

STEP NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER 2023



On the southwest corner of the Wattle Walk. Flowering here is *Acacia cultriformis* Knife-leaf Wattle while mostly hidden behind the rock is *Acacia gunnii* the Ploughshare Wattle. Photo Andy Russell

Hello all.

Planting and weeding have been occurring at a rapid pace down in the gardens of Forest 20, and I would like to acknowledge the dedicated team of STEPpers who have been hard at work this winter. It's not always comfortable, but every Thursday morning this hardy band can be found, head down in patches of shrubbery, pulling out weeds and trimming old plant growth. Even if it's windy and drizzly the team soldiers on, replete with work gloves, gum boots and beanies.

Spring seems to be here a bit early this year and we already have many species of Acacia in bloom. The Wattle Walks we took in association with National Wattle Day on 1st September were well attended. A total of 21 people came on our 3 walks, and many were surprised and delighted at the range of plants on display. We also noticed the variety of perfumes, including a distinctly aromatic *Grevillea australis*.

This scent was also commented on by people looking at our information table at the annual Park Care display, which was held from 1 Sept- 3rd Sept at Jamison Shopping Centre. I was able to pick a variety of blooms from our flowering shrubs, including Wattles and Grevilleas, to add colour to the STEP display. Many people stopped to look and ask about the species in the vase. This reminded me that native shrubs not only perform well in the garden, but also provide a useful source of cut flowers!

Spring is the ideal time to come down and see the progress that has been made in Forest 20. It's a great way to see what is in flower and pick up some useful ideas on gardening with natives in a Southern Tablelands climate. Even on a windy day there are several sunny, protected nooks with spaces for sitting and soaking in the sounds of birds, frogs and insects.

Happy Spring!

Regards Jane Cottee

STEP President

Photo: volunteers hard at work, weeding under the prickly *Hakea microcarpa* next page



Our volunteers hard at work on weeding (left) beneath *Hakea microcarpa* Small Fruited Hakea and right cutting back *Rubus parvifolius* Native Raspberry



The day the *Rubus parvifolia* was demolished by STEPpers. It was rolled up, folded and taken away by Eliot. But it will be back!

News from Forest 20

Great team work on show at Forest 20

Since the last STEP newsletter STEPpers have been very active across Forest 20. With the regular help of the Arboretum's Horticulture staff (mainly, but not always, Pete and Elliot) we have focussed on the beds along the upper parts of Forest 20 and continued to repair, restore, and re-plant a large part of Central Garden and adjacent beds. A wide range of shrub, herb and grass species more typical of the dry sclerophyll forest ecosystems will over the next year or so restore the 'bush' feel this part of Forest 20. About thirty trees, mainly *Eucalyptus macrorhyncha*, *E. rossii* and *E. mannifera maculosa* have been replanted after significant losses over the last 18 months due to saturated ground.

Photo Barrows all set out waiting for our willing volunteers to arrive.



When we can find safe and good access for the Arboretum's small tipper truck, we can get mulch delivered almost next to each repair site, and so relieve ourselves of some of the heavier work that we have done in earlier years. This has proved to be an excellent way in which we can leverage Arboretum assistance with the enthusiasm and energy of our volunteer STEPpers and make significant advances. As we see the progress, STEPpers have been heard to say to each other "it looks good, doesn't it" and "what a difference we have made over the past six months".

The Arboretum weed trailer is piled high by our enthusiastic weeders.



With drier conditions forecast we now have the challenge of keeping the newly planted shrubs and trees watered and growing. As soon as they have grown sufficiently, we will remove the many pink and green tree guards which detract from the visual effect but are necessary while the young stems are vulnerable to hares snipping them off!

Second seat installed in Forest 20

During the winter, STEP proposed to Arboretum management that it was time to have another seat located in Forest 20. We have noted an increase in visitation now that the lower carpark is fully operational and makes access much easier than previously. To our delight, in early September, a second seat was installed in Forest 20, at a location we nominated half-way along the Wattle Walk. Resting a while on this seat, we can enjoy a long view across several lines of eucalypt towards the Central Garden. Thank you to Arboretum staff for the work to install the seat.

Recent visitors

STEPpers have been generous with their time to provide guides for visitors. These have included Wattle Walks (scheduled through the Arboretum's programs), a group of Year11/12 CIT students studying a unit of ecology in their secondary biology course, a group of pre-schoolers, and many small casual groups who we have met on their walks. We are anticipating a visit from the Tuggeranong Over-55s Garden Club, following a talk given to their regular meeting in Greenway.



*Above left, Children from the Deakin Pre-school enjoy our new seat.
Above Right Wattle Walk visitors.*

Canberra Festival of Nature

STEP members have been actively involved with Landcare ACT in the planning and organisation of the first *Canberra Festival of Nature*. This idea for this festival grew out of Landcare's participation in Floriade 2022 where a garden bed of 'native only' plants was displayed. With so many community groups active in ParkCare, Landcare, restoration projects, Frog Watch, ACT for Bees an umbrella Festival has been developed with a coordinated web-site for groups to advertise their activities and, we hope, to grow interest and participation in Canberra's wonderful bushland setting and related nature-based activities.

STEP has scheduled several guided tours of Forest 20 as our contribution to Canberra's Festival of Nature coordinated by Landcare ACT. Do make a point of visiting the Festival website: <https://www.landcareact.org.au/festival> and find numerous walks, talks and other activities arranged for the period September to November.

David Shorthouse



A new eucalypt and a new wasp at STEP

A group of Mallee Snow Gums (*Eucalyptus gregsoniana*) have recently been planted near the end of the wattle walk and close to the wetland. Their mallee form means that they will produce multiple trunks from an underground lignotuber. This species of snow gum grows to a height of about 4 metres and has light grey bark and long curved leaves. The white flowers are born in clusters of 5-11 which mature into a cup-shaped fruit.

This species of snow gum was first described in 1973 and given the species name of *gregsoniana* to honour Jesse Gregson and his son Edward for their collection and descriptions of eucalypts in the Blue Mountains where *E. gregsoniana* is indigenous. It is also found on the Southern Tablelands in the Wadbilliga National Park in the Monaro.

If you look at these new trees from a distance you could easily mistake them for rose bushes. The tips of several branches end in a bright red swelling. These swellings have been caused by a eucalyptus gall wasp (*Leptocybe invasa*). This wasp attacks a number of eucalypt species including *E. bridgesiana*. It was only discovered in 2000 after the galls were found on overseas plantations of River red gums (*E. camaldulensis*), but it is indigenous to Australia.



This eucalyptus gall wasp is tiny, only just over 1mm in length and lives for only about 1 week. It is mainly brown in colour with a slight blue green iridescence on its body and has yellow legs. The female wasp can reproduce asexually and injects her eggs into new leaf buds of suitable eucalypts. This can kill the leaf bud but, if it survives, the bud swells and develops corky tissue internally. The exterior of the swelling becomes glossy and turns from green to pink, then dark red and eventually a dark brown. The wasp larva develops inside the gall and emerges as an adult wasp after 3-4 months. *Photo of the galls Andy Russell*

Jennie Widdowson

A Bioblitz for STEP

A Bioblitz is a citizen science event which can produce a detailed record of the biodiversity of a specific location. The word Bioblitz first appeared in 1996 with its origin from Bio meaning life and Blitz meaning to do something quickly and intensively. Therefore, a Bioblitz means a concerted effort to record and discover as many species as possible within a set location and over a limited time period. Bioblitzes are a good way to involve and educate the community about the local environment.

It is estimated that 75% of the species existing in Australia have not been discovered or described. A Bioblitz is one way to possibly find some of these undiscovered species. It also provides a way to increase our knowledge of our ecosystems and gives a baseline of information for comparison in future years for studying and reporting on the effects of climate change.

Running a Bioblitz at STEP can:

- provide a detailed inventory of the ecosystems of Forest 20.
- increase the public awareness of STEP.
- create partnerships with experts and other groups in the community.
- stimulate interest and awareness of nature and the environment.
- increase awareness of Canberra Nature map and its uses as this could be where the data is held.

As a Bioblitz is a complex multidimensional event and to run such an event, it needs to be well planned and well managed. Organisers, event managers, volunteer scientists and naturalists and the general public are all needed for a successful event.

As a start, I am proposing that STEP should run a Bioblitz on Sunday 19th November as part of the Festival of Nature. On what areas should the Bioblitz concentrate – birds, bats, moths, butterflies, pollinators, insects in general, weeds, something else?? It depends on what resources are available from experts and volunteers. STEP needs your ideas, suggestions and offers of help. Contact Jennie Widdowson (email: jenniew@ozemail.com.au) if you are interested in this proposal and would like to offer your help.

Canberra Nature Map has agreed to support this proposal.

STEP represented at Jamison ParkCare Display.

Once again STEP was included at this annual display, Friday to Sunday 1st to 3rd September. Jane Andy and Mardi were involved. Jane supplied a bowl of cut flowers from Forest 20



Photos Andy Russell



Visit by Canberra Nature Map users to STEP

On the afternoon of Sunday 23rd July about 30 people (users of Canberra Nature Map and their families) visited STEP for about 2 hours. They were guided around all the features of STEP including the Wattle Walk, the Wetland, the Bush Tucker garden and the Central garden by Andy Russell, Georgie Till and Jennie Widdowson. They all seemed to be very interested in what STEP has achieved and a number of the visitors said they did not know about STEP but would certainly visit again to see the plants at other times of the year.

It was pointed out that we did not have a notice at STEP with a QR code linking to the Field Guide for STEP on Canberra Nature Map. This has now been remedied and a poster with the QR code has been added to the notice board on the STEP shed.

Jennie Widdowson



Photos Andy Russell

STEP acknowledges the support of the following Corporate Members



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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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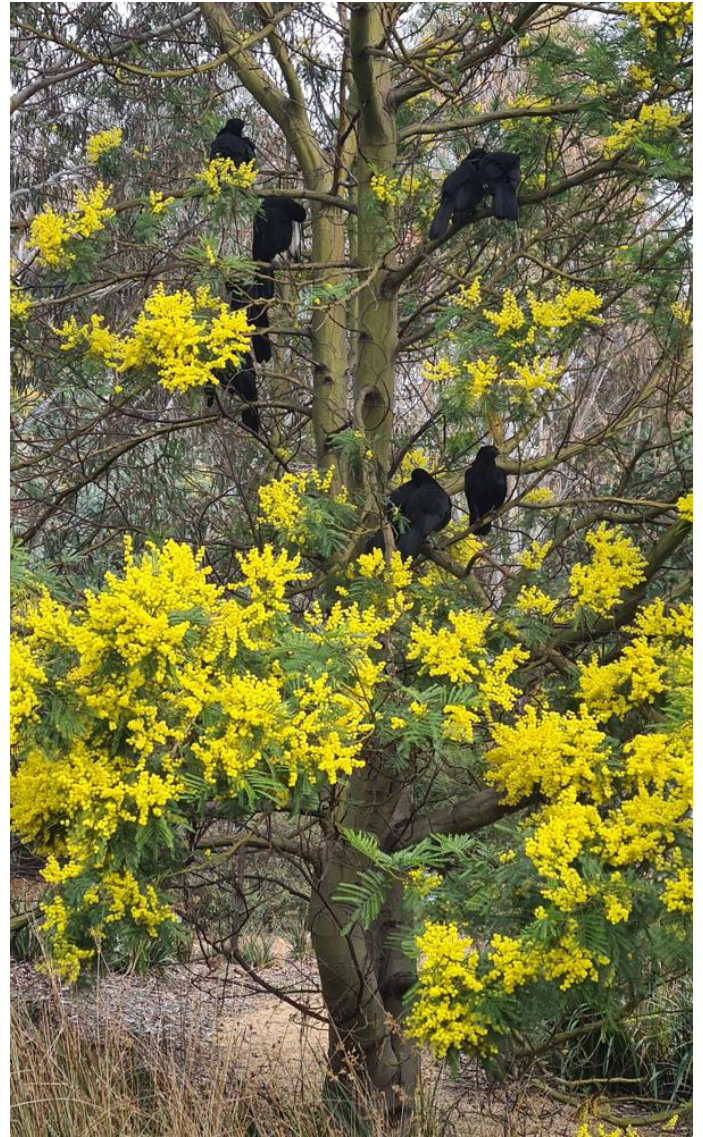
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