



News of Friends of Grasslands

Supporting native grassy ecosystems

ISSN 1832-6315

November–December 2015

Activities coming up in FOG

All (except members-only activities) are open to anyone.

Workparties October – December

Details are on p. 2 for the last four workparties for 2015: on Saturday **31 October** (Hall Cemetery); Sunday **1 November** (Stirling Park); Sunday **15 November** (Yarramundi Reach); and Sunday **29 November** (Stirling Park).

Scottsdale monitoring

Wednesday 11 November 9.30 – 3.30

FOG contributes annual monitoring of vegetation at the Bush Heritage property 'Scottsdale'. All are welcome to attend and help. No experience is necessary. Lunch will be provided.

Please email linda.spinaze@fog.org.au or linda@xamax.com.au to register and for further information.

Walk with the wildflowers at Stirling Park

Sunday 15 November 2–3.30 pm

The annual Stirling Park Wildflower Walk will take place on Sunday 15 November. Many species will be fully in flower including favourites such as Hoary Sunray *Leucochrysum albicans*, Sticky Everlasting *Xerochrysum viscosum* and *Dianella* sp., all of which look likely to be in profusion this year; similarly, the threatened Button Wrinklewort *Rutidosia leptorrhyncoides*. Apart from looking at the huge range of plant species in Stirling Park, those of you who are not familiar with the work FOG has been doing here over recent years – both removing woody weeds and undertaking substantial planting – should find the walk of particular interest.

The tracks are a little rough in parts, and the day may be sunny and warm, so please come prepared in suitable footwear and clothing and with your own water and sunburn cream.

The walk will start on the ridge, easily accessed from the open parking space on Fitzgerald Street behind the Norwegian and Danish embassies. There will be signs to the short track leading from the car park to the start point for the walk.

Please email pmcghie@optusnet.com.au if you intend to come so that we know how many to expect on the day.

Blue Devil Grassland Umbagog,

3rd visit, Monday 23 November 4.30 pm

Details are on p. 3. How will the grassland have changed since September?

End-of-year FOG members' picnic

Save the date: Weds 16 December. See page 3.

Thanks from Yarramundi!

A team of 14 volunteers from a Greening Australia Green Team went to work at Yarramundi Reach on 6 August (photo below). Between them, in just 2 hours, they planted more than 900 plants of 11 local forb species into the grasslands near the Burrunju Aboriginal Art Gallery. All the plants had been raised at Greening Australia's nursery in Aranda, ACT. This work was mainly funded by an ACT Environment Grant awarded to FOG in 2014.

FOG wishes to thank Greening Australia, its volunteers, and the ACT Government for their contributions to the ecological health of this grassland.



Membership of Friends of Grasslands: renewal reminder

Please remember to renew your membership by **1 January** so you are 'current' for calendar year 2016. Costs: \$5 for students & concession holders; \$50 for corporate membership; \$20 for the rest of us (individuals, families, not-for-profit groups). We can pay by EFT to BSB 633 000, A/c 124770835, putting name in the reference/description; or by cheque mailed to PO Box 440, Jamison Centre ACT 2614. The renewal form enclosed/attached can be mailed to the PO Box or emailed to membership@fog.org.au.

Life Membership is available: contact membership@fog.org.au.

Welcome to new Friends: see page 3.

Contents of this issue are listed on p.14.

Upcoming activities *continued*

On-ground workparties

Hall Cemetery, ACT

Saturday 31 October 9–11.30 am

By coincidence, this date is Hall-oween!

You are invited to *look lively(!)* and join this restoration workparty. We meet at the gate to the cemetery area on Wallaroo Road, near its intersection with Barton Highway, dressed and equipped for grubbing out or spraying weeds in tall grass with possibly sock-invading seeds, in the woodland beside the cemetery proper. FOG provides tools and morning tea.

REGISTER with john.fitzgerald@fog.org.au ASAP, or by 28 October if possible.

NOTE. The Hall wildflowers should be pretty well at their peak, just as they were this time last year. Milkmaids *Burchardia umbellata*, Bulbine Lilies *Bulbine bulbosa* and Buttercup *Ranunculus lappaceus* look terrific right now! Unfortunately grasses are also at their peak, including Ryegrass *Lolium* sp., and if you suffer from their pollens you may prefer not to join us on this date.

Stirling Park, Yarralumla ACT

Sunday 1 November, 9 am –12 noon

Sunday 29 November, 9 am –12 noon

Our home base will again be on Alexandrina Drive opposite Lotus Bay (which is beside the Southern Cross Yacht Club). FOG sandwich boards will identify the spot for newcomers. The last workparty did 'sterling' work in the area east of Haines Creek by dragging already cut material down to the ACTEW access road and stacking it ready for collection by contractors. There was also a good deal of new sawing, cutting and daubing, so we are making good progress. It is now possible to see, with a little imagination, how pleasant this area will be when we ultimately finish the job, although there is plenty to keep future workparties well occupied for many months.

Please wear gardening gear and footwear, bring eye and sun protection and drinking water! There will be the usual excellent morning tea.

Please advise, by email to pmcghie@optusnet.com.au, if you intend to come, so that we can get our planning right for tools and catering.

Yarramundi Reach grassland, ACT

Sunday 15 November 9 am –12 noon

You are invited to join the workparty, starting at 9 am at the native grassland at Yarramundi Reach (behind the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Centre buildings at 245 Lady Denman Drive, ACT). Wear gear suited to long grass, possible snakes, the weather and grubbing out or spraying weeds. FOG provides tools and morning tea.

REGISTER with: john.fitzgerald@fog.org.au by **Wednesday 11 November**.

FOG advocacy

August

1. A development application proposing a subdivision at Meehan Street in Yass is directly adjoining Natural Temperate Grassland (NTG) in the Yass Gorge. FOG expressed concern about potential secondary impacts to the NTG, such as weed invasion from garden escapes, run-off from the development, direct or indirect damage during construction, and requirements for bushfire asset protection of the proposed dwellings. FOG asked that these potential impacts be investigated and avoided prior to any approval of the application.

September

2. FOG put in a submission to the Senate inquiry about the Environment Protection & Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Standing) Bill 2015. This Bill would repeal section 487 of the *EPBC Act 1999*, which currently gives third parties the right to seek judicial review of decisions. FOG supported the existing arrangements, which give an option for third-party appeals, since its view is that environmental protection legislation should be both rigorously applied and enforceable. FOG drew attention to an issue specific to the ACT, where Government is the proponent in many development proposals affecting threatened grassy ecosystems, as well as being the evaluator and decision-maker in regard to environmental impacts – a clear conflict of interest. FOG supported any move to retain decision-making powers under the EPBC Act with the Commonwealth, and opposed delegation of such powers to the State and Territory governments.

3. The Commonwealth released a 'Draft policy statement: advanced environmental offsets under the EPBC Act' for comment. In its submission FOG indicated that it would not want to see any changes to the advanced offset policy statement that would weaken its provisions. In particular, the requirement for 'additionality' is critical, i.e. that the conservation benefit delivered by the advanced offset must be 'in addition to' the usual ongoing care of the proposed site. Without that requirement, there is a danger that usual care of the site might be replaced by the offset activities.

October

4. FOG raised two issues in its submission to the 2016–17 ACT budget consultation process. The first related to weed and pest animal control. FOG continued to be concerned about the level of resourcing for weed and pest animal control and the consistency of funding. In particular, as well as work to control a particular weed or pest animal, follow-up resources and work are needed into the future to prevent populations continuing to be out of control. The second issue was biodiversity offsets: FOG called for resources for a council or committee to oversee the offsets process. In addition FOG asked that budget be made available to assess and report publicly on offset implementation and outcomes.

The full text of FOG submissions appears on our website.

Upcoming FOG activities *continued*

Summer at Blue Devil Grassland, Umbagog Park, Latham

Monday 23 November 4.30 pm

FOG's third visit to the Blue Devil Grassland at Umbagog Park, Latham will be on Monday 23 November. Our aim this year has been to see how a good quality grassland changes from season to season, and this time we hope to find a considerable difference from the large amounts of dead grass biomass we found in May and September.

Meet: 4.30 pm, at the grassland, and expect to leave by 6.30 pm. **To register and for further details:**
Margaret.Ning@fog.org.au/.

A new end-of-year gathering – BYO picnic for FOG members

Dear Members of FOG

We are all invited to join in an end-of-year picnic on **Wednesday 16 December from 5.30 pm, at Jerrabomberra Wetlands, ACT**. The Activities Team is planning this mainly as an evening for 'getting to know other FOG members' *cum* 'catching up with FOG friends'.

You will need to bring your own picnic, etc., and you are welcome to bring guests – but to register you must be a member of FOG.

There is plenty of parking. We will be using the wetlands building with its pleasant outer deck and inner room. There are also bird-watching hides overlooking the wetlands, and we hope to have a short walk through the area, led by Lori Gould who is now Program Manager for the Woodlands and Wetlands Trust. The FOG newsletter for January–February 2016 will be being packed and labelled that evening, from 5.30 pm in the inner room, and you are welcome to help, or just arrive and chat, walk, birdwatch, eat, etc.

This is a preliminary notice only, and final details of the evening will be sent out in the ebulletin at the end of November. Contact person: ann.milligan@fog.org.au/.

Did you know?

As a member, you can see the newsletter in 'glorious technicolor' when it first comes out, by asking to be emailed it as a pdf file.

You can have it *as well as*, or instead of, the grey printed version. To join the 'emailed newsletter' list, please email: Margaret.Ning@fog.org.au or Ann.Milligan@fog.org.au.

Go on, spoil yourself...!

Welcome to new FOG members

We warmly welcome these members who have recently joined Friends of Grasslands Inc.:

Susan Buik, of Estella NSW

Maree Gilbert, of Kambah ACT

Helen Horton OAM, of Albany Creek Qld

Margaret Johnson, of Curtin ACT

Clare McInnes & Stephen Bruce, of Scullin ACT.

Alister Nairn, of Spence ACT.

Advertisements

Properties for sale

For sale, Wimbaliri, east of Collector, NSW

Wimbaliri is 128 ha of freehold land with a conservation covenant over 124 ha. It is all bush, with woodland with Yellow Box and forest with Red Stringybark, Brittle Gum, Scribbly Gum, Silvertop Ash and Black Sheoak. Heaps of birds, orchids, reptiles and other wildlife. No weeds.

Great views over the top end of Lake George (see photo) and north-east towards Goulburn. There is a one-room hut with verandah, kitchen, tank water, solar power and telephone connection. It is 40 minutes from Canberra; 20 minutes from Goulburn.

Price: \$370,000 negotiable.

Contact Doug Merriman, Ray White Real Estate Bungendore, phone 02 6238 0700.



Garuwanga, near Nimmitabel NSW

– now for sale via NSW Nature Conservation Trust

Readers who have visited Garuwanga, formerly owned by Geoff Robertson and Margaret Ning, may be interested to know that the property is now for sale via the Nature Conservation Trust of NSW. See <http://nct.org.au/rural-land-for-sale/southern-nsw-region/garuwanga.html#.Vic3LX4rLIU>

News from the FOG Committee

FOG Diary, 29 July – 23 September 2015

Activities undertaken on behalf of Friends of Grasslands

Presentations

Nil.

Meetings

- Bush on the Boundary (BOB) Molonglo 8 September (Sarah). Discussed progress of the Plan of Management, which is being held up by conflicting fire management and ecological management requirements in key areas (likewise, the Ecological Guidelines). Denman Prospect is the last suburb to be built on the southern side of Molonglo River. Fire management is to be within the urban boundary there. Trails are being constructed on the northern side of the river. Discussion to include the Molonglo Action Residents Group in BOB, or at least meet with them.
- Biodiversity Working Group 26 August (Sarah and Tony). Meeting minutes available from Sarah. 26 August: discussion about offset strategy and requirements.
- K2C Executive meeting, 18 September (John).
- BOB Riverview (Barbara).

Events, workshops etc. attended

- Eco Focus Seminar, Conservation Research and Conservation Planning units of EPD, annual half-day seminar on research projects, 26 August (Sarah).
- Parkcare Display, Jamison Centre, 4–6 September (Sarah and Ann).
- Parkcare Forum, Community Voices in Reserves, 11 September (Sarah, John and Tony).
- K2C Yass Gorge Community Field Day, 17 September (Sarah and John).

Workparties

- Stirling Park 30 August (run by Peter McGhie).
- Yarramundi Reach planting 30 August (run by Sarah and John).
- Hall Cemetery 12 September (run by John).
- National Capital Authority re. update of activities in Stirling Park and Yarramundi Reach (Sarah, John, Peter McGhie, Jamie with Peter Beutel), 24 August.
- Button Wrinklewort monitoring meeting and trial of reviewed methods (on-going project supported by CIT students) (Alison Rowell, Jamie, John, Hannah Selmes (CIT)), 25 August, 20 September.

Activities

- Umbagog Blue Devil grassland visit and survey, 7 September (run by Margaret).

Newsletter and ebulletin

- Newsletter 25 August (Ann).
- ebulletin 23 September (Ann).

Advocacy

See separate advocacy report for submission details (Naarilla and advocacy team).

- Ginninderra Experimental Station potential land sale meeting with CSIRO reps (Sarah, Barbara, Ann and Naarilla), 31 August.
- West Belconnen biodiversity offsets presentation at Conservation Council offices (Sarah, Tony).
- Advocacy group planning meeting, 16 September (Naarilla, Sarah, Barbara, John).

Other groups' activities

Saturday & Sunday 31 October – 1 November

Weed Swap: Members of the Australian Native Plants Society provide a free native tubestock plant to people who bring quantities of garden woody environmental weeds (Privet, Cotoneaster, Pyracantha, Hawthorn, Ivy and Broom seeds) to the green-waste dumps at CSG Parkwood, along Southern Cross Drive, or at Corkhill Bros near Mugga Lane Tip.
http://phyla.com.au/anps_canberra/index.php/conservation/weedswap

Public input by Tuesday 3 November

New Era for Travelling Stock

Reserves – a draft planning framework for Travelling Stock Reserves (TSRs) to support their future management. What do people think and value about TSRs? More information at <http://www.lls.nsw.gov.au/resource-hub/media-releases/2015/new-era-for-travelling-stock-reserves-draft-framework-launched>

Friday 6 November 9.15 am – 1 pm

Grassy Woodlands, Native Pastures

and African Lovegrass: A field day at Bemboka, run by Far South Coast Conservation Management Network, on African Lovegrass (ALG), its impacts on native plant diversity, and options for control and monitoring. Led by Josh Dorrough and Jackie Miles. Free; morning tea provided. **Book at** info@fscmn.com or phone Ali Rodway on 0417 246 896.

Saturday 14 November 9.30 – 2.30

African Lovegrass Workshop, at the Fire Shed, Murrumbateman NSW, run by Yass Area Network Landcare Groups, with five great speakers. Learn about this grass and some control methods. Free morning tea and lunch. **RSVP essential** to rebecca.widdows@lls.nsw.gov.au, or phone 02 6118 7706 **by 10 November**. More details at www.yan.org.au/.

Saturday 21 November 10 am–2 pm

New small-farm walk 'n talk,

run by the Small Farms Network – Capital Region, to share ideas among landowners about a range of topics, as explained at https://gallery.mailchimp.com/26422c1d659b072e100e1efec/files/Walk_N_Talk_09_10_15_1_.pdf Free.

News roundup

Friends of Yass Gorge launched

John Fitz Gerald

Sarah Sharp and John Fitz Gerald represented FOG at the launch of a new community group, Friends of Yass Gorge, on 17 September on the banks of Yass River, not far from the town centre of Yass, NSW.

As explained at the launch, Green Army teams have laboured very hard near the watercourse over the past 2 years, removing invasive woody weeds such as Willow, Blackberry, Tagasaste, Cotoneaster and Privet. This weed control task will now be shared by Friends of Yass Gorge.

The weed removal has reopened a pleasant track suitable for energetic walks along the southern bank of the gorge. After the launch, many in the group took the opportunity to explore the site and set off along this track, ably led by K2C's Acting Chair, Rainer Rehwinkel, who provided lots of great information about local natural values. The grasslands here on the steep rocky ground are an endangered ecological community, classified as the uncommon grouping 'Kangaroo Grass – Purple Wire-grass – Wattle Mat-rush dry tussock grassland of the Southern Tablelands region.'

The group walked down the track under the cliffs admiring displays of grasses, *Lomandra* and early flowering Rock Lilies, Yellow Burr Daisies and other species. Then we angled back up to the top of the cliffs for the return with excellent views. A few notable species pointed out on the walk were Tick Indigo (*Indigofera adesmiifolia*) and Small-leaved Clematis, but we also found not-so-welcome patches of Prickly Pear.

The delightful morning was rounded off by a very pleasant barbecue lunch provided by Yass Landcare. Yass Valley Council and Yass Landcare are sponsoring this group, which is supported by expertise from Kosciusko to Coast (K2C). Lesley Peden, facilitator of K2C, coordinated the launch event. Thanks, to all involved.

And best wishes for the success of the Friends group.

Anyone interested in joining or helping the Friends of Yass Gorge should contact **Jill McGovern**, mob. ph. 0450 960 215.



Top photo: The view looking up to the cliffs in Yass Gorge, with Rainer (facing camera) explaining some key features. Photo: John Fitz Gerald.

Below: Looking back along the gorge after reaching the top, with part of the group strung out below. Photo: John Fitz Gerald.

Second visit to Blue Devil Grassland, Umbagog Park, Latham ACT

The weather held fine but the wind was very chilly for our second exploration of the Blue Devil Grassland on Monday 7 September. We numbered about 13, and this time we rambled down to the Ginninderra Creek (middle of the photo, beyond the group), led by John Fitz Gerald and spotting plant species as we went. Unfortunately, last season's Kangaroo Grass was still thick in most areas, giving us a lesson in how biomass can hide the species-richness potential of a great grassland. Later, Sarah Sharp took us again on a quick survey of the marked 20 m x 20 m plot (thanks to John having previously re-marked the positions of some now-missing corner pegs). It will be very interesting to see what we find in November, after the warm and sometimes wet weather we have had since this visit.



News roundup *continued*

Sterling workparty in Stirling Park

Peter McGhie

On Sunday 30 August, 50 trees native to this area were planted by this workparty (pictured). The trees ranged from *Bursaria* and acacias to improve bird habitat, to a selection of eucalypts.

Half of our group devoted themselves to this activity while the others continued with cutting, daubing and removing woody weeds. We are now close to eliminating woody interlopers from the south-western area of Stirling Park although there is a whole new part of the Park east of Haines Creek which will keep work parties busy for many months ahead. After all, the total area of Stirling Park is 52 hectares (or around 130 acres in the old currency). No one can say we lack ambition!



The group who worked on Sunday 30 August, pictured in a moment of contented relaxation after the morning tea break. Photo: Peter McGhie.

FOG visit to Lake Bathurst, 10 October 2015

Ann Milligan

Lake Bathurst is between Bungendore and Goulburn, east of Lake George in southern NSW. The lake is not open to most people, but fortunately Rainer Rehwinkel has access. Therefore, for the second year running, an enthusiastic party of FOG members and guests was able to visit this interesting lake on a warm sunny Saturday in October. A number of the 20 people in our group (photo, right) were there as much for the novelty of the place as for its plant species. However, few of our botanically knowledgeable cohort would have seen some of these native plant species before, especially the rare ones. We all had plenty of reasons to be grateful to Rainer and to Dave Mallinson, the co-leaders of this excursion, for their boundless knowledge and patience as we kept saying ‘Oh look! What’s this?’. It was cheering that the native plant species seemed to outnumber the exotic species present (though there would have been many more actual plants of the exotics).

Rain overnight had made the soil surface wet, to the extent that kangaroos (our ramble was watched by a distant group of perhaps 30 roos) had left fresh skidmarks in mud on the track across the lakebed, but there was no standing water. Most of the bed is ‘flat’ earth – bare or with groundcover, with or without gravel in places and with soil crusts in others.

There is microrelief a few centimetres in scale, and outcrops of granite forming islands perhaps 50 cm high in some places or over 1 m high in others. Here we found communities of the Omeo Storks-bill *Pelargonium* sp. (endangered). Rainer has had some of these lakebed outcrop areas and communities fenced and has had contractors apply granular herbicide within, to kill the Serrated Tussock. Where water had ponded, the Serrated Tussock had drowned and was dead – often immediately adjacent to live tufts on micro-ridges; elsewhere the grass was extensive.

For a botanical overview of this year’s trip you would do well to read again the account of last year’s visit, reported in *News of Friends of Grasslands* November–December 2014, by Margaret Ning. We saw many of the plant species she describes.

One species that was of great interest was *Dodonaea procumbens* Creeping Hopbush (vulnerable); we found male and female plants about 5 m apart (photos p. 7). The female plants’ red styles stand proud like the upright spears of a miniature mediaeval army, contrasting with the knobbly flowers of the males, which were red on some plants and orange or yellow on others. Dodder *Cuscuta tasmanica*, which seemed to be vigorous last year was scant this year. Andrew found a single *Craspedia* (photo p. 7) and we saw numerous very small pink-purple flowered bindweeds, and tiny shiny yellow star-shaped *Ranunculus* sp. flowers (photo p. 7). Andrew’s photos give a nice ‘snapshot’ of our finds. We also stumbled across a patch of Onion Orchid, quite redolent.

There were a few birds – an Australian Pipit and a Wedge-tailed Eagle – and a Shingleback Lizard, and fortunately no tiger snakes!

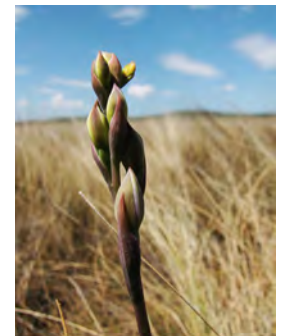
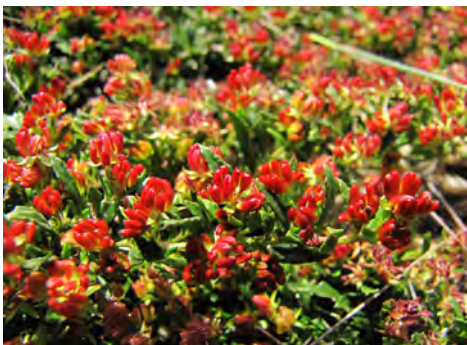
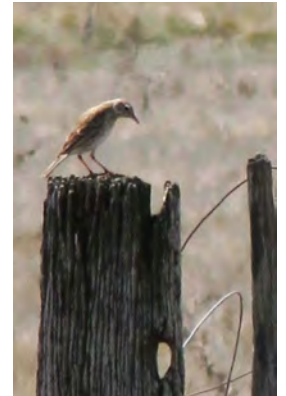
We all agreed it had been a fascinating walk.
Thank you very much, Rainer and Dave.



...continued next page

News roundup continued

Visit to Lake Bathurst 2015, continued



Left, top down: Common Sunray¹ *Triptilodiscus pygmaeus* (+\$2 for scale); *Ranunculus* sp.¹ (+\$2); male Creeping Hopbush¹ *Dodonaea procumbens*; female Creeping Hopbush² (+specs for scale); Fuzzy New Holland Daisy¹ *Vittadinia muelleri* (+50c for scale).

Centre, top down: low outcrop with *Pelargonium* sp. Omeo Storksbill community²; Serrated Tussock interspersed with areas of drowned tussocks²; an intent photographer².

Right, top down: Australian Pipit *Anthus australis* on fencepost¹; Billy buttons¹ *Craspedia variabilis*; Slender Sun Orchid¹ *Thelymitra pauciflora*; Jersey Cudweed¹ *Helichrysum luteoalbum*.

¹Photos: Andrew Zelnik.

²Photos: Ann Milligan.



News shorts

Canberra Nature Map growing

Aaron Clausen, cofounder of the Canberra Nature Map and website, announced on 2 October, that:

Canberra's authoritative rare plant database will soon expand to the next level to encompass reptiles, frogs, birds and butterflies, as well as doubling our reach via a new Android app thanks to the generous backing of a new 2015 ACT Environment Grant from Environment Minister Simon Corbell. ACT Government have been amazing in their support of this important initiative.

Relocating Striped Legless Lizards *Delma impar*

As reported in mid-October, Bush Heritage Australia is organising a pioneering relocation of ~200 Striped Legless Lizards, from land beside the Federal Highway in Watson ACT, to Scottsdale Reserve near Bredbo NSW. The ACT land is to become tourist accommodation.

See <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/oct/14/the-partys-over-for-the-striped-legless-lizard-in-the-nations-capital>

and/or

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/act-news/what-will-relocating-the-striped-legless-lizard-mean-for-act-development-20151014-gk8zud.html>

Canberra Ornithologists Group, winners

Congratulations! For its work in educating people about birds and conservation in ACT, the Canberra Ornithologists Group (COG) has won the Keep Australia Beautiful ACT Sustainable Cities Award 2015. They have also won the 'Environmental Sustainability: Nature Conservation' award. See <http://kab.org.au/canberra-ornithological-group-wins-act-sustainable-cities-awards-2015/>

Beauties in flower at STEP

Andy Russell reports that the species listed below are in flower now (late October–November) at Southern Tablelands Ecosystems Park, Forest 20 at the National Arboretum Canberra.

- *Chrysocephalum apiculatum* Common Everlasting
- *Leucochrysum albicans* Hoary Sunray
- *Dianella tasmanica* Blue Flax Lily
- *Dianella revoluta* Spreading Flax Lily
- *Stylidium graminifolium* Grass Triggerplant
- *Ranunculus lappaceus* Common Buttercup
- *Calotis glandulosa* Mauve Burr-daisy
- *Westringia eremicola* Slender Westringia
- *Pultenaea procumbens* Healthy Bush Pea
- *Veronica perfoliata* Diggers Speedwell
- *Bulbine glauca* Rock Lily
- *Goodenia pinnatifida* Cut-leaf Goodenia
- *Grevillea iaspicula* Wee Jasper Grevillea.

Articles

Sit quiet, Share now, Stay long

Klaus Hueneker AM

Poem written during several days exploring the Weddin Mountains National Park near Grenfell west of Young. [Klaus recommends this area for a FOG trip in spring, especially the east-facing slopes, to look for 'scattered stars'.] 'Weddin' comes from the Aboriginal word 'weedin' meaning 'sit, share, stay'.

Sit on rocky escarpment – drink in the vastness, phew.

“ looking east – blinding canola fields like a lava flow.

“ looking west – endless peneplain right up to Uluru.

“ too long imbibing the view – dark, dangerous descent.

“ in cool, dark shade – must be canopy of Kurrajong.

“ on knobbly bed of cones – must be Cypress Pine.

“ on forest floor of scattered stars – orchids dazzling, tiny, bright.

“ to rest aching feet – Nodding Greenhood almost crushed.

Share water from Bertha's spring – pure and crystal clear.

“ with shaggy wild goats – barely glimpsed.

“ dam with ink black tadpoles – father bonks nearby.

“ blood with hungry mosquito – splat, she's dead.

“ piercing, melodious airwaves – there he is, a Rufous Whistler.

“ camp with Pop and grandson – where are mine!

“ with noisy scouts – may be greenies one day.

“ photos later – 'Didn't know; wish I'd come'.

Stay and discover hidden gorge – secret waterfall unmarked.

“ with binoculars poised – Peregrine lands at last.

“ and wait another minute – aha, that golden, burning light.

“ and listen to the Wiradjuri – 'Feed on bulbine lilies now'.

“ and stare at ghostly flames – is that shooting tooting Ben Hall?

“ amongst sorry remains of Seaton's farm – iron, wire and dust.

“ to be transformed – space again to write and think.

“ to dream the dream anew – nature is my God, 'tis true.

Sit quiet, share now, stay long – before it's too late and we turn to stone.

Klaus Hueneker, September 2015



'Sit looking west –
endless peneplain ...'

Photo:
Klaus Hueneker.

Found in the moist
gully below 'Bertha's
Spring – pure and
crystal clear'.

Photo:
Klaus Hueneker.



Sorghum leiocladum: a grass of great beauty*

Jenny Liney

To find a population of the grass *Sorghum leiocladum* within our coastal region, a person would have to be very lucky or very knowledgeable. Once an important component of native grasslands, its occurrence has been significantly depleted by grazing stock, pasture improvement and land clearing. Today it occurs mainly on the remnant woodland verges of little-used roads, often accompanied by *Themeda australis* Kangaroo Grass (both can be seen in the top photo at right). Once these back roads are improved and/or widened, it will mean that this beautiful grass species will almost certainly disappear from public access lands, and probably from privately owned farmlands and pastures as well.

All known sites in the Eurobodalla, along the south coast of NSW, are on road verges and thus in danger of being bulldozed in the name of road ‘improvements’. An old population near the Moruya cemetery has expanded; another site was recently noticed along Dwyers Creek Road, again in Moruya, and a third near the cattle yards on the Congo Road just after it leaves the Princes Highway at Bergalia. I hope that there are other sites just waiting to be discovered.

Commonly called Wild Sorghum, this grass belongs to the same genus as the cultivated grain crop Sorghum. Wild Sorghum is a tufted warm season perennial (it has its main growing and flowering periods in the warmer months, but these are dependent on rainfall incidence and quantity) with flowering stems to 1 m high. A unique and charming feature is the row of white hairs to 0.5 mm long around each node of the flowering stem, exactly like an upside down ballerina’s tutu (photo, right). The spikelets – that is, the flowering parts that contain anthers and styles, and therefore the subsequent grain – are on branches in a loose spiral around the top of the stem. The spikelets are a stunning bronze colour that gleams and shines in sunlight; this colour is a dead giveaway to the presence of the grass (photo, right).

Sorghum leiocladum was first named *Andropogon australis* subspecies *leiocladus* by an Austrian botanist named Eduard Hackel in 1889. The next name was *Sarga leioclada*, bestowed by an American botanist R.E. Sprangler. However, an early 20th century botanist, Charles Edward Hubbard, eventually placed it in the genus *Sorghum*, retaining the specific name *leiocladum*, and that is where it remains today. The generic name *Sorghum* was taken from the Northern Hemisphere grass of the same name (the derivation is obscure); *leiocladum* is a combination of two Greek words – *leio* meaning smooth, and *clados*, meaning a growing shoot – referring to the smooth stems.

The tufts and the grain are only of moderate quality for grazing stock. Young growth is palatable, but deteriorates at maturity, while mature plants have hard stems high in silica. However, because the storage organs and growing points are located above ground, it is readily overgrazed in a native pasture. Nevertheless, Wild Sorghum is part of the biodiversity of our temperate grasslands, and as such it should be cherished.

We grass people admire it for its beauty.

*This article was first printed in the newsletter of the South Coast Group of the Australian Plants Society.

Jenny Liney is Curator of the Wallace Herbarium at the Eurobodalla Regional Botanic Gardens. She has a long-time interest in grasses, which has led to an equally long-time membership of FOG.



Some Pilbara grasses

Naarilla Hirsch

Last April I did a tour of the Pilbara, up the coast from Perth, out to Karijini National Park (~200 km south of Port Hedland) and back down again. There was much more in flower than I expected, mostly due to the cyclone and follow-up rain in the preceding two months. I hadn't meant to do much photography of grasses because I knew I would have difficulty identifying them. However, there were so many lovely and interesting grass flowers that I couldn't resist a few photos after all.

The grassy understorey at Karijini was mostly *Triodia* (spinifex) species, but in one place I saw a lovely *Themeda australis* grassland. The National Park Information Centre had bird and animal lists available but was unable to supply a plant list, which made identification of plants more difficult.

Here (in close-up and greatly magnified) are a few of the grasses I saw:

- possibly *Eriachne helmsii* Buck Wanderrie Grass (not sure about this one) (top left)
- *Triodia pungens* Soft Spinifex (top right)
- *Eragrostis eriopoda* Wire Wanderrie Grass
- *Triodia schinzii* Oat Eared Spinifex (bottom left)
- *Eriachne aristidea* False Wanderrie Grass (bottom right).

Sources

Mitchell AA & Wilcox DG. (1994) *Arid Shrubland Plants of Western Australia*. Department of Agriculture, WA,

Moore P.A. (2005) *Guide to Plants of Inland Australia*. New Holland Publishers, Sydney.

Western Australian Florabase.

<http://florabase.dpaw.wa.gov.au>

Photos: Naarilla Hirsch.



Grassland species magnified!

John Fitz Gerald

All these micrograph images are by John Fitz Gerald ©ANBG, taken at the Seedbank of the Australian National Botanic Gardens.



Sedge *Carex appressa*

In *News of Friends of Grasslands*, January–February, there was a note about the flowering cycle of the sedge *Carex appressa* which is growing in a wet area of Hall Cemetery grassy woodland, in north-west ACT. As expected, the sedge pollen is currently (October) flying, having begun taking off in the warm days of late September. A flower head from one of the plants provides a perfect subject for close-up viewing of pollen 'dusting'. The two images at left show pollen at two magnifications. Scale bars represent 1 mm (black, top image) and 0.1 mm (white, second image).



Button Wrinklewort *Rutidosia leptorrhyncoidea*

FOG members will have read regularly about the endangered Button Wrinklewort, and especially of FOG's and friends' efforts at Stirling Park to reduce the threat of competition from weeds to the healthy populations there. This plant usually flowers December to May and fluffy seeds can be produced and shed during the later months. Here are two fascinating images of a few Button Wrinklewort seeds.

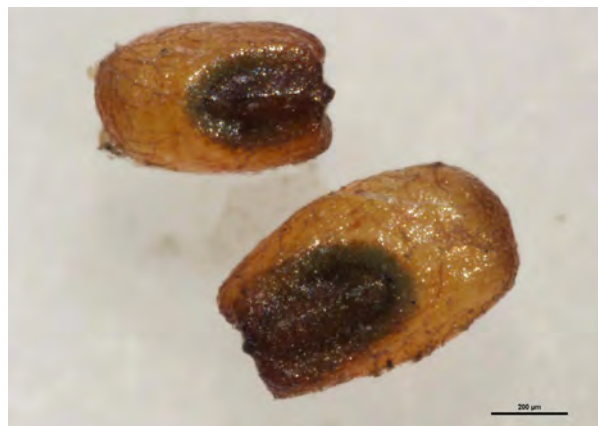
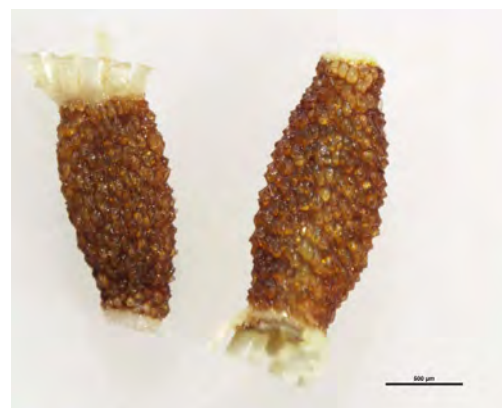


The first photo (right, black background; white scale bar 2 mm long) shows several brown seeds together with their fluffy white pappuses which should help them fly on the wind. In the photo below that (right), two brown seeds with their pappuses sliced off are more highly magnified (black scale bar = 0.5 mm). The rough surface on the seeds consists of tiny oil glands and this aromatic oil when released tends to stick groups of seeds together, meaning that seeds normally do not fly very far.

Eragrostis

Eragrostis is a worldwide genus of grasses reported to include about 300 species, around 50 of which are native to Australia. One of those native to SE NSW is Rough-grained Lovegrass (*E. trachycarpa*). The accompanying image of its complexly patterned grain (left photo below; scale bar = 0.1 mm long) confirms the origins of its common name, though clearly a good microscope is needed to see this.

Another from the genus, this one exotic, is an invasive weed scourge in many parts of Australia, our region most certainly included. The seeds of African Lovegrass (*E. curvula*) are shaped quite differently and their light/dark pattern (bicolouration) appears to be one useful characteristic for identifying the plant (right photo below; scale bar = 0.2 mm long).



Cultivation corner: about grassland species in the garden

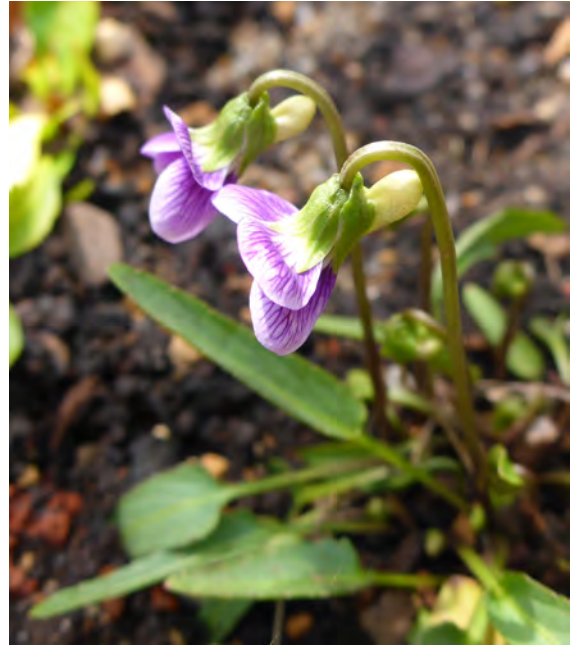
Learning by experience – slowly

Janet Russell

I was pleased to receive some feedback about my last article but I realise that I have to state up-front that usually the articles I write are about my experience with growing plants in our rather dry garden. Others may have quite different experiences with the same species, inside Canberra and outside it.

Having said that, I can follow up on my experience with the Showy Violet *Viola betonicifolia* (photo at right) and report that I now have a delightful native violet that has produced 10 flowers. The violet which germinated in another pot last year re-surfaced in the same spot this spring. I repotted it and for the first time a violet in our garden has found itself in a sufficiently hospitable position to start behaving like the perennial it is. I have accepted that now the only way that this plant can thrive in our garden is for it to remain in a pot.

There are some plants we have given up with ever being able to grow in the ground. We have killed off numerous Grass Trigger Plant *Stylidium graminifolium* as well as the Yam Daisy *Microseris lanceolata*. Even Yam Daisies in pots did not survive. When we dug them out when they had died we



found the tubers were empty, which we assumed was the work of slugs. Greening Australia planted out some Grass Trigger Plants in what I have tried to set up as a community garden and they have survived three seasons. This is just across the road from our garden where there seems to be more moisture retained in the ground than in our garden, in spite of our putting compost and other organic matter in when planting out.

Fortunately, there are plenty of other species that do thrive. This spring the Hoary Sunray *Leucochrysum albicans* have had an exceptional flowering. We have had natural increases in Purple Coral Pea *Hardenbergia violacea* and Diggers Speedwell *Veronica perfoliata*. We were pleased how many other species made their way through the layer of mulch we had put out a couple of months ago. Geranium (photo top left) and Pelargonium are germinating and flowering, and even the delicate plant *Glycine clandestina* made its way out into the sunlight. We did give a helping hand to get some plants through the mulch, like the Chocolate Lilies *Dichopogon strictus*.

There is always the serendipitous or surprising survivor too. One of these has been the Common Rice Flower *Pimelea humilis* (photo at left) which, contrary to its name, it is not common. It has only been recorded in a few locations in New South Wales and is found mainly in the southern parts of Australia, mainly Victoria. We planted two of them in the garden in May last year. I wondered whether they would survive as they did not look very hardy. They have survived, and what is more, whether they are flowering or not, in summer and winter, they always look fresh. Continually fresh-looking plants – in a garden with grasses and forbs which dry and hay off – are well worth having!

Masked Lapwing *Vanellus miles novaehollandiae*, an adaptable survivor

Michael Bedingfield

Masked Lapwings enjoy the open spaces that grasslands offer, making their frugal nests on the ground, and spending much of their time foraging for food in the soil. They are a common sight on pastures, golf courses and urban parks, where they like the relatively short grass. This allows them good visibility in all directions while they poke their beaks into the soil, looking for insects and their larvae, worms and other invertebrates. During cold or dry weather they will eat seeds.

They need the benefit of rain before raising a family, and when breeding, their nest is a mere scrape in the earth, sometimes lined with grass and other materials. It will usually be on slightly higher ground, for the better view. They vigorously defend the nest against intruders, and are very wary of approach by humans. Swooping at speed and calling loudly, they will aggressively protect their territory and their chicks. The adults will also pretend to be injured, in order to lure visitors away from their offspring. In extreme situations, the sharp spur on their forewings can be used for defence.

Both male and female share the home duties of incubating the eggs and caring for the chicks. The chicks have a complete covering of down when born and leave the nest soon after hatching to begin foraging with their parents. They all leave the exposed nest site to roam widely in search of food, and shelter is sought in taller vegetation or dry ditches. The chicks grow quickly and can fly after 6–8 weeks, but often stay with the parents after fledging, creating a small family group. These birds spend most of their time on the ground, and roost there, not in trees. With predators around this is a potentially dangerous practice, and they sleep very little. They can be heard calling at any time of day or night, and it is common to hear them on moonlit nights.

Although they like grassy, open areas, and can adapt to quite arid conditions, Masked Lapwings are most common near water and prefer wet grasslands. They are closely related to the waders, the plovers and dotterels; have relatively long legs for their size; and can be found on or near such places as mud-flats, marshes, rivers and ocean beaches. When they are not breeding they may form into flocks and roost by standing in the shallow parts of large expanses of water, seeking the protection it offers from predators. I find their affinity with water to be very interesting, because they nest away from water. There are waterbirds such as the Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio* that nest over the water in bulrushes or reeds but, although preferring to eat water plants and small aquatic animals, often move away from the water and feed on the local grasses. Similarly, the Eurasian coot *Fulica atra* will move away from its watery habitat to graze. At the water's edge there is a blending of grassy and riparian ecosystems.

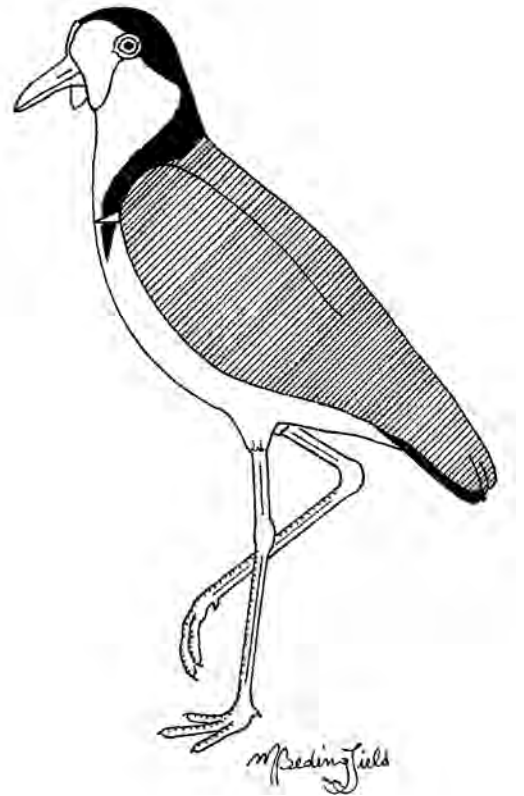
The Masked Lapwing also goes by the names of Spur-winged Plover or simply Plover. There are two subspecies: *Vanellus miles*

miles, which occurs in the north of the continent, and *Vanellus miles novaehollandiae*, which occurs in the south, including our region. My drawing and photo are of the local subspecies. The facial wattle is yellow, the front of the bird is white, the back is olive-brown; there is a black crown and black colouring on the back of the neck and down past the shoulders. The male and female are very similar in colour. In the northern subspecies, the yellow facial mask and wattle are larger, and the black stripes on the neck and shoulders are absent.

These birds are widespread in Australia, populating the northern, central and south-eastern areas, including Tasmania, and spreading into Indonesia, New Guinea, New Caledonia and New Zealand. Since European settlement of this country they have prospered, gaining benefit from land clearing for farming and the introduction of irrigation. They have also adapted to living in towns, sometimes even nesting on flat rooftops. Being undeterred by agriculture and the modern urban landscape, and showing great adaptability to different living environments, they have a bright future.

References

Readers Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds (1976; numerous authors)
<http://australianmuseum.net.au/masked-lapwing>
<http://www.birdsinbackyards.net/species/Vanellus-miles>



Contacts for FOG groups and projects

Refer to the website, www.fog.org.au, for more information

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Promoting wider knowledge of grassy landscapes

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Yarramundi Reach & Stirling Park, jamie.pittock@fog.org.au

Old Cooma Common, NSW, margaret.ning@fog.org.au

Education: Southern Tablelands Ecosystems Park (STEP) at National Arboretum Canberra: secretary@step.asn.au

Activities: activities@fog.org.au

Media spokesperson: Sarah Sharp (0402 576 412)

FOG dates and activities, late October – December

Date	Activity	Contact
Sat 31 Oct	Hall Cemetery workparty	john.fitzgerald@fog.org.au
Sun 1 Nov	Stirling Park workparty	pmcghie@optusnet.com.au
Weds 11 Nov	Scottsdale monitoring	linda.spinaze@fog.org.au
Sun 15 Nov	Yarramundi workparty	john.fitzgerald@fog.org.au
Sun 15 Nov	Walk in Stirling Park	pmcghie@optusnet.com.au
Mon 23 Nov	3rd visit to Umbagong	margaret.ning@fog.org.au
Sun 29 Nov	Stirling Park workparty	pmcghie@optusnet.com.au
Weds 16 Dec	FOG members picnic	ann.milligan@fog.org.au
Fri 1 Jan	Membership renewals due	membership@fog.org.au

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