



Upcoming events

We are reformulating our events program so that we can use Zoom and/or social distancing guidelines. We will keep you up to date through our Events Updates.

Report on 2020 FOG AGM

5pm, 22 April. Twenty-five members, including one from each of Sydney, Northern Tablelands, Queanbeyan and two from west Victoria, attended FOG's rescheduled AGM, using on-line Zoom session.

The pre-circulated AGM papers (agenda, president's report, motion to make Jamie Pittock an honorary life member, previous AGM minutes, annual accounts and annual report) were accepted. Geoff, as president, spoke of the huge contribution by numerous FOG members - a difficult job was keeping track of all this and ensuring members were kept informed.

In a moving tribute, John Fitz Gerald moved Jamie's honorary life membership, speaking of Jamie's ability, leadership, approachability, humility and contagious enthusiasm. In response, Jamie spoke of his great admiration for FOG and his delight in being an active member.

The election returned Geoff Robertson and Janet Russell as President and Treasurer, and Julie Beckman, Maree Gilbert, Ken Hodgkinson, Margaret Ning and Andrew Zelnik as committee members. Joining the committee were Sarah Sharp as secretary and Heather Sweet and Linda Spinaze as committee members. Geoff acknowledged outgoing secretary Paul Archer for his fantastic, efficient and no fuss role, and Rainer, also stepping down, for his ongoing contribution. Participants commented favourably on Zoom, enabling faraway members to be involved. Many examples of using it for virtual tours of outdoor sites and on-line presentations, including linking up with overseas partners, were suggested.

Other matters discussed were briefing Brian Everingham on grassy ecosystems for his NSW NPA advisory role; delaying our annual return to the ACT government; FOG signing the K2C Memorandum of Understanding; FOG's grassy ecosystem grants; FOG Blue Gum Point environment grant application; improving FOG approach to governance (membership, advocacy, events, newsletter, presentations to other groups, publicity and training volunteers); FOG acting as a watchdog (e.g. FOG raising examples of reserve and open space management); and encouraging submissions on the EPBC Act review.



"Wally Bell tells me that for Aboriginal people, eucalypts like the yellow box are the connection between the land and sky" ... See pages 3-4 for our feature on Yellow Box.

IMPORTANT NOTICE ON BUSHFIRE RECOVERY

Australian Association of Bush Regenerators (AABR) wishes to contact anyone who is managing recently fire-affected native vegetation of high conservation value and might need the assistance of bush regeneration contractors over the next 6-12 months. It is very important that AABR hears about ecosystems in particular need. There are a number of funding opportunities. For more information, contact (Dr) Tein McDonald President, Australian Association of Bush Regenerators. Email: president@aabr.org.au Mob: +61 (0) 458 565 654.

Welcome to our new members - Sue Ross, ACT; Ian Lester, ACT; & Geordie Scott-Walker, Vic.

Recent FOG events

ACTHA reptile survey, Stirling Park - Margaret Ning

Sun 15 March. The ACT Herpetological Association organised a three hour reptile survey at Stirling Park, Yarralumla for FOG. Jake McAuliffe led the survey and 16 people attended. We started at 9m and within the first five minutes three skink species were located. This was no fluke however, as we started our search among some sizeable logs that had been introduced to the site a few years back as habitat enhancement. Jake explained that the lower such logs are placed in the landscape the more quickly they are inhabited by all sorts of reptile and invertebrate species.

We had come equipped with a collection sheet that was designed for the occasion (thanks Emma), and which will hopefully get further use if we conduct future surveys. It enabled us to record the name of the species we found, the time we found it, whether we took a photograph of the animal, an approximate measurement, whether tail loss, and how the animal was detected. We also recorded the temperature, cloud cover and humidity as a basic record of the day's conditions.

We split into two teams and, between us, covered approximately the area in pink on the map below. Generally it was a good exercise in learning how to do such surveys in the field safely, record keeping and photographing, etc.

In all, we turned up 20 animals from seven species, of which six were skink species and one was a gecko. They were *Morethia boulengeri* (Boulenger's Skink), *Lampropholis delicata* (Delicate Skink), *Hemiergis talbingoensis* (Three-toed Skink), *Ctenotus robustus* (Robust Striped-skink), *Ctenotus taeniolatus* (Copper-tailed Skink), *Tiliqua scincoides* (Eastern Blue-tongue), and *Christinus marmoratus* (Southern Marbled Gecko).

Many thanks to everyone who turned out to help.

After-dark visit to Mulligans

7pm, Sun 15 Mar. On a coolish evening, 18 people assembled at the corner of Justice Kelly St and Quinane Ave, Ford, outside the entrance of Mulligans Flat, and were welcomed by Jamie Pittock and Shoshana (Sho) Rapley to take an after-dark walk in the reserve. The title of the walk, *a 500-year vision for restoration at Mulligans Flat*, as Sho explained, illustrated that some elements of the woodland, like the soil depth and complexity, and hollows, will take centuries to return. The Woodlands & Wetlands Trust (WWT), which runs Mulligans, takes a long-term vision. It is encouraging trialling new management techniques and research to take restoration in the right direction.

Sho has led many walks at the reserve. We often paused as Sho pointed out many examples of added habitat features, such as introducing fallen timber. The evidence, although research is ongoing, is that these additions are attracting various species of animals.

Sho undertook her honours research on the reintroduction of bush stone-curlew at Mulligans Flat and she related many fascinating stories about her ongoing tracking of curlews, her encounters with them, and experiences in capturing them for monitoring purposes.



Above, critters participating in reptile survey - photos Geoff Robertson.
Left: map of route taken by one of the survey parties.

Catherine Ross was also part of the group. As many readers know, Catherine has recently acquired her PhD from the ANU, unraveling the mysteries of bettongs and their important role as ecosystem engineers. It wasn't long before she was pointing out the small holes made by bettongs looking for bulbs, corms and the like, that provide them with a rich food source. Catherine believes the holes, little more than shallow indentations, trap water and seeds and hence serve an important ecological function in plant establishment and growth.

Leaders on such walks usually have a degree of anxiety - will the group see bettongs and, hopefully, even possibly a quoll, which is much less likely. The group was richly rewarded as we came across several small populations of bettongs, and as we watched them, Sho and some of her assistants, who had also joined us, explained the behaviour we were seeing. Then towards the end of the walk Sho spotted the eye shine of a quoll which stayed in sight for some time.

Throughout the evening there were heaps of questions, comments and side talks - possibly not the best behaviour when animal stalking, but certainly enjoyable. Thank you Sho, Catherine and your assistants for taking the group on the walk and for sharing your great depth of experience and knowledge. Thank you Jamie for organising the event. Participants were more than happy to make a financial contribution to the Trust.

Stirling Park spotlighting survey

Sat 29 Feb. On a pleasant Saturday evening, FOG conducted another wildlife spotting walk at Stirling Park (Gurubung Dhaura) attended by 18 people and led by Sarah Aylott and Jamie Pittock. Past issues of the newsletter have reported upon earlier nighttime surveys, and the growing list of night creatures is recorded on Canberra Nature Map.

To start proceedings, the group was addressed by Sarah and Jamie explaining the importance of Stirling Park, FOG's work there, and the gathering data on species. The photos tell most of the story of that night. The first image shows the group setting off after dusk. Many of the species seen on previous occasions were present,

although no sugar gliders. Again, there were new spiders and insects.

Two sightings were very exciting, namely a tawny frogmouth and numerous bats flying in and out of the tree hollow. In one tree hollow, young bats were seen just inside the hollow.

Stirling Park is like a honey pot attracting many people. Sarah has been working with Yarralumla Primary School, which she visited twice in 2019, setting up a program designed to roll out later this year, coronavirus permitting. The teachers are going to take year 3/4 to the site in spring/summer season and tie the visit into an art project with AeonAcademy.

FOG's Stirling Park-Yarramundi & Hall groups

Stirling Park/Gurubang Dhaura - Yarramundi Reach Group has continued to be very busy. At its 15 March work party, the group of 18 people undertook work at Blue Gum Point on the shores of Lake Burley Griffin. Blue Gum Point is ACT land on the northern side of Alexandra Drive, directly opposite Gurubang Dhaura. Blue Gum Point has extensive yellow box red gum grassy woodlands, as well as golden sun moth and button wrinklewort populations. It is also a major seed source for weed incursions across the road into Gurubang Dhaura. The site is used by many local residents for recreational purposes.

Work planned for the May work party, a massive planting of 400 wildflower species seedlings on disturbed lands

The amazing photos of our Stirling Park survey were taken by Amin Saleh and Andrew Zelnik. Most are Amin's, while the bat pictures are Andrew's. Thanks both.



at Gurubang Dhaura, was brought forward to 12 April. It was urgent that the seedlings go in the ground, however, the question arose as to how to proceed while complying with social distancing rules. The solution that arose was to have the holes for the plants pre-prepared by EnviroAg, which was completed on 8 April. On the day of the planting (12 April), four mini work parties, each with their own equipment, turned up to undertake plantings at different parts of the park. The plants to go in the ground had been dropped off to each of the four separate sites well before the volunteers turned up, and they then worked within the social distancing law (e.g. two people per site). The plants went into the ground successfully.



EnviroAg preparing holes for seeding plantings at Gurubang Dhaura - photo by Jamie Pittock.

The Hall Cemetery Group held its first usual work party as planned on 14 March and was attended by 12 people. Following the heavy rains, the group faced a huge volume of weeds. Due to coronavirus, the group did not proceed with its scheduled 4 April work party.

Weeds at Gurubang Dhaura and Hall Cemetery remain a major concern. A few FOG volunteers have been spraying at both sites, either as individuals or sometimes as a work party of two social distancing people.

FOG is currently preparing an application for an ACT Environment Grant to employ contractors to undertake major weed removal at Blue Gum Point in 2020/21.



Bass Gardens, Griffith

9 April. Margaret Ning and Geoff Robertson visited Bass Gardens with Sue Ross (photo), each keeping a social distance. Sue is the convenor of the Bass Gardens Park Care Group (BGPCG), an applicant for a FOG grant, and a new FOG member. Sue showed us around Bass Garden with its remnant natural temperate grassland,

flowering profusely. Golden sun moth is recorded there. Around the edge of the garden is a planting of largely exotic trees. Sue is an avid weeder, often to be seen there with a spray backpack. Members of her group largely do manual weeding. BGPCG has attracted some funding for the services of a professional weeder. Recently the inner part of the gardens has been designated as a conservation zone, with green conservation posts marking the boundaries of the zone. Stay tuned for updates on Bass Gardens.

Establishing a Franklin Grassland on-ground group

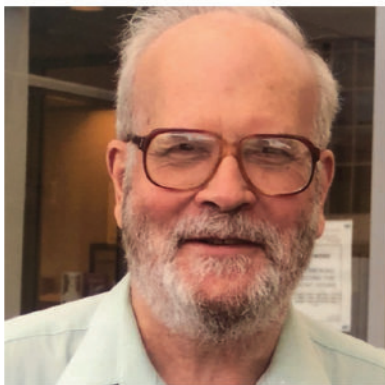
3pm 13 March. Ten people assembled on Franklin Grassland to discuss forming a group that might begin on-ground work there. Attendees included people from Ginninderra Catchment Group, FrogWatch, ACT Government and FOG, a local resident, and Ranger Craig Wainwright who is responsible for the reserve. Sadly, the social distancing rules were announced shortly afterwards, preventing the next step being taken.



Photos - Andrew Zelnik's photos at the meeting to establish an on-ground group for Franklin Grassland. His other images are: Yellow Rush Lily (Tricoryne elatior), Weeping Grass (Microlaena stipoides), a Nankeen Kestrel, likely eating a Giant Green Slantface (photographed separately) and Lesser Joyweed (Alternanthera denticulata).



For more Recent FOG events see page 15.



Vale Graeme Evans

FOG expresses its condolences to the family of Graeme Evans, a founding and continuous FOG member, who died 18 February aged 81. Many Friends of Grasslands members will remember Graeme as a committed conservationist, as well as being heavily involved in many political and social causes. Typical of Graeme, he donated his body to science. In the early days of FOG, Graeme worked intensively with Edwina Barton to produce FOG's draft constitution.

Unfortunately, his planned memorial service could not be held. FOG wishes to thank his daughter Jodie Evans for keeping FOG informed and supplying a copy of his eulogy.

News roundup

Optimism regrows at Yarramundi Grassland

John Fitz Gerald

In the smoke and heat of summer the little scrapes at Yarramundi, on which FOG worked all last year, looked desperately sad with leaves of most plants totally dried off and brown, and just a few crispy everlasting daisy heads.

Now the story is far better in most ways. The best news is that sown grasses are starting to show, Windmill Grass being the leader. Daisies have burst into leaf and flower action (Hoary Sunrays and Yellow Buttons) and *Wahlenbergia* species are flowering cheerfully. Vegetation coverage is still light, on average. The Wild Flax plants flowered earlier and now have green seed capsules. The Australian Bindweeds that appeared but were not sown have also flowered.

The process (with a little weed control intervention) seems to have beaten seedbanks of the worst perennial species like Ribwort Plantain, *Paspalum* and St John's Wort. Less encouraging are two annual exotic groups, *Vulpia* grass and *Trifolium* spp. - these are coming back too thickly, especially in the damper and lower points of each scrape. Maybe clipping will be needed, but that would also stunt the natives we are striving to establish. Life wasn't meant to be easy?



Hoary Sunrays forging on in the Eastern scrape at Yarramundi

FOG statement on social distancing - Geoff Robertson

In our recent events update (16 Apr), FOG released a statement *Strengthening FOG in Coronavirus days*. Since the issue of that statement, FOG has received various feedback which is incorporated here. Obviously, FOG members support the social/physical distancing restrictions imposed by various guidelines, part of which is to continue to exercise our minds and bodies. At the same time we need to bear in mind the huge investment that each of us has made in our grassy ecosystems and the need to continue to care for them. Following the drought, fire and rain, our grasslands and woodlands have been reviving spectacularly. However, so have weeds. Hence, we are advocating that our members combine exercise with visits to the grassland and woodland remnants around us.

Social/physical distancing requires us to stay and/or work at home as much as possible only leaving home for essential purposes including exercise. If out and about, or at our place of work, we should practise social distancing with people who are not members of the same household - keeping two metres apart. It is allowable to meet up with a friend on a one-to-one basis keeping two metres apart. Fortunately in regional areas and in the Canberra region, there are lots of areas to visit without getting up too close to others.

In the spirit of staying at home, periods away from home should be limited. However, when out and about, we may combine exercise and conservation of our grassy ecosystems, by:

- Monitoring and reporting on the structure and condition of the patch and taking any notes on anything special, or of interest - FOG would love to publish your findings.
- Recording plants and animals using your camera or mobile phone and uploading to Canberra Nature Map and other relevant platforms.
- Mapping weeds and rabbit warrens using your mobile phone and the ACT Government Collector app.
- Collecting rubbish. Remember to wear sturdy gloves, possibly more than ever before.
- Taking your favourite tool (e.g., a weeding fork or brickies hammer) and/or a bag to remove weeds or seeds - or simply hand pulling weeds like fleabane and thistles. Again, remember to wear sturdy gloves, etc.
- Where individual volunteers have authorisation to do so, cutting and daubing and/or spraying isolated weed infestations. Please note that in ACT Reserves,

Parkcare has suspended all programmed activities, and work and weed activities will not be covered by insurance.

- Planning a restoration activity if group activities are allowed later in the year.

If you are undertaking conservation work, please let us know, dates, hours and what you are doing. We would like to monitor this.

FOG will continue to:

- Publish our newsletter, events update, facebook and webpages. Keep feeding us material.
- Be a strong advocate for grassy ecosystems.
- Encourage our members to care for our local grasslands and woodlands.
- Discover what we can do with Zoom and the like - if anyone can assist in developing online presentations, please let us know.

Another matter members might experiment with, is gardening using grassy ecosystem plants. FOG has long recognised the importance of horticulture in understanding the behaviour of grassy ecosystem plants.

FOG grassy grants update - Andrew Zelnik

The 13 April deadline for 2020 Grassy Ecosystem Grant applications, advertised in our last issue, has now passed. This year, again considerably aided by our wider advertising, we have received five substantive applications for projects on a mix of public and private land tenures in the ACT and southern and northern parts of NSW. Four are for on-ground works (revegetation and/or weed control) combined with local outreach and education. The other is for experimental PhD research on beetle impacts on ecosystem function in grasslands. We also received several other associated enquiries which have the potential for other avenues of involvement with FOG.

In relation to the four 2019 grant projects and one remaining from 2018 we are in the process of obtaining progress updates. At this stage we have only had one notification of a possible 6 to 9 month delay to one of the 2019 projects. It is due to impacts of the drought in 2019 and now the COVID-19 virus pandemic affecting completion of required field work.

SE Oz grassy ecosystem by Rainer

- a must read, Ed

For those who do not have a good understanding of grassy ecosystems, here is a must read, namely *South-Eastern Australian Temperate Grasslands and Grassy Woodlands*, published by Rainer Rehwinkel and published in the *Encyclopedia of the World's Biomes*, Elsevier. The following link <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/B978012409548912024X?via%3Dihub>> takes you to a synopsis, abstract, a bio on Rainer, an outline of the article and some of Rainer's lovely photos. Rainer has advised FOG that the article might show a little bias towards NSW grasslands with which he is more familiar.

Each of the abstract and bio is worth repeating here. I have also included Rainer's photo of Bibenluke crown

The abstract states "South-eastern Australian grassy ecosystems include a variety of grassland, grassy woodland and related vegetation types. Prior to European settlement, grassy ecosystems existed in a mosaic, alongside extensive forests and other vegetation types. Some fauna species of grassy ecosystems are distinctive. Australian grassy ecosystems have a history of land-use by Aboriginal peoples. Since European colonization, grassy ecosystems have been adversely



impacted upon, including agricultural transformations, infrastructure development and invasion by pest animals and plants. Many grassy communities are now legislatively recognized as endangered. Recognition of native grassy ecosystems by government ecologists and conservation managers has emerged, with grassland and grassy woodland conservation reserves, off-reserve measures and engagement programs established. There is growing public interest, with community organizations and some landholders being particularly active. In the agricultural sector, there is growing application of sustainable use of native grassy systems. The conservation status of these systems remains poor, particularly that of grasslands, and government policies and legislative enforcement lag."

The bio states "Rainer Rehwinkel (B.App.Sc., Hons., University of Canberra) is a retired ecologist, formerly a Senior Threatened Species Officer with the NSW Government, where he worked on the conservation, recovery and management of threatened grassy communities and their fauna and flora. Rainer undertook extensive surveys of grassland and grassy woodland sites and developed the NSW Grassy Ecosystems Database. He established the Southern Tablelands Grassy Ecosystems Conservation Management Network and engaged widely throughout SE NSW on grassy

ecosystems conservation issues. Rainer was Chair of the Kosciuszko to Coast Partnership and co-authored two grassland and woodland field guides and a major classification of vegetation in SE NSW. Rainer worked with NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service staff to establish several grassland reserves and developed a plan for the rehabilitation of grassy woodland at a NSW nature reserve. Since retirement, Rainer undertakes ecological consultancies, is a committee member of Friends of Grasslands, a trust member of the Wandiyali Restoration Trust, Patron of Friends of Yass Gorge, and a keen Australian and international birder, contributing to eBird."

A copy of the full text is available from Rainer - contact rainer.rehwinkel@hotmail.com.

Franklin grassland update

Franklin grassland is well on its way to becoming a reserve within the framework of Canberra Nature Park following the ACT government's announcement that it planned to move in that direction late last year.

Meanwhile the government has appointed Redbox Design Group (<http://www.redboxdesigngroup.com.au/contact.html>) to prepare a landscape plan to create a design that incorporates both a strong conservation focus and a community recreation activity. On 27 February, Redbox held a community consultation and invited participants to share their ideas on the design of the new reserve. At a subsequent meeting of key stakeholders, on 16 March, Redbox set out and clarified various design options. FOG awaits with excited anticipation to see the design suggested.

In April, FOG attempted to commence an on-ground group - see page 4.

Magpie Hill Park consultation

In 2019, the Lyneham Community Association (LCA) obtained an ACT Government Adopt-a-Park grant which allowed it to conduct a community consultation and develop a sketch plan to direct future park development. At this time there is no funding for physical work in the park.

The park is approximately three hectares and is located on Wattle Street in Lyneham ACT. It has mainly native mature trees, including remnant trees, and very little understorey. The trees include *Eucalyptus blakelyi*, *E. cinerea*, *E. dives*, *E. macrorhyncha*, *E. mannifera*, *E. melliodora*, *E. pauciflora*, *E. polyanthemos* and *E. pulverulenta*.

Edwina Robinson, landscape architect (The Climate Factory), has been contracted to conduct the consultation and prepare a sketch plan. She reported to a community meeting on 14 March attended by 33 people, about half of whom were LCA members and the rest were other local residents, invited through a letter box drop. The meeting workshopped how the plan should be developed.

A strong theme of the consultation is to devise a plan to reintroduce indigenous plants into the understorey. On 19 February two FOG members conducted a quick survey of the understorey to identify what plants were present. The list prepared by FOG was included in

Edwina's report. The list provides a guide to possible plants that might be reintroduced.

Edwina mentioned to FOG that she will be making some recommendations regarding 'climate-ready' trees and fencing off a couple of key areas so the understorey (forbs and grasses can regrow) is not mowed.

Issues raised with ACT Government

20 April. FOG wrote to ACT Government regarding the building of informal BMX tracks at Tuggeranong and illegal vehicles accessing Blue Gum Point, Yarralumla.

At Tuggeranong woodland, a group of adults and children were discovered building a BMX track. The woodland is dear to our hearts as, some years ago, FOG conducted a successful campaign to ensure some high quality remnants, destined for urban development, were included within the reserve. Over the years, there have been outbreaks of BMX track building at the site, and we have dissuaded the builders from doing so - on several occasions FOG organised work parties to repair the damage. In response to the latest episode, the ACT government has repaired the damage, although FOG believes more needs to be done.

FOG has recently commenced work parties at Blue Gum Point on the southern side of Lake Burley Griffin. The area has patches of high quality natural temperate grasslands and woodlands, and populations of button wrinklewort and golden sun moth. FOG is concerned that insufficient is being done to manage the point particularly from illegal parking. FOG made a number of suggestions on both issues. We are awaiting a response.

Wild horse population to be reduced

MON 20 Apr. Ricky French in the Australian in an article *Mass cull: 'It should never have come to this'*, reported that the fallout from the bushfires will see 17,000 wild horses destined for the knackery or shot in trap yards. NSW Environment Minister Matt Kean announced that that about 4000 feral horses would be removed from three wildlife habitat areas, covering about 57,000ha, in the north of the park. Horses will be removed from the Nungar Plain and numbers will be reduced substantially on Cooleman Plain and parts of Boggy and Kiandra Plains.

Deputy Premier, John Barilaro MP, who introduced the "Brumby Bill", said he supported the removal of horses in the three key areas. "The commitment we made to reduce the (overall) horse numbers to a population of 3000 still stands."

Ricky French quotes Professor Jamie Pittock, who flew over Kosciuszko National Park in a helicopter (reported on page 4 of our previous issue), saw horses in the habitat of endangered species, including the northern corroboree frog, alpine she-oak skink and stocky galaxias fish. Feral horses are thought to have come through the bushfires largely unscathed and are now concentrated in certain areas. Jamie said "We saw herds of horses already knocking off the green pick. This prevents the re-establishment of the plant species. Vegetation not re-establishing means sediment is more

News roundup continued on page 15.

Yellow Box (*Eucalyptus melliodora*)

- a brief & personal history - Alex Kirk

The first time I set eyes on a yellow box, was of the giant “Cousin Itt” in the back corner of my Canberra garden-to-be, a tall dead tree trunk covered in decades of ivy.

It was once part of a vast grassy woodland covering much of the A.C.T. and stretching from south-eastern Queensland to central Victoria. Only scattered areas remain of what is now a critically endangered ecological community. In Canberra, yellow box is the biggest of the two key grassy woodland trees: the other is Blakely’s red gum (*E. blakelyi*). Remnants are protected under the federal Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999 and the ACT’s Nature Conservation Act 1980.

The earliest formal description of yellow box (shown in image) appears in Walpers’ 1843 *Repertorium Botanices Systematicae*, by German botanist Johannes Conrad Schauer. Although he never travelled to Australia, Schauer received many specimens collected by English botanist, explorer and famous Kew collector Allan Cunningham. After Cunningham’s death in 1839, the executor of his estate sent the specimens to Schauer. The story is encapsulated in the gum’s botanical nomenclature, bearing both botanists’ names (*Eucalyptus melliodora* A.Cunn. ex Schauer in W.G.Walpers, *Repert. Bot. Syst.* 2: 924 (1843)).

Allan Cunningham was the ‘King’s Botanist’ in 1816, sent to Australia by Sir Joseph Banks to collect Australian plants for Kew Gardens. He’d studied botany under Banks. After land and sea expeditions around much of Australia, Cunningham focused on the botany of New South Wales. The yellow box specimens he collected were from the Bathurst area.

Cunningham sailed back to England to write up his many years’ work in Australia and catalogue the specimens, returning in 1837 to be superintendent of Sydney’s Botanic Gardens. The story goes that he soon quit, fed up his job as “a mere cultivator of cabbages and turnips” for the Governor’s kitchen table, and returned to his first love - botanical research.

One of the most important early collectors of Australian plants did return to the Botanic Gardens, where he now rests – his remains are interred in a memorial obelisk in a pond by the Garden restaurant. Hopefully he’d approve of resting in Australia’s first scientific institution, despite the occasional odour of cabbage or turnip wafting from the restaurant!

Cunningham’s journals contain many references to “box”. He wrote of “open wooded country” .. “timbered with large and stately box”. Cunningham doesn’t appear to have used the term “yellow box”. I’d like to think the stately box was indeed *E. melliodora*.

Fast forward almost 200 years and thankfully you can see many grand old yellow box (aka honey box or yellow ironbark) around Canberra.

The most famous is the protected ancient “Corroboree tree” in Corroboree Park, Ainslie (see pic next page). The nearby sign says it “would have been already hundreds of years old when Captain Cook sailed up the east coast”. Its multiple trunks are in fact secondary stems growing around the original trunk which has rotted away.

A *heritage tour of Ainslie* brochure by the National Trust (ACT) describes long-term resident Iris Carnall, who lived in a cottage overlooking the park for much of last century, recalling her mother, as a little girl in about 1880,

witnessed Aboriginal people gathering around an elder sitting beneath that tree.

The Park was believed to have been used as a corroboree (meeting) ground. It’s also claimed this was the first campsite for Duntroon overseer James Ainslie when he arrived in 1825 (ABC 2015).

The Ngunawal call yellow box “yaradhang” (pron. yarathang). Ngunawal elder Wally Bell says all elements of the tree are used – wood for tools, weapons and coolamons to transport food, seed to make flour for bread, flowers for tea or medicine, honey and honeycomb as a rich food source.

Yellow box is considered the best native tree for honey production. Its scientific name “melliodora” comes from Latin *melleus*: honey and *odora*: sweet

smell, from the scent of the nectar of its flowers.

It’s also famous for its hard, heavy, strong wood that’s extremely durable and has been used for railway sleepers, poles, bridges and firewood. According to one report, one of the few trees that survived the 1945 atomic bomb blast in Hiroshima was an *E. melliodora*, less than a kilometre from where the bomb exploded, and is still standing.

Wally Bell tells me that for Aboriginal people, eucalypts like the yellow box are the connection between the land and sky ... “between us in the physical sense to the spiritual world of our ancestors as we believe we come from the land and are here to take care of country and ultimately return to the land to join and become ancestral spirits”.

Yellow box likes better quality soils, favouring wooded slopes of undulating hills. It’s slow growing and can reach 30m, with a large, rounded, open canopy. A key characteristic is its rough, scaly yellow-brown to dark brown bark on the lower trunk, yielding to smooth cream and grey bark (see pic next page) – where that changes varies markedly. The leaves, both juvenile and adult, have a marginal vein running parallel to the edge of the



E. MELLIODORA A. Cunn. Herb. no. 571. — Schauer mss. — Arborea glaucescens: ramulis pendulis teretibus; foll. coriaceis anguste lanceolatis subfalcatis in petiolum attenuatis acuminatis, margine incrassatis impunctatis concoloribus. opacis; pedunculis axillaribus 3-5-floris petiolo duplo brevioribus. pedicellisq. compressis, his cupula paulo longioribus; operculo coriaceo subhemisphaerico vix apiculato cupula obconica triente breviori. — Foliorum lamina 2½-3 pollices longa, 6 lin. circiter lata, pedunculus 3 lin. metiens, operculum 1 lineam altum cupulae concolor flavescens-virens. Flores mel redolentes. — In Novae Cambriae australis plagis interioribus occidentem versus frequens.

leaf (see pic below). It usually flowers every second year (Nov-Feb).

Early settlers and farmers were quick to see the yellow box as a barometer of the best land for agriculture. The woodlands that once covered millions of hectares in eastern Australia now occupy just eight percent of their pre-European heyday.

Yellow box can reach a great age thanks to its durability and fire tolerance. A carbon dating study in 1997 by an authority on Canberra's trees, Dr John Banks, found the maximum age for one local tree was 384 years. And because it was in good condition, he thought it could have lived for perhaps another 100 years!

If you'd like to treat yourself, apart from visiting the Corroboree Tree, the grounds of ANU are rich with stately yellow box, as are Stirling Park (Gura Dung Dhaura) and Red Hill Nature Park. The tiny Griffith Woodland (aka La Perouse Park) has a lovely stand of yellow box, young and old (see cover page). One has a beehive inside its base (see photo below).

Yellow box are handsome. And stately. And now I'd add majestic.

References

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Above - the "Corroboree tree", already hundreds of years old when Captain Cook sailed up the east coast".

Cover page - Griffith Woodland (aka La Perouse Park) has a lovely stand of yellow box, young and old. Photo taken late afternoon.

Below - bees taking advantage of a yellow box, and a tree showing both types of bark side by side. Usually the smooth back is above the rough



Left - a young leaf, an old leaf & capsules - important diagnostic tools.



Advocacy Report - Naarilla Hirsch

March 2020

Only one submission recently but it was a big one. The Commonwealth's EPBC Act is being reviewed. FOG did a substantial (13 page) submission on this, and answered most of the 26 questions that were part of the discussion paper. Here are some highlights of our major concerns:

- The EPBC Act does not go far enough in terms of protecting matters of national environmental significance – however, while threatened grassy ecological communities and species have declined, without the protection of the Act the situation would be worse
- There is a need for good statistical data and analysis to inform decision making
- The Act should be expanded to include landscapes, corridors and buffers; greater emphasis on non-MNES (Matters of National Environmental Significance); interim listing; and failure to prevent loss
- FOG has been concerned for many years about the way the referral process allows piecemeal proposals impacting on MNES to go through – death by a thousand cuts. The Act's consideration of MNES should include more of a landscape approach over time, including via strategic assessments on either a geographic basis or a species/EEC basis.
 - However, with a greater use of strategic assessments and similar approaches, there is a need to take account of factors such as the mechanisms needed to ensure that all possible developments within the timeframe of the strategic assessment are included, what is an appropriate timeframe for a strategic assessment to apply and triggers that render the assessment out of date, and how should public consultation occur
- While FOG in principle supported removal of duplication of processes, we do not believe that States and Territories should be delegated to deliver EPBC Act outcomes, even if they adopt national standards, for several reasons including conflict of interest (in the ACT) and focus on their own jurisdictions without taking account of cross-border issues
- Low-risk projects should not receive automatic approval or exemptions, since there needs to be consideration of whether or not all data relevant to the project has been taken into account, also of the landscape implications of the project
- The Commonwealth's regulatory role should be expanded to include habitat management at a landscape scale as well as species-specific protection
- The EPBC Act does not adequately safeguard the natural and Indigenous cultural values of Australia's protected areas, heritage places, and other conservation tenures; and does not specifically recognise Indigenous knowledge
- The public consultation period of 10 working days is too short

- The current process involves a lack of transparency from the point of view of a community group such as FOG, e.g. consideration of offset packages
- FOG supports the establishment of an independent National Environment Commission, the role of which would include developing and overseeing national environmental goals, strategies, gather and disseminating evidence on environmental conditions and trends; and ensuring recovery plans, threat abatement plans, conservation advices and threat mitigation directives are up to date and integrated into bioregional plans
- We remain concerned that a market-based approach or public investment vehicle for offset funds could lead to the perception (or reality) of developers being able to "buy off" environmental impacts, to the long term detriment of our biodiversity
- Offsets are one of a number of tools to be used to mitigate against loss of biodiversity and should be applied only in a narrow range of situations. In fact they have drawbacks as a primary tool for biodiversity conservation for reasons such as using averted loss rather than restoration gain in offset calculations and their application on a site basis rather than a landscape basis. It is essential that offsets are seen as a last resort only.

April

FOG provided comments to the NCA on its draft tree management policy. These included new targets of conserving indigenous trees that aid conservation of biodiversity and cultural heritage, and avoiding planting tree species that are invasive to natural ecosystems. Some anomalies in the scope of the plan were noted in relation to Stirling Park and Attunga Point, the Scrivener's Hut/Capital Circle woodland conservation area and the small, woodland remnant in the West Block area of the parliamentary triangle.

The full text of these submissions appears on our website.

Donations to support FOG

FOG makes small grants to researchers, educators and on-ground projects, a highly effective way to support grassy ecosystems.

To support this, you can make a tax deductible donation to FOG Public Fund by:

Direct debit: BSB 633 000, A/c 153493960 (Bendigo Bank). Please include your name and advise our Treasurer treasurer@fog.org.au.

Cheque: payable to 'Friends of Grasslands Public Fund', mailed to Treasurer, Friends of Grasslands Inc., PO Box 440, Jamison Centre, ACT 2614. Include your name and postal address.

A receipt for tax purposes will be sent to you. You may also include a donation when you complete your membership application/renewal form. THANKS

After the fire

FOG is eager to hear from members about the recovery. Here are some stories by Tein, Roger, Lauren and Libby. Send in your stories.

Scottsdale - gets some extra post-fire love - Tein McDonald (President, Australian Association of Bush Regenerators (AABR))

The Bush Heritage Australia's property Scottsdale at Bredbo was one of the Monaro properties extensively burnt by wildfire in January this year. But the news is not all bad for Scottsdale's native grasslands. These sites have been the subject of restoration works over the last few years (as they were previously dominated by African love grass) with the treatment involving aerial spraying with flupropanate at a rate that did not kill the extant native grasses or forbs. Kill rates of African love grass, and gradual recovery by natives was very good before the fire - but the response of natives to the fire has been even more heartening, with vigorous resprouting of the native grasses and forbs, plus germination of a wide range of forbs including the threatened species button wrinklewort and silky swainson-pea as well as the more common native convulvulus, native St John's wort, goodenia and glycine.

However, weed has of course, also resprouted and germinated - including one variety of African love grass that was known to not be susceptible to the low dose herbicide and a litany of the usual culprits, vipers bugloss, the weedy St John's wort and yellow catsear. Fortunately volunteers have come to the rescue - with a number coming from Sydney and Cooma to assist through the post-fire bush regeneration program initiated by the AABR in January. Repeated visits were made before the COVID-19 travel and congregation restrictions came into force and the volunteers have managed to spot-spray grass weed and much of the weedy forb load on around 11ha. Repeat visits will be made in the medium and longer term to help secure the non-weedy recovery of these grasslands.

If you have a high conservation value area of native vegetation that burnt during the fire and you think needs urgent assistance, please contact AABR by bushfire-response@aabr.org.au. Also see "Important notice on Bushfire recovery" on front page.

Monitoring along the Nerriga Road

We have two reports from Roger Farrow. On 22 April he reported he has started a small project to monitor some aspects of the regeneration of the fire affected vegetation at five sites along the Nerriga Road between Bulee Pass to east of Sassafras. He has been observing the different types of recovery from epicormic regrowth, lignotuber sprouting, basal shoots, tubers and seed. This fire was particularly hot and consumed drought-affected



Above Tein and David Meggitt, Turramurra, members of the AABR volunteers working at Scottsdale in March 2020.

vegetation that already contained much dead above ground material. Consequently, the shrub layer has been completely obliterated and a new dynamic has started with extensive germination from the surviving seed bank. Of particular interest has been the resurgence of orchids from tubers in the genera *Corunastylis*, *Eriochilus* and *Specularantha*. He states that obviously these were there before the fire but entirely concealed in the shrubbery.

Mclouds Creek Nature Reserve

Roger also visited Mclouds Creek Nature Reserve to look at the impact of drought-breaking rains on the flora especially the autumn flowering orchids. The orchids were growing in profusion probably because of the loss of competing shrubs due to the previous drought. The eucalypt forest, dominated by stringy-barks and scribbly gums, was extensively defoliated by the drought but the epicormic regrowth had now been severely impacted by an outbreak of a leaf-tying caterpillars in the family

Tortricidae. The secondary grassland areas adjacent to the forest have been heavily grazed by kangaroos that is well demonstrated in the exclusion areas, although heavy thatching by *Themeda* has reduced plant diversity in some of the exclusion areas.

Many of the cages used to protect plantings have been damaged by animals, in particular three cages in a clearing in the forest. According to the Ranger, these were originally protecting *Lepidium* plants that have since died and now support two volunteer specimens of gruggly bush, *Melicytus dentatus*. This species has not been recorded from the reserve and it may have arrived from seed passed by birds. The plants are tangled in wire from the depredations of herbivores such as swamp wallabies but would be worth protecting as they are rare plants in the area.

FOG has had a long term involvement in restoration work at McLeods Creek, as reported in earlier newsletters, and Roger has suggested he is happy to lead a small work party, when social isolation is removed, to repair the cages.

Lauren Booth on her Nerriga Property

FOG has had several visits to Lauren and Norm's Nerriga property. On 22 April, she reported being confined to home and "we have not visited the Nerriga property for about six weeks. We are unsure sure how the natural recovery is going.

On previous visits we cleared all the burnt sheds etc, just waiting on the scrap metal pick up. The species observed by FOG members on earlier visits have suffered - the fire was very intense at the rear of the property. The area of leptospernums along the back boundary was just left as burnt stumps/sticks, we're not sure they will survive. Everywhere else, every bit of undergrowth was burnt. The only part not burnt was a few hundred square metres at the front, just a little pocket the fire went around.

When we were there, there was no sign of *Grevillea renwickiana* or *Dillwynia glaucula* (both endangered species) both were completely burnt. However we hope they will regrow from the lignotubers and seed bank if it survived. The *Rulingia* in the



Gruggly bush tangled in wire at McLeods

paddock had the fire go over it but has come back really well after the rain. It actually looks really good. So many big trees haven't survived, or at least they hadn't any fresh shoots six weeks ago, it is probably still dangerous in the bush due to falling branches etc.

There are larger birds around, and a few small birds. Immediately after the fire our neighbours brought food and water for surviving animals, and we have seen wallabies and wombats but nothing smaller. There was a little bearded dragon that lived in our woodpile, and somehow it survived!

We lost all the fences and have applied to Blazeaid so hopefully towards the end of the year we will get some work done there."

Harolds Cross - Libby Keen

One of the good things about being isolated at Harold's Cross is that there's more time to observe interesting signs of recovery from drought and fire damage in the grasslands and bush.

The paddocks around us are looking amazing. Not having been grazed for several years - no grass - they are now lush with kangaroo grass, poa and wild

After the Fire continued on page 15.

Below: Roger's images - top images show numerous orchids.



Mistletoebird - in a mutually beneficial relationship with mistletoes - Michael Bedingfield

The Mistletoebird is rarely seen when flying among the treetops, but the evidence of its passing can be seen everywhere in a typical grassy woodland setting. The bird's favourite food is the berries of mistletoes and it moves around following the seasons looking for this harvest. The fruit can pass quickly through the bird's digestive system in as short a time as only 25 minutes. The unaffected seeds are dispersed in the sticky droppings and often chance to cling to the branches of trees. On suitable host trees the seeds germinate, take root and grow. Mistletoes are a partial parasite, in that they get water and nutrients from the host trees but still use photosynthesis to produce carbohydrates.

Mistletoebirds go by the scientific name of *Dicaeum hirundinaceum*. They occur all over the Australian continent in many habitats wherever mistletoes can be found, from rainforest to dry mulga scrub, but are absent from Tasmania where there are no mistletoes. They are summer migrants to our region, although some may stay for the winter. The bird is quite small, with a body length of about 10 cm and has long narrow wings. The male and female are different in colour and I hope to explain this from my drawing of a pair. The male is in the foreground and is more brightly coloured, blue-black above with a red throat and upper breast, a black streak down its white belly and pale red under the tail. The female is grey above, mostly white below with a grey streak down its belly and pale red under the tail. The song is a high-pitched warbling with imitation of other bird species, as well as high-pitched calls that sound like 'sweet-sweet' or 'tzeu'. The nest is pear shaped and hangs from a branch. It is made from spider webs and plant down and has a narrow slit-like entrance on one side.

While this bird's preferred food is the mistletoe berries, it does eat other fruit, nectar, insects and spiders. Its digestive tract is designed to process the mistletoe berries separately. These and other fruits bypass the stomach and go to the small intestine where the fleshy outer part of the fruit is digested leaving the seed to be expelled. Insects and spiders are processed more thoroughly via the stomach.

A very common local species of mistletoe is the Box Mistletoe, *Amyema miquelii*, and a drawing is provided. It is often seen on the Yellow Box Gum Tree, *Eucalyptus melliodora*. While regarded by some as a parasite and pest, the reputation is not deserved because Mistletoe plants rarely take too much from the host tree. In fact, Box Mistletoe is an integral and natural part of the Yellow Box/Red Gum Grassy Woodland Ecological Community.

Research has shown that when there is an absence of Mistletoe in a patch of woodland then the biodiversity is considerably less. The dense foliage of the mistletoe plants provides a safe nesting place for birds and

possums. The flowers are a source of nectar and the nutrient-rich fresh leaves of mistletoes provide food for many insect larvae. Leaf turnover by mistletoes is much higher than the host trees so they add significantly to the understorey leaf-litter. Leaf-litter is a habitat requirement for many invertebrates and more invertebrates occur when there is a healthy mistletoe population. In turn when there are more invertebrates there are more insectivorous bird species in the same patch. Also decomposition of the fallen leaves enriches the soil and this benefits the understorey flora.

The relationship between Mistletoebirds and mistletoe and their effect on the native fauna and flora provides a window into the complex web of connections that support the biodiversity of an ecological community. You may have never seen a Mistletoebird, but you can certainly see where they have been!

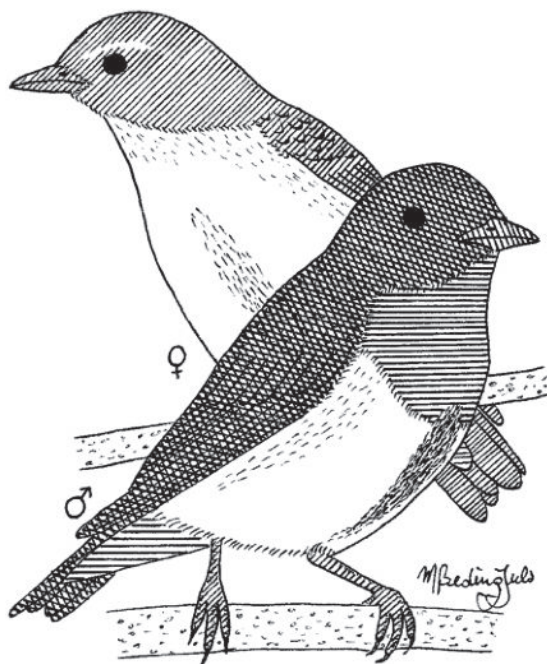
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<http://www.birdlife.org.au/bird-profile/mistletoebird>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mistletoebird>

"Readers Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds" with numerous authors (1976)



Around and about - John Fitz Gerald

With the Botanic Gardens in Canberra locked-down, I can't record any new microscope views. Instead I'll share some observations of plants in the grasslands and woodlands that I've made during recent walks and exercise.

First, however, I need to retract the good news about *Tragopogon* that was printed in the Mar-Apr's close-up. By the time the news issue was distributed, some decent rain had arrived and these apparently spent plants began to pick up. Now there are many heads distributing their airborne seeds - business as normal I'm afraid - sorry for the slightly out-of date 'fake' news.

Here and now, at least in SE Australia, the summer-autumn rains have made a huge green difference across our landscapes. Leaves have budded anew on previously sad-looking trees - even many of our Blakely's Red Gums suffering from die-back are having a good season now.

I was listening to a gardening show on local ABC Radio a few weeks ago when 'Willo', a knowledgeable host, was discussing this year's extraordinary autumn flush with a vigour more like normal spring growth. His discussion was mainly about roses and spring flowering bulbs where leaves have shot early. I see many parallels in our open spaces.

Let's start with the downside of the flush - the invasives. I'm sure everyone is staggered by the explosion of African Lovegrass in all its forms. A contact of mine likens some Canberra roadsides to wheat fields - dense flowering stands of tall African Lovegrass. Other pest grasses are booming away as well, *Paspalum* is one of the first to come to mind, Stinkgrass (*Eragrostis cilianensis*) another. However, my eye is drawn closer to ground level where the broad-leaved invasives are having an enormous season and just starting to flower. Paterson's Curse and Viper's Bugloss have huge rosettes, and thistles, milk thistles, flatweeds, Capeweed, Sheep Sorrel, exotic erodiums are not far behind. I'll mention another shocking species below but first want to divert upside.

Native forbs and grasses are making up for the lost summer. Yellow Rush Lily put on an amazing display

which peaked a month ago in many places - this was three months later than last year's good showing. Various species of *Wahlenbergias* are flowering madly right now. Daisies are not to be outdone - amongst the most striking are *Chrysocephalum apiculatum* and *Calotis lappulacea*, but I've also seen attractive Hoary Sunrays and Lemon Beautyheads. Lilies of many types have thrown up healthy leaves, so too has Blue Devil, and Golden Weathergrass had a flowering spurt in late March. *Glycines* flowered densely and have set plenty of seed. *Erodium cicutarium* shows huge germinations in places, but most plants have not grown to flowering stage yet. Native grasses have also fared well. I reckon Red-leg Grass has to be in the top tier and is flowering well and seeds beginning to form. However good flowers can also be found on Wallaby, Spear, Cotton Panic, Hair

Panic, Queensland Bluegrass, Windmill, Nine-awned and other grasses. We'd expect the opportunist Five Minute Grass to have boomed, and indeed it is lanky and shiny in red patches (that look from a distance as though they've been coated with spray dye), but to my mind the other grasses are well out of normal cycle. For all these flowerers, it remains to be seen whether enough warmth sticks around for seed to ripen. One of the furthest out of cycle has to be Kangaroo Grass - our 'dry' open grasslands presently have tall lush tussocks with many flowering heads showing plump green seeds and straight black awns. This must be four months beyond normal - my recall from seed collecting of Themeda stands is that peak harvest is around Christmas Day, otherwise ripe seeds soon fall on subsequent long hot days.

To finish I'll return to the shocking state of areas, almost bare at the end of the dry summer, that germinated masses of Ribwort Plantain. I include a photo of a small one, but any walk into Nature Reserves, paddocks, parks reveals large patches in too many places. This just shows what must lurk in the seedbanks waiting for its

chance. I chose to make some measurements and dug out all Plantain seedlings from an area of 0.1 square metres at Yarramundi. I took my bag of dug-up material home and (with help) laboriously separated all the plants by untangling in a wet state, then drying and weighing. I've recorded leaf lengths ranging 2-15 cm and tallied



A grassland near Ginninderra Creek - a riot of flowers of a *Wahlenbergia* species growing together with unusually vigorous Nine-awned Grass.

At Yarramundi Grassland, Ribwort Plantain *Plantago lanceolata* dominating totally dominates a small patch. 'Brickies' hammer head for scale.

6,500 Plantains per square metre with this vegetation (roots included) weighing 3.3 kilograms. I'll leave you to multiply up to hectares or square kilometres or whatever, but these figures (e.g. 3,300 tonnes per square kilometre for a 15cm groundlayer) are staggering, cementing this species' place as a transformative weed. This is why scrape and sow was chosen to tackle the seedbank problem in two small demonstrations at Yarramundi. Competition during growth will of course cut back the numbers of mature plants that finally fill my square metre, but complete covering by Plantain seems to be the only likely outcome without intervention. Ah well, I'm told everyone needs to pick something useful to do during lock-down - happy weeding!

"After the fire" continued from page 12.

sorghum, and full of wildflowers, notably swathes of Autumn Greenhoods, not seen by us since the end of the nineties drought ten years ago. There are at present very few weeds, just manageable bits of fleabane and the odd thistle, plus solanum and flatweed, but no verbasicum or Yorkshire fog or sweet vernal grass, hooray! Perhaps the exotics have been dealt a blow. Springtime will answer that I guess.

There was a lot of collateral bushfire damage around us where breaks were bulldozed through paddocks and along wooded tracks so we'd expected a weedfest once it rained. However we're seeing plenty of regrowth from the bulldozed stumps of gums and wattles, plus masses of lomandra, wild raspberry, flax lily, bear's ear, etc, and a variety of legumes and ground covers, all vigorously returning, plus quite a lot of new bracken, but again few weeds. I note that a similar pattern in the region has been reported in the Events Update. We're hopeful that the burnt forest is recovering too, and are encouraged by finding a Powerful Owl roosting in one of the garden conifers last week, clutching the remains of a Greater Glider.

Recent FOG events continued from page 4.

FOG presentations to Rotary

Late last year, George Wilson, the Rotary Club of Canberra, Burley Griffin Branch, invited FOG to make a presentation on grasslands. FOG is always ready to explain its passion and Rainer Rehwinkel put up his hand to provide a talk on natural temperate grasslands, including explaining the role of FOG. His talk was scheduled for 6 February but was rescheduled several times and was finally held on 26 March via Zoom. Rainer prepared a comprehensive and informative slideshow, filled with many fascinating images. His talk was well received and a great way to promote our passion for grassy ecosystems (for a copy, contact Rainer <rainer.rehwinkel@hotmail.com>). Also see *SE Oz Grassy Ecosystem* by Rainer, page 6.

George also approached Jamie Pittock to talk on Stirling Park. He advertised the event as "Jamie Pittock, Professor in the Fenner School at ANU will speak about Stirling Ridge overlooking the Lake at Yarralumla, its significance, history and conservation." The Rotary

Branch's normal meeting place has a view of Stirling Park and so was naturally interested in the topic. The Zoom talk was held on 16 April and was highly interesting and informative. At the end of the meeting, a Rotary member suggested, and participants readily agreed to, that the members of the branch would like to be taken on a tour of the site and, separately, to participate in a working bee there. Jamie readily agreed to assist in arranging these events when we get beyond coronavirus. A copy of Jamie's slides is available from Jamie <jamie.pittock@fog.org.au>.

George has invited FOG members to join them on future occasions - a schedule of upcoming talks may be found at <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1GIbrCT6Zf78zEXjAXx3iCHkyK_qwFo_9i2SVI_VFyIU/edit?usp=sharing>.

News roundup continued from page 7.

easily eroded and it risks clogging up the stream environment. That vegetation is also the habitat of the alpine she-oak skink and the broad-toothed rat, which need the tussock and grass in order to tunnel into to hide from predators, and for nesting."

According to the article, the draft management plan by the NSW government in 2016 proposed reducing the number of horses to 600 over 20 years, but this was rejected in favour of the Kosciuszko Wild Horse Heritage Bill, which was passed into law in 2018. But with the feral horse population increasing at a rate of 23 per cent a year, the do-nothing approach has come crashing down.

FOG has been a strong advocate over many years to remove wild horses from the high country - this is good news.

GED recovery team meeting

18 March. Geoff Robertson on behalf of FOG attended a meeting of the National Recovery Team Meeting on grassland earless dragon *Tympanocryptis lineata*. The meeting examined ACT government plans to spend \$2.166m on dragon recovery, announced in February. The meeting focused on how best to allocate the funds, the roles of various stakeholders and experts, and how to coordinate ACT-Federal Government efforts.

Jobs for Canberra Fund - Alison McLeod

The ACT Government has just announced the 'Jobs for Canberrans Fund' which is providing work opportunities for people in the casual or semi-skilled workplace who have lost their jobs or been significantly impacted due to COVID-19. You can find out more [HERE](#). The great news for ParkCare, is that 26 of these new positions will be working in our parks and reserves. There are designated PCS positions which will work on: walking and mountain bike trail repairs and maintenance, general repairs and maintenance, tree maintenance, pruning and thinning, pest, feral animal and weed control, and cleaning and litter collection.

In this issue

Cover page - Upcoming events, Report on 2020 FOG AGM, Important notice on bushfire recovery & Welcome new members.

Recent FOG events - ACTHA reptile survey, Stirling Park - Margaret Ning, p2; After-dark visit to Mulligans, p2; Stirling Park spotlighting survey, p3; FOG's Stirling Park-Yarramundi & Hall groups, p3; Bass Garden, Griffith, p4; Establishing a Franklin Grassland on-ground group, p4; & FOG presentations to Rotary, p15.

News roundup - Vale Graeme Evans, p5; Optimism regrows at Yarramundi Grassland - John Fitz Gerald p5; FOG statement on social distancing - Geoff Robertson p5; FOG grassy ecosystem grants update, Andrew Zelnik p6; SE Oz grassy ecosystems by Rainer, a must read, Editor p6; Franklin grassland update p7; Magpie Hill Park consultation p7; Issues raised with ACT Government p7; Wild horse population to be reduced p7; Grassland earless dragon recovery meeting p15; and Jobs for Canberra Fund - Alison McLeod, p15.

Advocacy Report - Naarilla Hirsch, p10.

Features: Yellow Box (*Eucalyptus melliodora*), a brief & personal history - Alex Kirk, pp8&9; After the fire with Tein McDonald, Roger Farrow, Lauren Booth and Libby Keen, pp11,12&15; Mistletoebird in a mutually beneficial relationship with mistletoes - Michael Bedingfield, p13; and Around and about - John Fitz Gerald, pp14&15.

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(order forms are at www.fog.org.au)

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To contribute to FOG advocacy: advocacy@fog.org.au

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For more on FOG, see

Our webpage: www.fog.org.au and Facebook page.

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