



September–October 2016

FOG expeditions, workparties and a display, September–November

FOG members can be very active this spring! We have arranged, or accepted invitations, to visit southern and/or central NSW on the first weekends of September, October and November. As well, we shall visit the Conder grassy woodland (ACT) and the 'Scottsdale' property near Bredbo (NSW) on 18 and 22 October, and there is the annual FOG wildflower walk on Sunday 13 November. More detailed outlines are on pages 2 and 3, and for full details and programs you will need to register. For any or all of

these expeditions and visits, either email us at activities@fog.org.au or email the specific activity team members shown overleaf. **Please note**, we are postponing the visit to Yass Gorge till 2017.

Workparty exercise

If you like to get your exercise by joining in workparties to help restore the vegetation balance in grassy woodlands, there are **10** opportunities between the end of August and late November. **Six** of those opportunities are on page 2.

Display at Jamison

This spring, FOG will again contribute to the ParkCare and Landcare display run annually at Jamison Centre by FOG member Jean Geue. The display will be in the centre from Friday 2 September to Sunday 4 September. If any member can offer an hour or so to talk to passing shoppers about caring for ACT's natural environment, please contact ann.milligan@fog.org.au to ask to be put onto the roster.



Aerial view of alpine/sub-alpine grasslands where brumbies are common. FOG member David Tongway AM has adapted his practical Landscape Function Analysis technique (see *News of FOG* July–August) to enable authoritative unequivocal assessment of landscape condition and soil erosion in the mountains, as outlined on pages 4 and 6. *Photo*: David Tongway.

FOG committee news

First, a warm welcome to new FOG members: **Laura Canackle**, of Higgins ACT, and **Caroline and John Giddings**, Campbell ACT.

Also, hearty thanks to FOG member **John Blay** for his stimulating talk about the Bundian Way at FOG's mid-winter afternoon gathering on 16 July, foreshadowing our planned visit to that region on 5–6 November (see page 3).

Do you need support to attend APCC11 ?

FOG Committee is offering up to \$500 to assist 1 or 2 members to register to attend the 11th Australian Plant Conservation Conference (APCC11) to be held in the Royal Botanic Gardens of Victoria, during 14–18 November 2016 (<http://www.anpc.asn.au/conferences/2016>). To apply, by (extended date) 20 September, briefly explain your interest in the APCC11 program, in an email to president@fog.org.au. Preference will be given to member(s) who are currently active volunteers in hands-on plant conservation, through either FOG or other groups. In return for support, we ask you for a conference report for the FOG newsletter, to be published in December.

Draft wild horse management plan, and other issues

Members may wish to make submissions about the Kosciuszko NP draft wild horse management plan. Submissions are due by 19 August, at <https://engage.environment.nsw.gov.au/wild-horse-management-plan>. FOG's submission supporting the plan is online at www.fog.org.au/advocacy.htm (dated 27 July).

For background to FOG's submission (dated 27 June) about the **NSW Biodiversity Conservation Reform Package**, see page 5.

The committee is watching the **Ginninderra Falls/Riverview/West Belconnen** development situation. FOG is represented on the West Belconnen 'Bush on the Boundary' group, and a recent relevant FOG submission is on the website (10 June).

FOG committee members (initials) are also in touch with these matters: CSIRO Ginninderra Field Station development (JFG, SS, TL); Canberra Nature Park Reserve Management Plan (TL); and K2C partnership (JFG).

Public drop-in sessions re CSIRO Field Station: 25 August 3–6.30 pm Evatt Scout Hall; 27 August, 12–4 pm The Abbey, Gold Creek.

FOG activities & workparties: detail (continues on page 3)

South Coast NSW grasslands, 3–4 September

On *Saturday 3 September* we shall meet at 10–10.30 am in Moruya, bringing our own morning teas and lunches, and joining up with members of the Australian Plant Society. Sites of interest for Saturday include Glenduart – a riverine grassy woodland old cemetery, managed as a Council Reserve. Courtney Fink-Downes will tell us about the Council's management regime there. On *Sunday 4 September* we shall drive to Potato Point, again with own lunches and teas. Possible target sites for Sunday include Jemisons Point within the Eurobodalla National Park (which was declared in 1997), Bingie Headland (south of Mya), and/or a headland or two at Dalmeny (which may or may not have just been burnt). We expect to hear about management issues on headland grasslands (e.g. shrub invasion, over-grazing leading to non-flammability) which are unique and function in a different way from those in the Southern Tablelands and Monaro. We expect to finish by, say, 3.30–4.00 pm. Jackie Miles and Jenny Liney (both FOG members) will probably lead us on both days. Notes on the burning were in *News of FOG* July–August 2016.

There is still time to email margaret.ning@fog.org.au to join the group. Margaret will send out fuller details, including meeting places, soon.

Central NSW cemeteries, 8–9 October

This is a weekend trip to explore grassy woodland in five old cemeteries near Cowra, which is ~2.5 hrs from Canberra. On Saturday 8 October, the group will meet at Koorawatha at around midday and then visit Morongla. On Sunday 9 October, the destinations are Woodstock, Neville and Lyndhurst. Woodstock contains remnant White Box. As noted in the July–August newsletter, the Central Tablelands Local Land Services in Orange is generously providing lunch on Saturday for the group. They may have a video team on hand, recording members of our group spotting species and talking about them. Their objective is to produce educational videos and fact sheets describing the grassland species to be found in the region, if possible.

There is still time to join the group already registered for this visit. Email margaret.ning@fog.org.au who will be sending out fuller details shortly.

Conder grassy woodland, Tuesday 18 October

On Tuesday late afternoon 18 October, at **4.45 pm**, we shall meet our guide Michael Bedingfield (the FOG member who most regularly contributes to this newsletter) near the Conder Wetlands at the **corner of Tom Roberts Ave and Templestowe Ave, Conder**, to walk around this grassy woodland which is now part of Tuggeranong Hill Nature Reserve.

This area was intended to be the housing estate known as Conder 4A. FOG opposed the development because it was a remnant with high quality native flora. It was the first time the Canberra community stood up for the local Yellow Box – Red Gum Grassy Woodlands. The resulting conflict with government brought much publicity to the issue of this threatened ecological community, and the issue has remained important ever since.

Please register via email to ann.milligan@fog.org.au

'Scottsdale' visit, Saturday 22 October

Thanks to the staff of Bush Heritage Australia, which owns the 'Scottsdale' property near Bredbo, we have been re-invited to visit this private property, after our planned trip there was washed out in June. Access is not generally available.

On Saturday 22 October, we shall meet at 9 am at the entry gate (on the west side of the Monaro Highway). As explained on page 1 of the May–June *News of FOG* (www.fog.org.au/newsletter.htm) we hope to be shown the property and the grassland restoration work that is in progress: scalping, site prep, planting, specialised machinery, herb propagation and seed collection. Similar procedures are outlined in two talks that Graham Fifield and Paul Gibson-Roy gave at FOG's 2014 forum: see <http://fog.org.au/forum2014.htm>

Registration is essential to get full details for this trip. Contact margaret.ning@fog.org.au ph. 0427 788 304.

Workparties, Stirling Park

Sundays 28 August,
25 September, 30 October

FOG and the Yarralumla Residents Group will be working at Stirling Park (the National Lands part) on the **last Sundays of August** (28th, 9.30 am start) **and September** (25th, possibly 9.00 am start); also on Sunday **30 October**. Register with pmcghie@optusnet.com.au (alternatively, jamie.pittock@fog.org.au) please, before each workparty, to be told the meeting place and time for each day, and so there will be enough tools and morning tea for all. All welcome.

Alternatively, on 25 September you may like to work at Yarramundi; see right.

Workparties, Hall Cemetery

Saturday 10 September

From 10 am till midday we shall be renewing our control of fleshy weeds (especially emerging thistles) and selected patches of exotic grass. There is plenty to do. The major task will be spot application of herbicide through the grassy woodland. Some physical removal can also be done. Come dressed for gardening on wet ground, and bring your favourite digging tool.

MOST IMPORTANT: so the quantities of morning tea and weeding gear match the volunteers' enthusiasm, **REGISTER** with john.fitzgerald@fog.org.au by Thursday 8 September.

Yarramundi Reach

Sunday 25 September

A small group will work at Yarramundi Reach grassland (at 245 Lady Denman Drive, ACT), concurrent with work at Stirling Park on 25 September. Tasks and start times will be advised to those who **register** with Jamie Pittock (or Peter McGhie); see Stirling Park note (at left).

'Scottsdale' veg monitoring Wednesday 9 November (tbc)

The annual monitoring at 'Scottsdale' is expected to be on 9 November. No prior experience necessary; lunch is provided; and all hands are welcome. For details, **register** with linda.spinaze@fog.org.au

FOG activities & workparties: details *continued from page 2*

Grasslands adventure to Delegate and Merambego, southern NSW, 5–6 November

We can expect an abundance of interesting stuff to see and experience in the Delegate and Merambego areas, southern NSW. (Merambego is ~3.5 hrs from Canberra/Moruya.)

Our leaders will be **John Blay** (a member of FOG), **Josh and Annabel Dorrrough** and members of the **Aboriginal women's business yamfields project** (AWAY).

The adventure will take the full two days, 5–6 November. The program is evolving.

On *Saturday 5 November* we should meet at the Bundian Way Aboriginal Art Gallery Delegate (next to the café), open 10.30–12.30 on Saturdays. Then John will show us some typical grassland landscapes of the southern Monaro and some Aboriginal landscapes between Delegate and Merambego. We could leave Delegate, late morning, to look at sites south, returning to Delegate for

lunch and to meet any late-comers. Then we could proceed to Merambego looking at grassland / woodland Aboriginal places along the way, and at Merambego investigate places for fencing as exclusion areas for yamfield regeneration. On Saturday evening after dinner the leaders may tell us more about the yamfields and the Bundian Way.

On *Sunday 6 November* at 8 am, we could leave for Merambego to walk some of the Bundian Way along a few kilometres of the route beyond the reach of roads – a good walking track with few steep slopes. There will be alternative activities investigating yam places for those who prefer not to walk too far. In the Kosciuszko National Park we will see various Aboriginal landscapes as well as some of the grasslands of Merambego, which has been part of the park since the 1970s. Depending on weather in October,

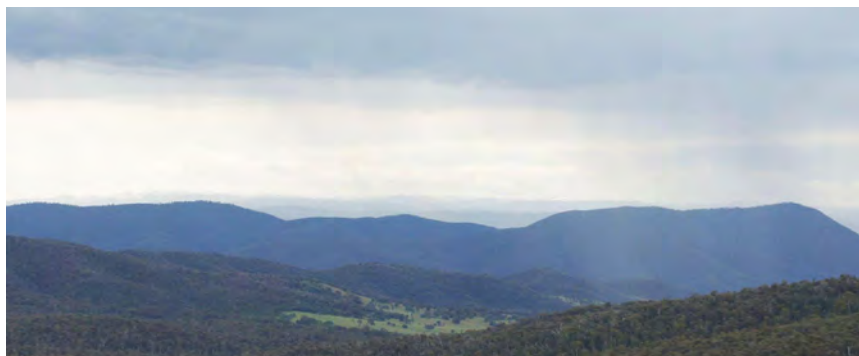
we could see brumbies, wedgetails, quolls, emus, Aboriginal artefact quarries, Byadbo Gap, orchids, lilies and a whole lot more.

For accommodation, John suggests the Delegate Hotel (comfy, top facilities), and the Bill Jeffreys Park caravan / camp site in Delegate. There are also camp sites along the route as alternatives. (The old Delegate Hospital Nurses quarters seem to be already heavily booked.)

Tracks are okay for 2wd vehicles except after serious rain – in which case we shall need to share 4wds. There is a petrol station in Bombala.

If we have to set a limit to the overall group size, we shall restrict registrations to FOG members.

Already 17 people are registered for this adventure. To join in, register with ann.milligan@fog.org.au



Left: View over Merambego to Byadbo and snow, from McGuigans Gap. *Right:* Merambego grasslands emus. *Photos:* John Blay.

Other activities and challenges of interest, *see also pages 8 and 9*

Native Grasses workshops, NSW: 9, 10 September

Look! Two upcoming Native Grasses workshops this September, to help participants make informed decisions about sowing and managing native grasses. Guest speaker is Dr Ian Chivers (Native Seeds Pty Ltd, Victoria), co-author of *Australian Native Grasses: Key species and their uses*, 4th edition. (First 20 people to register will get a free copy.)

Cooma (Ex-Services Club) – **Friday 9 September**

Braidwood (Servicemens Club) – **Saturday 10 September**

For details and to register, please contact SELLS Cooma, ph. (02) 6452 3411, or Jo Powells (mob. 0429 785 986), jo.powells@lls.nsw.gov.au or Alice McGrath (mob. 0408 372 106), alice.mcgrath@lls.nsw.au

Photo competition: Canberra's most amazing tree!

Details at: <http://www.environmentcommissioner.act.gov.au/living-sustainably-act/photo-competition-trees-and-the-imagination>

The competition is run by the Office of the ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment. The Commissioner, Dr Kate Auty, will be the judge. **Deadline** for entries: **5 pm on Friday 19 August.**

Spring on the Victorian Volcanic Plain: Native Grasslands, Stony Rises, Seasonal Wetlands and Salt Lakes

See page 8 for detail. A weekend (11–13 November) of meetings, talks, information and several excursions to visit ecological sites on public and private land. The weekend will be held in Camperdown, in south-western Victoria, 194 km west of Melbourne.

FOG advocacy

Naarilla Hirsch

JUNE: Noting that Draft variation 349 to the Territory Plan (public land overlay and zone changes) is being undertaken to meet offset requirements for two EPBC referrals, FOG agreed in principle to it. FOG did express concern about the lack of detail available about proposed management of the extension of the Pinnacle Nature Reserve.

Advocacy group members attended the ACT government's workshop to discuss the preliminary draft of the Canberra Nature Park Reserve Management Plan, and provided some comments on the document (which will not be up on the FOG website as the preliminary draft is confidential). We will provide further input to the Plan once it is released for public comment.

The Woodlands and Wetlands Trust sought community views on the proposed expansion to the Mulligan's Flat sanctuary, via an on-line survey. FOG was in favour of expansion of the sanctuary

but expressed concern that it should not be to the detriment of resources going into other woodlands and grassland conservation areas.

JULY: The New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service has put out the Kosciuszko National Park Draft Wild Horse Management Plan for public comment. In its response to this, FOG noted that the estimated number of wild horses in the park has doubled in the last eight years, and that it was aware of significant damage that the wild horse population has already done to our fragile alpine ecosystems, including communities with major grass and forb components such as the alpine yamfields. FOG strongly supported the objectives of the Plan and the strategies proposed to achieve these objectives, while holding the view that reduction of the wild horse population must be undertaken in a humane way.

Advocacy continues on page 5: FOG's response to the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Reform Package.

Article: Notes on how to assess horse damage to alpine streams

David Tongway

David (a member of FOG) has developed Landscape Function Analysis (LFA) – an acknowledged and widely used set of measurements and spreadsheet analyses for assessing how landscapes function as biophysical systems: in other words, how groundcover and ground surface-condition affect water movement through the landscape. This (LFA) is vital capability if we are to manage catchments and their vegetation to maximise water yield and to minimise soil erosion and loss of biodiversity. (More about LFA in News of FOG, July–August 2016.) Below are some brief notes and photos David has sent in relation to assessing the effects of horses near alpine streams, showing how LFA can be adapted for that purpose.

General observations on alpine streams and horses

- Most streams draining the broad valleys are quite meandering (photo, right), implying that water run-out energy is very low.
- Vegetation normally grows profusely right up to the stream bank, implying low-energy over-bank flow for the lateral surrounding landscape (top photo p. 6).
- Horse activity is high impact where they are active, but the damage is not continuous. Presumably the activity involves many horses, repeatedly over time.
- Activities include pugging, bank trampling (photo below and see p. 6), compacted tracks leading to water (see p. 1), dung piles.
- Effects include trampling of bank vegetation, increased speed of over-bank water flow eroding the bank by undercutting and mass-wasting and stream bed linearisation (see photos on p. 6).



... Continued on page 6

FOG Advocacy continued from page 4: **NSW Biodiversity Conservation Reform Package**

The NSW Government released a Biodiversity Conservation Reform Package for public consultation. This was a major piece of work to comment on. It consisted of a draft Biodiversity Conservation Bill (to replace the Threatened Species Conservation (TSC) Act) and amendments to the Local Land Services Bill, together with other material including codes of practice, a map method statement and biodiversity assessment method. In putting together its lengthy submission, the Advocacy Group was assisted considerably by long-term FOG member Rainer Rehwinkel, and the Conservation Council's Biodiversity Working Group.

FOG had many concerns with the Biodiversity Conservation Reform Package, both with the general approach and intent of the different components, and with specific sections of it. The Biodiversity Reform Package weakens Australia's ability to preserve native species and ecosystems for future generations. Instead it is a retrograde step that will increase loss of both threatened species and communities, and native species and vegetation in general.

- FOG questioned the need for completely new legislation rather than amending current legislation. The effectiveness of the current legislation has been hampered by inadequate resources to assess, manage and monitor lands covered by the Act, or to enforce breaches of the Act – a situation that is not likely to change with new legislation. There also appear to be inconsistencies between the two pieces of legislation out for comment, and between the proposed NSW legislation and the Commonwealth's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act and associated agreement between the Commonwealth and NSW on implementation of the EPBC Act.
- The aims of the draft Biodiversity Conservation (BC) Act are considerably weaker than those of the TSC Act it is replacing. In particular we have lost mention of threatened populations, threatening processes, and promotion of recovery of endangered ecosystems and the habitat of threatened species. If the goal of what should be done to conserve biodiversity continues to be narrowed in this way, in the end there will be no biodiversity to conserve.
- The proposed changes to conservation agreements and covenants were alarming, as individuals placing a conservation agreement on their land do so on the understanding that the biodiversity values of that land will be protected *in perpetuity*. However, the draft BC Act allows termination of these

agreements by a later landholder or by the Minister of the day if mining interests are found. It also allows covenanted land to be sold off by the Biodiversity Conservation Trust without, as far as we could tell, any public scrutiny.

- Another area where FOG had major concerns with the package is that of offsets. FOG is yet to be convinced that offsets are effective in delivering 'no net loss' when new developments impact on endangered species or communities. However, the package appears to allow *more* offsetting, and to reduce the need to avoid and mitigate development impacts. FOG's general concerns included our opposition to varying the like-for-like rule for offsets; the lack of long-term security for offsets given the proposed changes to conservation agreements and covenants; and the ability of developers to make payments into a trust rather than identify on-ground offsets. The implications of the package appear to be that it will be possible to offset an offset, something FOG considers totally unacceptable.
- FOG was concerned about the implications of the proposed assessment processes for grassy ecosystems. The proposed single method of assessment of vegetation might streamline the process but, if not modified, will be detrimental to native grasslands. Similarly, the base dataset to be used (particularly for the Biodiversity Assessment Method) does not deal well with grasslands and grassy woodlands.
- FOG was also concerned that the set-aside ratios in the codes could potentially mean that one hectare of high quality vegetation can be removed and replaced by three hectares of revegetation (i.e. lower quality habitat). In other words, the ratios proposed facilitate an increased rate of clearing of native vegetation across NSW.

As well as these general issues, we found numerous issues within the detail of each component of the package. FOG's conclusion was that it was completely opposed to the package in its current form, and considers it a backward step in conserving native grassland and grassy woodland communities. Our submission on this issue is dated 27 June

The full text of FOG submissions appears on our website.

Snippets

Glyphosate-risk assesement

On 9–13 May 2016 experts met at World Health Organisation headquarters and concluded glyphosate is unlikely to pose a carcinogenic or genotoxic risk to humans.

You can read the full statement here: <http://apvma.gov.au/node/13891>

Conceptual framework to guide debate on the threat of invasive plants to native plants

New publication by Assoc. Prof. Paul Downey (plant ecologist at University of Canberra): Downey P.O. & Richardson D.M. (2016) **Alien plant invasions and native plant extinctions: a six-threshold framework**. *AOB Plants*. <http://m.aobpla.oxfordjournals.org/content/8/plw047>

Grassland colouring book

Paula Peeters (@Paperbark Writer) was commissioned to create a colouring book about the Riverina Grasslands. You can read about the process, starting here: *How to draw a grassland – Part One*. <http://www.paperbarkwriter.com/how-to-draw-a-grassland-part-one>

Continued from p. 4, Notes on how to assess horse damage to alpine streams, by David Tongway

How I have adapted Landscape Function Analysis for use in alpine areas

I devised a system of evaluating 7 sets of indicators, based on previous work on ephemeral streams. These are arranged for the assessing person to make observations initially at the broad scale, becoming finer in scale as the assessment proceeds.

The indicator sets are:

1. Slope morphology of lands bordering on the stream (flat to steep, 5 classes)
2. Vegetative cover on valley floor (bare to densely covered, 5 classes)
3. Vegetation density at the stream edge (a little to a lot, 3 classes)
4. Number of horse tracks 20 m on either side of the stream (any direction, but 4 numerical classes)
5. Nature of horse tracks (no effect to deeply incised, 4 classes)
6. Nature of stream bank impact (nil to extensive and severe, 5 classes)
7. Stream meanders on a 50 m linear transect parallel to the general direction (numbers, from nil to however many).

A numerical scale emerges as the output, with values reflecting sites across the biggest range we could find. A range of horse effects are reflected in the numbers, from nil to excessive.

The same procedure could be used to evaluate ‘relief’ from horse disturbance. I’m not sure if anyone knows the self-rehabilitation rate, but this procedure would evaluate that rate, objectively.

Acknowledgement. This adaptation of LFA was developed as a contribution to a project of the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service. **Further information:** dtongway@iinet.net.au.



The photos show an area unaffected by horses (top right), compared to areas with horse damage, including imminent slumping (lowest right).

Article: The puzzle of *Bursaria* and fire at Hall. Can readers throw light on this?

John Fitz Gerald

An ecological burn in the southern woodland block at Hall Cemetery on 27 April was included in ACT fire operations over the 2016 autumn. For a couple of years, FOG had encouraged the land managers to run a controlled burn, and we were pleased to see it conducted. A detailed analysis of the effects will be assembled after active regrowth this spring. However, one aspect already puzzles me.

FOG had planted small groups of *Bursaria spinosa* plants (subsp. unknown) in midsummer 2010–11 through the woodlands beside the cemetery at Hall Cemetery. Our volunteers had cut and daubed many woody weeds here, and the intention was to regenerate a patchy shrub layer to provide shelter for small birds. Some *Bursarias* grew to over 2 m tall in the five years following; many flowered and set seed (see 'News of the Summer Rain', page 6 of *News of Friends of Grasslands* March–April 2015).

At the April 2016 burn, tall grass surrounding the groups of plants was all burnt, but none of the 30 *Bursaria* plants was directly burned – partly because the grass layer underlying each group had been regularly trimmed, but also because groups of *Bursaria* were also carefully protected by the fire crew during the burn.

The puzzle

I was shocked to find that every one of these plants experienced total leaf death within 3 days of the burn (see left photo above). Two months later, 35%



Photos: John Fitz Gerald

of plants were actively shooting along one or more limbs (right photo above). After one more month that score has risen to almost 60%.

I've searched the web about fire sensitivity of this species but uncovered only notes about some resprouting from the plant base following heavy burning, and nothing about sensitivity to heat.

It is to be hoped that the 40% of inactive plants shoot away in spring. Possibly this species was not the best choice for regenerating shrubs in a grassy cover that is to be managed by fire from time to time?

I welcome input from any readers who have knowledge or experiences to share.

Please contact me at john.fitzgerald@fog.org.au

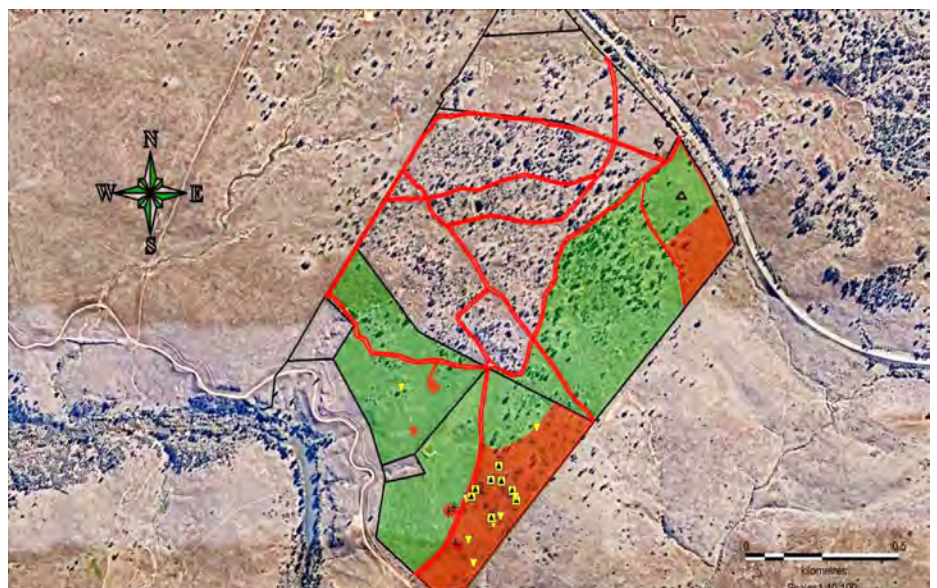
Canberra focus: Kama Nature Reserve

Exploded ordnance at Kama

The ACT Government has had Kama Nature Reserve assessed, this year, for the presence of artillery shells left over after military testing during the First World War. After a specialist survey of walking tracks and of grassland areas to be burnt for ecological purposes, which found exploded materials, the Government has concluded that the risk of finding any *unexploded* shells is very low.

If you discover something you suspect to be an unexploded shell (UXO for short), DO NOT disturb it. Mark the location clearly and contact Access Canberra on 13 22 81.

See also: <http://www.tccs.act.gov.au/parks-conservation/environmental-offsets/connections-with-rivers/molonglo-valley-offset-areas/kama-nature-reserve-uxo-survey>



Map of Kama NR showing tracks and areas surveyed and cleared of exploded materials. The map shows the Lower Molonglo River to the south-west of Kama, and William Hovell Drive bordering Kama's north-eastern edge. (Source: Kama Nature Reserve: UXO Factsheet, 2016. Environment and Planning Directorate, ACT Government)

Canberra focus: Weeds!!

BFG at Floriade – not a giant!

Did you know there is a **Bush Friendly Garden** (BFG) each year at Floriade? It shows visitors (hundreds of visitors) the main environmental weeds (woody and grassy) that grow commonly in gardens in this region.

As alternatives, the garden also displays an enticing range of native or other species that fill similar garden functions but are not escape-artists and therefore do not become environmental weeds. The garden is designed by Vanessa Hagon (landscape designer) and assembled by staff of the ACT Government.

FOG member Rosemary Blemings coordinates a team of volunteers to staff the BFG – which needs to be well ‘fed’ with explainers to bring it alive to the visitors and ensure they understand what they are being shown. ACT Government staff also help. **Explainers are needed** for each of two sessions, 10 am–1 pm & 12–3 pm, each day of Saturday 17 September – Sunday 16 October inclusive. Skills? A welcoming smile, and ability to read plant labels!

Please contact Rosemary, rosemary@blemings.org, and volunteer to take up this opportunity. You meet all sorts of people, and the conversations can be fascinating!

Weed Swap, October 29 & 30

Weed Swap is a biannual initiative to encourage people to remove environmental weeds from their gardens in this region. Each October (and April), two green-waste tips, one north one south, host volunteers and tube-stock for a weekend. The volunteers assess the loads of plant material being dropped off, and ‘reward’ those drivers bringing in Privet, Cotoneaster, Ivy, Periwinkle and other specified species. The reward is a tube-stock native plant or native grass. **Volunteers are always welcome.** Contact Rosemary Blemings, as above, rosemary@blemings.org



The BFG in 2015. *Top:* Before opening time, the structure is clearer, with invasives at the left side of the area, and ‘good’ alternatives to the right of the shed and tanks. *Below:* After opening time, visitors abound!

Victoria focus: New Biosphere Reserve planned for western Victorian grasslands. Invitation to 11–13 November, ‘Spring on the Victorian Volcanic Plain: Native grasslands, stony rises, seasonal wetlands and salt lakes’

The Victorian Volcanic Plains Biosphere (VVP Biosphere) Committee is working towards establishing a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve over the Victorian Volcanic Plain bioregion in Victoria.

One of the main aims is to raise the profile and appreciation of the critically endangered grasslands and grassy woodlands in the region. We hope that this might improve the biodiversity conservation actions and prospects.

We have planned an event for spring 2016 to showcase the features of the region around the Camperdown area, including visits to Plains Grassland sites, stony rises, stony barriers and significant habitats around Lake Corangamite.

The Committee has developed a local network of contacts and we have the opportunity to visit and highlight important ecological sites on public land, including recently purchased reserves, and private land including sites not often seen by the public.

VVP Biosphere members, Ecological Society of Australia members and **interested members of the wider public are all invited.** We will have speakers specialising in grassland ecology and natural history to provide context and educate attendees about the region, and to undertake field visits to a number of key sites in the area.

The area we will visit is the centre of the Western District Ramsar Lakes

which have fascinating hypersaline ecology. The diversity of habitats on the Victorian Volcanic Plain is substantial. This event will be designed to help interested people experience the original natural habitats, and to understand the threats to those values, and the priority actions for conservation.

As well as meetings and talks, several excursions will be organised based on carpooling in convoy, to visit ecological sites on public and private land.

If you are free on the weekend of 11–13 November and fancy an interesting natural history weekend, please contact Stuart to register your interest:

stuartmccallum@wetnet.com.au

Up close and fluffy – *Leucopogon attenuatus*

John Fitz Gerald



Photos: John Fitz Gerald. The close-up image above, ©ANBG, was taken at the Seedbank of the Australian National Botanic Gardens. Its scale bar is 1 mm long.

Leucopogon attenuatus is an uncommon woodland shrub from NSW and Victoria with the common name (at least in the ACT) of Grey Beard-heath. The plant is in flower in late winter in the Southern Tablelands, and it is described in *Woodland Flora: A field guide for the Southern Tablelands (NSW & ACT)* (Sharp et al. 2015) p. 120.

The small plants produce pink buds that become masses of stark white flowers (left image). Each fascinating flower has 5 lobes each covered in a 'powderpuff' of long hairs. Leaves also bear short hairs and a distinctly pointed tip (right image).

Australia-wide focus: Events and activities coming up

Greening Australia Capital Region:

'World Environment Day planting'

Rescheduled to **Sunday 28 August**, Bredbo Travelling Stock Reserve, NSW. Details: <http://actlandcare.org.au/node/2421>

RSVP essential: cbr.admin@greeningaustralia.org.au or phone 6253 3035.

ANPS Plant sale, Canberra, Saturday 15 October

This Australian Native Plant Society sale is so popular you may need to arrive at 6 am to head the queue! Gates open at 8.30 am at the Australian National Botanic Gardens.

20th Australasian Weeds Conference

The national weeds conference, **11–15 September**, at the Pan Pacific hotel, Perth. Topics include: herbicide resistance, environmental weeds, legislation, regulation & policy, and more. See: <http://www.20awc.org.au>

'Collaborative communities: Landcare in action'

2016 National Landcare Conference, **21–23 September**, Melbourne, celebrating 30 years of landcare. <http://cdn.connectingcountry.org.au/press/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/20165558/abstracts-call.pdf>

Restore, Regenerate, Revegetate: 5–9 February 2017

A conference on 'Restoring Ecological Processes: Ecosystems and Landscapes in a Changing World'

We are invited to the University of New England to contribute to the joint understanding of the challenges and successes in restoration, revegetation and reintroduction in a fast-changing world, with some of Australia's and the world's leading practitioners, scientists, consultants, advisers and artists working in this space.

For full conference details see:

www.conferencecompany.com.au/revegconf2017

To present at the conference, people must register, pay and submit an abstract by **31 October 2016**. Abstract submission guidelines are at the web address above.

'New approaches to plant conservation challenges in the modern world'

14–18 November, 11th Australasian Plant Conservation Conference, Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria.

For abstracts and registration:

<http://anpc.asn.au/conferences/2016>

Cultivation corner

Gardening on the ninth floor

Janet Russell

Janet resumes her occasional articles on cultivating grassland species, having moved from Aranda to an apartment, late in 2015.

We have the pots that we brought with us lined up mainly on the outer edge of the south-west balcony where they currently have access to both rain and sun. So far they have all survived except for the remnant Trigger Plant, *Stylidium* species (probably *Stylidium armeria*), which were marginally alive when we brought them here.

We had no idea of the force of the wind that we would have to contend with before we came to this new dwelling last spring. As the seasons have progressed it has become worse. Almost the only way that we can keep the pots upright is to put them exactly where they now are. Before this we have had a root ball rolling around separated from its large pot which was also rolling round, as well as other pots being knocked over! The last incident was the Waratah hybrid blowing over and the pot smashing. I had bought the pot specially for it before we left because the pot it was in was too wide and seemed not deep enough for the plant to support itself. The new pot worked beautifully and the Waratah was thriving. The Waratah has now been transplanted to a plain terracotta pot where it is still doing well.

Our Greenhoods, *Pterostylis* species, have had a series of adventures. While we were still in Aranda I moved the pot from a sunny spot to a more protected location because of hot weather that seemed to be interminable. I am guessing that in that new location it was on the nightly 'possum route' because I looked out one day and there were a couple of scoops out of the soil exposing the delicate white roots of



Pterostylis on the balcony, now, August 2016, well covering the pot!

the sprouting corms. I replaced the soil and it was not long before we moved.

The next incident here in our new dwelling involved the clothes drying rack. We had worked out that our clothes rack on wheels was totally unsuitable for this balcony as it easily became mobile. We have a heavier duty one that seemed more robust. However, when we came home from a weekend away I found it had fallen over and gouged a hole in the *Pterostylis* pot, once again. By this time, a few plants had already begun shooting. Once again I tidied the soil and filled in the hole. I expected that there would eventually be plants in about a third of the pot. I was amazed to see as they grew they covered almost the whole surface.

It has made me reflect on the corms. A couple of years earlier when I repotted this orchid I noticed just how small some corms were, and I wonder now whether then I sieved out what may have looked like small clumps of clay but were in fact corms. The orchids do reproduce in numbers but I shall have to see how many flower this spring. It will also be interesting to see how many of our other plants get through the winter. They are in a very different micro-climate from the sheltered north-facing courtyard that they previously enjoyed.



The *Pterostylis* pot earlier this year, after both incidents

Photos: Janet Russell

The Common Wombat, a solitary animal that likes to be left alone

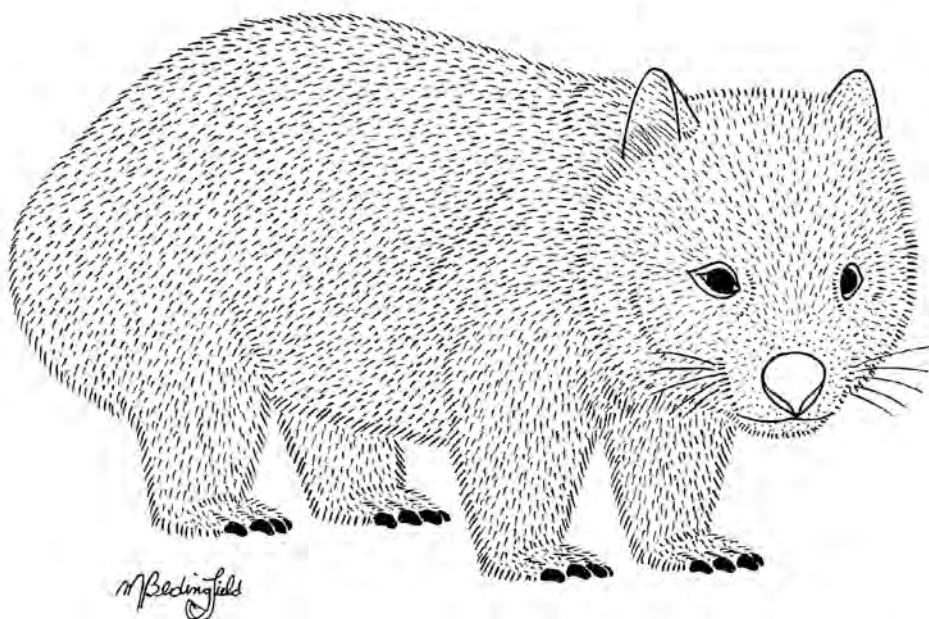
Michael Bedingfield

The Common Wombat *Vombatus ursinus* is a marsupial nocturnal grazer, which is usually seen alone, head down and nibbling at the grass. It is shy of humans and if approached it has two main strategies to turn to if it feels threatened. It might simply run away to a safe distance or to its burrow. Or it might just stand quite still and hope that it is invisible. The last method can be successful most of the time, because of its normal grey colouring and the poor light at the time that it ventures out. But in the modern age it can also be very dangerous if it is crossing a road and the threat is an approaching motorcar! Unfortunately many are lost this way.

Wombats are stoutly built with short legs and barrel shaped bodies. They are very strong and have been called the bulldozers of the bush. Such strength is necessary of course when you build your home underground using only your feet, claws and legs to do so. Wombats will break through a fence that has been placed in their path, however robust it may be. Many a farmer has lost his temper at such damage or on finding large holes in his paddocks, and so they have been persecuted. In the Bush Capital we have a fairly benevolent attitude to wombats, but in other parts of the country people have had different ideas, especially in the past. The early European settlers used them for food. They have been declared to be vermin and had a bounty on their heads. So while they are doing well locally, in other parts of their former range they have not fared well. Originally they were distributed along the Great Dividing Range from southern Queensland, through New South Wales to Victoria, continuing west to south-east South Australia, as well as Tasmania. But now their range is fragmented, and they have disappeared from some locations.

The wombat has the appearance of being a placid animal, but it is not afraid of a scrap. If an intruder gets uncomfortably close it may growl. I have seen one being harassed by a much larger dog, which it turned on fiercely, making the dog retreat. Then it bolted to its burrow and disappeared. If a predator follows a wombat into its burrow it will stand firm in the narrow passage and turn its back on the nuisance, using the tough cartilaginous hide on its rear as an impenetrable shield. It may kick back with its two back legs to ward off the aggressor. If the attacker is foolish enough to try to wriggle past it in the burrow in order to find a softer part of the wombat's body, it will use its great strength to press the attacker against the wall, crushing and killing it in the process.

The best time to see wombats is at dusk. They may begin grazing but sometimes they will just stand at the entrance to their burrows. In winter they may come out earlier when the sun is getting low. They may also venture out on cloudy days



when visibility is poor. Most of the time they keep silent and they are happy being alone. But they do socialise when necessary, and mating behaviour is such a contrast. The couples play chasings in wide circles. The female leads off with the male in hot pursuit. They stop briefly to mate, lying on the ground on their side for a while, and then she sets off again. Mating can occur at any time but spring is the most favoured. The female has a backward facing pouch and normally raises only one infant. It stays with her for about a year, takes three years to reach adulthood and can grow up to 90–115 cm long when mature.

Common Wombats have territories of from 5 to 27 ha, in which they may have up to about 12 burrows, visiting several in any night. Territories may overlap with those of their neighbours, and they mark their own feeding patches with scent and cube-shaped dung. They can be aggressive towards each other but usually avoid combat. While eating mostly grass, they will also eat other plants, as well as roots and bark. They have two pairs of rodent-like front teeth on the upper and lower jaws and their teeth continue to grow throughout their life.

There are two other species of wombat: the Southern Hairy-nosed Wombat *Lasiorhinus latifrons* and the Northern Hairy-nosed Wombat *L. krefftii*. The latter is classified as endangered. The Common Wombat has had its problems but there is no concern for its future. It has not fully adapted to the hazards of the modern age but it survives well where it has not been maltreated. Despite changes to the landscape it is doing well in the Australian Capital Territory. It is a fairly anti-social but lovable animal.

References

- Serventy V. (1977) *Wildlife of Australia*. Nelson.
Strahan R. & Australian Museum (1997) *A Photographic Guide to Mammals of Australia*. New Holland.
Websites. <http://australianmuseum.net.au/common-wombat>
<http://www.wombania.com/wombats/common-wombat.htm>

Contacts for FOG groups and projects

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

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Promoting wider knowledge of grassy landscapes

Publications: *Woodland Flora*, *Grassland Flora*, other books &
sales (order forms at the website), booksales@fog.org.au

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Activities: activities@fog.org.au

Media contact: Ann Milligan (mob: 0419 243 773)

FOG activities & workparties late August – early November

Date	Activity	Contact
Sun 28 August	Stirling Park – workparty	pmcghie@optusnet.com.au
3–4 September	South Coast grasslands visit	margaret.ning@fog.org.au
Sat 10 September	Hall Cemetery – workparty	john.fitzgerald@fog.org.au
Sun 25 September	Stirling Park – workparty	pmcghie@optusnet.com.au
Sun 25 September	Yarramundi Reach – workparty	jamie.pittock@fog.org.au
8–9 October	Central NSW grassy woodland cemeteries – visit	margaret.ning@fog.org.au
Tues 18 October	Conder grassy woodland – visit	ann.milligan@fog.org.au
Sat 22 October	‘Scottsdale’ restoration – visit	margaret.ning@fog.org.au
Sun 30 October	Stirling Park – workparty	pmcghie@optusnet.com.au
5–6 November	Delegate and Merambego grasslands / Bundian Way – visit	ann.milligan@fog.org.au
Weds 9 November (tbc)	‘Scottsdale’ monitoring	linda.spinaze@fog.org.au

In this issue

For **FOG expeditions & visits**, see pp. 2,3,
and for **FOG workparties**, see p. 2. **FOG
advocacy** is on pp. 4,5.

Articles scattered through this issue are
about: measuring horse impacts in alpine
areas; and a *Bursaria* puzzle readers may be
able to help with; and gardening nine floors
up; and the Common Wombat; and a close-
up of Grey Beard-heath.

There's **FOG committee news**, and a
few news **snippets**, as well as notes on
interesting-looking **upcoming non-FOG
events** in ACT, Victoria and elsewhere. One of
these is a conference at UNE next February,
and another is a weekend in a possible
grassland Biosphere Reserve. There are **calls
for volunteers** to staff education initiatives
in Canberra this spring, and a **tree-photo
contest** closing on Friday 19 August (p. 3).

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