



News of Friends of Grasslands

Supporting native grassy ecosystems

September-October 2005

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Program

SAT 17 SEPTEMBER 9:30AM to 3:30PM **Old Cooma Common Working Bee** Woody weed and St John's wort removal. This is an interesting time to see Old Cooma Common at winter's end. Contact Margaret Ning for details.

FRI-SAT 14 and 15 OCTOBER **FOG grassy ecosystem tour of SA** Following the Stipa Fourth Native Grasses Conference in Burra, Michael Treanor is leading FOG members and conference participants to visit some of SA's best grassy ecosystem sites. We will meet on Friday at 9.30 for 10am (Paxton Square Cottages, Kingston Street, Burra SA). The plan is to visit Beetaloo Valley and Bungaleer area to look at grassy woodlands, travel back via a TSR or two and stop at a Clare winery for dinner before returning to Burra. On Saturday we again meet at 9.30 in Burra (same location) and then travel to Mokota Conservation Park, some of the best Iron Grass systems in SA and home of the endangered Pygmy Blue Tongue. Then it is back via more TSRs and a Clare winery and dinner in Burra. We will be near some good bakeries around lunchtimes. The program is flexible so that people can join for one or two days, and visits to wineries are optional. Please contact Geoff if you would like to join us. His contact details are geof-frobertson@iprimus.com.au or 02 6241 4065, 0403221117.

SAT 22 OCTOBER 10am to noon **Boorowa TSR**. This TSR is an outstanding grassland one hour from Canberra. It is one of three sites for the Tarengo leek orchid. It also has creamy candles (*Stackhousia monogyna*) which is supposed to smell absolutely special during the night time. We shall check this out!! Enquiries Margaret Ning.

SUN MORNING 7:30AM 23 OCT **Canberra Ornithologists Group and FOG, Jerrabomberra Grassland Reserve** to study birds and plants. This is a new grassland reserve and we may see some early spring flowers. We might be lucky to see singing bushlark in addition to Richard's pipit and introduced skylark, as well as grassland earless dragon. For COG members this will be a rare visit to this type of vegetation. Meet before 7:30pm, at the Canberra model aeroclub site, western side of Monaro Highway, between Hindmarsh Drive and Lanyon Drive. Enquiries Margaret.



In this issue

- *News roundup*
- *Fog visit to Majura Field Firing Range*
- *Australian mainline churches and environment*
- *A rainy spring afternoon*
- *Narrow-leaf New Holland daisy: A tough little native with a bright future*

News Roundup

Reptiles and prairies

30 JULY FOG held its winter slide afternoon. While attendance was down on earlier years, those who attended showed much interest and asked many questions. Geoff Robertson made two presentations, one on reptiles of the Southern Tablelands and one on his trip to US prairies in 2001.

The reptile presentation was based on the ACT Herpetological Association (ACTHA) and Southern Tablelands Ecosystems Park project on *Reptiles of the*

Southern Tablelands. This project aimed to increase the level of public understanding of reptiles in the region, and in particular how to identify them and find them in the wild (by knowing their habitats or ecosystem niches). This in turn might lead to a better understanding of their abundance/rarity. Some species are naturally cryptic and therefore seem rare. However, Geoff fears that many have undergone very serious decline.

The project aimed to have a good picture or two of each reptile species. Originally, ACTHA's John Wombey supplied many fantastic pictures which he had taken over the years, but now many others have also contributed good pictures to the project.

At the January 2004 and 2005 ACTHA displays at the Australian National Botanic Gardens *Reptiles of the Southern Tablelands* was continuously screened. It appeared to engender much interest, as many people who saw it were able to recognise animals they were seeing frequently.

Geoff showed his slides and added much information on the behaviour of many individual species.

The second presentation was on Geoff's visit to some US prairies in 2001 which were written up in an earlier FOG newsletter.

Short-grass and to an extent medium-grass prairies had made a remarkable



Geoff talking on one of his favourite subjects - reptiles

comeback in the US and now performed their previous ecological function. There is much we can learn from that experience, although problems which plague Australian ecosystems such as introduced plants and animals do not have the same impact on US grasslands.

Are you coming to the Stipa Conference?

The Fourth National Native Grasses Conference, hosted by the Stipa Native Grasses Association, the Mid North Grasslands Working Group and the Native Grass Resources Group, will be held from 11 to 13 October, in Burra, SA. The Conference title is *grassland conservation and production, both sides of the fence*. It will explore the role of modern agriculture and grazing practices in maintaining a healthy ecosystem. As Wal Whalley so succinctly expressed it, "grassland management or production: are they two sides of the one coin?"

The key themes of the conference are healthy landscapes and profits, on-farm management of native grasses, native grass seed production and establishment, and fire as a potential management tool. The conference is expected to be attended by

landholders with existing stands of native grass or remnant vegetation, landcare groups, graziers, government or other agency personnel, consultants, ecologists, university staff, students and seed suppliers, i.e. anyone with an interest in managing native grasses/grasslands for production, conservation and profitability.

As readers will know, the previous conference, which was held in Cooma, was co-sponsored by FOG and was a big success. With a host of speakers on a wide variety of topics, and many poster presentations (including FOG's), it is anticipated that the fourth conference will be equally rewarding, maybe better. An addition to the program will be the *Grassland Visions Art* event.

For its part, FOG is organising a grassland tour on the Friday and Saturday after the conference with Michael Treanor as guide (see program on front page).

For more information about the conference see the advertisement circulated in this newsletter.

More FOG events in 2005

*Please put these dates
in your diary*

SAT 12 NOV 2:00pm to 4:40PM
Workshop on basic grassy ecosystem ecology and plant identification

SUN 13 (Not SAT 12) NOV
2:00pm **Mugga Mugga grassland walk**

SAT-SUN 19-20 (not 20-21)
NOVEMBER **Canberra Ornithologists Group and FOG, Camp-out at Garuwanga, Bells Road, near Nimmitabel**

SAT 10 DECEMBER 10am to noon
Revisit Boorowa TSR

ACT grassland strategy launched

Geoff Robertson

12 JULY Chief Minister and Minister for the Environment Jon Stanhope launched the *ACT lowland native grassland strategy (Action Plan No. 28)*. There was nothing substantially new in the document because it departed little from the *draft strategy* which I reviewed in the November-December 2004 newsletter.

Nevertheless, this is a very important document which contains a substantial amount of good scientific information on ACT natural temperate grassland, native pasture and habitat for rare and threatened grassland flora and fauna species. Additionally, it outlines a strategy to conserve higher quality grassland remnants and habitat areas, to reconnect and restore such areas, and to manage them adaptively.

A compendium document was released with the *strategy*. It is a report



on the submissions on the draft *strategy* and Environment ACT's responses. By the way, if readers are curious, the Conservation Council's submission, in which FOG members participated, is Submission 3, while FOG's is Submission 6.

As many readers know, the *grassland strategy* is part of a trilogy which also consists of the woodland and riparian strategies. The draft riparian strategy, on which members of FOG were recently briefed, should be out for comment before year's end.

The Conservation Council is committed to ensuring that the ACT gov-



ernment incorporates these strategies into instruments such as the *Canberra Plan* so that high quality woodland, grassland, and riparian areas are preserved, reconnected, and managed for conservation in perpetuity.

FOG recognises that the woodlands and grasslands strategy represent very high quality innovative and scientific work, and congratulates Environment ACT on its achievements. The documents provide both excellent descriptive work and maps. However, committed conservationists will need to study the documents very closely to understand how each piece of land fits into the overall strategy and to ensure that the strategy is fully implemented.

Austral Bugle

The Austral Bugle, the newsletter of the Southern Tablelands Grassy Ecosystems Conservation Management Network (STGE CMN) after an absence of several years (last published autumn 2003) has reappeared as a combined publication with *Woodland Wanderings*, the newsletter of the Grassy Box Woodlands CMN.

The combined publication has many interesting and informative articles. A particularly interesting insert titled *restoring grassy white box woodland* by Kevin Thiele and Susan Prober describes what the original understorey of white box woodland was like,

Photos: above – some well known Canberrans listening to Jon Stanhope (cover page) launch the ACT grassland strategy. Below, Davids Shorthouse and Hogg at the launch.

how and why it has changed, and what can be done to restore it.

Monaro Grassland Project

28 JULY *The Land* reported in an article, titled *raising potential of the Monaro* by Ian Paterson, that “long-term research into the grazing potential of native pastures on the Monaro has been launched with a field day at Berridale. About 100 graziers gathered earlier this month to hear the aims of the Monaro Grasslands Project and inspected one of two trial sites.”

Luke Pope, district agronomist, NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) was quoted as saying that most grazing systems in the Monaro were based on native pastures. The aim of the project is to find ways to keep them weed-free and increasing or at least maintaining their biodiversity.

Research on this scale in the Monaro has not been tried before, with most information coming from elsewhere.

The project is funded by the Southern Rivers Catchment Management Authority and managed by the DPI. Each of the two sites, one on basalt and one on granite soils, covers 45 hectares and is subdivided into nine plots set-stocked with Merino wethers.

The plots will be subject to different fertiliser treatments and will be assessed for available feed, pasture composition, ground cover and botanical composition. The wethers will be assessed for live weight, fat

score, micron and fleece weight while seasonal variation in wool growth will be monitored using dye banding.

Luke Pope was confident that results from the trial would be applicable to the vast majority of soils on the Monaro.

There are many photos of familiar faces accompanying the article – FOG's favourite is a smiling Kerry Pfeiffer with former federal Agriculture Minister, John Kerin.

ACT planning and biodiversity

At the invitation of the Standing Committee on Planning and the Environment of the ACT Legislative Assembly, FOG and many other environmental groups made submissions on the relationship between biodiversity and planning in the ACT. FOG's submission essentially supported the Conservation Council's submission on which FOG members had worked.

The Standing Committee used the instance of Draft Variation Plan 231 which covers the East Gungahlin suburbs of Kenny and Throsby and the Gooroyaroo Nature Reserve. The latter is a large grassy box woodland reserve which has been mentioned on many occasions in the FOG newsletter.

The submissions stated that clearing of native vegetation for urban development, especially varying quality grassland and woodland, was of great concern. Most stress was placed on the need to enshrine within the Territory Plan woodland habitat corridors and grassland and threatened species habitat, identified in the ACT government's woodland and grassland strategies, so that such areas could be protected, well-managed and reconnected.

As ACT planning is undergoing a major review, this push for greater protection of biodiversity could be timely.

Protecting Conder's wonders

Dan Thonia

Many FOG members will remember the drama and adventure that led to the housing estate known as Conder 4A being set aside to be a nature re-

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serve, because of the site's high floral diversity. As part of the compromise that led to this successful outcome, housing was to be permitted on the edges of the reserve.

In June, Conder resident and FOG member Michael Bedingfield visited the site to see how things were progressing. He found to his dismay that on the east side of the area, the builder had knocked down 100 metres of protective fencing and had erected his own self-supporting construction fence up to six metres within the new reserve. He had also encroached on the margins of the reserve with his machinery and earthworks.

Michael reported this to the authorities and various people became involved. Parks and Conservation sent out a park ranger, accompanied by an officer from the Environment Protection Authority (EPA). There was also a visit by a staff member from Wildlife Research and Monitoring, and the Office of the Commissioner for the

Environment was kept informed. Discussions were held with the builder who agreed to do whatever was required. Government officers decided to visit the area regularly to check on activities by the builder.

The builder scraped some soil back off the edges of the reserve toward the building site. He moved the construction fence so it was mostly within one metre of the boundary but still in the reserve. He will be required to re-construct the boundary fence before spring growth begins and at that time shift his own fence off the reserve. Re-seeding of the disturbed areas will be worked out later. When, in response to an observation that this was a bit soft on the builder, EPA explained that it is endeavouring to develop a harmonious rather than heavy-handed approach with the building industry.

Unfortunately, disregard for natural areas is common in Canberra where development occurs on the fringes of nature reserves. While I question the effectiveness of this approach, let's hope that it works in this case, that promises are kept, and as the building work continues there is no further trouble.

New grassland officer appointed

The natural temperate grassland (of the Southern Tablelands and ACT) recovery team has now received NHT funding for three years and has appointed Greg Bains as the new grassland project officer (photo below).



Greg has been busy attempting to improve the databases, so that information on natural temperate grass-

land sites is more readily available, and is planning surveys to identify additional natural temperate grassland remnants.

Serrated Tussock factpack

28 JULY *the Land* reported on *reducing the risk of tussock expansion*. This is a review of *The Serrated Tussock Managers' Factpack* which looks at the various ways to manage serrated tussock, including keeping ground covered, poisoning, and competition. Copies are available from local councils. Contact Sherryl Broderick (4828 6601).

Molongo Valley Study Groundcover

21 JULY The ACT Planning and Land Authority held the first of two public consultations on the Molongo Valley Structure Planning Study aimed at gauging public reaction to the proposal to develop new suburban areas in the Molongo Valley between Belconnen and Weston Creek in Canberra.

Following the 2003 Canberra Fire, the ACT government put forward the

proposal, as part of the *Spatial Plan* consultation, to develop new suburbs in the Molongo Valley on degraded land in what was before the fire, large areas of pine forest.

Views on the proposal are mixed, especially as many people consider that from an overall conservation perspective, Canberra ought to stop massive greenfield development with its many consequent poor biodiversity and greenhouse outcomes. Some rural lessees are also unhappy with the proposal.

While large areas of the valley have been degraded by the pine plantations, the Molongo Valley has important biodiversity values including extensive areas of remnant vegetation (including yellow box red gum grassy woodlands), pink-tail worm lizard habitat, migration corridor for many birds, and the whole area is important for raptors. ACTPLA is being careful to take account of these biodiversity values and the proposal on the table thus far is much less ambitious than what was potentially flagged in the *Spatial Plan* consultations. Develop-

ment will be largely restricted to one side of the river.

Nimmitabel cemeteries

Catherine Brew, Conservation Officer, Parks and Gardens/Cemeteries, National Trust of Australia, reported in the *Nimmitabel News* (July 2005) that the National Trust was very interested to inspect both the Nimmitabel General Cemetery and the Pioneer Cemetery. Concerning the former, the *News* reported "It is good to see that native kangaroo grass is being managed appropriately, i.e. clipped low in areas of use, but allowed to grow elsewhere. The Natural Trust's Guidelines for Cemetery Conservation state, "*Native grasses in many instances add to the visual quality of the cemetery providing a textured background, and by retarding the spread of weeds. They also have natural heritage value in their own right. Mowing of major paths only is generally recommended.*"

FOG visit to Majura Field Firing Range

Groundcover

2 JULY Twenty-eight FOG members and some friends turned out for the FOG Winter Grassland Tour at Majura Field Firing Range despite the constant threat of rain and the very cold conditions. The tour was led by David Eddy (FOG) and Lauren Gray, Environmental Officer (Department of Defence) for the NSW south east region.

After everyone met, the group arranged itself into a convoy of four-wheel drive vehicles to cope with the road clearance and to lessen the number of vehicles touring through the firing range.

The first stop was a briefing to make the group aware that this was an active field

firing range, and some of the dos and don'ts when travel-



ling in such an area were explained. Many members of the group were fascinated by the talk and wanted to learn more about some of the examples of old live ammunition, but we had to move on to complete the hectic schedule. So it was back to the cars which then travelled to the north east part of the range. Along the road we saw some suburb grassy woodland with some magnificent examples of yellow box and other trees.

The next stop was in a highly wooded area as the photo of part of the group being addressed by David shows. It was a bit of deja vu because the group was standing on the other side of the fence to Sarah and Adrian Fether's property which FOG visited on 9 October 2004 (see Nov-Dec 2004 newsletter). While the intention was to not stay too long at any one stop, the group found many plants, fungi, insects, etc. very fascinating, thus delaying proceedings a little. David and Lauren were also plied with many questions about the management. The report on the survey of the Majura Field Firing Range, which had been sent to FOG some time ago, was also produced to tease out the wealth of information about the Range.

The next stop was very open woodland with a grassy understorey present. As there was a seepage line through the site, there were two distinct eco niches, with grasses and plants with a wet preference preferring the seepage line. Many informal sub-groups formed identifying the many grasses and forbs present and discussing the vegetation. It was not too long before the cameras came out. As usual in wooded sites, there were many conversations about the defining characteristics of local eucalyptus trees.



The fourth site was higher, more open, drier and with older sparse trees. There was much interest in a large red box tree, which despite its being called a box could easily have been confused with a smooth bark eucalyptus. Another tree which excited much interest was one which had a large section of bark removed by yellow-tail black cockatoos, - it was also possibly an Aboriginal scar tree.

Kim Pullen who is always looking for things of interest, found a morethia skink. This beautiful reptile (see photo) can be distinguished by a strong white stripe running from below the mouth along the side to just beyond the back legs.



The final stop was the open grassland, which even on a cold winter day showed evidence of many species of grasses and herbs including many blue devil. The rays of the sun were getting long at this time and so it was time to return to where the cars were parked and after further conversations, the crowd slowed dwindled, all FOGed out.

So the winter grassland tour had again proved popular. The Majura Field Firing Range is a large area with a great diversity of dry forest, box woodland, and natural temperate grassland, and with the tour so well organised, the group was able to sample each of them. Thanks to David and Lauren for a great trip.



Photos: David Eddy (previous page) talks to the group in the forest area in the north east part of the range. This page: Lauren Gray (co-leader), Sally Stephens with camera, and morethia skink found by Kim Pullen.

Australian mainline churches and environment

Steve Douglas

Steve is a FOG member and FOG caught up with him at the 'Land, Our Life: Environment, Religion and Social Change in Australia' Exhibition and Seminar, 5 to 13 May, 2005, Canberra. The following article is substantially derived from Steve's PhD research at the ANU, which is supported by a University scholarship and voluntarily supervised by E. Prof. Valerie A. Brown in the School of Resources, Environment and Society. The article provides some fascinating insights to mainline church attitudes on the environment and conservation of grassy ecosystem remnants in particular. - Editor

As an active member of the environment movement, with over fifteen years of involvement, primarily in Sydney, I long held the view that 'the Church' was anything but an ally in addressing environmental concerns. This view was supported by the unfortunate outcomes of some controversial battles involving the sale and 'development' of Church-owned land with significant nature conservation values. The Church's actions in such cases reinforced my view that they were excessively interested in

money and real estate for institutional purposes, with a focus on human welfare that was totally disconnected from ecological realities. To me, the Church seemed to be about political conservatism, which allied it with materialism, which set it against the environment. I should point out that I grew up in the area of Sydney that gave rise to the controversial Hillsong Church, which is criticised by many, including much of mainstream Christendom, for pushing the so-called Prosperity Gospel seen as typical of US-style Evangelical denominations.

By a convoluted path, I now find myself researching the scope for interaction between mainstream Christian environmentalism and the nominally secular environmental movement. I have discovered that mainstream Western Christianity has undergone a dramatic shift in policy to-

wards environmental concerns within the last 20 years or so. By 'mainstream' I am referring primarily to the three largest Christian denominations in Australia and two of the largest worldwide: the Catholic, Anglican (Church of England), and Uniting Churches. These three denominations account for the vast majority of the around 67 percent of Australians who nominated their religion as Christianity in the 2001 census, though affiliation with and membership of the Anglican and Uniting Churches is in dramatic decline and Catholicism is only growing due to immigration, but it too faces demographic challenges and great difficulty finding trainee clergy.

All three denominations now have strong pro-environment policies that are increasingly being backed by implementation from the highest to the lowest levels of their variously hierarchical structures. They have individually and collectively, along with other denominations in the



Uniting Church's Meadowbank Cemetery, Campbell Town, Tasmania. This Greening Australia photo accompanied an article by Peter McGlone in the WWF Threatened Species Network newsletter last year.

National Council of Churches of Australia, called on the Howard Government to sign the Kyoto Protocol, express-

ing deep concern for the potential harm to 'Creation' including biodiversity, ecosystem function, sea level rise, and impacts on human welfare. I believe that it is correct to state that they all recognise that the Kyoto Protocol is primarily a statement of solidarity in addressing climate change, and that far more radical targets for greenhouse gas reductions need to be set and implemented. They recognise that this involves much more than energy efficiency measures and they are variously acting to address such issues within their organisations.

The National Council of Churches of Australia has recently participated, along with Catholic Earthcare Australia, UnitingJustice, and the Australian Conservation Foundation, in the production of a joint statement and publication calling for effective action to address human-

induced global climate change. To my knowledge, this is the first example of national institutional collaboration between such bodies on an environmental issue. This is consistent with similar trends internationally, including in the USA. There are also broader collaborative arrangements in place between Church, social justice, and environmental interests in the form of The Australian Collaboration (<http://www.australiancollaboration.com.au/>), which has produced some significant but seemingly poorly-known publications.

Another collaborative event that saw the Churches working with environmental groups is known as The Forest Liturgy. Originally an event in Victoria several years ago, it was more recently replicated in the Styx Valley of Tasmania, where several Tasmani-

an denominational leaders came together to hold a religious teaching about the contentious issue of logging native forests. I understand that Church participants included representatives of the three largest denominations, and that there was a clear call to end the logging of old-growth and other high conservation value forests. The event was backed by The Wilderness Society. Subsequent tensions within the Churches at various levels have allegedly seen such public expressions of their concern silenced or at least significantly constrained. However, an on-going outcome of the original Victorian event was the formation of the Faith and Ecology Network, now based in Sydney. The Forest Liturgy also highlights the false assumption that religious equals conservative equals pro-jobs equals anti-environment.

Mainstream Christian environmental concern is not a new phenomenon, though in general it has only (re)emerged in the last 20 to 25 years. Within Australia, the Uniting Church led the way, with clear pro-environment policy evident at the heart of its foundation in 1977. However, by its own admission, it tended to focus on particular environmental issues such as uranium mining, rather than the bigger picture, and tended to be good at developing policy statements but relatively ineffective at implement-

ing them, especially within its own organisations. In line with a global trend in Christianity, it has recognised the link between its long-standing concern for social justice, and environmental issues. The theological recognition of this connection is captured in the term 'eco-justice'. The Uniting Church handles eco-justice concerns within its UnitingJustice body, but features some notable regional and local groups such as the Melbourne-based Earth

Team and the Sydney-based Earth Ministry which have a more specific environmental orientation.

The Catholic Church led the global environmental reformation of Western Christianity, primarily under the leadership of the late Pope John Paul II, who in the

last fifteen years or so of his reign, made some very strong statements

to the effect that environmental concern and action was 'core business' for all Catholics. The number of policies, statements and institutional reforms driven by the late Pope are too numerous to describe here. A key outcome of his leadership in this context has been the formation of Catholic Earthcare Australia and its production of an environmental education video entitled *The Garden Planet*, along with publications supporting the protection of the Great Barrier Reef and the Murray-Darling Basin. Catholic Earthcare is currently unique in that it is the only 'corporate' body established by the three largest denominations in Australia at a national level to deal specifically with environmental issues. Catholic Earthcare has also been involved in significant revision of the Catholic education curriculum to reflect a strongly pro-environmental teaching as required by the late Pope.

The Anglican Church of Australia has been somewhat slower to act on both policy and praxis and this appears to be a global phenomenon, with international authors arguing that Protestantism is the most environmentally recalcitrant form of Western Christianity. However, the recently appointed head of the Church, Archbishop Rowan Williams, has made some very strong pronouncements on the need to effectively address environmental issues. The



The cross at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture at Barton ACT dominates the St Mark's Grassland. Also see photo on cover page.

Australian Anglicans have a national Environment Commission, and some dioceses (regional groupings of churches) have similar bodies. There is considerable regional and even local variation in Anglican environmental views and action, with the Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn being arguably the national leader. Bishop George Browning takes a strong pro-environmental stance backed by substantial capital outlay to retrofit infrastructure under his jurisdiction such as schools, churches and retirement homes, greatly reducing energy and water use. The Diocese has also mandated 5-star energy efficiency compliance for all new structures and renovations. Some of its parishes (local groups of churches) have a particularly strong environmental focus, whilst for others such issues are a far lower priority.

As part of my research, I have proposed to all three denominations, that they demonstrate their commitment to their environmental policies by entering into a process to audit natural heritage assets on their estate, and to have these protected through various conservation agreements with relevant agencies. There are already some examples of biodiversity conservation by various churches at local scales. These include the Natural Temperate Grassland remnant conserved by the actions of Anglican Bishop George Browning during planning for and construction of the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture at Barton in the ACT (see photo page 8); the protection and remediation of forest and rainforest within the grounds of a Catholic retirement complex in Lismore NSW; and the eradication of weeds that were threatening remnant native grassland by a Uniting Church in the Midlands of Tasmania (see photo page 7).

There are likely to be many areas of significant biodiversity value on church lands, with old cemeteries being a common source of such values, primarily in rural areas. Some of the monastic orders also hold quite large areas that have sometimes remained relatively protected from intensive land use. The new headquarters of Catho-

lic Earthcare at Camden south west of Sydney is such a site and features about 200ha of the endangered Cumberland Plain Woodland, including some old-growth trees, and a substantial area of a critically endangered variant of Riverflat Forest featuring the uncommon blue box (*Eucalyptus baueriana*). If you know of significant biodiversity assets in church ownership, there are now organisations within the denominations who will be interested to know about these and who may be able to act to protect them. Church hierarchies, declining memberships and funds, particularly in rural areas affected by drought, means that such a task is not always simple, though where significant areas can be protected at no cost to the Church and where land management subsidies are available, there is a substantial likelihood of success.

More recent FOG members may not know that FOG has had a long involvement with "the Natural Temperate Grassland remnant conserved by the actions of Anglican Bishop George Browning during planning for and construction of the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture at Barton in the ACT" referred to in Steve's article. The remnant, usually referred to as St Mark's grassland, has been visited by FOG members over many years and FOG members have participated in various working bees there, dating back to at least 1996. FOG participated actively in the Friends of St Mark's Grassland group formed in 1998 which existed for over twelve months. The group helped to finalize a management plan for the grassland (prepared by Sarah Sharp), undertook weeding working bees, and ran an open day in 1999. (References: Friends of Grasslands Newsletter, January-February 1999, page 7, November-December, 1999, page 1, January-February 2000, page 2, and January-February 2002, page 3). – Editor.

A rainy spring afternoon

Maryke Booth

Maryke Booth is a FOG treasure. She is a founding member of the Royalla Landcare Group which is heavily dedicated to grassy ecosystem conservation and many other conservation causes. The group's newsletter is fascinating and a recommended model. FOG has visited Maryke's property on a number of occasions. Benj Whitworth wrote up the December 2004 visit to her property in the Jan-Feb 2004 newsletter. Here is her story.

It was a rainy afternoon in the spring of 2001 and my mum Helen and I attended a Friends of Grassland field trip to the Royalla Travelling Stock Reserve, when I first met Rainer Rehwinkel (NPWS grassy ecosystems specialist) and Geoff Robertson (President of Friends of Grasslands). I had just purchased a 23 acre bush block at

Royalla. Royalla is a new rural subdivision south of Queanbeyan, NSW and adjacent to the ACT. I was curious as to what might be growing on my block. I casually mentioned to Rainer and Geoff that I had a place around the corner, and would they like to have a look. Around the corner we all went and spent a delightful few hours wandering around in the drizzling rain.

We discovered lots of wonderful plants that I had never seen or heard of, let alone been able to pronounce their names! We saw the striking blue devil (*Eryngium rostratum*), which I had been guilty of pulling out the week before, believing it to be a noxious thistle weed, hoary sunray (*Leucochrysum albicans*), small vanilla-lily (*Arthropodium minus*), common buttercup (*Ranunculus lap-*

paceus), austral bear's-ears (*Cymbonotus lawsonianus*), and one of my favourites – the showy copper-wire daisy (*Podolepis jaceoides*). There were native grasses, including kangaroo grass (*Themeda australis*), poa tussock (*Poa sieberiana*), purple wire-grass (*Aristida ramosa*) and those wonderful fluffy wallaby grasses (*Austrodanthonia* spp.), and trees including yellow box (*Eucalyptus melliodora*) and mealy bundy (*E. nortonii*).

It was too late - I was hooked! I had discovered my scrubby little bush block was, in fact, a small piece of high quality remnant grassy box-gum woodland, and certainly worthy of conservation. I have since found out that there are over 100 plant species, 40-odd different types of birds, as well as frogs, reptiles and mammals on my block – and still counting.

In fact the Royalla area is full of pockets of worthy remnant woodlands and grassland communities. I realised that many of these needed protecting. I also realised that people needed to understand what they have.

So we had a bit of community get-together and grassland walk at

my place in October 2001, where I met many like-minded Royalla residents. In December 2001 we held the inaugural meeting of the Royalla Landcare group.

Today our Landcare group has over fifty members and a very active committee of dedicated Landcarers. Our secretary Leanne Barrett puts in over a day's volunteer hours



Top photo: Royalla is a natural grassy box woodland. Bottom photo, Rainer and company. Photos by Maryke.



per week. The group's primary focus is to educate and raise community awareness, as well as doing on-ground works. We have a calendar of events, which over the year includes Frogwatch, Waterwatch, flora and fauna surveys, weed days, propagation workshops, property visits, nature walks, making nest boxes, slide nights - and walks on rainy afternoons looking at the plants.

For more information about the Royalla area and Royalla Landcare, please call me on (02) 6280 4128.

Narrow-leaf New Holland daisy *A tough little native with a bright future*

Michael Bedingfield



There are more than a few native plants which are rare or declining, but the narrow-leaf New Holland daisy is not one of those. It is common and widespread on the Southern Tablelands, preferring grasslands and woodlands for its habitat. It also occurs elsewhere in eastern NSW, as well as in Victoria and Queensland, though it is rare in Tasmania. This hardy perennial often occurs in large patches, prefers drier sites, grows well in poor shallow soils and colonises disturbed areas

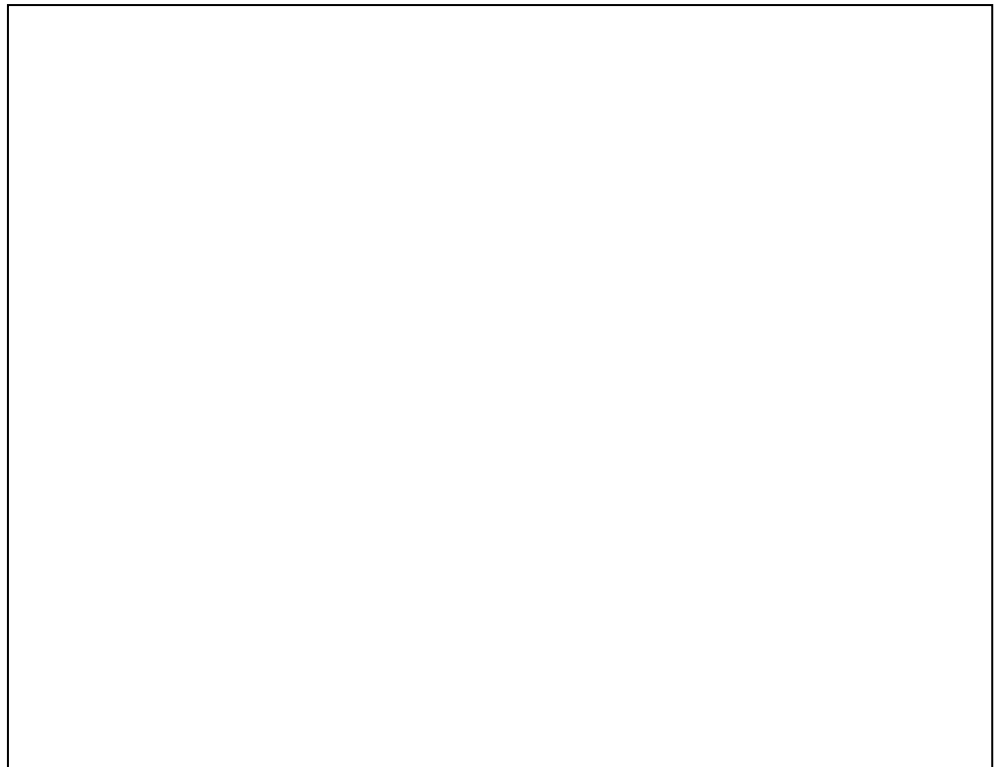
too. It also persists in native pastures and I've noticed that kangaroos don't eat it. Out of curiosity I tasted the leaves, which have a strong, unpleasant flavour.

The narrow-leaf New Holland daisy has an erect growth habit and is typically 10 to 15cm tall, but can be up to 30cm. The branches are quite stiff and numerous and can persist through the winter, though they do brown off. The leaves are bright green with three pointed lobes at the end, and scattered hairs. The leaves are usually one to two centimetres long, but can be up to four centimetres, and grow densely along the branches. The flowers have the typical daisy form but are quite small and inconspicuous, mauve or purple in colour with yellow centres. They are only 5 to 8mm wide, and the 'petals' (ray florets) are often curled under. Flowering occurs throughout the warmer months when there is sufficient rain. The seedheads are more easily noticed than the flowers and are fluffy orbs about two centimetres in diameter containing many seeds. The individual seeds have an inside-out umbrella of fluffy hairs and are dispersed in the wind. Please refer to the accompanying drawings, in which the whole plant is shown at about 65 percent of natural size, with some parts shown separately at normal size.

The scientific name for narrow-leaf New Holland daisy is *Vittadinia muelleri*, and it is named after two distinguished men. These are Carlo Vittadini, 1800-1865, Italian medical doctor and author on fungi; and Baron Ferdinand von Mueller, 1825-1896, a German born Australian who was an enthusiastic botanist, explorer, and plant collector, naming 2000 new species.

Other species that occur locally and are very similar are *Vittadinia cuneata* (fuzzy New Holland daisy or fuzzweed) and *V. gracilis* (woolly New Holland daisy). *V. cuneata* has wider leaves which can have three lobes or be without them, the leaves and stems are covered in short bristly hairs, and the colour of the leaves is variable, with grey and pale green forms. It is common, but not as common as our main subject. *V. gracilis* has leaves which are generally not lobed; the leaves and stems are covered in very fine woolly hairs; it is uncommon in this region.

Vittadinia muelleri is distinguishable from the others by its bright green foliage, narrow leaves with three distinct lobes, and few hairs. Narrow-leaf New Holland daisy, a small but stalwart and durable Aussie native.



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