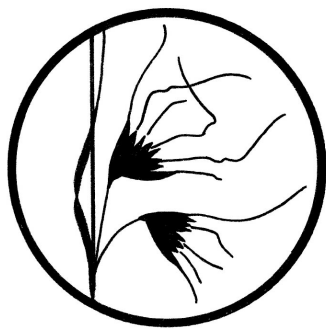




News of Friends of Grasslands

Supporting native grassy ecosystems

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September & October 2026

Welcome!
to five new members
who have joined FOG
since late June.

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Geoff's coffin carried sprigs of
Kangaroo Grass and Wattle.

President's report

Friends of Grasslands (FOG) lost one of its greatest champions in July with the death of Geoff Robertson. I had the honour of contributing a short eulogy on behalf of FOG at the funeral service for Geoff on 3rd August 2026. This is an edited version.

9,748! That was the total number of volunteer hours, valued at \$487,500, when Geoff persuaded FOG members to document their activities in 2020. This was one example of Geoff's enthusiasm for transferring all his professional skills into advancing the cause of nature conservation. (I note that FOG has not repeated this exhaustive accounting exercise ever since!)

Geoff, with Margaret (Ning) joined FOG late in 1996. Geoff did not mess around, becoming President in 1997 and leading FOG until 2004. In that time, he oversaw FOG's decision (1998) to be incorporated to become the successful champion that we are today for the conservation of endangered grassy ecosystems. Never one to resile from a challenge, Geoff returned as President from 2008 to 2011.

I first met Geoff a quarter of a century ago on a windswept site outside Cooma, known to my daughter as 'that boring brown hill'. Geoff and Marg were leading the charge to conserve a critical population of the endangered Monaro Golden Daisy at this hill, 'Old Cooma Common'. Geoff had a remarkable ability to spot potential volunteers and in his most persuasive manner put the proposition to me that I could contribute more. Today FOG is led by volunteers who were recruited by the formidable combination of Geoff and Marg.

Supporting Geoff's desire to see grassland conserved, the activities FOG undertakes have multiplied to include advocacy, and on-ground conservation work at numerous sites, and frequent field trips, as well as education activities. Despite this burgeoning agenda for our small community organisation, when in 2009 I first proposed a FOG program to restore Commonwealth Government-owned sites in central Canberra, Geoff was the first person to turn up for our scoping visit on-site, and he supported work that continues to this day.

Geoff was no bystander, throwing himself into all of FOG's activities, including many years leading the production of our newsletter and our advocacy with governments. His passion for conservation of grassy ecosystems continued right up to his final weeks: even in the previous newsletter this year he is listed as a FOG media contact.

Geoff was a champion for the conservation of one of Australia's least appreciated and most threatened ecosystems. We at FOG will be forever grateful for his passion and contributions to our cause. And somewhere on the windswept hills of the Monaro plains there are Monaro Golden Daisies and Grassland Earless Dragons that are safer today thanks to Geoff's commitment to Country. /..

Sadly, I also note the death of **Graeme Hirth** and acknowledge his contributions to conservation in the ACT. He retired from the ACT Parks and Conservation Service and promptly volunteered to help conserve the significant grassy woodlands on national lands at Gurubang Dhawura. Graeme applied his mapping skills to record and communicate all manner of weed infestations and other management

priorities. His weekly patrols greatly reduced infestations of many key weeds, greatly enhancing the restoration of this significant habitat.

I hope to be able to report happier news in the next newsletter. Meanwhile, see you in our grasslands.

Jamie Pittock, President, Friends of Grasslands



FOG ACTIVITIES – visits and work parties coming up

Visits Nothing in September, then three visits in October. *And we are invited to SELLS and ANBG workshops: pp. 10,11.*

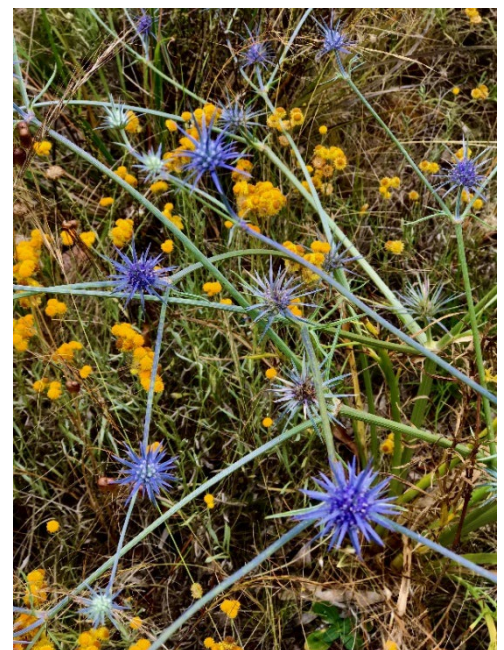
Monday 12 October, Tarengo TSR, near Boorowa NSW, 10 am – 3 pm.

We hope to see the Tarengo Leek Orchid in flower on this *rescheduled* activity! Meet in Boorowa at 10 am to join a member of Local Land Services and Rainer Rehwinkel who will guide us around this site plus one other within the town limits. A chance to see the outcomes of recent cool burns at both sites, and to lunch at the local bakery. Carpooling is possible. To register and for further information, email margaret.ning@fog.org.au

Sunday 18 October, TSRs near Bungendore NSW, 8.30 am – 3.30 pm.

Jointly with the Canberra Birds group, FOG will visit five current or former Travelling Stock Reserves near Bungendore, led by Rainer Rehwinkel. See interesting vegetation and birds in natural grasslands, grassy woodlands of Snow Gum, Black Gum, Yellow Box and Manna Gum, and Dry Forest, at Duck Flat, Sweeneys, Gidleigh Lane and Six Mile TSRs, and Brooks Hill Reserve. Meet in Bungendore at 8.30 am. Be prepared for snakes and to climb gates if necessary. Register with margaret.ning@fog.org.au

Wednesday 21 October, Kambah Pool Rd (ACT) grassland and grassy woodland, 9 – 11.30 am. The Early Nancies are in flower now (end of August) and other grassland favourites will be in flower over the next 1–2 months. Test your eucalypt knowledge too. Meet at 9 am at the end of Kambah Pool Road to wander here with Rainer Rehwinkel on FOG's first ever visit to this delightful site. Register with margaret.ning@fog.org.au



Blue Devil and Golden Buttons in a previous year at Gidleigh Lane TSR. Photo: R. Rehwinkel.

Work parties coming up (start at 9 am; end late morning)

Register for workparties at least two days before the event, so you can hear of any last-minute changes. Work includes weeding, planting, rubbish removal, and use of herbicides. Tools are provided. Wear gardening clothes (including hat) and suitable footwear. Bring your own drinking water. Morning tea may be provided. Events are cancelled if the weather is unsuitable or likely to be dangerous.

Gurubang Dhawura (Stirling Park, Yarralumla)

Saturdays: 19 September, 17 October, 21 November, 19 December.

Contact jamie.pittock@fog.org.au

Yarramundi Reach grassland

Saturdays: 5 September, 14 November.

Contact john.fitzgerald@fog.org.au

Hall Cemetery woodland

Saturdays: 3 October, 7 November.

Contact john.fitzgerald@fog.org.au

Budjan Galindji Grasslands (Franklin)

Wednesdays: 2 September, 23 September, 7 October, 28 October, 4 November, 25 November, 2 December, 23 December. Contact margaret.ning@fog.org.au

Top Hut TSR (near Cooma)

To be advised.

Dragons, birds and plants in grassy ecosystems – FOG’s winter activity, 1 August 2026

Strong interest, as usual, in FOG’s annual winter afternoon of talks (and tea) meant a full room on Saturday 1 August at Chambers Pavilion (Charles Sturt University campus, Barton) – adjacent to the St Mark’s Grassland, which some of us visited before the talks. The theme was ‘Grasslands as habitat’, and the talks featured dragons, birds and grassland plants. We heard three speakers, and enjoyed a truly scrumptious tea laid on by Fay Wareham, Marianne Albury-Colless, Julia Raine and a team of wonderful helpers (thank you all!). What a smorgasbord across two and a half hours!

At the start, emcee Matt Whitting (one of FOG’s two current vice presidents) said a few heartfelt words in memory of our friend Geoff Robertson, FOG’s first Honorary Life member, reminding us how Geoff used his ‘people skills’ and his ‘analytical skills’ to great effect on FOG’s behalf during the 30 years 1996–2026.



Dr Monica Knipler. Photo: A. Zelnik.

Then Dr Monica Knipler (Senior Threatened Species Officer, NSW DCCEEW, Queanbeyan) outlined her work studying Canberra Grassland Earless Dragons (CGED) *Tympanocryptis lineata* and the Monaro species *T. osbornei*. Monitoring uses lines (transects) of human-made ‘spider tubes’ which mimic the wolf-spider burrows in which dragons naturally shelter, and the dragons use the tubes, making it possible to photograph and count at least some of these small creatures (only up to 16 cm long, nose to tail-tip) in their expansive grassy habitats. Dragon numbers along the transects have risen and fallen year to year. Rainfall patterns and drought seem to be major influences, and Monica is also monitoring air and/or soil temperatures and land management factors such as presence or absence of pine trees and intensity of kangaroo grazing. Dragons ideally live in good quality Natural Temperate Grassland, though they can use suboptimal areas,

especially when dispersing – which can be over hundreds of metres. Each dragon has a different pattern on its back, making individuals identifiable: one was found to have travelled 720.5 m!

Restoration is an important step in dragon conservation, and Monica’s team and others also work to clear weeds, such as African Lovegrass, Chilean Needlegrass and St John’s Wort, from dragon-occupied high conservation value land.

Here is Monica’s ‘take-home message’ to us:

- spread the word and increase awareness!
 - protect and improve grassland habitat condition,
 - leave rocks in place,
 - reduce predation pressure,
 - conserve in perpetuity,
- and please report sightings to

Monica.Knipler@dcceew.nsw.gov.au

Next, Dr Michael Mulvaney stepped forward carrying a long stripey home-made scarf, representing global annual temperatures from 1919 (blue end) to 2019 (orange end). By 2019 Canberra’s average temperature had risen by 1.5°C he told us, and, at current rates, by 2050 we will reach a catastrophic 2.8°C rise. The scarf is a very graphic way to remind everyone how important anti-climate change activities are becoming.

We heard that climate change is not favouring Gang-gang Cockatoos (*Callocephalon fimbriatum*). In Red Hill Nature Reserve, chicks have been found drowned in their tree-hollow nests after recent heavy rains. In summer, chicks were lying exhausted on the ground below 5 of 20 nests inspected after daytime temperatures exceeded 35°C. Smoky air during large bushfires also brings too-young chicks out of their hollows. Fires deplete habitat, kill birds, and are becoming more frequent and widespread.



Dr Michael Mulvaney. Photo: AM.

Michael gave other examples of the bad effects of our changing climate. A study at the Australian National Botanic Gardens found breeding success in fairy-wrens is declining, attributed largely to hot dry springs and cold snaps mixed with warmer winters and hotter summers. These climate changes also favour summer-growing (C4) grasses over C3 perennials and annuals, and Button Wrinklewort (*Rutidosia leptorhynchoidea*) populations have shrunk over the last 15 years. In short, climate changes, as predicted years ago by CSIRO (higher temperatures, more very hot days, more intense rainfall in extreme events, and harsher fire weather) are having drastic impacts on local flora and fauna.

After tea, our third speaker Rainer Rehwinkel showed beautiful photos taken during his four summer trips to France, exploring the flowering plants in montane, woodland, heathland, wetland and grassland environments (and some photos of cryptogams, invertebrates and birds). Grouping the plants as woody species, flowers, grasses and rushes he noted examples found in both France and south-eastern Australia. Some plant families and genera are valued grassland plants in both environments; others are a source of wildflower joy in France but seen as serious weeds here – such as St John's wort. A few of Rainer's photos are below.

Thank you, Monica, Michael and Rainer, for giving us both new knowledge and enjoyment. Thank you also to Matt Whitting as emcee, and Andrew Zelnik operating the IT for Monica and Michael.

AM



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Visit to The Fair, Mt Majura Nature Reserve, ACT, 4 July, by Julia Raine

Waltraud Pix and Jochen Zeil introduced 18 FOG members, Landcarers and ACT Government staff to a 10 ha area of grassy woodland in Mt Majura Nature Reserve, east of The Fair housing development in North Watson. We heard about the lessons their team – Friends of Mount Majura – had learned during years of restoration of this compacted former farming, car racing and horse-riding area, involving extensive woody weed removal and planting of local native woodland species. (More detail is at <https://majura.org/category/newsletters/>, in the Aug 2020, Aug 2021, Sept 2024 and June 2026 issues.)

Our focus was mainly on three fenced seeding nodes (kangaroo exclosures) that were established in 2020. After ploughing to loosen the soil and allow water penetration, these had been sown with local native grasses and some forbs. Burning, two years ago, had created inter-tussock spaces, increasing native floristic diversity while also encouraging weed growth. The impact of kangaroo grazing on surrounding areas was readily apparent, but within the nodes (not grazed) grasses and forbs were flourishing, and the main threats were coming from exotic grasses such as Chilean Needlegrass, *Paspalum* and Sweet Vernal Grass. St John's Wort and its massive seed bank have presented many challenges which are ever-present.



Inside (left) and outside a fenced exclosure. Photo: A. Zelnik.

Memories of Geoff Robertson, Honorary Life Member of FOG 2013–2026

Geoff Robertson was FOG's first Honorary Life Member, in recognition of his extraordinarily huge inputs to FOG during 1997–2013 (and they hardly diminished during 2013–2026). Geoff's experience leading people, his likeable and friendly nature and compelling personality, and his strong partnership with Margaret Ning, helped make FOG a group still highly regarded today.

How to write about such a person? Perhaps best by quoting from Sarah Sharp's article (on behalf of FOG's members and committee) in *News of FOG* 2013 Sept-Oct outlining Geoff's qualities and work that led to the decision to award him Honorary Life Membership.

'Geoff's organisational energy and positive philosophy were obvious in the transformations he initiated as president. For many years he produced the newsletter, the e-bulletin, organised the [activities] program, ran a weekly radio program, and over time increased the role that FOG played in conservation decision making. Geoff also spearheaded research and projects, gained funds for special projects, and of course, involved many people in the process. After a long period of doing much of this himself, he facilitated the establishment of sub-committees to undertake many activities and share the load. The legacy of this process is still present, with many members actively contributing to the organisation of FOG and to the running of regular activities. Geoff's contribution to FOG (and to conservation more generally) is directly related to his drive and enthusiasm, his initiative, and the enormous amount of time spent on FOG, both pursuing actions and strengthening processes. Geoff's clear mind and ability to devise strategies and actions, plus his cheerful, positive and persuasive approach enabled him to deliver clear and significant results. Geoff has always encouraged that decisions be made on a scientific basis. ...

'There is no doubt that he has contributed enormously to the respect that FOG enjoys within the ACT and Commonwealth government and within the political, conservation and rural communities.

'It is also important to acknowledge Margaret. ... Margaret's practicality, enthusiasm and generosity with her time have contributed both to FOG and to Geoff's ability to retain his enthusiasm over such a long time. Stephen Horn said, "It is too easy to approach voluntary commitments with just sufficient attention to keep things going. By contrast, to transform and advance the organisation requires inspired leadership and dedication, which we have had in spades from Geoff and Margaret".'

Geoff died on 21 July, changing life forever for his devoted wife Margaret and his family.

FOG is fortunate that Margaret nevertheless continues to give both support and leadership in so many aspects of this group, helping keep alive memories of Geoff's enthusiasm and drive for grassland conservation. Thank you, Marg.

AM



Two Lovegrasses – a close-up by John Fitz Gerald

This topic grew from two FOG visits earlier this year: Mt Stromlo Woodlands (29 March) and Patches N and GG beside the National Arboretum (16 May). In the March trip report (May–June newsletter) I appreciated Andrew Zelnik's photo of flowerheads on native *Eragrostis elongata*, Clustered Lovegrass. Since I had never seen a live plant of the species, I got in touch with Andrew and zipped out to take a look and, of course, collected a sample for imaging. Then on 16 May, we saw many plants of the weed *Eragrostis cilianensis*, Stinkgrass, and discussed its similarities and differences in appearance relative to *E. elongata*.



Eragrostis elongata and *Eragrostis cilianensis*

My images are of a floret and seeds from each species, alongside each other (above), at quite similar magnifications. I expect you will share my impression that these two are alike. Other inflorescence features, such as hairs in branches, clustering of spikelets, stalk lengths of these clusters, etc., must be used for diagnosis. Feature sizes (e.g. lemma length) overlap extensively so are unhelpful. Please consult your grass ID resources for more detail.

I checked out the Australian distributions of the two species. [ALA](#) shows similar numbers of records: 4000 for *E. elongata* and 3800 for *E. cilianensis*. Distributions are quite different: the native grows across the country though more in the eastern states (but not Tasmania);

the weed grows mostly in temperate zones though is present from the tropics to Tasmania. The abundance through our Southern Highlands region, based on ALA, is that the weed is about 5 times more common. I'd say the weed is under-reported in ALA and gloomily suggest a factor of 50 is closer to the mark around the ACT.

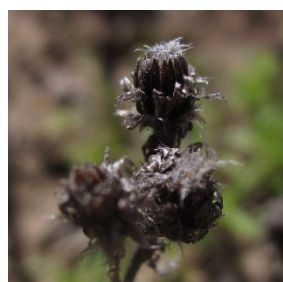
High magnification images were taken using the Nikon microscope at the National Seed Bank in the Australian National Botanic Gardens. Images can be reproduced freely with reference to the Creative Commons licence CC BY

Some of the information above was gathered from websites including Atlas of Living Australia ala.org.au

***Triptilodiscus pygmaeus* – a persistent little daisy, close-up by John Fitz Gerald**



Flowers each approx. 5 mm diameter



In late winter I have noticed a large number of seedlings of *Triptilodiscus pygmaeus*, the annual native daisy also known as Common Sunray; it is reasonably common in ACT. A good place to find it is in Natural Temperate Grassland at Umbagog District Park, Latham, part of which was managed with a patch burn in March 2025. The image (left) shows it flowering in spring 2025. This flush clearly set the seeds for new germination this year. Seeds are minute, with small pappus bristles, as can be seen in the microphoto (top right; scale bar 1 mm). The tiny seedlings are present in small mats now, see my image (right), and a good show of flowers is to be expected soon. Careful inspection of the seedling mats reveals the remains of last year's plants – dry stalks, still upstanding, and dry flower heads (image at left), some still carrying seed which I expect is no longer viable.



I searched with [Tree of Life, at Kew](#), to find close genetic relatives for Common Sunray, and was a little surprised to find that it is the only species in its genus. I was even more surprised when its closest relative *Gratwickia monochaeta*, a rare daisy from dry parts of South Australia, also came up as the only species in its genus. Next closest is *Leptorhynchos squamatus*, common around SE Australia, but that genus encompasses 17 species.

Looking a bit further into daisy groups, I find that many genera are endemic to Australia and some such as *Triptilodiscus* and *Gratwickia* have few species. Others have many species: *Leptorhynchos* is one; *Chrysocephalum*, *Leucochrysum* and *Rhodanthe* are others. Web searches indicate daisies evolved in South America or Antarctica 50–90 million years ago, and maybe only reached Australia via long-distance dispersal across oceans (perhaps from southern Africa? 15 million years ago? (Schmidt-Lebuhn 2022)). Daisies in our continent have still had significant time to evolve in isolation.

The high magnification image was taken using the Nikon microscope at the National Seed Bank in the Australian National Botanic Gardens and can be reproduced freely with reference to the Creative Commons licence CC BY.

Information above was gathered online including from: Atlas of Living Australia ala.org.au; Tree of Life, Kew treeoflife.kew.org; Wikipedia www.wikipedia.org; Schmidt-Lebuhn, A.N. 2022. Daisies down under... *Capitulum* 1, 33–52.

The Regent Honeyeater, a critically endangered bird of grassy woodlands and open forest

by Michael Bedingfield

The Readers Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds was published in the 1970s, with coloured photographs of all the birds. It is a large and comprehensive volume with a long list of authors contributing. In it the Regent Honeyeater is described as 'moderately common in forest and woodland in south-east Australia', but since that time its population has declined dramatically and it is now classified and listed as critically endangered in the ACT, New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and nationally, and endangered in South Australia. It used to be sighted anywhere between Adelaide and the central coast of Queensland, but over time its range has contracted significantly and there are only a few breeding grounds remaining.

The reasons for the decline of the species are familiar. The main one is the loss, fragmentation and degradation of suitable habitat, particularly woodlands. As it is regarded as a flagship species, activities to ensure its conservation will benefit a range of other threatened or declining birds and animals. The natural habitat it requires is dry open forest and woodland, the main communities being Box-Ironbark Woodland and riparian forests of River She-oak. These woodlands have lots of mature trees, a high canopy cover and plenty of mistletoes. Other dry forest and woodland types are used at times where there are suitable flowering trees for foraging. In NSW the bird's distribution is now patchy and it is confined mainly to the inland slopes of south-eastern Australia. However, it is very nomadic and moves to the tablelands and coastal districts as well, following blossoming trees.



The scientific name was once *Xanthomyza phrygia* but it has been reclassified as *Anthochaera phrygia*, putting it in the same genus as the Red Wattlebird, *A. carunculata*. It is a medium-sized honeyeater, 20–24 cm from bill tip to tail, with a wingspan of 30 cm. Its colouring is spectacular, in black, yellow and white, with a distinctive patch of pink or cream warty facial skin around the eye. The head and throat are black, and otherwise it has a mix of black, yellow and white, with the front having a scalloping pattern. The sexes are similar with the male being slightly larger. The call is a soft bell-like "tink tink-tink". I have provided a coloured drawing as illustration. A similar looking bird is the New Holland Honeyeater *Phylidonyris novaehollandiae*.

Regent Honeyeater feeding habits vary, but its main source of food is the nectar from a small number of eucalypts which produce large quantities of nectar. Important species are Mugga Ironbark *Eucalyptus sideroxylon*, Yellow Box *E. melliodora*, White Box *E. albens*, and Swamp Mahogany *E. robusta*. The nectar and fruit of mistletoes are also used. When these sources are scarce it will feed on lerp and honeydew. Insects provide only about 15% of the diet but are important when feeding nestlings.

Breeding occurs between July and January, within Box-Ironbark and other temperate woodlands and riparian forest. It nests in tall mature eucalypts or She-oaks, creating a cup-shaped nest using bark, grass, twigs and wool. The female builds the nest and incubates the eggs for fourteen days. Both parents participate in brooding and feeding the young nestlings. There are four known breeding areas in NSW: in the Capertee Valley, Lower Hunter Valley, Mudgee/Wollar and Bundarra-Barraba regions.

The main threats to the future of the species are historical loss and fragmentation of habitat and its continuing degradation. This is especially true of Yellow Box/White Box/Blakely's Red Gum Woodlands. There are other issues as well such as loss of key habitat trees and competition from larger and more aggressive honeyeaters, particularly Noisy Miners,

Noisy Friarbirds and Red Wattlebirds. The small population size makes the species vulnerable to the natural dangers of life in the wild. Recovery requires the reversal of these trends and there are efforts being made on this.

For example, there is work being done by the Taronga Zoo to breed Regent Honeyeaters in captivity for release into the wild. The NSW Government report of 16 Sept 2024, says that approximately 485 zoo-bred birds have been released to that date. The NSW Government's Saving our Species program and the National Regent Honeyeater Recovery Plan have provided more than one million dollars, with support from the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Australian National University. Members of the public can assist by reporting sightings to BirdLife Australia, at the address given in the references.

The Canberra Ornithologists' book *Birds of Canberra Gardens* (2nd edition) says of the Regent Honeyeater: 'It is a rare visitor to the woodlands of the ACT region, usually attracted by flowering Yellow Box or suburban ironbarks'. The book also says it will feed on the nectar of Grevilleas and Mistletoes. Despite its rarity, over time there have been occasional records of Regent Honeyeaters breeding in the ACT – so if you see a Regent Honeyeater it is a special privilege for you and well worth reporting.

Main references:

<https://threatenedspecies.bionet.nsw.gov.au/profile?id=10841>

<https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/news/release-zoo-bred-birds-boosts-critically-endangered-regent-honeyeater-numbers>

<https://www.birdlife.org.au/what-to-do-if-you-see-a-regent-honeyeater/>

<https://bie.ala.org.au/species/https://biodiversity.org.au/afd/taxa/31869a0e-2ce5-40be-b6f6-c0231a48b414>



Cool burn, St Mark's Grassland, Saturday 23 May 2026, by Sarah Stitt*

A fantastic turn-out of onlookers was greeted by Jack Klem from the Molonglo Conservation Group and his team leader, Jeannine Fromholtz, the organisers of this autumn's cool burn for St Mark's Grassland. The Rural Fire Service volunteers were there ready to assist if the fire needed containing. It transpired that the window for the burn was perfect. The previous week we had received rain, cooling the ground and adding moisture to the vegetation and air. The day was overcast, low wind, cool but pleasant.

Following some introductions, Ngunnawal Elders Uncle Wally Bell and Karen Denny led the burn. Approximately 40 people attended to watch, learn and participate. An area of the Grassland had been prepared, outlining where to burn and removing materials that would have caused the fire to burn too hot.

The objective of the burn is to remove the grass 'thatch' / biomass which smothers the native plants, potentially preventing their mid- to late-spring flowering and production of seeds. The burn also assists with weed control. Since 2018 two burns have taken place. Following both these burns, approximately 18 months later the Grassland's flowering has been phenomenal.

For this year's burn an area was chosen which had not been burnt in April 2024. This is a deliberate process called 'mosaic burn', leaving areas free for small vertebrates and non-vertebrates to relocate or burrow more deeply as the fire comes through.

Rain was forecast – and fell – during the week after the burn, helping to soak the potash into the soil: the perfect fertiliser and follow-up. All who attended, especially the organisers, went away content with their participation and new knowledge.

This project was made possible through an ACT Government Environment Grant. Works continue onsite with planting of native species and further weed control, helped by Molonglo Conservation Group, Friends of Grasslands and students from Canberra Institute of Technology.

*Corporate Services and Events Officer, Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, Charles Sturt University.



Lighting the fire. Photo: Mo Fahri.

Onion Grass – treatment trials by John Fitz Gerald & Margaret Ning

Onion Grass (*Romulea rosea*) – an environmental weed of concern – has been the subject of articles by John in previous FOG newsletters (Nov-Dec 2024 and Sep-Oct 2025). With Onion Grass growing strongly and thickly in too many places today, it's time to update readers.

Last year, we chose to trial some chemical treatment on this serious invader. We selected a trial patch and Marg carefully sprayed a few square metres. John made some associated trials. The main spraying was in August 2025, and a new plot was sprayed in September. We were testing [the control note from Agriculture Victoria's website](#) which, for this species, recommends applying metsulfuron-methyl 6–8 weeks after leaf emergence. Between us we did the following:

1. Hand clipping (to simulate mowing) – early August, repeated around November
2. Organic weedkiller Slasher – early August, repeated upon flowering
3. Metsulfuron-methyl (Brushoff) – early August
4. Starane – early August
5. Glyphosate – early August
6. Glyphosate – late September

Spot spraying in Treatments 3, 5 and 6 minimised harm to native grasses in the trial areas.

The results are quite clear. Brushoff controlled the weed well, and so did glyphosate, on both dates. New emergence this year was well below 5% of the original density with these three treatments. Starane had only a minor effect. Slasher burnt the plants immediately in August, but leaves kept emerging from the corms, and flowers developed; these were burnt off by a later application of Slasher. However, the weed regrew actively in this plot this year. Regrowing also occurred in clipped plot 1.

The photo (above) taken in late August shows the good kill in plots 3 and 5: note the brown central area. It also shows a surrounding bright green area that is active, dense, new growth of Onion Grass, and includes parts of plots 2 and 4.



Marg was very careful with her spot spray. Some brown native tussocks are showing in the central treatment zone where onion grass has been controlled, but these are *Themeda* and *Bothriochloa*, still alive but setback by winter temperatures. Clearly though, our successful treatment has created significant bare ground for which native seeding is required this coming spring.

Our conclusion: careful spot-spraying with either Brushoff or glyphosate defeats Onion Grass, even very dense patches, when applied in August–September to beat flowering. Corms below ground appear to have been killed. No doubt the soil seedbank will bring the weed in again, so getting the bare ground covered is essential follow-up. Other treatments have little effect, even though they prevented one year of weed flowering and seeding; here corms resprout to produce the following year's leaves and flowers/seeds.

The successful chemical control is quite labour intensive so would only be viable for small patches in high-value locations.

Recent news about weeds and weed control

National weeds prioritisation process

From John Fitz Gerald

iNaturalist (via Steve Taylor) just drew my attention to the recent announcement of the assessment results of the national prioritisation process. It is at <https://weeds.org.au/national-established-weed-priorities-newp/> These priorities look to be additional to the existing list

of Weeds of National Significance (WONS); e.g. African Lovegrass. However, new money is not available yet, apparently, and 'It is anticipated that it will take some time for organisations to consider and secure co-investment, to enable implementation to proceed'.

Business as usual?

News Flash – Funding for two of FOG's Travelling Stock Reserves

From Rainer Rehwinkel, 27 August 2026

Here is some excellent news on the travelling stock reserve (TSR) front. Ben Serafin, South East Local Land Services' Travelling Stock Reserve Manager, phoned me a few days ago to convey the news that he had received an allocation of funding from Transport NSW. Ben has directed these funds to the two TSRs that FOG has been working on.

Ben suggested that three years of funding will be directed for weed control at Gundry TSR, the reserve that FOG had recently funded a Management Plan for (see box). This is a great step forward for that excellent reserve. Weed control at that reserve will be followed in a strategic manner as a result of the plan. The major focus there will be on Sifton-bush, *Cassinia sifton*, which is increasing in abundance at the reserve.

Ben made the other allocation of funding for much-needed fencing along the roadside edge of that little grassland gem at Top Hut TSR.

On behalf of FOG, I wish to express my gratitude to Transport NSW, and for the excellent spirit of collaboration expressed by Ben Serafin's thoughtful work on this issue.

Gundry Travelling Stock Reserve Action Plan by Rainer Rehwinkel

Friends of Grasslands earlier this year completed a collaboration with South East Local Lands Services in producing an action plan for the management of the very high conservation value grassland at Gundry Travelling Stock Reserve near Goulburn. This large TSR's grassland is in very good condition and has one of the largest known populations of Button Wrinklewort, *Rutidosia leptorhynchoidea*. Additionally, there are records of Striped Legless Lizard *Delma impar*, and a number of other threatened and declining flora and fauna species. FOG contracted Lori Gould of Environmental Restoration Design and Planning (ERDP) to develop the action plan. The plan will be available on FOG's website in the next little while. I thank Ben Serafin at SE LLS for his willingness to work with FOG on this project, and also Lori and Susan Wilson at ERDP for completion of this important work. I also thank Rob Armstrong at NSW DCCEEW for his invaluable inputs, and all my collaborators at FOG who made this project possible. The project was funded by donations to the Friends of Grasslands Gift Fund.



Invitations to other groups' activities/workshops

Integrated weed management – develop a plan for your property (by SELLS)

South East Local Land Services invites you to join this three-part workshop series where you'll learn how to assess your property, identify priority weeds, and develop a practical management plan that works for you.

Place: This series is for properties in the Sutton/Gundaroo/Bywong area.
The exact location of the workshops will depend on the registrations.

Dates: 25 September – 30 November 2026

- **Workshop 1: 25 September** Take stock of what's on your property. Identify assets, map weed infestations and divide your property into practical management zones.
- **Workshop 2: 23 October** Learn about weed biology, timing and control options to develop effective management strategies for your priority weeds.
- **Workshop 3: 20 November** Turn your information into action by developing a realistic weed management calendar.

More information and registrations: On Humanitix:

<https://events.humanitix.com/integrated-weed-management-develop-a-plan-for-your-property-sept-2026>

Also ...

Plant recognition in our native grasslands (an ANBG activity)

Monday 19 October, starting at 1.30 pm

You are invited to join a party of the Friends of the ANBG Plant Recognition group on a plant recognition field workshop in two grasslands in the Belconnen area, ACT.

The workshop will begin at the Blue Devil Grassland at Umbagog District Park, Latham, and end at Dawn Crescent Grassland at Lawson.

Rainer says these are two of the most floristically diverse grasslands in the Belconnen area.

Margaret Ning, Andrew Zelnik, John Fitz Gerald and Rainer Rehwinkel are hosting the group.

If you'd like to join us and share your expertise with the ANBG group,

please contact Rainer at Rainer.rehwinkel@fog.org.au



Article

Are the Monaro's farmers acting on a mistaken belief? A gap in the numbers, not just the map

by Matt Whitting, FOG Advocacy convenor

The Native Vegetation Regulatory (NVR) map took effect across most of NSW from 31 August 2026, and the Monaro has become its flashpoint. NSW Farmers' Monaro branch has warned that finalising the map will 'outlaw' the timely control of African Lovegrass, with more than 60% of the district's agricultural land regulated and, they say, up to 200,000 ha mis-mapped. One regional observer has flagged a real practical constraint behind that concern: broadacre spraying in regulated areas requires Local Land Services (LLS) approval, and the whole region currently has just one LLS officer able to grant it.

Others see the moment differently. A source familiar with the NSW Land Management Framework points out that the 'transitional' map has been legally binding for ten years, self-assessment has always been conditional on record-keeping, and finalisation changes neither. On this reading, nothing is new except farmers' awareness of obligations they already had. Another correspondent notes the discomfort of native grassland increasingly being framed as the thing 'hiding' lovegrass, rather than the asset under threat from it.

FOG can't referee this dispute, and doesn't need to. But sitting beneath it is a narrower, *checkable* problem with the self-assessment tool landholders are being directed to use.

The field method available to landholders, a simple step-point count across five patches, sorts groundcover into just two buckets: native and non-native. It sets a single threshold: land is 'low conservation value' if native cover falls below 50% of total groundcover. Every exotic plant, annual or perennial, counts the same.

That is not the test that matters. What matters is the test in the *Approved Conservation Advice for the Natural Temperate Grassland of the South Eastern Highlands*. That diagnostic test recognises the federally-listed threatened ecological community that is protected under national environmental law at the highest threat level possible, 'critically endangered', i.e. Natural Temperate Grassland of the South Eastern Highlands (NTG).¹ That is the test that the Monaro's grassland should be assessed against. It asks whether native cover exceeds the cover of *perennial* exotic species specifically. Applying this test, annual weeds are irrelevant.

The gap is not cosmetic. A paddock could fail the state test in a season of heavy annual exotic growth, triggering a finding that grassland is of 'low conservation value' and therefore exempt from clearing regulation, while comfortably meeting

¹ Threatened Species Scientific Committee (2016). *Approved Conservation Advice (including listing advice) for Natural Temperate Grassland of the South Eastern Highlands (EC 152)*. Canberra: Department of the Environment www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/communities/pubs/152-conservation-advice.pdf. In effect under the EPBC Act from 6 Apr 2016, section 1.5

the Commonwealth's diagnostic threshold test because most of its non-native cover is annual and never enters that calculation. Grassland meeting the Commonwealth's test is protected under national law.

Nothing in the current NSW self-assessment paperwork surfaces this discrepancy, not to any land manager filling in the forms, not to LLS, and not to a map reviewer checking the result.

This should concern everyone in the current debate, not just conservation groups. A landholder who self-assesses using the state method and reasonably believes they have legal certainty may still be exposed at the Commonwealth level. A regulator relying on the same finding may be treating genuinely listed grassland as already excluded.

FOG has asked the NSW Department directly:

1. Does any NSW assessment method, i.e. the step-point sheet or the Monaro-specific Grasslands and other Groundcover Assessment Method, require exotic cover to be split into annual and perennial?
2. If not, will the Department confirm that a finding of Low Conservation Value in NSW cannot and will not be treated as evidence that a patch fails the diagnostic test for recognition as part of the federally-listed critically endangered ecological community NTG?

We'll report back when we have some answers.

ADVOCACY REPORT – in reverse chronological order

August

Letter concerning the cessation of funding for seed supply in NSW, 31/8

On 31 May 2024, attendees (including NSW Government officials) at FOG's *Conserving grasslands of the South Eastern Highlands of New South Wales* forum heard about issues associated with the lack of seed supply for restoration works.² In this letter, FOG has asked the NSW Government to restore funding for the Local Land Services Murray Native Seed Service (Service) for at least three years, to secure continuity of operations and retain specialist staff. We called for a structured transition plan that develops governance and delivery options protecting the Service's genetic, technical and community value, and for a state-wide native seed capability strategy across NSW more broadly. FOG does not publish letters; we regard them as private correspondence. Members interested in more detail about this matter can contact me at matt.whitting@fog.org.au.

Draft National Recovery Plan for the Gang-gang Cockatoo, 28/8 ([here](#))

FOG found the Draft Plan is a well-researched document, and a welcome step toward a national recovery plan for this much-loved species. However, we are concerned that its diagnosis of threats is not consistently translated into strong, measurable and funded actions. Our recommendations call for a stronger plan that prioritises climate adaptation, protects critical habitat and nest trees, establishes a hollow-security register, delivers an urban conservation strategy, addresses possum predation, sets measurable targets, embeds First Nations leadership, and ensures funded, accountable implementation through a resourced recovery team and clear responsibilities.

FOG members attend the Nature Conservation Forum, 20/8 ([meeting communiqué](#))

Julia Raine and Rainer Rehwinkel attended this Forum for FOG and heard discussion of issues directly relevant to FOG's mission to halt and reverse grassy-ecosystem decline. Rosie Cooney from the Parks and Conservation Service outlined draft principles and a strategy proposed for managing African Lovegrass across urban and rural areas. Expect to see a shift to risk-based zoning, long-term treatment commitments for a select set of priority areas, and trials adopting different grazing, mulching and planting practices. FOG emphasised the need for improved management, better community engagement, and avoiding mowing open spaces too short as it accelerates ALG spread.

Budget discussions highlighted opportunities for new conserved areas and a Conservation Council paper presenting their vision for Canberra's Western Edge was discussed. The vision includes landscape-scale stewardship through the coordinated adoption of improved practices across tenures, mature-tree retention, weed control and monitoring, all core

² Friends of Grasslands (2024)(ed) *Conserving grasslands of the South Eastern Highlands of New South Wales: FOG workshop proceedings*, www.fog.org.au/Reports/FOGWorkshopProceedings20240531.pdf, pp. 10-13, 42-46, 53-57, respectively.

FOG priorities. Presentations were delivered on the: H5 Bird Flu and its impact expected in the ACT; Municipal Infrastructure Standards, where FOG expressed concern at the continued listing of some species which, if they are planted by the ACT Government's City Presentation staff, will likely continue to create future management problems; and the Urban Forest Act reform process.

Comment on listing assessment and conservation advice for Perunga Grasshopper ([here](#)) and Canberra Raspy Cricket ([here](#)), both 13/8

FOG's submissions 'strongly supported' the listing of both Perunga Grasshopper and Canberra Raspy Cricket nationally as threatened (Endangered), with corresponding listings in NSW and the ACT. FOG emphasised these species' highly restricted and fragmented distributions, and their declining habitats in the face of multiple threats including weeds, inappropriate fire regimes, urban expansion, climate change, and predation by feral animals. FOG called for habitat protection, including prohibiting actions that fragment known habitat patches. We highlighted the need for funded research, including investigating whether Indian Mynas and Starlings prey on Perunga. We stressed the importance of volunteer-focused actions.

FOG members attended EcoFocus, an ACT Govt Nature Conservation Forum, 12/8

The forum heard from many presenters delivering on the ACT Government's current conservation priorities across threatened species, invasive species management, ecological monitoring and fire ecology. Presentations covered new tools for detecting cryptic species like Canberra Grassland Earless Dragons, including burrow eDNA and via AI-assisted insect monitoring, alongside work recovering at-risk species and ecosystems. Speakers explained selected strategic interventions restoring degraded Grassy Woodlands alongside work rehabilitating wetlands and rivers.

Comment on the Draft Guide for tree removals on design grounds, 8/8 ([comment](#))

FOG expressed support for the overall balance in the Draft Guide, but argued key ecological elements need strengthening. We called for clearer guidance on assessing a tree's ecological value, noting contradictions in how native and habitat trees are treated, and emphasised risks to urban-adapted woodland birds. FOG urged stronger consideration of intra-suburban connectivity, recognising trees as stepping-stone habitat. FOG recommended triggers that escalate certain applications for consideration by the Conservator, and proposed refinements to ecological network mapping, more restoration of public land, easier removal of inappropriate trees in grassland and Box-Gum remnants, and exemptions for future 'conserved areas' in urban localities.

Construction of a registered club premises (DA.2023.0635, NSW), 3/8 ([submission](#))

FOG submitted that the construction of a licensed Club in Jerrabomberra, on land just south-east of where Canberra Grassland Earless Dragons have been sighted, will reduce the Area of Occupancy for this critically endangered species. FOG is aware of many other reasons why this Club should not be constructed where it is proposed; however, for the sake of Dragons alone, development approval should be refused. Our submission refers also to 'relative habitat importance' mapping published recently by the new Environment Information Australia. This mapping confirms this site *could not be more important* for the Dragons.

Letter to the Federal Environment Minister requesting the variation of an approval, 3/8

FOG asked the Minister to consider new information about new sightings of Canberra Grassland Earless Dragons in Jerrabomberra. Coupled with new information published by Environment Information Australia demonstrating the whole area is of the utmost importance to the species, we argued the Minister ought to use his powers to better control development that has been approved nearby but that has not yet commenced. FOG does not publish letters like these; we regard them as private correspondence. Members interested in more detail about this matter can contact me at matt.whitting@fog.org.au.

July

Follow-up to letter on Lawson Grasslands, 24/7 and ongoing

On 15/4, FOG and the Conservation Council wrote, jointly, calling on the Federal Environment Minister to require that Defence Housing Australia remediate Natural Temperate Grassland that is declining in condition around the former Belconnen Naval Transmission Station. FOG does not publish letters like these; we regard them as private correspondence. In the absence of a substantive reply, we wrote again. A response was received on 6 August, and it is less than satisfactory. In short, no-one is holding DHA to account for gross neglect in its land management. As at 29 August,

FOG and the Council are preparing to escalate this matter in the media. Members interested in more detail about this matter can contact me at matt.whitting@fog.org.au.

Draft [Territory] Plan Amendment 14 – Belconnen green waste recycling facility and bulk landscape supplies (amendment proposed, [FOG comment](#)), 20/7

The Territory Planning Authority has proposed making a ‘green waste facility’ a form of development that could be assessed and approved on Block 1653 Belconnen, in the middle of Central Molonglo. Block 1653 has no remnant grassy ecosystem values. Normally, that would mean FOG would not comment; however, in this case, we see Block 1653 lies in the middle of a valuable area *known* to have extensive ‘potential threatened woodland’, much of which is likely to be protected under national environmental law. Given that, we argued it seems premature to enable an assessment of this possible land use without visibility of the plan for the rest of Central Molonglo. It appears out of step with the ACT Government’s commitments to plan at the landscape scale, and inconsistent with what the Belconnen District Strategy portrays as a protected blue-green corridor. We noted, at the whole of north Canberra scale, that this is an urban-industrial facility we would expect to see in an urban-industrial setting on the east side of Canberra, not in the middle of grassy woodlands upwind of Hawker and Whitlam.

Meeting with officials from the National Environmental Protection Agency, 14/7

Following on from concerns expressed by FOG on 14/6, Matt Whitting met with officials from the National Environmental Protection Agency regarding Lot 2 Wallaroo Road in the Yass Valley Shire, an offset area intended to protect Golden Sun Moth habitat near Ginninderry. FOG argued the entire 86 ha lot requires permanent protection via covenant, not just rezoning. The Department believes the developer is meeting its obligations (we agreed to disagree) but will review compliance in the upcoming annual report and respond to FOG's concerns. The Conservation Council website has more information on this case, [here](#).

We also discussed the widening of Drake Brockman Drive. Discrepancies in Box-Gum Woodland survey data were raised, along with the need to include infrastructure corridor impacts in strategic assessments. The Department acknowledged earlier surveys were inadequate and will in future press the ACT Government for higher-quality surveys and continued engagement with FOG. The Territory Planning Authority has removed from view all paperwork associated with this development application. The erosion of transparency is a matter the Conservation Council is now pursuing.

Municipal Infrastructure Standard: Plant Species for Urban Landscape Projects (ACT), 13 Jul ([here](#))

FOG and the Conservation Council responded jointly to an invitation to comment on revised standards for, among other things, what species are planted in ACT planting projects. We expressed concern that some species on the planting list are ‘sleeper weeds’. We asked that these species be removed from the ‘species recommended’ list.

FOG will *not* seek an administrative review of a decision about an offset

In early July, FOG considered seeking an administrative review of a decision by one of the Federal Environment Minister’s delegates to approve the offset management plan for an offset site near the Pinnacle Nature Reserve. The offset is intended to compensate for the loss of Box-Gum Woodland and Swift and Superb parrot foraging habitat from the widening of William Hovell Drive.

FOG’s experts advise the approved offset will deliver only **around 55 per cent** of the area that should be secured under the *EPBC Act Offsets Policy*, were risk and long-term uncertainty properly accounted for.

Despite this, FOG will not pursue a review. Any challenge would be limited to the legality of the decision, and the statement of reasons provided to FOG on 15 June states the delegate was satisfied the offset meets the current policy standard, i.e. the delegate was satisfied the offset provided will “maintain or improve” outcomes for the affected protected matters.

FOG’s experience reflects a broader issue: conservation groups across Australia are struggling to address inadequate conditions in, and poor compliance with, approvals issued under the EPBC Act. We hold grave fears that new National Environmental Standards made recently (see [here](#)) will not deliver promised ‘net gains’ for protected matters that will endure for the period of impacts at impact sites.

June

Revised Scope proposed for the Nature Repair Market *Protect and Conserve Method*, 30 Jun, [here](#)

Following on from FOG’s comments on this proposed method in December 2025 ([here](#)), FOG and the Council (jointly) welcomed this [Revised Scope paper](#), noting that the Protect and Conserve Method has shifted from a restoration-focused design to a streamlined protection instrument intended to operate to supply and protect environmental offsets. We emphasised that, because approval holders may now meet offset obligations through Market projects, the method must function as a regulatory-grade mechanism capable of *securely protecting* project areas that will also serve as offset sites. Our submission argues the method must therefore incentivise *in perpetuity* legal protections. We stressed the need for strong integrity controls, qualified assessors, alignment with recovery and bioregional plans, and meaningful engagement with technical stakeholders.

The proposal to establish and operate Marulan Quarry (EPBC 2026/10529), 29 Jun, [here](#)

FOG expressed concern this action, if it proceeds, will result in significant impacts to: Box-Gum Grassy Woodland, including the loss of 8.84 hectares of protected woodland, including stands of understorey species important to the Gang-gang Cockatoo; and 7765 individual Hoary Sunray plants. We recommended the proposal be determined to be a controlled action requiring assessment and an approval before it could proceed. We noted the offset proposed is opaque and sought detail when comment is invited on detailed assessment documents.

Meeting with the Canberra Grassland Earless Dragon Coordinator, 24 Jun and now monthly

This was the first of a now monthly series of relatively informal meetings between Matt Whitting and the officer coordinating implementation of the [Action Plan for the Canberra Grassland Earless Dragon 2025–2035](#), Dr Ben Croak. Experts in the research community and in the ACT and NSW governments are rightly focused on progressing three of the four outcomes in the Action Plan, i.e. outcomes related to maintaining and restoring Canberra Dragon populations and their habitat, and to achieving successful translocations from captive breeding program locations to sites in our region. We discuss the fourth outcome, ‘Community and policy support for Dragon conservation’. Recognising the whole Recovery Team is monitoring progress, Ben and I consider the items listed in Table 4 of the Action Plan (pp. 34–35) in more detail, including programs building community support and towards better protection of Canberra Dragons. I have outlined the option of establishing a cross-tenure conservation management network, like those that have existed previously in NSW.³ We are considering what good community engagement in conservation of the Dragons should look like, and thinking of others the Recovery Team should be partnering with.



Contact us

General inquiries, health & safety	info@fog.org.au
Media inquiries	0407265131 (Jamie Pittock)
Membership enquiries,	membership@fog.org.au
Events & work parties	Calendar
Book order forms	Grassland & Woodland Flora.
Advocacy contact	advocacy@fog.org.au
Website matters	webmanager@fog.org.au
Projects / work party contacts	Hall Cemetery, Ginninderry: john.fitzgerald@fog.org.au . Scrivener’s Hut, Gurubang Dhawura (Stirling Park), Blue Gum Point & Yarramundi Grassland: jamie.pittock@fog.org.au . Budjan Galindji (Franklin) Grasslands, TSRs & Old Cooma Common: margaret.ning@fog.org.au . Scottsdale: linda.spinaze@fog.org.au
Newsletter contact	newsletter@fog.org.au
Contact addresses	secretary@fog.org.au
Payments & accounts	treasurer@fog.org.au
Annual reports	annual reports
FOG Committee	secretary@fog.org.au

³ Rehwinkel, R. (2024) The conservation status of Natural Temperate Grassland in the South Eastern Highlands (NSW), In Friends of Grasslands (2024)(ed.) [Conserving grasslands of the South Eastern Highlands of New South Wales: Friends of Grasslands workshop proceedings](#), pp. 5, 7-8; Armstrong, R. (2024) Conservation of grasslands in south-eastern New South Wales: a NSW DCCEEW perspective, In Friends of Grasslands n 1, pp. 18-19

Photo feature

Andrew Zelnik



A regenerating trial ecological burn patch at Tarengo Travelling Stock Reserve (TSR), near Boorowa NSW in late October 2022.

This was one of two such patches unexpectedly found during a FOG Hotspot visit intended to see how the endangered (Cwlth, NSW) Tarengo Leek Orchid was faring in this iconic Natural Temperate Grassland remnant during the recent run of La Niña high rainfall years at the time. Not long after, we found out the burns had been carried out in autumn that year by the then NSW Department of Planning & Environment.

As shown in the image above the effect of the burns in stimulating the diversity and abundance of native forb growth was clearly evident, and in distinct contrast to the surrounding areas of unburnt high herbage biomass dominated by senescing Kangaroo Grass. In the bottom row are close-up photos of some burn-patch forbs mostly in flower including (L-R) a sundew, Blue Devil, Pale Flax Lily, Black-tip Greenhood Orchid, and Tarengo Leek Orchid accompanied by Scaly Buttons, Creamy Candles, Curved Rice-flower and Variable Raspwort.

With this in mind, it will be interesting to see the results of an early April 2026 NSW Local Land Services cool burn at this TSR and at another site in Boorowa during **FOG's upcoming visit on Monday 12 October**.

Images & Caption: Andrew Zelnik