



News of Friends of Grasslands

Supporting native grassy ecosystems

ISSN 1852-6315

March & April 2024

Activities

Work Parties

Gurubung Dhaura: 23 March & 20 April

Yarramundi Reach: 6 April
Saturdays 9am to 12:30pm

Register: [Jamie Pittock](#)

Budjan Galindji (Franklin Reserve)

Wed 28 Feb 9-11:30am

Wed 6 & 27 Mar 9-11:30am

Wed 3 & 24 Apr 9-11:30am

Register: [Margaret Ning](#)

Activities

Sat 16 Mar 9am to 3pm

Another FOG visit to the Tinderries. What flowers in March? Come along and enjoy the flora, views and the company, as we continue to expand the species list for this property. We shall visit some different vegetation types to last time, and possibly a neighbour's place.

Register: [Margaret Ning](#)

New members

Welcome to new members:

Markus Buchhorn & Julie Field,
ACT

Anne Forsythe & Ian Davies,
ACT

Adrian Marshall, VIC

Pat Guinane, NSW

From the President ...

February 2024

The deplorably limited efforts to effectively conserve remaining native temperate grasslands in New South Wales have long been of concern to Friends of Grasslands (FOG). In particular, it is really sad that grasslands conservation has become a source of cultural conflict, as highlighted by the controversy over clearing in 2016 of 103 hectares owned by the Jam Land company on the Monaro (see [here](#)). This is unfortunate because other pastoralists have found that good management of native grasslands can aid livestock production, reduce input costs and conserve biodiversity.

In this context, I joined the FOG tour of Tasmania in January to see what we can learn from non-government programs in that State that could inform conservation initiatives in New South Wales. I consider that there are a number of lessons that we can apply, including at FOG's proposed South Eastern Highlands Grasslands Conservation Workshop in April / May 2024.

We helped Threatened Plants Tasmania [<https://www.tpt.org.au/>] monitor endangered grassland orchids on the Florico forestry company managed lands. We visited Tasmania Land Conservancy's [Vale of Belvoir grassland reserve](#). Lastly, we visited a privately owned grassland at Okehampton on the east coast, meeting up with a work crew that employed a number of Palawa traditional owners.

Importantly, we visited the [Midlands Conservation Partnership](#), a collaboration of 14 farmers, Bush Heritage Australia and the Tasmanian Land Conservancy. The partnership includes 17 voluntary conservation agreements with 14 landholders to sustainably manage 7,360 hectares of high-priority ecosystems, including 1,628 ha of critically endangered lowlands native grasslands. These agreements protect 62 threatened species, including 16 listed under the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. Importantly, a trust fund provides annual stewardship payments to landholders, which were over \$45 per hectare in 2023.

One of the pastoralists, Julian von Bibra told us that the payments were 'pocket money'. However, he said that the partnership was greatly valued by farmers because it: recognized their good stewardship of the land; gave them access to more expertise; and enabled him to sell his superfine merino wool to high-value customers who wanted a sustainable product. Julian went on to say that the conservation agreements on his land helped him to maintain grassy ecosystems that were the best lambing paddocks, provided fodder in droughts, and sustained the soils and water catchments on his large farming property.

Our wet summer around the Canberra region has seen weeds flourish as government agencies dependent on contractors cannot secure spraying quickly enough. Further, many key sites are overdue for a burn to reduce grass biomass and maintain forb diversity. On private lands, the minority of farmers who are determined to over-graze or fail to control weeds can soon ruin their grasslands within the law. We can't regulate our way to effective grasslands conservation in rural areas. The visit to Tasmania made me think harder about the opportunities to partner with pastoralists who can undertake the necessary biomass and weed control from day to day, to conserve grasslands for both biodiversity conservation and livestock production. I've taken home the following lessons from FOG's Tasmanian field trip:

- Lesson 1: Grassland conservation requires landowners, conservationists and scientists to work together. In Tasmania there was little evidence of government agencies undertaking active grassland conservation activities. Non-government stakeholders are vital enablers of effective conservation programs.
- Lesson 2: Pastoralists with large properties are key to effective landscape-scale conservation of native grasslands. What opportunities are there in NSW for those of us in the conservation and scientific community to identify and partner with pastoralists who want their stewardship recognised, supported and enhanced?
- Lesson 3: We need boots on the ground to conserve native grasslands. This was highlighted in Tasmania where reserve managers were struggling to patch-burn protected areas that no one lives on anymore, whereas at Okehampton, the private owners were actively managing their grasslands. Park managers often appear to have too few staff based too far away from reserves to be effective on their own. The Palawa staff working on Okehampton were a reminder of the need for FOG and others to support the establishment of Indigenous ranger programs that can restore land access for Traditional Owners as well as reinstating patch-burning and other grassland management practices. We need to consider pastoralists as partners for grasslands conservation.

I would welcome your feedback on these ideas. As President of FOG, I am keen to see further opportunities to apply these kinds of lessons to conservation of grassy ecosystems in the NSW South Eastern Highlands.

See you in our grasslands!

Jamie Pittock, President, 0407 265 131



*Friends of
Grasslands*

Supporting native
grassy ecosystems



**Australian
National
University**

Forum: The Nature Repair Act 2023

*Thursday 4 April 7:30pm Fenner School ANU**

Join Friends of Grasslands for a Forum on the *Nature Repair Act*.

In this Forum we will discuss how the market will work, how participants might expect to engage with the market and how the benefits of the market can be realised.

The event is open to the ANU Community and all ACT Conservation Council member groups.

Register [here](#)

**Frank Fenner Seminar Room, building 141, Fenner School, Australian National University*

Advocacy report

Sarah Sharp

Submissions

January 2024

Lawson 2A Development

Areas of Natural Temperate Grassland were overlooked in earlier assessments; maps showing these locations were sent in. There is excellent bird habitat in planted locally indigenous species. Important reedbeds which provide known habitat for Latham's Snipe should not be disturbed. Follow up: FOG was asked to provide more information in correspondence with the manager of the Lawson 2A Development.

Review of the Eastern Grey Kangaroo - Controlled Native Species Management Plan

FOG supported recommendations for a better understanding of changes in biodiversity condition of the landscape as a result of kangaroo culling, together with improved communications around the benefits of the culls to biodiversity and other relevant outcomes. We urged better coordinated cross tenure management.

February 2024

DA 202342438: Proposal for telecommunications facility

This is a revised proposal, first commented on by FOG in April 2023, which FOG opposed. Our concerns remain, given this site retains remnant natural grassland, another example of more critically endangered habitat being lost or disturbed. FOG presented four conditions for consideration if the proposal goes ahead to restrict human, materials and vehicle access, that the area will be landscaped using local native grassland species and weeded regularly, and we requested resources be provided for revegetation and rehabilitation outside the construction zone.

DA 202342493, Proposal for the Horse Park Drive Tennis Facility

This proposal is typical in that it is being considered in spatial isolation, without due consideration of an overall plan to manage and protect the natural values in the area, in particular those of the Ginninderra Creek. There is likely to be direct impact on the creek corridor and remnant native grassland on the site with fragmentation of the riparian connectivity of the creek corridor. We believe recommendations provided will be compatible with the development, including retention of existing native vegetation and habitat, protection of the riparian corridor and landscaping using local indigenous species. The works should be guided by a Flora and Fauna Management Plan.

Lawson Mixed Use Site Place Design

'Site constraints' omits to identify existing conservation values, including natural temperate grassland, riparian habitat and planted vegetation that supports threatened and regionally rare species. We believe that these 'constraints' should be viewed as a bonus that will increase the desirability of the location and protect the waterways from contamination. Those areas should be protected from intense recreational use, and landscaping be compatible with those values, as well as avoiding the use of any species that have been identified as 'sleeper weeds'.

Degrowth Economics, living more simply, and the Small Vanilla Lilly

Michael Bedingfield

Let us travel back in time to the 1950s when I was very young and living in a small country town. Our street was about 50 metres wide with a dirt road. At the bottom of the street were some stockyards built next to the railway lines. The maze of railway lines making up the station and terminus was only 150 metres from our house. The trains used to come and go daily, mostly steam trains which used to huff and puff and belch out clouds of smoke. Those locomotives were gradually being replaced by diesel engines but most of the time it was fairly quiet. Occasionally you would hear a loud crack, like the sound of a rifle going off in the distance. It might be followed by several more loud cracks, all coming from up the hill at the top of the street. Then you would hear the sound of barking dogs and the lowing of many cattle. It was the men on their horses wielding their stock whips. Before long a herd of maybe a hundred cattle would come thundering down the street. It was an exciting spectacle to watch from the front verandah but you would have to be sure the gates were closed. With much commotion the men would guide the cattle into the stockyards. There they would wait, still bellowing loudly until they were loaded onto the railway trucks to be transported away to distant sale yards. The town is Bombala and I was living on Manning Street.

In those days when we came home from school my younger brother and I would be met by our mother with a cup of tea and a biscuit before we did a few chores. Let out the chooks so they could run around and do some foraging among the grass. Then collect the eggs and bring them to the house. When it was getting dark call the birds back to be fed and locked up again. In the meantime fill up the wood box and get some kindling to be used when lighting the kitchen fire the next morning. Most of the time the kitchen stove was the warmest part of the house. It was lit every day, first thing in the morning, for cooking and heating.

The kitchen was also the place where we would have a bath, in a large round tub, twice a week in the evenings. There would be two kettles heating on the stove providing hot water. The bathtub was filled up gradually from the kettles as everyone had their bath, one after the other, adding extra warm water for the next person. It was the smallest to the largest, with my father bathing last of all. The toilet was an outhouse about 25 yards from the house, with the can being replaced weekly by council workers.

The town had its own dairy with the milk being delivered around the town each morning. We would put a few coins on the front step and one or two saucepans. The milkman would carry a large milk can to our door and fill up the saucepans. The milk was boiled on the kitchen stove before use, the floating skin of cream scooped off, and stored in the kerosene fridge. We also had a greengrocer who would come around regularly selling fruit and vegetables from the back of his ute. My older brother used to set rabbit traps on the farms owned by our relatives, riding his bike out of town to check them. Rabbit was common on the menu but chicken was only for special occasions, at Christmas and Easter, selected from our older hens or roosters. A valuable item in the home was the piano which was played every day. There was no television and on winter nights the open fire in the lounge room was the centre of social life for all the family.

Since that time economic growth has been more or less continuous and our standard of living is much higher. Times have changed so much and now we have microwave ovens and digital

television, central heating and solar panels on the roof. Almost everyone has a personal computer, smartphone and internet access. We have electric motorcars and bicycles. There is an increasing number of robots doing all sorts of things from planting vegetable crops to factory work. We have very sophisticated health systems in place. We can buy food from all parts of the world at the supermarket and international travel is a common holiday option. We dress better, eat better food and generally speaking we have a lot more stuff.

But all these advances have come at a great cost. Continuously increasing economic productivity requires more and more resources drawn from the natural world and this is gradually degrading the natural environment. Biodiversity loss is a national emergency. Pollution is a worldwide problem. We have a climate change crisis with an increasing number of catastrophic weather events happening in all parts of the world. An example of how we are being affected by dwindling natural resources is the current international housing crisis.

Degrowth Economics suggests that we need to take a new direction that uses fewer natural resources. The idea dates back to the 1970s and follows a similar theme to Ecological Economics and Steady State Economics. These concepts have been mentioned in this newsletter in the past (Nov-Dec 2014 page 13, Jul-Aug 2021 page 3 respectively). A prerequisite for them to work is to shrink the economy to a more sustainable level. The models all agree that we are living beyond our means. The rate at which we use natural resources is beyond the capacity of the planet and we are ruining our earthly home. The primary goal of Degrowth Economics is to abolish the notion of economic growth as a social priority.

A popular view is that we can continue to grow economically by uncoupling productivity from greater use of energy and natural resources. Some argue in favour of having a circular economy, which means recycling materials used in production rather than drawing them from nature. In a circular economy nothing is wasted and nature is able to regenerate. Others argue that this is a pipe dream because recycling has proved to be very difficult. It can only be partially effective because recycling itself requires a lot of energy and resources. It is more expensive to create new goods from recycled materials. Also some raw materials deteriorate with each cycle, such as paper and plastic, and eventually can't be used.

So Degrowth Economics proposes shrinking economies, especially the richer ones, in order to use less of the world's dwindling resources. It suggests that in order to save the planet we need to scale back our global use of energy and resources. This would mean a downscaling of production and consumption. It would also require a new way of defining economic wellbeing. It doesn't mean that we have to give up having a good life. But it does mean we have to change the way we do things. There are innumerable ways we can reduce the amount of energy and raw materials we need. A simple example of how we could do this and reduce waste at the same time is in the way we use the take-away coffee cup. These did not exist in the 1950s. Available statistics vary but they tell us that Australian people dispose of about a billion coffee cups every year. Most of these end up in landfill because they are partly paper and partly plastic and can't be recycled. Suppose we do away with this commodity and drink coffee from old-fashioned ceramic cups or bring our own take-away cups. Then we save all the labour, input material and production and distribution costs as well. This might mean a small inconvenience for some but what do we really lose?

Other examples of how to reduce our use of energy and raw materials are: design products for long-term use, which are easy to repair; eliminate 'planned obsolescence' and reduce one-use throw-away products; have smaller houses and cars, fewer clothes and other things; decentralise services to reduce travel; minimize packaging; use local produce or grow our own vegetables; put

limits on public advertising; have shared ownership of some items. These are all fairly small objectives and we could make a very long list. What is really needed is a radical remodelling of how we manage economies. The big challenge is to change the entrenched idea that growth is essential to a healthy economy. While degrowth may have popularity in some academic circles, convincing governments, the corporate sector and the general public would be very hard indeed. And going about the radical restructuring needed would be a major challenge.

Degrowth Economics theorists suggest that attitudes need to shift toward a focus on environmental sustainability, social well-being and resilience. A more simple lifestyle has its own benefits. We could aim for less competition and more cooperation. Having what we need is enough. Sharing ownership improves community. We may have less income but more harmony.

I chose the Small Vanilla Lily *Arthropodium minus* as an example of what we could emulate. This native plant is tough and resilient, but also delicately beautiful.



Arthropodium minus
Small Vanilla Lily
Michael Beddingfield
2003

I have found it growing on rocky outcrops with very little soil and in deep soils as well. They come up in spring producing a rosette of grass-like leaves. In poor situations the flower spikes may only grow 10 cm tall, but be 50 cm in good conditions. The flowers are small and delicate with 6 tepals. They are mauve or purple in colour and hang downwards from leafy bracts usually one per node. After setting seed they dry out and disappear as the heat of summer comes along. They are a perennial and survive through winter by having tuberous roots. The habitat can vary and includes grassland and grassy woodland. They are widespread in south-eastern Australia. I've provided a drawing of a plant 20 cm tall for illustration.

The attitude that economic growth around the world can continue indefinitely is a critical mistake. We have to change. I have described some aspects of life as it was in the 1950s to illustrate that things don't have to be the way they are now. Life back then was basic and uncluttered, but we had everything we needed. Going back is not possible. So much has changed in those 65 years. It makes me wonder what life will be like in another 65 years. We can do things differently, even in a high tech world. There is an old saying, "Less is more". A way forward is to have a simpler way of living.

Main references:

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/degrowth-case-for-constructing-new-economic-paradigm/>

<https://theconversation.com/life-in-a-degrowth-economy-and-why-you-might-actually-enjoy-it-32224>

<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-consumption-production/>

"The Future Is Degrowth. A Guide to a World Beyond Capitalism" By: Matthias Schmelzer, Aaron Vansintjan, Andrea Vetter

Next trio of trouble - a close-up

John Fitz Gerald

For this newsletter edition I've gone back to a small selection of plants, this time weeds of either moderate priority in Downey's 2022 Advisory List of Naturalised Alien Plants in the ACT, and in the less-worrying half of that category, or low priority.



My first species is *Ehrharta erecta*, Panic Veldtgrass, a native of southern and eastern Africa. ALA shows almost thirteen thousand sightings in south-eastern and south-western corners of Australia. This species is rated as an environmental weed in NSW, Victoria and WA. Its habit is to dominate the ground layer and out-compete native plants. It develops large populations relatively quickly through large and continuous seed production, and can grow vigorously in open areas. Young plants not in flower have an appearance quite similar to native *Microlaena stipoides* (multi-stemmed, tapering bright green leaf blades) so it is difficult to winkle out

of areas already thick with the native species. Once flower and seed develop, their smooth and elongated shapes are very different to the angular, bristled shapes of *Microlaena* so distinction is easy but by then the next generation of weed seed could already be on the ground! Other differences are that the leaf blade is a little wider in fully-grown *E. erecta* plants and stems a little thicker. My image shows *E. erecta* seeds, one at the right still enclosed in glumes, plus four bare and slightly flattened seeds at the left. The scale bar at the base of the image represents 0.5 mm.

The second species is *Tolpis barbata*, Yellow Hawkweed, native to southern Europe. ALA shows almost two thousand sightings, again in south-eastern and south-western corners of our continent. This is a minor environmental weed in Victoria and WA. It is widely naturalised and found in the dry grassy ground layer in many places in our region. Most will easily recognise the conspicuous yellow flower, but once that has finished there is little leaf matter to recognise and the barbed fruit structures are not particularly obvious. Fortunately the plant is annual so pulls out easily. My image shows nine small dark conical seeds that each carry a sparse pappus of just four hairs; these would only help the seed to move a short distance from the parent. The scale bar here is 0.5 mm.



The final species is *Mentha spicata*, Garden Mint, native to north-east Africa, western Asia and south-eastern Europe. ALA lists just five hundred sightings but it is widely naturalised, once again in south-eastern and south-western corners of our continent. It is an environmental weed in Victoria and WA and regarded as a sleeper weed in southern Australia. In the ACT it is assigned low priority by Downey 2022. If you grow it at home in your herb patch you'll know it's a difficult plant to contain as it grows vigorously and spreads readily, including from root pieces. In

our natural areas it prefers damp drainage areas including creek lines. Each flower spike has large numbers of flowers and ultimately seeds. The seeds are quite small and would easily move during water flows. My image shows 16 generally spherical seeds and the scale bar of 0.5mm. Two dried flower cups sit at the right side of the image.

The grass, the daisy and the herb are quite different alien plants but they share a distribution in our Australian grassy areas, and also a competitive advantage through production of large seed numbers. They certainly require management as weeds.

Micrographs were recorded at the National Seed Bank of the Australian National Botanic Gardens. They can be reproduced freely if attributed and linked to the Creative Commons licence CC BY.

Information above was gathered from websites, principally:

ALA - www.ala.gov.au

Plantnet - plantnet.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/search/simple.htm

Weeds Australia - weeds.org.au

ACT Environmental and Cooling Your Suburb grants

The ACT government has announced 2024-25 ACT Environmental Grants Round are now open: [2024-2025 ACT Environmental Grants Program](#). There are two streams available to support projects in the ACT:

- Environment Grants - grants of up to \$35,000 for projects focused on enhancing ecological condition and connectivity, connecting people with nature and Caring for Country initiatives.
- Environmental Volunteer Assistance Grants - grants of up to \$5,000 for volunteer groups to improve their capabilities and capacity to engage in environmental stewardship through volunteer recruitment, promotion, training or planning activities.

Up to \$350,000 is available this funding round. Applications close 28 March. For more information including the [grant guidelines](#), visit the [Environmental Grants webpage](#) or contact the grants officer at actnrm@act.gov.au.

The 'Nature in the City: Cooling your Suburb' grants program is now open too, details [here](#).

FOG newsletter to be despatched electronically in 2024.

Margaret Ning

The FOG committee has recently reviewed how the bi-monthly newsletter is distributed. Looking at it from an environmental perspective (paper), the saving on postal costs (which are expected to increase to \$1.50 this year), and the saving in volunteer labour to send it out, the decision has been made to go electronic. We hope that members will understand the need for this decision, and enjoy receiving the electronic version which will be in full colour. Or perhaps print it themselves if that is their preference.

For members without an email address the default despatch will obviously still be hard copy. If you think your internet may be too challenged by the new arrangement, please be assured that none of the newsletters despatched over the last twelve months has exceeded 2.5Mb in size. If there is another reason you prefer a paper copy, please contact Margaret (margaret.ning@fog.org.au) with your reason.

Trip to Nunnock Swamp and Grasslands

Trevor Preston

In January I decided to take a trip with a few other enthusiasts to Nunnock Swamp near the top of Brown Mountain, south-east of Nimmitabel. Not far from where I grew up and I had always wanted to visit this area but never had the chance until then. It was a great decision as this was such a spectacular place of high biodiversity to explore. The area contains forest, woodlands, native grasslands and wetlands.

Thanks to the efforts of many dedicated people, this area is now preserved as part of South East Forest National Park, a reminder of the value of our continued conservation efforts. The day was pleasantly warm, and sporadically random wafts of mist would drift through the area cooling us down momentarily.



Nunnock Swamp Boardwalk



Nunnock grasslands

I was warned about leeches before the trip, and while I did see a few, I did not get bothered by them, possibly due to the pre-meditated gaff tape joining my pants to my boots and then sprayed with Bushman's insect repellent, a method I would recommend when venturing into areas with a lot of leeches.

The grasslands were much greener and wetter than the ones we are used to in Canberra, and contained many stunning plants. I was surprised to see the grassland dotted with Magenta Autumn Orchid (*Eriochilus magenteus*), a stunning sight amongst the bright green grasses. Also pleasant was a plant I had not seen before, Alpine Trachymene (*Trachymene humilis* subsp. *Humilis*).

Also in flower were Dusky Scurf Peas (*Cullen microcephalum*), Ivy-leaved Violet (*Viola hederacea*), Gunn's Everlasting (*Coronidium gunnianum*), Australian Buttercup (*Ranunculus lappaceus*), Red-Stemmed Cranesbill (*Geranium neglectum*), Downy Geranium (*Geranium potentilloides* var. *potentilloides*), Grass Daisy (*Brachyscome graminea*), and Swamp Cudweed (*Euchiton limosus*). Of course many other plants were present, and I suspect in spring this place would hold many other beautiful plants in flower.

From the campground there are several safe walking tracks around the swamp and into the forest and one leads to historic Alexander's Hut. Tracks led to other grassland areas as well but unfortunately I ran out of time to explore those. There is so much to see here that I doubt you could do it all in one day.



Magenta Autumn Orchid (*Eriochilus magenta*)



Alpine Trachymene (*Trachymene humilis* subsp. Humilis)



Geranium neglectum



Gentle mist through the grassy woodlands

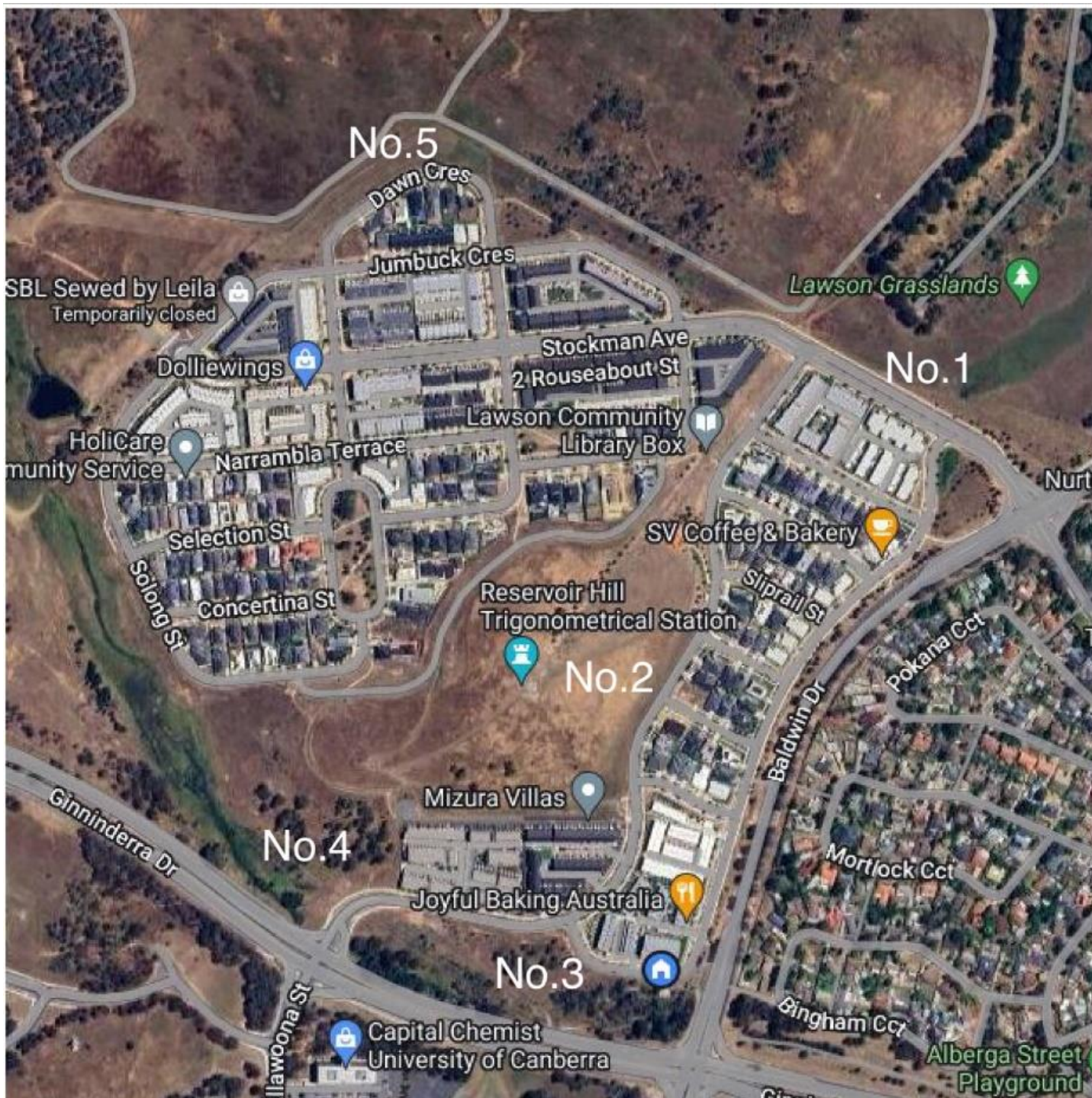
There are two ways in, one from the Snowy Mountains Highway via Packers Swamp Road, a spectacular journey through Glenbog State Forest which is worth visiting in its own right, and the other is via the Monaro Highway and New Line Road which travels past Glen Allen State Forest, also worth its own trip, and at only two and a half hours from Canberra a day trip is easily possible.

This is one of the most beautiful places I have visited and I hope to return many more times in the future. Thanks to my companions for joining me on this trip and for contributing their sightings to NatureMapr. All photos are by Trevor Preston.

Lawson - Some Gems, and Some Concerns

Margaret Ning & Rainer Rehwinkel

Saturday 10 February, nine people met at the Windy Park at Reservoir Hill, Lawson. In perfect weather, we assembled for an update on grassland issues and projects in various parts of the suburb. It was pleasing to see a number of non-FOG participants who had responded to Rainer's promotion of the walk on a suburban Facebook page. Rainer gave us a potted history of developments at the Lawson North Grassland site, following the recent announcement on the EPBC webpage that showed a pegging-back of the area to be developed by the Defence Housing Australia (DHA).



We walked along the southern boundary of the fenced site (no.1 on the map), and discussed the (lack of) management of the grassland there: the area is in desperate need of management of its herbage mass and St John's Wort has run rampant.

Margaret did count about a dozen native grass species and a handful of forbs on the southern, non-DHA side of the fence. Unfortunately, access to the DHA site is strictly forbidden so we really do not have much of an idea of what's happening there in terms of its quality. Rainer pointed out what is proposed by DHA within the different parts of the Lawson North site, including the latest news that there'll be the removal of three 'Superb Parrot trees'.

Heading back along the path on the base of Reservoir Hill in Lawson South (no.2 on the map), we discussed the (lack of) management of that site - once again, a build-up of herbage mass has been a major concern here. This part of the grassland was set aside for Golden Sun Moth, but a build-up of biomass was putting that population at risk.

A patch of flowering Hoary Sunray did give us hope! And in some good news that emerged a few days after our visit, the whole hill has now been slashed. We are still concerned however because of the windrows of thatch left after the slashing.

Rainer has contacted TCCS and has been assured that the site will be mown a second time to remove the thatch.

A visit to Rainer's Lawson Landcare Group's restoration site (no.3) was next. Rainer's Landcare Group, with the valued assistance of Ginninderra Catchment Group and FOG, is planning to restore grasses and forbs in a patch that links two intact areas. A contractor has sprayed out an area ready for planting in April. The contractor also targeted a number St John's Wort and some woody weeds, including a patch of Blackberry and some saplings of that nasty sleeper weed, the [Callery Pear](#).

Our walk continued on a new path that skirts the southern edge of Reservoir Hill (no.4), from where we saw extensive patches of *Microlaena* under a grove of Broad-leaved Peppermints (photo below left), and some intact native grassland on the exposed north-western slopes of Reservoir Hill (photo below right).



Our final stop was at a highly diverse grassland on the northern side of Dawn Crescent (no.5). When Margaret and Rainer first saw this delightful patch of Natural Temperate Grassland a few years ago it was in full display, with *Bulbines* and other forbs abounding. Rainer saw equally large numbers of Blue Devils later that season, and also recorded a healthy population of Golden Sun Moth there. However, because that grassland is on the northern edge of the suburb it is mowed regularly (too regularly and too short) by TCCS, apparently for fire-management. On top of that, another part of TCCS has planted a row of trees and shrubs along the edge of the grassland as part of their recent knee-jerk tree-planting frenzy. This grassland is still a subject of concern and discussions are continuing with TCCS. Thank you Rainer for the Lawson refresher, and thanks Margaret for brilliant organising, as usual!

Congratulations Dr Christopher Lex Watson OAM

Geoff Robertson

FOG wishes to congratulate Chris on receiving the Order of Australia Medal in the Australia Day awards for his services to the community of Belconnen. The list of organisations for which he has been a president or convenor is truly impressive. Many of us will know Chris who has been a member of FOG since it began in 1994, and who has championed any proposal to protect our remnant grassy ecosystems. Chris's efforts are greatly respected and appreciated. We wish this warrior well.

New signage, Old Cooma Common Grassland Reserve

Melinda Kent, Cooma Landcare Convenor

Just south of the township of Cooma is an area on top of Radio Hill known as Old Cooma Common Grassland Reserve. During the 1800s it was common land able to be accessed by all and extensively grazed.

In the early 1990s the area was recognised as having significant conservation values as a remnant natural grassland. It was set aside as a reserve and co-managed by Friends of Grasslands (FOG) and Cooma-Monaro Shire Council. FOG volunteers have spent many years removing woody and other weeds throughout the site



Thanks to funding organised by Upper Snowy Landcare Network the signage and fencing at the reserve recently received a much-needed upgrade.

The sturdy metal fencing gives the reserve entrance a sense of importance and significance.

The signage tells the story of Old Cooma Common Grassland Reserve from grazing days until the resurrection of the grassland by local members of FOG, and highlights the importance of this threatened ecological community.

Pink-tailed Worm-lizard: a rare sighting

Rob Lundie

Copied with permission from the Coolemon Ridge Parkcare Group Newsletter, January 2024

I had heard about the Pink-tailed Worm-lizard (*Aprasia parapulchella*) but had never seen one and was beginning to wonder if it was still on the Ridge. So, imagine my delight when a friend and I came across one in the middle of the Bicentennial Nature Trail mid-afternoon on Monday 11 December.



I thought it was a small snake but I soon saw its pinkish tail and reckoned it was a pink-tailed worm-lizard. It was lying across a bare part of the track about 100 metres north of the Darrell Place entrance and the farm dam. It became agitated when I approached, wriggling very quickly towards me and following me around as I moved out of its way. It then lay across the track allowing us to take photos.

As we moved on, so did the lizard towards large rocks lying in grass alongside the track. I posted the sighting with photos (left) on the Canberra Nature Map where its identification was confirmed. Comments on our sighting confirmed its rarity with surprise at it being out in the open on a rather warm day so that Will Osborne observed: “In all my years of working with this species (30 years) I have only

ever seen them active above ground twice”.

Pink-tailed worm-lizards are legless, grow to about 25 cm (nearly half being its tail) and have a blunt, rounded snout. It can be distinguished from a juvenile snake by small hind-limb flaps. It lives underground in ant burrows under rocks where it feeds on ant eggs and invertebrates. It is officially listed as vulnerable. Further information can be found [here](#).

Seed Production Areas

Meg Doepel Ranger, Environmental Offsets Urban Reserves, Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate

Seed Production Areas (SPAs) are parcels of land dedicated to growing local shrubs and wildflowers for the purpose of harvesting clean seed to be used in the restoration of ground layer ecosystems of woodlands and Natural Temperate Grasslands (NTG). Seed produced in SPAs enables easy access to a range of plant species that have limited and expensive supply and is especially important in that it decreases some of the pressures on remnant populations by reducing the amount of seed collected from them.

Currently the ACT New Reserves Team manages two SPAs adjacent to both Jerrabomberra and Budjan Galindji Grasslands. They aim to establish more SPAs within new biodiversity offset areas in the ACT to assist in meeting restoration objectives. Having them in-situ provides the additional benefit of any uncollected seed dispersing naturally into surrounding areas. Seed collected from these SPAs has been used for a variety of restoration projects including post-fire to increase the diversity and abundance of forbs and less common grasses.

Harvesting the seed can be an arduous and time-consuming task and is done in a variety of ways depending on the species. Non-mechanical methods include hand-stripping ripened seed or cutting the entire stem containing seed heads. Species of grasses are best harvested using a brush harvester. This non-destructive harvesting technique allows for multiple harvests of stands of grasses by removing only the mature seed, resulting in increased yields.



Bonshaw SPA - Harvesting - 15 September 2023.jpg



Budjan Galindji SPA - 21 January 2024.jpg



Bonshaw SPA - 3 October 2023.jpg

Some seed is collected using a vacuum. This method is especially valuable for species with fluffy seed and greatly reduces wastage by being able to collect fallen seed. Some species of forbs that require their seeds to ripen to maturity on the plant can prove particularly challenging. Murphy's Law dictates that these species often have fluffy seed heads, meaning that if the timing of the harvest is not 'just right' the very next puff of wind may blow them away, or seed pods that don't look mature one day will suddenly burst open the next!



Once I arrived at the SPA following an exhausting day of planting, only to find that hungry rabbits had feasted on the fresh new foliage during the night! A repeat of this situation has been rectified with the introduction of foot netting on the perimeter fence.

In December last year, I conducted a twilight tour of the Bonshaw SPA for FoG members. We saw a huge variety of species being grown, including Kangaroo Grass *Themeda triandra*, Wallaby Grass *Austrodanthonia spp.*, *Poa spp.*, as well as Billy Buttons *Craspedia variabilis*, Blue Devil *Eryngium ovinum*, Bulbine Lily *Bulbine bulbosa*, Wild Sorghum *Sorghum leiocladum*, Nodding Chocolate Lily *Arthropodium fimbriatum*, Scaly Buttons *Leptorhynchos squamatus*, and Wild Flax *Linum marginale* was putting on a particularly stellar show with

vibrant blue flowers!

The maintenance of the SPAs is a constant battle and keeping them weed free is rather like painting the Sydney Harbour Bridge! If you feel you have the capacity to help with this fantastic venture I'm sure any offers to assist would be welcomed!

Jenny Conolly (1962-2023)

Steve Taylor, ACT Parks and Conservation, 2 Jan 2024.

Jenny Conolly died on Christmas Day after a brief illness. She worked for the ACT Government for nearly 30 years, including in the former Horticultural Science Unit of the ACT Parks and Conservation Service. She later specialised in Invasive Species, an area in which she excelled.

Jen worked in the various restructures of 'ACT Parks' over those years, including: ACT Parks and Conservation Service, Canberra Urban Parks and Places, Environment ACT, ACT Parks, Conservation and Lands, and City Services.

Jen knew the importance of biosecurity before the term was coined. She was responsible for stopping and slowing the spread of numerous invasive plant species, for example Mexican Feather Grass, African Fountain Grass, and Fireweed.

Her skills in spotting invasive plants, such as Mouse-ear Hawkweed, were exceptional, and were recognised by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service in Kosciuszko National Park. They requested her expertise on a number of occasions.

She also was one of the first to alert government to the threat posed by European Wasps both to public safety in recreational areas, and their impact on pollinators. Recent research from Western Australia has confirmed these impacts.

Jen also worked extensively with Parkcare and Urban Landcare volunteers on programs such as Weed Swap and the Bush Friendly Garden at Floriade. She also contributed to national weeds conference presentations on mapping and environmental weed control techniques.

She was very hard working and dedicated to protecting native vegetation and wildlife. Jen inspired many to work in the field of invasive species management.

In an active retirement she moved to Moruya Heads, where she found her dream home and enjoyed five good years. During this time, as a volunteer, she continued her valuable work. She spotted new incursions of invasive species on the coast, such as Coolatai Grass, and found new locations of rare native plants.

Jen also worked as an RFS volunteer on the South Coast fires of 2020. Her experience and training gained in the ACT Parks brigade was highly valued. Jen's contribution to nature conservation and biosecurity was immense. She will be greatly missed.

In memory of Ted Edwards

Geoff Robertson

Ted died on 7 August last year at age 77. Unfortunately I was not aware of this at the time, and even more belatedly, I am putting together a small tribute to him. I have selected this photo of him (below), taken by Pang Hong amongst the many that were put up on a [webpage tribute](#) to Ted. An edited video of his send-off on Wednesday 16 August last is found [here](#).



Ted was an extremely knowledgeable lepidopterist, who worked tirelessly and shared his knowledge generously. He was an early supporter of Friends of Grasslands (FOG) and in FOG's second newsletter (1 December 1994) he reproduced an article on the Golden Sun Moth from Conservation of Lowland Native Grasslands in South-Eastern Australia, published by the World Wide Fund for Nature.

Rereading this article (and I suggest readers do so), seems very timely. Then GSM was (only) known from the Naval Transmission Station, and Ted argued that the grassland be managed for conservation once the Defence Department relocated the station to Narrandera. Curiously, the Transmission Station is still a central FOG focus as I write.

Ted played another active role in FOG when he was part of the trio Edwards, Farrow and Pullen, who conducted insect workshops on 1 June in Canberra and 11 and on 12 January 2003 at Garuwanga (reported upon in our newsletters of July-August 2002, p2 and March-April 2003, pp6-8). Ted set up two capture sites (a white sheet lit by a torch) from which he collected moths. Ted took many patient hours to pin the moths. These were subsequently placed in the national collection.



The image to the left is a compilation of photos of some of the boxes. January 11 2003 was a very cold night, and when I questioned him he said that there were about 100 species collected. Had it been a normal January night he would have expected about 400 species. He added that he was familiar with most species, although only half had been described, and 'some were interesting'. This blew my mind - an insight into the diversity of species – and I have used this slide in many many talks. These workshops, I believe, generated a great interest in looking beyond the larger plants, birds and mammals in our grassy ecosystems.

Ted was a great scientist and a grassy ecosystem treasure. We owe him and his work so much. Thanks Ted for your tireless contribution.

News Roundup

Paul Archer

West Majura Grasslands Reserve now reopened

Source: ACT Government media release 12/01/2024

West Majura Grasslands Reserve has reopened and the area is now safe to visit after contractors completed searching for and removing unexploded ordnance. Executive Branch Manager of the ACT Parks and Conservation Service Stephen Alegria said that the search for and the removal of unexploded ordnance is complete and the area declared safe for land management functions and public visitation.

“During the first half of the 20th century, Majura and Ainslie were used as live military firing ranges, leaving a legacy of more than 1,600 anomalies that needed to be investigated for potential unexploded ordnance,” Mr Alegria said. Five unexploded ordnances were discovered and removed from the West Majura Grasslands Reserve during the closure.

Explosive ordnance waste was also discovered, including shrapnel, mortar tails and fuses from the exploded rounds. This waste was inspected to ensure it was free from explosives and taken to metal recyclers. This work was necessary for public and staff safety and to so we can continue to protect the threatened grasslands, woodlands and wildlife in the area. I thank the community and adjacent land users for their patience and cooperation during this important safety work.

Store carbon, restore biodiversity

Notified by Ann Milligan

Article by Rachel Standish of Murdoch University: ‘If we do it right, we can replant trees and shrubs to store carbon – and restore biodiversity’ in [The Conversation 23 November 2023](#). The article discusses how carbon farming can be a win-win if done right.

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News of Friends of Grasslands is published six times a year. It is sent by email free to [members](#). The current issue and most prior issues are fully searchable. They are available [here](#) as text (no pictures or graphics) or in pdf format (1 to 4 MB files), including colour pictures and graphics. [Acrobat Reader](#) is required.

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