



News of Friends of Grasslands

Supporting native grassy ecosystems

ISSN 18526315

September & October 2024

Activities

Work Parties

Gurubung Dhaura

Sat 21 Sept 9-12:30pm

Sat 19 Oct 9-12:30pm

Sat 16 Nov 9-12:30pm

Register: [Jamie Pittock](#)

Yarramundi Reach

Sat 26 Oct 9-11am.

Register: [John Fitz Gerald](#)

Budjan Galindji (Franklin Reserve)

Wed 4 & 25 Sept 9-11:30am

Wed 2 & 23 Oct 9-11:30am

Wed 6 & 27 Nov 9-11:30am

Register: [Margaret Ning](#)

Hall Cemetery

Sat 5 Oct 9am-11am

Sat 2 Nov 2024 9am-11am

Register: [John Fitz Gerald](#)

Activities

Visit to Orchids in Hall Horse

Paddocks.

Sat 14 Sept, 10am to noon

Register: [Margaret Ning](#)

Grassy woodland walk Kowen TSR

Sat 26 Oct, 2-4pm [Details here](#)

Register: [Margaret Ning](#)

FOG's 30th birthday party at St Mark's grassland – Save the date!

Sat 16 Nov, 12.30 to 3pm

Register: [Margaret Ning](#)

Lawson Grassland visit

Celebrate our GLORIOUS GRASSLANDS for the Canberra Festival of Nature. See Page 2 for details.

New members: 6

See note on page 2.

From the President ...

Conserving grasslands of the South Eastern Highlands

Conservation of natural grasslands in rural landscapes in the South Eastern Highlands of Australia has been a focus of Friends of Grasslands' (FOG) work this year. In June I was working in South Africa and was delighted to see the commitment of non-government and government organisations to conservation of grassland ecosystems.

Grasslands have a deep cultural connection in South Africa. There are extensive areas of 'highveld' grasslands on the 1,200 – 1,800 m high plateau above the great escarpment in the central east of the nation, and 'middleveld' and 'lowveld' grassy ecosystems in towards the coasts. As in Australia, extensive agricultural use of these landscapes means that they are underrepresented in conservation reserves.

The Grassland Biome is identified as a national conservation priority in South Africa's National Biodiversity Assessment (2018) as well as the National Protected Area Expansion Strategy (2016). Australian governments could learn from South Africa the value in taking action to implement such strategies.

South African National Parks (SANParks), in partnership with World Wide-Fund for Nature South Africa (WWF-SA) and a range of national, provincial and local government and non-government partners, are collaborating to establish a new grasslands national park in the Eastern Cape Province.

A completely new approach is being taken to the declaration of the park under the National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act (2003). The park will be established based on a combination of land purchase, the declaration of state land, state-owned communal land and private land. Designation of the first properties is likely soon, involving around 10 000 ha under co-management agreements with landowners.

The national park will largely remain a working agricultural landscape. SANParks and its partners will not have direct management responsibility for most of the land but will play an extension and support role, providing technical assistance to landowners farming in the park.

South Africa's innovative approach to grassland conservation should inspire us in Australia to contemplate similar initiatives in regions like the Monaro in New South Wales and Western Volcanic Plains in Victoria.



Another South African inspiration is their rigorous approach to control burning of the veld. Pictured above are the fire breaks burnt across the Drakensburg mountains at elevations of up to 2,400 m [see also pages 21 & 21]. It would be great if Australian grassland managers could be supported to undertake more vigorous ecological burns.

On other opportunities, the 2024 Canberra Festival of Nature is focussed on "Glorious Grasslands". FOG is leading a key event at Lawson with a walking tour of key sites plus lunch on Saturday 28 September 2024 from 9 am to 1 pm. To register email [Rainer Rehwinkel](mailto:Rainer.Rehwinkel).

Thank you to all who help set up and speak at FOG's successful winter seminar event on the 4th August (see article in this newsletter), including the special general meeting that amended FOG's constitution.

See you in our grasslands,
Jamie

New members

At its meeting on 23 May the committee agreed that we will no longer publish the names of new members in the newsletter and therefore on the internet. However, we will note the number of new members since the previous newsletter.

Talks and Tea report, Mugga Mugga 3 August 2024

Ann Milligan

We heard good news, and reason for hope, at Mugga Mugga on Saturday 3 August at FOG's traditional 'winter talks and tea' afternoon.

At the 'scrape and sow' plot at the Ginninderry Conservation Corridor (at the north-western border of ACT), 20 of the 24 species of native forbs and grasses sown in May 2020 have become established. What a fabulous outcome! John Fitz Gerald began the afternoon's entertainment with this good news, which is based on annual vegetation monitoring by John and other FOG volunteers, as well as Ginninderry Conservation Trust staff. Even better, the plot supports sufficient ants for at least two Pink-tailed Worm Lizards and at least one visiting echidna (see the Ginninderry poster photo on page 5). Now the Ginninderry team is building on this success: they scraped and sowed a second patch in June, and it is visible from the walking trail.

Next, Jamie Pittock conveyed hope with his summary of outcomes of the (invitation only) FOG workshop that he and Rainer Rehwinkel ran on 31 May to examine 'Conservation of the grasslands of the South Eastern Highlands (SEH) of NSW'. It involved around 60 people – NSW landholders, and members of environment-active groups and government (NSW and Commonwealth) – discussing observations, initiatives, successes and failures across NSW, Tasmania and Victoria. Why? Because currently too little of the Natural Temperate Grassland in the SEH is managed to meet conservation targets. Jamie's written summary in *News of FOG* (2024-07, July–August) reports important lessons and emerging opportunities from the workshop, and the two Figures here show lessons and conclusions that Jamie spoke about this afternoon. The full workshop proceedings are available at <https://fog.org.au>.

Lessons

- Need to re-survey previously known grassland remnants to update status
- Bathurst region grasslands are less well known
- Need to invest in grassland restoration: knowledge, people, funding, seed supply
- Easier to recreate grasslands on ugly sites than to restore a degraded grassland?
- Enhanced resources for biomass and weed management
- Sustained funding is needed to support conservation by private land holders



'Merton Vale' grassland conservation agreement property, Tasmanian Midlands, © A Zelnik

Conclusions

1. Pastoralists with native grasslands on their properties need engagement and support
2. Trusted, ongoing support programs are needed, e.g. conservation management networks
3. Good government programs for conservation of native grasslands and species need to be scaled up
4. New nature repair & biodiversity credit programs may help
5. Nature repair investment and Indigenous ranger programs are new opportunities

Workshop proceedings: <https://fog.org.au/>



Silky swainson pea © A Zelnik

In short, there is hope that native grasslands may survive and recover if there is sufficient support for landholders to manage their grassland areas. Landcare networks and Local Land Services (LLS) are already active in that: as Luke Pope (of South East LLS) said on 31 May, 'Working with land managers is very effective, because they inherently want to manage the land well'. However, sustained funding seems to be very important – that is, better sustained than for the NSW Conservation Management Networks (CMNs) which were defunded a few years ago. For sustained funding the critical groups appear to be those forming partnerships with pastoralists. Examples are the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust, Trust for Nature in Victoria, and in Tasmania the Midlands Conservation Partnership/Tasmanian Land Conservancy. Can something similar be set up again for the SEH, but this time with funding in perpetuity from community-based sources? Should there be a focus on iconic fauna, similar to the Plains-wanderer focus in Victoria? Should FOG push to be part of something similar in the SEH, building on recent initiatives via Nature Repair, for example?

The afternoon's third item of hope came from a brief outline from Hugh Coppell and Sarah Hnatiuk who are members of the Invasive Plants Working Group. The acres of brown St John's Wort in reserved grasslands and native open spaces and roadsides around ACT will be vexing all of us, so the Working Group's efforts to establish the best treatment is welcome. Apparently, we should not pull the plants out, and it is ok to spray the rosettes before they put up flower stalks. Starane can be used in local reserves these days.

The other talks of the afternoon gave us wonderful photos and short accounts of two trips. Andrew Zelnik took us back to January when a very small FOG group went to see some northern and central grasslands in Tasmania. We glimpsed highland grassy landscapes stretching for miles with no habitation in sight, supported by Andrew's wonderful close-up images (often including a biro for scale – thank you Andrew!) of the species in flower. He made me wish I had gone on that trip!



Finally, Rainer outlined his own April visit to South Africa’s botanic gardens (there are three, with different foci) and veldt (rangelands). Apart from a few animals, his slides were a feast of colour and (sometimes familiar) plant forms, including lots of Themeda [see above and page 21]!

A highlight of these annual winter FOG talks is the opportunity to chat with FOG members whom one doesn’t often see – and 3 August lived up to that tradition. Margaret and others had provided a tasty and healthy afternoon tea which, clearly, we all appreciated. Thank you, Margaret!

Also this afternoon, a very brief general meeting passed a formal proposal to open the committee to two more general members. There is a large workload on the committee, and surely the more shoulders involved the better.

Finally, we heard this news:

- i. In an exciting FOG initiative (that will surely need to be led by new active teams if adopted), Jamie proposes taking on rapid assessment of Travelling Stock Reserves around the ACT and local NSW, to observe and record the quality of TSR grassland resources – probably some of the best such resources in this region – with a focus on their habitat potential.
- ii. At the end of July, Natural Temperate Grassland of the South Eastern Highlands was nominated as Critically Endangered in NSW. If listed, it will increase the priority for resources for grasslands’ future management.
- iii. And the South African Government is considering establishing a new National Park for grassland ecosystems across multiple land tenures.



John Fitz Gerald with the Gininderry poster Photo: Paul Archer

Spotted Pardalote, foraging in the tree tops, nesting underground

Michael Bedingfield

Spotted Pardalotes are more often heard than seen as they forage among the leaves of eucalypt trees. They have a loud and distinctive voice which is easy to recognize. The most common call consists of two very clear sharp notes of 'ding', repeated frequently. But their call can be one, two or three high-pitched piped notes which can carry over a long distance. The repeated three-note call is described as 'miss piggy, miss piggy' and 'sleep-may-be'. They search in the foliage of eucalypt trees for all sorts of insects as well as spiders. Their favourite foods are lerps and psyllids. Psyllids are tiny sap-sucking insects. A lerp is the covering of crystallized honeydew that a psyllid insect creates as protection for its body in the larval stage. Pardalotes dart quickly among the dense leaves of the canopy, so most of time they are hard to see and difficult to photograph.



But when you see them up close they are a delight to the eye with their spectacular colouring. These tiny birds are only 8 to 10 cm from bill to tail tip.

My drawing is of the male bird and I've tried to capture the colours as best I can. The crown and wings are black and covered with white spots. The throat and under-tail feathers are yellow and the rump is orange or dark red. They have a white eyebrow, a pale brown scalloped back and buff coloured tummy. The female has similar though slightly duller colouring. She lacks the yellow throat, and the eyebrow and head spots are off-white.

The scientific name of the Spotted Pardalote is *Pardalotus punctatus*. In the Canberra region we have two species of Pardalote. The other is the Striated Pardalote, *Pardalotus striatus*. This is also a busy canopy-feeding bird. In the male the eyebrow is yellow and white, the throat is yellow and the crown is black with off-white streaks. The wing feathers are black with white edges, giving it a striated look, and there is a small red wing spot. The back is grey-brown and the under parts whitish with a tint of yellow. The female is similar but duller in colouring. The often repeated calls are 'witta witta' or three notes of 'pick-it-up'. This bird is also hard to see among the leaves of eucalypt trees and its presence is more easily detected by its song.

Spotted Pardalotes usually make their nests underground, excavating a narrow tunnel in an earthen bank. They create a domed chamber at the end and line it with fine bark, grass leaves or feathers. The male normally chooses the nest site, and may come back to the same place year after year. Sometimes they will use tree hollows or man-made structures with a suitable shape or make burrows in garden beds. Both parents participate in excavating the tunnel, nest-building, incubation of the eggs and feeding of the young. They breed only once per year, and the season is variable from late winter through to early summer. The timing is different by region, earlier in the north and later in cooler southern areas.

These birds are spread widely along eastern and southern Australia. In NSW they occur in the coastal districts, over the ranges and tablelands onto the western slopes but are absent from the drier inland plains. Their habitat includes woodlands, dry forest and wet forest, but they also move into urban areas where there are suitable stands of eucalypts. It is a very common breeding resident in the Canberra region. They are largely sedentary, with some altitude migration only, out of higher altitudes after winter. After the breeding season they may gather together in flocks.

The clear crisp notes of the Spotted Pardalote is a familiar sound in the local grassy box woodlands. So too is the song of the Striated Pardalote, and you can listen to them at the 'ebird' reference. These birds are faring well and there are no threats to their future.

Main references:

<https://australian.museum/learn/animals/birds/spotted-pardalote/>
<https://backyardbuddies.org.au/backyard-buddies/spotted-pardalote/>
https://ebird.org/species/spopar1?siteLanguage=en_AU

Close-up - small seeds from two native grasses

John Fitz Gerald

For this newsletter, let's look at two smaller tufted grasses with distinct characteristics and distributions.

My first species is *Lachnagrostis filiformis*, known commonly as Blowngrass, though this name can also be used for other species in the genus. The annual-perennial C3 grass is native to Australia, New Zealand and Pacific Islands. ALA holds about 23 thousand records for the species, mostly from the SE and SW temperate-zone corners of our continent. Consistent with this, the species is said to prefer heavy soils or moist areas.



The inflorescence is a delicately branched panicle which is up to 30cm long and which separates from the plant at maturity, becoming free to be carried on the wind to drop seeds. My image shows five florets plus one small elongate seed (near image centre) freed from its enclosing plant parts. Each floret has a hairy lemma and a thin geniculate awn up to 4mm long arising from near the lemma midline. The scale bar on this image is 0.5mm.

My second species is *Tripogonella loliiformis*, known by several common names including Five-minute Grass. This annual-perennial C4 grass is from tropical Asia and Australasia. ALA holds over six thousand records from all over Australia, but it does not grow in Tasmania. A big distinction from the Blowngrass is that *T. loliiformis* persists across the arid zone.



This grass is ranked as uncommon and my experience in our region is that it does well in rocky areas of very shallow soils which disadvantage other plants, except for lichens. Its inflorescence is again a panicle but only to 8cm long and with spikelets held against the central axis so it looks very spike-like. My image shows four florets at the right and seven small elongate seeds at the left. Each floret has hairs only in its callus region and an awn at the lemma tip that is just 1mm long (though can reach 2mm according to species descriptions). The scale bar on this image is 1mm.

I'd like to pass on more five-minute facts that hopefully will interest readers:

- First, the common name refers to the capacity of the species to green and flower rapidly in response to rain. It has a reputation as a 'resurrection plant' that can come back from being apparently dead.

For anyone who wants to delve into the molecular biology that enables the plant to do this, please consult the paper by Okemo et al. referenced below, freely accessible online. This recent Queensland research established that the species survives if gradually dried to 60% relative humidity, but following that tolerates more severe and rapid drying. Essentially, its extreme desiccation-resistance needs to be primed.

- Second, the genus assignment varies across our country, still being known by an earlier species name *Tripogon loliiformis* in the online floras of Queensland, NSW and SA. The Australian Plant Census accepts the genus *Tripogonella* from a 2018 paper by Peterson and Romasch, with the 'tardy' states yet to convert from the genus nominated in 1934 by Hubbard.

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

The desiccation-biology paper is P.A. Okemo et al. (2023) Scientific Reports 13(1):20613

Walk at Parliament House Gardens

Ann Milligan (with Margaret Ning and Matt Kent)

24 July 2024. When driving the ring-roads around Parliament House on Capital Hill, Canberra, I concentrate on the traffic and ignore the vegetation upslope of the road. Therefore, I had no idea that there is a well-tended and mulched garden of native shrubs between those roads and Parliament Drive, with winding paths throughout. Our FOG group of 14 adults, a 4-year old and a baby (in arms or pram) wandered along those paths on Wednesday 24 July afternoon. Mild weather helped make the 2-hour walk a very pleasant time, much enjoyed by everyone.

Our leader was Matt Kent (FOG member, Cool Country Natives' employee and skilled bush-regeneration sprayer), and between him and some members of the Australian Native Plant Society and Canberra Nature Map the group was able to identify much of the vegetation; there are no labels. As you'd expect for this garden, the many species of natives are from several parts of Australia, not just the local region.



The mainly eucalypt over-storey is around 40 years old, established after the building was complete, but the shrubbery and grassland patch beneath does not look overgrown or over-mature and is well mulched. Of the large range of eucalypts, Brittle Gum (*E. mannifera*) and Apple Box (*E. bridgesiana*) feature strongly, with bark showing signs of possum life. We saw a few *Casuarina* or *Allocasuarina* of various ages, with at least one female in flower.

We spotted a few Kurrajongs (*Brachychiton populneus*), some Native Cherry (*Exocarpos* sp.) and Small-leaf Clematis (*Clematis leptophylla*), which are presumably naturally occurring, and a lone Cycad and some Grass Trees. I occasionally noticed tea tree and bottlebrush, and Pigface (*Carpobrotus* sp.), and we saw several Burgan (*Kunzea ericoides*).



Acacias are prevalent, including Blackwood (*A. melanoxylon*), Black Wattle (*A. mearnsii*) and Parramatta Green Wattle (*A. parramattensis*), and Cootamundra Wattle (*A. baileyana*) and a number of Snowy River Wattle (*A. boormanii*) soon to burst out in yellow bloom.

Already the Grevilleas and Hakeas were starting to flower, including *G. juniperina*, *Hakea* 'Burrendong Beauty' and Pincushion Hakea (*H. laurina*). Other spots of colour that day came from a mauve *Thryptomene*, yellow Billy Buttons (*Pycnosorus globosus*), dusky pink *Guichenotia ledifolia*, white and purple *Westringia*, and numerous *Correa* bushes with bells in red, pink, yellow, green and white. Bushes of fragrant-leaved Long-leaf Wax-Flower (*Philotheca myoporoides*) were in full bud. Matt proudly showed us his 'stand-out': a lone rainforest plant, Firewheel Tree (*Stenocarpus sinuatus*).

Representing grassland is a patch of Kangaroo Grass (*Themeda triandra*), a tall spear grass Slender Bamboo Grass (*Austrostipa verticillata*), River Tussock (*Poa labillardierei*) and Common Everlasting (*Chrysocephalum apiculatum*). There are *Lomandra* that have been brush-cut to a round shape, and elsewhere the few 'weedy' self-sown natives we saw included Weeping Grass (*Microlaena stipoides*) and Curly Sedge (*Carex bichenoviana*).

We walked mainly through the gardens on the western and southern sides of the hill, and along part of the eastern slope (no garden on the northern face). At the north-eastern corner the native woodland is replaced downslope by gardeners' sheds, and upslope by formal lawns with massed plantings of overseas species such as *Primula*.

Up here there are small memorials and ornamental ponds, and several walks beneath pergolas with beautifully finished beams of (perhaps) Jarrah. All three sides of the hill have immaculate-looking sporting facilities: we saw tennis courts, a basketball court, exercise stations for step-ups, chin-ups, etc., and there is a community park.



These gardens are a peaceful and enjoyable resource that everyone can stroll through at any time of the year. Highly recommended.

Photos by Ann Milligan. A brochure about the gardens can be accessed [here](#).

Goulburn Wetland and Gundry quandary

Ann Milligan (with species by Margaret Ning)

Button Wrinklewort (*Rutidosia leptorrhynchoides*), tiny Sundews (*Drosera* sp.), Sun Orchid (*Thelymitra* sp.), Slender Wire Lily (*Laxmannia gracilis*) and many other relatively uncommon grassland species were some of the highlights of our Saturday 29 June afternoon for nine FOG members and two Goulburn locals. We were walking through the Gundry Travelling Stock Reserve (TSR), having spent an hour earlier enjoying the Goulburn Wetlands.

Gundry TSR is on Windellama Rd a few kilometres south of Goulburn, across the road from Goulburn airport. Both TSR and airport are on a very wide plain with views for miles and miles and miles... especially from the small hill we walked up on the eastern side of the TSR. A keen wind blew on us from the north. Entry to the TSR is via a couple of gates after a soggy wide roadside drainage line, where fortunately thick Phalaris (*P. aquatica*) served as a platform for each foot.

Reaching the grassland, our visit was immediately rewarded as Helen spotted a beige-coloured Key's Matchstick Grasshopper (*Keyacris scurra*) leaping from beige grass tuft to beige grass tuft. Then we *all* spotted these very small grasshoppers – about 2 cm long and 3 mm wide – as they leapt about between our feet. Trevor later found other small areas where they were abundant. What a find!

On the lower slope of the TSR we wandered through short Kangaroo Grass (*Themeda triandra*) grassland with Button Wrinklewort, Scaly Buttons (*Leptorrhynchos squamatus*), Spur Velleia (*Velleia paradoxa*), Common Everlasting (*Chrysocephalum apiculatum*), Lemon Beauty Heads (*Calocephalus citreus*), Urn Heath (*Melichrus urceolatus*), Peach Heath (*Lissanthe strigosa*), Low Bush-pea (*Pultenaea subspicata*) and many other species from Rainer Rehwinkel's species list compiled over many visits.



Gundry TSR, with beautiful grassland in the foreground, then a large patch of Violet Kunzea (*Kunzea parvifolia*) in the midground, and higher up, scattered Sifton Bush (*Cassinia sifton*) before the pine trees. Photo Margaret Ning

The 'quandary' is to know whether wattle and other native shrubs planted 20-25 years ago, including the native Sifton Bush (*Cassinia sifton*) which is moving in like an invading army from the north, and invasions of waist-high Violet Kunzea (*Kunzea parvifolia*), ought or ought not to be removed from the TSR.

Of course there were exotic weeds as well – plenty of Flatweed (*Hypochaeris radicata*) which became continuous as we walked up the slope, mostly occupying otherwise bare ground. Does this reflect overgrazing in the past? Over the top ridge there were thistles and Chilean Needle Grass (*Nassella neesiana*), but we saw only a few patches of St Johns Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) while we walked. Sadly, African Lovegrass (*Eragrostis curvula*) and Serrated Tussock (*Nassella trichotoma*) were prominent in places.

Our earlier morning ramble was at the Goulburn Wetlands on May St in north-east Goulburn, constructed between 2010 and 2017, and opened in 2014.



Photo by Trevor Preston

This very pleasant place was created to clean the water running off the golf course (upslope to the west) before it enters the Mulwaree Ponds downstream. Rock baffles divert and still the water flow, allowing nutrient exchange that removes the pollutants and feeds the water plants. Keen birdwatchers and photographers in the group found Chestnut Teal and Grey Teal, along with moorhens feeding among the Water Ribbons (*Triglochin procera*) near the rock baffles.

There are two hides, with wifi at one of them (apparently so you can look up bird species online), and the waterbody itself is well screened by Black Wattles (*Acacia mearnsii* and *A. decurrens*), *Acacia parramattensis*, Honey Myrtle, *Banksia* and other shrubs, and Tall Sedge (*Carex appressa*).

Trees and dense bushes of *Hakea sericea* and *H. teretifolia* have been planted at the west side, to shelter small birds and to protect the path from wayward golf balls. Near the entrance off May St, the attractive small garden of ground-storey plants includes some grassland species, and all are labelled.

Thank you Margaret and Rainer for reconnoitering the sites on an earlier visit, and Margaret for providing such clear instructions to find the places, and for organising great weather.

Learning the Basics of Native Pasture Management

Peter Ockenden – Secretary, Warby Range Landcare Group Inc

Warby Range Landcare Group Field Day Report 16th March 2024 Chesney Vale, Victoria

Eighteen people (a mix of Landcare members and some new faces) gathered on a clear autumn morning at Chesney Vale in North-east Victoria. This event was funded by a 2023 grassy ecosystem grant from Friends of Grasslands (FOG). We were fortunate to have Ian Davidson (Regeneration Solutions), Russell Ellis (property owner) and Jiarra Atkinson (Bangerang expert) as our guest speakers. This event was a follow-up to a field day we held two years ago with Dr Meredith Mitchell and our Bangerang partners.

What did we do?

We began with a delicious morning tea provided by the Thoona CWA then we bussed everyone out to the main paddock site. Russell had lined up some bucket samples of important native species for us to peruse. The beauty of this approach was that Ian and Russell didn't have to tramp us all over the paddock to find some good samples. We then visited two paddocks getting a feel for ground-cover species ID (e.g. what is a C3 or a C4 grass?) with Ian; for feed value and grazing management by Russell; and for cultural importance by Jiarra.



Ian Davidson & Russell Ellis with the buckets showing off some key paddock native grass samples at Chesney Vale.



Jiarra Atkinson talking about the importance of native species to traditional owners

What did we learn?

The bucket exercise really helped us to identify these useful grasses. Russell also had some harvested seed available for us to view. Ian gave us the rundown on the key ways to identify these plants. We got to see the dominant native grassland species as we walked and talked. Good ground cover is a critical aspect in managing potential erosion risk and controlling weeds especially in autumn.

Ian's Message

Get more involved in understanding, monitoring, and managing the condition of your native grasslands. This can be done by using a standard monitoring tool: Ian recommends the COVRAM Vegetation Monitoring Tool phone app (see below). Get to know the main plant species that sustain your farm enterprise. Be familiar with your seasonal grasses and find out about C3 and C4 grasses (use the EVERGRAZE pasture guides).

The COVRAM app for iPhone users is [on the App Store](#). For Android users go to the relevant App Store and search for Covram-Veg. Otherwise go to [the COVRAM website](#) and follow the instructions. The collected field data can then be reviewed and analysed via a web app. As noted on the webpage on how to complete a Covram inspection: "... COVRAM is not a point-based flora survey due to time and resource constraints, but rather a method to broadly categorise the vegetation condition for areas of native habitat. Covram aims to inform basic management decisions based on the condition state identified at the site, and is useful in identifying and prioritising sites which require more detailed follow-up surveys (such as point based surveys) ...".

For those who want to dig deeper, it employs Ian's modified version of a *Vegetation Assets, States, and Transitions* (VAST) framework for reporting vegetation condition published by Richard Thackway and Robert Lesslie in the June 2006 [open-access special issue](#) of *Ecological Management and Restoration* Vol 7 (S1) pp53-62. For more information about this and other aspects of vegetation condition assessment see [Davidson, J. \(2017\) Rapid Conservation Assessment Method Training Package and Guidelines, a report to Local Land Services NSW.](#)

Russell's Message

My purposes in encouraging native grasses on our property include:

- To achieve some grass growth from every rain event, regardless of the season;
- To have more perennial grasses in the pasture mix to encourage the build-up of carbon in our soils thereby holding more moisture and extending the growing season;
- To provide a variety of grasses for stock at different times of the year and avoid having bare ground, which encourages the growth of

less desirable opportunistic species e.g. cape weed;

- To build better soil with a healthy diversity of plant species with the associated advantages for livestock.

The grass samples I showed on the day included several varieties of windmill grass, native lovegrass (*Eragrostis spp.*), wallaby grass (*Rytidosperma spp.*), red-leg grass, Warrego grass (*Paspalidium sp.*), arm grass (*Urochloa sp.*), early spring grass (*Eriochloa pseudoacrotricha*), weeping grass (*Microlaena stipoides*) and kangaroo grass. Participants were given copies of the most relevant EVERGRAZE Publications for identifying common native pasture species.

What will we do next?

Our Group made an application for a 2024 Victorian Landcare Grant to continue learning about native pasture species management and the

importance of monitoring. We have just received notice that our application was unsuccessful, however, we may pursue it elsewhere. The project would involve working closely with the Bangerang Aboriginal Corporation (our project partners), Ian Davidson and possibly in consultation with FOG. Maybe we could discuss it with FOG representatives at some point in the future?

We plan to use the COVRAM app (developed by Ian Davidson and his son Michael) to assist us in getting interested landholders to monitor the condition of their native grasslands over time. Monitoring the condition of native species on farms is critical if they are to be sustained for future generations.

A big thank you to FOG for providing the grant to run this successful event. Also, to Russell and Helen Ellis for allowing us to visit their farm.

Radio Landcare, 2XX Community Radio 98.3fm

Tom Baker

Radio Landcare goes to air from 9am till 10am each Tuesday. The Radio Landcare team of Tom Baker and Margaret Piper bring a summary of news and 'What's On' in the Landcare/catchment- management community. Interviews feature a wide range of stakeholders, including on-ground volunteers, coordinators, government and those with scientific and technical backgrounds. A range of music features on Radio Landcare. Radio Landcare is supported by members of Queanbeyan Landcare and the Molonglo Conservation Group. ICON Water is our sponsor. Friends of Grasslands' members Margaret Ning and Andrew Zelnik regularly chat with Tom and Margaret in the 2XX studio. **The next FOG interview is 9am Tuesday 17 September.**



Setting up *nugal biik* plants & seeds nursery

Charlotte Gordon - Conservation Lead at Whittlesea Community Connections' Wollert Community Farm, Wollert VIC

Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC) is an independent not-for-profit community organisation based in the northern Melbourne suburb of Epping. In 2020, WCC partnered with Yarra Valley Water (YVW), Melbourne Polytechnic and the City of Whittlesea to establish Wollert Community Farm (WCF) at YVW's Aurora Treatment plant site in Wollert, on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung land, adjacent to Galgi Ngarrk (Craigieburn) Grassland Nature Conservation Reserve. Galgi Ngarrk's grassland is one of the largest intact pieces of protected native grassland in the Melbourne region and has threatened species including Golden Sun Moth, Growling Grass Frog, Striped Legless Lizard, and Swollen Wallaby Grass (*Amphibromus phithogastrus*), and the critically endangered Stony Knoll Grasslands ecological vegetation class (EVC) on a significant proportion of the reserve.

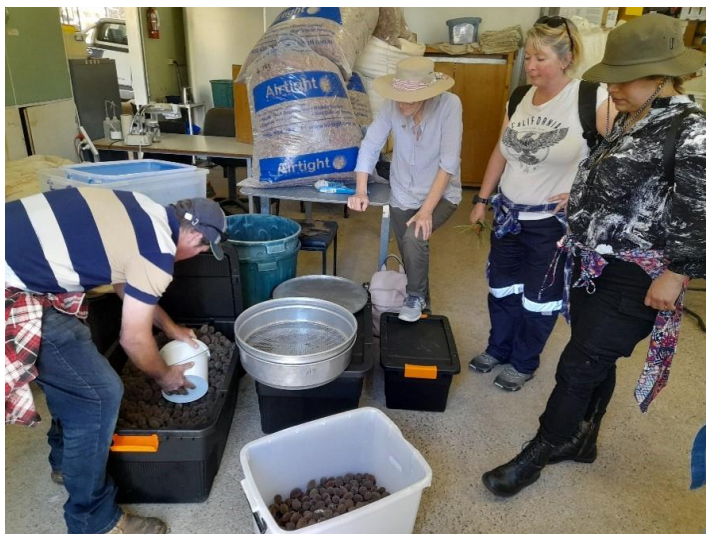
nugal biik means 'belongs to the earth' in Woi-wurrung and is the name given to a cluster of activities delivered by WCC at WCF. *nugal biik* activities focus on restoring natural heritage through revegetation and ecological management, and facilitating First Nations-led initiatives and connection to Country. Revegetation has been regionally limited by the small quantities of local native seed currently available. In 2022 Friends of Grasslands awarded WCC a grassy ecosystem grant of \$1,500 to help set up a seed production area (SPA) at WCF for propagation of seed collected from forbs and grasses indigenous to the area. This was initially intended to be used in direct seeding and plantings within the Galgi Ngarrk reserve as part of a larger project in partnership with Parks Victoria to increase seed stock for restoration focussing on the 5.4ha stony knoll area of the grasslands. FOG's grant contributed to the first phase of the project via the purchase of seed plants (5 different key species), irrigation equipment and other materials, and on-site seed collection training of volunteers by Seeding Victoria.

Thanks to the support of Friends of Grasslands, The Wettenhall Environment Trust, and the Hugh D. T. Williamson Foundation, we were able to begin the first stage of setting up our native grassland SPA. This included training at Seeding Victoria in 2023 and potting up the plants and setting up the irrigation at our farm SPA. A big thank you to new and old volunteers and rangers who helped us put this all together in a matter of days.



By early 2024 we had planted 17 species with over 80 individuals of each species. So far, we have already collected seed from over 8 species including Lobe-seeded Daisy (*Brachyscome dentata*), Common Everlasting (*Chrysocephalum apiculatum*), Running Postman (*Kennedia prostrata*), Plains Yam

Daisy (*Microseris scapigera*), Native Pelargonium (*Pelargonium australe*), Chamomile Sunray (*Rhodanthe anthemoides*), Yellowish Bluebell (*Wahlenbergia luteola*), and Sticky Everlasting (*Xerochrysum viscosum*).



Half of the seeds we collect over the next 3 years in this project will also be going towards a Melbourne University research project, 'Repurposing urban construction waste to create diverse wildflower meadows', summarised as follows: "This project aims to develop a novel process for establishing native wildflower meadows in urban parks and degraded grassy woodlands by repurposing low nutrient mineral waste from the construction industry. It will have multiple benefits including restoring urban biodiversity, increasing people's mental well-being, developing new markets for recycled construction waste and reducing the amount of waste going to landfill."



Advocacy Report, July - August 2024

Sarah Sharp

Submissions

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

Nomination for listing Natural Temperate Grassland of the NSW South Eastern Highlands as a critically endangered community

FOG prepared and submitted in July a nomination to the NSW Threatened Species Scientific Committee for listing Natural Temperate Grassland of the NSW South Eastern Highlands as a critically endangered community. The community was nominated as a sub-region of the EPBC listed ecological community.

Reconsideration of decision of the South Canberra Memorial Park, Block 1 Section 3 Symonston

FOG submitted a recommendation that reconsideration of the development of a private crematorium complex be undertaken, given significant environmental considerations were not provided in the original application, including that natural values of the area were understated and misrepresented; substantially more activity is proposed than stated in the original development proposal; and that alternative uses include restoration of the area to improve habitat for threatened species. The submission was substantially based on the request for reconsideration and on the Conservation Council's submission on this matter.

FOG ACT election priorities

We have prepared policies for the ACT elections. We will be presenting them to candidates before the election. Feel free to circulate the priorities, which can be accessed on the FOG website.

Nature Conservation Act review, 1 July

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 protection to encourage the inclusion of volunteer conservation arrangements with farmers. Other key matters addressed were the need to improve management and restoration through strengthening the ecological approach and ensuring managers are better trained and better resourced.

Comments on Conservators Guidelines (to developers)

Members of FOG were asked personally and informally to provide comments on Conservators Guidelines. Sarah's response was filed in Advocacy/Issues/other ACT for reference. Comments were provided related to buffering, approval for tracks, relocation of species, quality of introduced soil and better monitoring of large trees prior, during and post development.

Invasive Plants Working Group

Meredith Cosgrove will be Hugh's replacement on the IPW as FOG's representative when Hugh leaves in September.

Biodiversity Working Group, Conservation Council

Elle Lawless has resigned as Director of the Conservation Council. The new director is Simon Copland. The past two months out of session and normal meetings were used to provide input into the Nature Conservation Act draft submission (see above). The BWG is currently revising the 2020 CC Biodiversity Statement document (a mix of principles and policy), based on the election platform document.

The rewards of attending a Top Hut working party – a Monaro Grassland Earless Dragon sighting!



Photo by Margaret Ning

Hall Cemetery Ecological Burning 24 May 2024

Emma Cook

Over the course of the last few wet years there has been a build-up of grass thatch within the burial area of Hall Cemetery, as a result of the seasonal mowing program. The increasing layer of thatch poses a risk to the diverse suite of flora that calls this remnant patch of Yellow Box Red Gum grassy woodland home. This limits the capacity of some species, such as Billy Buttons, Fringed Lily and the endangered Tarengo Leek Orchid to emerge over winter and flower in their usual numbers come spring. It also reduces the ability of the Kangaroo Grass to maintain its dominance over the weedy grasses present (eg. Sweet Vernal Grass).

The Office of Nature Conservation (ONC) explored a number of methods with Canberra Memorial Parks to manage this issue. Limitations on machine capacity to collect damp thatch and the laborious nature of effective hand removal ruled these options out. Controlled ecological burning had not previously been explored as a realistic management option within the burial portion of the site. Due to the historical and social importance of the location there had been a reluctance from management to use such a method. ONC still proposed burning as the best option under the current circumstances, and with the support of cemeteries, management had an autumn ecological burn approved through the Bushfire Operations Plan process. Cool autumn burning has been observed to have positive results in other remnant populations of Tarengo Leek Orchid in NSW.

Delays in planning, and seasonal rain postponed the initial plan to patch-burn half of the cemetery in April, with the burn finally going ahead in early May. The timing and less-than-ideal conditions meant that the amount of thatch removed fell short of what was needed. The burn has since been rolled over into the autumn burning schedule for 2025. ONC plans to continue an ongoing autumn burning schedule in the coming years, to be sure of achieving and maintaining adequate treatment and reduction in thatch across the entire cemetery.



Photos by Margaret Ning before and after the fire

An online guide to describe grasslands in Melbourne

Adrian Marshall, The Grassy Plains Network, Victorian National Parks Association

The Grassy Plains Network has finalised the first phase of its online resource describing each individual grassland in Melbourne. The webpages are live, and can be found at the following locations:

<https://grassyplains.net.au/grasslands-map/> and
<https://grassyplains.net.au/grassland-database/>.

In addition, each grassland has its own web page.

Notably, FoG can use this project to include ACT and NSW grasslands. The process is relatively simple to understand once demonstrated (screen shots below).

Boral Quarry Northern Grassland, Co...

name
Boral Quarry Northern Grassland, Conservation Area 6

description
Conservation Area 6 is managed to protect Spiny Rice-flower and Striped Legless Lizard. Since 1996, an offset site was set aside to allow quarrying operations.

fid
1307

area
94.3263193888779

url
https://grassyplains.net.au/upcp_product/Boral-Quarry-Northern-Grassland,-Conservation-Area-6/

Sort By 415 products << Page 1 of 18 >>













Product Search

Categories

- Grassland (415)
- Conservation Reserve (264)
- Cemetery (8)
- Railway (28)
- Roadside (137)
- Private (5)

Tags

- WGR Acquired (45)
- MSA Western Grassland Reserve (WGR) (62)
- Melbourne Strategic Assessment (MSA) (106)
- MSA Conservation Area (44)
- MSA Conservation Area Acquired (9)
- MSA WGR Not Acquired (17)
- MSA Conservation Area Acquired in part (9)
- MSA Conservation Area Not Acquired (26)

 275-293 ST ALBANS ROAD	 AFTON STREET GRASSLAND	 AITKEN BOULEVARD GRASSLAND RESERVE	 AITKEN CREEK GRASSLAND RESERVE
 AJAX ROAD GRASSLAND	 AJAX ROAD NORTH GRASSLAND	 ALTONA NATURE CONSERVATION RESERVE	 AMBERFIELD GRASSLAND
 ANGLISS GRASSLAND (LAVERTON NORTH) NATURE CONSERVATION RESERVE	 ARCADE WAY RESERVE	 ARTHURS LANE ROADSIDE GRASSLAND	 AURORA GRASSLANDS AND GRASSY WOODLANDS

The website inevitably needs more work, but we have got to a good point with it. Every grassland in Melbourne has a 50-word description, though most lack the finer-grain detail we ultimately wish for each one. We have invited local council stakeholders to contribute to the site, and that process is proceeding well. Users are contacting us to say they have data they would like included. FoG is thanked on both main pages, and the grant acknowledged.

News Roundup

A fabulous partnership

Libby Keen

In an article in the Canberra Times (26/07/24) Peter Brewer reports on a native-plant growing project that is benefitting not only grasslands and Landcare members, but also a group of seven detainees in the Alexander Maconochie Centre. Their skills and paid work in AMC's horticultural program have produced over the last three years nearly nine thousand good-quality native plants for the Murrumbateman Landcare Group (MLG) to distribute for box gum grassy woodland restoration, on private and public land in the region. The program gives the detainees something interesting to do and expands their opportunities after release, and there are plans to extend it into aquaculture and kitchen gardening. Annaliese Caston of MLG describes it as 'a fabulous partnership'.

Updated conservation advice on box gum grassy woodlands

Geoff Robertson

The FOG newsletter attempts to alert its readers to important news of grassy ecosystems but we sometimes miss important items, and rely on members to bring news items to our attention. Recently, we received the following message, "I was looking at the FOG newsletter a little while back with the list of positive 'wins' for 2023 and wasn't sure if you had seen that the '2006 Conservation Advice for the BGGW' has been updated and there is now a 2023 version". Obviously we missed this one, so readers and friends, please keep us alerted.

The full title of the document is 'Approved Conservation Advice for the White Box - Yellow Box - Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodland and Derived Native Grassland', released on 31 August 2023 by the Commonwealth Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) as approved conservation advice under the 'Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act'. This 121 page document may be found [here](#). It replaced the 2006 conservation advice. It represents a major update by providing more information about the box gum woodlands, and its flora and fauna species, as well as appropriate conservation action and further planning that may be used to manage and restore it. It is well worth examining, even if only to cherry-pick the information that may be of most interest to you. Remember this community comprises many sub-communities, that of most interest locally is yellow-box, red-gum grassy woodlands.

Woodside to buy large areas of farmland in the Monaro

Link provided by Margaret Ning

An article in 'Regional' on 27 July 2024 (available [here](#)) reports that oil and gas giant Woodside Energy is buying huge blocks of farmland to help offset its carbon emissions. It paid \$23 million for 4300 hectares of grazing land in the Monaro. The article points out that "there is some concern in the community that the environmental benefits of carbon farming are overstated and the long-term costs to the environment and rural communities are being overlooked.

Selling agent Rawdon Briggs of Colliers said that the Government's Clean Energy Regulator required companies in the scheme to plant species endemic to the area. "Five to 10 species will be planted from seeds off the property and around the periphery to re-establish the native species."

He said the seeds would be planted in rows far enough apart for grass to grow and to give machinery access". The full article is available [here](#).

Protecting private land to save the plains-wanderer

Link provided by Jamie Pittock

An article in The Guardian on 25 August 2024 (available [here](#)) reports that the wide, dry grasslands of north-west Victoria are home to one of Australia's rarest birds, the critically endangered plains-wanderer. "Graziers who have lived alongside the elusive animal for generations have joined forces with conservationists to keep the species alive. Bill McGillivray's family has owned property on the Patho Plains in north-central Victoria for more than 70 years. "My father and partner bought the property in the late 40s just after the second world war and they had about 12,000 acres," the 80-year-old says. "They sold it off, but I've still got the original block they started with."

Of the 1,400 hectares (about 3,500 acres) that McGillivray owns, he says there are parts that have been grazed by sheep and cattle but have not otherwise been touched. That has left the native mix intact, which makes it an ideal habitat for this elusive bird. The full article is available [here](#)

Reinstating species from critically endangered plant communities in cities and towns

Link provided by Jamie Pittock

An article in Parkwatch (Victorian National Parks Association) in June 2024 described Katherine Horsfall's research at the University of Melbourne into urbanisation as a huge driver for the loss of native grassy ecosystems in southeast Australia. Her research investigates novel ways to reinstate species from critically endangered Natural Temperate Grassland and Grassy Eucalypt Woodland plant communities in cities and towns, by creating native wildflower meadows.

This work builds on pioneering research by Paul Gibson Roy, John Delpratt and others which shows we can restore native grassy ecosystems using direct seeding, providing that adequate site preparation is used to overcome the challenges of elevated soil nutrients and weeds. Their innovative methods use soil scalping, or removing surface soils prior to sowing, which gives seeds the best chance of establishing by limiting competition from nutrient-hungry exotics.

These techniques create species-rich and resilient restorations full of native wildflowers. They, however, cannot be used in some sites, such as those with contaminated soils or underground services. These situations are common in cities, so we need additional techniques to bring native grassy ecosystems back to urban streets. The full article is available [here](#)

Kangaroo grass in South Africa?

Rainer Rehwinkel

Themeda triandra is a common grass in the grassveld and bushveld communities in South Africa, where it's known as Red Grass or Rooigras in Afrikaans. I saw hundreds of hectares of reddish-tinged grasslands while on a recent tour in Kruger National Park [see Rainer's photo below].

It may surprise readers to learn that *Themeda triandra* originated in South Asian savannas, and has dispersed southwards from there on both sides of the Indian Ocean in relatively recent times (reference [here](#)).



Contact us

General inquiries, health and safety	info@fog.org.au
Media inquiries	0407265131 (Jamie Pittock), 0403221117 (Geoff Robertson)
Membership enquiries, join or renew	membership@fog.org.au
Events & work parties	Calendar
Book order forms	Grassland & Woodland Flora .
Small grassy ecosystem grants	supportedprojects@fog.org.au
Advocacy contact	advocacy@fog.org.au
Website matters	webmanager@fog.org.au
Projects / work party contacts	Hall Cemetery, Ginninderry scrape monitoring: john.fitzgerald@fog.org.au Scrivener’s Hut, Gurubung Dhaura (Stirling Park), Blue Gum Point & Yarramundi Grassland: jamie.pittock@fog.org.au . Budjan Galindji (Franklin) Grasslands, Travelling Stock Reserves & Old Cooma Common: margaret.ning@fog.org.au Scottsdale monitoring: linda.spinaze@fog.org.au
Newsletter contact	newsletter@fog.org.au
Contact addresses	secretary@fog.org.au
Payments & accounts	treasurer@fog.org.au
Annual reports	annual reports
FOG Committee	secretary@fog.org.au

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.