

Hakea microcarpa, Small-fruited Hakea, picture taken on 31 October 2021 Andy Russell

From the President

We are about to bid farewell to 2021 and the many problems and positives it brought us. At our recent AGM, our Annual Report outlined many of these. The most pressing problems have been caused by the unusually wet weather (La Nina): trees and understorey plants inundated and dying; paths flooded and susceptible to damage; rampant weed growth and the curtailing of our usual Spring planting. The positives recognized by STEP volunteers are that we are gaining greater recognition and appreciation as a visitor destination, and we are increasingly becoming involved with a wide range of community groups.

While our planned Wattle Week activities were curtailed due to the lockdown, we now have a clearly defined path and signage for the Wattle Walk (see article). Extra signage has also been erected along the Mesa Oaks path, alerting cyclists to use the designated track, not ride through Forest 20.

During the ACT's COVID-19 lockdown, Forest 20 became an exercise area of choice for many families, but unfortunately some irresponsible behavior resulted in damage to the Ephemeral Wetland (see article).

It is gratifying to see that birds, reptiles and insects are proliferating in the environment we have created, and that "birders" are now among our regular visitors.

I am forever grateful for the loyal and diligent volunteers who turn up when they can and who apply themselves cheerfully to tasks big and small. Without their dedication, Forest 20 would not be the special place it is today. Also, our growing collaboration with the Arboretum's Horticulture team is proving very valuable. Heartfelt thanks to one and all.

May the Christmas and holiday season bring you much joy. We all hope for some return to "normality" in 2022, both with the climatic conditions and viral transmissibility.

Best wishes

Judy Smith
President STEP

Visitor Register

12 October

- David Shorthouse conducted an orientation session for John, Hugh and Tralie (who have subsequently become members)

10 November

- Max Bourke hosted a visit from Mac Connell and John Buckley of Friends of Blaxland Park (Griffith). They were interested to see what native species might be incorporated in the park they are establishing.



17 November

- Mike Smith, Bill Handke and Judy Smith met with Brad Pillans about the proposed National Rock Garden to be situated at Forest 13, adjacent (at bottom end) to Forest 20.
- Four people walking through Forest 20, birdwatching
- Suzette Searle (Wattle Day Convenor) arranged a visit by Michelle Jeffrey and Peter Hall from the National Capital Authority. They were given a tour of Forest 20 by Jennie Widdowson, Judy Smith, and David Shorthouse to see Acacias which may be used in a garden within the Parliamentary Triangle.

24 November

- about the Regional Botanic Garden at Forest 20 David Shorthouse presented an address to the AGM of the Environmental Educators Association

25 November

- A teacher from Caroline Chisholm Highschool who had attended the Environmental Educators meeting the previous night visited to see how he could incorporate visits to STEP into his Science program.
- Indigenous Australian students from across Australia who are part of the Employment Pathway Program (providing preparation for placement in positions in the ACT government) visited Forest 20, accompanied by Scott Saddler, Christine Callen, and Heather Tregoning from the NAC. David Shorthouse addressed the group giving the students a brief outline of the aims and achievements of STEP. *David addressing indigenous students*



2 December

- Following earlier email correspondence, Chris Mobbs, Convenor of Bragg Street Park Volunteers, Hackett, visited to touch base with David Shorthouse and Judy Smith about ground preparation and suitable species for this emerging suburban park.

6 & 7 December

- The Junior Landcare group to use the clearing to film promotional material for schools on how to create a bushtucker garden.

The (wet) News from Forest 20

As we have experienced over the last few months the La Nina wet period is well established. Nowhere is this more evident across the National Arboretum than in Forest 20. It would appear that the combination of the large sealed lower car park and the regular deluge of natural rainfall have presented a major issue for STEP, our resourceful STEPpers and the Arboretum Staff partners. Three manifestations are troubling us: (1) regular, above average rainfall giving much relief to previously dry soils; (2) surface drainage from new surfaces and inadequate drains to cope with increased flows, resulting in eroded paths and boggy areas; and (3) flows from apparently sub-surface drainage probably resulting from saturated soils and previously unknown springs.



Paths with running water

All three sources of water have left us with degraded infrastructure (paths), a very soggy Central Garden with enormous growth of unwanted grasses, rushes and other weeds, and many plantings that could not cope with continually saturated soils. Also, this year, St John Wort has shown itself above the grassy undergrowth with wet ground postponing our normal mowing regime. But good progress with chemical control of this weed has been possible between rain periods.

Our rainfall records show 683 mm since March, with individual records of 107 mm, 58 mm, and 64 mm in a week. It's been very hard for STEPpers to keep up with repair work, and there will be much to be done over the next few months. But we are rising to the challenge and are not (so far) allowing spirits to be defeated.

Paths shut off because of excess water



Elsewhere in this newsletter are reports of our new information signs for the Wattle Walk, and for the Grasses Gallery and the She-Oak Nook (in preparation), distressing damage to the wetland area, and work on an elevated path over very wet ground.



Text David Shorthouse, photos David and Lainie Shorthouse

Recycling Nespresso pods

I am setting up a collection point for recycling Nespresso pods at my house. Please bring your used Nespresso pods to me at STEP on STEP working bee Thursdays for collecting and recycling.

Jenny Widdowson

Want to see wattles? Walk this way.

The corflute signs for the Wattle Walk have now been installed. At each end of the walk is a large sign giving information about the types of wattles on display and the rationale for the grouping of the various species. Smaller signs along the walk show visitors where the path goes. This is a very successful outcome for a task undertaken by many people: Mariana Rollgejser (design and layout), David Shorthouse, Jane Cottee, Jennie Widdowson and Mike Smith.

STEP is now building on this project to produce similar information signs for the Grasses Gallery and the She-Oak Nook.



Wattle Walk big sign photos Judy Smith



Mike with Wattle Walk small sign

Great conditions for ducks (and duckboards)

The new Wattle Walk will be one of the many treasures of STEP – and feature as one of our STEP Focal Points. But for that to eventuate, visitors will need to be able to walk the path - without getting bogged - to see the 28 wattles that are now planted along the Walk. The continuous rain over the past few months, however, has made the area around the Wattle Rocks a quagmire – impassable, except for ducks. So, the team of Jens, Terry, Mike, Digby and Bill have been at work attempting to drain the site, and consulting with NAC to construct an elevated 10 metre duckboard walkway over that section. The vagaries of COVID lockdowns have delayed completion of the task but work is now moving ahead with the next stage - getting the grated track erected. We expect it will be complete in about a month. The Wattle Walk will then be complete – signage in place, lots of wattles growing – and some flowering – and, importantly, a dry path and no muddy shoes!

Bill and Jens at work on the duckboarding



Other signs

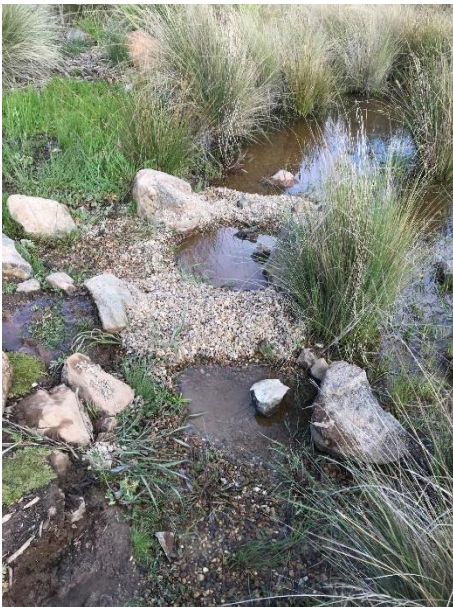
Given the boggy state of our crushed granite paths and the damage caused by bicycles (and horses!) we approached the NAC to request that corflute signs be put along the track through the Mesa Oaks. These signs alert cyclists to the right hand turn down the allee between the Mesa Oaks and Forest 20, thus directing them away from Forest 20's waterlogged and damaged paths. We are very appreciative of the NAC's assistance in this matter.



Detour for the cyclists

A Fragile Environment

A less positive matter is damage to gardens and paths. The weekend before lockdown ended, there was considerable damage to an area in the Ephemeral Wetland. Base gravel was moved to create ponds, and rocks (some of a substantial size) were moved to create a cairn of sorts. The rocks were covered in mud from the watercourse and gardens, and then “decorated” with plants and flowers pulled out of the ground from nearby display gardens including Billy Buttons, Bulbine lilies, Blue Storksbill, Bears’ Ears, Bracken Ferns, Hoary Sunrays and Cushion Bush. This was so disappointing and represents such thoughtless and



destructive behavior. Unfortunately, there was a second occurrence two weeks later. At this time, a considerable amount of Cushion Bush was pulled up and thrown into the water. We are working with the NAC to find ways to alert people to the expectation of appropriate behavior in a living environment.

Life in the Wild

Wednesday 17 November saw 4 “birders” enjoying the birdlife and relaxing ambience of Forest 20. The number of bird species is increasing. White winged Choughs felt enough at home in Forest 20 to build their very distinctive nest and raise three young, and Bill Handke managed to snap a photo of a Gang-gang in a eucalypt near the She-oak Nook. Bill also reported hearing a Rufous Songlark. A pair of Black Fronted Dotterels was seen along the edge of the dam – how wonderful if they make this their permanent home.



Birders relaxing



Gang-gang Cockatoo Bill Handke



Black-fronted Dotterel Judy Smith



Pair of White-winged Choughs feed their three chicks Andy Russell, Boobook Owl that was hounded by Noisy Miners Judy Smith



Text and photos on pages 2,5,6,7 & 9 are by Judy Smith unless otherwise indicated

The Ephemeral wetland

What a lot of rain! The STEP ephemeral wetland has changed from being dry for the whole of 2019, to being a true ephemeral wetland in 2020 with periods when it was somewhat wet and then drying out again to overflowing with water in 2021. The water has run over into the road a few times and the edges of the main wetland have become a bog. Now there is water in places where there has never before been any. The newer parts of the wetland are responding well to the increased amounts of water being collected as runoff from Boundary road accumulates in the gravelled creek bed. This was the intention when the creek was built.

The wildlife has appreciated the increase in water. On quiet days when there are few people at STEP, it is possible to see several family groups of kangaroos enjoying the area and leaving their footprints after coming to the wetland for a drink.



The frogs are overjoyed that it is finally wet with eastern froglets (*Crinia signifera*), plains froglets (*Crinia parinsignifera*) and spotted grass frogs (*Lymnodynastes tasmaniensis*) all calling for mates. There are now an abundance of tadpoles of various sizes that enjoy the shallow gravel areas between the reeds to hunt for food and take shelter.

Not only tadpoles inhabit the wetland now. There are water boatmen and whirligig beetles whizzing through the water and beautiful blue mayflies flitting through the reeds. The large river buttercups (*Ranunculus papulentus*) are in flower, even under the water and the Nardoo (*Marsilea drummondii*) has spread across the main part of the wetland.



Photos and text by Jenny Widdowson

AGM 2021

STEP AGM was held on 2 December at the picnic tables near the shed. Working on the theory of “meeting before eating” meant we had a very good roll up. The committee for 2022 is made up of Judy Smith (President), David Shorthouse (Vice-President), Ross Dalton (Treasurer), Elizabeth Minchin (Secretary), Andy Russell (Memberships and Publications) and general committee members Bill Handke, Terry Murphy, Jane Cottee, Georgie Till, Jennie Widdowson and Digby Gascoine, new to the committee this year. We welcome Digby and hope he finds this position rewarding.

The President informed volunteers of a new structure to be trialed next year. This would entail the formation of several sub-committees to attempt to spread the tasks of decision making and on-going maintenance. It is envisaged each would comprise a sitting committee member and several members from the general volunteer group. More details on this will be put forward early next year.



Friends of NAC Harvest Stall

On the spur of the moment last Wednesday, I wondered if I could possibly piggyback on the Friends Harvest Stall on Saturday 4 December last and try selling some of our excess stock. Friends were agreeable, so I collected some pots of *Poa induta*, *Hardenbergia* and *Dichopogon fimbriatus* Chocolate Lily. Judy, Tralie and I were at the Village Centre from 10a and managed to sell \$176 worth of plants.

The selling trick was having Chocolate Lily (from our garden, not STEP), and thrusting them under peoples noses for a sniff. Most were amazed and promptly bought a plant. It makes me think we could easily propagate, by division several species with showy flowers to sell in the future. The Friends welcomed us there and are happy to have us come back for the next stall which may be in March. Is anyone interested in participating in this endeavour? If you are please contact Lainie.



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Great year for.....

Snakes have rarely been seen at Forest 20, but this is perhaps the exception.

Photo by Bill Handke



Photos taken at STEP not used in "Of Interest at Forest 20 December 2021"



Leptospermum sp. Tea-tree



Bulbine bulbosa Bulbine Lily



Eryngium ovinum, Blur Devil



Ranunculus papulentus Large River buttercup



Pelargonium sp. *Striatellum* Omeo Storksbill



Chrysocephalum semipapposum Clustered Everlasting



Ammobium alatum Winged Everlasting



Dianella revoluta Black-anther Flax-lily



Podolepis jaceoides Showy Copper-wire Daisy



Xerochrysum viscosum Sticky Everlasting and
Melangyna viridiceps Common Hoverfly



Goodenia pinnatifida Cut-leaf Goodenia



Chrysocephalum apiculatum Common Everlasting

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