
News of Friends of Grasslands

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Grassland keepers of the future ?



Lauren Scotney, Souad Ibrahim and Charly Burt, year six students at Gilmore Primary School (ACT), relax in the school's Themeda grasslands after leading students through the grasslands to celebrate World Environment Day.

Story page 6.

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Editorial : Population growth imperils grasslands

Any region which feels compelled to destroy an ecosystem type of which only 0.5% remains has fairly clearly exceeded its human carrying capacity.

Still time to influence Federal Government response to Carrying Capacity report.

FOG's involvement in a recent public hearing into a proposal by Queanbeyan City Council (NSW) to rezone remnant lowland native grasslands for housing has brought home the link between human population growth and loss of grasslands.

In the ACT region, human population growth is clearly one of the major causes of grassland decline this decade. In the ACT, and in areas of surrounding NSW, subdivision for urban expansion or hobby farms is seeing more hectares of grasslands lost each year as land is opened up to provide housing for the region's expanding human population.

Queanbeyan City Council argues that it must rezone for housing a rural property known as The Poplars (which lies south-west of Queanbeyan's central business district, adjacent to the Jerrabomberra Heights and Jerrabomberra Park estates) purely to meet demand for housing as a result of projected population growth.

That the Council feels compelled to do so despite the presence of three endangered species - the Southern Lined Earless Dragon (*Tympanocryptis lineata pinguicollis*) which is arguably Australia's most endangered reptile, the Golden Sun Moth (*Synemon plana*), and the Button Wrinklewort (*Rutidosia leptorrhynchoides*) - gives an indication of the population growth pressure the region is facing and of the consequences of this for grasslands.

Also clearly brought out in the hearing was the town planning, development and housing industries' perception of lowland grasslands : they are still viewed by many as prime targets for development because their relative flatness means lower foundation costs and thus cheaper houses and greater marketability. Those arguing that the grasslands should be set aside for conservation were virtually accused of raising the cost of home ownership.

FOG lodged two detailed written submissions to the hearing, and provided oral presentations by Dr Ebbe Nielsen (CSIRO Division of Entomology, standing

in for Dr Ted Edwards on the Golden Sun Moth), Art Langston (University of Canberra, speaking on behalf of himself and Dr Will Osborne on the earless dragon), plus information from John Benson (National Herbarium of NSW) on Monaro region grasslands.

Whether FOG's submissions have had an impact will not be known for several weeks. The chairman of the public hearing will report to the Council, who will meet to consider the report on 19 July.

However in the meantime the population issue, and Queanbeyan City Council's response to it, prompted FOG - jointly with the Conservation Council of the South-East Region and Canberra - to meet with the Australian Local Government Association on 29 May and to write to the Southern Tablelands Association of Councils (STAC) on 30 May.

That letter urged the local government councils which make up STAC (Queanbeyan, Yarrowlunla, Yass, Crookwell, Goulburn, Gunning, Mulwaree, Tallaganda and Wingecaribee) to -

- identify in advance and set aside lowland native grasslands, grassy woodlands and other high conservation value lands
- target low conservation value lands instead for development
- assess the human carrying capacity of their regions.

In my view, any region which feels compelled to destroy an ecosystem type of which only 0.5 % remains has fairly clearly exceeded its human carrying capacity.

FOG will be putting these issues to the Federal Government in response to the House of Representatives Standing Committee for Long Term Strategies' December 1994 report entitled *Australia's Population 'Carrying Capacity' : one nation - two ecologies*.

Senator Bolkus' office is coordinating the Federal Government's response to that report, and there is still time to influence that response if a submission is lodged quickly.

FOG recommends that anyone interested in the effect of human population growth on lowland grasslands or other Australian ecosystems consider writing to Senator Bolkus, attention David Richardson, at Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600.

As NSW Premier Bob Carr has made clear in recent weeks, halting human population growth is a prerequisite to halting clearance of remnant native vegetation.

Copies of the House of Reps report are available from Commonwealth Government Bookshops in most capital cities, or can be mailed to you (anywhere in Australia) by sending a cheque for \$ 16.95 (made payable to 'Australian Government Publishing Service') to AGPS Mail Order Sales, GPO Box 84 Canberra ACT 2601.

Edwina Barton

BHP pipeline could affect grasslands

BHP proposes to lay a 700 kilometre underground natural gas pipeline from Victoria to NSW, with the preferred route likely to traverse lowland grasslands in the Monaro region.

Environmental studies are proposed, with their scope to be developed jointly by the Victorian, NSW and Commonwealth agencies responsible for environmental impact assessments. Once the environmental impact assessments are complete, detailed proposals will be reviewed by the NSW, Victorian and Federal Governments and made available for public comment. A final decision is expected in mid-1996.

Information on this project, including BHP's Eastern Gas Pipeline Community Newsletter *Pipeline Report*, is available by telephoning BHP's toll-free pipeline information line on 1 800 620 492.

Saturday 15 July 2 pm - 4 pm FOG meeting at ANBG

Join us in the Australian National Botanic Gardens' Visitor Information Centre Theatre at 2 pm for a two hour introduction to remnant grasslands in and around the ACT.

We'll use this meeting to lay out the big picture, by pinpointing all the known sites and highlighting their condition, species, status and conservation value, including threats facing them.

In the weeks and months following, an extensive field trip program will include as many of these sites as possible. Field trips will be spread over a wide range of dates and times, so that as many members as possible have the option of visiting at least one location.

The field trip program will be finalised in the next few weeks and will be mailed to all members.

The Australian National Botanic Gardens is located in Clunies Ross Street, Canberra, on the slopes of Black Mountain.

FOG committees up and running !

Thanks to a wonderful response from FOG members to the 'join a committee' invitation in our last newsletter, FOG is proud to announce that the following committees have been formed and are already hard at work:

- Executive Committee - 4 members
- Conservation Committee (including Remnants Sub-Committee) - 12 members
- Education Committee (including Poster Working Group) - 7 members
- Landscaping, Horticulture and Rural Committee - 3 members
- Constitutional and Incorporation Working Group - 2 members.

Field trip program to key ACT region grassland sites planned

The enthusiasm of these committee members will mean a significant boost in the quality and quantity of FOG's work.. The calibre of our contribution to The Poplars public hearing, for instance, was dramatically enhanced by the skills and effort of many of those members.

We still need a Treasurer and a Secretary to join the Executive Committee, and volunteers for these positions would be very welcome indeed (please phone Edwina on (06) 257 8668 if you think you could manage either of these jobs).

We'll introduce you to all the committee members in a future newsletter.

World Environment Day

FOG had a stand at a World Environment Day fair in Canberra City on 3 June, and participated in two native grass plantings in Queanbeyan, NSW - on the banks of the Queanbeyan River on 5 June and at Bicentennial Park on 20 June - as an extended celebration of World Environment Day.

To follow up the planting exercises, FOG will give a presentation to senior managers within Queanbeyan City Council on 18 July, emphasising the landscaping opportunities which grassland species present as well as the desirability of conserving natural grasslands.

Criteria for endangered species and communities in the ACT

On 9 June FOG provided comments to the ACT Flora and Fauna Committee on the Committee's draft criteria for recommending declaration of endangered and vulnerable species, endangered ecological communities, and threatening processes in the ACT region.

Copies of those comments are available from Edwina on (06) 257 8668. Views from FOG members on these issues are most welcome.

Grassland tours ex ANBG

By arrangement with the Australian National Botanic Gardens' grasslands display, FOG provided two grassland tours in recent months. Both included a trip to remnant grasslands at Barton, one of the most significant areas of natural grasslands in the ACT, plus a detailed information kit.

One tour was exclusively for ANBG's trained Volunteer Guides, to enhance their ability to explain grassland issues to the members of the public who visit ANBG, and the other was for the general public.

ANBG's grasslands display will be on exhibition until 25 August, and again from mid October until late November (when FOG hopes to run more public tours).

At the moment a delightful live Southern Lined Earless Dragon (*Tympanocryptis lineata pinguicolla*) is on view as part of the display - a rare chance to see one of these exquisitely cryptic grassland reptiles in the flesh.

Gungahlin Town Centre - community consultation workshop

On 30 May FOG participated in a workshop run by consultants engaged by the ACT Planning Authority to plan aspects of the land around Gungahlin Town Centre (ACT), which includes remnant grasslands.

Representatives of the local Gungahlin community showed strong support for retention of the natural qualities of the area, including creation of grassland reserves. The grassland landscape appears to have genuinely endeared itself to the residents, who now seek development that enhances and reveals - rather than disguises or alters - the natural character of the area.

The residents' clear desire for a suburb in harmony with the natural environment was impressive, and a far cry from the early days of Canberra development. FOG will watch with interest how this project proceeds.



ACT Flora and Fauna Committee release draft criteria for public comment.

FOG asked to help with species identification

FOG has responded to several requests for on-site help with grassland species identification in the ACT, including from Mount Ainslie Parkcare Group and Gilmore Primary School.

Over the coming months FOG will be considering what educational aids might help meet such requests. The absence of suitable grassland books is a serious problem. In the short term FOG will explore other options, such as multiple-copy herbarium collections combined with colour photographs.

In the longer term, FOG will assess likely demand for structured training courses, and will talk to organisations such as the Australian National Herbarium and the Australian National University's continuing education program to see what options might exist for user-pays courses.

In the very long term, exploration of a CD ROM on lowland grassland species may be worthwhile. FOG has already attended a demonstration of a CD ROM on eucalypt identification being developed by the

Australian National Herbarium, and is aware of CD ROMs developed by CSIRO for other native plant and animal species.

Ideas from FOG members on these issues are most welcome .

Grassy woodlands leaflet

There is considerable overlap between species found in treeless grasslands and those of the understorey of grassy woodlands.

Enclosed with this newsletter is a CSIRO leaflet entitled *Surviving In Cemeteries... And Stock Routes* which outlines the predicament of grassy woodlands native to the wheat-sheep belt of south-east Australia. Like grasslands, grassy woodlands have fared badly in the last 200 years and are in urgent need of conservation.

Our thanks to CSIRO Plant Industry Communication Group for providing copies of the leaflet.

Delma impar leaflet

Also enclosed is a leaflet entitled *Striped Legless Lizard - Managing a Threatened Species in our Native Grasslands*.

Produced by the Victorian Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and kindly supplied by the ACT Parks and Conservation Service's Wildlife Research Unit, this leaflet provides an introduction to an important threatened reptile which lives in grasslands of the ACT region as well as in Victoria and South Australia.

Threatened species leaflet

Finally, the enclosed leaflet entitled *Under Threat : Plants and Animals in the ACT* has just been released by the ACT Parks and Conservation Service.

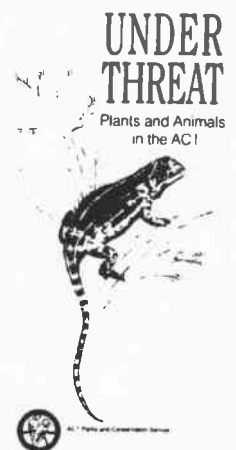
While it discusses threatened species generally, not just those in grasslands, it will come as no surprise to FOG members that a high percentage of the species listed are, in fact, grassland species.

For instance the following lowland grassland species appear in the leaflet : Golden Sun Moth, Striped Legless Lizard, Eastern Lined Earless Dragon (also known as the Southern Lined Earless Dragon), Button Wrinklewort, Small Purple Pea, Wingless Grasshopper, and the now extinct Australian Bustard.

Have we missed any grassland species referred to in the leaflet ? If so, which ones(s) ? Be the first person in your state to mail us the correct answer and we'll send you a FOG T-shirt with Golden Sun Moth motif in your size.

By 'grassland species' we mean species that occur now (or once occurred, if extinct) in lowland native grasslands in south-east Australia. Postcodes in the Canberra region will be treated as ACT.

Good luck !



***In the ACT,
most
threatened
species are
grassland
species***

Grassland keepers of the future?

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Gilmore Primary School

Over two days, taking 10 students at a time, Lauren, Souad and Charly introduced all 600 fellow students to the natural lowland native grasslands in the school grounds. Species identified included Blue Devil (*Eryngium rostratum*), Kangaroo Grass (*Themeda triandra*) and wallaby grasses (*Danthonia* species), as well as a number of exotic weeds such as African Lovegrass (*Eragrostis curvula*) which the school will seek expert help to remove.

That an urban school should actually have its own natural grasslands within the school grounds is remarkable, and due largely to the foresight of the school's first headmaster who recognised the importance of the area and made sure it was protected. Since then, teachers like Trish Smith have understood the value of the grasslands for environmental education and have helped the students learn about the grasslands and even create their own species identification signs.

Other primary schools recognise the importance of grasslands

While other ACT primary schools may not have their own natural grasslands on site, several are looking creatively at how to highlight the importance of grassland species in their region.

For instance Aranda Primary School used strong grassland messages at its information stand in Garema Place, Canberra City, as part of the World Environment Day Fair.

North Ainslie Primary School wants to help revegetate an area with grasses indigenous to nearby Mount Ainslie, and will explore seed gathering and propagation to do this. And Cook Primary School has already planted local native grasses in its school grounds.

Primary school teaching materials

The role of primary schools in grasslands education is an exciting emerging trend. But schools in the ACT region are doing it tough without much support in the way of grassland teaching materials.

FOG will be exploring ways to help bridge that gap, and would like to hear from FOG members in other states. Are primary schools in your region doing grassland-related work? Does your state have grassland teaching materials suitable for primary schools? Please phone Edwina on (06) 257 8668 if you have information on this.

Secondary schools and colleges

In the ACT, Stirling College is looking to develop a science project involving propagation of grassland species. Canberra High School (which has its own Landcare group), Copland College and Lake Ginninderra College have expressed interest in similar horticultural and agricultural opportunities.



Primary schools take up the grasslands challenge

FOG membership now totals 158

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