



News of Friends of Grasslands

Supporting native grassy ecosystems

May-June 2013

ISSN 1832-6315

Program - take the diary out now

SAT 4 MAY, 9.00 am – noon **Hall Cemetery working bee**. Register with Andy Russell
andy.russell@fog.org.au.

SUN 26 MAY, 9.00 am – noon **Stirling Park local work party**. Register with jamie.pittock@fog.org.au.

TUES 25 JUNE, 5.30 – 7.00 pm Newsletter collation. Register with margaret.ning@fog.org.au.

SUN 30 JUNE, 9.00 am – 12.30 pm **Stirling Park local work party**. Register with jamie.pittock@fog.org.au.

See p. 2 for further details.

Photo: Past-president of FOG, John Fitz Gerald, makes volunteering look most enjoyable. John attended the *Scottsdale* planting in April as a individual associated with Greening Australia (Stephen Corey). See p. 7 News Roundup.



New FOG postal address

Please note our new address:

**Friends of Grasslands Inc.,
PO Box 440,
Jamison Centre,
Macquarie ACT 2614.**

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Coming FOG and Other Events

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

Hall Cemetery working bee

Saturday 4 May,
9.00 am – 12.00 noon.

We will continue work on controlling briar, hawthorn, thistles and other weeds in the woodland. Morning tea will be supplied.

It is planned to go into Hall afterwards for a light lunch at one of the places along the main street.

Please advise Andy Russell andy.russell@fog.org.au if you are able to join us.

Stirling Park local work party

Sunday 26 May,
9.00 am – 12.00 noon.

Bring drinking water, sun and eye protection and sturdy footwear. A thermos of hot water for morning tea would also be useful.

Please register with Jamie Pittock
jamie.pittock@fog.org.au.

Newsletter collation

Tuesday 25 June,
5.30 – 7.00 pm

Please put aside an hour to help us despatch the FOG newsletter at the Conservation Council Office. We start at 5.30 pm, so you can do something else later in the evening! It would be really helpful if you would let Margaret know if you will join us, either by email margaret.ning@fog.org.au or 'phone 6241 4065 or 0427 788 304.

The Council office is at 3 Childers St, in a demountable building north of the Street Theatre. There is public parking at the back - it's paid ACT meter parking during office hours (to 5:30 pm).

Stirling Park local work party

Sunday 30 June,
9.00 am – 12.30 pm.

Bring drinking water, sun and eye protection and sturdy footwear. Follow the signs from the corner of Clarke and Fitzgerald Streets, Yarralumla.

More information: Jamie Pittock
jamie.pittock@fog.org.au.

Producing Seed for the Restoration of Threatened Grassland Communities

Thursday 9 May
9.00 am – 3.00 pm

**Australian National Botanic Gardens,
Clunies Ross St, Acton ACT.**

This Greening Australia workshop will provide information on seed production for grassland restoration, the establishment and care of seed production areas, and case studies on the use of harvested seed in grassland restoration programs.

There is no charge for the workshop. Lunch is included.

RSVP by 3 May. To register, please 'phone Greening Australia on 02 6253 3035, or email GAdmin@act.greeningaustralia.org.au with your name, contact details and dietary requirements.

The program is at www.greeningaustralia.org.au/community/capital-region.

National Capital Authority withdraws proposal to build embassies on Stirling Park

See Ross Peake's article in *The Canberra Times* of 17 April 2013: <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/act-news/nca-withdraws-embassy-proposal-for-stirling-park-20130417-2hzgs.html>

News Roundup

Good news on Tympos

Geoff Robertson

When I lived in Russia, I learned that everyone has three names: a formal name, a casual name that friends and acquaintances use, and a name that intimates use. So it is with *Tympanocryptis pinguicolla*, the formal name for one of our favourite grassland species. Grassland Earless Dragon (GED) is their common name and their intimates call them Tympos.

Dr Lisa Doucette, Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Institute for Applied Ecology at the University of Canberra, is responsible for a much needed captive breeding program for Tympos. It has produced one hatchling, the first to be bred in captivity, although Joe McAuliffe has succeeded in breeding near relatives.

Lisa explained that the Institute has one pair from the ACT and nine adults and one hatchling from a population on the Monaro south of Cooma.

The breeding season is over for the year. Unfortunately 'we never got any of the other pairs to breed' she said. 'There is something not quite right despite our efforts to vary conditions and try different things. I suspect it has to do with the lack of natural light and use of air conditioning to control temperature. It may also be because, apart from the one female that laid three eggs, all the other females were caught as juveniles in May. We will change the cage setup before next breeding season so that at least some pairs have access to natural light and ambient air temperature.'

Photo: The first Tympo to be bred in captivity (Emma Carlson UC Honours Student)



For Sale: Naturalists' Delight

Ten minutes from Queanbeyan a 6.5 ha refuge for native vegetation and wildlife, accessible via sealed road, is for sale.

Its stony shale soils carry dry sclerophyll forest, low shrubs and grassland. Spring and early summer wildflowers bloom with distinctive colours and a diversity similar to nearby Cuumbeun Nature Reserve.

Native birds respond to the plants and their pollinating insects. Kangaroos and wallabies keep the grasses in check. Views are of the ranges to the west and Black Mountain.

A modern, well insulated, 2-3 bedroom house could convert to ample garaging if another house were built. A large shed on a concrete slab has ample space for the hobbyist or worker-from-home.

Three 45,000 L water tanks complement the large reliable dam. An Onzite Wormfarm digests grey & brown water & compostibles.

Some annuals and Flatweed have blown in, but the weeds are mostly restricted to the access tracks.

The property is being sold by Hugh Blemings through Spackman Real Estate.

News Roundup (con.)

Workshop on the Grassland Earless Dragon

Geoff Robertson

On 19 December 2012, I attended on behalf of FOG a national workshop on the Grassland Earless Dragon (GED) *Tympanocryptis pinguicolla*. It was hosted by Tim McGrath of the Department for Environment, Water, Populations and Communities or DSEWPAC). It aimed to assess the recovery of the species and to develop guidelines for making decisions about the GED in Environmental Impact Assessments.

The GED is a highly cryptic grassland specialist listed as 'endangered' under the Commonwealth's *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). This reptile, now presumed extinct in Victoria and on the south west slopes of New South Wales (NSW), now occurs only in Natural Temperate Grasslands in the Canberra, Queanbeyan, Cooma and Nimmitabel regions of the Southern Tablelands. The EPBC Act is instrumental in the protection of GED from urban and agricultural development, the biggest threats to the species.

Tim opened the workshop by saying, 'There has never been a more appropriate time to bring together the stakeholders and experts as the alarm bells are ringing for this species'. He referred to a recent publication by Wendy Dimond and others from the University of Canberra (UC). This indicates that extinction is very likely for GED in Canberra in the next 10 years. Presentations were given by experts on the species and some interesting discussions were had about the threats and actions required to recover the species across its range. Commonwealth, ACT, NSW and Victorian government representatives, UC academics and students, consultants and community groups all participated.

Key discussion points included:

- i) Amelioration of development activities and other impacts under the EPBC Act;
- ii) All monitoring results to be shared among agencies;
- iii) The captive breeding program at UC (see p. 3),
- iv) Information gained since the 2010 Recovery Plan;
- v) Status and management of GED habitat across its

range.

The workshop was an extremely positive step in achieving the recognition that GED and its habitat deserve. Key recommendations are already being implemented. The workshop decided that:

- i) DSEWPAC should develop a draft *Guidance Note* relating to Environmental Impact Assessment under the EPBC Act, to be released on the Department's website for public comment;
- ii) Improved information should be prepared on habitat identification. Descriptions and photos will be provided in the *Guidance Note*; and
- iii) Awareness and education in the agricultural sector should be improved. A GED pamphlet for landholders, local businesses and conservation groups is being prepared with help from FOG, Kosciuszko to Coast, the ACT Herpetological Association and the University of Canberra.

Recording grazing impacts in Grassy Box-Gun Woodland on Mount Majura

Grasscover

Dean Graetz describes his video, *Kangaroos, Rabbits and Grass*, as 'a repeat photographic record of a demonstration herbivore-sieving project established to demonstrate the magnitude and specificity of kangaroo and rabbit grazing within the Mount Majura Nature Reserve, Canberra, Australia. The project was initiated and is managed by the Friends of Mount Majura.'

It is at <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IS8pEpT7kow>> or via <<http://majura.org/explaining-change/>>, and I highly recommend it.

Friends of Mount Majura have also published photographic essays on the damage done by herbivores to restoration work on a former stock camp on Majura ridge at <<http://www.flickr.com/photos/61627737@N03/sets/72157632823459049/>>,

and on the impacts of grazing on ground cover and soil at <<http://www.flickr.com/photos/61627737@N03/sets/72157631419900742/>>.

See also John Thistleton's *Canberra Times* article at <<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/act-news/too-many-roos-on-mount-majura-20130321-2gh3j.html>>.

News Roundup (con.)

FOG at Old Cooma Common Grassland Reserve

Margaret Ning

On 31 December 2012 Jim, Trish and I headed for the Old Cooma Common Grassland Reserve (OCCGR) for the third annual St John's Wort working bee.

Jim intended to boom spray with his quad bike, as per normal, and Trish I to use Cooma-Monaro Shire Council's wonderful weed spraying trailer, with three hoses and reels hanging off a 400 L spray tank. So, first thing was to pick up the trailer. Throughout the next three days we had more than very gusty winds, and were constantly reminded of the various malfunctions that can occur with spray equipment.

First up, the trailer had a flat tyre which the Council mechanic very obligingly had fixed. In fact, he returned with it, plus a new tyre for another wheel which he also replaced as it looked dodgy.

The trailer was finally on top of Radio Hill by about 11 am and ready to start, when I found myself facing my first 'sea of red'. This is a bit like the red screen of death that appears on one's computer screen from time to time, in terms of its horrific psychological impact! The 400 L tank of chemical had rotated sufficiently to damage an outlet which was leaking chemical at a pace which saw me placing jugs under it to catch the leak. We somehow managed to level the tank and apply some Telstra rope which maintained the status quo for the three days. On another occasion, a regulating valve burst and we were confronted by another sea of red. Council again rectified the problem, and we continued.

Interruptions aside, Jim did his systematic passes up and down the southern slopes of Radio Hill, and Trish and I focussed on patches of wort, especially near the better patches of grassland. It will be interesting to assess the kill rate, as we were operating in hot windy weather, when the plant's metabolism is supposed to close down. We moved around Radio Hill to avoid the wind to try to prevent this outcome.

With the spray equipment and walkie talkies, our three days were as efficient and 'sociable' as possible. The ability of the set up on the trailer to dispense weedicide is amazing compared with the output from backpacks and the 12 V quad bike equipment. The walkie talkies are invaluable on the Common. After all, we have to

synchronise meal times and the refilling of tanks!

We held two one-day working bees in February and November 2012, and the above special working bee with boom spraying from 31 December 2012 to 2 January 2013. For two of these, we borrowed Council's wonderful weed spraying trailer .

Some time back, FOG received an Environmental Trust grant for fencing to make it possible to graze the Common and to conserve the Hoary Sunray and Monaro Golden Daisy populations. Although the site has not yet been fenced, the OCCGR committee has met four times in the last 12 months and progress has been made. Rising costs since we received the grant have led to this delay, but we hope that things will happen quickly soon.

Many thanks to OCCGR volunteers over the last year, and hopefully in advance for future hours! We plan to make volunteer time more effective either by using Council's wonderful spray trailer on the Wort and other high priority targets, and/or by cutting and dabbing *Verbascum* spikes at a better time of the year, probably late December.



Photo: OCCGR in January 2013 after the annual 3-day St John's Wort weediciding. The dark lines of St John's Wort are below (outside) the Reserve boundary. The parallel lines on the hill above are the wheel marks of Jim's quad bike. (M. Ning)

News Roundup (con.)

Monaro Regional Weeds Committee (MRWC) meeting, Bombala

Margaret Ning

The meeting on 27 March 2013 discussed why African Love Grass (ALG) *Eragrostis curvula* had not been added recently to the *Weeds of National Significance* (WoNS) list. The MRWC had proposed that it be added, and mentioned loss of biodiversity as an important outcome of the species' inexorable spread. The vote was lost, apparently because control of ALG is regarded as a lost cause. Also, some areas still promote some forms of ALG as a pasture grass, considering it to be palatable, with a long long growing season, and that stock can be maintained (though not fattened) on it.

Cooma-Monaro Shire Council (C-MSC) has applied to host the 18th NSW Weeds Conference (2015) to highlight the Monaro's problem with ALG.

Last year Snowy River Shire Council (SRSC) received a five year Biodiversity Fund grant to "Protect and improve connected landscapes in Snowy River Shire". This will enable SRSC to target principally Cinquefoil *Potentilla recta* on roadsides, along with Milfoil/Yarrow *Achillea millefolium*, Ox Eye Daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare* and Great Mullein *Verbascum thapsus*, which are not declared noxious weeds.

NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) has invited comment on its DRAFT Weed Control Order 30 of the Noxious Weeds Act 1993. C-MSC has written to DPI about its proposal to drop ALG, Nodding Thistle *Carduus nutans*, Scotch Thistle *Onopordum acanthium*, Horehound *Marrubium vulgare* and Sweet Briar *Rosa rubiginosa* from its list of Class 4 locally-controlled weeds. Class 4 weeds are well established species which landowners must manage in a manner that reduces their numbers, etc., etc. C-MSC believes this has the potential to impact significantly on the agricultural and environmental values of the region, and is not acceptable.

Bombala Council reports that a new agency is responsible for noxious weed control along railway easements in NSW. There was some discussion as to whether the MRWC should write to John Holland Rail,

thanking them for what they have done so far, and urging them to continue. It was noted that they could be served with a weeds notice, if they did not continue to honour their commitment.

There was discussion of experiments by the Bombala office of the South East Livestock Health and Pest Authority (LHPA) employing serious crash grazing on a large TSR. Others commented that this was not a sustainable strategy.

Cooma and Bombala officers of the South East LHPA were having to share a weeds trailer, with associated dramas when they transferred the spray equipment between ute trays. The committee decided to write to the LHPA requesting that staff be given adequate equipment (i.e. a second Quik spray unit).

All agencies confirmed they were battling St John's Wort *Hypericum perforatum* in particular this season, with limited finances of course.

There was also discussion of plant hygiene and machinery washing down, and how difficult and slow it is to get the message out to the main players/offenders.

Little battlers get big coverage

Geoff Robertson

On 30 October 2012, *The Canberra Times* published a three page opinion piece by former staffer Rosslyn Beeby on the *Little battlers*, subtitled *the fight to save one of Australia's rarest reptiles*. The photos featured the Grassland Earless Dragon (GED), Anett Richter with a butterfly net, and Will Osborne who did much of the early GED research.

The following Saturday (3 November) there was a two-page piece on *Hunting dragons* which featured Tim McGrath describing the work he has been doing on the Monaro hunting GED. It is an amazing story. Tim has rolled 63,236 rocks to find only 45 dragons.

Will, Tim and Anett are all active FOG members and an inspiration to grassland conservationists.

News Roundup (con.)

Scottsdale planting

Bindi Vanzella,
Business Development Coordinator
Greening Australia Capital Region.

On Sunday 7 April, over 100 keen volunteers planted more than 2000 plants in stage one of a two year, 300 ha *Whole of Paddock Rehabilitation to Woodlands* project at Bush Heritage Australia's Scottsdale Reserve, south of Canberra. Another 1500 trees and shrubs will be planted over the next few weeks by more volunteers, and Greening Australia and Bush Heritage staff.

The restoration project, funded through the Australian Government's Biodiversity Fund, is part of Greening Australia's six-year *Whole of Paddock Rehabilitation to Woodlands* program to increase the area of vital habitat connections in fragmented and degraded grassy woodlands. Over \$200,000 from the grant, with equivalent in-kind support from Bush Heritage, will see the Gungaharra Valley revegetated using direct planting and direct seeding. The site will be a showcase for the broad-scale management of African Love Grass, currently spreading across the Southern Tablelands of NSW. So far, many efforts to control this noxious weed in the region have had limited success. FOG will become directly involved in the annual monitoring of this revegetation work.

Some of the excellent coverage can be viewed at: ABC TV (Sydney and Canberra) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=80fSowArBzg> and *The Canberra Times*, *The Age* and *SMH* online: <http://www.smh.com.au/act-news/green-thumb-a-helping-hand-for-seedlings-20130407-2hf89.html> <http://www.theage.com.au/act-news/green-thumb-a-helping-hand-for-seedlings-20130407-2hf89.html>

There will be a spring planting at Scottsdale on 8 September 2013.

Photo bottom right: The Bredbo Rural Fire Service truck volunteers to help with watering the plantings (GA).



Photo above: New FOG president, Sarah Sharp, watering plantings at Scottsdale. Sarah attended as an individual associated with GA (GA).



FOG Advocacy

Naarilla Hirsch

February

FOG made a submission to the ACT Government about its 2013-14 budget. Areas that FOG considered in need of more resources included the implementation of the strategic plans for weeds and feral pests, monitoring of conservation areas, management for conservation of remnants outside the ACT's reserve system, implementation of the former Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment's recommendations for both Natural Temperate Grassland reserves and Canberra Nature Park, establishment of a nature reserve at Kinlyside, and the combining of the Government's environmental arms into one directorate.

March

Following its submission on the Mugga Lane Landfill extension late last year, FOG provided similar comments in response to the subsequent Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The EIS addressed most of FOG's earlier comments, but FOG reiterated its view that funds should be set aside for management of the offset block in the long term, e.g. in a special-purpose trust fund. FOG also asked that the results of monitoring and reporting of the management activities and rehabilitation of the offset site be made available.

The possible hotel and car park development adjoining York Park conservation area is an ongoing issue. The proponent asked the Commonwealth to reconsider its decision on the basis of new evidence that winter shading would not affect York Park's Golden Sun Moth (GSM) larvae. FOG's view was that this evidence was insufficient and that, in the case of a critically endangered species such as the GSM, assumptions made should err on the conservative side.

A design for the Coombs section of Molonglo Riverside Park has been released. FOG was concerned that the Park is, in most places, too narrow to achieve sustainable conservation objectives. FOG's concerns related to protection of the Pink-tailed Worm Lizard (PTWL) and function as a conservation corridor being jeopardised in the long term by recreational activities and other urban impacts. In relation to the recreation

objective of the Park design, FOG drew attention to interpretive signage, adequate funding, inappropriate access to PTWL habitat (including provision of a dog park away from the habitat areas), and the use of more Southern Tablelands' species in the plantings.

April

ACTPLA has released a draft EIS for the relocation of a power line through the proposed Lawson South development. FOG supported the impact and mitigation statements for listed species such as the GSM and Striped Legless Lizard (SLL). However, FOG requested that the proposed Construction and Environmental Management Plan specify more detail about some of the proposed mitigation approaches.

Two EPBC referrals for the Majura area have been out for public comment. The first was for the development of a short haul road as part of the Majura Parkway development. FOG asked that a condition of approval be that the site be rehabilitated with suitable GSM habitat species once the haul road is no longer required, as per the referral document. The second was from the AFP for a new Driver Training Facility. The preliminary assessment noted the presence of potential habitat for SLL, and the sighting of a possible SLL during a vegetation survey. FOG therefore asked that the area be re-surveyed for SLL before any of the development is approved.

There have been two EPBC referrals for wind farms. For the Yass valley one, FOG's comments related to the length of time weed control and revegetation activities should continue to ensure that impact areas have been restored to a defined level of ecological integrity, particularly close to Yass Daisy populations or in high quality native vegetation. The second, north of Yass, will impact on a GSM population. FOG reiterated that development should not proceed if it has an impact on an endangered species and questioned whether, by relocation or removal of a couple of turbines, the impact on known higher density GSM populations could be further reduced.

The full text of FOG submissions is on our website.

Report from Brandy Marys

Jim Kelton

Our *Brandy Marys* forestry leases are c. 40 km east of Tumbarumba, on McPhersons Plain, adjoining the Kosciuszko NP. As many FOG members know, I have been restoring the Montane Peatlands there. These wetlands, and our other Endangered Ecological Community, *Tablelands Snow Gum Grassy Woodland*, comprise over 60% of *Brandy Marys*. The remainder of the property is high quality forest and the whole property has high indigenous cultural values. I was grateful to receive an unsolicited FOG grant (see p. 12), and used it to buy two 20 L drums of weedicide.

Levees

The series of ten levees which I constructed across our half of McPhersons Plain peatlands have been extremely effective and really demonstrated their benefit during the recent dry summer.

Revegetation efforts

I have at last had considerable success in propagating peatland shrub species from our Plain. These shrubs, when planted out, will add to the trial 1000 *Epacris* and *Baeckea* transplants taken last year from a newly cleared boundary fenceline (est. 60% success rate).

The recent success with cuttings from our native peatland shrubs has been largely the result of trial and error, but I think we now have our act together with more than 90% strike rates of *Baeckea* and *Epacris* (*E. breviflora* and *E. paludosa*) cuttings.

I now have hundreds of *Leptospermum myrtifolium*, *Hakea microcarpa* and *Baeckea utilis* (still waiting on *B. gunniana* to emerge.....hopefully) seedlings ready to be put in tubes. I pricked out 400 *Hakea* last week into tubes. These will be ready to plant next spring or autumn.

I also have c. 200 *Baeckea utilis* and 100 *Epacris breviflora* cuttings in propagation trays at home, and I found last week that many are now throwing out good strong roots. I will be taking these to Tumut Landcare nursery next week to plant them out into small pots. All this is great, and so very exciting that we have at last found out what works and what doesn't.

I have to say that none of the recent successes would have been possible without the encouragement and support of the Riverina Highlands Landcare Nursery at Tumut, managed by Steve Hamill, and the crew of voluntary workers. I cannot thank them enough. I try to do voluntary work for the nursery every second visit but that doesn't really pay them back for all the time and support given to our project here at McPhersons Plain.

Weed Spraying

Our efforts this year to eradicate St John's Wort from our bottom 500 acre block have met with great success. This is on top of the massive spraying programs for this dastardly weed over the last few years on the 'bottom block'.

I managed to scramble down to the Top Block the other day in the Troopie with the trailer and 1,000 L of spray and the spray unit. It was a bit hairy getting down the steep hill to the creek where the blackberry infestation is up in the tops of the 4 m high Woolly Teatree *Leptospermum lanigerum* gully. After doing a brief follow-up spray after last year's success, I had to cut a 50 m long vehicle track through the forest with the chainsaw, parallel to the creek, to access the unsprayed blackberries. I put out the full tank and put a big mark in the weeds. There are still about 200 m of blackberries along the creek, but also some lovely shaded sections of Teatree scrub totally uninfested with blackberries, almost 'rainforestry' in nature. To be continued next summer. This season I managed to put out the two 20 L drums of herbicide gratefully received from FOG and the one donated by Dr Geoff Hope. Thank you for the support extended to us over the years by FOG. It is much appreciated.

A New Stick Insect Species

Roger Farrow

Most stick insects inhabit the canopy of trees and shrubs, feed on their leaves, and rarely descend to the ground. Their eggs fall into the litter and the newly hatched nymphs immediately climb back into the canopy. Here they spend the rest of their life.

But in Australia there is a group of stick insects, in the sub-family Lonchodinae, which feeds on grass species. They are extremely thin, wingless and with very long legs, and vary in body length from 30 mm (males) to 120 mm (females). Six species in this genus *Denhama* have been described and are listed by Paul Brock and Jack Hasenpusch in *The Complete Field Guide to Stick and Leaf Insects of Australia* (CSIRO Publishing 2009). Most have been collected from widely separate locations in northern Australia. Compared to the canopy-living stick insects, there are few collections of *Denhama*. None has been collected from New South Wales or Victoria, but there are a few from South Australia. The type species for the genus, *D. aussa*, is labelled Denham (WA) and therefore this name was given to the genus by Werner in 1912. According to Paul Brock, this may be an erroneous location.

In early February 2013, the Wednesday Walkers group of the Australian Native Plant Society visited a nature reserve near Queanbeyan to record plant species. I found a curious stick insect in short grass and photographed it. It was wingless and extremely slender and I thought it may have been a nymph which had fallen out of a tree. Later, another member of our group found a pair of mating stick insects in short grass. They were straw-coloured and very well camouflaged. The female had a dorsal stripe, and I then realised that the specimen photographed earlier was a male, and that it was indeed a grass-living species. The vegetation consisted of patches of Red-anther Wallaby Grass tussocks, especially at lower

elevations, and more open patches of shorter Wallaby Grass species with miscellaneous forbs where the stick insects were seen. So it is not certain if there were stick insects sheltering and feeding in the taller Red-anther Wallaby Grass where they would have been harder to see.

Comparing my images with those in the above field guide, the only possibility was a species of *Denhama*, although there were no NSW records. Paul Brock at the Natural History Museum in London was sent my images and replied that this was indeed a new record of *Denhama* and probably a new species.

I returned a few days later to check the grassy areas outside the reserve hoping to collect a male and female for reference and description. But I failed to find any more individuals and none was seen inside the reserve where collecting requires a permit. It would be useful to keep a pair in captivity to obtain eggs, which possess diagnostic identification features.

These stick insects are extremely well camouflaged and difficult to detect, which may account for some of their rarity in collections. If they are confined to grassy patches in or above grassy Box-Gum Woodland, then we may have another animal species that depends on the conservation of this endangered plant community and the ecosystem it supports.

Photos page 9 (R. Farrow):

Denhama sp. male, 45 mm long (above).

Denhama sp. mating pair, female 60 mm long and with dorsal stripe (below).

A New Stick Insect Species (con.)



FOG AGM 2013 President's Report, March 2013

John Fitz Gerald

This has been a busy FOG year. Section reports summarise solid finances, satisfactory membership levels, continued enthusiasm and progress on a range of causes for conservation of grassy ecosystems. *News of Friends of Grasslands* has kept members informed. I thank FOG's many volunteers: FOG is extremely grateful that you contribute so much.

I comment on a selection of major items for 2012-13:

In the ACT, land development in Gungahlin and Molonglo, and its impact on conservation, again received wide media comment. The FOG Advocacy team has evaluated and commented on proposals in close contact with the Conservation Council ACT and member groups. Mediation by the ACT Administrative and Civil Tribunal resulted in positive changes to the development application for Coombs in the Molonglo Valley. These are environmental gains and give hope that the process in future will be more considered. An integrated strategic analysis of several of the developing suburbs will be released for comment any day now. It is hoped that this too will favour the retention of the best of the high-quality grassy ecosystems in the north of the ACT, and for better connectivity to benefit flora and fauna. Naarilla Hirsch, as Advocacy Group Convener, and Sarah Sharp, as the key intermediary with the Conservation Council and as FOG Vice President, deserve special commendation.

The Kosciuszko to Coast group (K2C), of which FOG is part, has obtained fixed-term grant funding and is now working with landholders and authorities across the Southern Tablelands and beyond. Directly relevant to FOG's objectives is the *Australian Native Grasslands Project* funded by the Myer Foundation. FOG will participate in grassland restoration and modern management on both public and private lands. FOG is also likely to interact with three other Melbourne-based sectors of the Project striving for better management of remnant grasslands close to large population centres and improved communication.

The activity on National Land beside Lake Burley Griffin has been enthusiastically and effectively (p. 2) pushed by Jamie Pittock. Thanks once again to him for his time and energy, and to others who shared responsibility for catering, transport, etc. An initial grant for control of *Weeds of National Significance* through the ACT National Resource Management Council was supplemented by a second that enabled better coverage of areas treated with herbicide and sparsely planted with native tubestock. Yarralumla residents are actively participating in FOG's regular activities in Stirling Park and Yarramundi Reach, no doubt catalysed by concerns about potential construction of a new Diplomatic Estate on the SW corner of Stirling Park (see p.2), and by proposed amendments to the National Capital Plan to have Attunga Point turned over to a Prime Ministerial Lodge. FOG has become involved only where issues of grassy ecosystems and of listed species and communities are paramount. Because of the increased involvement by local residents, the amount of weed control has significantly increased and the possibility of eventually handing over this program to locals continues to be advanced. Financial support and cooperation from the National Capital Authority, particularly their groundbreaking program of ecological burning, continues to be acknowledged by FOG.

Committee voted to use part of FOG's accumulated funds to support excellent environmental work in grassy ecosystems. The annual interest from a FOG Investments Fund will fund one or more small grants or loans. Potential recipients will be invited by FOG to apply. This year's support is for weed control at Brandy Marys (see p. 9).

The following committee roles changed hands: Kris Nash seamlessly filled the vacant position of secretary, with considerable help from John Buckley taking minutes. Heather Sweet needed to step down as Newsletter editor and was replaced by Isobel Crawford, who has imprinted her own character on the last few issues. Stephen Horn has made a fine contribution as Treasurer. Thanks to Evelyn Chia for her committee work.

I am pleased to have weathered two years as President and hope that this has been a plus for FOG as an organisation and for the achievement of FOG's objectives. If that is the case, then I attribute that almost entirely to others in FOG. I hope that I have indicated some of the key people and actions. There are others who worked more 'behind' these 'scenes'. Thanks to you all and I look forward to keeping on with FOG activities.

Emu-foot: One of Several Rare Native Pea Flowers

Michael Bedingfield

John Muir (1838-1914) was a prolific and passionate writer on nature conservation in the USA, and is still being published. Perhaps his writing remains well regarded because he achieved so much for the protection of wilderness, particularly in national parks, which were then a new concept. He once said “When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe.” His bold assertion was made pertinent to me when I was watching the ABC television series “Voyage to the Planets”. The planet Jupiter is one thousand times larger than Earth, and therefore exerts a very strong gravitational force in our solar system. So it attracts many wayward comets and asteroids that might otherwise crash with violent and destructive impact into our own planet. We were told, “Life would not be possible on the Earth if it were not for Jupiter. We need Jupiter.” It is still controversial, but some astronomers believe that without Jupiter’s protective influence, the Earth would not have been stable and safe enough for life to develop here. It is fascinating to think that a planet which appears to us as a tiny point of light in the night sky, just one of zillions, and which is over 590 million km away, could have such a significant effect.

There is so much we don’t know about our extremely complex and magnificent world, that we have to be very careful of what we do. The work of FOG in trying to secure a good future for grassy ecosystems, is very important. John Muir believed that wildness and wilderness are part of our own nature, that in wild places we can find true peace and contentment, our wounds are healed and our wellbeing restored.

John also believed that, since things are so intimately connected, when we lose features of the natural world, we lose a part of ourselves. Losing a species is a great tragedy, and there are many whose future is uncertain, including Emu-foot *Cullen tenax* (formerly *Psoralea tenax*). It is listed as endangered in Victoria, and is regarded with concern in the ACT. It receives special mention in Action Plan 27, *Woodlands for Wildlife*, ACT Lowland Woodland Conservation Strategy (Environment ACT 2004). Other pea species mentioned in the same vein are Mountain Swainson-pea *Swainsona monticola*, Small Purple Pea *S. recta* (endangered), Silky Swainson-pea *S. sericea*, Austral Trefoil *Lotus australis*, and Zornia *Zornia dictiocarpa* var. *dyctiocarpa*.

Emu-foot is a small perennial herb to 20 cm tall, sprawling to 60 cm wide. It appears to be very palatable, as it is often grazed upon. The small pea flowers are purple or mauve, in stalked spikes from the leaf axils. The leaves have three to five leaflets, occasionally seven, arranged palmately like the fingers from our palm. The fruit is a tiny black pod, about 3 mm long. It is rare in the ACT, reasonably common on the Monaro, and can be found on the slopes and plains of SA, NSW and Qld.

I have provided a drawing of *Cullen tenax* at about half natural size, with a flower-head at normal size. Whatever the effect is, on the universe or on ourselves, when a species is lost forever, it could not be beneficial. So we continue to work to protect plants such as Emu-foot to ensure it has a safe future.



Cullen tenax
Emu-foot
Michael Bedingfield
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FOG groups and projects

General inquiries

Contact info@fog.org.au, Sarah Sharp (0402 576 412) or Janet Russell (6251 8949).

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.

Advocacy prepares submissions and advocates for grassy ecosystem issues. It holds occasional meetings and workshops. Inquiries: advocacy@fog.org.au.

Committee & correspondence The Committee organises, coordinates and monitors FOG activities. Members are Sarah Sharp (Pres.), John Fitz Gerald (Vice Pres.) Kris Nash (Sec.), Stephen Horn (Treas.), John Buckley, Evelyn Chia, Isobel Crawford, Naarilla Hirsch, Tony Lawson, Katherina Ng, Margaret Ning, Kim Pullen, Rainer Rehwinkel and Andrew Zelnik. Andy Russell is public officer. Inquiries/ correspondence: committee2@fog.org.au.

Postal address: FOG, P.O. Box 440, Jamison Centre, Macquarie 2614.

Communication produces *News of Friends of Grasslands* and *FOG e-Bulletin*. Inquiries: newsletter@fog.org.au or ebulletin@fog.org.au.

Financial matters, excluding membership, contact stephen.horn@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.

Grassland Flora FOG is responsible for sales of *Grassland Flora*. Inquiries: booksales@fog.org.au.

Grassland monitoring, Scottsdale holds monitoring days at the Bush Heritage property at Scottsdale. Inquiries: linda.spinaze@fog.org.au.

Hall Cemetery, with ACT Government, holds regular working bees to protect the leek orchid and generally restore the site. Inquiries: john.fitzgerald@fog.org.au.

Media spokesperson Sarah Sharp (0402 576 412).

Membership and newsletter despatch Newsletter despatch is the fourth Tuesday of Feb, Apr, June, Aug, Oct and Dec. To help, contact 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 or david.eddy@fog.org.au.

Southern Tablelands Ecosystems Park (STEP) FOG helped to establish STEP, a regional botanic gardens and recovery centre at Canberra's International Arboretum. It showcases local ecosystems, especially native grasses and forbs. Inquiries: 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.

Website www.fog.org.au is full of FOG information, back issues of *News of Friends of Grasslands*, and program details. Inquiries: webmanager@fog.org.au.

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