



Canberra Nature Map newsletter

Volume 2 Issue 4: December 2024



My favourite photo this quarter is Matthew Frawley's photo of a blue tongue taken at Bombay, NSW.

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Meet the Mappers

Editor comment: Matthew Frawley has been conducting interviews with a variety of mappers over the past couple of years.

His interviewees to date have been:

1. Trevor Preston
2. Michael Beddingfield
3. Ciaran (aka Tapirlord) Ernst-Russell
4. Alison Milton
5. Stuart Harris
6. Kylie Waldon
7. Tim Leach
8. Suzi Bond
9. Michael Mulvaney
10. RodDeb
11. Tina (username CSteele4)
12. Glossygal
13. Katarina Christenson (username kasiaaus)
14. LisaH

I have been trawling the Facebook page to download and include these interviews in the newsletter and recently realised that I had overlooked three interviews, two from last year (including my own) and another more recent one.

Therefore I am redressing this oversight by including these interviews in the current newsletter, in the order in which Matthew recorded them. Due to the delayed reported some details are now out-of-date.

Alison Milton

As interviewed by Matthew Frawley on 24 June 2023

Now for some girlpower! Please meet our epic contributor, with over 10,000 sightings – Alison Milton!

Included in those 10,000+ sightings are 6,168 invertebrates and 22 significant sightings, such as:

- The first record of the Pink Grass-yellow butterfly in the ACT. As expert Suzi Bond pointed out it was quite a large range extension, with this species normally occurring in Queensland and across northern Australia, occasionally venturing into north-east NSW
- A new location for the rare Green-comb Spider Orchid in 2014
- A new location for the distinctive Musclemantree Ant
- A new recorded location of the threatened Key's Matchstick Grasshopper

Tell us a little about yourself and how you came to use NatureMapr?

I'm not sure when I first heard about Canberra Nature Map but I think it was through a talk given to the ACT Field Naturalists. At first I didn't understand the concept but somehow by 2016

I finally understood what the project was about and signed up as a member.

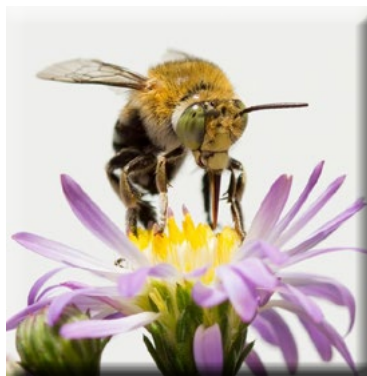
It was a slow start but I began submitting my photos and then trawled back through old photos that had GPS data to also add these. It quickly became an obsession and I began adding more and more sightings.

Do you have a favourite or most memorable taxa?

While having a passion for fungi and willing to upload photos of birds and anything else, I eventually found that I had a passion for leaf beetles. I have no scientific background at all but found that through Canberra Nature Map I learned so much I can now identify almost every bird in the ACT and can put almost every insect into a category. I was surprised and flattered when approached to become a moderator for beetles, and later ants and leaf hoppers, having learned all I know about these from Canberra Nature Map.

Do you have a favourite photo or sighting?

Perhaps my favourite photo is of a Blue-banded Bee taken in my back yard. This was almost a fluke shot as the background was my light-coloured garage wall so I did not have to remove any background and the photo showed the bee almost full front on.



My most exciting experience was visiting the nesting kestrels at Campbell Park just after we were released from lockdown. The parents had raised five chicks. The parents were having to forage further and further as they grew. Only myself and one other person were present when the parents finally returned with a mouse. One chick grabbed it then flew to a nearby tree and then onto the ground just three feet in front of us. We were awestruck to watch three of the other chicks join it just feet in front of us to fight over their feast. By this time they were so used to photographers

that they were not in the least worried about our presence. A once in a lifetime experience.

What is your favourite place to explore?

Not having a driver's licence, my locations can be limited but while I do manage to get around, my local, and perhaps favourite location is The Pinnacle Nature Reserve in Hawker.

When you are out in the field collecting sightings, what photography equipment do you use?

I use the Canon 7d Mark II with a 100 mm lens for my macro photos of insects and a Canon 1Dx with a 100–400 mm lens for birds.

What do you see as the greatest value in NatureMapr?

What I love best about NatureMapr is that you can access sample photos of all the species to try to find an ID yourself and the fact that it has greatly increased my own knowledge to be able to ID various species with a new passion to look for and ID various creatures of all categories.

It has reinvigorated my love of nature and inspired me to go out looking for sightings. As such I've experienced things I would otherwise have missed, such as watching a female Grebe hide her eggs so that she could go for a feed – but not before the male came back to watch the nest.



I love photographing insects and am constantly amazed at beauty and details not seen by the naked eye. For example, seen from the right angle, the face of a Drone Hoverfly is very interesting and almost comical.

It's also exciting to be the first person to find and photograph a species new to Canberra Nature Map, which I've been lucky enough to do a few times, the last: a Bee-mimic Hover Fly photographed in November last year.



All of Alison's sightings can be viewed [online](#).

These are Alison's [significant sightings](#).

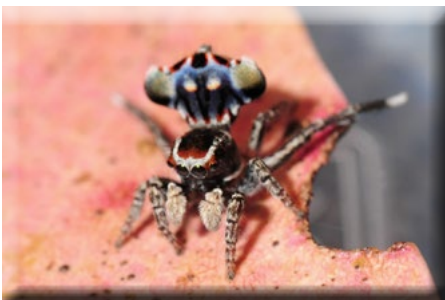
Stuart Harris

As interviewed by Matthew Frawley on 8 July 2023

Stuart Harris is arguably the most famous citizen scientist in Australia, following his discovery of a new species of peacock spider over a decade ago, the story of which was featured on a television documentary shown on the national broadcaster. His incredible dedication to searching the Australian bush for small, colourful creatures, has meant he has made many more significant discoveries. It was therefore a treat to be able to interview Stuart to learn more about him.

Tell us a little about yourself, Stuart, and how you got involved with NatureMapr

I am a 58 year old Canberra man who remembers wandering Ginninderra Creek, before there was a lake, and the suburb of Florey, 50 years ago, and being awestruck by the vivid red and cobalt blue dragonflies back then. My nature spark was dulled somewhat in the following years until I returned to my hometown Canberra from military service in Malaysia in 1991 and was blown away by the beauty of the local birds (especially the parrots, which I had never really noticed before). I bought McComas Taylor's 'Birds of the ACT' and proceeded to twitch gleefully and then I joined the Canberra Ornithologists Group (COG) in 1995 and the pursuit of avian sightings became more serious. This became an obsession in 2005 when I finally got my first digital camera and long lens! Whilst unsuccessfully looking for Spotted Quail-thrush at Booroomba Rocks back in 2008 I swapped my long lens for a macro one and jagged a photo of a new species of peacock spider. If you watch the 30-minute documentary 'Maratus' on ABC iview you will get the whole story of that encounter.



As to when and how I came across NatureMapr (in 2015) I must admit that I draw a blank! At that time the film 'Maratus' was released and I was doing a fair bit of media and public talks all around Australia; it was an amazing time! My first Canberra Nature Map sighting was of a Tiger Snake. I am a big fan of Canberra Nature Map as I like its simplicity and how it uses local experts and citizen scientists.

You've got sightings from all across Australia, do you have a favourite place to explore?

It pretty much comes down to time and money these days, so most of my favourite spots are pretty close to home. As a bird nerd, I twitched roughly 580 species out of the 700-odd in Australia, so if I win Lotto or similar I'll be off like a shot to find them. Of course, these days one's journey is not just about birds, or spiders, or jewel beetles; it takes in the whole gamut of natural beauty abounding.

How did you discover your love of jewel beetles and what's your secret to finding them?

My good friend David Knowles, a brilliant naturalist, planted 'jewel beetle seeds' in me back in 2017 when we were on a peacock spider hunting trip in the Grampians. These 'seeds' grew quickly and I saw my first jewel beetle (Genus *Ethonion*) on that trip, but put no real importance into it. The next year, on my honeymoon to south Queensland, I encountered a few species and it really has taken off from there.

David introduced me to one of Australia's leading jewel beetle experts, Allen Sundholm. I started volunteering at the Australian National Insect collection (ANIC), where I met a wonderful mentor in Kimberi Pullen, and the rest is a short history of manically scouring native shrubs and trees for these beautiful creatures.

My secret to finding them is time and strategy. One doesn't look for these beetles, one looks for the plants that are hosts and food for these creatures. Ironically, when one finds an abundance of flowering shrubs it is harder to find them because they are spread out, so often you strike 'gold' when the flowering is sparse and the beetle biodiversity is concentrated. Not always the case, but a rule of thumb that I use.

I added my first jewel beetle sighting to Canberra Nature Map on 2 October 2018, a *Melobasis propinqua*, and at that time there had only been 25 different sightings of jewel beetles, comprising only 13 different species. The tally now sits at 112 species (some of these are only to genus level) but one could safely say there are well over 100 species of jewel beetle on Canberra Nature Map. I haven't gone through and researched who made the first sighting of each species, but I reckon my tally would be at least 80 new species for Canberra Nature Map. Helping to increase the tally by that much is what I am most proud of thus far. I'm sure there are many more to come, possibly this year if El Niño kicks in proper.

Do you have a favourite or most memorable sighting?

Now that's a hard one! So many qualify for this but I just flicked through my jewel beetle diary to 5 November 2018 and found an entry where I saw one of my first *Castiarina* sp. and this one I used the word 'gorgeous' to describe it. Although small and somewhat common, the *Castiarina crenata* took my breath away with its glorious blue and red banding (fascia).



When you are out in the field collecting sightings, what photography equipment do you use?

For invertebrates I use an old Nikon D60, (which I bought second hand for \$200) with a Tamron SP90 lens and a tiny SB400 strobe flash attached by a coil lead. I like to shoot lightly, so I'm not a fan of ring flashes, nor could I afford one! For birds and other creatures I use my old Nikon D300 with a Tamron 200–500 mm telephoto.

What do you see as the greatest value in NatureMapr and citizen science more broadly?

Other than their obvious benefit to both science and conservation, I see the greatest value in these two wonderful things as benefiting the mental, emotional and physical health of individuals and collectives. Both give one a renewed purpose in nature (and

on the computer!). I look forward to seeing how both concepts evolve and are managed. I have a personal mandate to observe where I think exploitation might occur in the application and management of citizen science in particular. Everything has its negative and positive aspects, including me, hehe!

Our thanks to Stuart for sharing his remarkable story with us, and we look forward to seeing what he finds this coming spring and summer!

You can see all of Stuart's sightings on NatureMapr on his [profile page](#).

Katarina Christenson (username kasiaaus)

As interviewed by Matthew Frawley on 22 June 2024

Katarina has already amassed a collection of over 6,000 sightings. Incredibly, this includes over 4,300 moth sightings, highlighting her enormous dedication. She is also a moderator for moths in Canberra & Southern Tablelands.

Her other interest is bird photography and in her spare time she contributes her IT expertise to assist with NatureMapr software testing. It was a pleasure to catch up with her recently to find out more about her work.

How did you first discover NatureMapr?

I got introduced to NatureMapr when I joined a group of photographers taking moth photos for the now-published book *Moths in the ACT*. We met at night outings to various places around the ACT and photographed moths attracted to strong lights. We uploaded most of the photos to NatureMapr. The resulting book contains many of the photos taken by this group but also photos taken by other NatureMapr contributors, with permission of course.

I have continued to use NatureMapr since, both to upload a variety of independent sightings and to participate in projects. I enjoyed taking part in the Pollinator Survey last summer and I look forward to being involved in future surveys and projects.

You helped in the creation of the *Moths in the A.C.T.* book. Tell us a bit more about your involvement in that fantastic publication.

I was very enthusiastic about taking photos for the moth book. I even got my own lights to attract moths and started taking photos in my back yard to

supplement the ones taken by the moth photographer group. I took moth photos in my garden, or my carport if it was raining, every night for over a year! That is why I have so many moth sightings on NatureMapr.

In addition to taking moth photos, I also volunteered to do the layout for the book, probably not quite expecting that my offer would be accepted. I ended up doing all of the layout with the exception of the cover and I loved every minute of it. It was a huge challenge. I had never done anything like that before and the layout was quite complex. Every page was different due to the varying placement of photos, and there were many other challenges such as generating the index and including photo attribution. I worked very closely with the authors, particularly with Glenn Cocking, and with many other volunteers who assisted throughout the process.

Do you have a favourite photo or sightings?

Before I used NatureMapr, I used to put my photos on [flickr](#) and I then focused much more on photo quality and less on documenting what I saw.

It's hard to say which photo is my favourite but here are a couple of photos that I am particularly proud of (White-necked heron, *Ardea pacifica* and Emperor Gum Moth, *Opodiphthera eucalypti*).



Do you have a favourite place to explore?

While I have taken photos in many places around the ACT and around the world, I think I found the most amazing

variety of moths and other insects in my own back yard. I still often find new species to my garden and sometimes even species that are new to the ACT.

When you are out in the field, what photography equipment do you use?

I mostly use a Canon 7D MKII with a 100 mm Canon macro lens and a ring flash. It is a very good SLR camera for macro photography, even if now a bit old. I can't think of any newer camera that I would rather use.

You have recently joined the NatureMapr team as the test leader. Tell us a bit more about that role

I am a retired IT professional, with some experience of software development and testing. I am pleased to be able to use my skills to contribute towards making the NatureMapr software as stable and as functional as possible. My role as the Test Lead is very new and is still being defined but I believe I was invited to take it on due to my past contribution to testing of various aspects of the NatureMapr software. My recent involvement has been mostly with testing the new NatureMapr phone App.

What do you see as the greatest value in NatureMapr?

The community aspect of the App is what I find the most appealing. NatureMapr gets people involved with projects that promote conservation and that give participants a sense of belonging and a sense of pride in our local environment and diversity of species.

A huge thanks to Katarina for sharing her NatureMapr story. You can find all her [NatureMapr sightings online](#).

The [Moths in the A.C.T.](#) book is available for purchase.

Matthew Frawley



Significant sightings

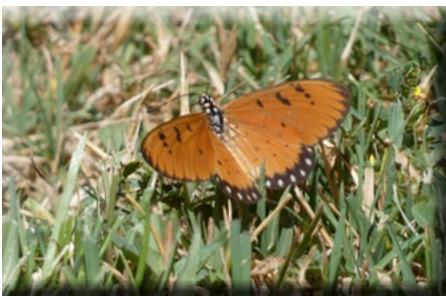
There have been a number of significant sightings recently.

Firstly KorinneM had this to say.

Saw this gorgeous thing on a walk yesterday in Deakin and grabbed some photos with my phone. Turns out that it's a special one: *Castiarina xystra*. This is the only specimen known since the collection of the unique type specimen at Black Mountain in March 1931, i.e. this is only the 2nd time that this species has been recorded at all.



Then there is the Tawny Coster or *Acraea terpsicore* found by Amata in McKellar, ACT.



As noted by our expert butterfly moderator Suzi Bond: "This is a highly significant record; the closest record is located near Taree, NSW. This species appears to be expanding its range in Australia since arriving in northern Australia in 2012."

The second significant sighting for a butterfly was the Moonlight Jewel or *Hypochrysois delicia* found by SteveBorkowskis.



This is a new Canberra & Southern Tablelands location for this locally uncommon butterfly species!

In September SteveBorkowskis found a *Perunga ochracea* at Hill Reserve in Gungahlin.



This is a new location for this threatened species.

Stuart Harris is well-known for his discovery of peacock spiders but has more recently been concentrating on jewel beetles. Once again he has made a significant sighting with finding a *Castiarina praetermissa* (lycid mimic jewel beetle) with this being the first record of this species in the ACT according to CNM and ALA.



However, while this is exciting, read Trevor's Bungonia trip report for even more exciting significant sightings news.

Alison Milton

Koala spotted near suburbs of Canberra

There was a great deal of excitement when a Koala was spotted and recorded on Canberra Nature Map by ACT government officer 'wadef' on

17 October. It was seen in woodland on the edge of the new suburb of Jacka in the north of Gungahlin. The location will eventually become part of Jacka when the suburb is fully developed.

This sighting was very significant because Koalas are rarely seen in the wild in the ACT and they are classified as an endangered species. The event was picked up and reported in the online news website [Riotact](#).

It was also reported in the [Canberra Times](#).

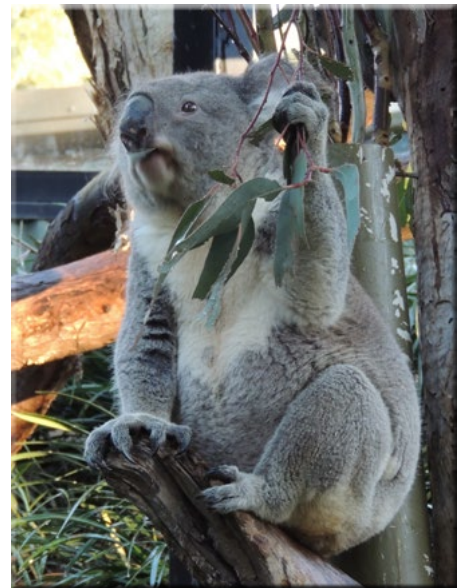


Photo: Michael Bedingfield

ACT senator David Pocock took time out from his busy schedule to look for this rare animal and was able to find it. His remarks are recorded on [Instagram](#).

The sighting on CNM by 'wadef' can be seen on [Canberra Nature Map](#).

Koalas (*Phascolarctos cinereus*) are endangered for a number of reasons, especially loss of habitat. Any sightings we get of these animals are very valuable.

Michael Bedingfield

Bungonia field trip

Supporting the Bungonia Park Land Managers Board, and a Jewel Beetle Bonanza!

On Sunday 17 November I held a field trip to several sites in Bungonia. Ten nature Mappers joined us on the day, which was a great result! Why Bungonia? First of all I've made a move to Goulburn, so Bungonia is now close to home for me and I have spent the last six months exploring many new sites, and secondly, Anne Wiggan of the Bungonia Park Land Managers Board asked me if Nature mappers could come out to the Bungonia Crown Reserve and map some biodiversity there to help protect it.

Anne and other Bungonia locals have spent years fighting to preserve this beautiful patch of grassy woodland and protect it from a quarrying company who are keen to put a road through the reserve. Nature mapping is a great way to protect a place as it provides very public proof of biodiversity.

We started this field trip by having breakfast at the Bungonia Community Hall. Breakfasts are held every first and third Sunday of the month to raise money to restore the hall, providing great food at very cheap prices. Where else can you get a Big Breaky for \$12 or a bacon and egg roll for \$7! This was great way to start the day as everyone got to meet and get to know each other a bit, or in some cases catch up with old friends, before heading out into the crown reserve.



Anne was very grateful to have so many mappers out on this project and gave us a short talk to let us know the significance of mapping this reserve (history, threats and current issues).



The cicadas were out in their thousands and provided a loud background noise as we crossed the creek to explore this reserve. We found two species of cicada with the most prominent being the large *Psaltoda moerens* (Redeye cicada).



We spent about an hour in the reserve before heading to nearby Bungonia National Park and Conservation area.

Only 32 minutes from Goulburn, and an hour and a half from Canberra, this is a beautiful place and Bungonia Gorge is one of the most spectacular sites in the whole region and well worth the trip for Canberrans. No massive hikes needed as you can drive to several lookouts with only a two minute walk or so to amazing views of the gorge.



Bungonia Gorge
Photo: Alison Milton

The flowering *Ozothamnus diosmifolius* (Rice Flower, White Dogwood, Sago Bush) was a haven for many beetles including a myriad of *Mordella* species,

three clerid beetles and many nectar scarab *Microvalgus* sp. The stars of this site, and perhaps of the entire trip was the multitude of jewel beetle species. At least 10 species were recorded including one, as yet, unconfirmed new species for CNM.



Possibly *Castiarina vegeta*
Photo: Miranda

However, the real highlight was the discovery of what might be a new undescribed species of jewel beetle photographed by two Mappers, that had the experts all aflutter.



Probable undescribed *Castiarina* sp.
Photo: KorinneM

A return trip found only three jewel beetles and failed to find the new beetle. A project for next year?

Perhaps like Stuart's new Peacock spider, it might take four years or so to find it again to have it officially confirmed as a new species.

The return trip however, did net a few extra species including only the second sighting of a rare leafhopper.



Dardus abbreviatus
Photo: Alison Milton



After lunch we met back at Bungonia and headed to Pomaderris Nature Reserve. This 100 ha reserve is only 15 minutes from Goulburn along Mountain Ash Road, and is well worth a visit although it is easily missed as the sign sits well back from the road. More fantastic Jewel beetles were sighted here, although things wrapped up early at this site due to storms rolling in. Rain was predicted all day, but in fact we had perfect walking weather up until the rain came between 2.30 and 3 pm.

Mappers on this trip added another 53 species to the NatureMapr field guide for Bungonia Reserve.

Besides the beetles, we also found numerous plants and other insects including a Blue Skimmer Dragonfly.

Thanks to all the mappers who came out for this trip despite the terrible weather forecast. It's always great to meet new mappers and catch up with old friends, and great to get new sightings on the board for the Bungonia area.

If you would like to visit this area there are many sites to visit nearby including Souths TSR (only metres from Pomaderris Reserve), Gundarry TSR (wonderful grassland site), and Goulburn itself has many reserves to explore including Mount Gray Bushland Reserve, Rocky Hill Reserve, Gorman



Road Reserve, West Goulburn Bushland Reserve, Goulburn Woodlands Reserve, and just 10 minutes out of town is Alison Hone Reserve and Narrangarril Nature Reserve. Perhaps these might be the subject of another field trip in the future.

Trevor Preston

All photos by Trevor Preston unless otherwise stated

New jewel beetle species

The new species found at Bungonia has been named 'Castiarina sp. Undescribed species 1' with the common name 'An Undescribed Jewel Beetle'. Please keep an eye out for this possibly [new species](#), especially in the Bungonia area.

If you do find this beetle, please capture it (or a few if more than one) so that it can be examined by the CSIRO Insect Collection for formal identification.

New local book

Local historical author Jenny Horsfield has released her latest book *Our Grassy Landscapes: A celebration of the people who care for them*.

Jenny Horsfield tells an extraordinary story of ecological change, pioneering settlement, science, politics and volunteer action. It covers the mountains and tablelands of the Monaro to our own beloved landscape and growing city. *Grassy Landscapes* is richly illustrated with stunning photographs many of which have been sourced from Canberra Nature Map, and black and white drawings by local conservationist Michael Bedingfield.

Dr Charles Massy, author of *Call of the Reed Warbler* was the guest speaker.

Jenny's book is available from bookshops at the National Library, the Australian National Botanic Gardens and Paperchain in Kingston at a cost of \$40.

A rescue story

It seems NatureMapr is not only important in recording the spread of local species, but has been instrumental in an important recent rescue of an endangered species.



A Rosenberg's Monitor was this month reported on Canberra Nature Map roaming the streets of Ainslie. With the help of neighbours Don Fletcher was able to track down and capture the reptile. Don reported that it proved to be a known individual, 'Rum'.

He caught him and returned him to a rabbit burrow at Campbell Park, which Gum had previously occupied.

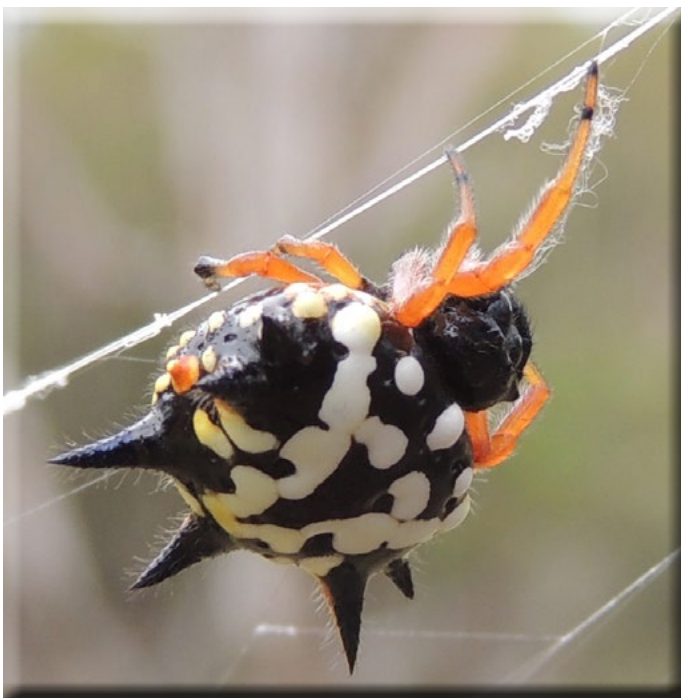
Alison Milton



Christmas spider and pointy crab spider

Michael Bedingfield

Christmas Spiders have the scientific name of *Austracantha minax* and are also known as Jewel Spiders. They are endemic to Australia, and are quite unique in being the only species in the genus *Austracantha*. They get the name of Christmas Spider because they are most abundant over December and January in some parts of Australia. I have included a photo of a female on her web. The colouring is mainly shiny black with decoration in variable patterns of white, yellow and orange. The female's abdomen has six sharp projections or spines radiating outwards and slightly upwards. This colouring and form makes them very easy to identify. They have eight eyes arranged in two rows. The females are larger with a body length of up to about 12 mm. The males are less spectacular and lack the spiny projections. They grow to only about 5 mm body length.



They are orb-weaving spiders belonging to the family Araneidae. They like to build their webs one or two metres above the ground between a pair of adjacent shrubs, where they catch flying insects. The females are the most often seen and they like to rest upside down in the centre of their web. Most orb-weavers destroy their webs and rebuild them daily, but these spiders keep theirs intact. They are social spiders and sometimes will form aggregations with lots of them living in close proximity to one another. They are distributed widely around the country and neighbouring islands although there are fewer records of them in the drier central plains of the continent. They like woodland habitats with an under-story of shrubs and locally they can be found in our grassy woodlands where they will make use of the shrubbery present.

Life is on an annual cycle with juveniles emerging in early spring. After growth to maturity mating occurs during summer. A female can mate with more than one male. But the male will stay nearby before and after mating. He will drive off other rival males to ensure he is the father of the offspring. He does this until the female's reproductive cycle is over. Later

the female lays her eggs. She creates an orange-brown egg sac from closely woven silk attached to some vegetation. The spiderlings spend winter in the safety of their egg sac to begin the cycle again when the warm weather returns.

The female Pointy Crab Spider often chooses a dry grass seed-head when creating her egg sac, and my photo shows one perched on the seed-head of a Kangaroo Grass plant, *Themeda triandra*.

She was a very good subject and did not move at all while I photographed her, being determined to protect her eggs against my intrusion. The browned off dry seed-head matched her colouring and provided good camouflage. Females have a body length of about 10 mm and the male up to 6 mm. They have an elongated, tapering abdomen that has a pair of pale coloured lines along its length and is slightly wrinkled toward the end. They don't make a web but are ambush predators, waiting patiently on pale coloured vegetation such as grasses, flowers or leaves. The front two pairs of legs are quite long for their body length and are made strong to enable the grasping and subduing of prey. They feed mainly on moths but also capture other insects and other arthropods. While waiting, the favourite posture is with the forelegs extended widely in readiness for a possible catch.



Pointy Crab Spiders have the scientific name of *Runcinia acuminata*, and belong to the family Thomisidae for crab spiders. This species is common and is distributed widely across Asia from Japan to India. The Atlas of Living Australia shows records of it along the east of Australia from Cape York down to Victoria. Crab spiders are so called because of their resemblance to crabs. The two front pairs of legs are relatively large and strong. They are also able to scuttle sideways and backwards. Some are ambush predators like this species but others are also wandering hunters. While they don't make webs, they do spin silk for drop lines and for use in reproduction purposes.

The Christmas spider and the Pointy Crab Spider are not aggressive towards humans and their venom is only mildly toxic. The Pointy Crab Spider is reported to be essentially



harmless to people. The Jewel Spiders rarely bite but if they do the result is only mildly painful. There are many interesting creatures in our local reserves and parks and to find one or more of these spiders is a nice surprise.

References:

https://www.arachne.org.au/01_cms/details.asp?ID=1869

http://www.arachne.org.au/01_cms/details.asp?ID=2185

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austracantha>

(This article is edited slightly from one published in the Friends of Grasslands newsletter for January-February 2021.)

Beetles galore

Many Mappers would have noticed the influx of thousands of scarab beetles during the first few weeks of December. This mass emergence prompted an ABC News report in which our beetles expert Kim Pullen, stated that the mass emergence was likely due to the recent run of hot weather.

“Their numbers depend largely on the weather conditions for the whole year or maybe several years beforehand,” he said.

“They’re subject to the weather conditions in the soil and when they emerge as adult beetles, they are also subject to the temperature.”

“They go and hide if it’s cold and come out if it is especially humid and warm,” Mr Pullen said.

There are over 2,000 species of scarab beetles in Australia, and much like moths, many are attracted to lights, according to Mr Pullen.

He said the best way to stop them being attracted was to turn off lights.

“That’s about the only way and just wait for the emergence event to finish. It won’t last forever.”

Mappers will have noted that most of the beetles are the *Phyllotocus macleayi* nectar scarab and *Sericesthis nigrolineata*, Dusky pasture scarab.

At home, among the beetles, I have found some interesting longhorn beetles. Perhaps the biggest and most impressive was the *Sceleocantha glabricollis*, Wattle root longicorn but there were three others. Also a largish beetle was the *Rhytiphora nodosa*. The other two were quite small and easily missed by anyone not looking for them. *Phacodes personatus* and *Atesta stigmosa* are only about 7 mm in length.

As a beetles moderator, I’ve noted that this emergence has not been restricted to the Canberra region with reports from Central West NSW.

Some people on the ABC said that the influx of beetles hitting their screens, sounded like rain and another said that they had to turn on the back door light and turn off all the internal lights and sit in the dark all night.

For myself, I would have welcomed the event. I had hundreds of the beetles in Higgins but not quite in the numbers reported elsewhere. One member of our dog meet-up group said that

while out for a stroll in the evening they were met with a ball of beetles about a metre wide hovering around a street lamp in Hawker. There were at least three beetle species. Unlike many Canberrans, I wish I’d been there.

I have noticed however, with the increased beetles presence, there have been fewer moths. Is there a correlation?

A few weeks before I had a lot of moths on my moth sheet, but in the morning I found hundreds of lost wings, presumably from the green lacewings that were also clinging to the moth sheet.

Besides attracting moths I presume that it is also attracting predators that are consuming the lacewings. I have found wasps and a brown praying mantis. Are these the predators?

Alison Milton

NatureMapr clean-up week

There are currently nearly 19,000 unidentified species on the national NatureMapr site.

Emma Collins is proposing a clean-up week in the week of 6–12 January 2025.

Her proposal is outlined below.

Our hope is to run this event for at least Birds, Beetles, Spiders and Plants, in the week of 6–12 January 2025. To enable this to happen, we need moderators who are willing to pitch in a bit of extra time during the nominated week, to reduce those unidentified sightings. This can be in whatever way works best for individuals and/or the category they are in. Some options may include, for example:

- individuals working in their own time during the week, to reduce unidentified sightings;
- small group sessions either in person, or remotely, to assist each other in identifications (this has worked well in the past for Spiders); or
- email groups or messaging chat groups that enable people to check in with each other on IDs.

We would be looking for someone to lead each category, this would involve:

- liaising directly with the moderators for that category who are interested in participating;
- breaking up categories into sub-categories (where needed - e.g. plants or beetles perhaps);
- considering options for the week - e.g. organising events, seeking input from moderators on their preferences.

Please reply to [Emma](#); [Michael Mulvaney](#); or [Michael Bedingfield](#) if you are interested in leading and/or joining.

Note: the spiders category does not need a leader, and plants may need sub-categories with individual leaders.

Alison Milton



Moderator tips

I am not an expert but I have found some things that may help Moderators. Some of these I have learned very recently.

Firstly, I found that if you click on Australia on the top navigation panel, and then select Species - Unidentified sightings, you can view all unidentified sighting by category nation-wide. This is very helpful if you are a moderator for multiple sites.



One of the big problems as I see it is that moderators don't always know to look at sightings outside of the Canberra region. I know I find it difficult to keep up.

Become a moderator?

Have you ever considered becoming a moderator for NatureMapr? There are currently more than 19,000 unconfirmed sightings nation-wide and for some categories the moderating falls to only one or two people.

Perhaps you think you are not qualified but you don't need to have any educational qualifications. If you know that you are getting most of your suggestions correct at any level then you can apply to become a moderator. This can be at any level you choose. For example you may think you know most true bugs or maybe just shield bugs.

The work doesn't have to be onerous as there is no quota to meet, just do a few at a time as your own time permits even if it is months between doing any moderation. It all helps.

How you can help moderators

This does not apply to all users, but have you noticed a discrepancy between the number of sightings with photos or sound files and the total number of your sightings.

The example below shows a discrepancy of 26 sightings.

7,361 0 7,387

I researched this and found that this is because sometimes when uploading a sighting there is a temporary glitch in the system and the photo (or sound) files don't get uploaded to the database.

Looking at this there are over 1,500 such records on the database nation-wide. It is nearly impossible for moderators to identify all of these, which means they will never be confirmed.

17,461 80 19,122

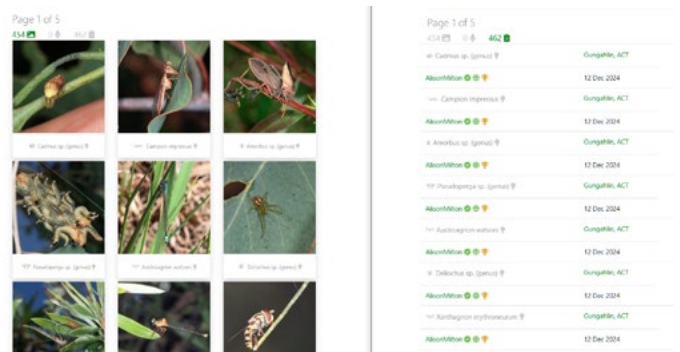
You can help.

How?

It may be tedious but the benefits are that it will help clear the mass of unidentified sightings help clear up your own unidentified sightings. Personally I'm always pleased to have a sighting confirmed and disappointed when it isn't.

While it may be tedious if you have a lot of unidentified sightings, the way to check for these 'hidden' sightings is quite simple (and much easier if you have two monitors, otherwise just use a split screen).

On your profile page select sightings then Unidentified. On one browser screen select to view the photos of your sightings and on the other select to see the sightings by list. Then by scrolling through and comparing the two when you see a sighting in the list that does not have a corresponding record in the photos list it means that the photo is missing.



Hopefully you will still have the photos and are able to then edit the sighting to add a photo or two or a sound file. If you don't then sad to say it is probably best if you delete the record as it is never going to be confirmed.

If you could look at doing this for your own sightings it would be a great help for the moderators, for cleaning up unidentified sightings and ultimately, the statistics and the aim of recording these data in the first place.

I hope you will consider looking at your records and doing something these hidden records.

Alison Milton

New Epic contributor

Congratulations to Hejor1 on becoming just the fifth person ever to pass 10,000 sightings on NatureMapr!

She now joins Alison Milton, Michael Bedingfield, Trevor Preston and Ciaran Ernst-Russell (Tapirlord) as epic NatureMapr contributors!

This is an incredible achievement on its own but is even more remarkable when considering that it has happened in less than two years, having only joined in January 2023!

You can see all of her [sightings online](#).



Canberra Nature Map is still growing

Michael Bedingfield

CNM is having another good year with lots of great sightings coming in. In the week ending Monday 9 December 2024 we had 1,926 sightings for the Canberra and Southern Tablelands region, which is a new weekly record. There have been lots of other sightings coming in too for the other regions of Australia. The previous weekly record for CNM was 1,824 for the week ending 22 January in 2023, and before that it was 1,742 for the week ending 11 October in 2021.

So thanks to everyone for your continued enthusiasm.

Because of this growth and the increasing amount of traffic on the NatureMapr website the software has required some improvements to make it quicker and more efficient. So our computer software whiz Aaron Clausen has been busy. Fortunately he is able to make the changes with minimal disruption to the service and very few temporary glitches.

He is also looking for a [new junior computer science or software engineering person](#) to assist in software development.

If you are interested contact him at aaron@naturemapr.org

NatureMapr or iNaturalist or other?

I have always been a great supporter of NatureMapr since I first came to grasps of what it was about and became a member.

At the time it was the only platform of its type of which I am aware apart from the Atlas of Living Australia (ALA), into which all of the NatureMapr feeds. It was a small program basically run and supported by one man, Aaron. Michael M and Michael B were always there answering queries and supporting the members and moderators.

Personally I find ALA difficult to use as a source of finding IDs for sightings and there are many errors, though that is not to say there are not errors in NatureMapr but I think there are far fewer.

Also at the time, it was a small program basically run and supported by one man, Aaron of course, and I was always amazed at how dedicated he was to the project, often responding to comments and queries on weekends when I never expected him to.

Since then it has grown to this amazing Australia-wide project though not yet well known outside of the Canberra community.

In 2014 iNaturalist became an initiative of the California Academy of Sciences and a joint initiative with National Geographic Society in 2017. I know many people now subscribe to iNaturalist and many also use both iNaturalist and NatureMapr.

iNaturalist is great in that it is world-wide and obviously has funding and support. Both iNaturalist and NatureMapr have their advantages, however, I have always, and still, favour NatureMapr over iNaturalist.

While iNaturalist can be great for recording species world-wide and a great source for IDing species, it seems that it only records sightings whereas, NatureMapr collects far more data such as breeding, nesting, pollinators, rare species etc, that is really useful for the scientific and even government organisations and in the Canberra region at least is actively being used for various projects by government such as connectivity.

Who knew that such a fantastic resource could have grown from one incidental sighting and photo of an orchid.

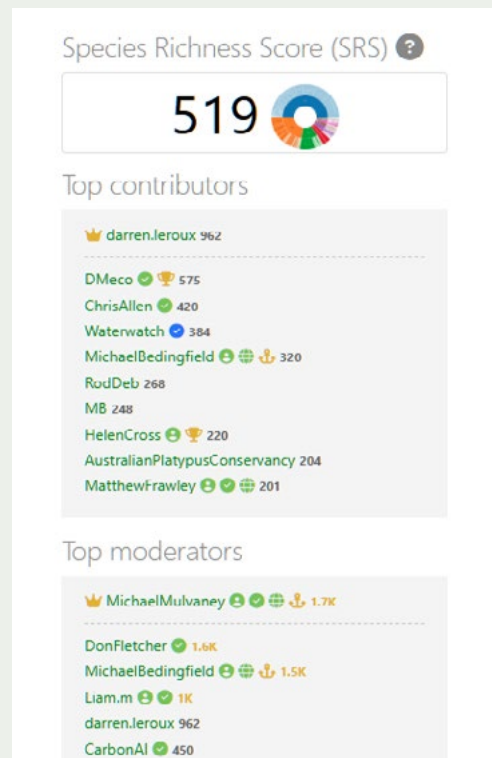
Hopefully governments will recognise what a significant project this is and offer permanent ongoing funding so that NatureMapr is better supported and can also get the human resources it needs to move into the future and extend the tentative tentacles into being a major Australia-wide resource.

Changes to NatureMapr web site

Users will no doubt have noticed many changes to the web site over the past few weeks. I admit that when the layout first changed it took time to get used to it, however, I realise that there are benefits.

One of the great things I love is the Home page for each category and sub-species within each category. This shows the latest comments restricted to the species and the same leaderboard as on the home page, but also limited to the chosen category. So if you think you'll never dream of reaching top 10 across the whole of Canberra or nation-wide. You may find yourself in the top 10 of a specific category instead. Why not look at a category for which you upload a lot of sightings.

You may be excited to see your name there as in the example below for mammals.



Alison Milton



NSW BCT Land Libraries wins 2024 NSW DCCEEW Service Excellence Award

This year, NatureMapr was fortunate to land the opportunity to design and deliver an innovative biodiversity reporting platform for NSW landholders for the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust.

The innovative project, lead by Alice McGrath, Joel Stibbard and James Lidsey from the NSW BCT Education Team, sought to deliver an innovative educational program for NSW based landholders to report and promote the incredible plant and animal species that exist on their properties.

This project was extremely important for NatureMapr as it represented a fundamental shift in our model, with NatureMapr effectively providing a paid “platform as a service” to a major government customer.

As NSW BCT’s supporting platform partner, the inimitable Lewis Choy and I attended multiple landholder workshops across NSW with the NSW BCT Education Team to help landholders get up and running smoothly.

During these visits, we were blown away by the level of professionalism and dedication to customer service excellence of the BCT Education Team.

Beyond their commitment to ensuring the wide ranging needs, ideas and suggestions of landholders were well supported, what we noticed the most was that this was a team of genuine innovators!

NSW BCT Education Team were pushing hard to break new ground when it came to high quality, expert verified biodiversity data collection within government.

Totally awesome stuff.

“Could NatureMapr do this for landholders?”

“What if we changed X and connected it to Y?”

These were the fantastic kinds of design discussions that filled much of the year in our weekly meetings.

The level of enthusiasm and focus on delivering a positive experience for landholders was astounding.

To support the project, and with a co-investment from the commonwealth, NatureMapr underwent extensive enhancement over a period of many months.

Land Libraries 1.0 (<https://naturemapr.org/locationhubs/land-libraries>) was born and was a roaring success with landholders in Pillar Valley, Wauchope, Brogo/Bermagui and Kangaroo Valley.

There were also many key learnings and much invaluable feedback from landholders that will help us continue to improve.

The information reported by landholders, once expert verified, will be fed directly to the NSW BioNet database, before travelling further downstream into the increasingly relevant DCCEEW Biodiversity Data Repository (<https://www.dcceew.gov.au/.../biodiversity-data-repository>) - 2 critical repositories that will maximise the exposure of these trusted records to real decision makers working on real outcomes.

Earlier this week we were not at all surprised to learn that the NSW BCT Education Team have been awarded a 2024 NSW DCCEEW Service Excellence Award.

This award is thoroughly well deserved and it is very satisfying to see our customer recognised for their tremendous efforts.

Congratulations Alice, Joel and James!

Thank you for the opportunity to work together on such a trailblazing initiative.

Aaron Clausen
Founder, NatureMapr

CNM Committee

[Emma Collins \(convenor\)](#)

[Ian Baird](#)

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Canberra Nature Map was co-founded by [Aaron Clausen](#) and [Michael Mulvaney](#)

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