

# STEP NEWSLETTER JUNE 2018



The new Bush Tucker Garden within Forest 20 that is being established by the Friends of the Arboretum volunteers.

## From the President

As I sit to write a few introductory words for the June Newsletter, gentle rain is falling, the day is grey, and it has turned quite cold. These are, nonetheless, things to be grateful for. It has been so very dry, and I hope this rain continues for several days to give the ground a thorough soaking. Much of the time spent at our Thursday work sessions has been devoted to watering: a very time-consuming activity.

Considerable planting was achieved in Autumn including some intriguing new specimens (see article). Our planting regime was assisted by students from the Horticulture School of Canberra Institute of Technology (see article) who gained valuable practical experience over their three visits.

In this Newsletter is a report on our second “STEP into plein air” event held in Tree Week. We were pleased to have many artists attend and display the results of their morning’s drawing and painting. NatureArtLab’s Julia Landford and one of her tutors, Megan Spiers, also attended, with Megan giving a talk on painting Eucalypts.

While we have been busy with development and maintenance of our plants, horticulture staff from the Arboretum have, with the assistance of Friends of the Arboretum, prepared and planted the beds of the Bush Tucker trail, adjacent to The Clearing. A pump has been purchased to take water from the dam to a tank near the She-oak Nook. This pump has also been used to boost flow from the tanks near the top east entrance. Thanks to Jens Svensson and Bill Handke for this work.

A few ideas have been suggested for our yearly mid-winter meeting – a walk around the Arboretum or perhaps an excursion to a place of interest. Whatever the decision, we will contact you via email with details and hope you are able to attend.

Judy Smith

## Membership renewals are now due

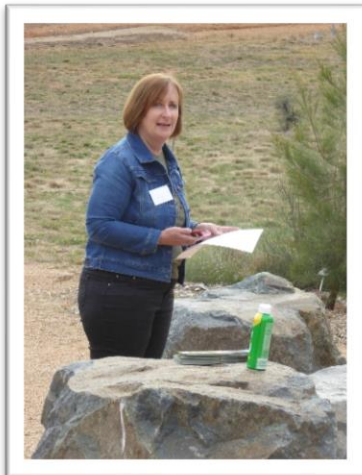
Please note that membership fees are now due for the 2018-2019 year. The individual or family membership fee is \$20.00. Payment may be made direct to the STEP bank account, BSB number 313-140 and account number 12067564 Please identify your payment. Alternately payment may be made by cheque payable to STEP Inc and posted to the Treasurer, STEP, PO Box 440, Jamison Centre ACT 2614. The Membership Officer advises that receipts are written and a scan of these will be provided by email. If you would like confirmation of your membership status email Andy at [membership@STEP.asn.au](mailto:membership@STEP.asn.au).

## “STEP into plein air” event

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> May this year, as part of the National Arboretum’s celebration of Canberra Tree Week, STEP hosted a morning of art and native plant appreciation. We called it STEP Into Plein Air and artists belonging to various art groups from all over Canberra were invited.

Judy Smith, our president, greeted the artists at The Clearing and gave an acknowledgement of country. Following this she outlined the philosophy and aims of STEP. In essence it is a volunteer organisation with the aim of setting up a regional botanic garden to be used as a conservation and educational resource. She explained the layout of Forest 20 in that there are 16 species of eucalypts arranged in bands to represent their relative positions in the landscape of the Southern Tablelands. In the central garden there are over 200 species of understorey plants which similarly relate to the ecosystem of the eucalypt under which they are planted. These understorey species are planted in a mosaic of 3m x 3m blocks to help visitors identify how the plants would look in a garden setting. STEP also aims to be complementary with the plantations carried out in the rest of the Arboretum.

Judy then introduced Julia Landford who spoke about NatureArtLab and the organisation’s teaching of the link with the science of the natural world, “form, structure and function”, to artistic expression. Julia in turn introduced Megan Spiers who spoke about painting eucalypts and then demonstrated her art by painting a nearby tree.



Julia Langford



Artists at work



Megan Spiers

At this stage the invited artists scattered throughout Forest 20 to set themselves up with easels and whatever materials they had brought with them to settle down to some serious sketching and painting. Some even ventured over our new stile into the GG block to become part of the broader landscape.

This was followed by a picnic-style morning tea around the tables and seats where STEP volunteers gather every Thursday for morning tea as part of an enjoyable morning’s gardening. The scene was set by a wheelbarrow full of thermoses (our hot water supply), a collection of plunger coffee pots and a wonderful array of cakes, slices and sandwiches. This was a good chance for the visitors to meet other artists and some of our STEP volunteers. It was made clear to the visiting artists that they were welcome to return to STEP anytime, to become a member and/or a volunteer. The morning finished with the artists returning to The Clearing to display and look at each other’s paintings.





Artists at work



Some of the mornings work.



Enjoying morning tea

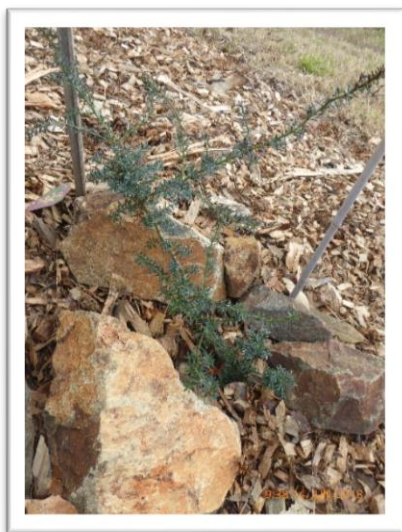
## Unusual Plants

In May we were given several most unusual plants. The first, *Exocarpos cupressiformis* (Native Cherry) was given to us by John Ellis, horticulture lecturer from CIT. This plant is a member of the Sandalwood family. As with other members of this family, it is usually parasitic on the roots of other plants – in this case of our plant, a *Eucalyptus rubida*. Morley and Toelken, (Editors of) *Flowering Plants in Australia* (1988, 233) suggest that as the plant has chlorophyll, it is best regarded as hemiparasitic. It is also described by them as having wood used for making spear throwers and an edible fruit. A much older text describes the timber thus: “The reddish-brown timber is hard, close-grained and tough and could possibly be used for small cabinet work and for golf clubs” (Anderson, R H, The Trees of New South Wales 1967, 69)





The second unusual plant is *Podocarpus lawrencei* syn. *P. alpinus* (Mountain Plum Pine) given to us by Terry Murphy. Podocarps are a very ancient family of conifers and our plants are related to such arboreal luminaries as the Huon Pine, *Lagarostrobos franklinii* and Celery Top Pine, *Phyllocladus aspleniifolius*. This plant is an alpine species, exhibiting a scrambling form where it grows above the tree line, or growing to a tree of 8m in forests (Wrigley and Fagg, 2013, 459) Where planted at STEP we have provided rocks for it to scramble on.



It is our fervent hope that both these plants will respond to our careful attention and thrive.  
Text Judy Smith, photos Andy Russell

### **CIT Horticulture Students at STEP**

CIT Horticulture students and their lecturer John Ellis have made 3 visits to STEP from March to May. The purpose was to give students practical experience in preparing ground, planting and maintaining native species and identifying and removal of woody weeds. Three sites were chosen: The She-oak Nook, a section at the bottom of the central garden and at the northern entrance.

On March 23, some 22 students and John Ellis arrived with working tools and great enthusiasm. After an introduction to STEP by David Shorthouse, the students formed into three groups. Their task was to prepare ground in their area by removing large weeds like paspalum, digging the ground then laying wet newspaper and covering all with mulch.



Continued on pages 5 and 6.

David introducing students to STEP

The second visit, on May 4, had an inauspicious beginning as it was raining quite heavily at the start of the day. Students hunkered down in their cars or the bus, while STEP volunteers waited out the rain in the shed. Luckily the rain stopped just after 9.00 am and the planned work was able to commence. The north entrance was planted with *Acacia*, *Daviesia mimosoides*, *Hardenbergia violacea*, *Dodonaea viscosa*, *Leptospermum brevipes* and *Vittadinia muelleri*. The area near the central garden was planted with *Rytidosperma bipartitum* and *Linum marginale*, while the She-oak nook area was planted with *Indigofera australis*, *Daviesia mimosoides*, *Coronidium scorpioides* and *Convolvulus angustissimus*. Students also put guards around plants as required.

Right, mulching is hard work



Day 3, May 18, saw students return to consolidate their planting work by thorough watering, checking mulch was not too close to plant stems and ensuring guards were firmly in place. Once this task was completed, David conducted a Q&A session to assist students with their assignment before they moved to the 2 closest woodland recovery enclosures to remove blackberries, briar roses and *Verbascum* and take out any remaining guards and stakes.

Left, day 2 planting



John Ellis makes creative use of a wheelbarrow



The anti-blackberry brigade



We were pleased to be able to offer students the opportunity to hone their horticulture skills and we welcomed the extra assistance and people power the students were able to provide.

Thanks to STEP volunteers who attended to help out: David Shorthouse, Lainie Shorthouse, Terry Murphy, Ray Knight, Elizabeth Minchin, Mike Smith and Judy Smith.



In late May, another opportunity arose for CIT students to use Forest 20 in their studies when two other groups of students came for a Eucalypt identification visit. Horticulture teacher, Lesley Pattinson had contacted the Arboretum to follow up on the introductory session STEP gave to five CIT teachers at the end of 2017. With 16 species of local eucalypts planted in clear lines and bands across Forest 20, the STEP regional botanic garden proved to be an ideal location for identification of the different juvenile and adult leaves, bark types and indications of growth habit. Jennie Widdowson and David Shorthouse each led one of the visits.

The STEP committee hopes to follow up these visits with CIT teachers with the objective of promoting this resource for excursions at a location very close to CIT, thus reducing travel times compared to previously used locations – a very practical demonstration of one of the primary objectives of STEP – a resource for community. Text and photos Judy. Smith

### **Glycine – a STEP success story**

When I became a member of STEP in 2014, Lainie Shorthouse took me under her wing and helped me learn much about the plants at STEP. As a raw novice, I was amazed to hear Lainie speak of little Glycine plants in tones of awe and wonder. At the time, I lived in fear of accidentally weeding a Glycine out, mistaking it for clover. The years at STEP have taught me to see the difference.



*Glycine tabacina*. *Glycine tabacina* with Common Grass-blue Butterfly *Zizina labradus*. *Glycine tabacina* colonising.



While it took some years to establish *Glycine tabacina* and *Glycine clandestine* as viable ground cover plants in the central garden, today there are numerous flourishing patches, in flower and cheerfully colonising adjacent areas.

Perhaps of greater significance is the occurrence of this species under the Eucalypts. Given the absence of grazing stock, it seems that the Glycine can now flourish under natural conditions. Along the fence between STEP and the GG Block (henceforth please can we call this the Woodland Block) little Glycine have taken hold. In the space of about 14 metres uphill from the rainwater gauge, there are some 16 individual Glycine plants.

May they continue to grow and spread. Text by Judy Smith, photos by Jennie Widdowson

## Spotted!

Jennie Widdowson's keen eye spotted this little fellow at the edge of the dam and she got a great picture of him. He's (or she's) a Spotted Grass frog, *Limnodynastes tasmaniensis*.

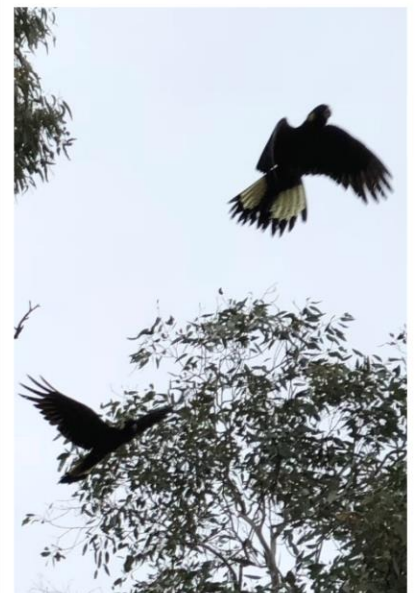
(Photo: Jennie Widdowson)

The last two articles were held over from the March issue



## Invasion

On Thursday 24 May, our usual working bee morning, volunteers were delighted to witness a visit by a large flock of Yellow-tailed black cockatoos. About 40 wheeled in from the south-west, scattering themselves among high vantage points of trees in the woodland block and then coming nearer to land in the trees near the shed and swoop through our eucalypts. Some very cheeky Noisy Miners attempted to harass them and chase them away, but they soon gave up.



Six Cockatoos above the morning tea tables, damage to an *E rossii*, Cockatoos coming in to land above us.

It appears there was an evil intent to this acrobatic display and raucous vocalising. While we were distracted and watched on in amazement, some sneaky birds took the opportunity to attack some young trees up near the She-oak Nook. Bill Handke, pump attendant and defender of the trees, chased them away but not before substantial damage was done.

This is the first time such a number of these birds has been seen at STEP and it raises some questions for us. While we acknowledge it is natural for birds to see our trees as a food source for seeds, grubs etc, it is unfortunate when the attack is made on young trees less able to withstand such damage. At the same time there was damage by birds, another tree was found with substantial damage, apparently by a hare. This raises the question of what to do when trees die or are damaged in this way.

Text Judy Smith, photos Judy Smith, Bill Handke and Andy Russell

### Grasses Leaflet launch 12 June 2018

Work on the STEP Grasses Leaflet started with a grant application to Friends of Grasslands for their Supported Projects Grants in April 2017 which was written by Max Bourke. This application was successful, and STEP received \$1500.00 towards this project. A sub-committee consisting of Andy Russell, Max Bourke and Rainer Rehwinkel set to work to write the leaflet. Michael Bedingfield offered STEP the use of his drawings which was gratefully accepted. David Shorthouse assisted in the editing process. Once we were satisfied with the content this was forwarded to our graphic designer Mariana Rollgejser to do her magic.

On a cool, though fine afternoon 26 STEP & FOG members and visitors came to “the Clearing” Forest 20, National Arboretum Canberra for the launch of the Grasses Leaflet.



Judy Smith welcomes STEP & FOG members and visitors.

Dr Ken Hodgkinson talking at “the Clearing”

STEP President Judy Smith acknowledged the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet – the Ngunnawal people and paid respect to their elders past and present. She welcomed those present and provided basic information regarding the Forest 20 site. Judy welcomed special guest Dr Ken Hodgkinson, Honorary Fellow in Ecology at CSIRO Division of Land and Water and he was invited to speak about FOG’s support for our Grasses Leaflet.

Ken talked about his education and work experiences, and how he became particularly interested in grasses. He explained how the FOG Supported Projects Grants Program operates. He commended STEP on the production of the leaflet and on what has been achieved at Forest 20.

Judy then spoke about it being 10 years next year since the eucalypt plantings. How the plantings are in bands across the landscape with *E macrorhyncha*, *rossii* and *mannifera* on the higher slope representing dry sclerophyll woodland followed by nine species representing grassy woodlands. Montane species are represented by *E dalrympleana*, *E radiata* & *E viminalis* which are planted in the natural drainage line midway down understory plantings. In a slight hollow at the lowest level are planted *E pauciflora* and *E stellulata*. Judy thanked the leaflet sub-committee



members for their diligence and expertise, Michael Bedingfield for the use of his excellent drawings and Mariana Rollgejser, graphic designer for her excellent work and declared the leaflet launched. We broke into two groups, one led by David Shorthouse and the other by Andy Russell to complete the afternoon walking around Forest 20. David and Andy talked about how Forest 20 is managed by STEP volunteers and fielded many questions from the visitors.



David Shorthouse with Ken Hodgkinson and STEP & FOG members and visitors.  
Text Andy Russell, photos Andy Russell and Andrew Zelnik

## STEP acknowledges the support of the following Corporate Members



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## Endangered species at Lake Beeac, Victoria

Janet and I attended a Greening Australia and Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) event held near Beeac which is in the Corangamite Catchment in western Victoria. Threatened species was the theme and in this instance, those found around the saline lakes of the volcanic plain. We met our hosts just off Morrissey Road close to the Lake Beeac shore. Candice Parker from Greening Australia, Geelong introduced Rani Hunt from DELWP who talked about the two species that are being conserved there, being *Lepidium aschersonii* Spiny Peppercress and *Poa sallacustris*, Salt-lake Tussock-grass. We were shown dry specimens of these plants and then walked the lake foreshore to see what we could find. We found some of the Peppercress but none of the Salt-lake Tussock-grass.

Returning to our starting point Rani introduces us to the Victorian Biodiversity Atlas data set for mobile or smartphone device for uploading plant and animal photo observations. Conservation group members, bushwalkers etc are encouraged to use this facility. Plant or animal identification is not provided nor does the system seem have public access like Canberra Nature Map.

We appreciated the lunch that was provided at the Beeac Recreational Reserve Hall.



Conservation planting at Lake Beeac



*Lepidium aschersonii*, Spiny Peppercress



Rani Hunt from DELWP talking about endangered species. *Poa sallacustris*, Salt-lake Tussock-grass



Text and photos by Andy Russell