



## Paul's Piece

Dr Paul Gibson-Roy,  
Senior Restoration Ecologist, NSW

Hi folks. It's again a great pleasure to update our Grassy Groundcover Gazette readers on the various GGRP undertakings of the past year and what lies ahead. These have been challenging times in our sector, and this has impacted on some of our GGRP activities; however, while recognising that smooth sailing is not always what occurs, I'm really pleased to be able to flag a few exciting developments for the GGRP. This edition will provide readers with plenty of offerings including SPA reports, field day review, and updates on sowing sites, along with GGRP-related stories. We hope this issue will provide valuable reading for those interested in grassland and grassy woodland restoration.

A major happening in late 2011 was the project being recognised by the international environmental protection organisation 'Earthwatch' when we received their Citizen Science award (presented at a rather flamboyant ceremony at the Palladium at Crown in Melbourne). This national prize (sponsored by Rio Tinto) focussed on projects that engage the community in environmental projects. We were thrilled to receive this major award (and cash prize). The judges were particularly complimentary about the projects long term connection with, and input from, farmers and rural communities. I personally believe these community connections have been instrumental in much of our onground work. So I again thank GGRP staff and all those who've been connected to the project in making it a more inclusive 'science-based' project than it otherwise may have been.

Another major announcement relates to the management of GGRP projects in Victoria. I'm extremely proud and delighted to let readers know that following my move to NSW, my wonderful and capable colleagues Jess Gardner (Wimmera) and Rod White (Geelong) will be taking over the management of Victorian GGRP work. Jess and Rod will be ably supported by the GGRP team and focussed on continuing to expand our activities and develop/refine restoration techniques.



Earthwatch founder Brian Rosborough relaxes in the grasslands at a special celebration at the Werribee Open Range Zoo with left: Gary Topp, CEO Greening Australia; Paul Gibson Roy, Greening Australia; Sally Lewis, Director, Zoos Victoria; Richard Gilmore, Executive Director, Earthwatch Australia; Cr. John Menegazzo, Mayor, Wyndham City Council and Peter Sullivan Curator of Horticulture

However, readers won't be totally rid of Gibson-Roy just yet. I have been thrilled to take on a role with GA NSW, and will be focussed on supporting or setting up GGRP-type projects in this state (and beyond). We have already been in discussions with a range of agencies and organisations looking to establish grassland or grassy woodland restoration projects. It is so exciting that Greening Australia is taking on GGRP-type projects in other states. For example Graham Fifield and the GA Capital Region (ACT) have been doing wonderful work on another new grassy program at the Canberra Airport.

I should also add there are other changes internally that may see some long-term and incredibly valued GGRP staff taking some leave from roles. In particular Lisa Rasmussen, who has managed our Burnley SPA for several years, is taking some time off this year. Lisa is somewhat of a force of nature. She is an astoundingly inclusive and approachable individual, with a sharp mind for things environmental. Lisa has managed all aspects of the Burnley SPA including plant propagation, plant maintenance, seed testing and seed collection. During that time she has garnered support from a wide range of participants including Burnley staff, students and volunteers (all of whom we thank). Lisa has been one of the reasons why this project has maintained the momentum and enthusiasm it has. It will be scary to have her gone, even if it is only hopefully, short term.



Lisa Rasmussen and John Delpratt at the Burnley SPA. Lisa will be taking some time off for the remainder of the year. We thank Lisa for her hard work and dedication.

### New Victorian Management Team



**Rod White**

Allow me to introduce myself, my name is Rod White and I am co-responsible for the delivery of the GGRP in the Victorian Volcanic Plains (VVP) Bioregion.

I have been a member of Greening Australia for the past four and a half years. Prior to this I worked in remnant bushland management around Melbourne. I am enjoying the challenge of restoring complex grassland plant communities throughout the VVP and I am looking forward to further expanding our activities into the future, especially in the area of offsets. Please do not hesitate to contact me.

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**Jess Gardner**

G'day everyone, my name is Jess Gardner and I have been with GA since 2005 working as project ecologist and scientific extension officer.

The GGRP team has been busy and active as usual, and we're pleased to have transitioned nicely to some new staff arrangements. Dr. Paul Gibson-Roy is now based with Greening Australia NSW however we won't be

letting him get away that easily and we're in just as much communication as ever! Mr. Rod White and I are heading up the Victorian pursuits with Paul's support.

To briefly introduce our fantastic team - David Franklin, behind the scenes and on the ground action man, seed producer, land manager and machinery inventor and developer extraordinaire. Lyn Willcock, community engagement legend, who has a passion for education and training. Candice Parker, passionate carer and lover of grassland plants. Candice has a wealth of knowledge about propagating our grassland species and the technical aspects of maintaining our sizable seed production area at Moolapio. Candice is tireless in her work to support Rod and Lyn.

We never forget the wider support from the Greening Australia family and the many volunteers and nurseries around the state that never fail to jump on board and lend us a hand!

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### Wimmera Update

Jess Gardner, Wimmera Project Officer

Now that we've finally had some rain here in the Wimmera, I can start to monitor and manage my two new grassland re-establishment sites. The first site is the new 'Nhill Truck and Trailer Exchange'. This project was undertaken last year in partnership with the Hindmarsh Landcare Network and is now home to four hectares of diverse native grasses species. This year we plan to sow one final hectare of native grasses on the site where the construction offices were once situated. This will complete this works program.

Last spring the 'Dimboola-Minyip 5 Chain Road' site (within the Hindmarsh Shire) was sown to a complex mix of native grass and forb species. This part of the world is much drier than other regions and therefore the plants take a little bit longer to establish. I'm grateful to VicRoads, the Hindmarsh Landcare Network, Hindmarsh Shire and community members who have placed their faith in these projects. Restoring native grasslands is a slower process than establishing pasture grasses (or crops), therefore instant results are unrealistic. However, I'm fortunate to have three of the original GGRP trial sites here in the Wimmera, and all look fantastic and provide a demonstration site to show to stakeholders new to the GGRP techniques.



## Moolapio Grasslands

Rod White, Land Management Technical Officer

A great lot has happened here at Moolapio since the last action packed edition of the Grassy Groundcover Gazette went out 12 months ago, including:

### Outcomes

1. Biomass reduction (cut & bale) in stages 1 & 2 (seeded 2008/9);
2. Stage 3 (seeded 2010) establishing extremely well, and looked fantastic last Spring;
3. Stage 4 (5 hectares –seeded 2011) is beginning to show signs of emergence from a broad range of species (bring on spring!);
4. Moolapio grasslands now cover an impressive 11 hectares!



1. Grassland area 1 after slashing and baling.



2. Stage 3 (sown in Spring 2010), showing a diversity of wildflowers and a good cover of grass species.



3. After the August 2011 sowing.

### Research

As part of our sowings at Moolapio last year, the GGRP established a study to investigate the effectiveness of over-sowing a complex forb mix into a native grass sward. The findings of this research will be invaluable in determining the most effective methods to utilise when goals include increasing species and functional richness in degraded grasslands or native pastures.

### The Future

The financial future of the Moolapio Grasslands is uncertain at the moment. That said, Greening Australia is exploring a number of funding opportunities which will allow us to continue expanding these important grasslands, as well as developing a large scale seed production facility to service the eastern Victorian Volcanic Plains Bioregion. Stay tuned! Contact me directly if you wish to see how you or your organisation may be able to contribute to the future of the Moolapio Grasslands and invest in a Grassy Groundcover Future.

## Burnley SPA Refelections for 2011-2012

Lisa Rasmussen and John Delpratt

Managing the GGRP Seed Production Area at Burnley this past year has been highly productive, interesting and thoroughly enjoyable.

We have continued to develop specific knowledge and nursery skills for all the Moolapio grassland species and with the help of a number of volunteers, Burnley staff and the rest of the GGRP team, have turned over virtually all the polystyrene boxes in production for both SPAs. The previous season's *Microseris lanceolata* tubers were cleaned and transplanted into new medium and the vast majority of other species were germinated



afresh from field-sourced seed or from previous SPA collections and re-boxed.

With this big effort at the beginning of 2011, we expanded the capacity of both the Burnley SPA and the Moolapio SPA to approximately 450 boxes at each SPA; introduced a number of new species (*Austrodanthonia carphoides*, *Brachyscome basaltica*, *Craspedia variabilis*, *Linum marginale*, *Microlaena stipoides*, *Minuria leptophylla*) and were able to set up a well organised system across the two SPAs. The turnover of boxes at Burnley helped us achieve our most productive seed harvest year ever, almost doubling seed production from the previous season. There are a number of species that we can readily grow in production now which reliably produce good quantities of seed. This includes species such as *Arthropodium strictum*, *Bulbine bulbosa*, *Helichrysum rutidolepis*, *Leptorhynchus squamatus*, and *Leucochrysum albicans* (among others).

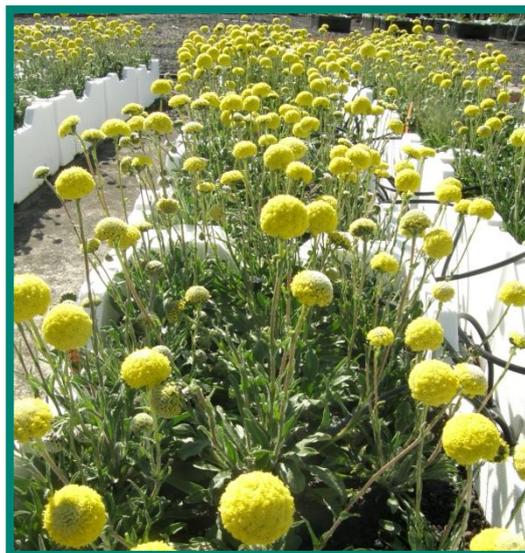
This year, we also developed a more efficient seed collection method over hand collecting. After a fair bit of trial and error, we successfully used an industrial strength vacuum cleaner with species-specific stockings attached to one of the tubing connections which proved effective for many species. We also instigated a couple of simple seed drying methods using stackable large plastic racks and tubs for freshly collected seed. This almost certainly has improved our seed quality for *Arthropodium strictum*, *Bulbine bulbosa*, *Craspedia variabilis*, *Plantago gaudichaudii* and *Wahlenbergia* spp.



After re-boxing and introducing some new species the Burnley SPA had a fantastic seed collection season.

This year, we also developed a more efficient seed collection method over hand collecting. After a fair bit of trial and error, we successfully used an industrial strength vacuum cleaner with species-specific stockings attached to one of the tubing connections for many of the species. We also instigated a couple of simple seed drying methods using stackable large plastic racks and tubs for freshly collected seed. This almost certainly has improved our seed quality for *Arthropodium strictum*,

*Bulbine bulbosa*, *Craspedia variabilis*, *Plantago gaudichaudii* and *Wahlenbergia* spp.



Boxes of *Craspedia variabilis* produced an amazing amount of seed which was dried by spreading out on plastic crates.

As always we came up with more research questions than we could ever answer. We attempted to tackle a group of species that we have found difficult in recent years to germinate or establish under nursery conditions (*Brunonia australis*, *Bothriochloa macra*, *Bossiaea prostrata*, *Cynoglossum suaveolens*, *Glycine tabacina*, *Stackhousia monogyna*, *Stylidium graminifolium*) but struggled to achieve much headway this year due to poor seed quality and time constraints.

We did manage to direct our attention to *Burchardia umbellata* which has been difficult to establish in the nursery owing to its long dormancy period, and the extremely slow development of seedlings to maturity. We currently have about 20 boxes containing dormant material of this species in the system at present.

This year the GGRP team, along with John Delpratt, conducted field trips to collect cutting/seed material for some species that we currently do not have in production. Under Sue Murphy's guidance, we successfully grew the following eight species from cuttings *Asperula conferta*, *Brachyscome basaltica*, *Comesperma polygaloides*, *Lobelia pratioides*, *Pimelea curviflora*, *Pimelea humilis*, *Pimelea spinescens* and *Veronica gracilis*. Happily we now have these species (albeit in small numbers) as part of the species we are growing at the SPA.



Cuttings taken from the field trip.

Sadly, yet understandably, with recent changes to Greening Australia and the move of GA (Vic) to offices at La Trobe Uni (which has its own nursery facility) we have decided to close the Burnley SPA and consolidate that collection at the Moolapio SPA. We hope that there will be more opportunities in the future to re-establish our connection with the University of Melbourne, and we also look forward to new research and nursery opportunities with La Trobe University over forthcoming years.

### Burnley SPA Thank You

With the imminent closure of the Burnley SPA there are many people to thank. The GGRP relationship between The University of Melbourne’s Burnley Campus and Greening Australia began in 2004 when Paul Gibson-Roy, following the completion of his PhD thesis, commenced work establishing 13 one-hectare direct-sown species-rich grassland and grassy woodland understorey demonstration sites (largely across Victoria’s Western Basalt Plains).

Over the past seven years, with the support of Burnley nursery staff, University of Melbourne research students, GA staff and volunteers, the Burnley SPA has gone from strength to strength, continuing to provide seed of rare and endangered grassland species for direct seeding. More recently, the SPA has devoted most of its efforts to producing seed for each year’s direct sowings at the Moolapio restoration site at Point Henry (Geelong).

For the past three years I have been employed one day a week by GA to manage the SPA and would not have been able to do this without the help of countless people.

Firstly, I would like to thank Burnley nursery staff including Nicholas Osborne and Sascha Andrusiak for all their help and support. Nick, Sascha and Vince (who has since left the nursery) have been the backbone of our SPA. The Burnley SPA has been able to achieve significant outcomes in terms of seed production, research projects and raising awareness of grassland species because of the support of staff and access to

infrastructure at Burnley. So many aspects of our SPA work were attended to by these dedicated staff in the general running of the nursery, not to mention the specialist and extra assistance they have given us at many other times.

Ground, administrative and academic staff at Burnley have all assisted the project in various ways whether with research projects or the SPA. We would particularly like to thank Greg Moore, Andrew Smith, Ross Payne, Jenny Bear, Debra McKeown and Sue Murphy.

Many hundreds of volunteer hours have generously been donated to the running of the SPA. There are too many people to thank here but just listing those who have helped in the last 12 months at Burnley gives you an idea of the effort and commitment that has gone into this work by so many. Thank you to Barb Friday, Susan Funder, Pedro Felipe Linares, Gill Gartlan, Ian Gartlan, Chris Meek, Dan Moss, Zac Novak, Geordie Scott-Walker, Glenys Rose, and the Friends of Burnley Gardens team.

Finally, I would like to thank the rest of the GGRP team who always have come and helped me at the Burnley SPA when the tasks have needed a big effort. One phone call and they just always seem to appear. So a big and heartfelt thank you to my dear friends Rod White, Lyn Willcock, Candice Parker and Jess Gardner.

Finally, there are two people who I just simply can’t thank enough. How do you begin to thank Paul Gibson-Roy for driving these big ideas in grassland restoration for such a long time, and for his warm and generous heart. I for one would not have been so drawn to this work if it was not for him. The other is John Delpratt who has guided and mentored me at Burnley since Paul’s departure to Sydney. Thank you so much John.

So it is good-bye from Burnley SPA and a big thank you to so many.

**Lisa Rasmussen**



*Microseris lanceolata* showy flowers.



## Moolapio Seed Production

Candice Parker, Project Officer

During the 2011-2012 seed collection season, we added new species to our production site and planted out into the field other boxes which had become a bit overworked. A huge effort was undertaken by the Moolapio team and numerous volunteers including The Gordon TAFE students, Wathaurong Certificate I students studying in Conservation and Land management and the National Green Jobs Corps works crew, who all put in a fantastic effort to plant out around 250 boxes into the restored Moolapio grassland.



*Rutidosia leptorrhynchoides* starting to fire up for what was a great seed collection season for the species and is still producing seed well into March.

Thanks to the handy help of the vacuum cleaner, the Moolapio SPA produced 4.7kg of seed, and this added with the Burnley SPA brings this to a total of 18.2kg of valuable seed.

At present, the Moolapio SPA will continue to be maintained so it can be showcased to prospective partners for the important role and link it plays to the grassland restoration work that has been undertaken on the Moolapio project at Alcoa, Point Henry.



*Microseris lanceolata* boxes providing lots of colour to the Moolapio SPA.

## Community Engagement GALORE!

Lyn Willcock – Moolapio Project Co-ordinator

### Moolapio Discovery Day

In mid November 2011, the Moolapio project conducted two Grassland Discovery Days, attracting over 110 visitors to the site. The second field day was only possible through kind sponsorship by the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority. Both days were declared an overwhelming success with feedback to staff outstandingly positive. The grasslands were in beautiful form, with the wide variety of grasses and flowers seeding and blooming. Many members of the community who participated in last year's Moolapio's Grassland Discovery Day were astounded at the evolution and growth in the grasslands. Sowing this year has increased the size to a stunning 11 hectares of re-established grassland, with the latest area showing new growth already.

Paul Gibson-Roy walked, talked and toured our visitors through the four establishment areas; breaking into smaller groups to ensure each person had an opportunity to engage in some individualised learning. This year's distinct rise in Moolapio's Grassland Discovery Day numbers indicates the inescapable interest, community and industry passion that exists for Victoria's endangered grasslands.



Participants listen in comfort as Paul Gibson-Roy introduces them to the plight of grasslands in Victoria and what the Moolapio project is attempting to achieve.

A native bee on the beautiful, *Podolepis jaceoides*.





At the end of the line! Participants stand at the end of last year's sown grassland and look at the 2011 sowing area. It is astounding what can grow in a year!

### Volunteer Thank You Day

To assist Greening Australia with the mammoth task of managing seed collection, propagation and nursery tasks associated with producing seed for the extensive Moolapio grassland, volunteers have donated over 360 hours of their precious time! Without our volunteers we would have been in serious trouble with managing the 900 containerised boxes of plants used for growing seed; housed between the SPA at Point Henry's Moolapio project and at Melbourne University's Burnley Nursery facilities. A day was held to honour and thank our volunteers with a special tour of the Moolapio grasslands with Greening Australia staff and a beautiful lunch. Each volunteer was presented with a GGRP specially designed labelled bottle of wine to show our grateful appreciation for the overwhelming hours donated to our grassland project.



Volunteers tour the grassland as a way of thanking them for their time and hard work in assisting Greening Australia staff. Volunteers were able to contextualise their work into the much bigger picture!

### Australian and International Ecology students tour the Moolapio Grasslands

The Moolapio grasslands offer a wonderland of educational opportunity for many students. The most recent students to put our grassland under the microscope were a keen group of 15 ecology students from Melbourne University, Queensland University; and included international students from Finland, England, Germany and Sweden.

The students were initially shown through the Moolapio SPA where Rod White, Moolapio Technical Land Manger and Lyn Willcock Project Co-ordinator discussed the plight of grasslands across the VVP and the overall process of producing and collecting seed for grassland re-establishment on site at Point Henry.

The group then visited the Moolapio grasslands and were guided through the process of how Greening Australia re-established 11 hectares of grassland on the site. As always, the students were provided with written and verbal materials to assist in their comprehension of the processes associated with re-establishing grasslands i.e. seed production, seed collection, onground techniques, follow up maintenance, and species identification. The students were inspired by the magnitude and obvious success of the grasslands and were impressed with the diversity of species including the many signature species of the grasslands.



Ecology students with Moolapio staff in the Point Henry SPA and Grassland.





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the GGRP?

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