Report on last meeting by Jenny Liney and Amanda Marsh …… Grasslands

Photos by Amanda

To the human race, probably one of the most important suite of plant species is that of grasses. Without grass, the diversity of life on earth would not exist. Many invertebrates eat grass (dead or alive), others use it as nesting material. Herbivorous animals eat grass; carnivores eat the herbivores that have eaten grass; and old grass enriches the soil during the process of decomposition.

Grasses are essential for life on Planet Earth. People eat grass seeds – wheat, oats, barley; use grass stems; eat meat that has eaten grass – cattle, sheep; and meat that has eaten grass seeds – pork, chook. For much of *Homo sapiens'* general well-being, they depend on parts of animals that live on grass. And yet they seldom give grasses more than a passing thought, even though there are more grass species (both native and introduced) than any other plant species in this country – some 1400.

While the economic value of grasses is incalculable, of more interest is the ecological importance of grasslands and grassy woodlands. At the time of white settlement, native grasslands were the most extensive vegetation type in the country. Today, some 98% of these lands have been cleared, modified, overtaken by woody species (either introduced or native), or sown to exotic grass species (so-called improved pastures).

The management techniques to maintain these remnant areas are as varied as the areas themselves, and it depends to a large extent on the desired outcome. Management of a native grassland for grazing can involve burning, stocking regimes and weed eradication. To maintain a good healthy grassland in a reserved environment could also involve the same, and other strategies, according to conditions.

Grasslands are never - well, hardly ever - composed entirely of grass. Although by definition they are dominated by grass species, they also contain numerous herbs and small woody plants; for example, daisies, peas, orchids, little bulbous species, and soft stemmed annuals and perennials that occupy the spaces between the tussocks, clumps and rhizomes of grasses. And, it must be said, many of these are listed as weeds.

Many of the remaining grasslands exist almost by default. They can be found alongside roads and railways, stock routes and TSRs (Travelling Stock Reserves), old cemeteries, grassy coastal headlands and vacant land. Others in privately owned properties may, or may not, be in good hands. Many have been acquired by local Councils and managed as Council reserves, with varying degrees of success.

REFERENCES

Australian Government, *State of the environment, 2006;* Department of Environment and Energy, 2006

Kirkpatrick, J, et al *Australia's most threatened ecosystems;* Surrey Beattie & Sons, Sydney: 1995

NSW Government; *Understanding our native grasslands*; NaturalResources Advisory Council, 2010

Carolyn and Mark Noake's property was again the venue for the September activity and the threat of rain and gale force winds did not deter a large group of native grassland enthusiasts, which was made up from APS and Friends of Grasslands.

The wind danced through the treetops as the meeting began, but it didn't interfere with a very interesting and informative talk on the history and activities of the Friends of Grasslands given by Geoffrey Robertson.

The rain rounded off the talk as we headed for our wet-weather gear and a walk around Carolyn and Mark's property. Thankfully the rain didn't last long and we were able to enjoy a close inspection of the grassland species that grow amongst the wonderful display of Grevilleas.

Carolyn points out which grass is which

Carolyn explained how she is working towards the re-establishment of the native grasses on the property and her hard work was very evident.

APS members Jenny Liney and Jackie Miles shared their expertise along with that of the Friends of Grasslands, with an extensive species list being produced.

Following lunch we were joined by Eurobodalla Shire's Environment Team member Courtney Fink-Downes, who outlined the work she and others in the Environment team are doing to re-generate and preserve native grasslands in this area and thru-out the Shire. Courtney then led us on a meander thru the wooded grassland reserve that runs along the Moruya River, this also includes the old Glenduart Cemetery.

Courtney's enthusiasm for her job, not only by giving up part of her weekend to talk to us about it, was evident and we would like to thank her and wish her well with the ongoing task of protecting and preserving the grasslands of the Eurobodalla.

Our thanks also go to Jenny Liney and Jackie Miles for sharing their expertise and a special thankyou to yet again Carolyn and Mark for their gracious hospitality.

Courtney explains her role at Glenduart

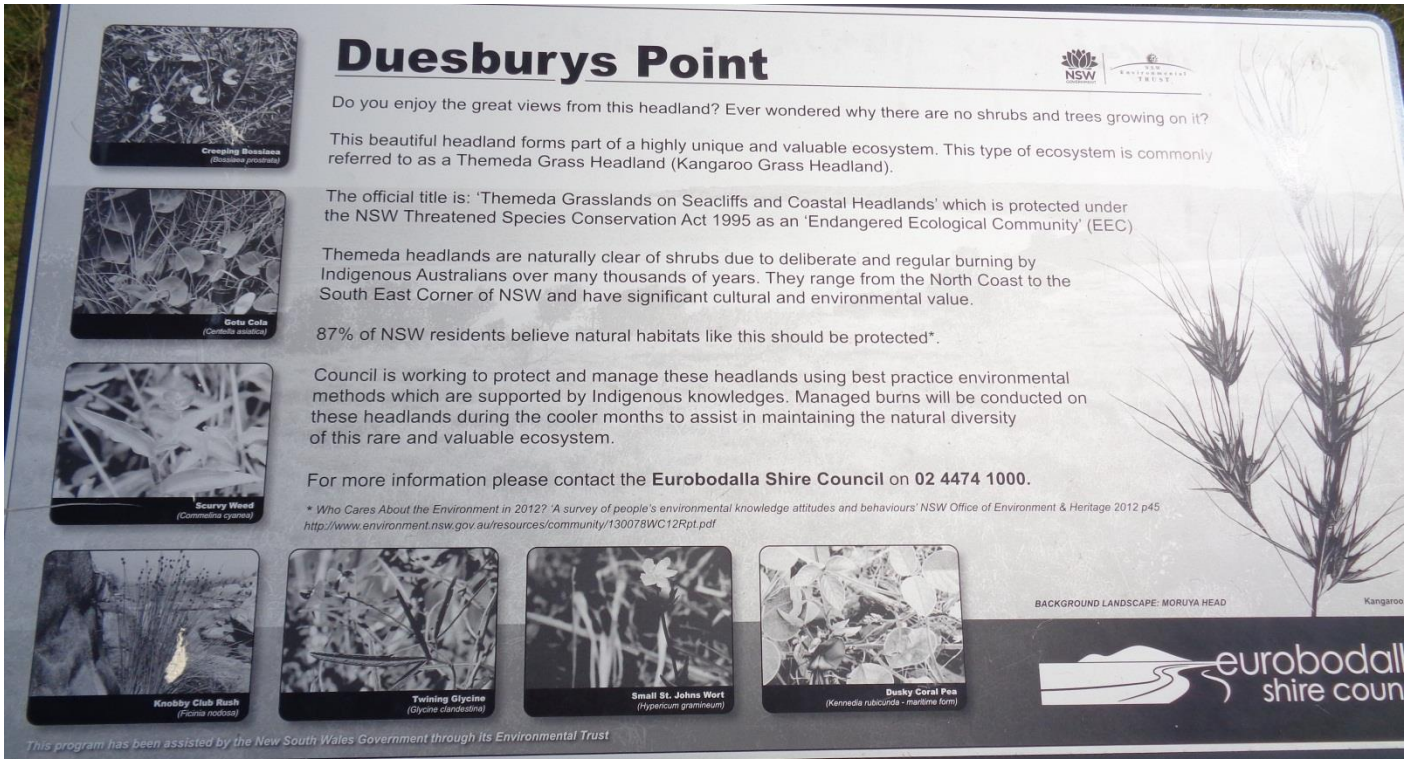
Some APS members joined The Friends of Grassland as they headed off to Toragy Headland to inspect the condition of this Themeda Grassland.

Themeda triandra grassland

On sunny Sunday, led by Jackie Miles, the Friends of Grasslands as well as seven APS members, headed south to Bingie and Dalmeny Headlands, where the aim again was to inspect the condition of the headlands and to compare the difference in the management of these ecosystems by National Parks and the Eurobodalla Shire.

"Themeda Grasslands on Seacliffs and Coastal Headlands" are protected under EEC guidelines.

APS would like to thank Friends of Grasslands, especially Ann, Margaret and Geoff for including us in this activity.



Detailed information signage explains the value of the reserve at Duesburys Point

Jackie Miles completed a quick assessment of the visits and produced a list of plants other than grasses, which is presented below. This illustrates how diverse grasslands can be when managed sympathetically.

Herbs

Dichondra repens, Centella asiatica, Viola betonicifolia, Glycine microphylla, Glycine tabacina, Desmodium varians, Laxmannia gracilis, Dianella longifolia, Tricoryne elatior, Arthropodium milleflorum, Lomandra Longifolia, Lomandra filiformis ssp filiformis, Oxlis sp., Euchiton japonicas (= gymnocephalus), Crassula sieberi, Wahlenbergia sp., Ranunculus lappaceus, Scleranthus fasciculatus,

Orchids

Diuris sulphurea, Spiranthes sinensis, Cryptostylis subulata