

Understorey Network

Winter Newsletter 2005
No.32

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CONTACT DETAILS

Enquiries and newsletter articles to:

Project Manager Ruth Mollison
Phone: Office (03) 6223 6377
Mobile: 0407 352 479
Email: ruth.mollison@understorey-network.org.au
PO Box 9868 Hobart 7001.
110 Hampden Road, Battery Point.

Memberships to:

Anne Griffiths,
PO Box 126, Huonville 7109.

Growers Scheme Coordinators North/NW

Anna Povey Ph: (03) 6334 6633

Growers Scheme Coordinator South

Louise Jerrim Ph: (03) 6295 0780

Visit our website and Plant Propagation Database at:

www.understorey-network.org.au

Project Manager's Report

This edition contains information about our upcoming growing season. Note that there is a Plant Order Form included with the newsletter—please get in your orders as soon as possible.

I attended the Landcare Conference at Lake Barrington in April - delegates at the conference expressed a lot of interest in the network. As technical support available to groups diminishes with NRM restructuring, the Network fills a gap in providing resources and support to many Landcare groups. The issue of funding for the Tasmanian Landcare Association was raised at the conference, and it is a relief to note that the association has been funded for another year by the state government, due to the support of members and hard work of Jodie Epper, the Executive Officer.

The seedbank is now in much better shape, thanks to the efforts of Josie, Mendel, Peter, Els, Sandy, Louise and Micah at a seed sorting morning tea. A special Big Thankyou to Martin and Margaret who have been coming in once a week to work on the seedbank. This work is ongoing, and without extra assistance would just not happen.

In the North -members attended an Australian Plant Society working bee at Heritage Park in Launceston, while students from four schools in the Riverside area attended a planting bee at the constructed wetland at Riverside Lake.

Greening Australia (Mike Noble) and the Understorey Network had a very successful field day at Campbell Town called 'Down by the River'. This was held primarily for the local landcare groups, however attendance was from a range of interested people.

USN Steering Committee 2004/5

President: Anne Griffiths Ph: 6264 1896

Vice President: Helen Morgan Ph: 0429 197 671

Secretary: Mary Jolly Ph: 6227 8506

Treasurer: Peter McGlone

Other Committee Members:

Brian Griffiths, Liz Quinn, Angela Jackson

PENGUINS AND PLANTS

Little penguins are a familiar and popular resident of coastal Tasmania. On Tasmania's offshore islands little penguins are relatively secure. However on Tasmania's mainland, many little penguin colonies have suffered serious declines and extinctions due to increased human development, increased predation, population pressures, habitat degradation and conflicting land uses. Appropriate and effective management and focused on the ground works are needed to address these declines.

Little penguins are amazingly adapted to life at sea, though must return to land for periods of rest, breeding and their seasonal moult. During these periods, penguins are particularly vulnerable to disturbance. The important vegetation component in penguin habitat is primarily reflected through the understorey. Whilst upper canopy provides important shading, penguins as ground dwellers rely on the understorey for nesting, protection against predators, heat stress, shelter and burrow stabilisation.

Little penguins will nest within a variety of habitats, utilising rocky cavities, sandy burrows, hollow logs, dense vegetation and even man made structures. The disturbance or removal of such features from a colony can severely decrease quality nesting sites. Penguin habitat is not just the nest site, as penguins often use large areas of the colony for courting, prospecting for new burrows, and resting or "refuge" areas when traversing between the landing zone and nest site.

Little penguins use a series of well-worn runs, like our footpaths, to get from the sea to their burrows and back again. It is vital that such access not be impeded by the construction of walls and fences, thick vegetation and drainage features.

Introduced coastal species with soil binding properties such as Marram Grass, apart from excluding other native vegetation, can often lead to the formation of steep banks, which again can exclude penguin access to colonies. There is recent evidence that such bank formations have been a major cause in colony abandonment in areas of southeastern Tasmania.

Continued on page 3

Understories



Collecting seed near the King River :Ruth, Laura, Gary, Chris and Katherine

The Wild West

Committee member Angela Jackson, and I recently travelled to the West Coast to assist the King River Action Group collect seeds for a revegetation project on the delta. We met up with members of the group, including Gary and Katherine, both Understorey Network members.

Gary and Katherine are in the Friends of the Wild West Coast group. This group is implementing a management plan for the Strahan Historic Foreshore Walking Track. Have a look at this special part of the foreshore next time you visit this area, as the remnant coastal vegetation here is a luxurious mix of species, with twining stems of *Bilardiera longiflora*, thickets of *Melaleuca ericifolia*, and patches of *Dianella longifolia* intermixed with other wet sclerophyll and coastal species .

The group has been working with a Conservation Volunteers Australia team to remove blackberries, monbretia and other weeds from the track. The resulting bare patches have been mulched with slashed teatree branches to promote revegetation. The group will also be planting with tubestock, with the help of the growers scheme, in some areas along the track.

It was good to see firsthand these interesting and inspiring projects.

Penguins and Plants continued..

When attempting any coastal regeneration it is imperative that the area be searched a number of times for signs of penguin occupation. Evidence can be found in the form of white streaky scats on runways, footprints and feathers. Penguins may also be heard calling after dark. Penguins can nest up to 300m inland, so when assessing sites it is important not to just concentrate on the immediate coastal fringe. If in doubt feel free to contact the Marine Unit, Nature Conservation Branch.

To avoid disturbance to penguins, works should only be conducted around nest sites in periods outside the breeding and moulting seasons. This generally only gives groups a few months with which to undertake major works, spanning from mid-April to mid July. It is important to only conduct vegetation removal in conjunction with sufficient replanting, maintain a gradual and staged approach. Often site remediation works or other land care type initiatives are undertaken without specific regard for little penguins and the removal of non-indigenous vegetation is a major goal of landcare efforts. Weed infestation, thorny bushes and thistles may inhibit penguin access, however older more established exotic vegetation such as African Boxthorn (*Lycium ferocissimum*) and Blackberry (*Rubus fruticosus*) may provide shelter from larger predators and can play a vital role in protecting vulnerable penguin colonies.

Some examples of penguin friendly native plant species include *Tetragonia implexicoma* (Ice Plant), *Rhagodia candolleana* (Seaberry Saltbush), *Myoporum insulare*, (Boobiella), *Carpobrotus Rossii*, (Pig Face) and *Poa poiformis* (Tussock). Most native coastal plants will be appropriate, especially if they have the ability to provide cover and insulation for nesting. Notes on the collection, propagation and availability of seedlings can be provided from The Understorey Network.

An excellent resource that is an essential tool for this subject matter is Marker and Wind (2003) 'Guidelines for works in areas of little penguin habitat', this can be found on the web at <http://www.dpiwe.tas.gov.au>. Over the following months we will be looking at establishing community partnerships to assist in the rehabilitation of penguin habitat.

For more information on little penguins, please contact the Nature Conservation Branch on 1300 135 513

Feature Plant

Ice Plant or Native Spinach



If you have a challenging coastal site exposed to wind and salt spray then this is the ground-cover for you!

Tetragonia implexicoma, or native spinach, is a creeping succulent with glistening diamond shaped leaves, small yellow flowers and orange-black berries.

Also known as Warrigal Greens, it was introduced to Europe in the 1820's, and is one of our earliest exports of bush tucker plants. The leaves are a pleasant substitute for spinach, and the edible summer-ripening fruit can also be used as a dye.

It's a Penguin friendly plant, creating a natural beach umbrella effect as it scrambles over rocks and fallen branches.

Propagation is either from the dried fruit, or for quicker results, from tip cuttings taken in January-February, which like most succulents, grow easily. Once roots have developed, tetragonia spreads rapidly making it an ideal coloniser plant for dry disturbed sites.

Growers Scheme

Plant Orders Due Now!

Don't forget to order your plants using the enclosed Growers Scheme form, for next Autumn. You can order up to **250 FREE plants**. If you need more plants for your site, just than take out another membership.

If you have forgotten to pay this year's membership—its not too late , you can pay your \$22 now.

Landcare Groups—don't forget to put your order in, as we have growers interested in growing for public projects.

Please let others know of our scheme too, pass on a plant order form, and application details.

Would you like to be a volunteer grower?

It is rewarding and easy to grow native plants with our method. You can do your bit to improve the environment in a practical way by helping a landcare group or a landowner with their revegetation project. Or you can just grow for yourself.

It is a hands-on way to become involved in some interesting projects around Tassie. Here are some of the areas we need growers for:

The Strahan Foreshore Track
(coastal mix of species)

Riverside Lake Wetlands
(reeds, sedges and water-edge plants)

Hobart Suburban Gardens
(Bird Attractant Species)

Penguin Colonies in the Derwent
(Prickly plants and shade species)

Or, we will match you with one of our many individual requests for plants. You don't need to live in the area to grow for the project as we can usually supply local seed. When your plants are ready to hand over, you may like to arrange a tour of the site. (The Project Manager can assist with this).

What's Involved?

Everything is supplied for volunteer growers. This includes an instruction guide, tubes, potting mix and seed. You must collect your growers' kit from a collection depot in September. There will be a depot in the North, South and NorthWest.

(Growers will receive notification of the Collection Depot address closer to the date.)

You also need:

- A place in the sun (1-2 square metres)
- A hose, with a soft rose attachment.
- A raised bench, bed-frame, or bricks to keep the boxes off the ground.
- The commitment to water and check the plants every day. A cheap watering system or reliable neighbour can help with this.
- Some spare time in October (half a day) to fill tubes and sow seeds, then a few minutes every day until April/May to water them.

What Happens Next?

If you would like seedlings grown for you:

- Send in the Growers Scheme form by 31st of August.
- **OCTOBER:** Start site preparation for Autumn planting by removing weeds etc.
- **NOVEMBER TO APRIL:** Keep in touch with your volunteer grower.
- **APRIL/MAY:** Arrange to collect the seedlings, plant out, mulch and protect.

If you would like to be a grower

- Send in the Growers Scheme Form by 31st of August.
- **SEPTEMBER:** Receive confirmation of order and details where to collect grower's kit.
- **OCTOBER:** Prepare your tubes and plant seeds.
- **OCTOBER to APRIL:** Continue to water seedlings and keep in touch with your landowner.
- **APRIL/MAY:** Arrange to deliver or have your plants collected.

To mow or to Graze Grassland?



The following is a summary of a paper in *Austral Ecology*.

Lowland native grasslands and grassy woodlands have been severely depleted in area and condition through-out their original range in south-eastern mainland Australia and Tasmania. One of the few remaining native tussock grasslands on basalt occurs in the Pontville Small Arms Range Complex (PSARC) at Pontville, owned by the Department of Defence. The use of PSARC as a small arms range has been combined with a grazing lease, with stock excluded from the range for the sake of their health. The small arms range is mown at high frequency, and the slash removed after mowing, to avoid grass fires.

As temperate grassy ecosystems require disturbance to maintain species diversity, a study was done to determine whether frequent mowing with removal of slash is a better option for lowland tussock grassland management than a moderate level of sheep grazing.

Quadrants were established on each sides of a fence between the mown area and the grazed area in order to compare plant species richness and abundance.

The results found that species richness was greater on the mown than the grazed side of the fence. As well, the abundance of native herbs and grasses, and perennial exotic grasses and herbs, was greater on the mown side of the fence. The mowing regime was significantly more effective than the moderate grazing regime in promoting perennial cover, probably by limiting establishment space for annuals.

The mowing regime is definitely superior in its conservation outcomes to the grazing regime. The mowing regime produces greater cover of rare or threatened species, greater native cover and less exotic grass cover. It thus presents an opportunity for maintaining or improving the condition of previously grazed remnants in reserves without resorting either to the use of stock or to fire.

The key to using mowing as a successful conservation tool in lowland native grasslands seems to be the removal of slash, as this reduces the nutrient status of the ecosystem, which discourages weed infestations. It also ensures that the intertussock space is bare ground, rather than smothered with litter.

Reference: Verrier, F.J. and Kirkpatrick, J.B. Frequent Mowing is better than grazing for the conservation value of lowland tussock grassland at Pontville, Tasmania. *Austral Ecology*, (2205), **30**, 74-78

Book Reviews

Birds on Farms

by Richard Donaghey

This is a handy glove box guide to birds on farms with a particular emphasis on North West Tasmania. The guide is a first for Tasmania because it highlights birds as an indicator of landscape health, and has practical guidelines on landscape design and habitat management for birds. There are about 90 birds listed, each illustrated with a painting and information on food, key habitat requirements, appearance breeding and behaviour.

It is bound with an easy-to-open spiral spine, and has sturdy well set out pages.

Books are \$10 plus postage, and may be purchased from Carolyn Donaghey on 6445 1025.

Beyond Organics

By Helen Cushing

Beyond Organics presents a way forward for modern gardeners who want their gardens to flourish and also hope to make a rich and positive contribution to the environment. It will show you how to transform your garden, whatever its size, into one that is low maintenance, low water and ecologically sound, simply by making a few straightforward changes. It includes advice on climate, soil, which plants to choose, attracting wildlife and more.

Peppered with personal anecdotes, this lyrical book will take you on a journey through past and present gardening ideas and philosophies, and offers a fresh perspective on the world we live in and how we should attend our gardens.

Books retail for approximately, \$30 and may be purchased from any good book shop.

Australian Rushes : Biology, Identification and Conservation of Restionaceae and Allied Families

Editors Kathy A. Meney & John S. Pate ; with illustrations by Ellen J. Hickman. (1999)

Hardcover + 486 pp.

This book has everything you may want know about this important, but often neglected group of plants.. It has the latest taxonomic changes (eg. The genus restio is now called Baloskion), a detailed description of each species accompanied by magnificent full page line drawings, and some interesting chapters on definition of plant parts, conservation status of rush species etc.

A very comprehensive, hardcover text available at approx. \$100 from University of Western Australia Press.

Down by the River

This Campbell Town field day was organised to inform local residents in the Northern Midlands and others on riparian revegetation methods, and gorse control. We struck it lucky with the weather—it was a beautiful sunny but frosty winter's day and surprisingly, 40 people attended. Everyone warmed up on arrival with homemade soup and bread, kindly provided by Frank with his caravan.

The day was focused on the work of Bill Chugg and the Township Landcare group. Next time you stop for a cuppa in CampbellTown, take the time to walk along the path near the red bridge, and you will see what a great job this group has done over the last 10 years removing weeds and putting in natives along the rivers edge.

After the riverwalk, everyone tip-toed across the Elizabeth River to Elizabeth Island, and heard about Bill's heroic efforts in clearing the island of gorse, and planting it with the threatened Midlands Mimosa or *Acacia axillaris*.

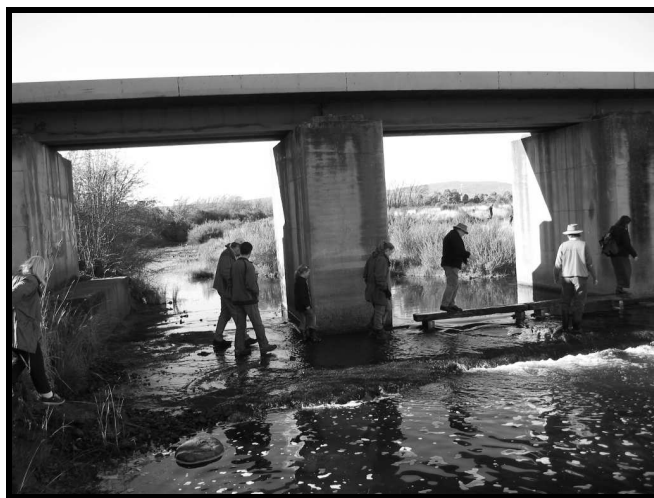
We also heard from Biz Nicolson about propagating and collecting seeds from this plant, from Rivercare's Rae Glazik about planning for revegetation, Greening Australia's Mike Noble about the Northern Riparian Project and from John Richardson about the 'About Campbell Town' strategy for the river environs.

Thanks GA's Mike, our president Annie Griffiths and husband Brian for assisting with shepherding the rather large group through the gorse and over the river. A barbecue lunch was put on by John from 'About Campbelltown', and fizzy drinks provided by the girl guides.

It was a community effort and a highly successful day.



Bill Chugg welcoming attendees



Mike Noble assisting people across the river



Bill discussing *Acacia axillaris* revegetation.

All newsletters are now available on our website:
www.understorey-network.org.au

The Understorey Network Annual General Meeting

On **Sunday, 18th of September 2005** from 2pm to 4pm.
At the **Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens Training Rooms**, Hobart.

Guest Speaker will be Mark Fountain, discussing the Joint Millennium Seed Bank Project between the Tasmanian Government and the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, England.
Afternoon tea will be provided

Also, note that at the AGM we need a resolution to amend the present constitution so we can claim Deductible Gift Recipient Status.

RSVP to Ruth please.

Grower's Plant Propagation Workshops

South

At: Royal Botanical Gardens Glasshouse
Date: Wednesday, 31st of August, 10 am—12 noon.

North

At: TAFE campus at Alanvale, in the horticulture department's nursery area.
Date: Saturday, 3rd of September 10am—12 noon.

NorthWest

At: The Tasmanian Arboretum at Eugenana, Spreyton.
Date: Tuesday, 20th of September. 11am—1pm.

These workshops will prepare you for the upcoming growing season with helpful tips from experts on using our grower's kit, seed treatments and taking cuttings.

Please RSVP to Ruth, as numbers at some venues are limited

Preparing to Plant Field Day

South

At: Inverawe Native Gardens, 1565 Channel Highway Margate.
Date: Sunday, September the 4th 11am—1pm

Bill Chesterman will discuss his methods of preparing to plant into a challenging area, using the examples of this extensive native gardens. Wear warm clothing and bring along a picnic lunch. (Entry is free to members.)

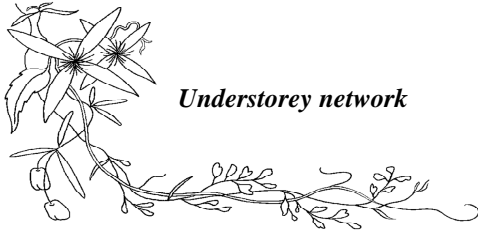
Plant and Weed Identification

North

At: Pipe Clay Lagoon, Georgetown. Meet at the corner of The Strand and South Street.
Date: Saturday, September 17th, 10am to 12 noon.

Explore, walk and talk about the vegetation in this area with Anna Povey

For more information, or to RSVP contact:
Fane Rapkins, Coastcare facilitator on 6383 6355.



Understorey network

Membership Application

ABN 62 599 420 020

Annual membership: \$22 includes GST

Please post cheque or money order to:

Anne Griffiths

Understorey Network

PO BOX 126 Huonville TAS 7109

Name:

Address:

P/Code:

Phone Home:

Phone Work:

Fax:

Mobile:

Email:

Signed:

Date:



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