

Fellow Residents of Lochiel Park and Grassland Volunteers including Circle Champions

This is an update on the Australian Native Grassland Meadow, being established in the LP Urban Forest north of the Northern Wetlands. And what is being done and needs to be done. (See the Bottom: More Information)

And a request for your help next Saturday October 26, 9 -10.30am



This beautiful ***Epilobium Willow - Herb*** that curls so elegantly was captured by our honorary photographer Aussie Kanck last year as it flourished and went into its curly mode to flip its seeds out. Glorious, unusual plant.

They are *very* numerous, though small, and spread in groups across many parts of the Grassland. This year Look for their red stems and (now empty) curly seed pods. They are one of our many true successes in self-seeding. On the right picture, you can just see one surrounded by pesky barley grass. We can't get in with the whipper snipper. It needs someone to come and clear around it so that this Epibolium is good as it can be in this dry year. Will do it please?

Spring is action in the Grassland: Grasses and other plants are growing from seed that fell last summer and autumn. Some are the native Australian perennial grasses They are clumping up strongly as well as germinating new plants from seed. Others are the herbs, forbs, groundsels, lilies etc that also make a grassland home.

Harder for us to see and make assumptions about are the small fauna that have made our Grassland home. They contribute to and benefit from a growing and vast biodiversity in this formerly barren area.

Our Experience so Far:

During the early establishment phase of the Grassland, since the first few plantings in late winter 2020, there have been pretty good conditions. Ie wet autumns and warm springs with hot summers. Each winter since 2020 the FoLP community have planted carefully selected plants with a pretty good success rate. In fact some species have done very well indeed. Many species have established strong underground root systems, no doubt with mycorrhizal fungal connections that allow them to communicate with each other.

The Weather is different this year: Low rainfall this year has seen less obvious, but early and quick activity from some of the herbs, forbs and flowering plants. They have gone through their seeding cycle already. We can safely assume that others may be biding their time until the return of a more favourable season. The Grasses though are definitely active. You can see stands of them healthy and strong. I urge you to have a slow look as you stroll by. Some heads are fluttering high and shining and the windy spring conditions, - tall and beautiful. Others are less obvious but their clumps are clearly enlarging and strong. Seed is abundant.

What are we doing about the weeds this year? Well it's a different bunch of weeds this year making a nuisance of themselves. Pesky and opportunistic, they too are moving ultra quickly and earlier through their life cycles. They get a bit of rain and some spring sunshine and its Ready, Set, Go!

Seed germinates, plant grows, flowers emerge, seed matures and drop! Job Done! Accelerated by the dry conditions. They know that they have to move quickly this year before the dryness dessicates them.

'Off with their Heads!' last week. Take no prisoners! The whipper snippers were and still are out this week, as the seeds approach maturity. Barley grass and several species of Bromes seem to be the dominant weeds this year. All that can be reached by whipper snipper will be done by Friday next..

Now What??

There will be a couple of jobs to be done after 'Off with their Heads! by whipper snipper is done. It needs a lot of people doing a bit of fiddly work. We hope that you can be one of them.

1. Pull out the 'thatch'

The 'thatch' in a native grass clump, ie the dried dead material from past years, can eventually 'choke' a Native grass clump. Some people, small

raking tools or gloved hands, like to sit down on the job, or kneel, for this one. Others with long handled rakes, do it standing up.

This allows new clumping to occur. In addition, if the soil around the plant is bare, ie free of leaf and grass litter, then fallen seed can germinate when the autumn rains come next year. This applies to all native plants, not just the grasses.

2. **Pull or cut spindly weeds that are growing *in* the grasses.** The whipper snipper could not get to them without also taking the grass stems. **It'd the seed heads we need to remove.**

3. **Collect the vandalised stakes that are strewn across the ground** and bring them back to the FoLP enclosure in the Community Garden. There will be a trolley for the purpose.

Grassland Working Bee on Saturday 26 October 9 – 10.30am.

Bring gloves, a bucket, and secateurs and you might like a kneeling pad or low stool. Hat and water.

Other useful items: Garden rake, steel leaf rake (most are expandable), those short handled 3 or 4 pronged weeding/ furrow tools, wheelie bins.

For More Information on the Grassland this year, read the Circle Champions bit below then go a bit further down.

A special note to Circle Champions.

I think you will find observing what is happening this year in your Circle interesting and different from the previous wetter years. We can clearly see plants in their survival mode as the dry kicks in. I would encourage you to observe, and clear around your special plants to save them from invasion. Even cut them off at or just below ground level not to disturb the root zone of good neighbours. Each circle looks very different from each other. Those with more grasses in their circle will see the intertussock spaces being clearly defined as grasses communicate and leave space between each other. Not so many little flowering beauties this year, but strong grasses. Watch for malvas (Australian Hollyhock) They have spread across the Grassland. *Do not mistake them for the weedy mallows we vigorously pull out elsewhere in Lochiel Park. Leave them in doubt.*

More Information

Weedy grasses are present but in an entirely different way this year. No longer are thistles, nettles and the like dominating. Remember our weed pulling working bees moving from one end of the site to the other? Well it worked. We hardly see any of

those pesky weeds in our grassland now. Hurrah! We might say. But this dry season has brought to light *Barley Grass and Brome species*.

Where did they come from? The bromes are in such profusion that one can reasonably guess that the seed has been there, in the soil, waiting for an opportunity. It is unlikely that in this location, enough seed would have blown in, and from where in such profusion?

Weed removal is into a new phase to reduce handweeding.

We all knew that hand weeding was not sustainable in the long term and we have been looking at additional methods. In the last 2 years we have tried a slow burn, scorching with a gas flame, and selective whipper snipping.

And significantly, hand weeding has continued in the urban forest immediately to the east of the Grassland and this year's piles made mostly by Linda McCalister and Peter Stokes are clearly in evidence at the site. This is not the only site where they have been working, The Southern smaller Grassland is in their care. Wow is that area any good!

Now that weedy seed heads are approaching maturity judicious whipper snipping in an "off with their heads!" effort is under way every day this week. That work is being done by, Ann Prescott our Grassland consultant and mentor, as well as me. We hope to be finished by Friday next and we expect to catch most of the seed heads. It depends on the weather. We will not get every single seed of course, but by gum we are giving them a run for their money.

Setbacks in the last Year

You may have noticed vandalism in the Grassland throughout the winter. This is most noticeably with label stakes, as well as purple and big brown stakes pulled out or snapped off. It is a bitter blow, because we have lost key identifiers. We have not decided what to do about stakes as yet but we do need to collect and store them..

And. . . . last years plantings that we got from one of our key suppliers were too immature to plant out and they were put in late ahead of a dry season. In hindsight, maybe our Team should not have accepted them and asked for them to be grown on to the next year. But we are amateurs of course and make mistakes. And as the season has shown that this winter may have been too dry anyway.

Huge wins this Year

On the eastern side of the wooded area, along the ridges of the mounds, you can see many red topped stakes, a signature sign that the FoLP planting team have dropped by. What a planting! That area will become a visual and plant border to the area we and Council designate as the Australian Native Grassland Meadow of Lochiel Park. This is intensive shrubbery planting by FoLP to create a strong visual and physical barrier which should help to alert contractors not to enter. We may also get temporary signs up next year in about July through October.

Ahead:

1. Indiscriminate spraying by Council contractors is still a problem. No spray should enter the Grassland at all. We must all be super vigilant.
2. We wonder also about the Circle Champion Program as barely a third of Circles were taken up.
3. This was always a long term project with specialist advice and plantings and ongoing maintenance requirements. The plants are long haul plants, so we must be too. So certainly succession of management is on our minds and anybody with ideas, and/or interest in joining the Team, please come forward and chat to Willie, Peter Larsson, Peter Stokes.

Di Sullivan

Australian Native Grassland Meadow Team

Member Friends of Lochiel Park