



News of Friends of Grasslands

Supporting native grassy ecosystems

September -October 2012

ISSN 1832-6315

Program - take the diary out now

SUN 23 SEPT, 9.00am – 12.00pm **Yarramundi Reach weed spraying**. See page 2 for details. Register with jamie.pittock@fog.org.au

SAT 29 SEPT, 9.30am – 12.30 **Stirling Park work party**. Register with jamie.pittock@fog.org.au. See page 2 for details.

FRI 12 OCT, 4.00-5.00pm **Canberra Airport**. Register with naarilla.hirsch@fog.org.au. See page 2 for details.

SAT 13 OCT, 10.00am - 1.00pm, **Hall Cemetery Working Bee**. Enquiries Andy Russell on 6251 8949 or andy.russell@fog.org.au.

WED 17 OCT, 9.30am - 3.30pm, **Grassland Monitoring at Scottsdale**. Register with linda.spinaze@fog.org.au. See page 2 for details.

SUN 21 OCT, 9.00am – 4.00pm **Scrivener's Hut and West Block woodland work party**. Register with jamie.pittock@fog.org.au. See page 2 for details.

SAT 27 OCT, 9.30am – 12.30pm **Stirling Park work party**. Register with jamie.pittock@fog.org.au. See page 2 for details.

SAT 27 OCT, 2.00pm – 4.00pm **Stirling Park public nature walk**. Register with jamie.pittock@fog.org.au. See page 2 for details.

SAT/SUN 27 & 28 OCT, **McAuliffe property at Nerri-ga**. Register with margaret.ning@fog.org.au. See page 2 for details.

SAT 3 NOV, 9.30am - 3.00pm **Old Cooma Common Grassland Reserve**. Register with margaret.ning@fog.org.au. See page 2 for details.

SUN 11 NOV, 9.00am-12.30pm **Visit to Rowes Lagoon, Collector**. Register with sarah.sharp@fog.org.au. See page 3 for details.

Photos: A beautiful sward of Themeda and a Monaro golden daisy hiding in the grass, both of which inspire us to keep our efforts going at Old Cooma Common. (Margaret Ning) See story page 8.



In this issue

Program

News roundup

FOG advocacy

A tale of two grants

Small grassland projects

Stirling Park

Our most fragile ecosystems

Wild sorghum - a closer look at grass flowers

Upcoming FOG Events

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

Yarramundi Reach weed spraying

Sunday 23 September,
9.00am – 12.00pm

Bring drinking water, sun protection and sturdy footwear. Please register with jamie.pittock@fog.org.au.

Stirling Park work party.

Saturday 29 September,
9.30am – 12.30pm

Bring drinking water, sun protection and sturdy footwear. Please register with jamie.pittock@fog.org.au

Canberra Airport's Eastern Grassland

Friday October 12,
4.00 – 5.00pm

Canberra Airport contains some areas of endangered Natural Temperate Grasslands (NTG), supporting a population of Grassland Earless Dragon, and some disturbed grassland areas. Some developments of Airport infrastructure (such as a new taxiway) have impacted on the NTG area. As part of its approval under the EPBC Act to proceed with these developments, Canberra Airport Group has to deliver some biodiversity offsets. One of these is the Parlour Grassland, which FOG visited last year. Another is to rehabilitate the disturbed grassland areas on the Airport grounds, a project that Greening Australia is undertaking on behalf of Canberra Airport Group.

FOG has an opportunity to visit the site of the rehabilitation work. Please register before Friday 5 October with Naarilla Hirsch at

naarilla.hirsch@fog.org.au (or on 6288 2413 between 24 September and 4 October – leave a message) if you want to come on this visit.

Hall Cemetery Working Bee

Saturday, October 13,
10.00am – 1.00pm

Andy Russell is looking for assistance at the Hall Cemetery Working Bee. If you can help, please contact Andy on 6251 8949, 0428 518 949 or at andy.russell@fog.org.au if you would like to join us. Morning tea will be supplied.

Grassland Monitoring at Scottsdale

Wednesday October 17,
9.30am to 3.30pm

Since March 2008 FOG has been monitoring the impact of grazing on ALG, and the interplay between the native grassy vegetation and the ALG in various sites at Scottsdale. Scottsdale is a grazing property now owned by Bush Heritage. It is just north of Bredbo, and is tucked into a curve of the Murrumbidgee River. It has magnificent native biodiversity near the river, but the flats near the road are heavily infested with African lovegrass. Bush Heritage is working hard at managing this problem, and FOG assists by providing a yearly monitoring team. No experience necessary, and lunch is provided. To register, contact linda.spinaze@fog.org.au.

Scrivener's Hut and West Block woodland work party

Sunday October 21,
9.00am – 4.00pm

Lunch will be provided. Please register with jamie.pittock@fog.org.au Bring drinking water, sun protection and sturdy footwear.

Stirling Park work party and Stirling Park public nature walk

Saturday October 27,
9.30am – 12.30pm (work party)
1.30 – 3.30pm (nature walk)

The morning weeding event at Stirling will be followed by a barbeque lunch, provided for anyone participating in either (or both) of these activities. Bring drinking water, sun protection and sturdy footwear. In the afternoon Jamie will lead a walk exploring the park. Location for the bbq and start of walk will be returned to everyone who registers with jamie.pittock@fog.org.au (please advise of all special food requirements).

Visit to McAuliffe's, Nerriga

Saturday-Sunday October 27 & 28

FOG members Joe & Lois have recently acquired a slice of sandstone heaven at Nerriga. Their 200 acres of natural bushland in the Budawangs is virtually surrounded by Morton NP. There will be lots to see - lots of typical sandstone flora and a variety of forest types. Come for one or both days. Allow 2 hours from Canberra to Nerriga. Contact marga-ret.ning@fog.org.au for details and to register.

Old Cooma Common Grassland Reserve working bee

Saturday November 3,
9.30am – 3.00pm

Attending a working bee at Old Cooma Common Grassland Reserve provides an opportunity to visit a good example of one of the most interesting and diverse basalt grasslands on the Southern Tablelands. You will see expansive views of the Monaro landscape, develop skills, and catch up with other FOG members.

OCCGR is located off the southern end of Polo Flat Road, Cooma, and has been established by FOG and Cooma Monaro Shire Council. It is fascinating to visit any time. It contains two threatened and one rare plant species. There are some tasks not using chemicals.

Enquiries: Margaret Ning 6241-4065 or margaret.ning@fog.org.au

Upcoming FOG Events cont.

Visit to Rowes Lagoon

Sunday November 11,
9.00am -12.30pm or later

Rowes Lagoon is an ephemeral lake on the Federal Highway, just north of Collector. It was empty for some years during the drought, but is now full of water, with hundreds of waterbirds. Latham's Snipe is a regular visitor. There is a population of endangered Dwarf Kerrawang (*Rulingia prostrata*) on the fringe of the lakebed. It has been identified as a highly significant wetland.

Adjacent to the lagoon is an area that contains very diverse snow gum woodland and yellow box woodland and possibly natural grassland. Orchids are common and there is a high diversity of other native forbs and grasses, and populations of threatened woodland birds.

It is all crown land, but is being managed for conservation outcomes by Robert Hunt, the neighbouring landholder, who has kindly offered to let FOG come out to take a look at this special site.

We will meet at the public rest area adjacent to Rowes Lagoon (the John Edmonson VC Rest Area) at 9 am and wander around the lagoon and woodlands for several hours. Robert will be joining us and can tell us how he plans to manage the site. We will take our lunch in with us, and find a spot under some trees for a break.

After lunch, we will be undertaking initial baseline monitoring at some sites with Robert. Any of you who wish to take part in this are extremely welcome, to learn how it is done. Otherwise, you may want to wander around some more, or leave any time that suits you.

It takes approximately 45 minutes to get to the rest area from north Canberra. Contact Sarah Sharp on 0402 576 412 or sarah.sharp@fog.org.au

FOG newsletter editor Heather Sweet needs to stand down from publishing duties after the Sep-Oct newsletter has been completed. FOG therefore calls for immediate interest from all members who have some publishing experience. The current editions are assembled using Publisher, but experience with other platforms is probably satisfactory. Current editor is able to assist the new person or persons. The 6 newsletters each year are mailed out in the fourth week of Feb, Apr, Jun, Aug, Oct and Dec. More details can be obtained from Heather.Sweet@fog.org.au.

Request for FOG help with ANBG Seed Collection (2012-3 season)

ANBG seed bank has a Southern Highlands grasslands collection project coming up over the next year. The aim of the project is the enhancement and maintenance of biodiversity by improving the selection of species for local and regional restoration projects. ANBG will initially make 15 quality collections of key species over the 2012/13 collection season, bank the collections for conservation and research and from this develop germination protocols.

We would be interested to know if anyone in FOG would be able to act as seed/species reconnaissance volunteers for us over the coming season? This is just a call for an expression of interest from members of the group to gauge the level of interest and then we'll work together on how to develop it from this.

If you would like to help, contact Tom North, Seed Bank Manager, ANBG on 6250 9462 or

Thomas.North@environment.gov.au

INTERESTED IN PROPAGATION OF SOME UNCOMMON NATIVE PLANTS FROM THE ACT?

During the afternoon tea break at Mugga Mugga on Jul 21st, Ingrid Adler wondered if FOG members could be interested in propagating some of the rare and uncommon plants, including some of those from the presentations, hopefully leading to their more common cultivation in gardens of local homes. Ingrid is very experienced in growing small plants and grasses from this region and is willing to share her knowledge with others. Everyone interested is invited to contact her directly via phone (02) 6231 4919.

News Roundup

Even a few hands make light work

Margaret Ning

THURS JULY 19 Seven enthusiastic people from Canberra, Bungendore and Majors Creek converged on Majors Creek cemetery. This site is a very important one, containing a number of threatened and rare species. Sandra Hand, one of the locals, has had plans for the site for a while, including doing a strategic burn to stimulate one of the site's orchids into flowering. Four quadrats had been earmarked to be burnt in autumn, but due to the wet season, this did not happen. So, swinging into Plan B, Sandra and her partner, Richard, suggested that the areas could be slashed instead. So, the team converged, with strimmer and rakes in hand, to do this. It was decided to do the strimming (using a weed-whacker) at two of the 'burning' quadrats, one of which was also due to be mown next month as part of the management plan.

The day's works started by clearing the areas of sticks, and then strimming the considerable build-up of native biomass. The slashed biomass was dragged away from the site on tarps and in bags, and relocated by Sandy to rehabilitate previously mined areas at Long Flat Common, a couple of kilometres away. Isobel also took some of the slash home for her chooks!

We also raked some long-dead slash from a late summer - early autumn mowing that had been done by the local council according to the site's management plan. However, well intentioned or not, the mowing had created five discrete patches of thatch, plus a line of dense thatch accumulated around the mown perimeter. This thatch was by now quite decomposed and was killing the native grasses and forbs underneath it.

We removed most of this, revealing bare patches. These will be monitored to assess their recovery.

A dozen or so germinating sprigs of blackberry also were cut and daubed, and a few gratuitous daubs were also taken at offending Cat's-ear (*Hypochaeris radicata*). We also removed a single plant of native daphne (*Pittosporum undulatum*), which, while native to some vegetation types on the south coast, can be invasive in other vegetation types.

The cemetery was looking quite splendid after some very good seasons, and high hopes are held for some exciting sights in spring. The licence to burn, issued in May 2012, is valid for 12 months, and Rainer Rehwinkel of OEH has every intention of doing a successful burn next autumn.

Other highlights included Sandy's delicious poppy-seed cake, cuppas prepared on Richard's NZ army issue burner, and bread from Braidwood's Dojo bakery. Our very productive little group was on its way home by 2pm, with plenty of time to make a visit to the Braidwood Vinnie's.

FOG Midwinter presentation afternoon

John Fitz Gerald

SAT JULY 21 The theme for this year's Midwinter activity was *Rare and Threatened Plants of the ACT and Region*. 24 members plus 2 guests came together at Mugga Mugga on a wonderful sunny winter afternoon in a nice snug venue - it was worth missing the sunshine to hear two fine presentations.

Firstly, Betty Wood presented case studies of 11 rare plants of the ACT. Betty carefully documented their conservation status, ecology, numbers over time, plus a summary of the efforts by different organisations (including FOG) to conserve the species. As would be expected, the information was accompanied by terrific plant images, mainly taken by Don Wood. It was especially inter-

esting to hear of differences between different species about how few plants might make up sustainable populations - life is quite complex for the range of plants that survive "on the edge" and we all hope that they continue to do so, not only due to on-ground conservation efforts, but also to community education exercises like this one of Betty's. Special thanks to Betty and Don for altering nature travel plans to fit in with the timing of FOG's afternoon.

Following an afternoon tea break, Amy Macris, from the Fenner School at the ANU, tackled the question, 'Is fire an appropriate management tool for the Button Wrinklewort?' This talk summarised methods and results from independent research projects conducted last year by Amy and fellow student Catherine Ross in conjunction with ecological burns in Stirling Park. Their monitoring results suggest that fire did not significantly reduce numbers of the endangered Button Wrinklewort but did cut back numbers in co-existing populations of weeds. Hopefully longer time monitoring proves this to be a long-term positive effect.

FOG e-Bulletin

The FOG e-Bulletin contains the latest information on FOG happenings and more. It contains no pictures so its size is minimal.

If you haven't been receiving it, and you want to, please provide membership@fog.org.au with your e-mail address. Also, please let us know of address changes.

Stirling Park - yet another portion of it

Margaret Ning and Jamie Pittock

SAT JULY 28 On a brisk morning FOG and Yarralumla volunteers assembled at a different location (corner of Clarke and Fitzgerald Streets) for a half day Stirling Park working bee to restore the woodlands at risk from proposed embassy developments. The work party marked the first of the new monthly morning work party format for FOG's conservation activities at the Park. Following a public meeting with Yarralumla residents in February, FOG undertook to schedule these more regular events to aid greater participation by residents. While regular work party coordinator, Jamie Pittock, was skiving off, local resident Peter McGhie stepped in to run proceedings with Margaret Ning, Geoff Robertson and Linda Spinaze providing FOG expertise to aid the throng of local volunteers and ANU students.

Because a large number of Yarralumla letter boxes had been 'dropped', almost 40 volunteers participated, forming many teams of cutters and daubers, including one armed with FOG's new chain saw. Our plan was to remove as many woody weeds as possible, including tallish pines, rose briar, hawthorn, cotoneaster, firethorn, etc. Although this area of the Park has been regarded as more degraded we found that the much of the grasslands and other understory is surprisingly intact and that the woodlands have some magnificent mature eucalypts, including Yellow Box. In just three hours our volunteers cleared 120 m3 of woody weeds from the surrounding woodland and controlled Chilean needle grass in about a quarter of the grassland. It is such a pity that we didn't take before and after pics, as we made a noticeable impact on the vista we were initially faced with, and while there was sufficient evidence of what we had

News Roundup

removed in the long rows of cut material, it would have been nice to have some documentary evidence as well.

The proposal to carve up a portion of this land for ten embassy sites highlights the urgent need for amendments to the National Capital Plan to reserve national lands at Stirling Park and Yarramundi Reach for nature conservation. While the area targeted for development has less indigenous vegetation it will place roads and embassies up against high quality habitat and contribute to its degradation through weed introductions, greater access by people and fire protection requirements. FOG is actively lobbying the Federal Government to conserve these lands.

This was just the first of a series of monthly work parties involving FOG and local residents. So thanks to all our volunteers, and please join us at future events.

K2C Partners' Forum at Scottsdale

John Fitz Gerald

TUES AUGUST 7 The second K2C Partners' Forum for 2012 was held in the shearing shed at Bush Heritage's Scottsdale property. On a beautiful sunny winter's day, formalities inside were efficiently dealt with by chairman Tom Baker. Partners shared information and updates and were all very enthusiastic to meet Kathryn Wells, newly appointed project manager for K2C's Myer Foundation grassland activity. Of course we were also treated to a walk through of Sue Connolly's fantastic propagation area alongside the shed. The team were then joined by Rod Mason, well known to many FOG members from our Traditional Land Values sessions of 2010 and 11, and Phil Paterson from the NSW Rural Fire Service for discussion of K2C's championing of traditional management practices. Following this, the group moved out into a Scottsdale paddock where a small area was set for its second cool burn treatment

with the specific intention of particularly targeting African lovegrass tussocks in that spot. To top off the grass treatment, mixed plantings went into the ground and all departed well smoked but happy with the terrific blend of talk and action for the day.

Photos: (top) Phil Paterson and Rod Mason amongst the last smolderings of the cool burn with the first of the new plantings already in the ground, well protected by tree guards.

(bottom) Nearing the end of the afternoon's work, now with many plantings in the ground, it's time for that billy of tea. From the left, Kathryn Wells, K2C Myer Grassland Project manager, Peter Saunders, Bush Heritage's Scottsdale Manager, and Lauren Van Dyke, K2C Coordinator. Nothing was left to chance in the planning of the activity, right down to the tray of delicious cakes and biscuits being handed around by Kathryn. (John Fitz Gerald)



News Roundup

ACT election issues

Naarilla Hirsch

An ACT Legislative Assembly election has been set for 20th October, so FOG has written to local parties about its six top priorities for grassy ecosystem conservation in the ACT. FOG considers these essential components of an environmental policy for the upcoming election and for the incoming Government. The priorities are:

Future urban development in the ACT should be subject to a strategic environmental assessment in line with conditions in the federal EPBC Act.

This approach to grassland and box-gum grassy woodland conservation should be similar to that undertaken for Molonglo. It should identify a connected set of sites conserved in perpetuity that includes viable habitats of threatened species and ecosystems. Areas that need such a strategic approach include Gungahlin, and the Majura and Jerrabomberra valleys.

Adopt a policy on offsets that rules out development of high conservation value habitats and applies offsets as a last resort.

This policy should take the market value of habitat to be developed and puts these funds into a trust dedicated to the expansion of the reserve system, and also ensure independent oversight of this process.

Increase resources to manage reserves and other open space containing Natural Temperate Grassland and Box-Gum Grassy Woodland adequately, in particular to improve those reported by the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment (CSE) as in critical condition or approaching critical condition.

Resources should be sufficient to measurably reduce all threatening processes, including weed invasion and grazing pressures, that are identified in operational plans. Re-

sources should also be provided at predictable and even rates for actions including weed and feral pest control to ensure works begun can be completed.

Increase resources (both immediately and in the long term) for the ACT Government's Weed and Pest Animal Strategies.

This is best directed to the control of weeds of extreme and very high environmental weed danger rating, including preventing them from becoming established in new locations. Of particular concern are the highly invasive weeds, African lovegrass and Chilean needlegrass.

Improve management of reserves and off-reserve conservation areas by implementing relevant recommendations of the CSE in her 2011 Canberra Nature Park report, and by reviewing Land Management Agreements with rural lessees.

In particular, reviewing the Canberra Nature Park Management Plan 1999, and implementing a nature reserve restoration program which would be additional to routine management actions.

Consider alternative ways to adequately resource and manage conservation areas.

One suggestion made was to investigate the potential for implementation of a natural environment levy, as identified by the CSE in her 2011 Canberra Nature Park report. Another was to undertake a feasibility assessment of Bush Management Teams to undertake professional conservation management.

In the letters, reference was made to recommendations in two of the CSE's reports: *Report on ACT Lowland Native Grassland Investigation (2009)* and *Report on Canberra Nature park (nature reserves); Molonglo River Corridor (nature reserves) and Googong Foreshores Investigation (2011)*. Details of the bush management team proposal were also provided.

ANBG receives grant to produce seed for the restoration of threatened grassland communities

The Australian National Botanic Gardens has received a Caring for Country grant of \$363 000 to produce seed for the restoration of threatened grassland communities.

The project will produce large volumes of seed to help restore two ecologically and financially unsustainable natural temperate grassland sites in the Canberra region. Seed production areas will be established at the Australian National Botanic Gardens and Greening Australia, and monitored by the CSIRO who will provide genetic testing to maximise seed quality for self-sustaining and evolutionarily adaptive grasslands.

ACT Environment Grants announced by Simon Corbell MLA

The ACT Environment Grants are awarded annually to assist organisations in their environmental initiatives and activities. Southern Tablelands Ecosystem Park (STEP) has received \$9,900 to implement the STEP Master Plan Stage 2 – to provide simple education and training in techniques for maintaining and enhancing local Indigenous plant communities, including box-gum woodland associated with the National Arboretum. The project will include the construction of an outdoor education space.

FOG website

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

FOG advocacy

Naarilla Hirsch

June 2012

The ACT Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate asked for comment on the proposed group centre for Molonglo Valley. FOG was pleased to see new refinements in the area put aside partly for conservation of pink tailed worm lizard (PTWL), *Aprasia parapulchella*, and in the alignments of river crossings. However, it expressed concern about an apparent lack of coordination between planning for the Molonglo Valley group centre and the adjoining Molonglo River Park (which contains the highest value PTWL habitat). In particular, high priority needs to be assigned to ensuring that both planned formal paths and informal non-vehicular movements from the group centre through any recreation facilities in the River Park have minimal impact on the sustainability and connectivity in the PTWL habitat.

There was a referral under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act for a proposed solar farm at Royalla. FOG was pleased to see that the proposed solar farm has been sited at the south of this block and away from the better quality box-gum woodland and PTWL habitat areas. FOG made a couple of recommendations, one being that revegetation over the proposed underground cable linking the solar farm to the nearest electricity substation be compatible with the natural values of the area.



July 2012

There was a referral under the EPBC Act for an upgrade to the transmission line from Theodore to Gilmore. FOG was pleased to see, in this referral, that there would be no impact on endangered box-gum woodland outside the transmission line easement, and that mitigation in the sensitive areas included implementation of a PTWL Management Plan and relocation of any directly threatened PTWLs. FOG did ask for a report to be provided of what occurred and what the results were when the upgrade is complete. Such a report would assist with assessing other similar actions and give FOG data about the levels of success with direct actions such as PTWL capture and local release.

FOG supported the environmental components of the Variations 2012-23 and 2012-24 to the Territory Plan proposed by the ACT Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate. These affect developments in Molonglo and include the realignment of the north-south arterial road and associated bridge crossing of the Molonglo River to protect medium to high quality PTWL habitat in the river corridor.

FOG was less pleased about a second referral under the EPBC Act for a proposed solar farm in Belconnen. While FOG appreciated that the underlying objective of this proposal has genuine environmental positives, it rejected the associated impact of clearing up to 60 ha of native vegetation. Major concerns with the referral included the impact on

habitat for endangered birds, lack of analysis of alternative sites in the Belconnen region where a solar farm could be built without destroying native vegetation and habitat for native fauna, lack of an offset strategy, and lack of consideration of environmental connectivity with nearby areas of ACT Nature Reserves and of the whole of landscape impact. FOG advocated that renewable energy installations must avoid conflicting with conservation of native vegetation and fauna.

The full text of FOG submissions appears on our website.

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

The FOG Newsletter only advertises FOG activities. However, non-FOG activities, of interest to FOG members, are included in the FOG e-Bulletin, which appears frequently (usually before a major FOG activity).

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

Newsletter available electronically

You can receive the newsletter electronically. The electronic version is in colour. To arrange, contact membership@fog.org.au.

A tale of two grants

Margaret Ning

After working on the woody and other perennial weeds on Old Cooma Common Grassland Reserve (OCCGR) since 1999, in 2008 FOG received a grant of \$34,260 from the NSW Environmental Trust which was to have enabled it to implement a new strategy for weed control on the Common. This in turn, was intended to facilitate an exit strategy for FOG from primary responsibility for the reserve. The funding was to cover stock water, bollards, signage, and sub-division fencing to create four paddocks to allow strategic conservation intensive grazing of weeds on the site. Unfortunately many delays have occurred in obtaining permission to graze the reserve over the last few years, and fencing is only now about to occur.

In recent years, FOG working bees have continued to focus on the Common's woody weeds, but we have also had to rethink some priorities, as other weeds have made significant inroads, to the extent that we were going backwards with some. In particular, St John's Wort was getting up a huge head of steam, so FOG began a brave new effort to control it by boom spraying the worst patches and continuing to spot spray the more isolated plants. Because boom spraying consumes considerable amounts of chemical and dye, FOG applied for a Community Action Grant (CAG) in 2010 to help pay for the new SJW strategy at the Common. The \$5,190 FOG received from the CAG has enabled us to focus on the wort during our one-day and, more intensive, three-day working bees over the last couple of years. Cooma Monaro Shire Council has also assisted FOG's effort's on the Common by controlling some Potentilla and all SJW on the vacant Crown Land at the eastern boundary (see the dead black bits in the picture below), and also by contributing herbicide, chemical gloves and a lot of valuable advice.



The photos reveal some aspects of the Common's recent history.

The photos show the fence-line effect of our efforts on the western and eastern boundaries of the

Common, illustrating the success of our efforts over the last few years. Another photo (above) uncovers tracks left by a joy-riding 4WD after recent heavy rains, damage which was very close to the best patch of Monaro golden daisy on the Common.

Another weed that needs to be targeted following recent good seasons, is lamb's ear/great mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*). Cooma-Monaro Shire Council has said it is happy for FOG to use Council's weeds' trailer, containing three 20m hose reels and a large spray tank, at its next working bee on 3 November; any volunteers?

It would be really encouraging to have an embarrassment of volunteers at our next OCCGR working bee. The site contains some wonderful patches of native vegetation which will appreciate your efforts. We propose to have a variety of weeding activities, including cutting and daubing, weeding wands and spot spraying, but there will always be jobs for people who would like to use a hoe or non-chemical control measures. So why not come along to enjoy the site in spring and make your own contribution to FOG's considerable long-term efforts at the site. We always enjoy a very pleasant lunch in town, which FOG has been subsidising as a thank you to members for participating.

I look forward to hearing from you; margaret.ning@fog.org.au , 02 6241 4065 or 0427 788 304

FOG SUPPORT FOR SMALL GRASSLANDS

A couple of developments in the last six months has led FOG to take a decision to distribute small amounts as grants or loans to assist worthy grassy ecosystem projects beyond FOG's own activities. Criteria have been developed as to what projects can be supported and what the selection criteria should be; these are being tried out as the precursor to embedding the process into ongoing FOG policy. A small subcommittee will be convened to process the information and make recommendations to FOG committee.

Aspects of any project FOG decides to examine for this purpose will include: is the project associated with grassy ecosystems; does it include advocacy, education, promotion, research and/or on-ground work; does it reflect well on FOG, promote its key messages, and encourage participation by FOG members; is it innovative, effective, sustainable and/or have good publicity potential; has it seriously attempted to attract mainstream funding; and will it be well managed and monitored?

Margaret Ning and Geoff Robertson drew up a proposal in March 2012 based on the above criteria requesting funding for herbicide to treat mainly St John's Wort but also Blackberry and some other serious weeds at Brandy Marys (see wetland trip report from News of FOG, Mar-Apr 2012, page 6), and this application was approved by the FOG committee at its July meeting. The accepted proposal contained the following key words of action:- *"A grant of \$1,000 towards the cost of herbicide. ... Margaret Ning will assist to ensure that herbicide is obtained at the best possible price and receipts will be submitted to show that expenditure has occurred."* All of the on-ground work over the coming spraying season will be undertaken by FOG members Jim and Mary Kelton who hosted the FOG visit in early Dec 2011. The proposal involves the operation of monitoring points for three years to analyse the success of these FOG-supported weed controls and the provision of a final report to committee which will be summarised in a future FOG newsletter to inform all interested members.

The committee does not anticipate more awards until the next FOG financial year. More information can be obtained from president@fog.org.au

Photo: (right) Jim Kelton says that spraying seems a long way off at the moment as the snap from his place attests.

STIRLING PARK SHOULD BE CONSERVED AS VALUABLE CITY BUSHLAND

Conservation of Stirling "Park" is not simply a Yarralumla residents' issue ("Residents to fight against embassies", July 30, p1). This land in central Canberra is home to the second largest population of an endangered native wildflower, the Button Wrinklewort, a nationally threatened type of bushland, Yellow Box-Blakely's Red Gum grassy woodland, and nationally threatened woodland birds.

Friends of Grasslands is a community group working for the conservation of grassland and woodland flora and fauna in the ACT and regions in south-east NSW. Since 2009 our members, boosted by many volunteers who live near the park area or study at ANU, have devoted 1750 hours in 18 days at Stirling Park to conserve these 52 hectares, including removal of 1330 cubic metres of weeds.

It is a shame that the Federal Government devotes few resources to conserving wildlife on its land. It is tragic that nationally significant habitat on national capital lands is not formally designated for nature conservation and is subject to ad hoc development proposals like the mooted embassies and new prime minister's residence. There are better places for these developments that are supported by the community, including at the Yarralumla Brickworks. In September 2011 our group made a similar submission directly to the NCA's preliminary analysis of three potential diplomatic estates.

It is time that the lakeside grasslands and woodlands at Stirling Park and Yarramundi Reach are fully protected in perpetuity by the federal government under the National Capital Plan and conserved through best-practice land management that is adequately and permanently funded.

Signed: Jamie Pittock and John Fitz Gerald

One of four letters published under the above headline, in Letters to Canberra Times, Thur Aug 2nd



What chance do our most fragile ecosystems stand? Why aren't brumbies included in animals to be eradicated from national parks?

Margaret Ning

I was very disappointed to read the recent Hansard extract below, and find that brumbies are not on the list of feral animals to be removed from NSW's national parks by volunteer shooters. Surely the brumbies do as much damage as any feral animal does??

FOG has published many articles on montane peatlands in earlier newsletters, most recently the May-June 2012 issue. They are an endangered ecological community listed under the *Threatened Species Conservation Act*.

HUNTING IN NATIONAL PARKS

NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard - 14 June 2012

http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parliament/hansart.nsf/V3Key/LA20120614105?Open&refNavID=HA8_1

Mr GREG PIPER: I direct my question to the Minister for the Environment. With the Government providing sporting shooters with access to some national parks, will the Minister ensure that assessments establishing baseline information about feral animals are carried out so that any alleged benefit to native fauna can be measured?

Ms ROBYN PARKER: We know that almost 25,000 feral animals were removed from parks last year and data is available about what animals were taken from where. However, we do not know exactly how many feral animals are in the parks. As members know, licensed shooters are now permitted to hunt in 79 parks in New South Wales.

Mr CLAYTON BARR: What about the brumbies?

Ms ROBYN PARKER: Brumbies are not part of this program—they are not the feral animals listed. Volunteer shooters will assist with the feral animal eradication program. They will be able to access 79 parks that are neither close to metropolitan areas nor world heritage listed. The details of the program are being developed. I point out that access will not be permitted 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. This program involves using volunteer shooters to assist in removing feral animals from parks and it will be done scientifically. The eradication of feral animals will assist our native animals and it will benefit park users.

We involve volunteers in bushfire management, and volunteer shooters will be involved in our feral animal eradication program. The member for Lake Macquarie is interested in the science behind this. We can use the same approach that we use with bushfire management. We study part of the park and determine what needs to be done and we then utilise volunteers to assist in the process. This is an extension of that program. The details are being worked out. I have met with environmental groups and I will be meeting with members of the union tomorrow. We can manage this program. Last week when I visited Victoria to discuss its approach I was provided with examples—

Photo:

All that remains of a Montane Peatland in Bago State Forest (Paling Yards) - domestic cattle and feral horses are the cause. Note the remnants of the peatland fringing the destroyed area in the photo background - the area now destroyed once looked like that. (Jim Kelton)



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

Membership forms are available on our website: www.fog.org.au and you may pay by cheque or electronically.

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

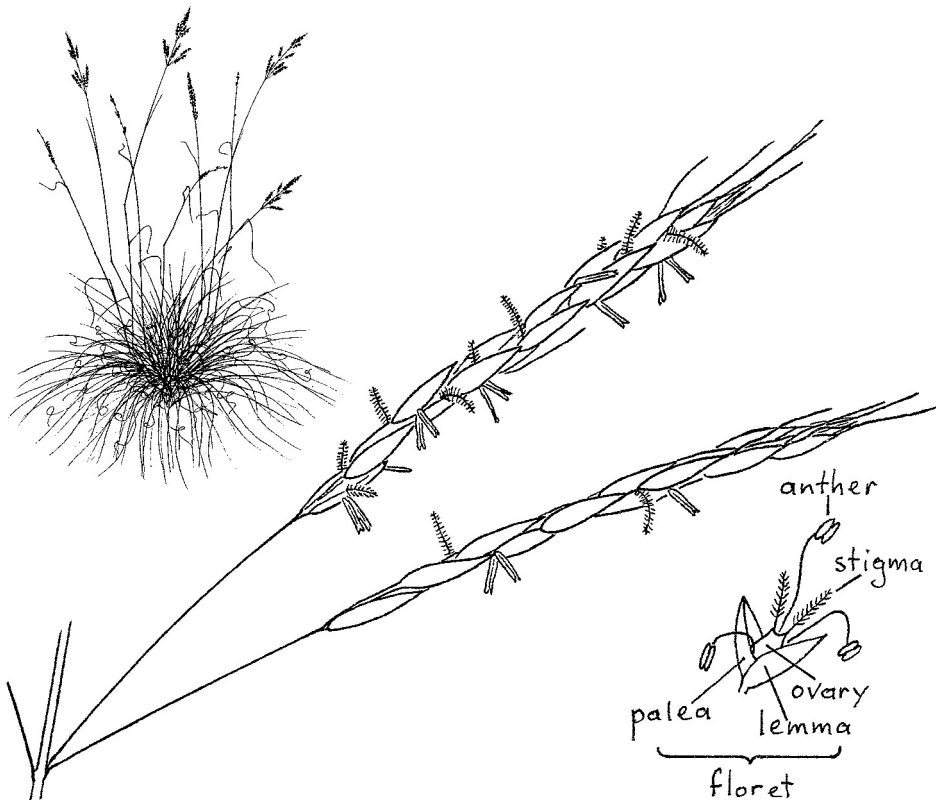
For inquiries contact membership@fog.org.au

Sorghum leiocladum, wild sorghum - a closer look at grass flowers

Michael Bedingfield

It is a common theme with local grassy ecosystems that they are wonderful in their variety of biodiversity, and in the many forms and shapes found in them, as well as in natural beauty, if only we take the time for a closer look. So, on this occasion we will look at wild sorghum in flower. Grasses are not renowned for their flowers, which are very small and generally require a magnifying glass to see properly. But when you have the patience to check them out, you are pleasantly surprised.

Sorghum leiocladum is the botanical name for wild sorghum, or native sorghum. It is a perennial grass, with a medium to large tussock, on which the leaves become curly when they dry out. The seed-heads are a rich reddish-brown, are soft and furry, and grow on stems that reach about a metre in height. The plant is unmistakable when flowering or seeding. The nodes on the stems have a circle of hairs on them, which is called a 'bearded node' or 'ballet skirt', and can be an aid to identification even in winter when the seeds have fallen.



Wild sorghum flowers in the summer months. When a grass plant is flowering, it is called anthesis, and the anthers can usually be seen if you look closely. The anthers are the male parts of the flower and contain the pollen, which is distributed by the wind. On wild sorghum the anthers are clearly visible, and are yellowish in colour, and look like two minuscule sausages joined together. The female part of the flower looks like a minute feather, and is called the stigma. This delicate item captures the wind blown pollen for fertilization and effective seed production. A very reduced drawing of the whole plant is provided. There is also a two times enlargement of branchlets of the flower-head, showing both male and female parts. A stylized drawing is given as

well, showing the general structure of a grass flower, which includes the anther, stigma and ovary, which are protected by two small bracts, called the palea and lemma. The whole of this structure is called a floret.

This grass is mentioned in "Action Plan 27, Woodlands for Wildlife, ACT Lowland Woodland Conservation Strategy", published by Environment ACT. It is regarded as being uncommon, which means it is not as abundant as it should be, and it needs to be monitored to ensure it has a safe future. It is generally found on better quality sites, and is associated with kangaroo grass (*Themeda australis*). Though uncommon, it is widely spread in our region, and also occurs on the other tablelands and the coast, slopes and plains of NSW, as well as in Qld, Vic and NT.

A good photo of wild sorghum at anthesis, showing the striking colours mentioned above, can be viewed at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/nswgrassyeosystems/2979227154/in/photostream/> This is one of a series of photos provided by FOG member Rainer Rehwinkel. When summer comes, it is worthwhile spending a bit of time getting up close to some grass flowers. Their miniature workings are a fascinating subject.

FOG groups and projects

General inquiries

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

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

Inquiries: activities@fog.org.au.

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

Committee & correspondence The Committee organises, coordinates and monitors FOG activities. Members are John Fitz Gerald (Pres.), Sarah Sharp (Vice Pres.) Kris Nash (Sec.), Stephen Horn (Treas), Kim Pullen, Naarilla Hirsch, Tony Lawson, Isobel Crawford Margaret Ning, John Buckley and Evelyn Chia. Andy Russell is public officer.

Inquiries/correspondence: committee@fog.org.au.

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

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

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

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

Financial matters, excluding membership, contact stephen.horn@fog.org.au.

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

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

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

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

Membership and newsletter despatch See Membership box (page 10). Newsletter despatch is fourth Tuesday of Feb, Apr, June, Aug, Oct. To help, contact membership@fog.org.au.

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

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

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

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