

FRIENDS of the GREAT VICTORIA DESERT PARKS

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Past President's Comment

The 2011 Field Trip

Not long after the August Friends of GVD Parks Field Trip, June and I travelled through France, Belgium, England and Italy. It was most interesting to see first hand the difference between the countryside of Europe and that of the Great Victoria Desert, and indeed in most areas of Australia. Of most interest to me was a comment made by our guide in Italy. He explained that we wouldn't see much wildlife because there was so much hunting. It was true, we saw only a few birds. In Italy, France and Belgium it was not unusual to see a group of people, shot gun in hand, walking across the fields looking to shoot pheasant or quail. However, in Italy it was a delight to wake one morning in the village of Assisi, the home town of St Francis, to the calls of birds! I know there are areas of Europe that have parks where wildlife can be viewed by the public but the absence of birds along the country roads was most noticeable to me.

I would like to thank Kevin O'Connor for so ably conducting the Friends of GVD Parks' November meeting and dealing with other matters in my absence. In addition I thank Kevin and Peter Facy for negotiating with the Royal Life Saving Society for use of their facilities as a new venue for our meetings. The new venue appears to have many features that will assist with the smooth running of the meeting and be more comfortable for members and guests.

Much of the success of the August Field Trip can be attributed to the organising group who met several times to plan the activities and surveys. I am sure all participants join me in thanking these people.

The Field Trip was most successful and the discovery of several Princess Parrots made it very exciting. It is pleasing to know that every participant was able to sight these beautiful birds and some were able to take some great photographs. A very special thank you is extended to Fred and Lynne Murray-Walker for the video footage they have shared with us and other interested people. Fred's photographic record will be valued by the environmental agencies and the Museum of South Australia.

The Alinytjara Wilurara Natural Resource Management Board has given valuable support to The Friends of the Great Victoria Desert Parks. This support included a significant fuel subsidy to field trip participants and assistance with maps and survey advice from the Goodwood Road Office and the Ceduna Office. I would like to make special mention of two officers who have left the AWNRM but were of great assistance. Karan Coombe-Smith based at Goodwood assisted with organising the surveys and Philippa Schmucker's assistance, especially in obtaining the permit to travel on the Maralinga Tjarutja Lands, was invaluable.

Those who took part in the last field trip have been given the opportunity to make suggestions for future trips and these have been taken up by those making preliminary plans for this year's expedition. If any member wishes to contribute thoughts or ideas they should feel welcome to share them with me, the new president, Kevin O'Connor or Neil Matthews who is planning the 2012 field trip.

We are most grateful to Harald Ehmann, Threatened Species Officer with the Alinytjara Wilurara Natural Resource Board. Harald made a valuable contribution to the 2011 Field Trip. He shared some of his knowledge about the features of the landscape and the ecology of the area in addition to guiding us to a better understanding of the Great Victoria Desert's indigenous heritage. He has indicated that he would like to assist our group and we appreciate his time at our meetings. We look forward to more input from Harald in future.



Harald Ehmann explains another interesting feature of the Great Victoria Desert to 2011 Field Trip participants.

What is the future for Animal Track Surveys during Friends of GVD Parks Field Trips?

I support efforts to learn more about the distribution of Australian creatures, especially the predators. Introduced predators have made a huge impact on Australia's wildlife. A paper recently distributed by the Arid Recovery Project highlighted the damage caused by feral cats.

The stomach content of a cat that had recently been shot 25 kilometres north of Roxby Downs was examined. Scientists found several native and introduced animals had been caught by this cat within the previous 24 hours. The prey included: 24 painted dragons, 3 bearded dragons, 2 earless dragons, 3 striped skinks, 1 mouse and 1 zebra finch. (See photo below)

The animal track and signs surveys conducted as part of our field trips help improve our understanding of the distribution of arid land creatures. During these surveys we record the footprints, diggings and scats found within a two hectare plot. However, these surveys have

achieved mixed results and I suggest their place in the field trips needs to be reviewed.

While there has been some enthusiasm to participate in the tracking surveys, we have not built up enough expertise to be consistent in our identification and recording. Nor have we been able to establish a pattern that allows us to make observations at regular intervals. Because there is such a long period between each field trip people often forget the skills acquired in the previous year.

I recommend that, unless we are working with an expert such as Dr. Rick Southgate, we adopt an "opportunistic approach" to recording tracks and signs. We should record and report only those tracks and signs that we can readily identify, concentrating on predator species. We have gained enough experience to identify the predators and perhaps other feral animals like rabbits and camels. These records will assist with a better understanding of feral creatures. At this stage I believe we should leave the identification of tracks made by most native fauna to the experts.



Note the native creatures in the stomach contents of the feral cat found 25 km north of Roxby Downs.

Alinytjara Wilurara Nganamara Surveys (Looking for Malleefowl.)

Surveys that monitor the Malleefowl (Nganamara) have been conducted in the Great Victoria Desert for over five years and when possible I hope the Friends of the GVD Parks can continue to contribute. A procedure established by Dr. Matthew Ward and colleagues can be followed whenever the footprints are found in the field trip area. The main objective is to know the areas these birds visit and to record the presence or absence of nganamara mounds. Our group made some exciting discoveries during the 2009 trip on Goog's Track and it would be important to continue the survey in future journeys to this track.

To carry out this monitoring program we need to have a good knowledge of predator tracks, especially fox and cat. People who are considering participation in the Googs Track Field Trip in September are encouraged to improve their tracking skills by referring to the "Tales in the Sand" guide book and observing carefully the tracks of these animals near your home.

Another good reference is "Tracks, Scats and Other Traces," by Barbara Triggs.

Limericks from the 2011 Trip. Collated by Peter Lloyd

A fun aspect of our Field Trip, suggested by Arelene Dowling, was a limerick competition.

The limerick considered best was by Margaret Mead a new member from Tasmania.

Val Hansen made a beautiful chocolate cake to celebrate Jan Forrest and Margaret's birthdays.

Margaret's Limerick:

*At Camp One I saw a strange thing,
A camp fire where no one would sing,
But two special dates
And a big chocolate cake,
Changed all and made the air ring.*

Jan Forrest's enthusiasm for invertebrates had people looking carefully at small creatures everywhere.

Terrie Coleman wrote:

*In Camp One, I saw a strange thing
People kneeling on the ground in a ring
Now - What's this I see?
They're paying homage to me?
Nah - 'Twas two spiders just having a fling.*

From June Hudson

*As I came into camp one day
I saw a dunny bright and gay
It has spiders 'neath the seat
Which can make you squeak
Drop your pants and run away*

The Field Trip Coordinator Phil Gaukroger had a whiteboard to direct the day to day activities.

Shelagh Matthews was inspired to write;

*A strange thing was seen at Camp One
'Twas Phil with his whiteboard, by gum
With jobs for the day
Left no time to play
Resorted to writing this ditty - what fun!*

We were all keen to find the Princess Parrot. Ian Jackson considered that he had sighted one, others doubted.

Peter Lloyd wrote:

*At Camp One, Ian told a tall tale,
About as likely as Jonah and the whale.
But could it be,
That he really did see
A splendid little parrot with a long tail!*

Not only was the long tail a feature, its call was distinctive.

Peter added:

*In camp we did hear a strange thing.
And lo and behold, it did sing.
Its melodious trill
Gave us all a thrill
Then, being female, it continued its preening.*

Peter and Sandy James have upgraded from a Hummer to an Oka with all mod cons, including a hot water service. Hence this rhyme from Bill Dowling:

*At Camp One I heard a strange thing -
A roar or a moan (not a ring).
The rig in THAT quarter
Was making hot water -
The Oka was starting to sing.*

I take this opportunity to wish the new president, Kevin O'Connor, the all the best for the coming year. Members, thank you for all your support during the past two years. I encourage you to use your many skills to continue making a contribution to the future of the Friends of Great Victoria Desert Parks.

Neville Hudson. President 2010-11