



News of Friends of Grasslands

Supporting native grassy ecosystems

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January–February 2015

FOG forward planning

1 January 2015: FOG membership renewals are due.

Meetings at FOG's restoration sites will resume in March, at the dates listed here. Contact people are in brackets.

1 March, Sunday: Stirling Park (Jamie Pittock)

7 March, Saturday: Hall Cemetery (John Fitz Gerald)

18 March, Wednesday: Stirling Park (Peter McGhie)

29 March, Sunday: Stirling Park (Jamie Pittock).

All FOG members are also invited to the AGM.

17 March, Tuesday: FOG's Annual General Meeting.

Details of these meetings will be in the next newsletter, due out late in February, but please note these 2015 dates now.



A newly emerged Red Eye Cicada *Psaltoda moerens*, about 5 cm long. See article on p. 11. Photo by Michael Bedingfield.

Other activities in January–February

Monday 12 January – Sunday 18 January: the Mt Oak Biobushblitz. The Mt Oak Community Association invites fellow members of FOG ... *continued on page 6.*

Monday 12 January – Sunday 18 January: Snakes Alive! Several members of FOG are involved in Snakes Alive! and would love to see you at this annual exhibition. This year's special treat is rare native fish of the ACT region. See page 6.

Saturdays 21 February and 7 March: Erosion control workshops for Parkcarers and Landcarers, rescheduled from spring 2014. See page 6.

Congratulations to Ros Cornish

John Fitz Gerald and Linda Spinaze

The December issue of the Journal from the Australian Native Plant Society in the Canberra Region contained recognition of the huge contribution to that Society by Ros Cornish over 25 years. Ros has been made a life member of ANPS (Canb) for her efforts in many areas including Propagation, Walks, Databases, Plant ID and Journal articles.

2014 has concluded with Ros also recently being recognised by the Australian National Botanic Gardens for long volunteer service, especially to the Growing Friends.

Many FOG members will endorse these awards, especially those who have enjoyed and learned at Ros-led activities at ANPS, such as the fabulous Wednesday Walks and the Friday afternoon Grass Group sessions keying out grass species. Ros has an ability to make everyone feel valued, and she has such tolerance of those of us with poor learning abilities!

Ros has been a member of FOG for many years and we extend our congratulations to her and look forward to her continuing outstanding work with native plants especially grasses.

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October

FOG made a submission to the ACT Government in relation to the 2015–16 ACT budget. While acknowledging the resources the government has already put into weed management, FOG pointed out that in some areas of the ACT (including many of the Natural Temperate Grassland sites) weed control efforts are insufficient to maintain conservation values. If weeds are left unchecked the problem is even worse in following years, and so FOG argued that increasing the weed budget across the ACT to increase the effectiveness of current weed control will pay dividends in the future. A related issue is that of pests such as rabbits.

FOG also requested that the budget considerations include funding the recommendations of two reports from the ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment — on Canberra Nature Park (2011) and lowland grasslands (2009) — since we believe that there are insufficient funds provided to achieve outcomes that government is obliged to achieve.

November

A concept plan for development at the CSIRO site in Campbell was referred to the Commonwealth under the EPBC Act. FOG opposed this proposal, because it did not consider the development to be compatible with the future viability of the endangered species and communities on and adjacent to the site, in particular the significant population of the endangered Hoary Sunray (*Leucochrysum albicans* var. *tricolor*) and the Natural Temperate Grassland patch persisting at the site. There may also be Golden Sun Moth and the vulnerable Perunga Grasshopper on the site, neither of which is addressed adequately by the proposal. FOG's view was that the entire site labelled CC01 in Action Plan 28 needs to be considered as a whole, and that a full ecological assessment of the entire site should be undertaken. FOG did not consider that sufficient consideration has been given to ways to avoid or minimise the adverse environmental impacts of the development, nor does it consider an offset to be an option for this site.

The full text of FOG submissions appears on our website.

News snippets

Grassland and woodland connectivity has been modelled across SE NSW, including ACT. The modelling team comprises FOG member Rainer Rehwinkel (NSW Office of Environment & Heritage; OEH), Kristy Moyle (South East Local Land Services) and Jamie Love (OEH in Armidale). Versions of these maps were shown at the FOG forum in October. Among other purposes, they are designed to set revegetation and restoration priorities for vegetation communities in the region.

Barbara Payne, a member of FOG's Advocacy subgroup, engaged in grassland advocacy of a different sort in the Braddon area recently (google 'ArchitectureAU a stitch in time'). She planted wallaby grasses and forbs (temporarily) in broken paving along Lonsdale/Genge St, joining other landscape architects in 'Mending the Urban Fabric'. This design project was part of the inaugural DESIGN Canberra festival in late November. (Photos p. 8.)

At the FOG forum, you may have heard Adrian Marshall, a Melbourne landscape architect and advocate for grasslands. He spoke about a book he has produced, called 'Start with the Grasslands'. That book has just won him the President's award in the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects Victorian awards 2014.

The federal government is inviting views on whether Superb Parrot *Polytelis swainsonii* should remain on the EPBC Act threatened species list, and 'the necessary conservation actions' for it. This species forages in grassy box woodlands and eats mainly grass seed and herbaceous species. For more information: <<http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/nominations/comment/superb-parrot>>. Written submissions are due by 9 January, by email to <species.consultation@environment.gov.au>, or by mail.

Did you know? As a member, you can see the newsletter in 'glorious technicolor' when it first comes out, by asking to be emailed it as a pdf file. You can have it as well as, or instead of, the grey printed version. To join the 'emailed newsletter' list, please email: Margaret.Ning@fog.org.au or Ann.Milligan@fog.org.au. Go on, spoil yourself...!

Membership matters!

Membership renewals are due on 1 January

Membership renewals are due on 1 January. Help propagate the next 20 years of FOG by renewing your membership **now** for the 2015 calendar year. How? See below.

As a member, you get the newsletter promptly as soon as it is published, 2-monthly. (Newsletters only appear on the website 2 months later, once the next issue is out.)

FOG member activities include: mornings restoring grassy areas and sharing morning tea (which FOG provides); excursions to grassland and grassy woodland areas with expert guides; the mid-winter afternoon of talks and 'slides'; and the AGM in March.

As a member you can also join the Advocacy subgroup, and contribute research and/or expertise to FOG submissions on policy and management of grassy ecosystems.

Membership costs:
\$20 per calendar year (for individuals, families, not-for-profit organisations),
\$5 per year (for students, concessions),
\$50 per year (corporate).
Life Membership is available. To inquire, contact <membership@fog.org.au>.

You can pay by EFT, to BSB 633 000, A/c no. 124770835 giving your name as identifier, or post a cheque payable to Friends of Grasslands Inc., to:
PO Box 440, Jamison Centre ACT 2614.

FOG warmly welcomes these members who have joined during recent months:

David Albrecht, of Rivett ACT
Claire & James Dennis, of Birregurra VIC
Lauren Booth, of Wattle Grove NSW
Euroa Aboretum VIC
Karen Groeneveld, of Queanbeyan NSW
Mardie Kearns, of Junee NSW
Charlie Massy, of Cooma NSW
Melita & Richard Milner, of Lyneham ACT
Sue Parr, of Forrest ACT
Harry Rose, of Dungog NSW
Robert Speirs, of Deakin ACT
Marchien van Oostende, of Sutton NSW
Pam Vipond, of Cooma NSW.

News roundup

Hall Cemetery workparty report

John Fitz Gerald

There were four work mornings held by FOG at Hall Cemetery during 2014, the most recent on 8 November. Eleven volunteers arrived to share the work on weed control and it was particularly pleasant to have some new faces amongst them. Most time was spent on physical weed removal especially of milk thistle, but several spray packs provided by Margaret Ning were also put to good use on a range of fleshy weeds, St Johns Wort and grasses such as Phalaris. Grass was also cleared around the thriving *Bursaria* clusters and from the front gate area. The Cleavers infestation amongst the *Carex appressa* in the drainage line at the NE corner of the woodland area is, we hope, now almost controlled. As promised, a short walk was held through the good range of native forbs flowering both inside and outside the cemetery block, such as *Ranunculus* spp., Milkmaids, and even some showy Fringe-lilies. The Blue Devil season is looking to be good and probably early this summer. During morning tea, a visitor to the cemetery came over and made a very generous donation to recognise our efforts — we all walked noticeably taller for the second part of our session!

Sincere thanks are due to everyone who has volunteered throughout the year to contribute to FOG's major effort.



Above: Some of the group at tea on 8 November.

Below: FOG's work at Hall Cemetery aims to protect the Tarengo Leek Orchid *Prasophyllum petilum*, seen here post-flowering in front of the fingers.



The Sedge *Carex appressa* at two stages in the flowering cycle of 2014. Top: In early October the flowers were fully open and functioning with pollen flying freely. Below: By late November, seeds had set, matured and were falling from the inflorescences. These two photos by John Fitz Gerald.



News roundup continued

Scrivener's Hut and Stirling Park

Jamie Pittock

Following the first cut-over of woody weeds in February 2014, the last 2014 workparty at Scrivener's Hut (on State Circle, ACT), on 30 November, involved eleven volunteers in a line-search, dispatching any escapees and removing rubbish. Pleasingly, few woody weeds remained — most were Cootamundra Wattle seedlings. Rain at about 11 am interrupted our spraying plans.

The ACT Government's natural resources management program has granted FOG \$6000 for 2014–15 to control key weeds and do some planting at grassland sites on national lands (thank you ACT Government). FOG's contractor will spray *Vinca*, St John's Wort, African Lovegrass and Chilean Needle Grass at this site, which should put it in excellent shape.

Malcolm Snow, Chief Executive of the National Capital Authority, participated in the workparty. At morning tea (see photo) he thanked all FOG volunteers for our work on national lands in 2014. That includes Yarramundi Reach (see report on page 5) and Stirling Park.

A highlight of the final 2014 workparty at Stirling Park on 19 November was the installation of a 1000 L water tank for watering trees, shrubs and grasses FOG had planted in spring with Greening Australia. Bill Watson volunteered his ute and time to help with the tank installation (see photo at right). The Two Rivers Rural Fire Service very kindly filled the tank for us in the evening, after finishing work in their day jobs. Peter McGhie is coordinating a team of 13 volunteers to water the plantings over summer. Around 15% of our plantings died in the dry spell in late spring. We hope our work to restore degraded areas of this important grassy woodland site will be more successful with a supply of water!

Nicki Taws (of Greening Australia, a major linking person between GA and FOG) writes: 'I paid a visit to one of our Groundcover plantings at Stirling Park in Yarralumla. The site had been heavily infested with Chilean Needle Grass and once this was sprayed there was little remaining groundcover alive. Last year with FOG we planted 200 forbs in a section of the sprayed area.

Fifteen months on, *Leucochrysum* has gone from 40 to nearly 300 plants, with the second generation now flowering and throwing seed. Little haloes of seedlings are starting to appear around both of the *Chrysocephalum* species planted. *Eryngium* has survived and is starting to flower this year. There are still issues with the roos, rabbits, dry summer and emerging weeds, but the site is certainly looking prettier than it did two years ago.'

Middle: The new tank being installed by Mike Peedom and John Fitz Gerald. Photo: Peter McGhie.

Below: The planted site at Stirling Park. Photo: Nicki Taws.



Morning tea at Scrivener's Hut woody grassland. (L–r) Paul Ratcliff, Helen McAuley, Barbara Payne, Malcolm Snow, Geoff Robertson, David Helm, Sarah Sharp, Anna Newton-Walters and Jamie Pittock. Photo: John Fitz Gerald.



News roundup continued

Conspicuous success of replanting at Yarramundi Reach

John Fitz Gerald

On 30 July 2014, a small team of volunteers planted about 700 seedlings of nine different forb species into grassland at Yarramundi Reach (on Lady Denman Drive, ACT). These were clustered into a few areas that had earlier been sprayed for Chilean Needle Grass and St Johns Wort under the environmental grant 'Grassy Ecosystem Restoration on National Lands in Central Canberra' from the ACT Government. Many places at Yarramundi Reach have good stands of grasses but very few forbs, so the addition of other common species was undertaken to improve biodiversity as well as enhancing areas of dead weeds. The work was carried out by volunteers from Greening Australia Capital Region (GA), and all the plants had been propagated in GA's nursery facility in Aranda. Despite some dry and warm times since July, several of the species have gone on to flower and set seed in their very first season. One of the most striking has been *Wahlenbergia stricta* (photos at right) which showed up dramatically early in November with many flowers in several of the planted areas.

As in other members of this genus, each seed of *W. stricta* is a tiny brown speck, but imaging with a good microscope can reveal considerable micro beauty, as the photos show! These images were recorded with the new stereo light microscope at the Seedbank in the Australian National Botanic Gardens (ANBG), and we thank Manager Tom North for allowing access.



Wahlenbergia stricta in flower at Yarramundi Reach grassland in 2014, with seed capsule. Photo: John Fitz Gerald.



Left: Seed capsule of *W. stricta* in the lab, plus a few of its seeds scattered nearby. Right: A group of fresh seeds at high magnification (the scale bar at bottom right shows 200 μm (0.2 mm) in comparison to the seed size). Photos: John Fitz Gerald © ANBG.

FOG 20th anniversary dinner at Mugga Mugga environment centre

The extremely rainy weather did not dampen the very happy FOG party on Saturday 6 December 2014, to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the launch of FOG on 12 November 1994. Several key people who have unlocked FOG's potential came, including early president and vice president Art Langston and Michael Treanor. Sarah Sharp welcomed everyone and thanked the people who have especially helped FOG reach this anniversary. Later, Geoff Robertson took us forward through the 20 years with photos of many 'Fiends of Grasslands', highs, lows and outcomes.



FOG forum, 30 October–1 November

Around 100 people attended each of the two main days of FOG's forum at the end of October, and there were 50 at the forum dinner on the Thursday evening and almost 50 on the field trip on the Saturday.

Celebrating two decades of activity and advocacy for grassy landscapes, the forum discussed: *Grass half full or grass half empty? Valuing native grassy landscapes.*

The speakers were excellent, and the workshops, posters, demonstrations and displays all contributed to a successful event. Participants particularly valued the mixture of themes and approaches. This was not a research conference. Instead it combined some research findings alongside presentations about practical management issues and community viewpoints. Several people said afterwards they had learnt a great deal from attending.

FOG expects to publish a proceedings online during the early part of 2015.

Here are two of the comments received afterwards:

I had a great time. Great conference, well balanced with different content around the grasslands theme. Marchien van Oostende.

Congratulations on the success of the FOG forum, it was interesting and well-run in a good venue. Alison Rowell.

Activities in January–February

Mt Oak Biobushblitz: Monday 12 January – Sunday 18 January

The Mt Oak Community Association invites fellow members of FOG — particularly our interested naturalists, ecologists, botanists, twitchers, herpetologists, entomologists and bryologists — to visit the woodlands and grasslands of Mt Oak and be part of the Mt Oak Biobushblitz, on 12–18 January.

Mt Oak is a 1140 ha covenant property on Ngarigo country near Bredbo, NSW. It has a population of Rosenberg Monitors (lizards) and other reptiles, several macropod species and bats, at least 250 plant species and a great diversity of mosses and other cryptogams. The community hosts regular bird surveys. There are no sheep. There is 3G reception, areas for camping, rainwater to drink and the Murrumbidgee for swimming. An outline is at the Mt Oak website: <www.mtoak.net/index.html>.

Mt Oak is at 395 Billilingra Rd, Bredbo. Turn west off Monaro Hwy, south of Bredbo.

Important. Contact the following people to find out about access, **which is tricky**: Gidja Walker <gidja57@gmail.com> or Philip Jensen <moca.secretary@gmail.com> or phone 0359 886 529 (until early January) or text 0418 416 182.

Snakes Alive! Monday 12 January – Sunday 18 January

Live displays and feeding sessions, 11 am and 2 pm daily.

Lizards, frogs, turtles, crocodiles and ... local threatened fish species (for the first time at Snakes Alive!). These fishes are some of the ACT region's rarest aquatic species.

Snakes Alive! is at the Australian National Botanic Gardens, Crosbie Morrison Building (downhill from the cafe). Hours: 10 am – 4 pm weekdays; 10 am – 6 pm Sat and Sun.

Admission prices: adults \$6, children \$3, concession \$5. For more information: phone 02 6250 9540, or visit the ACT Herpetological Assoc. Inc. website: <www.actha.org.au>.



Erosion control workshops for Parkcarers and Landcarers

Saturday 21 February, Saturday 7 March

These workshops (rescheduled from 2014) are hosted by Southern ACT Catchment Group and led by Cam Wilson (Earth Integral). Both days start at the Southern ACT Catchment Group office at Erindale Business Centre, 2 Lansell Cct, Wanniasa, ACT. Lunches and teas are provided. Attending both workshops is best.

Day 1 (21 February), 9.00–3.00: understanding erosion, targeting control sites and low cost solutions. Site visit to Mt Mugga Mugga Nature Reserve for lunch and hands-on erosion control activity. **Day 2** (7 March), 9.00–1.30: on-site application of principles and guided erosion control activities at Farrer Ridge Nature Reserve, followed by lunch.

To attend, contact Martine Franco <info@sactcg.org.au>, ph. 6296 6400, by 11 February.

Farewell Tony Howard

FOG notes with sadness the death of Tony Howard in late October this year. Tony was the long-time partner of Isobel Crawford who has herself been a contributing member of FOG for many years, as vice president and editor of the newsletter and in plant identification workshops. Some FOG members will remember Tony as a gracious host of meetings for newsletter mail-outs, and he also provided Isobel with technical support for producing the newsletter.

Tony's main interest was birds, and one of his major achievements was preparing the Voice section for many species in the monumental Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds. He was also a patient and careful observer and excellent photographer, and spent many hours in recent years walking on Mounts Ainslie and Majura, at Mulligans Flat Nature Reserve and around the urban wetlands. Many friends were delighted to receive beautiful cards incorporating his photographs of local birds, insects and native flowers, and to hear of the latest unusual bird to visit the Dickson wetland near their home.

Tony took an interest in the management of the local nature reserves, and volunteered his time to map rabbit warrens in Canberra Nature Park for the ACT Government. This year he wrote and provided the photographs for a delightful leaflet describing the common birds of Canberra wetlands, and although Tony had great technical knowledge of waterbirds, the text was thoughtfully written to interest and inform a variety of ages and types of wetland visitors.

Tony was a quiet and gentle friend who will be missed by many, and we extend our sympathies to Isobel.

Alison Rowell

18th NSW Weeds Conference

The 18th NSW Weeds Conference will be in Cooma, during 12–15 October. Its title is 'Weeds — The Future, Innovation & Adaptation'. Registration is open and the outline program is up. The conference organisers are Cooma–Monaro Shire Council and FOG's Margaret Ning is on the committee.

Website: <www.weedscooma.com.au/>

Inquiries:

<weedsconference@visitcooma.com.au>

Laurence (Laurie) George Adams (1929–2014)

Paul Cheeseman

Laurie Adams passed away on 7 November 2014 after a long illness. Laurie was a longstanding member of Friends of Grasslands.

I met Laurie in 2000. We met through a mutual friend whose backyard provided Laurie with some interesting botanical specimens. With Laurie as lecturer, Teena's backyard was also a classroom for the best way to plant tomato seedlings and the qualities of different varieties of tomatoes. I think the CSIRO Plant Industry Tomato Club provided the seedlings. Laurie was steward of a particular variety he named Canbec.

Good food featured prominently in Laurie's life particularly if it could be gleaned, grown or manufactured. It was in Teena's kitchen that I first tasted Mr Adams' fried *Lactaria* mushrooms gathered from the pine plantations around Canberra. Laurie loved baking, pickling and jam-making. He manufactured specialised blackberry picking equipment from recycled objects. As well, Laurie grew food in his garden, including a kind of peppery cress that he had found growing wild at the Cotter, and a vividly coloured variety of Fat Hen.

Two of Laurie's anecdotes further illustrated his appreciation of good food. While serving in the RAF after WWII, Laurie would tell how, if you arrived at just the right time when returning from leave to base on an early morning train, the cook would serve you a huge fry-up. He still smiled at this recollection. He also told of working in the Northern Territory on a botanical survey: their vehicle accidentally hit a kangaroo and, not wanting to waste an opportunity, they decided to cook the animal. Back at camp, however, one of the team objected vehemently so the meal did not go ahead and Laurie still regretted this lost culinary opportunity.

Laurie was first and foremost a botanist. Plants were his passion from boyhood to his CSIRO career to his active retirement as an Honorary Research Fellow. Until meeting Laurie I had no appreciation that life as a botanist was so exciting, embroiling and dramatic, nor of the life and death battles that took place in learned institutions across the world. With his encouragement I did an internship at the Centre for Plant Biodiversity Research. His professional biography is here: <http://www.anbg.gov.au/biography/adams-laurie.html>.

Among many scientific publications, Laurie wrote and revised *Trees and shrubs of Black Mountain, Mt Ainslie and Mt Majura: A key based on vegetative characteristics*. He also co-authored several editions of the *Field guide to the native trees of the ACT*.

He was always ready to go 'botanising' or attend a seminar or workshop (especially if there was a free lunch). He saw absolutely no sense in exercise for exercise's sake: bushwalking to climb a mountain was ludicrous to Laurie but bushwalking to botanise, and climbing a mountain in the process, was fine at any time. He was an active member of FOG and the National Parks Association. He assisted many, including myself, in floristic surveys, both formal and informal, throughout our region. He was generous with his knowledge and time and happiest when passing his knowledge on to others.

Laurie assisted with the annual Black Mountain Wildflower Ramble, I think leading or co-leading in some years. For weeks beforehand he would discuss whether it would be a good or a poor flowering season for the Ramble.

Laurie had many other skills and interests including his engineering background, book binding, book collecting, geology and fossicking, a student of the track and Latin and Greek. He developed a Latin and Greek botanical glossary using an MS Access database. For a very long time he sought a commercial distributor for this work until deciding to provide it *gratis* to CSIRO Publishing. See *Laurie's Latin, an English/Latin/Greek Glossary*. Laurie showed his skill when I asked him about the meaning of *parinsignifera* as



Above and below: Laurie Adams in the field.
Photos: Paul Cheeseman.

in *Crinia parinsignifera*. The meaning had been indicated as unclear in a field guide to frogs which I was using. Laurie replied unequivocally that *parinsignifera* meant equally marked.

Laurie was a great friend, a great botanist and a great teacher. He is missed.

I will leave you with a rhyme he told me, from his RAF service, from which you will be able to guess Laurie's role.

'Do not panic, Flight Mechanic,
Fitter Two will see you through.'

A farewell for Laurie will be held on Sunday 12 April 2015. It will be a walk from Mt Ginini to Mt Gingera. Details will be provided closer to the time.



Articles

New Asteraceae garden at the Australian National Botanic Gardens

Naarilla Hirsch

On 24 November the Australian National Botanic Gardens (ANBG) opened its new Asteraceae (daisy) garden.

Early plantings in the ANBG were based on taxonomic themes and were designed by botanists for botanists. Later developments were primarily focused on ecological, geographical and horticultural themes — examples include the Rainforest Gully, the Grassy Woodland Garden and the Red Centre Garden.

The Asteraceae garden is a return to the original taxonomic theme, but one planned with the ordinary visitor very much in mind.

The concept behind the new garden was for visitors to be able to wander through an undulating landscape, through mass displays and shrubs. The garden is meant to showcase the incredible diversity of the daisy family (only rivalled by orchids), and the large variety of forms and range of growth habits of daisies throughout Australia.

Design of the garden has made use of the slope and shading of nearby trees, together with water retention techniques, to create a mosaic of wet and dry, sunny and shaded areas. Then plant species were selected to fit climatic zones, matching plants to preferred conditions. For example, the endangered *Leucochrysum graminifolium* (Pagoda Rock Daisy) from the Blue Mountains is on a mound between rocks to match its growing requirements and natural habitat. In the centre of the garden is a five-petal bed which demonstrates the different types of daisy flower-heads.

The garden displays a selection of plants representing the Australian daisies, with of course a number of examples from grassy ecosystems. These are a mix of widespread species such as *Xerochrysum viscosum*, *Rhodanthe anthemoides*, *Microseris lanceolata* and *Calocephalus citreus*, through to rare or endangered species such as *Calotis glandulosa*, *Olearia rhizomatica* and *Rutidosia leptorrhynchoidea*.

With several of the daisies now in flower, the Asteraceae garden is a delight to visit.



The new garden puts on a beautiful display (above) and includes local species such as (below left) Yam Daisy *Microseris lanceolata* and (right) Hoary Sunray *Leucochrysum albicans*. Photos: Naarilla Hirsch.



Barbara Payne's plantings (see p. 2). Left: Outside Tongue & Groove — Wallaby Grass, Scaly Buttons and Lemon Beautyheads. Right: Outside Zambrero — In a crack in the pavement, a lonely Lemon Beautyhead. Part of 'Mending the Urban Fabric' in the inaugural DESIGN Canberra festival.

More articles

Grasses have a fragile majesty

Sharon Field

Grasses are largely ignored. Although grasses make up one of the planet's largest families of flowering plants, their agricultural, economic and ecological importance are recognised by few. Yet grasslands comprise 20% of the world's vegetation. Our ailing environment demands we recognise and value their fragile majesty which is often overlooked and trampled underfoot.

I am amazed that the few paintings or drawings of grasses I have done over the past few years have been a source of fascination and absolute wonder for people viewing my artwork.

Grasses are very challenging from the perspective of an artist, but so beautiful. As I begin to investigate these plants in more detail (their form, their colours) I appreciate even more their beauty, while at the same time deploring how little people know about them and their importance to us as people and as a planet.

I first became aware of grasses through *Themeda australis* which is an important structural component of many types of grassland and is quite common around the ACT. This grass grows well on my property at Burra.

Themeda australis is very colourful. It begins life in soft green, pink, lemon and purple, with a deep maroon flower. During the warmer months the leaves develop maroon colourings, which only add to the visual beauty of this grass. Summer also is time for the growth of wiry flower heads, so heavy with seed that they often bend low, sprawling over the curling mat of leaves. The visual effect is of a colourful spidery tangle. Then there is the rusty red over winter. What beauty is there!

In my journey as an artist, and as I learn more about grasses, I have become more interested in giving a 'voice' to Australian grasses, which are often missed because people just don't 'see' grass (there is so much of it), and because grasses are 'too difficult' to paint and draw (they don't have dramatic wall appeal).

If, by viewing my work, people are then inspired to stop and look more closely at grasses, then that is one step closer to those people becoming better 'educated'



Grasses have a fragile majesty I (*Themeda australis*). © Sharon Field.
Graphite on paper, 68 cm x 43 cm.

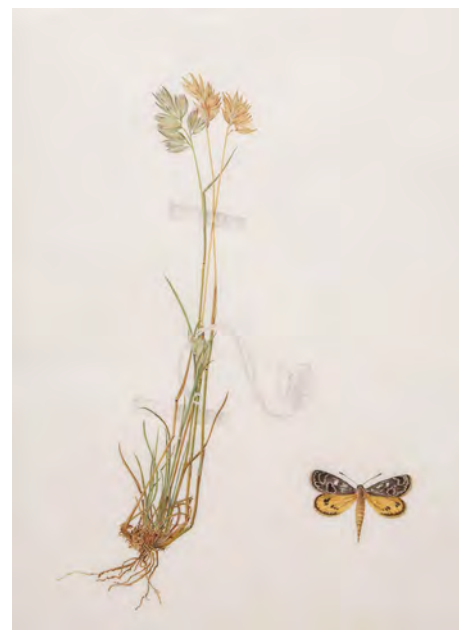


Grasses have a fragile majesty II (Red Wallaby Grass). © Sharon Field.
Graphite on paper, 47 cm x 37 cm.

Sharon Field (www.sharonfield.com.au) is a member of Wildlife and Botanical Artists Inc., a group that provided displays of painting, etching and artwork during the FOG forum in October.

about grasses and their value. Perhaps next time they see this plant in nature, their reaction will be different, more appreciative. That can only be for the good.

The Australian environment is unique, as are our flora and fauna. People in our country are becoming increasingly urbanised and mechanised, and as a consequence fewer people have any connection to the natural world. Interestingly, a drawing or a painting can help spark an awareness in both adults and children in the wonder and beauty of, and the tragedies facing, our natural environment — much more so than any photograph. There is poignancy in the plight of the *Rytidosperma* and *Synemon plana* which strikes a chord with people.



For posterity's record (Short Wallaby Grass and Golden Sun Moth). © Sharon Field.
Watercolour on vellum, 30 cm x 19 cm.

Every day of their lives, people see plants, animals and insects, but very few people stop to look at and appreciate the beauties that nature lays so generously before them in such exquisite detail, diversity and abundance. 'Art is not what you see, but what you make others see': these words, attributed to Edgar Degas, resonate with me. Art is transforming what is taken for granted. This is what I hope my artwork does too.

All photos: Rob Little Digital Images.

Cultivation corner

Finding the right microclimate?

Janet Russell

The garden looked wonderful early this spring 2014. The amount of natural increase in plants in the garden together with rain at the right time produced the best massed show of flowers and green cover we have had. Paper daisies *Xerochrysum* and *Leucochrysum* species, as well as the everlastings *Chrysocephalum* and the *Bulbine* species, are the stand-out performers. Although the *Rhodanthe anthemoides* finished flowering months ago, the persistent white bracts make plants appear like bouquets of brilliant fresh white flowers. Our neighbours, in spite of their propensity to plant exotic specimens, enjoy the show. These plants are either the hardy survivors or the prolific seeders.

The Rock Lilies *Bulbine glauca* (photo below) have multiplied and we have more than twelve that have self-sown. The Native Leek *Bulbine semibarbata* appeared in more numbers this year after some being planted out in 2010 and not being seen much since.

Many Vanilla Lilies *Arthropodium* sp. generally have not developed much beyond the leaf stage in the last few years. This is except one established specimen of Pale Vanilla Lily *A. milleflorum* now a metre high, and five new less mature ones. There are three flowering Small Vanilla Lily *A. minus*. Two of these are in the shade of the house until late morning. I was expecting most at the leaf stage to be the small Lily but but their leaves are now too robust and glaucous to be that species. Both Lilies prefer a sheltered position. There is a cluster of pale Lilies sitting in the shade of a Common Fringe Myrtle *Calytrix tetragona*, a shrub about a metre high. They are either responding to the very slight cover it provides or there is an overflow from our watering system that has provided a damp spot, for so many to germinate.

The westerly aspect tests the grassland plants to the full. Those like the pale Lily survive with some protection, but there are some plants that have been too tested and we have relocated them or put them in pots protected in our courtyard garden. The Common Buttercup *Ranunculus lappaceus* (right photo below) was

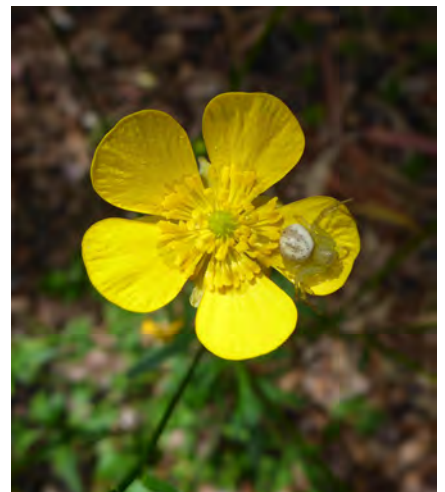


removed from the front to the protection of the shrubby garden, and while there has been no increase it has survived three years and puts on a beautiful show and even has a few fruits this year probably due to a bit of extra watering I gave it. The Grass Trigger-plants *Stylidium graminifolium* died in spite of being tried in different sites at the front, so when we bought four new plants we put them straight into a pot. They are now thriving and I counted seven flower-heads this morning (middle photo below).

Reflecting on garden design in regard to form and function and our experience of growing grassland species, if I were starting again I would do things differently. The more south-westerly aspect of the front garden supports a greater diversity of plants because these plants escape the most punishing of the afternoon sun's rays as the day heats up. Better placement of shrubs or different shrub species may have provided more suitable microclimates in other parts of the garden. Our original belief that grassland species survive in very harsh conditions in nature and will do so in the garden has since been kept alive by serendipitous successes. The reappearance of one Billy Buttons plant *Craspedia variabilis*, six years after them having disappeared, keeps hope springing eternal!



Photos by
Janet Russell



The Red Eye Cicada, *Psaltoda moerens*, a cacophonous sap-sucking insect

Michael Bedingfield

Late one afternoon last November when going out for my daily walk, I decided to take my camera with me, just in case I saw something interesting. As I began my walk, I began to see the occasional cicada shell, clinging empty to a tree trunk. After a while I came across a freshly emerged cicada, holding onto a stump, with its empty shell below it. It was waiting for its wings and body to dry, before it could fly off and begin its new life as an adult. It was a precious moment, seeing the insect in an extremely helpless state, unable to fly yet. Usually they come out after sunset, and have the darkness for safety during this vulnerable time. As I watched and tried to photograph this beautiful creature, I felt something crawling up my leg. It was another cicada, wet and soft, and unlucky to have come out of the soil without a tree to climb. I moved it from my leg to a nearby branch and continued to watch this unexpected sight. The insects were mostly pale aqua-blue in colour (see photo on p. 1), quite different from their normal black.

The following day I returned to the same place, and this time there were hundreds of these creatures clinging to the trees, and singing out of tune. Later still there were thousands of the animals, and some trees were densely crowded with singing insects. I was seeing a 'mass emergence' of the Red Eye Cicada, a phenomenon that occurs irregularly, and is quite a spectacle. In other years there may be few, or none at all. As I stood under the trees watching them, I was showered by a very fine mist of clear, sticky liquid. They are sapsuckers, using a proboscis to feed from roots when underground, and from mostly smooth-barked eucalypts as an adult. Since tree sap is not very nutritious, they drink lots of it, excreting the odourless and harmless waste.

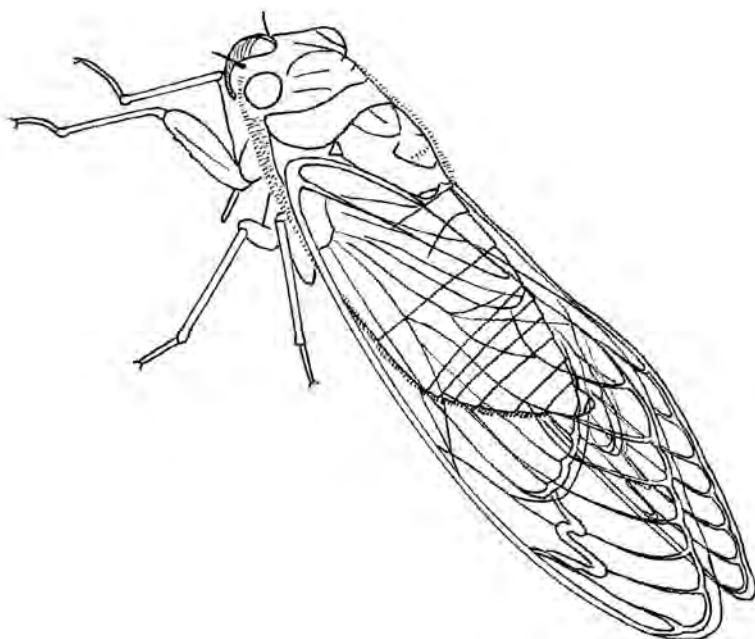
This cicada is mostly black in colour, with a brown or yellow ochre underside. The eyes are usually red, but sometimes they are brown or pink. They have two pairs of glass-like wings. The body length including the wings is 4–6 cm. They spend a number of years living underground as a nymph, and when the time is right dig their way out of the soil and literally come out of their shells. They spend their time in the trees from November to February. The females

lay their eggs in slits they create in the bark of tree branches. When they hatch the tiny nymphs fall to the ground, burrow into the soil and remain there for some years. They grow by repeated moults, and burrow around with powerful front legs. Their distribution extends from southern Queensland, through NSW, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania.

Most insects don't have hearing, but cicadas, crickets and grasshoppers do. A cicada's eardrums are located on each the side of its thorax. They are the loudest sound-producing insects, and the song is usually made by the males, which vibrate a membrane in the abdomen where there is a resonating chamber to amplify the sound. It is a form of communication, the main purposes being to attract females and to call the local population together into a group, so that males and females can meet easily. It also helps repel predators.

I have provided a photograph of the Red Eye Cicada, and a line drawing to show more detail. What struck me most about what I saw was the remarkable transformation that these insects had. After a lifetime of quietly living in silence and darkness under the soil, they could fly well through the air in the bright summer sunshine, and were very social and noisy. It seemed to me a very courageous change, and one filled with energy and purpose.

For reference I used: *Encyclopedia of Insects and Arachnids* by Maurice and Robert Burton (1984), and *Life on Earth* by David Attenborough (1979); and these web sites: <australianmuseum.net.au>, <abc.net.au/science>, <csiro.au>.



Contacts for FOG groups and projects

General inquiries

Contact info@fog.org.au or Sarah Sharp (0402 576 412).

Activities organises FOG field trips, talks, workshops, on-ground work, support to other groups, property visits and FOG's calendar. *Inquiries:* activities@fog.org.au

Advocacy prepares submissions and advocates on 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: Sarah Sharp (President), Kris Nash (Secretary), Leon Pietsch (Treasurer), John Fitz Gerald, Naarilla Hirsch, Stephen Horn, Tony Lawson, Ann Milligan (newsletter), Katherina Ng, Margaret Ning, Kim Pullen, Rainer Rehwinkel, Andrew Zelnik.

Public Officer: Andy Russell.

Inquiries or correspondence: committee2@fog.org.au

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Communication produces FOG e-Bulletin.

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Financial matters, excluding membership,

contact: treasurer@fog.org.au

Grassland flora and other sales. FOG sells and distributes the book *Grassland Flora*, other books, cards and T-shirts. *Inquiries:* booksales@fog.org.au

Grassland monitoring. FOG holds monitoring days at the Bush Heritage property 'Scottsdale' near Bredbo, NSW.

Inquiries: linda.spinaze@fog.org.au

Hall Cemetery. FOG with ACT Public Cemeteries Authority holds regular working bees to enhance the natural values of the area of grassy woodland that surrounds Hall Cemetery. *Inquiries:* john.fitzgerald@fog.org.au

Media spokesperson: Sarah Sharp (0402 576 412).

Membership. New members are welcome. We have two new membership categories: \$20 per year for not-for-profit organisations, and a new 'voluntary life membership' category. Membership forms are at the website.

For inquiries, or to help with newsletter dispatch, contact: membership@fog.org.au

National land. FOG, with the National Capital Authority, holds regular working bees at Yarramundi Reach (grasslands) and Stirling Park (woodlands), ACT.

Inquiries: jamie.pittock@fog.org.au

Newsletter. *News of Friends of Grasslands* is dispatched on the fourth Tuesday of February, April, June, August, October, December. Please send photos and articles about FOG or related grassland activities before the third Tuesday of those months to editor Ann Milligan at: newsletter@fog.org.au

Old Cooma Common. FOG, with Cooma-Monaro Shire Council, holds working bees twice yearly at the Old Cooma Common Grassland Reserve.

Inquiries: margaret.ning@fog.org.au

Southern Tablelands Ecosystems Park (STEP).

STEP is a regional botanic garden and recovery centre at the National Arboretum Canberra. STEP showcases local ecosystems, especially native grasses and forbs.

Inquiries: secretary@step.asn.au, or The Secretary, STEP Inc., PO Box 440, Jamison Centre ACT 2614.

Website, www.fog.org.au The website holds information about FOG and grasslands, back issues of the newsletter, and program details.

Inquiries: webmanager@fog.org.au

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