



News of Friends of Grasslands

Supporting native grassy ecosystems

September–October 2013

ISSN 1832-6315

Program - take the diary out now

SUN 8 SEPT., 9.00 am–12.00 noon. **Yarramundi Reach** work party. Register with jamie.pittock@fog.org.au.

SAT 21 SEPT., 9.00 am–12.00 noon. **Hall Cemetery** work party. Register with john.fitzgerald@fog.org.au.

SUN 22 SEPT., 9.00 am–12.00 noon. **Stirling Park** work party. Register with jamie.pittock@fog.org.au.

SUN 13 OCT., **Bindiderry field trip**. Register with margaret.ning@fog.org.au.

WED 16 OCT., **Scottsdale monitoring day**. Register with linda.spinaze@fog.org.au.

SAT–SUN 19–20 OCT., **Nerriga field trip**. Register with margaret.ning@fog.org.au.

TUES 22 OCT., 5.30 pm. **Newsletter collation**. New Conservation Council office, 15/28 Barry Drive Acton.

SUN 27 OCT., 9.00 am–12.00 noon. **Stirling Park** work party. Register with jamie.pittock@fog.org.au.

SUN 27 OCT., From 2 pm. **Stirling Park walk**. Register with jamie.pittock@fog.org.au.

See p. 2 for further details.

Photo: ACT Parks Conservation and Lands staff manage the autumn burning done as part of a soil nutrient reduction experiment at The Pinnacle Nature Reserve (Don Driscoll).

See p.7 for Don's article.

In this issue

Program

Coming Events

Fireweed Alert on Southern Tablelands

News Roundup

FOG Advocacy and Offsets

Geoff Robertson: FOG's First Life Member

Koala

FOG Groups and Projects

Insert: Treasurer's Report 2012



Coming FOG Events

Please register for outings to help FOG to organise any catering and to provide you with additional pertinent information. Car pooling may be arranged.

Yarramundi Reach work party

Sunday 8 September,
9.00 am–12.00 noon.

Help plant forbs, weed, and monitor the managed plots.

Dress appropriately for the weather and use sun protection. Morning tea and water will be provided. Please bring your own favourite small planting tool such as a trowel, cleaned and free of soil.

Park at the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Centre, 245 Lady Denman Drive, west of the landcare site. For more information, see p. 7, or www.bushcaresmajordayout.org/location/yarramundi-reach-grassland.

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

Hall Cemetery work party

Saturday 21 September,
9.00 am–12.00 noon.

This first 'summer' work morning is earlier than normal so that we can weed thistles and St Johns Wort before any seed is set. Otherwise, we shall cut and dab small Sweet Briars and tackle some other leafy weed patches.

Herbicide is provided but please bring gloves and your favourite small cutting tool. Morning tea is provided. Please dress for the weather and the tall dry grass.

Enquiries and registration john.fitzgerald@fog.org.au.

Stirling Park work parties

Sunday 22 September and 27 October,
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.

Bindidgerry field trip

Sunday 13 October.

Bindidgerry is east of Murrumbateman. It has outstanding grassy woodland which is being managed for its biodiversity with support from the Federal Government's Biodiversity Fund for the *Landcare Linking Biodiversity* project

This outing will be held in conjunction with the Murrumbateman Landcare Group.

Register with margaret.ning@fog.org.au.

Grassland monitoring at Scottsdale

Wednesday 16 October
9.30 am–3.30 pm

Since March 2008 FOG has been monitoring the impact of grazing on African Lovegrass (ALG), and the interplay between it and the native grassy vegetation.

Scottsdale is a grazing property now owned by Bush Heritage. It is just north of Bredbo, tucked into a curve of the Murrumbidgee River. It has magnificent native biodiversity near the river, but the flats near the road are heavily infested with ALG. Bush Heritage is working hard to manage this, and FOG assists by providing a yearly monitoring team.

No experience is necessary, and lunch is provided.

To register, please contact linda.spinaze@fog.org.au.

Nerriga Wallabia field trip

Saturday–Sunday 19–20 October.

Enjoy a weekend camping on Joe and Lois McAuliffe's 226 acre property in the foothills of the Northern Budawangs, between 620–680 m.

The geology is principally sandstone, with some basalt and alluvial deposits, with correspondingly varied vegetation.

The owners are looking forward to having visitors who are keen on plants.

No pets please.

Register with margaret.ning@fog.org.au.

Coming FOG Events (con.)

Newsletter collation

Tuesday 22 October,

5.30–7.00 pm.

Conservation Council 15/28 Barry Drive. Ground Floor, northern side of Lena Karmel Lodge

Please put aside an hour to help despatch the newsletter. Parking is available in Watson Street.

Please let Margaret know if you will join us, either by email margaret.ning@fog.org.au or 'phone 6241 4065 or 0427 788 304.

Stirling Park walk

Sunday 27 October,

from 2 pm.

See the beautiful golden-yellow Button Wrinklewort daisy in flower, and admire the results of well targeted weeding and other management practices in this patch of remnant native woodland in the heart of Canberra.

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

Golden Sun Moth Translocation Research: volunteers needed

The ACT Government and University of Canberra are seeking volunteers to help with research into translocating the Golden Sun Moth.

Volunteers are needed to help monitor the emergence of adults from October to January to ascertain whether the translocation has been successful. The monitoring site is near the National Arboretum in Canberra.

Volunteer for a week, a month or for the duration of the project! No experience is necessary. Training will be provided.

For more information contact either
Dr Bill Sea (University of Canberra) 6201 2280
bill.sea@canberra.edu.au, or
Clare McInnes (ACT Parks and Conservation Service)
6205 4680 clare.mcinnes@act.gov.au.

Fireweed Alert on Southern Tablelands

Canberrans are urged to look for Madagascan Fireweed *Senecio madagascariensis* detected in Gungahlin close to Gungahlin Hill, Gungahlin, Mulangarri, Percival Hill, Mulligans Flat and Mitchell Grasslands. It has also been recorded elsewhere in the ACT and on the Southern Tablelands over the last 5–10 years.

ACT Government weeds staff and contractors are seeking to destroy plants before they flower and set seed. Plants can produce tens of thousands of fluffy wind-borne viable seeds, making it highly invasive.

Fireweed can cause liver damage similar to that caused by Paterson's Curse to horses and other livestock, and is most damaging to grazing land. It typically invades along roadsides and quickly spreads into adjoining pastures and reserves.

Because of its bright yellow flower heads, Fireweed is likely to be noticed by passing motorists. If you think that you have seen Fireweed, please record the location, report it to Canberra Connect on 13 22 81, and photograph the plant if possible.

For more information, visit www.weeds.org.au/WoNS/fireweed/ or www.tams.act.gov.au.

Photo: Fireweed in turf imported from Sydney to Gungahlin.



Other Events

Revitalising Grasslands to Sustain our Communities

22nd International Grasslands Congress

15–19 September 2013

Sydney Convention & Exhibition Centre

For information visit <http://www.igc2013.com>,
'phone 02 9213 4010 or write to 547 Harris Street,
Ultimo, NSW, 2009.

Black Mountain Wildflower Ramble

Saturday 12 October 2013

9.30 am sharp–12 noon (or later)

Belconnen Way entry, c. 0.5 km east of Caswell Drive (look for the balloons).

Join wildflower lovers for the Burbidge/Chippendale tradition of celebrating the spring flowering on the 42nd annual Black Mountain wildflower ramble.

Discover the surprising diversity of tiny orchids, bush peas, wattles and billy buttons with experienced guides, easy bush tracks and good company.

All are welcome: no experience is required. BYO morning tea, hat, sunblock, water and stout shoes. Please book: 'phone Jean Geue 6251 1601 or email friendsofblackmountain@gmail.com.

Australian Native Plant Society Plant Sale

Saturday 19 October,

from 8.30 am

Australian National Botanic Gardens carpark

More than 600 species, forms and cultivars for sale, including those not normally available, as well as many local species.

Please bring bags and boxes to take home your plants.

ACT Centenary Bioblitz

25–27 October 2013

organised by the Molonglo Catchment Group

FOG is helping to monitor the grassy woodland and secondary grassland on the lower south-western slopes of Black Mountain.

Please contact Sarah Sharp if you would like to help:
sarah.sharp@fog.org.au.

ACT Weed Swap

Saturday–Sunday 2–3 November

8.30 am–4.45 pm

a joint initiative of the Australian Native Plants Society and the ACT Government

Swap your weeds for free Australian native plants at Canberra Sand & Gravel at the end of Southern Cross Dr, Belconnen, or Corkhill Bros near Mugga Lane Tip.

Why grasslands need champions

John Morgan leads the Plant Ecology Lab at the Department of Botany at La Trobe University, Victoria.

On 16 July 2013, he contributed an excellent blog post to the Lab's website on why grasslands need to be supported by locals. He concludes that 'By championing small sites, we ensure that they don't fall through the management cracks.'

This is very much the role that FOG seeks to play. See <http://morganveg dynamics.blogspot.com.au/2013/07/why-grasslands-need-champions.html>.

News Roundup

An eventful winter slide afternoon

Margaret Ning

On Saturday 13 July, 33 people assembled on a lovely sunny day for FOG's traditional winter slide afternoon.

Firstly, David Shorthouse and Barbara Payne summarised progress at the Southern Tablelands Ecosystems Park (STEP) which is developing into a regional botanic garden for the southern tablelands within the National Arboretum.

We were shown photographs of the 2.5 ha area, where mulched paths encourage visitors to wend their way about the site. The Arboretum supplies the mulch, enabling STEP to spend its scarce funds on understory plants. It is a sunny site, but frost susceptible, so shelter will be established for those species which require it.

The site has been developed with the help of volunteers, including hard core STEP members (an average of 13 to 14 every week), Greening Australia twice, Conservation Volunteers, and some other groups, including some Korean students who, incidentally, weren't very keen to touch the mulch! Large rocks have been brought in to act as future information points, and as quiet sitting places.

Barbara Payne described her part in the plan for the understory of the site. Barbara's aim was to educate visitors about the ecosystems of the Southern Tablelands, using plants that would engage the public, be easy and cheap to grow, and easy for volunteers to

work with. Why an understory? The understory tells us about a place, i.e. helps to explain a local ecosystem. By the time Barbara was starting her design, 16 eucalypt species had already been planted in bands across the site, approximately reflecting their altitudinal position in the landscape (except for *E. delegatensis* and *E. dalrympleana* which had been planted close to an ephemeral watercourse). Her design related to these species and their ecosystems. Since then, two Casuarina and one *Brachychiton* species have been added. Barbara said that the soil was derived from Mt Painter volcanics, with some Quaternary alluvial deposits to 1.5 m deep in places.

Problems experienced include kangaroo and (a little) hare damage, weeds. Weed control varies: some (e.g. Paterson's Curse) are hand pulled, and others (e.g. St John's Wort) are sprayed. There are also problems caused by the flow of water over and through the site, stemming from the construction of the elevated car park above, close to the main Arboretum structure. There is not much that STEP can do about this, but some modification is planned.

There is a lower density of trees around the edge adjoining the Arboretum. This is required to reduce fuel levels around the perimeter of the Arboretum, but is fortunately also appropriate for a grassy woodland. Straight lines of trees fringe the STEP site, but elsewhere bands of trees follow the contours.

Seeds for the initial ground cover for the site have been donated by Warren Saunders (*Seeds and Plants Australia*). The Arboretum is responsible for mowing,

Photo: *Dianella tasmanica* and *Leptospermum obovatum* (fore to mid ground), among *Eucalyptus dalrympleana* planted in 2009, and with *Acacia caerulescens* along the ridge, looking north-east from the central garden of STEP's Forest 20 at the National Arboretum (David Shorthouse).



News Roundup (con.)

An eventful winter slide afternoon (con.)

and maintains the grassy understory at 100–300 mm. A pruning workshop in 2012 discussed whether the trees should be ‘managed’ or allowed to ‘express themselves’. With the exception of the mowing, a little Sawfly removal and the removal of lower branches to facilitate mowing, everything is *au naturel*.

David put out a call for plants that could be used by STEP. In the past plants have been salvaged from a site scheduled to be destroyed by roadworks. Species included Blue Devil *Eryngium ovinum*, a Rock Fern *Cheilanthes* sp. and a *Chrysocephalum* sp.. Barbara mentioned that Blue Devil had been very easy to grow from seed.

The dream for the future includes permanent paths, an education space (perhaps where a few of the original plantings have died), more birds (50 species recorded to date, with the number of species and of individuals increasing all the time), and simply the sound of plants, trees and birds!

David said that FOG members are always welcome to visit Forest 20, and that working bees are held on Thursdays, 8.30–11.30 am.

I went to the STEP site the next time I was at the Arboretum, and gazed down on Forest 20 from that controversial upper car park. I was impressed by the progress over the last year. STEP would like to host a visit by FOG members, and we are looking for a suitable date.

Next on the program were the proposed constitutional changes. These were approved, including the ability to appoint life members. President, Sarah Sharp, briefly traced FOG’s development from a relatively passive group to one that effects change, always making decisions on a sound scientific basis. She then discussed the contribution of former president Geoff Robertson who had been proposed as FOG’s first life member (p. 9–10). Geoff accepted, and praised FOG’s fantastic reserve of people.

Following afternoon tea, Rainer Rehwinkel showed slides of his trip with Marianne to the UK in the 2012

northern hemisphere summer.

We were treated to the varied geography of limestone cliffs and granite tors; the modified British scenery of canals, Roman roads and bricks, hedgerows, serrated tussock planted in a public garden, and ubiquitous stone walls; famous tourist/historic sites of Bath, Stonehenge in wet and miserable weather, a white chalk horse at nearby Westbury, historic houses, and Dartmoor ponies; reserves with native red deer, many duck species, fields of flowers, broom, hawthorn, massive old growth oaks, and the dreaded ox-eye daisy in their natural surroundings; and stories of introductions of pheasants (as early as Roman times), grey squirrel, imported deer and the truly spectacular Mandarin Duck.

I wonder how many other slide watchers were drawn to think of making their own visit to that part of the world to see some of it first hand? Thank you David, Barbara and Rainer for a very enjoyable afternoon, and congratulations to Geoff on his award.

The STEP website has been revamped, thanks to Cathy Robertson and is well worth a visit. Check out <step.asn.au>.

Thanks to Janet and Andy Russell

The Hall *Rural Fringe* last June acknowledged the excellent work done at Hall Cemetery by Janet and Andy Russell who 'let go the reins of organising Hall work days for FOG after May's event this year'.

Reporter Bob Richardson joined the FOG workers for lunch at the Gumnut in Hall after the morning's work in May, to celebrate a massive reduction in Sweet Briar, Hawthorn and eucalypt suckers. FOG has contributed 'approximately 100 hours per year for over a decade'. Janet and Andy 'were congratulated for a job well done and presented with a bottle of local wine.' In addition 'A motion of gratitude and a bottle of 'Dog's Dinner 2013' was presented by the Village of Hall and District Progress Association.'

Sincere thanks to Janet and Andy from the FOG committee too.

News Roundup (con.)

Greening Australia grassland restoration

John Fitz Gerald

Greening Australia Capital Region is establishing trial plantings at ten sites in a Local Native Groundcover Challenge coordinated by Nicki Taws. Three sites are on land managed by the National Capital Authority near where FOG has been removing weeds.

The project seeks to involve the local community, so Yarralumla residents and FOG volunteers helped with two plantings in Stirling Park on 30 June and 1 August. The earlier one was in open woodland where Chilean Needle Grass had been sprayed by contractors engaged by FOG with ACT funds for WONS management (photo below), the later one in a mown area on the southern edge. Species planted include *Chrysocephalum apiculatum* and *C. semipapposum*, *Coronidium scorpiodes*, *Eryngium ovinum*, *Leucochrysum albicans*, *Bulbine bulbosa* and several native grass species. The plantings will be monitored to assess both survival rates and the number of new plants originating from natural seed dispersal into nearby control areas.

The third site, at Yarramundi Reach, will be planted on Sunday 8 September (see pp.1–2).

Photo: Stirling Park planting of understorey species into a patch of weedicided Chilean Needle Grass on a brisk clear morning (John Fitz Gerald).



Soil nutrient reduction experiment at The Pinnacle Nature Reserve, ACT

Don Driscoll

Traditional weeding methods in grassy woodlands cannot defeat their invasion by exotic grasses and other weeds. Recent research suggests that removing soil nutrients may favour native species.

So the Friends of The Pinnacle (FOTPIN) are experimenting with various methods to do this, with funding from Caring For Our Country, the ACT Environment Fund and the Labor Club. Ten replicate sites contain fenced and unfenced plots of each of five treatments: sugar, burn, slash (and remove the cuttings), crop (and harvest the sterile rye-corn), and a control. Sugar can lock up soil nutrients, to the advantage of native plants, but is expensive. The other treatments have the potential to remove nutrients, and could be applied at reasonable cost to large areas.

The experiment was initiated in 2010 and will continue until 2015. Results so far show that the sugar treatments have reduced some exotic species, consistent with nutrient excess being an important factor favouring exotic species. So far, none of the other treatments has had effects similar to sugar. Fencing to exclude herbivores (kangaroos and rabbits) produced large increases in the percentage cover of native and exotic species. However, unexpectedly, slightly more native species were recorded outside the fence, where the occurrence of some native and exotic plant species also increased. The autumn burn treatments (photo p. 1), caused both increases and decreases.

The success of the experiment depends on attracting enough volunteers to help with the annual surveys, which will be on the first three weekends in November. Transport can be provided almost to the monitoring sites. Members of FOG are especially welcome.

Contact Don Driscoll for more information, or to book your time for the surveys: weedmenace@dodo.com.au. Find out more at: www.fotpin.org.au/ngrp/.

Tim McGrath's Grassland Earless Dragon brochure was noted by the Bombala Times: <http://www.bombalatimes.com.au/story/1625933/hunting-dragons/?cs=531>

FOG Advocacy and Offsets

Naarilla Hirsch

It has been very quiet on the advocacy front over the last couple of months, so the group has taken the opportunity to seek information about the state of offsets for grassland developments from a couple of years ago. So far we have received a response from the ACT Government about the offsets for the Clarrie Hermes Drive extension in Gungahlin. These included the replanting of Yellow Box and Blakely's Red Gum and funding for two research projects on grassy woodland understorey regeneration. Advice on the tree planting is that it has occurred and the planted trees are all in good health. The first of the research projects was a Masters project by David Johnson on *The Tolerance of Native Forbs to Competition*. This has been completed and its results should appear in a future FOG newsletter. The other research project has been started but there are no results yet.

The Conservation Council recently held a forum on biodiversity offsets policy in the ACT, with guest speaker Dr Phil Gibbons. Dr Gibbons started with the message that biodiversity is declining, with habitat loss a key driver. He saw the advantages of offsets as including increased avoidance of developments impacting on grasslands due to the price placed on biodiversity, generation of funding for land management, greater knowledge of biodiversity, and (possibly) no net loss of biodiversity.

However, he also saw a number of challenges associated with biodiversity offsets, in particular the limits to what can be offset and issues of additionality (i.e. where there is no net gain if the land manager's duty of care to biodiversity is equal to the existing biodiversity value of a site). In the ACT, this raises the question of whether we are developing a Nature Reserve System that is dependent for its better management on the ongoing loss of biodiversity elsewhere. There is uncertainty about the gains that offsets can offer: for example, the improvement of sites that presently do not meet the EPBC definition of Box Gum Grassy Woodland may require an increase in forb species' richness which is not currently feasible on nutrient-enriched sites. Another concern is the length of time between the loss and the associated gain. A particular concern in the ACT is leakage, i.e. the displacement of the impacts of a larger urban footprint

in the ACT in areas of some (but lower) conservation value to offsets in NSW. Permanence of the offset remains a concern: Nature Reserves are the most secure tenure in the ACT, but require ongoing funding for management.

Dr Gibbons' final question for the diverse group at the forum was "How then can we halt biodiversity loss in the ACT?". He suggested:

- a cap on habitat/biodiversity loss;
- offsets being established in advance of loss;
- decoupling of urban development and habitat loss, e.g. by urban infill, from urban development outside ACT, and from disincentives for population growth.

Since the forum, the Conservation Council and the FOG advocacy group are revising their respective offset policies. If you would like to contribute to FOG's revision, please email me at advocacy@fog.org.au.

FOG Membership

To 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, due on 1 January each year.

Membership forms are available on our website: www.fog.org.au.

For inquiries contact membership@fog.org.au.

Geoff Robertson: FOG's First Life Member

Sarah Sharp

The proposal to change the constitution so that Honorary Life Membership could be awarded to FOG members who have contributed outstandingly was made early in 2013, and Geoff's nomination as the first Honorary Life Member was unanimously supported by the committee. We wished to recognise publicly Geoff's significant role in building and maintaining the organisation and contributing to regional conservation.

Geoff's involvement has been a long one. Geoff and his partner Margaret Ning joined FOG in 1996, and soon joined the committee. Geoff was on the committee for 15 years, as president 1997–2006 and 2009–2011, and vice president 2007–2008. In 2011 he stepped down from the Committee, but remained very much involved.

Rainer Rehwinkel has known them since 1996, when Geoff and Margaret sought to learn more about grasslands on *Garuwanga*, their property near Nimmitabel. Rainer said: "It was evident that I was dealing with exceptional people, with an extraordinary sense of enthusiasm about the environment and a huge thirst for knowledge."

Geoff's organisational energy and positive philosophy were obvious in the transformations he initiated as president. For many years he produced the newsletter, the e-bulletin, organised the program, ran a weekly radio program, and over time increased the role that FOG played in conservation decision making. Geoff also spearheaded research and projects, gained funds for special projects, and of course, involved many people in the process. After a long period of doing much of this himself, he facilitated the establishment of sub-committees to undertake many activities and share the load. The legacy of this process is still present, with many members actively contributing to the organisation of FOG and to the running of regular activities.

Geoff's contribution to FOG (and to conservation more generally) is directly related to his drive and enthusiasm, his initiative, and the enormous amount of time spent on FOG, both pursuing actions and strengthening processes. Geoff's clear mind and ability to devise strategies and actions, plus his cheerful, positive and persuasive approach enabled him to deliver clear and significant results. Geoff has always encouraged that decisions be made on a scientific basis.

Sarah Hnatiuk said: "Geoff would grab opportunities to make a significant contribution and take others with him: these were the hallmarks of his involvement with the successful Golden Sun Moth Project in 2008-09 that has yielded a report to WWF and, to date, two papers in peer-reviewed international journals."

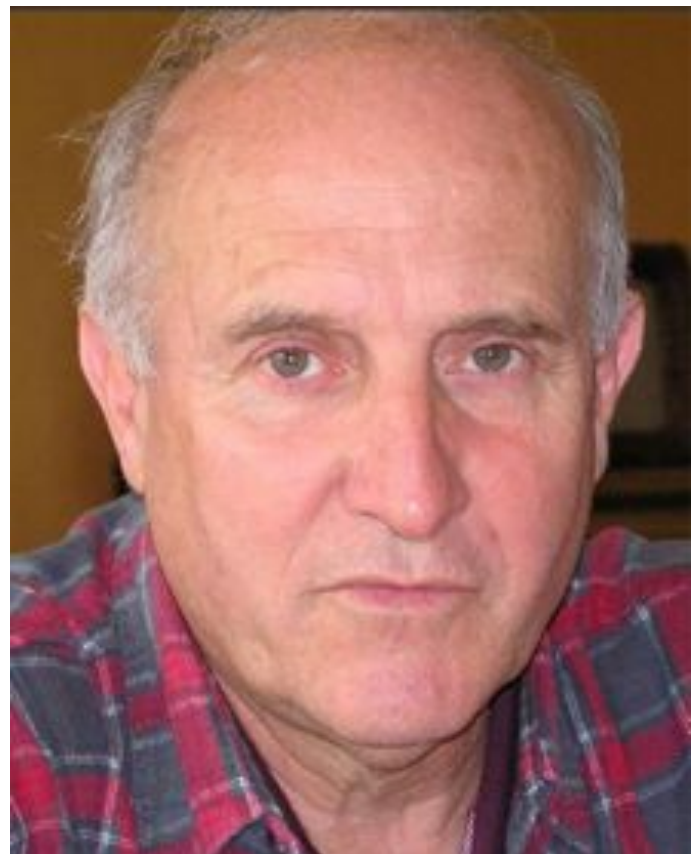
Geoff has represented FOG on the Southern Tablelands Grasslands Recovery Team, ACT Prison Panel, Conservation Council, Kosciusko to Coast (K2C) and several ACT Government working groups. He actively pursued open and transparent communication to resolve issues.

Geoff also contributed to the following organisations:

Herpetological Association: Treasurer 2001–2005, newsletter editor 2003, and organiser of *Snakes Alive* at the Botanical Gardens.

Conservation Council: from 2001, as a member and later co-chair of the Woodlands and Grasslands Working Group, which became the Biodiversity Working Group. He was also a member of the Board 2001–2006.

Australian Native Plant Society: He encouraged



Geoff Robertson: FOG's First Life Member (con.)

ANPS to take a more active interest in grassland conservation, established a conservation group, and helped organise a conference on local conservation issues. Ultimately he became national conservation officer and newsletter editor.

Southern Tablelands Ecosystem Park (STEP): Geoff initially joined as ANPS conservation officer, and played a key part in establishing the scientific basis of STEP. He prepared many presentations, was newsletter editor for two years and secretary for another two years.

Indigenous partnerships: Geoff organised a number of field events at *Garuwanga*, inviting Indigenous people, including Ngarigo Elder, Rod Mason, and the wider community to share his passion and to learn about Indigenous Land Management. This was further developed while Geoff was president of K2C, when K2C obtained funding to continue collaboration with Rod Mason in two projects centred on Indigenous Land Management and Traditional Values. Together with Rod and Lauren Van Dyke (K2C Facilitator) this knowledge is being documented in a booklet, to be published by K2C.

K2C partnership: While Geoff was president and FOG's representative, K2C expanded and applied for funds. In addition to indigenous management, other notable achievements have been the obtaining of significant funds through the Myer Foundation to promote grassland management, and participating in the K2C *Atlas of Living Australia* project, the Murrumbidgee Landscape Connectivity Project and the Glossy Black Cockatoo Project. Geoff stood down in mid 2013.

Cooma Rural Lands Protection Board: Geoff was a strong supporter and contributor to the very useful, but now defunct, Conservation and Wildlife Stakeholder meetings, held regularly with government and non-government organisations, and intended to increase communication and discussion.

There is no doubt that he has contributed enormously to the respect that FOG enjoys within the ACT and Commonwealth government and within the political, conservation and rural communities.

It is also important to acknowledge Margaret. She has been on the committee for 17 years, since 1996. Margaret's practicality, enthusiasm and generosity with

her time have contributed both to FOG and to Geoff's ability to retain his enthusiasm over such a long time.

Stephen Horne said "It is too easy to approach voluntary commitments with just sufficient attention to keep things going: by contrast, to transform and advance the organisation requires inspired leadership and dedication, which we have had in spades from Geoff and Margaret"

David Eddy said "I think what stands out most for me about Geoff's time on the FOG committee and as president was his unbridled enthusiasm and drive for the cause, and his cheerful, affable and welcoming nature, which made committee meetings relaxed, inclusive and jovial occasions."

Kangaroo Grass winter spraying alert

Bob Myers is an SA grass seed supplier and member of the Native Grass Resources Group www.nativegrassgroup.asn.au. He has issued a warning about the impact of a warming climate on winter dormancy of C4 grasses.

'In the frosty and cold conditions of winter, especially in the Mt Lofty Ranges, knockdown herbicide can be applied/oversprayed on weeds amongst dormant Kangaroo grass and other C4 grasses, but NOT THIS WINTER.

Because of above average soil temperatures, a mild June and continuous 'heavy' rainfall in July, not only have these grasses held green leaves but have produced more leaves and started to grow flower-bearing culms/stems.

Only spot-spraying with a shrouded hand-wand between the tussocks should be undertaken. There are certainly implications too for anyone who likes to burn in late winter to remove thatch. As well, there is a strong probability of early germination of C4 grasses if conditions continue as they are.'

Please email the NGRG with your observations:
secretary@nativegrassgroup.asn.au.

Koala: an Iconic Australian Mammal Once Common and Now Threatened

Michael Bedingfield

In 1996–97, I worked as a volunteer at the then National Aquarium and Zoo. My tasks included feeding the animals and cleaning their enclosures. The emphasis of the zoo was on Australian native animals, and they had a few Koalas. One day I had the privilege of cleaning the Koala enclosure, and a chance to become more familiar with them. There wasn't much to observe, however, as they were asleep! They are nocturnal, and need to have 16 to 22 hours sleep each day. This is related to their low nutrient diet, mostly of eucalypt leaves, which are extremely toxic, so a specialized digestive system is required to process them, gain nutrition and deal with the toxins. Koalas are very choosy about which eucalypt leaves they eat. If they are deprived of sleep, it can be detrimental to their health, so a public zoo is not the ideal place for them. Despite this, they were a popular attraction with visitors.

Because of their sleeping habits, they have a reputation for being a bit slow and drowsy. But when they are active, they are very adept and agile tree dwellers, capable of climbing quickly and easily, and leaping from branch to branch, or from tree to tree, with very strong arms, legs and claws. They can also run swiftly on the ground, swim well, and are more active at dawn or dusk. They endure all kinds of weather in the treetops, and they have beautiful thick fur to keep them warm. The “koala bear” is not a bear, but a marsupial, and its closest relative is the wombat. Like the wombats, the pouch opens downwards, they have a very short inconspicuous tail, and a large round head. The males are larger than the females, very territorial and aggressive. A dominant adult male will have a few females within his territory, though they are not social, and spend most of their time alone. The young are carried in their mother's pouch when small, and later on her back. When mature enough the young males move away to find a territory of their own. The females tend to stay near the place they were born.

The scientific name for the Koala is *Phascolarctos cinereus*. Originally, they occurred continuously throughout their range in eastern Australia, from north-eastern Qld, through NSW into Victoria and SA, in open forest and woodland. After European settlement there was loss and fragmentation of their habitat because of the clearing of trees. Bushfires and drought are always destructive, and combined with hunting and the fur trade,

Koala numbers declined dramatically. Protection measures were introduced in the 1930s, and afterwards things turned around and numbers have improved since then. But their future is still threatened. Throughout their range their status varies from common to locally extinct, increasing or decreasing in different situations. They were once common around Canberra, but now they are virtually extinct in the ACT, with only transient visitors, and a small group introduced to Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve. In the surrounding region there are very few. The clearing and fragmentation of woodland and forest continues to be a threat, as well as climate change and the disease *Chlamydia*. But there are locations where people are working to improve the Koala's lot. An important part of improving their future is maintaining and recreating wildlife corridors so they can move freely around the landscape.

It is good to know that there are people interested in conserving the Koala in the local region. One organisation doing this is Cooma-Monaro Shire Council, which is developing a management plan to rehabilitate some habitat of the Numeralla population. This is part of a significant population of several hundreds on the Southern Tablelands. Generally there is a lot of sympathy and effort in favour of the Koala, and it would be wonderful if they were able to make a comeback in the grassy woodlands and forests of the Southern Tablelands and elsewhere throughout their range.

My references are *A Photographic Guide to Mammals of Australia* by Ronald Strahan and the Australian Museum (1997), and the websites environment.gov.au, environment.nsw.gov.au and savethekoala.com.



FOG groups and projects

General inquiries

Contact info@fog.org.au, Sarah Sharp (0402 576 412) or Janet Russell (02 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 ACT 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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