

## STEP NEWSLETTER JUNE 2023



*A view of Forest 20 taken from the northwest corner near our shed. Photo Andy Russell*

### From the President

Hello All.

The gardens down in Forest 20 are really starting to reap the benefits of intensive weeding, mulching, and planting over the autumn period (see photo on page 8). Our focus now is to ensure the plants are labelled and receive appropriate after care, such as watering and tree guard removal. Despite the frosty mornings and icy winds there has still been a strong turnout for our Thursday morning working bees.

It is rewarding to note that more people are visiting the gardens since they have been re-established and it is not uncommon to see people studying the names of plants and taking photos. Personally, I enjoy chatting with visitors and often use our plant selection at STEP to demonstrate that winter gardens in Canberra need not lack flowers! Many of the wattles are starting to develop flower buds, several eucalypts are in bloom and, even though the days are getting short, there is still a surprising amount of plant growth.

We have had several groups come on pre-arranged walks recently, including the Volunteer Guides from the National Botanic Gardens. This provided an excellent opportunity for information exchange and raises public awareness of the Southern Tablelands Ecosystems Park and the National Arboretum.

On ACT Reconciliation Day (29 May) several of our volunteers were stationed down in the Bush Tucker Garden between 10 am and 12 noon. We had a steady stream of visitors who showed great interest in native plants and their practical uses. Thank you to those who helped on the day, showing people around and handing out brochures.

Regards Jane Cottee

STEP President



## Forest 20 Report

Many of the activities that STEPpers have been persistently undertaking in the last couple of months have been oriented towards getting Forest 20 ready for Reconciliation Day (29 May). Many of the Central Garden beds have been paper and mulched, weeded, and tidied up. Quite a few understorey species have been replanted and dead trees replaced. Plant name signs are being returned to their appropriate locations using a new fancy tool constructed by Terry Murphy for this purpose (a great initiative). The result of this means that the metal stems of the signs do not get bent as easily as they might have. The only downside of all the new plantings is the large number of tree guards that are necessary to protect the plants from grazing by hares and damage from kangaroos. We look forward to next spring when new plants will grow large enough to withstand such damage.



*Terry with his plant label tool*



On Reconciliation Day itself, seven STEPpers welcomed blue skies, no rain, but biting winds. Some 40 or more visitors came down the paths to Forest 20 during the morning we were there. Interest shown during guided walks and informal chats was considerable, including identifying plants suitable for home gardens, seeing bush tucker plants, surprise as to what a community group can accomplish, and general interest in the special nature of the diversity of plantings on show. As we left, we felt well satisfied that our presence was worthwhile and appreciated by our visitors.

There is so much potential for STEP to develop themes for learning about local native plants, conservation of threatened communities and starting new community-organised restoration projects around Canberra. Our challenge is to attract more STEPpers who can help us achieve more of the ambitious potential Forest 20 has to offer.



*Ross and Jane welcome visitors to Forest 20 on Reconciliation Day.*



*Lainie talking to another visitor on Reconciliation Day*

Text David Shorthouse photos Andy Russell



## Development of the STEP ephemeral wetland

An ephemeral wetland is a body of water that has no permanent source of water but relies on rainfall for its existence. Such wetlands usually form in depressions or low-lying areas that will hold water. They provide a somewhat unusual ecosystem where animals and plants have to be able to exist with both extremely wet conditions and periods that are completely dry. The ephemeral wetland at STEP was created so that this ecosystem could provide an example of Southern Tablelands plants suitable for such conditions. It also adds to the diversity of plant and animal life found at Forest 20.

The STEP wetland was created using machinery provided by the ACT government in February 2009 before any trees had been planted. A shallow depression was excavated near the Boundary road at the lowest point of Forest 20.



*2009 work commences on the wetland.*

*By 2012 the depression had filled with water and was starting to look like a wetland. By 2015 there were rushes (*Juncus usitatus*) and sedges (*Carex appressa*) growing strongly around the perimeter of the wetland. Unfortunately Umbrella sedge (*Cyperus eragrostis*) a non-native wetland weed had also colonised the area. This is still currently a problem throughout Forest 20.*



*2012 Beginnings of a wetland.*



*2015 Rushes and sedges established.*

In 2017 the wetland was further developed to include an area to the west of the main water body. This area was a small natural depression which only occasionally filled with water. However, by adding a thick layer of gravel to the area, the ground beneath stays damp for long periods of time enabling various plants such as the large river buttercup (*Ranunculus papulentus*), purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) and the



swamp isotome (*Isotoma fluviatilis*) to flourish as well as the rushes and sedges. Nardoo (*Marsilea drummondii*) a floating fern was planted in the main pond.

The end of 2018 was very wet washing mud and gravel into the wetland making the previously clear water rather muddy. However, to counter this, there was very little rainfall throughout 2019 and the wetland dried out completely for the whole year.



December 2018 the wetland rather muddy.



February 2020 wetland

Four frog species had been consistently heard up to this year and frog spawn and tadpoles were regularly spotted but became much less noticeable in 2019. The number of frogs has been monitored four times a year by Frogwatch volunteers ever since 2010.

The rain was back in large quantities in 2020 so the wetland was extended at its eastern end to include a channel to collect runoff from Boundary road and redirect this into the main pond. More rain continued in 2021 and the main pond overflowed on to the road. The sedges, rushes, poas and other grass and weeds grew with great gusto so that the whole area looked like an overgrown swamp! The nardoo grew so enthusiastically that it almost covered the whole water surface of the main pond. It did not seem affected by the complete lack of water in 2019 and the frogs chorus increased once more.



July 2020 Working on the creek line.



October 2021 a very wet wetland

Even more rain fell in 2022 with one downpour resulting in a flood which seriously eroded the paths throughout Forest 20 and deposited much of the path gravel in the wetland. Most of the surrounding mulch was washed into the pond resulting in an algal bloom in the pond. An additional series of channels were dug to help move the excess water from the paths and into the pond and this now seems to work well. In January 2023, the Arboretum also added a drain under the road to help to reduce the water that collects on the road.



August 2022 Gravel deposits and new creeks



The enormous growth of vegetation has been gradually cleared or thinned and additional sedges and rushes are being planted along the edges of the new channels. A short period of low rainfall allowed the main pond to almost dry out which was enough to clear the algae, so the pond is once again clear.

In the future, it is hoped that some additional species of sedges and rushes can be planted to add to the biodiversity of the area. Presently birds use the water for bathing and drinking, insects also use the water for drinking and the sedges and rushes provide support to hold their eggs or food traps. There are various types of water beetles and larvae and even a water spider that runs across the water to catch its prey. Fourteen years after its creation, the wetland is now developing into a mature ecosystem to add to the diversity found at Forest 20.



*January 2023 New culvert installed.*



*March 2023 Enormous growth of vegetation*

Text and photos Jennie Widdowson

### **Visit from Belconnen Catholic Community Group**

On Sunday afternoon of June 21<sup>st</sup> Andy Russell and Jennie Widdowson welcomed a group of visitors to Forest 20



Photos Jennie Widdowson.

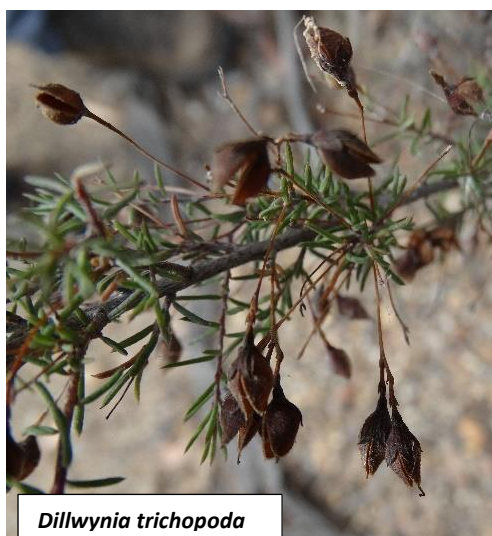




## A Learning Experience East of Tarago with Tim Hayes of the Southern Tablelands Group of Australian Plant Society.

Jens Svensson, Terry Murphy and I were privileged to travel out to the area east of Tarago with a most knowledgeable man, Tim Hayes, to see some native peas and other plants. Tim comes from north-west of Goulburn but has been walking through the bush in the Windellama–Oallen–Nerriga district collecting and identifying plants for over 30 years. Such is his knowledge of native peas and other plants that he has found plants there which were never previously known to exist in the Southern Tablelands - or even exist at all. So it was a real privilege and delight to spend time with him.

Interesting to us were *Dillwynia trichopoda* with its long peduncles, *Dillwynia glaucula* which Tim discovered, the virtual roadside hedges of *Bossiaea oligosperma*, the groundcover carpet of *Pultenaea microphylla*, the groundcover version of *Pultenaea subspicata* (ours in the Parade of Peas are 800mm tall), the variable leaf of *Bossiaea heterophylla*, and the bluish leaf colour of *Gompholobium minus*. While none of the peas were flowering, it is apparent that the roadsides throughout the area will be a mass of colour come spring. And it will not be just because of the peas.



*Dillwynia trichopoda*

Some of the other plants new to Jens, Terry and I were *Persoonia mollis* ssp. *livens* and *Persoonia microphylla* and

the Wolgan Snow Gum (*Eucalyptus gregsoniana*). Tim also pointed out to us the private property where a specimen of the extremely rare *Eucalyptus recurva* (the Mongarlowe Mallee) is growing: one of the six known sites. And also one property where another uncommon plant, *Kunzea cambagei*, grows.



Groundcover carpet of *Pultenaea microphylla*

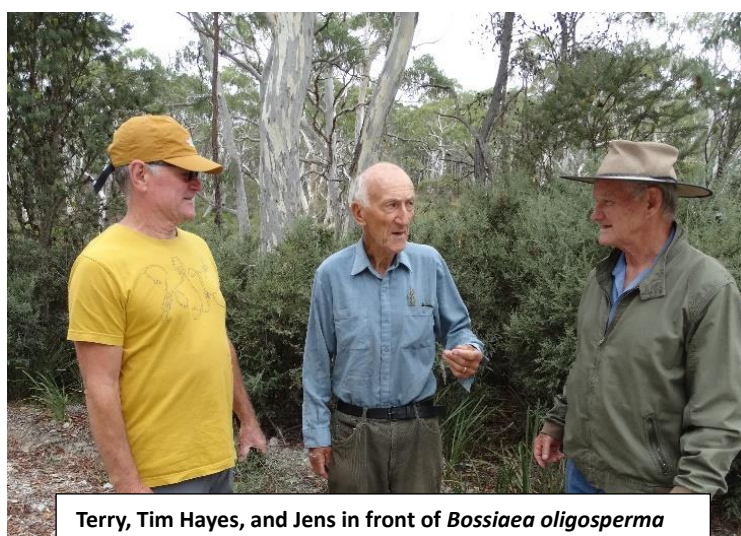
other

Now, to get some of those plants into STEP!

We are very grateful that Tim found the time for our trip. He is currently coordinating the major task of propagating 3000 tubestock for the Kanangra to Wyangala Corridor restoration project (K2W) of the Great Eastern Ranges Initiative.

We had a most fascinating time and learnt so much from this incredibly learned and most personable man. So, thank you Tim.

Text and photos Bill Handke



Terry, Tim Hayes, and Jens in front of *Bossiaea oligosperma*

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The STEP Newsletter is produced quarterly in March, June, September, and December. Contributions are welcomed. This newsletter has been edited by Andy Russell.

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Replanting and mulching in the southernmost understory sections at Forest 20. Photo Lainie Shorthouse.



May 29 Reconciliation Day was when we were surprised to see this Eastern Blue-tongue Lizard *Teliqua scincoides*. Photo Andy Russell



## **Please consider making a tax-deductible donation to STEP**

Through the Friends of the National Arboretum Canberra a tax-deductible donation can be made to STEP. This is our major source of funds each year Funds raised through these donations are only used by STEP for major projects.

Visit the Friends of the National Arboretum website at <https://friendsarboretumcanberra> select About, at the foot of this page is “Donate”, Select a figure to donate (or a multiple of the sums offered), Add to cart, then view cart. Beside the figure shown is a pen symbol, this offers the choice of a general donation to The Friends or a donation to Southern Tablelands Ecosystem Park. Please choose the latter and make the payment. Thank you for considering making a tax-deductible donation to STEP.

## **Membership renewals are due from July 1st.**

Our financial and membership year starts on July 1<sup>st</sup>, and we would be pleased to have these fees paid. Membership fees remain at \$20.00 for individuals or families. Membership fees are used for our general running expenses such as insurance, printing and postage and affiliation fees to the Conservation Council of the ACT. We do not require a membership form to be filled out unless there are changes to your details. Receipts are written. Payment is preferred to direct to the STEP bank account (BSB 313-140 Account number 12067564) though we will accept cash (with a membership form) and cheques.

If you have any concern that you may have already paid for the 2023-2024 year (as some already have) please contact the Membership Officer to check your status.

## **Welcome to the following new STEP members for the 2022-2023 year.**

S Bonnefi

P Cooke

M Davidson

M Hunt

M Love

Y Wisbey



Some recent photo from Forest 20



*Allocasuarina* sp. at the Clearing, identity yet to be confirmed.



*Westringia eremicola* Slender Westringia



*Calotis glandulosa* Mauve Burr-daisy



*Ammobium alatum* Winged Everlasting



*Pelargonium* sp. Striatellum Omeo Storksbill



*Rytidosperma bipartitum* Ringed Wallaby Grass

Photos by Andy Russell