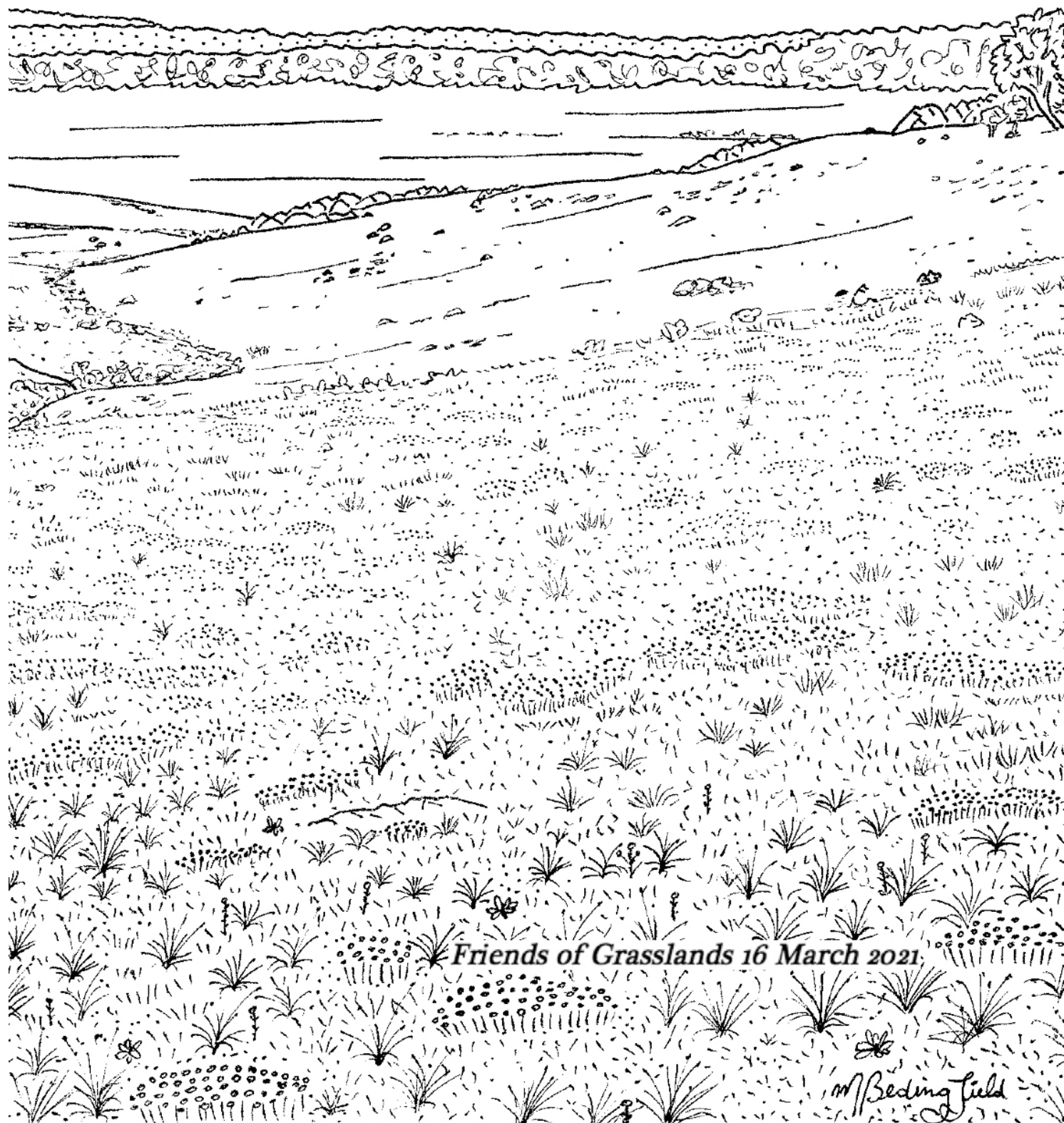


# *Friends of Grasslands Annual Report 2020*



*Supporting native grassy ecosystems*



*Friends of Grasslands 16 March 2021*

*M Bedingfield*

# 1. FOG highlights 2020

## A year of change and transition

We reported in the last FOG annual report “Despite many years of success, FOG faces a number of serious challenges, including the loss of experienced volunteers. The open forum ‘*FOG in the 2020s*’ (26 Nov 2019) canvassed transition scenarios. Since then a range of natural disasters has made FOG’s transition more challenging. Hence 2020 will be a make or break year.” In 2020, we began with heat and drought; followed by bush fires and smoke; then overabundant rain and hail; followed by waves of COVID 19.

The impacts were: we had to cancel, reschedule or modify many events and work parties; our work parties faced a weed explosion and changes in composition of our grassy ecosystems (e.g. kangaroo grass became abundant); we moved many events to on-line; we received assistance in the form of Jobs for Canberra; we encountered increasing complexity and work loads in our existing work.

Our new initiatives were: we took on new projects - each was taken on by volunteer project leaders who took responsibility for the project; we re-organised existing areas of work; and we recruited new volunteers who took on tasks.

As with those ecosystems we support, FOG proved adaptive and resilient.

## Events

In 2020, attendance (measured in hours) at FOG events open to members and the public, fell by 15% on 2019, while attendance at work parties increased by 63%. There was a large increase (27%) in attendance at specialist events mainly aimed at improving our governance and strengthening advocacy. A new type of event emerged, namely the solo or mini event. In summary, FOG-organised events rose by 657 hours or 14%. Official FOG attendance at events organised by others declined sharply. Hence, events’ volunteer hours dropped slightly (-1%). Smoke, rain and COVID 19

caused many events to be delayed, cancelled, or limited attendance. New on-ground projects and volunteer response to rain-induced weeds were responsible for the increase in our work parties and the adoption of solo and mini events. The rain-induced amazing wild flower season boosted field trips in the second half of the year. The need to improve governance arrangements and organise advocacy issues allowed us to take advantage of on-line meeting opportunities.

## FOG on-ground projects

FOG continued its work parties on national lands (Scrivener’s Hut, Gurubang Dhaura (Stirling) Park, Blue Gum Point and Yarramundi Grassland) and at Hall Cemetery. Heavy rain and COVID 19 increased the weed load and required a more adaptable approach. FOG’s National Land Group also adopted that part of Blue Gum Point managed by ACT City Services - receiving a major grant from the ACT Government.

FOG’ new on-ground projects: FOG established a Parkcare group at Franklin Grasslands FOG leased Top Hut travelling stock reserve (TSR) near Aaminaby; and FOG agreed to monitor a “scrape and seed” site for Ginninderry Trust. FOG also organised a work party at St Mark’s grassland.

Type of event	2019 hours	2020 hours	Change	% change
FOG general events				
Field trips	2529	2503	-26	-1%
Other (incl. forums, AGM, etc.)	1187	639	-552	-47%
Total	3715	3141	-578	-15%
Work parties	816	1327	512	63%
Governance & specialist	334	424	90	27%
Solo or mini event	0	633	633	
Total FOG events	4865	5526	657	14%
Events organised by others to which FOG contributed	1045	317	-728	-70%
Total	5910	5843	-67	-1%

*FOG is a community group dedicated to the conservation of natural temperate grassy ecosystems in south-eastern Australia, including related flora and fauna species. FOG advocates, educates and advises on matters to do with the conservation of grassy ecosystems, and carries out surveys and other on-ground work. FOG is based in Canberra and its members include professional scientists, landowners, land managers and interested members of the public.*

*Native grassy ecosystem communities once dominated much of south-eastern Australia and include treeless communities (grasslands), lightly wooded communities (woodlands) and more densely wooded communities (forests) where the ground storey is dominated by native grasses and forbs (mostly wildflowers). These vegetation communities provide habitat for many threatened and rare animal species. They are also highly suitable for both agriculture and grazing. However, over time their original vegetation deteriorated or was replaced. Natural temperate grasslands once occupied eleven percent of south-eastern Australia, now one percent remains, while woodlands, once extensive, are now less than five percent of their former area.*

*Within the Canberra region Natural Temperate Grassland of the South Eastern Highlands and White Box Yellow Box and Blakely’s Red Gum Woodland are regarded as critically endangered under Commonwealth legislation, and as critically endangered under Australian Capital Territory legislation. These woodlands are regarded as endangered under NSW legislation and for practical purposes natural temperate grasslands are also. Elsewhere grassy ecosystems communities are also listed as highly threatened.*

## Advocacy

In 2020, FOG made 21 formal submissions including major submissions on the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act to the Samuel Review, and on the Franklin Grasslands Reserve landscape plan. In addition FOG made a major submission to Defence Housing Australia (DHA) on its proposal to build a housing estate on grasslands at Lawson North. Another important submission was made to the Department of the Environment and Energy inquiring into its decision to allow the north road that will impact on critically endangered Grassland Earless Dragon at the Canberra International Airport.

## Communications

Six issues of our flagship *News of Friends of Grasslands* were published and continued to live up to expectations. It aims to provide a readable, informative and enjoyable story of our delightful and complex grassy ecosystem communities, their function and their treasured flora and fauna, and community involvement in their care and restoration. During the year, a new team was established to produce the newsletter.

Our other communications tools: *Events and Notices*, website, Facebook and inquiries all continued and underwent change with the aim to integrate our communications strategy.

## Membership, governance & finance

FOG is a purely volunteer-based, not for profit association, and its activities are organised by a large

number of volunteers co-ordinated by the FOG committee. Their efforts were highly successful in 2020. At the end of 2020 FOG's membership was 221.

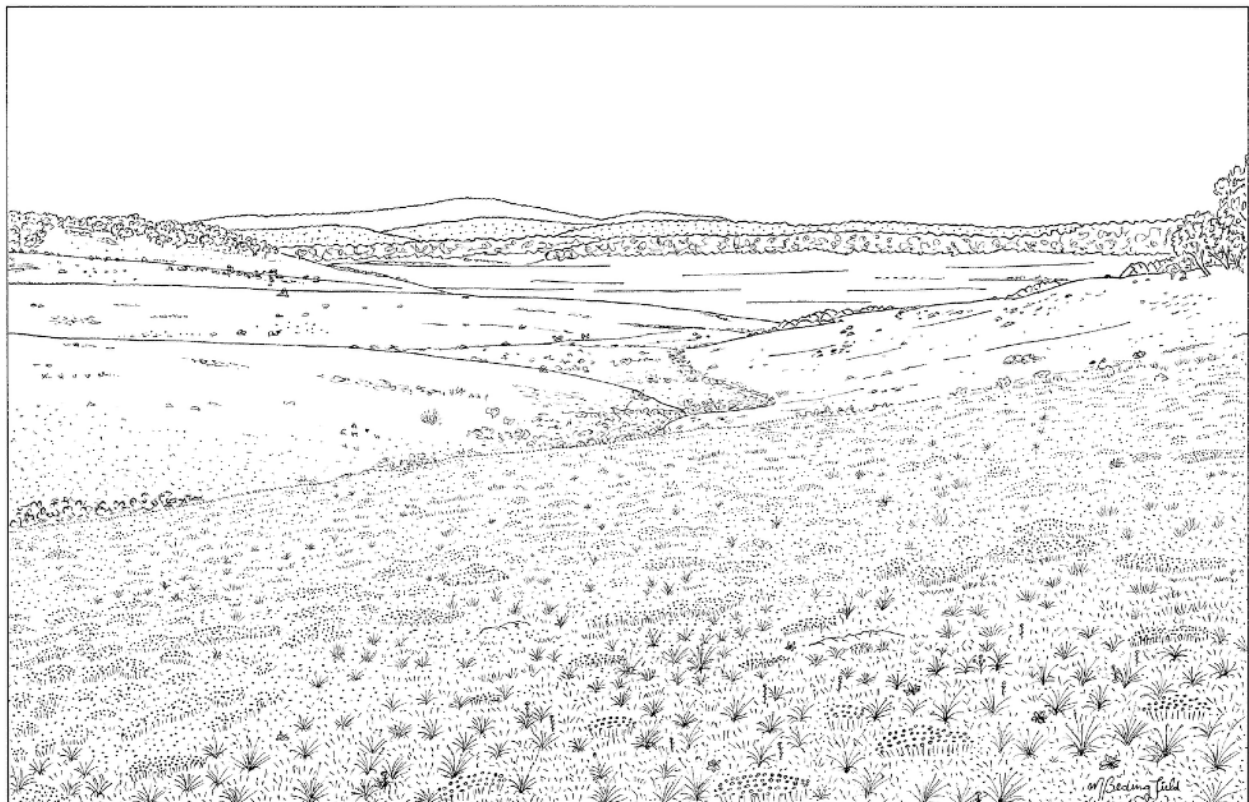
FOG finances remain strong to deliver the services we provide. It received grants of \$29,656 towards its on-ground projects.

## FOG's contribution to environmental outcomes

FOG maintains a record of events, their duration and number of attendees. It also conducted a survey of volunteers who estimated their time organising FOG activities. These data show that in 2020, FOG volunteer hours were 9748, up 248 on 2019. Their financial contribution is valued at \$487,500.

*Front and back covers by Michael Bedingfield*

*The scene on the front and back covers of our annual report (and below) is of a section of Long Plain in Kosciuszko National Park and was drawn by Michael Bedingfield. Michael is inspired by the variety and beauty in our native grassy ecosystems and has done several hundred drawings of the plants and animals found there. He has also done fine artwork specifically for FOG, such as the FOG logo and t-shirt design. He has contributed regularly for many years to the FOG newsletter with interesting articles about the local flora and fauna. His efforts are greatly appreciated.*



Long Plain, in the Snowy Mountains, N° 2

Michael Bedingfield, © 2013



## 2. FOG Events

FOG's events program has changed over the years, adapting to our learning about grassy ecosystems and the preferences of members. FOG events are designed to open up new and pleasurable experiences to members and provide an opportunity to see our amazing landscape through the eyes of people who love and care for that landscape and or through the eyes of our first nations' people. At the same time they provide opportunities to experience an adventure with new or existing friends. Events often involve sighting, and learning about, unusual flowers and animals.

Events designated as work parties and surveys provide a sense of satisfaction to participants who are restoring our grassland or woodland, adding to their knowledge and skills and contributing to citizen science.

The classification of events is shown in Table 2.1.

Events open to members, and generally to the public, include field trips, other general events (such as our AGM, winter presentation, forums and workshops) and work parties. In addition there are many specialist meetings devoted to governance, advocacy, and other FOG activities. 2020 saw the rise of solo or mini events especially to undertake on-ground work under COVID 19 conditions. Finally there are events organised by others in which FOG members are officially involved.

FOG held some 62 open events, 39 governance and specialist meetings, 123 solo or mini events and engaged in 49 events organised by others. The number of attendees at FOG-organised events plus FOG attendees officially attending others' events was 1147 who contributed 5250 hours in attendance and travelling time.

### Field trips

The first field trip in 2020 was not held until 7 June due to the fire, smoke and COVID 19. However, later in the year there was a keenness to visit sites, especially as the earlier rains had produced an excellent flowering season, something that does not happen often.

Field trips in Canberra visited Theodore Grassland (7 June), Mulanggarri Grassland (1 Aug) and Gungahlin Hill (5 Oct), while our winter grassland tour visited Jerrabomberra West Nature Reserve (25 Oct) - this was rescheduled twice due to heavy rain. Trips to NSW near Canberra were to Murrumbateman Village Grassy Woodland (20 June), Murrumbateman Cemetery (5 July), Burra Reserve (8 Oct), Carwoola near Captain's flat (24 Oct) and "Wandiyali" near Queanbeyan (28 Nov). Trips further away from Canberra were to Narrandera (25-28 Sept), Monaro (14 & 15 Oct) and Adaminaby (4-6 Dec). For insurance, health, safety and statistical purposes, field events lasting longer than a day, are recorded as multiple activities - each day is

	No of events	No of Attendees	Duration hours	Travel time hours
Open events				
Field trips	17	233	1312	552
Other general events	8	180	443	196
Work parties	37	299	955	372
<i>Total</i>	62	712	2710	1120
Governance & specialist meetings	39	202	332	92
Solo and mini events	123	145	525	108
FOG attendance at others' events	49	88	244	73
<i>Total</i>	273	1147	3810	1394

recorded as a separate event.<sup>1</sup> One innovation was the creation of ad hoc "hot spot" trips - this involved creating a mailing list of people who could at short notice visit a flowering display.

### Other general events

In 2020, again due to weather and COVID 19, other general events were limited and no formal forums were held. Nevertheless, eight other general events were held, including our AGM, which had to be rescheduled and was finally held on-line on 22 April. We held our traditional winter presentation with excellent presentations from Professor Jamie Pittock and PhD candidate Sarah Bates (25 Jul) - our audience for this was much larger than normal as we combined an indoor event and Zoom. Our delightful Christmas event was held (10 Dec) at one of our on-ground sites, Franklin Grasslands. We held a grass identification workshop at a Ngunnawal garden (10 Jan), but a planned repeat of this event had to be cancelled due to heavy smoke in



*A grassland, rich in wildflowers - Monaro visit in October.*

<sup>1</sup> A field trip might involve travelling on a Friday, site visits on Saturday and Sunday and return travel on the Sunday. Each of Saturday and Sunday is counted as a separate trip. The travel on Friday is also recorded but no event is recorded unless a site was visited on the way.

the atmosphere. We managed three ad hoc surveys in the early months - Gurubang Dhaura Park Twilight Survey (29 Feb), an ACT Herpetological Association/ FOG reptile survey, Gurubang Dhaura Park (15 Mar) and an After Dark Visit to Mulligans Flat (15 Mar). Our second Bioblitz with young rangers was arranged with ACT Environment Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD) staff (18 Oct).

### Work parties events

Thirty-seven work parties were held in 2020. A description and analysis of these events is included in section 3. On-ground projects.

### Governance events and specialists meetings

Governance and specialist meetings are shown in Table 2.2, which records that there were six committee meetings and four administrative committee meetings. The committee sets broad goals and standards, overseas co-ordination of FOG's many initiatives and projects, approves new initiatives and refines FOG strategies. It also decides on FOG expenditure, but does not have a formal budget. Generally, the committee allows each of its initiatives and projects a relatively free hand so that project leaders and their teams undertake the organisation and responsibility. The administrative committee was established during the year and held its first meeting on 25 May. It was established to share the administrative load and to free up committee time to consider issues more broadly. It deals with house keeping matters, prepares the agenda for the committee, and provides an opportunity to discuss issues facing FOG to provide advice to the committee.

Specialist meetings are get-togethers to perform specialist tasks. In Table 2.2. they include:

- six newsletter meetings (see 5. Communications - News of Friends of Grasslands),
- two program and events meetings (see Integrating events management below),
- twelve advocacy meetings (see 4. Advocacy - Events associated with advocacy),
- one TSR strategy meeting (see 3. On-ground projects - Top Hut TSR Management Lease),
- four grassy grants meetings (see 6. Membership, governance & finance - grassy grants), and
- four other governance meetings - one on membership, one on the Public Fund and two on dropbox management (see 6. Membership, governance & finance - membership, governance & public fund and donations).

### Solo or mini events

In Table 2.3, we measure small events which illustrate the range of tasks undertaken by FOG volunteers and collectively significantly add to FOG's efforts. Previously, these efforts have not been measured, but then they were not that significant. In 2020, these

Table 2.2. Summary of governance & specialists meetings 2020

	No of events	No of Attendees	Duration hours	Travel time hours
Committee & admin.	10	56	92	19
Specialist meetings				
Newsletter	6	33	65	48
Program & events	2	4	6	2
Advocacy	12	74	104	7
TSR strategy	1	10	15	0
Grassy grants	4	14	33	10
Other governance	4	11	19	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>241</b>	<b>73</b>

Table 2.3. Summary of solo and mini groups 2020

	No of events	No of Attendees	Duration hours	Travel time hours
Site evaluations	9	28	53	30
Mini/ solo work parties				
Hall Cemetery	107	107	410	62
Other	1	2	6	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>416</b>	<b>64</b>
Other project visits	3	5	8	3
Establishing nursery	1	1	12	0
Training	2	2	36	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>525</b>	<b>108</b>

events include nine visits to sites to provide owners and managers with information on the species they may have and provide weed and other management tips. Sometimes, these may lead to a later field trip to the site.

The remaining solo and mini events are associated with FOG's on-ground projects, especially at Hall Cemetery. The bulk of these focused on on-ground work by solo volunteers to remove the massive weed growth as a result of bare ground caused by drought, followed by abnormally high rainfall. Other project visits largely resulted from taking visitors to Franklin Grasslands to plot and plan future activity there or to gather data. One activity has been the establishment of a nursery to provide plants for Franklin Grassland from seed collected at the site. The remaining events are attendance at first aid and herbicide training sessions.

### FOG contribution to events organised by others

FOG has always maintained strong links to grassy ecosystem, and more generally biodiversity, stakeholder agencies and groups. These are often partners in our activities and a source from which FOG draws some members. FOG involvement and support for these agencies and groups, include joint organisation of

Table 2.4. Summary of FOG official attendance at others' events 2020

	No of events	No of Attendees	Duration hours	Travel time hours
Formal presentations	7	10	23	6
FOG displays at events	3	13	61	21
Work parties	1	5	20	10
Other - Comm. govt.	5	9	11	3
Other - ACT. govt.	4	4	11	5
Other - ConCouncil	18	30	69	14
Other - other	11	17	49	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>73</b>

### Text box 1. Roles of event organisers, event co-ordinator & event recorder

*Events are broadly classified as: (1) General events and workshops, (2) field trips, (3) work parties (in turn these are categorised by the organising group, e.g. National Lands and Hall Cemetery), (4) governance and specialist events, (5) solo and mini events, and (6) events organised by other organisations.*

**Event organiser (general events, workshops and field trips):** Design the event in conjunction with stakeholders, arrange venue and any payments; with the event co-ordinator, advertise the event through FOG channels; register and inform participants of event detail (e.g. directions, venue, catering, accommodation); at event, record participants on sign-on sheet, brief them on the purpose of the event, house rules, health and safety matters, catering, toileting and accommodation, and ensure participants are cared for and made to feel welcome; write up event for the newsletter and Facebook; file sign-on sheets; record statistics on the event (day, date, title, organiser, number of attendees, duration & average travel time); and provide statistics to the event recorder.

**Event organiser (work parties)** (usually the project co-ordinator): The role is similar to that of the general events, etc. organiser. In addition, the event organiser needs to maintain a good relationship with partner organisation, provides reports to partner, negotiate any protocols with partner (e.g. design and use of sign-on sheet, access rules), managing tools and herbicide and their use, and facilitate training of volunteers (e.g. healthy and safety, herbicide certification and use of equipment).

**Event organiser (governance and specialist meetings):** Requirements are less onerous but statistics of the event need to be reported to the event recorder.

**Event organiser (solo and mini events).** The project officer needs to keep a record of events, including statistics, and report to the event recorder (may provide summary data, but indicate the number of events).

**Events organiser (events organised by others).** The person organising FOG's participation should record statistics of the event, particularly the number of FOG members participating officially, and report to the event recorder.

**Event co-ordinator:** The co-ordinator needs to maintain and publish the program of general events and work parties, ensure that events and notices are published in the *Events and Notices* bulletin and included in the "Calendar" on the FOG website, and that a summary of events is published in the newsletter. It is important that event organisers (for general events, workshops field trips, and work parties) keep the events co-ordinator informed of their programs, changes to programs, etc.

**Events recorder:** The events recorder keeps a record of all past events, including the day, date, title, organisers, type of event, the number of volunteers, the duration of event and the average travel time. For solo and mini events, or events that are frequently repeated, summary statistics may be maintained for this purpose. It is the responsibility of the events organisers to provide the event coordinator with the relevant statistics. The events recorder also provides regular summaries and analysis of events.

activities and contributions and participation in their events. Some agencies with which FOG engages include those which may propose projects we consider are contrary to supporting grassy ecosystem. Nevertheless, engaging with such agencies is important to get the best grassy outcomes.

Details of the 49 events organised by other agencies and groups in which FOG members officially participated in 2020 are shown in Table 2.4 and include:

- seven formal presentation at events organised by others (see 5. Communications - Presentations to other organisations),
- three FOG displays at events - (see 5. Communications - On public show),
- one work party - five FOG members attended a work party at McLeods Creek Nature Reserve (9 Jun) to assist those looking after this reserve - this assistance has been provided for several years,
- five meetings with Commonwealth government agencies - see 4. Advocacy, Events associated with advocacy,
- four meetings with the ACT government - one on FOG's project at Blue Gum Point and three related on Franklin Grasslands Reserve (see 3 On-ground projects - Blue Gum Point Environment Grant & Franklin Grasslands Reserve),
- eighteen events with the Conservation Council (see 5 Advocacy - Events associated with the Conservation Council, and

- eleven events with other groups - these included attending the ACT National Park Association's 60th birthday celebration (6 Mar), attendance at two Grassland Earless Dragon recovery team meetings (18 Mar & 30 Jul), a meeting with the Canberra Airport Group (22 Apr), three events associated with bush fire recovery (7 Jun, 30 Jun and 23 Jul), two Vegwatch presentations (14 Oct), attendance at Kosciuszko to Coast's AGM (17 Nov), and attendance the Ginninderra Catchment Group's AGM (4 Dec).

### Integrating events management

Events coordination greatly improved in 2020. A co-ordination group (comprising Eleanor Galvin and Geoff Robertson) was formed and held two meetings. Now the group maintains a register of upcoming events and takes responsibility for advertising them in the FOG *Events and Notices* bulletin. The content of the bulletin is cut and pasted onto the website and a summary of upcoming events is included in the newsletter. At the same time the roles of event organisers, the event coordinator and the event recorder are more clearly defined - see Text Box 1 for details.

### Indigenous engagement

In normal years, FOG has participated in events that increase our understanding of Indigenous land management practices, and its applicability to grassy ecosystem management and restoration, and that build greater contact with First Nations people COVID 19 prevented this in 2020 - this will be addressed in 2021.

### 3. On-ground projects

During 2020, FOG continued its National Lands, Hall Cemetery, Scottsdale Monitoring, and Franklin Grasslands on-ground projects, with major developments taking place in each. In addition, new projects were taken on: Top Hut Travelling Stock Reserve (TSR), Ginninderry Scrape and St Mark's Grassland on-ground projects. No progress was made on Cooma Reserves and Monaro Golden Daisy Monitoring Projects (reported on in our previous report).

As part of FOG's transition, greater recognition was given to each FOG project team being responsible for its operations and events. FOG's committee provides broad oversight of projects, facilitates and promotes them and attempts to ensure that project events, as far as possible, do not clash.

Each project team works with an outside partner, which in some cases may provide resources. Matters such as health and safety, resources and instruments, such as the sign-on sheet, are negotiated with the partner. In 2020 each project had to deal with the impacts of drought, summer heat, extreme bush fire (although most projects were not directly impacted by fire), extreme weather, smoke, heavy rains followed by a weed explosion, and COVID 19 restrictions.

Table 3.1 shows that in 2020, thirty-seven work parties were organised involving 299 volunteers attending these events who contributed 1367 hours. The various challenges, mentioned in the previous paragraph, resulted in many work parties being rescheduled and being organised in such a way as to ensure social distancing.

The weed outbreak and COVID 19 led to a new initiative, namely solo or mini work parties. As recorded in Table 2.3, there were 108 such events contributing 480 hours, mostly associated with Hall Cemetery.

#### National Lands Group

The NCA is responsible for a large estate of National Land in Canberra, including woodlands and grasslands in Yarralumla at Gurubang Dhaura (Stirling) Park, Scrivener's Hut, Blue Gum Point, and Attunga Point and Yarramundi Grassland on the north shore of Lake Burley Griffin. FOG's National Land Group operates at all these sites. In an ongoing arrangement with the NCA, FOG organises work parties doing fine scale and expert work under a management plan and adheres to strict occupational health and safety procedures. NCA provides an annual small ongoing grant to cover equipment, herbicide purchase and training. This arrangement has worked well since 2009. In 2020, the Group also took on a project at Blue Gum Point managed by Transport Canberra and City Services (TCCS) - see Blue Gum Point Environment Grant.

Jamie Pittock, the project coordinator, puts out a frequent bulletin to keep the National Lands Group volunteers apprised of events and work parties at Gurubang Dhaura Park and Yarramundi Grassland.

Table 3.1. Summary of FOG project on-ground work parties 2020

	No of events	No of Attendees	Duration hours	Travel time hours
National Lands & Blue Gum Point	12	148	549	181
Hall Cemetery	4	29	86	44
Franklin Grasslands	15	82	184	82
Top Hut & other TSRs	3	9	33	23
St Mark's Grassland	1	19	48	19
Ginninderry Scrape monitoring	1	4	16	4
Scottsdale monitoring	1	8	40	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>299</b>	<b>955</b>	<b>372</b>

John Fitz Gerald takes responsibility for most aspects of the Yarramundi Grassland site. FOG holds regular Informal meetings with NCA and from time to time contributes advice on NCA strategies and plans.

FOG's annual report to NCA, prepared by Jamie Pittock and John Fitz Gerald, stated

"2020 was FOG's twelfth year of volunteer work to restore the grassy woodlands at Gurubang Dhaura and the grasslands at Yarramundi Reach. Since its inception, 148 FOG volunteers devoted 549 hours in 12 work parties, plus there were 354 hours in additional activities for a total of 903 volunteer hours. FOG has now held 142 work parties since 2009, contributing 6,207 hours to the conservation of the flora and fauna of these public lands in central Canberra. The La Nina conditions in late 2020 brought good rains and marvellous recovery of the grassy ecosystem vegetation but also tremendous challenges managing weeds. Unfavourable weather and logistical challenges prevented the National Capital Authority (NCA) undertaking controlled burns at both sites, making this more urgent after such a wet growing season.

#### Gurubang Dhaura Park

Despite COVID 19 restrictions, we were able to accelerate planting of degraded lands across the park with indigenous species. Particular success is evident in the 'horse paddock', western and northern ends of the Westlake clearing, and along Alexandrina Drive near Haines Creek and Lotus Bay. New plantings at Attunga Point and along Haines Creek continue these restoration efforts.

In FY19/20 we were delighted that the NCA was able to greatly increase investment, especially in new signs, work to control track erosion, and removal of a senescent pine plantation. FOG and Greening Australia supported the NCA by beginning re-planting on the former 5 hectares of pine plantation with locally indigenous trees plus white box from drier regions to our north west that may be better adapted to a new climate. The NCA have confirmed that they no longer intend to develop this portion of the park in a subdivision for new embassies.

FOG and NCA have worked closely to control weeds across the 52 hectares, including with our weed spraying contractor. All mature plants among a vast list of woody weeds have been eliminated since 2009, with work now focussed on reducing any regrowth. These include: Cootamundra and cedar wattles, nettletree, cotoneaster, hawthorn, broom, ash (*Fraxinus*), privet, boxthorn, African olive, pines, Chinese pistachio, poplars (a few left at Attunga Point ...), plum, firethorn, black locust willow and rowan. Other weeds treated to the point of residual regrowth or elimination include: asparagus, ivy, everlasting pea, honeysuckle, holly grape, fennel, horehound, wild sage, briar and scrambling rose, blackberry, bluebell creeper, Paterson's curse, serrated tussock, and great and twiggy mullein.

A great advance in 2020 was learning of a successful treatment for blue periwinkle, which is now in rapid decline. Along Haines Creek, weed treatment of blackberry and periwinkle has led to great regrowth of marsh club-rush. Infestations have been greatly reduced but ongoing control is needed for: African lovegrass, Chilean needlegrass, St John's wort, and scotch and variegated thistle. New targets for control include: purple top, fescue, phalaris, paspalum and umbrella sedge.

Challenges remain. The park remains zoned for 'national capital purposes' so lacks protection from development. More can be done to engage the Ngunawal traditional owners in the protection and management of the Indigenous values of this land. Large areas of the Westlake clearing remain infested with weeds and this area will take years to restore. Overgrazing in dry years and feral predators limit the value of this habitat for a lot of wildlife. Limited government enforcement capacity has been unable to prevent damaging activities, including illegal firewood harvesting, off-road vehicle access, dumping of garden waste and fires.

#### Yarramundi Reach

At Yarramundi Reach work continued to control key weeds and restore degraded patches across the 21 hectare site. FOG's efforts focused on follow up work on the 'scrape' demonstration, weed control and monitoring. The pilot scraping of weed infested top soil at two sites has led to the welcome establishment of a number of wildflower and native grass species from freshly sown seed. Unfortunately despite our careful planning some pesky weeds have also appeared in and around the scrapes. Another trial in 2020 involved the planting of kangaroo grass, both translocated tussocks and tube stock, to try and restore degraded gaps remaining after weed spraying in the native grasslands. Resurgent weeds have become a problem in these areas also. NCA has continued to work with FOG mowing of edges, maintaining tracks

and creating a trial plot aimed reducing densities of weed grasses such as wild oats.

Ongoing weed control has been required for: African lovegrass, Chilean needlegrass, paspalum, wild oats, serrated tussock, blackberry, great mullein, plantain, flatweed and St John's wort. Populations of these weeds have been greatly reduced in the core grassland area but restoration of the degraded lands remains a persistent challenge. The breaking of the drought added new challenges with extensive infestations of cape weed and French catchfly.

#### Conclusion

Thanks are due to the 148 volunteers in 2020 who contributed so much to conservation of these nationally significant sites. FOG also thanks the NCA for excellent collaboration and for the \$6,000 in support for our work parties. Together we are making great progress in conserving these key grassy ecosystems."

#### Blue Gum Point Environment Grant

Earlier in 2020, there was a discussion within FOG regarding applying for an ACT Environment Grant to remove exotic trees and replace them with grasslands and other native trees at Blue Gum Point, land managed by the ACT City Services (part of TCCS). This meant that our National Lands Group would be working on non-National Land, adjacent to National Lands on which it was already working. The grant application covered work to restore the eight hectares of box-gum grassy woodland, an ecological community that is listed as nationally endangered. The site contains populations of the nationally endangered Button Wrinklewort (*Rutidosis leptorhynchoides*) and Golden Sun Moth (*Synemon plana*) and a rare population of Buloke (*Allocasuarina luehmannii*) that will also be conserved. Most of the funds will be used to employ contractors to undertake weed spraying and removal of large woody weeds. FOG volunteers will undertake follow up control of herbaceous and woody weeds, lake shore planting and rubbish removal.

On 24 July the ACT Government announced that FOG had been successful and awarded it a grant of \$20,856. In anticipation of success, FOG members met Alan McLean (EPSDD) to discuss FOG's proposed project (21 Jul). In addition, the ACT government is supplying additional resources to take the project further. FOG held a weeding work party on 8 November.

#### Hall Cemetery

Since 2009, FOG has organised working bees at Hall Cemetery in partnership with the ACT Public Cemeteries Authority which reports to the ACT Government through the Minister for Transport. In the past, work parties have removed vegetation that has threatened the endangered Tarengo leek orchid and, more recently, has weeded the woodland area. FOG organised four work parties in 2020, involving 29 people



and 120 hours. One work party had to be rescheduled due to COVID restrictions.

However, in addition, as mentioned earlier, there were many solo work parties, under COVID 19 restrictions, to control the amazing burst of weeds. At Hall Cemetery, there were 107 solo efforts that contributed 472 hours.

In addition FOG obtained additional resources to confront the weeds. First, it obtained a Chief Minister's grant of \$1800 which was spent on professional sprayers. Also, the ACT NRM program on Box-Gum Woodlands contributed \$1000 towards the cost of weed control. Jobs for Canberra is an ACT Government initiative, an economic response to the COVID 19 pandemic, to provide employment opportunities undertaking community friendly activity. FOG was privileged to have Jobs for Canberra crews work in Hall Cemetery woodlands on four days in the second half of the year. Laura Williams from ACT NRM managed crews on three occasions (30 Jul, 10 Sep and 9 Oct). On 6 November, FOG volunteers welcomed and worked with another Jobs for Canberra crew, consisting of team leader Jenilee DeLandre and three helpers.

The crew worked with FOG in three locations helping with environmental restoration. Tasks at Hall included planting Blakely's Red Gum trees (*Eucalyptus blakelyi*) inside the main cemetery block, after trimming the grass around each spot where trees were planted, and scalping (removing soil) close to the plants. The group also installed a very obvious pink corrugated tree guard around each tree with two securing stakes. This planting, done with approval from Canberra Cemeteries and ACT Conservation Research aims at securing the health and long-term succession of trees in the open grassy woodland containing the grave sites at Hall. Another task was slashing areas of rapidly growing, flowering Phalaris in the woodland surrounding the cemetery block. Greening Australia provided the plants and guards.

### **Franklin Grasslands Reserve**

Our previous report described work undertaken by FOG to promote Franklin Grasslands as a conservation and recreation reserve. In 2020, FOG representatives attended three meetings organised by the ACT government (4 Feb, 27 Feb and 29 Jul) to participate in the landscape planning for the reserve.

On 23 May, FOG's president attended a COVID restricted event to launch Franklin Grasslands as a reserve and part of Canberra Nature Park. On 29 July, FOG held a stall at the launch of the Franklin Grasslands *Draft master plan/open day*. This day was well attended by the public. FOG members spoke at the event and led a walk at the activity. Subsequently FOG held an online forum on the draft plan and subsequently made a long submission on the *Draft Landscape Plan*.

The main FOG activity at the reserve was the establishment of the Franklin Grasslands Parkcare Group, in partnership with ACT Parkcare and the ACT Franklin Grasslands Offset Team. An initial gathering

was held on 13 March, but then with the COVID restrictions, work parties could not commence until early June. In all thirteen work parties were held.

The last meeting of 2020 was held with ACT government staff. At the meeting FOG presented a paper outlining what it considered should be the objectives of the reserve, the strategies that should be followed, and the roles of different stakeholders (including the the Parkcare Group and FOG).

FOG is pleased with the acceptance of its goals for the site and the support received from then ACT Government Ministers Mick Gentleman and Suzanne Orr, other members of the Legislative Assembly who visited the reserve, numerous units within the ACT government, and support from many community groups and individual. Less progress was made on finalising the offset plan and the landscape plan for the site, due to the intervention of COVID 19.

### **Top Hut TSR Management Lease**

FOG members responded quickly when Local Land Services (LLS) South East announced that a number of Travelling Stock Reserves (TSRs) would be available for five year leases. A consortium of interested FOG members and others formed a group and many emails were exchanged to investigate what TSRs were available for lease, what their conservation values were, and what organisations and individuals might apply to lease them. This was intensive work and many sites were visited by Margaret Ning, Lauren van Dyke and June Wilkinson, guided by local knowledge and extensive research undertaken by Rainer Rehwinkel and Andrew Zelnik. The work was greatly assisted by LLS staff. An on-line meeting by FOG members and other stakeholders (25 May) was held to discuss the best strategy to follow - deliberations were greatly assisted by LLS.

Subsequently, successful conservation oriented applications were made by FOG for Top Hut TSR on Dry Plains Rd, 30 kilometres north west of Cooma, Upper Snowy Landcare for half of Gegedzerick TSR, and by private individuals for Maffra Lake and 15 Mile Bobundra Rd TSR (Ravensworth). However, some applications by others were not successful. In 2020, a number of visits were made to these sites. In addition FOG announced that it would accept tax deductible donations for its Top Hut TSR work. More high conservation value leases may come up in future.

### **Scottsdale Monitoring**

FOG's annual monitoring at the Bush Heritage Scottsdale property took place on 11 November. These surveys have varied over the years and have been adapted to respond to changes taking place at Scottsdale in its management and weeding regimes. Apart from providing valuable data to Bush Heritage for its monitoring program, these days are very pleasant and a great opportunity to visit this exciting reserve and discuss its management experience. 2020 was a little different as most of the areas being monitored had been

severely burnt in the early 2020 bushfire and even finding our old sites was problematic. Nevertheless it was an interesting day, especially examining the impacts of the fire. A number of new volunteers joined us for the day.

### **Ginninderry Scrape Monitoring**

In 2020, FOG agreed to take on the annual monitoring of Ginninderry Conservation Trust's 0.27ha scrape and sow site. The scrape was prepared in May and seeded with native grasses and herbs such as bulbine lily, native flax, blue bells, hoary sunray, common everlasting, bindweed and more. FOG's role is to survey vegetation growing inside the scrape firstly measuring cover/abundance along transects, secondly by identification of all plant species, native and introduced, sown or not, growing in 2-3 circular plots of 400 square metres area. The first monitoring was undertaken on 11 November. John Fitz Gerald is the project co-ordinator. Ginninderry Trust will process and analyse the results.

### **St Marks grassland**

FOG has had a long association with St Marks grassland. In recent years, St Marks Theological College and Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture (ACCC) has appointed Charles Sturt University as managers of the site. The university has consulted FOG on its management. On 24 June, Sarah Sharp organised a clean up day at the grassland. The party was made up of six FOG members, three landscape gardeners from the site and another ten people associated directly or indirectly with the St Marks Theological College and ACCC. Management of this grassland is guided by a management plan, that includes burning it for ecological purposes, and this working party addressed some of the other management matters. FOG hopes to organise another work party in 2021.



*Scenes from our National Lands Group: gathering kangaroo grass seed for seeding Gurubang Dhaura Park, a planting party on the edge of Lake Burley Griffin and removal of exotic trees at Blue Gum Point to return the area to grasslands.*



## 4. FOG's advocacy group

Amongst smaller biodiversity groups, FOG is well known for its advocacy work and the quality of its submissions in support of grassy ecosystems.

Advocacy of grassy ecosystems permeates every aspect of FOG's activities. Through its events, on-ground work, links to stakeholders and the community and its news gathering activities, FOG members are learning and deepening their understanding of grassy ecosystems - this alerts members to issues and also informs our submissions. On the other side of the coin, at FOG events, attendees are informed of FOG advocacy work relevant to those events.

More directly, FOG makes submissions and undertakes various lobbying activities - this is undertaken by FOG's advocacy group, which is coordinated by Naarilla Hirsch. The group, and FOG more broadly, has over many years developed its understanding of how best to protect, manage and enhance remnant grassy ecosystem communities and their associated species. It has also kept abreast of decision-making processes, including legislation, that impacts (either positively or negatively) on grassy ecosystems. This includes legislation that protects biodiversity, including the Commonwealth's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act, and State and Territory legislation focused on planning and biodiversity, land clearing, etc. Due to the complexity of grassy ecosystems and FOG's limited resources, FOG largely confines its advocacy to grassy ecosystems and habitat for related species.

An important part of FOG's strategy is its weekly web searches (twice weekly for EPBC listings) for matters likely to have an impact on grassy ecosystems. With sometimes only a short time available to respond, the FOG advocacy group researches the background, prepares a submission, gets agreement within FOG and submits the submission - a remarkable effort. More broadly, FOG monitors measures proposed or taken by government agencies and others that may have an impact on grassy ecosystem remnants. On some issues, FOG engages with its wider networks to support broader issues and/or to inform them of issues that FOG considers significant.

Submissions may take the form of comments on draft or amended legislation, policy and planning measures, as well as matters associated with management of government reserves and open areas where grassy ecosystem communities and related plant and fauna species may be impacted.

The advocacy group meets from time to time informally to review and plan its approach or to discuss particular issues. In 2020 many such meetings were held to discuss some major issues outlined below.

## Formal submissions

In 2020, FOG made 21 formal submissions. Each of these may be found on our website. An analysis shows that:

- Nine submissions were EPBC Act referrals (seven on ACT developments and two on nearby NSW developments) - in each case the development proposal would impact on critically endangered ecological communities such as NTG or grassy woodlands, or endangered or vulnerable related species. The proposals involved were for a new Public High School, Kenny ACT (6 Feb); South Canberra Memorial Park (6 May); William Hovell Drive duplication, ACT (14 July); City to Commonwealth Park Light Rail (10 Sept); Monaro Highway-Lanyon Drive upgrade (14 Sept); Commercial development at Poplars, Jerrabomberra NSW (16 Oct); Morisset Road Extension and Sullivans Creek Retardation Basin, ACT (14 Nov); and Adaminaby sewage treatment plant upgrade (25 Nov).
- Six submissions were made to Commonwealth inquiries - Independent (Samuel) review of the EPBC Act (11 Mar and 15 Aug); NCA draft tree management policy (5 Apr); proposed North Curtin Diplomatic Estate (6 Jun); Australian Parliament on feral and domestic cats (22 July); Developing a new Threatened Species Strategy discussion paper (13 Nov); and the EPBC (Streamlining Environmental Approvals) Bill (17 Nov).
- Three submissions were in response to ACT government inquiries - Molonglo 132kV transmission line relocation (6 Jun); the ACT's Urban Forest Strategy (24 Aug); and Franklin Grasslands Reserve Landscape Plan (24 Sept).
- Three submissions were in response to NSW government inquiries - White Box–Yellow Box–Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodland and Derived Native Grassland in four regions (Preliminary determination) (30 Jan); Draft State Strategic Plan for Crown Land (10 Aug); and Planning Proposal for Memorial Park, Old Cooma Road (25 Sept).

## Housing development proposal for Lawson North

In June, FOG members became aware of the Defence Housing Australia's (DHA) intention to create a housing estate at Lawson North east. In February 2013, the NCA issued a Development Control Plan setting aside most of this area for conservation and heritage purposes, as it contained large areas of NTG and habitat for threatened species. These lands were subsequently identified as NTG in the ACT government's *Grassland Strategy*. Hence many FOG members and others were appalled by DHA's proposal. Many hours went into investigating the proposal, including attending online community information sessions organised by DHA's consultant Tait Network, holding a meeting with Tait Network, meetings to consider data prepared by members, and organising a submission to DHA, copied to other Commonwealth and

ACT agencies to ask it to reconsider its proposal. One hundred and ten signatures of organisations and individuals (mostly experts or other highly informed people) signed the submission. We understand that DHA is reconsidering its proposal.

### **North road at airport**

During the year FOG learnt that an approval had been given to upgrade the north road at Canberra International Airport (CIA) by the Department of the Environment and Energy which agreed that CIA had met the conditions to go ahead with the upgrade. After consulting several experts on the impacts of the decision on the population of critically endangered Grassland Earless Dragon, FOG wrote to the Department about its decision, querying the evidence. No reply has been received to date.

### **Events associated with advocacy**

In 2020 FOG organised twelve special meetings associated with advocacy. To research and prepare a submission to DHA over the Lawson North east proposed housing development, a Lawson North working group was formed. It met on 22 June, 23 June (this involved a discussion with Tait Network, the consultant to DHA), 26 June, 10 July, 7 August, 17 September and 26 November. In addition two meetings were held with the Conservation Council on the Lawson

proposal (24 Sept and 12 Nov). A meeting attended by twelve people was called to develop FOG's response to the Franklin Grassland landscape plan. Two advocacy committee meetings were held.

In addition FOG members attended six meetings organised by others. Three of these were four FOG members attending Online Community Information Session-Development of Lawson North (15-17 Sep), a teleconference with Canberra Airport Group (22 Apr), a meeting with NCA regarding earthworks at Yarramundi Grassland & other issues (7 Jul), and a meeting with the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture and Environment, at its request, to be interviewed on the form used to make EPBC submissions (7 Aug).

### **Events associated with the Conservation Council**

FOG's association with the Conservation Council has traditionally been a close one and in 2020 FOG members participated in eighteen Conservation Council events. Most of these were attendances at the Biodiversity Working Group which assists the Council to develop its biodiversity policy and to prepare submissions. 2020 was an ACT Assembly election year and FOG members attended nine events that prepared the Council's election strategy and election forums. FOG also organised a table for the Council's online dinner.

#### **Text Box 2. Themes in FOG submissions and broader advocacy**

**Scope** - FOG restricts our submissions to matters related to grassy ecosystems, related species and broader related biodiversity issues.

**Strengthening the EPBC Act** - the Auditor General's report pointed out the inadequacy of procedures related to the EPBC Act (partly related to lack of staffing), while the Samuel Review is highly critical of the EPBC Act and calls for Standards, Transparency, Independence, Enforcement and so on in the Act, generally supported by FOG.

**Offsets** - use of offsets is a complex matter, but our chief concern is that there is no evidence they actually lead to no net loss, and also their implementation and monitoring leaves a lot to be desired; use of offsets should be minimised and not be used to allow commercial and housing developments (e.g. York Park and Lawson North east).

**Managing reserves** - FOG urges greater government resources to manage reserves, as it believes that current staff are over stretched and in periods of emergency, such as bush fires, often unavailable.

**Particular species** - we are very concerned about the survival of Grassland Earless Dragons and the cumulative impacts of the removal of habitat for Golden Sun Moth.

**Protection of off-reserve grasslands and grassy woodlands and threatened species in ACT** - while the ACT has a commendable number of reserves that protect areas of grassy ecosystems, protection of grassy ecosystems outside reserves needs strengthening.

**Travelling Stock Reserves and other public land in NSW** - many of these areas, with high conservation values, should be managed for their biodiversity values.

**Invasive plants & pest animals** - while governments have some impressive weeds units and strategies, weeding efforts are limited by inadequate funding and resources; more can be done to reduce the impacts of cats (including cat confinement), foxes, horses, deer etc; more needs to be done to reduce populations of non-native birds; and the impact of native fauna species (e.g. kangaroos) on grassy ecosystems and habitat for threatened and rare species needs to be monitored and managed.

**Urban mowing as a cause of invasive grass spread** - we advocate better funding to properly map areas of highly invasive grasses and supervision and training of contractors to prevent spread of invasive species.

**Canberra as a garden city** - we urge ACT government to invest significantly in planning, infrastructure, incentives, seed production, and public campaigns to create a garden city (roadsides, public places, institutional, commercial and private gardens), planted with a diversity of indigenous grasses and forbs.

**Tree plantings** - while FOG supports tree planting for obvious reasons, planting should not compromise natural values such as by tree planting in and near native grasslands and over-planting in grassy woodlands.

**Retention of mature indigenous trees** - we are concerned by mature tree clearing for development and infrastructure; such trees, at more than 200 years of age, are part of our heritage in the ACT and provide invaluable habitat.

**Dumping, illegal parking, trail bike riding in reserves and other bush areas** - we consider stronger legislative protection and better management is required to manage these issues when they have an impact on remnant vegetation.

**Herbicide** - we are concerned about the campaign against glyphosate, an important tool in weeding, and support its careful use by volunteers with ChemCert qualifications.



## 5. Communication

### News of Friends of Grasslands

*News of Friends of Grasslands* (aka the FOG newsletter), since its inception in November 1994, has been a high quality advocate for grassy ecosystems. Since 1998 it has been published six times a year and the November-December 2020 edition was the 147th issue. The newsletter is FOG's chief communications medium to tell encouraging, yet dispassionate, stories of how FOG and other agencies, groups and individuals support grassy ecosystems through on-ground work, research and advocacy. It aims to impart knowledge, resources, skills and a can do attitude. It also encourages self reliance and confidence. It also provides a history of FOG and more generally grassy ecosystems. For many years it has promoted an understanding and respect for first nation's traditional land management practices and their relevance to supporting grassy ecosystems.

The newsletter includes regular features such as FOG's latest advocacy submissions, a president's report, a summary of upcoming events, and an extensive contact us - a who's who of FOG organisers; well researched articles, including regular flora and fauna profiles by artist Michael Bedingfield and fascinating information on plants by close up microscope photographer John Fitz Gerald; news of FOG events; and news on grassy ecosystem developments and broader news on biodiversity.

Contributors to the newsletter in 2020 were Alan Ford, Alex Kirk, Alice Bauer, Alison McLeod, Andrew Zelnik, Emily Sutcliffe, Geoff Robertson, James Benjamin Smith, Jamie Pittock, John Fitz Gerald, Libby Keen, Linda Spinaze, Margaret Ning, Michael Bedingfield, Naarilla Hirsch, Rainer Rehwinkel, Rod Holesgrove, Sarah Bates, Sarah Sharp, Sue Ross and Tein McDonald.

Geoff Robertson took over as editor for the newsletter following Ann Milligan's last issue in 2019. The volume of material received and published in 2020 increased as the number of matters impacting on grassy ecosystems greatly increased. Procedures to publish the newsletter were changed. By the end of the year, four people were involved in the newsletter's production - Geoff Robertson, Maree Gilbert, Margaret Ning and Sue Ross.

A major decision was made, starting with the November-December 2020 issue, to drop advertising details of upcoming events in the newsletter, which now only publishes a summary of immediate upcoming events. This reduced pressure on the newsletter and was facilitated by the re-organising of events and their publication in the *Events and Notices* bulletin.

For some years now, an informal collation group has met to fold, label, stamp and post the newsletter. Five such meetings were held in 2020, with the meeting for

the January-February 2021 issue taking place in January 2021. The first meeting of the new newsletter group was held late in the year (13 Nov).

### Events & Notices bulletin

Sixteen issues of *FOG's Events and Notices*, previously referred to as the *e-Bulletin*, were issued in 2020. Its traditional aim has been to keep members abreast of upcoming events in between newsletter issues and has also included some notices of items of interest. Geoff Robertson became editor of the bulletin in late 2019 when Ann Milligan gave up being newsletter and events bulletin editor.

Major changes were made in the production of the bulletin in the second half of the year - see 2 Events - Integrating events management.

### Annual report

At its Annual General Meeting, FOG members, amongst other matters, receive reports. Normally, an association would receive some written and some verbal reports. FOG's annual report has evolved, beginning some years ago when individual reports were consolidated into a single document and pre-circulated to members. Consolidated annual reports have been included on FOG's website (search for annual reports) since 2013. These now provide a comprehensive overview of FOG and provide a way to document our history.

### Website

2020 was a smooth year for the FOG website. Most work involved keeping the calendar, newsletters and advocacy pages up to date. The statistics package on the server (March 2020 to Feb 2021) recorded around 120,000 visitors for the year and 150 GB in downloads.

The home page was the most popular entry page (25% of visits), followed by *What is a grassland* (4%), *Grasses of NSW* (4%) and a *Grasses: habits and habitats* brochure (2%). So the website continues to rank well for education. Advocacy also attracts around 2% of visits (i.e. around 2,000 visits per year).

The fog.org.au domain is registered with OnlyDomains, the website is hosted by HostMetro in the USA, and FOG email services are provided faultlessly and free by Google.

During the year, work commenced in updating material on the website and making FOG procedures more integrated. The main example of this has been to streamline procedures associated with the calendar of events - these are described in the section on events. As a result material published in the calendar on the website is copied and pasted from the *Events and Notices* bulletin.

### Facebook

FOG established a Facebook page in November 2018 and is another media vehicle to distribute grassy news and information on upcoming events. Geoff Robertson and Sarah Hnatiuk are responsible for placing material on the website.



### Email, phone and press inquiries

FOG has several email addresses through which it receives various inquiries, but most come through [info@fog.org](mailto:info@fog.org). It receives several notices weekly of upcoming events, news reports and inquiries. Incoming information on events and news items is passed on appropriately, while inquiries are answered. Apart from advertising email addresses, FOG publicises phone number 0403 221 117 (Geoff Robertson's) which receives about one call a week.

Inquiries are made about all manner of issues such as what plants are suitable to grow, how does one manage vegetation, how does one volunteer, and many more. We are getting a number of press queries from journalists who want background briefings on our submissions and other newsy items on grasslands.

### Presentations to other organisations

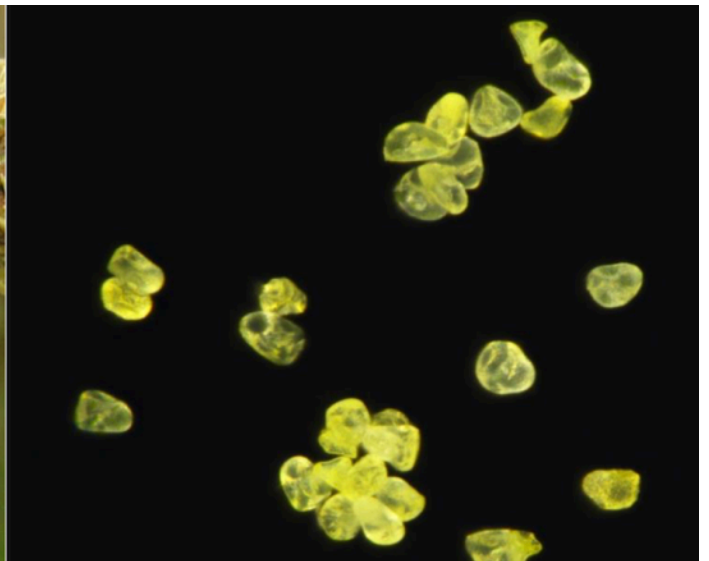
On 26 March, Rainer Rehwinkel gave a presentation to the Burley Griffin Branch of Rotary Canberra on *Grassy Ecosystems*, while a month later, 16 April, Jamie Pittcock, gave a presentation to the same branch on *Stirling Park*. Geoff Robertson was asked to give presentations on Franklin Grasslands at the ACT Government's Launch of Franklin Grasslands as part of Canberra Nature Park (23 May) and the ACT

Government's launch of the Franklin Grasslands Draft Landscape Plan Open Day (6 Sept). Jamie Pittcock gave a presentation at the Launch of the ACT Government Environment and Urban Park Grants at Blue Gum Point (24 July). Geoff Robertson spoke at the Lawson Grasslands open day (25 Oct).

### On public show

In 2020 there were fewer opportunities for FOG to participate in public displays organised by others. Nevertheless, it held stalls at the Franklin Grasslands Open Day, organised by the ACT Environment Protection and Sustainability Development Directorate, to launch the draft landscape plan for the reserve (6 Sept) and at the Lawson Grasslands Open Day organised by Ginninderra Catchment Group (25 Oct). On 11-13 September, FOG participated in the Parkcare display at Jamison Centre, organised by local parkcare groups. Jean Geue has organised this for many years and FOG has participated on each occasion.

*News of Friends of Grasslands includes our popular close up series - (top photo Carex appressa, inflorescence and pollen) and news of what we do - weeding at Franklin Grassland (below).*



## 6. Membership, governance & finance

### Membership

For many years, membership has remained constant around 200. At the end of 2020 it was 221.<sup>2</sup> FOG members are essentially individuals, comprising landowners and managers, professional scientists, land and park carers, conservationists and naturalists, who, as volunteers, support the protection and restoration of grassy ecosystems.

FOG membership payments are usually made via bank transfer, occasionally cash and rarely bank cheque. During the year, an investigation was undertaken into the use of credit and debit cards to pay membership fees and for sales. In addition, a meeting to discuss options was held (18 May). Square, which also offers a portable device, seemed to be the best payment option. However, Square will not register not-for-profit organisations. All other options investigated either proved to be unsuitable or too costly. For example, most payment schemes require a monthly fee of about \$20. Generally, given our relatively small membership, there appears to be, at this time, nothing available at a suitable price that will assist. This research also canvassed possibly databases that might enable FOG to manage its records more effectively - again, nothing satisfactory emerged.

### Governance

Our previous annual report stated that 2020 would be a year of transition. While 2019 was a highly successful year, it was clear that several key FOG volunteers would be stepping down, or playing a lesser or different role. The open forum *FOG in the 2020s* (26 Nov 2019) canvassed how we may achieve a transition. As we approach our 2021 AGM, the process of transition is well under way. However, in 2020, the process was complicated by the impacts of drought, fire, smoke, rain, hail and COVID 19.

At our AGM 22 April 2020, the following people were elected: Geoff Robertson (President), Sarah Sharp (Secretary), Janet Russell (Treasurer), and, as Committee members, Julie Beckman, Maree Gilbert, Ken Hodgkinson, Margaret Ning, Linda Spinaze and Andrew Zelnik. Neither of the two vice president positions were filled. Paul Archer, FOG's Secretary for two years, and Rainer Rehwinkel, a long time grassland ecologist, educator, advocate and committee member, did not stand at the AGM.

The committee met six times in 2020, mostly on-line. Generally, meetings were kept to ninety minutes. Each required preparation of an agenda and reports, tabling of correspondence, recording of minutes and filing of papers.

Apart from official office holders (president, secretary, treasurer and committee members), many of FOG's activities are organised by volunteers - through the year many new volunteers took on new tasks. By the end of 2020, FOG organisers were: Newsletter (Geoff Robertson, Maree Gilbert, Sue Ross & Margaret Ning), Events & Notices bulletin (Geoff Robertson & Eleanor Galvin), Website (Richard Bomford), Facebook (Geoff Robertson, Sarah Hnatiuk, and Laura Canackle),

Administrative, financial, membership, sales, project management, administration of grants received and given	1554
Advocacy: searches & research, preparing submissions, & working with other groups on behalf of FOG	534
Communications: newsletter, website, facebook, answering queries and public media	1126
Events - planning & management, incl. preparation of presentations & materials. (excludes attendance at events)	451
FOG partners: consultation and advising, including preparation of documents. Excludes formal advocacy submissions, project management, and attendance at events.	245
Total	3908

info@fog and spokesperson (Geoff Robertson), Event coordinators (Geoff Robertson & Eleanor Galvin), Event organisers (Geoff Robertson, Margaret Ning, Jamie Pittock, John Fitz Gerald, Linda Spinaze), Events data recorder (Geoff Robertson), Membership (Heather Sweet), Sales (Sarah Sharp), Advocacy Co-ordinator (Naarilla Hirsch), National Capital Authority Liaison and Work Party Coordinator (Jamie Pittock), Hall Cemetery Coordinator (John Fitz Gerald), Scottsdale monitoring (Linda Spinaze), Grassy Grants (Supported Projects) Co-ordinator (Andrew Zelnik), Work Health and Safety (Geoff Robertson) and Public Officer (Andy Russell). Behind each of these tasks is a group or network of people who actively support and/or act as back ups.

A major innovation in 2020 was the creation of an administrative committee, consisting of the president, treasurer and secretary. It met for the first time on 25 May and held a further three meetings in 2020. It helped to redistribute the workload and freed up the committee to focus on broader issues.

A working group was formed to review FOG's administrative arrangements, especially to review FOG's use of Dropbox - especially privacy concerns about data held on Dropbox and how to manage our use of Dropbox. After some deliberation, the working group satisfied itself on the security of Dropbox data. Towards the year's end work was proceeding quickly to assign roles and responsibilities for managing Dropbox and to clarify document retention procedures.

<sup>2</sup> Including six corporate, eleven association, five honorary life, two paid up life, and ten complimentary members.

## Finance, excluding FOG's Public Fund

In 2020, FOG received \$43,080 and spent \$8744, resulting in a cash surplus of \$34,366.

- Receipts included \$5556 in membership fees, net sales of \$7914 (largely from sales of *Grassland Flora* and *Woodland Flora*) and grants of \$29,656.
- The major items of expenditure were \$2202 (FOG projects funded by grants), \$2150 (FOG's grassy grants), and \$1402 (storage and insurance).
- Adjusting the cash balances for changes in the stock of books held and in grant liabilities, the non-cash surplus, a key measure of performance, was \$4160.
- At the end of 2020, FOG's assets were \$106,277 and liabilities were \$29,964, resulting in net equity of \$76,263.
- Assets comprised cash at bank of \$101,224 and book stocks of \$5003, while liabilities are for unspent grants.

## FOG sales

Publications are another way to support grassy ecosystems. FOG's flagship book publications, *Grassland Flora* and *Woodland Flora* (and other publications that FOG sells), aim to share a knowledge of grassy ecosystems and increase people's skills to identify plants. In 2020, sales were \$12,374.

In 2020, the committee decided to print a third edition of *Grassland Flora* and a cost of \$4460 was incurred to update scientific names and improve images, and to print a small number of books - in future there will be more frequent but small print runs.

By the end of 2020, FOG had sold 2677 issues of *Grassland Flora* commencing in 2012, and 2431 issues of *Woodland Flora* commencing in 2015.

## Grassy grants

In 2020 FOG offered its fourth round of grassy grants (previously referred to as supported projects) which provide grants of up to \$1500 to support grassy ecosystems for communication, education, advocacy, research and on-ground work. Funding for the grant program comes from donations to our Public Fund and FOG's income and reserves. FOG's Grassy Grants Group met on four occasions. Its role is to call for applications, advertise the grants through an extensive network of people and institutions, consider applications, obtain additional information in some cases, award the grants, and monitor grant progress and outcomes.

In 2020, grants were widely advertised and FOG announced grants of \$5700, compared with \$4650 in 2019. Successful grants were: *Bushland Regeneration Project*, Cooma NSW, (\$1200), *Revegetation of Grassy Woodland*, Two Rivers Catchment Reserve, Ballyroe NSW (\$1500), *Control invasive weeds and mowing in remnant NTG*, Bass Gardens, Griffith ACT (\$1500), and *Dung beetle species richness and composition in*

*grasslands*, Narrabri NSW (\$1500). An article describing these grants was published in the *News of Friends of Grasslands*, Nov-Dec 2020, p7.

In 2020 FOG paid out \$7799 to grantees - \$5649 from the Public Fund and \$2150 from general funds.

Our special feature provides details of all grants provided to date.

## Public Fund and donations

Since 2016, FOG has been a Registered Environmental Organisation which allows it to receive tax-deductible gifts through its Public Fund. Management of the Public Fund is conducted by three trustees (Janet Russell, Andrew Zelnik and Kim Pullen). It provides a source for FOG's Grassy Ecosystem Grants. In 2020, the trustees held one meeting and agreed to seek funds to support FOG's Top Hut TSR management project. In 2020, the public fund received \$3575. Hopefully FOG supporters will be generous with donations in 2021.

## Survey of FOG volunteers hours

A survey of FOG committee members, office holders and key volunteers reported that they contributed 3640 hours in 2020 (excluding time at and travel time to FOG events). The details are shown in Table 6.

The survey is conducted annually by approaching FOG office holders, committee members and those undertaking major tasks for FOG. Estimates are made for some items, such as writing material for the newsletter, by those who are not surveyed. Some estimates are included for non-response.

## Amending the constitution

Our last annual report mentioned changes to the ACT Associations Incorporation Act 1991 were introduced as of 1 July 2019 and that, after making inquiries to Access Canberra, the committee decided not to change FOG's constitution until the ACT Government issues new model rules which FOG would then adopt. (FOG has always followed the model rules with some exceptions). While FOG does not intend to change its rules until new model rules are available, in early 2021 it make some changes to procedures so that they are more consistent with the legislative changes.

## References

*FOG's Audited Annual Accounts*, *FOG's membership list*, *FOG's Register of Events* and *FOG Volunteer Survey*, *Annual Audited Accounts*.

## Thanks for assistance in preparing this report to:

Andrew Zelnik, Heather Sweet, Jamie Pittock, Janet Russell, John Fitz Gerald, Linda Spinaze, Margaret Ning, Michael Bedingfield, Naarilla Hirsch, Richard Bomford and Sarah Sharp.

## Photos provided by:

Jamie Pittock, John Fitz Gerald and Geoff Robertson.

## Drawings by:

Michael Bedingfield.

## 7. Special feature - FOG's Grassy Grants Program, Years 2017 to 2020

Title & location	Year	Amount (\$)	Description - News of Friends of Grasslands	Outcome
<i>Bushland Regeneration Project, Cooma NSW</i>	2020	1200	Nov-Dec 2020, p7	In progress
<i>Revegetation of Grassy Woodland, Two Rivers Catchment Reserve, Ballyroo NSW</i>	2020	1500	Nov-Dec 2020, p7	In progress
<i>Control invasive weeds and mowing in remnant NTG, Bass Gardens, Griffith ACT</i>	2020	1500	Nov-Dec 2020, p7	In progress
<i>Dung beetle species richness and composition in grasslands, UNE post doc research, Narrabri NSW</i>	2020	1500	Nov-Dec 2020, p7	In progress
<i>Replacement signage South Gundagai Cemetery White Box Woodland, Gundagai NSW</i>	2019	650	Nov-Dec 2020	Completed. FOG inspection Sep 2020. Newsletter item Jan-Feb 2021.
<i>Condition improvement plan for threatened Lowland Themeda grasslands and grassy woodlands on a working farm, Okehampton TAS</i>	2019	1000	Nov-Dec 2019, p8	Completed (1). Newsletter article submitted.
<i>Hiding in the grass: uncovering Melichrus (Ericaceae) species diversity in grassy ecosystems of eastern Australia, PhD research, UNE Armidale NSW</i>	2019	1500	Nov-Dec 2019, p8	In progress – was delayed by COVID-19 and drought.
<i>Role of plant and soil microbe interaction in weed invasion in grassy ecosystems, PhD research, University of Canberra ACT</i>	2019	1500	Nov-Dec 2019, p8	Nearing completion. Newsletter articles Nov-Dec 2020 & Jan-Feb 2021. Third article to come.
<i>Invasive weed control of Chilean Needle Grass, African Lovegrass and Serrated Tussock in a small urban patch of remnant native grassy woodland, Griffith ACT</i>	2018	1500	May–Jun 2019, p9	Completed. Newsletter article May–Jun 2019. Park care group continuing successfully.
<i>Forecasting the spread and impact of exotic plant species in Australia, PhD research, University of Canberra ACT</i>	2018	1500	May–Jun 2019, p9 Nov-Dec 2019, p8	Completed (2). Newsletter article to be published in Mar-Apr 2021.
<i>'Attitudes and latitudes: Towards a global perspective of grassland ecology', research paper, Murdoch University WA</i>	2017	1500	Jul-Aug 2017, p2	Completed (3). Newsletter article Mar-Apr 2019.
<i>Brochure on local native grasses and grass-like species growing at Southern Tablelands Ecosystems Park, National Arboretum, ACT</i>	2017	1500	Jul-Aug 2017, p2	Completed (4). Newsletter article Nov-Dec 2018. Brochure launch at National Arboretum.
<i>Quantifying awn length variation in Kangaroo Grass seed and other native grasses across Australia, Honours degree research, CSIRO ACT &amp; La Trobe University VIC</i>	2017	500	Jul-Aug 2017, p2	Completed (5). Newsletter article Jul-Aug 2018. Honours thesis submitted.
<i>Research on use of fire for grassland rehabilitation in Kangaroo Grass – Red Gum woodlands, Western Plains of Victoria, research study, La Trobe University VIC</i>	2017	500	Jul-Aug 2017, p2	Completed. Newsletter article Jul-Aug 2019.
<i>Contribution towards travel expenses of Conservation Volunteers Australia (ACT) for work at Old Cooma Common Grassland Reserve, Cooma NSW</i>	2017	825	Jul-Aug 2017, p2	Completed. Newsletter article Sep-Oct 2017.

(1) Kerry Bridle, Condition Improvement Plan for Threatened Lowland Grasslands and Grassy Woodlands on Okehampton, Tasmania: Final report to Dr Jason Whitehead, Cape Herbert Pty Ltd. (June 2020).

(2) Kyle Hemming awarded for best 'Flashtalk' at the 2019 international Ecology and Management of Alien Plant Invasions (EMapi15) conference which took place in Prague. Flashtalks have to fit a 5-minute time-slot. There's a photo at <https://emapi2019.org/>. Mar 2021 Scheduled online FOG forum - Forecasting the spread and impact of exotic plant species.

(3) October 2016 lead researcher and grant applicant, Dr Rachel Standish, was filmed with her students for a segment on ABC's Gardening Australia, about recovery of native vegetation near a formerly proposed highway that was to be called 'Roe 8' (<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-10-11/roe-8-highway-extension-in-western-australia-explained/7923658>). The segment is scheduled to be in the Gardening Australia program on Friday 15 March, 7.30 pm.

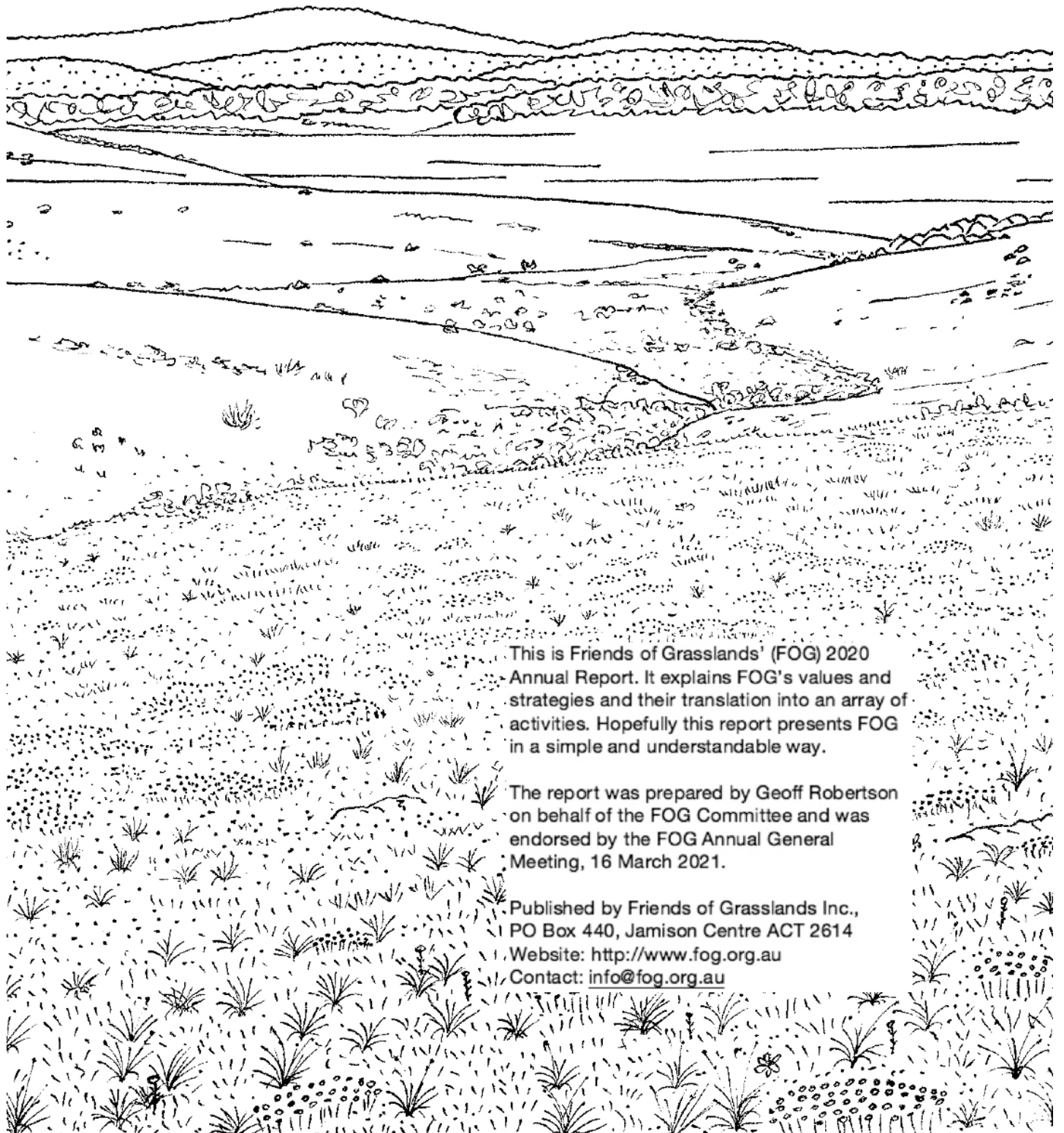
(4) STEP brochure, *Grasses at the Southern Tablelands Regional Botanic Garden: Forest 20*, launched by Judy Smith (President, STEP) and Dr Ken Hodgkinson (FOG Committee) at STEP's site at the National Arboretum Canberra. (June 2018).

(5) Annette Cavanagh, presentation to FOG Committee of the preliminary results and findings on her Honours project. (Jan 2018). Annette Cavanagh submitted her Honours thesis: *Awn morphology influences dispersal, microsite selection and burial of Australian native grass diaspores* (April 2018). Resulting paper from Honours thesis published in *Australian Journal of Botany*, 2019, 67, 309–334 <https://doi.org/10.1071/BT18216>, Annette M. Cavanagh, Robert C. Godfree, and John W. Morgan, *An awn typology for Australian native grasses (Poaceae)* (Aug 2019). Also noted in Sept-Oct 2019 FOG Newsletter, p13. Second paper arising from Honours thesis published in *Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution*, 2020, 8:581967. doi: 10.3389/fevo.2020.581967. Annette M. Cavanagh, John W. Morgan, and Robert C. Godfree, *Awn Morphology Influences Dispersal, Microsite Selection and Burial of Australian Native Grass Diaspores*. (Nov 2020).





*Supporting native grassy ecosystems*



This is Friends of Grasslands' (FOG) 2020 Annual Report. It explains FOG's values and strategies and their translation into an array of activities. Hopefully this report presents FOG in a simple and understandable way.

The report was prepared by Geoff Robertson on behalf of the FOG Committee and was endorsed by the FOG Annual General Meeting, 16 March 2021.

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