



STEP NEWSLETTER MARCH 2018

President's Report

From the President

Happy new year to you all – I hope that 2018 brings you much good health and happiness.

As usual at this time, activities around STEP slow down to accommodate the warmer weather. This has been a very variable Summer so far. Some heavy rain in December played havoc with some Grevilleas and the run of excessively hot weather in mid to late January has placed stress on many plants. We then had the great February inundation, followed by unseasonably hot Autumn weather (“we’ll all be rooned” said Hanrahan....)

Dozens of trays of what Terry Murphy calls “STEPlings” have been farmed out for planting later in Autumn. We are also hopeful that plants in excess of our needs might be sold and give us an addition to our income. (See article on pages 9-10)

The Bush Tucker Trail paths are now well established. Recent plantings and mulching are starting to give shape and interest to this area. A team of volunteers from Friends of the Arboretum were present last week, assisting the NAC horticulture team with building up soil in the beds, planting and mulching. I am sure their assistance was greatly appreciated.

The grant we received from Friends of Grasslands is being put to good use by the production of a STEP Grasses leaflet. The leaflet is in draft form and we expect it will be available by April-May. Thanks to Andy Russell, Reiner Rehwinkel and Max Bourke for their work compiling this.

Thank you also to David and Lainie Shorthouse for hosting the annual STEP luncheon. Their shady outdoor deck was a wonderful venue for a hot day and all reports indicate it was a great occasion (see photo on next page).

On Friday 23 March, John Ellis, lecturer in Horticulture at CIT, brought his students to STEP. They worked in 3 teams clearing and mulching areas near our entry points in preparation for planting on 4 May. More on this in the next newsletter.

I hope you enjoy the newsletter. Please visit us when you can any Thursday – no hard labour required to earn a place at the morning tea table.

Judy Smith (President)

The Workers Poem

TO:

the sowers and mowers,
the weeders and seeders,
the bakers and fakers (I made these Tim Tams this morning),
the sweepers and reapers,
the mulchers and vultures (I only came for morning tea),
the cleaners and leaners (resting on a rake till the next load of mulch arrives),
the planters and banterers (Ross and Ray S your puns are forgiven),
the trundlers and grumblers (why is the mulch always at the furthest point from where it is needed),
the oilers and (old) boilers (most of us?),
the planners (DS) and man-ers (and women-ers),
the water-ers and I-oughta-ers,
the diggers and riggers
Thank you to every last one
The year has been lots of fun!

Judy Smith

STEP Summer Lunch

26 STEPpers and friends enjoyed our annual summer lunch in 39 degrees under the grape vine at the Shorthouse residence on 21 January 2018.

Our spread was so impressive perhaps we could establish a subgroup STEP -Shared Table Eating Provedore



Lainie Shorthouse

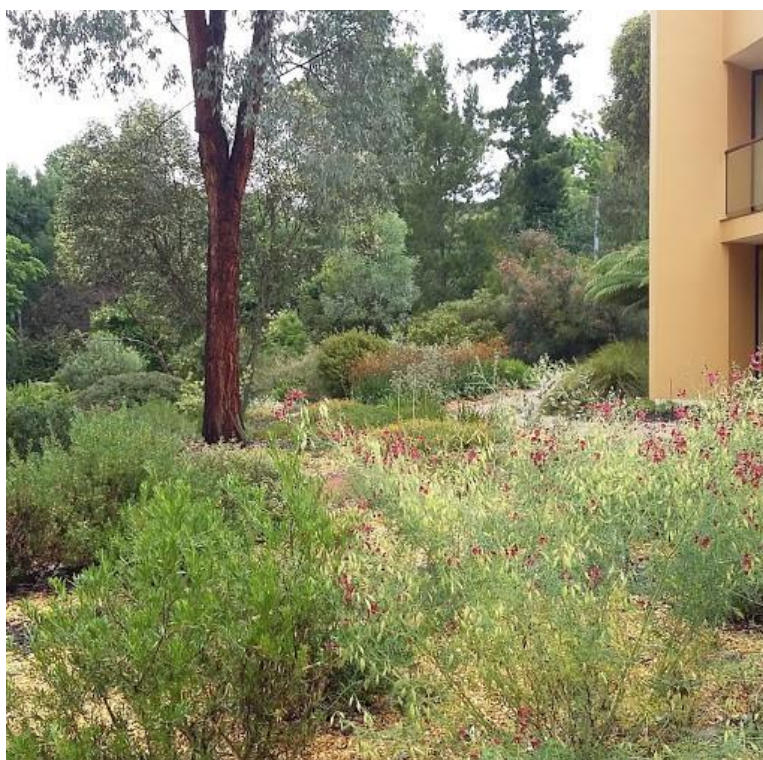
STEPping out: a visit to the garden of Ros and Ben Walcott

On the afternoon of Wednesday 20 December 2017, a group of STEP members enjoyed the privilege of a guided tour of Ros and Ben Walcott's garden in Wickham Crescent, Red Hill. Conditions could not have been better: light rain had fallen in the minutes before our visit. The garden was at its glistening best.



Ros and Ben Walcott with STEP visitors

The property—which, at 9300 square metres might be better described as a small park—was acquired by Ros and Ben in 2001. They began planting, almost entirely in Australian natives, in 2003. Our group of STEPpers was therefore able to view the results of fourteen years of growth—and of the labour that had made this possible. They also were able to enjoy the Walcott's' accumulated knowledge about their plantings, thanks to Ros's painstaking record-keeping over the years.



Ros and Ben have aimed to create a garden that is in accord with its environment. They have at all times aimed for 'naturalness' in respect both of garden design and of plant maintenance. They retain and use all the rainwater on the property. And they are delighted that they now attract over 100 species of birds, along with other wildlife, into their small world.

The garden is a triumph: large and small pools have been constructed using substantial rocks brought onto the site; paths meander gently through the garden, where 5000 plants, representing over 850 species, almost entirely Australian, but with a few New Zealand natives in addition, are on view.



Ros and Ben were admirable guides. We are enormously grateful to them for admitting us to their truly amazing garden (a term that does not do justice to such an enterprise) and sharing with us their experiences.

Elizabeth Minchin

Photos: Ross Dalton

Grassy Groundcover Gazette

This is an annual email newsletter from Greening Australia that members will find interesting. It can be found through the following web link. <https://www.greeningaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Grassy-Groundcover-Gazette-December-2017.pdf>

This Includes articles that relate to the ACT such as the one written by Adam Shipp, Indigenous Engagement and Training Officer (ACT) on the Bush Tucker Gardens Program which works with schools and community groups.

There are 22 pages of informative articles in this newsletter.

STEP Grasses Leaflet

As mentioned in our Presidents Report work on the grasses leaflet is well advanced. Graphic designer Mariana Rollgejser has done a considerable amount of work on the layout and the result is looking particularly good. Some minor editing work is still to be done and completion is hoped to be by the beginning of May.

Andy Russell for Grasses Leaflet Sub-committee

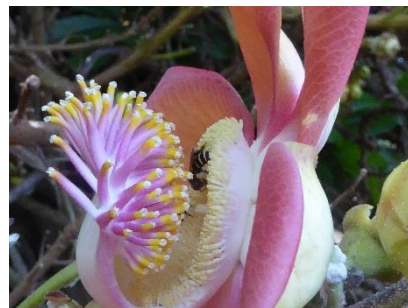
Hornbills and Cannonballs

The Singapore trip on behalf of the Friends of the National Arboretum Canberra was a great success, though it is for others to judge. For me it was a chance to introduce the group to an extraordinary range of places, some not usually seen by tourists and most importantly to people, rarely met by tourists!

The Director of the Botanic Gardens, Dr Nigel Taylor, the senior officer of the National Parks Board responsible for biodiversity Dr Lena Chan and the horticultural chief of Gardens by the Bay were some of the great presenters of their sites and the background to them. But then there were visits to the offshore island Pulau Ubin to see old kampongs and spice gardens, the time spent in the Mangrove Arboretum at Sungei Buloh, the Dipterocarp Arboretum, the greenest hospital in the world and the extraordinary garden educational facility at HortPark just to bring variety! I was pleased to share and happy it went well.

But the peak excitement for me were seeing my first Pied Hornbill in the flesh, what a sight in the Singapore Botanic Gardens, a truly magnificent bird. And to also see one of the most extraordinary trees in the world, the so-called Cannonball Tree, *Couroupita guianensis*, not only in fruit (cannonballs) but also in full flower. They are superb and so complex. We were a happy group of people who generously also contributed to the coffers of the Friends!

Max Bourke AM



The Cannonball Tree *Couroupita guianensis* flower and fruit and the flowers action to assist pollination by an insect.



Oriental Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros albirostris*. Dr Nigel Taylor being presented a gift by Trish Keller, President of the Friends of the National Arboretum Canberra accompanied by Janet Russell and Max Bourke.



Gardens by the Bay, we meet senior staff at this amazing garden. Chris our Singapore guide at Sungei Buloh Wetland Visitors Centre. Photos by Andy Russell

Strange happenings at STEP

If you walked through STEP at the end of February, you might have noticed large numbers of insects flying rapidly over the ground. These are hairy flower wasps. We have noticed them at STEP since December feeding on a range of flowering plants that are rich in nectar. They moved from the *Ammobium* to the myoporum, the *Podolepis* and the *Bursaria*. The two eucalypts that have been in flower - the macrorhyncha and the rossii have also attracted them. Now for more than a week, the females have been flying low patrols over the mulch. Evidently, these insects are attracted to compost heaps, wood heaps and dead tree stumps according to the Victoria Museum. The wasps are looking for beetle larvae of scarab beetles and weevils. When a beetle larva is detected, the wasp can burrow down to it, sting the larvae to paralyse it and then lay an egg on it. When the young wasp hatches it has a live, but paralysed source of food which they eat in such a way that it stays alive as long as possible, thus staying fresh.



Jennie Widdowson

New Bush Tucker Garden. David Shorthouse



In 2017 Scott Saddler, Executive Manager of the Arboretum approached STEP to see if it might be feasible to undertake this project at Forest 20. Our STEP committee welcomed the proposal, judging that it would be consistent with the Master Plan and objectives we work to. The project is part of the ACT Government's reconciliation action plan, which includes a plan for each Directorate. The relevant Action and deliverable in the plan for the Chief Minister's Directorate says: *Utilise the Directorate's multiple touch points to drive reconciliation and promote the celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, heritage, stories and contributions to the ACT community. Design and construct a Bush Tucker trail in the Southern Tablelands Ecosystems Park at the Arboretum.*

And so, in February and March this year, the project was formally initiated. First, gravel paths were laid out with a central area designed to accommodate a rock seating area, between two Yellow Box trees. Then garden beds were prepared with the help of Friends of the Arboretum's Thursday volunteers. Finally, on 11 March several volunteers planted the prepared beds with bush tucker plants, including *Indigofera australis*, *Melicytus dentatus*, *Themeda triandra*, *Dianella revoluta*, *Lomandra longifolia*, *Juncus subsecundus*. Member of the Legislative Assembly, Susan Orr (ALP Yerrabi) attended and threw herself enthusiastically into the planting. In a couple of hours several hundred plants were safely in the ground. The Arboretum's horticulture trainee, Roszanna Madden, will be spending several days per week maintaining the new bush tucker garden as part of her horticulture training, which also includes work at the bonsai collection. STEP looks forward to working with Roszanna and to her joining us for morning tea!

Balloons aloft at STEP

Early on 15 March as we arrived for our regular Thursday working bee, the Canberra balloon festival flew low and menacing over Forest 20. One participant even shouted out that we had dropped something from our basket while walking down the management road to the STEP shed!



David and Lainie Shorthouse

STEP acknowledges the support of the following Corporate Members



Accountants and business advisors of Deakin ACT



Tom's Superfruits Store Belconnen Markets, Belconnen ACT



Morgans in Alliance with CIMB, Sharebrokers and financial advisers of Deakin ACT



Equipment Repairers at Mudgee, Gunnedah & Singleton NSW, Leinster and Karratha WA

Over the fence in "STILE"

Thanks to Scott Saddler for arranging for us to have a stile which connects STEP to the Woodland Block (formerly known as the GG Block). The maintenance crew delivered this and placed it over the fence, and the following week, Bill Handke and Mike Smith dug the foundations and concreted in the feet to ensure it was stable. When Matt Parker (Operations Manager) visited with Owen Bolitho (Senior Horticulturalist), they declared it to be sturdy and well secured for public use. As the Woodland Block plantings mature, walkers will have easy access to this site.



Grevilleas – not waving but drowning

The stand of *Grevillea iaspicula* on Block B has been severely affected by seepage from the temporary carpark area. Over a matter of several weeks following heavy rain in December, the Grevilleas turned up their toes and succumbed to the inundation. The dead bushes have been removed, unfortunately leaving a considerably large bare area. David Shorthouse commented what a shame this was as these were among the first plantings at STEP. He thought that planting the same species might be more successful if they were closer to the edges, away from the soak line down the middle of Block B.

Area cleared where *Grevillea iaspicula* have had to be removed



Lazarus – *Brachychiton* reborn.

Three years ago, three Kurrajongs (*Brachychiton populnea*) were planted. They all grew very well until last year when the tallest specimen died back. This was such a shame, but luckily we delayed uprooting it as it has now started to send out shoots. Having removed the tree guard, the regrowth has become more vigorous and we hope it will soon look as healthy as the other two specimens.



Brachychiton with new shoots



Other vigorous Brachychiton

Inevitability – Death, Taxes and WEEDS

Every year we face the prospect of trying to control noxious weeds. Max Bourke and David Shorthouse are our weed warriors against St John's Wort and Ray Sloane has become our go-to person for blackberry elimination. As well as that, we have a band of workers (very cleverly called weed wanderers) who use wands with control chemicals to keep paths clear.

Thanks to you all for the hard work you do - so frustrating to know it is a constantly recurring task. The only blessing is that the sense of gratification at seeing an area free of weeds is not fleeting – we can get the same buzz next week when the weeds re-appear, and we weed them out again.

Re-using

About 2 months ago, NAC ground staff came to our morning tea area and removed a large tree and some branches which were leaning over the tables and were considered a possible hazard. We have made use of the timber in several ways. A large “V”-shaped log has been moved up to Block C as a scrambling point for the Clematis. Some of the trunks we had cut into shorter lengths. Holes were dug, and short logs were set in the ground to provide bush seats. Thanks to Mike Smith for his work on the crowbar and the heavy lifting.



Mike Smith putting logs in place



Bill Handke and Terry Murphy try out the seats

STEPping up Propagation at Forest 20

The successful establishment of a diverse range of native plants in the Southern Tablelands Ecosystems Park (STEP) for display to visitors is a challenging venture. Volunteers at STEP (the STEPpers) undertake a range of tasks that include planning, seed collecting, germination, potting on, caring for tube stock, soil preparation, planting, watering, mulching, pruning and weed control. A great deal of effort has been invested in each of these activities and more, to ensure that we present a valuable and interesting resource for visitors to the STEP Forest.

Many of our new species are purchased from the Australian Plant Society plant sale that is held in spring and autumn each year at the Australian National Botanic Gardens. This source of plants allows us to quickly expand our range of species and access high quality plant material that is grown by local native plant enthusiasts. Plants that are indigenous to the Australian Capital Territory and Southern Tablelands are identified as ‘local’. Only plants labelled in this way are included in our STEP plantings. Furthermore, the selection of species for planting at Forest 20 is guided by nine criteria that are detailed on the Forest 20 Masterplan (see Understorey Masterplan - panel 3 as shown on the STEP Website).

More recently, volunteers at STEP have grown plants for our understorey plantings from seed that has been produced by plants in the STEP gardens. We now have a significant seed bank for volunteers to access if they wish to try their hand at germinating seed from this resource.

On two mornings in December 2017 more than 1500 seedlings (STEPlings) comprising 13 species of perennial shrubs, herbs and grasses were transferred to forestry tubes from recently germinated trays of seedlings. With the great success of our propagation efforts last year, we adopted similar methods for this, our second major propagation effort. STEPlings carers have had good success during the difficult summer months, establishing this tube stock that is now ready for planting.

Table 1. Numbers of STEPlings surviving in tubes (December 2017 - April 2018)

Species	Number	Species	Number
<i>Bothriochloa macra</i>	31	<i>Linum marginale</i>	351
<i>Calotis glandulosa</i>	126	<i>Poa fawcettiae</i>	49
<i>Calotis lappulacea</i>	80	<i>Rytidosperma bipartitum</i>	271
<i>Cassinia quinquefaria</i>	5	<i>Viola betonicifolia</i> subsp. <i>betonicifolia</i>	35
<i>Convolvulus angustissimus</i>	40	<i>Vittadinia muelleri</i>	14
<i>Coronidium gunnianum</i>	39	<i>Dianella longifolia</i>	14
<i>Indigofera australis</i>	9	Total	1068

Since August 2016 STEPpers have produced over 4000 healthy STEPlings. These plants have been used to establish new 3m x 3m squares (tiles), create colourful displays at the entrances to Forest 20, The Clearing and the She-oak Nook and to replace losses of established plants due to harsh environmental conditions. Generally, our plantings survived well despite the very dry conditions that prevailed throughout summer. Over the 76 days from 5 December 2017 to 26 Feb 2018 only around 45mm rainfall (BOM rainfall gauge at Bruce) fell in the local area.

The success of the STEP volunteers in producing this plant material has contributed greatly to our plantings at Forest 20. As our propagation skills develop we will be able to further expand our fantastic representation of plants to be found across the Southern Tablelands.



Terry Murphy