

STEP NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER 2021



From the President (in exile)

Greetings to you all from sunny Queensland where we are waiting for ACT's lockdown to lift and keeping our fingers crossed that there will be no dramas here which will prevent us from returning home. Our stay is much longer than anticipated and I am very grateful to David Shorthouse for all he does to keep Forest 20 and STEP activities bubbling along.

When I wrote my little blurb for the FNAC newsletter, it seemed possible that some of the Wattle Week activities might proceed. This unfortunately was not the case, but I hope that wherever you are, you are able to see wattles in bloom and appreciate the joy these wonderful natives bring.

Since the last newsletter, the very industrious Thursday workers papered and mulched around the Acacias along a significant portion of the Wattle Walk (see photos). Some of the plantings of pea species in front of the new Gathering Node are already in flower and are a colourful addition to the diversity of species at Forest 20. David and Lainie, Max and Margie and Andy all attended the memorial service for Shirley Pipitone (see article).

STEP was very pleased to receive a grant from FOG – one of our “parent” organisations. With this we will be updating our grasses leaflet and providing more signage for the planting of a considerable number of grasses along the Boundary Road. In addition, we were also given a donation from the Chief Minister to assist us with the electronic recording of plants at Forest 20. We thank FOG and the Chief Minister very much for their support.

Photo Work on the Wattle Walk. A huge job has been done spreading mulch over layers of wet newspaper.



Best wishes to you all. Stay safe and well
Regards Judy Smith President

Vale Shirley Pipitone 3 April 1947 – 15 July 2021

On 10 August several STEPpers and friends of STEP attended the memorial service to celebrate the life and legacy of Shirley Pipitone. Shirley was an early supporter of STEP and for STEP, her legacy was surely her key role in the early development of the STEP project. Fittingly the memorial service was held at the Arboretum's Margaret Whitlam Pavilion in the heart of one of her favourite places. The following words are drawn from one of the eulogies at the funeral, given by Geoff Robertson (former President of STEP).

As far back as 2002 Shirley expressed an interest in being involved with the STEP vision for a regional (Southern Tablelands) botanic garden that would show the plants indigenous to the region, especially grasses and wildflowers, often overlooked in botanic gardens.

A group was formed and commenced looking for a suitable site. Shirley, as part of that group, visited many potential locations. That search helped to clarify STEP's vision and a site at Amaroo seemed to have great potential.

Shirley enthusiastically threw herself into the work that needed to be done. She suggested that the name of the proposed garden be called the Southern Tablelands Ecosystems Park or as we well know - STEP for short. Her next major contribution was to develop a plan for the garden. At the time Shirley was working towards her Masters degree in landscape architecture (Canberra University) and proposed she develop a plan for the proposed STEP project.

Once her assignment was agreed to, she set about the intensive work of developing drawings and specifications, demonstrating her landscape architectural skills. When the plan was ready, STEP organised a well-attended function at the Canberra Museum and Gallery (9 December 2003) - imaginatively called "STEP into Amaroo".

While not successful in obtaining Government support for the Amaroo site, Shirley's ideas, work, and recommendations made an enduring contribution and are now clearly evident at the STEP garden at the National Arboretum Canberra.

Shirley was strongly committed to keeping our planet healthy and habitable. In the notes for her 2015 Chief Minister's Award, she showed that she led by example. There it is quoted that "She has dramatically cut her CO2 emissions and made significant changes to her house and garden to reduce her electricity and water use".

As current STEPpers we are indebted to the early and enthusiastic work of Shirley Pipitone and others in bringing the STEP vision alive.



News from Forest 20

Although activities in Forest 20 are severely curtailed due to the late August “Stay at Home” rules, STEPpers were previously very active preparing Forest 20 for spring, and particularly Wattle Day (1 September). It was disappointing to learn that these celebrations had to be cancelled.

Nevertheless, the new Wattle Walk, commenced in late 2019 is now completed. Thank you to Jane Cottee for overseeing this new feature, with most of the Southern Tablelands’ Acacias planted and interpretive signage prepared. The four groups of leaf types are represented: needle-like or narrow leaves, wedge-shaped or triangular leaves, fern-like, feathery true leaves, and those with large, elongated leaves.

When you are next able to visit Forest 20, check-out the Wattle Walk and see if you can recognise your favourites amongst the four groups.

STEPpers have been working hard in collaboration with the Arboretum’s horticultural staff to complete work on paths linking the new entrance area to the Casuarina Nook and Wattle Walk. This work is designed to facilitate access across nearby very wet areas following the construction of the new car-park and recent wet weather. The “Stay at Home” period has also halted work just when the materials became available. We will get back to this as soon as we are able to work in groups.

STEP has been advised that we will soon receive a small grant (\$1500) from Friends of Grasslands. This will fund a revision of our grasses leaflet, and signage for the new plantings of many local grasses, organised by Wal Kelman. We will also be able to provide a new interpretive sign about native grasses, along the lines of those prepared for the Wattles, and Casuarinas. We are very grateful to the superb design work by Mariana Rollgejser for these signs.

We have also received a letter from the Chief Minister, Andrew Barr advising us that we will receive a donation (\$3500) to assist us to increase community access to Forest 20 through a mapping and digital access to botanical and cultivation information in association with the Australian Native Plants Society. More information on this exciting development in future newsletters. We are, however, very grateful to the ACT Government for this support.



Significant we areas on our paths Photo Lainie Shorthouse

Keeping up with rainfall and movement of water within Forest 20 is proving to be a significant and on-going task.

David Shorthouse

An on-going challenge for STEPpers

STEP and the National Arboretum management staff have agreed that the paths in Forest 20 are not suitable for bicycle wheels. Last year it was agreed that 'No Cycling' signs would be installed at all entrances.

However, many (not all) cyclists ignore the signs and when challenged claim they did not see the signs.

But the damage to paths, exacerbated by the erosion they cause following heavy rain, let alone the potential injury to walkers and STEPper volunteers continues.

Any ideas as to how we can restore the safe and quite ambience of Forest 20 and remove the need to continually repair damage from wheels?



No cycling sign photo by Lainie Shorthouse



Wheel marks damaging our paths Photo Lainie Shorthouse

Arnhem Land Bush Tucker

During July we were we were able to do a tour through Arnhem Land. The tour started in Nhulunbuy and finished at Seven Spirit Bay on Port Essington in the Garig Gunak Barlu National Park.

In western Arnhem Land we spent a day at Murwangi at the edge of the Great Arafura Swamp where we were introduced to some of the bush tucker plants used by the Yolngu which may be of interest to STEPers. The products of these plants have many differing uses.

Jalparan: *Alstonia actinophylla*, Milkwood

This wood is used for carving totems of animals, making pipes for smoking and dugout canoes. The sap is mixed with ochre for painting bodies, bark and caves. It is also used to stick feathers and kapok fluff on the body for decorations and symbols. The sap can also be used as a medicine for scabies and to help lactating women with cracked nipples and milk production.



Two photos by M Fagg

Caltcha: *Pandanus spiralis*, Screw Palm

The leaves are stripped and dyed to make baskets and mats. The kernels of the fruit are extracted and eaten raw, roasted or ground. The roots of young plants are crushed and mixed with boiling water to make an antiseptic bush shower. Branches can be used to transport fire.

Pandanus sp. Photo Ray Walker



Bullomo: *Syzygium suborbiculare*, Red Bush Apple

Ripe fruits for eating are collected from the ground. *(no photo available)*

Njaridan: *Eucalyptus tetradonta*, Stringybark

The Dhuwa moiety of the Yolngu use the wood to make tools, canoe poles and yidaki (didgeridoos). The bark is flattened and made pliable over a fire. It can then be used to make traditional canoes while the smooth interior can provide a surface for paintings.



Two photos by R W Purdie of *Eucalyptus tetradonta*

Jilpuri: *Brachychiton paradoxum*, Red Flowering Kurrajong

The seeds are eaten raw, roasted, and may be ground into flour. All hairs must be removed from the seeds before they are eaten or processed. The inner bark is used to make rope or string for bags or nets or to attach axe heads, spearheads, or woomera pegs. The sap could be used as an emergency food or to make children's lollies.



Brachychiton paradoxum Photo Andy Russell

Bundeh: *Ficus scobina*, Sandpaper Fig

Ripe figs are picked and eaten as a snack while travelling. The leaves are used to smooth the rough surfaces of tools, cleaning sores before medicine is applied and to file fingernails.

Ningini: *Terminalia ferdinandiana*, Billy Goat Plum

Ripe fruit on the ground is eaten. This fruit contains high concentrations of vitamin C and is treated as a medicine rather than bush tucker. There is some commercial interest in the fruit because of its naturally high vitamin C levels.

Photo from the web. of the Terminalia ferdinandiana fruit.



Maipin: *Erythrophleum chlorostachys*, Ironwood

The Yirricha moiety of the Yolngu use the wood to make tools. The wood is very hard and must be soaked for months or years so it can be worked. Resin extracted from the roots is an extremely effective adhesive used for making tools or canoes.

The Yirricha use the leaves in smoking ceremonies. Leaves can be put on a fire to produce mosquito repellent smoke. Inhaling small amounts of smoke alleviates constipation while a woman may inhale large amounts of smoke to prevent conception or cause abortion.

Two Photos by M Fagg



Mulcham: *Grewia retusifolia*, Dysentery Bush

Bark is stripped and crushed with water to make a poultice for spear wounds and to treat /infections and to treat diarrhoea. The fruit has high levels of thiamine and vitamin C and is eaten raw as a bush medicine. The leaves are chewed for toothache. Stems are used for fire sticks and paint brushes.

Two photos by M Fagg



Dindin: *Melaleuca spp*, paperbark

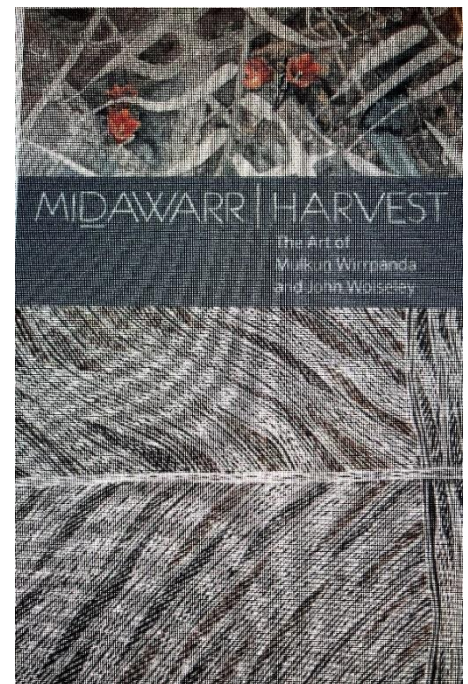
The bark of the tree is used for bedding, bandages, shelter, rafts, containers and more.

The leaves add flavour to cooking, and a traditional ground oven will often include layers of paperbark leaves. Tea made from the leaves is diuretic. In emergencies swellings at the base of young trees may be tapped as a source of water. Bodies are wrapped in paperbark for funeral ceremonies.



Photo Melaleuca leucadendra An Arnhem Land species. Photo by RW Purdie

A unique overview of Yolngu bush foods can be found in the book Midawarr Harvest published by the National Museum of Australia. This book brings together the art of Mulkun Wirrpanda and John Wolseley. The joint work of these two artists, Yolngu and white Australian, has created an important and profoundly shared vision of the Australian environment which stands alone.



Ray Walker

17 August 2021

Book jacket photo from the web.

The source of the photos in this article are by M Fagg and RW Purdie (unless otherwise indicated) and are from the Photo Collection Home Page <http://www.anbg.gov.au/photo> , Australian Plant Image Index, Australian National Botanic Gardens. STEP appreciates the use of these photos.

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Welcome to these new members

J Kennedy and R Harvey

We invite any new members (there were nine mentioned in our last newsletter) to come and join the working bee group on a Thursday for morning tea at 10 am at the tables near the shed at the northwest corner of Forest20. Park at the lowest part of the overflow carpark. Of course, this needs to be after our current lockdown ceases.

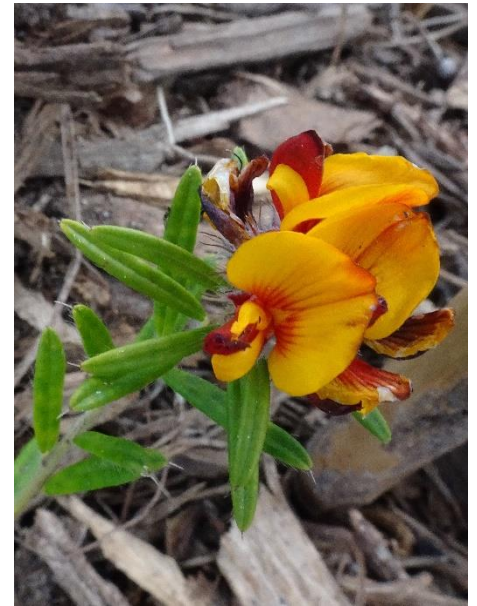
The Entrance Peas

To complement our wonderful new STEP Entrance, we now have a planting, in front of the little retaining wall, of 13 native pea species that are common to the Southern Tablelands. To our delight a couple of the plants are already flowering, even though Terry and Bill only put them in a few months ago. And we can expect that over the next 5 months we will have the other peas coming into flower, sequentially. This mass planting of yellow and orange and red



Pultenaea retusa Photo Andy Russell

coloured flowers will in time provide the “wow” factor that will enhance the whole STEP experience for visitors. There are 129 species of native peas in the Southern Tablelands and these 13 add to the other 13 species that we already have elsewhere in STEP.



Pultenaea polifolia
Photo Andy Russell

In the future, we can expect that there will be some different peas flowering here from late August through to late January. So far, the signs are good!



Pultenaea subspicata
Photo Andy Russell

The Wattle Rock Walkway

People will have noticed that our Wattle Rocks seating spot near the new Entrance – once a tranquil resting niche – has become very water-logged following the last few months of heavy and prolonged rain. This spot is along the route of the new Wattle Walk and has become both impassable and an eyesore. It is proposed to rectify this with some judicious drainage works and a “temporary-permanent” 3-metre-long grated walkway. Jens, Terry, Digby and Bill have this in hand – well they did have before the lockdown. So now we await the go-ahead for us to again be able to do “capital works” on site. The grated walkway will sit slightly above the boggy ground and allow visitors to walk the length of the new Wattle Walk without getting their shoes muddy.

Both articles by Bill Handke



Waterlogged and boggy path through the Wattle Rock Walkway. Photo Bill Handke

Recent funding increases to STEP

In recent months STEP has received welcome additions to our funds. Following an appeal, before the end of the financial year, \$4000 of tax deductible contributions were received by the Friends of the National Arboretum Canberra on behalf of STEP. Those wishing to donate at any time can do so through the Friends website, nominating STEP as the beneficiary.

We successfully applied for a grant through the Friends of Grassland Ecosystem Grants program and will receive \$1500. This will assist in the revision and reprinting of our brochure “Grasses at the Southern Tablelands Regional Botanic Garden” and with meeting the cost of improved signage about grasses within STEP (Forest 20). We appreciate this grant from FOG and their continuing support of our activities.

In recent weeks we were awarded \$3500 from the ACT Chief Minister to assist us to increase community access to STEP and provide more detailed information. This grant will significantly boost our capability to provide digital information about the STEP garden and its collection of plants.

STEP welcomes and appreciates the support we have received which will assist in implementing many activities identified in our “Strategic Plan for 2020-2030”.

Ross Dalton

STEP Treasurer

Currently flowering at Forest 20 is *Hakea decurrens*.

This species is found from the South Coast, each of the Tablelands and Slopes districts as well as the Northwest plains. It is a woodland or forest species that may be semi prostrate or erect shrub. It normally flowers between May and September.

Around Canberra *Hakea decurrens* may be found on Black Mountain

Photo by Andy Russell

The STEP Newsletter is edited by Andy Russell and is produced in March, June, September, and November each year.

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