

December 2011
ISSN: 1836-2761



OBJECT: To foster an interest in nature

MEETING—THURSDAY 1st December 6:30pm Australian National University Venue details back page

CHRISTMAS PARTY !!



As usual, there is no formal meeting in December but we will get together for a couple of hours for a social Christmas celebration. Bring something to eat and drink and share some Christmas treats.

Please note we will be meeting in Building 44 - next door and down stairs from where we usually meet.

Keep an eye out for Christmas Beetles! This great photo is from www.cfzaustralia.com (Centre for Fortean Zoology Australia)

OUTING—SUNDAY 4th December 9:30am Yankee Hat—Namadgi NP

Meet Dierk at the Yankee Hat car park at 9:30am. This outing will partly be an exploration for ANN next year.

Yankee Hat Walk 6 km return (2 1/2 hrs) Easy

Stroll through expansive grasslands dotted with kangaroos, to the Yankee Hat Shelter to view Aboriginal rock art. Beautiful mountain views.

To find out more about this walk, download the brochure at the address below.



http://www.tams.act.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0007/229552/Yankee_Hat_Webversion.pdf

CONTENTS

Page 2 RAMSAR and the ACT by Chris Bunn

Page 3 8.7 million species on Earth. More great speakers to look forward to in 2012.

Page 4 Contact details. Membership application.

RAMSAR and the ACT by Chris Bunn

The Convention on Wetlands is an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. It was adopted in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971 and came into force in 1975, and it is the only global environmental treaty that deals with a particular ecosystem. (Shouldn't there be one covering rainforests?)

One hundred and sixty countries have joined the convention and almost 2000 sites have designated significant conservation sites. The country with most sites (by far) is the United Kingdom with 168. The countries with the biggest areas are Canada (13,066,675 hectares, 37 sites); Chad (12,405,068, 6 sites); Russian federation (10,323,767, 35 sites) and Mexico (8,376,271, 129 sites). The United States has only 1,646,745 hectares at 30 sites, while Australia has 65 Ramsar sites covering 7,510,177 hectares. Australia's claim to fame is we had the first site to be designated under the Ramsar convention (find out where at the end of this article).

Under the Ramsar criteria, wetlands should be selected for the Ramsar List on account of their international significance in terms of the biodiversity and uniqueness of their ecology, botany, zoology, limnology or hydrology. The convention lists nine criteria, some being specific for fish and waterbirds.

In Australia, Ramsar wetlands are recognised as a matter of national environmental significance under the Commonwealth environment Act (EPBC Act). Consequently, an action that has, will have, or is likely to have, a significant impact on the ecological character of a Ramsar wetland must be referred to the Minister and undergo an environmental assessment and approval process. However in a recent study commissioned by the Commonwealth department the following statement appeared: "*Currently Australia does not have a systematic reporting process to allow government stakeholders and other resource managers to gain an overarching view of the state of Australia's Ramsar estate at any given time.*" Or in plain language the State and Federal governments don't communicate effectively with each other!

The ACT contains one Ramsar wetland, consisting of 410 hectares, the *Ginini Flats Wetland Complex*, located in Namadgi National Park. It is made up of a series of interconnected flats known as Ginini Flats and Cheyenne Flats.

The Ginini Flats Wetland Complex Ramsar site meets four of the nine criteria:

Criterion 1: The Ginini Flats wetland, in the Murray Darling Basin Australian Drainage Division, is one of the largest, deepest and least disturbed subalpine Sphagnum bogs in mainland south-eastern Australia.

Criterion 2: The wetland complex has a diverse assemblage of subalpine flora and fauna that is restricted to this wetland type. It is important habitat for the nationally threatened Northern Corroboree Frog. The area also supports the largest population of this species in the Brindabella Range.

*Criterion 3: The Ginini Flats wetland complex is at the **northern limit** of this habitat type, and is of importance in maintaining the genetic and ecological diversity of a number of endemic and restricted species found in subalpine wet heaths and bogs.*

Criterion 4: The Ginini Flats complex provides important breeding habitat for the threatened Northern Corroboree Frog, a rare species confined to the Southern Highlands of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory.

The region's geology is made up of intensively folded metasediments overlying granite. The metasediments allow deep penetration of water down to the granite layer, at which point the water flows along the granite layer until it emerges as seepages and springs. At Ginini Flats and Cheyenne Flats, which are low lying open areas with impeded drainage, the water pools and allows the formation of a bog complex on relatively deep peaty soils. Well developed peats have developed up to two metres deep beneath areas of wet heath and bog. The age of the peat is estimated to be over 3000 years old. Permanent small streams cross the flats.

Snow cover on the subalpine ranges in this area provides a significant winter water storage that is released slowly as the snow melts. Snowmelt may also be an important factor in maintaining the hydrological conditions that encourage Sphagnum development within the wetlands.

The ACT government has produced a comprehensive plan, dated 2001 on the internet http://www.tams.act.gov.au/play/parks_conservation_and_lands/about_us/publications_and_forms/strategies_plans_and_reviews/?a=13019

The first Ramsar site was Cobourg Peninsula in the Northern Territory!

Early morning mist over the wetlands (2006), Photo: Nerida Sloane <http://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/wetlands/ramsardetails.pl?refcode=45>



8.7 million species on Earth, say experts

Scientists have come up with the first precise, accurate and verifiable estimate of the number of species on Earth. Ecologist Professor Camilo Mora of the University of Hawaii and colleagues report their findings today in the journal PLoS Biology. One of the most important characteristics of life is diversity, says Mora, yet for 250 years scientists have been unable to answer the critical question of how many species there are on the planet. "It's the most basic question, however practically it has been very challenging to answer," he says. "This is the first time we've delivered a method that gives a number. The number we have come out with 8.7 million species. It is not only precise, but it is also accurate - we have validated it." Estimates to date of the number of species on Earth range from 3 million to 100 million species, says Mora. These have been based on the unvalidated opinions of experts, says Mora.

The above text is extracted from an article by Anna Salleh, published on the ABC Science web-site on Wednesday 24 August 2011. To view the full article, which includes details of the method used and how the new model was validated, visit <http://www.abc.net.au/science/articles/2011/08/24/3300326.htm>

More great speakers to look forward to in 2012

Thursday 2nd February - Lure of the Lyrebird

Presentation will cover results from a three year study of the lyrebirds in the Moruya State Forest. By use of movie camera, still photography and sound recordings we will cover the complete history from nest, egg, chick (feeding of) fledging and male display and mimicry. The presentation includes anecdotal comments (to support or disprove many current theories) and climaxes with excellent footage of the male presenting his full concert. The male's display (movie) includes the sound track of 21 mimicked birds.

Thursday 1st March—Legionnaire's Disease - the implications of infection



Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra Inc.

Who are the Field Naturalists?

The Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra (FNAC) was formed in 1981. Our aim is to foster interest in natural history by means of meetings and regular field outings. Meetings are usually held on the first Thursday of each month. Outings range from weekend rambles to long weekends away. Activities are advertised in our monthly newsletter. We emphasise informality and the enjoyment of nature. New members are always welcome. If you wish to join FNAC, please fill in the member application below and send it in with your subscription to the FNAC Treasurer at the address below.

President: Chris Bunn (02)62412968/0417407351

Email: fieldnaturalist@yahoo.com.au

Website: www.fieldnatscanberra.com

All newsletter contributions welcome.



Monthly meeting venue: Division of Botany and Zoology, Building 116, Daley Rd, Australian National University. Park (occasionally the adjacent building 44). Meetings start at 7:30 pm and are followed by refreshments.

**Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra
GPO Box 249
Canberra ACT 2601**



MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION OR RENEWAL

Family name: First name:

If a family membership, please include the first names of other members of the family:

.....

Postal address:

Suburb: State: Postcode: Home phone:

Work phone: Email address:

Subscription enclosed: \$.....(Single/Family \$25) Donation: \$.....

How did you hear about FNAC? Please circle: FRIEND? OTHER? Please specify: