



News of Friends of Grasslands

Supporting native grassy ecosystems

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May & June 2023

Activities

All day Tinderry wander, Sat 20 May, 9am start. Contact Margaret for more info on our plans for a day visit to this exciting property in the Tinderries, with an array of different ecosystems.
margaret.ning@fog.org.au

Work parties

Budjan Galindji (Franklin Grassland)
Wednesdays 26 Apr, 3 May and 24 May.
margaret.ning@fog.org.au

Gurubung Dhaura

Sat 13 May (then none till Sat 12 August)
margaret.ning@fog.org.au

New members

Welcome to:
Jack Thomas, ACT
Luke Hush, ACT
Brian La Rance, ACT
Tracy Rail & Tim Mullaney, ACT

From the President ...

18 April 2023

In this fortnight I've been reminded of the important roles that Friends of Grasslands (FOG) volunteers play in assisting government agencies to achieve better conservation of our cherished grassy ecosystems.

Weeds

Last Monday, a crack team of 5 FOG members met with senior staff of the Environment Protection and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD), seeking to enhance the ACT Government's work on weed control. We had met with the Minister for the Environment in mid-2022 to query why the hectares of reported weed control had declined at a time when allocated funds had increased, and to ask for improved engagement between stakeholders and the Directorate. While a number of actions were agreed, FOG had not been advised of implementation. Our further representations resulted in the new meeting led by the new Conservator of Flora and Fauna where practical steps were agreed. FOG will be an enthusiastic participant in a new, multi-stakeholder ACT Invasive Plants Working Group. This may provide the forum we seek for such crucial action as more effective weed control across land tenures, and further measures to identify, map and eliminate emerging weeds. In particular, EPSDD is now reviewing information on 10 exotic plant species identified by FOG that are being planted by the ACT Government. We fear these are emerging weeds and we expect the review to see planting of these species to be stopped.

Fire

The past three wetter years have seen massive growth of biomass in our grasslands, which threatens the survival of the plants and animals that need more open swards, has limited weed control, and increases risks from hot wildfires. Yet it is institutionally hard to get ecological and fuel reduction burns for the most biodiverse grassland sites on different land tenures. At key sites, FOG has been encouraging government agencies to collaborate and redouble their efforts to undertake burns, even going as far as writing the first drafts of burn proposals. This coming Thursday, we are delighted that Transport Canberra and City Services and EPSDD are joining forces to burn 6 hectares of urban parks land at Blue Gum Point in Yarralumla. Since 2020, FOG has led on-ground restoration of this grassland that is home to the endangered Button Wrinklewort. This coming weekend, the Rural Fire Service in partnership with the National Capital Authority will burn key parts of the 21 hectare Yarramundi Reach grasslands in Acton. Since 2009, FOG has led on-ground restoration of this grassland that is home to the threatened Striped Legless Lizard.

Restoration

Last Saturday, FOG received an “outstanding” 2022 National Trust Heritage Award for our Lake Burley Griffin Ecological Project. This covers the work that 170 FOG volunteers have undertaken since 2009 to restore the Yarramundi Reach grasslands in Acton, and the Blue Gum Point and Gurubung Dhaura grassy woodlands in Yarralumla. The National Trust judging panel said “The Friends of Grasslands project exemplifies the importance of coordinated community and stakeholder mobilisation, and proactive management action in protecting Canberra’s significant natural landscapes. By undertaking weed removal and planting of native species, the project maintains an important link to the natural heritage values of the Limestone Plains on which Canberra was settled.” This is but one of the crucial on-ground projects FOG leads to restore key grassy ecosystem remnants at places such as Top Hut travelling stock reserve near Adaminaby, Hall Cemetery, and Budjan Galindji Reserve in Franklin. These examples illustrate the vital roles FOG plays in leading by example with on-ground work, collaborating, providing additional expertise to governments, and being persistent in advocating for change.

Your membership of FOG is key to making this happen. Thank you.

FOG is seeking your tax-deductible donation for critical work in the coming financial year. We need to advocate for conservation of endangered Native Temperate Grasslands on the Monaro following the change of government in NSW. We need to secure a biodiversity network across land tenures in the ACT. We need to ensure that grasslands benefit from Federal Government environmental reforms. Further, we will continue to support critical research and on-ground projects for conservation of grassy ecosystems.

As President, I will match every donation received from you by the 25th June with a donation of up to \$5,000. This will double the impact of your tax-deductible gift to FOG. Please give generously to help conserve the grassland flora and fauna that we cherish.

For grassland conservation – Jamie Pittock, President,

Please make a tax-deductible donation by June 25th

Direct debit:

Account name “Friends of Grasslands Public Fund”, BSB 633000, A/C 153493960 (Bendigo Bank).

Please include your name and notify our [Treasurer](#) to receive your tax-deductible receipt and to advise your preference for use, if any.

Cheque:

Payable to "Friends of Grasslands Public Fund". Mail to Treasurer, Friends of Grasslands Inc., PO box 440, Jamison Centre, ACT 2614. Include your name and postal address to receive your tax-deductible receipt and also include your preference for use, if any.

Advocacy report

Sarah Sharp

Submissions

1. Territory Plan & District Strategies 3 March 2023 (submission [here](#))

Issues included:

- The draft Territory Plan and district strategies as they stand cannot comply with the legal mandate to protect heritage and biodiversity values;
- There is no protection identified for conservation areas outside the reserve system; and
- The maps in the district strategies are not fit for purpose.

Recommendations included:

- The draft Territory Plan and draft District Strategies should be finalised only after amendments are made and following further consultation, and include consideration of the recommendations of the Inquiry into the Planning Bill (22 December 2022) relating to environmental matters (recommendations 38 to 46);
- Demonstrate that primary consideration is provided to the protection of heritage and biodiversity values in all planning and development decisions;
- Define Conservation Areas to include leased and unleased land outside the reserve system;
- Include an additional land use zone for Conservation Areas in the Territory Plan;
- Revise the draft district plan maps to identify all Conservation Areas and remove inaccuracies and discrepancies between the District maps and the Territory Plan maps; and
- Provide the opportunity for FOG and other stakeholders to identify important remnants of grassy ecosystems as off-reserve Conservation Areas on both leased and unleased land.

Additionally, a joint submission was signed by 12 community groups with similar concerns.

2. Construction of a new 132 kV transmission line: Monaro Highway, Hindmarsh Drive & 722 Canberra Ave DA 202241244 (submission [here](#))

Issue: The works are immediately adjacent to one of the nation's most important remnants of nationally critically endangered grassland that contains at least six threatened invertebrates and reptiles. The proposal could result in direct disturbance of habitat; risk of collision of the Little Eagle with powerlines and predation of threatened flora.

Recommendation: Works should not occur within the grassland, disturb the grassland or cause weed invasion into the grassland.

3. Inquiry into the ACT's heritage arrangements

Issue: Despite containing criteria that include natural history, places that contain elements of 'natural history' especially places of high ecological value containing critically endangered natural grassland and/or Yellow Box-Blakely's Red Gum grassy woodland or associated threatened species are poorly represented on the register.

Recommendation: The Heritage Council urgently needs environmental/ecological expertise in its composition to advance conservation of natural heritage, in particular, the nationally endangered grasslands and grassy woodlands habitats and species in the ACT.

4. Biodiversity Network

- A Biodiversity Network Exchange meeting with 50 people present was held at the ACCC offices in Barton on 13 February;
- A presentation was given to the ACT Scientific Committee¹ on 1 March;
- Sarah Sharp and Peta Bulling (Conservation Council) met with Jo Clay and Rebecca Vassarotti;
- A meeting with personnel within the Planning Department has been requested;
- An online webinar was held on 26 April: 'A Biodiversity Network for the ACT';
- Consideration is being given to how elements of the Network can be implemented through budget submissions currently under preparation.

¹ The ACT Scientific Committee is a statutory expert body appointed by the Minister for the Environment under the Nature Conservation Act 2014 (Ed.)

Canberra Grassland Earless Dragon

Michael Bedingfield

The Canberra Grassland Earless Dragon has been classified as endangered. It is also known as the Lined Earless Dragon, and by the scientific name of *Tympanocryptis lineata*. Until recently it was known as *T. pinguicollis*, but that species was revised and split into two. *T. lineata* is the species local to Canberra and *T. osbornei* is the Monaro Grassland Earless Dragon which occurs near, and to the south of Cooma NSW.

Canberra Grassland Earless Dragons are described as 'earless' because they don't have an ear opening but they do have ears and can hear. They are quite small with a maximum size of 7cm for the head and body and a maximum total length with the tail of 16cm. The colour is variable in differing shades of grey and brown.

The drawing I have provided is with the animal posing next to a specimen of Short Wallaby Grass, *Rytidosperma carphoides*, to give an idea of its small stature. The recent droughts have had a detrimental effect on the numbers of surviving animals. One of the places where they are known to occur is on the Jerrabomberra Grasslands.

There is also a population in the Majura Valley that occurs at the Canberra Airport. This population is under threat and at risk of being wiped out by the proposed Northern Road described in previous newsletters. The road will cut right through the area in which it lives, so it is in need of a bit of support.

Other local species that are threatened are the Golden Sun Moth, *Synemon plana*, and the Canberra Raspy Cricket, *Cooraboorama canberrae*. Having lived in the district for so long, they have an untold shared history with *T. lineata*. The three species are not well known to the general public, but if they were better known their future might be more secure. Songs are an ancient way of teaching and spreading knowledge. Their story is best told in a song. With respect and apologies to singing group Peter, Paul and Mary, the tune is from their song "Puff the magic dragon". The song is called "Tympo the Earless Dragon" and goes like this:

*Tympo the earless dragon lived on the plain
And frolicked in the grasslands in the sunshine and the rain.
Canberra Cricket Raspy loved that rascal Tym
And brought him strings, and sealing wax, and other fancy things.*

*Oh, Tympo the earless dragon lived on the plain
And frolicked in the grasslands in the sunshine and the rain.
Tympo the earless dragon lived on the plain
And frolicked in the grasslands in the sunshine and the rain.*

*Together they would travel across the countryside
Raspy hopped on Tympo's back to have an easy ride.
Jerrabomberra people would bow whenever they came.
Golden Sun Moths would appear when Tympo roared his name.*

*Oh, Tympo the earless dragon lived on the plain
And frolicked in the grasslands in the sunshine and the rain.
Tympo the earless dragon lived on the plain
And frolicked in the grasslands in the sunshine and the rain.*

*Dragons don't live forever, crickets grow old quickly.
Open space and grassy plains made way for the capital city.
One grey day it happened, Raspy Cricket came no more.
Tympo, that earless dragon, he ceased his fearless roar.*

*His boldness had now vanished, grey scales fell like rain.
Tympo no longer went to play along the Mugga Lane.
Without his lifelong friend, Tympo was filled with sorrow.
And so that earless dragon sadly slipped into his burrow.*

*Oh, Tympo the earless dragon lived on the plain
And frolicked in the grasslands in the sunshine and the rain.
Tympo the earless dragon lived on the plain
And frolicked in the grasslands in the sunshine and the rain.*



References:

<https://canberra.naturemapr.org/species/13604>

<https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/threatenedspeciesapp/profile.aspx?id=10817>

[Note: John Fitz Gerald's regular 'Closeup' article will return in the July and August edition of this newsletter. Ed.]

Report - grassland sites mapping

Alan Ford

When FOG went to Flea Bog Flat recently we were shown a Management Plan prepared for the site by Capital Ecology. I later discovered that there was another document in the public realm by Capital Ecology which is available on Trove through the National Library site. This is 2017 'Grassland Quality and Extent Mapping' (2018), prepared for the Environmental Offsets, ACT Parks and Conservation Service of the ACT government.

This report covers surveys of seven grassland sites in and around the Territory: Bonshaw, Jarramlee, West Macgregor, Kenny, Majura West, Woolshed creek and Yass Valley Lot 2. It notes that the quality and extent of grassland in each of the sites has been mapped previously, however, the mapping has been undertaken across several seasons, by numerous practitioners, using various methods and scales. The objective of the study was to develop a logical and repeatable Geographic Information System (GIS) supported by assessment methodology.

Launch of the Biodiversity Network paper

Maree Wright, Landcare ACT2 Communications Officer

[Note: This article was originally written for 'Engage' magazine. It is presented here by agreement. Ed.]

It was a glorious late summer evening in February when we gathered at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture to tour the stunning remnant grasslands there and attend the launch of the Biodiversity Network paper. Hosted by the Conservation Council and Friends of Grasslands, we came together because of our shared interest in being responsible stewards of the irreplaceable natural landscape we are so lucky to have.



Co-authored by Friends of Grasslands and the Conservation Council, the Biodiversity Network paper seeks to establish a tenure-blind, coordinated approach to conservation land-management in the ACT, the better to combat increasing biodiversity loss. The paper recognises that we must work together and form new partnerships to protect and restore our ecosystems, while also balancing the many competing needs of a growing capital city. In order to remain the 'Bush Capital' we must collaborate to take better care of the capital's bush.

The Biodiversity Network paper does not call for an end to building new homes, roads and infrastructure. It instead advocates for legislative changes to ensure that the environment is viewed holistically, and that environmental priorities are a primary consideration when land is developed. It asks that we place conservation on an equal footing with development. While much of the ACT is designated Nature Reserve, some of our most threatened ecosystems are outside the Reserves, including 67% of the ACT's critically endangered natural temperate grassland and 80% of our Box Gum Woodlands. These often fragmented remnants are on rural land, by the roadside, or on urban open areas. They are not currently managed for their conservation value, but to do so would not conflict with their current purposes. Urban Open Area can provide community amenity and recreation, aesthetic value, and also essential connectivity and habitat for native species. Partnerships are crucial for environmental stewardship. No single entity can effectively tackle the complex and interconnected environmental issues facing our planet today. The challenges we face require a collaborative effort from governments, businesses, community organisations and individuals to address them comprehensively and

sustainably. We must work together to build trust and foster cooperation between different stakeholders. By involving all relevant parties in the decision-making process, partnerships create a shared sense of ownership and accountability for environmental outcomes.

The Landcare movement was born over 30 years ago through just such a partnership, with farmers and conservationists recognising that agriculture and environmental stewardship can be complementary rather than competing priorities. In the ACT, many of our farming families prioritise environmental stewardship and conservation alongside their economic and agricultural objectives. The challenge we face as a rapidly growing city - the nation's capital, no less - is to extend such a collaborative relationship to include a much broader range of land users, and land uses.

We must imagine a Canberra that sees our natural grasslands as a treasured feature to be cared for, not a site for greenfield development. We must see the value not just in selling off land, but also in conserving it in its natural state. We can, and must, find a sustainable balance between growing our city and destroying the increasingly rare ecosystem we are a part of. And we must work together to achieve this vision for the future. A summary of the Biodiversity Network paper as well as a link to the whole paper can be accessed [here](#).

Grasslands & woodland offsets & monitoring

Geoff Robertson

For many grassland enthusiasts the ACT grasslands and woodlands offset program remains somewhat of a mystery. Recently I came across the Environmental Offsets Ecological Monitoring Program Report 2018–19, published in February 2020 and found [here](#). I realised that I had been looking for something like this for many years but hadn't known it existed. It seems to have slipped out when bushfires were raging and COVID was getting a hold.

As we know, the ACT government in the late 2010s acquired much offset property. This allowed the future protection of threatened ecological communities and species, but also it provided suitable offset sites. These sites were not brought into Canberra Nature Park because, if they were, they could not be used as offsets - government reserves could not be used as offsets under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC). For example Franklin Grasslands, previously a large part of North Mitchell Grassland and now Budjan Galindji, was chosen as an offset site, monies were received from the Commonwealth to develop the offset to improve golden sun moth habitat, and finally it was included as a reserve in Canberra Nature Park. A map of these offsets may be found on p6 of the report.

However, the Commonwealth's offset program required ongoing monitoring of offset sites. Benchmark surveys were required to establish the monitoring program. The report presents the findings of the benchmark survey and covers the methodology used and overall findings for the golden sun moth, the striped legless lizard, woodland birds, plant diversity, available phosphorous, and vegetation metrics. It also includes a description of and survey results for each of the following sites: AMTECH Estate, Bonshaw, Cookanalla, Franklin Grasslands, Horse Park North, Isaacs Ridge Nature Reserve Extension, Jarramlee, Jerrabomberra East, Justice Robert Hope Park (Watson Woodlands), Kenny, Kenny Broadacre, Kinlyside, Majura West, Taylor, The Pinnacle Nature Reserve Extension, Throsby East, Throsby North, West Macgregor, Woolshed Creek, and Yass Valley Lot 2 Wallaroo Road.

There is much fascinating information in this report and much of it is highly insightful, and so I would encourage readers to study it. Even if you only read the executive summary you will find it extremely helpful. It also reminds readers that the survey was undertaken during a period of prolonged drought.

Activities and Excursions

Bat trapping at Wandiyali 17 March 2023

Margaret Ning

Setting the scene

On the evening immediately prior to our bat activity, three of us joined bat expert Michael Pennay, who works for NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, to identify optimal places in which to set up harp traps for our bat activity the following evening. We were on the environmental gem of Wandiyali, near Googong, with its owner Carolyn. The privately owned property contains some lovely grassy woodland which was superbly appropriate for our proposed activity, and four harp traps were duly assembled. The following morning Michael, accompanied by Carolyn, gathered the bats that were trapped overnight, and dismantled three of the traps. Throughout Friday, those bats slept safely in torpor through the day as usual snug in a bag carefully looked after by Michael.



At 7pm, 15 of us assembled in the fading light of a lovely grassy woodland area of Wandiyali, and Michael immediately started sharing his bat knowledge. We walked the short distance to the remaining harp trap, and Michael explained how it works. Photo by Ann Milligan.

Bats can live more than 30 years, they only have one young at a time, although some can have twins. Bats don't carry any fat, they go into torpor when it's too cold or windy. There used to be a split between 'mega' and 'micro' bat species, but this doesn't hold up any more. Some bat species call out of their mouths and others out of their noses. The range for carnivorous ghost bats is limited these days to northern Australia but it used to occur in central Australia.

Another species, the Large-footed Myotis (*Myotis adversus*) has huge toes with which to catch aquatic prey on big open water sources, like the Queanbeyan River, where they can get a good run. They scoop up their prey, hold it in their toes, and eat while on the wing. It is possible to catch ghost bats in harp nets. Most Australian bat species live in tree hollows. The entrances they utilise can be tiny, and preferably only head size, in order to keep out predators. Not all bats can 'hold' tracking transmitters used to study their movements and behaviour. The latter weigh a quarter of a gram, which is a big percentage of the bat's body weight.



Michael introduced us to the first of the two bat species caught overnight in the harp traps. It was a Little Forest Bat (*Vespadelus vulturnus*) which is really tiny, and a contender for the smallest mammal in Australia. A fully grown adult is one tenth the weight of a mouse or about that of a 10c coin. Bats have really thin bones and have to be handled very very delicately. Somehow Michael handled the bat, while at the same time exerting no pressure. There are two known bad bat viruses in Australia affecting both big and small bats, including the Australian Bat Lyssavirus and Hendra virus. The Lyssavirus is related to rabies, makes the bats sick, and is virtually 100% fatal to mammals it infects. The Hendra virus doesn't seem to affect the bats at all but can spread to people through an intermediary host (horses) where it can make both horses and humans very sick, sometimes fatally. Although we don't have rabies in Australia, Michael is vaccinated against it, which also prevents lyssavirus infection. But Michael assured us that a feisty wild bat is less likely to be a danger to us as bat trappers and observers, while wildlife carers who help bats which may be ill or injured are more at risk. Gloves are essential attire (visible in photo). Bats do not seem to be put off by the noise

and movement of people walking around underneath them. Photo by Luke Hush.

The second of our captured bat species was a Large Forest Bat (*Vespadelus darlingtoni*), which weighs about seven grams (around the weight of a \$2 coin). Both our captured bat species had wingless bat-flies on them, which do not seem to bother the bats but may indicate that they are from a bigger colony. Most of the wingless bat-flies (Diptera: Nycteribiidae and Streblidae) are specific to individual bat species, and the bat-flies themselves have specific microparasites and microorganisms that only occur on their species. This bat was said to have had 'wingless bat-flies' on it. Photo by Luke Hush.

The main predators of bats are birds like currawongs, kookaburras, and tawny frogmouths, and snakes and goannas. Bats are normally taken from their roost sites, or sometimes when they are too late or early and are caught out of the roost in the light. Gould's Wattled Bat (*Chalinolobus gouldii*) and its cousin the Chocolate Wattled Bat (*Chalinolobus morio*) sometimes leave the roost earlier in the evening, especially in autumn, and can be seen against the twilight, but most species usually wait until complete darkness to avoid bird predators. Before departing on an evening's hunting, bats need to warm up before they can fly. Michael was able to demonstrate this as he released the species he had trapped the night before, just before 8pm. He held one in his hand, listened to its ultrasonic 'cheep' on a bat detector and off it flew. Undaunted by its brief experience in captivity, one began chasing some food straight away!

Michael told us about other bat species, including the Eastern Bent-wing Bat (*Miniopterus fuliginosus*) that roost in caves. Apparently they don't seem to mind the cold in winter and sometimes seek it out to help them sleep (hibernate) better. Some species of bats have been recorded flying up to 4.5km above ground level. After the captured bats were released, we were provided with acoustic detectors with which to walk down a track and discover what we could hear. We added a White-striped Mastiff Bat (*Austronomus australis*) to our list. To finish off the evening we then dismantled the final harp trap. Even while packing up the final trap, Michael was still imparting info, although we did not feel we were on overload as it had been such a casual relaxed evening.

Michael confided he was initially concerned when he was asked by Friends of Grasslands to hold a bat activity, but he was relieved that our remit extends to grassy woodland which is pretty much ideal habitat for bats. Grasslands have much slimmer pickings. Michael's day job with NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service is to assess properties that the department may buy. This takes him all over NSW and onto many beautiful properties. However he volunteered to give us this bat walk in his own time.

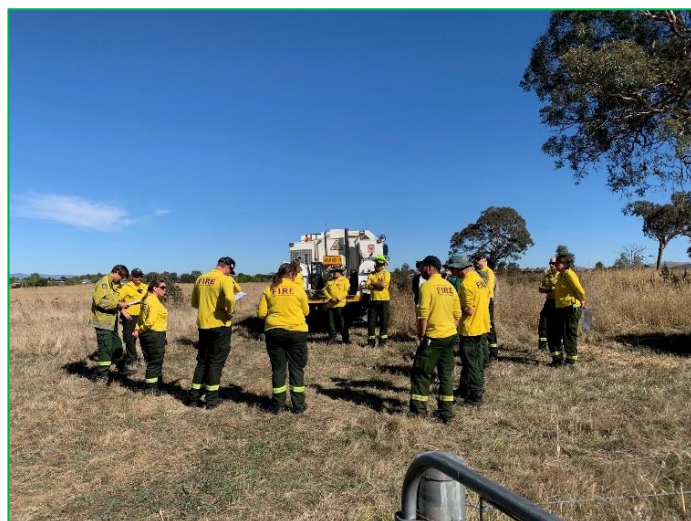
It was difficult to take notes and focus properly on what was going on around me, especially in the dark and I haven't conveyed the great atmosphere of Wandiyali itself, but hopefully the wondrous extent of Michael's knowledge, and his ability to impart it all to his audience, is apparent. We were all ears! Thank you Michael and Carolyn for making the evening possible. Please see and read more about Wandiyali-Environs Conservation area [here](#).

Burning at Budjan Galindji

Geoff Robertson

On Friday 10 March an ACT Parks and Conservation team of fourteen staff rocked up at Budjan Galindji (Franklin Grassland) to conduct a five-hectare burn, about a quarter of the reserve, under the supervision of Maree Gilbert. This was the third burn at the reserve, earlier burns having been conducted in 2021 and 2022. Last year, two large patches were burnt. This year's burn covered a large central patch of the reserve.

Previous fires and this year's burn have been medium to hot burns, leaving little vegetation showing at the end of the fire. This is due to the large amount of biomass present, including much unwanted phalaris. While ongoing burning of good quality grasslands ideally should be cool burns, hot burns have their place, especially in weedy areas



that have not been burnt for some time and may scorch the top of the soil and its unwanted seed bank.



Previous burns at Budjan have resulted in a mix of welcome indigenous grassland, including a number of indigenous plants not previously reported, and weed plants coming back. The follow-up plan is that in the burnt area unwanted plants, particularly phalaris, will be herbicided and the area seeded with appropriate native grasses and wildflowers. Nevertheless care was taken with fire preparation. The site was prepared by dividing it into five to six sub-patches separated by fire breaks (mown areas). The patches with light vegetation, including Canberra peppergrass, were either avoided or burnt carefully. After the fire these could be clearly seen here and there, and lemon beauty heads and other plants were untouched by the fire.

Fingers crossed - since the 2022 ecological burn we've found that a mix of weeding and direct seeding appear to be very successful, with plants such as wallaby grass, chocolate lily and linum thriving. Meanwhile, the seed gardens at Budjan Galindji under Ranger Stephen Bruce's stewardship are providing a good source of bulk seed.

Higgins remnant grassland

Margaret Ning

On a hot and steamy afternoon in February, 13 FOG members visited a tiny box-gum grassy woodland in Higgins that has recently been recognised as meeting the EPBC listing criteria for this critically endangered ecological



community. What makes this remnant grassy woodland even more unusual is that it is located in a suburban park that has been mown to within an inch of its life for the past 50 years. Over the last few years, local resident and ecologist Matthew Mullaney has been documenting the native grasses and forbs in the park.

Matthew explained that old aerial photos of the area show that the two remnant red gums in the park mark the point where west Belconnen transitioned from box-gum grassy woodland to natural temperate grassland. When the suburb was established in the early 1970s, residents planted a forest of local and non-local eucalypts in the park.

A couple of areas were left lightly planted, and one of these areas now forms the new conservation area, although the rest of the park also contains significant local species. On the day of our visit, all but the conservation area had been recently mown. The mown areas were bone dry. However in the conservation area with its expansive grassy sward of *Austrostipa* and *Themeda*, there were still signs of moisture in the ground.

Whilst the wallaby and plume grass had dried off, there was still a lot of grass in its prime, including a bounty of *Panicum effusum* and some lovely *Microlaena* and *Sporobolus creber*, as well as young *Themeda* which varied in colour from bright green to violet blue.

Tall Stipa leaping out of the Variable glycine.
Photo: Andrew Zelnik

It was also nice to see a number of *Lomandra*, one of which Matthew assured us was *Lomandra braceata*, whilst another variety could potentially be *L. filiformis*. *Vittadinia muelleri*, some still with an unusual white flower, was also abundant with its fluffy seed heads, and the *Glycine tabacina* growing under trees that formed the edge of the grassland was particularly spectacular with *Austrostipa* thrusting energetically through it. Some *Plantago varia* was also still visible.

The conservation area had come a long way since Geoff, Andrew and I first saw it in November last year. Under Matthew's guidance, a small group of volunteers has been weeding the usual suspects across the entire park. Adding to the existing forbs, native grasses and sedges hanging on across the park, the team has also done some preliminary planting of grassland forbs with help from Ginninderra Catchment Group and the ACT government - eg. hoary sunray (*Leucochrysum albicans*), button wrinklewort (*Rutidosia leptorhynchoidea*), vanilla lily (*Arthropodium* sp.), *Dianella longifolia*, *Leptorhynchos squamatus*, and *Linum marginale*. In the space of a few short months, the volunteers have grown confident in their Landcare abilities. Pleasingly, they report that the community has slowly come to appreciate how a healthy understorey can support both a greater diversity of wildlife and increased community connection with the local environment.



Characteristically curly *Carex bicheni* is a sedge we seldom see on FOG activities



The group's signage is already in place

Our group was inspired and excited by what the Higgins Landcare volunteers have achieved and could still achieve by managing other promising areas of the park to support ecological values. The latter is not a foregone conclusion and discussions with the Government are still underway to change the mowing regime. It would be a shame if only areas meeting the highest conservation values could be spared the mower. There was more to see but unfortunately we had to leave as a storm was approaching.

Work parties

Southside

Jamie Pittock

At our work party on 15th April at Gurubung Dhaura, 16 volunteers maintained past tree plantings in the Westlake clearing and hand weeded Vinca. Thanks to the ACF Canberra volunteers who joined us. On the day, the National Trust ACT presented Friends of Grasslands with an [ACT National Trust Heritage Award 2022](#) ('Lake Burley Griffin Ecological Project') for our restoration work on these heritage listed lands from 2009. During that time we've held 157 work parties with 170 volunteers contributing over 8,200 hours of work.

On Thursday 20th April an ecological burn was conducted at Blue Gum Point over 6 ha of urban parks land that we in FOG have been restoring since 2019. This welcome burn reduces excessive grass biomass to enhance the habitat for wildflowers like the Button Wrinklewort and also the Golden Sun Moth. It also enables better weed control and lowers fire risk. FOG drafted an initial burn plan. We thank ACT Parks and Conservation Service, and City Services for collaborating so effectively to conserve nature in our city.

Hall Cemetery Woodland

John Fitz Gerald

Team Hall has been hard at work again on mornings of both March 4 and April 1. Six enthusiastic volunteers on each date contributed to a total 31 hours of effort. The team is heartened that our major focus on Sowthistle in 2022 has paid off. Also rewarding is the strength of some large patches dominated by *Microlaena*. However, no resting on laurels, because plenty of other targets have to be managed: Spear Thistle, Blackberry, Fog Grass, Plantain, Umbrella Sedge, *Potentilla* included. Some small patches of other weeds, such as grasses *Cynosuros* and *Setaria*, have been bagged to minimise new growth next year. We remain in contact with Canberra Cemeteries and Conservation Research over future planning and hope to get some patch burns into thick grasses, principally *Phalaris*. In the meantime, we resort to manual trimming. Thanks to all volunteers.



Left: Group at the March working bee with a stash of weeds in the bucket and white bag.

Right: Some of FOG's early work at Hall Cemetery was control of all sorts of weed in the Carex belt. This picture is a nice illustration of results. The Carex flower and pollen was John F's 'Closeup' topic in the Nov-Dec 2020 FOG newsletter. This patch of Tall Sedge Carex appressa, located in the northern woodland, has benefitted from the last few years of La Nina and provides a natural buffer to slow and filter runoff from the adjoining free range egg farm.

Photos by Andrew Zelnik

Ginninderry Conservation Corridor

Margaret Ning

Thursday 6 April 2023. Everyone arrived punctually for a 'third time lucky' attempt at our Ginninderry Conservation Corridor visit. It was planned as a vehicular tour of the Ginninderry site, capped at ten FOG visitors, and initially with Bridie and Violet of Ginninderry, we fitted into three 4WD vehicles. Best of all, we set off from The Link, the Ginninderry Community and Information Centre, with UHF radios in all vehicles so that everyone could listen to what was happening as we travelled.

The recent wet/weedy seasons were evident as we began our trip, but some lovely old Eucs were able to take our minds off that. *Photo: Andrew Zelnik*



In the distance we also saw the clearing that has been done for the next stage of the Ginninderry development, ie the suburb of Macnamara. All of it has been sold, and preparations have been ongoing for a year already, with possible moving in in December 2024. We also saw some recent eucalypt deaths but apparently it is not of any species in particular. Our first stop was the beginning of the new 3.4km one-way walking track with its excellent signage (photo on previous page). The walk is two hours return, and a metal Themeda sculpture graced the beginning of it.



An old farm dam with stock access control fencing was our next stop. The dam has been fenced off, with a hardened access point to allow cattle to access the water source and to protect the banks and water from cattle damage.

This has been a trial with some fails so far, including as dam levels drop with a fading La Niña. The dam was surrounded by Themeda and was home to a couple of young Australasian Grebe.

The cattle had been moved from an area adjacent to the dam and the vegetation was growing again, even though it was late in the season.

Photo: Andrew Zelnik

There were many short stemmed Golden Weather-grass, *Hypoxis hygrometrica* still squeezing out flowers in quite prolific numbers. I have never seen so many in one place. At this point we were joined by Jess, Ginninderry's Sustainability Manager.

Our third stop was the 'scrape and sow' site that FOG has monitored three times over the last three years since it was created (photo by Andrew Zelnik below).



Thirty centimetres of soil had been scraped off and Greening Australia had sown their normal scrape mix. Most eye opening, in my eyes, was the area adjacent to the scrape, which cattle had reduced to lower than ankle length grass, from the 1m high level we saw when we monitored late last October. An amazing transformation!

Inside the scrape area, rocks and bricks had been laid to encourage Pink-tailed Worm Lizard, and while there had been a build-up of ant numbers, it was not until the day of our visit that a lizard skin was found and subsequently identified on Canberra Nature Map as a Pink-tailed Worm Lizard shed! The native grass species inside the scrape were looking very healthy. We left the scrape in slightly improved condition via some quick fleabane, skeleton weed and African lovegrass removal. Fauna included a Spotted Marsh Frog and a scorpion.

Our next stop was an open area, actually part way along the Corridor walking track, the beginning of which we had already checked out. We walked a short distance along it to another metal sculpture, a Wallaby Grass this time. The view was rather special, towards the Murrumbidgee River with the end of the 3.4km track far in the distance (above left). Two of our party chose to get a little more exercise by walking farther along the Corridor Track, from Lookout 1 to Lookout 2 which is on the Riverview Loop. They reported that on leaving the Lookout-1 grassland, they found an area rich in St Johns Wort with occasional praying mantis cocoons.



The "cocoon" is a typical praying mantis egg case or ootheca. Photo by Marchien Van Oostende

The track then went through sparse woody grassland and past a dam with white-flowered waterlilies, just before a rock-paved slope leading up to a smart rusted-iron stile over a fence. A current burrow suggests that local wombats do not use the adjacent stile. From then on, the loop track is in Callitris forest. The return track from Lookout 1 to The Link passes through quite dense woodland hosting a few luscious-looking fungi (photo below), as well as one more sculpture and a Chocolate Lily, *Arthropodium fimbriatum*. This short (brisk) walk returned us to the carpark in time to meet the rest of the group setting off towards the Strathnairn cafe for some of their excellent fare.

There was some discussion of the Grazon trials Ginninderry was doing to control the SJW that abounds in certain places. Interestingly, where the SJW was thick, the cattle did not bother to penetrate it to eat the grasses. We returned to The Link and were given an excellent overview of the two broad-scale models of the Ginninderry

development. By 2032 development will have extended over the border into NSW. There was extensive discussion of the development, past, present and future. There is a comprehensive bus service from Ginninderry to Kippax, thanks to Ginninderry's initiative and perseverance. PhD students have been funded to research appropriate topics associated with development.

The final part of our visit to Ginninderry was a drive/walk around part of the development. Lifting education and awareness levels within the Ginninderry community is the go. There are Housing Design Guidelines which aim to make the development more environmentally friendly and sustainable, including turfed verges, lighter roof colours, solar power and higher efficiency appliances, etc. Residents/owners are able to have their front soft-landscaping completed if they meet the Guidelines which help to reduce weed/unwanted plantings and allows for more discussion of increased native and edible gardens. Fake (artificial) grass is not allowed in front yards. There is an allowance of future space for community batteries. We alighted from our vehicles to take a closer look at a 20kph limited street - Tredwell Street - a road with a storm water filter and rain gardens. We were shown more affordable flexi-living homes, which were still single title, as well as terrace houses with a body corporate set up, amid the single-family homes. Each dwelling puts up a \$5,000 compliance bond which they get back, along with their free front soft-landscaping, if they have followed the Housing Design Guidelines. There is a cat containment policy, and dogs must remain on leash throughout the urban area. Dogs are not allowed within the Conservation Corridor.

There were lots of questions, including discussion of the increased percentage of Eucalypts kept at different stages of the development. We visited large Eucs that are now surrounded by native plantings in an attempt to keep people from going under them. These large remnant trees are being researched as part of an MOU between the ANU, ACT Government and Ginninderry to trial a number of landscaping treatments around these existing trees to support new growth and habitat over the lifetime of the trees and beyond. Three treatments are being trialled for urban parks containing remnant trees, with the objective of testing whether greenspace can be managed to mitigate impact of urban development on biodiversity; motivate community engagement; reduce maintenance cost; and increase property values. The three treatments include Traditional management (control), mulch and mass-plant and ecological restoration (using native grasses and wildflowers). Plantings of grasses and wildflowers, along the same lines as at the scrape and sow, have not been as successful. The Government historically has a lop-and-chop attitude in such areas however, in these research areas, dropped branches are allowed to fall in place creating additional habitat.

We also made a brief foray to the next suburb over, Ginninderra Estate (part of Holt) where the developer did not impose any restrictions on housing or design (only baseline ACT Government standards). Jess has monitored temperatures in summer within the two areas with their different sets of rules. Using a thermal imaging camera, she has found temperature differences of up to ten degrees in the peak of summer.

Back into the vehicles for the last time, we drove past a fabulous-looking kiddies' park - Paddys Park. Adjacent were two large wetlands which will form part of Ginninderry's stormwater harvesting and recycled-water irrigation system. The ponds are on either side of the road and the water is treated before being released. Ginninderry has become a water utility and has had to build a water treatment plant before being allowed to harvest the water from the pond system. Land marked as conservation land will remain as such, and this includes extensive areas (nearly 600ha in total over the life of the project). This land is managed by the Ginninderry Conservation Trust and is funded by the development. Ginninderry does not currently have a Landcare group, but does have conservation volunteers and permanent employees whose job it is to get the conservation side of things done.

Ginninderry conducts many events targeted at various multi-cultural audiences, as according to Census results, there is actually a higher proportion of Ginninderry residents born overseas or with parents born overseas, than in Canberra. The Ginninderry Conservation Trust includes two Hindi/Punjabi speaking rangers (who also happen to be residents at Ginninderry) with the hope that residents from all backgrounds will become more engaged with their surrounding landscapes and conservation areas. It's all about experimentation. Special thanks to Bridie, Violet and Jess of Ginninderry, for their enthusiasm and constant stream of information and explanations at every part of Ginninderry we found ourselves in. Click [here](#) for details of the Corridor walk.

ACT Heritage Award

Julia Raine

Late last year, Friends of Grassland restoration works at Gurubang Dhaura, Blue Gum Point and Yarramundi Reach were recognised as making an outstanding contribution to the conservation of heritage in the ACT, receiving a 2022 National Trust ACT Heritage Award. The award recognises project leaders, Jamie Pittock and John Fitz Gerald, as well as the many FOG volunteers who contributed hundreds of hours weeding and planting.

FOG President Jamie Pittock and FOG volunteers were pleased to be presented with the award by National Trust ACT President Gary Kent, at the end of their monthly work party in April. FOG thanks Sally Barnes, National Capital Authority Chief Executive, for joining us for the presentation and for supporting FOG's works on NCA-managed land for many years, as well as Transport Canberra and City Services for their assistance with works at Blue Gum Point.

The Award judges noted that "The Friends of Grasslands project exemplifies the importance of coordinated community and stakeholder mobilisation, and proactive management action in protecting Canberra's significant natural landscapes. By undertaking weed removal and planting of native species, the project maintains an important link to the natural heritage values of the Limestone Plains on which Canberra was settled." Please find an article in the City News 'Trust thrilled at quality of heritage award winners' [here](#).



Left: Award presentation by National Trust ACT President Gary Kent. Right: FOG work party participants on hand to celebrate the award. Background: Gurubung Dhaura on a glorious autumn day

Sleeper Weeds

Rainer Rehwinkel

There are a number of plants that are recommended on lists issued by the ACT Government that are recognised as emerging or sleeper weeds. A list of those species is presented [here](#). In order to gather evidence on the spread of these plants in our public open spaces and reserves, we urge everyone to lodge photos of these plants onto [Canberra Nature Map](#).

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About the newsletter

News of Friends of Grasslands is published six times a year. It is sent by email (or posted on request) free to [members](#). The current issue and most prior issues are fully searchable and available [here](#) as text (no pictures or graphics) or in pdf format (1 to 4 MB files), including colour pictures and graphics. [Acrobat Reader](#) is required.

Conservation Covenanted Property looking for new custodians. \$700,000neg.

This 184ha covenant occurs in the East Gippsland Uplands bioregion. It is an isolated property that abuts Bonang State Forest to the north west and cleared agricultural land to the south east. The property supports two Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVCs). Montane Grassy Woodland (listed as vulnerable) covers the central bulk of the covenant and is offering significant habitat opportunities for native fauna. Shrubby Dry Forest EVC covers the remainder of the covenant.

In addition to covenanted area, 3.3ha fenced 'domestic' space consisting of self-sustainable very comfortable weekend accommodation. 360 degree views encompassing the Snowy, Errinundra & Tingaringy national parks. 30 mins to Delegate. Elevation 830m. Coordinates -7.159957 148.700931. For more detailed information, photos etc. please contact Jenny 0466 005 734

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