

## SOUTHERN TABLELANDS ECOSYSTEMS PARK—A REGIONAL

BOTANIC GARDEN, EDUCATION AND ECOSYSTEMS RECOVERY FOR THE SOUTHERN TABLELANDS.

**NEWSLETTER:** DECEMBER 2013.

**PO Box 440, Jamison Centre, 2614.**

**[www.step.asn.au](http://www.step.asn.au)**

### **Annual General Meeting.**

Under cramped conditions ( we were gazumped by the Bonsai and Penjing fraternity despite David Shorthouse's booking, so they kindly allowed us to use their office space) 20 members of STEP assembled at 1100 on November 30 at the National Arboretum.



The slightly cramped AGM!

An efficient AGM chaired by David Shorthouse was held with speedy elections overseen by Lainie Shorthouse.



Most of your new Executive: L to R Tony Lawson, Margie Bourke, David Shorthouse, Hopalong Andy Russell, Bill Handke and Judy Smith.

## 2013 STEP AGM

The STEP AGM was held on Saturday 30 November at the Arboretum.

The meeting started at 11:05 am and proceeded quickly, as copies of the Agenda, the Minutes of the previous AGM, and the Annual Report for 2012-3 had been emailed out to members beforehand.

After noting the attendees and the apologies (a further 11 members), the meeting passed the Minutes of the previous AGM and the Annual Report, presented by our Vice-President, David Shorthouse.

The Treasurer then gave his report. In 2012-3 we achieved a record membership of 78. To date in 2013-4 we have had 41 renewals. Expenditure has considerably exceeded revenues from memberships so we have had to rely heavily on other sources to fund our activities, including Government and other Grants for specific purposes, and general and specific donations for such items as plants.

The main items of expenditure were for communication services, including printing and postage (\$7603), which were largely financed by earlier grants, plants (\$2623), and tools and equipment (\$1040). Apart from grants, the main sources of income for 2012-3 were memberships (\$2460) and donations (\$535), which includes the first tranche of a donation of \$2000 from the ANPS for the purchase of plants from their sales and from their member growers. Excluding the latest Government grant which was yet to be spent, STEP carried forward a surplus of \$1778 to 2013-4.

The Treasurer pointed out that STEP needs to consider additional ways to raise funds for general administrative purposes as well as for specific projects. He also recommended separating grants from the income and expenditure in the accounts, but including them in the balance sheet.

The Treasurer's report was accepted.

Lainie Shorthouse was appointed as Returning Officer for the election of office-bearers, which occurred efficiently and quickly. It was good to have all of the positions filled. The new Committee is:

President: Margie Bourke

Vice-President: David Shorthouse

Treasurer: Andy Russell

Secretary: Tony Lawson

Committee: Jens Svensson, Bill Handke, Judy Smith and Ross Dalton

Next three motions were put forward for discussion and approval, namely:

1. That the STEP Committee continue with its work to progress development of Forest 20 at the national Arboretum Canberra (NAC);
2. That the STEP raise funds to support development of an education space for Forest 20 in partnership with the NAC;

3. That STEP develops an active role in recovery of the yellow box red gum woodland adjacent to Forest 20 that was added to the Arboretum in 2013.

In respect of the first motion, David Shorthouse noted that we had now planted 75 species of understorey and ground cover trees, shrubs, forbs and grasses in addition to the 16 species of *Eucalypts*, and the grove of *Allocasuarinas* and some *Brachychitons*. We expected to exceed 100 species in the next Autumn plant out.

Bill Handke, who chairs a small sub-Committee to develop the education space, gave a brief report on what was happening in respect of Motion 2. The Arboretum was supportive of the idea and Jason Brown was seeking approval for the concept from the Chief Minister.

In respect of the third motion, there were questions raised about the management of the newly acquired land to the North of the Arboretum, and the possibility of part of it being used to grow rare *Eucalypts* of the Southern Tablelands. It was pointed out that part of this land was to be rehabilitated as Grassy Woodland as an offset agreement for the Molonglo development.

The three motions were passed.

In subsequent general discussion, Max Bourke offered to prepare two or three Newsletters a year. This offer was gratefully accepted.

The AGM concluded at 11:35 am, and after some mingling and photographs, many attendees adjourned for lunch in the Café.

Tony Lawson (Secretary)

#### **FEATURE PLANT OF FOREST 20: Kangaroo Grass:**

Some things you may not know about *Themeda triandra* / *Themeda australis*, aka Kangaroo Grass:

- The species is found in all states of Australia, South Africa, Indonesia, New Guinea, Japan, India, Saudi Arabia, southern Turkey and Mongolia! It's also become naturalised in New Zealand. I have seen good stands in central Burma too.
- In Australia, there are two main genetic races - the diploids ( two sets of chromosomes in each cell) that occur south and east of the Great Divide (i.e. coastal populations), and tetraploids (four sets of chromosomes in each cell) that occur in drier, inland areas.
- The species probably evolved in tropical Asia and migrated down the east coast of Australia (although there is a crazy hypothesis that suggests that *Themeda* colonised Australia via the importation of camels from Asia and Africa in the 19th century!!)
- there have been no crossing trials between South African and Australian populations to see if they can breed.
- it is an important forage species in Africa for impala, antelope, wildebeest, zebra and buffalo. When the spring flush occurs each year kangaroos on the NAC site browse it heavily until it starts to mature. I have observed kangaroos and wallabies browsing it on the coast where it certainly seems to be able to cope with the grazing pressure.
- *Themeda* can decline in the absence of disturbance because tillers are shade-intolerant, and flowering culms are rarely produced on plants that are moribund.
- up to 94% of seed falls within 50 cm of maternal plants.
- Almost without exception, sheep have been shown to negatively impact *Themeda*.

- It is what is called a C4 grass which refers to its ability, like many tropical species (and this demonstrates how it has evolved from a tropical spp) which means it has an ability to partially process carbohydrate during hot days and through a different metabolic pathway, it completes that process at night when it is less hot, a clever trick! Grasses like sorghum and sugar cane and kikuyu can all do this too.

**MB based on notes by Dr John Morgan Latrobe University.**

## STEP SIGNS

As one of our key objectives is to educate ourselves and the general public about our local flora, it is obvious that signs are very important for visitors to the site, however we do not want the visual experience of Forest 20 to be one of obtrusive signs.

The original 541 trees have been numbered by us and a record kept on a spreadsheet as to when they were planted, by whom (when known), whether they have died and their progress in growth terms. Jens is our 'tree measurer' and 'keeper of the information'. Each tree had its number written on an aluminium tag which was attached to a lower branch. These would glitter as the sun caught them blowing in the wind. This proved too much for some birds who managed to peck them off!!

After that we wrote each number on a short stake and put the stake next to the tree. This system is working okay although the numbers are fading a bit. Jens wrote a lot of tree names and numbers on plastic holders but these too have faded.

Luckily the grant we secured from the Dahl Trust enabled us to produce our brochure - "Eucalypts of the Southern Tablelands Ecosystem Park" and also to have substantial signs made to identify the 16 species of Eucalyptus. These expensive signs were made in accordance with the standard set by the Arboretum for the ACTEW waterwise garden.

And of course we have the banner fixed in various ways to the water tank. There is the general forest sign along the boundary road, but this is now rather faded and out of date.

But when it comes to identifying the understorey plants I took it upon myself to write signs, using a skill I acquired when obtaining my Ticket-writing Certificate!! I cleaned up and re-used the plastic ones and used various pens. Unfortunately most of the signs faded in the harsh conditions we have at Forest 20. I tried different methods even painting with house paint, however the paint did not adhere to the plastic during heavy rain and the words peeled off.

Now I hope we have a longer lasting solution. With a renewed supply of plastic signs and a pen that uses enamel paint the latest signs seem to have weathered well so far. The picture shows me concentrating on the writing because if I make a mistake it takes lots of eucalyptus oil to remove it.

In general I have used only the scientific names (hoping the spelling is correct) as common names are confusing but some things like blue devil, rock fern, kangaroo grass maybe should also have their common names too.



Lainie Shorthouse signing on!

### **VISIT OF MICHELAGO SCHOOL**

On Thursday 21st November STEP hosted a visit from the whole of Michelago School for a quick walk around Forest 20 as part of their morning at the Arboretum. 5 STEP members met the 27 children plus their Principal, teacher and some parents at the Village Centre and walked them down the hill. There the Principal divided the group into two, with each group a mixture of ages and we went in different directions around the site. The teacher was horticulture trained and it was obvious that many of the children had a great interest in the bugs and spiders and in listening to the frogs in the wetland.

This visit was not part of the Arboretum's formal education program but the NAC Education Officer had referred them to us. While we were very happy to accommodate these keen country kids it revealed to me that we have not yet worked on a 'set piece' to tell our story. I had prepared a little handout for the children with our name, a few notes on plants, website and an illustration that they could colour in if so desired. After Forest 20 they were to go to the Bonsai collection but most seem to be looking forward to the playground!

We have received positive feedback from the school but we should be grateful to them for being our guinea pigs! **LS.**

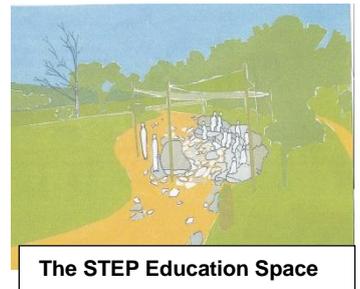
### **DEVELOPMENTS AT FOREST 20**

We have come a long way since we started planting in Forest 20 in 2009. Following our Master Plan, over 500 trees are now well established with some individuals of the 16 species flowering and subsequently holding fruits. Adult and juvenile leaves are very obvious. In addition to the eucalypts we have three Kurrajongs (*Brachychiton populneus*) and about a dozen Drooping She Oaks (*Allocasuarina verticillata*). The understory had received much attention and some 75 species have now been planted in over one hundred of the 3 X 3 metre squares, each presenting a species to the visitor. Already this spring several have flowered prolifically (*Hardenbergia violacea*, *Indigofera australis*, *Microseris lanceolata*, *Grevillea iaspicula*, *Leucochrysum albicans*, and *Bulbine bulbosa*). The ephemeral wetland is behaving as it should, alternately wet or dry and supporting three sedge or rush species plus several less common wetland herbs that we hope will persist. A small piece of Nardoo (*Marselia* sp.) is being trialled.

Our Thursday morning working bees are well attended by an enthusiastic group of STEP members who plant up during the spring and autumn, and maintain the site during the remainder of the year. STEP members are welcome to visit us, especially for morning tea (about 10.00am). This is an enjoyable time for information exchange, news and experiences which go well beyond the STEP project. **DS.**

### **STEP Education Space**

The STEP Plan for an Education Space has taken a couple of good steps forward, with the preparation of a concept plan by Amalie Shawcross (a landscape architect on Graduate rotation with the NAC), meetings with Jason Brown (the Director of the Arboretum), and the STEP Education Space sub-committee putting a submission to Jason about the proposed project development. Our proposal is for the project to be developed in stages, with Stage 1a being the clearing of the site, laying of the base, Stage 1b being the construction of seating (comprising rock and timber), and Stage 2, to be progressed when funds permit, being the erection of poles and shade cover over the site.



We are awaiting word from Jason that the Chief Minister has endorsed the broad proposal before we start any on-ground work.

While we have sufficient funds to commence work on the project, we will need additional funding to get the job done. So, if our members can chip in to fund the project or have ideas for additional funding, that would be most welcome.

The plans and the proposal to the NAC will shortly be put on our website. **Bill Handke.**

### **FOREST LITTER**

1. Cathy Robertson hooked us up with the Southern ACT Catchment Group a year ago to borrow their spray trailer to undertake St John's Wort control, a major weed on our site. We had it for a week in December 2012 but were unable to use it due to a total fire ban on the site. This year we are trying again with a small team on 9 December. Max Bourke has undertaken the Chemical Certificate training so we have a 'qualified' operator in charge.
2. There are quite a few members of STEP who are also members of the Friends of the ANBG who will have seen a small piece in the magazine Fronds about STEP. We are trying to find ways into fraternal organizations to increase our membership. **MB**

**MEMBERS PLEASE URGE FRIENDS AND ACQUAINTANCES TO JOIN US, COME ALONG FOR THURSDAY WORK PARTIES AND TO SUPPORT WHAT WE ARE DOING.**