

STEP NEWSLETTER JUNE 2021



From the President

Autumn has seen considerable activity at Forest 20. We spent many weeks preparing Forest 20 for Reconciliation Day (31 May) when several thousand people visited the Arboretum. The venue for Reconciliation Day celebrations was moved from Glebe Park to the Arboretum and an added bonus was the offering of guided tours of Forest 20 (see article).

The wet conditions in March and again in May have increased the number of macro fungi species observed, including the very peculiar Basket Fungi (see item).

Following the water damage to the new entrance gathering space, considerable work has gone into creating a rock wall as a sturdy edge to support the crushed granite (see article). We have been most fortunate to have assistance every Thursday from people from the Horticulture team. Pete, Elliot and Chris have been a welcome addition to our working bee teams and we are happy to reward them each Thursday with morning tea.

We have had to remove 5 or 6 trees (mostly *Eucalyptus macrorhyncha*) which were unable to survive the excessive inundation of the upper part of the block. Unfortunately, there are some of our precious *Acacia pycnantha* which are also suffering from the same problem. The cut timber has been recycled in the Central Garden beds as edging, or scrambling support for various creepers such as *Clematis aristata*, *Comesperma volubile* and *Billardiera scandens*.

In April we had a surprise visit from Willi and Sheila Singleton, former volunteers who have moved to Toowoomba. They were delighted to see how Forest 20 is flourishing and Willi (our former Shed concierge and caretaker) was most impressed with our new shed and the neat organisation of our tools and equipment.

Best wishes to you all. Come and visit us at Forest 20.

Regards

Judy Smith

President STEP



Photo of Sheila and Willi taken at their farewell 19.12.2109 by Andy Russell.

Reconciliation Day Guided Tours – 31 May 2021

We spent many weeks preparing Forest 20 for Reconciliation Day (31 May) when several thousand people visited the Arboretum. The venue for Reconciliation Day celebrations was moved from Glebe Park to the Arboretum and an added bonus was the offering of guided tours of Forest 20. To get our “house in order” before the event meant considerable time spent weeding, repairing mulch on gardens which had been washed away by heavy rain and excess surface flow, ensuring paths were in good order, making sure plant signs were visible (not hiding under vegetation) and removing tree guards where possible.

David Shorthouse ran two Orientation to Forest 20 mornings to ensure all guides were thoroughly prepared for this significant event. STEP volunteers and guides from Friends of the Arboretum were on hand from 9am to 3pm and an estimated 240 people availed themselves of these highly informative and enjoyable tours.

It was a very successful event, with many people commenting on the diversity of plants of our Regional Botanic Garden and interested in the display of STEP related material on display at The Clearing.



Above, Pressed plants display. Above right new pull up banner and book display.

Centre, laminated information sheets and visitors

Below STEP and Arboretum volunteer guides with visitors



Something there is that loves a wall (apologies to Robert Frost “Mending Wall”)

Following the water damage to the new entrance gathering space, considerable work has gone into creating a rock wall as a sturdy edge to support the crushed granite.

Work began in late March and completed mid-May and included many non-working-bee days. The selection of suitable rocks, their placement and the cementing was a long and exacting process but the very excellent result has made it a worthwhile task. The new welcome sign has been installed and below



the wall is a massed planting of some of the 127 pea species native to the Southern Tablelands. The result is a very professional example of landscape design adding substantially to the appeal of our Regional Botanic Garden to visitors. Many thanks to Bill for his hard work, ably assisted by Chris, Mike, Terry and Digby.

We were also fortunate to have the assistance of NAC Horticulture staff working in partnership with us: Pete, Elliott and Chris. They added “weight” to heavy work such as moving and packing crushed granite, delivering soil, providing and moving some of the rocks for the new gathering node, digging over the site for the pea planting and a host of other tasks.



Left work in progress with the wall



Right Our wall specialists, Bill and Mike

Team Hort adds weight to Team STEP

NAC Horticulture team people, Pete, Elliot and Chris have been a welcome addition to our working bees, and their assistance is a very positive measure of how much we can achieve by working as partners. They have re-located *Themeda australis* (Kangaroo Grass) plants to create a denser display of this very significant species. As the plants are not yet fully established, it was necessary to put a fence up to protect the Kangaroo Grass from the kangaroos.

The Hort team have also sprayed out the *Phragmites* garden (a species which rapidly became a pest and started sending up shoots from suckers through the paths), sprayed path edges, removed dying and dead trees, planted more *Brachychiton populnea* in the Bush Tucker garden, removed dead (and very spiky) *Acacia* bushes, dug holes for and planted six more *Brachychiton* around the Kurrajong rest area, provided much-needed material, mechanical and physical support in the improvements and repair of the paths and the gathering node and a host of other tasks. We really appreciate all that they do. To recognise their assistance, we arranged for Pete and Elliot to plant three replacement *Eucalyptus dives* close to The Clearing . We are happy to develop this partnership and get to know these people over morning tea.



Planning meeting at Kurrajong rest area, below Pete and Elliott plant replacement *Eucalyptus dives*.



Not all about the trees

Here are two interesting understorey species which might be overlooked. The first is *Viola betonicifolia*, Mountain Violet . We have added more of this species in Block D and some which had “escaped” have been transplanted to create a denser display. The arrow-shaped leaf is very distinctive and the flower very pretty. The second is *Comesperma volubile*, Love Creeper, a rather insignificant looking plant with very few leaves. It has been provided with small branches the twine and scramble over and we await the display of lovely blue-purple flowers July to December.



Viola betonicifolia Mountain Violet. Photo Andy Russell

Comesperma volubile Love Creeper

Weavers at work

On Friday 28 May, a group of women met at The Clearing to engage in weaving traditional headdresses. They had a range of vibrant colours to work with and had a beautiful sunny and peaceful location in which to work.



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Welcome to the following new members of STEP this calendar year

M Arnstein

I Chambers

A Johnson

K McEune

A & B Read

M Saul

R Vartuli

T & R McLeish

M Smith

Women's International Club

A group of 9 women from this organisation came for a guided tour through Forest 20 on Monday 24 May. The WIC website says this organisation in Canberra “was established in 1964. It created a platform for local and visiting women to meet in a welcoming environment. By sharing their lives, homes and knowledge of Canberra and Australia, Permanent Members of WIC act as hosts to our Visiting International Members; this is the bedrock on which our Club is founded. The legacy of previous Members has shaped WIC to be the Club it is today where all Members can engage with each other in an open, positive and harmonious way.”

Lorraine Nicholls, President of WIC, organised this event. It is just one of some 58 activities offered by WIC. We had a very pleasant walk, with visitors expressing considerable interest in the diversity of plants and their lush growth. Following morning tea at the shed area, our return route was along the newly formed Wattle Walk. It was a pleasure to host this group.



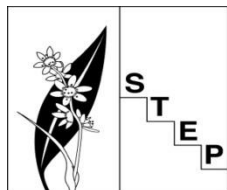
*Above, Wattle Walk Top right, Women's International Club visitors at the Clearing. Photo Lorraine Nichols
Below WIC visitors at the morning tea tables.*

All text and photos on seven pages (unless otherwise attributed) are by Judy Smith

Membership Renewal

Please note that our membership year is from 1 July to June 30th so as we move into July we would like to have our members renew. We are pleased to acknowledge that we have 28 members who are already financial for the next year and in some cases more years ahead. We are accepting multiple years payments of up to five years. If you are in doubt of your membership status please feel free to contact the Membership Officer at membership@step.asn.au or by post to Membership Officer, STEP, PO Box 440 Jamison Centre ACT 2614

Funding Request



Regional Botanic Garden education and ecosystem recovery centre for the Southern Tablelands

PO Box 440 Jamison Centre 2614

ABN: 60834573059

www.step.asn.au

Hi all

Have you visited Forest 20 lately? Did you like what you have seen? STEP volunteers are proud of our achievements and have many more plans to expand the scope of our Regional Botanic Garden.

Our only sources of income for projects are memberships, occasional community grants and occasional generous donations made via the Friends of National Arboretum Canberra tax deductible facility.

If you would like to see STEP continue to flourish, you may wish to make a donation.

The process is very easy:

1. Log on to arboretumcanberra.org.au/sitemap
2. Click on Donate.
3. Select STEP as your donation preference.
4. ENTER PAYMENT DETAILS - ensure the Donation reference number on the second line ends in 2000 to allow funds to go to STEP.
5. Enter card details and amount.
6. Provide your email address if you wish to receive a tax invoice.
7. SMILE – you have made a significant contribution to a very worthy cause.

Some of the projects for this year are the completion of the Wattle Walk, updating the electronic database of plant species, refreshing our website and signage for our new entrance and other features.

Kindest regards

Judy Smith

President STEP

21/5/21

Have aliens arrived at STEP?

A few weeks ago, after a day of rain a very strange object was discovered buried among grass roots in section H at STEP. This white ball shaped lattice turned out to be a Smooth Cage Stinkhorn (*Ileodictyon gracile*). Initially, the fungus looks like a small egg which then 'hatches' when mature and opens to a whitish cage structure which becomes detached from the underground filaments. The Cage found was smooth and almost looked like some plastic material but was easily broken apart. As the stinkhorn matures it emits a foetid smell similar to rotting meat or very mature soft French cheese which emanates from the sticky brown spores on the inside of the cage. This smell is used to attract carrion eating insects which then help to disperse the spores. This species of stinkhorn is common across most of southeast Australia and this particular species probably arrived with the mulch used in the area.

The role of all fungi is to break down dead and decaying material to access the nutrients they need. This process is not only important for the fungus, but also releases nutrients that can be used by other plants in the vicinity. There would be a network of underground microscopic threads (mycelium) which grow and expand through the decaying plant material. When conditions are favourable, particularly after rain, the fruiting body of the fungus pushes its way to the surface. The fruiting body may only last a few hours or days but produces spores which are then dispersed by wind or insects (as in the case of stinkhorns).

Earlier in the year, another stinkhorn was found at STEP growing amongst the *Ammobium* in the grassland area. This was an Anemone stinkhorn (*Aseroe rubra*). It looks like a red sea anemone or a starfish and has similar characteristics to the Cage stinkhorn in that it breaks down mulch and rotting material and produces a foetid smell to attract flies to the central slimy area containing spores. This is a species that occurs worldwide but may have originated in Australia as it was first collected in Tasmania in 1792 and first described by Jacques Labillardière.



Above, *Aseroe rubra* Anemone stinkhorn Right *Ileodictyon gracile* Smooth Cage Photos & Text Jennie Widdowson

The STEP Newsletter is produced quarterly in March, June, September and December. The newsletter is edited by Andy Russell. Postal address for STEP is PO Box 440, Jamison Centre ACT 2614 Email membership@step.asn.au

STEP members at World Environment Day dinner

The Conservation Council ACT Region held their World Environment Dinner at the Gandel Atrium, National Museum of Australia on Saturday June 5th.

Entertainment was provided by Canberra Qwire, which was followed by the guest Speaker Rebecca Huntley, social researcher.

The picture shows Geoff Robertson, Janet and Andy Russell. They three of the 10 STEP members present.

Photo by Lucinda Royston Text Andy Russell



Signing of agreement between National Rock Garden and National Arboretum Canberra to bring the National Rock Garden to the National Arboretum Canberra

This agreement was signed on Friday June the 4th. The photo shows Professor Brad Pillans, (left) Director of the National Rock Garden and Scott Saddler AM (right) Executive Branch Manager for the National Arboretum Canberra and the Stromlo Forest Park, watching the agreement being witnessed by Mike Smith Director National Rock Garden and for the Arboretum by Christine Callan, Events & Community Engagement Manager.

The National Rock Garden is planned to be sited on Forest 99 adjacent to Forest 20 and will be planted with *Geijera parviflora* the Wilga. The Wilga is a shrub or tree of inland regions of New South Wales

Text and photo Andy Russell

