

# STEP NEWSLETTER JUNE 2024



Looking down the main path from this

seat, photo taken June 13 by Andy Russell

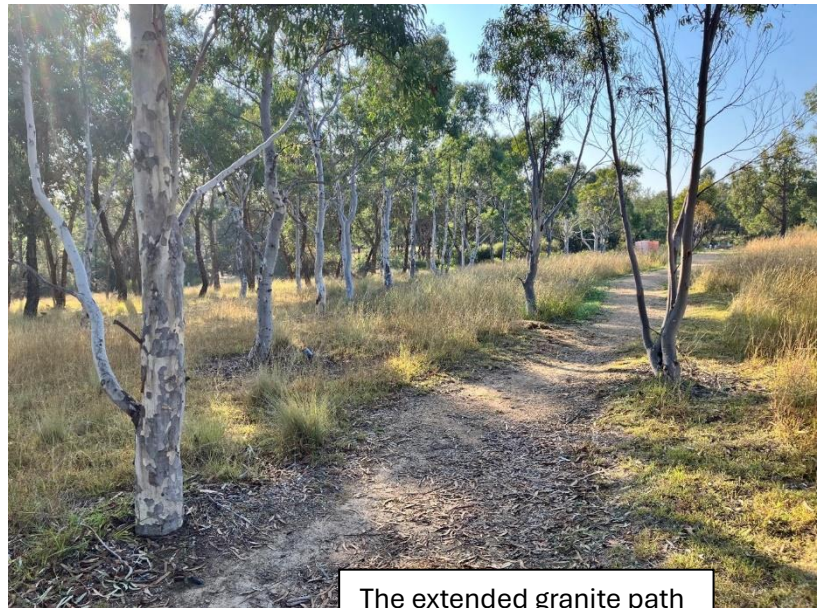
## From the President

Hello all.

The gardens and vistas down in Forest 20 are looking particularly inviting at the moment, despite the fact that the colder months are upon us.

Visitors now have a clearly visible walking track down through the belts of Eucalypts. The mown walk complements the brochure *Eucalypts of the Southern Tablelands Ecosystems Park* which can be picked up at the main entrance signs to the gardens. This trifold publication highlights 16 Eucalypt species that can be seen down in Forest 20 and is an excellent educational tool.

Another track that has been extended, in the form of a crushed granite path, is the one that links the main entrance to STEP down to the left and through the She-oak Nook. The Nook is a beautiful place to sit (there are some rounded rocks to perch on) and listen to the magical sound of wind through the Casuarina leaves. The National Arboretum horticultural staff have carried out most of the path extension and it is going to make a huge difference for walkers on wet days.



The extended granite path

And finally, thanks to the dedicated efforts of both STEP volunteers and Arboretum staff, we now have a sign for our Gallery of Grasses. I recommend taking a walk down to the lowest side of Forest 20, near the Boundary Road, to see the grass plantings. Summer and early autumn are usually the best time to see the range of grass forms in all their glory because we cut them back hard in winter. Fortunately, now that we have the sign, visitors can see the range of inflorescences (flowering stems) that make native grasses such wonderful garden and ecologically significant plants.

Happy winter!

Jane Cottee

President STEP



## The She-oak Nook – a place of intriguing plants

The *She-oak Nook* is a nice quiet spot for relaxation and reflection amongst a group of She-oaks along the Wattle Walk. Take some time to look closely at these plants: they are fascinating.



Casuarinas and Allocasuarinas are commonly called She-oaks. And Australia has lots of them - in the area of the She-oak Nook there are 7 of the 8 She-oaks that grow in the Southern Tablelands.

They were called casuarinas as their needle-like “leaves” were thought to look like the feathers of the Cassowary of north Queensland.

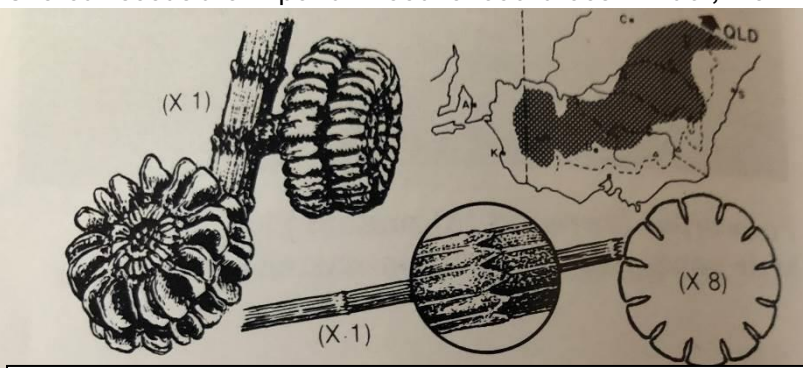
She-oaks have some really interesting features: there are male and female plants (and sometimes even male and female parts on the same plant), and their needle-like “leaf” (called a cladode, which all She-oaks have) is actually made up of a series of little grooved branchlets, often around 1 cm long. Look closely where two branchlets join and you will see little “teeth”: they are their very tiny leaves.

The length of the branchlet, the number of “teeth”, the number of grooves on the branchlets and the shape of the cone all help to identify the species. As well, the little stem holding the flower can be a give-away.

She-oak seeds are important food for cockatoos: in fact, the



She-oaks



*Allocasuarina leuhmannii* seed capsules and distribution.



*Allocasuarina littoralis* Black She-oak

endangered Glossy Black Cockatoo only eats the seeds of She-oaks. Cockatoos will also attack the trees to get at grubs in the trunk and branches.

She-oaks have the ability to absorb nitrogen from the air and fix it in root nodules which means that they improve soil and are able to grow in poor soil.

Two of these She-oaks are common-place in Canberra: the Drooping She-oak is seen on rocky hills throughout Canberra while the River She-oak – our tallest and largest She-oak - grows along rivers, so you see it along the Murrumbidgee River and out at Uriarra Crossing.



Cockie damage in getting a grub



One species (*Allocasuarina luehmannii*) is known as a Bull-oak (or Buloke), rather than She-oak, and is commonly reported as having the hardest wood of any tree in the world: it is 2½ times harder than Jarrah. An older specimen of this tree is at The Clearing.

Another interesting feature, which some gums trees also have, is that the roots of She-oaks release



***Jacksonia scoparia* Native Dogwood**

allelopathic toxins which prevent the growth of nearby plants. Within the She-oak Nook is another tree which has a superficial look to a She-oak, but is



***Allocasuarina luehmannii* Black She-oak**

unrelated. It is *Jacksonia scoparia* Native Dogwood. It is planted here to demonstrate how unrelated plants can have the same unusual “leaf” look. While up in Section A, up the top of the Central Garden, is another tree, *Exocarpos cupressiformis* Native Cherry which has a similar look, but also totally unrelated. It is also unusual in that its seed sits outside its red cherry fruit and as a seedling /sapling its roots attach to those of other plants, from which it then gets the nutrients it needs.



***Exocarpos cupressiformis* Native Cherry**

The other shrubs and under-storey plants in the area are generally associated with some of the She-oak species.

**The She-oaks seen here are:**

*Allocasuarina diminuta* – Broombush She-oak, *Allocasuarina distyla* – Scrub She-oak

*Allocasuarina littoralis* – Black She-oak, *Allocasuarina luehmannii* – Bull-oak/ Buloke

*Allocasuarina nana* – Dwarf She-oak, *Allocasuarina verticillata* – Drooping She-oak

*Casuarina cunninghamiana* - River She-oak.

Text and photos supplied by Bill Handke. Illustration referring to *Allocasuarina luehmannii* is from Leon Costerman’s Native Trees and Shrubs of South-Eastern Australia.

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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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## Welcome to new members this STEP year

P Lilley

R Bauer

D Gorman

I & A Hotchkiss

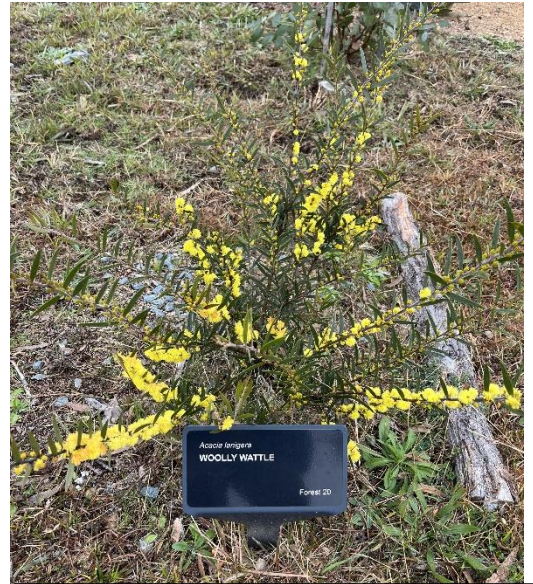
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## ***Acacia lanigera***

“ *Acacia lanigera* . A splash of colour on a grey day! This is the first wattle to flower this winter, having commenced blooming late May. The Woolly Wattle is a small spreading shrub to 2 metres, has linear curved phyllodes ( leaves) and egg-yellow flower heads. The seed pods are slightly hairy, hence the common name.

If people are interested in wattles, there will be a guided walk down at STEP on Saturday 31 August at 11 o'clock. Bookings should be made through the National Arboretum website closer to the day, as it is part of their annual Wattle Day celebrations. “



*Acacia lanigera* Woolly Wattle

## **Visitors to Forest 20**

We have been very pleased to have many visitors to STEP over the past few months. It is gratifying to see occasional visitors wandering along our paths, absorbing the information from our excellent signage and acquainting themselves with particular flowers, grasses, shrubs and trees.

We were very happy to have a visit from some of the NAC administrative staff on 9 May. Of foremost importance was the newly appointed Acting Executive Branch Manager, Stuart Jeffress, who joined us for morning tea on a showery day. Despite the inclement weather, he was very happy to meet with us. He had been on a visit to STEP a few days before and commented on how well STEP presented such a great experience of native plants to the public.

On the same day we also had a visit from Alison Stewart who was bringing Richard Allan to STEP to orientate him. Richard is the new Indigenous Tourism Officer for NAC.



Ross Dalton chats with Stuart Jeffress

Another visitor on 9 May was Rhiannon Sutherland WH&S Officer for NAC. She came to provide training and instruction to some new members of STEP. We really appreciate her visit to ensure we are all up to date and aware of relevant safety requirements while we are volunteering at Forest 20.



On Thursday 16 May, I was pleased to meet up with Richard Allan again. He was conducting a tour of visitors through STEP and was kind enough to allow me to photograph his group. Richard's role at NAC is to teach about aboriginal culture and he has developed his own walk and content to share with visitors (including school groups). Richard also teaches the science behind tools and artefacts, and the cultural uses of native flora and fauna in the Canberra region. We are very pleased that Richard finds STEP a useful resource to pass on his knowledge. On a side note, the group he was with on 16 May had done a balloon flight over Canberra before coming to NAC so they had a wonderful ACT experience.



Richard Allen leading visitors to Forest 20

On 13 June, we had a visit from Sandy Lolicato. Sandy worked with David Shorthouse to set up a native plant display at Floriade 2023 and, as he works with Landcare, he is very interested in STEP and the potential we have to educate the public about native plants and ecosystems.



Jenny Andrews, Mike Smith & Sandy Lolicato

## Pruning the Callistemons

The Callistemon bushes in Block E had been attacked by Callistemon Sawfly larvae, significantly reducing the leaf cover. Following a similar occurrence in the Wetland area, it was decided to give these bushes a dramatic haircut, taking them down to about one metre above ground level. This represented about 14 barrowloads of pruned branches taken down the hill ready for

removal by the ever-helpful horticulture crew. Once pruning was complete, weed removal was able to occur. We are looking forward to Spring re-growth in this part of Block E.



Six of our volunteers who cut back the Callistemons.



Here are the piles of cut-back material.



## Christmas in the Bush (Capital)

### It's still a long time to Christmas , but . . .

Each year we are kindly allowed to offer items for sale at the stalls held by the Friends of the Arboretum. This year, STEP is hoping to offer items at the December stall along the theme of Christmas in the Bush (Capital). I have started a collection of bush/nature themed art and craft items for sale, and I would invite any STEP members who can create art or craft items on this theme to contact me. Also I would like to hear of any ideas you might have for things which could add to the variety of our stall. Please contact me on 0450 577 081.

All proceeds to STEP so this is a very worthy cause.

Judy Smith

### Congratulations

Congratulations to our STEPper Jenny Andrews for being Highly Commended in the recent ACTLandcare Awards. Her category, Women in Landcare was tightly contested as there are many of us! Well done, Jenny.

### News from Forest 20

A feature of Thursday morning Working Bees at Forest 20 has been renewal and seasonal maintenance. Renewal is becoming more and more necessary as many of our understorey plantings are reaching the end of their natural lives. When I think of the early period of establishing Forest 20, I have had to pinch myself to remember those days when the trees were less than a meter high, and the 3 metre by 3 metre squares of woody shrubs, herbs and grasses were sparsely distributed across the site.



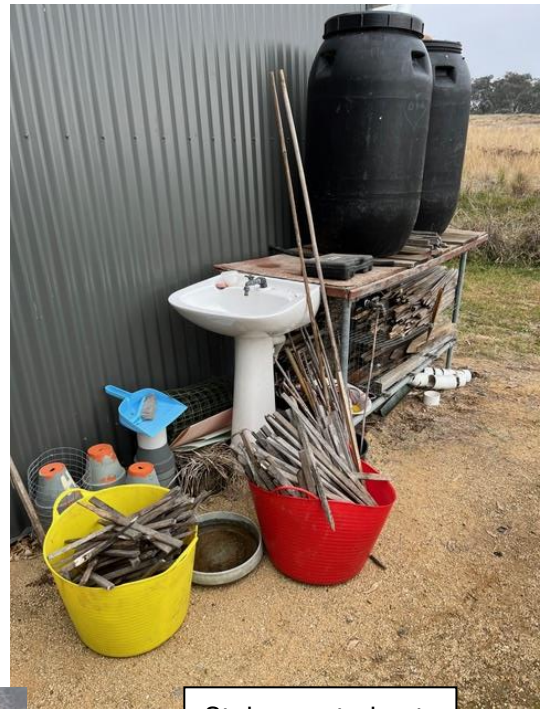
Mulched paths and early tree growth

As other stories in this newsletter show we are entering a phase of replacement and repair, and not only of plants. In the last few weeks we have done major pruning of mature *Callistemon sieberi* which were heavily impacted by an attack from sawfly (pictures page 6). Almost an entire planting of *Carex appressa* in the Bush Tucker Garden has been renewed. The new Grasses Gallery sign is now in place and work has started on more educational signs.

Our initial system of weed mat and mulch paths was replaced with gravel over several years, but in recent weeks repair and maintenance to reduce the chances of erosion from heavy rain has been

necessary, and extending the first gravel section of the Wattle Walk has eliminated an eroding natural surface path. Even our stock of wooden stakes and pink, green and black tree guards have been sorted through and disposed of where their useful life has expired.

All STEPpers have enthusiastically joined these necessary but perhaps less glamorous maintenance tasks with enthusiasm. And we have also welcomed several new STEPpers to our ranks. Forest 20 is in good shape for the coming spring and we have had the opportunity to plant new species (where we can find stock). Replacement plants have been added where needed or where there is an opportunity to add to another location.



Stakes sorted out



David cutting back Dianella encroaching onto the path



Paths and plantings in 2020



## STEP membership renewal time is coming up, but

The STEP membership year begins on 1 July each year. From April 1, 2024, the membership fee for a single person or family was increased to \$30 per annum. It is 14 years since the last change to our membership fees. Current members need not return a membership form unless there are any changes to their details. Feel free to contact the membership officer ([membership@step.asn.au](mailto:membership@step.asn.au)) if you wish to confirm your membership status.

## Gallery of Grasses at Forest 20

During June STEP and the National Arboretum Canberra installed a new information sign at the entry to The Gallery of Grasses. The Gallery of Grasses is located along Boundary Road at the northern end of Forest 20 and is a focal point of interest for visitors.

This large format sign is there to aid visitor understanding of grasses within Southern Tablelands woodlands and grassland ecosystems.

When flowering grasses are generally similar in appearance. However, when in flower, grasses have a range of flower head (inflorescence) types that show their diversity. Along the Boundary Road a number of these flower head structures can be seen on single plant of various species. As flowering time varies between species, so not all flower at one time. The sign shows five examples of the inflorescence (flower head) type to assist with plant identification.

STEP is grateful for the advice and assistance of the National Arboretum Canberra in manufacture and installation of the sign. STEP also acknowledges and thanks the Friends of Grasslands whose project funding assisted in the design and preparation of the sign's artwork.



National Arboretum staff work on new Grasses sign. Photo Andy Russell. Grasses Section sign. Photo Ross Dalton





*Muscidae (family) Fly on Lephthorynchus squamatus*  
Photo Andy Russell



*Hardenbergia violacea* False Sarsaparilla. A particularly early flowering. Photo by Lainie Shorthouse



*Gymnopilus junonius* Spectacular Rustgill