



FIELD SITES and TALKS

Stirling Park, Yarralumla, ACT

A considerable area of land within Canberra is managed by the National Capital Authority (NCA), and some of this land carries rare native vegetation in good condition. FOG advocates for three sites in these areas to protect them from development: Scrivener's Hut (6 ha), Yarramundi Reach (23 ha) and Stirling Park (52 ha).

The Stirling Park area was known to Indigenous people as Gura Bung Dhaura, or stony ground. Later, in Canberra's early days, it was the site of workers' cottages and was named Westlake. The dwellings and other associated buildings were all removed by the 1960s, and the area reverted to bushland. The park is now managed by the NCA for nature conservation, although it continues to be zoned for 'National Capital use', potentially including development.

Stirling Park contains a fine example of grassy woodland, dominated by Yellow Box (*Eucalyptus melliodora*) and Blakely's Red Gum (*E. blakelyi*) over an understorey of tussock grasses, herbs and scattered shrubs. One of the largest remaining populations of an endangered daisy, the Button Wrinklewort (*Rutidosis leptorrhynchoides*), exists in the park. Since 2009, FOG has worked under a partnership agreement with the NCA to restore the woodland community with a combination of removal of invasive weeds (from grasses to shrubs and trees), environmental burning, and strategic replanting of native flora. There has been measurable regeneration of native groundcover species where dense woody weeds have been removed. FOG's on-ground work at Stirling Park adds weight to its advocacy for protection of the site.

Stirling Park Conservation Area: An example of Cooperative Land Management

Peter Beutel

National Capital Authority

While Stirling Park Conservation Area is an area of the National Estate, and therefore managed by the National Capital Authority (NCA), the NCA works cooperatively with community groups to achieve the best outcome for the environment, heritage and community in the area. The Friends of Grasslands community group plays an invaluable part in helping the NCA undertake research, weed and fuel management activities and native species planting while also providing general advice on management options. The NCA also utilises the skills and expertise of other community groups, such as the ACT Rural Fire Service and Conservation Volunteers Australia, to achieve mutual goals. In the current financial environment, the NCA has found that partnering with community and volunteer groups can be a cost-effective way of implementing land management practices. Community and volunteer groups provide expert assistance in advocacy for projects within the community, extensive scientific knowledge, management skills, and a capacity to source grant funding. They are invaluable partners in the management of Conservation Areas.

Peter is a professional land and asset manager with a strong background in fire management. Peter has worked as an Overseer with Queensland Forestry during the 1980s; as a Senior Technical Officer at the Australian National University during the 1990s; as a Plantation Officer and Forestry Coordinator with ACT Forests/ACT Parks and Conservation Service during the 2000s; and as a manager of NCA's open space, Lake Burley Griffin and Scrivener Dam since 2010. Peter has been a volunteer member of the ACT Rural Fire Service since 2001 and has fulfilled many roles such as Operations Officer, Deputy Captain, Group Officer and Fire Investigator.



Planning restoration and engaging the community at Stirling Park, ACT

Jamie Pittock

Fenner School of Environment & Society, The Australian National University
& Friends of Grasslands

Friends of Grasslands (FOG) works to conserve nationally threatened grassland and woodland species and ecological communities on national lands managed by the National Capital Authority (NCA) in central Canberra. The work focuses on grassy woodlands at Scrivener's Hut (6 ha), Stirling Park (52 ha), as well as grasslands at Yarramundi Reach (23 ha). These sites are typical of grassy ecosystem remnants on lands managed by organisations for whom biodiversity conservation is a secondary priority. In 2013 FOG's 2009 partnership agreement with the NCA was renewed, reiterating the organisations' commitments to conserving natural heritage. FOG's work for these sites has involved both on-ground work and advocacy. Stirling Park has one of the largest remaining populations of an endangered wildflower species, the Button Wrinklewort, as well as a portion of the critically endangered White Box Yellow Box Blakely's Redgum Grassy Woodland ecological community. The field trip will look at this biota plus examine restoration efforts by FOG and the NCA, including the results of up to five years of weeding, reinstatement of ecological burning, and strategic replanting.

From 2009 to September 2014, FOG has held 58 work parties totalling around 3500 volunteer hours work, which have removed an estimated 4100 m³ of woody weeds.

Key activities have included: surveys, weed spraying, woody weed removal, rubbish collection and strategic replanting. This work was aided by a number of factors, including:

- the partnership agreement with the NCA, including providing FOG with \$6000 per year for workparty tools and other supplies;
- Grants from the ACT Government of over \$30,000 enabling contract weed spraying and revegetation;
- a proposal to develop new embassies on part of the site, which mobilised many local residents to contribute to ecological restoration work on Stirling Park;
- a partnership with Greening Australia's 'Grassy groundcover challenge' that led to missing grassland flora species being replanted at three trial sites at Stirling Park and Yarramundi Reach.

Significant regeneration of groundcover species is evident where dense woody weeds have been removed. FOG's work has dovetailed with the NCA's program of patch burning, weed spraying, and the felling of over 200 invasive and fire-prone Bluegums, Cedar Wattle and pines. Contract spraying has focused on African Lovegrass, Blackberry, Chilean Needlegrass and St John's Wort. Surveys of rare and threatened plants in 2014 indicated that the weeding and ecological burning have maintained the high population numbers of these plant species.

FOG continues to advocate for protection of the three sites from proposed developments and for their dedication for nature conservation. In July 2013 Yarramundi Reach was rezoned as open space under the National Capital Plan. Further protection is required for Stirling Park where there are a number of development proposals, including for new embassies and a Prime Minister's Lodge. FOG's on-ground work increases its influence when undertaking advocacy.

Dr Jamie Pittock is a Senior Lecturer in the Fenner School of Environment and Society at the Australian National University. His research focuses on better governance of the interlinked issues of water management, energy and food supply, responding to climate change and conserving biological diversity, and he directs two large international programs of research on these topics. Among his other roles, Jamie is Chair of the board of Water Stewardship Australia and a volunteer for Friends of Grasslands.



What Stirling Park means for Indigenous people

Wally Bell

Buru Ngunawal Aboriginal Corporation

&

Tyronne Bell

Thunderstone (Murungul Gurubung) Aboriginal Cultural
and Land Management Services

Two organisations established to accurately reflect the past, present (and future) culture of the Ngunawal people. As with many other Aboriginal cultures, the Ngunawal people have passed down traditional knowledge from generation to generation through word of mouth and Dreamtime stories. The Ngunawal people hope to educate the wider community about the rich history and cultural practices of the Ngunawal people, as well as impart the importance of preserving and protecting this culture from being lost or destroyed. They have websites at www.ngunawal.com.au and www.thunderstone.net.au. We all can play a part in ensuring that Ngunawal culture exists for future generations.

I would like to be able to do some things now that in the long term will be of benefit to the younger generation of Aboriginal people that hopefully will follow in my footsteps and carry on the culture that I hold so dear. I can only hope that my small contribution can make it just a little easier for them to achieve their goals.

Ngunawal elder Don Bell (snr) (deceased).

Wally Bell is a Ngunawal man who actively participates in all aspects of Aboriginal cultural heritage management for the area that is within his tribal boundary. Wally also engages with the wider community to develop a better understanding of his culture. He has formal qualifications in Business Management and Conservation and Land Management. Wally has worked for the ACT Government in maintaining and conserving the natural environment, and he also works as a volunteer with Greening Australia (GA) and Friends of Grasslands (FOG). Wally has been part of the Yurung Dhaura Aboriginal Land Management Team who won the 2014 National Award for Indigenous Land Management and has won the 2015 ACT Landcare Award for Indigenous Land Management.

Tyronne Bell is a strong advocate for the recognition of Aboriginal culture and language, and particularly of the Ngunawal people. He has worked as a ranger in ACT Parks and Conservation and in the public service, mainly in the Aboriginal Affairs portfolio where he worked in the Native Title Unit. He has recently been appointed to the ACT Natural Resources Management Council. Tyronne has also been deeply involved with non-Indigenous community activities and projects, and he has considerable knowledge of the local region.