

STEP News No.9

August 2010



Molonglo Catchment Group and Southern Tablelands Ecosystems Park Parkcare in the Molonglo Valley Workshop

Saturday 28 August 2010
8.30am to 1.00pm
Crosbie Morrison Centre,
Australian National Botanic Gardens

All STEP members are invited to attend the Parkcare in the Molonglo Valley Workshop to be held on Saturday 28 August at the Crosbie Morrison Centre, Australian National Botanic Gardens, Clunies Ross Street, Acton.

STEP needs your help to establish a simple monitoring program that will contribute to several STEP aims and objectives towards its vision for a community based regional botanical garden, education and ecosystem recovery centre for the Southern Tablelands. Volunteers will be needed to contribute a few hours every six months.

See the story on page 11

This is an UN International Year
of Biodiversity Event.

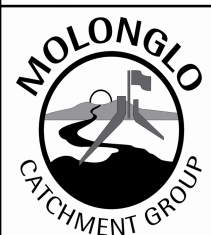
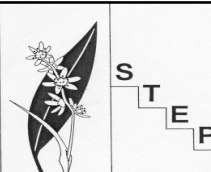
STEP Memberships for 2010/2011 year are now due.

Please remember to renew your STEP membership for 2010/2011.

Fees this year have increased to \$20.00 per membership.

Please address your cheques to the membership Officer, STEP Inc at PO Box 987 Civic Post Office 2608.

Donations are always welcome.



Molonglo Valley:

Why it is a special place for
Canberra's community....

"Situated to the west of Canberra city the Molonglo Valley holds a rich natural and cultural landscape which reflects several hundred million years of land formation and over twenty thousand years of human activity.

The valley is a key element in the unique landscape setting of the national capital."

" The Valley as we see it today had its genesis some 425 million years ago when volcanic activity to the south initiated lava flows and air-borne volcanic material to form in the area. Evidence of this activity can still be seen in the granite outcrops and the 'tuff' formations caused by the build up of deep layers of airborne volcanic dust throughout the valley.

Marine deposits also played a part in the formation of the valley when it became inundated with a shallow sea which extended throughout much of what is now south eastern Australia. Limestone outcrops formed by the deposition of many millions of shelled sea creatures and shale deposits formed by shallow muddy waters can still be seen in the area of the lower Molonglo River.

Following broad regional uplifting events which ceased around 65 million years ago the two major rivers, Molonglo and Murrumbidgee began to cut their way through the valley. Land stabilisation and weathering has produced the current landscape of low rounded hills and smaller valley areas within the major valley.

(Extracted: **Molonglo Valley – A glimpse back into the distant past and near future.** by Dr Peter Dowling Heritage Officer for the ACT National Trust. 2002.)

STEP at Festival of the Forests—March 2010*Geoff Robertson*

The Festival organisers had a wonderful coup by having *Australia All Over*'s Makka to broadcast his show there from 5.30 am on the day. Thousands of curious visitors turned out to find out what the arboretum was all about. So there were many fresh faces interested in our stall attracted by the showy STEP and FOG posters. (STEP happily shared its display space with FOG). For those who were interested in what the arboretum was all about we told the STEP story within the arboretum and the need for community engagement in conservation management of the Southern Tablelands region. Many people from out of town were interested in biodiversity conservation for their rural property, and so we talked about FOG. Many landowners of smaller rural blocks were eager to learn how to discover what flora and fauna they might have, and how to encourage its presence and conserve it. STEP had a vivid display of local forbs and grasses, thanks to *Seeds and Plants Australia*, and they proved to be a good talking point.

We talked to lots of people and had a number of activities on offer during the day. These included: the STEP raffle with wonderful ground-storey plants for the prizes, donated by Warren Saunders; David Shorthouse's STEP tree talk and planting; and the STEP talk in the Speakers Tent given by Cathy Robertson, which drew the large lunch time crowd.

The big event of the day was our community tree planting, sixty trees from five iconic southern tablelands species - the last of the tree plantings on the STEP site, went really well. The crowd followed David from the events terrace about half a kilometre to the STEP site do the planting, and were still enthusiastic. Then I observed an amazing sight as David Shorthouse addressed more than seventy people, many in family groups, in the open air at the site. People went to find their tree planting positions with enthusiasm got on with the job at hand, helped by the STEP team leaders. Many looked around to see what else needed to be done and volunteered for additional tasks. Tom Baker, Queanbeyan Landcare was just there to help me with the group who planted the largest group of trees, *E. polyanthemos*.



It was a great day. My visit to the many other interesting and enlightening stalls revealed that many groups are becoming part of the arboretum. The arboretum and its new allies are becoming enthusiasts and advocates for local biodiversity, a great outcome for STEP and its parent FOG. I also met many friends, out on a stroll, and talked grassy ecosystem conservation issues with many new people. Another highlight was selling a raffle ticket to my stepson who took out second prize in the STEP raffle.

Thanks to all who came and worked with us.

Vegetation Management Plan (VMP) for lots 31-35 National Arboretum Canberra

STEP has been asked to assist with developing a proposal for VMP to provide the National Arboretum in Canberra with an inventory of vegetation found in a large area of study adjacent to the Cork Oak plantation, strategies for planning the future role and purpose of Lots 31-35 as part of the Arboretum, and actions for managing and enhancing the native vegetation in Lots 31-35. The proposal if agreed, will go out to public tender shortly. The study area would include some other adjacent land identified by the National Arboretum in Canberra including a section of the Bi-Centennial Trail and other tracks and roads.

There are a number of elements : to locate and describe land units within the study area (with geo-referenced maps and written descriptions) including geology, soils, ecological communities, exotic or introduced species (e.g. woody weeds), and naturally occurring or planted vegetation and any other natural features of the area. To assess the ecological, habitat and educational values of the native vegetation as examples of the ecosystems of the local area and Southern Tablelands. To identify management issues for each sub-unit (or groups of sub-units) and measures required to address the issues (including, but not confined to weed control, rehabilitation, connectivity, habitat restoration). To develop a strategic management plan for the area consistent with the objectives and programs of the National Arboretum in Canberra. To draft a five-year operations plan, including any revegetation, weed control, or other actions that are designed to implement the strategic management plan. The Project will be coordinated by the Project Team for the National Arboretum Canberra Project Dr David Shorthouse, will be the Southern Tablelands Ecosystems Park's liaison contact for the Project. The tender should be publicly advertised in September.

Landscape Architect offers to lead STEP Master Plan project !

STEP's search for a gifted landscape architect lead us to Ms Barbara Payne, Quandong Designs Pty Ltd, who is establishing her practice as a landscape architect. Barbara also has a strong interest in restoring our local vegetation. She has offered to donate her services to the STEP regional botanic garden Master Plan project. Barbara has established her own company, Quandong Design, and works as a consultant. It was very generous of Barbara to accept this assignment on a prop bono basis. She commenced the preliminary work on the STEP Master Plan Design Project in July 2010. Her assignment will result in the production of both a landscape and a horticultural design for the STEP regional botanical garden.

STEP first met Barbara at our meeting with Gary Rake, CEO of the National Capital Authority, in October 2009. At this meeting, the group discussed the NCA Master Plan for re-planting local tree species in the Lindsay Pryor National Arboretum.

Barbara has also been working for some time as a volunteer with Friends of the Grasslands on the NCA project for the revegetation of Yarramundi Reach. More recently Barbara has been working on a project for the ACT Government in partnership with the NCA to design signage for the new recreational pathways bordering Lake Burley Griffin.

In June, STEP applied for an ACT Environment Grant to pay for the plants and landscaping of the Botanic Garden, to implement Barbara's plans. The grant would cover all costs of completion of our regional botanic garden. Other elements of our grant concerned working with other community conservation groups to enhance biodiversity resources in the Molonglo Valley. The grant also included a plan to assist with an Ecosystems Monitoring Program within the National Arboretum that harmonises with similar projects being undertaken by conservation groups around our boundaries. We have not heard yet about the success of our grant. Irrespective of being successful, STEP is pursuing our objectives and goals. Being rewarded with a grant would mean that the ACT Government valued STEP's contribution and that would be wonderful.



Barbara Payne at the STEP site, looks into her lens with an Landscape Architects smile, and captures those intriguing STEP possibilities.



A Report on the STEP Project as at 22 July 2010

The Southern Tablelands Ecosystems Park (STEP Inc) is a community not-for-profit organization with the vision of creating a regional ecosystems botanic garden, and an ecosystems recovery and education site by March 2013. STEP Inc's values and objectives are summarised in its Constitution.

STEP has always been independent of the Arboretum in terms of fundraising and governance. We are a separate entity situated within the Arboretum with a vision to bring the conservation of southern tablelands biodiversity to the attention of the Arboretum as an organisation and to display and enhance the value of southern tablelands biodiversity in the eyes of local and international audiences.

STEP is very centrally located in inner Canberra and is part of a broader landscape setting which includes a large biodiversity corridor. The STEP site is located in the middle of the Molonglo River Valley.

There are two planning frameworks for this area: the first is the National Capital Open Space System and this is part of the National Capital Plan, and the second is the public land reserves under the Territory Plan. This area is the centre of a remarkable and highly concentrated level of community engagement with conservation projects involving many community groups. This central corridor includes the Belconnen Hills (including Black Mountain and Kama Nature Reserve) Mount Painter; the Pinnacles, the Aranda Bushland; It also includes the grasslands at Yarramundi Reach and the riparian zone of the Molonglo River corridor downstream of Scrivener Dam.

STEP intends to join with other park care groups to work towards common goals and develop its own small projects to enhance the biodiversity in this region.

Frogs were heard at the STEP wetland on a warmer day in May 2010

Below:
Tony Lawson coordinating the STEP display at the National Arboretum Open Day March 2010.



In 2010 STEP has approached many other groups to ask to share their learning and experience with conservation management projects in the Molonglo Valley.

From the STEP sites we look into the Valley and wish to become a community resource with our botanic garden opening onto the new suburbs and the nature reserves

in the Valley. With the assistance of the Molonglo Catchment Group STEP will be jointly hosting a workshop at the Australian Botanic Gardens on Saturday 28 August. This will be our first opportunity to meet with the Parkcare Groups in the Molonglo Valley to discuss and develop a project to identify ways all the groups in the area can work together toward a common goal and to establish an ecosystems monitoring project for the Molonglo Valley area. We would very much like to hear about the ecosystems monitoring projects that the Botanic Gardens undertakes on its site and would love that experience to be shared at our workshop. The Board of the Arboretum will also be participating in this workshop. STEP hopes that the collaboration of these stakeholder groups will support creative ideas for going forward.



Hunter Valley Community of volunteers manages its Regional Botanic Garden

STEP is not the first in the field of community owned regional botanic gardens to feature local ecosystem plantings suitable for home gardens, street and nature park plantings. The Hunter Region Botanic Gardens is a good comparison to keep in mind.

The Hunter Region Botanic Gardens cover an area of 140 hectares, much of which has been preserved as natural bushland. The Gardens, which were opened to the public in 1986, are designed, developed and managed by a non-profit company of volunteers. The development of the Gardens was recognised in 1999, when it won the 'Significant Regional Attraction' award in the Hunter Regional Awards for Excellence in Tourism. The Gardens was later a finalist in these awards in 2000, and won Newcastle City Council Environmental Awards in 1999 and 2000.

The Hunter Region gardens are constantly growing: it is part of their vision to regularly feature new recreational, educational and scientific displays. Rare and endangered Australian species are also cultivated. However, unlike STEP's vision, the Hunter Gardens feature exotic plants as well as "Australian" species.

Many of the plants in the Hunter Gardens are featured as suitable for the home garden and the landscaping is also an inspiration for the keen gardener. Expert personal advice is available to visitors and community groups on plantings and propagation and a large selection of plants and herbs can be purchased at low prices. The four ecosystems are on display in the Hunter Gardens are: Mesic Forest, Wetland, Blackbutt Forest and Bloodwood Forest. There is a website for this interesting garden at:

<http://www.huntergardens.org.au/>

STEP Partnerships with neighbouring community groups who are leaders biodiversity conservation.

A key insight for STEP is that our capacity to be effective comes from productive partnerships with like-minded organisations. STEP has sought support for our strategy by asking for letters of support for our project. Twelve letters have received. The fine letter received from Aranda Bushland is reprinted in this news letter: These letters express support for our project as a key means to further promote the value of biodiversity to agencies, landowners and the community in the Southern tablelands region through our community engagement activities and our communications strategy.

The organisations that have sent letters of support for the STEP vision are:

- ACT Herpetological Association,
- ANU Green
- Australian Native Plants Society Canberra Region Inc,
- Conservation Council ACT Region,
- Field Naturalists Association of Canberra Inc,
- Friends of Aranda Bushland,
- Friends of Grasslands,
- Friends of Mt Painter,
- Kosciuszko2Coast,
- Molonglo Catchment Group; and
- Seeds and Plants Australia
- Yarralumla Nursery

Below: The crowd of about-to-be tree-planters gather around while David Shorthouse explains what STEP is about at 2010 Festival of the Forests.



Support from Friends of Aranda Bushland

"Friends of Aranda Bushland wishes to support STEP's application for a grant of about \$16,900 (Editors note: this figure was revised to \$16,058 in STEP's final application) to plan, develop and promote a landscaped display garden featuring the beauty and diversity of the native trees, shrubs and grasses of the Canberra region.

The strong understorey focus will create habitat structure to support wildlife diversity and enhance the conservation values of the biodiversity corridors between Belconnen and Woden. The biodiversity mapping of these corridors will facilitate public understanding of ecosystems.

The STEP ecosystem garden will be located in the tourism focused National Arboretum Canberra where it has the capacity to form bridges between those who love Canberra's bushland and those who prefer more formal landscapes. The site has the potential to attract crowds who would not normally be interested in the bush. It can show them how to look at nature and see the wonder of the strange and delicate beauty of native flowers and foliage.

We support the signing and improving of tracks to link our self-guided *Frost Hollow to Forest Walk* with the Cork Oaks Plantation walk and the Arboretum. We envisaged joint marketing at least as long ago as 1998 and this is an opportunity to achieve that dream.

We support STEP in negotiating for improved tracks with more signs for walkers, cyclists and horse riders within the Arboretum and the proposed new Molonglo suburbs. There are sufficient linking tracks and bike paths in Belconnen within and around Aranda Bushland, Black Mountain, Mount Painter, The Pinnacle and the William Hovell Drive underpass connection. The proposed signage and accessible mapping would be appreciated.

The Arboretum is an excellent site for recreation activities such as horse riding and mountain biking that can be highly destructive of conservation values in nature reserves. Too many off-track, rogue riders destroy vegetation, create erosion and bring weeds. Friends of Aranda Bushland was in the hot-spot for horse riding in nature reserves in 1998 to 1999 and the issue has reared again on The Pinnacle this month (May 2010) in a forum for the Environment Commissioner's investigation.

Providing excellent facilities outside nature reserves is the best protection we can give to the biodiversity in Canberra Nature Park. The Arboretum has an interesting network of well formed roads with the good visibility needed for safety.

Thanks to all STEP members and friends groups for their support in 2010.

Enough roads have grades of less than 7 degrees as required for horse riding and will provide pleasant rides – especially once the trees grow. It is critical that horse riders have reasonable priority in the Arboretum and Stromlo. If they are engulfed by cyclists, they will continue to pressure nature reserves which are more suitable for low impact walking and quiet contemplation.

There is an opportunity to ensure that the Bicentennial Trail is sufficiently wide to accommodate horse riders, cyclists, fast walkers and ramblers in peace and safety. Horses, bikes and walkers don't mix once there are too many of one or the other. Divided tracks for different uses may be needed if traffic builds up to create conflict. Issues like open access to the Bicentennial Trail may need to be addressed now if the Arboretum is likely to charge entry fees as was envisaged in some options at the Albert Hall display.

Promoting any Canberra Nature Park tracks for cycling is not acceptable. Mountain bikes have wrecked havoc on Aranda Bushland's steep tracks in the past and have been active again lately. They are a major problem in most nature reserves. Bikes are permitted on 'formed roads only', but there is no possibility of fencing them out and apparently no possibility of resources to police and penalise rogue riders."

Jean Geue, President, Friends of Aranda Bushland.

Would you like to join the STEP Botanic Garden donors program to provide seeds and seedlings with Southern tablelands provenance for our planned botanic garden? We would like to hear from you if you can do this. Please contact Geoff Robertson (see details back page).



Photo: David Shorthouse being interviewed at the NA Open Day.

STEP and the first Southern Tablelands plants to be displayed in the Australian Open Garden Scheme

Andy and Janet Russell will open their Garden at 6 Gidabal Street Aranda to display a woodland terrace garden with southern tablelands species and a number of linked courtyard gardens.

This Open Garden event will be held from 10.00am to 4 pm on Saturday and Sunday 2 and 3 October 2010.

A variety of both local provenance plants and native plants from other regions will be featured in their garden. The Russell's will be there to explain the mysteries and excitement of their garden. Tea and coffee will be available with delicious home baked goodies. Why not come along and enjoy a morning or an afternoon in the sunshine ?

STEP is seeking new ways to display the attractiveness and benefits of planting regional flora when domestic gardens are being designed. The proceeds for this event will be shared by the Open Garden Scheme and STEP. There will be a six dollar entry fee. STEP will use the funds we receive from this event to produce a pamphlet about native design for new houses in the Molonglo Valley. We look forward to seeing you there.

Andy and Janet have a small number of their garden plants from seed themselves. They will be delighted to chat with visitors about the plants and their horticulture.

The table below displays a list of some of the Southern Tablelands flora that will be featured at the Aranda Open Garden

Latin name	Common name
<i>Xerochrysum bracteatum</i>	Golden everlasting
<i>Chrysocephalum apiculatum</i>	Yellow buttons
<i>Actinotus helianthi</i>	Flannel flower
<i>Derwentia perfoliata</i>	Diggers speedwell
<i>Swainsona galegifolia</i>	Smooth Darling pea
<i>Scaevola alba</i> (pink form)	Pale fan flower
<i>Callistemon pallidus</i>	Lemon bottlebrush

What is Australia's Open Garden Scheme?

Australia's Open Garden Scheme is a non-profit organisation that began in Victoria in 1987. The Scheme aims to promote the knowledge and pleasure of gardens and gardening across Australia. It does this by opening Australia's most inspiring private gardens to the public.

How are they chosen?

All of the gardens included are first visited by selectors who are experienced gardeners themselves. In the case of the Russell's garden, the garden design is a good example of a courtyard and terraced garden featuring southern tablelands plants. It is a good example of a garden designed for this climate with interesting landscaping to fit the sloping site and well-maintained using water collected from on site water tanks, drainage swales, natural mulch and stones. It is also a highly researched and documented garden.

What happens to the entry fees?

Owners, such as Andy and Janet Russell, who so generously open their gardens to the public charge a nominal fee (the standard fee is \$6). All the Scheme's income is derived from these entry fees. It receives no other financial support. Thirty five per cent of the entry fee is returned to the garden owner or to the charity of their choice. In this case, the Russell's have chosen to donate their share to STEP. Sixty five per cent is returned to the Scheme. After operating costs, surplus funds are distributed by the Scheme to the community as grants to garden-related projects.

Garden owners donate around \$350,000 annually to charities and local causes. Since 1987 over \$1,000,000 has been given to community garden projects by Australia's Open Garden Scheme.



STEP is considering making an application for a grant from this scheme next year.

Photo:

Chrysocephalum apiculatum growing in the Russell garden.



E. dalrympleana is a tree typical of the NSW south western Slopes Bioregion. This bioregion is an extension of the Great Dividing Range extending through southern New South Wales to Western Victoria. In the higher rainfall eastern hill country, woodlands and open woodlands of white box (*Eucalyptus albens*) are dominant.

To the west and north these give way to vegetation communities dominated by grey box (*Eucalyptus microcarpa*) and white cypress pine (*Callitris glaucophylla*). Other tree species characteristic of the bioregion include red stringybark (*Eucalyptus macrorhynca*) on higher slopes, with black cypress pine (*Callitris endlicheri*), kurrajong (*Brachychiton populneum*), red ironbark (*Eucalyptus sideroxylon*), white gum (*Eucalyptus rossi*), yellow box (*Eucalyptus melliodora*) and Blakely's red gum (*Eucalyptus blakelyi*) occupying the lower slopes.

Valley flats are dominated by rough-barked apple (*Angophora floribunda*), with river oak (*Casuarina cunninghamia*) found along eastern streams and river red gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) lining the larger central and western streams. (This information was extracted from the NSW DECC web site).

Eucalyptus dalrympleana - STEP Feature Tree

There are 12 specimens of this tree planted on the STEP site. They were grown from seed by the Yarralumla nursery with specifications for local provenance requested by STEP. Despite our expectations, the provenance for this seed lot was the dividing range in N.E. Victoria. This was very disappointing, but it also reflects the scarcity of local seeds and the attention given to this issue by nurseries at this time.

The trees were planted at the National Arboretum Open Day in March this year. So far, they appear to be growing very well. We planted them along the water flow line and the *E. viminalis* and *E. delegatensis* are planted close by.

This species grows to a height of 40 metres in good conditions. The bark is smooth throughout and blotched white and grey to yellow-white, and sometimes with pink and green to olive. There is often an accumulation of shed bark at the base of the trunk. Adult leaves are narrowly lanceolate to lanceolate, 10 - 20cm long and 1.5 - 2.5cm wide.

It occurs southwards from the central tablelands of New South Wales through the southern tablelands (including the Australian Alps) then westwards to The Grampians in Victoria as well as occurring in eastern Tasmania where it grows on upper slopes in mountain forests. It is commonly known as *Mountain Gum*.

Specimens can be found in the Australian National Botanic Gardens. I asked for a map reference from the Gardens. Cheryl Backhouse, Australian Plant Image Index at the Australian National Botanic Gardens helpfully provided a reference for my information. To view *E. dalrympleana* species growing in the gardens, you can use the following link <http://www.anbg.gov.au/cgi-bin/vic> and enter '*Eucalyptus dalrympleana*%' in the 'Name' field. This will list the plants along with their location. To find the location use this map <http://www.anbg.gov.au/images/maps/ANBG-section-map-2007.jpg>.



Bush on the Boundary

STEP is now a member of Bush on the Boundary for the Molonglo Valley. We have attended one meeting so far. The next meeting will be on 10 August. The Bush on the Boundary Reference Group in Molonglo brings together land developers, local community and catchment groups, scientists, and residents to work collaboratively in addressing the impact of suburban development on surrounding nature parks, reserves and public land, by targeting issues such as cat containment, urban wetlands, illegal dumping and weed control.

Open Garden Scheme

Andy and Janet Russell will open their garden of local provenance and Australian plants 2 and 3 October 2010. If you have time to help us please contact STEP via lime-tone@grapevine.com.au. Thanks to all those who have already offered to help.

July Friends of the Arboretum Planting

This was a glorious morning on Sunday 4 July. I was there, as the STEP representative on the Friends Council and provided assistance with organising the event by writing 70 Certificates and handing out numerous *allocasuarinas* to the 70 or so people who came to plant a tree. Adam Burgess was the coordinator for the planting. The event planted 194 trees and raised a good sum of money for the Arboretum.

Australian trees now planted at the National Arboretum.

About eight percent of the trees planted at the National Arboretum are Australian. The current list is: *Eucalyptus argophloia*; *Acacia caerulea*; *Eucalyptus Benthamii*; *Wollemia nobilis*; *Grevillea robusta*; *Araucaria Bidwillii*; *Eucalyptus lacrimans*; *Eucalyptus scopiaria*; *Eucalyptus tricarpa*; *Eucalyptus michaeliana*; *Corymbia Maculate*; *Allocasuarina verticillate*.

Natural Vegetation Management Plan for the north east corner of the National Arboretum Canberra

David Shorthouse, Andy Russell and Cathy Robertson met with Emma Hallway of the National Arboretum Canberra Project Team on Thursday 22 July to discuss the scope for a tender for a natural vegetation management plan for the area near the Cork Oaks in the National Arboretum Canberra. The scope for this plan is quite a large area including a dam, part of the bicentennial trail and the road connecting it to the STEP site. The group agreed that a STEP liaison would be part of the requirements to insure that ecosystem management principles support all stages of this project. David Shorthouse will be the STEP Liaison Consultant for the plan. After the meeting Cathy Robertson and David Shorthouse drafted a scope document for the tender and forwarded it to Emma Hallway for finalisation by the NAC Project Team. This tender is expected to be advertised in August and the project is expected to be completed by the end of this year. STEP will need to consider its involvement with the implementation when it is completed.

First meeting with Barbara Payne, Quandong Design Pty Ltd 7 August 2010

Barbara Payne attended the August STEP Committee meeting to outline how she intends to proceed and what she needs from STEP. Barbara indicated that she thought the project could be completed by 31 October 2010 subject to her other paid work commitments during this period. The Committee decided that David Shorthouse, Geoff Robertson and Andy Russell should form a Botanic Garden subcommittee to assist Barbara.

**BIODIVERSITY & FARMING FAIR**

SUNDAY 10th October 2010 Bredbo Village 9am - 4pm

**Key Presenter, Sam Archer - Livestock producer & Biodiversity farmer
(MLA Nuffield Scholar 2008)**

STEP hopes that the ATLAS Project can support the “Molonglo Community Science Project”.

STEP is planning to work in partnership with the ATLAS Living Australia (ALA) Project to assist with recording simple ecosystems monitoring data about the Molonglo Valley and its biodiversity.

Dr Donald Hobern, ALA is the coordinator about the new online site that documents Australia's living species. Hobern says the project is a collaborative effort between museums, CSIRO and universities with funding from the Federal government. Hobern says the system will clarify species information based on location and images. Hobern says he is keen to work with the public including bird groups and natural history societies to compare with other information available. Hobern says the site is a bit like Wikipedia with information pulled from historical records.

The ALA project plans to manage information about the rich variety of plants, animals and micro-organisms, many of which are unique to the Australian continent.

The ALA business case is based on the remarkable biodiversity of Australia as a key part of Australia's economic, social and environmental well-being, and its future sustainability. This project will encompass the information on Australia's biodiversity that is currently held in biological collections in museums and herbaria. ATLAS will ensure that by bringing together distribution data for Australian plants, animals **and micro-organisms, and combining it with** images, literature, maps, identification tools and molecular data that researchers and the public will be able to explore and analyse this information in novel ways.

The Atlas project will link together information about all species found in Australia and its surrounding oceans. Particular focus areas will include names and classification, species distribution and tools for identification, with the goal to improve access to all relevant sources of information.

The Atlas project will also deliver tools which enable any observer to improve our understanding of Australian biodiversity by contributing sightings of any species. Such observations can greatly enhance our knowledge of how native species are faring and highlight the arrival and spread of pest species.

You can also visit the Atlas of Living Australia at <http://www.ala.org.au>.

Where can you find out more about ATLAS?

There will be a display by the ATLAS Project at the Ecosystems Monitoring Workshop on 28 August. STEP hopes that the Molonglo Monitoring Project will be one of the first trials for the ATLAS Project in the Canberra Region.

The ATLAS people are sending Bryan Karms along to the monitoring workshop with a stand alone laptop presentation plus fact sheets, postcards and stickers and samples. They will be there to answer questions and do a short talk.

The Atlas of Living Australia project is collaboration between:

- The Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO)
- The Australian Museum
- The Museum and Art Gallery of Northern Territory
- Museum Victoria
- The Queensland Museum
- The South Australian Museum
- The Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery
- The Western Australian Museum
- The Council of Australasian Museum Directors (CAMD)
- The Council of Heads of Australasian Herbaria (CHAH)
- The Council of Heads of Australian Collections of Micro-organisms (CHACM)
- The Council of Heads of Australian Entomological Collections (CHAECE)
- The Council of Heads of Australian Faunal Collections (CHAFC)
- Southern Cross University
- The University of Adelaide
- The Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF)
- The Australian Government Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts



More about the STEP Ecosystems Workshop 28 August

We are expecting many people who are STEP members will come to participate in our biodiversity monitoring workshop on Saturday 28 August. This is a wonderful opportunity for STEP members to get involved in our monitoring project. It will also be our opportunity to work in harmony with neighbours in the Molonglo Valley.

STEP will be establishing a simple project to monitor the ecosystems on the STEP sites, building on what we learn from the experience of other groups in the Molonglo Valley such as Friends of Aranda Bushland, who have been working on their very large site for the past twenty years. We also hope to gain the cooperation of neighbouring groups to contribute to a broader picture of monitoring biodiversity in the Molonglo Valley. We hope that each community group can select a key element of what they are already monitoring, and standardise a small component of their monitoring data so that it can be transferred to a shared public record on the new ATLAS Community Science Portal, currently being established by CSIRO. We also hope that the National Arboretum as a whole and STEP as a part of it, will participate in this project. If successful, this project should result in sharing some key data about the flora and fauna in the Molonglo Valley area and in the Arboretum site, via a publicly funded accessible and well maintained facility.

Molonglo Catchment Group (MCG) and STEP are partners in hosting this event. MCG is generously donating the morning tea, which will be prepared by Hudsons' Café at the Botanic Gardens. The Australian National Botanic Gardens have generously donated the use of the Crosbie Morrison Building to accommodate the Workshop.

The building and its facilities are conveniently located and have the perfect ambience for this workshop. Sarah Sharp has agreed to facilitate the workshop for us. Sarah will be giving us her expertise on a pro bono basis, which is very generous of her. STEP has taken on the responsibility for organising the concept and the logistics for the workshop. There is much to do still. Hearty thanks to Linda Beveridge for all she has done to get this running smoothly, in her role as the coordinator for this event. Please enrol by sending an email to: gkljbev1@bigpond.net.au.

Looking forward to seeing you there!



No news about the Woodland

Despite our efforts, there has been little progress recently with establishing the fence around the remnant pocket of 16 Ha of existing Yellow Box-Red Gum Grassy woodland on the adjacent rural lease in north east Molonglo. The sheep are already grazing on the new grass after the rain this winter and will quickly damage the new season growth of grasses and forbs.

STEP Block covered in the mud

STEP has been disappointed at the lack of progress to address the continuing problems caused by the earth works at the car park site next to the STEP Lot 100. It was exasperating to see even more damage had occurred when the STEP Committee visited Lot 100 on Saturday morning 7 August with Barbara Payne who is helping us design the understorey plantings and other features for Lot 100.

Of course we are pleased to see the continued good growth of our trees, and the condition of the ephemeral wetland. We even recorded a couple of (NSW) threatened bird species fly past! However, we afterwards wrote again concerning the condition of the car park and pile of soil that is still having a significant influence our site. Both the 'temporary' dams at either end of the soil dump are breaching with recent rains and sending sediment over the block. Of great concern also is the clear evidence of a vehicle (probably a truck?) driving along the sediment fence, between two rows of trees, finding a boggy place, changing route and then driving over a well established *E.macrorhyncha*. It is disheartening to say the least, that Lot 100 does not seem to have the respect it deserves, equal to all the other Lots and plantings.

We have previously asked for meetings with the arboretum management and landscape architects about the design of the car park, the need for soil stabilisation, the breaching of the sediment fence, and plans for drainage of surface water. Our original planting plan was predicated on the original flows across Lot 100 bringing extra water to the mountain species. We would like to have this recognised in the works that are being undertaken for the car park. We have asked for an urgent meeting the curator, the landscape architects and contractors so that we can work together on these problems.



STEP Calendar 2010

August Thursday morning working bees at STEP site from 9 —11 am
Phone 647 3816 for details.
Sat 28 Ecosystem Monitoring Workshop

September Thursday morning working bees at STEP site from 9 —11 am.
Phone 6251 3816 for details.
The National Arboretum will be open for bus tours during Floriade on Sundays

October

2&3 October Open Garden at Janet and Andy Russell's in Aranda – details in this newsletter.

10 October K2C Biodiversity Fair – details in this newsletter.

Nov AGM —TBA

STEP Committee in 2009/2010

President	Cathy Robertson
Vice President	David Shorthouse
Secretary	Geoff Robertson
Treasurer/Membership	Andrew Russell
Committee members :	Warren Saunders; Tony Lawson Hannah Jaireth Linda Beveridge
Public Officer:	Andrew Russell
STEP Communications	Tony Lawson
STEP Newsletter	Cathy Robertson
Banner and website:	Rainer Wilton.
Ecosystems Monitoring Workshop Coordinator	Linda Beveridge

Latest news: Max Bourke, an active STEP member, has offered to look into the possibility of applying for a grant from the Dahl Trust. The Bjarne K Dahl Trust is a philanthropic fund focused on Eucalypts, Australia's icons. The Bjarne K Dahl Trust will be officially launched in the Winter of 2010. The Trust has been established by a bequest gifted by Bjarne Klaus Dahl, a Norwegian Forester who came to Australia in 1928 and fell in love with the bush. The Bjarne K Dahl Trust is in an establishment phase, and will shortly launch their grant making program. In the future they will be looking at other ways to operate and will be seeking partners for these activities. Max has the idea of creating a booklet of about 6000 words about the STEP project focussing on the woodland with lovely pictures and good design that we could hand out at the National Arboretum Visitors Centre. David Shorthouse and Andy Russell have agreed to work with Max to develop the grant application.

If undelivered please return to:

Southern Tablelands Ecosystems Park Inc
PO Box 987
Civic Square ACT 2608