

FROG CALL



NEWSLETTER No. 64
March 2003

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Notaden bennetti photographed by Jodi Rowley

Next meeting 6.30 PM for a 7.30 PM start

FRIDAY 4th April 2003

AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM,
WILLIAM ST ENTRANCE

FATS PICNIC IN CENTENNIAL PARK

Ash Paddock Picnic Area near Allison Road
Saturday 12th April 11am to 3pm
see inside Frogcall for directions



MEETING FORMAT for 4th April 2003

- | | |
|---------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 6.30 pm | A small number of frogs are ready to collect from the Frog Rescue Service. Please bring your FATS membership card, Amphibian Licence. |
| 7.30 pm | Welcome and announcements |
| 8.00 pm | Stan Orchard will be talking about the 4 years progress of the Rio Tinto Frog Program. |
| 8.45 pm | Jodi Rowley speaking about frogging out west, Alistair MacDougall presenting the Smiths Lakes report, Wendy Grimm will give a short talk about North Head, Dan Edwards will show a film on Frog Conservation. |
| 9.30 pm | 5 Favourite Slides (Please bring along any froggy slides that you would like to show) |
| 9.45 pm | Auction and drawing of door prize |
| 10 pm | Tea and Coffee |

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Our second FATS meeting (in the Year of Fresh Water and Wetlands) was opened by Arthur White. After welcoming new visitors, members were reminded to check on 9681 5308 if planning to attend an advertised FATS field trip.

Our mainspeaker, Ken Griffiths, mesmerized a packed Hallstrom Theatre crowd with dozens of stunning slides and anecdotes. Equipment discussed included the digital cameras, SLR's, and point and shoot cameras. He advised not to "position" frogs but to photograph them in as natural a setting as is possible.

Cameras and sea shores don't mix. Take a plastic bag to protect your equipment. Ken uses Fuji film or Sensia for more economical filming. Other advice included reducing one "stop" in very reflective conditions and to practice photographing frogs at home. You can get good pictures with modest equipment (a couple of hundred dollars). A wider angle lens will give a good depth of field. Use a twin flash with diffuser to half power. Ken's advice is if you walk away from a night's work with one good picture, you've done well.

Ken provides spotlight tours at the Barren Grounds – a great weekend away and opportunity to practice your photography.

Lothar Voigt ran the video of the National Frog Conference in Adelaide. The video, "what's killing our frogs" will be a real flagship for FATS. He reminded members that the Frogmobile will be on display at the FATS picnic in April. Matthew Kemplay-Hill brought many great slides of Oolong and David Nelson presented excellent pics from the Darkes Forest field trip. Jodi Rowley spoke about her planned work at James Cook university. Many thanks for an evening of wonderful slides and to the diverse and accomplished presenters. A big thank you to our tireless auctioneer, Arthur White. Congratulations to auction bidders and guessing competition winners Graeme Banks and Claire Papworth. The committee appreciates the enthusiasm of those bringing auction items, bidders and our young fundraisers Katherine Wangmann and Peter Spradbrow.

NORTH HEAD QUARANTINE STATION SURVEY

The FATS group were recently asked by several heritage organisations and community groups to survey the land around the North Head Quarantine Station. This area has been the subject of various development proposals, and the rather complex land-use arrangement between State and Federal Governments has only added to the uncertainty of the decision-making process. Sadly, it seems these days that a little piece of relatively undisturbed bush is not sufficient to save it from destruction, the bar has in fact been 'raised' to finding the existence of rare or endangered fauna or flora. Some evidence of small but important frog populations may assist in presenting a much stronger submission to planning authorities, and this may help halt any deleterious development proposal.

The area is a mixture of heathland with small patches of dry sclerophyll forest. The numerous small watercourses traversing it are highlighted by the occasional small perched swamp or dam. Conditions were very dry, most watercourses were either completely dry or simply a series of stagnant pools. We were particularly anxious to uncover any populations of Red-crowned toadlets, - we suspected there may be some suitable habitat, however the dry conditions defeated us on the night. We did pick up some more common species of frogs, a variety of reptiles including a family of Cunningham's skinks, water dragons and eastern water skinks. Mammals included bandicoots, ring-tail and brush-tail possums as well as the nest of a small antechinus. Tawny Fromouths and a variety of roosting birds were also found.

The FATS group have agreed to return to the site when conditions improve. **Robert Wall**

Here is a sample letter/email to The Hon Bob Carr, NSW Premier. It's best to use your own words. Please send a message today. MW

The Hon Bob Carr, bob.carr@www.nsw.gov.au
Dear Premier,

I request a commitment by your government to establish a sanctuary at North Head, including all publicly owned land.

Approval by the NSW State Government of the long-term lease of the Quarantine Station as a private resort hotel will jeopardise the opportunity to set up a Sanctuary. The opportunity exists for the State to implement a visionary long-term plan for all of the public land on North Head now that occupation of this State land by the Commonwealth for defence and quarantine purposes has ceased.

I understand that the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust and the National Parks and Wildlife Service jointly hosted the North Head Sanctuary Conference in July 2002. A substantial number of people from community and conservation groups, scientific and educational interests, including eminent scientist Tim Flannery, came together and championed the establishment of a sanctuary on North Head.

North Head displays a natural and cultural heritage that is a unique part of our national heritage. The establishment of a North Head Sanctuary will protect and conserve this special place for the future. I seek your support in achieving this visionary outcome.

Will the State government make a commitment, to save the whole of this extraordinary site including publicly owned land, for a sanctuary?
yours sincerely XXXX(please supply your name, address and date) FATS member





IN SEARCH OF THE HOLY CROSS TOAD THE CONDOBOLIN ADVENTURE (FEB 2003)

We were all packed and ready for the FATS Autumn 2003 Smith's Lake Field Trip. Our bags were filled with field guides to eastern NSW, maps of the Myall Lakes area and even snorkels and fins. A mere hour or two before our agreed departure time, mention was made regarding the rain that had fallen in central western NSW. None of us froggers had been out west looking for frogs, and the recent rain was the most rain that area had received for several years. After much frantic discussion, we discarded our fins and embarked upon an adventure to find arguably the cutest frog in the world- the Holy Cross Toad (*Notaden bennetti*).

The first actual stop (petrol stations don't count) was Parkes, where we decided to stay for the night. After dumping all our non-frogging gear in a caravan, we headed off up a randomly chosen road, and followed the raucous calls of frogs until we found a farm dam. The area was covered in cow-pats, rusty mattresses and other debris, but the frogs didn't seem to mind. Amongst the refuge, we saw calling and amplexing Green Tree Frogs (*Litoria caerulea*) and Painted Burrowing Frogs (*Neobatrachus sudelli*).



Neobatrachus sudelli photographed by Jodi Rowley

When got over our initial excitement at seeing our first frogs of central NSW (involving lots of hugging and about 200 photos), we wandered around the neighbouring waterholes along the side of the road, and came across large numbers of elusive Wrinkled Toadlets (*Uperoleia rugosa*) as well as more Green Tree Frogs and Painted Burrowing Frogs, all in a breeding frenzy.

The next day, after visiting Parkes infamous "Dish" we headed further west, to Condobolin, which is a known to be Holy Cross Toad territory. Shaking with excitement, we headed to an area where these frogs had been seen before. Our ears pricked up at the "wooooo, wooooo" call of the Holy Cross Toad, we jammed on the brakes, launched out of the car and into our waders and ran headlong to the source of the noise. On the way, we ran in to (almost literally) a local who just happened to be familiar with the local frogs, especially the Holy Cross Toad, and knew where the best spot to look for them was (he had spent some time in his past collecting these frogs and sending their skins overseas for analysis)! The flooded grassland where we were lead was absolutely massive and full of the haunting "woooo- wooo"-ing. Only a couple of meters into the swamp we spotted our first frogs...Holy Cross Toads! Delighted, we screamed, grabbed them, and promptly got slimed by them (they puff up and produce a sticky, milky substance from glands on their skin as a defence mechanism).

After our initial 'slimy' welcome by the frogs, we managed to see many Holy Cross Toads, as they were floating, calling and amplexing all over the swamp. Along with the famed Holy Cross Toad, we managed to see the Water Holding Frog (*Cyclorana platycephala*), which we nicknamed the "moo frog" or "cow fog" because of it's call, Sloane's Toadlet (*Crinia sloanei*), the Spotted Marsh Frog (*Limnodynastes tansmaniensis*), the Desert Tree Frog (*Litoria rubella*) and more Green Tree Frogs and Painted Burrowing Frogs. Around that area we also saw and heard Peron's Tree Frog (*Litoria peronii*) and the Broad-palmed frog (*Litoria latopalmata*).

On our last night, we ventured into Weelah State Forest, SW of Condobolin, and found the Giant Bullfrog (*Limnodynastes interioris*). These frogs are as big as their common name suggests, and seriously cute. We managed to see them call and even engage in some wrestling with one-another! Along with these guys (which were the main attraction here, we heard more Holy Cross Toads and saw even more Wrinkled Toadlets, Desert Tree Frogs, Painted Burrowing Frogs and Green Tree Frogs.

Although we hear that the Smiths Lake trip was even more fantastic than usual, we had a wonderful trip, saw lots of new species (the frogs out west are so fascinating!) and above all, proved that the Holy Cross Toad *really* is the cutest frog in the world!

Jodi Rowley, Anne Miehs, Matthew Bulbert

HEATHCOTE FIELD TRIP

As FATS have a close and long-standing knowledge of the Heathcote site, we decided to proceed with this field trip in order to gauge the impact and extent of drought at this location. The site proved extremely dry, particularly given the recent sporadic rain that had occurred across parts of Sydney. Dams were totally dry, an examination under rocks revealed no moisture whatsoever. Creeklines were reduced to stagnant pools. The evening also turned quite cool, further discouraging froglife.

Despite the disheartening conditions, we picked up Striped Marsh Frogs *Limnodynastes peronii* in relative abundance, also quite a few very young Dwarf Green Tree Frogs *Litoria fallax*. The numbers of both species were down on past years. That other little survivor, *Crinia signifera*, was present, with some individuals having particularly unusual markings.

Steve was anxious to examine the habitat where red-crowned toadlets are reliably found, but we were left to ponder their fate.

Amidst the spotlighting, we picked up ring-tailed possums, sugar gliders and lobster-sized yabbies. Recent tracks in the mud showed that the kangaroo population is alive and well at this site.

The frogging highlight was perhaps the *Limnodynastes dumerilii* spotted by the side of the walking track.

Under very trying conditions, trip leader, Steve Weir, managed to turn in a first class performance!

Thanks Steve! **Robert Wall**



Perons Tree Frog photographed by David Nelson

ALIEN SPECIES IN CAHOOTS

Scientists at the USGS Forest and Rangeland Ecosystem Science Center in Corvallis, Ore., spent 3 years examining the complex relationship among these introduced species in Oregon's Willamette Valley, as well as the effect of these introduced species on native pond amphibians. The scientists found that the non-native fish are aiding bullfrog invasion by eating native dragonfly nymphs that would normally prey on bullfrog larvae.

These findings provide the first experimental evidence of 'aiding and abetting' between two non-native vertebrates. USGS scientist and lead author, Michael Adams, said, "As if the problem with invasives wasn't bad enough already, it now appears that non-native species help each other

out." Non-native species, also sometimes called alien, exotic, or invasive species, are any species introduced to an area where they are not naturally found. By some estimates non-native species cause more than \$138 billion in economic losses in the United States each year. Moreover, they are homogenizing the earth's biota, leading to biodiversity losses and changes in ecosystems. Understanding the impact these invasives have on ecosystems is essential given their potential consequences for commerce, agriculture, and biodiversity.

Compounding the problem in the Pacific Northwest is that many lakes and ponds in this region were naturally fishless until bluegill sunfish and other sport fish were introduced for recreational fishing. They have since spread, leaving fewer fishless habitats for native species. Bullfrogs coevolved with these non-native fish in the eastern United States. "Our research suggests that the re-creation of this natural native relationship is critical to the success of bullfrogs in the West," Adams said.

.....Thus, ecologists are interested in decreasing the numbers of introduced fish and bullfrogs.This research also investigated the role of habitat change in the bullfrog's spreading. In addition to non-native fish, the study looked at multiple habitat characteristics that might influence bullfrog distribution and abundance, including wetland permanence, depth, area, and type, as well as road densities, shade, and how much forest is adjacent to the wetland. The results indicate that pond depth, in conjunction with the presence of non-native fish, influences the survival of bullfrogs more than any other habitat feature.

USGS scientist and co-author Christopher Pearl noted that, "Wetland mitigation projects that replace shallower temporary wetlands with deeper permanent ponds are probably helping to spread bullfrog and non-native fish in the Willamette Valley and elsewhere. More abundant introduced predators are not a good thing for native amphibians."

This project was funded by the US Environmental Protection Agency's Regional Applied Research Program and received additional support from the USGS Amphibian Research and Monitoring Initiative (ARMI). ARMI is a nationwide collaborative effort designed to assess amphibian status and habitats on Department of the Interior lands and to determine the factors responsible for population declines. EXTRACT Results of this study appear in the April issue of the scientific journal, Ecology Letters. The abstract is accessible on-line at

<http://www.blackwellpublishing.com/journals/ele>
http://www.usgs.gov/public/list_server.html
http://fresc.usgs.gov/news/images/2003_3a.jpg
<http://fresc.usgs.gov/news/newsreleases.asp?NRID=3>: Sandra L. Kilpatrick Ecologist Trainee National Forests in Mississippi Homochitto Ranger District 1200 HWY 184 East Meadville, 601-384-5876 skilpatrick@fs.fed.us passed on by Stan A. Orchard

FROGBITS AND TADPIECES

THE FROG DOCTOR HOT-LINE:

Offers Gardeners Advice On Frogs Leicester Mercury News, UK 3/6/03 Conservationists have launched a new telephone advice service for gardeners to try to protect spawning frogs this spring. Severn Trent Water has set up a "hop-line", with its own frog doctor. Colin Green, environmental adviser at Severn Trent, said: "We have created it to encourage the public to understand the importance of frogs." The hop-line number is 0116 267 0150, and is open from 10.30am to 3pm.
Stan A. Orchard

EMAIL MESSAGES TO FATS MEMBERS

The first message has been sent out to members using the **fatsgroupnsw Yahoo group**. There is no need to reply, in fact messages cannot be sent back to the list. If you have a comment or question, please send it to either **fatsgroupnsw@hotmail.com** OR **fatsgroupnsw@yahoo.com.au**. Attachments are preferred at the **fatsgroupnsw@yahoo.com.au** address.
Steve

THE FATS PICNIC DAY

Is in April, on the 12th, which is the weekend after the weekend of the meeting. FATS has booked the Ash Paddock Picnic Area, which is on the southern area of the park, near Allison Road. For anyone keen to see exactly where it is before the next FrogCall comes out, here's one way how.

Go to www.whereis.com.au

Click the "Place of Interest Search" tab. (Or go there directly

http://www.whereis.com.au/search/search_POL.jhtml) In the "point of interest" menu select "Park" In the "suburb or town" box type "Centennial Park" In the "state" menu select NSW Click the "SEARCH" button on the lower RHS of the frame. Ash Paddock should be the top park in the selection (of 8) Click on the map icon for Ash Paddock on the RHS. And voila!!, you now have a map showing how to get to the FATS Picnic Day. So we now expect to see you there, no excuses !! **Steve Weir**
Membership Secretary 02 9710 6866 (w)

Frog and Tadpole Study Group of NSW Inc. Postal :
PO Box 296 Rockdale NSW 2216 Email :

fatsgroupnsw@hotmail.com

Website: www.fats.org.au

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED IN GOSFORD AREA

FAATS volunteers are invited to participate in a fauna survey of a section of Mangrove Creek on the Central Coast, including using tape recording and frog call recognition. The likely date is September 2003.

Interested members are asked to contact Grant Woolcock at Gosford City Council, by phone on (02) 4325 8413, or by email at Grant.Woolcock@gosford.nsw.gov.au

Centennial Parklands 9339 6699 info@cp.nsw.gov.au ⁵

www.cp.nsw.au

Spotlight prowls 15/4, 18/4, 22/4, 25/4 and 2/5/03 for one hour from about 5.45

BERLIN WALL BUILT FOR FROGS

Taxpayers in Berlin have reacted angrily after it emerged the city is spending thousands of euros to prevent frogs from getting run over. The cash-strapped capital is building a network of walls and tunnels to protect frogs trying to cross a busy road. The project is reportedly costing 430,000 euros (\$474,200). It comes at a time when the city is grappling with debts of a 46bn euros and is trying to make savings by closing public services, including swimming pools and kindergartens. Fifteen tunnels are being built to give the frogs safe passage to a lake, wildlife protection officials said. A 650-metre (2,000 feet) wall is also under construction in Pankow, east Berlin, to guide the frogs towards the tunnels. Guenther Brinker, head of Berlin's taxpayer association, said: "I'm all for protecting animals, but this really is a utopian scheme. It's a colossal waste of money." (Edited by Yvonne Detlaff) BBC Science, 3/8/03 forwarded on by Stan A. Orchard

Amplexing *Neobatrachus sudelli* photographed by Jodi Rowley



EPA REFUSES TO BAN HERBICIDE

The EPA has given a "provisional green light" for agribusiness to continue using the herbicide atrazine, despite new scientific information linking exposure to tiny amounts of the chemical to sexual abnormalities in frogs and prostate cancer in men says the New Orleans Times-Picayune 2/1. An NRDC senior scientist contends that atrazine is clearly "dangerous at levels the EPA says are harmless" and is "shocked that the EPA would abdicate its responsibility to protect the public and allow the manufacturer to write the rules" for its use.
GREENLines, 12,2, 2003, Issue 1800 Stan A. Orchard

<http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/armiatlas/>This website is intended to update as well as replace the US Amphibians Distribution Maps <http://home.bs.u.edu/~MLANNOO/>
<http://www.Ecology-Today.eboard.com>

FATS HEATHCOTE FIELD TRIP 8TH MARCH 2003

Drought. We see the pictures on the television, hear the radio reports, and notice that even the weeds aren't doing so well in our gardens. Somehow, the unfamiliarity of the places shown tends to lessen the impact; the hardship is happening to someone else somewhere else. We can always get water out of the tap, and apart from some minor voluntary restrictions, all seems not too bad in suburbia. Until, of course, you wander into local bushland.

Before any field trip, I like to familiarise myself with a walk in daylight around the area I'll be covering at night. I hadn't walked around Heathcote for over three years, so thought it prudent to find out if anything had changed.

Things had changed. I immediately noticed the mass dieback of the She-Oaks (*Casuarina spp.*), and lack of undergrowth. A possible cause could be the bush fires/backburning within the past 18 months. Plants are food for bugs, which in turn are food for frogs, so already the frogs would have been on the back foot. Things did not start well, but they got far worse very quickly.

I walked down to the dam near Engadine station, and was stunned to find the water level was down by over a metre, the water area reduced to around 20% of its former size. A stroll through what was heath several years back found nothing but sticks poking out of dry hard soil, with no puddles or soaks to be seen. Heading towards the creeks I was hopeful of some water, but it was not to be. Ponds that I had seen with over 2.5m of water in them were nothing but dry bottomed pits, with a crispy coating of brown leaves on a parched sandy base.

Heading back towards the Heathcote Swamp, I was morbidly curious to find out what state it was in. Although not surprised, I was disappointed to find it reduced to but a fraction of its former size, being about 2m down on water level, and essentially just a matt of dead reeds covering a few inches of putrid stagnant water.

Surprising me with their resilience, I had heard Striped Marsh Frogs (*Limnodynastes peronii*), and Common Toadlets (*Crinia signifera*). I suspected we may encounter Eastern Sedge Frogs (*Litoria fallax*) on the night, or perhaps Peron's Tree Frog (*Litoria peronii*), but I doubted very much doubted that we would encounter much else. A list of frogs I was hoping to see includes the Red-crowned Toadlet (*Pseudophryne australis*), Giant Burrowing Frog (*Heleioporus australiacus*), Freycinet's Frog (*Litoria freycineti*), Lesueur's Frog (*Litoria lesueuri*), Leaf Green Tree Frog (*Litoria phyllocroa*), and Haswell's Froglet (*Paracrinia haswelli*).

I had contemplated calling off the field trip, but was still hopeful we would see something. The evening of the field trip turned out to be probably worse than I had

hoped. In the previous week the temperature had started to drop, and it was definitely getting cooler at night. It was getting late in the season, but still too early for the autumn breeders. I was hoping that if it was dry and no frogs could be found, there would be a good chance of seeing some geckos. That night it rained during the walk, not enough to bring the frogs out, but just enough to cool everything down.

The actual walk was not a great success. At Heathcote Swamp, our first stop, only a few metamorph Eastern Sedge Frogs were found, as well as a single Striped Marsh Frog and single Common Toadlet. It was hard to see the water beneath the dried reeds, and no tadpoles were sighted. On the way from Heathcote Swamp to the Engadine Dam, an adult male Ring-tailed Possum (*Pseudocheirus peregrinus*) was spotted.

As expected, the dam was very light on for frogs, although the same three species as earlier were either seen or heard. A Snake-necked Turtle (*Chelodina longicollis*) was briefly observed in the shallows, but it beat a hasty retreat when it saw us. The number of froggers made it difficult to get the frogs to call long enough to locate them. No tadpoles were seen

We then followed the creek line away from the dam, hoping to see the Eastern Water Dragons (*Physignathus lesueuri*) I had sighted on my earlier walk. As was to be expected for this walk, none could be found. We did however find two Large Sydney Crayfish (*Euastacus spinifer*), and David Nelson spotted a Sugar Glider (*Petaurus breviceps*). No tadpoles were spotted in the small ponds.

After resolving a head count anomaly, we decided to take the slightly longer way back in the hope of at least seeing something unusual. David Nelson once again didn't let us down, spotting something on the edge of the Fire Trail. After a concurring identification from Adam Parsons, it was decided it was a Pobblebonk or Banjo Frog (*Limnodynastes dumerili*), after my initial distance guess of a Giant Burrowing Frog. After several photographs, the frog was let go back on her way. The last frog spotted was an adult Eastern Sedge Frog amongst the leaves of a Gynea Lily (*Doryanthes excelsa*).

All in all it was a disappointing trip, the highlight for me being a full head count when we all grouped together after the walk <grin>. I hope that people will go back to the area, either by themselves or as part of another FATS Field Trip. Such a future trip will put this trip into perspective, and show just how quickly the frogs can bounce back and what species diversity actually exists. So long as we get some rain, which seems to be happening as I write this.

This trip brings to a close the FATS Field Trips for the Spring/Summer of 2002/2003. I would like to thank Robert Wall on behalf of all the FATS members who participated in the program for his patience and persistence in organising what I believe to have been an overall very successful series of Field Trips. **Steve Weir**



STUDENT SEEKING VOLUNTEER WORK

I am a student at the University of California of Santa Barbara in the United States. I am an environmental studies major and my passion in life are frogs!! I am coming to Australia at the end of June for a leadership conference but when that is over I was hoping to stay and volunteer or intern somewhere in Australia trying to get some hands on experience and real life knowledge about the flora and fauna there. ...I volunteered last summer in Barbados saving Hawksbill Sea Turtles with the Earth Watch Institute. It was an unforgettable experience and I loved every moment of it. EXTRACT OF ORIGINAL LETTER Sincerely, Kirstyn Werner: kirstynwerner@hotmail.com

FATS AT SMITHS LAKE 21-23 FEB. 2003

“You’ll be at Smiths Lake this weekend? Not much fun, the weather forecast is for rain...oops!”, said a non-FATS friend.

Yes, rain, rain, drought-ending, glorious rain. Nothing quite like it for soaking the plain, filling the drain, easing the pain, or whatever misquoting of the famous ditty. The windscreen wipers were busy all the way from the city to the lake. Tapped, the tanks at the Field Station gave a full-bellied bong, base to the hundreds of *Crinia tinnula* and *Paracrinia haswelli* calling from the saturated swamp and roadsides.

More joyful singing, couldn’t help it really: “Jolly frogging weather... We’ll frog together And it’s frog, frog together...” But not quite. A message on Karen’s mobile to say some of the group have gone inland for *Notaden* and company --- and why not!

In the evening, on the Seal Rocks road, headlights pick up stripeys, [*Limnodynastes peronii*] many crossing, many squashed. What would another kind of frog fancier make of it? Crumb and pan fry? It would take a few minutes to collect a kilo, but we’re not inclined, and they’re probably a little small. There are *Litoria tylei* on the road, also live and squashed and ubiquitous *Crinia signifera*. We hear calls and stop to look in the trees for *Litoria peronii* and, a first for one or two of us, banana frogs, *Litoria gracilentia*, more melodious in the wild than in our living rooms. We stop and start constantly. Arthur and David in the front are a choreographed pas de deux... They see, doors open, they pounce --- now on a 1.5 metre male python. Markings show an intergrade between carpet and diamond. He’ll feast tonight. Then dazzled, a robust little red-necked pademelon. [Not catchable]

There’s a gecko, [*Saltuornis coronatus*] on the vast thickness of the Grandis, our spots and torchlights have outlined it --- admired and replaced.

We jump in and out of the cars, finding *Litoria phyllochroa*, *Mixophyes fasciolatus*, *Litoria leseuri*, *Pseudophryne coriacea*, spot another pademelon, a sugar glider. [Oh to learn the difference between brushtail and sugar-glider eye-shine.]

Saturday night is a revelation --- of *Litoria revelata*, the Whirring Tree Frog! There are thousands of them at

Wallingat State Forest’s twin dams. Is this the reason for the name *revelata*?

I have become frustrated with a damp notebook and night note taking. A tape recorder with small stereo microphone clipped to my shoulder is a delightful improvement. Here, some transcript snippets:

“Weepweepweepweepweepweepweep ” never-ending.

Arthur: “Just watch where you’re treading. There are frogs on the ground everywhere. Most of that high-pitched calling is whirring tree frogs just going continuously and underneath it you can hear a lot of others”

Everywhere – on branches, on leaves on blades of grass, by the water...

Alistair?: They’re active aren’t they? [The understatement of the evening.]

Arthur: “They’re only little frogs and they make a bloody good racket.” There are many in amplexus.

David: “OK. I’ve got to get my camera”

Punia: “Take your pick. Do you want them on a green leaf or a brown leaf?”

Child: “I’m getting a headache.”

Later:

Arthur: “The trouble is, all the *revelata* are just about drowning all the others out at the moment. If you wander around, you’ll start to see some of the others. There’s *Uperoleia* calling over the back there. You can just hear *Lim. peronii* and *Litoria tylei*. There are tusked frogs [*Adelotus brevis*] calling down in that pond there”

And this is the theme for the whole ten out of ten evening.

Down Sugar Creek Road in the flowing gutters there are countless *Litoria chloris*, *Litoria gracilentia*, *Litoria fallax* and *Pseudophryne coriacea*. Fascinated, we watch two male *coriacea* wrestling in their hole.

We try to imagine how such great numbers have survived in the dry. Many are thin, but many are amplexing. Wondrous, these small animals with permeable skins. How resilient they are. HOW LOUD.
Punia Jeffery

THE LOSS OF FOREST COVER and conversion of forested land to other uses can degrade supplies of fresh water, threatening the survival of millions of people and damaging the environment, finds a new study issued by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The study was published today in advance of next weeks’ annual meeting of the agency’s Committee on Forestry. Some 300 participants from more than 100 countries are expected to attend. <http://ens-news.com/ens/mar2003/2003-03-06-01.asp>



ANIMAL CARE AND ETHICS COMMITTEES

In response to recent discussions on frognet, Frank Lemckert, State Forests of NSW, has produced the following background information on Animal Care and Ethics Committees in Australia - but particularly for NSW.

Animal Care and Ethics Committees

Why do we have Animal Care and Ethics Committees?

ACECs, as they are known in short, are essentially community "watchdogs". It is their role to apply community standards in deciding if any plan to use animals in scientific research is reasonable, ethical and humane. Over the past 30 years, governments all over the world - including NSW - have established these committees in response to public outcry over a variety of clear cases of unnecessary animal cruelty that have been brought to light.

The committees are designed to represent a cross-section of society, and their deliberations have been made a legal requirement for all research involving animals - both in the lab and in nature. Any given research proposal will only receive its licence to proceed if it has first been approved by an ACEC. This aims to minimise animal suffering, but it also weighs animal distress against broader considerations. So, research that causes some discomfort to animals may still proceed if the results will provide sufficient benefits to the species in question and/or to other species of animals (often including ourselves).

Who is on an ACEC?

Any ACEC must consist of at least four people, each representing one of four categories. There must be a scientist, a veterinarian, someone with demonstrated animal welfare interests and someone with no obvious connection to any animal research or animal welfare. In theory, each category has a complementary role in the ACEC process. The scientist should provide input into the scientific aspects of a proposal, and explain whether the plan is technically feasible. The veterinarian should advise on the probability of pain and suffering an animal would go through and means to alleviate it.

The animal welfare person is there to remind the Committee about the rights of the animals and to consider whether or not the research is even necessary. The lay-person(s), who has no professional links to animal work, could be considered the key Committee member. It is they who really represent society's perspective on the merits of the plan. In my experience, all members tend to discuss and argue from all points of view, and a scientist is likely to be as concerned about the welfare of the animals in question as is the designated animal welfare person.

An ACEC can be as few as four people, but usually has multiple members in each category and can consist of over 20 people in a large institution such as a University. This range of personalities aims to approximate a cross-section of views of our community and, no doubt the mix

of skills, interests and concerns will vary from one ACEC to another. The scientist members are usually staff from the institution or agency proposing the research, and veterinarians generally come from the local area.

Representatives with a demonstrated long-term interest in animal welfare are harder to find because not many people have this qualification. Lay-people are generally found through recommendations, particularly when vacancies

occur - so they tend to be known and respected members of the community.

Who has ACECs?

Any Institution or Organisation that undertakes regular wildlife research is required to have its own ACEC to assess its research proposals. The NSW Department of Agriculture oversees all ACECs in NSW. Additionally, they run an independent Committee to review research by private individuals (e.g. consultants) or organisations that only infrequently conduct animal research.

Who needs to apply to ACECs?

This question is tricky. The relevant animal welfare legislation indicates that anyone undertaking "research" that will disturb an animal may need to get approval from an ACEC. It is tricky because the term 'research' is so loosely defined here that it may not always be recognisable. For example, it refers to any activity that someone undertakes to specifically look at an animal - so catching for education is included, as is ecotourism. In fact, the definition is so broad that it might conceivably cover just about anything you do in the vicinity of an animal. "Influencing an animal" is similarly vague enough that it could include allowing the animal to see you. Fortunately, common sense is factored into this process.

For the average FATS member, this means that going out and looking at frogs for the sake of seeing frogs does not require a specific approval from an ACEC - so you need not worry about being thrown in jail by the police. For anyone who thinks about doing a bit of amateur research (e.g. marking frogs to recognise individuals, or testing what happens if you put fish and tadpoles together) this might require a research authority from an ACEC. So if you are planning something along these lines, check with the Department of Agriculture first to see what you might require in the way of approvals.

In NSW, animal research licenses and additional information on any aspect of animal welfare can be obtained from the Animal Welfare Unit at the NSW Department of Agriculture - phone 02 6391 3100. There are also a few useful WebPages that can be visited for information on animal welfare and its associated issues:
<http://www.agric.nsw.gov.au/Aw/index.html> or
www.health.gov.au/nhmrc/research/awc/code.htm.
People in other states will need to check as to the



relevant body administering animal welfare and contact them.

Finally, I should remind readers that this is my perspective based on the NSW legislation. Other people in NSW may have their own and somewhat different points of view on ACECs and how they do or should function. Be warned also that the legislation and review process regarding animal research and welfare varies between states. However, I do believe that the general principles are the same in each state and the approaches similar. Hence, anyone outside of NSW who reads this article can expect that their state will have the same sorts of processes and regulations in place as those presented in this article. It is just a matter of contacting the relevant agency, and always remembering to be kind to animals no matter what you are doing. **Frank Lemckert Chair of the State Forests of NSW ACEC and FATS member**

Perons Tree Frog photographed by David Nelson



FROG DIP DETECTS KILLER FUNGUS: INFECTION-DETECTING BATH COULD AID CONSERVATION.

Alex Hyatt of Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) in Australia has developed a frog dip that helps detect the often-lethal, skin-borne chytrid fungus (*Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*), which causes widespread frog decline in the Americas, Europe, and Australia by disrupting breathing and water absorption, and maybe secreting a toxin. Aside from frogs, the fungus infects toads and salamanders in the Americas, New Zealand and Europe. It first reached Australia in 1993, is now known to occur in 30 frog species and may have contributed to the extinction of six Australian species. The 15-minute dip is a harmless mix of water and salts that washes the frog's skin. The dip is then tested for the fungus using antibodies or genetic testing. This procedure should eliminate the old sampling method of toe clipping and can be used to non-invasively screen amphibian shipments for pet and lab trade.

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KENDALL POWELL, Nature Magazine Edited by Y.Dettlaff. For more of the article go to <http://www.nature.com/nsu/030203/030203-11.html>

HOLLYWOOD COMES TO FATS (AN INTERVIEW WITH DAN EDWARDS 'DOCUMENTARY FILM MAKER')

Well, it's not exactly a Hollywood production, but independent documentary makers Dan Edwards and Vanessa Rodd are embarking on a documentary about people who keep frogs, and where better to start than FATS. Dan and Vanessa have started interviewing and filming frog keepers for the documentary and are excited by what they have uncovered so far, and what's yet to come.

FATS member Alistair MacDougall asked Dan about what he's discovering about the weird and wonderful world of 'frog people' and what we can expect to see...

Alistair: So Dan you're making a Doco on people who keep frogs. Why?

Dan: "Well, I've been looking around for a subject to make a doco on for a while. I knew a couple of guys keeping frogs including yourself and thought 'ah' ...that might be a good subject. Then I found out about FATS and then the whole background to frog keeping. I thought this could be good, because it's a human interest story that not many people know about. It's something unusual that a group of people are interested in, and I hope other people are going to want to know why.

Alistair: Tell us a bit about yourself and Vanessa, your partner. What's your background in making films?

Dan: I come from a academic and journalistic background of writing about film.. I've been working as a free-lance film journalist for three years for a variety of street press, magazines and on-line publications . I'm currently doing a PhD in film studies at UNSW, where I also teach film studies. Parallel with that I've also made a couple of short films, writing and directing them with Vanessa acting as producer.

Alistair: Will those be the roles you take in the making of this film?

Dan: Pretty much, although in this film the roles will be a little more fluid. When we go out on the frog field trips Vanessa will probably record sound and the roles will be generally more flexible. The last shoot we did was a bigger production shot with film, at night, on location with a larger crew with more clearly defined roles. With a documentary shoot you have a smaller crew and roles are not as clear.

Alistair: You said it's a human interest story, what is it about people that you like to capture on film?

Dan: I guess what I find interesting about people are their passions. I like to see people getting passionate about things especially if it's something I'm interested in as well. So what I'm looking for through the film is to develop an empathy for the characters that are portrayed. I want to gain an

understanding of why these people have the passion they do about frogs and what it is that they love about frogs.

Alistair: Well that sort of negates my next question; can 'frogos' expect to see themselves portrayed as a clandestine cult on A Current Affair?

Dan: Ha, ha, Yeah I think it's more about empathy.

Alistair: OK then, do you think that by making this doco that you might uncover some special types of eccentric?

Dan: I guess, I hope to find some unusual characters to the extent that they have an unusual passion. Um... but I don't know if I like the term eccentric really, it's a sort of loaded term. But I suppose on the other side of it everyone that I'm friends with or sort of interested in, and I include myself in this, are all probably a little bit eccentric in their own different ways.

Alistair: So it's more about your subjects having a bit of passion?

Dan: Absolutely, it's more about passion than trying to bring out something weird or culty. However, if we do happen to get a bit of strange behaviour that's fine too (Laughs)

Alistair: Oh, I think you'll get it. You've been to a few FATS meetings now, what do you make of it? Did anything about the proceedings surprise you?

Dan: It did surprise me a little bit how 'every day' people seemed. I suppose I did have an initial preconception about these people who meet at the Museum at night, even though I said that's not what I'm looking for. So I guess the thing that struck me was their passion, excitement and commitment. Including the environmental aspects that go with the whole thing. This is of special interest to me as my interest in this documentary is also running parallel with a growing interest I have with environmental issues.

Alistair: If someone has an interesting frog set up should they approach you on frog night? Are you looking to interview all sorts of people?

Dan: I'm happy for people to approach me on frog night and I am looking to interview all sorts of people. However people should be aware that I won't be able to include everyone in the film, for issues of time if nothing else, and people who'd like to be interviewed will need to sign a release form to be in the film. But yes, I'd certainly love to meet as many people as possible.

Alistair: And people shouldn't get disappointed if they get left on the editing room floor?

Dan: Exactly. Yeah.

Alistair: I know that from shooting footage of frogs in my 'vivarium' you've gotten to know one or two characters in there. Do you think you are developing empathy for the little guys?

Dan: Certainly more than when I started. To be honest I'd never really thought about frogs, other than hearing them when it rains. I didn't think about the fact that frogs might have individual personalities. But having met them they certainly do have different personalities between the species and even individuals within the species seem to as well.

Arthur's *Litoria gracilentia* photographed by Dan.Edwards

Alistair: I noticed that Vanessa seemed smitten by one or two frogs last Frog night. I can't hear the 'pittapatter' of little webbed feet?

Dan: Ha, ha, ah, we'll reserve judgement on that one, but we are certainly not ruling it out.

Alistair: If your documentary was to be made into a feature film who would you cast in the role of Lothar Voigt?

Dan: Prolonged laughter ...ah...that's a tough one, maybe Christopher Walkin in a strange kind of way. Although we'd have to take the killer edge off a bit. The glint in his eye would be about right though.

Alistair: When can FATS members expect to see some footage and the final product?

Dan: Depending on how the shooting goes I would like to present some of the footage of the frogs we've shot this coming frog night. As far as the finished product, I'm hoping to have the film finished by mid next year.

Alistair: Well, all the best Dan I'm sure everyone is looking forward seeing it.

Dan will speak at he next frog night about the film he's shooting.. **Alistar MacDougall**

Dan Edwards is shooting a documentary on frog keepers and will be interviewing and filming people at FATS over the next few months.



From: Alistar MacDougall

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The 2003 ASH conference at Mary River Park was originally scheduled for December 4 - 8. However, that overlapped with the ESA conference by one day, so we have decided to start the ASH conference one day earlier and finish on the 7th, so it will be possible for people to attend both.

AMPHIBIAN WINNER!

An amphibian-related entry in the annual Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest has won first prize! To enter this contest you must compose the opening sentence to the worst of all possible novels. Below is some background on the contest - but this year's winner is:

"The sun oozed over the horizon, shoved aside darkness, crept along the greensward, and, with sickly fingers, pushed through the castle window, revealing the pillaged princess, hand at throat, crown asunder, gaping in frenzied horror at the stated, sodden amphibian lying beside her, disbelieving the magnitude of the frog's deception, screaming madly, 'You lied!'"

"It was a dark and stormy night; the rain fell in torrents--except at occasional intervals, when it was checked by a violent gust of wind which swept up the streets (for it is in London that our scene lies), rattling along the housetops, and fiercely agitating the scanty flame of the lamps that struggled against the darkness."--Edward George Bulwer-Lytton, Paul Clifford (1830)

HISTORY OF THE BLFC Since 1982 the English Department at San Jose State University has sponsored the Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest, a whimsical literary competition that challenges entrants to compose the opening sentence to the worst of all possible novels. Send your entries to: Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest Department of English San Jose State University San Jose, CA 95192-0090 To inflict your BLFC entry electronically, digitally stimulate Bulwer's nasal member. Please include your name, phone number, and addresses--gastropodous and email, and include your entries in the body of your email. In this viral age, we never open attachments, especially since at least one evildoer is specifically targeting the contest. Stan A. Orchard National Co-ordinator - WWF/Rio Tinto Frogs! Program WWF Australia: 9281 5515 sorchard@bigpond.com

FROGUTS

Save a frog by visiting this online frog dissection. Designed by graduate student and science teacher Richard Hill, Froguts attempts to teach the lessons typically learned through classroom dissections "while preventing what may be an over-use of frogs in our environment." The dissection can be viewed from start to finish, or you can skip straight to the parts that are most interesting. Additional resources for teachers are available for download (.pdf). With vivid photos and detailed text this site has a lot to offer. <http://www.froguts.com/> <http://www.froguts.com>

Cold blood is hot as pet frog craze bites

James Woodford

SMH 22 March 2003

NSW is in the grip of a pet frog drought. It is far easier to arm a child with a licence to keep a reptile or an amphibian than it is to end up with an actual animal.

For just \$60, by submitting a form from the internet, anyone older than 10 is entitled to begin the quest for a legal, cold-blooded pet. But good luck. Even breeders like the Northern Territory's Dave Wilson says he has a waiting list of at least a dozen people from NSW.

Mr Wilson is the Territory's only commercial frog breeder and it will take him at least a year before those on the waiting list will get a call. He specialises in green tree frogs, which are raised from tadpoles collected from special ponds on his property.

"They are so calm and peaceful, so amenable to handling," Mr Wilson said. "They're easy going - like most Territorians, I suppose."

The shortage is probably not a bad thing considering that in the early 1990s - the last time the state's pet stores made frogs readily available - nearly 20,000 Queensland tree frogs died from lack of care.

The number of NSW residents with amphibian licences has nearly tripled since a 1997 amnesty - before the introduction of a licensing system - revealed that 210 people had frogs as pets. Today there are 591.

Amphibians, like reptiles, are not for sale in NSW pet shops and cannot be sold commercially. This means that the only place a child over 10 can legally obtain them is from a herpetological society or from a licensed breeder with excess stock.

In demand... breeder David Wilson displays a young green tree frog. Photo: David Hancock



The explosion in reptile licences is even more dramatic than those for amphibians, said the co-ordinator of wildlife licensing for the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Jeff Hardy.

"Reptiles have been absolutely incredible," he said. "At the time of the 1997 amnesty 1600 people came forward. We are now on the brink of 10,000 licences."

More than 1700 people have licences to keep carpet pythons and children's pythons and have over 4000 snakes in their care. More than 500 licences have been issued for blue tongue lizards and another 600 for long-necked and Murray turtles.

Exacerbating the shortage caused by the ban on pet shop sales is the fact that it is almost impossible to get either a snake or frog outside the summer months, when the animals breed.

"There are a lot of people - particularly young boys - who see their mates with a reptile licence and talk their mum and dad into getting one," Mr Hardy said. "Then, depending on the time of year, it may take a very long time to get an animal."

Still, he said, a cooling off period is not necessarily a bad thing as a frog or a reptile is a challenging and time-consuming pet.

FIELD TRIPS NO FIELD TRIPS SCHEDULED - AUTUMN / WINTER RECESS.

The Spring/Summer Programme recommences in September.

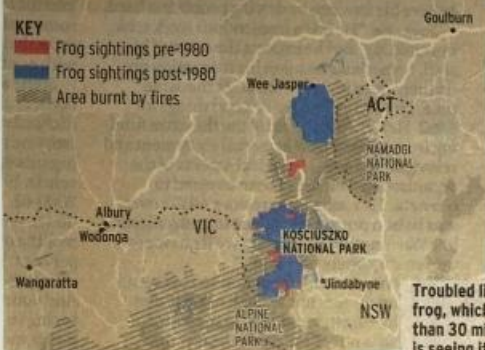
We have come to the end of this season's Spring/Summer field-trips programme. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those field trip leaders who were scheduled this year. We would also like to thank those who 'stood-in' at the last moment, those that carried out vital 'reconnaissance' work for us, as well as those who have generously volunteered their time and skills for future dates. -The success of our field trips programme lay with you. The glowing feedback from our members bears testimony to the vast amount of talent we have both in our club and in our field-trips personnel line-up. Without your time, generosity and helpful advice and recommendations, our job would have been made much more difficult. It has been very much a 'club' effort.

Also a big thank-you to our editor, Monica, who at times endured unreasonable requests for lead times and newsletter space, and who always managed to produce a far more professional presentation than the hastily scribbled notes and scrambled diskettes would have suggested.

And finally, to our members, whose conduct and enthusiasm throughout the year made the field-trips a pleasure to attend, and with whose support will ensure that the field -trips programme will become a permanent part of the FATS calendar.

Keep watching for our new, expanded programme of field trips next season! The FATS committee

DISAPPEARING FAST Caught on the hop SMH 8 Feb 2003



Arthur White's *Litoria gracilentia* photographed by Dan Edwards



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We hold six informative, informal, topical and practical meetings each year at the Australian Museum, Sydney (William Street entrance).

Meetings are held on the first Friday of every **even month** (February, April, June, August, October and December) at 6.30 pm for a 7.30pm start. **NO MEETINGS ARE HELD ON GOOD FRIDAY** so check each newsletter for alternate dates. Visitors are welcome. We are actively involved in monitoring frog populations and in other frog studies, and we produce the newsletter *FROGCALL* and *FROGFACTS* information sheets.

All expressions of opinion and information are published on the basis that they are not to be regarded as an official opinion of the Frog and Tadpole Study Group Committee unless expressly so stated.

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