

Winter 2006

BOTANIC NEWS

FRIENDS *of the* ROYAL BOTANIC
GARDENS MELBOURNE INC.

IT'S PARTY TIME!
Celebrate the opening of the
Australian Garden at Cranbourne on
Sunday 28 May. Entry free from
10.30am on this day.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

The Commonwealth Games had a major impact on our activities during March and, as a result, dented our budget substantially. However, the beauty of the Royal Botanic Gardens and its surroundings were brought into the spotlight during the Games, with the men's and women's marathons and the two road cycling races starting and finishing only a few metres from Gate Lodge in Birdwood Avenue.

Our hard-working Growing Friends held a very successful Autumn Sale on 4 and 5 March; a month earlier than usual and hot weather notwithstanding, the sale raised \$22,255. Congratulations to all concerned, with particular thanks to the Growing Friends.

The plant sale is a significant fixture on our calendar twice every year and a most important source of revenue for the Friends.



Slowly but surely, the Friends are achieving their stated aim, announced in June 2002, to support much-needed extensions to the Gardens' automatic irrigation system. To date we have contributed \$96,995 to our *Water Works*, *Water Wise* project. Recently a further grant of \$35,000 to fund Stage 3 of the project was approved – \$10,000 from the Friends' funds and \$25,000 from the Trust Fund – the



irrigation of the Vireya Bed, which is located on the sloping area below the Rose Pavilion, on the western side of the Ornamental Lake.

We were all saddened to hear of the death of RBG horticultural staff member, Matthew Flinn, and on behalf of Members, I extend our sympathy to his many friends and colleagues at the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne and Cranbourne.

We held a New Members Welcome night on 23 February. I was delighted to see that we already have 116 new members this year. Before the formal part of the proceedings everyone enjoyed the opportunity to meet each other. Refreshments were provided by our volunteer catering group. As they usually do at these gatherings, the voluntary guides attended to take many of the participants on a tour of the Gardens. We thank the guides for taking these tours for us.

John Landy concluded his term as Governor of Victoria in April and thus ceased to be Patron of the Friends. We thank him for acting in this capacity and are delighted to announce that his successor, Professor David de Kretser has agreed to become the Friends' new Patron.

Irwin Newman

Assistance Required

The Catering Group of the Friends provides food for the various functions organised by the Activities Committee. We are always looking for more members to join our group. It is not necessary to be a gourmet cook or to attend every function. You can choose to be reimbursed for the cost of the food prepared.

While we help to make a contribution to the Friends' activities, it is also the opportunity to make good friends. If you're interested, please contact the Friends' office on 9650 6398.

Notes from Gate Lodge

Members strolling in the Gardens during June, July and August might like to visit the Camellia Collections (No. 2 on Gardens' map); the Arid Garden (No. 6); the Luculias in the Pinus Radiata bed; Hellebores and conifers (throughout); Southern Chinese Collection (No. 12) and the Vireya Rhododendrons (near the Rose Pavilion). Maps are available at each entry gate and at the Visitor Centre.



Photo: Jennifer Marshall

FROM THE GARDENS AND HERBARIUM

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Front cover: *The Clivia Miniata* (Kaffir Lily) in the Herbarium Bed.
Photo: Janet Thomson



Examples of gardens in the making with Australian materials at Cranbourne. Photos: Meg Miller



Australian Garden

After twelve years of planning, fundraising and persuading, and almost three years of construction, the magnificent new Australian Garden at RBG Cranbourne will throw its gates open to visitors! The Victorian Premier, the Hon. Steve Bracks, launches the Garden's first eleven hectares on 28 May. We invite you all to join us for the celebrations and the 'Awakening of the Garden', to be performed by local school children. What a wonderful debut for a beautiful new environmental and educational attraction.

The Australian Garden is the most significant new public garden in Victoria for more than 100 years. Its striking landscapes and imaginative plantings, designed by Taylor Cullity Lethlean with Paul Thompson, will inspire visitors to enjoy the colours, textures and scents of Australian plants in their own gardens. The plant collections are beautifully complemented by the timber-clad Visitor Centre, designed by Kerstin Thompson Architects, and the Rockpool Pavilion designed by Greg Burgess.

This garden is a banquet for the senses – visual, aural and aromatic. You can sit and discuss these delights over a fine cup of coffee at the café in the Visitor Centre, and select a memento of your visit in the Garden Shop.

The Australian Garden will be open every day, 9.00am to 5.00pm, but closed Christmas Day. Adult entry costs \$9.00, and children up to 15 years old are free at all times. Members

of the Friends are eligible for concessional entry at \$6.75 on presentation of their Friends' Membership card.

Irrigation For Vireya Bed

The Friends have been important partners and contributors to the RBG's remarkable success in conserving water at the Melbourne Gardens. We now use annually only 40 per cent of the water for irrigation compared with ten years ago. The Automatic Irrigation System has been at the core of our achievement, and the Friends have helped by providing capital funds to allow the system to be extended.

Only very few parts of RBG Melbourne are not irrigated in this way and later this year we will be able to tick off another extension. The Friends' Council, assisted by the Friends' Trust Fund, has agreed to make a grant of \$35,000 to install the irrigation system in the Vireya Bed, just north of the Rose Pavilion.

My warm appreciation goes to the Friends for this – not only will the vireyas and other plants benefit from more efficient irrigation, we will be able to continue our water saving strategies!

Victorian Conservation Seedbank

The Victorian Conservation Seedbank project, a partner in the global Millenium Seedbank Project run by RBG Kew, has now been operating for eight months. In that time 25 field trips have been conducted

covering over 12,000 kilometres and project staff have amassed seeds and voucher specimens from 203 species. Of these, 108 species are known, or thought to be, nationally threatened and 28 species are nationally endangered. We aim to collect a minimum of 4000 seeds from each target species, and this has been achieved for 164 of the species collected so far. For the remaining 39 species we aim to supplement the collections during the life of the project.

The seeds of all species collected have been routinely germination-tested without any pre-treatment. For those species where germination is below 75 per cent, various standard methods of pre-treatment (eg: scarifying, stratifying, application of smoke-water) are being tested to improve germination rates. Seeds from 94 species were recently sent to the Wakehurst Place headquarters of the Millenium Seedbank to partially fulfil our commitment of 100 species per year. It is intended to dispatch a further shipment of about 50 species before the end of July 2006, which will exceed our commitment for the first 12 months of the project.

RBG Board

The Victorian Government has recently made two new appointments to the RBG Board following the conclusion of the terms of appointment of the Deputy Chairman, Professor Pauline Ladiges, and of Mr Michael Bourke. Professor Ladiges was a member of the inaugural Board

CONT'D STAFF PROFILE

appointed in 1992. During her 14 years of service she made many notable contributions to the Gardens, especially in the development of our plant sciences research and the training of students.

Mr Bourke was Chairman of the Board's Finance and Audit Committee. His guidance and advice were most beneficial for the governance and management of the RBG. I warmly thank both Professor Ladiges and Mr Bourke for their service and support for the Gardens.

I welcome Professor Mark Burgman from the School of Botany at The University of Melbourne and Ms Linda White, Assistant National Secretary of the Australian Services Union, who have been newly appointed to the Board. The government re-appointed Ms Elaine Canty, as Chairman, and Mr Michael Hamson, who has been made Deputy Chairman. Mrs Janet Halsall and Mr Rodger Elliot AM have also been re-appointed as members.

Philip Moors

Jenny Steinicke is the Divisional Director, Corporate Resources, for the Royal Botanic Gardens with responsibility for 'things that make the organisation tick'. They include Human Resources, Marketing and Communications, Information Services, Business and Finance, legal and legislative matters, Government relations (with the RBG), and the financial, contractual and project management side of realising the plan for the Australian Garden at Cranbourne. Her role includes that of Secretary to the RBG Board, and a significant responsibility for addressing the governance and compliance reporting requirements of the RBG by the State Government. These reports are part of the wider reporting by all State Government instrumentalities which is required to keep Ministers abreast of the business for which they are responsible.

All this would not be possible without a very good team to help her, Jenny maintains.

After obtaining her initial tertiary degree in Psychology, Jenny took a graduate diploma in Business Studies. The degree also included some focus on Criminology, as Jenny was interested in how people think and why they think in different ways. Her first employment was as the only administrator in the Biochemistry Department at LaTrobe University. Her ability to think logically and to draw on her own university training in clear thinking and good planning came in handy

in organising the Department.

Jenny then went on to work in various other government departments including Education, Consumer Affairs – where she became the Information Systems Manager – and the Department of Justice. She helped set up the Credit Licensing Authority. She has always enjoyed growing into her jobs, being interested in keeping pace with change and improving the practices of her workplaces to reflect the needs of the organisation, and has found these challenges have helped her to look beyond the accepted practices to embrace new possibilities. She enjoys having an impact.

During the 13 years Jenny has been employed at the RBG she has seen many changes in the demands placed upon the Gardens entity. The excitement of planning for the Australian Garden Stage 1 at Cranbourne and its realisation have given her great satisfaction in spite of many hours of attention to details, attendance at years of planning meetings and managing through the funding issues required to see the completion of the project. Planning has now commenced for the Australian Garden Stage 2, so there will still be meetings to attend and details to watch over.

Jenny is also a member of the Board of the Gould Group and the Gould League, and Chairman of its Governance and Performance Committee.

She comes from a background of busy parents and three siblings and says that half the family is very logical and half is very creative. Jenny claims to be able to kill plants



Photo: Meg Miller

almost by looking at them, but both her mother and sister have green thumbs and have produced home gardens for the family to enjoy. Her parents enjoyed sailing together, then gradually her brother and she both crewed for their father in National E class (a 16-foot, mono-hull, off-the-beach craft). There have been many trips around Australia to compete in sailing championships and until late 2005 Jenny's was the only woman's name on the National Championship honour board.

Whenever there is time for holidays Jenny goes travelling, and has spent time in Canada and the USA (including a trip in 2000 to North Carolina for the World Botanic Gardens Congress) as well as visiting France, Italy, Spain and the Mediterranean area. She hopes soon to enjoy the sights of Eastern Europe. Other interests include theatre and the arts, and she is fostering an interest in cooking, much to the delight of at least the more gourmet-inclined of her nieces and nephews.

Meg Miller

Photo: Jennifer Marshall



Sub-Species, Varieties and Forms

Life was easier for taxonomists (the people who classify plants and animals) before Darwin. In those days most people, with a few notable exceptions, believed that plants and animals had not changed since their creation. Any differences from the 'normal' were dismissed as 'variations'. Darwin changed all this. He showed that the differences are important, and that all living things are changing from one generation to another. When the differences become large enough, new species are born, provided that they can survive under natural selection.

This made classification much more difficult. Every plant belongs to a species and has a double-barrelled name—the *genus* and the *species*. But how can you define a species when all the individual plants in that species are to some degree different? In fact nobody has yet come up with a simple and accurate definition of 'species', but the essential feature is that a species is made up of similar plants that are distinct from those of other species, and are usually found in a particular geographical region. The problem is to define what is 'similar'. The answer is that we must rely on human judgement. A century and a half ago, Darwin wrote of the difficulty in deciding what was a species and what was simply a variation of it. He concluded that "the opinion of naturalists having sound judgement and wide experience seems the

only guide to follow". That is equally true today.

Any system of classification must take these variations into account. When a new species is described, a dried specimen is deposited in a recognized herbarium, and a description (in Latin) is published. This is known as the type specimen. Any plants found subsequently and identified as belonging to this species will be more or less identical with the type specimen. If they are markedly different, but not sufficiently so as to necessitate moving them into a different species, they may be given the status of subspecies (subsp.) The name of the sub-species is then added to the species name, as in *Rhododendron arboreum* subsp. *arboreum*. (The lower ranks and the species may have the same name.) It is sometimes found that there is sufficient variation within a subspecies for a second subdivision to be necessary. This is called a variety (varietas, var.) For example, the familiar *Rhododendron arboreum* has several subspecies, one of which is *R. arboreum* subsp. *cinnamomeum*, and this in turn is split into several varieties, mainly on the basis of flower colour. One of these varieties is *R. arboreum* subsp. *cinnamomeum* var. *roseum*. But this is not the end. A variety, in turn, may be split even further into one or more forms (forma, f.) This is the lowest rank in plant classification and represents only the smallest differences.

Plants may be placed in any of these ranks, according to the judgement of the botanist. For

example, a plant which differs only in some minor detail from the type specimen may be classified as a form of the species, without placing it in a sub-species or variety, as in *Acer palmatum* f. *atropurpureum*. On the other hand, a plant may be placed in all three ranks below species, although this is unusual. I can only recall one example: *Narcissus romieuxii* subsp. *albidus* var. *zalanicus* f. *albus*.

As with the species itself, it is not possible to define subspecies, variety and form precisely, and disputes often arise among botanists as to the rank in which a particular plant should be placed. It also happens that this choice may not be final: as new information becomes available, it may be necessary to move a plant to a higher or lower rank.

The lowest rank – form – is considered of minor importance by botanists, but is often of great interest to gardeners as it may indicate features we look for, such as flower colour or leaf shape. The name of the form often indicates such a feature: eg f. *alba* for a white-flowered variant. But flower colour does not automatically place a plant in a form. The botanist may consider flower colour an important characteristic, and then you may find varieties, or even subspecies, separated from others on the basis of flower colour.

Another term that you may come across is 'race'. This is not strictly a rank in classification, but it is sometimes used to describe plants that are morphologically

similar but display some difference in behaviour, such as frost hardness or earliness.

All of this discussion has been about the classification of plants in nature. Garden plants far out-number plants in the wild and so many hybrids have been produced that systematic classification would be excessively cumbersome. Instead they are usually given a 'fancy name' or 'cultivar name' that is simple and convenient but tells us nothing of their relationship to other plants.

Bill Slater

Reprinted from the Ferny Creek Horticultural Society Newsletter, October 2005, with Bill's kind permission.



Top: *Rhododendron cinnabarinum*
Below: *Rhododendron cinnabarinum* ssp. *Xanthocodon*.
These pictures show why names must be so specific.

GROWING FRIENDS



Thank you for supporting our 2006 Autumn Sale during Melbourne's busy month of March. Our efforts were rewarded by a steady stream of visitors purchasing from the range of very appealing plants we had available.

An interesting observation from this past Sale was the increasing use of 'common names' for some of our plants. Aside from the totally irrelevant fact that we avoid selling 'common' plants, the reality is that common (or vernacular) names for plants vary from region to region, country to country and between the Northern and Southern hemispheres.

In Australia we have invariably adopted the vernacular plant names for introduced species from other countries regardless of their validity, thus confusion arises. Particular *Helleborus* species as an example are sometimes referred to as the 'Christmas Rose' which leaves some of us a tad perplexed as they flower during winter in the southern hemisphere. The 'Winter Rose' or 'Lenten Rose' is more

appropriate in Australia.

Conversely, 'Balsam' is the common name for more than sixty different plants including species of *Thymus*, *Impatiens*, *Pelargonium*, *Liquidambar* and *Populus* - depending on which country or region you live in.

Botanical nomenclature appears intimidating to many of us, but it's a fascinating journey worth travelling. With each plant named in a scientific form gardeners can identify them in an internationally recognised language. The learning of the correct botanical name for plants (and remembering them!)



is undoubtedly a challenge but with appreciation, the names gradually begin to advise plant qualities and occasionally their native conditions. Species names such as *canadensis* (from Canada), *chilensis* (from Chile), *chinensis* (from China), *japonica* (from Japan), *compacta* (compact), *decidua* (deciduous), *densiflora* (dense-flowered), *foliosa* (leafy), *gigantea* (giant), *grandiflora* (large-flowered), *maritime* (maritime, near the sea), *rosea* (rose pink), *rotundifolia* (round-leaved) can be a hint of the plant's origin,

form, characteristics and colour.

That's all well and fine, but what really stops home gardeners in their tracks is the hesitation to verbalise this acquired knowledge and pronounce the names correctly. If you've learnt Latin you have a head start but for the rest of us it's a topic of continual education. How often have you quietly withdrawn into your shell on receiving a smile from a knowledgeable individual when you flounder with a difficult pronunciation? I'll let you in on a secret - everyone has! "Give it a go" with your Aussie accent

from the Greek word *clema* (vine shoot). Additionally, *Clivia* was named for the noble family of Clive (Stearn, W.T. (1996) *Stearn's Dictionary of Plant Names for Gardeners*). Professor Stearn advocated the pronunciation should therefore rhyme with 'hive' rather than 'cleave'. So how should we pronounce it here? It's your choice! Perhaps developing an Australian idiolect for botanical nomenclature is the next phase.

Our next sale is 7 and 8 October 2006, following the strongly anticipated winter rains and coinciding with the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne Spring Open Day. The Nursery is already brimming with a fascinating range of plants to share with you.

Pam Eames, Convener

Stearn, William T. (1996) *Stearn's Dictionary of Plant Names for Gardeners, A Handbook on the Origin and Meaning of the Botanical Names of some Cultivated Plants*. Available at the Gardens' Shops in the RBG.

Photos of the recent Growing Friends' Plant Sale by Jennifer Marshall



ACTIVITIES



Winter Weekday Insiders' Walk

COMMONWEALTH CONNECTIONS

Wednesday 14 June
at 10.00am
Meet at Gate Lodge (opp. Shrine)
Cost: \$10 MEMBERS ONLY
NUMBERS LIMITED
RSVP by Monday 12 June
on enclosed booking form

During this walk we will discover how the RBG represents the diversity of flora from Commonwealth nations and the role of these plants in shaping global history.

An experienced guide will escort you through many interesting parts of the Gardens that have representative plants from the Commonwealth, including the Camellia Bed, Herb garden, hothouses and Fern Gully.

Join us for morning tea and a brief information session at Gate Lodge, (the Friends' headquarters opposite the Shrine) before the walk.



Winter Weekend Insiders' Walk:

STRUCTURE & FORM IN THE WINTER GARDEN

Sunday 9 July
Meet at the Visitor Centre
at 10.30am sharp
Cost: \$7 MEMBERS ONLY
NUMBERS LIMITED
RSVP by Friday 7 July
on enclosed booking form

When the trees lose their leaves and the flowers are gone, what sustains our garden throughout the long winter months? What still hangs in there during those chilly days? Structure and form!

One of the talented RBG Voluntary Guides will take us on this interesting Mid-Winter Walk. Bring a friend, rug up well and we will be shown around the Gardens, concentrating on how good plants and gardens can look when nothing much is in flower.

Emphasis will be placed on the structure and form of the garden, together with beautiful barks and fantastic evergreen foliage, all of which will take your own garden through the whole year.



The Growing Friends Nursery

GUIDED VISIT

Friday 14 July
Meet at Gate Lodge (opp. Shrine)
at 10.00am
Cost \$5 MEMBERS ONLY
RSVP by Wednesday 12 July
on enclosed booking form
Bookings essential
as numbers will be limited

This morning will provide an opportunity for Members to familiarise themselves with the whereabouts and workings of our Growing Friends' Nursery.

We will meet at Gate Lodge (the Friends' headquarters opposite the Shrine) for morning tea and to meet some fellow plant-loving Members, plus a representative of the Friends' Activities Committee.

You will then be guided down to the Growing Friends' Nursery (open on Friday

mornings to Members only) for a brief overview of the nursery.

Plant purchases may be made during the visit.

ACTIVITIES



A Greek Plant Odyssey ILLUSTRATED TALK BY CAROLINE DAVIES AND DAVID MARTIN

Wednesday 19 July
at 6.00pm for 6.30pm
Mueller Hall, National Herbarium
Cost: \$20 Friends \$15
RSVP by Friday 14 July
on enclosed booking form

Please join us for a glass of wine
and savouries before the talk.

Greece is Europe's richest country in botanic terms, standing at the cross-roads from east to west. There are more than 6000 plant species, many of them endemic.

Most people visit in summer, when the stark landscape has a certain grandeur, but in spring it is totally transformed by the extraordinary wealth of wild flowers which paint the countryside, until erased by the summer heat. The intensity of

Greek light ensures that colours are pure and clear.

The talk will also include Greek Mediterranean gardens (relevant to Australia) from Corfu, Epirus, Meteora and Delphi, village pot gardens and ancient olive groves, which contrast with the spectacular virgin forests of hornbeam, beech, maples and firs such as those found in the Pindhos mountains.



Christopher Lloyd: his life and influence ILLUSTRATED TALK BY MICHAEL MCCOY

Tuesday 1 August
at 6.00pm for 6.30pm
Mueller Hall, National Herbarium
Cost: \$20 Friends \$15
RSVP by Friday 28 July
on enclosed booking form

Please join us for a glass of wine
and savouries before the talk.

Christopher Lloyd has had an immeasurable influence on gardening in the Twentieth Century. He may one day be recognized as the most prolific garden writer of all time, having contributed to every issue of *Country Life* for more than 42 years, along with thousands of articles for other newspapers and magazines, and over a dozen garden books. Furthermore, the quantity of his output was more than matched by the quality, arising

as it did from a lifetime of hands-on experimental, tradition-challenging and somewhat audacious gardening.

Michael McCoy worked and lived with Christopher Lloyd for a summer in 1991 and corresponded with him for over a decade. He will tell us of Christopher's influence on his own life, and on gardens and gardening worldwide that Lloyd continues to have, since his death in February this year.



Winter 'Talking Plants' Morning CAMELLIAS

Friday 4 August at 10.00am
Meet at Domain House
on Dallas Brooks Drive
Cost: \$10 Friends \$8 (includes
guided tour fees)
RSVP by Monday 31 July
on enclosed booking form

Morning tea will be served during
the talk

This morning will be held in Domain House and will be an informal gathering of Friends with a common interest in plants and gardening.

A knowledgeable person will discuss the morning's topic and have some terrific suggestions for us.

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

Following the discussion there will be the opportunity to visit the Growing Friends' Nursery which usually stocks a small range of Camellias.

ACTIVITIES



Winter Fit Friends' Ramble NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA

Monday 7 August
Meet at Gate Lodge
at 9.30 am sharp
Cost: \$20 Friends \$15
(Includes guided tour fees)
RSVP by Wednesday 26 July
on enclosed booking form
Numbers will be limited so book
early to avoid missing out

We will walk from Gate Lodge along the tan, via the Weary Dunlop statue (observing the winter beauty of the mature trees in the Domain along the way) to the NGV International on St Kilda Road.

At the Gallery we will be taken on a specialised conducted tour of botanical paintings and artefacts in the collections, with a Gallery Guide. We will have morning tea after the tour, at our own expense, in the Gallery.

Our return to Gate Lodge will be via a different route.

Alternatively you may choose to remain at the Gallery for lunch and further viewing of the collections.

If the weather is inclement we may opt to use the trams on St Kilda Road.

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



Winter Feast of Film OUTSTANDING ENGLISH GARDENS OLD AND NEW

Tuesday 22 August
at 10.00am sharp
The Lodge, Melbourne Grammar
School, 355 St Kilda Road,
Melbourne
COST: \$20 Friends \$15
RSVP by Friday 18 August
on enclosed booking form
Numbers will be limited so book
early to avoid disappointment.
Morning tea will be served
before the screenings

Once again we are delighted to present two beautiful garden films in the elegant Lodge at Melbourne Grammar, from where we will be transported visually to *Some Shropshire Gardens*.

Sir Roy Strong introduces five famous gardens that include Shrewsbury Quest, Wollerton Old Hall, Preen Manor, Brownhill House and Burford House Gardens.

After a short break we will view *Gardens of Cornwall*,

visiting the Humid Tropics Biome and the Temperate Biome, as well as the Lanhydrock House and Gardens, the Lost Gardens of Heligan, Trebah Gardens and Pine Lodge Gardens.

A comprehensive catalogue will be available and orders for videos and DVDs will be taken during the morning.

The Friends gain a small commission from these sales.



Advance Notice: INTRODUCTION TO HORTICULTURE

A Short Course to be presented in conjunction with the RBG, Melbourne.
Spring 2006

Following the success of previous hands-on courses conducted by RBG staff exclusively for members of the Friends, we are delighted to announce a short course to be conducted in six sessions over six weeks.

The course will combine some classroom-style teaching and some hands-on. Topics to be covered will include landscaping for the home garden, propagation, planting and pruning.

Exact details and costs are not available at this stage.

Please call our office to register your interest in advance for this course.

Numbers will be strictly limited and places on the course will be offered to those members who have registered their interest with us.

ILLUSTRATORS

Botanical Illustrators Quarterly Meeting

Tuesday 11 July at 10.00 for 10.30am in the Whirling Room Studio

Cost: \$5.50 incl GST. Pay on the day

RSVP: Friends' office on 9650 6398

Dianne Emery, one of our resident teachers of botanical illustration and an artist acclaimed for her vibrant watercolours, will talk to us about colour and its practical application.

Botanical Illustrators

At the February quarterly meeting, Janet Thomson, Vice-president of the Friends, gave the Illustrators a most interesting talk about her three trips to China, two of them with Peter Valder. She had read about the early plant hunters in China, and knew of RBG horticulturalist Terry Smyth's trips to Yunnan (sponsored by the Friends) looking for plants to enhance the Southern Chinese Border in the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne.

Janet visited wonderful gardens, especially in Suzhou in the Yangtze river delta area, and many temple gardens throughout her tours. The characteristics of Chinese gardens are expressions of Chinese culture, and are unlike the general concept of Western designs – they are composed of natural landscapes in miniature form, with the basic elements of buildings, rocks, water, plants and calligraphy arranged in harmonious compositions. Historically, from 200BC, these gardens were for the wealthy. The local population grew plants mainly for food, and mainly in pots.

Janet also saw gardens created during the Qing dynasty with revered ancient trees – many of these gardens deteriorated over the years and were only restored after WWII. She showed us many photos of beautiful gardens, illustrating the various aspects of Chinese culture, from Peter Valder's books *The Garden Plants of China* and *Gardens in China*.

Judy Jarman



Artist Profile: Edyta Hoxley

Edyta first discovered botanical art while studying at Melbourne University where she completed a Bachelor of Science Degree with Honours in Zoology. Those years at university led to a great appreciation of the natural world and in particular Australia's unique flora and fauna. They also introduced her to the world of scientific illustration and taught her a few skills in observation

though none in drawing.

In 1996 Edyta enrolled in evening botanical drawing classes at her local TAFE where her teacher encouraged the pupils to visit the RBG to see *The Art of Botanical Illustration* exhibition. This exhibition and that of Margaret Stones at the National Gallery inspired Edyta to try to learn more. She took lessons with Dianne Emery, later with Jenny Phillips and participated in workshops conducted by Anne-Marie Evans during her visits from England.

At the next biennial exhibition in 1998 Edyta was among the exhibitors and sold her first painting. Since that time she has painted regularly with the Whirlybirds and sold works at various other exhibitions and at every subsequent *The Art of Botanical Illustration* exhibition. Her painting of three species of Lichen was purchased for the State Botanical Collection at the 2000 exhibition.

In 2004 her painting of *Isopogon anemonifolius* (pictured left) was included in *The Illustrated Garden Collection*. This particular species of Drumstick Bush is indigenous to the central east coast of Australia and is a hardy and delightful addition to any Melbourne garden. Edyta's favourite subjects are Australian native plants, which she likes to portray in a mixture of watercolour and tonal drawing.

Edyta is the current Convener of the Botanical Illustrators. The Illustrators' committee is in the process of

preparing for this year's *The Art of Botanical Illustration* Exhibition. The 2004 exhibition was an extraordinary success. It was the first time the exhibition had been held in the stunning new venue, Domain House. Edyta is particularly excited about the way in which the internet catalogue has turned this Friends' activity into a truly international exhibition, now attracting overseas collectors.

Classes

Term 3 will start in the week beginning Monday 10 July 2006

Classes will be held on Tuesday evenings and in the daytime on Mondays, Wednesdays (two sessions) Fridays and Saturdays.
2.5hr classes: \$245 (incl GST)
Friends \$205 (incl GST)
3hr classes: \$280 (incl GST)
Friends \$240 (incl GST)

Ongoing Beginners' Workshop

For those students who have already completed a workshop or introductory term, this workshop will extend skills and experience in botanical drawing and painting.

28, 29, 30 June 2006
10.00am to 4.00pm
Cost: \$190 Friends of RBG \$150
Materials not included

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

ILLUSTRATORS

Painting: Epacris impressa by Robyn Goding



The Art of Botanical Illustration Exhibition 2006

11-26 November 2006
Domain House

A reminder: Exhibitors must be financial members of the Friends prior to entry for selection.

There will be an entry fee of \$15 per person.

Interstate and overseas artists may submit quality 35mm slides of their work for selection. All selected works for this exhibition will be available for viewing and for sale on the Friends' website.

Monday 3 July: Entry forms for those wishing to submit works for selection will be available for collection from the Friends' office, or you may send a business-size (DL) stamped self-addressed envelope marked 'TABI entry Form'.

Monday 11 September: Completed entry forms must be returned to the FRBG by this date.

Monday 25 September: Deliver completed artwork to

Mueller Hall for selection process. Artists are encouraged to submit unframed works (in preference to framed) for ease of handling in the selection process, to reduce the risk of damage to framing and to allow selected works to be photographed prior to framing.

Friday 29 September: Pick up art works from Mueller Hall.

Monday 6 November: Delivery of selected artwork to Domain House for exhibition.

Friday 10 November: Opening reception at Domain House.

Saturday 11 November: Exhibition opens to the public.

Whirlybirds

During the Commonwealth Games period, the Whirlybirds arranged to meet at two different venues – Basaltica Water Wise Garden in Altona and RBG Cranbourne. We were given interesting and informative guided tours at both places.

The Whirlybirds resumed their normal weekly painting days on 11 April. If you would like to join us on Tuesdays in the Whirling Room Studio, please contact Sandra Sanger on 9598 9532 for further information.

Botanical Illustrators' Visits

Our first visit was to the Basaltica Waterwise Garden situated in the middle of CRT Group Transport Depot in Altona North, where we spent the day painting in Helen Wild's studio and enjoyed seeing her drawings and paintings of indigenous basaltic plains flora.

We were also treated to a most interesting talk by Ross Mellor, Co-ordinator Facilitator, and Elio Comello, Secretary of the Habitat Trust.

This experimental garden, which the artists visited six years ago in its infancy, has grown rapidly and is a haven of green in this industrial area, surrounded by huge shipping containers. The basic philosophy of the Garden is "refurbishment and revival of the land and landscape", and focuses on survival – water was only used regularly during initial plantings, then gradually left naturally and, even after a long dry season, the plants look remarkably healthy.

We were made aware of the improvements along the Kororoit Creek nearby, and of the commissioning by Hobsons Bay City Council of *Threshold*, an artwork by Louise Lavarack at the Barnes Road Bridge. This consists of two groups of precisely aligned poles, painted in bands of alternate colours which produce optical patterns representing saplings, reeds or the variegated patches of bark from long-gone River Red Gums.

Our second visit was to RBG Cranbourne where we had lunch with some of the members of the newly-formed Cranbourne Botanical Artists' Group in the Eucalyptus Room of the Administration buildings. We discussed various issues and offered some suggestions for a potential name for the group (some hilarious). We were also taken on a tour of the new Australian Garden and Visitor Centre, and admired the way it is all taking shape.

Judy Jarman

BOOK REVIEW



Bruce Fuhrer
Bloominings Books 2005 RRP \$49.95

The world of Australian fungi is exposed in its diversity of form and colour – and all its glory – in this field guide.

Those of us whose only contact with fungi has been a mushroom omelette, may be surprised to know that fungi are among the most numerous organisms on earth and that they have the vital function of continuously recycling forest debris into soil nutrients.

This is Bruce Fuhrer's eighth book since 1978, and the fourth about fungi. His interest in fungi dates from the 1950s and his photographic collection now apparently numbers more than 3000 species.

His background in biology is obvious in the diagrams, and explanatory and field notes that accompany this collection of over 500 different fungi, each beautifully photographed in its natural environment. There is also information on classification as well as a glossary of technical terms to help us understand what we are looking at.

Even if fungi have never rung your chimes, there is bound to be a luscious photo that will excite you. It's enough to make you want to rush out, book in hand, and start to document everything you see!

Terri Kay

GARDENS

Photo: Steve Clancy



It will come as a surprise to some readers that there is, to the best of my knowledge, no current official world ranking of botanic gardens. We do not have the equivalent of cricket's Wisden almanac, for example, to provide an authoritative up-to-this-season assessment of where we sit in comparison to the other notable botanic gardens of the world. This situation does not sit comfortably with everyone. As a botanic garden community, many among us feel far more at ease when we can quantify the score, and then the order and ranking becomes clear.

How would we judge such a thing as our place alongside the world's great botanic gardens? The answer is, of course, subjective for the most part, if we are judging the quality of the design and the landscape as a whole. Add to this our natural tendency to barrack for the home team, subtract a small measure of professional modesty, multiply this by your age, and there you have it. Top three medal chance.

A far more logical course

would be to make sensible comparisons of quantifiable factors – the number of new plant accessions in a year, or the number of plant conservation programs under way, or the number of visitors through the gate, for example. Logical, yes, but lacking in that endearing quality of Big Statements that makes them impossible to be proved absolutely right or wrong.

Another alternative is to defer to the opinion of a greater authority. Some opinions carry more weight than others, naturally. Notable author Edward Hyams opens his chapter on our Garden in his book *Botanic Gardens of the World* by saying: "*The Royal Botanic Gardens in South Yarra, Melbourne, have the distinction of being the most beautiful of their kind in the Southern Hemisphere, and perhaps the world*". Now there's a Big Statement.

He follows up with: "*...in the matter of sheer beauty they are superlative, and it is worth crossing the world to see them.*" It's hard to argue with that.

One of the most often-quoted references comes from Arthur Conan Doyle, who spent some time in Melbourne during his post-Sherlock period. In his book *The Wanderings of a Spiritualist* (1923) he notes: "*I spend such spare time as I have in the Melbourne Botanic Gardens which is, I think, absolutely the most beautiful place that I have ever seen... Green swards slope down to many tinted groves, and they in turn droop over still ponds mottled with lovely water plants. It is an instructive as well as a beautiful place; for every tree has its visiting card attached and one soon comes to know them*".

In trawling through the old press clippings in the Library, I have found various quotes regarding the Gardens from people with differing degrees of celebrity. Take for example Derek Nimmo, who was visiting Melbourne in 1972 while performing in 'Charlie Girl'. The press noted that the English actor and comedian (surely you can't have forgotten 'All Gas and Gaiters') was a constant visitor to Melbourne's Botanic

Gardens. Mr Nimmo observed that: "...they are among the most beautiful in the world. I went there twice last week, and they are always changing. There is always something to see".

Thank heavens for that. In many people's view, there is no stronger form of celebrity than royalty. Recently we almost had another Royal Tree Planting. As you will be aware, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II was visiting Melbourne, albeit briefly, to open the Commonwealth Games. A plan to have HMQ (this is Buckingham Palace's abbreviation, not mine) plant another tree within the Gardens started to take shape. She planted her first one in 1954, at which time *The Age* Newspaper reported: "*The Queen, hatless and wearing a simple summer frock, slipped quietly out of the small gate leading into the Botanic Gardens and planted on the Hopetoun Lawn a young Tristania conferta, otherwise known as Scrub or Brush Box*" ... and now known as *Lophostemon confertus*, just for the record. The Duke of



GARDENS

Edinburgh planted an *Alnus X aschersoniana*, also on the Hopetoun Lawn. The report didn't record the Duke's state of headwear or lack of it, or other fashion notes.

It turns out the Gardens contains one of the best collections of trees planted by the Royal Family outside the shores of Great Britain. From the planting in 1881 of a pair of *Trachycarpus fortunei* by the two young sons of the then Prince of Wales (later Edward VII) in what is now known as the Princes' Lawn, one can trace the visits of various Dukes, Duchesses, Princes, Princesses and of course the reigning monarch.

The whole notion of having the Queen plant another tree gained quite a bit of momentum early this year. We were visited by contingents of officials of ever-increasing importance and quality of livery. I won't say that we were actually polishing the Royal Spade (because we had lent it to the Museum for display), but things were looking pretty positive. We planned to not only have a planting by the

Queen, but also by the Duke of Edinburgh. Species and locations were selected, commemorative signs were spruced up, the security folk gave it the once-over, and we awaited the final green light.

Sadly the Queen's itinerary in Melbourne was fore-shortened (or should that be just shortened?), and the whole tree planting thing was shelved, without so much as a memorable quote to add to our records.

It turns out the Gardens contains one of the best collections of trees planted by the Royal Family outside the shores of Great Britain.

Security for these sorts of events has become considerably more serious than it appeared to be twenty-odd years ago (for some obvious reasons). I was working in the old 'Ecology Section' in a building located in what is now the Observatory carpark in the early 1980s, at the time of the meeting of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM, pronounced as it is spelt) in Melbourne. I was

distracted from my endeavours at the desk by the entry of our then Director, Dr David Churchill, who was seeking some assistance.

"Do you know what Indira Gandhi looks like?" he asked. He was referring of course to the Indian Prime Minister of the day. I affirmed that I did have a vague idea of her physical appearance. "Excellent" replied Dr Churchill, "could you take

a car into the Gardens and try to find her - the security people have lost her."

Well - you don't have to ask twice when it comes to a call for action to locate a misplaced Indian Prime Minister in the Gardens. I bolted into the carpark, and realising that there was no Gardens vehicle present, leapt into my aged Peugeot 404. Starting it up, I engaged a suitable gear, gave it plenty of throttle and hastily dropped the clutch. Too hastily, as it turns out, because I had neglected to notice that I had parked with the front wheels turned obliquely to one side. As a result, the initial movement of the car was a sudden lurch to starboard, straight into the pride of the Government Weights and Measures Branch vehicle fleet, an almost-new Ford Cortina.

I don't know if you've ever stirred up a bull-ant's nest, just to see how quickly they emerge, and how angry they look.

Suffice to say that our Government's finest Weights and Measures officials flooded out of their offices (the old Observatory Building) like a bunch of angry insects, and it was apparent that R Barley was on their menu. Can you believe that they were more concerned about having me pay for the extensive damage to the door of their Cortina, than my Special Commission to seek and return the Prime Minister of India? After furnishing the W&M chaps with necessary details, I again launched into my rescue mission.

Some time later, after completing a number of laps of the Gardens, I surmised that the aforementioned Indian dignitary had been found by someone else - or if not, then by that time perhaps it was a far bigger issue than I was going to solve on my own. I returned Gandhi-less, but at least I had given it my best shot. The news that evening mentioned nothing about a missing CHOGM member, so there you are. The car repairs cost me \$650.

One can only guess at the quality of quotable comments that I could have recorded regarding the qualities of the Gardens landscape, had I been fortunate enough to track down and pick up the Indian PM. Whether or not those comments would have affected our ranking in the Wisden Botanic Gardens Almanac is another question altogether.

Richard Barley

Queen Elizabeth II planted a Lophostemon confertus on the Hopetoun Lawn in 1954 (far left). The same tree in 2006 (left)

Photo: Richard Barley



Birds of Cranbourne

The Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne (RBGC) contains one of the largest remaining patches of indigenous vegetation in the Melbourne region. Many native birds depend on such patches for their survival and as a result the Gardens supports an impressive bird community with more than 160 species packed into its 370 hectare area. Habitat for native animals is rare elsewhere in the region and many of the birds that can be seen on a visit to the RBGC are now uncommon in Melbourne's suburbs.

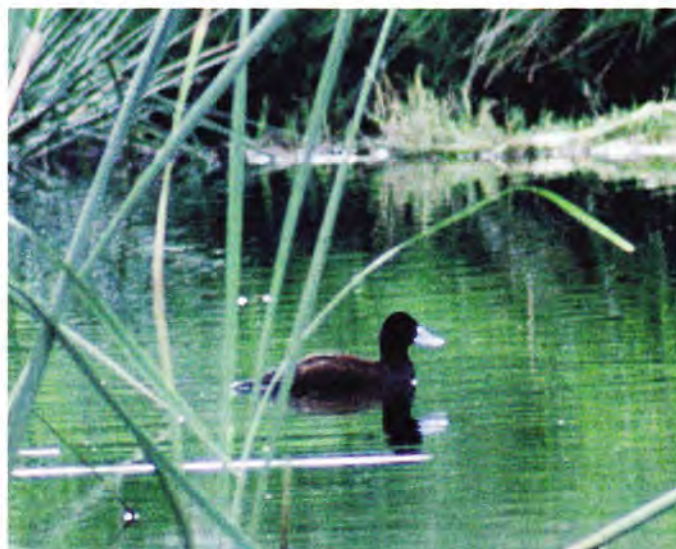
The heathy woodlands and wet heathlands of the RBGC support a diverse community of honeyeaters, pardalotes, wood-swallows, fantails, thornbills, wrens, finches and small parrots. From the warm "ting" of the recently returned bell miners around the main picnic area to the chatter of wrens in the heathland around Trig Point Lookout, visitors are reminded of the diversity in the natural world by the constant sound and movement of birds. Goshawks and Harriers shoot and soar overhead, filling the sky with courtship and hunger. In spring the plaintive calls of cuckoos bounce eerily across the site. Brown quail, heath-wrens and emu-wrens occasionally surprise a lucky few when they emerge momentarily from the dense scrub.

Passing from the dense native woodlands onto the open grasslands in the Wylies Creek area, visitors will encounter a completely different bird community. Iconic species such as kookaburras, butcherbirds, magpies and magpie-larks are common here. Wagtails and pipits dance amongst the rippling grass and both small and large raptors slide silently across the sky looking for prey. Dotted among the grasslands are a series of man-made lakes that support many common waterbirds such as grebes, black ducks and chestnut teals. Mobs of swamphens can be seen traipsing across the open ground around the lakes. However, a patient observer will soon discover many less obvious birds in this part of the gardens. More than 80 species have been recorded around these lakes over the past six years, including a number of rarer species such as blue-billed ducks, whiskered terns,

hardheads, crakes and the occasional rail or snipe.

A visitor could not hope to see all the birds of the gardens on a single visit. Yet each visit presents an opportunity to see a complex, busy and dynamic community in operation. Each day brings new surprises. There is a constant seasonal rhythm as birds come and go. Pallid Cuckoos arrive predictably and herald the coming of spring. Others arrive in autumn hoping to escape the freezing nights of an inland winter. Some birds are secretive and require a patient observer. Some appear only fleetingly and rarely. But each year something new seems to turn up: a Dollarbird or Painted Honeyeater, a Flame Robin or Striated Fieldwren. How these birds find Cranbourne amongst the suburbs of Melbourne remains something of a mystery. Yet without places like the RBGC what would become of them?

*Terry Coates
Ecologist, RBG Cranbourne*



A rare blue-billed duck on one of the Wylies Creek wetlands in the Arboretum at RBG Cranbourne. Photo: Joanne Fyfe



Association of Friends of Botanic Gardens' Conference

The Friends of the Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne will host the next Association Conference from 15-17 September 2006. Several excellent speakers will focus on the theme *Evolution, Environment, Ecology & Botanic Gardens*.

The Cranbourne Friends will also be highlighting the magnificent new Australian Garden, which opens on 28 May.

As part of the Conference activities a special visit has been arranged to Cruden Farm, home of Dame Elisabeth Murdoch, Patron of the Royal Botanic Gardens.

These Association conferences are always stimulating and very enjoyable. For further information and/or to obtain a registration form please call the Friends' Office 9650 6398 or visit website: www.friendsbotanicgardens.org

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Photo: Jennifer Marshall



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