



# News of Friends of Grasslands

*Supporting native grassy ecosystems*

*March-April 2012*

ISSN 1832-6315

## *Program - take the diary out now*

### *March*

SUN 4 MARCH, 9:00am–4:00pm, **FOG/Fenner Working Bee, Stirling Ridge** Contact [jamie.pittock@fog.org.au](mailto:jamie.pittock@fog.org.au) for further details and to register. Details page 2.

SAT 10 MARCH, 9:00am–12noon, **FOG Hall Cemetery Working Bee** Contact Andy on 6251 8949 or at [andy.russell@fog.org.au](mailto:andy.russell@fog.org.au) Details page 2.

FRI 16 MARCH, 6:30 for 7:00pm, **FOG Table at Conservation Council Trivia Night** Book on 6229 3208 or [www.consact.org.au](http://www.consact.org.au) Details page 2.

TUES 20 MARCH, 5:30 for 6:00pm, **FOG AGM** Details pages 2 & 7.

TUES 20 MARCH, 7:00pm, **FOG Dinner** Contact [tony.lawson@fog.org.au](mailto:tony.lawson@fog.org.au) if you would like to join us.

24 & 25 MARCH, **Weereewa Festival, Lake George** Details page 2.

### *April*

THURS 19 - FRI 20 APRIL, 9:00am–4:00pm, **Indigenous values workshop, Nimmitabel** See flier for details

SUN 22 APRIL, 9:00am–4:00pm, **FOG/Fenner Working Bee, Stirling Ridge** Contact [jamie.pittock@fog.org.au](mailto:jamie.pittock@fog.org.au) for further details and to register.

FRI 27 APRIL, 10:30am, **FOG Macrophoto Workshop, ANBG** Details page 2.

### *May*

SUN 5 MAY, 9:00am–4:00pm, **FOG/Fenner Working Bee, Stirling Ridge** Contact [jamie.pittock@fog.org.au](mailto:jamie.pittock@fog.org.au) for further details and to register.

SAT 12 MAY, 9:00am–12noon, **FOG Hall Cemetery Working Bee** Contact Andy on 6251 8949 or at [andy.russell@fog.org.au](mailto:andy.russell@fog.org.au)

Photos: (G Robertson), levees on Tomney's Plain (top), and Macpherson's Plain (middle), eyebright on Tomney's Plain (bottom). Report on wetland visit on page 6.



### **In this issue**

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*The blue grass-lily, Caesia calliantha*

### **RENEWING YOUR**

### **FOG MEMBERSHIP FOR 2012**

Please consider the hardworking FOG members that help keep FOG operating. If you are intending to renew, please do so promptly. This saves us a lot of time! (see page 11)

Emails have been sent to those who had not yet renewed, and a coloured dot will be on your newsletter if you need to renew.

If you don't want to renew, please send a short email to [membership@fog.org.au](mailto:membership@fog.org.au) letting us know.

## Upcoming FOG Events

Please register for FOG activities with the **FOG contact person** who can assist with directions and possibly car pooling. By registering, you assist FOG to organise any catering and to provide you with other information you may need.

### March

#### **FOG/Fenner Working Bee, Stirling Ridge**

9:00am–12noon & 1:00–4:00pm,  
Sun 4 March

We will continue the work to dispatch woody weed infestations in Stirling Park. This is the first scheduled work party at Stirling Park in 2012, so please help in our efforts to clear out weedy invaders from key button wrinklewort habitat. FOG is looking to work with local residents to establish a new group, Friends of Stirling Park, to further enhance the restoration of its ecologically significant grassy woodlands and support other management. If you are interested in being involved, please contact Jamie at [jamie.pittock@fog.org.au](mailto:jamie.pittock@fog.org.au) for further details and to register.

#### **FOG Hall Cemetery Working Bee, Wallaroo Rd, Hall**

9:00am–12noon,  
Sat 10 March

Andy Russell is looking for assistance at the Hall Cemetery Working Bee. If you can help, please contact Andy on 6251 8949 or at [andy.russell@fog.org.au](mailto:andy.russell@fog.org.au). Morning tea will be supplied.

#### **FOG Table at Conservation Council Trivia Night**

6:30 for 7:00pm start,  
Fri 16 March

The Conservation Council Trivia Night is just around the corner! It will be held at the Majura Hall, 3 Rosevear St Dickson. Cost is \$25 each or you can buy a table of 8. Early bird tickets are \$20 each if paid before March 1. Book early on 6229 3208 or [www.consact.org.au](http://www.consact.org.au). BYO Drinks and Nibbles. Light refreshments will be provided.

FOG hopes to organize a table. If you would like to join us please contact [sarah.sharp@fog.org.au](mailto:sarah.sharp@fog.org.au).

#### **FOG AGM, Conservation Council, Acton**

5:30 for 6:00pm,  
Tues 20 March

Please note the date in your diary. The AGM will be held at the Conservation Council office in Childers St (next to the Street Theatre). Further details on page 7. Join us for dinner after the AGM. Contact [tony.lawson@fog.org.au](mailto:tony.lawson@fog.org.au)

#### **Weereewa Festival – Celebrating Art and the Environment – a Festival of Lake George** 24 & 25 March

The 2012 Weereewa Festival will take place on the bed of Lake George over this weekend. The Festival, held every two years, aims to celebrate, conserve and share the unique landscape and spirit of Weereewa Lake George region through arts and community events. The theme for 2012 is *Two Days on the Lake: Living Lake, Living History*. Lake George or Weereewa as it is now becoming known is, when full, the largest expanse of fresh water in Australia and is thought to be the fifth oldest fresh water lake in the world. It is a lake of myth, mystery and magic.

Full information on the Festival including program and ticketing details are available through <http://www.weereewafestival.org>

### April

#### **Indigenous Values Workshop, Connecting the Community to Natural Values & Resources in the Landscape, Nimmitabel**

9:00am - 4:00pm,  
Thur19 - Fri 20 April

This is the final workshop with Rod Mason. The cost of \$25 provides two lunches, morning and afternoon teas. Accommodation at Garuwanga is free. See flier for more details. Contact [geoff.robertson@fog.org.au](mailto:geoff.robertson@fog.org.au) to enquire/register.

#### **FOG/Fenner Working Bee, Stirling Ridge**

9:00am–12noon & 1:00–4:00pm,  
Sun 22 April

Contact [jamie.pittock@fog.org.au](mailto:jamie.pittock@fog.org.au) for further details and to register.

#### **Macrophoto Workshop, ANBG Theatrette**

10:30am,  
Fri 27 April

FOG photographers will know eco-photographer and fellow member David Wong. David was central to the Seeing Grasslands project which led, amongst other things, to the FOG workshop in the grasslands of North Mulligan's in November 2010. This year, FOG members are invited to meet David again and join with other enthusiasts from the Photographic Group of the Friends of the ANBG at their monthly meeting for April. The event will run until lunchtime and there will be plenty of opportunity for you to focus your new macroskills afterwards onto the marvellous native plants throughout the ANBG. No need to register. Contact [margaret.ning@fog.org.au](mailto:margaret.ning@fog.org.au) for more information.

### May

#### **FOG/Fenner Working Bee, Stirling Ridge**

9:00am–12noon & 1:00–4:00pm,  
Sun 6 May

Contact [jamie.pittock@fog.org.au](mailto:jamie.pittock@fog.org.au) for further details and to register.

#### **FOG Hall Cemetery Working Bee, Wallaroo Rd, Hall**

9:00am–12noon,  
Sat 12 May

Andy Russell is looking for assistance at the Hall Cemetery Working Bee. If you can help, please contact Andy on 6251 8949 or at [andy.russell@fog.org.au](mailto:andy.russell@fog.org.au). Morning tea will be supplied.

### FOG website

The FOG website ([www.fog.org.au](http://www.fog.org.au)) is now well established and attracting over 2,000 visits per month. If there is anything you'd like to contribute to the site, let us know: [web-manager@fog.org.au](mailto:web-manager@fog.org.au).



## **Tribute to John Hibberd**

*Conservation Council ACT Region staff and board*

It is with much sadness that the Conservation Council ACT Region farewells its former Executive Director, John Hibberd.

John was a dedicated and passionate person who fought for the environment. In the three years that John was the Conservation Council's Executive Director, John worked hard on many projects including the vast and complex issues arising from Canberra's population growth. Urban planning took up a lot of his time and he fought for the acknowledgement and protection of endangered biodiversity and species across the Canberra region.

One of the most recent successes was the Biodiversity Mapping Project. John secured funding for the Council to purchase software and hardware to support the vital task of mapping biodiversity across ACT. Thanks to his persistence with this project John was able to secure the cooperation of ACT government bodies and this resource is now available for our member groups.

John was also committed to the Bush on the Boundary Working Group (BoB), a group that focuses on resolving issues arising from suburbs being developed adjacent to nature reserves. BoB is a platform that facilitates communication and cooperation between representatives from Government, non government and community organisations. John's enthusiasm for such a group helped drive the Gungahlin Group and led to the formation of a second BoB for Molonglo. John also won funding to expand BoB even further to include Jerrabomberra and Tuggeranong.

The protection of koalas along the New South Wales south coast and the stopping of logging in the area was very close to John's heart and



he worked alongside environment groups such as SERCA to raise awareness of the importance of preserving forests to ensure there remains enough food and habitat for koalas.

John has been at the forefront on many vital environmental issues in the ACT and region. He led the Conservation Council with a style, passion and vigour that made him an inspiration to work with. Our job now is to ensure the ball keeps on rolling on his behalf.

As a boss, John was always a pleasure with his witty humor and not to mention his sweet tooth! Staff knew him as a generous man with a kind heart whose passion for the environment was an absolute inspiration.

The Board is indebted to John for his commitment and perseverance. He expertly guided the Board through complex issues of governance, policy creation and political challenge. His counsel was respected and gratefully received and many of the Board are honoured to have considered John as a friend, as well as a colleague.

The extended family of the Conservation Council ACT & Region, including its staff, board and member groups send our heartfelt condolences to John's family, and thank them for sharing with us a man whose legacy will live on in all that we do.

He will be sorely missed.

## **A strong conservation advocate and friend**

*Geoff Robertson*

With the recent death of John Hibberd, the Canberra region has lost a strong conservation advocate and friend to many.

As a past president of both the Conservation Council and Friends of Grasslands, I believe I have a good understanding of the role John played as Executive Director of the Conservation Council and his wider role in conservation, although I was not serving on the Conservation Council during John's time there. Nevertheless there were many occasions that John and I worked together on matters of mutual interest or just spent time catching up.

John was in many ways a unique person, passionate about conservation, with a good sense of what is achievable, but never shrinking from the challenges that he faced. He was always a pleasure to work with, as he was easy to talk to, informative, considerate, very willing to listen to others and to understand their viewpoints.

John was always very frank about his illness, which we discussed on a couple of occasions, and (it seemed to me) like everything else he did, he faced it calmly and lived life to the fullest. I was amazed by how he balanced his conservation commitment and treatment.

We feel sad and disappointed that John's life was cut short, but his example, love and wisdom will live on in all of us who had the privilege to know him and to share our lives with him. While his wife Sylvia and their children and grandchildren know John's qualities, I hope that they will also take comfort from knowing the high esteem and respect in which John was held.

Photo: John Hibberd by S Chung

## A tireless campaigner for conservation

Sarah Sharp

John Hibberd was a tireless campaigner for conservation and sustainable development in the ACT and southern region of NSW. The FOG advocacy group had a close and rewarding relationship with John, and worked with him on a significant number of submissions concerning development proposals in grassland-related sites. John also shared FOG's commitment to influence authorities across our region to develop clear, effective and compatible offset policies.

More personally, I worked with John for several years, as a member of the Biodiversity Working Group, and more closely over the past year I worked with him to help establish the Biodiversity Mapping Project. I think his determination to get this key resource for the Conservation Council network epitomised his approach towards achieving what he most believed in. He recognised the importance of this resource to advocacy groups, he solicited and won a grant to pay for establishing it, and obtained key components such as a free large-format printer from Hewlett Packard, a free licence through ANU to run the GIS system, and licences to use ACT Government ecological, planning and attribute data. I know he was very proud of having achieved all this, and was particularly looking forward to getting it fully functional when he became too sick to continue.

I was always impressed by John's ability to manage the enormous numbers of issues that ConsACT dealt with, including not only biodiversity issues, but also long-term planning, sustainability, waste and energy issues. He was a far-sighted man, strongly opinionated, however always ready to consider what others had to say. He was a very fine and able leader, a good listener and someone who got things done. He was always ready for the

next challenge, which of course in the end was to ensure his declining health did not prevent him from living his life to the fullest. Even when I visited him in Clare Holland House he was concerned about issues and asked me to continue to be involved. A legacy I readily agreed to.

## Community Monitoring Project established

Sarah Sharp

In 2011 the Molonglo Catchment Group (MCG) received a grant through the Caring For Country program and ACT Government to promote and establish community-based diversity monitoring programs. The project aims to encourage the application of comparable monitoring of vegetation and habitat condition across the region. The project is based around a manual written by Lori Gould and me, *A Step-by-step Guide to Monitoring Native Vegetation in the ACT* (2010). I have been contracted to the MCG to help eight community groups establish long-term monitoring sites over a two year period.

The training for this involved three stages: The initial planning days helped community groups develop goals and plans for their sites and decide what type of monitoring they need to do to determine if those goals are being met. The field training days provided practical field experience in using the monitoring techniques from the manual. The monitoring days provided on-site support for each group when they begin their monitoring program.

An online database will be developed by MCG to assist with easy online data entry and mapping. The data will be used by community groups to guide their on-ground efforts and to learn from each other by comparing results over time and in different locations to improve management outcomes on their sites.

At the ACT and regional level the project aims to provide consistent baseline data across sites, enabling

the effectiveness of techniques to be evaluated at different locations, and to increase networking between community groups.

To date, six Parkcare groups have established community monitoring in the reserves that they manage. There is capacity in the project for two more groups to establish monitoring programs. More information can be obtained by emailing me, on [sarahsharp@grapevine.net.au](mailto:sarahsharp@grapevine.net.au)

## Scriveners Hut

John Fitz Gerald

FOG is delighted that the National Capital Authority (NCA) will once again provide significant financial support for FOG activities in the National Lands including equipment, herbicides, training and accreditation.

The first work has already concluded. Some 15 volunteers appeared at Scrivener's Hut on Sunday Feb 5th for one of the few warm days this summer. Woody weeds were the main target for this activity.

A public meeting, aimed at convening a Friends of Stirling Park Group, will be held in Yarralumla on the evening of Tuesday Feb 21st. FOG intends to actively support this group, helping with various activities including training. The expectation is that, for 2012, individuals from the new group would pitch in to the FOG activities program which is already fully planned.

With full support from the NCA, FOG recently lodged an application for funding from ACT National Resource Management Council's Weeds of National Significance Program. The main part of the proposal is to attack weeds in the National Lands such as Chilean Needle Grass and Blackberry close to areas of the highest conservation values already partly worked on by FOG. Weed control is proposed to be carried out using spray contractors, and would be followed up with effective monitoring and some replanting in sprayed areas to complete the tasks.



## Hall Cemetery News

Andy & Janet Russell

FOG has been working in the grassy woodland block surrounding Hall Cemetery for over four years now, removing a large number of woody weeds such as briar rose and hawthorn. In 2010 we were given permission by the ACT Government to do some plantings in the woodland surrounding the cemetery. Our first suggestion was that we put in some *Bursaria spinosa* to replace the bird habitat lost by the removal of the briars. In December that year the government supplied 50 plants rather more promptly than we were prepared for, however we managed to get the plants in within a month. At the last check we had lost only 2-3 plants so are very pleased with that result.

Later FOG was given about eight chocolate lilies (*Dichopogon fimbriatus*) grown by Greening Australia, and once the Government was happy with the provenance of the seed, we were allowed to plant these in the woodland in March 2011. Unfortunately our success rate with the lilies was not as good because we could only find about three of them there in January.

The recent wet seasons produced some wonderful flowering generally. One of the forbs that we had never seen in the 3 years while working at the site is the blue grass-lily (*Caesia calliantha*) and in 2011 it was out in huge numbers. Early Nancy (*Wurmbea dioica*) is another pretty forb which made a strong appearance. On the negative side, common centaury (*Centaureum erythraea*) had a very good season and was in the cemetery proper in surprising numbers, as was a swathe of fog and sweet vernal grass.

In December last year, Emma Cook, Research Support Officer with the Department of Environment and Sustainability, contacted FOG. She requested FOG's assistance with the process of planning and implementing tree succession



in the cemetery. The Department proposed that a program of tree management be put in place 'to ensure the continuing survival of the ecotone of Yellow Box Red Gum woodland and Natural Temperate Grassland as well as preserving the aesthetic of the site for historical and community reasons'.

In the past FOG has removed all eucalypt regeneration within the cemetery to protect the Tarengo Leek Orchid (*Prasophyllum petilum*) as well as for the management of the cemetery generally. The proposal now is that FOG selects up to 20 trees in total (no fewer than 15) within the designated eucalypt regeneration areas on the perimeter of the cemetery and mark them with wooden stakes and/or tree guards and flag them for retention. The ratio of species would be predominantly *Eucalyptus blakelyi* and then a mix of the other eucalypts present. For eventual succession of the mature eucalypts overlooking the graves area, specific replacement species will be planted once ideal locations have been selected. Eucalypt regrowth management will continue to be part of our main focus as well as removing woody shrub regrowth and managing the thistles and exotic grasses in surrounding woodlands.

Photos: (above left) blue grass-lily and (above right) Tarengo leek orchid (J & A Russell), and (right) aromatic peppergrass (S Connolly)



Our program for working bees in 2012 is:

9 am Saturday 10 March

9 am Saturday 12 May

9 am Saturday 13 Oct

9 am Saturday 10 Nov

All are welcome to assist. Morning tea is provided. Please contact Andy Russell on 02 6251 8949 or 0428 518 949 if you would like to join us.

## Aromatic Peppergrass News

November's FOG newsletter contained news about September 2011's activities in translocation of the endangered aromatic peppergrass. Rainer Rehwinkel excitedly contacted FOG in mid January to report some success revealed by Sue Connolly up by the Scottsdale shearling shed. Sue noticed and photographed a very healthy young plant in a site where seed had been scattered. Hopefully, when equivalent sites are next checked near Bungendore, there's reason to be quietly optimistic?



## FOG wetland visit

Geoff Robertson

3 & 4 DEC A small but enthusiastic FOG contingent visited wetlands near Tumbarumba, to observe the restoration work being carried out and undertake follow up plant identification surveys. FOG had visited these sites in February 2011.

### McPherson's Plain

The Saturday was devoted to McPherson's Plain, specifically Brandy Marys, owned by Jim and Mary Kelton. Brandy Marys has often featured in the FOG newsletter which has reported on the remarkable work being undertaken by Jim to protect the wetlands of McPherson Plain, the nearby bogs, snowgum woodlands and alpine ash forest located on Brandy Marys. Jim, an archaeologist, is a crusader for biodiversity, threatened ecological communities, aboriginal heritage and the protection of dingo populations in the alpine region. He has worked hard to have many orchid species described and listed and more recently had the local population of yellow-bellied gliders listed as a threatened population.

Jim has fenced off the bogs and wetlands (Commonwealth and State threatened communities), so that straying cattle, horses and pigs are kept out of these sensitive areas. To restore the wetlands which have developed a number of channels Jim has created a number of levees and replanted some areas with divots taken from areas where he has dug postholes. Jim is also an energetic weeder and in a sea of St Johns wort curse, Brandy Marys stands out in contrast.

We were impressed with Jim's energy, work, and knowledge, fascinated to see the wetlands regenerating with their plant communities, including the many rare and threatened plants present at Brandy Marys. The group enjoyed wading in gum boots through the wetlands and the fringing vegetation, talking about the restoration work and discussing plant identification.



Jim has not been able to attract grant monies, as Brandy Marys is a forest lease, so he is resourcing this work as best he can. Those attending the activity started to think of ways that Jim may be helped.

### Tomney's Plain

Parallel work is being undertaken on Tomney's Plain which is owned by a non-for profit education group. Here a driving force has been Barry Cooper, who has co-opted Jim Kelton who has been involved with much of the work.

Restoration work has been funded by a grant from the Murrumbidgee CMA. Tomney's Plain is a nationally listed wetland and an example of the endangered ecological community Montane Peatlands and Swamps of the New England Tableland, NSW North Coast, Sydney Basin, South East Corner, South Eastern Highlands and Australian Alps.

A key component of this community, sphagnum bog, is under threat on the plain due to a history of disturbance from cattle and brumbies. This is causing waterways throughout the peatland to become incised and eroded.

The site is being fenced to protect the peatland from further trampling and grazing. To help restore the natural hydrology, embankments have been constructed in the disturbed, eroded areas with a combination of soil, pea straw bales, shade cloth and revegetation. These levees slow the water and make it spread out across the plain, keep the sphagnum bog hydrated, support the diverse plant community and will ultimately increase the cover of sphagnum.

The Murrumbidgee CMA is working with landholders, community members, and montane wetland restoration specialists. A Property Vegetation Plan has been developed to fence and manage 32 ha of wetland and surrounding native grassland, and to construct earthen levees to help restore

the natural hydrology of the wetland. A report published by the CMA mentions FOG for its assistance with plant identification field days.

FOG visited Tomney's Plain on the Sunday and identified plants not seen on a previous visit. The group was amazed by the response of the vegetation to the new levies that have been introduced. The grassland was putting on a spectacular flowering, and was awash with a familiar yellow tone..... but there wasn't a *Hypochaeris* in sight! Instead *Diuris*, *Ranunculus*, *Craspedia* and *Lep-torhynchos* abounded. A couple of areas of purple eyebrights were also a real treat.

It was a great weekend, and although rain was forecast, the weather remained just right. Thanks to Margaret for arranging the weekend and who with her collaborator, Dave Mallinson, did the bulk of the plant identification. Thanks also go to Barry and Jim for facilitating our stay at the Tops and for showing us around. David Stein, Natural Resource Officer, MCMA, was able to join us on the Saturday and provided much background on the works being undertaken.

Photo: Margaret & Charles, Margaret & Geoff, Dave, Evelyn and Barry Cooper (G Robertson).

David Stein's article on Tomney's Plain will appear in the next newsletter. - Ed

### Newsletter available electronically

You can receive the newsletter electronically. The electronic version is in colour. To arrange, contact [margaret.ning@fog.org.au](mailto:margaret.ning@fog.org.au).



## Cultivation Corner:

### Canberra Grass

Janet Russell



Growing your own plants is a fascinating past-time. It gives you the opportunity to observe them in a way that seeing them in the field does not allow. We planted out a *Scleranthus biflorus* we bought in the spring. It now has a dead dried patch in it which is something I had noticed on other specimens I had seen growing. Our plant had also been attacked by what appeared to be a bird as there were tufts of the plant scattered around. When we checked it out, we found that a couple of the tufts were actually seedlings. I had made the assumption that because these plants were unusual, they would not readily self-seed. This is not so; they just need sufficient moisture to germinate.

I know that I had seen a reference to the reason for dead spots in this species. I checked out the growing native plants section of the ANBG website. It seems that the fungus *Rhizoctonia* sp. causes disease in the plants. The growth of the fungus is made worse apparently by plants being stressed, and the arrival of summer rains. The network of fungal hyphae causes root rot in plants growing in low nutrient soils, but this network can be physically broken up by tilling the ground which reduces the risk of disease. The fact sheet (WA Dept of Agriculture & Food) that I accessed contained information that was related to the growing of crops such as canola, and I am assuming that it has equal relevance to our plant.



Barrie Hadlow who had written the entry for the ANBG responded on the ANPSA Gumnuts website to someone who inquired about the die-back in his plant and after inquiring of members' experiences with growing this plant, he posted this response from a Canberra gardener.

"..One good outcome is that if you don't remove the dead areas it should break down and the seeds ... from last summer will germinate in the plant's own mulch. This happened to me in the last few years and you can then gently thin out some of the seedlings and pot them out..."

After I read this, I spread some of the seed around. With the rains that have arrived, we may get some more germination. We decided to leave the seedlings in situ at this stage. I had a look at a seed I collected from our plant under the microscope. It is a tiny grain to the naked eye but it is in fact a creamy-white small nut with a luminescent quality to it, something akin to a pine nut.

I was surprised to find that overseas websites discussing growing *Scleranthus* seemed to outnumber Australian ones. When I checked the NSW Herbarium site I found out why - this plant is native to NZ and South America as well as Australia. It is a member of the Caryophyllaceae family which contains natives like *Stellaria* and exotics such as *Dianthus*. Incidentally a Burke's Backyard fact sheet referred to the plant as Canberra grass, a name I think I will adopt. We will watch our Canberra grass seedlings with interest.

Photo: "Canberra grass"  
(J & A Russell)

## MEETING NOTICE

Friends of Grasslands AGM  
2012

Conservation Council,  
3 Childers St Acton  
5:30 for 6:00 Tuesday March 20

### Agenda

1. Attendance and apologies
2. Minutes of 2011 AGM
3. Matters arising out of these minutes
4. Treasurer's Report and Presentation of Audited Accounts
5. Reports from Membership, Advocacy, Program, Publications, Newsletter, E-Bulletin, FOG-Fenner Group, Conservation Council Biodiversity Working Group, Molongo BoB, Gungahlin BoB, and usage statistics for fog.org.au (to be circulated)
6. President's Report (to be circulated)
7. Annual elections
  - a. Appointment of a returning officer
  - b. Election for FOG President, Secretary, Treasurer and Committee
8. Appointment of Public Officer
9. Motions with notice

## Friends of Grasslands AGM 2012

Any member planning to attend FOG AGM 2012 has the right to put a motion on notice to be considered by the meeting (Agenda item 9).

Motions can be submitted either by **surface mail** to FOG at PO Box 987, Civic Square ACT 2608 or by **email** to [correspondence@fog.org.au](mailto:correspondence@fog.org.au)

All such motions must be received before the meeting, at the latest by Friday 16th March.

Also, please lodge any apologies for the meeting to either address above.

## *Kooranbool*

*Phillipa Street*

24 NOV Rod Mason, Ngarigo elder and natural resource manager, again generously shared his knowledge and recollections of traditional life and custom in south eastern Australia. On this field trip Rod described his family's connection with Tidbilliga. (the alpine country) and we explored his family's traditional camp at Bull-ocks Flat, known to him as Kooranbool.



Rod traces his ancestry back to the “old country” in the western desert with traditions much older than those in south-eastern Australia. His family are water people whose spirits make their way back to the mountain caverns and caves by entering through a door that opens at a particular time during the year. “Grandfather's spirit” would ride the updrafts of the high country, over the waters and lakes, keeping watch over the sleeping people camping in the mountain valleys.

He would ring out the bullroarer as a call to ceremony.

The area located above the tree line in the Australian Alps was regarded by the local indigenous people as a spiritual place dedicated to the observance of ceremony. During the summer months from November to January, people from various tribes gathered in large numbers in the high country. From the camp sites in the valleys, special journeys were made up into the high ridges, where various ceremonies were performed and herbs collected for exchange. The bogong moths provided a treat, but were not the main purpose of these gatherings.

Family and clan groups travelled the old pathways and trails to the high country, coming from coastal NSW and Victoria. Local tribes acted as the hosts of these gatherings. The pathways to the ceremonial grounds were prescribed by custom; Rod recalls travelling in a figure eight, anticlockwise direction, approaching the high country from Omeo and Tom Groggin via Dead Horse Gap.

On our previous field trip, Rod recalled the numbers that gathered at Tuross River cascades swelling into the hundreds. Meetings between groups happened on the approaches to the foothills and agreement was reached on matters concerning law (relating to Fire, Wind and Rain), retribution and punishment. Decisions on these matters were made before the groups arrived in the high country. Rod's family made their camp on the Thredbo River at Kooranbool, and from here made short duration trips into the surrounding mountains to participate in ceremony.

Photos: (above) Rod Mason at Kooranbool, and (right) the McEvoy's house (P Street)

The Alpine Way leaves the long grass country of the Monaro and approaches the foothills of the Alps. Here we find Wollondibby “the drizzly place” and enter a grassy valley. This conical hill helps guide travellers from the direction of Cooma. On the left is a stone cottage where the first European settlers of the district Mary and James McEvoy lived.

Rod's grandparents had contact with the McEvoy's, helping them survive in a harsh environment, gathering rocks for the hut, working their cattle, supporting them in childbirth, and burying those who died on the hill behind the cottage. Before cattle grazing Rod described an extensive swamp below the cottage, so abundant with waterbirds that the ground would be coloured brown and white with the vast flocks. These are the Turtle Grounds, plentiful with water fowl, turtles and eggs.

Continuing along the Alpine Way, the valley begins to narrow and near Crackenback Resort the tar road leaves the old pathway, passing below two distinctive grey rocks on the ridgeline. The Malamar or Two Witches are dressed in possum fur coats, facing each other. It is custom to say .....

*continued on page 9*





“Boodjaree” - “hello”- as you pass. This area had plentiful pigeon, quail and emu, also *Lomandra* - “bush rice”.

Kooranbool is further along the AlpineWay. There is a large carpark there now for the skitube, a railway tunnel dug through the mountains, taking skiers to Perisher Valley. Kooranbool provided all the materials needed to survive weeks or months in the high country: food, medicine, fibre and building materials. The area was actively managed with regular burning. Shrubs were encouraged to form long whippy growth, useful for spears, shelter poles and to provide long strips of rope fibre. The rope makers were respected for their craft as were other specialist trades. Fruit (fleshy drupes from the mountain plums) and nuts (oil rich seed from *Hakeas*, etc.) were harvested to supplement a protein rich diet.

## **FOG advocacy**

*Naarilla Hirsch*

After the intense activity towards the end of 2011, things have recently been quieter on the advocacy front, with only one submission going in. However, the advocacy group is starting to plan ahead for the coming year. It will be holding a meeting to discuss directions for the year to come, and better ways to use its resources and share the workload. There's always plenty to do, and those new to advocacy activities can take their time getting into the area and carving out their own little niche. New members are always welcome, and anyone who might be interested in joining the advocacy group should contact Naarilla Hirsch at [advocacy@fog.com.au](mailto:advocacy@fog.com.au).

### **January 2012**

A proposed denominational school site at Throsby was released for public comment under the EPBC Act. This proposal indicated that the ACT Government is finalising a *Gungahlin Strategic Offsets Package*. FOG's view is that offsets should be in place before any development occurs and that it is insufficient for this Package to be only at proposal stage. Given that we have been waiting for close to two years for public release of the ACT government's offset policy, FOG opposes any development in Gungahlin (including Throsby) until both policy and Package have been made available for public scrutiny.

The full text of FOG submissions appears on our website.

These camps were the bush schools where children could learn the various crafts from their elders. It was a place to exchange ideas and prepare for ceremony. Hunting was not allowed in the ceremonial herb gardens. Agreed punishments were also carried out here. A conical hill to the south of the car park was a place where elders were honoured and their broken tools returned.

Plants found at Kooranbool, snow gum and black sallee eucalypts, important possum habitat, fruits such as Snowy mountain plum (*Pimelia pauciflora* and *Leucopogon hookeri*), *Hakea microcarpa* important for rope fibre, nuts, nectar, and mat rush or bush rice (*Lomandra longifolia*), the seed of which was soaked in nectar water, shaped into cakes. As Rod often reminded us, plants had many medicinal uses: yellow flowers managed fat, purple was for blood and white for sweet.

## **Results from membership renewal questionnaire.**

*John Fitz Gerald*

This year the membership renewal form came with a questionnaire at the back, designed to feed back reasons for relatively low attendance of members at FOG site visits during 2011.

Thankyou to the 51 respondents who took the time to answer the questionnaire.

The result is not surprising –mainly, people are just plain busy and can't find the time to come along to advertised events, no matter how appealing or interesting they find them. Members who want to make more comments, please send them to [activities@fog.org.au](mailto:activities@fog.org.au).

34 respondents chose to circle their possible reasons for not attending. The tallies came to:

17.7\*\*\* had too little time and/or too many alternative activities

8.8 considered event locations too far away (however six of these live away from the immediate ACT and region)

3 asked for shorter events (half day)

2.2 had transport issues

1.5 found event locations of no interest to them

0.5 was not interested in any site visiting

0.3 wished to attend but asked to be able to make that decision on the day of the event and not need to pre-register.

The other 17 respondents circled that they consider FOG's activities program to be satisfactory. Most (14) added reasons that they did not attend more. Again time shortage was the main culprit (total of 10.4), while location-too-far and preference-for-shorter-events were equal (at 1.8).

\*\*\* decimals in the tallies were introduced as many respondents marked several categories, (If both time and transport were marked, each of these categories received 0.5 of score.)

## *The genesis of the STEP Garden*

*Geoff Robertson*

Two ideas came together in STEP: the concept of a regional botanic garden and landscape restoration. In 2001, I organised the conservation speakers for the national ASGAP conference in Canberra. The theme was regional programs for conserving the local vegetation. The speakers were great. John Knight's presentation on the Eurobodalla Gardens inspired me to think that ANPS ought to do something about establishing a regional botanic garden focusing on the indigenous plants of the region, especially grasses and forbs, as these tend to be somewhat neglected in botanic garden collections. I raised the idea with the ANPS Council and was asked to provide a presentation at one of the ASGAP monthly meetings. One issue we considered was how the plants should be presented. Should they be presented in families or vegetation communities? I suggested that a presentation by broad community (ecological community) such as grassland, woodland, dry and wet forest, riparian, wet, heath, etc. would be one way of doing this. After the meeting a group was formed to kick the idea around. Unfortunately, their condition was that I would head the group.

At about the same time, through my conservation grounding in FOG, I was coming to the realisation that if grasslands and woodlands were once major communities in the region, and were now threatened ecological communities, restoring them and establishing good landscape function meant restoring our grasslands and woodlands wherever possible. I could see that there is a lot of land held in reserves, open places, roadsides, disused farmland, etc. that could provide good opportunities for appropriate indigenous plantings that in the long term would provide better landscape function, better habitat for indigenous fauna, and be easier to manage. I understood that this would not happen overnight and so it had to be a long term strategy. I thought the best way to get there was to establish a skilled restoration unit which would develop the strategies, techniques, skills and resources to achieve this over a longer time frame. Within FOG we put a statement together and approached the ACT government.

We had meetings with various ACT government ministers. The meeting with Minister Simon Corbell and David Shorthouse, then head of Wildlife Research and Monitoring, saw the fusion of the two concepts. While we met to discuss FOG's proposal we also mentioned the botanic garden concept. Simon suggested the two ideas should be merged and asked that David and I form a working group to get the ball rolling, initially by having a workshop to explore the concepts. That workshop was held in 2001, facilitated by Maxine Cooper and was very well attended. Four of the current committee members (and I) participated: Cathy Robertson, Andy Rus-

sell, Warren Saunders and David Shorthouse. There was now broad support to explore our ideas further.

The ANPS botanic garden group continued to meet and now had a broader vision to guide us. The group decided that it needed to incorporate, and it called itself STEP, Southern Tablelands Ecosystems Park Inc, a name suggested by Shirley Pipitone.

Defining the region was problematic. I considered that the Southern Tablelands, as defined by botanists (Flora of NSW), was the regional concept to adopt, as Canberra is a natural regional capital of the region (excluding the coast), to the Victorian border and botanists have already made available extensive information on the plants in the Southern Tablelands. Along the way, I made another important contribution, namely talking my cousin into joining this venture, and later suggesting that she become STEP's president, a job that she has done amazingly well.

Then came the next stage of finding a suitable site, large enough to accommodate our requirements, adjoining some natural remnant vegetation, in central Canberra and that would, if possible, provide a partnership with a bigger entity.

We first looked as a site in Amaroo which satisfied some of these criteria. Shirley Pipitone put in a tremendous effort in drawing up landscape plans which were exciting and from which we learned a lot. When after much pain, it became obvious that that site would not work, we looked at the Birrigai school site, and Warren Saunders and I spent many hours drawing us sketches, but again it became painfully obvious that that site would not work.

Then in 2008, through the adept work of Hanna Jaireth we were offered a site in the Canberra International Arboretum. Hannah, by the way, subsequently joined the STEP committee and made many valuable contributions. I was underwhelmed by the idea of locating STEP in the arboretum but Cathy and the others could see it had potential. John Nightingale, whom we had re-recruited to the committee upon his return to Canberra, then drew up some exciting plans for Block 100. These were initially rejected out of hand by the Arboretum architects who wanted to what to know what single tree species we were proposing. For me it was pretty much time to throw in the towel, but in the meantime Cathy had recruited David Shorthouse to the committee and Cathy and David over many months negotiated for a compromise between a monoculture and the Nightingale plan. They both threw themselves into working with the Arboretum Project Team, the Friends of the Arboretum and Jocelyn Plovits and they got started on the road that has achieved many remarkable outcomes for STEP.





A special mention should be made of Jon Stanhope. He wrote a very supportive letter to STEP early in our history. That letter plus his later very practical support at the Arboretum site opened many doors along the way, especially when things were difficult, and we might say that without him, STEP would not exist today. I have had many meetings with him in various contexts over the years, and we haven't always seen eye to eye, however, he did make me an Honorary Ambassador for Canberra for my contribution to FOG. I have great admiration for him and the many contributions

Part of my involvement at this time was to research the vegetation classifications that would form the framework for our planting strategy. That took many hours. My more recent contribution was to approach Barbara Payne whom I had got to know through FOG, to ask her to draw up some plans for Block 100. She has done some truly impressive work.

Many people have helped establish STEP and have put in many hundreds of hours. Some I have already mentioned. Andy Russell has stayed with STEP from the start and Cathy talked about him in the last (STEP) newsletter. I concur with her about Andy's steadfast contribution. Many hours have been spent enduring difficult meetings to make the concept work. Jean Geue, Jo Walker, Alan Ford, Paul Jansens (ANBG), Warren Saunders, Steve Skinner, Tony Lawson and Michael Bedingfield - to name a few. It has been a great pleasure to share time with all of these people.

he has made to Canberra and, from my viewpoint to conserving Canberra's biodiversity.

STEP's future and my own involvement: While STEP has made tremendous headway, there is obviously a long way to go, but I am very optimistic that it will continue to move forward. As for myself, I have stood down from the committee and I have been somewhat less involved. Personal circumstances require me to take a little time out for myself. Despite that I am finding that I am devoting much time to Kosciuszko to Coast, of which STEP has been a strong supporter. Hopefully in the days ahead, both organisations can work together on projects of mutual interest. As and if I get my own life in order I hope that I can get more involved in some of the working bees and continue to show my support.

*(Reprinted from STEP News Winter 2011)*

**Do you want to advertise an event, job, etc through FOG?**

The FOG e-Bulletin advertises activities of interest to FOG members. Many non-FOG activities are included. It appears frequently (usually before a major FOG activity).

To publicise an activity, etc., please provide a short description to FOG e-Bulletin editor (see back page).

**FOG Membership 2012  
Join or renew**

FOG membership entitles you to receive our newsletter and e-Bulletin, to attend FOG's many and diverse activities, and much more.

**The cost is small:** \$20 for individuals and families, \$5 for students/concessions and \$50 for organisations. Membership is due on 1 January each year.

Membership forms are available on our website: [www.fog.org.au](http://www.fog.org.au) and you may pay by cheque or electronically.

While donations are not tax deductible, they are always very welcome.

**For inquiries** contact Margaret Ning on 02 6241 4065 or [membership@fog.org.au](mailto:membership@fog.org.au)



## Student project at Garuwanga

Tim McGrath



Tim is a Masters student with the Institute for Applied Ecology at the University of Canberra, studying the conservation biology of the Grassland Earless Dragon on the Monaro Tablelands of NSW and is going into his third year of research on the species. Tim also works full time with the Commonwealth Department of Sustainability Environment Water Populations and Communities as a Threatened Species Policy Officer. He plans to be involved with the conservation of biodiversity on the Monaro Tablelands for many years to come and to work closely with the NSW Parks and Wildlife Service in the recovery of the species. Tim has recently trialled the use of remote sensor activated cameras to detect the Grassland Earless Dragon on the Monaro Tablelands with some exciting results. Tim promises to keep us posted!!!!

This article was prepared for the K2C newsletter, Ground-cover.

Over 4 days in late September 2011, Margaret Ning and Geoff Robertson's wonderful property, Garuwanga near Nimmitabel, was home to some 25 environmental students and staff from the University of Canberra. Tim McGrath led the students across the travelling stock reserves (TSRs) of the Monaro Tablelands in search of reptiles, in particular the cryptic and endangered grassland earless dragon, *Tympanocryptis pinguicolla*. After a tutorial at Rock Flat TSR just north of Nimmitabel, students, most in their third and final year of an environmental science degree, were given the challenge to design a project that looked at reptile diversity and the TSRs on the Monaro.

Students chose a design that involved active rock rolling across seven TSRs on the Monaro which included Nine Mile, Ravensworth, Avon Lake, Eight Mile Bobundara, Slacks Creek, Top Hut and Four Mile TSRs. The student's project also included the Kuma Nature Reserve as the control site. Students stratified the TSRs by landform (upper slope, plateaux and valley floor) and in conjunction with multiple rock turning surveys they undertook botanical surveys and measured habitat variables to investigate important habitat attributes for threatened grassland reptiles, in particular the endangered grassland earless dragon.

The project was a great success and each student presented their results in different and interesting ways. The project resulted in several important findings including the discovery of a new population of grassland earless dragon some 20km north west of Cooma at Top Hut TSR on Dry Plain (also in a new habitat type for the species), a new southerly range extension for the striped legless lizard on the Monaro with a discovery at Ravensworth TSR and healthy numbers of little whip snakes recorded across the Monaro with numerous discoveries made.

The project identified a high diversity of reptiles across TSRs on the Monaro including a suite of

threatened species at many of them. Students prescribed various management actions for the TSRs and highlighted the importance of further protecting the values of these important sites on the Monaro. Analysis of results identified Eight Mile Bobundara, Nine Mile, Ravensworth and Top Hut TSR as having standout conservation importance for reptiles on the Monaro. Overall this project, initiated by Master's student Tim McGrath, has played an important role in improving our understanding of reptiles on the Monaro and the distribution of threatened reptiles across the landscape.

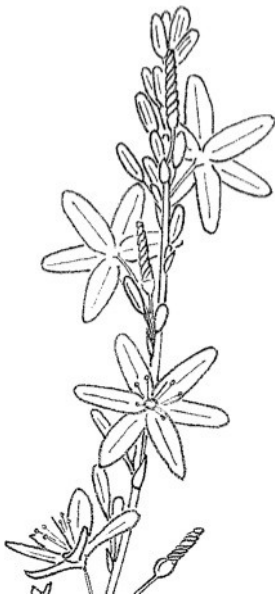
Special thanks to the Livestock Health and Pest Authority for permits to access and survey the TSRs and to Margaret Ning and Geoff Robertson for their hospitality.





*The blue grass-lily, Caesia calliantha, is very well adorned*

By Michael Bedingfield



“Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow..... even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.” So said a very famous man from Nazareth, about 2000 years ago. No-one would know what type of lilies he was referring to, but the lilies of the our grasslands and grassy woodlands decorate them very well. One of these is the blue grass-lily, which has the botanical name of *Caesia calliantha* (formerly known as *C. vittata*). The genus name, *Caesia*, is after a 17<sup>th</sup> century Italian naturalist, Federico Cesi. The species name, *calliantha*, comes from the Greek, “callos” for beauty, and “anthos” for flower, giving the meaning “beautiful flower”, an appropriate title.

The blue grass-lily is perennial, and is dormant over winter, saving its energy in a cluster of tuberous, fleshy roots. In the spring it produces a crowded tuft of grass-like leaves, and the flower-heads rise up from the centre of this tuft. The upright flowering stems can be up to about 50 cm tall. The flowers have 6 petals, are about 20 mm across, and coloured deep blue or lilac. They are arranged along the slender stems, and when they age fold up in a twisting spiral. Later on, small capsules 4 to 8 mm across are produced containing tiny seeds. The plant withers and slowly disappears with the onset of summer. Because its leaves are

similar looking to grass, the plant can be inconspicuous unless it is flowering, and during dry periods it is very shy.

This lily is widespread in south-eastern Australia, occurring on the tablelands and western slopes of NSW, as well as in Vic, SA and Tas. It requires sites that have some dampness, particularly in the growing season. It occurs in grasslands, grassy woodlands and open forests. Although widespread, it is not a common plant around Canberra. This is because of its need for damp sites, as well as being susceptible to grazing and other types of disturbance. So it occurs mainly on better quality sites, and a good place to find it locally is at Hall cemetery.

There are more than a few other lilies that can be found among the local grasses (forgetting botanical names for brevity). There are yellow ones, such as the bulbine lily, rock lily and yellow rush-lily; white ones – early Nancy, vanilla lily and milkmaids; more that are blue – smooth flax-lily and nodding blue lily; some are purple or mauve – nodding chocolate lily, small vanilla lily and common fringe-lily; some pink – slender wire lily; and there are more as well! They each have their own habits and requirements and add to the amazing diversity of our local flora.

The boxed drawing of the blue grass-lily shows a flowering stem at about half size, and a whole plant at about one sixth, with some flowers and buds shown separately at normal size. It is one of many of our wild lilies, a group of plants that has been admired down the ages.



## **FOG groups and projects**

**Activities** organises FOG field trips, talks, workshops, on-ground works, support to other groups, property visits, and the FOG calendar.

Inquiries: [activities@fog.org.au](mailto:activities@fog.org.au).

**Advocacy** prepares submissions and advocates for grassy ecosystem issues. It holds occasional meetings and workshops. Inquiries: [advocacy@fog.org.au](mailto:advocacy@fog.org.au).

**Committee & correspondence** The Committee organises, coordinates and monitors FOG activities. Members are John Fitz Gerald (Pres.), Isobel Crawford (Vice Pres), Sarah Sharp (Vice Pres.) Al Gabb (Sec.), Sandra Hand (Treas), Kim Pullen, David Eddy, Naarilla Hirsch, Stephen Horn, Tony Lawson, Margaret Ning, Benjamin Whitworth and Evelyn Chia. Andy Russell is public officer.

Inquiries/correspondence: [committee@fog.org.au](mailto:committee@fog.org.au).

Postal address: FOG, PO Box 987, Civic Square, ACT 2608.

**Communication** produces *News of Friends of Grasslands* and *FOG e-Bulletin*. Inquiries: [heather.sweet@fog.org.au](mailto:heather.sweet@fog.org.au) (newsletter), and [tony.lawson@fog.org.au](mailto:tony.lawson@fog.org.au) (e-Bulletin).

**Cultivation and Conservation** encourages growing of local grasses and wild flowers to learn about their horticulture and ecology, and produces *Cultivation Corner*. Inquiries: [janet2.russell@fog.org.au](mailto:janet2.russell@fog.org.au).

**FOG ANU Fenner School**, with the National Capital Authority, holds regular working bees at Yarramundi Reach (grasslands) and Stirling Ridge (woodlands). Inquiries: [jamie.pittock@fog.org.au](mailto:jamie.pittock@fog.org.au).

**Financial matters, excluding membership**, contact [sandra.hand@fog.org.au](mailto:sandra.hand@fog.org.au) or Sandra on 02 4846 1096.

**Grassland Flora** FOG is now responsible for sales of *Grassland Flora*. Inquiries: [booksales@fog.org.au](mailto:booksales@fog.org.au).

**General inquiries** Contact [info@fog.org.au](mailto:info@fog.org.au), Janet Russell (6251 8949).

**Grassland monitoring, Scottsdale** holds monitoring days at the Bush Heritage property at Scottsdale. Inquiries: [linda.spinaze@fog.org.au](mailto:linda.spinaze@fog.org.au).

**Hall Cemetery**, with ACT Government, holds regular working bees to protect the Hall leek orchid and generally restore the site. Inquiries: [andy.russell@fog.org.au](mailto:andy.russell@fog.org.au).

**Media spokesperson** Sarah Sharp (0402 576 412). FOG is a regular contributor on Radio Landcare, Tues 9-10am on (2XX, Canberra 98.3FM).

**Membership and newsletter despatch** See Membership box (page 11). Newsletter despatch is fourth Tuesday of Feb, Apr, June, Aug, Oct. To help, contact [membership@fog.org.au](mailto:membership@fog.org.au).

**Old Cooma Common (OCC)** with Cooma Monaro Shire Council manages the OCC Grassland Reserve. Working bees are held twice yearly. Inquiries: [margaret.ning@fog.org.au](mailto:margaret.ning@fog.org.au) or [david.eddy@fog.org.au](mailto:david.eddy@fog.org.au).

**Southern Tablelands Ecosystems Park (STEP)** FOG helped establish STEP (at Canberra's International Arboretum), a regional botanic gardens and recovery centre to showcase local ecosystems, especially native grasses and forbs. Inquiries: [limestone@grapevine.com.au](mailto:limestone@grapevine.com.au).

**Woodland Flora** *Woodland Flora*, the sequel to the popular *Grassland Flora*, is now at advanced production stage. Inquiries: [sarah.sharp@fog.org.au](mailto:sarah.sharp@fog.org.au).

**Website** ([www.fog.org.au](http://www.fog.org.au)) full of FOG information, back issues of *News of Friends of Grasslands*, and program details. Inquiries: [webmanager@fog.org.au](mailto:webmanager@fog.org.au).