

OBJECT: To foster an interest in nature

October 2014
ISSN: 1836-2761



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FIELD NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA INC.

FIELD NATURALIST

MEETING—THURSDAY 2 October 2014
7:30 pm Australian National University
Gould Seminar Room, Building 116, Daley Road, ANU, ACT
details back page

Grasslands and their care

Speaker: Ken Hodgkinson

Ken is a Research Fellow of Ecology, CSIRO Ecosystem Sciences and Australian National University



Contents

Wattle Day Dreaming	2
Rare phenomenon	4
<i>Ngunnawal Plant Use</i>	4
<i>Wurmbea dioica</i> : early Nancy	5
Activities	5

Wattle Day Dreaming

Address to the Friends of the Australian National Botanic Gardens

Thursday 4 September 2014

Good afternoon. It is great to once again be speaking to the Friends of the ANBG. I say that for several reasons. One is that our Association is a member of the Friends organisation, so we share much in common. It is particularly great to be with you today because Friends of the ANBG are friends of the Wattle.

I also acknowledge those other great friends of the wattle, the Ngunnawal people of this region, who have lived with and cared for our wattles for thousands of years. We acknowledge them and thank them for their custodianship.

When I last spoke to this forum in 2011 my talk was entitled: Wattle Day – An essential part of the Australian narrative. It was subtitled: Let the witness speak!

That witness was and is the Wattle. I think of our wattle as the great witness to the whole of the Australian story. I also pointed out at the time that:

- our travelling companion on continent Australia is a very patient and eloquent witness; and
- that the wattle has taught us two things about surviving and thriving in this land - Resilience and Adaption.
- I also made the point that we have been hesitant to embrace the wattle and haven't yet given it its rightful place in our nation's thinking and affairs.

So what progress have we made in that 35 million years or perhaps just 200 plus years? As advocates of wattle it is appropriate that we take a longer view of these things, in the spirit of the resilience that sustained the wattle over those 35 million years.

Against this frame, we have in fact made significant progress. Since the first nationally co-ordinated Wattle Day celebrations in 1910, we have now passed the centenary of National Wattle Day celebrations. The dates of 1988 and 1992 are

highly significant in that story, as we have seen.

In the last 22 years we have endeavoured to recapture some of the awareness of wattle and its symbolism that is evident from earlier times and the photos you have seen.

100 years ago this week the Newcastle Herald said: *“There should be few citizens seen in the streets today without a sprig of golden wattle. To display such will show that the appeal to the sentiment of nationality has not been in vain and the wearer has given something towards the fund to succour those who are going forward to fight the Empire's battles”*. The link at that time was towards funds raised to assist those helping to prepare kit bags for Australian soldiers and comforts for those who may be wounded. A link between symbolism and engagement – an abiding feature of Wattle Days down the years.

So 100 years on from 1914, where does Wattle stand in the landscape of our 21st century nation, Australia? My short answer to that question is: **Poised and Ready**.

To understand this we need to acknowledge several factors:

- We are now a continent with 100 years of successful modern nation building experience;
- The sentiment of Australians in 2014 is quite different to that of 1914 or 1901;
- We are now a less sentimental and more matter of fact community - economically, socially and spiritually;

But that is not to say that we don't have a warm sentiment, just that we do express ourselves differently and we as wattle advocates need to pitch our message in ways that connect with the Australians of today and tomorrow.

We are also no longer a nation that sees itself as a last outpost of a far flung empire. That said it is fair to say we consider ourselves

independent but perhaps we don't really feel comfortable in acting accordingly. We like to have a big friend close by;

- As a nation we are moving inexorably closer to Asia, just as a continent we are drifting northwards; and
- We still have unfinished business to be fully independent and complete in our constitutional arrangements.
- At Citizenship Ceremonies two weeks ago we invited new citizens to pledge their allegiance to this land, Australia, yet at the heart of our constitutional arrangements it is true that we remain a domain of a monarch residing in a land thousands of kilometres away.

So we still have nation building to do, to truly become who we are.

Last Friday, when we accompanied a group of school children to Government House to present wattle to the Governor-General on behalf of the children of Australia, His Excellency encouraged us to promote the use of wattle at Citizenship Ceremonies around the country. That support, a validation of what we have been doing in Canberra for many years, is a powerful endorsement of our mission – to promote wattle as Australia's national floral emblem and symbol of national unity and National Wattle Day. This is clearly a signpost for the future.

In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, wattle was often used as a **signpost**. It announced, in different places, the coming of the whales, the eels and the Bogong Moths.

Might our patient travelling companion be also a signpost of a future that we are yet to embrace, perhaps unnecessarily hesitant to embrace? For instance:

- Every year in late January we observe the emerging expression in our collective hearts that for many, Australia Day makes us feel uncomfortable. We know

it causes pain to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the day their land and much of their culture was taken from them.

- To know that is so is one thing. To dismiss that pain is something else. To recognise that pain and seek to remove it takes us somewhere else. It leads us to consider that real reconciliation would seek to remove this pain rather than renew it each year. As our own dear member and Canberra icon, Dawn Waterhouse has said in a special message this week on the Wattle Day website: Wattle Day “*hopefully opens our minds to change*”. She goes on to add:

“Our National Day should have no political or historical significance other than celebrating the ancient plant that had its feet in the soil long before the first footsteps of mankind. The first day of spring would be the ideal day for us all to celebrate our National Day and our national flower.”

These words remind me of the comments made by historian Mark McKenna at a forum we held in 2007. McKenna spoke of Manning Clark’s love of wattle and the fact that for him “*its appeal was not first and foremost to the idea of the nation but to the idea of place*”.

So the Governor-General’s strong support for wattle as a powerful symbol for Citizenship Ceremonies and the questioning in our hearts that seeks a solution to the Australia Day pain for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, are perhaps two signposts to the future for National Wattle Day. Others could be:

- the prospect of **Bravery Awards** being announced at the time of National Wattle Day, rather than as currently occurs, late in August. Such a step would add to the social collateral around Wattle Day, create a broader focus for it in the community and engage a wider group of Australians on what are inspiring and uplifting stories of courage and self-sacrifice.
- Of course there is always the prospect that **Order of Australia** awards could be announced on National Wattle Day (1 September) rather than on the June Queen’s Birthday

weekend, which in any case is not observed nationally in a consistent manner or date.

- Another element that a broader celebration on the first day of spring, could be developed by the greater recognition on that day of **respecting and caring for the land** that has sustained the wattle for 35 million years and which we would want to ensure is able to do so and to provide our own sustenance for many years to come. This was strongly advocated by former Governor-General Michael Jefferies.

The work the Wattle Day Association has done in recent years increasingly enables us to let the wattle speak and be heard by Australians around the nation and to encourage greater recognition of wattle. Our website is a great resource, regularly commented on by others and a repository of knowledge and resources for those who advocate on behalf of the wattle. Social media is an area where, through our Facebook page, we have begun to engage with Australians, particularly young citizens, on an on-going basis throughout the year.

At this stage we need further champions with status in the community, and preferably with largish pockets to enable us to take our efforts to another level of community and government recognition. We also need members and committee members to help us with this.

I am keen to extend an invitation today to our friends here at the National Botanic Gardens to join us in our efforts to promote National Wattle Day. We can offer you excitement and satisfaction, tailored to your capacity to contribute. Feel free to talk to one of our committee here today. You will be most welcome to join us and become involved.

In doing so you will be part of something that contributes in a real sense to our nation building. It will help us build the focus and recognition of National Wattle Day.

Our badge project with its links to Bushfire Brigades here in the ACT is a perfect fit for wattle, in the spirit of the great social history of Wattle Day. But we want and need to make it work better and extend it beyond the boundaries of the ACT. To achieve that we need an engaged national sponsor to get behind, what

we have proven in concept, is a worthwhile and workable initiative.

Joining the WDA and participating in our great task will help to give us the organisational clout and capacity that we need to take advantage of the opportunities identified above, to celebrate the symbolism and day that has no baggage – just inspiration.

In recent months the Association has had discussions with several Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives and organisations. Some of those with whom we have met have since joined our Association. One in particular, Tammy Solonec, a young Nyikina woman from the Kimberley in WA and an elected member of the Congress of Australia’s First Peoples, is a passionate advocate not just for National Wattle Day, but for it to become our national Day.

We will continue to talk with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. These discussions are a journey of discovery, learning and understanding– in the spirit of the wattle. We are indebted to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for their care of the continent and its wattles over many millennia. Our discussions will soon lead us to a meeting with the Reconciliation Australia to explore what role the wattle and National Wattle Day may be able to play at this time in our nation’s journey.

So our wattle **is poised and ready** to play its role in our nation’s future. But it needs helpers.

To return to the theme of my earlier address. We, the Wattle Day Association, **are** giving voice to the wattle. We **are** bringing the wattle into the conversation on our nation’s future. We **are** letting the great witness to our story, share its wisdom. The wisdom of the wattle is something that enriches us all. We **should** dream of a future for all Australians that respects and draws strength from the land that sustains us. We **should** dream of a future Australia in which Wattle and National Wattle Day, are not only honoured but inspire us all annually, in a reconciled nation under the Southern Cross. Thank you

**Terry Fewtrell
President**

**Wattle Day Association Inc.
4 September 2014**

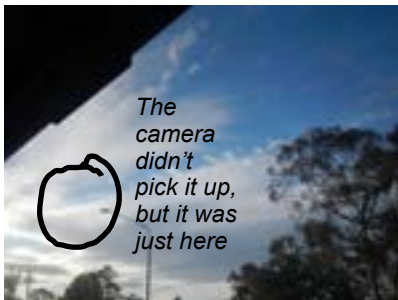
Rare phenomenon

I have been privileged to witness a rare or at least uncommon phenomenon. Nearing the Belconnen bus interchange on last Thursday I glanced up from my book and was amazed at seeing what looked like an oil slick of colours in the clouds, in just one spot.

At first I didn't believe what I was seeing and thought it might have been a deflection of the sun through the bus window, I soon realised it wasn't.

I didn't have time to take out my camera, but boarding my next bus moments later, I took the same seat and could again see the rainbow colours in the clouds, though now much faded. I took a photo but as expected the colours were too faded to be captured on a pocket camera.

At the time the sun was setting a little below and to the west of the clouds.



A Google search found this photo showing a similar effect, though what I saw was a more circular display.



Wikipedia had this to say:

Cloud iridescence is the occurrence of colours in a cloud similar to those seen in oil films on puddles, and is similar to iridisation. It is a fairly uncommon phenomenon, most often observed in altocumulus, cirrocumulus, lenticular clouds and cirrus clouds. The colours are usually pastel, but can be very vivid. Iridescence is generally produced near the sun, with the sun's glare masking it, so it is more easily seen by hiding the sun behind a tree or building.

Iridescent clouds are a diffraction phenomenon caused by small water droplets or small ice crystals individually scattering light. Larger ice crystals produce halos.

If parts of clouds have small droplets or crystals of similar size, their cumulative effect is seen as colours. The cloud must be optically thin, so that most rays encounter only a single droplet. Iridescence is therefore mostly seen at cloud edges or in semi-transparent clouds, and newly forming clouds produce the brightest and most colourful iridescence. When a thin cloud has droplets of similar size over a large extent, the iridescence takes on the structured form of a corona, a central bright disk around the sun or moon surrounded by one or more coloured rings.

I feel so privileged to have witnessed such a rare phenomenon. I'll probably never see its like again, and the explanation about ice crystals perhaps explains the -4°C temperature the next morning, despite it being mid-September.

Ngunnawal Plant Use

The ACT Government has produced a new compact book (it is sturdily made to endure being taken into the bush as a field guide) after much consultation with bush-knowledgeable local Aboriginals.

The book, *Ngunnawal Plant Use*, is about the practical uses that Aboriginal people have made of local flora.

For example the petite flower of *Wurmbea dioica* sometimes called the Early Nancy but also sometimes called Blackman's Potatoes because the corm of this lily is very rich in starch and was valued by Aboriginals as a good source of nutritional energy.

Native plant enthusiasts and common gardeners will learn astonishing things about the natives they have in their gardens. How many of us knew that the leaves of *Hardenbergia violacea*, sometimes known as the False Sarsaparilla or Happy Wanderer, were boiled to make a sweet tea and a mouthwash to treat ulcers and that 'its flowers were also eaten to treat liver and kidney complaints'?



Ngunnawal Plant Use - a traditional Aboriginal plant use guide for the ACT region is available via environment.act.gov.au and will soon be in some discerning bookshops.

Wurmbea dioica: early Nancy

At the September meeting Colin brought these delicate blooms from their property as another symbol of spring. Pat and Warwick teamed up to show how they've explored the cultural and botanical history of Wattles....the quintessential spring flowers.

When they were at risk of being discarded I brought the Early Nancy flowers home and they have thrived on the windowsill. They are in a strange little elephant vase the twin of which I sent to my mother in England 25 years ago or more.

In spite of pointing out the sometimes-cryptic, grassland plants to people for decades I realised I'd never looked at them closely before. The flowers seem to be glued on to extraordinary zig-zag stems, seeming to be the creations of a master glass-blower rather than aeons of evolution.

Early Nancy flowers are out, almost in swathes, in the bush now. But it often takes time to find the first one or two of any given colony. Take a hand lens and renew contact with the minutiae of nature.

Rosemary Blemings



Activities

Fetherston Gardens working Bee 8 October 2014

Location: Heysen Street, Weston, close to Streeton Drive, turn into the Islamic School entrance.

Background

These gardens were designed and developed as the former Canberra Institute of Technology Horticulture College in Heysen Street, Weston which was opened in 1974. In the gardens, which have been named after the first and longest serving Head of the Horticulture College, Tony Fetherston, there is a well-established arboretum, a woodlands garden, and an enclosed 'secret garden'. The CIT's Weston campus was closed in 2009, and the gardens ceased being a purpose-built educational facility. Later, in 2009, in response to representations from the WCCC, the ACT Government dropped its plans to redevelop the site for residential purposes, and handed the land back to the Weston Creek Community for use as a community park, while the former classroom buildings became part of the Canberra Islamic School.

The gardens were officially opened by the ACT Government Minister for Territory and Municipal Services -TAMS, Shane Rattenbury on Saturday 12th October 2013.

Working bees are held from 10 am to 1 pm on the last Sunday of every month and the Field Naturalists propose to join them on 8 October 2014.

Friends of the Pinnacle Spring walks

Sunday 19 October: Pinnacle Past and Present II, led by Craig Wainwright, starting at 9.00 am from the De Salis Street entrance, Weetangera

Sunday 26 October: Birds and Nesting at the Pinnacle, led by John Brannan, starting at 9.00 am from the Dungowan Street entrance, Hawker

Sunday 9 November: Aboriginal Heritage Walk, led by Wally and Tyrone Bell, starting at 9.00 am from the De Salis Street entrance, Weetangera. Followed by a BBQ open to all to be held near the De Salis Street reserve entrance.

Month	Speaker	Topic
2 October	Ken Hodgkinson	Grasslands and their care
6 November	Danswell Starrs	Freshwater Fish Ecology
4 December	Christmas party	BOZO meeting room



Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra Inc.

Who are the Field Naturalists?

The Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra (FNAC) was formed in 1981. Our aim is to foster interest in natural history by means of meetings and regular field outings. Meetings are usually held on the first Thursday of each month. Outings range from weekend rambles to long weekends away. Activities are advertised in our monthly newsletter. We emphasise informality and the enjoyment of nature. New members are always welcome. If you wish to join FNAC, please fill in the member application below and send it in with your subscription to the FNAC Treasurer at the address below.

President: Rosemary von Behrens **Phone:** 6254 1763

Email: fieldnaturalist@yahoo.com.au

Website: under construction

All newsletter contributions welcome.

Email: alison.milton@health.gov.au

Editor



Monthly meeting venue: Division of Botany and Zoology, Building 116, Daley Rd, Australian National University. (The Xmas meeting is at the adjacent building 44 and will start at the earlier time of 6:30 pm.)

Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra
GPO Box 249
Canberra ACT 2601



MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION OR RENEWAL

Family name: First name:

If a family membership, please include the first names of other members of the family:

.....

Postal address:

Suburb: State: Postcode: Home phone:

Work phone: Email address:

Subscription enclosed: \$.....(Single/Family \$25) Donation: \$.....

How did you hear about FNAC? Please circle: FRIEND? OTHER? Please specify: