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THE
**GRANITE BELT
NATURALIST**



**Monthly Newsletter of the
Stanthorpe Field Naturalist Club**



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THE GRANITE BELT NATURALIST
MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE
STANTHORPE FIELD NATURALIST CLUB

P.O. Box 154,
Stanthorpe, Q., 4380.

OFFICERS OF CLUB FOR 1988 - 1989

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MEETINGS - 4th WEDNESDAY of each month in the Q.C.W.A. Rooms
at 8 p.m.

OUTINGS - The Sunday PRECEDING the 4th Wednesday of the month

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS

Single \$6.00 Family \$10.00

Rent donation per family per meeting

AIMS OF THE CLUB

1. To study all branches of natural history.
2. Preservation of the Flora and Fauna of Queensland.
3. Encouragement of a spirit of protection towards native birds, animals and plants.
4. To assist where possible in scientific research.
5. To publish a monthly Newsletter.

No.212

1.

October, 1989.

Minutes of the Stanthorpe and District Field Naturalists Club meeting
held in the QCWA Rooms Victoria Street
Stanthorpe on
27 September, 1989 at 8pm.

Present 22

Apologies 8

Minutes. Moved by Claude Walters and seconded by Robin McCosker
that the minutes be taken as read in the September news-
letter and confirmed. Carried.

Correspondence. Inward received from - 1. Subs from Don Lightfoot,
Margaret Compton, E. McCulloch, John O'Donnell, Jack and
Una Deutscher, Zade Newman- Zade sent best wishes to all
club members. 2. Account from Border Post for covers; 3.
Reply from N.S.W. National Parks and Wildlife Service; 4.
Newsletters and Journals from Darling Downs Naturalist
Club, Richmond Valley Field Na ts, Queensland Naturalist
Club, Footprint. 5. Australia Post re rules for registration
of Newsletter. 6. Tasmanian Environment Centre; 7. Petition
from S.E. Q8ld Conservation Working Group, 8. Lothian Books
re "The Australian Natural History Drawings".
Outward forwarded to - 1. NSW National Parks and Wildlife.
2. 4QS re outing and meeting notices.
Moved by Ailsa Wilkinson and seconded Kel Dominey that the
inward correspondence be received and the outward endorsed.
Carried.

Treasurer's Report. Treasurer Julia Brown read her report which
showed a credit balance of \$261.24. She moved that her
report be received and the following accounts be passed for
payment:- Duplication \$6.00, Rent \$8.00, postage \$21.00,
Border Post for covers \$69.00. Motion seconded by Leila
Hermannsen. Carried.

Outing Report. The report prepared by Peter Kerr was read, it was a
very interesting walk along Sandy Creek and 47 people
attended on a very beautiful day for walking. A letter of
thanks was forwarded to Mr. Bill Judd as requested by Peter.

Next Outing. This was to have been to Hunters Hill, however the dry
weather has not been suitable for the area to be seen at its
best and an alternate venue will be arranged and details will
be in the Newsletter.

Guest Speaker. Guest speaker for the meeting of October 25 will be
Robin McCosker who will show slides and give a talk on his
recent trip to Central Australia.

Specimens. Robin McCosker showed the nest of a Grey Crowned Babbler
which was very large and obviously well used. Millie Marsden
brought along some quandong fruit which she brought back
from Bollon. The tree was laden with fruit and looked most
attractive.

September Minutes(continued)

General Business. Kel Dominey extended an invitation to members to Join with the Stanthorpe Camera Club on an outing to Palgrove and Iron Pot Creek on September 30.
The meeting was closed at 8.40pm.

After Meeting Program. President Ray Marsden introduced the guest speaker Jean Harslett B.E.M. who presented a superb program on insects and birds. Jean had captured wonderful shots of insects and showed their adaptability to the environment and their skill at camouflage. Jean was thanked for her well produced program and congratulated on the high quality of photography.

Tom Archer
Acting Secretary.

Outing Report for Sandy Creek Walk on September 24.
by Leader Peter Kerr.

Because of access difficulties, the outing was altered so as to remain on the Rocklands property, becoming a return trip to a hill overlooking the Leslie Dam. After the mandatory smoko at the crossing, and blessed with a perfect spring day, 47 people followed Sandy Creek downstream for 2km, enjoying the shallow pools of the trickling stream and a turtle catching lesson. The pale green of the young willow leaves contrasted with the darkness of the riveroaks and apple trees of which there were some large specimens.

Moving away from the creek, a steady upward climb took the group through open grazing country with outcropping granite slabs until a steeper pitch led past a fascinating variety of large spear tipped balckboys, long untouched by fire, to the welcome shade of magnificent Moreton Bay figs on the top of the hill, where lunch was taken. Several view points revealed a panorama stretching from Herries Range to the Main Range and down the length of Leslie Dam. A view of Rockland homestead shows it pleasantly situated in a hill valley with a N.E. aspect. Part has been renovated and part re-built by the Jubb family, to maintain its original 1880's style.

The return trip, on a slightly different course, revealed clematis covered rocks and trees against picturesque backdrops, and back to the cars. Which was more welcome a cuppa or a dip?

Some history of the area. An 1860's map shows the area as part of the huge Rosenthal Station, managed by Augustus Fitzherbert for 10 years. A slab hut and old yards with 20" diameter posts near the road, mark the site of an outstation called Sandy Creek Station. As a 'golden handshake' Evans selected "Rocklands", then about 6500 acres. The size has fluctuated, but since taking over in 1967, the Jubb family has again built it up to 6000 acres.

Native Blooms seen on the Sandy Creek Walk.
Contributed by Jean Harslett.

Two orchids were seen the tiny greenhood

1. Pterostylis mutica (The midget greenhood).
2. The tree Apmbidium canaliculatum
3. A lovely purple pea- one of the Darling Peas Swainsona galegifolia
4. Twining Glycine and a darker form
5. Also a short stalked, but comparatively large flowered dark purple pea flower growing in the grass.
6. Yellow daisies -Senecio lautus
7. Lantana - suggested the warmth of the area.
8. A remmant scrub tree with bright red new growth tips- not identified.
9. Flowering also was the Matchhead Mistletoe - Amyema cambagec
10. Wild Olive with its small yellow flowers - Notelaea longifolia.
11. On two rest stops the shade of the fine fig trees was enjoyed.
12. On the top of the hill Leptospermum flavescens (var. minuto folium
13. Bulbine bulbosa
14. Purple wild verbena
15. A number of Acacia buxifolia were just past their prime.
16. Two specimens of Acacia viscidula - a fairly unspectacular species
17. There were a great number of Black Boys(Xanthorrhoea) some in comic, almost human, attitudes others commanding silhouettes, and one or two with very neat skirts and beautiful symetric patterns.
18. Clematis. Around several rocks and climbing trees - in great display.
19. White stars in the grass.

More Food for Thought.

Contributed by Dore McCosker.

Water Use or Misuse? David Bellamy can be relied on to promote food for thought. 5-1-88 . "forty per cent of rain that falls on the land is channelled for use in cities and this diversion is destroying the eco system." and all for the convenience of a population of one person to 51 hectares! ! ! !

7-6-89. Nev Hammond discussing a forthcoming meeting of scientists and bee keepers on the Darling Downs said "Scientists beleive bees need to be banned from state forests because poor quality forest timber is resulting from the cross pollination of trees.

The next week's TV program was being advertised and the subject title -"using fire to control the environment". I felt a more appropriate study could have been "Controlling fire to have an environment to use." Fierce fires used to destroy spinifex is said to have reduced the population of the mala (a small kangaroo-like marsupial) to 20. It formerly inhabited one fifth of the continent but is now being bred in cages in Alice Springs to build up numbers to release into the wild and an area is being protected from bad fires to allow spinifex to grow properly and once more provide a suitable habitat.

Notes on specimens from September meeting.

Grey Crowned Babbler.

From Cayley's What Bird is That?

Distribution. From Cape York through eastern and south-eastern Australia (rarely near the coast in the south-east) to Eastern South Australia. Usually in flocks of from eight to twelve birds, frequenting scrub and open forest. It is noisy and very active and spends much time on the ground in search of insects. Many calls are nondescript but the loud 'Arco' or 'Ya-ho' cannot be mistaken. Nest, large, dome shaped with a spout-like entrance, outwardly formed of sticks and twigs loosely interwoven; lined with bark-fibre, feathers, grasses or wool, usually placed in the fork of a tree at up to 20 feet or more. Eggs - three to six; varying from pale brown to purplish-brown and buff, covered with hair-like markings of dark brown. Breeding season - August to December.

The nest Rob brought in had two distinct openings which caused much discussion.

Quandong fruit.

Millie brought in a sample of quandong fruit which had been picked near Bollon. The trees were growing beside a poplar box on one occasion and the other trees were adjacent to wilgas. The leaf of the quandong - *Santalum acuminatum*, was so similar to that of the wilga that one could not be picked from the other except by the fruit. The trees we saw in September were just laden with brilliant red fruit of which we picked some and brought home to be shown to interested people and even some jam was made.

Keith Williams states in his volume one. Common name Quandong or Sandalwood. A large scrub or small tree that is a root parasite. It likes a sunny open forest aspect and host species appear to cover a wide range including eucalypt, acacia and causerina. It is thought some perennial grasses may also be involved. (We were told that some experiments were being carried out at Dubbo using lucerne.) It is really delightful when carrying fruit. The seeds are also a very interesting shape and were used in the game of chinese checkers. They could be used to make attractive natural necklaces and bangles, and quite useful in floral art dried arrangements.

October Outing.

At the time of going to print the outing destination is expected to be to Sugarloaf area to be led by Val White and Noel Collins-Rubie. Time to meet at Weroona park on October 22 is 9am, lunch will be at the cars. Should this prove not convenient to Noel an alternate venue will be arranged with times remaining the same.

October Program.

Will be presented by Robin McCosker on his recent trip to Central Australia. This will be held in the QCWA rooms at 8pm on October 25.

While on a trip recently to the south west of Queensland we were lucky enough to visit Ian and Nan Pike, who are making some interesting experiments in the horticulture field. Having a background in sheep and cattle raising, they have moved in a little closer to 'civilisation' during the last seven years. At Eulo they are creating their own oasis incorporating date palms and geraldton wax. Both work in the 'wax' but Ian does most of the work with the dates as Nan finds that work a bit on the heavy side.

Ian and Nan started with the 'wax' as they term it, just 18 months ago, choosing a white strain which is not subject to too many growing hassles and is acceptable for the export market. Beginning with the one plant, Ian has propagated his won stock and now has 1800 plants to be harvested. He has more plants in the nursery awaiting planting for next season. Nan said they chose to grow their blooms mainly for the market in Japan as "the Japanese spend \$70 per person per annum on flowers while the average Australian spends \$17."

The flowering season is very short and lasts only one month. During that time all 1800 scrubs have to be harvested and marketed, they are cut down to about one foot above ground level and the bushes we saw would yield anything up to 20 stems per bush. The flowers are cut in the field, transported to the shed as quickly as possible, and placed in large water containers to soak up as much moisture as possible. Each stem is trimmed, sorted into lengths and packed in boxes for market. Stems from .8m to 1.10m go to Japan, the shorter lengths are sold by weight, mainly through the supermarkets in the USA city of Los Angeles.

Flowers picked at the Eulo complex on Sunday are forwarded to St. George for fumigation and chilling before being flown to Japan, they hit the market place on the following Saturday. Life of the blooms after this is two to three weeks.

The Pikes have found there are many obstacles to be overcome when producing a top quality product for the export market, costs are high both for production and freight but the challenge is the thing. Nan says that Ian is always saying that 'next year things will be better'. (Think I have heard that phrase somewhere too). It was a great sight to see all these lovely flowers in bloom and we hoped indeed that things will be better in the future. Such a lot of trial and error has already gone into the production of the geraldton wax.

Ian's other great challenge is that of growing the date palms. He is trying to propagate a special date with the right ration of fibre and sugar, nothing very much is known about date growing in the south west but Ian is amassing a lot of knowledge now. I wonder whether his son will be interested in carrying on this industry begun with such enthusiasm by Ian. At present he has 600 palms in different areas, he told us that dates are actually a form of prehistoric grass and not actually a tree at all. Pollination is the important factor, and as pollen can waft on the wind for up to 80km, it is imperative to have trees blooming at the same time to avoid cross pollination. Ian has devised a complicated method of sexing the trees by the way the veins form in the stem, this saves him waiting the eight years to find out if his plants are male or female. First fruiting can be expected in around eight years and the years will continue to bear for up to 100 years. A mature tree will yield up to 275kg of fruit, we were told that there are about 800 known varieties of dates. Ian

Date Palms(continued)

Began his date plantation with trees transplanted from as far away as Barcaldine. Transplanting is a very touchy business he said, if the plant is dropped if only a few inches it is enough to damage the plant and it will not survive. It is very important to to this work in very hot weather, strict attention must also be paid to the position of the plant. The side growing to the north must be also facing north after transplantation, Ian thinks this has to do with the insulation of the plant. He says that the palm is designed to harvest every drop of moisture available. The fronds are so designed to catch the moisture and channel it to the trunk for storage.

It was fascinating to see his nursery and hear about the research he is doing to establish this new industry at Eulo. He has a small complex on the farm where he sells table dates, other date products including an experimental wine. We found his knowledge of many aspects of natural history to be very wide indeed and felt it was a privilege to meet the family. As it was harvest time for the geraldton wax while we were there, it was a case of all hands on deck. Eulo is a noted honey area and the beekeepers are not allowed to have their hives positioned within a certain distance of the town. While we were there someone must have overstepped the mark as the bees were creating a certain amount of havoc among the blooms.

The south west was a wonderful spectacle in September with carpets of white and yellow flowers, everywhere the countryside was blooming, we hope that Ray will have some good slides so that we will have a lasting memory and also something to share with others.

I wouldlike to have members send in contributions for the newsletter, I know that we all lead busy lives but I am sure that you would all have something to share. How about it?

Did anyone see the nesting spurwing plover at the northern by-pass. When one thinks about it I guess it does make sense to nest in the middle of the triangle of roads. As it is lit up all the time predators would be kept at bay and the traffic did not seem to worry the mother bird. Ray took a photo of the bird nesting, one of the four eggs but unfortunately we were away when they hatched. We were told that the mother and four youngsters were seen, we hope she was able to lead them to safety across the busy intersection.