

The Ecological Society of Australia's annual conference, Perth, WA, November 2007.

Report from Susie Murphy-White on Symposium One '*Embedding an ecological approach in agricultural landscapes: a way forward*' convened by Kerry Bridle and Jann Williams.

This symposium focused on the relevance of ecological work in agricultural landscapes to agricultural land managers, with an emphasis on how researchers have successfully engaged with land managers, particularly farmers, to develop improved environmental outcomes in agricultural landscapes. The conference was sponsored by a number of agencies and programs including Grain and Graze. Ted Lefroy (Landscape Logic, UTAS) provided funds to allow our keynote speaker, Davy McCracken, to present his research on biodiversity across Scottish farming landscapes, a project not unlike BiGG.

Davy's talk was well received and was followed by another European talk by Annie Ouin, a visiting French ecologist. She presented her research on understanding landscape connectivity in farming landscapes with respect to butterfly conservation.

We then heard from Geoff Titmarsh (GG Maranoa-Balonne) about the action learning module used in the Darling Downs of Queensland to assist land managers identify and consider landscape scale natural resource management. Greg Ford of the Queensland Murray Darling Committee (GG Border Rivers) then spoke about 'farmecology' finding the right medicine to help producers recover from an ailing landscape. Greg also highlighted how much the 'green' can learn from the 'brown' and how it was possible to work together.

The mid morning sessions were dominated by the Biodiversity in Grain and Graze project. The session started off with Susie Murphy White's presentation looked beyond the remnant vegetation at farmers understanding and management of biodiversity within the Avon farming systems. Janet Smith from UTAS then spoke about how land use influences birds in a mixed farming landscape. Peter McQuillan provided an ecological interpretation of the beetle communities found across the nine regions involved in BiGG. The talks then went underground with Gupta Vadakattu (GG Mallee) talking about the complex relationships between soil biology and production landscapes.

The afternoon sessions brought a range of presentation from eastern Australia about the impacts of grazing in native pastures (Ian Lunt, CSU; Vivienne Turner, ARI and GG Corangamite/Glenelg/Hopkins). David Green (UTAS) demonstrated the value of soil mites in the landscape and the effect of grazing on mite numbers. Jann Williams offered an overview of the outcomes of the Land, Water & Wool Native Vegetation and Biodiversity subprogram, while Nick Reid (UNE) provided more detailed information on their LWW project. Other presentations looked at habitat provision in agricultural landscapes. The final talk, by Shane Broad (UTAS), outlined the globalisation of Tasmania farms and the implications for natural resource management.

There were many poster presentations in addition to the talks.

The symposium highlighted the extent of the ecological research occurring across Australia on agricultural landscapes and the change in practices that has occurred and is needed to occur in the future to gain good environmental outcomes. Many

thanks to all who took part in this event, and special thanks to our session chairs (Greg Ford, Viv Turner and Nick Reid), to Jann Williams for structuring the symposium, to the local organising committee, particularly Patrick Smith, for their efforts and to Richard Price and Ted Lefroy for supporting the day.

Dave Green's report on the BiGG field trip follows:

The BiGG Day Out at the ESA Conference in Perth, roving reporter Dave Green (UTAS)

The Wednesday of the ESA conference in Perth was given over to field trips of various sorts. It was decided that instead of participating in one of the organised trips, the BiGG contingent would take the opportunity to visit two of the farms that are part of the BiGG project in the Avon region of WA. Susie Murphy-White (Department of Agriculture and Food WA), the Avon region Biodiversity Co-ordinator for BiGG kindly organised the day.

From Perth we headed into the wheat belt and the Avon Valley. Our first stop was a visit to Lawry Pittman's farm at Corrigin. Although late November is probably one of the busiest times of the year for Lawry and his family, due to harvesting, he generously spent almost an hour talking to us about his life, his family, and his farm. In Lawry we met a man with as many interests as there are days of the year; a passionate naturalist/photographer who has captured stunning pictures of the nature that lives on his farm, and a philosopher who seemed to be able to put a positive spin on even life's harshest lessons. We heard about the history of the property and how tough the last few years had been with drought and failed crops. The conversation ranged from pet eagles, to cameras, to revegetation corridors, to global warming and family trees, but unfortunately all too soon the conversation had to come to an end and Lawry had to get back to work. We had a chance to visit one of the remnants used in the BiGG study on Lawry's farm to see what the vegetation is like, and even in the few minutes that we were there, we spotted several birds and lots of insects.



Our next stop was to Colin and Debbie Stacey at Quairading where once again we got a glimpse into life and farming in the Avon region. Although not a participating farm in the BiGG project, Colin and Debbie gave generously of their time considering it was all hands on deck to get the harvest in. We heard about the history of the farm and the revegetation that was happening there. Most generously, for the boys and girls among us we were able to ride in the cabs of the headers that were working the nearby wheat paddocks. It was great to be in these huge machines, and put into perspective my aspirations of owning a ride on mower one day, a match box toy by comparison. Once again we met some very generous people here who gave us some more insight into making a living in this somewhat unforgiving environment.

The last farm we visited was Gene Stone's at Quairading, and for the third time that day we met a man who is generous with his time. We spent about an hour hearing about his property, the history, the crops and his appreciation and memories of the wild flowers that grow in some of the remnant vegetation on his farm, of which we managed to visit one. Here we saw a few late season flowers, birds and various insects.



The day was surprising and educational for me in many ways; the ease in which dialogue and ideas flowed both ways between farmers and researchers was great, the mutual respect that was underlying the various conversations was reassuring and being able to now relate and have some tangible experience of the environment in which part of the BiGG study was conducted was hugely important and lets not forget the ride in the headers. If we, as scientists and researchers, can inform the farmers in this project half as well as they informed us during this field trip, we will have done our work well.

Our profound thanks go to Susie for organising the field day, Peter Coyle from Department of Agriculture and Food, WA for driving the bus, being the resident bird expert and many other duties and David Kessell also from Department of Agriculture and Food for his botanical knowledge and understanding of wheat belt agriculture.

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