



News of Friends of Grasslands

Supporting native grassy ecosystems

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November & December 2025

Activities

Work Parties

Gurubung Dhaura

Sat 8 Nov & 13 Dec 9-12:30pm

Register: [Jamie Pittock](#)

Gungaharra Nature Reserve

Sat 22 Nov with Ranger Kieran

O'Connor, Register: [Jamie Pittock](#)

Yarramundi Reach

Sun 23 Nov 9-12:30pm

Register: [Jamie Pittock](#)

Budjan Galindji (Franklin Reserve)

Wed 5 & 26 Nov, Wed 3 & 24 Dec;

9-11:30am. [Margaret Ning](#)

Top Hut TSR (near Cooma NSW)

Sun 16 Nov, & Sun 14 Dec, 9:30am

– 3:30pm. Register: [Margaret Ning](#)

Follow-up NTG survey at Mulloon

Institute Fri 14 Nov, 10am,

Register: [Margaret Ning](#)

Excursions

See Page 8 for details

New members

Two new members since

1/9, both from ACT

President's report

Matt Whitting, Vice-President, Friends of Grasslands

Labor, deliver the nature laws Australia needs

The Federal Environment Minister Murray Watt is about to table the Australian Government's highly anticipated new nature laws. The reform package is expected to include amendments to the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Act)* plus bills to establish an environment protection authority, an environment information agency and a restoration fund into which 'restoration contributions' will be paid to resource 'restoration actions' (offsets).

This follows from Professor Graeme Samuel AC's review of the operation of the Act which was finalised more than five years ago. Samuel wrote 'the activities of government should be consistent with' nine legally enforceable 'National Environmental Standards' to be made by the Environment Minister¹. To hasten the process, Samuel drafted four. The first on his list, and arguably the most important, should be made to 'describe the outcomes that contribute to effective environmental protection and management' of the Act's 'matters of national environmental significance' (the **MNES standard**)².

FOG is not one of the organisations that has been invited to meet with the Minister as he has tested positions and organised the Government's reform proposal. However, we're not that far behind. That is because, according to expert commentators, to date few if any outside Government have seen any of the proposed legislation or standards.

Assuming the public will have a chance to comment during a Senate Inquiry, as the convener of FOG's advocacy there are certain things I

¹ Samuel, G. (30 Oct 2020) [Independent Review of the EPBC Act – Final Report](#), pp. ii, viii, 201

² Samuel n 1, p. 51

will be looking for on FOG's behalf: Clear, strong rules. An MNES standard that will drive better outcomes, including by providing protection for all species living in grassy ecological communities, especially those listed as threatened under the Act. Samuel said for fast, robust decisions we need a clear indication of what is unacceptable. He also said we need rules that will promote greater accountability and transparency in decision making.

I encourage you to engage during the forthcoming reform process. Lawyers for the big conservation organisations, like the [Environmental Defenders Office](#) and [WWF-Australia](#), will no doubt publish positions and make available templates enabling you to comment in ways that will maximise your impact. Use those opportunities. Consider writing to the Prime Minister and his senior cabinet ministers, and/or to the Opposition Leader, to let them know the importance of protecting nature, including its grassy ecosystems, for prosperity and productivity.

Labor, deliver the nature laws Australia needs, then follow up please by protecting the places we love!

THE LATEST: EDO has published [this article](#) on national law reforms

Curiosity Corner - Sex and Early Nancy

John Fitz Gerald

Firstly I must admit to stealing the CC title - long-term readers of FOG news will know that Janet Russell contributed many wonderful pieces under this banner.

Early Nancy, a wonderful flower on small plants in early spring, is having a big year in grasslands of our region. In SE Australia, this common name applies to *Wurmbea dioica ssp. dioica*. I'm sure most readers will recognise it and 'know' that the species has distinctive male and female flowers on different plants - it is dioiceous.

That was also my understanding until Mitch Korda from the National Seed Bank brought me up to speed that a small fraction of Early Nancy plants show both fruit and pollen - such plants are hermaphrodites. I scuttled away on a web search (at least Google did when I asked) and amongst the results was a very informative paper by Barrett et al. (1999). That in turn stimulated me to look about while plants were still flowering and fruiting this season.

Let me start by telling you that the Barrett paper can be downloaded freely online. It states that "In subdioiceous populations, plants of three contrasting sex phenotypes occur: female, male and cosexual.. In *W. dioica* ... plants with hermaphrodite flowers (the cosexual plants) were male ... displaying sex inconstancy." The researchers report detailed field studies of several ACT populations, including an important site (ACT 18 with 90 flowering plants) from Black Mountain Nature Reserve. This included study of sex ratios and constancy in marked plants across two flowering seasons, 1981 and 1983, separated by a dry non-flowering 1982. These confirmed that all female plants remained female; only the male plants changed and this was found to occur in both directions as some initially 'true' males became 'mixed' and some initially mixed became true. Barrett et al. label the mixed plants as 'fruiting males' with flowers that simultaneously carry female fruit and male anthers. Generally the fruiting males were larger plants with larger fruit on lower flowers. Barrett et al. observed that, in 1983, a significant fraction, just over 20% of the population, had hermaphrodite flowers. There is a great deal of other data that readers could find fascinating but I'll leave you to pursue that in the paper for yourselves.

I've looked carefully through several grassland patches of abundant Early Nancy in 2025 and find nothing like 20% hermaphrodite, probably closer to 1% and less in some places. I show an image (below) of a typical fruiting

male flower spike to give readers some idea what to look for (probably next year since flowers will have mostly gone by the time my contribution is distributed).



In my image, all flowers on the spike have clear stamens and anthers, six per flower. The lower flowers also have a dark, conspicuously swollen ovary in their centre. Careful examination shows that female parts are present right up the stem although the ovary is much smaller and paler coloured in the highest flowers and easily missed without magnification.

I've had a lot of pleasure poking around these pretty flowers this year. I hope that readers are interested by this note about the phenomenon, even though it could be seen as mere curiosity. I'm sure some readers will be somewhat amused by the Barrett et al. statement in this case: while females are invariably constant, males are unpredictable.

On pages 134-6 of their paper, Barrett et al. tangle with models of evolutionary paths towards dioecy and test data against these. Again, check out their discussion if interested.

Finally, since this topic arose via the National Seed Bank, I include a micrograph from them of material collected from this species - plump, brown near-spherical seeds, around 1mm in diameter. Scale bar is 0.5 mm.

Barrett, Case and Peters (1999), Gender modification and resource allocation in subdioecious *Wurmbea dioica* (Colchicaceae). *Journal of Ecology*, 87, 123-137.



Hall Cemetery News.

John Fitz Gerald

Twelve volunteers turned out on a perfect work morning on Saturday October 4th. Effort was divided between hand weeding and glyphosate spraying of exotics. A quick morning tea turned into a walk through the central cemetery block to check out the native flowering which was going well despite the strong winds of late.

Flowering plants included *Ranunculus lappaceus*, *Craspedia variabilis*, *Bulbine bulbosa*, *Drosera gunniana*, *Wurmbea dioica* and *Asperula conferta*. Even our lone *Diuris chryseopsis* was out - seems to be the same plant flowering annually since at least 2016. Buds are present on many other plants (including exotic grasses sadly) so we look forward to a bigger and better show on our return on 1st November.

Yarramundi Grassland update

John Fitz Gerald

Eight volunteers attended YG on 13th September for weeding work. Most effort went into spraying exotic grass tussocks, but some other work was done by hand including uprooting of *Eucalyptus viminalis* seedlings. Thanks to all for their efforts.

Since then spring has arrived and YG is showing the anticipated growth flush, particularly in areas ecologically burnt 12 months ago. Also the Ryecorn trial has satisfactorily reached its full height and flowering heads are beginning to hay off. President Jamie has put in enormous effort backpack-spraying Chilean Needle grass and Serrated Tussock, intending to demonstrate how grass weeds can be strategically managed through native-rich areas in their slow regrowth phase after an autumn burn. African Lovegrass is actively growing again now that frosts have more or less finished, similarly St John's Wort is active, and these need to be managed soon.



The most visible native flowers in the eco-burn areas are Bulbine Lilies on stems about 40 cm high. Anyone visiting around the middle of a warm day after the temperature has stayed up overnight will be treated to nice yellow patches of its flower spikes.

I include a recent image of one patch of Bulbine Lilies with *Themeda* (also budding now) directly in front of one of the trial plots of Ryecorn. Other plants in advanced-bud stage include *Plantago varia* and *Acaena ovina*. *Eryngium ovinum* has major growth of spiked leaves but no flower buds yet.

A Tale of a Grassland - Close-up

John Fitz Gerald

In this edition, I want to look at some native plants from a grassland remnant alongside Lake Ginninderra in Belconnen district. The remnant is mapped as NTG on government resources and is labelled by the nearby road loop as Diddams Close. It is one of the small patches in which Ginninderra Catchment Group (GCG) has a stake, particularly via Ken Hodgkinson's Grassland Restoration Group. The narrow NTG strip, with abundant *Themeda*, lies alongside the Lake but has a second narrow part running upslope to the top of a stony rise. While most of the rise is covered by tree plantings that followed the damming of the lake, an open area at the top is a fair quality native grassland too. GCG has been involved in some weed control, planting, and recent rationalisation of mowing status with the managers at City Services. It is a popular area for cyclists and walkers, using the bitumen cycle path running along the bottom of the tree-line.

My first plant from the NTG remnant is *Grevillea sp.*, [something missing here?] The grevillea plants here arrived with the tree and shrub plantings and unfortunately have naturalized and become a serious invader of the open grassland, even though they are good bird habitat. Another native invader of concern here is *Hakea decurrens*.



Unfortunately the recent change in the mowing regime for the NTG to once annually at 15cm has strongly advantaged the grevillea plants (image left) in particular. For many years they have been suppressed by repeated and low mowing.

Management intervention is needed to reduce the threat, and probably means cutting and poisoning stems. I reckon that the plant I found my seed on, like that in the centre of my image (left), has affinities with *Grevillea juniperina*, mainly based on orange/apricot flowers and low-growing form.

However, it is pointless striving to name species since the original plants were cultivars and the population potentially widely mixed with many red-flowering plants.



My second image (above left) is of four large brown seeds, shaped a little like canoes but with one jagged end. The scale bar represents 1 mm here. The seeds must be very viable given the number of seedlings scattered through the grassland strips.

My second plant is a widely distributed truly indigenous native herb, *Stackhousia monogyna* or Creamy Candles. This species was first reported onto ALA at Diddams in 2019 and was able to survive the close mowing of the time. It does seem to continue to thrive in the now tall NTG strip between cycle path and Lake and produces seed each year. I doubt that it would be at all happy to be overgrown by grevilleas however!

My image (above right) shows eight dimpled seeds, a little over 1 mm across with a 1 mm scale bar for reference. This species is commonly posted onto ALA records – 14,600 of them – and grows through SE Australia including Tasmania and SA and in the SW corner of WA.



My final plant is *Austrostipa densiflora*, the attractive indigenous native grass with large tussocks known as Foxtail Speargrass. It grows well at Diddams, not in the NTG strips but up in the native grassland and planted woodland near the top of the rise. ALA lists 3,200 records, all across SE Australia.

Each floret has quite a long, twisted awn which I cut off for imaging – see alongside; scale bar is 1 mm. Florets are covered in striking appressed hairs, particularly at the callus end. I opened florets and separated two elongate brown seeds shown in the image.

High magnification images were taken using the Nikon microscope at the National Seedbank in the Australian National Botanic Gardens. Images can be reproduced freely with reference to the Creative Commons licence CC BY Information above was gathered from Atlas of Living Australia website:- www.ala.gov.au

Blue Gum Point update

Paul Archer

Seven energetic volunteers spent a productive Saturday morning on 11 October converting a small mountain of woodchips into a thick covering of mulch around our recent plantings at Blue Gum Point.

The highlight of the day was an unexpected visit from a large (around 6 feet on the old scale) eastern brown snake. We were enjoying a quiet morning tea when the cry of 'snake' went up from a passing dog-walker. Naturally we all investigated, keeping a respectful distance.



The snake (above left) paid no attention to us, heading diagonally across the grassland in the direction of the lake and what remained of our woodchip pile. Undeterred, we continued the work until every last woodchip was moved (above right).

In my 13 years of FOG work parties in this area I had never seen a snake of any kind. For me the presence of this large, well-fed snake was a sign that we are doing the right thing here and in Gurubung Dhaura across the road. Let's keep it up! *Photos by Andrew Zelnik.*

Blue Planarian or Blue Garden Flatworm, a strange and wonderful creature

Michael Bedingfield

One evening, while taking a walk up Urambi Hills, I discovered dozens of dark blue, worm-like creatures scattered sparsely along the trail. They were Blue Planarians, also known as Blue Garden Flatworms. Even though we rarely see these secretive creatures, they are a very common native species and have some remarkable abilities. The area I was walking in was mostly cleared of trees but was formerly Yellow Box/Red Gum Grassy Woodland. They occur in a great variety of habitats, preferring conditions that are moist, and may even be found in your garden. Normally they are found in damp places such as under rotting logs or rocks, among leaf litter or in decaying organic matter. Seeing so many on the move was unusual but this can occur after wet weather.

They go by the scientific name *Caenoplana coerulea*. These worms are called land planarians to separate them from the majority of other planarians that live in the ocean or freshwater. Land planarians or land flatworms belong to the family Geoplanidae. Land planarians are distinguished from their aquatic relatives by their terrestrial habits and physical differences. Blue Planarians are usually dark blue or black in colour but can be dark brown, and light blue on the under surface of the body. There is a longitudinal stripe along their back which is a cream or fawn colour. When stretched out the adults can be 6 to 12 cm long and about 3 mm wide, with a narrow head that is coloured pink or red. They have multiple tiny “eyes” that are arranged in a pattern on the front part of the body. The eyes don’t give clear detail but allow them to detect light and are important for their survival. There is only one opening or mouth, which is used for both feeding and excretion. It is located under the body near the middle. These animals look superficially like leeches, but their way of moving around is quite different.

These flatworms are predators, feeding on other invertebrates that live close to the soil such as slaters, millipedes, land snails and some insects. Like slugs and snails, they glide along on a layer of slime and are more active at night. They trap their prey on these viscous slime-trails and then drown it in this mucous-like slime. They are then able to consume the prey through the mouth on their belly. Within the mouth is a structure called a pharynx that is muscular and tube-like. It is extended out of the mouth to engulf prey and release digestive enzymes. It thus breaks down the prey’s tissues externally before consuming it.

The Blue Planarian or Blue Garden Flatworm is a hermaphrodite, meaning that it has both male and female reproductive organs. During the process of mating the two worms align themselves and exchange sperm through a genital pore located on the back half of the underside of the body. The one opening is called the gonopore and contains both male and female sex organs. Both partners become pregnant and go their separate ways. The eggs develop within each individual, encased in small protective capsules. These are about 1mm in diameter and are laid in the soil. After a few weeks the eggs hatch into tiny juvenile flatworms.

However, these worms have amazing regenerative abilities and are also able to reproduce by fragmentation. To achieve this, a portion of the worm separates from the rest of the body. It is usually the posterior part of the worm. This then regenerates a new head and other body parts in a few weeks. Meanwhile the original worm regenerates a new tail. The two individuals are now both fully-developed whole worms. These animals are also able to regenerate other parts of the body when injured, just showing how remarkable they are. They are able to do this because they have an abundance of pluripotent stem cells, which can transform into any cell type within the body. Due to their ability to regenerate it is hard to say how long they live for.

The Blue Planarian is native to Australia and is spread widely along the east side of the continent from North Queensland down to Victoria. However, through the human transportation of plants it has spread to other countries. In Europe it has become well established and is regarded as an invasive species. Since it is

a predator it is believed to be a threat to their ground-dwelling invertebrates and potentially to impact soil ecosystems. It has also been introduced to New Zealand and USA.

Another less common but related species is the Two-tone Planarian or Flatworm, *Caenoplana variegata*, with synonym *C. bicolor*. This one I have found in my garden. It has a dark brown body with a yellow stripe down its back and lives in damp places. While it does reproduce by sexual means its primary means is by fragmentation. It is also a native of Australia that has spread to Europe, where it has become an invasive species. It is known to feed on arthropods such as woodlice, insects and spiders.

I have provided photos of both species of planarian, to give a clearer idea of what flatworms look like. There is an enormous number of images and plenty of information about them on the internet. So it seems that there are lots of people who like to go searching under rotting logs and rocks and poking around in damp leaf-litter. They have made some very interesting discoveries.



Main references:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caenoplana_coerulea

<https://bie.ala.org.au/species/https://biodiversity.org.au/afd/taxa/fa60490f-3102-4caa-afda-a148fd902c3d>

<https://australian.museum/blog-archive/at-the-museum/planarian-worms/>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geoplanidae>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Planarian>

Activities (from Page 1)

- *Follow-up NTG survey at Mulloon Institute:* Fri 14 Nov, 10am, Register: [Margaret Ning](#).
- *Revisit Poplars with peak flowering:* Thursday 13 Nov, 10am to 1pm, Register: [Margaret Ning](#).
- *Visit Budjan Galindji Grassland, Franklin and view Golden Sun Moth monitoring.* Late morning mid Nov TBC.
- Sat Nov 15 field day, 9am-1pm - **With LLS and a couple of landcare groups - grassland workshop** at a quality grassland near Bungendore (details available soon.). More info [Margaret Ning](#).

Advocacy Report

Matt Whitting

October

Comment on Discussion Paper: Implementing Australia's Strategy for Nature 2024-2030, 15/10

In September 2024, Australia updated its [Strategy for Nature](#). This established new domestic biodiversity targets after Australia and 195 other nations had adopted the Global Biodiversity Framework in 2022. In the [Discussion Paper](#), the Government sought feedback on how the targets would be achieved.

FOG, the Conservation Council ACT Region, and the National Parks Association ACT submitted jointly that the outcomes proposed under four of six targets in the *Strategy* needed strengthening ([here](#)). We expressed concern that, as drafted, the outcomes we reviewed would not guide prioritisation, lacked specificity and measurability, and lacked ambition. Each outcome could be said to have been achieved already; as a result, the outcomes set little if any 'strategic direction for collective action' as claimed. Noting that grassy and freshwater ecosystems are among the hardest to restore, we argued that Australia needs to protect, maintain, and restore where necessary, the 'best of what's left'. FOG & NPA explained and offered our services.

Request for improvement of biomass management of grassland in east of Lawson North, 7/10

FOG and the Conservation Council wrote jointly to Defence Housing Australia expressing 'serious concern' at the lack of biomass management threatening critically-endangered Natural Temperate Grassland (NTG) in the east of the North Lawson Grasslands. We explained that this failure of management could cause the native sward to die, and thus risk fundamentally and irreversibly altering the quality of the site.

September

Recognition of critical habitat, under the EPBC Act, for Canberra Grassland Earless Dragon, 19/9

FOG implored the Federal Environment Minister to list 'critical habitat' for the Dragons under Section 207A of the EPBC Act. We suggested that given the pressures to develop the Majura and Jerrabomberra valleys, which is where the three populations live, any habitat identified within the species 'extent of occurrence' should be listed as critical habitat *regardless* of whether it is currently found to be occupied. All remaining habitat is necessary to ensure the long-term future of the species through reintroduction and re-colonisation.

Finalisation of a Recovery Plan for all Grassland Earless Dragon species, 19/9

FOG sought the support of the Victorian Environment Minister in our push for the finalisation of the National Recovery Plan for the four species of Grassland Earless Dragons. We explained that the Recovery Plan must be adopted to help prioritise actions needed to conserve and protect habitat critical to the survival of the Canberra Grassland Earless Dragon.

Monaro Rock Quarry Project, 19/9

FOG objected to the above proposal ([here](#)). If approved, it will clear 77.8 ha in Royalla including 22.4 ha of Box Gum Woodland (BGW) and 55.4 ha of a grassy forest community. FOG argued that rock, while needed for the region's development, ought not be sourced from under critically-endangered BGW. FOG noted that, for the BGW on site that will remain, there would be a substantial alteration to the surface water drainage pattern as well as other indirect impacts from increases in noise, vibration, light and air pollution. The dust particulates would threaten the respiratory systems of several woodland bird populations listed as threatened in NSW.

Aikman Drive, Ginninderra Drive, Haydon Drive, College Street, Bruce, 1&8/9

FOG recommended multiple ways this 16 ha development could be improved. Comment was provided on both the proposal for clearing and earthworks ([here](#)), and on the construction of buildings and roads ([here](#)). Noting the entire 16 ha development site would once all have been Box Gum Woodland, and that the development includes green spaces, FOG encouraged the developer to improve connectivity with University Park to the south.

Light Rail to Woden: Stage 2B draft Environmental Impact Statement, 5/9

Recognising that it is not likely that advocacy will prevent the loss of mature trees used by Superb Parrots and Gang-gang Cockatoos, nor the loss of habitat for small fragmented populations of Golden Sun Moth in the National Triangle, FOG focussed its comments ([here](#)) on Infrastructure Canberra's offset strategy. FOG expressed disappointment that the ACT Government has elected to prepare a strategy for providing an offset *in the future* when it could have acted to deliver an offset in advance. FOG offered to discuss its thoughts on potential sites in the ACT that could be used to offset the conservation losses.

August

FOG meeting with City and Environment Directorate representatives, 29/8

On 29/8, FOG met with the Conservator and representatives from teams in the City and Environment Directorate's Natural Resource Policy & Programs, and Parks & Conservation Service areas. We considered:

- The need for a better approach and resourcing to support volunteers;
- The push for landscape planning needed to reduce conflict between development and conservation;
- The need for a conversation about what different elements of the emerging ACT Nature Conservation Strategy will do, and where in future each element might fit in a strategy establishing a conservation 'priority system' in the landscape;
- The urban growth boundary due to be set in 2027;
- Activities related to the conservation of the Canberra Grassland Earless Dragon.

EcoFocus, 27/8

FOG was well represented at EcoFocus, an annual science and conservation event hosted by the Office of Nature Conservation. Of note was the heavy emphasis placed on the push toward landscape-scale planning in the ACT, including to restore, conserve and protect high conservation value areas outside reserves. Work is continuing on a threatened species index and on indicators for the condition of box-gum woodland and natural temperate grassland. A new 'restoration prioritisation map' is 'coming soon' to guide volunteer teams working in urban areas.

FOG Mid-winter event, 23/8

FOG members took every opportunity to advocate for the better protection and management of our region's grassy ecosystems. FOG has obtained permission to publish [this presentation](#), by Lori Gould on behalf of Environmental Restoration Design and Planning and ACT Natural Resources Management, about environmental restoration in the ACT and St Mark's Grassland. Other presentations covered the management of Travelling Stock Reserves in NSW (James Cornwell and Ben Serafin from NSW Local Land Services); and the management of conservation of native plants in Natural Temperate Grassland (Ken Hodgkinson). See page 20 for details.

Contributions welcome

Do you have a story from your favourite grassland or grassy woodland that you would like to share?

If so, please contact the Editor: newsletter@fog.org.au

A very worthwhile walk at The Poplars grassland

Ann Milligan and Margaret Ning

Bulbines! Billions of bulbines! (well, maybe hundreds); very young greenhood orchids with flower-buds; button wrinklewort (*Rutidosia leptorhynchoides*); many native plantains; at least one yam daisy (*Microseris lanceolata*), and at least 60 other native plant species. We 15 FOG people were treated to all this at 'The Poplars grassland' (areas of Natural Temperate Grassland and Box Gum Grassy Woodland) on which we rambled with its owner, Carolyn Larcombe, for two hours on Thursday 18 September. In a few weeks' time this place will be a glorious sight!



The Poplars grassland, near Jerrabomberra, is a 40ha block of land, surrounded by a 2m-high fence with a locked gate. This is private land, being managed for conservation, with no public access.

The grassland has been in Carolyn Larcombe's family since the 1980s. In its previous life it was grazed by the Larcombes' sheep and cattle, and before that it may have been cropped. As Jerrabomberra's numbers of humans, dogs and roadways grew during the 1990s, farming sheep and cattle became unworkable, but by then this northern block was recognised as high-quality Box Gum Grassy Woodland and Natural Temperate Grassland (NTG).

Being, fortunately, directly under the noisy final approach to Canberra Airport, the grassland was saved from development! *Photo by Ann Milligan.*

The area's ecological values were recognised, and it became a bio-banking site, for which the owners receive annual management payments that allow 'some weed control, fence and track maintenance, pest animal control, fire management, annual surveys and photo monitoring'. A weeds contractor spends two mornings per week tackling the biggest issue – grassy weeds and St John's Wort (SJW). The site is also invaded by garden weeds, of the 'gradual influx' or 'dumped' variety. In past years, members of Queanbeyan Landcare, and also FOG in 2014, have helped against the weeds; Bill Willis (QLC and FOG) recalls an old count of 700 button wrinklewort plants in the high-quality areas.



An interesting highlight on Thursday was a patch of fan grevillea (*Grevillea ramosissima*), which is endemic to eastern continental Australia. It is a low spreading shrub with lobed leaves and clusters of cream-coloured to pale yellow flowers: an exciting first for most of us. *Photo by Andrew Zelnik.*

Flowering bushes of Beard-heath (*Leucopogon fletcheri* and *L. sp.*) and easily trodden-on flowering woodrush (*Luzula sp.*), were also new to some of us. Spreads of coralline lichen (*Cladia corallaizon*), remembered from 2014, are still present,

though currently they are a crunchy brown carpet.

At one stage we realised that while wandering all morning we had seen many more native plantain plants (*Plantago varia*) – in large groups – than the exotic plantain species (*Plantago lanceolata*). How often can we say that these days!!?? Short-leaved matrush (*Lomandra bracteata*) in flower was relatively common, and there were beautifully glossy deep-green sundews (*Drosera* sp.).

As we wandered in the woodland we disturbed a mob of perhaps 20–30 kangaroos, and several large birds, and heard many frogs in the significantly damp patches after recent rain. Apparently, small bird species are scarce, because of Noisy Miners.

We have discussed with Carolyn the idea of another FOG visit early this November, when flowering would be at its peak. A couple of us would take backpack sprayers for the SJW in the two best NTG areas, especially the huge button wrinklewort patches, and other FOG visitors could flag any SJW they see, for the sprayers to pursue.

Thank you so much, Carolyn, for allowing us to visit your delightful grassland, and for spending the whole morning with us in discussions and in showing us its highlights.

FOG at Jammo Parkcare Display 5-7 Sept 2025

Margaret Ning

There are lots of reasons to participate in the annual Jamison ParkCare display. One is spreading the parkcare word, but others are to catch up with friends in other parkcare groups, and we always meet members of the public who are experts in our 'field'. Retired or still working, they often dazzle us with their own histories.

This year, one was an ex-regional manager of Kosciuszko National Park who shared some great historic moments. Another works for a private company that does tree rehabilitation on farms, having previously worked in government where he did some policy work on current-day issues. Another from the Wallaroo Road area knew of the proposed Hall Cemetery extension and asked questions about that.



Photo by Linda Beveridge, Friends of Black Mountain.

We meet people from out of town, sometimes with properties and making interesting contributions to our knowledge. Sometimes a local person shares something that surprises us, such as the supposed location of Blue Devils in an old TSR near the Belconnen Big Splash site. There are always amusing, and often mystifying moments. We always field queries on honeybees. This year it was 'find me some bees for the Manchurian pears', and 'what's our policy on the mobile phone 5G network interfering with native bees'?

This year we added possums to the mix with three possum conversations in one day, which was a little challenging as well as thought provoking... I often exchange contact details with people, which may lead to a FOG activity sometime in the future.

Our fluffy display boards still do a marvellous job of showing off our posters and other promotional material. We handed out our brochures, and many people eagerly made a gold coin donation to acquire one of our beautiful 'Celebrate Threatened Native Grasslands' posters. Other display material showed people the extent of our FOG activities on maps with places we have visited, as well as where our work parties operate. Our display specimens of African Lovegrass, Chilean Needlegrass, Serrated Tussock and Onion Grass drew a lot of attention and myriad questions.

Overnight, the ParkCare stalls are corralled and covered, and so far no security breaches have occurred!! It was a comfortable three days, with easy parking, coffee shops and supermarkets, and it is inevitable that one runs into friends.

Of course, not everyone is happy with the way the environment always seems to slip between the cracks when funding and priorities are being determined, and some conversations we have are very critical of how things currently are. And not everyone is happy with FOG's priorities.

Once again, Jean Geue's sister brought Jean along to say hello to her friends, which was nice. Thank you FOG volunteers, for setting things up, liaising with the public and then packing it all up again! I firmly believe it was the best FOG volunteer effort ever, and the level of public interest was the best I have seen for a while as well!

Weed Control at Mundulla Common

Tracey Strugnell, Community Engagement and Grants Officer, Tatiara District Council, Bordertown SA

Introduction by Andrew Zelnik

In 2021 FOG awarded Tatiara District Council a Grassy Ecosystem Grant of \$1,500. This article is an edited version of Tracey's November 2022 report for this grant project. The grant was to assist with costs for engagement of a local contractor with relevant expertise to undertake a combination of targeted mechanical and chemical weed control in the remnant grassy woodlands of Mundulla Common. This work, needed to supplement the regular activities of the local volunteer Mundulla Common Working Group, was done in selected priority locations identified in accordance with the Common's 2018-2028 operations plan.

The Common is a significant remnant of multiple native grassy woodland communities within a highly cleared and modified agricultural landscape. For the FOG Supported Projects team and the Committee the merits in funding this project primarily lay in the opportunity to provide practical support for grassy ecosystem conservation at a significant and locally valued site well outside FOG's usual geographic focus area.

The Mundulla Common is Crown Land under care and control of Tatiara District Council. Mundulla township is located 11km south west of Bordertown, South Australia. Mundulla township is surrounded by the Mundulla Common (43 hectares) to the east, south, and north west and Moot-Yang-Gunya Swamp (60 hectares) to the north (see Site Map 1 below). This forms the majority of the the open space which totals 110 hectares surrounding the town. The Commons were originally grazed, by cows and horses belonging to the townspeople, as a traditional town common. This area is now a highly valued nature and recreational reserve adding a beautiful aesthetic to the township.

Three remnant native grassy woodland communities occur within Mundulla Common (see Site Map 2 below):

- Grey Box (*Eucalyptus microcarpa*) 17.80ha – a nationally listed Endangered Ecological Community (EEC) under the Commonwealth EPBC Act. In South Australia Grey Box woodland is estimated to be only at 3% of its original extent compared to 10-15% nationally – a consequence of it growing on heavy, fertile soil that is highly productive for agricultural purposes;
- South Australian Blue Gum (*Eucalyptus leucoxylon* ssp. *pruinosa*) 14.95ha;
- River Red Gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis* ssp. *camaldulensis*) 9.85ha.

The Common is also habitat to and has sighting records^(a) for the following rare and threatened native fauna and flora species:

Scientific Name	Common Name	South Austral Status	National Status
<i>Litoria raniformis</i>	Southern Bell Frog	Vulnerable	Vulnerable
<i>Burhinus grallarius</i>	Bush Stone-curlew	Rare	
<i>Corcorax melanorhampho</i>	White-winged Chough	Rare	
<i>Trichosurus vulpecula</i>	Common Brushtail Possum	Rare	
<i>Petaurus breviceps</i> (b)	Sugar Glider	Rare	
<i>Templetonia stenophylla</i>	Leafy Templetonia	Vulnerable	
<i>Mentha satureioides</i>	Native Pennyroyal	Rare	
<i>Austrostipa gibbosa</i>	Spurred Speargrass	Rare	

References

(a) Atlas of Living Australia spatial search species list 28/10/2025 unless noted otherwise [AZ]

(b) Record in Fearn, E. K. G. & Geelen, L. (2009) *Management Plan for the Moot-Yang-Gunya Swamp and Mundulla Common*. SA Department for Environment and Heritage, Mount Gambier.

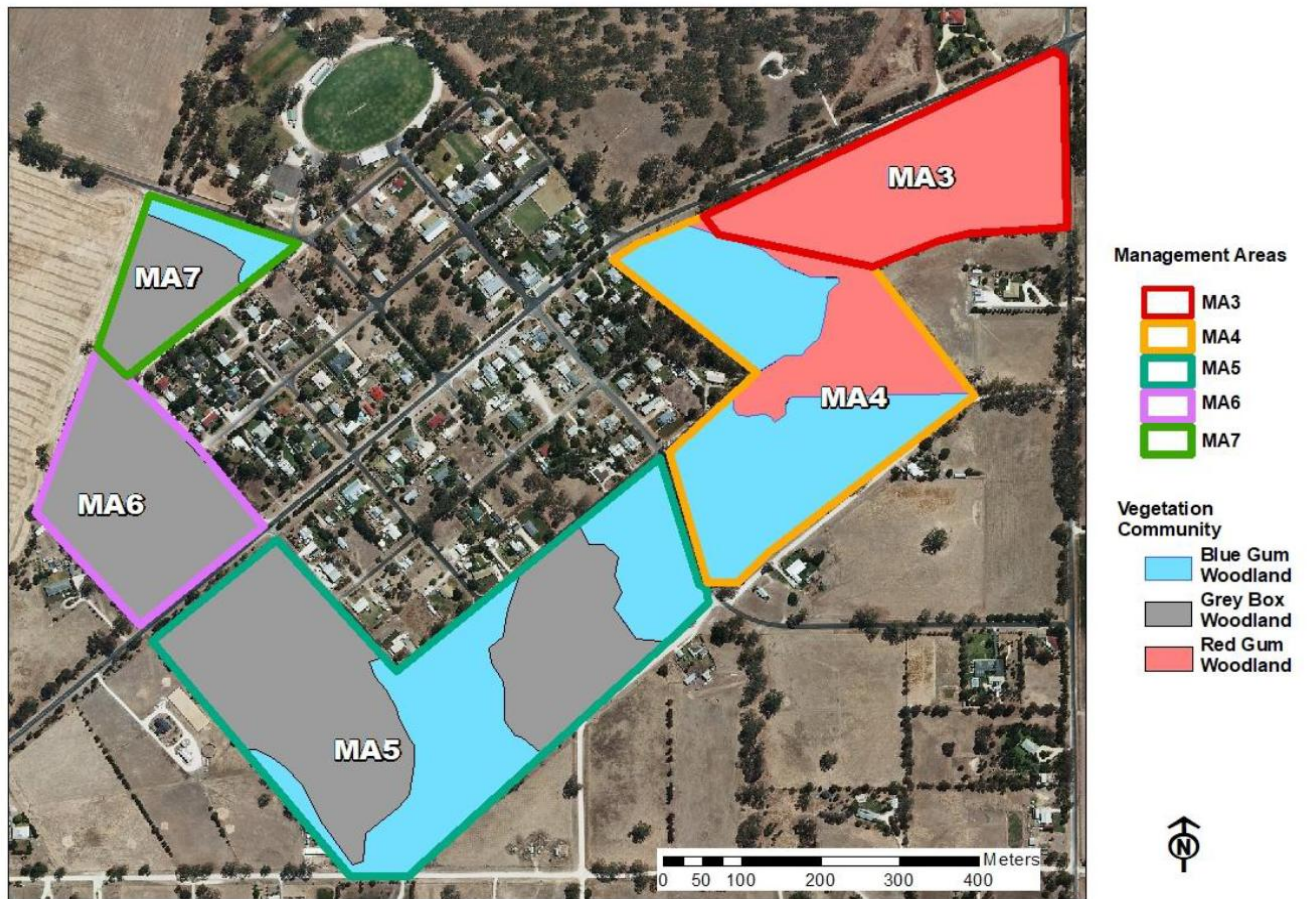


Site Map 1: Moot-Yang-Gunya Swamp and Mundulla Common
Source: p5 Mundulla Common Operations Plan 2018-2028

 Moot-Yang-Gunya Swamp
 Mundulla Common



0 62.5 125 250 375 500 Meters



Site Map 2: Mundulla Common Management Areas and Vegetation Communities. Source: p7 Mundulla Common Operations Plan 2018-2028

The Friends of Grasslands grant project focused on three sites within the Mundulla Common delivered by a combination of contractors and passionate local volunteers. Expenditure of the grant amount was offered to assist with engagement of a local contractor to undertake a combination of mechanical and chemical control of target weeds in the following areas (see Site Map 1 above):

- Pickerings Path in the Western Common;
- Faraway Tree Grazing Exclusion Enclosure in the Southern Common;
- Vinens Road Grazing Exclusion Cages in the Southern Common.

The **Pickerings Path** area of the Western Common consists of Grey Box Grassy Woodland with an abundant range of understorey species. At this site the focus was on weed control of Cretan Weed (*Leontodon rhagadioloides*) and escaped garden bulb *Ixia sp.* to reduce competition with the native understorey species and improve regeneration of native understorey species. This area of the common cannot be grazed due to its EPBC listing.

The **Faraway Tree and Vinens Road Grazing Exclusion Project Sites** are located in the Southern Common which is characterised by Inland SA Blue Gum Woodland with the Nalang Creek flowing through the area. A myriad of species are found here including a wide range of native grasses, Blue Squill Lily (*Chamaescilla corymbosa*), Twining Fringe Lily (*Thysanotus patersonii*), Early Nancy (*Wurmbea dioica*), Native Bluebells (*Wahlenbergia sp.*), Running Postman (*Kennedia prostrata*), Blue Grass Lily (*Caesia calliantha*), and Milk Maids (*Burchardia umbellata*).



Pickerings Path, Western Common - Weed load in foreground July 2021

A



*Pickerings Path, Western Common - July 2021: Left - Contractor examining *Ixia* sp. patch to be controlled; Right - Threatened native Leafy Templetonia*

A Grazing Management Agreement is in place between Tatiara District Council and the Native Vegetation Management Unit in SA broadening the management tools available in the Southern Common and Moot Yang Gunya Swamp. Grazing is used as a tool to reduce fuel load around the town prior to bushfire season and to control introduced species such as Phalaris, Cocksfoot, Wild Oats and Veldt Grass.

This management strategy works well. This project has provided an opportunity to expand our understanding of the impact of this crash grazing program on native understorey species through the use of grazing exclusion and weeding. The grazing exclusion sites have enabled the observation of the spring germination of native understorey species that have remained ungrazed.



Faraway Tree, Southern Common - Grazing exclusion enclosure, November 2022



Left - Faraway Tree – Contractor inspection of grazing exclusion cages post grazing, November 2022 Right - Vinens Road - Contractors marking and recording Blue Squill Lily locations for grazing exclusion, July 2021



Vinens Road, Southern Common - Blue Squill Lily

Ongoing activities in the management of Mundulla Common include:

- Targeted control of woody weeds and escaped garden plants including Olive, Flinders Ranges Wattle and *Ixia* sp.;
- Ongoing comparative monitoring of native species abundance in ungrazed vs grazed areas of the Mundulla Common;
- Building improved understanding of the optimum techniques to encourage natural regeneration of native grasses and our other precious understorey species;
- Improving understanding of water management options for the Mundulla Swamp to reduce the growth of introduced weeds in wetland areas;
- Continuing community engagement in the common through projects involving volunteers, contractors, Mundulla Common Working Group and Tatiara District Council;
- Improved interpretive signage for visitors to the common to assist with understanding and appreciation of this unique environment;
- Increased usage of the Mundulla Common and Moot Yang Gunya Swamp with new opportunities such as Park Run and the development of a walking and bike trail to Mundulla from nearby Bordertown.

Top Hut TSR progress report October 2025

Margaret Ning

If I look at Top Hut Travelling Stock Reserve in terms of seasons, we are beginning season 2025-26, and I think I can confidently say that we are more or less on top of things there and are looking forward to seeing what this spring can dazzle us with around November when things start to flower.

Meanwhile, over the last 12 months we have conducted work parties focussed mainly on clearing up the thistles that materialised following the eco burn on the non-fire shed side of the TSR back in 2024. We even discovered a new weed, *Lepidium campestre*, which appears to be quite uncommon.

To be super-efficient, we even held a couple of work parties over camping weekends in order to maximise our time there. This worked well even when one of them was threatened by rain. We managed to effectively cut and daub hundreds of broom seedlings in between rain events, as well as spray the outside road verge for African Lovegrass.

In addition to chasing weeds over the last 12 months, we have also experienced a handful of invasions from a neighbour's sheep and cattle that took advantage of lower creek levels and very old fence lines to visit us and taste our native grasses, once their modified pastures were eaten down to bowling-green levels.

Fortunately we now have an experienced fence-mending team that has coped with everything thrown at us. So thank you to all the Top Hut spraying and fencing volunteers over the last 12 months, and welcome to all those FOG members who would like to visit the site in the next month or so in order to enjoy the sight of Top Hut TSR in spring.



Pic 1 (above left): all it took was three star pickets and some existing ring-lock fencing to mend this breach by 30 of the 200 sheep in an adjacent paddock. Pic.2 (above right): a highjacked grandson, visiting during the school holidays, who was put to work hammering in a star picket.



Pic 3 (above left): A 10m breach by cattle, which very messily ripped out a lot of the existing grass tussocks and left the paddock covered in cow poo. Maybe we should invite people up who would like to harvest all that manure!!

Pic 4 (above right): Messy eaters!!!

Lessons for restoration of grassy ecosystems

Ann Milligan with assistance from Ben Serafin, James Cornwell, Ken Hodgkinson and Margaret Ning

FOG's annual Talks and Tea party is billed as the 'mid-winter' activity. However, Saturday 23 August this year was anything but wintery, with gloriously warm spring-like sunshine in which we could wander in St Mark's grassland before the talks on restoring grassy ecosystems began at 1.30 pm.

St Mark's Chambers Pavilion was a new venue for this annual activity and it proved ideal for the 53 people attending (maximum capacity). The room has good acoustics (and a microphone where needed) and the two large side-by-side screens meant everyone could see well.

First, Ben Serafin and James Cornwell from NSW Local Land Services (LLS)³ gave us an overview of the 452 Travelling Stock Reserves (TSRs) they manage in south-east NSW, covering 6734 ha of grassland and woodland. TSRs are 'parcels of Crown land reserved for livestock to travel to, rest or graze'. In the SELLS area they average about 15 ha (0.13–155.8 ha, including stock-route roadsides) and are 10–20 km apart (a day's walk for cattle or sheep). These TSRs are relevant to the restoration of grassy ecosystems because most of them (categories 2, 3 and 4, totalling 99%), are identified as possibly having significant biodiversity conservation values, as well as cultural values and suitability for livestock (Figure 1). Among the gamut of management challenges, Ben and James mentioned re-vegetating for habitat, dam de-silting, fencing (with 1350 neighbours), working with First Nations representatives, administering permits for stock use and strategic grazing to manage the vegetation (e.g. 680 head of cattle for 8 weeks on TSRs around Boorowa). Publications are available⁴ explaining topics including the 'monitoring and audit strategy', the 'statewide plan of management' (e.g. consistent classification, funding, communication, quality assurance), and 'best environmental management practice' (conservation value, sustainable use, and the TSR role in landscape connectivity). There is also a glovebox-size *TSR user handbook*. The team welcomes citizen-science inputs, such as bird lists, to help them make wise decisions.

Next, Dr Ken Hodgkinson, a long-time member of CSIRO (and FOG and Ginninderra Catchment Group), described his long-term experiments exploring management for conserving native plants in patches of Natural Temperate Grassland (NTG) in Ginninderra Creek catchment (ACT & NSW). The catchment's original grassland (illustrated in Robert Hoddle's 1830s painting⁵) was used as pasture for 100–150 years, and now the remnants have exotic plant species – i.e. weeds – as well as natives. Ken had observed (during a South African study trip) that regular burning of former woodland prevents woodland regeneration and maintains a *Themeda triandra* dominated grassland, so in 2008 he began a small-plot experiment on remnant NTG at Croke Place in Evatt. It compares how low or high mowing vs spring or autumn burning (2008–2024) affect the relative numbers of native and exotic species. From 2008 to 2017 the number of native species increased after burning or mowing: the greatest increase (10 native species) occurred with autumn burning. However, by 2021, numbers of native species had declined to the same as in the 'control' (no mowing or burning). In 2014, Ken began a second experiment involving 13 sites to see if natives in NTG varying in weediness also benefited from autumn burning. Most have, but not all. Another experiment examines the survival of tubestock (five forb species) planted into the burnt, mown and control plots at each site. A separate glasshouse experiment with international co-scientists has used soils from seven of the sites to explore whether soil biota (organisms) affect plant growth. By comparing germination and seedling growth of NTG forbs and African Lovegrass (ALG, *Eragrostis curvula*) in steam-sterilised (abiotic) or 'live' (unsterilised) soils, the group has gained useful insights on plant–soil feedback in NTG, and on some effects of biota on ALG. A peer-reviewed paper describing the work for an international journal is at a final stage for acceptance.

The tea-break gave us all access to scrumptious sweet and savoury offerings and the chance to chatter and further discuss the two talks and question the speakers. Then it was the turn of Lori Gould (of Environmental

³ Ben (who is in South East LLS) is based at Yass; James (who is in State LLS) is based at Goulburn.

⁴ See <https://www.nsw.gov.au/regional-and-primary-industries/primary-industries-nsw/travelling-stock-reserves>

⁵ <https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/catalog/3423118>

Restoration Design and Planning⁶) and Kate Boyd (of ACT Natural Resource Management⁷). Lori's business, which began life as GrassRoots Environmental in 2015, aims for 'holistic and practical environmental on-ground works planning, and project delivery'. Lori and Kate both spoke about restoration and improvement work that they are working on together. For instance, there are Grassland plans for Gungaharra Grasslands Nature Reserve, and Molonglo Gorge Nature Reserve grassland areas, and – most pertinently for our meeting – for St Mark's Native Grassland. In answer to a question from the audience, Lori explained that, to her, the word 'restoration' means 'whatever it takes to recover the native species structure of an area'. For St Mark's, 'restoration' means some weed control and replanting to bring a good site up to being an excellent site. In other areas 'restoration' is much more comprehensive, and can include tree-planting, or even the 'scrape and sow' technique. However, that is very expensive, and the team is testing how well cheaper methods can succeed – hence the spray-burn-spray-seed methods they are using at Crace Grasslands Nature Reserve. One tricky aspect of their work is the aligning of environmental priorities and community priorities. Another is feral animal control: foxes control rabbits, and fewer foxes can mean more rabbits. Lori explained the St Mark's grassland restoration plans which will be tailored to what FOG wants, and will heavily involve Margaret Ning and Matt Kent.

The theme of grassland restoration gave this year's set of talks the aura of a professional seminar, which the audience appeared to welcome. FOG sincerely thanks Ben, James, Lori, Kate and Ken for making the afternoon so informative and interesting.

The afternoon would not have happened without Margaret Ning organising the whole event (talks, venue and tea team), and the St Mark's staff allowing use of the Pavilion and its IT facilities, and the tea team providing delicious tucker, and Matt Whitting managing the IT and slides for the three talks. Thank you all.

Reference

Local Land Services 2019. *Travelling Stock Reserves Statewide Plan of Management*. NSW Government. https://www.lls.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0005/1200857/Travelling-Stock-Reserves-State-wide-Plan-of-Management.pdf [Accessed 2 Sep. 2025].



Post presentations Q & A time Photo: Andrew Zelnik

⁶ <https://envirordp.com>

⁷ <https://www.act.gov.au/directorates-and-agencies>

News Roundup

National Trust award for Landcare

Information and link provided by Marianne Albury-Colless

Under the 'Heritage Landscapes and the Natural Environment' category, Landcare's *Your Guide to Natural Temperate Grasslands* brochure was highly commended. This was the only award under that category.

More information is available [here](#).

Volunteers needed

Link provided by John Fitz Gerald

The Centre for Invasive Species Solutions (CISS) is looking for volunteers to help build WeedScan 2.0 — Australia's next-generation weed identification app: "We've nearly doubled the number of species to around 950 plants and gathered over 900,000 images to train our AI system. Before training begins, we need your help to review and tidy this massive image dataset — filtering out low-quality or incorrect images so the AI can learn to identify weeds accurately. If you're detail-oriented, reasonably tech-savvy, and can spare a few solid days (or even a week or two) over the next month, we'd love your help!

You can join us remotely from anywhere in Australia (provided you have a laptop, reliable access to the internet and your own Google or Microsoft account) or in person at our Canberra office. Training and support are provided — and you'll get a sneak peek of WeedScan 2.0 before launch! Interested? Email lucy.webster@invasives.com.au with the subject line 'WeedScan 2.0 Volunteer'".

Making young trees older

Link provided by Sarah Sharp and Ann Milligan

An article in *The Conversation* on 8 September by Philip Gibbins, Alex Holland and Stanislav Roudavski (available [here](#)) discusses their research into the process of making younger trees age faster without chainsaws ("veteranisation") to create more homes for wildlife.

ANU website: showcase unique values of Box-Gum Grassy Woodlands

Link provided by Sarah Sharp and Ann Milligan

This website has been created by the Australian National University's Sustainable Farms initiative to showcase the unique values of Box-Gum Grassy Woodlands, the science that underpins woodland restoration, and the urgent need for investment to ensure the conservation of the woodlands and woodland biodiversity for future generations. The site also provides a platform to connect with the many organisations and agencies who are working together to restore the Box-Gum Grassy Woodlands and support woodland biodiversity.

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Which is the real masterpiece, Vincent Van Gogh's "Sunflowers" (1888) on the left or the flowering Common Everlasting (*Chrysocephalum apiculatum*) on the right?

In May 2021 I had the pleasure of attending the National Gallery of Australia's Botticelli to Van Gogh Exhibit of masterpieces from the British National Gallery in London. After leaving the exhibit, I noticed in a planter outside the gallery building entrance there were Common Everlastings with rather robust looking flowers. When I looked at them more closely, I was struck by their morphological similarity to the sunflowers in Van Gogh's painting I had just viewed and snapped a picture of in the exhibit. And, of course, the question I pose above came immediately to mind. As I am a long time FOG member, I figure you can guess what my answer is but I wonder what your answer would be? Images & caption: Andrew Zelnik