Summer 2005/06

BOTANIC NEWS

FRIENDS *of the* ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS MELBOURNE INC.

FEATURES

Saving water: a blueprint

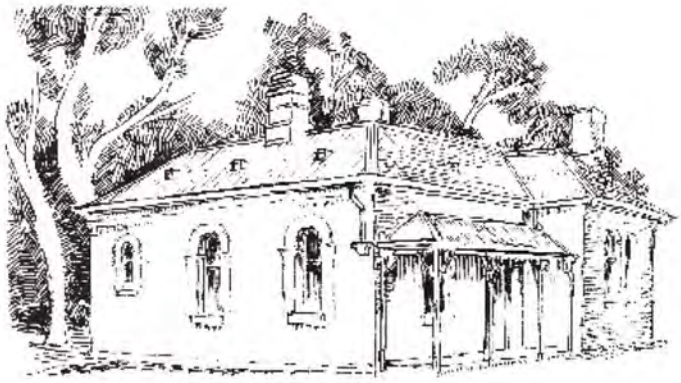
Weeding on a special island

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Our hard-working Growing Friends broke all records at their highly successful Spring Sale on 8 and 9 October, making a net profit of $30,149. Our thanks and congratulations go to them all on this very well deserved result. Thanks are due also to everyone else who volunteered their time and energy over the Sale weekend. There is no doubt that holding other crowd-attracting activities in the Gardens (on the Saturday of the Sale, the first of the season's Markets in the Gardens and, on the Sunday, the Spring Open Day) contributed to our customer numbers. We hope that our Sales will coincide with similar activities in future.

The impact the Commonwealth Games will have on the Friends' activities is quite substantial. The road cycling event will use roads surrounding the Gardens, including Birdwood Avenue. Most of the staff car park and all of Southern Cross Lawn adjacent to Gate Lodge will be taken over for Games facilities. Therefore, no activities will be held in March, and the first term of Botanical Illustration classes will be restricted to four weeks. Access to the Friends' office may be limited. Please take particular note that the Growing Friends have decided to bring their Autumn Plant Sale forward to 4 and 5 March, considerably earlier than usual, because the Grand Prix and the Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show will be held on succeeding weekends, immediately after the Commonwealth Games.

Paintings from the Botanical Illustrators' Florilegium of the Oaks in the Royal Botanic Gardens were exhibited at the end of September to coincide with the Voluntary Guides' very successful national conference. As well as the conference delegates, many Members and other visitors took the opportunity to visit this beautiful exhibition. Prints of the artists' work, together with cards, calendars and bookmarks featuring some of the illustrations, sold well.



The Bronze Award-winning joint stand of the Melbourne and Cranbourne Friends at the ABC Gardening Australia Show at Caulfield
Photo: Cathy Trinca

In early November, we farewelled Jean Woodger, our expert Assistant Treasurer who has, over the last seven years, kept skilful track of the Friends' finances. Jean's cheery good humour, friendship and willingness to take on duties beyond her financial responsibilities whenever the need arose, made her a special member of our office team. We thank her sincerely for the contribution she has made to the Friends' affairs and wish her well in her move to New South Wales.

We are delighted to welcome Jackie Courmadias who has taken over Jean's job. Jackie is also the Executive Officer of the Australian Garden History Society. She will be working for the Friends on Wednesdays and Fridays.

Professor Jim Ross, distinguished Chief Botanist and Divisional Director, Plant Sciences and Biodiversity, retires early in December. Since joining the botanical staff in the National Herbarium in 1975, Jim has made a significant contribution to scientific activities at the RBG (see Director's report, p3). On behalf of all Friends, I wish him a long and very happy retirement.

Gaining new Members and retaining current Members has always been a Friends' priority. With the formation of a new Membership and Promotions Committee we are now in a much stronger position to actively promote the Friends and its activities to attract new Members and to address ways in which we can remain relevant to current Members. Jointly convened by Lorna Downey and Cathy Trinca, the new committee, together with the Friends of the Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne, organised a stand at the ABC Gardening Australia Festival at Caulfield Racecourse in early October. We also actively sought new Members during the Plant Sale and the Markets in the Gardens. The results were very encouraging. We thank those who helped on each occasion. To date almost 40 new members have joined our ranks via these avenues.

The staff at Gate Lodge join me and members of the Council in wishing all Friends a happy and peaceful Christmas and New Year.

Irwin Newman

FROM THE GARDENS AND HERBARIUM

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Front cover photo of Iris 'Amber Snow' *taken by Jennifer Marshall. This specimen can be found in the Iris bed on the Western Lawn behind the Herbarium.*

Photo: Meg Miller

Mixed Australian seeds and capsules included in the Millenium Seed Bank.

Photo: Neville Walsh

Millenium Seed Bank Project

Since European settlement, 46 flowering plant species in Victoria have become extinct. We're in danger of losing a lot more – nearly half of the State's native plant species are regarded as rare or threatened.

Scientists and horticulturists at the Royal Botanic Gardens have been making important contributions to conserving Victoria's threatened plants, and recently we joined a major new conservation program. RBG Melbourne is the home of VICSEEDS, one of seven Australian partnerships in the Millenium Seed Bank Project. Victoria's participation was launched on 24 August in Mueller Hall by Hon John Thwaites, Minister for Environment, and Prof Sir Peter Crane, Director of RBG Kew.

The Millenium Seed Bank was established and is being co-ordinated by RBG Kew. It aims to collect and conserve seeds from 10 per cent – or 24,000 species – of the world's seed-bearing plants by 2010. VICSEEDS will contribute seeds from at least 450 Victorian plant species over the next five years, working in collaboration with the Department of Sustainability and Environment.

Based at the Herbarium, VICSEEDS staff will visit sites throughout Victoria to gather samples from the smallest orchid to the tallest eucalypt. The seed will be stored as duplicate samples in the Herbarium and at the Millenium Seed Bank, a purpose-built long-term storage facility at Wakehurst Place, part of RBG Kew, England.

We are delighted to be partners with RBG Kew in this global conservation project. VICSEEDS will be a vital investment against the future extinction of Victorian plants and will help secure the survival of whole plant communities.

Jim Ross Retires

One of our longest-serving and most respected members of staff, Prof. Jim Ross (pictured left), retires on 9 December 2005. Jim joined the botanical staff in the National Herbarium in 1975, and was appointed Chief Botanist in 1992. For the past 13 years he has held the combined position of Chief Botanist and Divisional Director, Plant Sciences and Biodiversity.

Jim has overseen a renaissance in the scientific activities at the RBG. Twenty-five years ago botanical staff numbers were falling, research was declining and the collections were languishing. Now the Plant Sciences and Biodiversity Division is a hive of activity: research programs encompass plant systematics, fungi, mosses and lichens, plant conservation, genetics, and plant propagation. Undergraduate and postgraduate students work in the Herbarium, and external research grants enable us to extend our programs. The State Botanical Collection is being curated and managed to high standards, and all the 700,000 specimens of Australian plants are now being databased and properly mounted.

Jim has played a key role in achieving these significant changes and improvements. Their benefits will last for years, reminding us all of Jim's vision and quiet determination. I am most appreciative of all Jim's many contributions to the RBG over the decades and for his personal influences for good throughout that time. All RBG staff join me in wishing Jim a long, rewarding and enjoyable retirement.

Functions and Events

The Royal Botanic Gardens Board has recently appointed Blake's Feast Pty Ltd to operate functions and events at RBG Melbourne. The company is closely associated with Andrew Blake, the well known Melbourne restaurateur and chef. Blake's Feast will also manage functions and events at RBG Cranbourne and run the café in the Visitor Centre at the Australian Garden.

Spring Open Days

The arrival of Spring, with its bursts of colour, new growth and warmer weather, was the perfect reason for open days at both RBG Melbourne and RBG Cranbourne. Actually, at Cranbourne it was an 'open week' – Wildflower Week (8-16 October) celebrated the magnificent displays of heathland wildflowers with guided walks and other activities, together with previews of the exciting developments in the Australian Garden.

In Melbourne, the Spring Open Day (9 October) was held in conjunction with the Growing Friends' Spring Plant

Sale. Behind-the-scenes tours of the National Herbarium, Nursery and Gardens House were especially popular with visitors. Bands played beside the Ornamental Lake and at Observatory Gate, fun activities were held in The Ian Potter Foundation Children's Garden, and the Voluntary Guides led Garden Discovery Walks at regular intervals.

Philip Moors, ***Director***

Photo: Steve Clancy

Even the birds enjoyed the music on Spring Open Day

Spring Open Day visitors on a guided tour

Photo: Steve Clancy

Maggie McNamara is the RBG's only Sign Officer. She was first employed on a 10-month contract to 'investigate and install a printing system for plant labels'. From her workshop in the old Rat House, with holes in the floor and inadequate heating, Maggie used the *Gedakop* system, manufactured in Switzerland. These labels were etched onto anodised aluminium, using photopositives and ultraviolet light. Readers would know these labels by their 'gold' appearance, with black print. The disadvantages were that the system became very expensive, nothing could be altered once the labels were produced and the inks used in the process were toxic.

The RBG administration then became conscious of the need for a corporate image so Maggie's 10-month contract was made permanent and the job extended to include directional signs, interpretative signs, operational signs and map-boards as well as plant labels. Imagine the chaos not long after this, when all telephone numbers received the '9' prefix and all the map-boards had to be re-done!

The Friends funded all the mapboards which were produced in glass enamel.

Fortunately, not long after that, it became possible to produce computer-generated signs which are cut into vinyl and applied to powder-coated aluminium. The Victorian Government gave the RBG a grant to enable the change, and Maggie, who had no computer skills, to undertake on-the-job training. All who have had this experience will know how daunting this situation is, especially if one is the only person in the organisation using such job-specific programs.

Maggie grew up on Point Cook air force base and attended primary school there, then secondary school at Werribee High School. It was necessary for her to leave school at the start of her Leaving year (Form 5) as she was needed at home. The Leaving year was completed by correspondence and then Maggie attended night school at University High and gained her HSC English. Tertiary training was begun at Prahran College and continued at RMIT where Maggie studied Fine Arts, specialising in Printing (one of only four in her year) and majoring in etching and yes, she admits to using the famous line...

Over a period of about six years Maggie became a commercial silk-screen printer, worked part time making patés and terrines for commercial sale and helped run the ROAR studios in Fitzroy – one of the first self-administered, self-run studio/galleries in Australia. During this time she also held several exhibitions until the need for a steady income led to her 10-month contract at the RBG where she has now worked for 21 years as a permanent member of staff. She is proud to say she has never missed a deadline, which is remarkable considering the size of the site and sign requirements. At times Maggie can be juggling 20 different

Photo:Chris Kennedy

work requests and says planning skills are a very necessary part of her occupation, especially as she is still the lone sign officer.

Maggie is married and is very proud of her home garden. She is passionate about gardens and says the effect on her of working at the RBG has been life-changing. She has been encouraged to play down her practical bent in favour of her creative streak and eye for detail. Now she says she is missing the smell of oil paint and is about to take up painting again and try her hand at archery, just for something different.

Meg Miller

GROWING FRIENDS

We hope you enjoyed our 2005 Spring Plant Sale on 8 and 9 October. It was a busy weekend for us all, particularly as this year we combined with the Royal Botanic Gardens Spring Open Day. The result definitely exceeded our expectations.

Time flies when you're having fun (or maybe it's an age thing). With our Autumn and Spring Plant Sales seemingly falling over each other, it's continually inspirational to witness the 'spontaneous' evolvement to a full house of plants for the forthcoming sale – from near-total depletion after the previous sale. This is testimony to the industrious efforts of the GF Group with each member's contribution and influence profoundly affecting the Sales. Of course, the steady and enthusiastic support of Melbourne's Royal Botanic Gardens' staff also helps! The Plant Sales provide one of Melbourne's most interesting and unique range of plants.

Raffle ticket seller extraordinaire, Mary Hicks, with the prizes won by Kay Sawrey (Clivia), Michelle Morrow (tapestry) and Karen Delves (succulent pot). Photo: Judy Jarman

Our Autumn Sale for 2006 will be held on Saturday 4 and Sunday 5 March. This is a couple of weeks earlier than usual and largely due to the scheduling of the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne next year. There's already a healthy supply of seedlings waiting impatiently to be potted up, which will keep us busy over the next few months. The Growing Friends have never been shy of a challenge – perhaps thirty odd pairs of roller skates and/or skateboards might help (although the gravel surface could pose a problem).

Whilst the selection of plants for our Sales, with their respective care and maintenance, is the primary reason for us meeting each Friday, necessity calls for a multitude of additional roles that members willingly fill. Our team thanks for the year are extended to our Nursery Manager; our reliable and well-organised Section Leaders, Seedlings Superintendent; Cuttings team; Purchasing Officer; Publicity Manager who is also our OH&S officer; Catalogue, Inventory and Duty Roster Editor; Photographer; Maintenance Chief and Pots Man; Raffle Queen; Radio Station Representative; Treasurer; Waiting List Co-ordinator; Librarian and Sale Weekend Catering Manager. We also thank Virginia, Helen and Jean from Gate Lodge for their support and Friends' Member volunteers who have assisted during the year at Plant Sales. The list goes on...

We all wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

*Pamela Eames, **Convener***

Meet a Growing Friend

LUCILLE STRACHAN

Lucille is a graduate of the Advanced Certificate of Horticulture from Burnley. She is a professional horticulturalist and inveterate propagator of plants – an interest she began as a child, when she nurtured and maintained a large fungus collection.

In order to find out more about plant collections, Lucille joined the Ornamental Plant Conservation Association of Australia (OPCAA), and after many years as an active member, she became President of this group. She is also a Member of the Mt. Macedon Horticultural Society, Friends of the Gisborne Botanic Gardens and the Australian Garden History Society.

Finally, Lucille is one of the founding Members of the Growing Friends, attending the first meeting at the old Astronomer's Residence some seventeen years ago with Golda Isaac, Beth Higgs, Lydia Bartlett and Gillian and the late Neil Kirk, the latter three having gone on to lead the fledgling group and help to shape it into what it is today.

Photo: Steven Wells

As Lucille herself has commented, involvement with the Growing Friends has not only been a personal pleasure, but also a ready source of always-friendly advice and greater knowledge. Her wide experience is currently being put to good use in the Perennials Section of the Growing Friends nursery.

Meg Miller

Photo: Jennifer Marshall

Acacia: what's in a name?

More than you would think. As was reported in *Botanic News* Winter 2003, recent taxonomic research in Australia and abroad has shown that the genus *Acacia* as we know it cannot be maintained as a single entity. It is likely that in the near future it will be divided into at least five genera. *Acacia* is a cosmopolitan genus of about 1350 species distributed from Africa around the Indian Ocean to tropical Asia and Australia and in the tropical Americas. The vast majority of the *Acacia* species occur in Australia. *Acacia pycnantha*, the golden wattle, is our national emblem; its vivid colours are worn by our athletes in international competition.

Botanists all agree that the division must happen, to better reflect the diversity of this vast genus, but the problem to be resolved was which one was to be called *Acacia*. Under the International Code for Botanical Nomenclature (ICBN), when a genus is split in the way proposed for *Acacia*, the generic name follows the internationally accepted standard known as the Type species and is usually the first species to be named in the genus. In the case of *Acacia* this has long been accepted as one of the African species, *A. nilotica*.

Under this protocol almost all of the Australian species would have needed new names under the next oldest generic name, *Racosperma*. However the ICBN allows that in cases where strict application of the rules would introduce unnecessary disruption to nomenclature, cases can be referred to the Spermatophyta Committee of the International Association for Plant Taxonomy (IAPT) for a legislated exception. In 2003 two Australian botanists, Bruce Maslin and Dr Tony Orchard prepared a proposal that the type should be changed to the Australian species *A. penninervis*.

In mid-2004, the Committee supported Maslin and Orchard's proposal, after intense debate and much lobbying, in a vote of 9 to 6. It was one of the most high profile and hotly debated cases in the history of the Committee. Opposition from Africa had been very strong. After formal endorsement by the General Committee of the IAPT the decision needed to be ratified at the International Botanical Congress in 2005. Much was at stake. To Australian interests the case for adopting an Australian type was overwhelming. The cost to herbaria, botanic gardens, nurseries, ecologists, publishers, the world-wide agro-forestry industry and others, of changing the scientific names of almost 1000 Australian species would have been enormous.

Our representative in Vienna received significant support from local interests in putting his case. Letters and emails of support were sent from the vast national botanical and horticultural sector including State and Federal Government Departments, Botanical Institutions, Botanical and Natural History Societies, Horticultural Organisations, Academic Institutions and businesses, and from numerous individuals passionate about the *Acacia* as part of their national identity. Final ratification came on 30 July 2005 and means that should the genus be split in the future the name *Acacia* will still apply to the 948 species of Australian phyllodonous wattles.

Most information in this article is drawn from a report entitled, *The name Acacia retained for Australian Species* on the Centre for Plant Biodiversity Research website: www.anbg.gov.au/cpbr

Bronwen Merrett

Top: Golden Wattle (Acacia pycnantha).
Below: Scarlet Blaze (Acacia leprosa)
From the archives of Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne.

Lord Howe Island

What is so special about Lord Howe Island that people enjoy visiting the island again and again, not just for a holiday but to be part of a Weeding Group? Perhaps 'bush regeneration' makes the weeding job sound somewhat more important and worthwhile.

Lord Howe Island IS special. Declared a World Heritage site in 1982, it is spectacularly beautiful with the volcanic mountains of Mount Gower (875m) and Mount Lidgbird (777m) towering above the sea and the central low-lying area and northern hills wrapping around the lagoon which is sheltered by a coral reef. The island has 241 species of native plants, nearly half of which are endemic; it has extensive colonies of nesting seabirds, and the rock shelves and reef are home to marine life of both tropical and temperate zone waters.

As all gardeners know, any plant growing in the wrong place is a weed and in recent years groups of volunteers have been working to control the spread of two garden escapees up the slopes of Transit Hill. The two varieties of asparagus fern – Climbing (*Protasparagus plumosus*) and Ground (*P. aethiopicus*) – can only be eradicated by methodical working through a defined area. Seedlings can be dug with a knife or trowel, but the well-established plants must be either cut down and have poison carefully applied to every stem or be given the 'Peter lever' treatment: roots severed and woody crown

FROM THE MEMBERS

Photo: Ruth Flett

"Tools of Trade": Peter lever, knife, Ruth's secateurs and gloves and tough plastic bag.

levered out of the ground. Seedlings and crowns are bagged ready for disposal by LHI Board staff.

2005 is the eighth year for these volunteer weeder groups; 23-30 July was week 31 of the program and my third weeding trip. Ian Hutton, who initiated the whole program and is currently Vice-President of Friends of Lord Howe Island, has photographic evidence and records of what has been achieved. FLHI quarterly newsletters detail conservation issues and projects on the island.

It was not all work! Each afternoon was a time for exploring, walking or beachcombing; a boat trip around the island; time in a glass-bottomed boat on the lagoon reef or a half-day deep sea fishing expedition were also available. Pinetrees Guest House meals are wonderful and the fellowship, this time with folk from Tasmania, Victoria, South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland, can be best of all.

Ruth Flett

Ed. note: Ruth is one of the splendid volunteers who pack our quarterly, Botanic News.

Ian Hutton says, "The natural history of Lord Howe Island has long been recognised as unique and worthy of preservation – in fact as early as 1870 the whole Island was declared a botanical reserve, and has always had some conservation status, culminating with World Heritage Listing in 1982. The Island has a rare and unique flora, related to Australia, New Caledonia and New Zealand, with about fifty per cent of its plant species endemic to the Island. Certainly an environment worthy of protection from being over-run by weeds.

The Island has had a small settlement for over 150 years, and like most places that Europeans have settled, weeds eventually found their way into the environment. Some of the introduced plants have colonised areas away from the settlement and pose a threat to the long-term integrity of the native forest. In fact the 1997 review of World Heritage values of Lord Howe Island identified weeds as the major threat to the conservation of the Island's unique flora and fauna. However, what can you do when the Island's population is just 300, and is isolated by 500km of ocean with a very expensive airfare? In what seems an impossible situation, a novel approach to the problem has evolved and is proving effective – ecotourism.

Working in a small group of like-minded dedicated people adds up to an experience that many eagerly look forward to each year – yes, there are many people who have been five or six years in a row. All derive pleasure from being involved and when they depart the Island, they leave with a sense of ownership of the part of Lord Howe where they have worked. Being with like-minded folk for a week and being part of a team achieving success is indeed a memorable experience. People come from all states of Australia, a team of 17 visited from New Zealand in 2003 and people from the UK and Spain have participated.

Perhaps the most significant project has been to initiate a program with funding for airfare and food costs for teams of six young professional bush regenerators to visit for two weeks and make a start on the Island's worst weed, cherry guava (*Psidium cattleianum*). This set a model for similar teams to visit under a major grant from Environmental Trust's Integrated Environmental Program, and now some serious weed control is being tackled. A lot has been achieved in ten years." Contact Ian on 02 6563 2447 or lhitours@bigpond.com

New Members Welcome

Thursday 23 February at 5.30pm
Mueller Hall, National Herbarium

Invitations will soon be sent to all recently-joined Friends to come to our next 'Getting-to-know-you' gathering. We look forward to meeting you. After a glass of wine and savouries we will present a short information slide show, a welcome by the Director of the Gardens and brief talks by our committee leaders. Following this the Voluntary Guides will take you on an early-evening guided tour of the Gardens.

If you have not been able to attend a previous New Members' Welcome and would like to come this time, please call the Friends' office on 9650 6398.

"Bush regenerators" enjoy a hard-earned rest on Lord Howe Island

Photo: Ian Hutton

ACTIVITIES

Summer Quarterly Insiders' Walk

AUSTRALIAN RAINFOREST WALK

Tuesday 7 February at 10.30am
Meet at Gate Lodge (opposite Shrine)
Cost: $10 MEMBERS ONLY
NUMBERS LIMITED
RSVP by Tuesday 31 January on enclosed booking form
Join us for morning tea and a brief information session at Gate Lodge before the walk.

Join the Friends and one of the Gardens' Voluntary Guides and explore rainforest plants from Tasmania to Queensland in the Gardens' Australian Rainforest Walk. This Walk features signage telling the story of our rainforest habitats and highlighting the importance of conserving these precious areas.

If time allows we will also be guided through the mysterious world of the Fern Gully, where we can follow the stream through the Gully's magnificent displays of lush tree ferns, and experience the habitat of a deep, sub-tropical rainforest.

Summer 'Talking Plants' Morning

MEDITERRANEAN AND DRY LANDSCAPE PLANTS

Friday 17 February at 10.00am
Meet at Gate Lodge (opposite Shrine)
Cost:$10 Friends $7
RSVP by Monday 13 February on enclosed booking form
Morning tea will be served during the morning.

The Summer 'Talking Plants' theme will be Mediterranean and Dry Landscape plants suitable for the home garden, with a knowledgeable person who will discuss the morning's topic and have some terrific suggestions for us.

The morning will be held in the Gate Lodge garden (weather permitting) and will be an informal gathering of Friends with a common interest in plants and gardening.

All those attending are invited to bring a piece of a favourite plant, suitable to the topic if possible, to show and share information about.

Following the morning there will be the opportunity to visit the Growing Friends' Nursery to peruse their range of plants.

Summer Fit Friends Ramble

URBAN SECRETS

Wednesday 22 February at 9.00am sharp
Meet at 15 Turnbull Avenue, Toorak
Melways 59 B3 (unrestricted parking, near to Heyington Station)
Cost: $15 Friends $10
RSVP by Wednesday 15 February on enclosed booking form

Please wear appropriate clothing, good walking shoes and bring a water bottle. As always, be able to keep up a good walking pace.

After departing 15 Turnbull Avenue, we will walk along the path that runs beside the railway line, then across the freeway and into the back gate of Burnley Gardens, the Burnley Campus of Melbourne University.

We have been invited to take an extensive guided walk with Andrew Smith, Head Gardener, to view these varied and beautiful gardens.

Morning coffee can be purchased in the Campus Café.

Our return will be via the Yarra River and Glenferrie Road to Turnbull Avenue.

The need for water use efficiency has never been higher in the history of the RBG. In 1995, the Gardens organised water management training for its staff in anticipation of future needs for efficient water use, even before the current water crisis we now experience as a community. In addition to this training, other measures were applied including:

- regular auditing and testing of irrigation system performance
- adoption of water-efficient, warm-season grasses in turf areas and water-sensitive principles in landscape design for new projects
- use of contemporary technology like the Automatic Weather Station, soil moisture sensors and rain switches
- transparent reporting of water consumption to focus organisational accountability

RBG Melbourne has achieved its Water Conservation Target of 60 per cent by July 2007, (as set out in the Irrigation Management Plan), two years in advance of this.

Before (2003) and after (2004): the Southern Cross Lawn showing the benefits of the irrigation extensions

The Gardens' partnership with the Friends through the *Water Works Water Wise* program has provided important funding to very successfully complete irrigation extensions to the Southern Cross Lawn and the award-winning and highly popular Ian Potter Foundation Children's Garden. These projects have helped contribute to water use efficiency. RBG Melbourne has acknowledged this partnership through its nominations for Savewater Awards which it has won for the 'Garden Design and Construction' categories in 2003 (Water Conservation Garden) and 2004 (Long Island). The RBG has been a finalist in 2003 for the 'Efficiency in Government' category, and was a finalist in 2005 for the 'Garden Management' category.

During September, a review of the priorities and costs for further irrigation extensions was completed to inform the *Water Works Water Wise* program. Water conservation and more sustainable use of water resources were key factors in deciding on these future priorities. It was deemed that certain areas (such as the Grey Garden) had significantly less need for automatic irrigation due to the tolerance of many taxa in this collection. All areas in the Gardens were prioritised.

Most irrigation components are manufactured from plastics and these costs are linked closely to world oil prices! The other consideration is that we now expect an irrigation design that performs at much higher efficiencies than what would have been acceptable ten years ago. However, even with adjustments to an increased cost per square metre, the consolidation of the project priorities has realised a reduction from a potential $230,000 to $170,000 for extending automated irrigation to the remaining 0.9 hectare of priority sites.

Bird's eye view of the Ian Potter Foundation Children's Garden showing results of Friends'-sponsored irrigation.

Photos on this page by Peter Symes.

For 2005-06, the Vireya Bed has been proposed as the highest priority for action. Considerable labour time is currently spent in manually irrigating this site that could be used more productively in other skilled work. Manual irrigation has also been made more difficult with the requirements of the current Permanent Water Saving Rules that require all manual watering systems to meet a 8.00pm to 10.00am timeslot. Irrigation during the day, even in the morning hours, is less efficient due to increased evaporation losses from solar radiation and higher wind speeds. In accordance with best practice that matches plant selection with the microclimate and soil conditions, it is also anticipated that water demand will be reduced in this area through the use of more 'dry-shade' tolerant taxa as the ground cover component of the landscape. This presents considerable educational opportunities to show our visitors how to select plants for those horticulturally demanding dry and shady sites in the garden.

During 2006–07, a replacement fogging or misting system is proposed for the Fern Gully. Since the effective relocation of the Grey-headed Flying Foxes, it is now relevant to look at ways to improve the environmental conditions and amenity of the Fern Gully. Fogging and misting systems do not use large amounts of water if designed and managed properly, and a replacement system is expected to be more efficient than the current one. The relatively small amounts of water that would be used through a misting system will be more than offset by the water savings currently being obtained elsewhere in the RBG and the improved environmental and amenity benefits.

We are grateful for the Friends' continued assistance, which has allowed us to keep the landscape in good condition, while meeting the challenges of more sustainable and efficient water use. We look forward to the further achievement of important benefits for the Gardens through the *Water Works Water Wise* program.

Peter Symes
Senior Curator, Horticulture

ILLUSTRATORS

Classes

Term 1 will start in the week beginning 30 January 2006 and will run for four weeks only due to the Commonwealth Games access interference.

Classes will be held on Tuesday evenings and in the daytime on Mondays, Wednesdays (two sessions) Fridays and Saturdays.

2.5hr classes: $125 (incl GST)
Friends $105 (incl GST)
3hr classes: $140 (incl GST)
Friends $120 (incl GST)

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

Workshops

Four-day Beginners' Workshop with Dianne Emery

3, 4, 5, 6 January 2006
10.00am-4.00pm
Cost: $250 Friends $210

This intensive course is an introduction to Botanical Art via pencil and watercolour. Over the four days, students will begin to develop skills in outline drawing and 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. Classes will be held in the Whirling Room Studio, Observatory Gate.

Drawing 2-day Workshop: An Interesting Approach with Mali Moir

9, 10 January 2006
10.00am-2.00pm
Cost: $140 Friends $100

Comprising drawing exercises to bring your attention to another way of 'seeing'. Whichever creative art field you are in, the end result will be improved.

Plant dissection and Microscope Workshop with Mali Moir

11, 12 January 2006
10.00am-2.00pm
Cost: $140 Friends $100

Suitable for both beginners and more advanced artists. Basic botany and plant dissection for illustration will be covered. Choose your medium – pen and ink, graphite pencil or water-colour. Students will need to apply for a materials list.

Workshops for Term Class Students (no beginners)

To work towards student exhibition
16, 17 and 21, 22 January 2006 with Mail Moir
19, 20 and 24, 25 January 2006 with Dianne Emery

All these workshops:
10.00am-4.00pm
Cost: $120 Friends $100

Whirlybirds

The Whirlybirds enjoyed their involvement with the *Quercus Exhibition* in September and have now diversified the subject matter for their botanical illustration.

If you would like to join this group of Botanical Artists on Tuesdays, please contact Sandra Sanger on 9598 9532.

Please note that the Whirlybirds will resume meetings after the Christmas break on 31 January 2006 and will not meet during March while the Common-wealth Games are in progress.

On 21 February, at 10.30am in the Whirling Room, we will meet with Vice-president Janet Thomson to hear about her two trips to China and China's gardens.

Madonna Lily

The Friends' 2005 Christmas card shows the Madonna Lily (*Lilium candidum*) beautifully realised by Bernadette Lim. The cards are available for purchase from the Friends' office (with the inside message 'Season's Greetings' or blank) at a cost of $10 for five cards. Please ring Gate Lodge on 9650 6398 if you would like to place an order.

Bernadette was born in Malaysia. She completed her secondary schooling in Hertfordshire, England. She commenced her academic studies in science at the University of London and completed her degree in biochemistry at the University of Ireland, Dublin. She also did a fine arts course at Trinity College, Dublin. She was research assistant to the Professor of Biochemistry for a number of years before emigrating to Australia, where the early years were spent bringing up her children until they started school.

Bernadette was free then to pursue her love of, and interest in, painting and was inspired by Anita Barley who started the first classes in botanical illustration at Burnley Horticultural College in the late '80s. This led to her fascination with white flowers, and she has painted them ever since. Her earlier painting of the *Magnolia doltsopa* (which grows on the Magnolia Lawn) is held in the RBG State Botanical collection.

Her recent painting of the Madonna Lily, which grows in the grounds of Gardens House, was a challenge in the play of light and shade, to capture the delicate beauty of a white flower. However, Bernadette is equally passionate about still life compositions of fruit and vegetables and has held two successful solo exhibitions in this genre at the Libby Edwards Gallery in South Yarra in 1993 and 1996.

Bernadette has also exhibited in every biennial *Art of Botanical Illustration* Exhibition held since 1992.

Botanical Illustrators Quarterly Meeting

Christmas Lunch
Tuesday, 6 December

Celebrate the end of the year with fellow artists. Meet in the Whirling Room Studio at 12 noon with food suitable for a picnic and (weather permitting) we will lunch on the Oak Lawn. Artists can also paint during the morning if they wish. BYO folding chairs.

Quercus – The Oaks Florilegium

26-30 September at Domain House

The successful exhibition of Oaks from the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne, painted by some of the Botanical Illustrators, was enjoyed by many. Visitors included enthusiastic Friends of the RBG, Botanic Gardens' Voluntary Guides from all over Australia while at their Conference, and members of the public.

It was very interesting to see how each artist had tackled the subject – given that each painting was the same size and had to show the habit of the tree, acorn, leaves and the male and female flowers over an annual cycle. The criteria allowed for a variety of personal interpretations.

These wonderful paintings are now in the Herbarium Library and will become permanent assets for the Friends of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne.

Judy Jarman

Original Quercus Cerris *painted by Patricia Brass*

Forthcoming Exhibition

Artists and Students from the FRBG Botanical Illustrators' classes will be mounting an exhibition of their work at Catanach's, 1212 High Street, Armadale, phone 9509 0311.

The exhibition of framed works will be held from Thursday 2 March to Tuesday 4 April, 2006 from 9.30am-5.30pm Mondays to Fridays and 9.00am-5.00pm Saturdays. Prints, cards and unframed paintings will be for sale

Do support these Botanical Illustrators in their endeavours – bring your friends and family to admire the artist's work. Mark these dates in your diaries for March and April.

Remember, some of Australia's best botanical illustrators have come from these classes.

Paphiopedilum Hybrid (Slipper Orchid) *painted by Sandra Sanger, one of the paintings for sale at the exhibition. Photo: Sandra Sanger*

Bring the Gardens to Your Table

The Victorian tourism award-winning Gardens Shops are proud to showcase its new *Gardens Table* range of botanically-inspired fine bone-china mugs.

The Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne is delighted to be producing these unique mugs in partnership with Maxwell & Williams P/L. Inspired by the magnificent images from the Royal Botanic Gardens archives, these mugs have been designed for your enjoyment.

The new range includes six new Art Nouveau-style mugs and six new botanic art mugs featuring floral images such as the Native Rose *Boronia serrulata*; Flannel flower *Actinotus helianthi*; Native Fuchsia *Epacris longiflora* and the Large Christmas Bells *Blandfordia grandiflora*.

The authentic botanical images on the mugs have been sourced from archival images held at the Royal Botanic Gardens, with some of these images dating back to the late 1700s.

The Gardens Table mugs are currently available for $9.95 each. Each mug is sold individually in a fashionably designed box.

The Gardens Shops currently sell a range of exclusive branded products: everything from bed linen, chocolates, gift cards and stationery to umbrellas, and its very own produce range. The branded products assist in gaining revenue, raising the profile and identity of the Gardens Shops and assist the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne to advance the knowledge, conservation and enjoyment of plants.

Members of the Friends of the RBG are reminded that the Gardens Shops offer a 10 per cent discount on all purchases.

GARDENS

Photo: Richard Barley

The recovering Fern Gully – since 1876 regarded as 'one of the greatest attractions of the Gardens'.

What a pleasure it is to wander back into the Fern Gully on a hot summer's day this year. This luxuriant feature which sits almost centrally within the Gardens is now showing the signs of over two and a half years' recovery since the roosting colony of Grey-headed Flying-foxes was relocated from the site.

A number of the larger trees in the Fern Gully, such as the Queensland and New Zealand Kauris (*Agathis robusta* and *A. australis* respectively), the Blush Tulip Oak *(Argyrodendron actinophyllum* – which despite its common name is not remotely related to the oaks of the northern hemisphere, but is a rainforest tree of the Australian subtropics) and the magnificent old Ridge Myrtle (*Melaleuca decora*) are sporting quantities of new shoot growth and foliage. During the reign of the flying-foxes new shoots would routinely be stripped off the upper canopy by these animals as they moved about and squabbled with each other.

As the canopy of the Fern Gully redevelops, the growing conditions for the understorey also start to improve. The flying-fox-related damage to the upper canopy meant that the understorey plants were subjected to strong direct sunlight for some years, which for many of the tree-ferns and other material was just too much. Foliage burned, plants were desiccated. Re-establishing the balance between shade cover and understorey health will take time, but we are now on the right track to do this.

William Guilfoyle had sketched out possibilities for the Fern Gully concept as early as his first year of directorship (1873), according to Pescott's detailed history of the Royal Botanic Gardens. Indeed by 1876, the Fern Gully is reputed to have become 'one of the greatest attractions of the Gardens'. Guilfoyle arranged for the collection, transportation and planting of hundreds of plants, including large tree-ferns from the cool gullies of Mount Macedon, and rare epiphytic ferns from Queensland. The result of his endeavours was the achievement of a landscape feature which reflected the feel (if not the actual species composition) of the subtropical rainforests which the young Guilfoyle had found so attractive and compelling.

Today the Fern Gully has regained much of its subtropical feel and quiet ambience, and again tempts the flagging visitor (or staff member!) with a cool retreat from the summer's intemperate offerings. We have plans in the pipeline to install a new fogging system into the Fern Gully to augment the moist microclimate, improve the growing conditions and enhance the 'rainforest' feel of the area. At some point in the future we also need to take stock of the central creek which flows down the gully with a view to improving its overall presentation and function within the landscape. As many Friends and other visitors will know, the lower stretch of the creek (before it flows into Central Lake) becomes a minor floodplain in the event of a heavy rainstorm. We would like to find a remedy for such anti-social tendencies.

At the lower end of the gully is the enormous Montezuma Cypress (*Taxodium mucronatum)*, which at last check was still the tallest tree in the entire Gardens, despite having lost a large part of its upper canopy in the summer storms of 2002-ish. In the 1960s it measured 36 metres, and about 2000 tipped the glass at about 42 metres. It holds a place on the National Trust's Register of Significant Trees

I was moaning over the loss of so much of the tree's magnificent headwear (after the storm) to a visitor from Baton Rouge, who reassured me, topically, that this species in the south-east of the United States is forever losing quantities of limbs and canopy in hurricanes. He advised that they then just set about regrowing their upper mass. Phew! He also noted that the city of Baton Rouge takes its name from the various species of Taxodium, some of which colour up so strongly in 'Fall'. Hence the name 'Red Stick'. Baton Rouge sounds so much more exotic though, doesn't it? I wonder what Melbourne might have been named if the French had hoisted their flag here. 'Nuage Gris' perhaps?

The big Montezuma Cypress has also played a role in one of the more amusing Gardens folklore tales. Up until the 1980s, payday in the Gardens' depot area was heralded by the ringing of a schoolyard bell. This would alert staff to the fact that the Assistant Superintendent was ready to distribute staff salaries (cash, in envelopes, of course) through the open window of the office. One day in the mid-1980s, the unthinkable happened: the bell went missing. A thorough search was carried out, but to no avail. The bell could not be found. A short while later, while passing close to the Montezuma Cypress on a windy day, the Assistant Superintendent experienced an eerie sensation... he could hear

Photo: Richard Barley

Sign Officer Maggie McNamara is dwarfed by the giant Montezuma Cypress (Taxodium mucronatum)

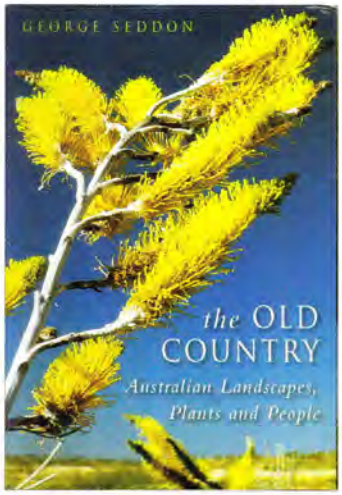
BOOK REVIEWS

the familiar ringing tone of the payday bell! Try as he might to locate the source, it could not be pinned down. Was this the ghost of paydays past? He remained in a campanological quandary until finally retiring from his role some years later.

The explanation – and I am assuming that it is safe to mention this now – was that some mischievous members of our Arboricultural team (long departed members!) had appended the bell to one of the uppermost branches of the Cypress. As the wind blew and the limbs moved, so the bell rang. The stuff of legends!

Richard Barley

Book Reviews



Cambridge University Press, 2005
RRP $49.95 (Discount for members of FRBG, see enclosed flyer.)

Fans of Gardening Australia will have seen George Seddon, Emeritus Professor of Environmental science at the University of Melbourne and a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Western Australia, in his Fremantle garden several weeks ago. At that time he was discussing his philosophy of gardening in Australia. This includes 'fear the hose!'

In this book he makes a strong case for the Return of the Native (which was his working title) in Australian gardens and manufactured landscapes.

He creates a picture of the Old Country – with depleted soils, ancient geological formations and a diverse flora adapted to nutrient poor soil and a variable water supply – that has been misinterpreted by its European colonisers. This misinterpretation arises because generally the Australian vision of our world is European, shaped by our language and mythology. This leads us to struggle to adapt our environment to a series of aspirations it doesn't fit. Seen through the lens of evolution though, this land and its flora make sense.

He writes in a conversational, discursive way and incorporates many complex ideas, but the effect is exhilarating. The book is like a series of amazingly interesting lectures. Each chapter takes a theme such as First Encounters, The Conifers, Mediterraneity, and Being Deciduous and develops it in relation to Australia, its geology, geography, climate and flora – but in sometimes unexpected ways with the conversation wandering around the topics. He touches on politics, linguistics, fashion, history and explains the interconnectedness of it all. There is even a discussion of the history and politics of botanical art.

But all points come back to his major thesis – that is, we should be using native plants on design grounds as well as horticultural ones. His final chapters are on Design and Weeds. He talks about the 'garden as myth' and the 'garden as clearing' and maintains that there are 'no weeds in Eden'. In Australian gardens, Australian plants have the correct height, flower proportion, leaf shape and colour to look good in the light and create balance and harmony. He exhorts us to 'fear the hose', maintaining that 'constant watering creates a landscape that is out of harmony with the plant forms, leaf colour, skies and soils of the natural setting' (p239).

The photography is beautiful and sharp and provides a counterpoint to the text, almost like slides illustrating a lecture.

This book certainly contains food for thought and a new pair of spectacles through which to view our country and understand our environment.

Terri Kay

The Penguin Mini Series RRP $9.95

These two cute and colourful books would be ideal to take away on holiday and use as a pocket guide when out and about enjoying nature.

In addition they would provide hours of fun for the trivia buff! Did you know that the skin secretions of the striking Red-Crowned Toadlet are so toxic they can kill you? Or that the voice of the Cockatiel is a high, rolling 'cweeree'?

With information about 32 of Australia's native frogs and 40 of our most colourful birds there is plenty to keep anyone occupied and fascinated.

The format is clear and easy to read, with a double page, including a full colour photograph, dedicated to each creature. The information covers habitat, conservation status, geographic range and other items of interest.

These two small volumes will give you an appreciation of the range and diversity of our fauna. They form part of a continuing series.

Terri Kay

Photo: Jennifer Marshall

Botanic Birds

From my desk in the Friends' office, I look out at the striking bluestone bird bath in the Gate Lodge garden. Hewn from stone sourced near Mount Macedon and shaded by a graceful jacaranda tree, it is a much-admired work of art.

In the absence of rain, we need to clean and refill the bath regularly. This task is rewarded by the sight of all our feathered visitors making the most of a fleeting, luxurious, frenzied or relaxing plunge according to the size and origins of the bird. There is a definite pecking – or drinking and bathing – order that sends the more timid native birds to the end of the queue. The quarrelsome mynas and starlings manage to intimidate most others, but even they slink off when the raven appears, usually with bread filched from the outdoor tables at the nearby Observatory Café. This delicacy is dunked in the water until it's soft enough to be devoured. Occasionally, if the bird is distracted, it will leave the bread in the water too long, resulting in no meal for the culprit and an evil-smelling residue to be scrubbed out several days later, reluctantly and with gritted teeth. The ravens and blackbirds are profligate in their water usage, splashing with abandon, while the dainty white-plumed honeyeaters and scrub wrens barely raise a ripple when it's their turn.

One Willy Wagtail appears to feel a sense of stewardship of the facility to the point that, when I arrive for work on Mondays I am sure to find him sitting on the fence, scolding and agitating to have the water topped up following the weekend's drinking and frolicking. Once the water has reached a satisfactory level, he enjoys a solitary dip, mentally ticking off one of the tasks on his 'to do' list before returning to cull the insects on the Southern Cross Lawn.

Visitors to the bath are many and varied: so far I have counted nineteen species and live in hope of seeing (and being able to identify) many more. The rainbow lorikeets usually arrive as a raucous gang; as I write there are eight jostling for the best spot. There was great excitement at the visit of a magpie because, while a group 'hangs out' across the road near the Shrine of Remembrance, they are very territorial and would not normally make an appearance on our side of Birdwood Avenue. Other rare visitors include sulphur-crested cockatoos, bellbirds, and swallows – and once we even saw a mouse. What an egalitarian bath!

Helen Fahey

Swans on the move

All birds are naturally very caring of their young, but few are so aggressive and protective as swans when their cygnets are threatened or perceived as such. The cob (male) especially will fluff up its feathers, arch the neck and advance towards the threat, hissing in a most intimidatory manner.

Conversely, it is lovely to see a pair shepherding their young across a busy road. Gently guiding the little balls of fluff with small noises at a speed to accommodate their tiny legs and turning their long necks towards waiting motorists and trams, they defy the traffic to so much as dare to jeopardise their babies.

David Plant

This swan family was shepherded from Albert Park Lake during morning peak hour traffic by two kind members of the local constabulary.

Photo: Meg Miller

FRIENDS BENEFITS

The Gardens Shops offer 10 per cent discount on all Members' purchases.
The following businesses kindly offer discounts to Friends on PRIOR presentation of their current membership cards, which are not transferable.

Gills Nurseries (all branches)
1 Centre Rd, East Brighton
390 Balcombe Rd, Beaumaris
cnr Bay/Graham Sts, Port Melb.
5% off plants only

Bulleen Art and Garden
6 Manningham Rd West, Bulleen
10% off plants, 5% off other goods

Town and Country Gardens
1280 Malvern Rd, Malvern
24 Whitehorse Rd, Balwyn
10% off plants over $20 only.

The Gardeners Corner Store
190-192 New St, Brighton
10% off all plants

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Kew Nursery
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22 Industry Court, Lilydale,
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Ask for the Members' surprise

Terrace Tea Rooms & Reception Centre RBGM
Complimentary tea or coffee with meals, scones or cakes

BOTANIC NEWS

BOTANIC NEWS is produced quarterly for Friends of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne Inc. which was formed to stimulate further interest in the Gardens and the National Herbarium and to support and assist them whenever possible.

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Advertising material requires the approval of the editorial committee.

Contact the Friends' office 9650 6398 for details

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