

SOUTHERN TABLELANDS ECOSYSTEMS PARK – A REGIONAL

BOTANIC GARDEN, EDUCATION AND ECOSYSTEMS RECOVERY FOR THE SOUTHERN TABLELANDS

NEWSLETTER: December 2015.

PO Box 440, Jamison Centre, 2614.

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

As this is the last Newsletter for 2015, I want to look back at some of the highlights of the year.

February saw a milestone for us with the opening of our Outdoor Education Space: The Clearing, by the Minister for Territories and Municipal Services, Shane Rattenbury. To acknowledge our “parent” organisations, the Australian Native Plant Society and the Friends of Grasslands, the current Presidents of these two organisations each planted a Callitris, as did the Minister.

In April the Duke of Kent paid a visit, accompanied by his entourage. During the year members of other groups such as Rotary, Greening Australia, the Green Army, Conservation Volunteers, representatives of the local indigenous community, have paid visits, so we are gradually becoming recognised as a regional botanic garden. This sets us apart from the other forests in the National Arboretum Canberra. The staff of the NAC have been very helpful in increasing this awareness with visitors, and encouraging them to move from the Visitor Centre and follow the new path to find us.

For a week during the ANPS Conference in November we were delighted to welcome groups of delegates for short visits, unfortunately in very hot and blustery conditions. All our hard work in the months leading up to the Conference paid off as the central garden section looked beautiful with many understorey plants in bloom.

At the end of November we held our AGM, at which I stood down. I would like to thank our dedicated Thursday workers for their enthusiasm and hard work over the year. It was pleasing that their endeavours were recognised in August with a Keep Australia Beautiful Award.

Lastly, my sincere thanks to the Committee, the Newsletter Editor, and our Webmaster, who all cheerfully and energetically contribute their expertise to help STEP achieve its goals. I know the new President, Judy Smith, will keep up the momentum.

Best wishes for the Christmas season and 2016.

Margie Bourke



Lainie Shorthouse guides some of the ANPS

visitors around STEP.

STEP AGM

The AGM for STEP was held in the Green Room at the NAC on Sunday 29 November. The following were elected as officer bearers and members of the committee for 2016:

President – Judy Smith

Vice-President – David Shorthouse

Treasurer – Ross Dalton

Public Officer/Memberships – Andy Russell

Secretary – Tony Lawson

Committee members – Jens Svensson, Bill Handke, Lainie Shorthouse.

Margie Bourke is to be thanked wholeheartedly for her two years as a wonderful President. She provided strong leadership and clear vision for the aims of STEP.

Lainie Shorthouse has volunteered to be Minutes Secretary. Thanks also to Sue Genner who has agreed to take over the compilation of the Newsletters next year. Many thanks to Max Bourke for his work over several years in this very important role. The Newsletter has become a vibrant reflection of our actions, thoughts and aspirations.

Judy Smith

News from Forest 20

Regular Thursday STEPpers have put in extra effort over the last few months to prepare Forest 20 for the visit by delegates at the Australian Native Plants Society's of Australia conference. Completing the central area as a regional botanic garden was the key goal for 2015 and we achieved all major activities associated with this: the gravel paths are now completed and The Clearing opened, all areas within the paths are mulched and ready for planting, many squares are planted, pink plant guards removed where we could, and of course, much weeding. Just over 260 squares have been

planted with 160 understorey species. In addition to the 16 species of eucalypts, 8 other tree species have been added.

About 130 conference delegates visited Forest 20 during five daily sessions in the generally hot and sunny week of 16-20 November. We can report from the many conversations between the very knowledgeable visitors and STEPper guides that the visitors were impressed with our achievement and comments were very encouraging for us to continue working towards the STEP vision. We also enjoyed a visit from Angus Stewart (ABC Gardening Australia) who showed particular interest in plants that may be suitable for home gardens and landscape plantings.



Sue Genner introducing Forest 20 to visitors from the Australian Native Plants Society's of Australia conference



Andy Russell explains STEP's planting plans to visitors from the Australian Native Plants Society's of Australia conference.



Angus Stewart (Gardening Australia) joined STEPPers at morning tea on 19 November.

We now feel fully justified in claiming the STEP project as having achieved the status of ‘the southern tablelands regional botanic garden’ (located at Forest 20 at the National Arboretum Canberra). With the Arboretum’s newly opened mineral path system in place and connecting to STEP’s central garden we are now realistically a destination for visitors to the Arboretum. More information about STEP is available at the Village Centre and this has helped to direct more visitors to us and has generated additional interest in the regional botanic garden. We are also offering a location for one of the official seats that are spread throughout the Arboretum.

STEP is pleased to have been the subject of two ‘blog reports’ about Forest 20. Ian Fraser wrote about Forest 20 as *“one too-obscure corner of the arboretum which regularly draws me to inspect its progress; this is the Southern Tablelands Ecosystems Park (STEP hereafter), an absolutely delightful pocket of diverse native vegetation tucked away in a corner. Effectively it is a lovely, and rapidly evolving, little botanic garden of local plants, including 16 eucalypt species”*. Ian’s blog can be accessed at: <http://ianfrasertalkingnaturally.blogspot.com.au/2015/11/southern-tablelands-ecosystems-park.html>

A second blog writes *“ Amongst the newly growing forests in the Arboretum is one of the best kept secrets, a regional botanic garden called STEP (Southern Tablelands Ecosystems Park)”*, and is accessed at <http://www.canberrasgreenspaces.com/?p=801>

Another internet source of information about STEP is the Canberra Nature Map project which is a repository for park care groups, volunteers and members of the public to report sightings of rare and endangered plant species and any of the many treasures that Canberra's nature parks are home to. STEPPers Jennie Widdowson and Andy Russell have been posting photos of our flowering plants to the site <http://www.canberranaturemap.org> thus spreading the word about the southern tablelands regional botanic garden (located at Forest 20 at the National Arboretum Canberra)

David Shorthouse

The eagle and the fox

On one of our tours of the STEP site during the week of the ANPS conference, we accidentally turned on a demonstration of what it is about Canberra that makes us so love it so much.

As we were escorting a group of conference-goers towards the Clearing, we stopped to admire a wedge-tailed eagle above us, resting on its mighty wings in an updraft. Then, astonishingly, it closed his wings and shot down like a torpedo. What it had seen, but none of us had, was a fox cub ambling along at the edge of the STEP plantation.

Whether because of the trees, or from inexperience (Max said later that its light plumage meant it was young), the eagle missed its target and found itself standing on the ground a few paces from the surprised cub. Neither animal seemed to know what to do next. The fox cub did not dash away, and the eagle made a few clumsy hops towards it, then stopped. Naturally, as good conservationists, we were all on the side of the eagle, but it seemed to be incapable of attacking except from above. As for the fox, it may not have seen the burly creature near it as a bird at all.

When the cub trotted under a small tree, the eagle gave up and took flight again, soaring away magnificently towards Mt Painter, with a tiny pee-wee in pursuit.

This scene was played out in front of our eyes, only a few kilometres from the centre of the city. Where else could that happen?

Jenny Andrews



The young eagle hopping after the fox.



The young fox hopping away from the eagle! *Photos by Andy Russell.*



The Clearing with its beautiful new sign.

Photo Bill Handke.

Canberra Nature Map

Canberra Nature Map is an interactive database of plants, reptiles, frogs and butterflies (birds will be added in the near future) found in the Canberra region. There are currently 27,300 sightings of 2,528 species across 505 locations. The locations of all species are shown on Google maps although only a general position is shown for rare species. All the Natureparks and reserves in Canberra are included as well as Namadgi and Tidbinbilla, river corridors, urban lakes and ponds, the National Arboretum and STEP.

All photos on the database have been contributed by members of the public. Information placed on Canberra Nature Map is automatically also added to the Atlas of Living Australia.

Canberra Nature Map can be used to:

- search for a particular species to see what it looks like and understand its distribution throughout the ACT.
- to look at all the species that occur in a particular area
- to look at the distribution of rare plants across the ACT
- to look at the distribution of weed species across the ACT

Anyone can search the database or, by registering, they can upload photos providing there is a GPS location attached. Most recent mobile phones and some cameras are able to take GPS enabled photos. There is also a Canberra Nature Map app for those with iPhones.

It does not matter if you do not know exactly what species your plant, reptile, frog or butterfly belongs to as there are a panel of experts who interact with the database to help with the identification or confirm your suggested identification. It is also possible to have an interactive discussion about the characteristics of a species in which anyone can join.

Do have a look at this site : <http://canberranaturemap.org/>

It is an amazing resource and I have learned a lot from it.

Jennie Widdowson

Southern Tablelands Ecosystem Park

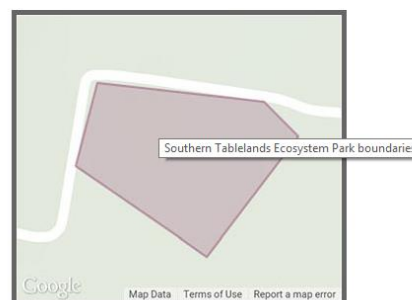
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Southern Tablelands
Ecosystem Park Species Guide

[View Species Guide](#)

Reserve boundaries



Follow Southern Tablelands
Ecosystem Park

Receive email alerts when new sightings are

This is the STEP site on the Canberra Nature Map.



A wet day moved morning tea inside the shed!



But look at the tidy shed, we could eat morning tea off the floor as my old Dad would say (Ed). *Photos Jennie Widdowson.*

Small STEPs – an appreciation.

On many levels, Forest 20, our Regional Botanic Garden, presents a feast of delights. It is easy to revel in the pattern of the bands of Eucalypts, the sloping symmetry of plantings of grasses and shrubs, the enticing sweep of the crushed granite paths and the open spaces of the pods and The Clearing.

What has always fascinated me, however, has been the world in miniature. It requires me to slow down, and to focus and to be patient in my observations. There is a treasure trove of sights and delights ever new, every day: the delicate patterns of the phyllodes of the *Allocasuarina*; the symmetry of the *Dichopogon* flowers; the diversity and multitude of insect life which abounds in the Spring flowers; the glossy green of the Kangaroo Apple fruit; the delight in seeing an unidentified native bee hover and then disappear into a hollow between rocks at the edge of the path; the feather of an Eastern Rosella caught in the grass; the exquisite points of the Kangaroo Grass seed heads, and a litany of other sights too numerous to mention. These represent just one aspect of

why I am grateful for the time I can spend at STEP.



Photos by Judy Smith of some of the world in miniature on the STEP site.

The outgoing President Margie Bourke, also works on the “other native plant site” on the NAC, the Friends’ Forest 100, the plantation of *Allocasuarina verticillata* planted for Glossy Black Cockatoos and now with an understory of *Themeda triandra*:



New Members

J Morgan, S Stephens, J Kiely, H Mackay. Welcome to you all.

Corporate Members are Morgans in Association with CIMB ; Everalls DFK. Double R Heavy Machinery Maintenance, Tom's Superfruits ,Franco of Canberra.

Next Newsletter mid-March 2016, edited by Sue Genner.