

STEP NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2020



Forest 20 on a Thursday with our volunteers hard at work

From the President

As we approach the end of 2020, we have much to reflect on. The excessive heat and lack of rain at the start of the year was followed by downpours, hail, COVID-19 and an extremely wet Spring, each producing its own challenges.

I have much admiration for the resilience of STEPpers who willingly hop into tasks, whether these are routine, repetitive, arduous, or challenging. Thank you all for your hard work, friendship, and cheerfulness.

The 2020-2030 Strategic Plan has been printed. The extensive consultative process to bring this project to fruition was managed expertly by David Shorthouse who deserves our heartfelt thanks for his vision and drive. Mariana Rollgejser was responsible for the design and layout of the publication and her talent has given us a very beautiful and professional document (see photos). The Memorandum of Understanding between STEP and NAC has been provided to NAC administration for comment and we hope that this can be signed off at the annual Volunteers Evening on Monday 14 December. *Photo, David Shorthouse and Judy Smith at work on the Strategic Plan, photo Lainie Shorthouse*



On 26 November we held our AGM. Committee positions are Judy Smith President, David Shorthouse Vice-President, Ross Dalton Treasurer, Elizabeth Minchin Secretary, Andy Russell Publications and Membership Officer, and general committee members Bill Handke, Jennie Widdowson, Jane Cottee, Terry Murphy, and Georgie Till. We extend a warm welcome to Georgie as a new appointment.

Special thanks must go to Andy Russell for all his work providing a monthly sheet of what is in flower at Forest 20, his production of the newsletters, his management of our memberships and his enthusiastic promotion of STEP at many events and venues.

Our annual get-together will be Sunday 17 January from 12pm at Judy and Mike Smith's place. Details about catering will be circulated early next year.

I hope that the Christmas season will be a time of much happiness for you all and that 2021 will bring peace and hope.

Best wishes, Judy Smith (President)

Visitors

On October 11, we had a visit from the Friends of Mount Painter. They were interested to see what species thrived at Forest 20 as possible plantings for the area they maintain. The members indicated they found it a very useful exercise. Thanks to David Shorthouse, Robyn Black, Jennie Widdowson and Jane Cottee for acting as guides for the group.

Judy Smith



Friends of Mt Painter visiting STEP

On Sunday 8 November we hosted the National Parks Association. Their visit was to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the founding of this group which has been so active in promoting the establishment of National Parks. Their work in lobbying for the Namadgi National Park is one of their accomplishments. They were impressed with the range of species at Forest 20 and many indicated they would come for a return visit.

Judy Smith



NPA visitors at the She-oak Nook

Another Speargrass noted at Forest 20

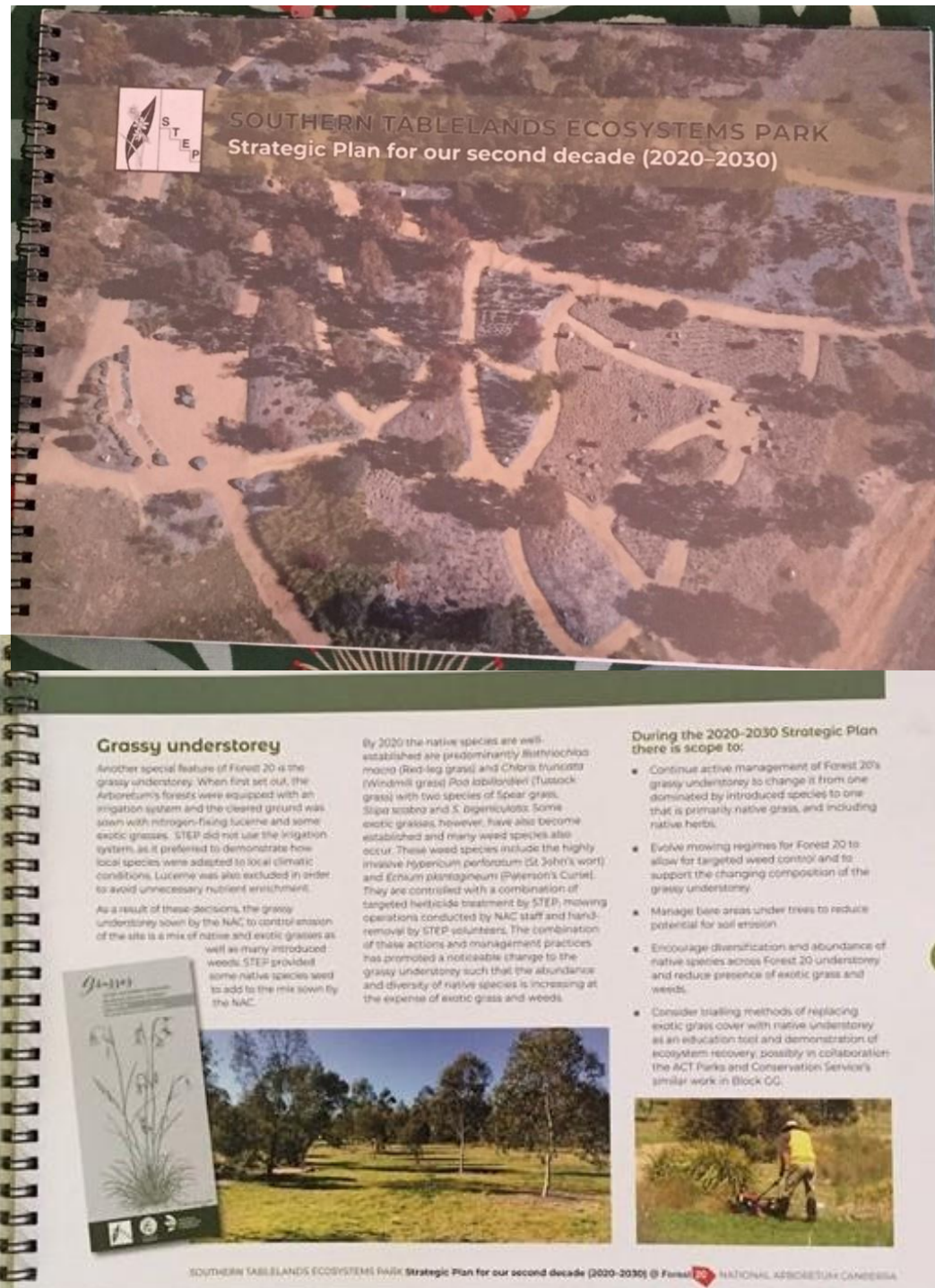
It was a bit of a surprise this spring to find how much this grass has spread in Forest 20 from just a couple of plants near the She-oak Nook. *Austrostipa densiflora* (Brushtail Grass) joins two other species of this commonly found genus: *Austrostipa scabra* (Corkscrew Grass) and *Austrostipa bigeniculata* (Tall Speargrass). Some small patches of all three grasses have been protected from mowing this spring in order to help the plants set and distribute seed.

David Shorthouse



The next ten years

After considerable consultation and drafting, the plan for the next ten years has been formulated. It is a comprehensive document which sets out the history of STEP to date and outlines directions for the future. The history is important as it informs newcomers of the past plans and practices. The future directions are a guide for those who will be caring for STEP in the years to come, ensuring the mission of this organization remains strong and the regional botanic garden will flourish. David Shorthouse is to be congratulated for his vision and diligence in seeing such a huge task to a highly successful outcome. The Strategic Plan is in booklet form, with attractive layout and design by Mariana Rollgejser.



Pictured above, top the cover, lower part of the text.

New Entrance

With the completion of the new carpark, we now have a new main entry point to Forest 20. A concrete path from the Visitor Centre gives easy access for visitors and our yellow STEP flag is easily visible. We have moved the sign from the She-oak to this new location, created a crushed granite path and a visitor assembly area with rock seating and have completed extensive paper, mulching and planting. The visual effect is very pleasing, but we have some water runoff and reticulation issues to address. Thanks to Bill Handke for his expertise in creating this space and working to minimize the effects of the excess water. We are hopeful that a long-term solution may be found.



STEP Volunteers work connecting the concrete entry ramp to our path system, above left re-erecting the STEP banner

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STEP now on “Instagram”

Lainie Shorthouse has established a STEP presence on Instagram. Regular postings will show some of our plants and other features of Forest20.

Follow us on [step__canberra](https://www.instagram.com/step__canberra)

The Presentation of Cultural Artefacts - A Major Cultural Event for the NAC at STEP

Increasingly, the Southern Tablelands Ecosystem Park (STEP) continues to provide an attractive venue for a range of events and activities for the ACT community. As our forest matures and continues to be 'discovered' by organisations and individuals, it will surely become a favourite choice as a pleasant outdoor venue.

Recently, the National Arboretum Canberra (NAC) hosted a major cultural event at The Clearing at STEP. The Presentation of the Indigenous Australian Cultural Artifacts ceremony was held in the late afternoon amongst the forest trees that provided welcome relief from the heat and wind.



Visitors at this event

Dr. Matilda House (aka Elder Aunty Matilda) as a traditional custodian opened the proceedings with a Welcome to Country. She welcomed all guests including Ms Kathy Leigh (ACT Head of Service and Director General) and acknowledged the first nations people of the Ngunnawal and Ngambri on whose land the ceremony was to be conducted. She then thanked both Kathy Leigh and Scott Saddler (Executive Branch Manager NAC and Stromlo Forest Park) for hosting the event. Her three young granddaughters - Leah Matilda, Justine Brown and Tiana House continued the Welcome ceremony soon after by performing a traditional dance for guests.



Elder Aunty Matilda

Scott Saddler thanked the dancers, extended a welcome to Ms Kathy Leigh, Robert Wright (Executive Group Manager, Corporate CMTECC), Sue Vroombout (Chair of the CMTECC Reconciliation Action Plan), ACT government executives and Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) representatives and members of the public.



Photo, Scott Saddler with Elder Aunty Matilda's three granddaughters Leah Matilda, Justine Brown, and Tiana House

Jessica Spencer (Indigenous Tourism Officer, NAC) was invited by Scott Saddler to present the Cultural basket gift to Kathy Leigh. After the basket was smoked by two of the indigenous weavers it was placed on the large rock (one of

three) in the centre of The Clearing. After acknowledging the traditional custodians, Jessica (Wiradjuri woman) explained how the basket was created. The large, beautiful basket was woven by many different women from different mobs across the country over a period of 8 months. The women brought a range of traditional and contemporary techniques, sharing their unique techniques with others. The weavers were guided by the fibre artist Ronnie Jordan who was present at the ceremony and was acknowledged for sharing her creative talents with many of the weavers in the making of the basket.

Lastly, Jessica spoke of the deep gratitude felt by indigenous people for the support provided by Ms. Kathy Leigh and how the woven basket, a symbolic indigenous gift, was made for and gifted to CMTEDD in recognition of that support.

Scott Saddler spoke of his role as CMTEDD cultural advisor and indigenous mentor in facilitating cultural experience for indigenous ACT government employees on country, in locations such as Tidbinbilla. This is often a first-time experience for ACT government indigenous employees. This enables knowledge and skills such as sourcing natural materials to produce yarning sticks to depict their personal stories.



Jacob Collins (Director, Workforce Strategies) gave a personal account of his life growing up in difficult circumstances due to his aboriginality. He reflected on changes and improvements to the lives of indigenous people in recent years since his childhood. He thanked Kathy Leigh and others for creating the environment for such meaningful projects as this to be presented in order to display aboriginal culture.

The yarning stick artists were invited to pass their yarning sticks through smoke prior to placing them in the woven basket. These sticks would remain with the basket while on display at CMTEDD. The dancers then performed another traditional dance with the basket on display.

Kathy Leigh thanked all involved in the production of the basket, speakers and those attending. She noted that the yarning sticks include a personal family message on each and the basket will hold the dreams and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders now and into the future.

She finally reiterated her commitment and that of the service to the reconciliation process



Although four volunteers from STEP availed themselves for a tour of STEP, our offer was declined due to the hot prevailing conditions. Some attendees said that they would return on a cooler day.



Mingle and farewell after the event

Note on the basket construction

The basket was initially made from ropes constructed by women from many mobs across Australia. These ropes were created by using a central core of material such as stripped *Lomandra* or *Poa* and binding this using natural raffia (from the raffia palm - not native to Australia) or native grasses or reeds. The brightly coloured segments of the basket are from dyed raffia. These ropes were put together to form the basket using fishing line to hold the ropes in place in a coiled shape originally typical of those made in South Eastern Australia., but now found throughout Australia. The top edge of the basket was decorated with a fringe of emu feathers.

Article by Terry Murphy, last paragraph on basket construction by Jennie Widdowson Photos Andy Russell

Rocky river

Considerable work has been done around the ephemeral wetland. A gravel streamline with a rocky crossing diverts water from the Boundary road into the wetland and rock gardens where new planting added considerable interest to this part of Forest 20.



The NAC has provided signage to inform cyclists not to ride though Forest 20.

They have made an alternate route

which takes cyclists along the allee between Forest 20 and the Mesa Oaks, thence to the Boundary Road. We are hopeful that this will be the route of choice for cyclists.

Other Plants in flower and interesting things not shown in the December photo sheet



Westringia eremicola



Octopus Stinkhorn fungi Clathrus archeri



Callistemon pallidus



Masked Lapwing



Hibbertia obtusifolia



Phyllotocus rufipennis on *Kunzea ericoides*



Chrysocephalum apiculatum



Solanum linearifolium



Brachyscome rigidula



Chrysocephalum semipapposum



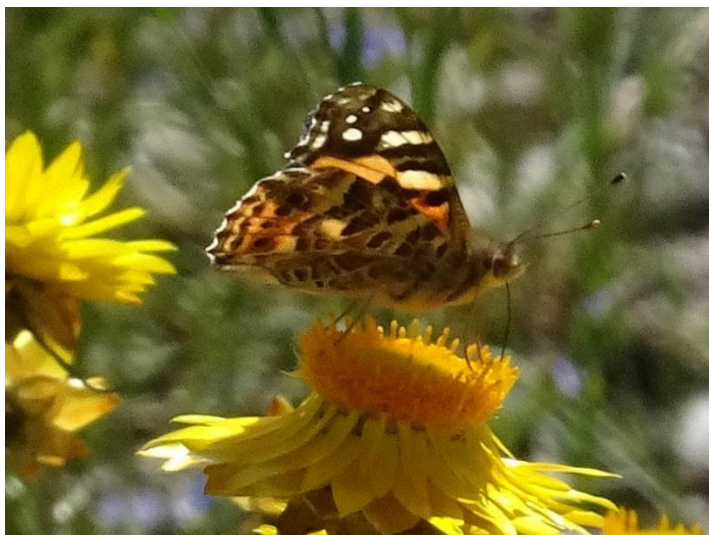
Billardiera scandens



Psaltoda moerens Red-eyed Cicada

Cicada photo Jane Cottee, others by Andy Russell

Some observations from the recent Pollinator Week event by Andy Russell



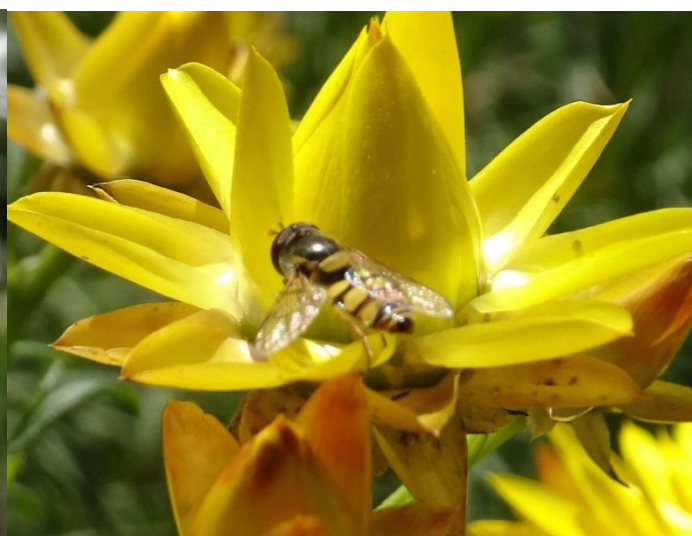
Vanessa kershawi, Australian Painted Lady



Tabanidae sp. (family) A Horse or March Fly



Rutilla (Chrysorutilia) sp. Genus and subgenus A Bristle Fly



Melangyna viridiceps, Common Hoverfly



Tephritidae sp. (family) Fruit or Seed Fly on *Ammobium alatum* Winged Everlasting. The first and forth photo show *Xerochrysum viscosum* Sticky Everlasting



Mordellidae sp. (Family) Pintail or Tumbling Flower Beetle

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