

# Indigenotes



# Editorial

Browsing my collection of Indigenotes which spans 21 years of IFFA's operations I came across the March 1987 issue. Not much has changed — or has it?

Twenty years ago Indigenotes was expressing concern about government sell-offs of land with important remnant vegetation, and about on and off-shore developments around Port Phillip Bay. At least now there's obligatory assessment of remnant vegetation before land is developed. The planning scheme which until recently didn't consider that subdivision was a process which damaged remnant vegetation now requires remnant vegetation to be protected at subdivision stage.

Mind you, the whole planning scheme is designed to have conflicting objectives and as a result, interpretations of it depend on the subjective judgements of those employed to adjudicate on planning appeals. However clearly spelt out an environmental objective is a VCAT chairperson whose sympathies lie with developers can find loads of provisions of the planning scheme which support a developer. Conversely a VCAT chairperson whose sympathies lay with the environment could do a lot to protect the environment, but such people seem rare at VCAT.

The March 1987 issue contained an account from Cecily Falkingham describing a Gang Gang Cockatoo feeding on saw-flies, and enjoying a ride on the whippy end of a Eucalyptus branch in a gale. She pointed out:

"There is so much we can all learn by being better observers of nature. Animal behaviour is an area neglected in so much of our books and there is an emphasis on numbers and identification on field trips. Perhaps we could then better understand an animal's needs, and by careful and patient observation we could all be better and much more efficient land managers."

The basis of land management being the needs of the fauna and flora of the land is an ideal that we are still struggling to entrench. Parks Victoria parks around the state often must place earning income at a higher priority than land management. At least we seem to have passed through the phase where interpretation of parks' natural values was considered the role of business not the role of Government. But announce-

ments of additional staff for parks are to be treated with scepticism; such announcements are often more based in spin than reality.

John Reid provided "An insect diary from the suburbs" with daily accounts of indigenous insects in the wilds of suburban Heathmont based on the same premise as Cecily's. Haven't there been many habitat losses since then, but also many small victories. Certainly my house in suburban Brunswick attracts more indigenous insects now than it used, thanks to a tiny front yard planted with indigenous plants, and work on nearby parks and Creeks also.

Funny though, I still get fire notices from the Council.

Garden Week 1987 rated a short mention, with IFFA using the event to raise the awareness of the gardening public about "local native plants".

Roger Jones invited input to "The Eclectic Parrot" a forthright radio show on 3RRR which he and Bob MacDonald put together every Monday. Ahh gone are the days of honest reporting.

Daintry Fletcher reported on news from Sandringham including a very successful seminar run by the Beaumaris High School

Heathland Group on heathland management, the change in direction of the local community plant nursery towards indigenous plant production (away from Australian natives), an experimental hot control burn in the Winifred Waddell Sanctuary. Now we know hot burns are important in restoring heathland diversity, but back then it was cutting-edge.

Andrew Paget provided guidelines for Indigenous nurseries on propagation techniques. No mention of smoke treatment — that's something entirely new. Our understanding of indigenous nursery technique has evolved, but there's not been much published since Murray Ralph's 1994 "Germination of local native plant seed". IFFA's Indigenous Nurseries Network could provide an important service here if we could find the treatment to overcome it's dormancy. Anyone with ideas could discuss them on IFFA's website, which incidentally now contains a fledgling "book" called Indigenous Nurseries Code of Practice.

— Tony Faithfull



# Biomass Reduction in Grassy Ecosystems

## - a reply to Liz Donoghue

### Beth Gott

Liz Donoghue in her article in the November *Indigenotes* poses the problem of the loss of biodiversity in grasslands and grassy woodlands.

She rightly points to the overgrowth of tussocks which shade out those non-grass species which make up the biodiversity. (Lilies, Orchids and Daisy species predominate). This is the problem in grasslands, but in grassy woodlands an additional shading factor is the growth of shrub species.

I would like to make a case for the use of fire as the main agent of biomass reduction. Liz says we have been 'seduced' by the idea of pre-1750 Aboriginal burning in grasslands, but I ask her to consider that the fire-adapted grassland ecosystems have evolved under many thousands of years of Aboriginal burning. That original biodiversity which the Europeans first recorded in the grasslands and which now serves us as a benchmark was the result of Aboriginal patterns of management. The purpose of the management in south-eastern Australia was primarily to maximise the growth of the tuberous perennial species which were the most important vegetable foods – and the two species she cites - *Wurmbea dioica* and *Hypoxis vaginata* are examples of this.

Grazing by kangaroos and wallabies certainly would have contributed to the control of grass tussocks, but their populations in turn were restricted by Aboriginal hunting. Certainly we could encourage the grazing of areas by native animals, but I find it alarming that Liz should consider the use of sheep to control fuel loads, since they are well known to reduce the biodiversity of native species. Within ten years of the settlement of Melbourne we have a complaint from Moonin Moonin, a Goulburn Aborigine, that the cattle and sheep have completely destroyed Murnong (*Microseris lanceolata*) and other food species originally common in the grasslands and open forests around Melbourne. Another early record from Curr describes the sheep scratching up and eating the tubers of Murnong.

It is well to remember that the frequency of burning by Aborigines was determined not by a time scale, but by observation of the land itself, and that the method was to burn in controlled patches, producing a mosaic of areas in different stages of fire recovery.

Fuel loads did not accumulate to disastrous levels. The burns were carried out when the tuberous perennials were dormant – early autumn, when they had already shed seed, and not when they were in full vegetative growth during winter and spring. In addition, the Aborigines were able to draw on long-accumulated knowledge of weather patterns to time their burns.

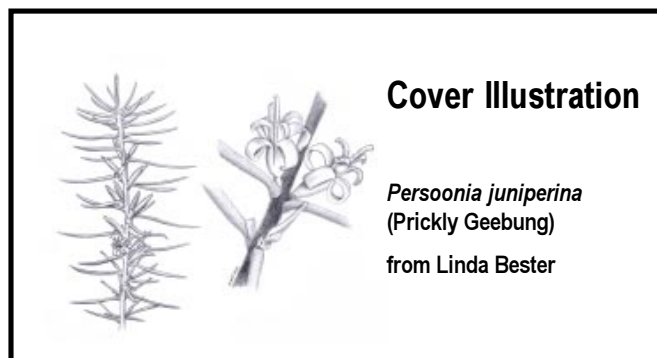
Now I recognise that to copy the Aboriginal burning patterns which produced maximum biodiversity presents difficulties in the present day, particularly in areas where lack of regular burning has resulted in high fuel loads. The difficulties may be summed up as follows:

1. Early autumn is a dangerous time to burn, considering the weather and the dry condition of the vegetation.
2. It is unwise to burn areas where the fuel load is very high
3. Obtaining permission and sufficient personnel to control the burn may be an unsurmountable obstacle.

Nevertheless, over a long time scale, if we want to maximise biodiversity, we should be guided by the Aboriginal history of management by fire of the grasslands and open forests.

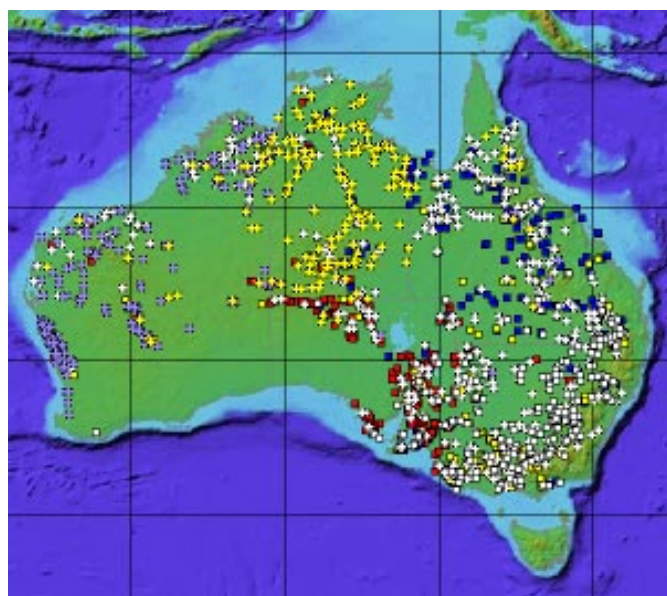
### Reference:

Gott, B. 2005 Aboriginal Fire Management in South-eastern Australia: aims and frequency. *Journal of Biogeography* 32, 1203-1208.

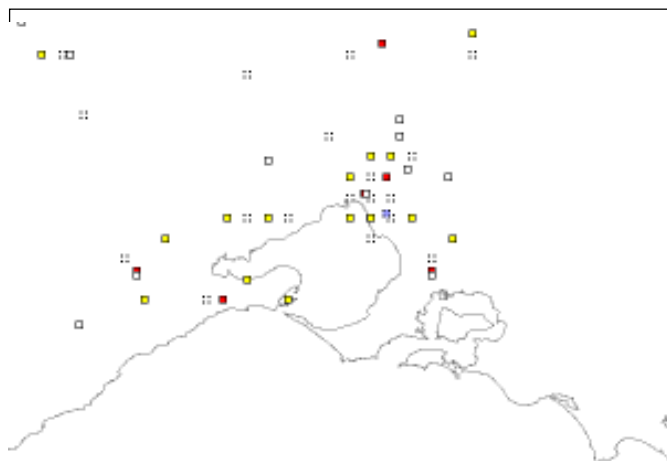


# Australia's Herbaria and their websites

State / Territory	Postal address	Phone	Website
Australian National Herbarium	GPO Box 1600 Canberra, ACT, 2601	02 6246 5108	<a href="http://www.anbg.gov.au/cpbr/herbarium/index.html">www.anbg.gov.au/cpbr/herbarium/index.html</a>
National Herbarium of New South Wales	Mrs Macquaries Rd Sydney, NSW, 2000	02 9231 8111	<a href="http://www.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au">www.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au</a>
National Herbarium of Victoria	Private Bag 2000 Birdwood Avenue South Yarra, Vic, 3141	03 9252 2300	<a href="http://www.rbg.vic.gov.au/research_and_conservation/herbarium">www.rbg.vic.gov.au/research_and_conservation/herbarium</a>
Northern Territory Herbarium	PO Box 496 Palmerston, NT, 0831	08 8999 4516	<a href="http://www.nt.gov.au/ipe/pwcnt/">www.nt.gov.au/ipe/pwcnt/</a>
Queensland Herbarium	c/- Brisbane Botanic Gardens Mt Coot-tha Rd Toowong, Qld, 4066	07 3896 9326	<a href="http://www.env.qld.gov.au/environment/science/herbarium">www.env.qld.gov.au/environment/science/herbarium</a>
South Australian Plant Biodiversity Centre	PO Box 2732 Kent Town, SA, 5071	08 8228 2308	<a href="http://www.flora.sa.gov.au/index.html">www.flora.sa.gov.au/index.html</a>
Tasmanian Herbarium	Private Bag 4 Hobart, Tas, 7000	03 6226 2635	<a href="http://www.tmag.tas.gov.au/Herbarium/Herbarium2.htm">www.tmag.tas.gov.au/Herbarium/Herbarium2.htm</a>
Western Australian Herbarium	Locked Bag 104 Bentley DC, WA, 6983	08 9334 0500	<a href="http://science.calm.wa.gov.au/herbarium/">http://science.calm.wa.gov.au/herbarium/</a>



Maps of the distribution of *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* from an on-line query from Australia's Virtual Herbarium which links all the Australian Herbaria together. Each of the herbaria has a portal to AVH. The Victorian portal is at <http://www.rbg.vic.gov.au/avh/>



## New NGIA publication on weeds and the nursery industry

The Nursery and Garden Industry of Australia (NGIA) have just issued a Technical Nursery Paper on Weeds and the nursery industry. This paper is written by Robert Chin of NGI Victoria. The paper suggests that nurseries know what plants are on local council 'hit lists', stop selling them and instead 'proactively offer customers low invasive alternatives.'

The paper stops short of being prescriptive though -

"Many local governments have an increasing interest in weeds. ... It is worth considering identifying and/or removing from sale plants causing the most problems in your local area."

Still, this is progress.

You can find the paper on the NGIA web site [www.ngia.com.au](http://www.ngia.com.au) Look under publications and nursery papers where it is issue 11, 2006. or try [http://www.ngia.com.au/publication\\_resources/nursery\\_papers\\_listing\\_db.asp#2006](http://www.ngia.com.au/publication_resources/nursery_papers_listing_db.asp#2006) see EcoHort

# Call for articles

## Ecological Management & Restoration

The journal 'Ecological Management & Restoration' (EMR) is calling for submission of short notes and features for peer review and potential publication.

Do you have a short project report you would like to submit? (Length for short notes is restricted to 1500 words - and one graphic - so we can fit numerous notes in each issue and so avoid long delays till publication. Features are full length articles with lots of pictures.)

EMR specialises in the restoration and improved management of Australasian ecosystems. If you feel you have you a good story to tell or are unsure, please contact me on [teinm@ozemail.com.au](mailto:teinm@ozemail.com.au) and I can give you some feedback on how your ideas might work in the journal.

Note: At least some data are needed - at least increases in species or changes in condition mapping.

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VISIT THE WEB PAGE OF 'ECOLOGICAL MANAGEMENT & RESTORATION' TO LOOK AT A SAMPLE ISSUE: [www.blackwellpublishing.com/journals/emr/](http://www.blackwellpublishing.com/journals/emr/)

## Dont Forget Indigenotes

IFFA's newsletter is always on the lookout for material for publication also. Material can be more speculative or anecdotal, but needs to be readable by a more general audience.

Articles up to 4 pages (around 2000 words or preferably with graphics and shorter) or snippets as small as 200 words, or even simply photos or artwork with an explanatory caption are welcome. Indigenotes is published electronically in colour but on paper in black on white, and any graphics need to be reproducible in black and white.

Contributions to *Indigenotes* should be sent to the editor — the deadline for the next issue is 28 February 2007. Contributions must be in electronic form, either on PC formatted floppy disk or CD or can be emailed to [editor@iffa.org.au](mailto:editor@iffa.org.au)

# VicTrack

## Grassroots Program

– working with the community to conserve and extend native grasslands in Victoria

**VicTrack is the Government Business Enterprise that owns Victoria's rail land, infrastructure and associated facilities. Many rural and outer-suburban rail corridors carry significant remnants of indigenous vegetation, including native grasslands.**

**Through its Grassroots program with partner Landcare Australia, VicTrack is again funding projects by community groups and other bodies that help conserve, extend, publicise or enable us to better understand native grasslands in our state.**

**Projects can be anywhere in Victoria – they need not be restricted to VicTrack or other public land.**

**VicTrack is calling for expressions of interest for projects involving native grasslands, specifically focussing on:**

- Strategic and regionally based native grasslands projects, incorporating broad community, research, business and education elements.**
- General research projects and surveys.**
- General projects involving weed control, burning, area plantings, seed collection, equipment, inventions, community education.**
- Community-based projects.**

**Project application forms are available from Rob Youl, Landcare Australia: [rob.youl@landcareaustralia.com.au](mailto:rob.youl@landcareaustralia.com.au). Project managers should highlight opportunities to promote the project to the community, and be prepared to provide an indicative project timeline and very brief three-monthly reports for their project's duration.**

**Applications close 28 February 2007.**

## 2nd International Workshop on Weed Risk Assessment

The 2nd International Workshop on Weed Risk Assessment is being held just prior to EMAPi9 and you can register your expression of interest for this workshop via the EMAPi9 weblinks below.

Additionally to this information, the Australia Weed Risk Assessment System has recently been reviewed and the report is available to download from this

URL:[http://www.weeds.org.au/docs/Review\\_of\\_the\\_National\\_Weed\\_Risk\\_Assessmt\\_System\\_2005.pdf](http://www.weeds.org.au/docs/Review_of_the_National_Weed_Risk_Assessmt_System_2005.pdf)

This document clearly outlines the WRA process as it is currently applied in Australia and is a good background document for anyone interested in the process and is recommended reading for potential workshop participants.

## 9th International Conference on the Ecology and Management of Alien Plant Invasions

Hyatt Regency Perth, Western Australia 17 - 21 September 2007

The Weeds Society of WA (Inc.) is hosting the 9th International Conference on the Ecology and Management of Alien Plant Invasions (EMAPi9). The organising committee is pleased to invite all those who are interested in invasive plants, to submit an abstract for either an Oral or Poster Presentation at the Conference. Online submissions can now be made at the Conference website below until Friday 16th February 2007. Before you prepare your paper, see the Conference website to read a copy of the "Call for Abstracts Fact Sheet".

The Conference will cover topics such as:

- ecological, biological and biogeographical studies on invasive plants;
- the management of plant invasions;
- the development of multidisciplinary activities focused on prevention of new incursions and management of existing infestations;
- appropriate legislation, public education and information; and any other relevant aspects of plants that invade natural areas.

Further info: <http://www.congresswest.com.au/emapi9>

## Want to have an adventure AND make a contribution?

**ParkMates is the Victorian National Parks Association's Park Survey Team. It has been designed to monitor the state of our park system. Regular park users we are in the perfect position to comment on park management. The program aims to collect data in a consistent way and as simply as possible. You don't need to be an expert to carry out a survey, just someone that loves parks! The program has proven to be an enjoyable and educational experience for participants - it is amazing how much more you see when challenged to take a good look. Participating in the team can add a whole new dimension to a park visit.**

**ParkMates' strong liaison with Parks Victoria and the ability to provide feedback data from informed park users are some of the many strengths of the program. ParkMates is being very well received by Parks Victoria who, like VNPA, are well aware of the importance of considered monitoring programs focussing on the health and public utility of our great park network. It is a big job and the more of us that contribute the better short, medium and long-term outcomes for our park system.**

See <http://www.vnpa.org.au/whatyoucando/guardian.htm>



*Microlaena stipoides*, Weeping Grass. Photos Mick Connolly.

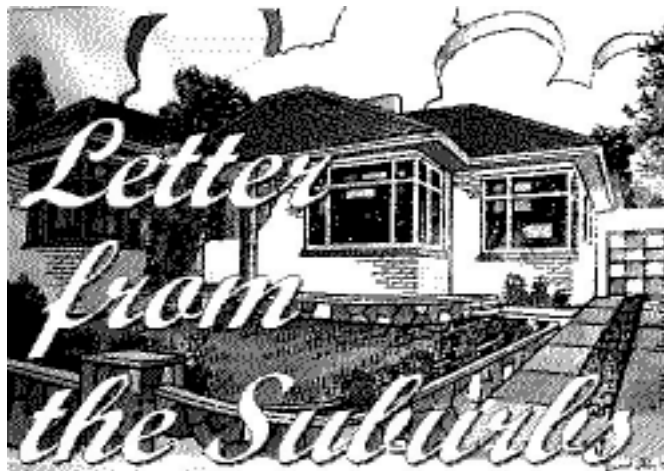
***I got the microlaena blues  
It got me real bad  
The couch grass done got me  
And I's gonna die.***

**- Wailin' Suburban Joe, 1927**

I must have been mad to start a microlaena lawn. A month or two ago, I finally got the last 650 plants into the ground and then a few days ago, I came back from holidays to find the microlaena had hardly begun to grow, and the couch had spread so much it had become a lawn in some places. Where does couch grass come from? Is it African? It certainly likes hot and dry.

I'm not giving up, though. Not after all that I've been through (cue dramatic music).

Why did I decide to plant a microlaena lawn? I'll tell you. When we moved out here, there was a huge manna gum in the back yard, 30m tall. We loved it, even though it never should have been planted there and was a bit scary. It was always full of birds and it provided shade for three properties, including ours.



Well, in time, all trees either fall down or are cut down. We were so lucky that it fell in the best possible spot, crushing the pool and the clothes line, missing our shed. Thank the gods, it was well away from any of the three houses it could have hit.

I remember, after it fell, one of the things I kept noticing was how quiet it was. The birds were gone. In fact, the morning after, there was a poor, drenched little galah, looking like someone had held it under water (there was a *lot* of rain), staggering across the rear deck.



**The Manna Gum's downfall.  
Photo Neil Huybregts**

Anyway, it was all covered by the insurance company (thank god we got a good one) and we did really well out of it. New pool, new clothesline, new frog pond (still no frogs, though), new plants for the garden. They even got rid of the stump for us, but it was so big that they destroyed a third of the garden getting it out, and so Meredith and I were looking at 20 or 30 square metres of grassless lawn area and that's when this mad, crazy idea to plant a microlaena lawn popped into our gormless brains.

Ok, so what have I learnt?

Glyphosate is your friend. If you're going to plant a microlaena lawn, make sure you kill whatever was there before. Dead. All of it. It might take several months of repeated application of glyphosate, but it's worth it. I did this with about the third of the backyard (the third that was pretty much killed by the bulldozer anyway), but I wanted to leave the rest green until I was ready to plant. Big mistake. This meant I didn't have enough time to properly kill the couch on the remaining two-thirds, and I am now paying the price.

Make sure the seed is indigenous. You can buy bags of microlaena seed at some nurseries, but god knows where it comes from. If you can't get seed or plants that are of local provenance, plant a non-indigenous species. At least then you won't be diluting the local gene stock.

Get help. Lots of it. Organise some friends to come and help with the planting and weeding, or pay someone. Best thing I did was pay a professional (thanks, Elspeth!) to help me plant the last 650 plants and a month or two later, pull out the couch lawn.

And develop a long-term view of things.

# Field Trip Bush's Paddock and Pinkerton Forest

## Sunday 31 March

IFFA members and friends are invited to a field trip to Bush's Paddock and Pinkerton Forest for on Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> March 2007. Meet at the front of Bush's Paddock (on Mt Cottrell Road south of Greig's Road turnoff) Melways 2005 page 221 H6 at 10.30 am and bring lunch. You will see a dry stone wall and a "Trust for Nature" sign. The walk will be guided by Frances Overmars who has been involved in the rehabilitation of this area for more than 10 years. Pinkerton Forest is a Greybox Woodland and Bush's Paddock a remnant wildflower grassland. Enquiries 93860264

## Website initiatives

Have you seen IFFA's indigenous plants wiki? Hot off the press, it allows everyone to contribute to developing information about our indigenous plants. To make additions/edits to what's there you need to log on, and before you log on you must register (this is to stop web bot spam) Have a look and write down what you know. [www.iffa.org.au/wiki](http://www.iffa.org.au/wiki)

## Membership

IFFA membership costs  
\$40 for non-profit organizations,  
\$50 for corporations,  
\$25 for individuals and families,  
or \$20 concession.

### Membership includes

**4 issues of *Indigenotes* per year, enhanced access to IFFA's website at [iffa.org.au](http://iffa.org.au) and discount subscription to *Ecological Management & Restoration Journal***

*Members should check the mailing label to ascertain the status of their membership. If an invoice is required, please send a purchase order requesting an invoice.*

*Membership applications and renewals should be sent to the membership secretary.*

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*The views expressed in Indigenotes are not necessarily those of the Indigenous Flora and Fauna Association.*

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