



# News of Friends of Grasslands

Supporting native grassy ecosystems

January February 2008

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## Program

10am-3pm, SAT 12 JAN **Informal workshop: understanding soils and biodiversity** at Garuwanga, near Nimmitabel. Bernadette and Geoff will report on the *benchmarking and understanding soil chemistry course* they attended and the results of soil sampling at Garuwanga, and pose questions about the soils and remnant vegetation management. People can attend the workshop (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. To enquire/register, contact Janet (see activities back page).

4 to 7:30pm SAT 23 FEB **FOG AGM & barbeque, Mugga Mugga** Short but enjoyable AGM followed by a slide show on FOG activities for 2007 and the traditional free barbeque. Please bring own beverages. This is an important annual event for FOG to discuss its broad directions, elect a new committee,

and relax and enjoy the comfortable environs of Mugga. Venue: Mugga Mugga Education Centre, Narrabundah Lane, Symonston ACT (opposite the Therapeutic Goods Administration). Please let Janet know if you are coming for the barbeque (see activities contact back page).

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## Of special interest

MON to SUN, 14-20 JAN Come and see the ACT Herpetological Association's *Snakes Alive!* *Threatened, not threatening* exhibition at the Australian National Botanic Gardens. For FOG members, there is an opportunity to see a number of local reptiles and frogs including the threatened striped legless lizard and corroboree frog. Details are on page 13.

## Membership renewal

Margaret Ning

We have only enclosed renewal forms for members who have not yet renewed. Of course, if you renewed only in the last week or so, we may not have everything up to date, so forgive us for putting in a form for you. Many thanks to those who have already sent in their FOG membership renewal or way-laid me to pay it or indeed paid it while attending a FOG activity. A special thanks to those who also included a donation with their renewal as it all helps to keep FOG such a viable organisation.

Images from OCC working bee - 10 Nov.





## News Roundup

### Belconnen Naval Station

Sarah Hnatiuk and Naarilla Hirsch

20 OCTOBER. Eight FOG members visited the now decommissioned Belconnen Naval Station. We inspected three parts of the site and, unexpectedly, were taken on a tour of the Station itself where much of the original equipment is still in place. We saw the two transmitting halls and massive valves, powerful enough to send messages to Whitehall. We learnt something of the history of the Station, including how the Hill's hoists in Kaleen tingled as people hung out their washing while the station was transmitting. There are plans to establish a museum in the Station to record its history as a communication centre from 1939-2005, together with that of the small village community that served it.

As we drove on to the site, the kangaroos were very much in evidence in the shade under the trees and streaming across the paddock when disturbed: 563 were counted very recently. The impact on the vegetation, of them and the drought, was obvious: grass and palatable herbs had been grazed very short, and there were frequent patches of bare ground.

Despite this, we saw a number of flowering plants as we walked across the area that has been proposed for conservation when the suburb of Lawson is developed on the Station site. There were significant patches of *Triptilodiscus pygmaeus*, *Goodenia hederacea*, *Vittadinia cuneata*, *Eryngium rostratum*, *Stackhousia monogyna*, *Calo-*

*cephalus citreus*, *Leptorhynchos squamatus*. Down by the lake we saw many *Ranunculus lappaceus* in full flower. There were also extensive patches in stony places with lichens and mosses amongst the herbs.



Two enclosures have been erected very recently to protect small populations of the endangered Ginninderra peppercress *Lepidium ginninderrense* which occur in a lower-lying area in the north west of the site. We searched in vain for signs of the peppercress. A patch of very small, dry plants in a dried out wet spot had us wondering if we had found it, but it was eventually identified as another member of *Ranunculaceae*, *Myosurus australis*

(mousetail), actually an exciting find—see page 3.

The last stop for the afternoon was at a grassland area beside the road. This was designated 'grassland pasture', and the area where we first stopped was a dense *Themeda* grass-

land with some invasion by serrated tussock. Further up the slope there were more inter-tussock spaces and the flora was more diverse, and our visit culminated with the discovery of some greenhood and some spent diuris orchids.

The species we saw included *Themeda australis*, *Danthonia carphoides* and another *Danthonia* species, *Bothriochloa macro*, *Poa sieberiana*, *Austrostipa scabra*, *Elymus scaber*, *Aristida ramosa*, *Chrysocephalum apiculatum*, *Calocephalus citreus*, *Asperula conferta*, *Acaena ovina*, *Convolvulus erubescens*, *Goodenia hederacea*, *Euchiton involucratus*, *Lomandra filiformis*, *Dichopogon* sp. (chocolate lily), *Diuris* sp. (donkey orchid), *Plantago* sp., *Leptorhynchos squa-*

*matus*, *Tricoryne elator*, *Vittadinia muelleri*, *Triptilodiscus pygmaeus*, *Rumex dumosus*, *Wahlenbergia* spp. and *Pterostylis cynocephalus*. Unfortunately, there were a number of weeds such as African lovegrass, Paterson's curse, Cape weed, St Johns wort, *Briza minor*, nodding and saffron thistles, *Oxalis* spp., clover, exotic plantains and flatweed. Some apple box seedlings were also encroaching on the area from over the fence.



### New FOG website

FOG has a new website! It includes rather more material than the old one, and we are going to work hard to keep it up to date. Have a look at [www.fog.org.au](http://www.fog.org.au). Many thanks to those who put together the original website and have worked on it over the years, and to Richard Bomford for putting together the new one. We will be putting extracts from the E-bulletin onto the new site, but members will still be the first to know what is going on. Back issues of the newsletter will also be added, so you'll be able to search them electronically to find that article you know must be there somewhere. Let us know if there is anything you'd like to see added to the site - especially if you have the material already to hand!

### New FOG cultivation group

7 DECEMBER Five FOG members met in Janet Russell's garden which was the first meeting of the FOG Cultivation and Conservation group (C&CG). As advertised in e-Bulletin No. 15, there are a number of FOG members who are trying to grow local grassland and grassy woodland species in their gardens. The C&CG has been set up to facilitate the exchange of information about growing these plants.

According to Janet, in spite of the plants being local, they are not always easy to grow in gardens. The group will focus on local species, and encourage the growing of plants for conservation reasons. One way the group will do this is visiting people's gardens, seeing what they are growing, where they source plants, or how they grow them, and how they manage the garden. No date has been fixed for the second meeting, but in January the group is anticipating that it will be meeting on the south side to see a garden that backs on to bushland. One thing that it will be looking at is harvesting seed from grasses.



FOG is also planning that Janet will contribute a regular column on growing local grasses and forbs in the newsletter.

If you are interested in being involved and/or you would like to come, please contact Janet Russell on 6251 8949 or at [activities@fog.org.au](mailto:activities@fog.org.au).

### Exciting FOG find

Roger Hnatiuk

I thought I would bring you up to date on the saga of the 'not lepidium' from the Naval Station outing in October (story page 2). You may recall that you had a possible identification of plantago. It

Janet's grassy woodland garden

turned out to be *Myosurus minimus* var. *australis*. (see photo)

I've given the specimen to the National Herbarium. Brendan Lepski and Dave Mallinson were both delighted to have it. Since I started discussions with Brendan about it, as it wasn't in the ACT flora Census, another specimen has turned up for the ACT. It came from near Boboyan about 30 years ago, and was amongst specimens from Environment ACT. So the Naval Station find has turned out to be significant: the second record for the ACT and the first in 30 years.

### Golden sun moth

25 OCTOBER Steve Holliday reported that on his way to the Ainslie shops through Fisher Place, which has a small area with remnant native grassland vegetation and hosts the endangered, day-flying golden sun moth, a couple of moths were already out, quite early for them, as normally they start appearing in November. "From memory", he said "they were flying early last year as well".



## **ACT plant census on web**

*Sarah Sharp*

For those of you who aren't aware of it, Brendan Lepschi, Dave Malinson, Laurie Adam and others at the National Herbarium have been working really hard to compile a definitive checklist of vascular plants of the ACT, based on vouchered specimens. It has been a mammoth task and is a fantastic outcome, as I'm sure most of you know that the *ACT Flora* (1973) is way out of date in terms of what plants occur in the ACT. There is a total of 1551 plants on the list. Murray Fagg has engineered it to be on the ANBG website.

The ACT Census is now on the web, at <http://www.anbg.gov.au/cpbr/ACT-census/index.html>. This is the Excel-formatted list. It will be linked to APNI so it will have an APC-style Census output with plant name authors, etc. This is underway at the moment. There are also moves afoot to provide a printable version so people can download a hardcopy. This version (i.e. on the web) will be the 'official' version of the Census.

The ANBG will be maintaining the checklist on the website, so that any additional species or name changes will be updated regularly. I will endeavour to get a link from the ACT Government website to the census on the ANBG list. We shall not be maintaining two separate links.

The majority of our plant specimens that have been held here at Research and Monitoring over many years are also now either over at the National Herbarium or on their way there. With the proper conditions there, they can be properly maintained and the Herbarium is a better resource with respect to accessibility than we can provide at R&M. We are holding a reference collection, however, for each species for our own use.

My heartfelt thanks go to Brendan and the others and to ANBG, for getting this done, and for agreeing

to maintain it on behalf of the ACT. This is a task that was way beyond the resources that we at Parks, Conservation and Lands have (expertise, time, patience, etc) and is an enormously valuable addition to our data for the ACT.

## **Second edition of *Our Patch***

*Diana Brown*

What compels people who are not professional botanists to learn the botanical names of plants? Common names, of course, will get you only so far; there are too many similar heathy things, and some unrelated plants share the same common name. Perhaps naming is seeing. No, that's too cute: rather, naming reinforces seeing. We all know people for whom the bush – never mind grassland – is a blur of undifferentiated vegetation. Such people never seek the name of any plant.

Since I came to live in Aranda, my companion in naming and seeing has been *Our Patch*, a field guide to the flora of the ACT as photographed in the Aranda Bushland. Most of you will know it. Marilyn Evans, the founder and first convenor of the Friends of Aranda Bushland – still one of the most active bushcare groups in the ACT – initiated the Aranda Bushland Documentation Project in 1993. Seven members of the group used their own equipment to take photographs in the field. A voucher specimen was collected for each plant and identified by staff at the Australian National Botanic Gardens. Those specimens, along with the coloured slides, now reside in the Gardens' herbarium. Three grants sustained the project over the five years, but the printing costs were met largely by donations of \$100 each from individual supporters – who were repaid within six months from sales of *Our Patch*.

Now a second edition of this stalwart guide has appeared. As taxonomists apparently cannot get enough of naming, the new edition includes recent changes to botanical names, particularly the orchids. You can purchase copies of *Our Patch* from

the Botanical Bookshop at the ANBG, the Yarralumla nursery, or the Friends of Aranda Bushland, for under twenty dollars. For more information, see [www.friendsof-arandabushland.org.au](http://www.friendsof-arandabushland.org.au).

## **Commissioner to scrutinise grassland management**

24 OCTOBER ACT Chief Minister Jon Stanhope has directed the newly appointed Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, Maxine Cooper, to 'inquire into the adequacy of the management of Canberra's grasslands, and the vulnerability of their ecosystems, amid fears that the Commonwealth Department of Defence is putting gravely endangered species at heightened risk of localised extinction at two critical sites'.

FOG welcomes the development and has already met with the Commissioner detailing its recent submissions on ACT grassland sites, and with a range of stakeholders at a roundtable called by the Commissioner. FOG is encouraging the Commissioner to look thoroughly at the issues involved and has suggested possible outcomes for the inquiry to pursue.

## **Senator calls for cull**

22 OCTOBER Liberal Senator, Garry Humphries, announced that he and the Limestone Plains Group were calling for an immediate kangaroo cull by the Department of Defence at Belconnen and Majura to reduce the impact of kangaroo grazing on grassland biodiversity and the grassland earless dragon.

According to David Shorthouse of the Limestone Plains Group, this is not a political issue. We understand that there is broad support for a cull across all the major parties, so it is now just up to the Department to act. Currently they are using the caretaker election period as justification for their lack of action, but this is just an excuse.



## Saint Mark's grassland

### Grasscover

8 NOVEMBER Twelve people attended the lunchtime visit to Saint Mark's grassland organised by Benj Whitworth (see photo) (Dept. of Agriculture, Fishery and Forestry), Ian Franks (Dept. of Environment and Water Resources) and FOG. This has become a regular event in recent years. There was a



lot of discussion about natural temperate grasslands, of which St Mark's is an example, and their structure, vegetation and fauna components, ecological function, and extensiveness in former times. The management of such remnants also was widely canvassed.

Mal Pryor, the manager of the site, was on hand to explain how the site is managed. St. Mark's is a kangaroo grass remnant with a variety of other grasses and forbs. Any visit to a grassland in spring is a Goldilocks' experience - some plants are too aged, some are too young and some are just right. Benj, a frequent visitor to this and other favourite Canberra sites, said that the site was at its best about a month earlier. There were a number of 'just right' plants and button wrinklewort, a threatened species, was just right.

## Hall Cemetery

Sarah Hnatiuk & Geoff Robertson

21 NOVEMBER A small group of FOG members met at the cemetery in the hope of seeing the Tarengo leek orchid (*Prasophyllum peti-*

*lum*), but the unseasonal conditions did not bode well for this, and the orchid remained elusive. Nevertheless there was much to see. In the open area around the graves, native grass species included kangaroo grass (*Themeda australis*), which is dominant at the site, several wallaby (*Austrodanthonia* spp.) and spear grasses (*Austrostipa* spp.), and the occasional plant of poa tussock (*Poa* sp.), wheat grass (*Elymus scaber*) and weeping grass (*Microlaena stipoides*), while introduced grasses included *Briza minor* and phalaris. Amongst the forbs, the most spectacular were scattered milkmaids (*Burchardia umbellata*). Other forbs included *Tricoryne elatior*, lomandra (small and larger species), dianella, *Chrysocephalum apiculatum*, *C. semipapposum*, *Glycine clandestina*, *Gonocarpus tetragynus*, *Leptorhynchus squamatus*, *Eryngium rostratum* and *Wahlenbergia* sp., regenerating *Eucalyptus bridgesiana* and *Acacia dealbata*.



On this occasion, it was decided to check out the wooded area between grave area and Wallaroo Road. In the wooded area the group observed *Eucalyptus rubida* (regenerating), *E. Bridgesiana*, *E. blakelyi*, and *Exocarpus cupressiformis*. The native ground cover was generally of a lower standard in the wooded area than in the open area, although there were occasional better patches. A number of forbs in the area around the cemetery were repeated here, although this area recorded much healthier specimens of eryngium. New species included *Acaena ovina*,

a native fireweed, and goodenia or velleia.

Finally, the group returned to the spot where the orchid had been reported and found a very spent example.



Tricoryne lily (left) and milkmaid (above)

## Molongo Valley looms ahead

FOG as well as many groups and individuals made submissions on the proposed Molongo Valley development to ACT Planning and Land Authority and the National Capital Territory. FOG thanks all those who made submissions.

The issue is starting to get coverage in the media with Rosslyn Beeby, the Scientific and Environment Reporter for the *Canberra Times* (23 Nov), extensively quoting bird scientist on the threat to bird species posed by the development.

The *Chronicle* (20 Nov) quoted Trish Harrup, Conservation Council Director, saying that the Council didn't want to see Central Molongo developed, and despite talking to ACTPLA since 2005, found the Preliminary Assessment very disappointing. 'They didn't take into account any of our concerns and, in fact, extended the development - it has become worse' she said. Local FOG member and activist campaigner on this issue, Rosemary Blemings, quoted by the *Chronicle*, has called for a total rethink.

### **New edition of ACT trees**

*Christine Goonrey*

Another edition of the popular little book *Field Guide to the Native Trees of the ACT* has just been published. It has been enhanced by colour photographs for all species. It is well organised, with a map and useful introductory notes on the vegetation of the ACT and the distribution of the major species throughout the territory. Eucalypts are notoriously hard to identify, and the notes on how to distinguish species are very helpful. Other useful sections, particularly for the novice, are the keys for identifying species, a glossary with lovely clear illustrations of certain terminology and a brief list of the meaning of species' names. It is also thoroughly researched, scientifically accurate and beautifully illustrated.

As in previous editions, there are more than just eucalypts and acacias in this guide. It covers 61 woody species of Australian plants commonly reaching tree height (about 4 metres) growing naturally within the ACT. This helps an observer to identify large shrubs such as acacias, banksias, casuarinas and lomaria. It is published by the National Parks Association of the ACT, 98pp, \$27.50

### **Conservation Partners Program**

*Belinda Cooke*

In order to support a growing number of landowners interested in conservation on their lands, the Department of Environment and Climate Change (DECC) has expanded its Conservation Partners Program. I have just started in a new role to support conservation on private lands. Landowners interested in protecting land can enter into covenant agreements such as Conservation Agreements and Wildlife Refuges.

Properties within the Canberra/Southern Tablelands region also fall within broader scale conservation initiatives such as the Kosciuszko to Coast (K2C) project. K2C

is concerned with working with landowners to create a network of inter-linking woodlands and grasslands across this landscape. In order to support on-ground works on these properties and implement management recommendations, DECC will be carrying out a monitoring program of existing Conservation Agreements and Wildlife Refuges. This is a good chance for landholders to give some feedback about their experience with the process and what they would like to see happen on their land, as well as receive up to date information on the state of the property and what species are found.

I am based at Queanbeyan but will be travelling within the region to meet up with people. I look forward to catching up at FOG events or may be in touch to organise a visit out to your property. If you have any queries about protected areas on private lands or about monitoring please get in touch. My contact details are: 6298 9733, [Belinda.cooke@environment.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Belinda.cooke@environment.nsw.gov.au).

### **VIP at TNR**

23 OCTOBER Many community groups, including FOG, attended a meeting to learn about the proposal for Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA) to provide a Volunteer Interpreter Program (VIP) at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve (TNR). Paula Banks will be the volunteer manager at TNR, and will be located on site.

Volunteers will undertake training and then provide interpretation services in the new wetlands area in Tidbinbilla which is to be opened early in 2008. Later in the year volunteers would staff the visitors centre at the entrance to the reserve and further duties may be included in the contract further on.

Volunteer interpreters would be asked to make a one-off payment of \$50 (\$30 concession) before commencing training which is designed to foster a level of commitment from the potential Volunteer Interpreter. There would be a big time commitment. CVA recognises that the challenge will be to find enough suitable

people for the program as potential volunteers may already be active members of other groups. Suggestions for volunteer sources included students. People can contribute by assisting with training or by making arrangements to participate in interpretation activities that are outside the program. Public transport to Tidbinbilla remains a big problem for visitors and volunteer interpreters. Options such as car pooling and use of bike hire to get around the reserve are being explored.

Christine Goonrey has agreed to represent FOG on an advisory group to the VIP and FOG has flagged its willingness to assist with resources and training. For more information contact Paula Banks on [pbanks@conservationvolunteers.com.au](mailto:pbanks@conservationvolunteers.com.au) or phone (02) 6247 7770.

### **ACT biosphere reserve now closer**

The ACT Standing Committee on Planning and Environment has released a 131 page report recommending that the ACT Government proceed with nominating the ACT as a biosphere reserve, subject to some further consultation. The report advocates that the ACT be represented at the Third International Congress of Biosphere Reserves as an observer to lobby for the ACT and to push the concept of a biosphere trade mark.

The report also makes recommendations to pursue eco-tourism synergies as part of the ACT becoming a biosphere reserve. The report sees a role in the biosphere for the Commissioner for Sustainability and Environment as Chair of a biosphere reserve steering committee which would involve a wide range of stakeholders. The report also recommends that the nomination be adequately funded. These recommendations demonstrate that the Planning Committee has been attentive to submissions, including those from FOG, and have come up with innovative suggestions to progress the nomination.



## **Bullanamang purchase**

*Steve Douglas*

Biobanking company, EcoTrades, is purchasing *Bullanamang*, a property of about 5040 acres of freehold and Crown lease between the Murrumbidgee River and Namadgi National Park. It adjoins the *Scottsdale* property owned by the Australian Bush Heritage Trust. It will be managed for its ecological values.

Bullanamang (see photo) was inspected by FOG members, Geoff Robertson, Margaret Ning and me on 30 August. It contains extensive areas of low shrubby and grassy woodland dominated by a canopy of Bridge's apple box on steep slopes. In lower and flatter areas, these have been modified for earlier pastoral use. Commercial grazing reportedly ceased in the late 1970s concomitant with the gazettal of Namadgi NP as the property was unfenced and stock escaping into the Park were destroyed as pest species. Modified apple box woodland has resulted in areas of derived native grassland and some artificially grassy wooded sections. Some sections have been infested by serrated tussock and vipers bugloss, with the riparian zone of the river affected by African love grass. The property includes both the Ordovician metasedimentary and Devonian granitic geologies, with strong evidence of how these produce different floras.

Moving higher up the block, the vegetation changes to include areas in which the low woodland becomes woodland and open forest including broad-leaved peppermint in more sheltered areas and drooping sheoak on exposed sites. The main gully features a forest of ribbon gum with candlebark. Mid-altitude areas develop into montane forest of candlebark, peppermint and ribbon gum, with a major frost hollow featuring a grassy woodland (partially derived from clearing) of snow gum and black sallee. The highest sections of the property are dominated by grassy



snow gum woodland which is best developed along the Clear Range and Mount Clear along the boundary with Namadgi NP. Within this subalpine/montane vegetation are at least three grassy/shrubby swamps dominated by poa species, leptospermum and baeckia species, with some artificial areas of open water and associated aquatic flora. In these higher areas, weeds were mainly restricted to trail margins, though the frost hollow was significantly infested with vipers bugloss. It is anticipated that weeds and pest fauna will be addressed once a comprehensive management assessment and plan has been produced.

## **FOG future's evolving** *Groundcover*

Following the *future directions* workshop (see previously newsletter), Bernadette O'Leary has distributed a summary of the workshop to participants. With assistance from others she has produced a draft Strategic Plan (see pages 12 and 13).

Apart from being a wiz as secretary, she is heading up the FOG advocacy group. FOG's submissions on grassy ecosystem issues have been well researched, argued and prodigious. The advocacy group is working closely with many other players and is establishing informal contacts

with people in government.

Richard Bomford has done a wonderful job of bringing FOG's website up to date and it already providing a very valuable tool to get FOG's message out there. The website includes FOG's recent submissions, a very valuable resource, and will shortly include its newsletters and other materials. The website shall be a key component of FOG's communications strategy.

The newsletter continues to be of a very high standard and treasured by members as a thoughtful and an informative source of information on grassy ecosystem issues. From recent times, it is complimented by the e-Bulletin which keeps members up-to-date and provides a more flexible communication tool. Tony Lawson has recently agreed to take over editorship of the e-Bulletin.

Geoff Robertson and Janet Russell have established a program/activities group. Participation and suggestions are welcome. (Also see page 10.)

As these groups evolve, FOG is trying to define tasks taking 4-6 hours a month and seeking volunteers to do these. If you are interested in being part of this, please contact Kim, Bernadette, Janet or Geoff (contact details on back page).

## **Walk against warming**

*Geoff Robertson*

11 NOVEMBER I saw many familiar FOG faces at the *Walk against Warming*, organised by the Conservation Council on 11 November. FOG actively supported this colourful event which was attended by 9,000 people, a significant portion of the Canberra population. The Conservation Council is delighted at the turnout and wishes to thank all those who helped and participated.

## **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 on the FOG website at [www.fog.org.au](http://www.fog.org.au).

### **EPBC referrals**

FOG provided comments in response to public notification of two referrals under the EPBC Act. In relation to a proposal to extend the suburb of **Macgregor**, FOG's comments highlighted the need to clarify the value of natural temperate grassland on and adjacent to the site, and to put mitigation measures in place to protect the local population of golden sun moth and its habitat. The Department of Environment and Water Resources advised that the proposed action is not a controlled action, but has added some mitigation measures.

Regarding a proposal to **transfer Defence land** to DoTaRS for on-sale to **Canberra Airports Group** to enable construction of a road, FOG's comments related to: the occurrence of an endangered ecological community and four threatened species on the site (which continue to be threatened by other proposed works in the Majura and Jerrabomberra valleys, and elsewhere in the ACT); failure of agreed conservation management measures on Defence/Canberra Airport land; the unknown align-

ment and size of the proposed road and future potential impacts of related works; and loss of *Territory Plan* coverage after land transfer/onsale. DEWR advised that the proposed action is a controlled action and provided a draft recommendation report for public comment until 21 December, which FOG followed up.

### **Water inquiry**

FoG provided comment on the Legislative Assembly's **Standing Committee** on Planning and Environment's *Water Use and Management Inquiry*. FoG encouraged promotion of, and support for, the use of grassy ecosystem species - including by Government - in both public landscaping/gardens and greenspaces, and on private land including urban nature strips and front/backyards.

### **Territory Plan**

FOG made submissions to two *Territory Plan* draft variations. Regarding the proposed developments in the **Molonglo Valley** and North Weston, DV281 and related Preliminary Assessment, FOG's view was that principles of good planning had not been followed in the consultation/planning process, and the reasoning provided included further threats to already threatened communities/species and habitat. FOG also questioned the need for a proposed lake. FOG noted that it is not opposed to development in the areas, and identified the sort of proposal that it was more likely to support - one that recognised remaining biodiversity values, and conserved threatened woodlands and grasslands and other areas of high conservation value.

Concerning the proposed redevelopment at a site in **Watson** adjacent to Majura Reserve, DV261, FOG's concerns included the need to recognise and build on remnant Yellow Box/Red Gum woodland values - e.g. to protect/enhance remaining trees and other vegetation on and adjacent to the site through landscaping treatment, establishing a manageable buffer with the reserve, mitigation of

potential impacts of the development phase, and preferably restriction of cats given the known breeding occurrence of the Regent Honeyeater.

### **Belconnen defence site**

FOG made a submission on the Belconnen Defence site as part of the ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment's inquiry into grassland management. FOG's concerns included the ongoing need for effective management of the grassland and its threatened species, and also the need to conserve valuable grassy remnants and buffers as the suburb of Lawson is developed. FOG's views were based on long term interest in this site.

### **Other activities**

FOG wrote to the Commonwealth Environment Minister, Shadow Minister, ACT Senators and Secretary DEWR about **concerns regarding administration of the EPBC Act** such as: complexity of decision processes; significance thresholds and cumulative impacts; and the value - and implementation - of recovery planning.

FOG provided information to the **Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment** relevant to the inquiry into grassland management, met with the Commissioner, participated at a roundtable with other stakeholders, and provided a position on the proposed terms of reference.

FOG also met with officials from the **ACT Department of Territories and Municipal Services** about a range of grassy ecosystem related issues, to follow up on a meeting earlier in 2007. FOG's concerns included the number of developments that further threaten already threatened ecosystem communities/species, especially cumulatively, and management issues including fire and weeds. FOG was pleased to learn that TaMS proposes a regular communication forum for stakeholders.



## Eastern Riverina Ecotour

Janet Russell

29 SEPTEMBER The small hardy band of FOG Canberrans camped at Wagga Wagga, met with Tina de Jong and Danielle Smetana who led us and other local people at Uranquinty to investigate some of the sites in the Eastern Riverina.

Our first stop was to meet John Ebsworth at the Henty Dam Nature Reserve. John has had a long involvement with the site and he told us that the last rains that filled the swamp were in 1985. This swamp had started life



John Ebsworth et al at the Henty Dam Nature Reserve

as a dam which like many others had been created for the purpose of providing water for the steam trains. It had been dug out by hand using wheelbarrows to remove the soil. This is a site where white, yellow and grey box converge. The site was last burned in 2004 and there are no plans for further burns. There are eleven species of native grasses including *Chloris truncata*, *Austrostipa* sp. and *Elymus* sp. and two carex species, *Carex inversa* and *Carex appressa*. The reserve supports a variety of wild life. The greatest management challenge for John is dealing with the weeds.

We stopped at a couple of spots along Ryan's TSR. Alan Lieschke who had joined us at the Henty dam took us to a grey-crowned babbler's nest. He also provided us with a list of species that are associated with the areas round his property. David Stein also met us along the road to show us a particularly good spot. In spite of the very dry season, we found a number of grasses and forbs. *Austroanthonia* sp, *Austrostipa scabra*, *Aristida behriana*, *Goodenia* sp, *Hydrocotyle* sp, *Thysanotus patersonii*, *Hypoxis* sp, and *Bulbine bulbosa* among the *Eucalyptus melliodora* (yellow box) and *Callitris* sp. community.

Corey Beckett, the duty publican, was there to greet us at the Pleasant Hills Community Hotel. The hotel holds the honour of being the first NSW hotel to be granted a community licence and is run the majority of time by volunteers. We were plied with a delicious array of sandwiches, cakes and fruit. Over lunch we met Susan Creek who has been involved in looking after The Esplanade, which is in the middle of the village and members of the local community have heroically maintained the site in the face of protests from some local people who have a liking for more traditional, tamed landscapes. Pleasant Hills is in a transition zone and besides containing the more common grassland species, contains others such as *Sida corrugata*, *Maireana excavata*, *Calotis cuneifolia*, *Atriplex semibaccata*, and *Vittadinia triloba*.

We met Elizabeth Ellis at the Mundawaddery Cemetery, our next stop after lunch. Elizabeth has been involved with this and adjacent sites for the past twenty years.

There were four distinct areas which are fenced off, the stock reserve, the verge, the stock exclusion zone in which *Themeda australis* is dominant, and the cemetery which is mown.

We found only one plant of the rare Dookie daisy (*Brachyscome gracilis*) but there were a number of other species we had not seen elsewhere including *Microseris lanceolata*, *Wurmbea dioica*, *Pterostylis bicolor*, *Eutaxia microphylla*, *Triptilodiscus pygmaeus* and *Diuris lanceolata*. *Ptilotus spathulatus* also appeared for the first time in the 20 years that Elizabeth has been there. There was a ripple of excitement when we found a brown snake in the grass. Geoff was called and cautiously approached with his camera but unfortunately found out that it had been long dead.

30 SEPTEMBER Sunday saw us negotiating the back roads to find the Mangoplah Botanic Gardens in rather a hurry due to a tardy departure from the Uranquinty Bakery. We were due to meet Tina, her mother, Hazel, and Sarah Hobgen, who in spite of having returned from WA the day before, managed to spend time with us. The land for the Mangoplah Botanical Gardens had been set aside for a in 1888 and is a small remnant of White Box grassy woodland. Sarah Hobgen provided a plant list for this site and the Birdlip Reserve. Although the dry conditions had taken their toll, the group with Margaret, as our resident expert and leader, managed to find some species that had not been listed. These plants included *Cynoglossum suaveolens* and *Lomandra multiflora*.

The local school has become involved in weeding projects, removing Chinese firebush which is sourced from a garden hedge in the district, and a photinia cultivar which

had also started to colonise some scrub across from the reserve. Onion grass, *Romulea* sp. has become naturalised in many areas and is impossible to remove.

At the Birdlip Reserve, we met Bruce Jaeger who has been heavily involved in the Mangoplah Landcare group for many years. Bruce lives on a property adjacent to this reserve and was very generous with his time telling us about the management and history of the reserve. The reserve had served as a camp site for the railway line which ran to The Rock, the remnants of which were on the opposite side of the road.



Bruce Jaeger and Sarah Hobgen

The site has been subject to partial planned cold burns (this site has never burned naturally within living memory) and the Paterson's curse, horehound and wild oats (*Avena* sp.) have been the more problematic weeds. There was a crash graze in 1998-2000 to get rid of the wild oats.

The reserve had three eucalypts, white and yellow box and Blakely's red gum (*E. albens*, *E. melliodora*, and *E. blakelyi*). Again, we were able to add to the list provided. We found *Crassula sieberiana*, some fairly dry looking *Drosera* sp, and *Asperula conferta* amongst others. Our next stop was The Rock and this is where Andy and I had to take our leave. Margaret is responsible for the writing up of the rest of the article. As the person responsible for this trip, I would like to thank Tina and Sarah from the Murrumbidgee CMA for all their help and all the local Riverina people who were so generous with their time.

### Postscript

Margaret Ning

The Rock is a 'singular peak' rising 800 feet above the surrounding highly developed agricultural land. The Rock Nature Reserve (NR) consists of 900 acres and is one of a group including Tabletop NR and Cocoparra National Park which contain some interesting relict plants which are similar in some respects to the flora of the Flinders

Ranges in South Australia. A spur trail of around six kilometres round trip leads to a trig at the summit of the Rock, but in typical FOG fashion, we only progressed a few hundred metres in over an hour.

We found the following in the late stages of flowering: nodding blue lily (*Stypandra glauca*), *Calandrinia eremaea*, a (very spent) *Caladenia*, similarly spent *Bulbine semibarbata*, a spent *Diuris*, and twining fringe lily (*Thysanotus patersonii*). It was a dry community at the best of times, but we also came upon a small sunken area which had obviously benefited from significant rain a few weeks earlier. It was approximately twenty metres square, and contained a prolific flowering of many ephemerals, most of which were essentially unfamiliar to me. This was the reason we did not progress very far as it was spectacular in its own very subtle way, and I immediately wished Rainer, Dave, Andrew or another of my mentors was with me to enjoy it.

I have attempted to identify the little ephemerals post trip, and the consensus is that the area contained *Centrolepis strigosa* ssp. *strigosa*, *Drosera peltata*, *Myriocephalus rhizocephalus*, *Levenhookia dubia*, *Siloxerus multiflorus*, *Stylidium despectum*, *Stuartina* sp., a small red *Crassula* species, another small red species and a small *Hydrocotyle* (or *Ranunculus*) species - most are illustrated on the next page.



Looking for unusual plants in an ephemeral bed

All plants were under a couple of inches in height and intermingled in attractive combinations of colour and shape. In the slightly drier area surrounding these ephemerals were some orchids: sun orchid (*Thelymitra* sp.), one orchid (*Microtis* sp.), and donkey orchid (*Diuris* sp.) and lilies such as bulbine lily (*Bulbine bulbosa*), twining fringe lily (*Thysanotus patersonii*), and small vanilla lily (*Arthropodium minus*). A very special discovery indeed!





Top row from left  
*Drosera peltata*,  
*Myriocephalus rhizo-*  
*cephalus*,  
*Levenhookia dubia*,  
*Crassula* species



Left  
*Siloxerus multiflorus*

Right  
*Stylidium despectum*  
and *Centrolepis*  
*strigosa* ssp. *strigosa*



## *A short note on FOG's program*

This year we have not planned a complete program for 2008 for a number of reasons. First, many other groups now provide the types of activities that FOG has traditionally provided. Rather than attempting to put on alternative activities, we consider that it is better to support activities provided by others. Second, with climate change or changing weather patterns, it is proving increasingly difficult to know how any particular field site might look like say next spring. Third, FOG visits many private or public properties during the year to assist in plant identification and management issues. These visits usually do not appear in the FOG program because we may not know what to expect at such sites and because they are usually arranged at short notice. However, using our e-Bulletin, we might be able to advertise such visits. If particular members are interested in property visits, possibly they could let us know. In summary, we are therefore planning a more responsive and flexible

approach to field program activities. This means that many will only be advertised closer to the event.

We shall of course be putting on a number of workshops to increase understanding of grassland ecology and to improve members' skills. We are planning a soils workshop in January (see cover page), and an advocacy workshop around May. There is room for another workshop and we have been thinking of a workshop on assessing sites/leading visits to sites.

We shall be arranging a number of on-ground activities at Old Cooma Common and possibly some sites in and around Canberra.

We shall also be having one or two slide afternoon/workshops on matters of interest to members, and a field trip interstate or more remote parts of NSW.

Any suggestions for these would be welcome. For any thoughts, please contact Janet Russell or Geoff Robertson (see contact details on page 14).

## FOG draft Strategic Plan 2008-2010

*Following the recent workshop, Bernadette O'Leary, working with other members of the committee, prepared this draft Strategic Plan. If you have any comments, please get back to Bernadette, so that a final version can be prepared for endorsement at the February AGM.*

### Context

FOG's immediate focus is the Southern Tablelands including the ACT. FOG is also active in surrounding regions of NSW (e.g. southern rivers, western slopes and northern tablelands), and seeks to work cooperatively with others in south-east Australia (e.g. basalt plains of south-western Victoria, and northern plains of South Australia).

Protection and management of grassy ecosystems involves many sectors, from government (federal, state/territory, local and regional/catchment agencies), to research and education, organised community groups (FOG and others), land managers (rural and conservation), and the general community.

Institutional arrangements are complex and include a broad range of legislation and related policy that covers: listing of threatened communities/species and recovery planning; reservation; strategic planning for management and investment; impact assessment; and weed management.

Resources available to support grassy ecosystem conservation vary over time, and within institutions and seasons. Monitoring of change after management intervention is not always possible.

The status of grassy ecosystems (condition and extent), description of it and understanding of it, also varies over time. Information (including maps and databases), and access to it, is improving.

Threats to grassy ecosystems include: clearing and development; agricultural intensification (i.e. grazing to cropping); weeds and pest species; climate change; and ignorance.

### Vision

The biodiversity values and ecosystem function of natural grassy ecosystems in south-eastern Australia are recognised, valued, protected and enhanced.

### What is FOG?

FOG is a community group dedicated to the conservation of natural temperate grassy ecosystems in south eastern Australia. FOG advocates, educates and advises on matters to do with conservation of grassy ecosystems, and carries out surveys and other on-ground work. FOG is based in Canberra and its members include professional scientists, landowners, land managers and interested members of the public.

### Aims. FOG aims to

- build on existing data, systems and expertise, to improve knowledge and understanding of, and support for, grassy ecosystems by communities, industries and governments
- identify threats to grassy ecosystems, and influence decisions relating to protection and management
- improve management of grassy ecosystems on public and private land, including through better allocation of resources and integration of effort
- focus on holistic approaches, and functioning landscapes and ecosystems.

- build the skills and participation of members to be an effective and sustainable group
- assist in restoring grassy ecosystems through active intervention
- broaden adoption of grassy ecosystem species in horticulture and landscaping.

### Areas of activity

**1. Communication.** Develop and implement activities to improve knowledge and understanding of grassy ecosystems, through informing and enriching FOG members, the wider community, other conservation organisations and governments.

#### Activities

1.1 Develop and distribute bimonthly *newsletters* and regular *e-Bulletins*.

1.2 Manage an up-to-date website.

1.3 Run field/site/property visits and surveys.

1.4 Make presentations and run workshops.

1.5 Develop and use educational and information resources.

1.6 Assist agencies, other groups and industry to develop their understanding and actively promote conservation of natural grassy ecosystems.

1.7 Use the media.



**2. Hands-on conservation.** Support land manager and group participation in practical management, to protect and reestablish grassy ecosystems; as an adjunct to such action by agencies and the private sector.

Activities

2.1 Develop and promote operational guidelines.

2.2 Run regular working bees at Old Cooma Common Grassland Reserve.

2.3 Assist other groups and individuals with management planning and implementation.

**3. Advocacy.** Ensure that adequate and appropriate legislative, policy, planning and implementation measures exist to protect grassy ecosystems; and identify and rectify laws, policies, planning and implementation processes detrimental to grassy ecosystems.

Activities

3.1 Monitor measures proposed by, or taken by, governments and others, and seek to ensure such measures are consistent with FOG's vision and aims.

3.2 Identify policies and regimes which would further FOG's vision and aims, and work to achieve their application by both the public and private sectors.

3.3 Seek to change, wherever necessary, the values and behaviours of those who have powers relevant to the wellbeing of grassy ecosystems, and those who influence such persons/organisations.

3.4 Respond to requests for advice and input on matters of public policy.

3.5 Work with likeminded agencies and other groups to achieve mutual aims.

**4. Research.** Cooperate with relevant organisations (e.g. environmental, planning, educational, and scientific) to actively participate in their work to better understand grassy ecosystems.

Activities

4.1 Establish a clear position for FOG within the institutional context.

4.2 Seek to identify and understand the values of grassy ecosystems and causes of the decline of grassy ecosystems, and how to address such decline (including through recovery planning/strategies).

4.3 Maintain and/or seek scientific expertise/methods in other areas of activity.

**Values.** FOG seeks to grow its membership to include relevant individuals and organizations and to network with related organizations, using principles of mutual respect, open communication, membership participation and skill development, human diversity, non-discrimination and non-harassment. FOG works in areas and on issues identified as priorities.

**Administration.** FOG operates via a Committee, with office holders (President, Vice Presidents, Secretary, Treasurer, Public Officer) responsible officers (e.g. on administration, newsletter/e-Bulletin, correspondence, membership, website) activity groups (e.g. program, advocacy, education), and representatives (e.g. on NTG Recovery Planning, Snowy Mountains Standing Committee on Weeds, OCCGR Management, Conservation Management Networks, CCSErAc, Parkcare, Southern Tablelands Ecosystem Park, Limestone Plains Group, Kosciuszko to Coast).

FOG works to an annual *workplan*.

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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 boxes above. For newsletter and e-Bulletin matters contact Geoff Robertson or Tony Lawson, respectively. We look forward to hearing from you.

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