

12 March 2019. Mongarlowe Cemetery and beyond.

18 km east of Braidwood lays the picturesque village of Mongarlowe at the foot of Mt Budawang. It's surrounded by a patchwork of heathlands and open woodlands on relatively impoverished sandy soils. On its outskirts is a small cemetery that no longer has internments. Like many other cemeteries, it supports a remnant native grassland with a rich assortment of shrubs and herbs that withstand the irregular visits from the council mowing team. The cemetery is famous among botanists for its range of autumn-flowering orchids in the genera *Chiloglottis*, *Corunastylis*, *Eriochilus* and *Pterostylis*. Most of these flower in March after good summer rains. These were not forthcoming this year so we did not have great expectations from the site on this occasion. We were also disappointed to find that the cemetery had been recently mown.

On this occasion the Wednesday Walkers were joined by orchid specialist, Jean Egan, co-author of the Orchids of the ACT. After arriving Jean described the structure of the flower of the midge orchid (*Corunastylis*) and we learnt a new word, **resupinate**, that refers to an "upside down" orchid flower, with the labellum pointed downwards. Jean also showed us pictures of the four species of midge orchid so far seen in the cemetery. Despite their name midge orchids are generally pollinated by tiny, calyprate flies in the fruit fly and scavenger fly families (Drosophilidae and Scatopsidae) rather than midges.



Resupinate Midge Orchid flower, *Corunastylis oligantha*

Thus armed with the knowledge, we dispersed over the cemetery looking for orchids, that proved to be few and far between, as a result of the drought and recent mowing. Our first find was Parsons Bands, *Eriochilus cuculatus*, a common local orchid, that was growing in small numbers over most of the area. Next, a small patch of *Corunastylis oligantha* and *C. apostasioides* was located, growing among a large prostrate, exotic *Grevillea* (nevertheless very attractive with its purple toothbrushes). The Mongarlow Midge Orchid, *Corunastylis oligantha* is endemic to this area. The Freak Midge Orchid, *C. apostasioides*, is a widespread species. Its flowers rarely open and it is self-pollinated. A few more scattered *C. oligantha* were located in the grassy slopes of the cemetery before we moved on to the shrubby surrounds where some patches of the yellow everlasting, *Coronidium scorpioides* (formerly *C. rutidolepis*) provided the only colour, but no orchids. Although there is quite a range of interesting shrubs and herbs at this site, mainly prostrate forms, we are leaving these for a spring visit when most would be in flower.



Parson's Bands *Eriochilus cucculatus*



Freak Midge Orchid *Corunastylis apostasioides*



Mongarlowe Midge Orchid *Corunastylis oligantha*
showing its 2 horn-like dorsal sepals. **Endemic**



Comesperma sphaerocarpum

The next stop was the roadside just outside the village where more orchids are known to occur. Here a council protected vegetation sign actually marks the spot where the orchids are growing. More *C. oligantha* and the endangered, *Corunastylis superba* were seen, although they took of a lot of finding in the scrub. More Coronidiums, including *C. oxyantha* were still in flower, as well as the rush-like *Comesperma sphaerocarpum*.



Jean photographing a *C. oligantha* in a vulnerable spot next to the vegetation sign



The same *C. oligantha* growing in roadside gravel next to the sign

Endemic



Pink Midge Orchid *Corunastylis superba*

Endangered

Following our route of previous visits, we drove down Half Moon Road through a mosaic of woodland and heathland for lunch near a large area of *Casuarina nana* heathland. Jean found a prime specimen of *C. superba* in the adjacent woodland as well as drawing our attention to a comb fern, *Schizaea bifida* that we don't often see. Coincidentally next to the *superba* was a tiny greenhood, the recently described *Speculantha furva*, with its in-turned flowers. This road passes through a diverse range of shrubs and herbs that would be worth a spring visit to see in flower, a trip that we have never done.



Forked Comb Fern *Schizaea bifida*



Pink Midge Orchid
Corunastylis superba **Endangered**



Tiny Greenhood *Speculantha furva*