

National Parks Association of the ACT Inc

General Meeting minutes

7:30 pm Thursday, 15 April 2021

Uniting Church Hall, 56 Scrivener Street, O'Connor

1. Welcome

President Esther Gallant welcomed about 40 members, life members and guests to the meeting.

Esther paid respects to the traditional custodians of the land and their elders, past and present.

2. Announcements

Esther noted that NPA is supporting protection of the North Lawson native grasslands which are under threat from urban development. An NPA stall at the Lawson Markets on 27 March 2021 was very successful with lots of interest from the public. Esther thanked NPA members who volunteered on the stall.

Esther suggested members check out the latest *Burning Issues* which listed a number of ways they could help the environment including: ACT Parks and Reserves Visitor Survey, Parks Victoria Draft Feral Horse Action Plan, ACT Urban Forest Strategy 2021-2045.

3. Presentation by Dr Don Fletcher:

Update on the Rosenberg's Goanna Project: What have we learned?

Esther welcomed Dr Don Fletcher, leader of the citizen-science project researching Rosenberg's Monitor being conducted in the Naas Valley, Namadgi National Park.

Don commenced by acknowledging the huge amount of work undertaken by volunteers, noting that the project would not happen without volunteer support. The project has received funding and other support from the NPA and the ACT Government.

The ACT previously had two goanna species, the Lace Monitor (or Tree Goanna) and Rosenberg's Monitor, but the Lace Monitor has not been recorded in recent years. The Naas Valley is the only area where Rosenberg's have been regularly observed in recent times.

Rosenberg's Monitors are listed as Vulnerable in NSW, Victoria and SA.

The Naas Valley survey site is about 15 square km between the Booth and Clear ranges. Rosenberg's lay eggs in *Nasutitermes exitiosus* termite mounds as these are not too hard for juveniles to emerge from.

In October 2020 volunteers undertook 20 sweep counts to identify *Nasutitermes exitiosus* mounds and each mound was marked on GPS using mobile phones. In January and February 2021 volunteers walked a number of routes through the mounds (identified on maps by Don) to look for small holes which indicated that juveniles (or hatchlings) were exiting the mound. Motion sensitive cameras were installed to focus on each exit hole with batteries and SD cards replaced regularly.

Don noted some observations from the project so far:

- Adult Rosenberg's visit termite mounds with hatchling holes. It is unknown if they are:
 - showing parental interest
 - have carnivorous intent (unlikely)
 - seeking social contact.
- Termite mounds burn, and this might explain why mounds are only found in some areas and not others.
- The area has Aboriginal artefacts, including tool sharpening grooves near water.
- The success of newly designed backpacks which carry radio and GPS. These fit behind the goannas' back legs and must not impede movement, especially when underground. The backpacks are glued on and need to be regularly checked as they can fall off when the goanna sheds skin. This shedding has had a big impact on the quality of data collected, as goannas have to regularly be recaptured and the backpack re-glued.

Don's view is that it is highly likely that goannas have a role as a predator in ecosystems.

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Key results from radio and GPS data collected to date are:

- Radio tracking shows that goannas have a primary (or home range) and a secondary range which is visited less regularly.
- Some travel long distances e.g. 9 km and 12 km.
- Goannas will pass through grasslands but will only remain in areas with trees.

The Naas population is the only large and growing population of Rosenberg’s Monitors in the ACT. This is probably as a result of canid baiting which has occurred in the area since 2009. Prior to baiting, sightings of Rosenberg’s were rare.

A recent survey conducted on Mount Ainslie recorded only a very small number of Rosenberg’s Monitors. Cameras showed that dogs visited 40% of the baited sites, even though dogs off-lead are illegal in the Mount Ainslie Nature Reserve. Don also noted that a goanna was killed on a major road near Mount Ainslie so road kill also has an impact on goanna numbers. It is not the hatchlings the public should be concerned about but the number of adult monitors as without breeding success this goanna population could become extinct.

A key text for further reading on Rosenberg’s Monitor is the book by Brian Green and Dennis King, *Monitors: the biology of varanid lizards*.

John Brickhill observed that as a volunteer on the project he knew that Don devoted a huge number of hours to the field survey work in the Naas Valley and also to tasks such as planning field work, preparing maps and reports, and coordinating volunteers. All in all a very sizeable contribution.

After comments and questions from the floor Esther thanked Don for the update and declared the meeting closed at 9:00 pm.

Next General Meeting: Thursday 20 May 2021.

Chair: Date: