



News of Friends of Grasslands

Supporting native grassy ecosystems

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July & August 2026

Activities

Work Parties

Gurubang Dhawura (Stirling Park)

Sat 18 July & Sat 15 Aug, 9-12:30pm.

Register: [Jamie Pittock](#)

Budjan Galindji Nature Reserve

Grasslands (at Franklin) Wed 1 & 22

July, 5 & 26 Aug

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

Excursions

Sat 4 July 2-4pm. *A visit to Mt Majura*

ParkCare's seed nodes/exlosures in

Watson, ACT. They have housed

many experiments on managing

native grassland species over several

years: e.g. evidence of grazing

pressure, St John's Wort

investigations, and more. Register:

[Margaret Ning](#)

Sat 1 Aug, 2-5 pm. *FOG's annual*

mid-winter 'talks and tea' at

Chambers Pavilion (adjacent to St
Mark's Grassland). Theme:

Grasslands as habitat. Speakers:

Rainer Rehwinkel on French

grassland plants; Dr Monica Knipler

on the NSW DCCEEW grassland

earless dragon program; Dr

Michael Mulvaney on his research

into 'climate change in grassy

ecosystems, including Gang-gang

Cockatoos'.

New members

Welcome to seven new

members, four in the ACT and

three in NSW.

What to look for in amendments – coming soon – to the ACT's *Nature Conservation Act* Matt Whitting, Vice-President FOG

I am stepping in to provide a report for our President Jamie Pittock who, at last report, was atop a mountain in Slovenia! Safe travels Jamie.

I understand the ACT Government is poised to progress amendments to the *Nature Conservation Act 2014 (NC Act)*. So, before the legislative machinery starts moving, it's worth looking back at what Friends of Grasslands (FOG) argued when a Review of the NC Act began in May 2024 ([here](#)) and to consider how the changes we want and need relate to the better protection and management of the ACT's grassy ecosystems.

It's also relevant to consider our recommendations from that time alongside the draft *Nature Conservation Strategy 2026-2036 (Strategy)* on which comment was invited in January 2026 ([here](#)). This Strategy will only be as strong as the amended Act under which the Strategy will be implemented.

In July 2024, FOG's central message was clear: The ACT cannot deliver credible nature-positive outcomes unless the NC Act explicitly recognises, protects and manages off-reserve conservation areas. This theme runs through almost every recommendation ([here](#)) The Strategy reinforces the same point, i.e., the proposed Nature Conservation Network, landscape-scale restoration priorities and climate-resilience actions all assume that conservation effort will occur across tenures, not just inside nature reserves. Without legislative backing, however, these ambitions will remain aspirational.

FOG called for the NC Act to define and map conservation areas, and for stronger powers to safeguard them. This aligns directly with the Strategy's emphasis on transparent spatial planning, legislating to recognise and protect 'Priority Conservation Areas'. The Strategy's listening report shows there is strong community support for clearer rules, better mapping, and more accountability. These are precisely the gaps FOG highlighted.

Another major theme was strengthening compliance and enforcement. FOG argued that penalties, powers and offences need a full review, and that infringement options should be available for breaches outside reserves. The Strategy's implementation framework anticipates more rigorous monitoring and reporting, but again, this requires statutory authority. Enforcement can only be done under the NC Act.

FOG urged the ACT to embed climate-change adaptation, enable leadership by Traditional Custodians, and provide for restoration at landscape scale. These are all in the Strategy which proposes, for example, climate-ready programs, cultural-burning pathways and catchment-scale restoration priorities. The Strategy assumes the NC Act will enable these actions, particularly new forms of stewardship, long-term agreements and multi-site restoration programs.

Finally, FOG stressed that offsets must be a last resort and urged that offset sites are established and governed transparently under the NC Act. The Strategy's consultation materials show widespread concern about offsets and a desire for stronger rules. This is another area where legislative amendments will determine whether the Strategy's principles translate into practice.

In short, the Strategy and FOG's 2024 submission on the NC Act are closely aligned. The question now is whether the forthcoming amendments to the NC Act will give the Strategy the statutory backbone it needs.

STOP PRESS

Australia's Nature Repair Committee is seeking comment, by 29 July, on the draft Enhancing Native Vegetation (ENV) Method ([website](#)). This 'Method' will enable land managers to improve grassy ecosystems as a new revenue-earning form of land use. Obviously expenses achieving the improvement must be deducted from the revenue ... the notion being put here is land managers may *profit* from repairing nature in Australia's temperate biome. The draft method must tackle issues related to interpreting data and measuring benefits. If anyone has an interest in this area, please email advocacy@fog.org.au

FOG Celebrates Major Success at the Conservation Council's 2026 ACT Environment Awards

Matt Whitting

Friends of Grasslands (FOG) had a remarkable night at the 2026 ACT Environment Awards, held on Friday 5 June at Capital Brewery in Fyshwick. Among strong fields of community leaders, scientists, landcarers and advocates, FOG (or FOG members) received three of the evening's honours: the Working Together Award for the organisation, and the Lifetime Achievement Awards for long-serving members and grassland champions Sarah Sharp and Michael Mulvaney. These awards recognise not only recent achievements but in Sarah's and Michael's cases decades of persistence, collaboration and evidence-based advocacy for grassy ecosystems in the ACT and region. Respect also for the leadership of our President Jamie Pittock. Jamie missed the ceremony as he was away working in Africa.

FOG wins the Working Together Award

The Working Together Award celebrates organisations that *"have seized the opportunity to build momentum through people working together and are working on a program for the environment which has achieved significant results in the past 12 months"*. This year, the judging panel recognised FOG's sustained, collaborative work advocating a landscape-scale conservation vision for the ACT.

FOG's nomination highlighted the organisation's unique strength: its ability to bring together professional ecologists, land managers, policy specialists, landholders and community members to protect the ACT's lowland grassy ecosystems. As the nomination stated, FOG's advocacy is

grounded in “*expertise across biogeography, ecology, land management; the operation of government and nongovernment institutions; and planning and environmental law*”.

A major focus of the nomination was FOG’s work since the release of the 2022 Biodiversity Network proposal, developed jointly with the Conservation Council. Over the past two years, FOG has:

- Mapped and described high-value conservation areas outside the reserve system;
- Articulated best-practice approaches for managing low-altitude grassy ecosystems;
- Built shared understanding across government, land managers and community groups about what a coordinated, cross-tenure ecological management system should look like.

This collaborative effort has directly influenced the *Draft ACT Nature Conservation Strategy*, which now proposes an ACT Nature Conservation Network—an idea FOG helped shape through years of constructive engagement. As the nomination put it, FOG has “*helped shift the ACT toward a more integrated, landscape-scale conservation model*”.

Sarah Sharp receives the Lifetime Achievement Award

FOG was also proud to celebrate Sarah Sharp, who received the Lifetime Achievement Award for more than 30 years of extraordinary contribution to grassy ecosystem conservation.

Sarah’s nomination captured the breadth of her impact: from her early work in the ACT Government mapping grasslands and preparing the first Action Plans, to her pivotal role in establishing FOG in 1994, to her decades of leadership in advocacy, community education, monitoring and on-ground restoration. Her achievements include major publications such as *Grassland Flora*, *Woodland Flora*, the *Grassy Ecosystems Management Kit*, and the *ACT Vegetation Monitoring Manual*, as well as co-organising landmark conferences in 1993 and 2014. More recently, Sarah was the lead author of the 2022 Biodiversity Network proposal, many elements of which now appear in the *Draft Nature Conservation Strategy*.

As her nomination noted, Sarah’s “*collaborative and pragmatic approach has brought people to the table, creating the space for practical and achievable solutions*”. Her influence is visible across government, Landcare groups, and the broader conservation community.

Michael Mulvaney receives the Lifetime Achievement Award

Dr Michael Mulvaney was recognised for a lifetime of contribution defined by scientific rigour, deep ecological knowledge and exceptional community engagement. Michael’s career spans roles in the ACT Government, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, and the Albury Conservation Company. His work in the ACT has shaped biodiversity decisions in areas including flora, fauna and development impacts. Michael has also been a driving force in community-led conservation: from more than 40 years of hands-on restoration with the Red Hill Regenerators—transforming former sheep paddocks into one of the ACT’s most intact box-gum woodlands—to mentoring students, volunteers and citizen scientists across the region. His co-founding of the NatureMapr platform, which “in its first three years... collected as many records of rare plants as had been recorded by anyone in the previous 100 years”, has left a lasting legacy for biodiversity knowledge and land management.

Michael’s leadership in research projects, including Little Eagle and Gang-gang Cockatoo ecology, and his generosity with time and expertise, have delivered enduring, measurable benefits to the ACT’s natural environment.

A moment of pride—and momentum

These awards reflect the dedication of FOG's volunteers, the strength of our partnerships, and the enduring importance of our work protecting and managing grassy ecosystems in the ACT and region. They also signal growing recognition—across government and the community—of the need for coordinated, long-term, landscape-scale conservation.

Congratulations to everyone involved, and especially to you Sarah and Michael!

Thank you and farewell to FOG members and all my colleagues

Sarah Sharp

On 15 July Phil and I are moving to South Australia, south-east of Adelaide in Mt Barker. I wish to thank and acknowledge some of those people who I have worked with in my paid and volunteering career, to whom I owe such a debt of gratitude and with whom I have shared so much intellectually and socially. I will maintain interests and involvement in conservation matters in South Australia, and I will of course stay in touch with FOG happenings through the newsletter. And I do hope to catch up with some of you if you venture across the plains.

Firstly, I would like to thank you all for your amazing farewell in April, followed up earlier this month by being nominated then receiving a Lifetime Achievement Award by the Conservation Council, together with Michael Mulvaney. To be acknowledged by the farewell and the award was truly humbling and a great honour.

When I began my grassland adventure in 1992 to review the known information about grasslands, grasslands were a very convenient landscape on which to build a city – flat, no trees to clear, essentially neglected 'sheep paddocks' all ready to be developed into something useful. There is now a general recognition that grasslands and grassy woodland remnants are biodiverse gems with their own singular beauty and unique flora and fauna that require protection. It was a great privilege to be able to learn so much and be involved in modifying public opinion about these ecosystems, working with an incredibly diverse range of people.

The highlight of my professional career and personal desire to see conservation truly embedded into all aspects of life is the forthcoming creation of a conservation network in ACT. The network outlined in the draft Nature Conservation Strategy is designed to provide protection (and ecological management) to on- and off-reserve conservation areas. The conservation network was largely influenced by the Conservation Council's proposal for an off-reserve Biodiversity Network, which I was heavily involved in developing.

While I can't begin to name everyone that I have had the privilege to work with, I do want to identify a few key people in my career. I acknowledge and thank my initial colleagues at the Wildlife Research Unit (now incarnated as the bigger Office of Nature Conservation), including managers Keith Williams and David Shorthouse, colleagues Will Osborne, Kruno Kukolic, Nicki Webb and Mark Dunford and others within Parks and Conservation Service particularly Peter Mills, Brian Murphy and Steve Taylor. Especially I wish to thank Rainer Rehwinkel, David Eddy and Dave Mallinson for the opportunity to write the Grassland and Woodland Flora field guides and Isobel Crawford who guided me in my first ventures into identifying grassland plants. I wish to acknowledge the Ngannawal elders, especially Wally Bell, who have helped me to respect and therefore tread more lightly on Country. I wish also to acknowledge all of those volunteers that work as dedicated advocates for the preservation and conservation of our biodiversity for the preservation of humanity and all of life on this land we call home.

I give particular thanks for the companionship and acknowledge the dedication of my FOG colleagues, those on the committee, past and present, and those working behind the scenes. FOG is an amazing organisation, supported by its stable and involved membership, and is respected for communicating in a non-confrontational way to provide measured and practical ideas. It is thus a key stakeholder within the general 'community' of organisations concerned with conservation matters. I feel very proud to have been a part of this organisation since its inception.

Collared Sparrowhawk, swift, silent and secretive

Michael Bedingfield

One day while I was pottering at home in the kitchen, I heard a very loud BANG outside. I looked out the window to see a hawk crouching over a Crested Pigeon. The hawk had apparently hit the pigeon at high speed before crashing into my metal garden shed. The pigeon was quite inert and held tightly in the hawk's talons. The birds remained in that position for some time and I was able to get a few photos of them, and one of my photos is shown here. After a while the hawk tried to fly away with its capture but the weight was too much for it to gain lift off. So it dragged the pigeon to a more private place under some shrubbery where it proceeded to pluck it. Later on I went out to see what had happened. All that was left was a few pigeon feathers.



The attacker was a Collared Sparrowhawk. It is a smallish, lightly built hawk, slate grey on the upper side and finely barred rufous and white below, with a distinct chestnut collar and yellowish legs. The male is 28 to 33 cm from bill tip to tail, the female is larger at 36 to 39 cm, and their colouring is the same. Their call is a rapid and sometimes high-pitched "keek keek keek". They are very similar in coloring to the larger Brown Goshawks (*Accipiter fasciatus*) and distinguished from them by their smaller size and having a square tail compared to a rounded one on the Brown Goshawk.

Collared Sparrowhawks have the scientific name of *Accipiter cirrocephalus* and are distributed all over the Australian continent and Tasmania as well as being in Papua New Guinea. They use a diversity of habitats, including grasslands, grassy woodlands and forests, and have adapted to urban areas. They breed in the Canberra region and are present all year round. They are generally sedentary, but known to have migratory behaviour although their movements are not well known. They live a solitary life except when breeding. Though regarded as uncommon, their conservation status is noted as of least concern.

Collared Sparrowhawks feed mainly on small birds which they catch in flight. Unlike other raptors they don't spend much time circling way up in the sky, but instead they are secretive ambush predators who wait patiently under cover. When approaching a possible target they will fly low, stealthily moving from tree to tree. They will sit silently on the branch of a tree or shrub concealed among the foliage, waiting for an unsuspecting bird to appear. When the time comes they fly out quickly and hit the bird in flight, often with great force. If their ambush fails they are able to pursue prey at high speed, with erratic flight through obstacles of trees and shrubs. They grip their victim with their strong, sharp talons until it has died, though sometimes the shock of the impact is enough to subdue it. Then it is plucked and eaten. While their diet is primarily of small birds, they will also eat larger birds such as the unlucky pigeon, small mammals, lizards and larger insects.

Breeding for this species is on an annual cycle with one brood raised each year. Nesting occurs from July to December, but mainly in September and October. The nest is a rough platform high in a tree, made of sticks and twigs and lined with green leaves. The clutch of eggs is two to four in number with an incubation of thirty-five days, with the female doing most of the sitting. The male helps out and also brings her food. Both parents feed the young. After fledging the juveniles remain dependent on the parents for up to six weeks. Sexual maturity is reached after one year.



It is worth saying a few words about the unfortunate Crested Pigeon, for which I felt some sorrow because of its fate. It is known as *Ocyphaps lophotes*. These pigeons live and breed in my suburb. They frequent my garden and I am quite fond of them. They are common throughout most of the Australian continent, preferring a grassy habitat with scattered trees. However it was a fascinating surprise to witness the successful hunt by the Collared Sparrowhawk. I've photographed this hawk a couple of times before, but the result was not good because of its habit of perching in amongst shadowy eucalypt foliage. So to get clear photographs of the bird in action was quite satisfying.

Main references:

<https://www.birdsinbackyards.net/species/Accipiter-cirrocephalus>

[https://app.birda.org/species-guide/8498/Collared Sparrowhawk](https://app.birda.org/species-guide/8498/Collared_Sparrowhawk)

<https://australian.museum/learn/animals/birds/collared-sparrowhawk/>

Too much of a good thing? Close-up

John Fitz Gerald

This edition, it's native species. I'm returning to a thought I raised in 2018 Nov-Dec FOG news – "Foe or Friend". This was about some native plants that have locally become troublesome, usually in response to a disturbance such as fire or land degradation. We'll all appreciate that some species are quite good pioneers and make the most of their opportunities when favourable circumstances arise, but that can reduce diversity if their success is too great.

It's interesting to search through websites for information of this type. Generally, advice appears very locally and it's hard to pin down current and reliable information. In the ACT, a resource compiled by Paul Downey, gives a list, largely of shrubs and trees, for which caution is recommended in sensitive natural sites (see weblink at the base of this article). No reader will be surprised that over one quarter of that list comprises 44 *Acacia* species, with *Acacia baileyana* posted as enemy number one - too many local grassy woodlands have been invaded by this unwanted plant or other *Acacias*.



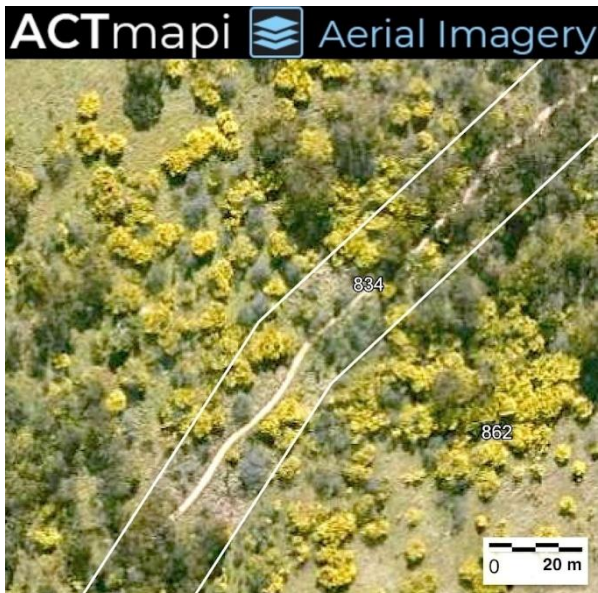
I draw attention to one species not on this watch list – *Acacia pravissima*, the Ovens Valley Wattle. ALA has over 2,100 records in the south-east corner of Australia. This plant is native to the ACT but only at higher elevations in the west and south. So it is out of natural range in our lowlands - probably you know of many places where it has been planted in Canberra's nature reserves and open spaces, and proven to be a hardy attractive shrub.

Generally it does not appear to be invasive – recruitment does not seem extensive. The accompanying image stored by the National Seed Bank for its collection CBG8700071 (scale bar 1mm) shows a shape, an aril and a shiny hard coat normal for *Acacia* seeds. Technically, lowland plantings here should be discouraged. Also, I've

heard that ACT Parks and Conservation are inclined to actively remove its plants.

This could be in response to a large and vigorous population along the Centenary Trail about 1 km north-east of the trail carpark at the edge of Hall village. This population is definitely recruiting actively. The Trail opened in October 2013 and involved tree and shrub plantings. A short walk along the Trail will reveal the problem to you as the recruiting population extends for a few kilometres, over to at least One Tree Hill.

A quicker look at the problem is remotely, via the government site ACTmapi: open an Aerial Imagery map, navigate to the Trail section near Hall, and select the image layer 2023 September. You could need to zoom in to see abundant yellow blobs – each is an *A. pravissima* in full spring flower. Using that resource, I took a screenshot of a small section of Trail and include it on the next page.



As context, the ACTmapi layer for 2016 March shows only small plants at this place on both sides of a very young Trail. I have no idea what is special here – the former paddock was very open, probably fertile from a long grazing history, and possibly then disturbed by Trail construction.

Therefore, please keep a watch in case *A. pravissima* is booming elsewhere. The website Weeds of Australia does note that this species is naturalized in the Blue Mountains NSW and Canberra Nature Park but, more ominously, is an environmental weed in central and southern parts of Victoria.

My second choice is *Kunzea ericoides*, a species listed as suspect in both Downey and Weeds of Australia, with common name Burgan. ALA has just over 7,000 records. It has a wide native range at higher elevations from south-east Queensland to Victoria.

My image here shows the tiny seeds of the species (scale bar 0.25mm), and a good flowering year will produce large quantities of these. Once again, it seems to be stable in many places in our region where it is favoured as reliable and attractive, and a tough pioneer plant that is easy to propagate.

It is clearly an opportunistic species and is reported to spread rapidly in disturbed agricultural land, especially after sheep grazing. In the ACT we all know of places swamped by thickets of the shrub – for example the valley floor at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, some steep river valleys of the Murrumbidgee and Molonglo Rivers, and the grasslands and slopes on the southern side of Black Mountain. Definitely another native to watch!



Weeds of Australia notes that all *K. ericoides* in Tasmania is naturalized and considers it an environmental weed in Victoria (especially the Grampians) and ACT. Some of its relatives have a somewhat similar reputation, for example *Kunzea parvifolia* where overstorey has been removed in the Braidwood area, so caution is probably advisable for all Kunzeas. I finish with a qualification about species names. Currently, *K. ericoides* is accepted as a New Zealand taxon while its taxonomic status in Australia is a work-in-progress. In VICFLORA, advice under the *K. ericoides* taxon states “*Kunzea ericoides* (A.Rich.)is native to New Zealand and does not occur in Victoria” and that Victorian plants are now referable to one of five alternative *Kunzea* taxa – *Flora of Victoria*, vol. 3 (1996).

One characteristic of shrubs like *A. pravissima* and *K. ericoides* is that, once established, they survive periods of hot, dry weather. This means they will be ‘permanent’ unless countered by active management. In contrast, there are many other small herbaceous natives which boom given a chance by disturbances such as fire (Senecios are a prime example) or loss of ground cover (this

summer has shown large mats of *Dysphania pumilio* (Crumbweed) or *Portulaca oleracea* (Munyeroo), seeming to take advantage of 'vacant' sites). However, once the effects of the primary disturbance drop away, other species (including weeds) progressively move back and diversity returns to ground covers. In my experience, it is unusual that native herbaceous booms require much, if any, active management.

High magnification images were taken using the Nikon microscope at the National Seed Bank 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 websites including:

Atlas of Living Australia – ala.org.au

PlantNET – plantnet.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au

Downey, invasive-native-plant-list-ACT – <https://www.act.gov.au/environment/animals-and-plants/plants/reporting-and-controlling-invasive-plants#Downloads>

ACTmapi – actmapi.gov.au

Weeds of Australia – keyserver.lucidcentral.org/weeds/data/media/Html/index.htm

VICFLORA – vicflora.rbg.vic.gov.au

Vale Jean Geue

Margaret Ning

News of Jean Geue's death was circulated by email in May. Here are two additional tributes that were published in 'Field Natter', the newsletter of the Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra.

Rosemary Blemings

In case you haven't heard this sad news from other sources, Jean Geue passed away on 14 May 2026.

Jean was a very active member of the local Native Plants Society for many years. She regularly attended their meetings and was often seen around the Botanic Gardens. Jean had simultaneously been an active member of the Field Naturalists and many other conservation organisations. She also religiously volunteered at the annual park care information stall at Jamison, dedicating an entire weekend to provide information and advice to promote, particularly, her favourite patch, Aranda Bushland Reserve, but also Black Mountain and other local reserves.

Jean contributed to the Friends of Aranda Bushland's pioneering Field Guide, Our Patch and was integral to the success of the Black Mountain Wildflower Walks introducing scores of everyday people to spring wildflowers and later lead the Chippendale walks as well as writing self-guided walks for individuals exploring Black Mountain's trails.

She spent hours at the Belconnen Green Waste site explaining about weeds and offering free native plants in exchange during the twice-yearly Weed Swap team's initiative.



Jean loved wearing bright colours especially pink, purple and green shades, which went well with her blond, braided hair. We understand she had a large, impressive wardrobe at home.

Jean used to take many photos of members and flowers on group walks. The photos Jean took were 'way ahead of their time', accurately and beautifully revealing the diversity of local species..., especially when they were encountered on walks in the region's natural areas or the Aranda bushland.

Jean moved into care a few years ago.

She was passionate about conservation and contributed a great deal to this cause. She will be sorely missed.

Alison Milton

Sadly, this newsletter did not go out in time to give details of Jean's final farewell but I did meet a few members from Field Nats and other organisations with which Jean was a member.

The service was appropriately held in the Margaret Whitlam Pavilion at the arboretum with views over the lake and the bushland on Black Mountain, which Jean would no doubt have approved. It was a lovely service with words of her life history from her younger sister Susan and her niece Naomi created a wonderful pictorial history of her life from the many thousands of photos that they had found in Jean's house, many of which were taken by Jean herself.

In keeping with her strong beliefs in conservation they had chosen a wicker basket coffin, which oddly enough was the second funeral I had attended this year with a wicker basket coffin. This one however, in keeping with Jean's love of wearing bright colours had a green thread right through the middle.

The service concluded with light refreshments of sandwiches. It was noted by some attendees that this was the first funeral they had attended where there were no white bread sandwiches. Jean liked her glass of wine so we were also encouraged to take a glass of wine to drink a toast to this remarkable woman who pioneered many paths for women in the workforce, digital recordings for library recording systems and of course her passion for conservation and propagating Australian native plants and her photography.

I learned so much more about her at this service and her remarkable journey and achievements. She was indeed a very remarkable woman. She lived a great life and left an imprint on her passion for conservation and native plants especially in the areas of Black Mountain and the Aranda Nature Reserve, which was almost literally on her back door.

Being so close to the reserve she had numerous local birds visiting to her great delight, some of whom were regular visitors that she could hand feed a small handful of seeds.

'Scrape and Sow' sites near the National Arboretum of Canberra (NAC)

Margaret Ning

Below are three articles born out of FOG's visit to Patches GG and N just adjacent to the northern end of the National Arboretum of Canberra, on Saturday afternoon, 16th May 2026. The first by Matt Whitting (FOG advocacy) explains some of the advocacy issues that led to our visit, the second by Rainer Rehwinkel contains a general description of 'scrape and sow' sites and the third by Ann Milligan and me describes our actual afternoon visit.

The Advocacy Behind Patch GG

Matt Whitting

In 2011, a decision under national environmental law, that authorises urban development in 'East Molonglo', identified Patch GG as a compensatory 'environmental offset'. East Molonglo includes the suburbs Coombs, Wright, Whitlam and Denman Prospect; it also includes suburbs not yet commenced including Bandler and Sulman. In 2014, Patch GG was added to the National Arboretum.

Patch GG protects 43.9 ha of critically endangered Box-Gum Woodland; potential populations of the Pink-tailed Worm-lizard; key breeding and foraging habitat for declining woodland birds and provides a potential corridor between the Belconnen woodlands and the Molonglo River Corridor (via the National Arboretum). Concerns exist about the future of Patch GG.¹ In short, the approval granted under national environmental law that enables urban development in 'East Molonglo' expires in 2041 and, unless the ACT Government dedicates Patch GG as a nature reserve (or similar), the requirement to protect Patch GG will also expire. Other environmental offsets for the East Molonglo development are nature reserves. At present, Patch GG is zoned for residential development. Given all the work going into restoring Patch GG, it should be a nature reserve. The Conservation Council is leading in the fight to ensure the continued existence of Patch GG.

Grassland Restoration Project sites near the National Arboretum

Rainer Rehwinkel

On Friends of Grasslands' second field trip on Saturday 16 May, we were walked through two Greening Australia restoration sites by Nicki Taws. The sites are on public land immediately north of the National Arboretum Canberra and are accessible via a gate just downhill from the Himalayan Cedars carpark. These two sites demonstrate the success of the scrape-and-sow method, in which a layer of topsoil is removed* and seeds of grassland grasses and forbs (wildflowers) are sown onto the remaining soil layer. This method is designed to remove the topsoil, which is generally higher in nutrients than the lower clay horizon. This is so especially in agricultural landscapes, such as at this site where grazing has occurred for many years. Topsoil also contains a greater number of the exotic weed species, which are also prevalent in agricultural landscapes.

Disturbing topsoil in lowland sites invariably activates the weed seed store. Seeds are encouraged to germinate by the disturbance. Additionally, soil microbes become active by exposure to the air. This then promotes the release of nutrients, which in turn feeds the weed seedlings. So, removing the topsoil takes away this feedback system that is disadvantageous to the establishment of seedlings of indigenous species, which are adapted to lower soil fertility.

We were shown two sites, one more recent and the other established a few years ago. To the untrained eyes, the older site is indistinguishable from a naturally occurring grassy ground layer.

**On these two sites, the removed topsoil has been deposited in banks surrounding the restoration sites. The banks are planted up with wattles and other shrubs, and hardy, rapidly establishing groundlayer species like mat-rushes etc.*

¹ <https://conservationcouncil.org.au/blog/2026/05/19/the-future-of-patch-gg-an-environmental-offset-site-zoned-for-future-development/>

Grassland restoration at 'scrape and sow' sites on a grassland offset

Margaret Ning and Ann Milligan

FOG has been interested in Greening Australia's trials of restoration by the 'scrape and sow' method for ten or more years around Canberra and in local NSW. FOG groups help to assess the success of Greening Australia's 'scrape and sow' restoration trials at Scottsdale and Ginninderry, and FOG is also directly responsible for two patches at our Yarramundi Grassland work area.

On Saturday afternoon 16th May a largeish FOG group visited two 'scrape and sow' plots north of the Himalayan Cedars section of the National Arboretum of Canberra. Our guide, Nicki Taws of Greening Australia, told us that this area had been identified as Box-Gum grassy woodland, and of National Environmental Significance, during the Molonglo Strategic Assessment in around 2010. At that time, Tall Stipa (*Austrostipa bigeniculata*) was the dominant grass in the largely native ground-storey, but there were few forbs. The moderate quality of that grassland, then, meant it could be designated an environmental offset (known as Patch GG and Patch N) for seven proposed new suburbs in the Molonglo Valley (Coombs, Wright, Denman Prospect and Whitlam now exist; Molonglo, Bandler and Sulman, not yet.)

The first area we walked through on Saturday, Patch N, had been severely invaded by weeds by the time it was scraped of topsoil in 2023 and then sown with 20–40 species of native forbs and grasses, Nicki said. We saw that many of the sown grassland species were growing well through the open network of jute mesh (laid to reduce erosion). The native plants were relatively sparse and interspersed with common weeds such as Flatweed, *Hypochaeris radicata*, and Fleabane, *Erigeron* sp. On Saturday the site was pretty with flowers of Hoary Sunray, *Leucochrysum albicans*, Common Everlasting, *Chrysocephalum apiculatum*, Bluebell, *Wahlenbergia* sp. and Native Flax, *Linum marginale*. Unfortunately, the patch is surrounded by dense original groundcover (weeds), and although they have been slashed and mulched and had new trees/shrubs planted, we saw that those weeds were still growing very well, and re-invasion of the scrape seems to be a constant threat. However, in a separate, more open part of this 2023 sowing of Patch N, the groundcover was more sparse with fewer weeds and many small well-grazed tufts of pale grass, possibly showing that the kangaroos are finding good tucker there.



Patch N (the most recent scrape and sow) Photo: Mo Fahri



Photos: Michael Bedingfield. Above L to R: Common Everlasting, Hoary Sunray all within Patch N. Immediately above: 'The butterflies are Common Grass-blue, *Zizina otis*'

Then we moved to Patch GG, which had been scraped and sown in 2019. Here the jute mesh has disappeared, and there were numerous healthy native forbs and grasses with plenty of bare ground. It was a joy to be in. Yes, there were still a few weeds, but only a couple of Fleabane.

Some Yellow Burr Daisy, *Calotis lappulacea*, was in flower. Kangaroo grass, *Themeda triandra*, had been 'hammered' here by kangaroos, and we saw several wide *Themeda* tussocks eaten down to about 2 cm in height.

I was delighted to see frequent wolf-spider burrows looking well established, with openings around 2.5 cm in diameter (in suitable areas, these would be habitat for Grassland Earless Dragons, I think). I had not spotted anything comparable in the more recently scraped area.

A total of 1.2 ha of forb-rich native grassland has been restored by this method in Patches GG and N. The two Patches together total 75 hectares of Box-gum woodland and secondary grassland, now managed by the ACT Government Parks and Conservation Service. Significant investment has been made over the past ten years in improving the woodland and grassland towards high-quality ecological condition.

FOG's advocacy group is asking ACT Government minister Yvette Berry to *guarantee* that this area will be preserved after 2041 when it stops being designated an 'offset'. The preference would be for it to become a nature reserve.

Thank you, Nicki, for giving up your Saturday afternoon to show us this important area; so near to popular paths – yet not generally known about (or accessible to the public).



Group photo: Mo Fahri

Advocacy Report

Matt Whitting

In reverse chronological order:

June

Concern expressed over a perceived failure protect an environmental offset, 14/6

FOG and the Conservation Council wrote to the Federal Environment Minister expressing concern, jointly, over a perceived failure to protect what is supposed to be a 'Golden Sun Moth Conservation Reserve' protected by a conservation covenant at Lot 2 Wallaroo Road in Wallaroo (Lot 2). We explained we consider the intention to construct an electricity sub-station in the middle of this environmental offset site would be inappropriate. Even if the patch upon which the facility may be constructed is degraded habitat, building on it will permanently remove the possibility of the potential habitat being restored.

Submission on the exposure draft of the National Environmental Standard for Environmental Offsets (draft Offsets Standard) ([here](#)), 9/6

FOG and the Conservation Council commented jointly on the draft Offset Standard, offering support on two conditions. We explained, first, that to avoid compounding losses through time, offset sites under repair to compensate for permanent impacts must be formally (legally) protected and managed *for the duration of the impact at the impact site, i.e., in perpetuity*.

Second, we explained that we consider all actions and measures taken to 'adequately compensate' for residual significant impacts on protected matters, including the 'more strategic offsets' to be delivered by the Restoration Contributions Holder, must be subject to the Offset Standard; otherwise, offset projects delivered by this pathway may not be 'like for like', and may not even occur near the impact site where a residual significant impact on a protected matter occurs.

Submission of draft Plan of Management (Plan) for Queanbeyan Nature Reserve (Reserve), 9/6

FOG and the Conservation Council commented jointly ([here](#)) on the draft Plan for this Reserve which sits in NSW abutting the ACT border. The plan establishes which activities will be allowed in the Reserve and lays out strategies and objectives for 'Preserving remnant biodiversity values through active and adaptive management', 'Contributing to the conservation of a broader grassy landscape' and 'Supporting appreciation of the park and its values'. We urged that the Plan be more ambitious, particularly in view of the decision looming for the landscape-scale conservation and development of the lower Jerrabomberra Valley on the ACT side of the border, where development could threaten grassy ecosystems and species including arguably the most threatened species in Australia, the Canberra Grassland Earless Dragon.

Draft North Curtin Residential Area - Detailed Conditions for Planning, & and Development, 3/6

FOG's submission on the detailed plans for the development of a portion of land in North Curtin, abutting Yarra Glen, i.e., at the eastern end of the North Curtin horse paddocks, focused on what we perceived as poor process ([submission](#)). We were critical of the way detailed plans were prepared without completing ecological surveys. Our submission points to records of populations of grassy ecosystem species and highlights the importance of considering their retention in the landscape.

May

Submission on the exposure draft of the National Environmental Standard for Matters of National Environmental Significance (draft MNES Standard) ([here](#)), 27/5

FOG suggested amendments to the draft MNES Standard to achieve desirable outcomes, enhance clarity and promote accountability and consistency in decision-making. Among the changes suggested FOG called for: suitably qualified experts relied upon to be independent; monitoring and reporting sufficient to know whether the Standard's objectives and outcomes are achieved; for decisions to be made based on high confidence, supported by evidence, such as on the likely effectiveness of proposed mitigation measures; and for adaptive management to be required to reduce impacts as much as practicable throughout the lifespan of any approved action.

Nature Conservation Forum, 21/5

This quarter the Nature Conservation Forum (info on [the Forum](#)) discussed a range of topics and heard from the ACT Environment Minister Suzanne Orr about her priorities. The communique from the meeting is [here](#). High on the Minister's priority list are the next Nature Conservation Strategy (to be considered by the ACT Cabinet in July) and advancing landscape-scale approaches to conservation planning and regulating development in the ACT. The Minister confirmed her vision is for a single bioregional plan for the whole of the ACT (there is information about the bioregional planning process [here](#)). Other big plans relate to the management of matters related to energy, climate and water.

Comment on ongoing development of the Nature Repair Market ([here](#)), 4/5

FOG and Conservation Council commented jointly on the Federal Environment Department's three issues papers about the ongoing development of the Market. The opportunity to comment follows reform of national environmental law in Nov 2025; following these reforms, obligations to offset damage to matters of national environmental significance can be acquitted in this Market.

We commented on how gains delivered through the Market for threatened species and threatened ecological communities will be accounted. We called for a direct accounting-style relationship to be presented in the Market Register, which would enable the public to see what specific loss is offset by what specific gain. We called for the better legal protection of offset sites that are meant to compensate for permanent losses, because the Market's protection will never last beyond the term of any nature repair project, a maximum of 100 years.

April

Statement of reasons request: offset for William Hovell Drive Duplication (EPBC 2020/8703), 24/4

On 22 April, an offset management plan (OMP) was published for the offset intended to compensate for the duplication of William Hovell Drive ([here](#)). Concerned the offset does not appear to 'improve or maintain' Box Gum Woodland or habitat for Swift and Superb parrots as it ought, FOG has requested a statement of reasons for the decision to approve that OMP. This is a first step. On reviewing the basis for the decision to approve the OMP, FOG *may* seek a judicial review of the approval.

Contributions welcome

Do you have a story from your favourite grassland or grassy woodland that you would like to share? Please contact the Editor: newsletter@fog.org.au

Never a Dull Moment at Budjan Galindji Grassland Reserve

Margaret Ning

As I write this article, this lovely print (below) by David Pope is [for sale](#). It has a back story that I shall now share.



On 4 February this year, eleven Budjan Galindji volunteers attending a normal Wednesday morning work party, experienced a more action-packed day than normal.

At the beginning of our day, a handful of us saw someone in the new southern Corkscrew Grass area wielding a machine of some description, so we traipsed over to see what was going on. A seed collector was sucking up the bountiful amount of *Vittadinia muelleri* seed like there was no tomorrow. After we confirmed that he had permission to be operating there we returned to our normal area and did normal things.

Later on, Ranger Alex visited and stocked up our supply of coloured marker flags. These are an essential

tool for quite a few of our special Budjan operations, and always make the site look rather colourful.

We were then surprised to discover our next grassland visitor for the day. The cartoonist David Pope was amongst us taking photos of some of our still-flowering flora. By the looks of his lovely print (above), he did some other homework as well, as there was no Golden Sun Moth in sight on that day.

The excitement didn't stop there, as around mid-morning I sighted a Latham's Snipe flying from our dam off to the North (photo below). It had been operating on the newly-exposed mud flats of our dam and should have soon commenced its migratory flight to the northern hemisphere.



Photo: Paul Cheeseman

And finally a small number of us converged on our favourite café in Mitchell for lunch. What a morning!

A ramble in Mt Ainslie Reserve

Ann Milligan and Margaret Ning

27 April 2026. The slopes of Mt Ainslie are amazingly free of invasive plant species (though there are a few), as we observed during our morning walk led by Margaret Ning and Andrew Zelnik in cool clear autumn conditions on this Anzac weekend public holiday Monday.

Among the relatively sparse trees – mainly eucalypts and parasitic *Exocarpos cupressiformis* (native cherry/Cherry Ballart) – on the flat areas and lower slopes, we spotted plenty of native grassy woodland forbs and shrubs despite autumn not being the main season for grassland flowers. Had the day been as planned, we should have been spotting birds as well, but Rainer Rehwinkel was unable to be with us, limiting our group's bird expertise.

Rainer had sent us a long checklist of plant species he has found in this patch during earlier visits, and the botanists – especially Isobel Crawford and others in our group found most of those species and added nearly forty more, particularly in the early stages of the walk.

Cryptandra amara (Bitter Cryptandra) bushes covered in white pinhead-size buds brushed our ankles. *Hibbertia obtusifolia* (Grey Guinea-flower) bushes shone with occasional pale yellow flowers, and infrequent *Xerochrysum viscosum* (Sticky Everlasting) plants still displayed tatty golden flowerheads. *Cassinia quinquefaria* (Rosemary Cassinia) was relatively common but not overwhelming – yet. *Glycine tabacina* (Variable Glycine) and *G. clandestina* (Twining Glycine) lurked, flowerless, among *Plantago varia* (Native Plaintain) and *Cynoglossum australe* (Australian Forget-me-not). A highlight was *Oxytes brachypoda* (Large Tick-trefoil) with its huge trifoliate leaves.



Right: *Xerochrysum viscosum* (Sticky Everlasting). Left: *Hibbertia obtusifolia* (Grey Guinea-flower). Both photos Mo Fahri. Below right: A large yellow box with Mo Fahri at base to show height. Photo: Andrew Zelnik

An open grassland area beside the bitumen road leading to the top of Mt Ainslie proved to be rich in small plants of *Leucochrysum albicans* (Hoary Sunray), a threatened species Andrew told us. A few of the plants were in flower, looking like small fried eggs on stalks, basking in the glorious sunshine. There we also saw chunky plants of *Cheilanthes sieberi* (Rock Fern), and one *Centaureum erythraea* (Common Centaury – a weed) with its pretty pink flowers.

Higher up the slopes the tree-cover is more dense and with little to see on the ground our pace increased but was still stop–start. For example, a large bush of *Olearia lirata* (Snowy Daisybush) near a gully of spreading blackberry rambles generated much discussion.

At the top of the path where it meets a formed gravel road, the group split and most of us returned to the cars, while a few set off to find *Allocasuarina verticillata* (Drooping She-oak) but there were no Glossy Black Cockatoos in them. The highlight for everyone on the way back was the magnificent old-growth *Eucalyptus rossii* trees (Scribbly Gums) with their wondrous shapes.

Thank you, Andrew and Margaret (and Rainer for initiating the visit) for an interesting morning. Also thanks to Andrew for using *Woodland Flora* to show the newer members and visitors what several species looked like when they were in flower.



Afterthought: Janet Russell and Ann, in earlier years, have found a good array of native groundcover species on the flat parts of Mt Ainslie Reserve at peak flowering time. Let’s aim for that season for our next visit.

A different FOG excursion

Margaret Ning and Ann Milligan

Can goats control blackberries in grassy landscapes? Goats were apparently successful against thick blackberries and other weeds in Canberra several years ago (ref: [here](#)) at the edge of Lake Burley Griffin, and in deep gullies at the top of the Australian National Botanic Gardens, and also on TV in the program *River Cottage Australia* set in Tilba NSW.

On Saturday 6th June a twelve-strong FOG party visited 'Dacelo' at Reidsdale, near Araluen, to see the goats in action with our own eyes. Our visit took place in mild temperatures under a brilliant blue sky – a relief after the Canberrans and Bungendoreans had driven miles through thick mist earlier in the morning.

We were welcomed by generous and hospitable hosts Clare and Larry, and offered freshly baked muffins (two flavours) and coffee, before following Larry on a tour of the twenty acres they have owned for twenty years. This property, on Yuin Country, occupies a deep valley with a running creek, downslope of the road from Braidwood to Araluen. It is woody – a mixture of eucalypts and *Acacia mearnsii* (Black Wattle) mostly with mistletoe and lichen – and among the native grassland species there are many patches of non-natives, including blackberries and honeysuckle.



In this Queabeyan-Palerang Regional Council area, control of blackberries (and serrated tussock) is mandatory, and inspectors check the property every five years. However, despite Clare and Larry paying a spray contractor to attack the blackberries in previous years, those pests are still present, especially where the terrain is difficult.

Recently Clare and Larry were persuaded to try goats as control agents, and they now have a small herd of 7 goats hard at work in the woodland, surrounded by lightweight plastic and wire electric fencing on the very steep hillside. *Photo left Andrew Zelnik.*

The goats have already eaten their way through five of these temporary paddocks. Where the brambles are thick, Larry has laid planks over them to give the goats better access. He says they *aim* for the blackberries, especially eating the leaves until just denuded stalks remain; but regrowth can be quick, depending on the time of year.

Larry and Clare have been pleasantly surprised by the goats' success. They say they were sceptical at first, worrying that the goats would escape, but this has happened only once. Moving them is not easy, as we found when we helped to walk the goats along the track from a higher to a lower paddock. Three ran off, jumping into unfenced undergrowth, but fortunately three of our group nimbly rounded them up to join the rest as we herded them into the new patch. The goats are calm and friendly, and so far Larry has not been head-butted.

The property also supports seven free-ranging alpacas that are shorn once a year, and there are wombats, as well as pigs and rabbits so the groundcover is well grazed and fertilised. We did not see any pig damage. As usual, our party stopped and checked native forbs and grasses and ferns every few metres along our tour but found only five native species not already listed during a previous visit. It was a pleasure, and exciting, to see an extensive understorey of *Microlaena stipoides* (Weeping Grass). The newly-spotted species are *Sigesbeckia australiensis* (Cobber Weed, a forb), *Banksia marginata* (Silver Banksia, a tree), *Pennisetum alopduroides* (Swamp Foxtail Grass, new name *Cenchrus*), an unknown *Eragrostis* (Lovegrass) that we hope is native, and a very large fern, possibly *Blechnum* sp. at the creek.

At the end of our ramble with Larry, we returned to the home paddock to a very welcome plentiful and delicious sit-down lunch that Clare had prepared in our absence. What amazing hosts! Thank you so much, Clare and Larry, for inviting us to an interesting and different FOG excursion, enjoyed by us all. The landowners/land managers in our party seemed to strongly appreciate this opportunity to discuss management issues in this challenging terrain.

Photo feature

Andrew Zelnik



Tunbridge Township Lagoon Nature Reserve in late January 2024. In the middle-distance is Marg Ning inadvertently adding a sense of scale. We called into this iconic key remnant natural temperate grassland site during our FOG trip to Tasmania (see pp1-2 Mar-Apr 2024 and p4 Sep-Oct 2024 Newsletters). It's on a 16ha reserve located in the Central Midlands, about halfway between the picturesque historic towns of Oatlands and Ross.

*Sadly, in contrast to FOG's visit 20 years prior, very early in January 2004 (see pp 4-5 Mar-Apr 2004 Newsletter), we missed out on being treated to a display of the high floral diversity this native grassland is famed for. The cold and windy conditions didn't encourage wide exploration and botanising under an already very short time window. Nevertheless, amongst the finds were flowering Dwarf Riceflower (new for me), Shiny Swampmat (in abundance closer to the water), Milky Beautyheads (also new for me), Fuzzy New Holland Daisy, Narrow-leaved New Holland Daisy, and Roundleaf Wilsonia (not flowering). The latter four species are listed as "Rare" in Tasmania and were just a few of the 24 threatened species (22 flora and 2 fauna) listed for this site.
Photo & Caption: Andrew Zelnik*

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