed in 1952 due to low production. Using historic photos of the area and examples of miners' equipment Eric explained the processes used to mine and produce the end product of oil and petrol. He showed us a miner's pick and said the handles of the picks were shortened so that they would not hit the roof when mining the three-foot-wide shale seam. On closure all moveable and saleable equipment was auctioned and gradually the town and mining area fell into ruin.



Christine at the river junction where clear water flows. Photo Eric Tanner.

Eric showed this modern-day photo of the junction of the Capertee River and Running Stream, and he could match it to one taken 70 years ago. He commented that like after a bushfire vegetation returns but it is not always the same. A small population remains in The Glen, and it is now surrounded by National Parks such as Wollemi, Capertee, and Gardens of Stone. A true paradise where nature and history can be explored.

Thanks to Eric for a fascinating talk and to Christine for the handouts of historic and recent photos.

Last Excursion – Sunday 17th March - Glen Davis and Capertee Valley.

Text by Patsy Nagle.

Following Eric Tanner's interesting talk on the recovery of nature at the Glen Davis shale oil mine a dozen OFNCS members ventured out to assess and experience the landscape today. Rain threatened all day, and some low cloud and mist deprived us of lookout views but overall we had great weather, with the skies only opening up as we returned to Orange.

We travelled to Capertee via Bathurst, Yetholme, Meadow Flat, Portland, Cullen Bullen, Ben Bullen, Pearsons Lookout (no view because of cloud), and the western edge of the Gardens of Stone NP. Regenerating open cut mine landscapes were already evident along this route as well as targeted tree plantings for the Regent Honeyeater and Swift Parrot.



Hai, Eric, Patsy, Helmut, Paul, Glen, Sandra, Marc and John outside the Shale Mine (MP1). Photo Christine Jacobs.

From Capertee we took the Glen Davis Road, through where John Fell (of Commonwealth Oil Corporation) had opened 'Newnes North' mine (later called 'The Glen'). Crossing Coco Creek Eric told us of the street-bounty collected there in his youth from the wild fig trees, now over 100 years old and still bearing fruit. Chinese miners were also resident here in the early days where they dug round-mouthed shafts (so spirits couldn't hide in the corners) for gold.

The impressive sentinel escarpment of Sir Johns Nose guards the Glen Davis valley, surrounded by equally impressive cliffs almost on four sides.



The Glen Davis valley and the ruins that remain of the township. Photo Patsy Nagle.

Within the town of Glen Davis itself Eric showed us many sites including:

- the migrant hostel for 17+ different nationalities of workers
- the Police station and cell, manned by the aptly named Sgt Catchem, who doubled up as the barman
- the grand 2-storey hotel run by the Hendersons. It had red cedar fittings and a bar separated from the accommodation
- The Ambulance station, churches, Post Office & telephone exchange
- The Poplars gateway inside which were located the VIP staff houses and offices
- the Primary School where Eric's father Ron Tanner reigned as Principal, along with 5 teachers
- the campground with interpretation boards and community notices and photos
- brick houses still standing, and the sites of fibro houses removed or relocated
- Eric's own family house site while he was a lad of 10-13.



Eremophila debilis slowly returning at the site of Eric's childhood house. Photo Hai Wu.

Across from Eric's teen home a couple of blind women lived in a small house, now just a ruin of a cement slab and a few rocks. Eric recalls visiting them, and we all were incredulous that in such a visually stunning place unsighted characters were found.

We walked around and talked about many things, the wildlife, people, operations, how they sustained themselves, trips to the Capertee store or railway, weather and flood events, discrepancies between the management class of residents and the poorer 'Bag-town' workers or those who lived simply in rocky overhangs. In all the challenges of the lifestyle here the beauty of the place and the times were evident. The surreal absence of people now to when there was a thriving community of 2000 was hard to fathom.



Geastrum triplex or Collared Earthstar.
Photo Sandra Chrystall.

Past the ash dumps of shale spoil we ventured up to The Works. Standing ruins and whole buildings remain now but are getting slowly engulfed by forest trees, shrubs, grasses, vines, lichen and ant mounds. Many weed species were seen but overall, the resilience of the native vegetation was indeed noteworthy. The relatively low-impact technology of the extraction of the raw material, its processing, heating, fractional distillation, storage and transportation, coupled with the short years of operation, have allowed the ruins to sit gently here.



Nature reclaiming a mine opening.
Photo Christine Jacobs.

We lunched at the NPWS campground at the junction of the Coorongooaba Ck (aka 'Running Stream') and the Capertee River, accompanied by nonchalant kangaroos and a goanna.



A goanna visiting at lunchtime. Photo P Nagle.

We made our way back home through the sunny and spectacular scenery via Glen Alice, Rylstone, Ilford, Sofala and Bathurst. A long but fabulous day. Thank you Eric for your memories, facts and figures, talk and tour.

OFNCS Committee News

Welcome to new member Patsy Nagle, who generously wrote the excursion report.

Check out the Field Nats website <https://orangefieldnats.com/> as it has been updated with a new format. It is still a work in progress with Helmut and Nigel Hobden trained on how to keep it up to date.

The Central Tablelands LLS are planning activities to be held for Biodiversity Month in September. Rosemary has been representing Field Nats.

March Newsletter Correction – apologies to Jake Hansen for incorrectly spelling his name in the sightings report of a Tiger Snake. If you wish to download a corrected newsletter it is available at www.orangefieldnats.com

May Talk and Excursion

Thursday May 9 – Greg Ingram, Central Tablelands LLS, and Geoff Selwood, (in his role at Canobolas Zone, RFS) will talk about their knowledge and experience of using cool burns as a way to rehabilitate and care for our natural environment.

Sunday May 12 – excursion location yet to be finalised but may be Nangar National Park.

Vale Chris Pratten

The environment and heritage in NSW lost a passionate advocate and true champion and conservationist with the death of Mr Chris Pratten, OAM, on March 7, 2024.

Chris was the founding President of Orange Field Naturalist & Conservation Society. He held this position from 1973 for 10 years; services for which he was awarded Honorary Life Membership. Chris was very actively involved in the Nature Conservation Council during his term with OFNCS, also holding the position of its Chairman in 1978 and 1979.

Chris was born in Sydney and got to know the Orange area when spending most school holidays at the family farm “Amaroo” west of Orange. He graduated with a Bachelor of Science from NSW University studying wool and pastoral science. When the family property was divided with his brother Geoff, Chris became a grazier at ‘Koolewong’ where he and his wife Elaine and their three children lived for many years.

He was a formidable driving force in lobbying on a wide range of conservation and environmental issues, with a special concern and energy for matters of local heritage. He led by example and practised what he preached, establishing a bush regeneration and wildlife paddock, with dams, on ‘Koolewong’. It is affectionately known by his son Michael, who now runs the property, as “Dad’s Scrub”. Jennifer Kenna, a previous OFNCS President, relates how she visited with Charles Boyd, the second NPWS ranger, who advised on wildlife refuges. When the dam had filled Chris was delighted that a platypus had taken up residence.

A short course on Australian Wildflowers at Orange TAFE was instigated by Chris in 1977. It later became the “Know and Grow” course familiar to many locals. This resulted in many new people coming to Field Nats meetings and outings.

His enthusiasm for educating and sharing his knowledge also extended to a series of programs on trees on local TV, “written, directed and presented” by Chris. One called ‘The Lament of the Rural Gum’ was co-presented with the late Peter Andren.

In 1983 he realised his time on the land was coming to an end and soon after Chris moved

to Sydney. In 1984 he became the newly appointed Trust Conservation Director at the National Trust. This involved lobbying state and local governments on conservation issues. In this role he pioneered the Bush Regeneration Management Program, later moving on to the Australian Conservation Foundation. Chris was heard to say, “*finally I’m getting paid to do what I love doing*”! His passion for preserving the built environment meant he joined Jack Munday to stop developers demolishing significant buildings around Sydney. In 1990 he commenced working as a heritage consultant.

At the time of OFNCS’s 40th anniversary celebrations, which Chris attended and addressed, he was still an enthusiastic advocate, encouraging everyone to keep up the pressure for nature conservation. His vision and energy in the Society’s early years is reflected in the legacy we enjoy today in our local parks and reserves, most notably the gazetting of Nangar, Conimbla and Goobang National Parks, and the preservation and protection of other Crown Lands. He also served on the Canobolas Park Trust and was Chairman for a period of time. Jennifer Kenna remembers that Chris often said, ‘*when the world wearies, and society fails to satisfy there is always the garden*’. We are fortunate to have these local national parks as the ‘native gardens’ we can seek solace in.



Jennifer Kenna and Chris Pratten on an OFNCS excursion at Calula Mine, 9 November 1980. Photo supplied by Jennifer Kenna.

In January 2001 Chris was recognised with a Centenary Medal for services to the community. He was awarded an O.A.M. in January 2005 for ‘*service to the environment and to the conservation of natural and built*

heritage areas as a grazier, educator and administrator’.

Chris has been prolific as an author in his own right with numerous ‘flora and fauna’ reports, National Trust policy papers, conservation plans and commissioned reports, as well as many history and heritage publications. One of his own books, “*Amaroo: squatters, sheepwalks, yeomen and more*” was published in 2002. It is held in the Reference Section of the Orange Library and available for loan from Molong Library.

The launch of ‘Orchids of Central Western NSW’ was Chris’s last trip to Orange. His daughter Jenny said in her eulogy ‘*His speech at the age of 89 was nothing short of brilliant, if I may say so myself*’. On hearing Chris had passed away Penny Todman expressed what many of us thought. She said ‘*It was so nice to meet and hear Chris talk at the book launch and we feel very blessed to have met him. Thank you for sharing this sad news. We will do our best to keep his legacy going and feel very proud to be a OFNCS member*’.

[Prepared using information from the introduction of Chris Pratten at the launch of “Orchids of Central Western NSW” by Dick Medd, with inputs from Jenny Medd, Doug Benson (of RBG), Jenny Pratten, Jennifer Kenna, Penny Todman and an interview with Chris for Ashfield Historical Society that can be found at [Multimedia Publications – Ashfield & District Historical Society \(ashfield history.org.au\)](http://MultimediaPublications-Ashfield&DistrictHistoricalSociety(ashfieldhistory.org.au))]

Canobolas Conservation Alliance Update

Report by Rosemary Stapleton.

At the Orange City Council meeting on 19th March a motion to continue with the mountain bike track proposal was debated. Nine people spoke for and against the proposal in the Public Forum. Dr Andrew Rawson, CCA President, outlined the many conservation and cost reasons why the proposal should not be supported in the SCA. Elder Uncle Neil Ingram and Dale Carr spoke of the sacred and cultural significance of Gaanha bula Mt Canobolas to them and the Wiradjuri people.

Thank you to all OFNCS and CCA members who attended and presented a solid front of support for the mountain.



After some debate by the councillors the motion was withdrawn by Cr Floyd as it was becoming clear it would be defeated. This was a frustrating outcome as it means the council decision from over 12 months ago still stands. This was to leave the original mountain bike plans on the table, despite the SEARS having lapsed.

However, it was positive to see that several more Orange Councillors were unwilling to spend any more ratepayer’s money on the project. At this stage all they seem to be willing to do is keep their eyes open for funding opportunities from elsewhere, something that seems unlikely for the foreseeable future. The fact that the development would also be in an adjoining Local Government Area and outside their jurisdiction was mentioned by several councillors.

Currently there are no ratepayers’ funds allocated to the bike track proposal however the draft budget for next financial year will be debated at a council meeting in May. This will be closely watched by the CCA.

An associated motion for Council to support the mountain bike club in efforts to ensure long term use of the trails constructed in Glenwood State Forest was carried.

Gaanha bula Mt Canobolas Update

Some of the winter migrant birds are back with Flame Robins, Pallid Cuckoos and a female Golden Whistler being spotted at several places on the mountain. Some were feeding in the *Acacia dealbata* thickets. Not many plants are flowering although Hai noticed that *Monotoca scoparia*, Prickly Broom Heath, was flowering on part of the Fern Gully Trail.



Pallid Cuckoo. Photo Hai Wu.

If you go to the summit, you will notice the plantings NPWS have tried to establish are still

struggling due to regular ‘pruning’ by the local animals. A pity they are so tasty!

NPWS is undertaking more improvements to the Federal Falls Walking Track and the southern loop track will be closed until 4pm 2 May 2024. During this time, the Northern loop section is open providing access to Federal Falls. Signs will be in place to direct visitors to the correct section of track to use.

For the most up to date information, please contact the Central West Area Office in Bathurst on 02 6332 7640.

Dates for your Diary

2024 Cowra Woodland Bird Survey dates are 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. Workshops, with Alison Pouliot, are:

- **Introduction to the Kingdom Fungi** - Wednesday 1 May, 12pm–3:30pm.
- **What’s That Fungus?** - Thursday 2 May, 9am–12:30pm.
- **Focus on Fungi** - learning to photograph fungi - Friday 3rd & Saturday 4th.
- **Mt Canobolas Fungus Foray** - Sunday 5 May, Morning and Afternoon sessions.

There is a small charge for these events. As spaces are limited make sure you book at <https://events.humanitix.com/host/central-tablelands-regional-landcare-network>. More detailed information, including the full program for each event, participant requirements, and registration details, will be provided upon booking.

You can also register at this Humanitix link for **The Mushroom Mysteries: A Fungi Whodunit**, Wednesday 1st May, 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm. It is co-hosted by Intrepid Landcare. ‘Dive into the enchanting and mysterious world of fungi on this interactive whodunit that beckons you into the woods.’

Dubbo Field Naturalist and Conservation Society are now only visiting **Burrendong Arboretum** on Sunday 26th May. For details email contact@dubbofieldnats.org.au

On Tuesday 17th September at 7pm **Col Bower** will be speaking on ‘Orchids of

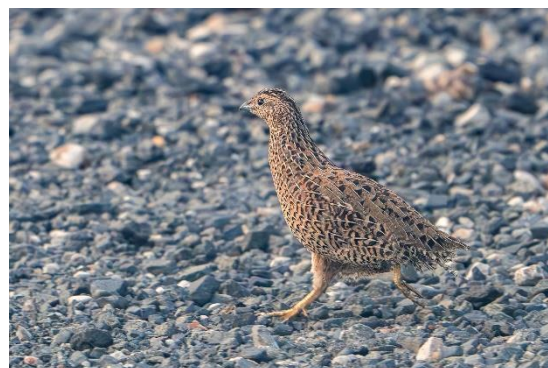
Central Western NSW’ in Dubbo. DFN hopes to visit Orange the following Sunday, 22nd September, to look at orchid locations around Orange. Details will be circulated closer to the date.

Sightings around Orange

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

Things with Wings

There have been a few ‘firsts’ for Nigel Sethack at Spring Creek Reservoir in March. On March 6 he photographed a White-eared Honeyeater. He also captured a photo of a Brown Quail on March 22. Nigel commented ‘*When I’ve seen them before they’ve always been so quick to disappear into cover. I’ve not seen them there before but have seen them briefly at Gosling Creek. I still had to be quick with this one. All the other photos of it were of tail feathers.*



Brown Quail. Photo Nigel Sethack.

Male and female Scarlet Robins were seen along the track to The Falls in Mullion Range SCA on 24 March by Catherine and Rosemary Stapleton.



Male Scarlet Robin. Why do they always sit in the wrong place? Photo Rosemary Stapleton.

Mosses and Liverworts

Alison Downing has had another specimen from the Mullion Range excursion identified, this time with the help of Dr Rod Seppelt, a leading Australian bryologist. He identified one specimen as *Streblotrichum convolutum* (previously *Barbula convoluta*) which is very uncommon in NSW.

Alison listed some of the other species and said 'These are not as rare as the *Streblotrichum* but certainly uncommon in the area. The limestone outcrops were really rich in species. They looked so dry - you would never expect them to be so rich in bryophytes.'

Mullions Ranges mosses that are uncommon in the area

- *Orthotrichum cupulatum* Hoffm. ex Brid. – noted in the March Newsletter. Alison added that it is rare other than in the southern Alps
- *Brachythecium salebrosum* (F.Weber & D.Mohr.) Schimp.
- *Brachythecium rutabulum* (Hedw.) Schimp.
- *Brachythecium paradoxum* (Hook.f. & Wilson) A. Jaeger
- *Gymnostomum calcareum* Nees & Hornsch.



The dry limestone outcrops in the Mullion Ranges. Photo Alison Downing.

Not a Creature but a Question of the Month

Why are Christmas beetles shiny?

Report by Murray Fletcher.

Towards the end of last year, there was some publicity about Christmas Beetles (*Anoplognathus* species) and whether they were declining. A segment on Gardening Australia (ABC TV) interviewed **Chris Reid**, curator of beetles at the Australian Museum. The presenter asked Chris why so many Australian beetles are glossy and Chris replied that nobody really knows.



A shiny Christmas Beetle (*Anoplognathus* spp, family Scarabaeidae) seen at Spring Glade, Mt Canobolas on 29 January 2023.

Photo Rosemary Stapleton.

However, there was a possible clue in a paper presented at the Australian Entomological Society's conference held in Albany in November 2023. The Society has presented an annual prize since 1971 for the best paper submitted by a postgraduate student. From 1990, the prize has been known as the Phil Carne Prize, named in honour of one of the Society's early stalwarts.

Last year, the Phil Carne prize was won by **Patricia Henríquez-Piskulich** of the University of Melbourne for her paper "Dazzled by shine: gloss as an antipredator strategy in fast moving prey." Her paper reported a series of experiments she had undertaken using praying mantids attempting to capture small moving balls. One of the balls was shiny and the other was dull.

Patricia demonstrated that the mantids had greater success catching the dull ball than catching the shiny ball. A possible explanation was that the mantids had trouble estimating the distance to the object when it was shiny and either missed altogether or only caught the ball with one of its raptorial front legs. This might be a reason why so many Australian beetles (and other insects) are glossy and shiny - the changing light reflecting from the insects might make it harder for predators which hunt by sight to catch them.

Reference: Patricia Henríquez-Piskulich, Devi Stuart-Fox, Mark Elgar, Ivan Marusic and Amanda M. Franklin (2023) Dazzled by shine: gloss as an antipredator strategy in fast moving prey. *Behavioral Ecology*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/beheco/arad046>



Lunchtime at the junction of Coorongooba Ck (aka 'Running Stream') and the Capertee River. Photo P Nagle.

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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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