

Autumn 2010

BOTANIC NEWS

FRIENDS *of the* ROYAL BOTANIC
GARDENS MELBOURNE INC.

GROWING FRIENDS'
PLANT SALE
April 17 - 18

FROM THE PRESIDENT

At the Annual General Meeting last November amendments to the Friends' Trust Fund were approved and two new Trustees, Maurice Castro and Peter Griffin, were appointed. I am now delighted to announce that Frank Phillips has taken over as Chairman of Trustees, following Prof. Robin Sharwood's decision to step down from that role. Maurice Castro has been appointed as Secretary to replace Lawrence Cohn who retired at the AGM.

We acknowledge and thank Prof. Sharwood most sincerely for the significant contribution he made as Chairman since the Trust Fund was established in 1986. Frank Phillips was the first President of the Friends and also served a term as a member of the first Royal Botanic Gardens Board. He has been a Trustee of the Trust Fund since 1992. Members may recall that Lawrence Cohn had been a Trustee and Secretary of the Trust Fund since it was established in 1986.

Changes have also been afoot in the Events Committee. We are very sorry that Susan Mackintosh has decided to stand down as Convener and retire from the Committee, and our thanks go to her for all she has done during the year that she was involved. I am delighted that Judy Trenberth, who has been a committee member since 2007, is taking over as Convener.

In October 2008, Council approved a grant of \$70,000 to help fund the Guilfoyle Volcano project. This very exciting undertaking will be officially opened at the end of March. The clever landscaping concept of volcanic activity,

including lava flows, uses massed plantings of succulents. It has worked beautifully, and I do urge Members who have not already seen it or who have not seen it for some time, to come and have a look.

Unfortunately I have sad news for the fans of Richard Barley's column which has appeared regularly in each edition of *Botanic News* since Summer 2003-4. Having been appointed as Chief Executive of Australia's Open Garden Scheme, Richard will be leaving the RBG in mid-March so the column in this edition will be his last as Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne. Richard has delighted our readers with his whimsical and amusing writing which has taken us on amazing and sometimes fanciful journeys along many highways and byways and then somehow found the track back to the Melbourne Gardens – sometimes the journey commenced in the Melbourne Gardens and took off from there! On behalf of the Friends I would like to express our appreciation and thanks to Richard for these wonderful columns which have given so much pleasure to many Members and to wish him well in his new role.

Please remember that the Growing Friends' Autumn Plant Sale will be held on Saturday 17 and Sunday 18 April. Please make a note of these dates in your diary. Many special plants will be offered for sale.

Janet Thomson, President



Photo: Catby Trinca

2010 Calendar – Apology

Unfortunately, it has come to our notice that the dates for Easter have been incorrectly printed in the 2010 Calendar. Good Friday actually falls on **Friday 2 April** and Easter Sunday on **Sunday 4 April**. The Friends apologise to Members for this error and for any inconvenience caused as a result.

Association of Friends of Botanic Gardens Inc.

The Friends of the Australian Inland Botanic Gardens, Mildura, are hosting the next Association of Friends' Conference which will be held on 21-23 May. An interesting range of speakers will address the theme of the conference *Secrets of the Mallee*. For conference details and registration form go to www.friendsbotanicgardens.org and click on *Events*. Information is also available at Gate Lodge.

These conferences, which are open to all with an interest in, or involvement with, botanic gardens, are always stimulating and friendly occasions. They provide not only an opportunity for participants to visit the local botanic garden, but also to meet supporters of botanic gardens and arboreta located in many different parts of Australia. Why not plan a holiday to Mildura and include the conference in your itinerary?

Janet Thomson

Below: Rose display at the Inland Botanic Gardens, Mildura.
Photo: Susie Brookes



FROM THE GARDENS AND HERBARIUM

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Front cover: Late Summer sunset in Melbourne.

Photo: Jennifer Marshall

Back cover: Detail of Alison Gianangeli's painting of persimmon *Diospyrus kaki*.

Chinese Botanic Gardens

During November I attended anniversary celebrations and meetings at two botanic gardens in southern China – one in Guangzhou (Canton) and the other in Nanning.

Established in Guangzhou in 1929 and covering 320 ha, South China Botanical Garden (photo, top left) is one of three botanic gardens overseen by the Chinese Academy of Sciences. It therefore has a strong scientific focus and its research facilities are outstanding for their quality, diversity and technical support – equal to, if not better than, equivalent facilities at most Australian universities.

As well as attending the 80th Anniversary of the Garden, I was also a member of an international panel reviewing the Garden's 2010-2020 Strategic Plan. Chaired by Prof. Peter Raven, President of Missouri Botanical Garden, and with other members from Britain, the United States, Australia, Indonesia and Ireland, the panel's program involved presentations from senior staff, inspections of the garden and research laboratories, and preparation of a report.

We were especially impressed by the Garden's scientific and horticultural achievements and the major capital and other investments being made in the institution. South China Botanical Garden is clearly already amongst the top few botanic gardens in China, and its ambitious plans for the next decade will place it as a leading garden internationally.

In Nanning (an hour's flight west of Guangzhou) I participated in the 50th Anniversary of the Guangxi Botanical Garden of Medicinal Plants (photo, bottom left) and presented a paper at the 2009 *Chinese Botanical Gardens Annual Academic Conference*. The Garden's collections include approximately 5,000 taxa of medicinal plants, placing it in the top five medicinal plant collections world-wide. Its staff undertakes extensive research into pharmaceutically active compounds in these plants, both for traditional Chinese medicine and for Western medical uses.

At the conference I spoke about the Australian Garden in a session with the theme *Construction of and outlook on*

modern botanical gardens.

Many new gardens are being built in China – there were only 12 China-wide in 1950, but the number had risen to 138 by 2000 and to more than 200 by 2009. There was much interest in the Australian Garden, especially in our vision for the garden and its objectives and how we have matched its landscape design with our key educational messages and visitor experiences.

Professional Development for Asia-Pacific Gardens

Whilst in Nanning, I also discussed preparations for the inaugural International Certificate in Botanic Gardens Management. This 15-day certificate course, intended particularly to help develop the professional expertise of staff at Asia-Pacific gardens, was recently held at the Singapore Botanic Gardens. Peter Symes and Neil Perkins from RBG Melbourne went to Singapore as presenters of the course module on horticulture, which included topics such as pruning, weed risks, pest and disease management, and impacts of climate change. Their attendance was funded by the RBG Foundation. The course was also supported via trainers and funding from Botanic Gardens Conservation International, RBG Edinburgh, RBG Sydney and Botanic Gardens of Adelaide.

Extended Opening Hours for the Children's Garden

Since opening in 2004, The Ian Potter Foundation Children's



Above: The lake at South China Botanical Garden features a 'dam' of aquaria holding a remarkable display of global freshwater plants. Below: A sign at Guangxi Botanical Garden displays a maxim all gardens and gardeners can live by.



Photos: Dr Philip Moors

Garden has closed at 4.00 pm. This timing was set mainly to manage 'wear and tear' on a young garden, but it has meant families and children were often disappointed not to be able to visit the garden during summer evenings. Five years on, the Garden is now well established, and we have a full understanding of how its attractions are used by its thousands of visitors. Accordingly, we have altered the closing time to sunset throughout the year, matching the time when RBG Melbourne itself closes. The Children's Garden is now open to general visitors from Wednesday to Sunday inclusive from 10.00 am (unchanged) until sunset; it is also open on all public holidays and throughout the holiday periods of State schools.

Philip Moors
Director and Chief Executive



Photo: Meg Miller

Muehlenbeckia 'animals' opposite entrance to The Ian Potter Foundation Children's Garden

Mildura Trip

5 – 8 JUNE 2009

At various recent Friends' Christmas gatherings several Members separately told me details of a most enjoyable and informative trip they took to Mildura in June 2009 with the Cranbourne Friends.

Members may remember this trip being advertised in our Autumn 2009 issue of *Botanic News* with an invitation for Melbourne Friends to join with our Cranbourne colleagues.

The result, reportedly, was a full bus of 48 intrepid travellers, led by Rodger and Gwen Elliot and organised by Helen Page. Members suited each other very well, and each person was challenged to contribute to a diary of their daily doings – and what a marvellous document it is!

Two artistic members of the group – Sandra Sanger and Joan Mason – contributed drawings of plants they encountered along the way. Others shared their photographs. Included were serious notes on places visited, plants and animals encountered and verse such as 'A world-famous botanist is leading our tour, His name and his fame shall forever endure. When a strange plant we spy, 'Here, Rodger!' we cry 'Please give us its nomenclature.'

Places visited included:

- The Pink Lakes which are 60km west of Ouyen along the Mallee Highway. The water is crystal clear and very salty. A species of red algae (*Dunaliella salina*) gives the lakes their characteristic pink colouring which is more
- intense if the day is overcast.
- A trip to Neds Corner Station. A *Trust for Nature* project of 30,000 hectares on the Murray River, Neds Corner is located 100km south west of Mildura on the Sturt Highway. Illustrator members of the Friends returned to Neds Corner in September and while there visited the Inland Botanic Gardens to paint some of the marvellous plant collection.
- The diary continues: 'We then drove on to Meringur to visit the Millewa Pioneer Park where we were given an informative talk on pioneer days and the local history. Many interesting Eucalypts and native plants are also grown in this small park, donated by local pioneering families and each plant is identified with a plaque including donor family information and the name of the plant'.
- Hattah Kulkyne National Park.
- Ken Mansell's (Ken is also President of the Friends of the Australian Inland Botanic Gardens) fruit block which he has diversified into growing banksias and now has six varieties including *B. menziesii* and *B. ashbyi*, which are sent to flower markets in Brisbane. He also grows avocados and mangoes as well as some of his original vines and citrus.
- Across the Murray River in Buronga, we visited the Inland Botanic Gardens which has an extensive

rose garden, an Australian Native Garden and a natural open air chapel.

- Russell Wait's property at Natya. His interest and passion for finding and growing eremophilas was a result of his travelling in the outback and discovering how well they grew in arid places. Russell and his co-authors, Norma Boschen and Maree Gards, have published a book – *Australia's Eremophilas – Changing gardens for a changing climate*.

At the back of the diary is a list of plants found during the trip, including botanical, family and common names; scientific and common names of birds and animals seen on the way (including 'a bus-load of grey-crowned babbler'); a short article on cloud shapes and the weather to be expected when these clouds are seen and another article on the dragonfly *Austrogomphus angelorum*, rare and only known on the Murray River. These articles were contributed by Ian Endersby. Last, but not least, a recipe for a favourite Chocolate Rum Slice and the photo and name list of the group.

If the evidence of this diary and of our Members who enjoyed themselves so thoroughly can be a guide, it seems Melbourne Friends should make sure they avail themselves of any future trips of this kind.

Meg Miller, with help from Sandra Sanger and Helen Page.

FEATURE, CONT'D



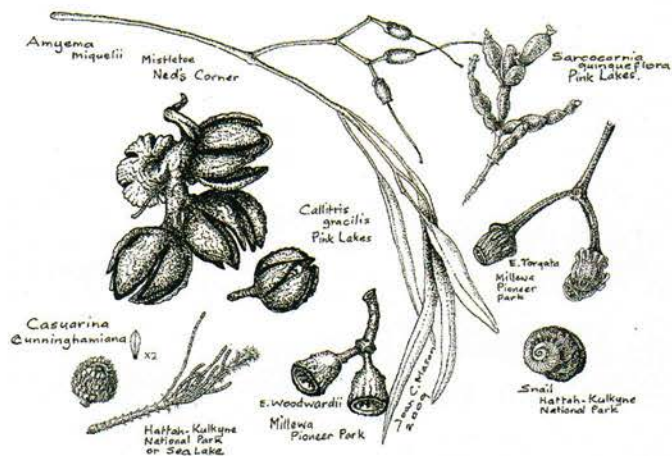
The 'busload of grey-crowned babblers'.



Ken Mansell with Banksia.



Eremophila.



Joan Mason's artwork. All photos for this article taken by Helen Page.



Rotunda Ceiling made of seed pods and gumnuts.



Pink Lakes and lovely cloud reflections.



Goldfields Regeneration Nursery at Mandurang.

GROWING FRIENDS

Plants We Grow

The Rhododendron genus comprises more than 1500 species covering the sub species commonly known as 'azaleas', 'rhododendrons' (or 'asiatic rhododendrons') and 'vireyas'. While rhododendrons and azaleas are well known to gardeners, vireyas are unfortunately not as well known as they deserve to be. There are approximately 400 species of vireyas which are native to areas of South-East Asia including Australia (two native to northern Queensland), New Guinea, Borneo, Java, Philippines, Sulawesi, Sumatra, the Malay Peninsula and surrounding islands.

Vireyas first came to the attention of European gardeners when plant hunters brought back specimens in the 1840s. Nurserymen, particularly R Veitch and Sons, were struck by the beauty of the flowers and, using only a small number of species, produced a great variety of hybrids over the next fifty or so years. With their vibrant flower colours and perfume, they were very popular in England and Scotland even though they needed to be grown in glasshouses. With the advent of World War I the cost and labour required to maintain these collections became prohibitive and most of the Veitch hybrids were lost.

When Dr H Sleumer published his treatise on vireyas, *Flora Malesiana*, in 1966, interest in vireyas was renewed. At about the same time Australian gardeners and nurserymen also became interested in vireyas as a result of samples being sent

by Rev. N Cruttwell from New Guinea to Australian rhododendron enthusiasts. Since that time Australian hybridisers have produced an amazing array of plants; from small trees to tiny shrubs, upright and trailing, with flowers of all the colours of the rainbow (except blue) and many with strong perfume. Some vireyas flower twice a year with the main flowering periods being spring and autumn.

Although they are native to tropical areas – and are sometimes incorrectly called 'tropical rhododendrons' – vireyas are usually found at high altitudes on mountainsides and plateaus. Therefore, they have been found to adapt well to temperate conditions at sea level and so thrive in Melbourne and the cooler areas of south-eastern Australia. Because many vireya species are epiphytic, garden plants need to be grown in soil which is well drained and, in common with the entire rhododendron genus, must be neutral to slightly acidic. They make ideal pot plants because of their small root system. Vireyas are quite tolerant of dry conditions but do need protection from prolonged exposure to scorching sun (above 38°C) and hot north winds. However, to obtain good growth and flowers the plants must get some sun during the cooler winter months. The main pest affecting vireyas is the Azalea Lace Bug which attacks the underside of the leaves during spring causing a 'silvery' appearance, as all azalea growers will know. The only effective treatment for the home gardener is to spray with an insecticide. The fungus 'rust' may be a problem and should

be treated with a fungicide.

The Growing Friends propagate a good selection of vireyas, both species and hybrid, some of which are shown in the photos and/or are listed below:

HYBRIDS

Great Scent-sation
very fragrant, deep pink

Mrs Elizabeth Miller
fragrant, pink

George Langdon - white

Vladimir Bukowsky - orange

Craig Faragher - pale pink;
great in hanging baskets

Golden Casket - yellow

SPECIES

laetum - yellow;
this flowers twice each year
viriosum (lochae) - red;
Australian native
dielsianum - pink

These, and indeed all plants in the nursery, may be purchased from the Growing Friends' Nursery any Friday morning or at the Autumn and Spring Sales. The Autumn Sale will take place on 17 and 18 April.

While some vireyas are planted in the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne, the best public display of them can be seen at the National Rhododendron Gardens at Olinda. More detailed information and many more photographs are available from the Australian Rhododendron Society website, www.ausrhodo.org.au and from Chris Callard's website, www.vireya.net.

Michael Hare, Convener



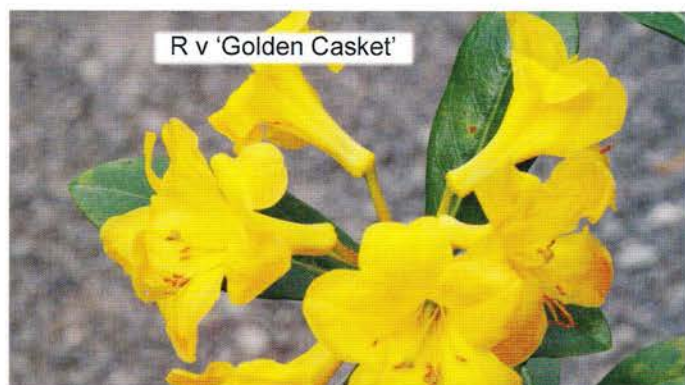
GROWING FRIENDS



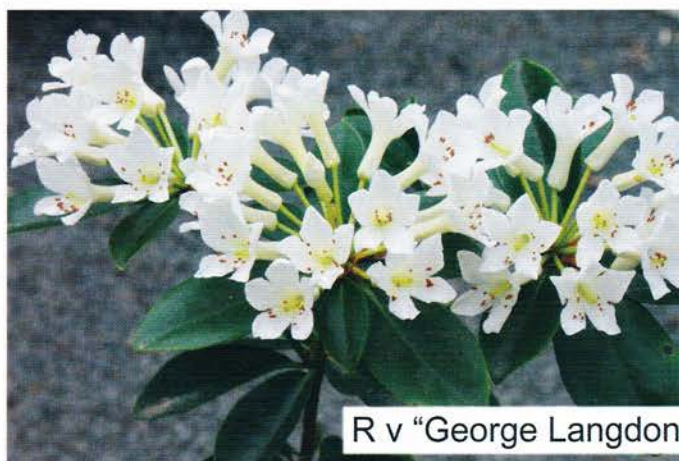
R v 'Carillion Bells'



R v "Craig Faragher"



R v 'Golden Casket'



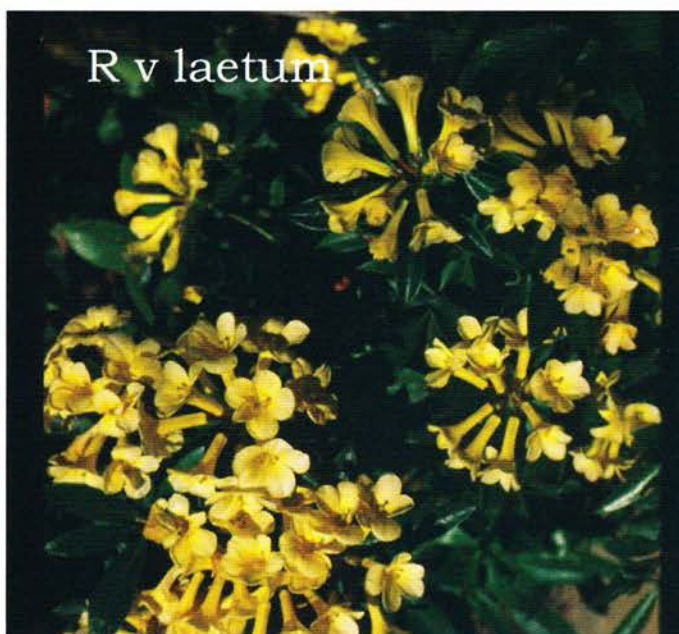
R v "George Langdon"



R v "Little Bo Peep"



R v 'Tropic Tango'



R v laetum



New Members' Welcome

Thursday 11 March at 5.30pm
Mueller Hall, National Herbarium
Birdwood Ave, South Yarra
COST: Free
RSVP by Friday 5 March

Please join us for the New Members' Welcome! Invitations have been sent to all recently-joined Friends to come to our next 'Getting-to-know-you' gathering. Drinks and

nibbles will be served while you mingle and meet other new members. Learn about the Friends' wide range of activities in a friendly and relaxed atmosphere with conveners of all Friends' groups on hand to provide information. The evening will finish with a special tour of the Gardens conducted by an expert Voluntary Guide. We look forward to meeting all those who have joined the Friends since our last Welcome, and

those who have already requested an invitation to an evening Welcome. If you have not been able to attend a previous New Members' Welcome and would like to come this time, you are warmly invited as well, so please call our office on 9650 6398 and we'll make sure your name is included on the list.



What's Happening to the Yarra?

ILLUSTRATED TALK BY ROD INGHAM

Wednesday 17 March
at 10.00 for 10.30am
Mueller Hall, National Herbarium
COST: \$25 Friends \$15
RSVP by Friday 12 March
on enclosed booking form or
download one from the Events page
on our website:
www.rbgfriendsmelbourne.org

Rod Ingham, project officer of the Yarra Riverkeeper Association, patrols the Yarra for a few days each week, watching, and reporting on, the state of the river.

Melbourne relies on the Yarra catchment to supply, on average, 70% of its water. The health of the river is suffering from high levels of water removal, along with pollution and the effects of urban expansion. Join Rod for an illustrated presentation to

explain measures planned for improving the health and future of the Yarra River.



Twilight Picnic

WITH FRIENDS OF CRANBOURNE

Thursday 25 March at 5.00pm
COST: \$28 Friends \$25
Meet at 'A' Gate (corner Anderson Street and Alexandra Avenue) at 5.00pm. Walk begins at 5.30pm
RSVP by Friday 19 March
on enclosed booking form
or download one from the Events page
on our website:
www.rbgfriendsmelbourne.org

Our fellow Friends from Cranbourne will join the Melbourne Friends to enjoy the *Rare and Threatened Species Walk* with the knowledgeable Voluntary Guides. The plants are in beds reflecting regions of Victoria – Alpine, Mallee, Grampians, Grasslands and Gippsland – and showcasing various rare and threatened plants of these regions.

The planting of these beds took place last year with the expertise of the highly qualified

staff of the RBG. The beds have been appropriately set and irrigated for the different regions. It is exciting to see how the plants have advanced in this prepared environment.

After the walk we will enjoy a picnic on the lawn, prepared by the Melbourne Friends' wonderful Catering Committee. We are delighted to have this opportunity to exchange ideas and meet and mingle with our Cranbourne Friends.



Autumn Talking Plants

TREES FOR AUTUMN COLOUR

Friday 26 March at 10.00am
Domain House, Dallas Brooks Drive
Cost: \$15 Friends \$10
RSVP by Wednesday 24 March
on enclosed booking form
or download one from the
Events page on our website:
www.rbgfriendsmelbourne.org
Refreshments will be served during
the morning.

The foliage, colour, shape and growth habit of trees will be discussed to enable you to achieve the best design for your courtyard or large or small garden. Growing conditions, including site location, water requirements, feeding and staking, pruning, and site selection will also be discussed.

A knowledgeable person from Flemings Tree Nursery will be present to show many beautiful trees and discuss and answer all your questions about

Trees for Autumn Colour.

Following the discussion there will be an opportunity to visit the Growing Friends' Nursery for plant purchases.



Autumn Fit Friends' Ramble

ROYAL PARK AND NORTH MELBOURNE

Tuesday 13 April at 9.30am sharp
Meet under the clock at Melbourne Central.
COST: \$30 Friends \$15
RSVP by Wednesday 17 March
on enclosed booking form or
download one from the Events page
on our website:
www.rbgfriendsmelbourne.org
Book early as numbers will be limited.

Royal Park is Melbourne's largest and most varied park and lies between Parkville and North Melbourne. Come and enjoy both parkland and city on our special ramble. We will travel by tram from Melbourne Central to Royal Park. In the Australian Native Garden section of the park we will have a guided tour learning about the native plants and their uses. Then we'll wander through the Park to North Melbourne where we will explore various

streets, finding interesting churches, little cottages and gracious mansions. These buildings speak to us of the early days of Melbourne. They reveal the past of this suburb that was once an industrial area, but is rapidly becoming gentrified. We will pause for morning tea in North Melbourne in a place that is famous for its superb coffee, and then return to Melbourne Central by tram.



Yarra River Cruise

Thursday 22 April at 10.45am
Leaving Morell Landing at 11.00 am (sharp) and returning at 2.00 pm.
Cost: \$45.00 including lunch
RSVP by Thursday 8 April
on enclosed booking form or download one from the Events page on our website:
www.rbgfriendsmelbourne.org
Morell Landing is just downstream from the Morell Bridge (now only a footbridge) at the bottom of Anderson Street opposite A Gate of the Botanic Gardens. If for any reason, you are lost or running late, please ring 0407 335 644 because the launch must leave on time.

Come cruising on the Yarra River in MV *Blackbird*. The *Blackbird* spends most of her time on the Maribyrnong River, but with favourable tides has been persuaded to take us on a trip up the Yarra.

Leaving from, and returning to the historic Morell Landing, which was the ferry landing for Melburnians visiting the Botanic Gardens in the early days, we join the *Blackbird* for a leisurely and informative cruise upstream to the

Hawthorn Tea Gardens. Many hidden treasures and unusual views of the river bank and riverside suburbs will be revealed before we return downstream to land on Herring Island, where we will have a picnic lunch. Here there will be sufficient time to explore the Island before our short return voyage to Morell Landing.

EVENTS



Autumn Insiders' Walk

THE HISTORY OF THE TAN

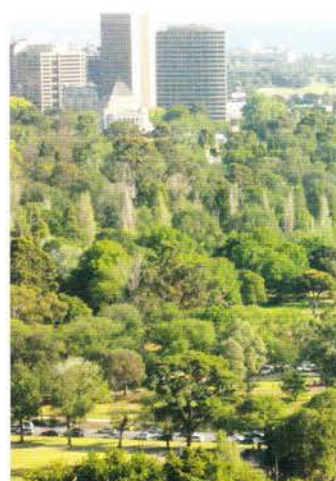
Friday 23 April at 10.00am
Meet at Gate Lodge (opposite Shrine)
Cost: \$15 MEMBERS ONLY
RSVP by Monday 19 April
on enclosed booking form or
download one from the Events page
on our website:
www.rbgfriendsmelbourne.org
Book early as numbers will be limited.
Morning tea at Gate Lodge will
precede the walk which will begin
promptly at 10.30am.

Janet Thomson, President of the RBG Friends, will guide us through the history of the Tan. We will walk anticlockwise around the RBG, past the Pioneer Women's Memorial Garden, the Sidney Myer Music Bowl, the Domain and Government House Drive to Gate Lodge.

Janet has great knowledge of the history of the structure of the Tan and the area within its boundaries. She will impart stories related to items of interest along the route, for

example the beautiful Janet Lady Clarke Rotunda, a burial site, and memorials to kings and renowned Australians. Laid out in 1896, the Tan is an exciting part of Melbourne's history.

The walk is approximately three km and will take about an hour and a half to two hours. Afterwards, members may wish to picnic in the grounds of the RBG. Please wear appropriate footwear and bring hat and waterbottle if hot.



The Care and Value of Trees during Climate Change

ILLUSTRATED TALK BY GREG MOORE

Thursday 6 May at
10.00am for 10.30am
Mueller Hall, National Herbarium
Cost: \$25 Friends \$15
RSVP by Friday 30 April
on enclosed booking form
or download one from the
Events page on our website:
www.rbgfriendsmelbourne.org

Over the past decade, it has been said that 'there are better things to use water on than plants and gardens'. Name them! What else delivers so many benefits immediately, benefits that last centuries into the future, prolonging lives and making cities sustainable and liveable?

Mulch with drippers under it and early morning irrigation regimes make sound biological sense. Landscapes provide shade, reducing the heat island effect and electricity

consumption, and they sequester carbon at a time of climate change. They improve human health, extend life spans, lower blood pressure and save a fortune on medical infrastructure costs.

Join Dr Moore, former Head of Burnley College, who makes a strong case for the vital need to use a valuable resource sustainably to make our cities, states and nation liveable.



Autumn Guided Visit

TO THE GROWING FRIENDS' NURSERY

Friday 14 May at 10.00am
Meet at Gate Lodge (opposite Shrine)
COST: \$5 MEMBERS ONLY
RSVP by Wednesday 12 May
on enclosed booking form or
download one from the Events page
on our website:
www.rbgfriendsmelbourne.org
Early bookings are essential as
numbers will be limited.

After the heat stress of a Melbourne Summer, this visit to the nursery provides an opportunity to replace plants that have not survived the heat (and water restrictions), and to settle new plants in before the approach of winter.

This visit is particularly suitable for new members and others who are not familiar with the whereabouts and workings of our Growing Friends' Nursery. We will

gather at Gate Lodge for morning tea and the opportunity to meet other like-minded gardeners, and then be guided down to the nursery.

There will be the opportunity to purchase plants, so if you plan to buy, think about bringing some strong carry-bags or your market trolley to help carry your purchases home.

ILLUSTRATORS

Classes

Term 2 will start in the week beginning 19 April. Classes will be held on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings and in the daytime on Mondays, Wednesdays, Saturdays (two sessions each day - 2.5hr), Thursdays (one 2.5 hr session) and Fridays (one 3 hr session.)

2.5hr classes: \$270 (incl GST)

Friends: \$225 (incl GST)

3 hr classes: \$315 (incl GST)

Friends: \$270 (incl GST)

For further information on classes or workshops please contact the Friends' office on 9650 6398.

Please note: The Saturday morning class is no longer available to beginners.



Banksia serrata - Saw Banksia by Robin Seale.

Beginners' Workshop

WITH DIANNE EMERY

Whirling Room Studio, Observatory Gate

12, 14, 15, 16 April (please note: no workshop on 13 April)

10.00am to 4.00pm

Cost: \$295 Friends: \$250

This intensive course is an introduction to botanical art via pencil and watercolour. Students will begin to develop skills in outline drawing, foreshortening, tonal work and rendering of surfaces, basic colour work and paint application.

The cost includes drawing materials, paint, watercolour paper and brushes and morning and afternoon tea.

Botanical Illustrators Quarterly Meeting

Tuesday 13 April at 10.00am for 10.30am in the Whirling Room.

Cost: \$5.50. Pay on the day.

John Nicholson, RBG Voluntary Guide, will take us on a walk to point out some of the Eucalypts in the Gardens' collection. This will be of special interest to those artists who are working towards a future exhibition of the Gardens' Eucalypts.

Wear your walking shoes, and bring a hat, water bottle and camera.

Whirlybirds

The Whirlybirds are a group of botanical artists who meet every week commencing the first Tuesday in February.

We were fortunate to exhibit our work at Artists' Realm, Gisborne, in November and early December, and would like to thank Pam McDiarmid, one of our botanical artists and a Gisborne local, who undertook the task of co-ordinating this successful exhibition. Anita Barley opened the exhibition and a copy of her speech can be found on pages 12 and 13 of this issue of *Botanic News*.

We are now working toward the biennial exhibition *The Art of Botanical Illustration 2010*, which will be held in November.

If you are a Friend of the Botanic Gardens and would like to join us in the future, please contact Sandra Sanger on 9598 9532 for information and to join our waiting list.

Botanical Illustrators

CHRISTMAS BREAK-UP

On Tuesday 15 December, the Botanical Illustrators finished their painting year with a most enjoyable Christmas lunch. Lois Brunt gave us a very interesting short talk on painting icons, showed us some of her work and discussed the strict guidelines and materials used.

Icons originated in the Byzantine Oriental style in the 4th and 5th Centuries AD and were used to depict holy Christian subjects. An icon was a simple painting on a wood panel of Christ, The Holy Family or saints and angels, and was intended to be revered as much as the Cross on the altar. The icons were decorated with gold leaf to increase their preciousness, and as they were often worshipped in dark churches, were painted in bold, strong colours and shapes which could easily be seen. Paintings had to follow strict rules of permitted ways of portraying religious figures.

Lois said icon painters now used linen on MDF building board, attached with rabbit skin glue, covered with layers of handmade gesso, then sanded back to a fine smooth finish. Powdered pigment is mixed to a paste with water and vodka, then diluted with egg yolk and vinegar solution to become the painting medium. As with oil painting, artists start with dark colours, using gradually lighter ones, till the highlights on folds of fabric become the lightest parts of the picture. Icon painters find that it is a very contemplative occupation.

Judy Jarman

National Trust Apple Sale

SUNDAY 14 MARCH

Where: Rippon Lea Estate

Time: From 10am.

Rare Heirloom apple trees such as Winter Banana, King Cole and Coral Crab will be for sale.

Rippon Lea garden staff will be on hand to answer questions and to provide advice on training and looking after your apple tree. Apples from the orchard will be ready for sampling and tasting and cultivation notes will be provided with each tree.

Demand is expected to be high and stock is limited. While any unsold stock will remain available from the Rippon Lea nursery, we strongly advise you to come along on 14 March to avoid disappointment.



Subscriptions

There will be a modest increase in subscriptions from 1 April 2010. Although we have tried to keep our rates as low as possible, we need to cover cost increases. The last increase in fees was 21 months ago in July 2008. We ask Members to assist us by promptly renewing their membership on receipt of their first renewal notice so we can avoid postage costs incurred when sending out reminders.

It was in the epic 1970s motion picture *Magnum Force* that actor Clint Eastwood (playing the lead role of policeman Harry Callahan) dispensed the pithy advice: "a man's got to know his limitations". At this point in the movie, if I recall correctly, Callahan had left a trail of dead folk across town, and was providing a learned insight regarding his offside's ability to add to the tally, or something similar. This advice came to mind recently when engaged in an animated discussion with Mrs Barley on the subject of art, artists, what they see, and what they depict. I should have known better... she has what the bookies would call 'form' on this track. You can see it's a small step from Harry Callahan to botanical art, I'm sure.

As I humbly wave the white flag of surrender on this topic (knowing my limitations), I offer the text below which is the speech that Anita delivered for the recent opening of an exhibition of botanical artwork created by the *Whirlybirds*

group within the Friends. The exhibition, titled *A Fascination with Nature* was held in Gisborne.

"Having been an exhibiting artist many times over the three decades of my career, and now tonight for a first time being an exhibition opener, I can say that I feel more relaxed standing here, as daunting as I find it, than if I were one of the 21 artists participating in the exhibition.

Although having one's work shown can be a flattering, exciting process and one that delivers the satisfaction of a goal attained (and sometimes even a dollar earned) it takes what is essentially a solitary and contemplative experience into the arena of a performing art, exposing our innermost workings of mind, hand and eye. No matter how pleased or confident we may be with our artistic outcomes as artists depicting nature, we will always fall short of the beauty and wonder of the original creation. So to some degree we thrust ourselves into the public arena to parade our real and imagined shortcomings, dreading

the careless remark that can dismiss many months of work created with passion and love. It takes courage to exhibit and is a great comfort to do this in the company of a like-minded and supportive group.

This is such a group. I am particularly thrilled to be opening this exhibition as a few of its members were among my first art students at the Burnley Horticultural College when such courses were first run in the mid-1980s. They went on to be founding members of the first group of botanic artists painting together in Victoria, and this in turn grew into the Friends of the RBG Melbourne botanic art group, with hundreds of artists learning and exhibiting in the Gardens today. This sub-set of the larger body is affectionately known as the *Whirlybirds*.

They are called this because they work in the *Whirling Room* at the old Melbourne Observatory site at the RBG. The Whirling Room was the home of a machine that operated like a propeller, and

was used to test the air meters so vitally important for the health of workers in underground mining.

The group is self-motivated, and they share their knowledge and experience to produce botanically accurate works in which artistic integrity is not compromised.

For as long as humans have existed on this earth, they have looked at objects in nature for their own sake – the exquisite, close observation of natural phenomena. It certainly reached a pinnacle in the later part of the eighteenth century when the precise, reverent contemplation of nature clearly associated with the Romantic poets and artists married with the scientists and explorers of the New World. Botanic art has an unbreakable link with exploration, not just exploration of places unknown, but of the morphology of plants in all its amazing detail and variety. In the hands of these first explorer-artists there is an almost sacred attention to things simply and precisely observed – a unity of scientific



This photo of the Whirling Room machine has been reproduced with the kind permission of the Museum of Victoria from their collection.



Photo: Pam McDiarmid

Sign in Gallery featuring exhibition.

and artistic sensibility.

While the numbers of exponents of the 'old' crafts and arts have dwindled before advances in technology during the last few hundred years, and their skills have in many cases become obsolete, the botanic artists have worked on steadily. In fact, not only are botanic artists still plying their skills after over 500 years, or even 1000 years by some definition of history, but the last decade has seen a surge of enthusiasm for the art form. Why is this?

Perhaps the computer-driven age has led people to seek a more direct connection between the human hand and the object of creation. It is also relevant to issues affecting our present environment, such as the urgent need to better understand the world's plant biodiversity, to contribute to a living archive of knowledge as a new plant species is discovered and others are classified as extinct.

The true botanic artists are the ones who do not depart from their observation thinking *they* can do better. Interpretations

that mean that the artists are noticed before their subject matter and are not subordinate to it mean that their art has entered the realm of decoration or impression. In my view of botanical art, the true art lies in nature itself. The skill of the botanical artist is in bringing the subject to life by the quality of thought and knowledge that lies behind it. While working within the conventions of botanic art, the artist must fully understand the subject; how, when, where it grows, and its characteristic form and posture. These are qualities learned through careful and patient observation over time, and through a connection with the subject matter that must be genuinely felt and not contrived. It is the mind and heart of the individual that breathes life into the painting.

The famous astronomer William Herschel, a contemporary of Joseph Banks (and a man who would fully understand the function of a Whirling Room), said when describing how he could discover a new

planet or astronomical feature in a full sky that:

'An object is frequently not seen, from not knowing *how* to see it, rather than from a deficit in the organ of vision... I will instruct you how to see them.'

The botanic artist can teach us to 'see', to restore subjects rendered mundane by everyday familiarity to the sources of wonder we saw laid out, and at which we marvelled in childhood. Look tonight at the strawberries, snails, butterflies and berries in this exhibition and remember again the first time you saw them in nature, and how amazed you were by their complexity and beauty. A student recently said that her formerly dull trips to the supermarket have been transformed as she searches for the perfect lettuce leaf or passionfruit for the next painting subject!

Mankind has come in for some bad press lately. Each day we hear repeatedly how we are responsible for all our planet's ills – biological, physical and ethical. An exhibition such as this can bring balance by

reminding us that we are clever, creative beings. It can fill us with pride and optimism for the future with a sense of respect, and even reverence, for our surroundings. Gazing at a beautiful painting can uplift us, as a piece of poetry, or music, or architecture might. A painting that fills us with wonder at nature's glory and the artist's response to it, can lift us from the mundane and transport and transform us, inspire us in our own endeavours, or bring about a desire to protect or celebrate the glory that is the living natural world.

I urge you to look through these artists' eyes, to feel inspired to slow down your days, to learn to use your senses more fully, and to truly see the world around you. It is my pleasure to declare open *A Fascination with Nature*, and to congratulate the exhibiting artists."

Anita Barley 2009, reported by Richard Barley, Director, RBG Melbourne.



Gallery owner Joyce Sullivan with Lyn, Jim, Jude and exhibiting artists Pam McDiarmid and Sandra Sanger at the exhibition.



A large appreciative audience at the opening of the exhibition.

AGM Address

At the Friends' AGM in November 2009, Warren Worboys, Curator, Horticulture, RBG Cranbourne, gave a very interesting address on the extension of the Australian Garden, into Stage 2.

First, there were some up-to-date photos of the maturing plantings in the **Stage 1** garden, especially where these will be extended into Stage 2. Then followed photos of features such as the Eucalypt Walk, and the waterway which becomes two connected lakes between the two hills.

Warren also showed slides of the rural landscape at the time the Cranbourne Gardens were commissioned in 1994, comparing it to the urban growth in 2002, 2009 and projected growth of housing into 2020. The growth in housing and population in this area is truly amazing.

Part of this section of the presentation focused on garden styles for modern housing, showing Australian native plantings, pebble mulching, and sophisticated designs for minimizing home-owners' impact on the environment, while at the same time enhancing the attractiveness and value of their properties.

We were shown artists' drawings of each proposed section of Stage 2, together with photos to illustrate the inspiration for each section. For instance, the diagrams for the Melaleuca Spit included photos showing an actual Melaleuca spit while the schematic for the extension of the Eucalypt Walk included photos of extant Eucalyptus forests to give a feel

for the finished plantings.

There were photos of the bare, cleared ground, taken from the hill areas towards the Stage 2 planting site. It will be interesting to look back on these in a year or two when the works are completed and the young plantings are in place.

There was even an artist's drawing of the proposed improvements to the Visitor Centre, showing enlarged windows across its face, and the orchid display area beneath the building. Unfortunately, most of these photos were embedded in a PowerPoint presentation and could not be retrieved from the program for colour printing purposes.

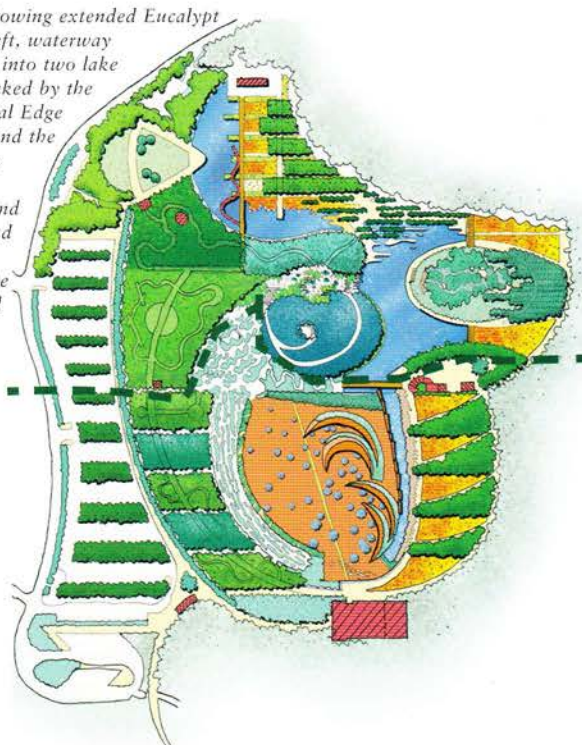
Warren conveyed the depth and grandeur of the Stage 2 plan and made us all feel excited and enthusiastic for its outcome. After seeing the photos of the maturing Stage 1 plantings, I am sure many of us were awed by the privilege of being able to watch its development. A visit by next Spring would seem to be a must.

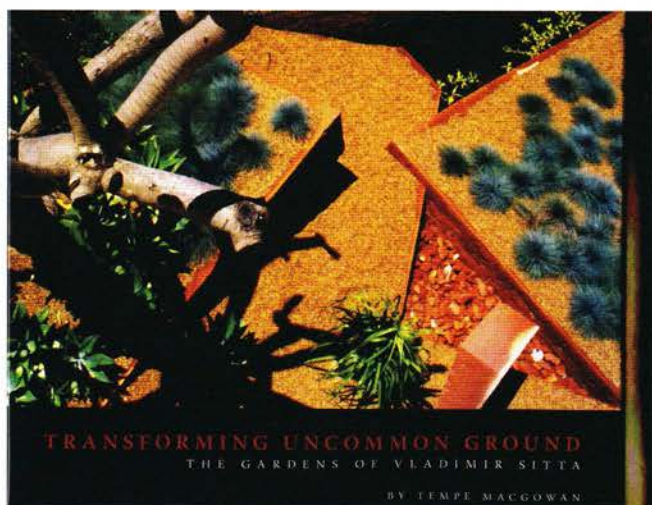
Meg Miller

These four photos of the maturing Stage 1 Australian Garden were taken by Janusz Molinski.



Stage 2 showing extended Eucalypt Walk at left, waterway extending into two lake areas, flanked by the Continental Edge Gardens and the Ian Potter Lakeside Precinct and Gibson and Howson Hills in the centre and at right. Stage 1 below dividing line.





Transforming Uncommon Ground

THE GARDENS OF VLADIMIR SITTA

By Tempe Macgowan
Bloomings Books, 2009

Monty Don featured one of Vladimir Sitta's gardens in *Around the World in 80 Gardens*. To him, the 'Red Garden' represented the Spirit of Australia.

The gardens that are sumptuously illustrated and described in this book in some cases test the limits of 'garden'. They are totally theatrical and incorporate many different design elements and very 'out there' ideas – such as using a skeletal fish in a glass case as a divider/fence. Sitta features the four elements of water, fire, earth and air, and uses a lot of water and stone in unexpected ways. Colour is used very dramatically – as is some plant material. At 'Garangula' (a large property) he created a 'cathedral' of Italian alders that were trained to bend forward and form a canopy over a

crater garden. There is even a garden that is comprised of portable elements that could be packed up and taken away. It really shows how a clever and creative designer can make any area, large or small, an original and beautiful space.

Sitta's design practice, *Terragram*, is known for its commitment to experimentation and technical innovation. He has won many prizes in international and local competitions.

The gardens are truly beautiful but they are not necessarily for plant people. The plant palette is very limited – and not always detailed in the text.

The book production is extremely handsome.

Terri Kay

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The Gardens Shops offer 10 per cent discount on all Members' purchases.

RBG Cranbourne - Australian Garden: Entry fee \$7.35. Non-members \$9.80.

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