



News of Friends of Grasslands

Supporting native grassy ecosystems

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July & August 2024

Activities

Work Parties

Gurubung Dhaura:

20 Jul, 17 Aug. Saturdays
9am to 12:30pm Register:
[Jamie Pittock](#)

Budjan Galindji (Franklin Reserve)

Wed 3 & 24 Jul 9-11:30am
Wed 7 & 28 Aug 9-11:30am
Register: [Margaret Ning](#)

Activities

Sat 24 July
July afternoon winter wander: *Circumnavigating Parliament House's 9 hectares of native garden* perimeter with native plant enthusiast Matthew Kent. Over 4000 trees and 135,000 shrubs and groundcovers to discover.
Register: [Margaret Ning](#)

Sat 3 Aug 2-4.30pm
Mugga Mugga mid-winter slide afternoon and short general meeting (see Page 3 for details).

From the President ...

Conserving grasslands of the South Eastern Highlands

FOG held our 'Conserving grasslands of the South Eastern Highlands (SEH) of NSW' workshop on 31st May which sought to collate information on conservation programs; identify gaps and lessons; and determine priorities and opportunities for collaboration for conservation of Natural Temperate Grassland (NTG) in the SEH.

A key question that we sought to address is: "what enhanced cross-tenure conservation initiatives are needed to better conserve adequate areas of NTG in the SEH, and to sustain populations of and habitat for threatened grassland species?" The focus was on proactive conservation initiatives and not research or regulatory measures.

Our workshop brought together over 50 enthusiastic participants from NSW and federal government agencies, landholders, researchers and community organisations.

NTG is a critically endangered ecological community. Information presented to the workshop suggests that only around 5,000 of 500,000 hectares of the original extent of NTG of the SEH were formally reserved by 2016 in NSW and the ACT. In addition, there are now over 1,800 hectares of grassland under NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust agreements. Further, travelling stock reserves conserve key remnants.

The workshop papers outline a wide range of targeted programs that are having positive impacts, including for: extension / peer learning, conservation agreements, threatened species conservation, weed and fire management. Yet more systematic and better funded programs are required if NTG are to be conserved.

The workshop benefitted from lessons from programs in Victoria and Tasmania. Partnerships with pastoralists are resulting in benefits for conservation of grassland biodiversity, pastoral production and marketing of livestock produce (especially wool).

The Victorian Trust for Nature program in northern Victoria shows that a focus on an iconic threatened species, the Plains-wanderer, can inspire landholder pride and engagement. This raises the question of whether the earless dragons or similar species can provide a similar focus in the SEH of NSW. Four key lessons emerged from the workshop discussions, namely:

1. Generating key knowledge. There are major knowledge gaps, including of the current extent and rates of loss of remaining natural temperate grasslands and loss of condition of remnants, compared to sites surveyed between 1995 and 2015.
2. Being strategic in our conservation work. Dr Sue McIntyre outlined five requirements for the ongoing survival and improvement in the condition of existing natural temperate grasslands in the following order of importance: a) preventing addition of more nutrients; b) maintaining a 'friendly' landscape matrix as much as possible to restrict influxes of weeds and nutrients from neighbouring lands; c) continuous weed control; d) biomass management; and only then, e) re-introduction of lost species.
3. Investing in restoration. The workshop discussed the need to invest in a grassland restoration industry at scale to lower costs and increase capacity to achieve conservation goals. This requires investment in knowledge, people, funding, and seed supply if threatened species are to be conserved, the Global Biodiversity Framework targets for grasslands conservation are to be met and for the nature repair market to be effective for this ecosystem.
4. Increasing resources for management. Enhanced resources are needed across tenures to manage grass biomass and weeds.

Importantly, the workshop discussed three important, emerging opportunities, namely:

1. Re-establishing a SEH-wide grassland conservation management network. This is essential to link and support landholders and land managers across tenures, and others, including researchers, non-government and government agencies and the broader community. Continuity of funding is essential if these networks are to achieve their greatest potential.
2. Engaging emerging markets. It is as yet unclear what the emerging Commonwealth nature repair market or the proposed reforms to the NSW biodiversity credit system will mean for conservation of NTG. Those working for conservation of grasslands need to engage in the development of these programs to ensure that grassland managers have opportunities to benefit from good stewardship.
3. Funding Indigenous ranger programs. As native title is recognised and more lands are returned to Indigenous nations there is a need and an opportunity to support management of Country by these communities. Not only would this help address past dispossession and increase socio-economic opportunities for Indigenous nations, but there are opportunities to improve management of grasslands by reintroducing traditional practices like cool burning. Indigenous rangers could make major contributions to enhanced management for grass biomass, weeds, threatened species, cultural sites and infrastructure.

The good will and constructive discussions in this workshop from government, community and academic participants demonstrates that by collaborating we can achieve so much more for conservation and restoration of grasslands to benefit the people and biodiversity of our region.

Friends of Grasslands thanks all the participants for coming together in our 'community of practice' for conservation of grasslands. I particularly thank the NSW Government agency representatives for their frank and constructive contributions. Our donors and NSW agencies provided the resources needed for this event. This workshop was FOG at its best and I thank the volunteer team who made this important event a success. Workshop proceedings will be published on our website in coming months.

I invite FOG members to our mid-winter event on the afternoon of 3rd August to hear more on our next steps for grasslands conservation. There will be a brief special general meeting at the event to include a few minor constitutional amendments.

See you in our grasslands,
Jamie

Mugga Mugga mid-winter slide afternoon

Saturday August 3 from 2pm to 4pm

Mugga Mugga Heritage Museum, Narrabundah Lane, Symonston

Join us for presentations by Jamie Pittock (grasslands and the new Cwlth Nature Repair Act), Rainer Rehwinkel (South African grasslands) and Andrew Zelnik (FOG's January Tasmania grasslands trip).

To be followed by a short general meeting where we'll ask members to vote on a couple more changes to the constitution following those made at the AGM. Watch for the special bulletin in early July for more details.

Register: margaret.ning@fog.org.au

ACT environmental grant for FOG

The ACT government on 5 June 2024 announced the 2024/25 ACT Environmental Grants successful projects. In total, \$351,633 was funded for 23 projects across the Environment Grants and Environmental Volunteer Assistance Streams.

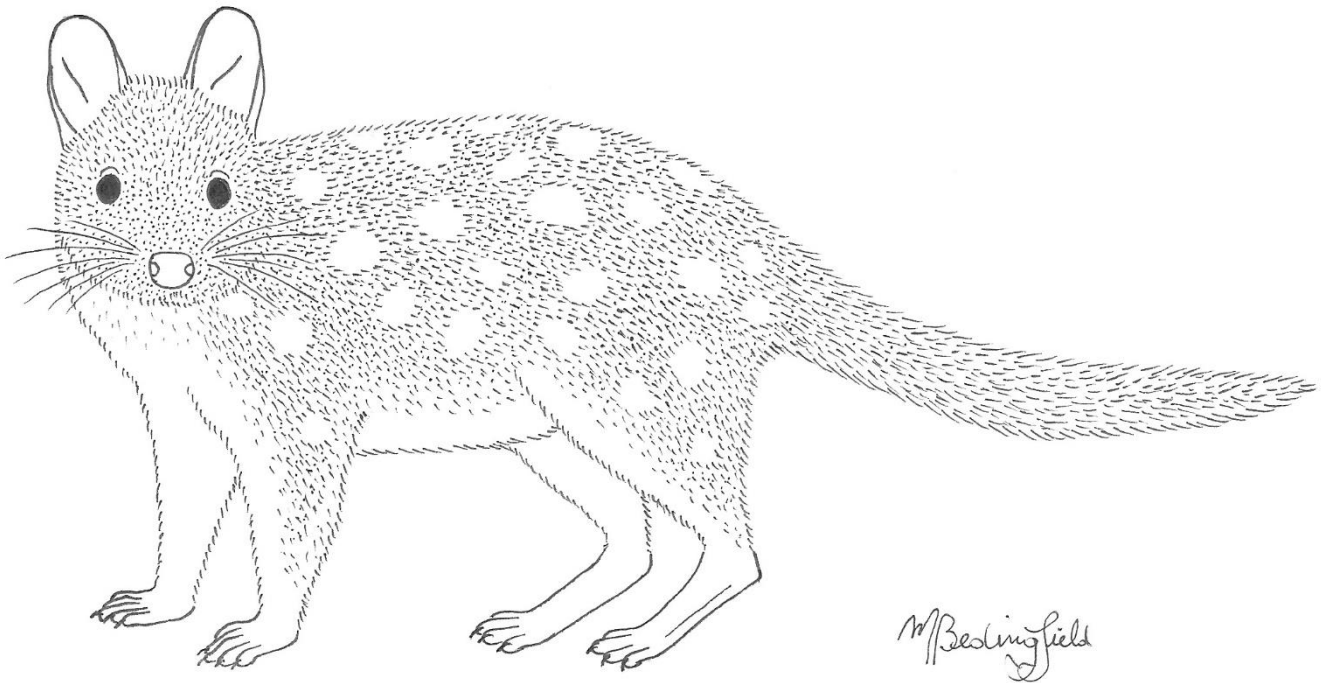
Successful applicants included: Friends of Grasslands (\$28,887 towards year 5 of the restoration of Blue Gum Point project); Red Hill Bush Regenerators (\$27,700 towards blackberry eradication); Hughes Friends of Nature, Hughes Friends of Grassy Woodlands and Southern ACT Catchment Group (\$17,270 for Gang Gang nest protection at Hughes) with Friends of Dryandra Woodlands and Molonglo Conservation Group receiving \$12,124 towards Dryandra Woodland O'Connor - restoration stage 4.

Eastern Quoll, extinct on the mainland, endangered in Tasmania, can it be brought back?

Michael Bedingfield

The Eastern Quoll (*Dasyurus viverrinus*) is classified as an endangered species. It became extinct in the wild on mainland Australia in the 1960's. It has survived in Tasmania but is declining. Its survival there is attributed mainly to the absence of foxes on the island. However there is hope for the future of this interesting mammal with various recovery programs including the experimental introduction of the animals to the Mulligans Flat Nature Reserve in Canberra.

The Eastern Quoll is an omnivorous, marsupial mammal about the size of a domestic cat. In the past it was often called a 'native cat' because of their very similar appearances. My drawing of the Eastern Quoll shows this strong resemblance. The body length of an adult male is 32 to 45 cm and the bushy tail is 20 to 28 cm. The female is slightly smaller. The colour is either ginger-brown or black, with off-white on the underside. It has white spots all over except on the tail. It has erect ears, a tapering snout, pink nose and very sharp teeth. It has four toes on the hind feet while all other quolls have five.



The Spotted-tailed Quoll (*Dasyurus maculatus*) has similar looks and occurs locally, but it is larger, the head and body length being 38 to 76 cm for males. The colouring is rufous brown to dark brown above, pale below. It has white spots all over including on the tail. This marsupial occurs in the ACT, but is very rare and has been declared vulnerable here. Nationally it is listed as endangered. It is the largest carnivorous marsupial in the wild on mainland Australia. In Tasmania only the Tassie Devil (*Sarcophilus harrisii*) is larger.

At the time of European settlement Eastern Quolls were widely distributed in south-eastern Australia, from the east coast of South Australia, through Victoria and up to the north coast of New South Wales as well as in Tasmania. The preferred habitat is generally a mosaic of open grassland, woodland, forest and agricultural land, especially where pasture grubs are common. A variety of factors brought about their downfall - introduced predators, especially the Red Fox and feral cats, disease, habitat destruction and persecution. They are adversely affected by extreme weather so climate change is a more recent concern. While they are restricted to Tasmania in the wild, there are attempts to bring them back on the mainland. They have been re-introduced into several mainland locations besides the fox-proof enclosure at Mulligans Flat in the ACT.

They are solitary animals most of the time, and nocturnal in their feeding habits. They are opportunistic predators and while their food consists mainly of insects and their larvae, they will also take ground-nesting birds, reptiles, frogs and small mammals, and will feed on the carcasses of larger mammals. In season they will also eat fruits and plants.

Eastern Quolls are not territorial and individuals have home ranges that may overlap considerably with others. They will have multiple dens in which they take refuge for rest and safety. Males have a larger home range to females, about 44 and 35 hectares respectively, but males will travel much more widely during breeding season. The dens take a variety of forms, such as underground burrows, rock crevices, hollow logs or haysheds. They may be simple hideaways or have several chambers. Sometimes den-sharing occurs, but most of the time quolls avoid one another. Interactions become more frequent during the short mating season and then males are likely to get into fights with each other.

The mating season is synchronised for May and June each year. References differ on the number of young born and the number of nipples the female has, from about 6 to 8. After a three-week gestation she gives birth to up to 20 or 30 young that are only 6mm long. She has a rudimentary pouch for the nipples and only the first infants to latch onto one of these will survive. They stay attached to the teat until mid-August when they become too big to fit in the pouch. The mother then leaves them in a grass-lined den, carrying them on her back if she needs to change dens. By the end of October the juveniles have been weaned and become independent. The members of the litter will be either fawn or black in colour independent of the colour of the parents. They are sexually mature by the next breeding season.

WWF-Australia introduced Eastern Quolls into Booderee National Park near Jervis Bay in 2018 and 2019, 20 animals in the first year and 40 in the second, from animals bred in sanctuaries. There was initial success with the animals learning how to survive and fend for themselves. There was even some breeding and a successful litter produced, but mortality was high and eventually they all succumbed to the difficulties of life in the wild, with the last record of a live animal being in 2021. It is planned to build a predator-proof fenced area within the Booderee National Park and release more quolls into that.

They were introduced into the Mulligans Flat Enclosure in 2016. The enclosure, about 485 hectares of Box Gum Woodland and perfect habitat for the Quolls, provides a safe sanctuary against introduced predators especially foxes and cats. There they are monitored and studied. The program has gone very well with the animals living safely and breeding successfully. The aim is to expand the species beyond Mulligans Flat. This will be difficult because outside the fence the fox is a great danger to them, and their biggest threat by far. However lessons are being learnt about their habits and needs so the exercise is quite beneficial. There is another successful program operating at Mt Rothwell in Victoria within a fenced area free of feral predators.

In Tasmania, where the fox is absent, there is a good chance of improving the future of the Eastern Quoll. A significant threat is the feral cat, so management of cats is a priority at strategic sites. However, Tasmanian Devils are the top predator on that island. Studies have found that when the Devils are healthy and abundant they suppress the feral cat population, which in turn protects the Eastern Quolls and other small native mammals such as bandicoots. Unfortunately Tassie Devils have a problem of their own with the fatal Devil facial tumour disease that affects them. Looking after the Devils is important to the future of the Eastern Quolls.

On the mainland the challenges are greater. Tasmanian Devils became extinct on the mainland of Australia about 3000 years ago, most likely due to the arrival of the dingo. Wiping out the dingo as the apex predator in many parts of the mainland has allowed foxes and cats to become top predators. With these present the Eastern Quoll has great difficulty prospering in the wild on the mainland, but in protected wildlife sanctuaries they are doing well.

The path to recovery for the Eastern Quoll is complicated and difficult, with a few hurdles to jump over. But with dedicated people working to achieve this goal we can be optimistic about the future improvement of the population.

Main references:

<https://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/species/pubs/333-conservation-advice-2015123.pdf>

<https://biodiversityconservationblog.com/2020/09/07/reintroducing-the-eastern-quoll-in-mulligans-flat-quoll-ity-biodiversity-conservation/>

<https://www.dcceew.gov.au/sites/default/files/env/pages/e206aad2-6b02-42ec-8cae-139d2ba2f117/files/eastern-quoll-year-3-scorecard.pdf>

<https://www.aussieark.org.au/eastern-quoll/>

Urambi Hills and St John's Wort - a sign of things coming to a grassland near you!!

Margaret Ning

Over the last three years FOG members have watched in dismay the march of St John's Wort (SJW) over huge areas of our local environment, whether in grassland reserves, Canberra Nature Park (CNP), or paddocks in general. I have been aware its rapid spread in north-side areas of Canberra, but recently FOG was invited to check out an area of Urambi Hills Nature Reserve (NR) in the Kambah area where local FOG member, Michael Bedingfield, has seen an avalanche of SJW take over in only eight years. His images below illustrate the reasons for his concern, showing how an area of Red-leg Grass (*Bothriochloa macra*) grassland was transformed in that time. Five FOG members visited Urambi Hills NR on 27 April, and were subjected to some rather horrifying scenes. Below are Michael's before and after images, followed by two other shocking views (see reddish-brown patches) by Andrew Zelnik taken on our visit.



Before: 25 April 2016. Photo: Michael Bedingfield



After: This season (2024). Photo: Michael Bedingfield



11 May 2024 (note the reddish-brown patches) Photo: Andrew Zelnik



11 May 2024 (note the reddish-brown patches) Photo: Andrew Zelnik

Further to the SJW however, we also recorded patches of other worrying species, specifically Narrow-leaved Cotton Bush (*Gomphocarpus fruticosus*), Greater Beggars Ticks (*Bidens subalternans*) and Paddy's Lucerne, Arrow-leaf Sida (*Sida rhombifolia*). I have never seen these species locally.

Other than the weather, the high points during the afternoon were the grand view of the mountains to the west and a pair of flame robins that flitted by! This activity was preparation for further exploration of the issue of SJW at Mt Majura at a planned FOG activity in May (see next article). We saw clearly the extent of the problem, and it wasn't difficult to get an idea of what we may have to face in future years if SJW is not controlled.

Thoughts and Action

At the very LEAST we must keep SJW out of the remaining nice areas that we have left in Canberra's grasslands and CNP. These areas must be identified, advertised and sightings of ALL SJW in them should be reported on Canberra Nature Map with a view to immediate control by ACT Government. For example, FOG visited Little Mulligans last December, and we could see the beginnings of patches of SJW there. How long until it too is overwhelmed?

A new Parks approach should be adopted, whereby new populations of undesirable weeds in any area, should be immediately sprayed/removed. Don't wait for the 'contractor' to be called in! Grazing is not the answer! (Ask farmers/managers who have been party to that.) Mowing is probably not the answer! The Chrysolena beetle isn't the answer - I haven't seen more than a dozen of them this season.

I believe that refusing to use broad-leaf herbicides, fearing their pea-destructive qualities, is also not the answer, as, that way, we ultimately lose everything rather than only the peas. Over the last 15 years we have also seen the SJW population at Tarengo TSR south of Boorowa grow from a

handful of plants to a point of no return. The NSW Department of Environment was too slow to get serious about fighting Ox Eye Daisy in Kosciuszko National Park following the 2003 fires, worrying about some vulnerable native species, but ultimately ending up with an aerial spray program as a result. Governments are too cautious.

Given SJW will never take a backward step, slowly but surely our precious grassland forbs will be outcompeted and die under the yellow canopy that consumes them. Why aren't we, as protectors of native grasslands, doing more to prevent the ruinous progress of St John's Wort?

An immediate priority is to urge the ACT government to come up with an ACT strategy to control SJW, particularly in our grassland reserves, and to fund it. FOG has already put in the following statement to the Invasive Plants Working Group:

FOG expresses their grave concern at the looming expiry of funding for the biosecurity program at the end of FY24, and loss of experienced staff due to retirement and funding uncertainty. They urge the ACT Government to adequately resource biosecurity as a recurrence program in the ACT budget.

Meanwhile, some of us are getting together to try to find further ways to raise the profile of SJW.

Further reading

The Parkcare/Landcare community is totally dissatisfied, and has voiced its concerns on Canberra Nature Map (CNM) in the following threads:

SJW at The Fair, Watson <https://canberra.naturemapr.org/sightings/4412555> (this is the main discussion thread)

SJW at Tuggeranong Hill <https://canberra.naturemapr.org/sightings/4543267>

SJW at Watson <https://canberra.naturemapr.org/sightings/4515669>

SJW at Molonglo River Reserve <https://canberra.naturemapr.org/sightings/4498893>

Michael Bedingfield has also created a Collection on CNM of SJW sightings with landscape images of large infestations. He has called it "St. John's Wort - Major Infestations". See: <https://canberra.naturemapr.org/collections/sightings/12356>.

There have also been calls for the Invasive Plants Working Group to reclassify SJW to being a 'transformative' weed with a 'massive' impact like African Love Grass (ALG), Chilean Needle Grass (CNG) and Serrated Tussock (ST).

In the ACT Weeds Manual:

- SJW is classified as "Environmental impact: *Moderate. Risk Priority: Medium-high*"
- ALG is classified as "Environmental impact: Massive. It is a transformer species. Risk Priority: Very High"
- CNG is classified as "Environmental impact: Massive. This is a WONS (Weed of National Significance) A transformer species. Risk Priority: Very High"
- ST is classified as "Environmental impact: Massive. Also, a Weed of National Significance. A transformer species. Risk Priority: Very High"
 - There is a SJW decision tree in the ACT Weeds Manual on page 76. Nothing is straightforward, but we must start somewhere.

Online version: <https://sactcg.org.au/act-weeds-manual/>. PDF: <https://sactcg.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/ACT-Weeds-manual-Nov-23.pdf>

In Pursuit of St John's Wort

Margaret Ning

On Saturday 11 May 2024, 14 members from FOG and Friends of Mt Majura (FoMM) assembled to discuss SJW (SJW) control strategies, exchange experiences, suggest experiments and see the result of work carried out by FoMM volunteers at their site. This meeting was originally intended as a field inspection of areas at The Fair where Friends of Mt Majura (FoMM) have trialled different approaches to controlling St John's Wort (SJW). Note: the Office of Nature Conservation (ONC) has recently started to run SJW control trials in the same area. Unfortunately the heavens opened even prior to our meeting time of 2pm, and although we listened to an intro from Waltraud while looking at the site, we quickly decided to continue the conversation at the nearby 'The Knox Made' in Watson. Four members decided to go ahead with the Mt Majura walk, and nine ended up at the cafe where we had a session that lasted two hours!

A detailed summary of the discussion together with supplementary material is [included here](#). Please also see the related articles in this issue: 'St. John's Wort – another close-up' (below) and 'Urambi Hills and SJW - a sign of things coming to a grassland near you!!' (above) for further information on strategies for combatting SJW in our grasslands.

St. John's Wort - another close-up

John Fitz Gerald

For this newsletter, I've jumped on the St. John's Wort bandwagon to accompany the above article about the FOG activity in May 2024 with ACT landcarers concerned about local abundance of this transformative weed. In my title above, I've written 'another' because I first wrote about *Hypericum perforatum* in the [July-August 2017 edition](#) (Ctrl+click to link) on page 6; I commend that article to you particularly as it contains a clear micrograph of a leaf showing apparent perforations, important for identifying this invasive species.

In May and June 2024, I collected dried Wort seedheads from a few places, mainly from Yarramundi Grassland, but also from Umbagog District Park, to compare their features. I thrashed the dry stalks, collected the fine materials produced by this, then separated some seeds and examined them microscopically.

My main interest was in seeds retained on plants at Yarramundi in areas that were treated by contractors engaged by the National Capital Authority. These contractors boom-sprayed Grazon Extra on the Wort in mid-February 2024 when the plants were near peak flowering. The active ingredients in this selective and residual herbicide are picloram + triclopyr + aminopyralid for managing broad-leaved weeds, in this site Wort and Blackberry, but not affecting the grasses.

I collected stalks still erect on dry stems without leaves on May 11th; these stalks would have had green seed capsules or open flowers in mid-February. I chose two small patches where the leaves were clearly dead, indicating that the spray boom had passed across both. I could tell immediately that seeds were still present by the tiny black dots that massed in the bottom of my bucket as soon as I up-ended the dried stems.

Incidentally, the following advice needs to be given to landcarers harvesting dry stems: hold them in their growth orientation until contained in a bag or bucket, otherwise seeds simply spill onto the soil surface. This creates the ideal situation for *H. perforatum* to germinate, according to horticultural web sources giving recommendations to grow plants, because sown seeds of the species require light + dark exposure so should not be covered by soil.

I show an image of seed processed from this sprayed collection below with its scale-bar representing 1 mm. The seeds are a little less than 1 mm long, cylindrical in shape, dark in colour, with a surface texture that seems made up of many small shiny dots.



I also collected seeds on May 15th from Umbagog in a Themeda-rich area which is mown and raked annually but not sprayed. These plants were still showing partly green leaves on the flower stalks. I have to report that the unsprayed plants held seed totally indistinguishable from that in my image from sprayed plants - seeds are of equivalent size, colour and texture! Copies of all images can be provided to anyone on request.

Obviously the external features of seeds do not demonstrate viability, so I made a cut-test, used by seed scientists and agronomists to quickly and cheaply assess seed quality. I cut 30 seeds of my sprayed Yarramundi collection. The insides of 29 of these were full and moist, only one was brown and shrivelled. My second micrograph (below) is an image of cut seeds - the dark line around the outside is the dissected seed coat, the grey translucent jelly-like interior is probably endosperm, the nutritive tissue that supports growth of germinating seeds. The scale-bar here represents 0.1 mm. All this suggests to me that seed from the sprayed plants at Yarramundi is very likely to germinate. A better test would be for me to germinate some seeds after their dormant phase and, if I do that, I will come back to you in a future newsletter.



I went one step further at Yarramundi. In February 2024, I brush-cut Wort in flower from a small vegwatch survey plot, which was not boom-sprayed. On June 17th, I collected some cut stalks that had lain on or near the ground for the intervening 4 months. I was unhappy to find many seeds were held in this material; again their size and appearance is indistinguishable from the unsprayed seed that I'd harvested at Umbagog.

This all rings alarm bells in my head and adds to the messages from the article on p6 that the large numbers of small Wort seeds can be long lived (NSW Weedwise suggests up to 12 years). My extra observations here reinforce that prevention of seed is critically important for management. To reiterate, I strongly suspect that sprayed plants can still produce plenty of seed, also that stems clipped/slashed even from flowering plants should be contained in case they too can mature and release seeds. Finally, take maximum care when harvesting dried stems as these could drop seed; actions of shearing or mowing to fell larger areas of stems potentially just throw seeds across the soil surface to germinate in future.

A final word of caution: right now *Hypericum* species are growing actively from their root stock, even in mid-winter. This means that the native *H. gramineum*, Small SJW, is very active but difficult to distinguish from growing *H. perforatum*. Any chemical that controls growth of the weed will not only devastate the native *Hypericum*, but also every broad-leaved native that grows actively in grasslands at this time of year.

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.

Bass Gardens Update

Ann Milligan

Saturday 6 April. Bass Gardens is a loop and stalk street, with the Bass Gardens' 'stalk' coming off Durville Crescent in Griffith, an early suburb of Canberra. The loop surrounds Bass Gardens Park which is about 2.5 ha of Natural Temperate Grassland (NTG) and exotic trees, with three Southern Blue Gum *Eucalyptus globulus subsp. bicostata*. The park is on relatively flat ground, in the centre of which is a Conservation Area of about 1 ha.

Sue, who lives in Bass Gardens and cares for the Conservation Area, has listed around 60 species of native plants and fungi, and almost the same number of exotic plant species, as well as about 15 native fauna in the park. She has uploaded most of her observations to Canberra Nature Map. These include threatened species sightings including several of the Golden Sun Moth (*Synemon plana*) and one of Button Wrinklewort (*Rutidosis leptorhynchoides*).

Sue told us that the venerable cedars and other trees, such as the Holm Oaks were planted in the 1920s-1930s, and that the native grassy patch was left undisturbed. The Millennium drought and extended dry seasons have had an adverse impact, reducing the number of old trees. A few other trees have been planted since, but most of the trees in this patch are very tall and old.

These days, the area outside the Conservation Area is mown in spring and summer. The Conservation Area is rarely mown and this is subject to the approval of the Conservator of Flora and Fauna. In recent years this has happened when the vegetative biomass growth is deemed to be too dense and will leave excess thatch which adversely impacts the NTG flora and fauna. Hence, as a result of this management approach, the native grassland species have persisted, with only a few weeds in the parts we walked through. However, weeds seem to be more invasive at the northern edge.

Our group of eight people, including Sue, wandered through the Conservation Area for two hours, spotting 30 of the native plant species on Sue's list – and occasional non-natives. The Red-leg Grass (*Bothriochloa macra*) dominates. They are knee-high (or thigh-high, depending on how tall you are) and interspersed with occasional spear grass (*Austrostipa spp.*) stalks, as well as native lovegrass (*Eragrostis brownii*) and Hairy Panic (*Panicum effusum*). Weeping Grass (*Microlaena stipoides*) abounds in patches under the trees, and we found two Kangaroo grass (*Themeda triandra*) plants. Slender Rat's Tail Grass (*Sporobolus creber*) is scattered throughout, and there is some Wallaby grass (*Rytidosperma spp.*). African Lovegrass is also present, in strong clumps.

In the understorey of tall grasses we found numerous small Scrambled Eggs (*Goodenia pinnatifida*), patches of Variable Glycine (*Glycine tabacina*) and Slender Tick-trefoil (*Desmodium varians*), Bears Ears (*Cymbonotus sp.*), Common Everlasting (*Chrysocephalum apiculatum*), Pink Bindweed (*Convolvulus angustissimus*) and Common Woodruff (*Asperula conferta*). Not much was in flower at this time of year, of course. I saw two Yellowish Bluebell (*Wahlenbergia luteola*) flowers and scattered yellow splotches of flatweed (*Hypochaeris radicata*) flowers.

Notable were the number of spent Earthstar fungi (*Astraeus hygrometricus*), in patches near the conifers. And we enjoyed checking out the new, very attractive, signage at the site, and hearing about the small plaque that was also present.

Although the day was very wet in the morning and evening, it had eased off by early afternoon. Our walk at 2pm was dry – and overflowed twice by the Air Force Roulettes from the Canberra airport open day which was not far away (as the jet flies). We were very lucky in our timing. Thanks to Margaret Ning for excellent planning and for her expertise identifying the plants; and thanks to Sue for welcoming us and leading us around this interesting patch.

Friends of the Ainslie Volcanics Grasslands

Marianne Albury-Colless

This really all began on 19 March 2022, with Professor Jamie Pittock undertaking a site visit to a sliver of land along the hills, buffers and ridges of Mt Ainslie (AKA Blocks 2 and 3 Section 60, Quick Street, Ainslie). With us on this day were Dr Shane West and Helen Wilson.



Jamie confirmed we had remnant Natural Temperate Grasslands and Grassy Woodland and that there were not only all the usual well-established suspects (flora and fauna invasives) on the site but areas of high diversity value. So, we got going concentrating, following Jamie's advice then authorised by Urban Parks and Places, on the *Hypericum perforatum* stretching in seemingly 'never-ending lines'.

Little did we know that we would have to contend with water thieves, workarounds for a couple of camp sites and the threat of modern communication technologies in the form of a base station on Block 2. The proposed base station and all its paraphernalia would, of course, disturb ground in close proximity to Golden Sun Moth habitat as well as remove a significant area earmarked for restoration. We were very appreciative of the support we received, and the Ainslie residents were brilliant in their response to the Development Application. They are very definitely ready and willing to go to ACAT, if and when necessary.



Our team, other sterling Ainslie residents and supporters also took up the petition 'Incorporating the Ainslie Volcanics site into the Mt Ainslie Nature Reserve', sponsored by Jo Clay MLA, and were thrilled when we got 581 signatures. This was rejected by the planning minister. This was particularly disappointing as we know that there is a 90% decline in the extent of grasslands with their ensuing listing as either endangered or critically endangered under the EPBC Act.

Interesting to note that the hills, foothills and ridges were supposed to be left free of what is termed 'development' as outlined in the National Capital Open Space System (NCOSS; see [here](#) for details).



We note too that this area has been nominated for entry to the ACT Heritage Register for its Ainslie Aboriginal and Geological Heritage Values. See [here](#) for details. Further protection of this site would be commendable.

It has been terrific to be so very ably supported through the various ups and downs by Allan McLean, Urban Parks and Places program, and the Molonglo Conservation Group (MCG).

It was an absolute treat to have Rainer Rehwinkel and Margaret Ning take us through a plant ID exercise across the area and Margaret continues to be an invaluable coach and cheer leader.

This year we've been very lucky to have Martin Henery, NRM, provide support with spraying of Serrated Tussock, rabbit control and the staged felling of invasive trees according to Lori's plan.

Jeannine Fromholtz and Elyssa Castles, MCG, have been pivotal in accessing grants for kit and plants, and were also able to harness the support of CIT students. Despite a scorching hot day, 30 students dug multiple holes ready for us to plant the 620 tube stock comprising: *Leucochrysum albicans*, *Rytidosperma spp.*, *Indigofera australis*, *Bursaria spinosa*, *Cassinia quinquefaria*, *Daviesia leptophylla* and *Wahlenbergia spp.*



And we have been flat out, literally and figuratively ever since! We're running just a bit behind, from the first set of tube stock, with about 150 *Leucochrysums* left to plant in the grassy areas. Once they're in the ground we'll be planting, in the relevant areas, *Brachychiton populneus*, *E. melliodora*, *Rytidosperma pallidum* and *Rutidosia leptorhynchoides*. May the weather be with us.

So, while we work on a contested area, it's very rewarding to have such a dedicated, albeit small team as we continue with the planting regime. Word gets around the team that we find wort removal and planting out of tube stock all a bit addictive. In this case, the only medication required from time to time is shortbread and fruit cake. We love it!

Thank you, Jamie, for galvanizing us into action.
All photos by Marianne Albury-Colless

2024 ACT Landcare Awards

Geoffrey Robertson

On Thursday 30 May 2024, our community came together to celebrate the 2024 Landcare Awards, hosted by Landcare ACT. It was an inspiring night, as the passion, hard work and commitment of so many throughout the ACT was recognised.

Many ParkCarers and those closely affiliated with ParkCare were nominated, with many winning their respective categories. In particular, we wish to recognise Vera Kurz, Antony Cory, Sarah Sharp, Jenny Andrews, ANU Intrepid Landcare and Bush on the Boundary who each took home a certificate at the end of the evening.

The ParkCare Team and the ParkCare Volunteer Program was also Highly Commended in the Community Partnerships category and is a testament to the relationship between our coordination team and our incredible volunteer community.

Congratulations to all those who received an award and all who were nominated. The full list of recipients follows:

- Woolworths Junior Landcare Award: ACT Venturer Scouts (winner).
- NextGen Landcare Award: Zoe McMahon (winner), ANU Intrepid Landcare (highly commended).
- ACT Govt Citizen Science Award: Antony Cory (winner).
- Women in Landcare: Sarah Sharp (winner), Jenny Andrews (highly commended).
- First Nations Collaboration Award: Bradley Bell & Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN) (winner).
- Australian Government Sustainable Agriculture Award: Callum Brae (winner), Majura Valley Free Range Eggs (highly commended).
- Australian Government Community Partnerships Award: Bush on the Boundary (winner), The ParkCare Team and the ParkCare Volunteer Program (highly commended).
- Australian Government Individual Landcarer Award: Vera Kurz (winner).
- Australian Government Climate Innovation Award: The Climate Factory (Highly Commended).

Advocacy Report, May-June 2024

Sarah Sharp

Submissions

Copies of all submissions are available here: [Advocacy \(fog.org.au\)](https://fog.org.au/advocacy)

Draft National OECM Framework

A joint submission was made by Friends of Grasslands and the Conservation Council. We recommended against recognising commitments that can be revoked, as being not sufficient to count toward Australia's and the global protected area target. If the Framework is introduced, to be effective, it needs to deliver on the following:

1. Inclusion of some form of secure, in-perpetuity protection;
2. Recognition and support for participating land managers including advice and financial assistance to private landholders or lessees;
3. Coordination for strategic management of landscape level threats and opportunities;
4. Priority given to the ecosystems that have suffered the greatest loss and disturbance, in this region being temperate grasslands and grassy woodlands;
5. Clarification that assessors would be adequately trained and apply a consistent approach across all jurisdictions; and
6. Detail about how each state and territory government will implement the Framework to meet the OECM principles.

Light Rail Stage 2B

Jamie Pittock and Sarah attended a Team meeting with staff from Stakeholder Engagement Major Projects, Canberra Light Rail, to address concerns relating to protection of the Guilfoyle St Grassland and areas containing small populations of Golden Sun Moth. We were advised that a construction site would be built in open space between Newman and Gunn Streets, not in the Guilfoyle St Grassland. Offsets were also discussed, including restoration of the construction site with grassland species.

Nature Conservation Act review

FOG has signed onto a detailed submission prepared by the Conservation Council with input from the Biodiversity Working Group, and with huge input from Matt Whitting. A smaller, more specific response was prepared by FOG to respond specifically to questions raised in the discussion paper, generally to facilitate inclusion of off-reserve

sites in conservation management and to encourage the inclusion of volunteer conservation arrangements with farmers.

Updates

Biodiversity Network update 23 May 2024

1. Discussions are continuing to advocate for the biodiversity network being implemented on leased land, to include stewardship options.
2. Mapping of important areas is progressing, and a report from Capital Ecology has been prepared for the ACT Government to progress a survey of urban sites.
3. Discussions have been held about improving the skills of managers of conservation areas.

Biodiversity Conservation Forum 16 May

Conserving Canberra – habitat restoration Ngunnawal partnership, Office of Nature Conservation

A presentation was given on the two year restoration program being run from ONC. Emphasis is on restoring cultural bonds for the Ngunnawal nation, including advisory roles, embedding knowledge and values. Three trial projects have been established at Ainslie-Majura, Urambi Hills and Namadgi. Guidelines are being prepared for a single restoration plan for the ACT, emphasising landscape restoration in reserves and adjacent lands, including tools and rapid monitoring methods. A Restoration Steering Committee chaired by Rosie is being established.

Kat McGrath (GCG) presented on the needs for off-reserve management, including education of local communities through the use of conservation posts, interpretive signage and the need for mapping data.

Danial Iglesias, TCCS emphasised that 2024/2025 will be the year of solving management of conservation area issues, directly addressing the need to distinguish between amenity and biodiversity management.

Invasive species prioritisation: Issues being addressed to prioritise species include pathways (nursery stock, stockfeed, hitchhikers (transport), species of national concern and species already in Australia and ACT).

Community input will be sought and management plans developed. A review of the Nature Conservation Strategy emphasized the need to consider priorities and processes, and to develop a short, sharp, directed document.

Nature Positive Plan: Link with the 2030 Global Biodiversity Framework targets. OECM is seen as providing long term protective measures for private land, including conservation measures, and the need for national threatened species alignment. (Note, however, that FOG's understanding is that it doesn't provide for long-term or in-perpetuity protection).

Biodiversity Working Group

Conservation Council election priorities have been finalised. The biodiversity principles paper is being updated on the back of that document.

News Roundup

Latest news on the Victorian Grassland Earless Dragon

Geoff Robertson

The Victorian Grassland Earless Dragon (VGED) was rediscovered, in January 2023 “unexpectedly during a predevelopment environmental survey. Since discovery, 29 animals have been collected and brought to Melbourne Zoo to commence a conservation breeding program. The first breeding season has delivered over 55 eggs, building on knowledge gained through caring for the Canberra Grassland Earless Dragon.

Modelling shows that with a population of 500 individuals, we will be able to dependably release 100 VGED per year back into the wild.” So says Zoos Victoria in a report which may be found [here](#). This is very exciting news.

HECS for farmers? Nature repair loans could help biodiversity recover – and boost farm productivity

Rosemary Blemings

Rivers of Carbon and Greening Australia have been achieving dam-rescues for decades, here's a national approach perhaps. This article by Bruce Chapman and David Lindenmeyer (*The Conversation* 9 May 2023) claims to show "how farmers could access loans similar to HECS but based on annual revenue, not income, to undertake work helping both their business and restoration of nature. This work will boost farm productivity and biodiversity with farmers repaying the loan when their revenues permit". Click [here](#) to download.

Independent statutory review of the ACT's Eastern Grey Kangaroo Controlled Native Species Management Plan 2017

Paul Archer

Professor Sarah Legge's 'Independent statutory review of the ACT's Eastern Grey Kangaroo Controlled Native Species Management Plan 2017 Report to the Act Government' was released by the ACT government on 15 May 2024 and is available [here](#). The media releases that accompanied the report are available [here](#) and [here](#). FOG's submission to Professor Legge's review is available [here](#).

Native plant seed supply problem for nature repair

Link provided by Rosemary Blemings

This article by Ellen Andres, Joe Atkinson and Rachael Gallagher (*The Conversation* 10 June 2024, available [here](#)) points out that only 10% of native plants can be bought as seed which is a big problem for nature repair and describes how we can make plantings more diverse (see also Page 2 of this newsletter).

Cultural burn near Boorowa reveals rare native treasure – the small scurf pea

Paul Archer

This article by Edwina Mason in *The Riot Act* on 23 May 2024 (available [here](#)) describes how "a hidden treasure has emerged from the soil on a travelling stock reserve near Boorowa thanks to the use of traditional burning practices. The discovery of a rare native species of plant by Australian National University (ANU) researchers has generated much excitement given the fact it is a listed threatened species and had never previously been detected in the area. Listed as endangered in NSW and Victoria, more than 120 endangered small scurf-pea (*Cullen parvum*) were discovered after a cultural burn – conducted by NSW Aboriginal Land Council Onerwal – had taken place".

Editor's note:

We hope you enjoyed reading this newsletter. If you have a story from your favourite grassland that you would like to share, please contact newsletter@fog.org.au

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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 and prior issues are available [here](#) as text only or in pdf format including colour pictures and graphics. [Acrobat Reader](#) is required.



Vale of Belvoir conservation area - to see more of this and the other special places visited in FOG's Jan 2024 Tassie trip come to FOG's Mugga Mugga mid-winter slide afternoon on Sat 3 August 2024. Photo: Andrew Zelnik