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SPRING 2022

# Newham & District Landcare Group



Working towards a  
healthier environment

Address – PO Box 314, WOODEND, 3442



**Here's to great environmental  
initiatives in 2023!**

## NDLG activities

As you can see on the front cover we held the annual gathering on 3 December, with BBQ, games, the usual splendid food brought by members, and blessed by unusually good weather. Hilary organised the egg toss which was won by Janine and Howard Stirling, and Ian Scott stepped up to win the Wellington Boot Toss.

This issue has a focus on regenerative grazing and grasses with articles contributed by members.

### Weedies working bees

Roadside Management Group members have been active again looking after our precious roadsides. On 14 November some braved the weather and cleared Broom from Sheltons Road yet again, and once more on 12 December. Thanks to Karl and Brigitte Kny for treating the group to splendid morning teas.



One of the benefits is being among the gorgeous wildflowers and grasses we are protecting.

Future working bee locations will be advised by email to members and also on the website under Events. All tools and protective equipment are supplied from our shared trailer, but wear suitable clothing and boots.



### Coming events

**Sunday 12 February 2023: *Visualising the Environment – a Reflective Lens on Environmental Photography.***

A workshop to learn how to improve the impact and interpretative power of your environmental images with renowned International nature photographer Alison Pouliot. RSVP, cost and queries to Bruce Hedge [bahedge@bigpond.com](mailto:bahedge@bigpond.com) or 0427 888 122.

**Sunday 5 March 2023: *Clean Up Australia Day.*** Register at <https://www.cleanupaustraliaday.org.au/fundraisers/janinestirling/newham-and-district-landcare-group> and meet at the Hall at 9am.

## Group contacts

**President:** Penny Roberts, [penroberts@bigpond.com](mailto:penroberts@bigpond.com), 0418 396 837 (new members and general enquiries).

**Vice President:** Howard Stirling, [howardjanine01@gmail.com](mailto:howardjanine01@gmail.com), 0432 809 314.

**Treasurer:** Hilary Roberts, [hproberts@bigpond.com](mailto:hproberts@bigpond.com), 0407 343 256.

**Secretary:** Kathy Mexted, [secretaryndlg@gmail.com](mailto:secretaryndlg@gmail.com), 0403 927 940.

### Committee:

Paul Carter, [millhouse@aussiebroadband.com.au](mailto:millhouse@aussiebroadband.com.au), 0407 271 199. Doug Dalglish, [dougdalglish@hotmail.com](mailto:dougdalglish@hotmail.com), 0428 571 465. Bruce Hedge, [bruceahedge@gmail.com](mailto:bruceahedge@gmail.com), 0427 888 122. Karl Kny, [karl@kolora.com](mailto:karl@kolora.com), 0409 543 061. Helen Scott, [orseda@outlook.com](mailto:orseda@outlook.com), 0412 582 526 (website and newsletter).

Luke Spielvogel, [luke.spielvogel@gmail.com](mailto:luke.spielvogel@gmail.com), 0401 878 084.

### Other Contacts

**Roadside Management Group (the Weedies):** Sue Massie, 5427 0065.

Wesley Park and Jim Road: Jane Trikojus, 0413 499 252.

**Spray trailer and cameras:** Howard Stirling, 0432 809 314.

**Website:** <https://newhamlandcare.info> Keep checking it for Events, and other updates under *What's New*.

The committee meets on the first Tuesday of each month (February to December) between 7.30–9pm at the Newham Hall. All members are welcome to attend to become more involved or raise specific matters. Please advise a committee member if you wish to attend. Meetings start and finish on time... and we enjoy them!

# A word of warning . . .

## regarding Chilean Needlegrass and Serrated Tussock

Penny Roberts

Our new home is earth-sheltered on the southern and eastern sides with a slab roof covered by 500mm of fill. In late Autumn 2021 the roof was sown to several species of Wallaby Grass and now has a good cover of these species. Along the way there have been seedlings of an assortment of the common foreign species found on the property, and a couple never seen before, but recently I was horrified to discover several Chilean Needle-grass (CNG) plants and a very healthy Serrated Tussock.

### **Where had these nasties come from?**

The roof cover was layered: washed sand topped with a 2-way garden mix from a local garden centre and the excavated area behind the house was backfilled with soil from the site 'cut'. All the backfilling and moving of soil mix to the roof area was undertaken by a local contractor.

This 100 acre block has had Spear Thistle a-plenty; occasional Briar Rose, Hawthorn and Blackberry appearing courtesy of bird deposits and large areas of Phalaris that was originally sown for pasture but never Serrated Tussock or CNG.

Both these invasive exotic grasses are present in the Macedon Ranges, with Serrated Tussock being a serious problem south of Mt Macedon and CNG to the north of the Cobaws. These plants both cause environmental and economic harm and are declared noxious weeds under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994* (CaLP Act).

### **Both have been found in the Newham district.**

Small infestations of **Serrated Tussock** have occurred on Boundary Rd, Dons Rd and on private land in the past, almost certainly due to seed being tracked in on a trench-digger, slasher or road-working equipment. Fortunately these infestations were recognized and the plants carefully removed and destroyed, with follow-up checks by DELWP confirming eradication.

A large infestation of **Chilean Needle-grass (CNG)** on Three Chain Rd at Carlsruhe was first noted in MRSC records about 15 years ago. In the decade before it came to the attention of our Landcare Group

it had spread along the roadsides from Carlsruhe to McMasters Lane, Lancefield, with large numbers occurring at Carlsruhe and Lancefield. Most plants were within 3m of the bitumen, ie within the slashed area but wider infestations occurred where vehicles were able to turn on the roadside and where road or culvert works had been undertaken.

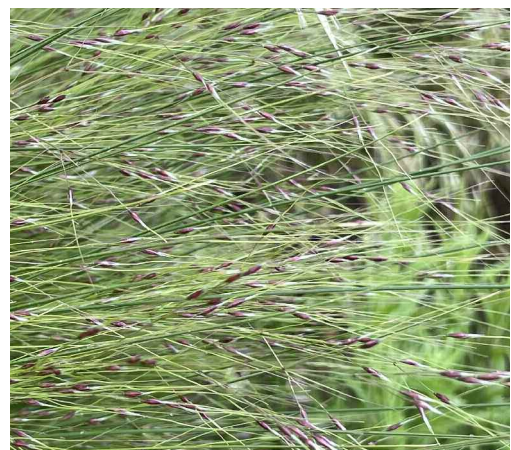
### **NDLG and MRSC have worked together to manage the CNG infestation.**

Control of the roadside infestation has been progressive – with NDLG volunteers putting in a mammoth effort in the first few years – removing seed heads prior to slashing / spraying (representing 1000s of potential new



A Serrated Tussock hiding (nearest bucket).

Below: Close up of Serrated Tussock seed.



plants); digging out many, many 100s of plants that had spread along the roadside in the 'slasher strips' and delivering copies of "Chilean Needlegrass: A Ute guide" to landowners on Three Chain Rd.

After MRSC assumed management of the major infestations in the Newham district, volunteer efforts shifted to scouting on foot each year in November for new or missed CNG plants along the roadside between the major infestations and then removing them manually.

The Shire has continued to invest funds on CNG – in education/increasing awareness of residents and in tackling CNG on roadsides outside the Newham area.

**A note of caution:**

Several types of native Spear Grass (*Stipa sp.*) that occur in our area have a superficial resemblance to CNG.

The CNG seed has a 'corona' at the base of its seed – visible by eye to many and felt as a sharp edge when you run your finger and thumb down the tail of the seed onto the seed itself.



Chilean Needlegrass (left) vs Native Speargrass (right).

See Jane's article on Grass identification for some useful resources.

**If anyone thinks they might have either noxious weed, Penny is happy to confirm an identification for you.**

## Community Environment Group End of Year Celebration

A few of us represented NDLG among Macedon Range's community environment groups at Hanging Rock on 1 December to hear Council's Krista Patterson-Majoor reflect on the year that has been and share plans and ideas for the year ahead for MRSC's Environment Department.



Biolinks Alliance spoke about their project with landholders

fencing and preserving native habitat on the Greenhill to Black Hill biolink, and John Walter about Upper Campaspe Landcare Network's Pollinator project and Insect booklet. Simon Purves, MRSC's Conservation Reserves Officer, led a tour of the conservation works being undertaken along Smokers Creek – he is doing a great job! We then enjoyed a BBQ dinner.

Thanks to the great enviro team at MRSC with whom we have a productive relationship.

Don't forget to sign up for the Shire Environment eNews at <https://www.mrsc.vic.gov.au/Live-Work/Environment/Environment-Events>

# Grass identification

Jane Trikojus

On Sunday 11 December Martin Roberts, Macedon Ranges Shire Council's Bushland Reserves Officer and Jason McAinch, Private Land Conservation Officer, led about 20 visitors on a walk-and-talk grass identification session across the northern section of Malmsbury Common. The area has been mined, cleared of trees and understory, and grazed.

They told us how important it is to avoid transporting seed on machinery, clothes or shoes – particular problems in the Shire are the seeds of Texas and Chilean Needle Grasses. These unpalatable grasses are considered some of Australia's worst weeds, as they are extremely hard to control because of their prolific seeding habit. If they invade pastures the sharp seeds can injure the eyes, skin and fleece of stock, severely reducing productivity. Chilean needle grass has hidden, self-fertilising seeds in the flowering stems. It can therefore reproduce despite grazing, slashing or fire. Martin and Jason also mentioned that the corona on the seed of the needle grasses is the best way to distinguish them from the seed of the native spear grasses, which have no corona. There are many resources advising on identification and treatment – some are listed at the end of this article.

We walked down and back up the slope, looking for species of native grasses and exotic weeds. While at first glance the Common appears to be a sea of Yorkshire Fog Grass, Rye Grass, Sweet Vernal Grass, Bent Grass, Texan Needle Grass, Meadow Foxtail, Phalaris and Brome Grasses to name a few, twenty native grasses have also been identified. We saw *Themeda* (Kangaroo Grass – photo on right), several Wallaby Grasses and Wheat Grass. We also spotted Bog Sedge, Native Dock, Willow Herb and Sweet Hound's Tongue.



A highlight was the contrast between clumps of fresh and vigorous *Themeda* in a section that had had a cool burn, and clumps of dry, senescing *Themeda* which were further down the un-burnt slope and were being smothered by surrounding vegetation and their own foliage. New growth comes from the centre of the tussock, near ground-level. The removal of exotic woody weeds like Gorse, and the absence of native understorey like Tree Violets, meant that there was no shelter for kangaroos and they had ceased visiting the slope to graze. This example drove home the point that all native grasses, including Poas and Spear grasses, need defoliating.

A few points we picked up on the ramble:

- Learning to identify when seed is ready to grow is important for control as well as collection: ripe seeds of some exude a creamy dough when separated from the husk and squeezed.
- Annual exotics pull up easily because their root system is shallow. Their seed only lasts in the soil for a year or two so they can be eradicated if prevented from setting seed.

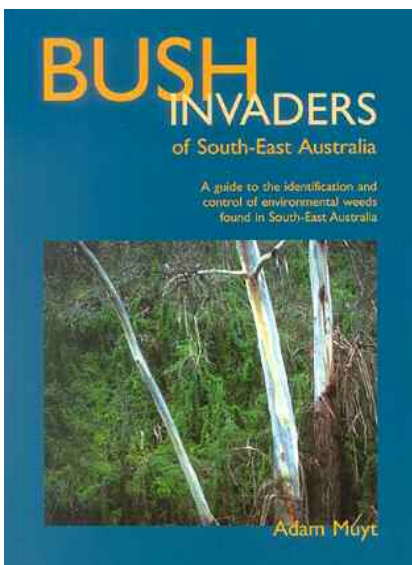
- Perennial native grasses can have roots going down a metre and a half making them far more valuable in terms of nutrition, erosion control, drought survival and fire management.
- Wallaby Grasses have hairy ligules and fluffy seed heads. NB Grasses can be hard to identify as there are many lookalikes.
- Cool burning and pulse-grazing can be used as well as spraying to manage weeds and encourage native grasses – seek advice from the Shire Council.

Thanks to Martin and Jason for their work on behalf of the environment and their willingness to share their knowledge.

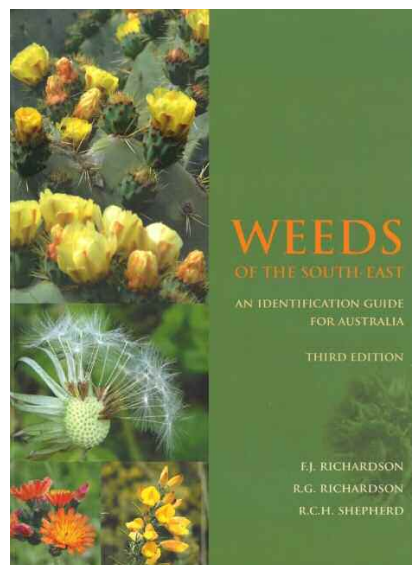
**N.B. Clare Claydon and Win Westerhoff are local seed collectors – they are happy to collect seeds of indigenous plants, but they mostly collect to order. Contact Clare on 0423 294 430 – the collecting season has already begun!**

## Some resources

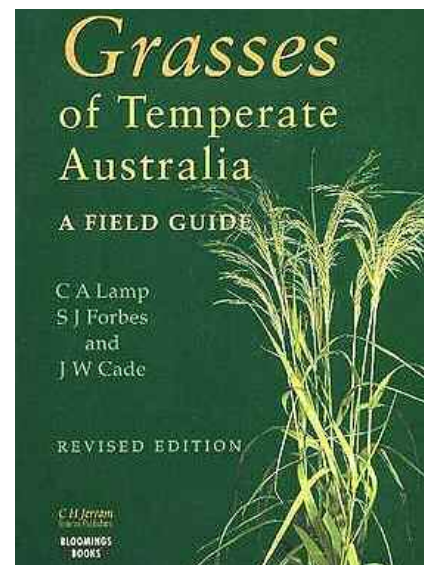
Martin showed these books:



2001 – out of print.



3rd ed. – 2016.



2001 ed.

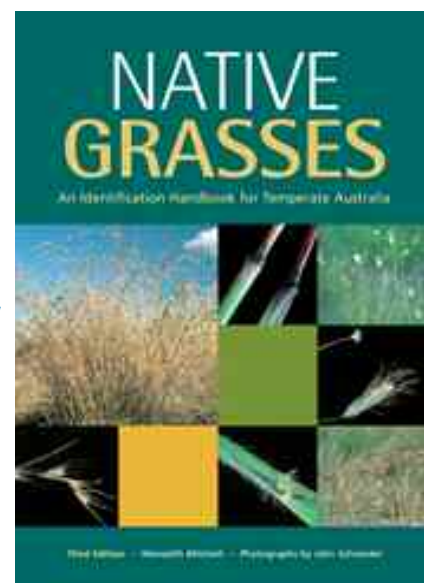
Some useful booklets to download can be found on NDLG's library list under Weeds - <https://newhamlandcare.info/library/>

(e.g. *Ute guide to Chilean and Texas Needle Grass: identification and management*. 2nd ed. Campaspe Valley Landcare Group, Dec. 2015; *Your Guide to the Weeds of Central Victoria*. Shire Councils of Macedon Ranges, Mitchell, and Mount Alexander, and South Western Goulburn Landcare Network, Nov.2015, 79p). Some are available from Shire information centres, along with *A bushwalkers guide to the flora of the Macedon Ranges*. Macedon Ranges Shire Council. June 2019, 98p.

The Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party has a vast range of resources at <http://serratedtussock.com/> – see the section on Identification.

The terrific booklet – *Native Grasses: An Identification Handbook for Temperate Australia*, 3rd edition by Meredith Mitchell, published by CSIRO in 2002 is only available now as an eBook <https://www.publish.csiro.au/book/2646/>

A community local Margaret Panter has produced two useful information sheets: one on distinguishing between needle and native grasses (pictured opposite) and the other on what to do to manage the weeds; online via Connecting Country at <https://connectingcountry.org.au/needle-grasses-and-native-grasses/>



## DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN **NEEDLE GRASSES** AND **NATIVE GRASSES**

### **Chilean Needle Grass** **(*Nassella neesiana*) (WEED)**



Photo: Charles Grech

At maturity, if plant is not mown, seed heads usually droop to one side. Seeds have a tiny collar (corona) where the long tail (awn) comes out of the seed.

### **Fine-head Spear Grass** **(*Auistrostipa oligostachya*) (NATIVE)**



Photo: Seed Conservation Centre Botanic Gdns SA

Can look similar to Chilean Needle Grass. The best way to tell them apart is that Spear Grass doesn't have a collar on its seed, and the seed is hairier. (See drawings of seeds on reverse side.)

### **Rough Spear Grass** **(*Auistrostipa scabra*) (NATIVE)**

Sometimes confused with Needle Grasses. Although it may look a bit purplish, it is much finer than Chilean Needle Grass and its leaves are rolled, not flat. Heads are normally fairly upright.



Photo: Sam Panter

### **Wallaby Grasses** **(*Rytidosperma* spp.) (NATIVES)**

Often found near Needle Grasses.



Photo: Seed Conservation Centre Botanic Gdns SA  
**Striped Wallaby Grass**

Awns on Wallaby Grass seeds are much finer and shorter than awns on Needle Grasses – see photos below.



Photo: F. Cincotta

**Copper-awned Wallaby Grass has flat leaves like Chilean Needle Grass but a fluffy seed head.**

### **Texas Needle Grass** **(*Nassella leucotricha*) (WEED)**



Photo: Em Perkins R&F Richardson

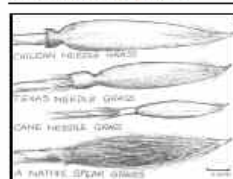
May look purplish, like Chilean Needle Grass, but is usually more upright.

### **Cane Needle Grass** **(*Nassella hyalina*) (WEED)**



Photo: David McLaren Photo: Euan Moore

May look similar to Texas Needle Grass, but is finer and wispiest and seeds and awns are smaller, and seeds often look yellowish at maturity.



Drawing: Margaret Panter

**Seeds of Chilean Needle Grass, Texas Needle Grass, Cane Needle Grass and a native Spear Grass magnified 5x**

### **Espartillo** **(*Amelichloa caudata*) (WEED)**



Photo: Bernard Slattery

Seed has an awn, but no corona. When mowed, tufts often feel sharp and spiky when a hand is placed on them.



Photo: Rob & Fiona Richardson

### **Large Tussock Grass** **(*Poa labillardieri*) (NATIVE)**

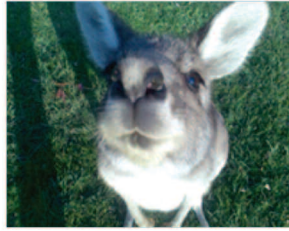


Photo: Ian Higgins

Leaves of the local form are folded, whereas Espartillo has rolled leaves that are much stiffer than those of Large Tussock Grass.

Leaflet from Margaret Panter 5470 5072 (7am-7pm)  
25 Jan 19

**Brigitte's  
Wildlife  
Blog**



Recently I spent a few days with family in Healesville. Of course we visited the Sanctuary and sampled some of the staples the Yarra Valley has on offer.

But what is for me a defining part of Healesville are the 'Bin Chickens,' also known as 'Tip Turkeys'. Not many people know them as 'White Ibis', an Australian native species that has incredibly adapted to changing environment and even has been shipped interstate.

Their story is absolutely fascinating and I can't help myself – I have just to share this with you.

Healesville Sanctuary opened in 1934 to preserve and showcase native Australian animals in their natural



habitat. And I believe to add 'native wildlife ambience' they encouraged the early tourists to feed bits of their picnic morsels to whatever wildlife was in the vicinity.

And guess what – instead of our multitude of visually pleasing and cuddly looking animals, our most weird and slightly hideous looking birds took up the challenge to engage with humans. And when I say 'slightly hideous' – they sure are not super cute.

But whatever their appearance – the White Ibises thrived on that challenge – they left their natural habitat of paddocks and floodplains nearby and their responsibility of being 'farmers helpers' by eating grubs out of the soft soil – they instead moved to Healesville





Sanctuary and ate picnic food. AND figured out how to find discarded picnic food in rubbish bins at the Sanctuary and later on in all the bins in the Healesville township.

By the 1970s other interstate wildlife sanctuaries and zoos also attempted to add 'wildlife ambience' to their program and looked at the Healesville Sanctuary Ibis model. And yep – you guessed it – they also wanted the very adaptable and people interactive Ibis on their grounds. Of course our Victorian Sanctuary agreed – they probably were pretty happy by then to get rid of a number of their birds. And I bet they failed to tell the interstate wildlife parks that the Healesville Ibises had learnt to raid bins.

Taronga Zoo in Sydney got 19 Ibises from Healesville early 1970s. With ALL the birds' knowledge where the good picnic food is coming from !!! (I think the current population is over 10,000 by now). Another wildlife park at the Gold Coast as well as Tidbinbilla in the ACT also imported a few of these bin-imprinted birds from Healesville Sanctuary.

Here is a link to a 1973 ABC news report on the arrival of the Australian White Ibis in Sydney. My favourite part is the description of this 'magnificent, graceful and decorative' bird. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-08-10/taronga-zoos-ibis-relocation-program-to-sydney/13977752>

The 'Bin Chickens' have charisma, determination, personality, character, are oddballs and are utterly bizarre looking. And I really like their survival and adaptation skills.

And now 50-odd years later our description of these birds has changed. I have seen kids chase and throw sticks at them. And yes, they sure are ugly things. But I remember flocks of them from ages ago in our paddock digging for those annoying weird pale grubs. And they were called 'Farmers Friends' all around the Newham community at that time. We still see them occasionally on our farm – both the white and the straw necked Ibis but no longer in the large flocks of the past. They must have all gone to Healesville.

## Indigenous plant seed balls workshop

On Sunday 2 October 2022 we held our first Indigenous plant seed ball making event at the Newham Mechanics Hall. This was a great fun event for all the adults and children who attended.

It was a real hand's on event where we learnt the history of seed ball use and recent local activity initiated by Upper Campaspe Landcare Network Facilitator Rebekah Ritchie.

Seed balls have been used for centuries as a means of sowing seeds. The Japanese farmer and philosopher, Masanobu Fukuoka, used them to reclaim land degraded by poor farming practices in rural Japan.

All those who attended took home all the seed balls they had made to use in their gardens and properties. It was great fun!

### Why seed balls?

- Seed balls help pollinators and can help grow wildflowers, trees, shrubs, grasses
- Garden with seed balls all year!
- Protects seeds from wind, birds, and other critters.
- Easy dispersal.

Seed balls make gardening easy, fun, and accessible, and can help our environment.

**Howard Stirling.**



# Forest Gardening

## **Healing Country Field Day in the Wombat Forest**

Recently DJAARA, the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation, hosted a field day presenting their contemporary philosophy and practice of their Galk-galk Dhelkunya (Forest Gardening) Strategy.

Forest Gardening is Djaara's approach to healing the harm done to Country by colonisation and wrong land management practises. It is developed from Djaara's traditional biocultural knowledge and stories and practiced in a contemporary context.

*"Forest Gardening is about getting Djaara back into landscapes. It heals us and it heals Country, and we lead the healing on our terms" – from the Strategy*

It was a very interesting day with attendees from community and Landcare groups, foresters, contractors, unions, academics and government. We visited a number of sites in the Wombat Forest.

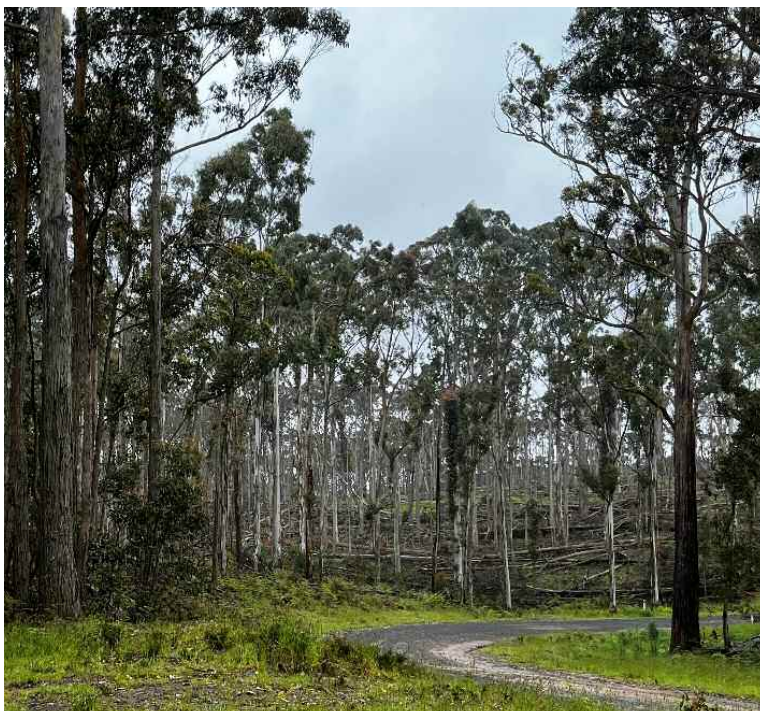
At the first site we reviewed and considered the effectiveness of current fuel reduction burning practices compared to cultural burning which would produce a mosaic of lower intensity burnt patches.

At the next site we looked at forest regrowth with trees choking each other and discussed how ongoing forest management is required to ecologically thin out the suppressed trees.

Next, a more contentious site was visited where processing and sale of the logs from windfall trees was occurring. The consensus here seemed to be that if this was to continue it needed to be done in a more sensitive and careful manner with smaller machinery. Such activity will open up patches and tracks in the forest which provides the opportunity for replanting native understorey species to improve the biodiversity.



*Rodney Carter – Dja Dja Wurrung Group CEO discussing healing Country and Djaara's Forest Gardening Strategy in the Wombat Forest.*



*Patches of uprooted trees from the June 2021 windstorm, Wombat Forest.*

It was great to hear from Djaara how they wanted to heal Country by applying Traditional Owner care in a contemporary, responsible and sustainable way.

As Rodney Carter – Dja Dja Wurrung Group CEO stressed (with apologies for my paraphrasing):

*Sharing our vision to return Country to health is so important. We have the greatest respect for you all and we understand that you love the forests. Djaara wants to lead and introduce our Galk-galk Dhelkunya to heal Country and ourselves. We can't do this alone, we need doers, friends and allies. And together we will ensure there can be a better future for all of us on Country.*

**Karl Kny.**

# Regenerative Grazing Field Day

*with Jason McAinch at Hesket*

On a cool and mostly sunny afternoon on 16 October 2022, a group of 14 locals gathered on Jess and Andy's Hesket property to learn from Jason McAinch how to be a productive farmer as well as a 'greenie'. Jason, the Private Land Conservation Officer with Macedon Ranges Shire Council (MRSC), is responsible for providing advice to land managers about regenerative grazing and related biodiversity management practices. Jason has a dairy farming background and experience as a farming extension officer and researcher.

*Regenerative grazing aims to increase perennial pasture species, including native species, while also maintaining species diversity. Through high intensity grazing regimes followed by long rest periods, the approach increases organic matter in the soils and facilitates all year round ground cover, protecting soils from sunlight and erosion. This approach increases soil health and improves water retention and drainage. Livestock benefit from a consistent and complete diet which results in improved health and productivity.*

For Jess as a second generation farmer and botanist, discovering Regenerative Grazing practices was a lightning bolt moment which resolved the conflict she had been experiencing between traditional grazing techniques on one hand and her efforts to preserve native grassland biodiversity on the other.

Her property has steepish north-facing slopes with a diversity of remnant native grass and herb species, despite having been ploughed and sown with various crops since the 1950s. She harvests and sells Weeping grass (*Microlaena stipoides*) and Kangaroo grass (*Themeda triandra*) seed as well as managing sheep for meat production. Farming is not the main income source for the family and the pastures are defined as low-fertility and the country as 'light-on', which was why it was maintained as a wood-lot until the 1930s when it was cleared.

She no longer cuts hay for winter feed as the property provides sufficient forage all year round. If extra bushfire management is required, they slash and mulch protection zones. On taking over the family farm 10 years ago, she was keen to manage it to preserve and favour native grass species which she observed were getting overgrazed by conventional practices in her three large and two small paddocks. Her 50 acres also required different management from the flatter, more fertile and pasture improved grazing land that she grew up on next door and currently also agists her stock on.



The field day began with Jess welcoming everyone and sharing the management story of her 50-acre property as well as the additional 60-acre agistment property, the former family farm next door. She currently has 40 Wiltipoll ewes which lamb yearly, 20 wethers, six alpacas and two horses and has just started grazing them as a single FLERD. The term FLERD is an acronym formed from FLock (of sheep) and hERD (of horses or alpacas). Jess has noticed that different animals prefer different grasses at different times, with horses healthier in Spring as the sheep quickly eat the rich grasses, leaving horses to eat the more suitable-for-them longer, higher roughage grasses. On the field day, the FLERD was grazing nearby in a small area of pasture and scattered Silver Wattle (*Acacia dealbata*) and indigenous shrubs behind a 3 strand movable 'Kiwitech' brand electric fence. They



are moved into a new grazing area every three days.

It has been two years since Jason McAinch first visited her property. Since then she has made modest and cost-effective changes that have enabled her now to be trialling FLERD grazing system with a three strand mobile electric fence set-up. Her transition towards regenerative grazing has focused on three realms: developing familiarity with movable electric fencing, increasing the number of water points for mobile water trough filling and, planting for increased stock shelter.

- 1) Familiarity with mobile electric fencing. Over the past year, Jess developed her skills with mobile fencing enabling stock to be moved every three days. She did this with a herd of six horses, two of her own and four of her sister's, grazing with a single electric wire fence which is easy compared to the 3-wire fence required for sheep. She was lucky to be doing this with her sister and together they experimented with grazing areas, impacts and how it compared to what they had learned on the family farm. This experience was valuable preparation for using the 3-strand electric fencing required for sheep and alpacas.
- 2) Increasing watering points. Over the last year, Jess connected three plumbing risers with hose attachments to an existing underground water pipe which meant that the movable water trough could be easily filled with a hose to each new grazing area in one of the large paddocks.
- 3) Stock Shelter. Jess has commenced planting shelter vegetation needed for protecting stock from sun, wind, and rain – this is a long-term project. In the short term she trialled using a movable 'sled shed' that her mum designed many years ago. However, is not big enough for the large 60+ FLERD and is laborious to drag by tractor every three days. The longer-term plan is to plant more low flammability groves of trees and shrubs and paddock trees as illustrated in the first photo in this article.

Jess benefitted recently from having bushfire ecology academic, David Cheal, visit on an NDLG field day in May 2022 – written up in the previous newsletter with the photo below. David was able to use Jess's property as a case study, suggesting low flammability native species and planting configurations for stock shelter that will also reduce wind speed and bushfire impacts.

Projects ahead for Jess are;

- Mounting the 'Kiwitech' mobile fence unit on the quad bike for ease of mobile fencing installation and movement.



- Putting in more water pipes with risers so that movable water troughs can be easily filled. In the longer term when she has a few years' experience with these water points and mobile fencing configurations, she will put these irrigation pipes underground permanently.
- Increasing stock shelter by planting copses of trees and shrubs as well as paddock trees across the property so that as the stock rotate around the farm, they have access to shade and shelter wherever they are.

In summary, Jess has enjoyed learning different grazing techniques in addition to the priceless traditional grazing methods she learnt growing up on her family farm. One of the advantages of maintaining three large open paddocks is that stock can move freely and shelter in bushfire conditions, sheep graziers' weather alerts or when a holiday is needed! It has been invaluable to be able to utilize the neighbouring agistment property, particularly after lambing and in winter. The agistment property also has multiple small paddocks (as a result of a past alpaca breeding business) that means Jess can do intensive grazing for 3-day periods without using mobile fencing.

She has benefitted from two farm visits from Jason McAinch over the last two years and recently completed a once monthly, 6-month Regenerative Grazing course run by Jason and local beef farmer Sam White from Pastoria. The personal support and friendships developed from the course, regular property visits to see how other's regenerative grazing is going and information sharing has been invaluable. Details of the course and more information about Regenerative Grazing is at the end of the article.

Jess is happy to discuss how she manages the property and the transition to regenerative grazing with all its delights and challenges. If anyone is interested to learn more, they are welcome to join her in moving the mobile fencing or planting some trees to help her as they talk. Please email her on [info@jess-szigethy.com.au](mailto:info@jess-szigethy.com.au)

After Jess's introduction, Jason commenced the formal field day presentation. He covered topics such as grass morphology and growth behaviour before and after grazing, perennial vs annual grasses, native vs introduced species, C4 summer active green grasses vs C3 winter active green grasses, transitioning from fertilizers and other inputs, weed control, consistency of feed all year, cut hay vs 'standing hay', biodiversity belts integrated throughout farms, carbon farming and soil biodiversity (it's all about the soil!). He noted an up to 30% increase in farm productivity using regenerative grazing methods and biodiversity improvements when done consistently over 3+ years. Jason showed us the two main structural types of grasses; ones with stolons/tillers and ones that are tufted grasses. He explained how heavy constant grazing tends to favour stoloniferous grasses and reduce species diversity. He also talked about Capeweed and how it thrives on exposed soil; instead of focusing on killing it, focus on (i) reducing stock opportunities to overgraze and stand for long periods in the same areas and, (ii) creating a diversity of species comprised of grasses and forbs.

Jason is an entertaining speaker gifted with the ability to provide clear and informative responses to people's individual queries.

Attendees came from a range of backgrounds and experience in managing their properties. The film *Kiss the Soil* was mentioned by one family as an inspiration to try Regenerative Grazing techniques.

Topics raised and discussed included:

1. What to do about Sweet Vernal Grass (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*) whose small purplish flower heads dominate some paddocks in early October until the other grasses start growing. Jason's perspective is to look at the big picture of grazing regeneratively which reduces the situation of stock only eating what they like most and leaving the less palatable Sweet Vernal Grass which then comes to dominate the many grazing paddocks. Newham Landcare members, Barry and Jenny Toll, provided some evidence of this. They have been grazing their herd of sheep for eight months regeneratively and have completed three grazing circuits of the farm. In this time, they have already noticed a reduction in the dominance of Sweet Vernal and Bent grasses (*Agrostis capillaris*) in the pasture. However, Jason said that it would take at least three years of doing regenerative grazing to an 80% standard before you really get pastures diversifying and dominants annuals like Sweet Vernal Grass and perennials like Bent Grass being reduced.
2. 'Where do we start?' Jason's advice was to get some electric fencing and just start experimenting!
3. What to do about kangaroos jumping over the fence? ...'they ruin the flow of cell grazing and grass regrowth!' In terms of grass consumption, they are equivalent to half a sheep and this question is a huge topic that couldn't be fully explored on the day. Jason's perspective is that kangaroo grazing is something most

farmers must accept to a certain extent. Having good stock fencing that females and their joeys can't squeeze under also reduces the number of male kangaroos who jump over the fence into paddocks, as they tend to stay with the females.

We finished the day by looking at the electric fencing and charger setup that Jess is using and talked about other fence setups and solar electric units. We



experimented with winding in and out some three strand electric fencing kits.

### **FURTHER INFORMATION**

The 6-month Regenerative Grazing course mentioned above is designed to help landowners identify and implement practical land management practices to improve grazing, productivity, soil health, biodiversity, and waterway health and is delivered as a partnership between Macedon Ranges, Hepburn and City of Greater Bendigo Councils.

MRSC also offers the following programs about regenerative agricultural practices to help you improve your land, soil, water, and livestock:

- Individual, free, on-farm advice
- Webinars, workshops, and field days
- Holistic Grazing Management short course
- Farmer discussion groups

See it all at <https://www.mrsc.vic.gov.au/Live-Work/Environment/Land-Management/Healthy-Landscapes>

Regenerative grazing as mimicking ruminant movement in the evolution of grasslands, a South African perspective <https://www.regenagsa.org.za/regenerative-grazing/>

Regenerative grazing is managed grazing where the farmer decides where and for how long the animals graze a particular patch of grass. Using this tool, the farmer is able to manage the under/over grazing issue. The idea is to mimic nature whose grasslands evolved in a symbiotic relationship involving four players – ruminants, predators, grasses and the soil microbiome. The result of this symbiotic interaction was that the grasslands became one of the dominant biomes of the world and the soils below the grasses became the most carbon rich soils on the planet. Grasses were maintained by moving herds of grazers and the herd effect of the ruminants' hooves, mouths, dung, and urine which stimulated and fertilized the soils which in turn fed the plants.

Conventional grazing is highly selective grazing and high-quality forages suffer under repeated grazing without sufficient time to recover. Over time this results in the less palatable grasses dominating and the whole ecosystem declining. By stopping selective overgrazing of palatable species and allowing grass appropriate rest periods it is possible to increase the cover of the grasses, the diversity of plants, the organic matter in the soil, the amount of photosynthesis and the biomass per square meter.

*Thanks to Jess Szigethy-Gyula for this informative article.*

### **RURAL LAND USE STRATEGY**

At the Macedon Ranges Shire Council meeting on 14 December it was resolved to not progress the current Rural Land Use Strategy project, after council officer recommendation. Many of us made submissions and may well be pleased at this outcome.

# Restoring native grasslands

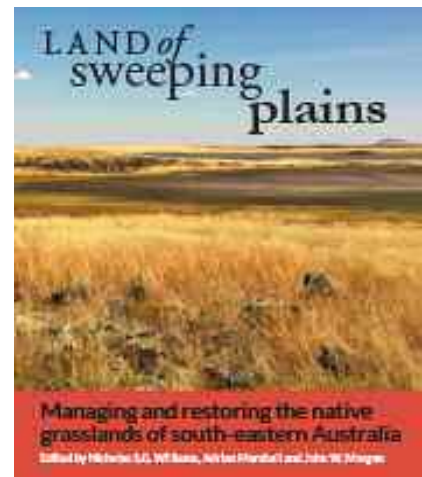
This is the topic addressed by the inimitable Landcarer Stephen Murphy, of Recreating the Country, in his latest blog posts – <https://www.recreatingthecountry.com.au/blog>

**In Part 1** he describes the plant diversity of grasses and forbs (flowering native herbs) on native grasslands pre settlement, as 'herb rich pantry-lands' or 'medicinal herb-lands'. This is because the Traditional Owners managed grasslands for their traditional uses as food and medicines, as well as the ecologies that the diversity of plants supported. He illustrates what has happened since with the intense grazing pressure of sheep and cattle and destructive wildfire. Some of our best examples of remnant grasslands are found on roadsides, sustained partly by burning for firebreaks, though autumn rather than spring burning is better. <https://www.recreatingthecountry.com.au/blog/restoring-native-grasslands-part-1>

**In Part 2** he explores what we can learn from the people like farmers and scientists who have been successful at bringing back native grasslands. This where Regenerative Agriculture comes in, as illustrated in our last newsletter and this one about Jess Szigethy's property. Some techniques are: no tilling, holistic grazing, direct drilling grain crops in winter, minimal use of fertiliser/pesticide/herbicide, soil inoculation for microbial action, bulk seed production. <https://www.recreatingthecountry.com.au/blog/restoring-native-grasslands-part-2>

**In Part 3** coming in December, he outlines a low cost and adaptable method that could be used to restore grasslands at a small or a large scale. It will contain the Table of Champions – a list of hardy indigenous grassland plants that have the potential to turn the tables on those unwelcome sneaky exotic weeds. The champion's list presently includes 70 species, 51 genera and 23 families from central Victoria.

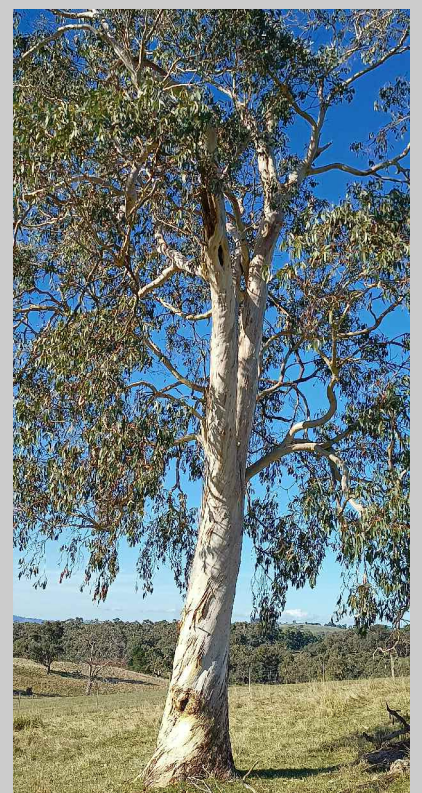
In NDLG newsletter no.55 in 2019 Penny wrote about a 2017 presentation to us on *Restoring Australian Grasslands* (p.10-13) and Helen Scott reviewed a great book called *Land of sweeping plains – Managing and restoring the native grasslands of south-eastern Australia* by CSIRO (p.14-16). [https://newhamlandcare.info/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/55\\_NDLG-Newsletter\\_Summer\\_2019.pdf](https://newhamlandcare.info/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/55_NDLG-Newsletter_Summer_2019.pdf)



## Caring for large old trees

At Connecting Country's AGM in November, ecologist Chris Pocknee from Biolinks Alliance discussed the complex interaction between old trees and the wildlife that depend on them, and the role old trees play in agricultural productivity and habitat connectivity. The threats facing old trees, and native animals and ecosystems they support, were tied in with how we can address these issues to conserve old trees.

Recent academic studies have concluded that some woodland birds depend upon old scattered trees across the landscape more than dense vegetation belts. You can download his presentation via <https://connectingcountry.org.au/large-old-trees-draw-a-large-crowd-our-agm-2022/>



# Newham rainfall report

## BRUCE HEDGE

Coordinates: 37° 16' 22"S 144° 35' 50"E. January 2022

### August to November rain at Newham

Well, where do we start? This will not be a boring business-as-usual report. Haven't had a spring like this since I started recording rain here in 1979. The raw bland numbers just don't reflect this spring at all. So here goes. August started the wet season with 128mm, followed by September with 115mm. (all corrected to nearest millimetre).

Which brings us to October. Yes, October smashed all previous monthly records with 257mm, including 133mm on the 13th/14th. The previous wettest month was January 2011, with 'only' 209mm. If you'd thought we might be reprieved, November rolls up with 126mm, including 43mm on the 20th. 1000mm for the year clicked over on November 21st, and year to date on November 30th stood at 1017mm. Paradoxically, we're probably not going to get to my wettest year's figures which were in 2010, when we had 1183mm for the year, but as we've observed before, nothing is certain. Over that 2010-2011 period, we had eight consecutive months of over 100mm from June to January. I remember my dam still overflowing in mid January! This Year's figures are down on that period, with a relatively dry start to December.

Of course, the other remarkable weather event has been the extraordinarily cold spring days. My apple flowering was about three weeks later than usual, and the grey overcast skies didn't help the bees to get out and pollinate the trees. Those that have set fruit are showing fungal disease (black spot) but some varieties are naturally resistant to that, and could be OK. I have no temperature records, so it's purely anecdotal, but I can't remember a time when I couldn't get the tomatoes in till December. The long range forecast is for above average rain over summer, when most models suggest La Nina will have neutralised by mid-late summer. The one bright spot might be another benign fire season. Here's to 2023.

Rainfall recorded in Central Woodend as follows: August 130mm; September 151mm; October 234mm; and November 107mm, but a year-to-date at the end of November of 1105mm – 10% more than Newham.

## Rabbit Control – Bunnies in my backyard

5 February 2023 event

Are you having problems with rabbits on your property? You are not alone. Join Macedon Ranges Shire Council and Victorian Rabbit Action Network (VRAN) presenter, Tim Bloomfield, for a field visit and information session on how to manage rabbits on your urban property.

In this workshop, you will:

- listen to a rabbit control expert
- create awareness about how to eradicate rabbits with integrated pest management control methods
- look at potential control techniques that can be applied on an urban property.

The workshop will be held at Magnet Hill in New Gisborne. Entry is via an unnamed road off Magnet Lane. More details will follow once registered.

This is an outside event, so make sure you wear appropriate clothing and footwear. This event will be held on Sunday 5 February 2023 from 9:30am–11:30am,

to register go to <https://www.mrsc.vic.gov.au/See-Do/Events/Whats-on-around-the-shire/Rabbit-Control-Bunnies-in-my-backyard>

