



News of Friends of Grasslands

Supporting native grassy ecosystems

ISSN 18526315

November & December 2024

Activities

Work Parties

Gurubung Dhaura

Sat 16 Nov 9-12:30pm

Sat 21 Dec 9-12:30pm

Register: [Jamie Pittock](#)

Budjan Galindji (Franklin Reserve)

Wed 27 Nov 9-11:30am

Wed 2 Dec 9-11:30am

Register: [Margaret Ning](#)

Excursions

Top Hut TSR in spring

Sun 10 Nov 9:30am-3:30pm AND

Sat 30 Nov. Details [Page 6](#)

Register: [Margaret Ning](#)

Happy birthday FOG!

FOG's 30th birthday party at St Mark's. Celebrate with a sausage sizzle, circulate with friends and view the post-eco burn grassland. Sat 16 Nov, 12.30 to 3pm.

Register & dietary: [Margaret Ning](#)

Get to know your

Threatened Species

Landcare Bus Tour, Cooma

Sat 23 Nov 8:30am-5:30pm

Details [Page 6](#)

Top Hut in spring

Sun 10 Nov 9:30am-3:30pm AND

Sat 30 Nov. Register: [Margaret Ning](#)

Details [Page 6](#)

Scottsdale & Cooma: 'Get to know your Threatened Species' Landcare Bus Tour.

[Bookings here](#), Details [Page 6](#)

There were 4 new members in October and November

From the President ...

Friends of Grasslands (FOG) turns 30 in November 2024 and it is time for us to reflect on what we have achieved and what we aspire to do.

Our foundation

Intellectually, members of FOG understand the importance of our organisation being dedicated to conservation of some of the previously widespread but now grievously endangered grassy ecosystems of south eastern Australia. We are relating to and conserving the flora and fauna of the region where we live rather than pining for some other ecosystem that others culturally prefer. We are undertaking the opportunity and responsibility for being stewards of our environment. This is not an easy task when so many of our fellow Australians have not yet had the joy of smelling the Button Wrinklewort and are yet to appreciate grassy ecosystems.

Back in 1994, eighty people attended the launch of the organisation, Pullen and Robertson (2007) reported in their history of FOG. They go on to report that the founding FOG members drew on many highly skilled people and were excited by a new concept of grassland conservation from the ecosystem perspective. The first FOG president, Edwina Barton, was described as 'immensely enthusiastic and effective, with a wealth of experience, network of contacts, and total commitment to grassland conservation'. FOG, in its early days, experienced many great bursts of energy and then retreat, and from late 1997, after a 'do we shut down or continue?' moment, a steady and prolonged flowering.

Pullen and Robertson (2007) commented that "To protect and ultimately recover grassy ecosystems, it is necessary to build strong community understanding, skills, and support. Friends of Grasslands (FOG) was launched to provide such support. FOG's first newsletter, 22 November 1994, shows that FOG's founders saw the need to attract attention to grassland conservation through community liaison, public education and information, development of posters, publication of an informative newsletter, and data collection and storage. Infrastructure and community building were also recognised as necessary, including more mundane issues such as incorporation, finances, sponsorships, and grants."

Reflecting our longstanding practice, in 2023 FOG formally acknowledged and celebrated First Nations Peoples, the Traditional Custodians of the grassy ecosystems that we strive to conserve. We reiterated our commitment to collaborating with Traditional Custodians to manage grassy ecosystems to support traditional and ongoing social, economic, cultural, and spiritual values.

What we have achieved

FOG has over 200 members, mostly in south eastern Australia, who bring tremendous knowledge and experience to our mission. From this modest base, FOG volunteers have and continue to undertake the most astonishing range of activities in support of the conservation of grassy ecosystems.

To improve understanding of grassy ecosystems and share knowledge, FOG has the most fantastic newsletter, we support tertiary student training and research in grasslands, spruik the case for grassy ecosystems in the media and distribute the key guide books, *Grassland Flora* and *Woodland Flora*. FOG's newsletter is the publication of record for the conservation of grassy ecosystems in the ACT and south eastern NSW. Our regular public events introduce new people to the joys of grassy ecosystems. Our series of major workshops have brought together scientists, government agencies and non-government community groups to learn, share best practices and build a community for conservation of grassy ecosystems. This was exemplified by our May 2024 workshop, 'Conserving grasslands of the South Eastern Highlands (SEH) of NSW'. Our volunteers have helped with research projects to better understand how to restore species like the Monaro Golden Daisy and Golden Sun Moth

FOG's activities program each month sees members travelling to grassy ecosystems sites in the ACT, south eastern NSW and further afield. Visiting public reserves and private properties, these trips show people the delights of these ecosystems and collect information on the species present as well as management.

On-ground work to maintain and restore key grassy ecosystems ensures that FOG practices what we preach, gives us practical experience to bolster our advocacy and is ensuring that critical remnants are conserved. At Old Cooma Common, FOG has worked with local organisations to conserve critical habitat for the endangered Monaro Golden Daisy.

At Top Hut Travelling Stock Reserve near Adaminaby, FOG is demonstrating best practice for conservation of these reserves while sustaining threatened species populations. At Hall Cemetery, FOG is sustaining its remnant grassy woodland, also buffering the grassland habitat of the endangered Tarengo Leek Orchid it encloses. FOG was instrumental in the establishment of the 20 hectare Budjan Galindji Grasslands Nature Reserve in Franklin and partners with the ACT Parks and Conservation Service for its restoration. Since 2009, FOG has partnered with the National Capital Authority to improve management of key habitat at Gurubung Dhaura (Stirling Park; 52 ha) and Yarramundi Reach (23 ha). A common theme is that FOG has focused on previously neglected sites to help the managers apply good practices for conservation of grassy ecosystems.

Our on-ground work has grown in ambition and we have moved from an approach of maintaining our grassy ecosystems remnants to one of trialling many innovations working closely with major partners. Innovations include burning, strategic mowing, trialling different weeding techniques, seeding and planting. In recent years FOG's grants across south eastern Australia have supported new on-ground projects, research, and education for stewardship of grassy ecosystems. Over twenty years ago we co-founded the now very successful and highly popular Southern Tablelands Ecosystems Park at the National Arboretum Canberra, showcasing these ecosystems to the rest of Australia and the world.

FOG is the leading advocate for conservation of grassy ecosystems in the ACT and NSW. Importantly, FOG has led work to embed the concept of a biodiversity network of lands conserved across tenures in ACT Government programs. Our collaboration with government agencies in the ACT and NSW has provided advice, knowledge and supported strategic approaches for better conservation of grassy ecosystems. Recent wins have included the reduction of the development footprint proposed by Defense Housing at Lawson North development and the promised nature reserve at Ngununggula (Bluett's Block).

FOG's achievements are due to a cohesive group of dedicated, active members who actively lead our on-ground activities, communications, field visit activities, supported projects and advocacy, as well as administering our organisation.

What we aspire to do

FOG has so much more to do to secure the future for grassy ecosystems. Recent and welcome biodiversity conservation policy commitments by the ACT Government need to be turned into practical, on-ground conservation. The ongoing degradation and loss of grasslands and grassy woodlands in south eastern NSW needs to be halted and reversed with measures to engage and support both private and public land managers. The Federal Government needs encouragement to better manage the extensive habitats on its Defence and other lands. We need to both maintain and establish effective ways to restore grassy ecosystems. We need to enjoy spending time in these ecosystems and help more Australians appreciate the wonders of these most special ecosystems.

See you in our grasslands,
Jamie

Blue Gum Point Work Party with Senator Pocock

Jamie Pittock

On Saturday 21st October, Senator David Pocock and 21 volunteers joined us to continue our restoration at Blue Gum Point. Out plantings were mulched and a massive pile of woody debris was removed to enable the next stage of restoration. It was a great opportunity to introduce Senator Pocock and his team to the unprotected grassy woodlands at Gurubung Dhaura and at Blue Gum Point, and discuss options for their conservation.



Photo: Andrew Zelnik

Mole Crickets, *Gryllotalpa* species (genus), adapted to life underground

Michael Bedingfield

The European or Common Mole, *Talpa europaea*, is a mammal that lives underground in tunnels. It excavates them with its strong forelegs which have huge claws in proportion to its body size. An adult is only 11 to 16 cm in body length and feeds on worms and other invertebrates that it finds in the soil. Mole Crickets have similar habits and so are aptly named. They are related to other crickets and belong to the family Gryllotalpidae. This family is within the order Orthoptera, which includes crickets, grasshoppers and bush crickets, and Mole Crickets have similar habits to these too. This essay will look at the genus *Gryllotalpa*.

Mole Crickets spend most of their life underground but they have wings and can fly. The adults of *Gryllotalpa* species are 3 to 4cm in body length and brown in colour. They have very strong front legs with large claws which they use for burrowing into soils and making tunnels. They don't hop or jump and their back legs are shorter than those of other crickets. Both males and females have short wings which are about half the body length, but the females fly much more than the males. Compared to other crickets the antennae on their heads are short. At the rear of the abdomen they have a pair of cerci which are important sensory organs with a similar role to that of the antennae.

Mole Crickets live in complex underground burrows which they dig themselves. They create a maze of tunnels, generally close to the surface of the soil, which are protection against insect-eating predators. They are omnivorous, eating plant roots and leaves, tubers and seeds, as well as small invertebrates such as beetle grubs and other insect larvae, and get their food both above and below the soil surface.

The adult male is keen to attract females for mating purposes. He stays at home and creates a Y-shaped entrance to his burrow. There he stands facing inwards to the burrow with his tail outwards and practices stridulation. Stridulation is the act of rubbing together certain body parts to produce a sound. Crickets, including Mole Crickets, rub their two upper or fore-wings together back and forth repeatedly in a scissor-like motion to make a chirping sound. One forewing has a row of tiny pegs along a particular vein which is rubbed against a scraper on the hind edge of the other fore-wing to create the vibration. The Y-shape of the entrance to the burrow helps to amplify the sound which can be quite loud, especially if there are a lot of crickets doing it at the same time. The call of a Mole Cricket, recorded by Matthew Frawley, can be listened to at the Canberra Nature Map reference given below.

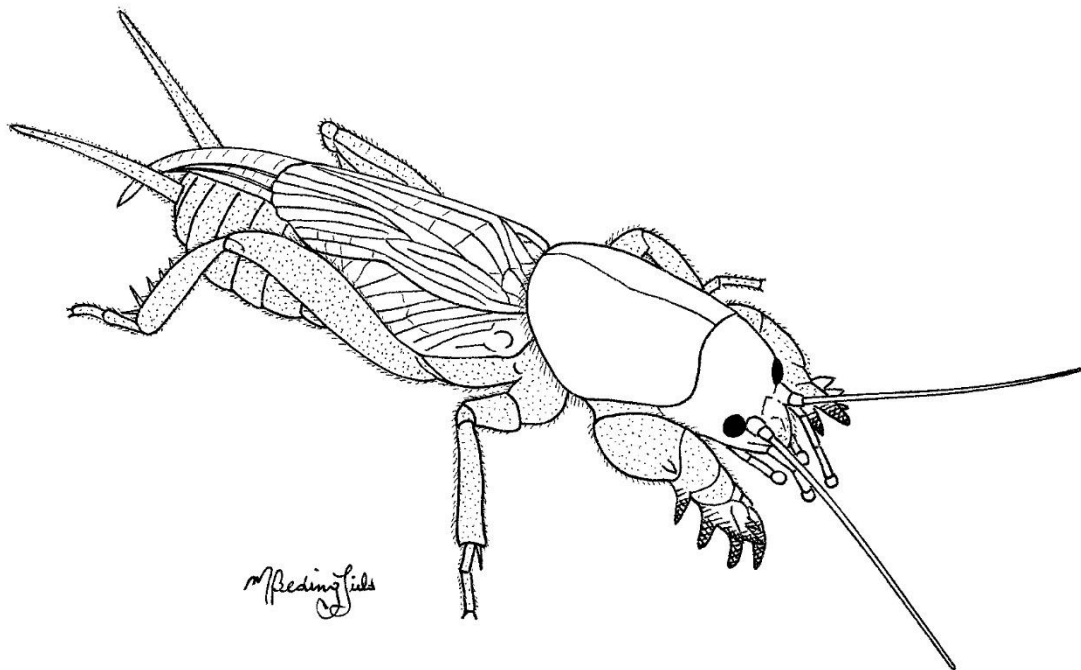
The female is more mobile and flies well. She will check out the males in her neighbourhood and give preference to those with burrows in soil that is somewhat moist. Mating occurs underground. After mating she digs a chamber where she can lay her clutch of eggs. She stays nearby guarding the eggs and protects the young nymphs after they hatch, which is quite unusual for an insect. The nymphs grow by a series of many moults until they reach the adult stage and can start their own family. These insects are active during the warmer months and dormant, hidden in their burrows, during the Southern Tablelands' winter.

The habitat for *Gryllotalpa* species can be variable with grassy woodlands an important one. They also occur in dry forests, farmland and urban areas. They are quite common and widely distributed across Australia, being more abundant along the eastern side, along the coast and on the ranges and slopes. They are also found in similar places to the west of the continent but are scarce in the dryer inland parts of the country. Mole Crickets generally like a great variety of habitats, preferring those with damper and richer soils, including parklands, golf courses and home gardens. Some introduced species are regarded as pests because they can ruin lawns by feeding on the roots of grasses.

Despite their underground refuges these *Gryllotalpa* crickets do have challenges from predators such as birds, reptiles and other insects. There is also a parasitic wasp which attacks them, but with the non-wasp name of Blue Ant, *Diamma bicolor*, that gets its common name from the wingless female that looks very much like a large ant. It is a dark metallic blue or green in colour with red legs while the male is black and white, has wings and a typical

wasp appearance. The female captures a Mole Cricket by paralysing it with its sting then lays an egg on its body that later becomes food for the larva when it hatches.

I have provided a drawing of the *Gryllotalpa* Mole Cricket for illustration. For creatures that live a mostly subterranean life the ability to fly is a wonderful thing. Many other insects have this capacity, such as cicadas and most beetles. It gives them mobility and enables them to adapt to difficult circumstances or changes in their habitat. There is no end to the ingenuity of Nature and Mole Crickets are another interesting example of that cleverness.



Main references:

<https://australian.museum/learn/animals/insects/mole-cricket/>

<https://fieldofmar-e.schools.nsw.gov.au/fact-sheets/mole-crickets.html>

<https://canberra.naturemapr.org/sightings/4483530>

Scottsdale monitoring

Linda Spinaze

FOG will yet again assist the ecologist to monitor vegetation on Scottsdale on Thursday 21st November. FOG has performed this yearly service since Bush Heritage bought the property in 2006. Initially the aim was to assess the impact of cattle grazing on African Love Grass (ALG) but the focus is now on native plants.

We need volunteers to mark out areas, hold tapes and record plants. You don't need to be able to identify native grassland plants, but it does help.

Scottsdale is situated about 4km north of Bredbo, about 35 minutes from Tuggeranong's southern edge. We usually car-share if possible. The day will start at about 9.00am at Scottsdale, and finish at about 3.30pm, but timings may vary depending on what the ecologist has planned for the day. Coffee is available on arrival, and lunch is provided by Bush Heritage.

Please contact Linda Spinaze (linda@xamax.com.au, or 0417 276 497/ 6288 6916) if you are interested in enjoying a day at one of our local special places.

Advocacy Report

Matt Whitting

Submission on the proposal to establish a Nature Reserve at Bluett's Block

FOG commented on this proposal offering support while calling for the inclusion in the Nature Reserve of all, not part, of Bluett's Block. The ACT Govt is proposing *not* to protect Stromlo Rural Block 402 on the basis that it is part of the Western Edge Investigation Area. We say Block 402 should be included in the proposed Reserve no matter what ([the submission](#)).

Submission on a Discussion Paper about the Nature Repair Market

The Nature Repair Market is taking shape, fast. In early September, the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) invited comment on a [Discussion Paper](#) that raises a selection of issues arising as the DCCEEW drafts Rules to govern the operation of the Market (we have not seen the actual proposed Rules). We are concerned that the Rules may be no more than a list of points to be addressed in applications to the Regulator, like a recipe with a list of ingredients but no quantities. FOG and the Conservation Council submitted (jointly) that standards are needed for the information to be provided by applicants to the Regulator, so that the Regulator will have good information on which to base key decisions. For more, see the article on this topic by Matt Whitting below.

Under the Act, the Market cannot be used to satisfy offset requirements; we go on to make suggestions about how to judge when any land's 'offset purpose' might be considered to have ended. We have pointed out important matters about which we remain uncertain ([the submission](#)).

Guidelines for developers preparing Construction Environmental Management Plans (CEMP)

FOG and the Conservation Council submitted a comment, jointly, on the Conservator's draft CEMP Guidelines. Overall support was expressed while suggesting a greater alignment with the DCCEEW's Federal *Environmental Management Plan Guidelines* (2024) ([the submission](#)).

Biodiversity Working Group, Conservation Council

The new Executive Director of the Conservation Council, Dr Simon Copland, has hit the ground running. Simon is working to achieve the outcomes sought by the Conservation Council in their submission on the Nature Conservation Act; FOG supports that submission ([link](#)). Besides aiming to achieve sensible much-needed legislative amendments, the Group's work needs to promote sound understanding among decision-makers and the community about the necessary improvements.

The Group continues to raise concerns with the Environment Minister and the Finance Minister about processes underway and planned for: in particular assessing Defence Housing Australia's proposal to develop residences at Lawson North; and handing the administration of the Lawson Grasslands site to the ACT Government after construction is complete.

Activities from Page 1

Top Hut in spring Sun 10 Nov 9:30am-3:30pm AND Sat 30 Nov. Register: margaret.ning@fog.org.au

This is a work party/assault on Dandelions and other undesirable weeds, but we shall also be checking out the latest eco burn on the northern side of the TSR. The site should be a sea of yellow as the Ranunculus, Craspedia, Yam Daisies and Leptorhynchos all strut their stuff.

Get to know your Threatened Species Landcare Bus Tour, Sat 23 Nov 8:30am-5:30pm. Organised by Upper Murrumbidgee Landcare, this bus trip includes visits to Top Hut TSR and BHA's Scottsdale. [Bookings here](#)

Nature Repair Market is taking shape, fast

Matt Whitting

Articles on pages 1-3 of the [May-June edition](#) of the FOG Newsletter describe the Nature Repair Market and the opportunities it presents. This article covers what's happened since and what's next.

From January 2025, where land has been 'comprehensively cleared', it is expected that land managers will have the option of proposing a project that will change the use of that land for twenty-five or one hundred years. That is they will be able to apply to begin a project that will follow the proposed 'replant Native Forest and Woodland Ecosystems' Method.

At the time of writing, FOG is drafting comments on an outline of this Method. We say that to be approved the Method must provide clarity, *by region*, on what grassy woodland should look like:

- What species to plant in which parts of the landscape, with lists of trees, shrubs, grasses, forbs and aquatics for each landscape, including plants that will encourage pollinators;
- What the density of plantings (spacings) for different species for each landscape should be, to ensure wildlife habitat is retained;
- What habitat elements to include, e.g. fallen timber, rocky outcrops, nesting box density;
- What measures will be needed to avoid undesirable range expansion by aggressive Australian native species.

We can only hope that, in 2025, a Method will be formalised that will enable land managers and give them an incentive to propose projects that will rehabilitate and restore natural temperate grasslands.

More detail

At a time when progress on environmental law reform is stalled, development and promotion of this Market is happening at breakneck speed. The Market is scheduled to begin operating in January 2025. First, let's see what the Australian Government is doing to promote demand for nature repair projects in which investors can invest:

- On 30th September Minister Plibersek published [Australia's Strategy for Nature 2024-2030](#). This revised Strategy will coordinate Australia's delivery against international commitments. Along with almost every country on Earth, Australia has committed to 'halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030' on a 2020 baseline, and to achieve full recovery by 2050. It's the equivalent of the 1.5 degrees goal in the Paris Agreement that exists for climate. The UN intends that nature will be in a visibly and *measurably* better state by 2030. [The COP16 meeting in Colombia](#) (21st October to 1st November) was designed, among other things, to achieve greater clarity in the global framework for monitoring nature.
- The Government's Strategy makes the point repeatedly that to realise a massive ambition like this 'we will all need to work together'. Stimulating demand from big business and big philanthropists fits this narrative. So, on the 8th to 10th October the Minister convened the inaugural [Global Nature Positive Summit](#) 'to boost private sector investment in protecting and repairing our environment'. For a good insight into the meaning of 'nature positive' and what the Summit was all about, have a listen to [this interview](#).
- Investor appetite is being stimulated by greater clarity in accounting and reporting standards. The Government is encouraging companies to improve their reporting now, before being required to, consistent with a new global reporting standard (the new standard is in the Recommendations found

[here](#)). The hope is that better reporting of companies' dependencies on nature and the risks their operations pose to nature, will prevent greenwashing and overall promote outcomes that are nature-positive.

- In early 2025 the Australian Bureau of Statistics is set to begin publishing what are dubbed the '[National Ecosystem Accounts](#)'.

Second, how do we enable and encourage supply? Before investors can invest, will social attitudes encourage land managers to take up nature repair as a new form of land use? Will enough land managers be able to get seed and staff, and believe they can profit from starting nature repair projects? Here's what's happening on these fronts:

- A [Committee](#) and an [Expert Reference Group](#) are now advising the Minister about repair priorities and about how repairs to nature must be conducted and measured across Australia's land, inland seas and near-shore marine areas. The expertise of the Committee members is outlined [here](#).
- During September public comment was invited on a [Discussion Paper](#) about the Rules that will govern the operation of the Market. Before the Market can begin in January 2025 we need to see these Rules tabled in Parliament.
- During October public comment was invited on outlines of (1) an [Ecological Knowledge System](#), 'a robust and transparent source of information about biodiversity and restoration options' for the Market; (2) the first proposed nature repair [Method](#) by which land managers will 'replant Native Forest and Woodland Ecosystems', and (3) the first proposed (and what will be the *primary*) [Biodiversity Assessment Instrument](#) by which improvements to nature will be measured.
- Fourteen grants have been awarded worth \$8 million in total that will, by the 30th June 2026, offer new or improved ways to assess and measure improvements to nature. To see details: create an account at www.grants.gov.au (it is free) and search for 'Innovative Biodiversity Monitoring'.
- The 'Platform for Land and Nature Repair' is up and running, enabling anyone to start planning a (real or hypothetical) nature repair project. For any patch of land you can 'draw a line around' in any of the six States (sadly, at the time of writing, not yet for the Territories), based on a few assumptions you can: calculate emissions; discover the land's current biodiversity score; and look for partners for potential biodiversity and carbon projects. To try it you will need to create an account at www.planr.gov.au (it is free).

It remains unclear what investors will be willing to pay for the certificates that will be issued when the Regulator is satisfied a registered 'project is sufficiently progressed to have resulted in, or be likely to result in, the biodiversity outcome for the project'.



Hall Cemetery Work Party 5 October.

John Fitz Gerald

Hall Cemetery was a busy place on this pleasant Saturday morning as we enjoyed the presence of eleven volunteers, the biggest roll up for some time. Thanks to everyone for contributing.

It had showered overnight so our weeding focused on physical management which we concentrated in the grassy woodland on the northern side of the Cemetery block. Many Cleavers and exotic grasses developing flowers were our main targets.

After morning tea in this lovely setting (thanks to Andrew Zelnik for this terrific photo in the cemetery-woodland), most of us went a little further down Wallaroo Road to view the grassland plots that Ken Hodgkinson has managed and measured for many years. A few of us stayed on to contribute to this year's monitoring effort.



Photo: Andrew Zelnik

Onion Grass, an environmental weed of concern, close up

John Fitz Gerald

For this newsletter, I have chosen to examine Onion Grass, *Romulea rosea var australis*. This perennial weed grows amongst native vegetation on many, maybe all, of the FOG worksites. I'm having to rely on images from my camera because the microscope of the National Seed Bank is unavailable during building work at the ANBG campus.

This species is native to South Africa. In Australia it has naturalised and is an environmental weed across southern Australia. Canberra Nature Map has over 80 sightings and ALA lists more than 5500 records. Downey in his 2023 list ranks this as a weed of moderate priority across ACT lands.



The plant grows in our region through springtime from an underground globose corm and produces round grass-like leaves, then goes on to flower and set seed. Globose seeds are about 1 mm across and are readily transported on machines such as mowers. I went in early September to a site where I had tried to control the weed in earlier years and was disappointed to find too many of the leaves. I carefully dug under plants making sure I captured the corm.

My first image (left) shows mature corms approximately 1 cm diameter with fibrous roots, a brown skin, and leaves (note my scale has mm/cm

marks). The pale part of the leaves grew underground, showing that the corms were sprouting from several centimetres down.

Next, my attention was drawn to areas nearby where many tiny and thin single leaves were showing. Again I carefully dug and found the material in my second image (right). To me these look like newly generating corms, closer to the soil surface, much smaller and with a thin single leaf and some roots. I expect these germinated from seeds dropped from earlier years and it means I'll have to be far more diligent in my efforts to beat the weed.

Two weeks ago I went back to a mown strip in the area where Onion Grass flowers had developed. I hoped that our dry spring spell (with rainfall for the past 3 months being just one third of our average) would have lessened or beaten seed formation. No such luck - my next image (next page) shows many green fruit bulging with ripening seed which, had I not picked them, would have gone on to split and spill brown seed shown in my final image.





Green seed capsules. Image: John Fitz Gerald

Agriculture Victoria hosts a very good description of Onion Grass and possibilities for control. I was fascinated to learn that each corm, following its sprouting in spring of the new leaves, becomes exhausted and is soon replaced by an entirely new corm.

The site notes that chemical control is difficult, and recommends the optimal period for best chemical control is very short at between 6 and 8 weeks after leaf emergence, being the time when the old corm is exhausted but the new corm underdeveloped.

Spraying after this will control flowers and therefore limit seed production but does not kill corms and plants. These retreat underground until next year's growing season. However, with such a critical window of opportunity, managers then need to know where to actively check for identifying when new leaves first appear each year and this task becomes even more difficult in a groundlayer leafy green with grasses and forbs. Finally it is important to use practices all through spring that reduce Onion Grass seed development and distribution.



I'm not confident about winning this uphill battle and it concerns me that there are too many weedy areas where Onion Grass is dominant and others which are well along the trajectory to this unwelcome state.

The image to the left shows the mature seed capsule, split and spilling seeds.

Information above was gathered from websites, principally:

ALA - www.ala.gov.au

Agriculture Victoria - agriculture.vic.gov.au

Weeds Of Australia -

keyserver.lucidcentral.org

'FOG five' amazed by Cathy Franzi's woodland flora

Ann Milligan



Do you admire accurate drawings that reveal the beautiful forms of native flora, in minimal colour? How about when that beauty is portrayed via complex sgraffito (designs carved onto a ceramic surface)? If so, you would probably have marvelled, as we did, at (FOG member) Cathy Franzi's work at Beaver Galleries, Deakin ACT, 17 October to 2 November.

The 22 exhibits show off Cathy's extraordinarily detailed images of woody grassland flora sprawling, life-like, around the surfaces of irregular cylinders ... not on paper; not as pictures for the wall; but via sgraffito and stencils!!

Notes for this exhibition ('This place, this time') report that Cathy's focus here was 'plant life situated in the Tinderry Range' and its 'distinctive ecosystems'. 'With the eyes of both the scientist and the artist, ... she celebrates the diversity, beauty and importance of our natural world'. Indeed she does.

(The 'FOG five' were Margaret Ning, Brigitta Wimmer, Janet Russell, Andy Russell, Ann Milligan)

Photo by Ann Milligan: Trailing speedwell (nearest, 11.8 x 19.4 x 9.2 cm); Long-leaf wax flower – porcelain, wheel-thrown and altered, sgraffito, engobe, (middle, 29.7 x 18 x 17.8 cm); Silver Banksia (farthest, 34.3 x 23 x 22.4 cm).

Viewing Orchids at Hall

Margaret Ning and Ann Milligan

It is not surprising, given the unusual shapes and beauty of native orchid flowers, that an impressive number of people (14) turned up to walk in Hall Horse Paddocks on Saturday 14 September.

Our leader, Christian, says there are 23 orchid species in the reserves east and west of Victoria St (the main street of Hall), and members of our group found five of them in flower, plus two types in bud, and two others just in leaf. Nine! Not bad! And particularly not bad for one short ramble in only part of the woodland (though Christian knows where to find these species, and directed our steps).

Black Mountain boasts many more species, but that reserve has different geology and has never been grazed. By contrast, the dozen or so horses at the Hall horse paddocks had been in this woodland nibbling the bushes until a few days before our visit (we saw many Australian Indigo (*Indigofera australis*, photo over page) had been severely munched), and there are also around a hundred kangaroos, which hopped off when we arrived.



We sighted numerous Dusky Fingers (*Caladenia fuscata*) (pink stem, generally only one flower) and one Pink Fingers (*C. carnea*) (greenish stem, probably more than one flower, photo below), as well as Wax Lip Orchid (*Glossodia major*), Golden Moth (*Diuris chryseopsis*), and Leopard Doubletail (*D. pardina*).

Budding orchids sighted were members of the Sun Orchid *Thelymitra pauciflora* complex (those with current flower spikes which most likely would flower near the end of September) and the tall forest sun orchids, some of which have more than one leaf.



The knowledgeable botanists in our group also identified Greenhood (*Pterostylis* sp.), and Onion Orchids (*Microtis* sp.), just from the leaves.



This is grassy woodland, or woody grassland (both, perhaps), so naturally we also all looked out for other species – with some success (it's grazed, remember). There had been enough moisture for flowering of Common Billy Buttons (*Craspedia variabilis*), Yam Daisy/Murnong (*Microseris walteri*, (several, scattered, photo left), Everlasting (*Coronidium* sp.), Woodrush (*Luzula* sp.), Wood Sorrel (*Oxalis* sp.), Twining Glycine (*Glycine clandestina*), and Early Nancy (*Wurmbea dioica*).

Also, in the shrub layer, we found flowering Prickly Moses (*Acacia ulicifolia*), Ploughshare Wattle (*A. gunnii*), Australian Indigo, Urn Heath (*Melichrus urceolatus*), and False Sarsaparilla (*Hardenbergia violacea*).

Keys matchstick grasshopper (*Keyacris scurra*) leapt out of our way at regular intervals: grey ones, green ones, nymphs and bigger! (It must be a good year for this threatened species, which we also saw at Gunday TSR.) I didn't see many birds, however.

If you visit the horse paddocks, especially starting at the north end of Victoria St as we did, watch out for dips left from the copper prospecting at the site in around 1910. And it may be best to avoid visiting during high winds such as we have had lately; many large branches had fallen.

Thank you, Christian, for letting us benefit from your great knowledge of this site and its species.

Pink-tailed Worm-Lizard Survey

Margaret Ning

12.30pm Saturday 14 September 2024 Hall Horse Paddocks: Sixteen people, comprising 12 adults and four children, turned out for the ACT Herpetological Association's Pink-tailed Worm-lizard (*Aprasia parapulchella*) (PTWL) survey, all as keen as mustard. President Luke gave us a briefing of the way we would be doing the survey, and what we needed to look out for. We were also given a snake warning by our local host Christian who has made three sightings of Eastern Brown Snakes already this year. Luke reminded us how to behave with the snakes, counselling that 'a calm snake is a safe snake'. He also cautioned everyone to be conscientious 'rock rollers', explaining how easily the microclimates under the rocks can be destroyed during the exercise (ie temperatures and humidity). We were looking for rocks with ants under them, and I have to say that I, for one, found very few rocks that were without an ant (or termite) colony underneath.



We operated in a line, attempting to stay 10m apart, lifting the rocks and occasional logs carefully, and examining the 'action' underneath before replacing them. Between 12.45 and 3pm, we swept the site in systematic fashion, occasionally clustering around one of us who had made a reptile discovery, or even an invertebrate find.

While we didn't find any PTWLs, our reptile tally for the afternoon consisted of two Shingleback (*Tiliqua rugosa*), three Three-toed Skink (*Hemiergis decresiensis*), two juvenile Eastern Brown Snake (*Pseudonaja textilis*), one Marbled Gecko (*Christinus marmoratus*), one Boulenger's Skink (*Morethia*

boulengeri) and one Striped Skink (*Ctenotus robustus*). The invertebrate list included scorpion, millipede, centipede, wolf spider, and red back spider species.



The southern part of the horse paddocks, where the horses are now confined to, is becoming quite severely grazed and degraded. In addition to the dozen horses paying for agistment there, Christian estimates that there are around 100 kangaroos permanently across the site as well. At one stage in the afternoon, we watched as around 80 'roos, of varying sizes, appeared over a crest and swept down past us to the south.

The site is plagued by Patersons Curse, St Johns Wort, and exotic grasses (including Serrated Tussock), but there was still a

smattering of Early Nancy and indeed of the threatened Keys Matchstick Grasshopper in places.

We intend to repeat the survey in around a month's time, in the hope of getting a different result.

Gallery of Grasses at Forest 20

Ross Dalton, Treasurer STEP

During June STEP and the National Arboretum Canberra (NAC) installed a new information sign at the entry to The Gallery of Grasses which is located along Boundary Road at the northern end of Forest 20 and is a focal point of interest for visitors.



This large format sign is there to aid visitor understanding of grasses within Southern Tablelands woodlands and grassland ecosystems (left: NAC staff installing the new sign, photo Andy Russell)

Grasses are generally similar in appearance before flowering. However, when in flower, they have a range of flower head (inflorescence) types that show their diversity. Along the Boundary Road a number of these flower head structures can be seen on single plants of various species.

Flowering times vary between species, so not all flower at one time. The sign (photo right, Ross Dalton) shows five examples of the inflorescence type to assist with plant identification.

STEP is grateful for the advice and assistance of the National Arboretum Canberra in manufacture and installation of the sign. STEP also acknowledges and thanks the Friends of Grasslands whose project funding assisted in the design and preparation of the sign's artwork.



Comment from Andrew Zelnik, Chair FOG Supported Projects subcommittee



Photo: Andrew Zelnik, Margaret Ning is holding the new grasses brochure

This project arose from FOG's \$1500 grassy ecosystem grant awarded to STEP in late 2021. The original application was for funding for the revision and printing of 1000 Grasses brochures as well as for new metal signs for native grass plantings and for the design and printing of a large corflute sign. However, COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and major rain damage in 2022 significantly delayed progress.

The revision and printing of the Grasses brochure was completed in 2023. However, by this time the wording of the sign had been altered to align with NAC protocols. The new interpretive sign is shown above.

ACT Landcare Festival of Nature Glorious Grasslands

FOG and Lawson Landcare Event

Rainer Rehwinkel

28 September 2024: After brief introductions by myself and Jamie Pittock, President of Friends of Grasslands, outlining the Lawson Grasslands restoration project and the importance of grassland conservation, Senator David Pocock gave a thoughtful speech.



After the introduction and morning tea, which was attended by about 50 people, there was a chance to look over the Lawson Project which employed multiple applications of herbicide to the site followed by planting of grassland species and applying a thick layer of Kangaroo Grass mulch.

The aim was to connect two intact areas: one a Broad-leaved Peppermint woodland with a Weeping Grass ground layer, the other a remnant of Kangaroo Grass grassland. The project was supported by the Adopt-a-Park program and Ginninderra Catchment Group.

After morning tea, the party proceeded to the Reservoir Hill Grassland via another Peppermint woodland and there was much interesting discussion about the significance of the sites; topics included grassland management and threatened grassland fauna.

Ken Hodgkinson gave a presentation of results from his grassland burning trials.

The next stop was the Dawn Street grassland via the Box-Gum grassy woodland remnant at Bluebell Loop. The floristically rich Dawn Street

site was just about ready to burst forth with masses of Bulbine Lilies and other wildflowers and, later in the season, the Blue Devils should put on a show. Inappropriate tree-planting within grasslands was discussed here: this site provides a good example! At this site we had an overview of the Lawson North grassland, with its Defence Housing Development proposal. This generated more spirited discussion. Finally, after a quick walk back to Nevertire Street, we had lunch and more friendly chatter.



Acknowledgements to Maree Wright from Landcare ACT, who provided publicity and catering, and to all those FOG members who came along to assist. I'd also like to acknowledge and thank all those from Lawson Landcare and many others who assisted with the project, and particularly, Kat, Bruno and Suzanne from the Ginninderra Catchment Group (GCG). I'd also like to formally thank Elle Bowd, ANU researcher, for her donation of grassy ecosystems plants.

Jammo ParkCare Display 2024

Margaret Ning

Friday to Sunday 6-8 September 2024.

Friday morning at 8am at Jamison Centre, I was on my way into the building when 20 Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos flew over with their accompanying raucous chorus! What an excellent way to start the day!

Inside, setting up the annual ParkCare display was about to begin for a handful of Parkcare groups whose patches are closest to Jamison Centre. Friends of Aranda Bushland, STEP, Friends of Black Mountain, Friends of Mt Painter, Friends of the Pinnacle and Ginninderra Catchment Group were also there.

Each group has enough of their own brochures, pamphlets, photographs, and display items to fill a whole display board, and we stretched out for quite some distance as we were in a different part of the centre this year. Being in front of Coles, we should have been in a position to attract exiting customers, but this year's Friday and Saturday were quieter than previous years so there were fewer conversations.



Although Sunday was a little busier than normal, we spent our quiet times speculating why the numbers were down, and was it because people were 'doing it tough'? But they still have to buy food? Because Coles opposite was open until 11pm, our brochures and pamphlets and Linda's 'list of activities' still moved in the hours we weren't there.

Moments of excitement included:

- The unfortunate smashing of a display table at the florist's, by a rather large mobility scooter.
- The bloke who tried to stir a couple of us up; me, by asking "what's the name of that weed?" twice when looking at a Blue Devil, and a ParkCare volunteer by stating that the government should kill all kangaroos, and possums.
- A person wanted to make a donation.... but nothing yet and someone else, who managed mature age students, was looking to place mature age students in work parties. Not sure if anything will come of that.

And then, THE highlight was a visit by Jean Geue, whose sister brought her over from her nursing home to take a look around (photos above and right by Andrew Zelnik). Jean also took the opportunity to purchase a brightly-coloured top in nearby Cassidy's.

We gave away Michael Bedingfield's beautiful Chocolate Lily cards, suggesting the kids colour them in and send them to their grannies on a special occasion! They were a great hit.

Thank you to the rest of our team of Andrew and Ann who also worked shifts and helped with opening and closing. It was nice to once again bump into friends over the three days, and to catch up with ParkCare friends.



News Roundup

Paul Archer

New national park for NSW

Link provided by Jamie Pittock

The NSW government has announced the acquisition of 'Thurloo Downs' in the state's far north-west for addition to the national parks estate. At 437,394 hectares – almost twice the size of the Australian Capital Territory – it is the largest acquisition of private land for national parks in NSW history. The property contains exceptional biodiversity values, filling important gaps in the national park estate and protecting landscapes and ecosystems not found in any other national park. These habitats support an array of threatened species, including black falcon, flock bronzewing, bustard, stripe-faced dunnart and woma python. Details are [available here](#).

Farmers paid to protect environment, improve biodiversity

Link provided by Ann Milligan

A report on ABC Rural ([available here](#)) explains that while the NSW government is reviewing the state's Biodiversity Conservation Act and the [biodiversity offsets scheme](#), some farmers are already making money while protecting the environment. The report describes how Greg Rummery, a farmer and agronomist with properties around Walgett in northern NSW, receives annual payments of about \$22,000 to protect a corridor along the Namoi River on his 1,000-hectare property: "The riverine corridors are a pretty important part of the landscape in terms of vegetation and vegetation diversity and biodiversity where the water courses are, which are the life and blood of the landscape". Mr Rummery has been working with other landholders to significantly expand the area under protection in the district.

Native wildflower meadow in the heart of the city

Link independently provided by several FOG members

An article in 'The Conversation' describes research in which Katherine Horsfall created a beautiful native wildflower meadow in the heart of Melbourne using threatened grassland species. Katherine and her team sowed more than a million seeds on sites with two depths of sand (10mm and 80mm) and one without a sand layer, in Royal Park. Within one year, 26 of the 27 species sown had established to form a dense, flowering meadow across all sand depths. These plants included three threatened species. The full article is [available here](#).

ACT Weeds Manual wins two ACT National Trust Heritage Awards

Information provided by Andrew Zelnik

An email to ParkCare volunteers describes the awards presentation as follows:

"A number of ParkCare volunteers and staff attended the ACT National Trust Heritage Awards ceremony on Tuesday 10 September 2024. The Awards recognise projects that make a significant contribution to preserving or promoting the heritage of the ACT. We are thrilled to announce that the [ACT Weeds Manual](#) was the successful recipient of two awards:

- Local Community Projects: Local projects of heritage significance
- Heritage Tool or Resource: Innovative tools, resources or other materials which were developed to facilitate the conduct of particular projects and/or which may assist others conducting heritage research.

The inception of the ACT Weeds Manual began in August 2022 with an email from Vera Kurz from Friends of Tuggeranong Hill, that started with: ‘I’ve been mulling over an idea of a weed manual for volunteers, and thought I’d run it by you...’

15 months later, and with the input of over 25 volunteers (in text, photos, feedback and proofreading), Friends of Grasslands members, the Biosecurity Team, ParkCare staff, and Joe and Zohara from the Southern ACT Catchment Group, the 96 page ACT Weeds Manual was finalised.

The ACT Weeds Manual is a resource created for volunteers, by volunteers, and provides an educational tool which provides practical advice, equipping the community to make informed decisions about removing priority weeds based on a strategic approach and sound ecological principles”.

Note from Andrew Zelnik: FOG was involved not only in contributing technical input to the manual but it also contributed a grassy ecosystem grant for graphic design and setup of online publishing - see [Jan-Feb 2023 FOG newsletter](#). This comes off the back of FOG's 2022 National Trust ACT Heritage Award for restoration work on NCA land, led by Jamie Pittock and John Fitz Gerald, at Gurubung Dhaura (Stirling Park), Blue Gum Point and Yarramundi Reach – see [May-Jun 2023 FOG newsletter](#).



Photo (left to right): Vera Kurz, Tenzin Phuntsho, Martin Bajt, Minister Rebecca Vassarotti, Margy Burn, Sarah Hnatiuk, Bren Burkevics (Executive Group Manager, Environment, Heritage and Parks, and Conservator of Flora and Fauna), Lauren McQueen

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



Small White Sunray (*Rhodanthe corymbiflora*) carpeting a remnant patch of flood plain woodland amongst the intensively farmed landscape at Boree Creek, Narrandera NSW. Photo Andrew Zelnik, September 2019.