STEP Newsletter September 2025





Spring has sprung and there is an abundance of news from Forest 20. *Ed*

From the President

Hello all,

As we move into Spring it is a pleasure to see the Acacia species putting on their classic 'green and gold' displays. The annual Wattle Walks, held on Sunday 31st August, were well attended (25 people in the morning, 13 in the afternoon). We were lucky to have fine weather, as the preceding days had been wet and windy. It was an excellent opportunity to share information about the 33 different types of Southern Tablelands' wattles that we have growing in Forest 20, and several walkers took notes and photos.







The weather has been extreme over winter, and I would like to pay tribute to the hardy STEPpers who have continued to come along to the weekly working bees, whatever the weather! As can be seen in some of the photos in this newsletter, we had mornings where there was snow on the nearby hills, thick fog and the secateurs were caked in ice in the tool shed. There is

nothing like a bit of vigorous pruning and weeding to keep a person warm though, and we have managed to thin out a lot of the old woody shrubs (leptospermum, callistemon , indigofera and dodonaea mainly) ahead of spring planting.



There is a new wooden table setting nestled underneath the eucalypts down in Forest 20. We appreciate the assistance given by the team at National Arboretum Canberra and the Friends of NAC, who have given their time and support to this project. It has enhanced the visitor experience and is the ideal place for a picnic or just to sit and contemplate the view. The table is accessible from the main carpark near the entrance to STEP.

In other news, the annual Combined Park Care display at the Jamison Centre took place between 5th and 7th of September. This is an opportunity to inform members of the local community about what happens at STEP and to network with local volunteer organisations. We are also planning guided walks for several groups from the National Botanic Gardens over the next few months, so all in all, it is looking like a bumper season.

We hope to see you there, as the good rainfall and hard work of our volunteers over winter mean that the floral display should be better than usual.

Photos and text ***Jane Cottee***

STEP President

Forest 20 News and Activities

In late winter and early spring a small group of STEPpers have been systematically undertaking an inventory of the major plantings, which have or need a plant name/sign, and what maintenance is needed. They have taken note of which species are still growing in each Area, what pruning (for woody species) or dethatching (for grasses and strappy plants) is required, which plants have died and need replacements, and where some remedial mulching is needed. This has and will continue to feed into our weekly Working Bees, into lists of plants to be purchased, and into up-dated lists of which species can be found where.

Given that planting in Forest 20 commenced with the trees in 2009 and understorey plants in the following years, it is not surprising that renewal is now needed for some parts. Renewal may take the form of pruning and supplementary plantings, or in other situations where the initial plantings have not survived due to completion of natural life span or environmental conditions have been sub-optimum (we remember extended dry times and excessive flows of water across the site), we are now seeking replacement plants.

In the past month we have visited Greening Australia and ACT & Southern Tablelands Native Tubestock Nursery (Damian DeMarco) and made useful purchases. In October we shall be at the Australian Native Plants Society (ACT) sale at the National Botanic Gardens, and at another frequented haunt, Cool Country Natives at Pialligo. Some

STEPpers also visit nurseries in the region and sometimes find unusual or different ranges of native plants. The Pea Parade has been a beneficiary of such searching for uncommon species.



Planting Gahnia – a new species for the wetland *JW*

STEP is very pleased to be the location of a picnic table consistent with those around the Arboretum. Siting of this combined several criteria: not too far from the carpark, visibility, shade, and a 'forest' experience. We hope that rubbish will not become an issue for us. The table and benches have been provided by the Arboretum with STEP and the Friends of the Arboretum sharing the cost of its installation and plaque.



JW



JC

The other significant structural development has been the completion of the garden-wall enclosing the Parade of Peas and plantings around the Welcoming entrance sign. This has required dedicated work by a 'rock team' plus the welcome delivery of rocks and soil provided by the Arboretum.

Over the last few months we have welcomed new STEPpers to our weekly Working bees and seen longer-term STEPpers return from travels and ill-health. We have also met with new Arboretum staff and welcomed them to our morning teas. It's really good to be able to share news and information, discuss our next steps, and to learn from staff with different perspectives and experience.

We are ready for another year at Forest 20!!

David Shorthouse

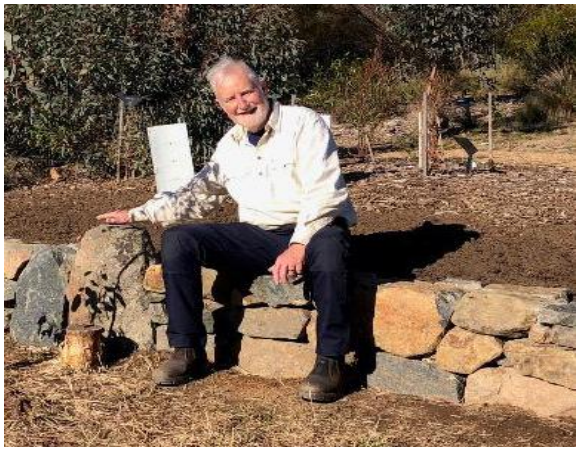
More news from Forest 20

Men at work (and at rest).

Tuesday 1 July was a day of light drizzle when Bill, Mike and Chris (the Rock team) were gainfully employed moving soil. As substantial rain had been forecast for later that week, Bill was keen to have a pile near the carpark entrance moved before it became too sodden. This soil was destined for the extension of the pea gardens where a new stone retaining wall has been built and the task was completed satisfactorily in about 2 hours.



The Rock team (Bill, Chris and Mike) hard at work on the new pea garden JS

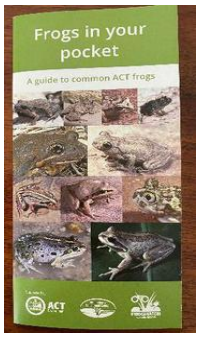


And at rest (Chris) JS

Fantastic Frog Facts



On Tuesday 1 July, Jennie, Jens, Bill, Mike and Judy attended an information session about frogs of the ACT at the Margaret Whitlam pavilion. The presenter was Anke Maria Hoefer, Coordinator of ACT and Region Frogwatch who gave a highly informative and engaging talk.



Anke Maria's presentation was in three parts: special features of frog anatomy, appearance and behaviour; efforts to re-introduce the Golden Bell Frog to the ACT and frogs of the National Arboretum and their distinctive croaks. Participants were provided with a booklet on Frogs in your Garden and a very useful field guide booklet (Frogs in your pocket) which gives descriptions of ACT frogs and their distinctive vocalisations. These publications have been placed in the STEP shed where other reference books are stored. They are also available from the ACT government website and www.ginninderralandcare.org.au/frogwatch. Participants were also given Freddo frogs as a thank you for their interest!

Visitors

Thursday 3 July

We were pleased to receive a visit from Nathanael du Boulay who has been appointed Senior Horticulturalist. He joined us for morning tea, along with Elliott and Gabe (undertaking a horticulture apprenticeship placement with NAC).



Gabe, Nathaniel and Elliott

Nathanael spoke of his role and his interests in trees and soils. He is keen to monitor soils and tissue samples to help inform fertilising programs. He mentioned that some forests eg Forest 23, Parana Pine (*Araucaria augustifolia),* may not be thriving due to a boron deficiency which can cause a variety of biological and structural problems. Another example he gave was of Forest 6, Persian Silk Tree (*Albizia julibrissin),* which is very susceptible to borers. He also spoke of the *Franklinia alatamaha* (Forest 93) extinct in the wild and quite successfully established now at the Arboretum.

Jane thanked Elliott and Gabe for placing the crushed granite around the picnic table. This alleviates the problem of the downslope dropoff from the concrete pad

Thursday 17 July

A visitor this day was John Giacon. He volunteers with the Emu Creek Landcare group (Belconnen) and brought to our attention a petition his group was circulating. The aim is to alert the ACT government of the need to reduce mowing and increase and improve habitat, rather than mowing treed areas. He noted the importance of leaving fallen branches on the ground where practicable and that tree planting alone is not helpful in developing healthy ecosystems. The petition can be accessed at https://epetitions.parliament.act.gov.au/details/e-pet-028-25 or by using the QR code.



Judy Smith

Roving STEP reporter

Community News

Weeds manual version 2 *(from Vera Kurz, author)*

This valuable resource is now available to download from https://sactcg.org.au/resources-2/

The main changes are:

- a couple of new weed profiles based on suggestions from volunteers
- a new section on seed life for each profiled weed
- updated risks and priorities from Downey's list - a number of people have asked about reinstituting public access to this list. This has not yet been done, but will hopefully still happen down the track. In the meantime there is an email address to ask for access
- additional weeds in the secondary list
- updated treatments as advised
- updates on power tool use

Guided walks to the Western Edge

You may be interested in the series of walks sponsored by the Conservation Council to explore a number of reserves along Canberra's Western Edge. They are being run regularly on Saturday mornings starting on September 20th. Details can be found on the **Conservation Council website** https://cpnservationcouncil.org.au or by searching for '**Walks on the Western Edge**'.

Great Southern Bioblitz

The Great Southern bioblitz is an international period of intense biological surveying in an attempt to record all living species within a designated area in the Southern hemisphere during spring. The ACT is one of the designated areas and the event will be held from 24-27 October 2025. You will need to download and use the inaturalist app to record sightings and there is two weeks allowed after the event for uploading. You do not need to be able to identify your sightings. More information is available from www.greatsouthernbioblitz.org

Ed

Symbols of national identity – Golden Wattle and National Wattle Day'

Volunteers with STEP, Friends of the National Arboretum and the Wattle Day Association have been celebrating National Wattle Day (1 September) at the National Arboretum Canberra (NAC) since 2015. On this day, wattle blossoms colour and scent the arboretum at locations such as STEP (Forest 20), the Golden Wattle Grove (next to Cork Oak Road carpark) and the Pod Playground and there are wattle walks and talks for the general public. But why do we celebrate and what do we celebrate?

The early history of National Wattle Day (NWD) and *Acacia pycnantha* (Golden Wattle) reveals a rich symbolism focused on national identity and unity. More than a century later the words of early wattle advocates still resonate. The following highlights some of their reasoning.



The wattle day movement began in Adelaide, South Australia when Will J Sowden, a member of the Australian Natives' Association (ANA) - a friendly Society for 'Australian-born white men'*- proposed the Wattle Blossom League – a ladies' society in conjunction with the ANA. Formed on 12 May 1890, this independent league aimed to: promote a national patriotic sentiment among the women of Australia; interest women in the work of the Australian Natives' Association and encourage in the household among the rising generation, a spirit of Australian patriotism. It only lasted a year.

In 1891 in Melbourne the ANA was considering adopting some sort of an Australian motto and emblem. David Scott of Mount Lonarch Victoria, suggested that all the colonies would be united in an emblem of wattle, in all its variety. He suggested a motto: 'Unity, Peace and Prosperity'. Nothing was decided however.

Later that decade, Melbourne naturalist Archibald Campbell founded the Wattle Club in 1899 and 'encouraged the recognition of the golden bloom as a symbol of patriotism, among other virtues'. However, when the Federation of the Australian colonies was celebrated on 1 January 1901, there was no flower for Federation.** In 1908 (9 September) Campbell delivered an address where he advocated specifically for the honouring of a Wattle Day throughout Australia. He wrote, 'Approximately, there are about 500 species of *Acacia* flora in the world, of which perhaps over 400 are Australian; therefore by numbers, the Wattle is almost exclusively Australian, and should undoubtedly be our National Flower'.***

In Sydney a year later (1909) three people convened a preliminary meeting of sympathisers with the 'Wattle Day Movement'. JH Maiden, Government Botanist of the Sydney Botanical Gardens, Mrs Agness Kettiwell (a poet from South Australia who wrote under the pseudonym of Agnes l. Storrie) and Mrs Hannah E. Clunies-Ross, wanted to organize a 'Wattle Day' throughout the Commonwealth, to stimulate 'Australian national sentiment', and connect it with the love of our beautiful flora. On this day they suggested that the Australian national flower – the Wattle Blossom – might be worn, and its display [everywhere] encouraged. Wattles might also be sown and planted on this day. They suggested that a date in September would be universally suitable, but did not propose that it be a holiday.

Two days before the first Wattle Day in 1910, Ellenor Symon and Muriel E. Farr of the newly-formed South Australian Wattle Day League promoted the wattle as Australia's national flower in Adelaide in the newspaper *The Advertiser.* They encouraged the wearing of the blossom on 1 September to foster national pride and identity in a celebration of patriotism, unity, and love for their homeland.



It was no coincidence that two years later stylised wattle was added as a decorative embellishment to the new Commonwealth Coat of Arms by Prime Minister Andrew Fisher who was a supporter of the aims of the Wattle Day League. And perhaps it is not surprising that as a result, many Australians thought that wattle was their floral emblem.

JW

However, it wasn't made official until 1988 in Australia's bicentennial year. Thanks to a campaign led by Maria Hitchcock ('The Wattle Lady'), radio host Ian McNamara, and members of the Australian Native Plants Society, a particular species of wattle, *Acacia pycnantha* (Golden Wattle) became Australia's national floral emblem. Four years later, the Governor-General of Australia officially declared 1 September as National Wattle Day across the country.

National Wattle Day gained little awareness or popularity after its initial announcement, leading Jack Fahy to establish the Wattle Day Association in Canberra in 1998 to promote it. The association is still going strong and promotes National Wattle Day as 'A celebration of Australia and Australians'; an inclusive day for all Australians when we celebrate all that we have the privilege of sharing across this great land of the wattle. It has a popular website and if you wanted ideas about how to celebrate National Wattle Day (1 September), check out our 100 ways to celebrate National Wattle Day (https://wattleday.asn.au/top-100-ways-to-celebrate-national-wattle-day/ Happy Wattle Day!

Notes:

*This Australian Natives' Association advocated for the federation of Australian colonies and promoted a distinct Australian identity, separate from Britain, while still remaining loyal to the British Empire.

** In fact, state floral emblems were not officially established until the late 1950s and 1960s. It wasn't until decades later, in 1988—the bicentennial year of the First Fleet's arrival in Sydney—that *Acacia pycnantha* was declared Australia's national floral emblem.

***In 2025 we have 1,076 described *Acacia* species and plants called Acacia. As a result of a decision by the Nomenclature Section of the XVII International Botanical Congress, plants in other countries that were once classified as *Acacia* but have different characteristics, no longer belong to the *Acacia* genus.

Photo and text

Suzette Searle

Some Wattle facts!

The Hiroshima wattle - A. dealbata

Silver wattles (A. dealbata) grew in a park in the area that was bombed in Hiroshima in 1945. They all died but the seeds are resistant to heat. Just 2 months after the bombing, new plants germinated in the bombed area. The population of Hiroshima felt this symbolised the return of life and hope after the bombing.

In 1992 The Acacia Appreciation Circle (AAC) formed in Japan in recognition of the significance of the regrowth of this wattle in Japan. Now, the AAC sends 1000 yellow ribbons to the Australian National botanic gardens (ANBG) each year as gesture of friendship

The ribbons are presented to visitors to the ANBG on Wattle day. Visitors are encouraged to wear the ribbons and then attach them to a favourite tree or shrub.

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Have you noticed that each denomination of Australian bank notes portrays a different wattle species:

- Wattle on $5 note - Prickly Moses, A. verticillata ssp. ovoidea – found in Tas, Vic, SA
- Wattle on $10 note - The Bramble wattle, A. victoriae – found in SA, WA. NT, Qld, NSW, Vic
- Wattle on $20 note - The Box leaf wattle, A. buxifolia found in ACT, Vic, NSW, Qld
- Wattle on $50 note - A. humifusa – found in WA, NT, Qld
- Wattle on $100 note - The golden wattle , A. pycnantha – found in SA, Vic, WA, NSW, ACT

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In 1921 an acacia was found on the slopes of Mount Jerrabomberra in Queanbeyan by Joseph Maiden the NSW Government Botanist. It was first thought to be a new species and was named Acacia westonii. However, although there are a few slight differences, this plant is now accepted as Acacia pycnantha and has been renamed. There are scattered occurrences of Acacia pycnantha (Golden wattle) throughout the ACT, but it is not common. Several plants are flourishing at STEP and there is a small forest of Golden wattle adjacent to Forest 2.

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TRAVELLERS TALES

From Judy – Wild Patagonian Fjords

"Patagonia is a land of silence and solitude where the winds sing their eternal songs and the earth stretches beyond the imagination" *Antoine de Saint-Exupery 1939* .

Following on from my account of our trip to Antarctica, the next leg of our trip took us north along the Chilean coast, into many of the fjords. The Andes provided a stunning backdrop to soaring narrow gorges, dramatic waterfalls, snow-capped volcanoes and glaciers. The two most impressive glaciers were Garibaldi and PioXI both of which end at the coast. PioXI is 6 km wide at its snout, and is one of the few glaciers in the world which is advancing, not retreating.



Orsono volcano *MSS*



Waterfall *MSS*

Garibaldi glacier *MSS*



PIO XI glacier *MSS*





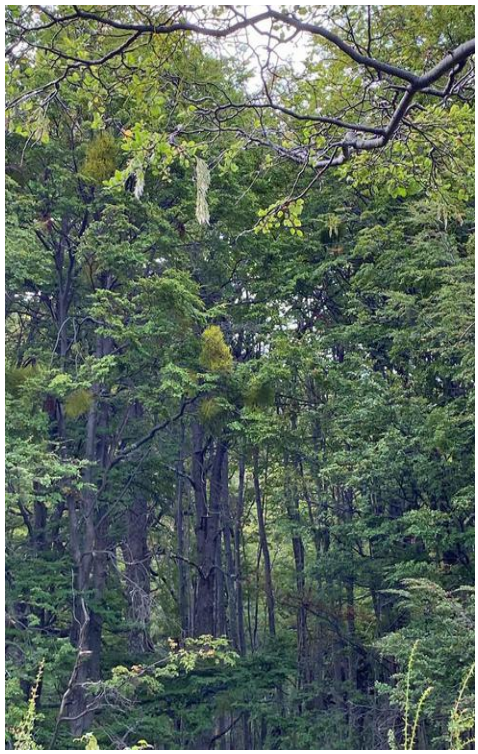
This leg of the trip began at Ushuaia and our first excursion was to Tierra del Fuego National Park. The park is 68,000 acres, of which only 2,000 is open for tourism. The road (unsealed with many potholes) is Highway #3 and is the termination of the Trans-America Highway - an extremely long distance of approximately 30,000km (19,000 miles) from Prudhoe Bay in Alaska.

This National Park was our first experience of the almost ubiquitous Nothofagus (Southern Beech) forests – the southern-most forests in the world. The genus is significant in that it is also found in New Zealand and Tasmania, linking these three regions to Gondwanaland. There are three species of Nothofagus, *N betuloides, N antarctica* and *N pumilio* the latter two being deciduous. Their local names are Caigue or Coigüe, Ñirre and Lenga. The trees are covered in Old Man's Beard lichen (Usnea sp.) and also the parasitic False Mistletoe *Misodendrum punctulatum.* Another Nothofagus parasite *Cyttaria darwinii* , Darwin's Bread, is a fungus which forms large, round, edible tumors on the trunk. Other forest species are the Winter's Bark tree *Drimys winteri* and the Chilean Cypress, *Alerce milenario.* The latter also goes by a local name of Great-grandfather tree (Gran abuelo) as some trees have been found to be over 5,400 years old.





Nothofagus leaves JS



Nothofagus forest *JS*



Old man's beard *JS*



False mistletoe *JS*

There were many interesting understory plants. *Gaultheria mucronatata* (Prickly Heath) is a shrub with profuse pink-purple berries and spiky holly-like leaves. These berries are edible, as are the berries of *Empetrum rubrum*, a heath bush growing at high altitudes near the tree line. The local name for this is Murtilla de Magallanes. The Bell flower *Lapageria rosea,* and the *Fuchsia magellanica* (a food source for the Green-backed Firecrown hummingbird) are colourful additions to the landscape.



Prickly heath *JS*



Bell flower *JS*



Fuchsia *JS*

A trip away from the coast to the pampas region introduced us to the local delicacy, Calafate (*Berberis microphylla).* The bush is very spiky and the fruit is an ingredient in jams, beer and pisco *(a local fermented wine (ed))*. It is also a food source for the guanaco which roam freely. Local tradition has it that if you eat Calafate berries, you will return to Patagonia.



Calafate *JS*



Guanaco *JS*

My next traveller's tale will be about the Yamana people of Tierra del Fuego, who are now extinct.

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The STEP Newsletter is produced quarterly in March, June, September, and December. Contributions, comments and suggestions are welcomed. Email widjennie@gmail.com

Thank you to Jane Cottee, Judy Smith and Suzette Searle for their contributions this month. Also thank you to Jane Cottee (JC), Judy Smith (JES) Mike Smith (MSS) and Suzette Searle (SS) for their photos. This newsletter has been edited by Jennie Widdowson.

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