STIPA NATIVE GRASSES ASSOCIATION

Bulletin

ISSUE 3, FEBRUARY 2008

Stipa is named after the genus of grasses now called *Austrostipa*—one of the most common *Stipas* is speargrass. Since its inception in 1997, Stipa has promoted the use of native grasses to achieve profit from a healthy landscape

In this issue:

Stipa Native Grasses Association
ABN 42300161459
Interim CEO: Graeme Hand
PO Box 276, Wellington NSW 2820
T: 02 6845 1044
F: 02 6845 1099
E: vivienne.stipa@bigpond.com

Chair: Colin Seis
Treasurer: George Taylor
Member communications editor: Kim Goldsmith
Ochre Communications
PO Box 933, Dubbo NSW 2830
T: 02 6887 2288 M: 0419 439 923
E: kim_ochre@bigpond.com

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April Bulletin: 4 April
June Newsletter: 6 June
August Bulletin: TBA

Grizzly bears, elephants & wolves
- Sue Rahilly

I was very fortunate to be able to attend the Quivira Coalition Conference, "Building Resilience: Creating Hope in and Age of Consequences", in January 2008. It was held in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Quivira is an organisation very similar to Stipa in that it brings ranchers and environmentalists together, promoting ecologically regenerative land management. The Coalition formed in the early nineties when environmental groups were campaigning for the prairies to be "Cattle Free by '93".

I met as many people as possible which was exciting and stimulating. The ranchers attending were all passionate about America's native flora and fauna, and are working to incorporate their production systems into the native ecological system. This means contending with native fauna such as mountain lions, grizzly bears and wolves. These predators make the fox look totally insignificant!

Bison grazing at 2000 metres and below freezing, New Mexico, USA

Presentaions at the conference covered a wide range of topics.

An archeologist, Eric Blinman, has studied the Pueblo Native Americans' adaptation to climate change over the last 2000 years. This did give us hope, as the Pueblans have adapted to changes as dramatic as we are experiencing now.

David Western together with John Kamanga, a Maassai herder, talked of opportunities to combine pastoralism and eco tourism in Kenya. Here, herders have learnt to live with lions and elephants. Unfortunately the human element in Kenya could prove far more devastating to these peoples lives.

Harvesting water in dry landscapes was well covered. The sorts of remediations in creeks recommended by Peter Andrews are being carried out with a great deal of success, the

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Changes at Stipa
- Graeme Hand, Interim CEO

As you would know from the insert in the December newsletter, Neville Gould has left Stipa and the Stipa executive have proposed an interim CEO be appointed to oversee activities until the end of May 2008.

Graeme Hand, from Branxholme, in South West Victoria, has taken on this role part-time. Graeme and family run beef cattle on their own property. He spoke at the Mudgee conference on regenerating native grasses using grazing management. Apart from farming, Graeme has worked as an industrial chemist for large corporations, extension for Victorian DPI, consulted for the meat industry on eating quality and marketing, as well as now training land managers in Holistic Management which includes grazing management and profitable redesign of agriculture.

Graeme's focus will be to secure funding for a full time CEO for Stipa as well as ongoing project funding that allows for the national development of Stipa, with an initial focus on Victoria. He is also a member of the conference committee. As the next Stipa conference is to be held at Horsham, Victoria, he will play an active local role.

At this stage, Graeme is travelling to Wellington NSW every second week to assist Vivienne, Angela and Xanthe with the WeaLtH Project and the Drought Preparedness Project. Graeme will also be presenting at some of these workshops.

He welcomes any calls or emails to discuss the future and direction of Stipa. Graeme can be contacted on mobile 0418 532 130 or by email at graemeh1@bordernet.com.au

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

6th National Native Grasslands Conference
Regenerative Grassland Management for Profitable, Ecological and Social Gains
9-11 November 2008, Horsham Victoria

Abstract submission deadline: 29 August 2008

Download more information & guidelines from the 2008 Conference page at www.stipa.com.au

Perennial Stipa Calendar available now!

Only $20.00

A grass or grassland plant is featured each month, with identification, growth habits and grazing information. A great document to keep all your annual events and dates in.

To purchase, complete the order form attached to this Bulletin or download an order form from www.stipa.com.au. Also available at the Central West Conservation Farming Field Day (21 February).

CONTRIBUTION DEADLINE FOR APRIL 2008 STIPA BULLETIN: 4 April 2008
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Send contributions to Ochre Communications—PO Box 933 Dubbo NSW 2830 or kim_ochre@bigpond.com

systems being designed by Bill Zeedyk. These structures have been built in streams in Mexico for thousands of years.

Wes Jackson of The Land Institute spoke on "What Will the Ecosphere Require of Us?". His answer was an emphatic NOTHING. The ecosystem will recover from human activity, whether we survive or not. To save human's habitat on earth, Wes called on us to carry out restraint and to be creative.

Following the conference, Sheldon Atwood, with his son Angus, took me to Vermejo Park Ranch, a 600,000 acre ranch owned by Ted Turner and managed by Mark Kossler. In northern New Mexico, the ranch runs from prairie country at 6400 feet elevation (1970 m) right up to snow covered mountain tops, at 13,000 feet (4000m). Mark, who is one of Sheldon's partners in Carrus Land Systems, took time out to show me around.

We started with a flight over the ranch in Mark's plane. All the fauna on the ranch is native, as the intent is to graze bison profitably and ecologically. The web page for Vermejo details the other flora and fauna as well as the history, and is well worth visiting. We are hoping Mark will come to Australia in November for the Stipa Conference.

After a long spectacular drive through Colorado we arrived in Salt Lake City. There, I had a meeting with Fred Provenza, Professor of Animal Behaviour, SUS, Sheldon and Michel Meuret, a French Agricultural Researcher who researchs grazing livestock in the Alps and how the shepherds are dealing with globalisation and nature conservation.

This meeting was the highlight of the trip for me. Discussion ranged from the fact that plants probably do not compete with each other, but in fact collaborate, and the more plants and animals on a piece of land the more fertile it is, to the need for more collaboration between people, especially at the local level.

In all, I realised that we are not alone in the problems we face in Australia. How exciting it would be to form a network of researchers and land managers across US and Australia. There is so much to learn from each other.

Go to www.stipa.com.au/Articles of Interest for the longer length article and more photos.

I also recommend the following:

www.vermejoparkranch.com
www.carruslandsystems.com
www.quiviracoalition.org
www.usu.edu/ust/index.cfm?article=10713
www.quiviracoalition.org/images/pdfs/759-Fred_Provenza_-_05-22-06.pdf
www.international.inra.fr/join_us/working_for_inra/portraits/michel_meuret

"In the Dust of Kilamanjaro" by David Western.

"Rainwater Harvesting for Drylands and Beyond" Brad Lancaster.

WeaLtH Project Update

- Angela Roberts

Stipa has hit the ground running in 2008, continuing to share knowledge through the WeaLtH Project workshops.

The first of our workshops for 2008 was held in late January in Wellington with a Native Grass Identification day presented by Jenene Kidston from NSW DPI. This was followed with a very successful and informative two day Grazing Management session held in Coonamble on 4 and 5 February.

Stipa have added to their workshops in 2008 through the Drought Preparedness Project, supported by the Central West Catchment Management Authority. Through this project Stipa will be offering a range of new workshops including Succession Planning & Depression, Pasture Identification & Management, Water Supply Planning, Introductory Grazing Management and Financial Planning. We will also continue to offer workshops under the WeaLtH Project, including Advanced Pasture Cropping, Native Grass Identification, Soil Management, Saltbush Establishment & Management and Advanced Grazing Management.

Following are the dates for our upcoming workshops in February & March 2008:

23 February: "The Road Ahead", Cobora Station, Dunedoo: Focusing on *Healthy Minds, Healthy Families, Healthy Farms* this workshop will cover topics such as succession planning, depression, nutrition, and men's health. There will be a range of stalls available on the day including a local doctor, naturopath, Cancer Council, as well as a jumping castle for the kids and a BBQ lunch.

26 & 27 February: Advanced Pasture Cropping, Trangie Bowling Club: This is the final pasture cropping workshop by Col Seis as part of the WeaLtH Project so you will need to get in fast. This workshop focuses on how to properly apply the systems of pasture cropping and no kill cropping to regenerate grasslands by grazing and cropping. Suitable for all croppers, mixed farmers and graziers, local experiences will be highlighted outlining the gains in water use efficiency and soil health.

4 March: Introductory Grazing Management, Coolah; and **5 March**: **Advanced Grazing Management**, Wellington: These sessions will introduce those interested in improving their grazing management practices by assisting you to see your land differently and to identify production opportunities and will also help those wishing to fine tune their grazing practices. There will be practical sessions looking at ground cover and plant recovery as well as a session on monitoring and evaluating your progress.

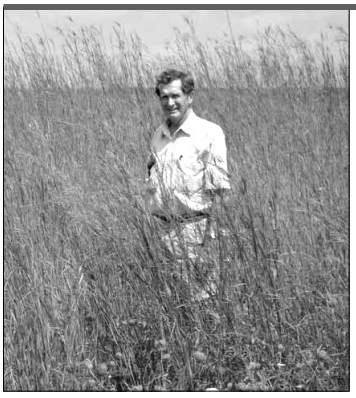
11 March: Pasture Identification and Management, Coolah: Will provide participants with the knowledge to identify native grasses and pastures whilst outlining best practice of the plant at all stages of its life cycle.

13 March: Water Supply Planning, Nyngan: This workshop will provide participants with the knowledge of water supply and the best practices for implementing. It will include theory and a practical visit to demonstrate options of water supply on a property.

17 March: Financial Planning, Dunedoo and **18 March: Financial Planning**, Tullamore: Both workshops will provide participants with the knowledge of financial planning , including reducing the impact of drought whilst covering the following topics: off farm income, making money during drought, management of a property to deal with drought and drought support availability.

All of these workshops are free to attend and numbers are filling up quickly. If you are interested in attending some or all of these workshops please **call Angela Roberts now on 0424 228 725 or 02 6845 1044. You can also email Angela at angela.stipa@bigpond.com**

Funding for these workshops has been provided by the Central West Catchment Management Authority as part of the NSW and Australian Government's National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality.



American prairies & Australian grasslands

- John Watson, "Kilmarnock", Boggabri NSW

John Watson in big bluestem at the Neale Smith National Wildlife Refuge Centre, Iowa, USA

For someone *into* grasses the examination of an iconic grass species is perhaps like sighting a human celebrity. So the chance was taken to look at re-established big bluestem in the eastern mid-west of the USA. There it is very obvious that it fits into the tall grass prairie ecology where there is great diversity. We may have some contenders for iconic status in Australia but where and how they fit in our grasslands is problematic. It is time we tried to re-establish an 'authentic' local grassland.

Membership of Stipa has inspired me to look at native grasses in many places and seeing big bluestem in the USA some years ago caught my interest every time I saw it mentioned. This first sighting was at a University field day in Milan, Tennessee. Last year (2007) I was fortunate to be able to plan a trip to the mid-west to look at the prairie from West to East. That is, from the short grass prairie to the tall grass prairie areas, from 300mm to 1000mm of rainfall and more than 1,500km distance, from Montana to Iowa. I hoped to see prairie re-establishment, compare their species with our Australian ones and also compare American activities with what Stipa is doing encouraging the growing of native grasses in this country.

Big bluestem is probably the iconic grass of the American prairie. It grows over two metres tall, is deeply rooted down to three metres in those deep fertile soils, where it can dominate in some circumstances. John Madsen (1995), in a wonderful, if folksy book, states "[t]he symbolic grass of tall prairie, an official stamp of authenticity, [is] the big bluestem or *Andropogon gerardii"*. Meredith Mitchell (2003) writes how it could be cut for hay for 100 years without fertiliser in those deep very fertile soils of the eastern prairies. Only a small fraction of one percent of the tall grass prairies are left, they were ploughed out to grow corn and other crops. Two or three decades ago many people in the prairie states started to re-establish the huge diversity of the original grasslands.

Australia does have at least one iconic grass of its own - Mitchell grass, *Astrebla spp.* The four species are widely distributed in the

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2008 calendar of events

More information & updated events at www.stipa.com.au
For more information on workshops contact Angela Roberts on 02 6845 1044 or 0424 228 725 or email: angela.stipa@bigpond.com

February

23 **"The Road Ahead"** ***Healthy Minds, Healthy Families, Healthy Farms*** **workshop,** Cobora Station, Dunedoo, 10am—3.30pm.

26-27 **Advanced Pasture Cropping Workshop,** Trangie Bowling Club, 9.30am—4pm. Final pasture cropping workshop with Colin Seis—booking fast.

March

4 **Introductory Grazing Management Workshop**, Coolah

11 **Advanced Grazing Management Workshop**, Wellington
Pasture Identification & Management Workshop, Coolah

13 **Water Supply Planning Workshop**, Nyngan

17 **Financial Planning Workshop**, Dunedoo

18 **Financial Planning Workshop**, Tullamore

28 **Saltbush Establishment & Management Workshop**, Warren.

April

2 **Soil Management Workshop**, Dunedoo

4 **Soil Management Workshop**, Molong

15 **Pasture Identification & Management Workshop**, Coonabarabran

16 **Water Supply & Planning Workshop**, Coonabarabran

24 **WeaLtH Project Incentive Funding deadline**
Contact: Xanthe White 02 6845 1044 or 0402 117 790 or email: xanthe.stipa@bigpond.com

What are your options now it has rained?

Stipa can offer you information about financial planning, grazing management, pasture identification & management, succession planning, depression, family health & water supply planning.

Contact Stipa today on (02) 6845 1044 and ask about Drought Preparedness Project workshops or look at the workshops listed at www.stipa.com.au

Mitchell grass plains of north-west NSW and northern and western Queensland. Not as spectacular or prolific as big bluestem but highly significant to the northern Australian pastoral industries.

Here in northern NSW we do have a tall grass - tall oat grass (*Themeda avenae*) which may have been widespread at the time of white settlement. (Rolls, 1984) Interestingly it was originally classed as an *Adropogon.* However, its former density and future importance is quite speculative at this stage. These individually spectacular species do not make a prairie or grassland.

Many institutions and individuals in the prairie states of the USA have been restoring the prairie to its original diversity of over 200 species. One such individual is Karl Kurtz, of Iowa, who many years ago started to grow native prairie species on his corn and soybean farm, and now can claim 130 species in his re-established prairie. Talking with Kurt in his prairie, I think I started to experience the sense of awe that must have been felt by the North American settlers as they trekked westward out of the forests, over 200 years ago, into those vast treeless plains with vegetation you could hardly walk through.

Many scientists from a large number of universities and designated prairie institutes are now involved in re-establishing prairie areas as they might have existed before settlers came with their ploughs. Professor Laura Jackson (2007) of the University of Northern Iowa has demonstrated that grass dominant prairie can be managed to give much greater diversity. This involved experimenting with the timing of the burning of the dry grasses and investigating how various legumes and forbs could be re-seeded. Livestock have not been introduced to these areas; the aim is to create a refuge for the original native species including animals, a historical perspective as well as a sporting or amenity function.

In contrast here in Australia our approach has been by mainly individual farmers, Stipa members no less, who have increased productivity and reduced costs by growing natives. Short grazing periods and long spell periods have re-invigorated the native grass component of our grasslands. Ground cover is the all important measure of success of this system and it gives us erosion and weed control and more stable productivity. These advances have been lead by dedicated individuals who have persevered with subdividing paddocks, improving stock water supplies and changing grazing practices. All this despite the lack of knowledge and suitable native grass seed supplies. Sometimes it would be easier to grow introduced species.

On the northwest slopes and plains of NSW the superiority of introduced subtropicals, for example bambatsi and premier digit, over native grasses has been demonstrated and interest in these exotics continues to expand. Agricultural Department and Catchment Management Authority support for increased plantings is justified with the greater productivity of these introduced sub-tropical species. This development is made easier with reliable seed supplies and greater knowledge of establishment and management. Despite this, there are many people who wish to grow natives even if only on certain dedicated areas of the farm.

The actual diversity of species in native grassland pre-white settlement in the north-west is probably a mixture of speculation and informed guess. The early settlers, and squatters, certainly seemed to be in a hurry to get their livestock to the best areas, little knowing the fragility of the local ecosystem and the threat of drought. Their assessment that the grasslands were an inexhaustible resource, has been shown to be wrong. Native grasslands have been under threat since imported grazing animals were introduced. I would have to ask whether the widespread planting of imported sub-tropicals species continues this threat and that they, the exotics, will become dominant in northern NSW as buffel grass has in Queensland. I think we have a duty to look back to the past and try to re-establish even small areas of what we see as the original native grassland, for individual satisfaction and public good.

Many individuals such as George Taylor (2006) have re-established considerable grass diversity on their properties and can be justifiably proud of that achievement. Many others, for instance Des Lang (2003), have listed and demonstrated what legumes were perhaps present in original grasslands. Governments and their agencies have a responsibility to further assist in these endeavours and dedicate land, staff and funding.

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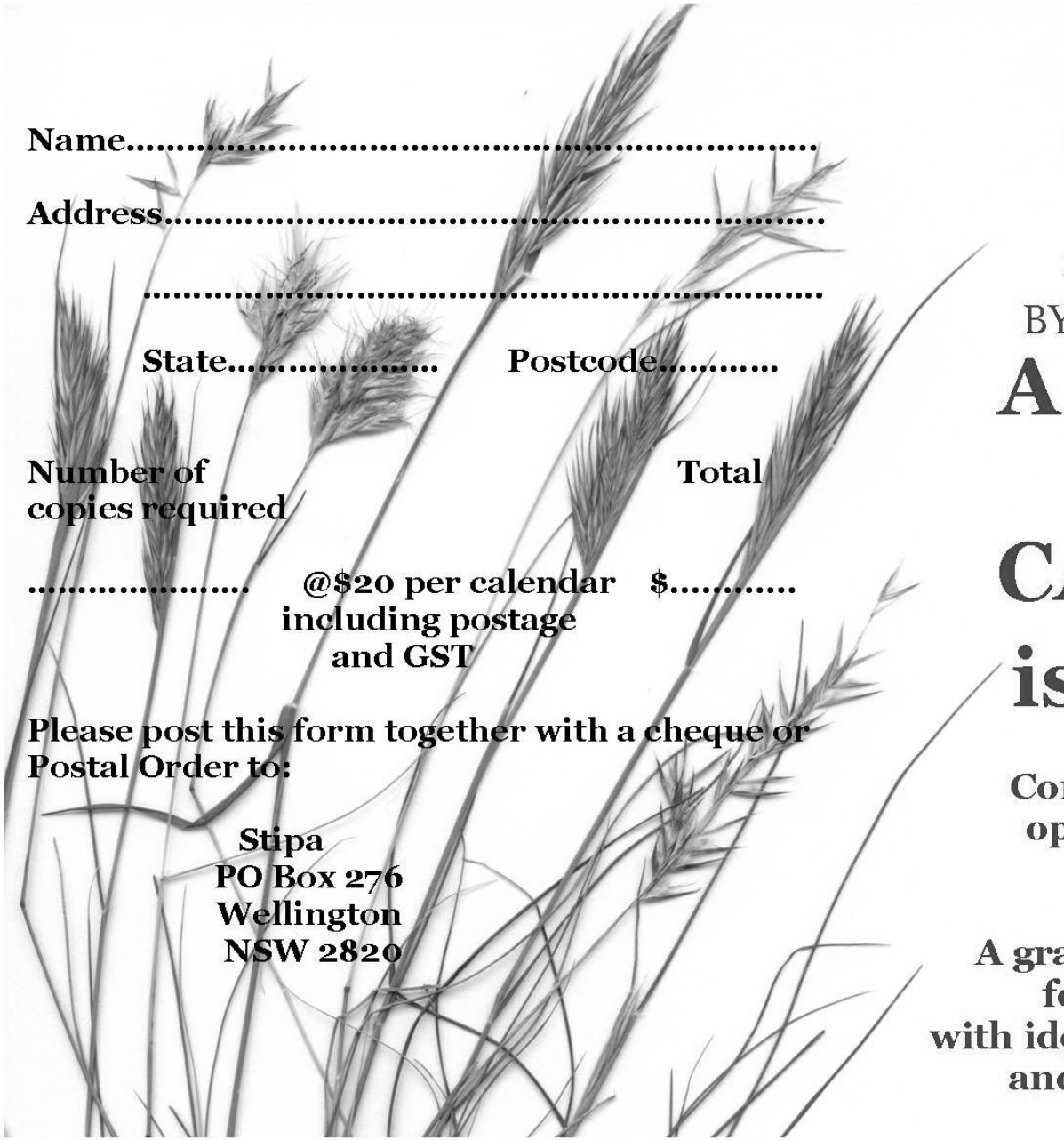

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A grass or grassland plant is featured each month, with identification, growth habits and grazing information.