

STEP NEWSLETTER JUNE 2020



Acacia penninervis Mountain Hickory photo taken 30th May 2020

From the President

Early June brings us many things and perhaps most significant to all is the easing of the COVID-19 restrictions. We have been maintaining our work program at STEP with a loosely formed roster. Members have been coming for a morning or an afternoon on various days of the week and observing appropriate social distance while at Forest 20. This has been a very efficient and safe way for us to keep up with weeding and other maintenance tasks.

Bill Handke has coordinated the placement of feature rocks around STEP and the next phase of the plan is to put crushed granite around some rock areas to provide places for seating or reflection. The sites chosen are around the Kurrujong planting, on the Acacia walk, near the top tank entrance and another site along the central path. Bill has been ably assisted in this work by Mike Todd, Mike Smith, Terry Murphy and Ed (our rock moving contractor).

The new carpark is nearing completion and, in consultation with the contractor and NAC staff, an agreement has been reached about the location of an access path from the carpark to STEP. On a related matter, we are working with the NAC to put up definitive signage to alert visitors that the paths in STEP are for walkers, not cyclists. A new graded trail has been made along the easterly edge of STEP (between STEP and the Mesa Oak Forest) to divert bike riders around Forest 20.

Some items in this newsletter were held over from the last newsletter. This last issue was later than expected due to the hospitalisation of our Editor, Andy Russell. I am pleased to report he is now back on deck.

May you all enjoy Winter and the renewed freedom you now have.

Judy Smith(President STEP)



Tim Howard, the new horticulturalist at NAC, came to visit in February. He has been involved in many discussions about STEP and Bush Tucker Garden. We are grateful for his concern and interest in what we are doing at STEP.



New member Brian Palm, second from left, has been a valuable addition to our team of volunteers.

Life and death in a small pond

The good rain in mid-February was followed by more in early March. Our ephemeral wetland was really living up to its name and demonstrating the effects of irregular water supply. The Nardoo burst into life, sending up beautiful leaves to perch on the water surface. As the pond gradually dried, the Nardoo continued growing in the mud.

A healthy “cloud” (I looked up the collective noun) of tadpoles could not develop fast enough in the rapidly drying pond which soon became their graveyard. There were, however, insects and birds which made the most of this unexpected banquet.



Due to COVID-19 restrictions, we have had to move our annual STEP into Plein Air event from May to September. Please register if you wish to attend as numbers are limited.



*'STEP INTO
PLEIN AIR'*



Wednesday 2nd September 2020

Bring your chair, easel, paints, pencils or charcoal to Forest 20 (STEP), National Arboretum Canberra, for a morning of art, native plant appreciation and good company.

Canberra artist, Valentyna Crane, who has exhibited her acrylic paintings at the Arboretum's Village Centre, will be present to talk about and demonstrate her work.

Morning tea will be provided, but numbers are limited, and bookings are essential.

Email: secretary@step.asn.au

Meet at 9:00 am at the Village Centre, National Arboretum Canberra. (Forest 20 is a 5 – 8 min. walk from the Arboretum carpark.)

Donation to STEP for Morning Tea would be much appreciated.

News from Forest 20

STEPpers have been very adaptable to the conditions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Since early March, Thursday working bees have been replaced by physically distanced and individually organised work, spread across the week, such that usually only a few STEPpers were present at any one time. Working bees re-commenced in early June, but with suitable physical distancing observed.

However, even with this constraint an enormous amount of weeding and other tasks were completed, including a very big effort to weed the Bush Tucker Garden and leave it looking in very good condition for Reconciliation Week in late May. We were grateful for some professional arboricultural assistance to remove two trees that died during the summer period.

Quite a few new plantings were also accomplished to replace some plantings that succumbed to the dry and very hot summer weather, and another 5 species of Acacia have been added to the Acacia walk, which now displays 18 species.

Over the winter period we will be completing some work to place rocks in strategically selected locations as sitting spots and place markers. STEP has also worked with Arboretum management to identify a new entrance to link with the newly extended carpark and provide a walking and stroller friendly access to our path system. The Arboretum have also assisted us by constructing a new link path that enables cyclists to avoid entering Forest 20 and mixing with visitors who are enjoying the quiet ambience provided there.



Visitors to Forest 20 during the last few weeks have included friends from Cool Country Natives (Pialligo) with whom we are arranging an 'in-kind agreement' of seeds and cuttings from Forest 20 in exchange for tubestock from the range of plants available at their plant nursery. Also visiting were students from CIT Horticulture studying weeds, and Suzette Searle from the Wattle Day Committee to discuss celebrations at Forest 20 in September.

David Shorthouse



So, what leaves DO koalas eat?

One quiet morning in STEP a visitor approached me and asked which eucalypts feature in the diet of koalas. I failed the test; I didn't know. But I came home and consulted Dr Google.

Distributed as they are through south-eastern Australia, koalas *Phascolarctos cinereus*, live for the most part in eucalypt woodlands—but they may be found also in trees of other genera: *acacia*, *allocasuarina*, *callitris*, *leptospermum*, and *melaleuca*. The leaves of eucalypts make up the bulk of their diet. Although they have many more species to choose from, koalas appear to show a preference for about 30. Of these the primary, most favoured, food sources are *Eucalyptus microcorys* Tallowwood, *E. tereticornis* Mountain Red Gum, *E. agglomerata* Blue-leaved Stringybark, *E. amplifolia* Cabbage Gum, *E. cypellocarpa* Mountain grey gum, *E. punctata* Grey gum, *E. camaldulensis* River red gum (none of which is found in STEP)—and *E. viminalis* Manna gum (which is!).

Amongst the secondary food sources are the following STEP eucalypts: *E. blakelyi* Blakely's red gum, *E. melliodora* Yellow box, *E. pauciflora* Snow gum, *E. polyanthemos* Red box, *E. radiata* Narrow-leaved peppermint, and *E. rubida* Candlebark.

We are often told that koalas are fussy eaters and that they favour the leaves of one eucalypt only. Certainly, they are discriminating, they are known to have individual preferences even within species. But they can adapt, koalas in captivity in Adelaide eat the leaves of Western Australian eucalypt varieties without protest.

Koalas eat up to about 400g of leaves a day. Theirs is a low-energy diet, hence their need to sleep or rest for about 20 hours a day. The leaves, however, provide all or almost all the water these marsupials need (the name 'koala' derives from the Dharug word *gula*, meaning 'no water').

During the summer bushfires distressed and injured koalas represented for many Australians the catastrophic consequences for our wildlife of this environmental disaster. There has therefore been a surge of interest in these strange creatures: hence the STEP visitor's question.

I commend the detailed and well-referenced Wikipedia article for a koala-overview. I also enjoyed 'Eucalypt mythbusting: a comprehensive guide' (rememberthewild.org.au). The best source of precise information on koala diet, however, is the website for the Wariapendi Nursery (native plant and revegetation specialists): wariapendi.com.au. And my thanks to Lainie and David Shorthouse.

Elizabeth Minchin

STEP acknowledges the support of the following Corporate Members



DFK Everalls, Specialist business and personal taxation advisors of Deakin ACT Phone 02 6253 4162 Web www.dfkeveralls.com



Tom's Superfruits Store Belconnen Markets, Belconnen ACT. Great quality food at low prices with outstanding customer service. Phone 02 6253 4162



Morgans in Alliance with CIMB, Stockbrokers, Wealth Management and Corporate Advisers of Deakin ACT Phone 02 6232 4999 www.morgans.com.au



Equipment Repairers of Mudgee, Gunnedah & Rutherford in Hunter Valley NSW, Leinster & Karratha WA Phone Mudgee 02 6372 3257 Web www.dblr.com.au



FlagCentral.com.au E-mail sales@flagcentral.com.au Phone 1300 788 891 Suppliers of promotional banners and flags of Burleigh Heads, Queensland. Flag Central donated the flag at STEP



Hawker Place
Physiotherapy & Pilates

+

Hawker Place Physio & Pilates. Expect excellence in service when it comes to physiotherapy assessment, diagnosis, and treatment. Phone 02 6255 2033 www.hawkerplacephysio.com.au

Membership renewal is due from 1 July for the 2020/2021 year

This is a gentle reminder that with the start of July, membership renewal is due. There are some 17 members who are already up to date so feel free to ask the Membership Officer (Andy Russell membership@step.asn.au) if you are in doubt as to your status. Membership fees remain at \$20 annually and the preferred method of payment is direct to the STEP bank account. BSB 313 140 Account 12067564 Cheques may be sent to the STEP postal address, Membership Officer PO Box 440 Jamison Centre ACT 2614

To make a tax deductible donation to STEP

Visit The Friends of the National Arboretum website, when you select donate you will be offered three choices which are “Friends of the Zigzag Garden” “General Gift to the Friends” “Southern Tablelands Ecosystem Park (STEP). When you select STEP then a payment page is revealed, and credit card information can be submitted, and a donation made.

Visit by ACT Garden History Society

On Friday 28 February, the ACT Garden History Society came to STEP



For a number of years, the ACT Branch of the Australian Garden History Society has started the year with a twilight ramble at an interesting garden in Canberra. Late last year STEP was approached to see if it was possible to be the 2020 venue. So, on a perfect late summer evening forty AGHS members were taken in two groups for a guided tour, followed by refreshments in The Clearing. From their comments many members were unaware of what a hidden treasure STEP is and were impressed with what our volunteers have achieved. The memory of this phenomenally successful visit has now taken on a dream-like quality as it was the last big gathering at STEP before social distancing came into effect. Hopefully, it will not be too long before we can host large groups again.

Margie Bourke

STEP used as outdoor classroom.

On May 27, a group of CIT horticulture students and their teacher came to STEP to learn how to identify weeds as the CIT classrooms were not yet open due to the Coronavirus. They wandered around and said they found very few weeds in the central area, but there were a good range near the Boundary road. They also spent some time in the adjacent block (GG) and were interested in what is being done there with the 'scrape' experiment. The class intends to come to STEP for practical work in their studies and their teacher Michael came to a recent morning tea to explain what they might do.

Jennie Widdowson

History of the She-oak Nook

The area of the current She-oak Nook was established in late 2012 with the placement of an arc of boulders from the nearby rockpile (2012) and the planting of Drooping She-oaks (*Allocasuarina verticillata*) (early 2013). It then lay forlorn and neglected for some years: rarely visited and not maintained.



2012

Subsequently, around 5 years ago after the NAC established mineral paths across STEP in late 2014/ early 2015, including around the She-oak Nook area, the Committee agreed to rejuvenate the site by way of laying the crushed-granite base (2015), and with planting of more species (*Joycea pallida*, *Persoonia chamaepitys*, *A. nana* (Dwarf She-oak), *Stypandra glauca*, *Pelargonium rodneyanum* etc) (April 2016).



2015

After this flurry of activity, it again lay dormant, while the focus was elsewhere in STEP. In the past 3 years STEP has gotten back to refreshing and planting out the area: the Committee gave approval to a She-oak Nook sign, with its erection in May 2017, to the installation of the water cube and acquisition of the pump. Planting involved CIT students

putting in a patch of *Calotis glandulosa*, and STEP volunteers planting *Daviesia mimosoides*, *Indigofera australis*, *Acacia pycnantha*, and *Pomaderris pallida*.



2017

In late 2018 the first discussions were held about what other Southern Tableland she-oaks would be suitable for the spot for it to become a focal point for Southern Tableland she-oaks. This was subsequently firmed up as a way to proceed as part on the planting program for the area. In line with that, plots in the area were then planted with *A. distyla* (Shrubby She-oak) and *A. littoralis* (Black She-oak) (March 2019) and the

search for *A. luehmannii* (Buloke / Bull-oak) started. Concurrently, the area was planted with *Kunzea ericoides*, *Cassinia quinquefaria*, *Pomaderris pallida*, *Leptospermum rotundifolium*, *Lomandra longifolia*, *Hovea linearis*, *Themeda triandra* and *Pelargonium rodneyanum*. And as per the agreed approach for the area to represent Southern Tablelands she-oaks, STEP obtained NAC's agreement in early 2020 that it would plant the bank of the new enlarged dam with River She-oaks (*Casuarina cunninghamiana*), as they would be too large and thirsty to plant within the She-oak Nook.

In Feb 2020 additional species - *Jacksonia scoparia* and *Bursaria spinosa* - were added in front of the seating area, following the placement of further rocks there and across STEP. In April 2020 *A. diminuta* (Broombush She-oak) and *A. paludosa* (Scrub / Swamp She-oak) were identified as other Southern Tablelands she-oak species that, if available, could be considered for the site to then

enable all Southern Tableland she-oak species to be represented in the general area. With the planting of a grove of *A. luehmannii* in late May 2020, this ambition is now closer. The planting program within the She-oak Nook area reflects the long-term and intermittent development of the site: it has evolved developed with agreed plantings and theme as per other sites within STEP. Bill Handke



May 2020

Wattle Walk Progress

To date 31 species of Acacia have been planted as part of the Acacia Project/ Wattle Walk at Forest 20 .

They have been arranged in groups of 3 to 7 along the South and West edges of the site .

These are Acacias which come from the Southern Tablelands region and will flower at assorted times of the year. Plantings commenced September 2019 and are ongoing, as plants become available. We only have a couple of less - common species yet to source

(*A. kettlewelliae* and *A. obtusata*)

The order of plantings has been conceived to reflect the similarities of leaf morphology. For example, Acacias with bipinnate leaves are together, (eg *A. decurrens*, *A. dealbata*, *A. mearnsii*) while those with triangle- shaped phyllodes - ie- flattened petioles or leaf stalks that function as leaves, are in another group. (eg *A. pravissima*, *A. cultriformis*, *A. gunnii*) and so on.

While late winter and spring will be the peak of flowering season for many of the Wattles, and the walk should look spectacular around Wattle Day on 1 September, we have been mindful that the Acacia Project/ Wattle Walk will also be a wonderful educational tool. Not only foliage, but also fruits , flower-types and growing habits will be well represented in this planting.

Growth has been accelerated by the autumn rain, and already some small guards have been removed and replaced with tall ones. This is gratifying to see and reflects the wonderful work that the volunteers have done in preparing the planting holes and watering through the drought.



Left, Hickory Wattle *Acacia implexa* outgrowing its guard. Right, part of the Acacia Walk plantings

Article and photos Jane Cottee

Contact details for STEP are, by post, STEP President, PO Box 440, Jamison Centre ACT 2614.

For newsletter or membership matters email contact is membership@step.asn.au

For further information on STEP please visit the STEP website at www.step.asn.au

STEP newsletters are produced quarterly in March June September and December

STEP is Rocking!

This year we have been busy placing boulders throughout Forest 20 – rocks that NAC needed to move from the temporary dirt carparks before they started work on sealing them as permanent carparks. Some rocks were placed:

- a. to enhance the perspective of an entry point, view field or Section (eg at the south east entry, in front of the She-oak Nook, and the pathway near The Clearing);
- b. as focal points (eg in Section E near The Crossing and in Section EE – our original BTG);
- c. to act as mental barriers to cyclists riding fast (along the western mineral path);
- d. one rock trio as a way to redirect water overflow (opposite the western side of Section D); and
- e. to make four informal seating areas – to provide sitting spots to enable visitors to better appreciate the STEP space and to enhance their opportunities for learning. They are:
 - a trio of rocks along the eastern main path near Section BB
 - a trio of rocks along the western main path in Section K
 - a trio of rocks along the new Wattle Walk
 - a group of five rocks within the Kurrajongs.



Above, recent rock placements at Forest 20. Article and Photos by Bill Handke

Below, Remember when! Our paths were mulch over white weedmat and easily damaged by heavy rain as in January 2013.



Photo on right is the same path but looking from the opposite direction and now most of our paths are in crushed granite, a great improvement. Right hand photo by Andy Russell

