

News of Friends of Grasslands

Supporting native grassy ecosystems

November December 2007

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Program

THURS 8 NOV 12:30 to 1:15pm **St Mark's Grassland** with Benj Whitworth. St. Mark's grassland is a hotspot of grassland biodiversity in the heart of Canberra (Blackall Pl., Barton). If you can assist with advertising this event (e.g. work or elsewhere), which is open to the public, or plan to attend on the day, please contact Benj (contact details back page).

SAT 10 NOV 9:30 to 3:30pm **Working bee at Old Cooma Common**. Attending working bees provides an opportunity to visit one of the most interesting grasslands on the Monaro, develop your skills, and to catch up with FOG members and experts. See details on page 3.

WED 21 NOV 5 to 6pm **Tarengo leek orchid**. Join us at Hall Cemetery to see this threatened orchid species and many other grassy woodland species. Meet at the corner of Barton Highway and Wallaroo Road at 5pm. Enquiries, contact Janet Russell (details back page).

SAT 8 DEC 9 to 5pm **Nungar Plain** with Roger Farrow. For details, see page 2.

Of special interest

THURS TO FRI 22-23 NOV ANPC Canberra Workshop **Identifying plants of grassy ecosystems of the ACT region**. This workshop, supported by FOG, has been previously advertised. Note that you can register for either one or both days. For further enquiries or to register, contact the ANPC office, anpc@anpc.asn.au, 02-6250 9509 and website (<http://www.anpc.asn.au>). For free places, see page 5.

SUN 11 November 2pm - **Walk Against Warming** To participate in, or to assist the Conservation Council organise this event, contact the Conservation Council, www.consact.org.au. If you want to know what politicians are up to on climate change please take a look at www.thebigswitch.org.

Membership renewal

PLEASE READ THIS CAREFULLY: A membership renewal form is enclosed. Yes, it is time to get out the cheque book and renew your membership for 2008. We have kept our fees to the current low level: \$20 for individuals and families, \$50 for corporations, and \$5 concessions for those on social security benefits. Donations are welcome as the budget is tight.

Please complete the renewal form and send it in promptly as much effort is otherwise involved in chasing up members to renew. If you don't want to renew, please return the form or email us, and tell us that you do not want to renew. If you have any doubts about rejoining, please remember that FOG needs your support.

When completing the form, please ensure that your details, especially your e-mail address are correct. Those providing E-mail addresses will receive our E-Bulletin which is proving an effective way of reminding members about activities/changes to activities between newsletters.

Please note that if you joined (not renewed) since 1 July, your membership is up to date, i.e., paid until the end of 2008, and you should not have received a membership renewal form.

Grass collars photos - see page 2.



News Roundup

Future Directions Workshop

Bernadette O'Leary

25 AUGUST FOG held its planning workshop at Mugga. Twenty-two mostly FOG members participated in the workshop which was facilitated by Peter Davey from the Ginninderra Catchment Group. Three other members were unable to attend but emailed comments to support the discussion.

The workshop provided members and interested observers with an opportunity to find out more about what FOG is up to, and how it has

been going in recent years; and to contribute to discussion about direction, priorities and approaches for coming years. Various background papers were provided to intending participants prior to the workshop.

The workshop began with an introduction to FOG - how it operates, recent activities/successes and key issues - presented by FOG President, Kim Pullen. The workshop continued with an introductory discussion scanning FOG's external and internal environment: what has changed since it began; what is likely to change; and the critical challenges facing FOG in terms of its overall directions, operations and practices. Two group discussion sessions followed.

Session 1: What should FOG do? Discussion was in four sub-groups, with leaders from the FOG Committee, in key areas - communication, hands-on conservation, advocacy, and liaison and research. Two scenarios were presented: no or marginal change in FOG's current capacities; and substantial increase in current capacities. In each scenario, participants were asked to identify: what current activities should continue unchanged / be strengthened / be downgraded or deleted; and what new activities should be undertaken.

Session 2: How should FOG proceed? Two sub-groups were formed combining the earlier four as communication/ hands-on conservation and advocacy/liaison and research, with the task to, given the context scanned, the activity priorities determined and capacity implications - consider how to proceed, as an organisation, and through business operations and a strategic plan.

Both sessions were reported back to the whole group. A report on the workshop has been sent to participants and interested others, and is available on request. The FOG Committee considered the report at its September meeting and is proceeding to draft a strategic plan by the end of 2007.

The FOG Committee appreciates the participation of members and others in the workshop, and thanks Peter Davey (photo below) in particular for his generous support as facilitator.



Nungar Plain Sat 9 Dec

With Roger Farrow

SAT 8 DEC 9 to 5pm. This trip is combined with ANPS, and will visit Nungar Plain, north of Adaminaby NSW. The Plain is reputed to contain the most species-rich grassland in the alpine area. Roger suggests that people stay overnight in Adaminaby on the Friday night so that we can start promptly at 9am. Assessment of whether 4-wheel drive is required and general road condition will be determined by Roger closer to the time. To register, contact Roger Farrow or Janet Russell, contact details back page.

Some diary dates for 2008

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

10am-3pm, SAT 12 JAN, 10am-3pm Informal workshop: understanding soils and biodiversity at Garuwanga, near Nimmitabel. Optional - stay longer at Garuwanga. To register, contact Janet, details back page. For more information see item on FOG soils workshop - this page.

SAT 23 FEB 4 to 7:30pm FOG's AGM, Mugga Mugga Short AGM, slide show on FOG activities in 2007, and barbeque. Venue: Mugga Mugga Education Centre, Narrabundah Lane, Symonston.

Grass collars photos - front page

On FOG's trip to the Eastern Riverina (18-30 September, report next issue), I was fascinated by variations in the collar area of grasses, i.e., where the leaf blade breaks away from the stem. In the three photos we see differences in the extent to which the leaf covers the stem below the collar, the presence (especially top photo) or apparent absence of auricles, the degree of hairiness and their patterns, and the colour of membrane (not seen in black and white). *Editor*

In this issue

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- Many-flowered mat-rush - *Lomandra multiflora*

Old Cooma Common

The next working bee at Old Cooma Common is on Saturday 10 November 9:30 to 3:30pm.

Old Cooma Common is a grassland reserve, located off the southern end of Polo Flat Road, Cooma, and has been established by FOG and Cooma Monaro Council. It is fascinating to visit any time and is one of the most interesting grasslands on the Southern Tablelands. It contains two threatened and one rare plant species.

FOG holds working bees there in March and November each year which may involve control of St John's wort and African lovegrass, cutting and daubing briars, seed removal, mapping weeds, and applying monitoring procedures. Some tasks will not involve herbicides. Taking part regularly, or occasionally, in these working bees, is a good way to learn about grassland management.

At lunchtime we tend to buy lunch and retreat to a more shaded area. Enquiries and car pooling: Margaret Ning and David Eddy, see contact details back page.



Photo of Old Cooma Common looking fairly weedless in September – let's keep it that way.

FOG Soils Workshop – Sat 12 Jan

In July and August, Bernadette and Geoff undertook the *benchmarking and understanding soil chemistry course* conducted by the Department of Primary Industry. This involved two days of theory and field work. In addition they were required to collect eight soil samples at Geoff's property, Garuwanga (near Nimmitabel), which were analysed as part of the course.

Bernadette and Geoff consider that an informal workshop, planned for January, would provide a good opportunity to share what they learnt, to consider its implications for biodiversity management, and just have a good time.

People can attend the workshop on the Saturday (and a simple lunch will be provided free) or stay the weekend - it is planned to share a meal on the Saturday and people can explore Garuwanga if they wish.

The Poplars' future

Tom Baker

5 SEPTEMBER Queanbeyan City Council resolved to support the application to draft a further local environmental plan by the owners of the Poplars and Village Building Company for the 210ha Poplars property, on south side of Lanyon Drive between Queanbeyan and Canberra.

The Poplars includes a large area of natural temperate grassland, a threatened ecological community, and adjoining woodlands and is home to threatened species such as the grass-

land earless dragon, a small lizard which lives in spider holes and similar, and button wrinklewort (*Rutidosis leptorrhynchoides*). The grasslands also support the day flying moth and a population of the pink tailed worm lizard, also a threatened species, is also probably present.

A new local environmental study will take in, among other things, work done some years ago for the

creation of protected areas for good native grassland, and habitat of the button wrinklewort and the earless dragon. Council also resolved that prior to the development of the Poplars, a Master Plan will be set out clearly the various proposed land uses (school, etc.), in addition to the principles applying, and that this will occur at the same time as the preparation of a draft Local environmental plan.

What this means is that the future land use of the Poplars, currently zoned Rural A Zone, will finally be resolved. The first rezoning proposal took place in 1990, followed by a Public Hearing and an extended debate on the impact of aircraft noise on proposed residential areas. The draft local environmental plan and master plan will shortly be put out for public comment as per normal practice. If you want more information, contact me on 0415 839017.

Grasses of the North Coast

FOG recently received a copy of *Grasses of the North Coast* published by Harry and Carol Rose and Tac Campbell, all of NSW DPI. It contains colour and diagnostic photos of 75 of the North Coast CMA's most common native and naturalised grasses – another excellent contribution to understanding our native grasses. However, according to the authors there is more to do – there are around 325 native and naturalised grasses in the region. To obtain a copy contact the DPI's Kempsey Office on 02 6562 6244.

Support Molongo Appeal

FOG has been working with other groups to have the ACT Government pull back certain parts of the proposed Molongo development which would see wholesale destruction of threatened grassy woodlands, and habitat of the pink tailed worm lizard, and many threatened bird species. It has been unsuccessful. *Draft Variation to the Territory Plan No. 281*, which is wholesale attack on grassy ecosystem remnants, is now out for comment. The Conservation Council proposes to run a campaign to have the government wind back on this proposal (see letter inserted with this newsletter). Please support this appeal and become informed on this issue. Please put in a submission - deadline 27 November. For more information contact Geoff – details back page.

Restoration of Michelago Creek

Tony Robinson

Over the past five years the Michelago and District Landcare Group has been restoring natural habitat along Michelago Creek, and parts of Ryries Creek and Margaret's Creek. These creeks, together with Booroomba Creek, make up the main water-courses in the Michelago district. They originate to the east of Michelago village in the Tinderry Range and flow into the Murrumbidgee to the west.

The main activities, funded mainly through the Natural Heritage Trust's Envirofund, have been weed control, native tree planting, the removal of invasive crack willows from the watercourses, the construction of rock gabions along eroded creek banks (see photos), fencing off stock access to the creeks and the provision of off-stream watering. Other valued funders of these activities have been Greening Australia, Duke Energy and the Olympic Committee.

The removal of the crack willows from the watercourse has improved the biodiversity along Michelago Creek with the reappearance of acacias and tea tree (*Leptospermum* sp.) and a range of smaller native forbs. A recent visit (16 Sept) by FOG members identified for us a number of interesting and uncommon grasses and sedges such as curly sedge (*Carex bichenoviana*) and river tussock. Thanks to Geoff and Sarah. We hope to learn more as the habitat changes and develops.

With the removal of crack willows, the course of the creek is changing with flow of water remaining more centrally in the creek and the appearance of a more vegetated stepped series of ponds. This year at least four spe-

cies of frog have been heard calling. Not all willows were removed, as it is recognised that in many situations they have a role in the stabilisation of stream banks. To overcome further invasion by seed, all female trees were removed, leaving the males.

As there has been no major flood in



Photos supplied by Dennis – these show 'the construction of rock gabions along eroded creek banks' just after construction, and after vegetation has become established. Photo below is a flower head of swamp foxtail grass (*Penisetum alopecuroides*) sighted on the 16 Sept trip.



recent years the rock gabions have not been seriously tested but smaller floods have shown that they are standing up well and holding the toes of the steep banks as they slump. The tree plantings along the banks of the creek in the village have been very successful and many are now six to eight metres tall and attracting a range of small native birds. We are monitoring the changes to flora and fauna as the project progresses and would eventually like to use the area as a natural recreation site for villagers and others to enjoy. Future projects will involve assisting local landholders with more fencing, off-stream watering and tree planting.

Stipa in Canberra

21 AUGUST the Stipa Native Grasses Association presented a workshop to ACT region farmers – its title was *Native grasses as a basis for cropping and grazing*. The workshop which FOG and the ACT Rural Landholders Association (RLA) helped to organise was attended by 25 people. The aim of the workshop was to talk to farmers and illustrate how native grasses can play an important part in cropping and pasture. Andrew Giekie (President, ACT RLA) opened the workshop. Stipa speakers included George Taylor, Sue Rahilly, Xanthe White and Angela Roberts, as well as two local graziers, Tobias Koenig and Martin Royds, both well known to FOG members.

Many questions were posed to the speakers and over lunch, intense and fruitful discussion ensued. After lunch Geoff Robertson gave a short talk on the cultural and natural history of the venue (Mugga Mugga) and the group adjourned to identify the various native grass and forb species that grow on site.

The following day there was a similar workshop – this time addressed to scientists and bureaucrats. It was organised by CSIRO. Col Seis, who could not make it on the previous day, was also a speaker. This was Stipa's first appearance in Canberra and they were very pleased with their reception.

New ST CMN Facilitator

Mary Appleby

The Southern Tablelands Grassy Ecosystems CMN now has a Facilitator – that's me. Funding has been provided by several agencies.

My job is to facilitate actions of the CMN by producing a newsletter, maintaining contacts between network members, sharing resources, organising field days and workshops, producing resource material, and anything else that supports CMN members to improve conservation outcomes for grasslands and grassy woodlands in the Southern Tablelands. I may be contacted by telephone at 4842 1100 or 0429 850 838.

Several activities interesting and informative field days have already been advertised. More are on the way, including *Native Grassland Management Field Day* - Friday 2 November at Lerida TSR (Goulburn RLPB), *Native Grassland Management Field Day* - at Gundary TSR (Goulburn RLPB), *Identifying plants of grassy ecosystems in the Kosciuszko to Coast project area (Bredbo)* – Friday 30 November.

Free places for ANPC workshop

DECC has announced that it will fund several places on the ANPC *Identifying plants of grassy ecosystems* course. To apply, this offer is restricted to NSW residents, contact rainer.rehwinkel@environment.nsw.gov.au by Friday 26 October.

Grassland buttercup

Rainer Rehwinkel has excitedly reported that he has found another unusual grassland species growing in a damp corner of his garden. The species is *Ranunculus pumilio*, a softly hairy annual herb which is intermittently moist sites, mostly in grassland or woodland. Further information may be found in *New South Wales Flora Online*.

Spring flowering

Benj Whitworth

18 SEPTEMBER At Gungahlin Hill, on my recent walk, I saw a few golden moth orchids – all very small. Cryptandra have been in flower at St Marks and Gossan Hill. Also at Gossan Hill and Bruce Ridge NW corner I

saw many finger orchids, mainly *caerulea* and *fuscata*.

Southern Tablelands' study

FOG recently received a copy of the report *Maintenance of biodiversity in native pastures*, which posed the question of what are the benefits of maintaining biodiversity in native pastures for primary producers and grassy ecosystems conservation on the Southern Tablelands.

The report states that 45 farm managers participated in the study. All properties studied contained sixty percent or more native pasture and, where possible, had up to 30 years continuous ownership or management. Some properties with no ploughing, over storey clearing or broad acre herbicide in the last ten years were also targeted. Farms from different stocking regimes were chosen.

One of the key findings was the move away from *set stocking*. Nevertheless approaches to management were very variable. For more information contact the Southern Rivers CMA.

New UMLC Committee

Tony Robinson

The Annual General Meeting for the Upper Murrumbidgee Landcare (UMLC) Network was held on Tuesday evening 25 September at Cooma. This was followed by a General Meeting and two presentations from local landcare groups on their recent activities.

Prior to the AGM, Lynton Bond, Carwoola Landcare, announced that he would stand down as Chair but was willing to continue as an active member of the committee. Lynton has been a tower of strength to the Network during a period of change with the advent of the Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) and the changes in the way natural resources are managed in the region. Lynton's efforts will be known to many in the catchment. He has been ably assisted by Pam Vipond the UMLC Community Support Officer (CSO). Over the last few years they have been working through the change processes and developing partnership relationships with the Murrumbidgee CMA.

At the AGM, I, representing the Michelago and District Landcare Group, was elected Chair. Lynton accepted the position of Deputy Chair to assist the Committee and me with the handover. Maryke Booth, Royalla Landcare, was re-elected Treasurer, Tom Baker, Queanbeyan Landcare, Secretary, and Phil Selmes, also of Queanbeyan Landcare, the Public Officer. Ken Dane and Jim Wharton of Numeralla Landcare were elected as Committee members. One Committee member position remains vacant.

During the AGM Lynton was presented with a gift and thanked for his sterling efforts on behalf of the Network. Two Committee members, Jean Wynes, Bredbo Landcare, and Bill Warrenner, Numeralla Landcare stood down this year and were thanked in their absence for their efforts over the past few years.

Over the next year the new committee will complete the strategic plan that was started by Lynton, will establish a presence on a new website and will assist Pam with the development of her workplan. Discussions on the terms of reference for the MCMA, Murrumbidgee Landcare, and the UMLC CSO will continue as these partnerships mature.

Action on Indian Mynas

Bill Handke, President of the Canberra Indian Myna Action Group is pleased that the group received an ACT Environment Grant valued at \$15,000 to continue their work on reducing the numbers and spread of Indian Mynas. The grant will support the group in public education and awareness raising, and to contract trap makers to reduce the trap waiting list and to trial some trapping in currently restricted areas. A major task is to develop information brochures and pamphlets to distribute to the general public. If you have any skills to assist in this, Bill would like to hear from you. His contact details are handke@grapvine.net.au. The group also holds regular trap building workshops.

Report on four new fire trails in Namadgi *Christine Goonrey*

Since the 2003 fires we have known that many new fire trails were proposed for Namadgi National Park, in addition to the network of existing roads, fire trails and management tracks. The new trails which caused most concern are known as Bullen Range, Spencers Border, Orroral Tors and Stockyard Link and in April 2007 a consultation process was undertaken by Territory and Municipal Services (TAMS) as the first step to getting approval to build these trails.

The Bullen Range fire trail is surrounded by private property and very clearly part of the important urban edge protection system, so NPA decided not to oppose it. Spencers Border fire trail, on the NSW/ACT border at the southern end of the park, is separated from an existing fire trail on Spencer's property by a three strand wire fence. We stated very firmly that building this trail would be a complete waste of public money and evidence that fire fighting relations across State jurisdictions are not working as well as we might hope.

Stockyard Link fire trail starts by running through a small wetland, carries on across an exposed ridge, then plunges down a steep spur which has defied all road building attempts to date, then ends up at Corin Dam. Our main objections to this fire trail were that it will create erosion directly into the Cotter River; it will always require extensive and costly maintenance simply to ensure it could be used by vehicles; and it will be used to introduce inappropriate prescribed burning to a key area of the catchment. We opposed this trail vigorously.

The fourth fire trail starts at the old collimation tower site on Orroral Ridge and extends right across the ridge to join Smokers fire trail about a kilometre from the locked gate off the Corin road. Its purpose is to enable a program of frequent intense burning every 2-3 years from the proposed road down into Orroral Valley to establish a low fuel zone on these slopes. An undefined prescribed burning program would also be carried out into Blue Gum Creek.

Our reasons for objecting to this fire trail are numerous. It would destroy the highly valued experience of following a footpad trail through some of the loveliest and most unusual scenery in Namadgi. It would require the blasting of rocky tors and subsequent destruction of Aboriginal sites. It would open up the area to illegal 4WDs and motor bikes and increase the incidence of arson. The prescribed burning would reduce vegetation and leaf litter on the steep scree slopes of Orroral Valley with resulting erosion into Orroral River and possibly de-stabilise significant tors such as Cathedral Rocks.

Can you help FOG?

FOG has identified that it would greatly help if several people could contribute about 4-6 hours a month to assist with FOG tasks. One task would be to be editor, or assistant editor of the FOG E-Bulletin. There are several tasks that could be undertaken on the program, and many more come to mind. If you would like to discuss this further, please talk to Geoff, contact details back page.

In conjunction with other interested clubs including FOG, Canberra Ornithologist Group and Canberra Bushwalkers, we took part in the consultation process which itself seemed quite flawed. The flora and fauna survey was limited and not likely to show the richness of the area in non-drought times. There was some doubt as to the weight put on comments on the ecological values of the areas or our assessments of the proposed fire regimes. We weren't very confident that this process would contribute to a sensible decision so we increased the pressure.

Stateline on ABC TV did a substantial item on the issues which attracted a lot of public attention. We met with the Minister for Emergency Services who promised no new trails would be commenced while the current review of the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan was under way. We met with senior officials in TAMS who took our concerns on board. It was much more difficult getting a response from the Emergency Services Authority which

is the body pushing for the building of these fire trails. The Commissioner, Gregor Manson, eventually came to the July general meeting of the National Parks Association (NPA) ACT and made clear that he thought such contentious issues should be resolved by interested parties at an informal level.

From June through to September NPA kept up active lobbying - check the NPA website at www.npaact.org.au for details on the long drawn out process. Finally, on 12 September, the Chief Minister announced that the Orroral trail would not be built, the Stockyard Link would be a much modified, smaller track and Spencers was on hold for a year. Only Bullen would go ahead in its original form. After four and a half years of seeing the yellow tags flutter along Orroral ridge, this was a huge relief for us all.

However, there is no doubt in anyone's mind that we need to keep an eye on the larger picture, i.e. the overall fire management plan for the ACT, because this is the plan which could again mandate more fire trails in inappropriate places. An effective, sustainable fire management plan is our only guarantee that trails such as these will never be built because there will be no good reason to build them.

Christine is President of NPA ACT, an executive member of Conservation Council, and a FOG member.

More grasslands threatened
Grasscover

22 SEPTEMBER Canberra Times Marika Dobbin mentions that "The ACT Government is considering opening up a massive stretch of land to Canberra's east for light industry." This is part of the "Eastern Broadacre Study (which) follows a similar study of the Molonglo Valley". Unfortunately, it is difficult to actually find references to these elusive studies on ACT Government websites. However, what is implicit is that large areas of natural temperate grassland, grassy woodland, and habitat for threatened species will face the development threat, and we can have no confidence that the government will protect these areas. So watch this space!

Biodiversity offsets

Groundcover

Readers will be aware of the various provisions of the NSW *Native Vegetation Legislation* and that land clearing is allowable in some circumstances, and in some of those situations, biodiversity offsets are required. NSW passed the *Biobanking Bill* in December 2006. Biobanking is a new process and it is unclear as yet what the ecological and ethical implications of it are. According to one opinion, "while some aspects of offsetting are ecologically pragmatic and arguably in the public interest, there are other aspects that amount to little more than green-wash".

According to its website, Eco Trades is the first company in NSW to provide the development industry with rapid access to strategically acquired, fully documented biodiversity offsets. It describes itself as a specialist biodiversity offset provider and offset broker.

Currently it manages 25 properties totalling nearly 20,000 hectares on behalf of its investment partners. Collectively these properties provide habitat for a number of endangered ecological communities, including grassy white box-yellow box-Blakely's red gum woodlands, Lower Hunter spotted gum-ironbark forest, dry rainforest and coastal saltmarsh, and many threatened plants and animals such as koalas, brush-tailed rock-wallabies, squirrel gliders, swift parrots, regent honey-eaters, grey-crowned babbler, brown tree-creepers and speckled warblers.

Owners of high conservation properties can also sell offsets. For more information you might want to look at the Eco Trades web site, www.ecotrades.com.au.

Can you believe it?

Grasscover

28 SEPT CANBERRA The Defence Department announced that it will implement a kangaroo management plan in the Australian Capital Territory purportedly designed to promote sound ecological management and a responsible approach to animal welfare. The plan will use a mix of translocation,

fertility control and – only where necessary – euthanasia to bring the kangaroo population into balance with the ecosystem at the Belconnen Naval Station (BNS).

This follows advice from its expert panel, convened in August 2007, to assess the environmental impact of the kangaroo population at the naval station. The panel comprised specialists on kangaroos, native temperate grasslands, reptiles and on responsible wildlife management. As many FOG members know, the site is fenced and the kangaroos are a captive population.

The panel concluded that the structure of the grass swards and soil condition at the BNS showed very heavy grazing which threatened the long-term sustainability of the grassland. However, part of the package was a curious announcement that "supplementary feeding will be introduced as a measure to save grass and soils".

At the Majura Training Area, Defence has engaged a contractor to construct a kangaroo temporary exclusion fence around threatened Natural Temperate Grassland – obviously the Department is not short of cash!

In response (4 Oct), the Limestone Plains Group, comprising local Canberra scientists and nature conservation groups, while welcoming the Defence Department's decision to manage actively kangaroos at its Belconnen Naval Station, was critical of the decision saying that Defence was still too focused on kangaroos rather than taking responsibility for managing the entire grassland ecosystem. Spokesperson, David Shorthouse said "It is essential that kangaroo numbers be reduced immediately. Spring is a key time for the grassland plants to grow and set seed. Continuing the overgrazing will jeopardise recovery of the grassland".

The Group remains concerned about Majura and fears that Defence's pro-



Check this out

Michael Bedingfield took this photo of a new display board during a visit to Mulligan's Flat. There is a similar board in Goorooyarroo.

posed fencing of the best quality grassland will simply increase the grazing pressure on adjoining vegetation, including the threatened woodland community. There is very little grass available in the woodland. In its view, the kangaroo population must be culled immediately or the grassland earless dragon and other threatened species will be placed at even greater risk of extinction by continued overgrazing by kangaroos.

FOG submissions

Bernadette O'Leary

I've included summary information below about FOG submissions in response to public notification in recent months. Full details of submissions are available via request to fogcanberra@yahoo.com.au, and they will eventually be included on the website (hopefully by the end of 2007).

Symonston caravan park swap

Further to a recent submission on an EPBC referral about providing services to, and leasing of, the Symonston caravan park swap site (see Sept-Oct newsletter), FOG provided comments to both the ACT Planning and Land Authority and the National Capital Authority on a draft variation to the Territory Plan (no.285) and a draft amendment to the National Capital Plan (no.67), respectively.

Again, FOG's comments were based on the likely significant impact on the

grassland earless dragon (*Tympanocryptis pinguicolla*) and its habitat, and the currently unknown status of this species especially given the drought and effects of overgrazing.

FOG noted the Conservator of Flora and Fauna's comments on, and supported most of his recommendations relating to, the Draft Variation to the Territory Plan. Although FOG does not support the proposed development, our stated position was that if it is allowed: the area affected should be minimal; as much habitat should be conserved as possible; and a regime of effective management should be put in place.

ACT Weeds Strategy

FOG also provided comments on the draft ACT Weeds Strategy which revised the existing (1996-2006) Strategy. In brief, FOG's stated view was that weeds of grassy ecosystems are some of the most problematic; weed management needs to be resourced adequately for success; community (including volunteer) participation needs to be well supported to be effective; all land containing weeds needs to be included in an ACT approach; landscape scale approaches (across tenures and borders) are critical; and

the ACT Government should show leadership in managing weeds on its own land.

FOG letters

Microleana lawn!

Helen Bayes

Dear FOG, I have seeded a *Microleana stipoides* lawn in my O'Connor front garden, under two old, wild, blakeleyis. If FOG folk would like to come and see how it is progressing, they are welcome. Please ring front door bell, so I can meet you and describe what we did. My e-mail is baymor@cyberone.com.au.

Opinion piece

Overgrazing of grassland

Isobel Crawford

So where are we now, three months after the decision by Defence on 5 July not to proceed with a cull of kangaroos at either Belconnen or Majura, in response to pressure from Wildcare Queanbeyan? Kangaroos are still overgrazing grasslands which have provided habitat for threatened species, at both locations.

Belconnen.

The next delaying tactic from Defence was to convene a group of four scientists, an 'Expert Panel', to give their opinions on what should be done. They visited Belconnen on 11 August, and reported very promptly. It then took about a month for Defence to release the summary of a combined report, *The Expert Panel Assessment - August 2007*.

It seems most odd that experts would recommend that euthanasia be used only as a last resort at Belconnen. (Shooting has been banned by the AFP.) Translocation is still being pushed as the favoured 'solution'. The Limestone Plains Group still considers that this is not a solution: it is inhumane to expose wild animals to being darted, captured, handled, tagged, confined, transported, exposed to noise, and then released into a strange new location with insufficient food resources, competing resident roos, and

surrounded by landowners with permits to shoot. You wouldn't let anyone do this to your favourite dog, so why do it to roos?

Apart from the fact that translocation is cruel, it also seems wrong to increase the number of kangaroos somewhere else, when we are in continuing severe drought. This will only increase the grazing pressure on the land they are moved to. Finding a location or locations than can accept about 400 roos from Belconnen, and provide good quality food for them, plus the existing roos etc., seems a difficult, if not impossible, goal to realise. How long will we have to wait for Defence and Wildcare to accept that this is not a solution for Belconnen?

Majura

At Majura, a fence is going to be built around the grassland in the south-western corner. This will largely involve increasing the height of existing fences. It will have an impact on the threatened woodland community outside the fence, as it will push the roos into the woodland (and other poorer quality grasslands). It sounds as if this was not given sufficient weight in the Impact Assessment done under the EPBC Act, which has a question about this. It would be interesting to see how this was answered.

Defence has a responsibility to manage these grasslands so that threatened species are conserved, rather than further endangered by a refusal to cull kangaroos. Life is about making tough decisions, not copping out and hoping that the roos at Majura will magically find some food outside the fenced grassland, in the continuing and serious drought. There is no food elsewhere at Majura: either the animals will starve on the range, or they will move away. If they move, they will either be shot by adjoining landholders, or run over, or they will add to the existing pressure in nearby nature reserves in NSW and the ACT.

We have a very simple choice: either we kill individuals of a common and widespread species, i.e. roos, or we increase the likelihood of extinction for one or more threatened species.

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What FOG Members Have Been Doing, Part II

Margaret Ning

Last time, we published Part I of Margaret's write up of the FOG slide afternoon held on 16 June. We now continue with Part II, Editor.

Using interactive identification keys - electronic plant ID!

There were two presentations in this part. The first was a demonstration of *Families of Flowering Plants of Australia*, edited by Kevin Thiele and Laurie Adams by Janet Russell and I. We gave a brief overview of how *Families of Flowering Plants of Australia* works to help one identify plants to family level. Ideally, when one has a plant specimen it should be possible, using the interactive key, to do this by entering particular characteristics of the plant which will gradually eliminate all the families other than its own, although in practice, this is not always possible. One can then use either the photos of species within each family on the DVD to possibly get down to genus/species level (though there is only a limited range of photos for each family), or other resources such as floras and field guides.

The identification process commences with a list of 240 families, and an extremely long list of characteristics (166) that can be entered for the specimen, including state, region, vegetation community, habit, leaf/flower/fruit/seed details, etc. The specimen that Janet and I chose to demonstrate the key with, was nodding saltbush (*Einadia nutans*), which, because of its particular leaf shape (hastate – two outward pointing lobes at the base and a pointy tip) and fleshy fruit, we managed to identify only after selecting only six characteristics. And that is the secret to success – note unusual easily identifiable macro features and select for those characteristics first. Apart from the *einadia*, we also had some other beautiful fresh specimens on show which also illustrated some of these unusual characteristics – e.g. unusual leaf shape, spines on stems, pungent odour, glands, etc.

Dave Mallinson then demonstrated *Euclid, Eucalypts of Australia, Third edition*. Dave went through similar steps to demonstrate *Euclid*, which is the definitive electronic identification and information system for Australian eucalypts which now covers all 894 species. He had grabbed his euc specimen from a street tree, so we started out behind the eight ball a little when it came to answering some of the characteristics like State, region, vegetative community, etc. However, his specimen had buds and fruits, and nice leaves for which the length, venation, petiole length,

base/apex shape, etc. could all be determined. Dave had also noted the bark type, the presence of ribbons of bark in the upper branches and the absence of scribbles on the tree that yielded the specimen. It was a bit of a struggle to reduce the last handful of possible species, but plenty of the audience were making suggestions as to what characteristics could be tried next, and after a couple of trips outside to check some characteristics in the sunlight, it finally came out as a subspecies of *E. viminalis*.

Using both these interactive DVDs is a fun way of identifying plants and also an excellent way of expanding one's botanical knowledge. Both DVDs are available from CSIRO Publishing or the Botanical Bookshop at the ANBG for \$75 for Plant Families and \$120 for Euclid. Further information can be seen at www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/abrs/publications/cds/flowering.html for Plant Families and www.publish.csiro.au/nid/20/pid/5401.htm for Euclid. Also I am happy to

answer any queries - contact number back page.

Rainer Rehwinkel - Spinifex and gorges – the grassy ecosystems of the Pilbara

Late last year Rainer travelled to the Port Hedland area in Western Australia to do a couple of months voluntary work on an Aboriginal community. On most afternoons and weekends he went exploring, which explains why he had so much difficulty paring back the number of slides in his presentation. The community itself was an oasis with a wonderful range of bird species – and these were also well illustrated in his slides.

The grassy species in that area includes spinifex. The area is also extraordinarily rich in solanum and acacia species, and there was a photo of a favourite of mine, an attractive minniritchi (*Acacia cyperophylla*?) barked acacia. A wide range of other forbs, shrubs and trees with beautiful flowers also featured, in a display that seemed very impressive given the time of the year that he was there (Oct-Nov). We all decided that the season had been particularly kind to Rainer as he said there was heaps of water left at the end of the dry season which possibly also accounted for why he was able to sight crocs on river deltas.

He also visited dry river beds with their ubiquitous river red gums and associated flora and fauna – the latter was evidenced by the myriad tracks in the sand. Fauna either photoed or mentioned included:



Acacia cyperophylla. Photo by: M. Fagg, ANBG Photo No.: a.9950

- wading birds,
- a pair of very flighty broilgas, which Rainer said was a result of their being shot at,
- two herps species (a skink and a goanna), and
- a brush turkey/bustard.

The only plant species Rainer saw over there that are also in our area were common everlasting (*Chrysocephalum apiculatum*) and kangaroo grass (*Themeda triandra*).

Rainer also showed us photos of many wonderful natural features, including awesome pinnacles, the jasper of Marble Bar and the dramatic red iron oxide of the Hamersley

Range with the nearby Karijini National Park. Unfortunately no part of this country is untouched by invaders, and there was buffel grass (*Cenchrus* sp.) growing in the river channels, and lots of the area was modified by years of grazing.

In contrast to the natural landscapes Rainer also showed us a brief number of industrial landscapes, including salt works, magnesium mining, and the harbour at Port Hedland all involving huge infrastructure. Port Hedland's harbour also included natural sights such as mangroves, a mudskipper and a dramatic black and red crab. Rainer's photos included some close-ups and many broad overviews - not much escaped his eager eye.

Reading the Landscape

Leanne Barrett

On a wonderful sunny Saturday, David Tongway presented a one day workshop on *Reading the Landscape*. Twenty-one participants attended the workshop hosted by Royalla Landcare and Friends of Grasslands (FOG). They came from many different backgrounds, from property owners to employees of environmental organisations. Everyone was interested in learning how to read the landscape.

As a property owner I have read and listened to several people who can read the landscape. One of these people was our presenter David Tongway, whom I first heard speak at an ANPC conference in Dubbo in 2005. David has extensive first hand knowledge that is supported with scientific methodology to provide tools to aid land managers in reading the landscape.

David's methods showed the workshop participants how to look at their landscape and see what is happening to it. He demonstrated how to monitor the landscape and assess its functionality.

He demonstrated four types of data collection:

1. LFA (Landscape Function Analysis)
2. ASWAT Aggregate Stability in Water
3. EFA (Ecosystems Function Analysis) Point-centred quarter
4. Ephemeral Drainage Line Assessment.

While most of the workshop focused on learning how to collect data, David had some important messages for us to think about.

1. A functional landscape retains resources; water, topsoil, and organic matter.
2. A dysfunctional landscape is when resources are taken away from the landscape. For example, water carries the topsoil and organic matter away from the landscape.



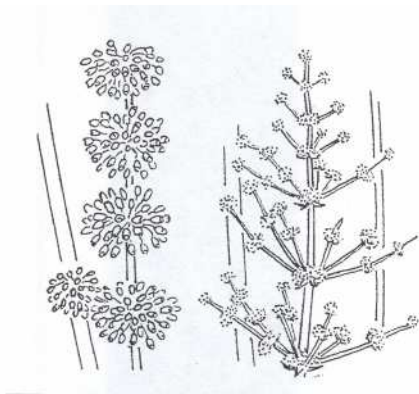
3. Water and wind are sometimes factors that remove resources from landscapes that we are managing.
4. In our region the B horizon soil (soil below the topsoil) tends to be easily dispersed in water. The exposure of B horizon soil can lead to erosion. Use ASWAT to check your soil properties.
5. LFA monitoring can indicate whether a site is stable or if it has the potential to lose resources. E.g. How do patches in the landscape collect resources? How do inter-patches allow resources to leave the landscape?
6. Assessing the data collected from monitoring sites over time can assist in land management decisions.

To find out more about the monitoring methods used at the workshop, go to <http://www.cse.csiro.au/research/efa/> which has several products to download, or contact Royalla Landcare or FOG.

Leanne is an enthusiastic member of Royalla Landcare and FOG, and the workshop was held at her property.

Many-flowered mat-rush – *Lomandra multiflora*

Michael Bedingfield

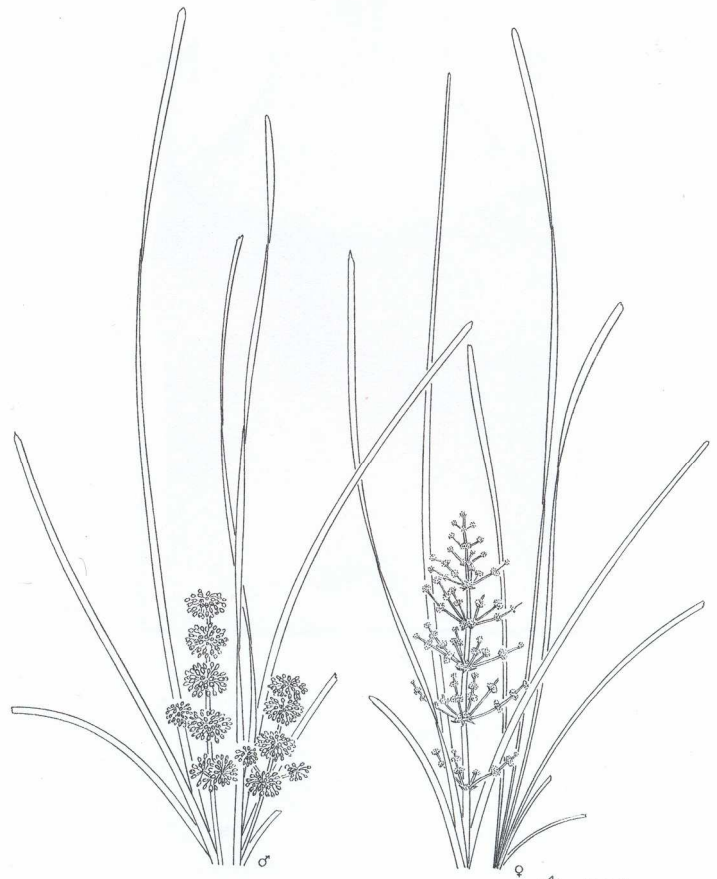


In the world of science, a hermaphrodite is the name given to a species in which the individual has both male and female sex organs. It is rare among animals, but earthworms have this combination. In plants, however, it is the most common arrangement, as most flowers have both male and female parts. *Lomandras* are an exception to this, with the male and female flowers being on separate plants. They take the common name of mat-rushes, and there are four of them that occur in the Canberra region. A feature of these plants is the tough, flat, strap-like leaves, which grow upwards from tight groupings at the base of the plant. Differentiation of species can be a difficult unless the flower or seed stem is present, but then it is much easier.

The mature leaves of the many-flowered mat-rush are typically 30 to 50 cm long. In spring, the male plant produces a fine display with lots of pollen-bearing flowers, growing in dense clusters which are yellow-ochre or brown or a mix of both colours. The individual flowers are ovoid, two to three mm long, and on the end of short stalks which are 3 to 8 mm long. The clusters occur on branched stems that rise from within the leaf base and are less than half the length of the leaves. The female plant produces a comparatively modest flower spike of the same size, but which is not colourful, the flowers being green or brownish. The flowers are much smaller than those of the male, have no stalks, and grow in tight groupings at the tips of the branches.

Of the other three locally occurring mat-rushes, their common names are quite descriptive and can help in their identification. The wattle mat-rush (*Lomandra filiformis*) has flowers that are small and yellow, and grow on erect and slender stems to about 15 cm high. From a distance they have a resemblance to wattle flowers. The short-flowered mat-rush (*Lomandra bracteata*) produces flowers on short stems in a tight mat-like grouping close to the ground among the leaves. These two plants are smaller than the main subject. The spiny-headed mat-rush is known as *Lomandra longifolia* because of its long leaves. It is the tallest of the locals, and it has a spiky flower-head.

The many-flowered mat-rush grows in woodlands and open forests. It is distributed widely in the region and is quite common. It also occurs on the slopes, coast and plains of NSW, as well as in Vic and Qld. In the drawing, the whole of both plants is shown at about one-quarter size, with a portion of the flower spikes shown at half size. The male is shown on the left, with female on the right. *Lomandra multiflora* - a distinctive plant with interesting features.



Lomandra multiflora, Many-flowered Matrush
Michael Bedingfield, ©2005

FRIENDS OF GRASSLANDS INC

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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 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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