



News of Friends of Grasslands

Supporting native grassy ecosystems

July-August 2007

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Program

SAT 14 JUL 1.30pm to 4pm **Understanding Canberra's grasslands and their management.** FOG's winter afternoon visit will be to Mulangarri, which is part of the Gungahlin grassland complex. We plan several activities to help you understand grassland management. Meeting point is Fay Lane, near corner of Delma View and Gozzard St. To find out about what is planned contact Geoff Robertson (details back page).

SAT 25 AUGUST 9.00am to 1pm. **FOG Future Directions Workshop** Following on from the survey of FOG members and supporters (see page 2), the workshop will provide members with an opportunity to find out more about what FOG is up to, and how it has been going against its stated objectives in recent years; and to contribute to discussion about direction, priorities and approaches for coming years. Also, this is an opportunity to identify an interesting and useful role for you, if you want it. Discussion will be structured in areas such as: 'Education/information/ extension', 'Hands-on conservation', 'Advocacy' and 'Liaison'. Venue: Mugga Mugga Education Centre, Narabundah Lane, Symonston ACT (opposite the Therapeutic Goods Administration Centre). Morning tea will be provided – there is no charge. For catering/organisation purposes, it would help if you let Bernadette (contact details back page) know that you are coming by Friday 17 August. Bernadette also has further information about the workshop if you're interested.

FRI night to SUN 28 to 30 SEPT **Eastern Riverina grassy ecosystems tour.** See article on page 2.

THURS-FRI 11 to 12 OCT **Post-Stipa Conference Field Trip**, Mudgee and Wellington NSW. See article on page 2.

For remainder of the 2007 program, see page 2.

Of special interest

21 AUG 8:45am to 4pm **Stipa Native Grasses Assoc., ACT Workshop: Native Grasses as a Basis for Cropping and Grazing** FOG is helping to organise this workshop which will illustrate how native grasses can be used in cropping and pasture, and includes well known Stipa members and local farmers. Cost, incl. lunch, free for Stipa members, and \$32.50 for non-members. Contact Geoff Robertson (details back page) for information.



Martin Royds talking to FOG (Story page 8).

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News Roundup

Weekend ecotour - Eastern Riverina

Janet Russell

Join FOG members for the Eastern Riverina Tour (Fri night to Sun, 28-30 September). The Eco-Tour is a self-guided tour of significant ecological sites which was developed by the Eastern Riverina Environmental Trust. The Trust, working with local Landcare Groups, identified various sites which represent a variety of vegetation types including high quality remnant vegetation, box woodlands and wetlands.

We shall spend Saturday in and around Henty. The tour will include Munyabla Cemetery Lane, a grey box grassland community; Ryan Stock Route, a stretch of high conservation value roadside vegetation; and the Mundawaddery Cemetery and adjacent reserves (grey box woodland remnant), the latter being home to the rare dookie daisy (*Brachyscome gracilis*).

On Sunday we shall visit some more northerly sites to the south and south-west of Wagga Wagga including a small reserve which was set aside for the Mangoplah Botanical Gardens. This is a white box woodland with grasses, daisies and lilies. Birdlip Reserve is a significant grassy white box woodland which contains sundews, bluebells, vanilla and chocolate lilies

and many native grasses.

While, we shall leave it up to individuals to make their own accommodation and food arrangements, we can assist to facilitate shared accommodation and car pooling. It will also greatly assist if you register for this trip. Would those people who are willing and able to take others who may want a lift (note we shall be travelling along some gravel roads) and/or share cabins, please contact Bernadette or me and we will distribute your contact details to the others in the group.

We suggest that people use the Riverview Caravan Park (93 Hammond Avenue, Wagga 2650) and we encourage people to make their bookings fairly promptly. There are en-suite cabins, on-site caravans and camping sites available. Contact details for the Park are phone: 02 6921 4287, fax: 02 6921 9413, or e-mail: eastpark@bigpond.net.au

To register, or for further information, please email fogcanberra@yahoo.com.au or contact Bernadette (before 29 Sept) or me (after that date). For our contact details, see back page.

Post STIPA Conference Field Trip

FOG and Stipa Native Grasses Association are organising a field trip in and around Mudgee and Wellington (Thurs and Fri, 11 and 12 October), immediately following the Stipa Conference. The trip will visit grassy woodlands as well as other ecosystem communities.

Grassy box woodlands (large and somewhat sparsely spaced yellow-box, white-box, and Blakely's red gum trees growing with a ground storey of native grasses and wildflowers) once dominated large areas of the Central Tablelands. Today only occasional remnants persist, yet they are essential to maintaining our biodiversity and should form the backbone in any attempt to restore natural landscape function. In addition they provide an essential seed store for native grasses and other plants.

The trip will include several public land sites as well as various properties

which have retained these natural box woodlands, as well as other types of remnant vegetation. The trip will be self-drive, but FOG will attempt to facilitate car pooling and catering. For more information and/or to book, contact Bernadette (details back page) or fogcanberra@yahoo.com.au.

Chilean needle grass

In the Jan-Feb newsletter, it was mentioned that the Ginninderra Catchment Group was seeking FOG's support for its Chilean needle grass (CNG) project which aims to identify outbreaks of CNG in the Gungahlin area of Canberra and to identify strategies to keep it out of the grassland and woodland reserves in Gungahlin.

Since then Margaret Ning has been employed to map CNG, itself a challenging task. FOG is assisting in many ways, such as helping in the preparation of a brochure targeted at Gungahlin residents, assisting in the design and undertaking of the survey, encouraging FOG members to be involved (so far seven FOG members have been involved in the survey), and publicis-



ing the project. FOG has arranged short reports on the project at an Australian Native Plants Society and FOG meetings, published an article in *Rural Fringe*, and publicised the project on the *Radio Landcare Program* on community station 2XX. If you want to spend an hour or two learning how to identify CNG, finding out what this project is about and learning some practical information about this weed, contact Margaret Ning (contact details back page).

More diary dates 2007

Please place the following dates (subject to change) in your diary. For more details, contact Bernadette (see back page).

SAT 20 OCT 2 to 4pm. Visit to Belconnen Naval Station, Lawson ACT

WED 7 NOV 12:30 to 1:15pm St Mark's Grassland, ACT

SAT 10 NOV 9:30 to 3:30pm Working bee at Old Cooma Common.

WED 21 NOV 5 to 6pm Tarengo leek orchid Hall Cemetery, ACT

SAT 8 DEC 9 to 5pm Nungar Plain, north of Adaminaby NSW.

Brooks Hill walk

Rainer Rehwinkel

SATURDAY 12 MAY Bungendore Landcare organised a walk at Brooks Hill Reserve on Saturday morning to introduce the ecological values of the reserve to its new neighbours at Carlton, a rural residential development adjacent to the reserve. A number of very keen residents of Carlton turned up, as well as some from further afield, including Bungendore, Queanbeyan, Royalla, and Canberra.

The walk aimed to match novices with those who have various levels of expertise, such as plant or bird identification skills, and enabled small teams to rove about and see what the reserve has to offer. A number of experts attended, notably Jenny Bounds from the Canberra Ornithologists Group and Margaret Ning from Friends of Grasslands. Jenny was able to impart her encyclopaedic knowledge of the region's birds, and Margaret did the same for her area of expertise, namely the smaller plants that are often overlooked – grasses and wildflowers, and particularly orchids. Surprisingly, Margaret found a small patch of midge-orchids in fruit. This was the first time this elusive species has been recorded at the reserve.

Another highlight of the day was the fine view people had of a white-eared honeyeater. The group also heard eastern spinebills and the grey shrike-thrush. All three bird species are winter visitors to the region.

If you were not able to make this event, then I shall be organising a similar one in spring, 2007. Hopefully the drought will have well and truly broken by then, and we can then enjoy the spring wildflowers and more birds, including the summer migrants. Though no date is set for the spring walk, let me know if you would like to make it by emailing me on: rainer.rehwinkel@environment.nsw.gov.au. Thanks Jenny and Margaret for your assistance, it was much appreciated.

And more on Brook Hills

Margaret Ning

SATURDAY 12 MAY While Rainer has already described the day, I will add some further observations.

Rainer explained the issues facing Brooks Hill and similar remnant areas



Photo courtesy of Rainer Rehwinkel

in our landscapes. Firewood removal was particularly obvious as a newly fallen large eucalypt had already had most of a very large branch cut back as far as the trunk by a chain saw. Rainer explained the importance of fallen timber, etc. as habitat for invertebrates, reptiles and birds.

The group I led went in search of an area which had undergone a hazard reduction burn a couple of years ago. We were confronted by a fine specimen of kangaroo grass (*Themeda triandra*) which was the first of a handful of native grasses we saw flowering that day. Others were austroanthonia species, wire grass (*Aristida ramosa*), hairy panic (*Panicum effusum*), common wheat grass (*Elymus scaber*), weeping grass (*Microlaena stipoides*), *Austrostipa blackii*, and the ever present red anther wallaby grass (*Joycea pallida*).

The few plants we saw in flower included: clustered everlasting (*Chrysocephalum semipapposum*), leafy daisy (*Brachyscome rigidula*), wattle mat-rush (*Lomandra filiformis*), a bluebell (*Wahlenbergia* sp.), ivy goodenia (*Goodenia hederacea*) and the seedy stages of a Mueller's fuzzweed (*Vittadinia Muellieri*). At least one species of acacia already had some tiny flower

buds for the next season! On occasions I was reduced to asking the group to imagine a small mauve or orange pea on a particular plant, and even describing the reproductive mechanism the triggerplant uses. A few small rock ferns (*Cheilanthes* sp.) were also found.

The highlight for me was a small colony of around six tiny midge orchids (*Corunastylis* sp. - formerly *Genoplesium* sp.) all looking very pregnant, which is something I found very pleasing as, all too often, I find Geoff's and my own orchids do not manage to reach that stage. Rainer had not seen the midge orchids in earlier years.

The drought has taken its toll on the reserve as there were many dead large acacias lying around, although there

were still some extremely healthy looking large acacias, as well as many young recruits. There seemed to be a large number of eucs with mistletoe although none seemed to be the worse for it. The eucs we came across included red box (*E. polyanthemus*), scribbly gum (*E. rossii*), brittle gum (*E. mannifera*), broad-leaved peppermint (*E. dives*) and finally an extremely large euc that could well have been a hybrid.

Other sightings included lots of kangaroo droppings and an extremely tiny skink. Rainer's local knowledge also solved the 'mystery object' question, when he explained that the tiny clinking broken dark chunky objects Maryke had found were the remains of shattered clay pigeon targets.

The 'newcomers' from Carlton marvelled at the lichens, mosses and other cryptogams, especially when their immediate response to water was demonstrated!

After an excellent morning tea, (thanks Rainer and Maryke!), we all went for another small walk before calling it a day and moving into the Carlton development at the invitation of a couple of the residents.

The Carlton development consists of 29 blocks, ranging from 2 to 5 acres,

on which 27 houses have been built so far. A couple of areas of red box have been protected on a couple of the blocks. At first there was an absolutely 'no cats' policy in the development, but this was relaxed for some new arrivals who already owned cats, but they were to be indoor cats and not to be replaced. No hoofed animals are allowed except horses, of which there were three in residence. Some of the residents who had joined us for the walk were keen to know more about what had been growing where they now lived and wanted to encourage and look after the natural regrowth on their blocks. They were also aware of weed issues, especially serrated tussock (*Nassella trichotoma*), and we undertook an impromptu weed ID session while we were there.

It had been an absolutely glorious day for the walk, but it was time to finish up and move on to Rainer's place for a very European lunch, courtesy of Maryke and him.

Volunteers battle weeds

Our last issue ran an item by Jim Williamson on *weed attack at OCCGR*. Following some urging from FOG, the Cooma-Monaro Express ran an article on *volunteers battle weeds* (26 April 2007), which described the work FOG is doing at the reserve and plans by the Cooma Council to improve management there, together with a picture of Jim in his spraying gear, similar to what was featured in our last issue. Good work, Margaret, Jim, and David in arranging the publicity.

A little beauty *Grasscover*

The April edition of the *Stipa Newsletter* was a delight for anyone interested in native grasses, and it was full of good news stories. This edition advertised several positions, following Stipa Native Grasses Association's successful attempt to fund several of its projects, especially the WeaLth (Promoting Whole of Landscape Health). This will help to promote a number of workshops.

Sue Rahilly reported that her farm plan, *Fitting into Nature on 'Alma'* was amongst the winners of the Farming Systems project of central west

NSW. FOG will be visiting *Alma* as part of its field trip in October (see article page 2).

The newsletter included a report from Ian Chivers on his visit to Argentine Patagonia grasslands. As well there were fascinating articles on the adaptability of wallaby grass for odd weather (Matt Crosbie), and an extract of an article by Sue McIntyre and David Tongway on *Grassland structure in sub-tropical native pastures: links to soil surface conditions*.

Finally, the newsletter includes the Stipa Strategic Plan. This I thought provided a good example of a strategic plan that FOG might model its own on.

Harold Adams *Geoff Robertson*

I was very saddened to learn of the recent death of Harold Adams, who was President of the ACT Rural Lessees for many years, editor of the *Australian Maritime Digest*, and who had long been a member of FOG. His FOG association commenced when he was asked to provide a paper during at our *Development and Native Grasslands, Resolving Conflicts, Workshop*, 26 May 1998. While always putting a strong farmer's advocacy position, he was very sympathetic to conservation, and worked with groups like FOG and the Conservation Council on many occasions to achieve common objectives. He was very supportive of me.

Unfortunately Margaret and I did not visit his property of *Melrose Valley*, on the Old Tuggeranong Road, ACT, until 31 March this year. We spent several hours there and Harold showed us parts of his magnificent house and large property brimming with both natural and cultural heritage. We were planning a later visit.

Harold was keen to ensure that the rural setting of *Melrose Valley* be maintained and had been lobbying to achieve this. He gave me a copy of a report from Karen Williams *Melrose Valley, Preliminary Cultural Survey Report, 2003-2004* and some other materials. I am planning to write this up for an article in the next FOG newsletter to kick along Harold's campaign. Harold was happy to host a

Stipa Native Grasses workshop, that I am helping to organise later in the year.

Harold will be greatly missed for his vision, balanced and thoughtful views, conciliatory approach, leadership, and the encouragement he gave to many people.

Beat-up over purple pea

4 MAY the front page of the *Canberra Times* ran a piece headed *rare pea the latest threat to Tralee*, referring to a large urban development proposed on the Canberra border at Queanbeyan.

Property reporter, Marika Dobbin, stated that the threatened small purple pea (see photo) might jeopardise the Tralee development.

She quoted Friends of Grasslands' Geoff Robertson saying "it was impor-



tant that the ecological impact on the small purple pea was considered. It's really important that this plant is protected because it is threatened and on top of that it is extremely rare. Any construction around it would have to be careful so that it didn't disturb the habitat... Its immediate environment should be protected."

She also stated that the pea does not grow on the development site but there are conflicting reports about whether the colony extends to a section of the narrow railway corridor that directly abuts it.

According to Geoff the story is probably a beat up, and he was approached for a comment (this is not something FOG had raised) but he could not say absolutely, that a population of the pea

was not in the vicinity of the Tralee development.

Pink-tailed worm-lizard nomination *Groundcover*

1 JUNE Paul Cheesman on behalf of FOG and Geoff Robertson on behalf of the ACT Herpetological Association nominated the pink-tailed worm-lizard (PTWL) (*Aprasia parapulchella*) as a vulnerable species under the *Nature Conservation Act 1980*.

This small grassland legless lizard is a



Photo by Ross Bennett

grassland icon and only found where grasslands have remained relatively well intact, especially where rocks and other structures have remained undisturbed. Canberra is a stronghold of this reptile, although its habitat has been severely fragmented. The most imminent threat is the proposed urban development of the Molongo Valley. There has been discussion of damming much of the habitat, without much thought environmental and aesthetic values. Even if the dam is knocked on the head, close proximity by humans is a multifaceted threat.

The PTWL is already regarded as threatened (special protection status) under ACT legislation which allows the Conservator to declare a species threatened, thus bypassing the Flora and fauna Committee. However, the nominators considered that if the Minister declared the PTWL vulnerable on the recommendation of the Flora and Fauna Committee, its protection would most likely be enhanced.

A big thanks to both, but especially Paul, who did the bulk of the work to prepare the submission.

FOG submissions

Bernadette O'Leary

Well it seems likely I shall be reporting on FOG submissions for the time being, and lately there has been a lot of activity. The last newsletter mentioned various matters, including letters to Senator Humphries on the *Airports Amendment Bill* and ACT Minister Hargreaves on proposed developments (e.g. Symonston caravan park and Molongo Valley), management of urban remnants and progress on Action Plans. Senator Humphries replied supportively (acknowledging 'countless examples of streamlined planning regimes leading to bad environmental outcomes') and asked to be kept in the loop. Minister Hargreaves thanks FOG for raising concerns and noted that a summary of the implementation report on Action Plan 27 (woodlands)

would be circulated soon.

Following a request from NSW NPWS, FOG made a submission on the *Scabby Range Nature Reserve* and *Yaouk Nature Reserve Draft Fire Management Strategies*. We suggested that appropriate fire management requires good scientific knowledge of fire ecology and the impact of fire on the functioning of natural ecosystems, and that fuel reduction activity should be undertaken cautiously. Also, that scientific study, to obtain a better understanding of these processes, and monitoring are essential. FOG also stated that decisions about fire management rely on informed judgement and need to take account of the inputs of a diverse range of stakeholders. FOG endorsed the current approach, which included these elements.

FOG participated in the ACT Government's consultation on four proposed fire trails in Namadgi National Park and Bullen Range Nature Reserve. FOG noted that, although it understands that fire trails are required to provide access to isolated areas (including for hazard reduction and back-burning), trailworks cause both initial and ongoing impacts along their alignment and in adjacent areas, which require careful management. FOG expressed concern that, without adequate

information on vegetation communities and other environmental values likely to be affected by the proposed works, it was not possible to make an assessment of the likely impacts. FOG provided comments on each proposal, based on information provided. The Government appears to have taken action on submissions made by FOG and others, and is already revising proposals.

FOG responded to the ACT Flora and Fauna Committee on its *proposed amendments to the guidelines and criteria for assessment of threatened species and communities in the ACT*. FOG stated its general support for the amendments proposed, but suggested that the Guidelines and Criteria could be improved and brought up to date, given the evolving (national and international) policy, legislation and scientific context in which they exist, and provided comments from an expert member (Benj Whitworth) to assist.

FOG also made a submission to the ACT Government (ACTPLA) on the *draft Restructured Territory Plan* (TP). FOG provided suggestions for policy matters to be followed up in a new TP including: public land boundaries and related zoning (in the Jerrabomberra Valley); recognition and protection of significant environmental values, including through a mapped 'conservation' overlay; and bushfire protection and conservation of remnants in urban areas.

Copies of the submissions are available from fogcanberra@yahoo.com.au and will be placed on FOG's website in the near future.

Nice pics

Nice pictures of Sheridan Roberts and Geoff MacFarlane (Canberra Times (CT) 23 April) on the launch of COG's *Bringing back birds: a glove-box guide*, and Lori Gould and Angela Calliess (Greening Australia) (CT 19 May) for their work on willows.

Thumbs up

Congratulations to the Federal Government for finally recognising the importance of stewardship payments in the latest budget.

Culling at Majura Grasscover

Most Canberrans will be aware of the controversy that has taken place over the proposal to cull kangaroos at the Majura Field Firing Range that FOG has visited on a number of occasions because of its quality grasslands and grassy woodlands. While I am personally I not generally in favour of kangaroo culling, and I often take some

badgering on this front, it does seem that some urgent action is called for.

Don Fletcher, Senior Ecologist, with the ACT Government, has brought together some startling and disturbing information, about the rapid drop in grassland earless dragons at Majura.

The photos provided by Don show the results of kangaroo grazing at the Majura Training Area (left) in the drought of 2006–07 which removed the habitat

of grassland earless dragons whose numbers plummeted. At the same time on the *Woden* sheep property (right), controlled grazing left enough vegetation in place for earless dragons to persist in moderate numbers. Other threatened plants and animals also depend on the vegetation for protection, and would have been similarly affected.



Regenerating Sites in the Lower Cotter

Margaret Ning

SUNDAY 29 APRIL we all, some 22 of us, arrived at the Greening Australia (GA) 'office' in Aranda for the third year of being shown a selection of their post-2003 fire regeneration sites. Our hosts this year were Susie Wilson and Haydn Burgess. Before departing, we received an orientation talk re GA's arrangements and links with other groups such as the ANBG, the Billabong Aboriginal Corporation, etc. Susie discussed GA's seed bank and showed us the nursery. A very comprehensive folder was given to each of us, containing our itinerary for the day, GA's latest edition of their glovebox bird guide, their community events calendar to June 2007, and a very interesting information brochure on GA, etc. Then fifteen of us piled into a mini bus and a dual-cab 4WD for our journey.

First stop was at the ABC site, opposite Deek's Forest Walk, at the corner of Uriarra Rd and Cotter Rd. This was actually a revisit, as it was one of the sites we had visited on a previous trip two years' ago. Last time we saw a lot of Kangaroo Grass, but it was in with other native grasses this time – including Hairy Panic (*Panicum effusum*), Wire Grass (*Aristida ramosa*), Red Grass (*Bothriochloa macra*), and *Austrostipa bigeniculata*. St John's Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) was omni-present unfortunately.

This site was the first area replanted after the fires. Originally it was ripped and mounded in order for pines to be planted, but there was quick realisation that smooth-barked

eucys would be a better way to go, plus a 20 metre band of 'nothing' along Uriarra Rd for further fire abatement. Volunteers were used to do the planting, and there was only one lot of watering, i.e. when they were planted. The site has actually just come into its own this season with all the welcome summer rain. The only weeding that has been carried out at the site is for blackberry and pine wildings.

On our way to the next site, we were held up by an accident between a 4WD and three female cyclists participating in one of the cycling events being held out there that day. A diversion had already been arranged which enabled us to circumvent the scene. We proceeded up Brindabella Rd, past the Cotter Dam, turned off at a locked gate to a site containing huge numbers of new plantings on a steep terraced lower slope of Mt McDonald. This became our morning tea spot – a warm drink and biccies on a beautiful sub-peak with a glorious view and surrounded by Xanthorrhoea and very impressive native regrowth, which included a fine specimen of Leafless Indigo (*Indigofera adesmiifolia*). Also obvious was a very forlorn tangled old fence which apparently was a remnant of the rabbit proof fence originally intended to fence off the catchment area.

In some places in the Lower Cotter Catchment, pines and weeds are holding the soil together. In other places, volunteers and contractors have been planting natives. Pine removal days have been held, and on one occasion 40 volun-

teers used long handled loppers and saws for two hours to make a huge dint in the wildings in one area. GA is keen to get the message out that they are about more than plantings. In March they held a mountain bike tour of the plantings, with about 55 participants - it was too dry for planting and too hot as well! GA has 2000 active volunteers and they aim to increase that number to 5000! Their volunteers are all ages. They have had a 'kids at the Cotter' volunteer day which was a school holiday planting. The site chosen for the kids' day was basically flat and safe, and because kids enjoy killing things as well, wilding removal was very successful that day. They have had Mothers and Fathers Day plantings, and even a Treeathlon event for triathletes! The GA employees say they have learnt a lot about 'managing' volunteers, and there have been times when it has been the 10 GA staff with 400 volunteers..... a logistical challenge, but they are learning more each time. The importance of watering is stressed as it is vital to survival rates. Susie Wilson estimated that approximately half of the GA volunteers at any event are repeats. GA also does events during the week with departmental and corporate volunteers.

We were told how GA picks the sites to be replanted. A lot of thought goes into it.

On one occasion, a GA employee returned to a selected site after an absence of 12 months in order to do a preparation recce for planting, only to find there was so much natural regeneration that nothing further needed to be done. We could see tens of thousands of planted trees, shrubs and grasses. GA has mainly finished on the northern side of the Cotter Dam, and is breaking new ground to go to the base of Condor Hill, south-west of the dam. When we resumed our journey, we could see where the Cotter River joined the dam area - this became a photo op. We could also see tens of thousands of pine wildings - a huge job to remove, but finite if many hands were on the job. GA wants to reward regular volunteers, after ten sessions, for example. This whole catchment area is heavily used by the public for many purposes. Haydn once saw a bloke driving along and walking his dog on a leash out of the car window!

Our next stop was on Sinclair Circuit, a track that circles Condor Hill, from where we could look back in the distance at our morning tea spot. We were in front of a hillside with intermittent dead pine wildings, still standing, and giving the impression of having been sprayed. However Susie thinks that they died when nearby windrows were recently torched and very hot fires eventuated, as pines are very susceptible to fire. Extremely bare areas have resulted from these very hot burns.

One hundred thousand plants are to be planted between now and next year with the help of the community, and volunteers will be removing pine wildings as they go. In very steep spots the ACT Government, using contractors, has done some hand seeding of native grasses, but the success rate is unknown! We could see Red-leaf Wattle (*Acacia rubida*) regenerating in very large numbers. We could also see some Kurrajong (*Brachychiton populneus*) regrowth towards the top of Condor Hill, although the parents' location was not evident.

Trees, grasses and shrubs are planted in equal proportions, i.e. one third each, at the sites. Up to 30 different spe-

cies could be planted in any one area, guided by Sarah Sharp's model of what was probably at the site origi-

nally. Patch burning may be used as a management tool to contain pines in the future, though this would be difficult to carry out in a catchment area.

There was some discussion of willow removal at Blundells Flat which was not far away from where we were. We could hear burned timber being felled. With the exception of a high hilly spot at Blundells Flat, there won't be any plantings at that site. Geoff Robertson and Jenny Bounds gave the group some background information regarding FOG's interest in Blundells Flat, and the hope for a community event in early October. It is a site considered to be Corroboree Frog habitat before it was modified. Blundells Flat is a very good example of government/community involvement, and the hope is that trail bikes that have been compacting and increasing the bare areas, will be stopped.

Further side discussion was of Sarah Hnatiuk, one of GA's volunteers, and a FOG member, whose focus is on moni-



Susie Wilson (above) pointing out features of the ACT's recovering landscapes and below some of the ACT's recovering landscapes

toring some of GA's private sites where remnants are fenced off from grazing. Sarah is monitoring 10 planted sites in the Mt McDonald area, and the interest is in knowing what changes occur in species composition over time.

Although the FOG turnout was smaller than on previous occasions, most were new faces and motivated. The person next to me on the bus said it was all very soothing and satisfying for the mind. On the way home, there were some very animated conversations going on all around me on the bus, all racing to have their say before we arrived back.

Geoff summed it all up by saying that it was good to come out each year to see what's happening at these regeneration sites, and that essentially the 2003 fires have enabled us to see our natural landscapes again. The rain had held off, so the conditions were close to perfect. Many, many thanks to our very enthusiastic, knowledgeable, committed GA hosts, who obviously enjoy their work and the challenges it presents.

GA's website is <http://live.greeningaust-ralia.org.au/GA/ACT/>

Natural Sequencing Farming

Janet Russell

Introduction to Jillamatong

We arrived at Jillamatong at about 10.30 and we were warmly welcomed with coffee, tea, juice and a delicious array of cakes and fruit bread provided by Patricia, Martin's partner. Just over 30 people attended this workshop-cum-field trip.



Martin Royds (photo) started by talking about the property and himself. Jillamatong is 4 kms south of Braidwood not far from Mt Gillamatong. It has an average annual rainfall of 660 mm and in the '50s 900 mm annual rainfall was not unknown. More recently it has fallen to

more like 450 mm. The property consists of natural grasslands and patches of *Eucalyptus viminalis* grassy woodlands. Martin's grandparents were early conservationists who tried to slow down the erosion of the land. He remembers being restricted in using the plough and has since used his tractor with restraint.

Martin did an applied science degree in natural resources under Peter Cullen in 1982. Before proceeding any further with his talk, he showed us two large aerial photos of the property, one taken in 1967 and the other 1985. In the 1840s there used to be a chain of ponds with bogs and meadows. By 1967, the creek ran in a straight line across the property. The woodlands are drying out and dying. This is exacerbated by the Christmas beetles which live in the grasslands and then migrate to the *E. viminalis*, defoliating them. Martin is still working to find solutions to this problem.

Natural Sequencing Farming

Peter Andrews developed the concept and the technique of *Natural Sequencing Farming* and has appeared on a number of television shows promoting it. The following is the introductory quote from his website:

"Natural Sequence Farming (NSF) is a rural landscape management technique aimed at restoring natural water cycles that allow the land to flourish despite drought conditions. NSF offers a low-cost, widely applicable method of reducing drought severity and boosting productivity on Australia's farms and landscapes. The technique is based on ecological principles, low input requirements and natural cycling of water and nutrients to make the land more resilient." Source: Natural Sequencing Farming website at: <http://www.nsfarming.com/>

Land management at Jillamatong

We went in convoy round the property and stopped at five points of interest along the way so Martin could demonstrate the way he is managing the land.

Eroded gullies

He showed us how the headwalls of eroded gullies had eaten into the land. To start the process of rehabilitation, the first thing he needed to do was to stop the flow of water. This he did by constructing weirs to dam the water and allow excess water, in times of flash flood, to flood uphill distributing the benefits of the water over a wide area. To start stabilising the banks of the gully, Martin used the cattle to trample the sides to break up the compacted earth and he then sowed grasses to stabilise the soil. Over 10-15 years the gully has grassed up and the gullies have become more shallow. This process would be expected to continue. Martin explained that the water level in the soil outside the creek is higher than the water level in the creek. This is created by the capillary action of water moving through the surrounding soil. Martin pointed out that the dams close to the house had dried up but there are weirs built over the gullies further on, where the dams still hold water.

It was a perfect day with the sun shining and the sky a light autumn blue as we looked towards to the bush-covered hills that bound Martin's property. Martin pointed out a magnificent area of *Microlaena stipoides* and *Themeda triandra* on the hillside. He was very enthusiastic about *Microlaena* for its value as stock feed due to its high protein content (26%).

Martin took us to the weir and we were able to see on the side of the gully the rich black soil overlaid by the red post-settlement alluvium which had blown in from neighbouring land. This red soil had built up as the top layer of the soil and it had become compacted and sterile. The erosion of the gully was no longer active, as was evident from the sides starting to grass up. The cumbungi reeds in the gully put their roots down well into the soil to assist the stabilisation process. Willows are also used as pioneering species for the same purpose. The group, as may be expected, was unenthusiastic about their use and Rainer suggested that species such as teatree (*Leptospermum* sp.) may be able to be used instead. There is obviously a need for further research in this area. The dog Judy's performance cavorting in and out of the creek during the time we spent there was obviously meant to compete with Martin as the centre of attention.

Pastures

We had a closer look at some of the paddocks. Martin explained the history of the paddocks and their current status and management. *Microlaena* dominated one paddock in which Martin had identified 28 native species, including native sorghum (*Sorghum leiocladum*) and 15 exotic species. This paddock had never been ploughed or fertilised and was dotted with swamp gums.

Margaret Ning found a couple of people who were eager to expand their knowledge of native grasses so she took the opportunity at this and the other stops to locate quality specimens of every grass with an inflorescence and compiled the following list from the sites that we stopped at: *Panicum effusum*, *Austrodanthonia* sp., *Dichelachne crinita*, *Themeda triandra*, *Austrostipa bigeniculata*, *Microlaena stipoides*, *Austrostipa scabra*, *Elymus scaber*,

Sporobolus creber, *Chloris truncata*, *Bothriochloa macra*, *Eragrostis trachycarpa*, and *Lachnagrostis filiformis*.

Another paddock had been dominated by rat's tail fescue (*Vulpia myuros*) and this had been improved by selective grazing practices. Martin actively manages the land by cell grazing and the cattle usually do not spend more than two days in a paddock before being moved on. It is 60 days before they return to the same paddock.

Water management for stock

Martin explained the system he is developing of moving water through a system of pipes to troughs on the hills. He needs water held both naturally on the land in the more low-lying areas as well as in troughs in case of failure of either. Movement and management of stock are an important part of the process of managing the land. Martin has plans to plant trees for the cattle to camp under on high ground so

that nutrients in the manure from these camps will then be distributed by movement of water through the landscape.

The end of the day

We returned to the house where we sat and talked over the excellent lunch spread. Thanks must go to Patricia and her friend the baker. After lunch Martin showed us the *microlaena* seed he had collected for drying in the woolshed and was making ready for sowing. We returned to the house for a final wrap-up of the day.

The hallmark of Jillamatong is the evident restraint used in stocking and the quality pastures on the property at a time when paddocks on surrounding areas are mostly bare. The amount of feed as well as the number and diversity of native grasses was very pleasing to see. Pasture weeds such as Paterson's curse and thistles seemed to be well under control.



It is all about capturing water and healthy landscapes.

We very much appreciated Martin and Patricia's hospitality and having Martin spend so much time with us to give us such a comprehensive view of the work being done. A most interesting and enjoyable day.

FOG Member Survey, March 2007

Prepared by Geoff Robertson

Introduction

More than a third of members responded to the survey on FOG's performance and future directions. On behalf of the FOG committee, I would like to thank those who responded for taking the time and giving careful consideration to their answers. The results will provide a good base for considering FOG's future directions.

The survey provides valuable information, which we haven't had before on FOG's members and the hours that they put into unpaid work on conservation, and their assessment of FOG's activities.

Extremely little negative comment was received. FOG's newsletter and program are very popular and FOG is seen as a well-organised group. In some areas, the survey shows that a large portion of members are not familiar with FOG's endeavours - this is indicated by a high level of Don't knows to some questions.

Members are keen for FOG to continue, although only a modest number can assist with organising FOG, and plan to come to the 26 August workshop on FOG's future directions.

Response

81 people responded. 59% of members lived in the ACT, 25% in the Southern Tablelands (ST), and 16% were from 'other' areas (remainder of NSW or other States).¹

Duration of membership

FOG has a good record of recruiting and retaining members. 12% have been with FOG one year or less, while the average member has clocked up 5.5 years.

Table 1. No. of years of membership

<2 yrs	12%
2<5yrs	29%
5<10yrs	32%
10+yrs	27%

Who are FOG members?

80% of members said they fitted one or more of the following categories.

- Professionally involved in conservation (42%)²,

- Landowner and/or manager of land with conservation values (42%).
- Member of a landcare, parkcare, or other community group concerned with grassy ecosystem management (39%).
- Students (2%).

The remaining 20% may be described as amateur ecologists³.

Hours of voluntary work

Most FOG members (72%) undertake unpaid conservation work associated with grassy and other ecosystems. This includes work on advocacy, writing, research, on-ground work, landcare, fire fighting, education, organising community activity, and/or attending activities.

On average, members (doing unpaid work) put in 5.5 hours per week. This ranged from 1-3 hours per week (43%) to ten or more hours (33%).

Table 2. No. of hours of unpaid voluntary work by FOG members reporting doing unpaid work

1-3 hours	43%
4-5 hours	11%
6-10 hours	13%
10+ hours	33%

General evaluation of FOG's performance

People were asked to evaluate various aspects of FOG's performance and were given four categories: Poor, Good, Very good and Don't know. I have chosen two measures, the percentage answering Very good (VG%) and the percentage answering Don't know (DK%), to evaluate FOG's performance.⁴

Table 3 show all activities are rated highly (VG%=59% or more). The newsletter is the most highly rated (VG%=88% and DK%= 4%), followed by Program, Organisation/Committee and Education Services. I would put Program ahead because of its much lower DK%.

¹ 76 members and five non-members reported. Of the five non-members, three lived in the ACT and two in the ST. Four of the non-members had dealings with FOG through work, and one was about to join FOG. One response was received after the survey was processed and it is not included in the results.

² This includes 'professional manager, scientist, government or non-government employee concerned with natural resource management, ecology, vegetation and/or wildlife, including extension services.'

³ Self descriptions included 'interested in grasslands/ecology', 'retired', 'retired grazier', 'supporter', 'archaeologist and interested lay person', 'amateur biologist', 'interested in native plants and belong to similar groups', and 'concerned with grassy ecosystem management'.

⁴ Only three Poor (P) responses were recorded. VG% = VG as % of total P + G + VG, and DK% = DK as % of total responses.

**Table 3. Assessing what FOG does:
Very good (VG%) and
Don't know (DK%) Ratios**

	VG%	DK%
Newsletter	88	4
Program	77	9
Organisation/committee	84	26
Submissions	76	45
Education services*	70	44
Member support*	65	33
Flora survey	67	43
Network support*	63	47
On-ground work	60	42
Visits to members' sites	59	49

* One P response for this activity.

It is interesting to ask why some activities score a relatively high DK%, - does this mean that FOG members take little interest in activities, or FOG does not publicise what it does in such areas sufficiently? Maybe the answer lies somewhere in between.

FOG program

Participation

The majority of survey respondents (72%) had been to a FOG activity in the last 3 years. 59% had been to more than one type of activity in that time. By 'type of activity' participation was:

- 62% - field trips.⁵
- 51% - AGM and/or slideshows,
- 49% - workshops,
- 26% - promotional and administrative activities, and
- 25% - on-ground work.

Geography factor

Location of activities in relation to where people live is a factor in participation. Table 4 also shows the participation in activities by where people live. As might be expected, distance from ACT is a deterrent to those who live further away, although members living in the ST have a higher participation rate in workshops, field trips and on-ground work than ACT residents.

**Table 4. Percentage of persons
participating in activities**

(Note: In this table, and a number of subsequent tables, the total includes all survey participants, while the other columns only include members' responses, classified by where they live.)

	Total	ACT	ST	Other
Workshops	49	54	56	25
Field trips	62	67	72	50
Slideshow/ AGM/etc.	51	67	44	8
On-ground work	25	28	39	0
Promotional and admin.	26	38	22	0

⁵ Of those attending field trips, 78% reported attending a half day or one day trip, while 48% reported attending a weekend or longer trip.

It is interesting to look at the location of the field trip and home base of members. Table 5 illustrates that FOG members are likely to attend field activities closer to their home base.

**Table 5. Percentage attending field trips by destination of
field trip**

Destination	Home base			Total
	ACT	ST	Other	
ACT	65	15	0	44
ST	68	92	17	68
Other NSW	32	23	33	30
Other States	35	8	50	30

Rating of activities

The VG% (described earlier) helps to evaluate what types of activities people most appreciate. Table 6 shows the VG% is highest for workshops (85%), followed by field trips (74%), slide shows, etc. (62%), while other activities were rated less highly (30%). No one reported an activity as being Poor.

**Table 6. Percentage of persons attending activities rating
them as very good**

	Total	ACT	ST	Oth
Workshops	85	76	100	100
Field trips	74	69	73	100
Slideshow/ AGM/etc.	62	63	100	100
On-ground work	30	31	29	n.a.
Promotional, etc.	29	35	0	n.a.

Reasons for non attendance

To ascertain whether FOG was providing the right types of activities, questions were asked on reasons for non-attendance of activities. Multiple answers were possible. The following analysis is a summary of answers for all categories (details are shown in Table 7).

- Wanted to participate, but location was inconvenient (20%). This is lower for field trips (13%), perhaps because they are offered in a wider variety of locations.
- Wanted to participate, but timing inconvenient (20%). This was around 30% for workshops and field trips. However, one person commented: 'due to my other commitments, not FOG's poor timing'.
- Generally was not interested, or I am too busy (28%). For field trips, only 16% answered this category. Many respondents crossed out Not interested and/or emphasised that they were very interested in activities.
- 20% mentioned other reasons.⁶

⁶ These included: heavy work or property commitments, often being out-of-town, babysitting young children or family reasons, already committed to other organisations, being too far away ('I live in Armidale NSW. I rarely visit Canberra - FOG members did come up in 2002'). For on-ground work many had health or injury issues to prevent attendance. Some were already heavily involved in on-ground work with other groups. For plant surveys, several people quoted lack of plant identification skills as a factor.

- 23% did not respond, making results harder to interpret.⁷

Table 7. For persons not attending a particular type of activity, reasons for non-attendance

(% response – multiple answers possible)

	Location	Timing	Not int. - too busy	Other	Not stated
Workshops	22	29	29	24	12
Field trips	13	29	16	19	32
Slideshow/AGM/etc.	26	8	33	18	18
On-ground work	20	18	26	23	23
Promotion	17	17	36	15	25
Average response	20	20	28	20	23

To summarise, there appears to be strong support for the range of activities that FOG arranges. To quote one comment 'the balance is good - in particular, need a balance between short and long field trips.' Non-attendance at activities may be attributed to FOG members being dispersed, being already heavily committed, and activities not being nearby. In the case of on-ground work and plant surveys, physical inability and lack of plant identification skills are factors for non-participation.

FOG Newsletter

Those responding to the survey were highly complimentary about the newsletter. Most people read it from cover to cover when it arrived (53%) – interestingly, 48% of Canberra respondents fall into this category, compared to 62% of respondents from elsewhere.

Table 8. Responses to: when I receive newsletter, I ...

Read cover to cover	53%
Read what interests	18%
Put aside and read at a later time	27%
Don't read it	1%

Questions were asked as to whether readers found information on the FOG program, news roundup, and articles, Helpful, Interesting, or Neither. Clearly most find the items either helpful or interesting, with program information the most helpful.

Table 9. Responses to: I find the following in the newsletter

	Helpful	Interesting	Neither
Program	36%	63%	1%
News	25%	70%	5%
Articles	27%	60%	2%

People were also asked for a yes/no answer on whether they liked information on certain topics. They answered overwhelmingly yes on each occasion: Field trips (100%), Submissions (99%), What other groups and people are doing

(96%), Particular species and ecosystems (97%), and What governments are doing (99%).

Some written comments on the newsletter were: 'It is useful. I pass bits on to my landcare group and members have attended FOG activities that I was unable to get to'; 'I think it has just the right mix and is well done'; and 'The FOG newsletter contains just the right advice for me as a property owner'.⁸

Electronic newsletter

A majority of survey respondents receive the electronic newsletter (78%), and of those, the bulk found it useful (91%).⁹ Of those not receiving it, a number mentioned that they had no email address (29%), while some (24%) said that they would like to receive it and could supply an email address (24%).

FOG submissions

People were asked about FOG submissions. In particular they were asked whether they thought that FOG submissions:

- Target appropriate subjects – the replies were: Yes (62%), No (0%), and Don't know (38%), and
- Are well researched, considered and argued – the replies were: Yes (60%), No (0%), and Don't know (40%).

Some people answered yes, on the basis of what they had read about submissions in the newsletter, whereas others thought that this wasn't a sufficient basis on which to make a judgement. One person who answered yes, commented 'haven't seen one (submission) for a long time – they were well done', while another answering don't know stated 'I have not seen many completed submissions and not too much press. The few early ones that I have seen may be too rich in detail – not policy and hard hitting enough.' Possibly FOG should do more to publicise its submissions to members!

Services to members

Several questions were asked about the services provided to or on behalf of members.

- A quarter of respondents said that members of FOG had visited a property owned or managed by them, including landcare/parkcare sites (27%). Of this group, a large proportion found that information supplied on the visit was useful (89%) and a small number not useful (11%).
- 100% percent of respondents answered that their dealings with FOG had been good. One commented that FOG was 'Positive, organised, and professional.'

⁷ While only 12% did not respond to the question on why they did not attend workshops, 33% did not respond on the reason why they did not attend field trips – this might be largely due to poor questionnaire design for this question.

⁸ Another comment was there should be 'more information on interaction and feedback from other groups whether they be in conservation or government agencies - ACT, Councils, State, Federal.'

⁹ One who found it not useful, commented 'I receive it but it is on an email address I don't check often. I tend to come back to the newsletter. Usually overwhelmed by all the emails I get.'

- 88% stated that the FOG committee does a good job. 12% answered don't know to this question – there were no 'no' answers.
- 45% agreed that FOG is effective in providing services to other groups and 55% said Don't know.
- Only 18% said that FOG presentations to schools and other groups are effective, and the remainder answered Don't know.

Fulfilling objectives

79% considered that FOG is fulfilling its objectives, while the remainder answered Don't know. One person commented "it might be useful to state clearly what these (objectives) are".

On the question should FOG reconsider its objectives, 20% said Yes, 30% said No, and 50% said Don't know. One person answering yes stated "there should be a broad review from time to time". One person answering no stated "only in a routine 'keeping on track' way". This suggests that reviewing its objectives is not a high priority.

One respondent said 'Overall I applaud FOG for the excellent work it is doing in helping to raise awareness of and preserving our native grasslands.' Wal Whalley made a very strong supportive statement on FOG's achievements and since it was published in the last newsletter it is not repeated here. Another comment which might sum up some members' views is "As I generally only read the newsletter and attend one slide afternoon and one of other workshop/fieldtrip per year, FOG is currently meeting my need (for information and interest). I feel FOG is currently working really well and does not need to change direction."

Issues on which FOG should place more emphasis were: grasses as a carbon sink (climate change debate); population growth associated with sprawl of cities, country towns, and hobby farms, and hence a loss of biodiversity; federal funding for restoration of farmlands with indigenous grasslands, woodlands, etc; and ACT regional restoration issues. Two members suggested that FOG should change its name to Friends of Grassy Ecosystems.

Future direction

Sustaining activity

The survey asked that if FOG has difficulty sustaining its current activity, should it (multiple answers were allowed)

- Find new people (77% said yes)
- Cease to exist (3% said yes) – a number of people wrote in 'definitely not'.
- Reduce services to members (26% said yes)

26% answered this question with a Don't know. There were a number of suggestions such as 'Review all options'; 'Look at what FOG is trying to achieve and what resources there are to achieve this'; 'There are just too many groups all wanting to do helpful environmental things – maybe amalgamation is the way to go, as most of them seem to have troubles with members.'

There were a number of suggestions about things FOG might aim to do. These included improving our internet profile and bringing in some younger people to increase the energy level of the group. It was suggested that FOG might budget \$1,000 a year for this purpose. It was also suggested that \$5 annual subscription for people on low income is too little. It should be at least \$10. Another suggestion was that FOG should adopt some sites.

What assistance can members provide?

The survey also asked people to indicate whether they would be willing to assist in the following areas (multiple answers were permitted):

- Direction and policy (6%)
- Submissions (7%)
- Program (15%)
- Newsletter (15%)
- Committee (12%)

Overall, 16% said that they were prepared to work on one or more areas of activity, 21% said that they were prepared to work on one area of activity, and 63% did not indicate any area of activity.

Attendance at workshop

Finally people were asked would they be attending the workshop on 25 August to discuss FOG's future direction. 13% said Yes, 41% No, and 46% said Don't know.

Treatment of non-response: There is a high level of non-response on some questions. This might be attributed to poor questionnaire design – people not seeing questions and the questionnaire being long. Following common practice, I calculated percentages as the percentage of those who responded.

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Friends of Grasslands Newsletter

Do you want to subscribe to the newsletter? It comes out six times a year, and you can obtain it by joining FOG. You do not need to be an active member - some who join often have many commitments and only wish to receive the newsletter.

However, if you own or lease a property, are a member of a landcare or parkcare group, or actively interested in grassland and woodland conservation or revegetation, we hope we have something to offer you. We may assist by visiting sites and identifying native species and harmful weeds. We can suggest conservation and revegetation goals as well as management options, help document the site, and sometimes support applications for assistance, etc.

Of course you may wish to increase your own understanding of grasslands and woodlands, plant identification skills, etc. and so take a more active interest in our activities. Most activities are free and we also try to arrange transport (or car pool) to activities.

If you are already a member, why not encourage friends to join, or make a gift of membership to someone else? We will also send a complimentary newsletter to anyone who wants to know more about us.

How to join Friends of Grasslands

Send us details of your name, address, telephone, fax, and e-mail, etc. You might also indicate your interests in grassland issues. Membership is \$20 for an individual or family; \$5 for students, unemployed or pensioners; and \$50 for corporations or organisations - the latter can request two newsletters be sent. Please make cheques payable to Friends of Grasslands Inc.

If you would like any further information about membership please contact Margaret Ning, or if you would like to discuss FOG issues contact Bernadette O'Leary, Kim Pullen, Janet Russell or Geoff Robertson. Contact details are given in the box above. We look forward to hearing from you.

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