Winter 2007

BOTANIC NEWS

FRIENDS *of the* ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS MELBOURNE INC.

FEATURE: CONTRIBUTING TO PLANT CONSERVATION

VISIT THE REFURBISHED TROPICAL GLASSHOUSE

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Twenty-five years' support for the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne was celebrated in fine style by the Friends on Wednesday 14 March. With the Jazz Doctors adding to the party atmosphere with their splendid musicianship, well over 100 Members and their guests enjoyed catching up with old friends, exchanging reminiscences about the exciting early days of setting our organisation on the road to success and sharing pride in what has been achieved.

Our very special thanks go to the always hard-working Catering Group who prepared and served the delicious food at this function and to members of the Events Committee who served the drinks and helped in many other ways during the evening. Thanks also to Cathy Trinca, Vice-President, who arranged a number of interesting displays which clearly illustrated the Friends' organisation for the last 25 years.

Although much pleasure can be gained from looking back at past achievements and our contribution of more than $1.3 million to fund many and varied projects in the RBG, we must also look to the future. At our party, I was delighted to announce the introduction of the Friends' Scholarship Scheme for all staff employed by the Royal Botanic Gardens Board. The Scheme has been developed in close consultation with Dr Philip Moors, Director and Chief Executive of the Royal Botanic Gardens and the trustees of the Friends' Trust Fund. The Scholarships, to a total value of $10,000, are intended to aid the professional development and skills of staff members.

Since the foundation of the Friends in 1982 grant funds have been provided to assist staff attendance at conferences, conventions and for study tours. It is intended, through the new Scholarships, to provide further opportunities for staff to broaden their knowledge and experience and to further strengthen the bonds that exist between the RBG Board, its staff and the Friends.

The first winner of the Friends' Scholarship will be announced at the Friends' Annual General Meeting on Monday, 19 November 2007 in Mueller Hall.

Photo: Cathy Trinca

At a time when drought and water restrictions are a primary concern for all gardeners, the Growing Friends prepared for their Autumn Sale, on 18 and 19 March, with some trepidation. Their decision to focus on offering a wide range of hardy drought-tolerant plants was a wise one and attracted many long-term loyal customers as well as new ones. A commendable amount of $20,000 was raised and I thank the Growing Friends for this fine result. Thanks also to everyone who helped on the sale days. Their support is always greatly appreciated.

Janet Thomson

Photo: Richard Kirsner

The Friends' Scholarship

This scheme is open to all full-time and part-time employees of the Royal Botanic Gardens Board, including employees located at Melbourne, Cranbourne and ARCUE, who have at least the equivalent of 12 months' pro-rata full time employment to their credit.

Applications will open in March of each year and close at the end of August. Selection will be managed by a joint RBG/Friends Selection Committee and the scholarship will be announced at the Friends' AGM in November and will be payable and must be spent in the following year.

One or more Friends' scholarships may be awarded annually, subject to the availability of funds and/or suitable candidates. Financial assistance will be provided towards the costs of such activities as:

- conference participation
- approved research projects
- visits and study trips to appropriate organisations in Australia or overseas and
- further study directly relevant to the RBG's needs

Applicants will be expected to provide a short report to both the Friends and the RBG of their activities including demonstrable benefits for their employment.

FROM THE GARDENS AND HERBARIUM

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Front Cover: The interior of the refurbished Tropical Glasshouse (see story page 4). Photo: Jeremy Prentice

Below: Friends' President Janet Thomson with RBG Director and Chief Executive Dr Philip Moors at the Friends' 25th Birthday celebration. Photo: Richard Kirsner

Bottom: The celebrated Qantas Australian Tourism Award for the Australian Garden

Friends

Congratulations to the Friends on your 25th Anniversary! The group has achieved a remarkable amount since 1982, especially in its support for RBG Melbourne, and the RBG is sincerely grateful for the ongoing commitment of the Group. The 'birthday party' on 14 March was a very happy celebration and I thoroughly enjoyed being there to join in the festivities.

On behalf of the staff and Board of the RBG I would also like to thank the Friends' Council most warmly for its generous initiative in establishing the Friends' Scholarship Scheme, providing up to $10,000 each year to RBG staff to support travel, professional development, conference attendance and further study. The Scheme encourages staff to enhance their professional skills and experience, thereby assisting both the individual and the organisation. I look forward to the announcement of the first fortunate recipients of the Scholarship at the Friends' AGM in November.

Australian Garden

At the Qantas Australian Tourism Awards ceremony in Sydney on 23 February, the Australian Garden was named as the Best New Tourism Development in Australia for 2006. The Australian Garden was selected ahead of the other State and Territory winners in this category, which included hotel and eco-resort developments and a major 'outback experience' destination in Queensland. I believe this is the first time that a botanic garden has won such a prestigious tourism award.

The Gardens Shop at RBG Melbourne was a worthy, but unsuccessful, finalist in the Tourism Retailing category.

The Australian Garden's win has had several positive consequences. The recently appointed Tourism Minister, Tim Holding, visited the Garden on 29 March. He made an Adjournment Debate speech in Parliament about the Garden and the award during the sitting week 13-15 March. The City of Casey has resolved to hold a Mayoral Reception at the Australian Garden in early June in recognition of the award and the Garden's significance for the Casey region.

Water Conservation

At a gala dinner on 23 March the winners were announced for the 2007 savewater! Awards. For the second time, RBG Melbourne was a finalist in the Garden Management category, which was won by Greenmark Landscapes. RBG Melbourne has previously won awards for the Garden Design/Construction and Sustainable Gardens categories. RBG's presence in these awards over a number of years is a tribute to our continuing commitment to water conservation.

At the conclusion of the 12th FINA World Swimming Championships on 1 April, as part of a State Government initiative, about 6 million litres of water from the temporary pools at Rod Laver Arena were pumped into the Ornamental Lake at RBG Melbourne. The transfer, via a 1.3 kilometre pipeline, dispersed water into the Lake at the rate of approximately 60 litres per second. The water was chemically treated to neutralise the chlorine, and was a welcome top-up to support the trees and collections on the Lake margins and the plants and wildlife in the Lake.

3rd Global Botanic Garden Congress, China 2007

During April, Grant Cameron and I travelled to Wuhan, China, for the 3rd Global Botanic Gardens Congress. The overall theme for the Congress was 'Building a sustainable future: the role of botanic gardens', for which Grant presented a paper on the Australian Garden. I convened a workshop on behalf of Botanic Gardens Australia and New Zealand (BGANZ) dealing with co-operation and capacity-building between Australasian gardens and botanic gardens in Asia and the Pacific. The Conference was highly successful and an important international forum for RBG participation. During my trip I visited the new HortPark project in Singapore that combines botanic garden features with retail and events spaces, and also Kadoorie Farm and Botanic Garden in Hong Kong to learn about their regional biodiversity conservation programs.

Hidden in Plain View – The Forgotten Flora Exhibition

This touring exhibition from the State Botanical Collection is on show now at the McClelland Gallery and

FROM THE GARDENS AND HERBARIUM

Sculpture Park in Langwarrin and the Australian Garden at RBG Cranbourne until 11 June before it moves on to the Swan Hill Regional Art Gallery from 20 August to 7 October. The exhibition focuses on the rarely seen botanical world of fungi, lichens, mosses, liverworts and hornworts. *Forgotten Flora* is presented through watercolour and pen-and-ink illustrations, herbarium specimens, historical books and botanical records, and three-dimensional displays. The Horsham season of the exhibition from January to March 2007 was extremely well attended, with visitors and school groups appreciating the tactile nature of the show.

Philip Moors

Photo: Peter Symes

Tropical Glasshouse re-opening 4 June

Located near E Gate, the Tropical Glasshouse is one of the important Nursery collections. The collection includes species from tropical zones around the globe; the front section of the glasshouse is open for public display.

For just over twenty years the second half of the Tropical Glasshouse has been closed to the public. Now, thanks to a generous donation from the Plant Craft Cottage, that second half will be re-opened, effectively doubling the current public display area.

Photo: Jeremy Prentice

There have been a few challenges to bringing this exciting new development to fruition, from installing a new emergency exit, identifying and sourcing appropriate plant material, to moving 90% of the plant material out (to have the floor sandblasted) and moving it back in again two days later!

The layout of the new section will be similar to the current display, using organic lines and winding paths to draw visitors onwards.

There are also a number of new features which will enhance the display:

– three new self-guided walks that will explore three major themes of the collection: Vital Plants, Plant Evolution and Botanical Marvels. Visitors can follow numbers on the walk pamphlet, discovering more about the plants and their stories as they delve further into the glasshouse. The Voluntary Guides have been integral to forming these walks by uncovering and collating the plant histories, and are heartily thanked for their contributions.

– a new pond and creek installation, generously donated by a local chap who is a frequent visitor to the Gardens. This will add the delightful elements of movement, sound and visual appeal that are inherent in a tastefully installed water feature.

– more plants! We have expanded our range of plants, including new Pitcher Plants species (*Nepenthes*), White Bat plants (*Tacca integrifolia* white form), a South American relative of the Titan Arum (*Dracontium sp.*) and many more.

For the past few months visitors have been able to watch the progress through the dividing centre doors, and it is these doors that will be opened permanently on 4 June.

So if you haven't been through the Tropical Glasshouse lately (or ever!) then this winter is a great time to remedy that – the days average 23°C inside, which is very pleasant when it is only 12°C, blustery and wet outside!

With the exception of the Autumn and Spring Growing Friends' Plant Sale weekends, the Tropical Glasshouse, located near E Gate, is open every day of the year from 10.00am to 4.00pm (12noon to 4.00pm on public holidays).

Jeremy Prentice, ***Curator of the Tropical Glasshouse, RBGM Nursery***

Below: This lovely grouping includes the purple foliage of Nautilocalyx lynchii, *the red flower of* Scadoxus multiflora *and green foliage of* Eucharis amazonica, *all found in the tropical greenhouse.Photo: Meg Miller*

Conserving Plants – From Gardens to Natural Habitats

The Ornamental Plant Conservation Association of Australia (OPCAA) was modelled on the National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens in Britain and was set up to conserve Australia's garden plants, so many of which have been lost to horticulture over the years. Old nursery catalogues bear witness to the many cultivars that have been available, even popular, but are now found rarely, if at all. The OPCAA has successfully raised the level of awareness about the plight of our garden plants, and through its registered collections, has helped to guarantee the survival of many plant groups.

The OPCAA has the potential for contributing to plant conservation in a broader context too. As the human pressure on the world's natural resources increases, so the need for conserving habitats and their plant, animal, and fungal components increases. Clearing land for agriculture, urbanisation, forestry or the uncontrolled invasion of natural areas with foreign species, are just a few of the threats that are diminishing our inherited biodiversity.

Retaining biodiversity is not an easy task and often involves the collaboration of many organisations, associations and individuals.

The plant collections of botanic gardens can act as a resource for conservation. Linked by Botanic Gardens Conservation International, around 800 botanic gardens in 120 countries hold a combined 12,000 threatened species; these having been added to their collections, often without conservation in mind, over the last couple of centuries. Botanic gardens can be the last repositories for some species that have become extinct in the wild, like Easter Island's *Sophora toromiro*. Ex situ collections (plants grown away from their natural habitat) can be a great resource for conservation purposes.

Members of the OPCAA, particularly those collecting Australian taxa, contribute to the conservation of the world's threatened plants in a number of ways:

- collectors with plants of known wild provenance and accurate records of propagation and cultivation act as a source of material for reintroduction into natural habitats.

- the collector's knowledge about the propagation and cultivation of species from a particular genus may be useful in the development of ex situ conservation collections or the development of recovery plans.

- plants in OPCAA collections could be used for morphological and molecular studies that improve our understanding of taxonomic relationships and improve our definition of species.

- collectors can alert others about the weediness of some taxa.

Many OPCAA collection holders enjoy the process of collecting plants, heading towards a complete set of the group they have, and getting to know their collection in more detail. While membership is not restricted to collection holders, new members can be provided with the framework to undertake a more long-term and broad-based conservation commitment, if they wish.

Plant conservation can encompass a diversity of approaches, from conserving our garden plants through to the protection of native plants in their natural environment. With so much of our flora at risk, it is easy to feel overwhelmed by the problem. However, if all concerned people contribute by working cooperatively together, we will make a difference. Then the beauty and essential life-giving properties of the natural world we have inherited will live on for future generations.

Rob Cross,
Horticultural Botanist

Reference: Botanic Gardens Conservation International (2007) *BGCI – Celebrating 20 Years of Securing Plant Diversity*. Botanic Gardens Conservation International (www.bgci.org accessed 2 April 2007)

A sample of Salvias to delight any collector. From left to right:
1. S.Africana lutea
2. S. patens
Photos: Meg Bentley
3. S. splendens 'Flare Path'
4. S. uliginosa
Photos: Growing Friends archives

EVENTS

Spring in Greece

CORFU/EPIRUS/DELPHI

Thursday 1 – Saturday 24 May 2008
Cost: $8995.00 per person, double or twin (singles extra $1130.00). Includes return air travel with Singapore Airlines, taxes, all travel within Greece, a high standard of accommodation, many meals, all admissions and guiding.
Land content only: $6679.00 (includes Greece internal flight).

With more than 6000 species of flowering plants and fems, Greece is the richest country in botanical terms in the whole of Europe. Our spring tour offers a unique opportunity to explore Epirus, an area which is not on the usual 'tourist trail' as well as sites carefully chosen for their beauty and wealth of wildflowers. The exceptional itinerary has been designed by Caroline Davies and David Martin, in consultation with The Friends, and they will both accompany the group.

The tour begins in the Ionian Island of Corfu, 'Venus of the Isles', with lush vegetation, romantic coastline and a fascinating Venetian, French and British heritage along with its Greek character. We visit private villas and Mediterranean gardens, explore the picturesque bays by traditional caique, and walk in the gentle countryside of olive groves, cypresses, ancient villages and tiny churches.

A short ferry trip to Igoumenitsa brings us to unspoilt Epirus with its dramatic mountain scenery, verdant forests, deep gorges and ancient culture, in the outer reaches of north-west Greece. With our base at Ioaninna, on the shores of Lake Pamvotis, we explore the heritage of Turkish mosques, minarets, forts and bazaars, Byzantine art and early Orthodox monasteries. We visit sites of antiquity in the countryside, folk art collections rich in embroidery, the mountain villages of Zagoria with traditional stone houses and their famous stone bridges. Our walks follow the Akheronda River through the mountains of Souli ... the Voidamatis River with crystal clear water and immense plane trees ... the Vikos Gorge in the North Pindhos Mountains with spectacular cliffs, wildflowers and virgin forests ...

At this time, Judas trees bring splashes of colour throughout the countryside, slopes are covered with cistus varieties, hillsides with yellow asphodels (*Asphodeline lutea*), *Narcissus poeticus* fill damp alpine meadows, colonies of fritillaria hide on rocky outcrops and rarities include *Ramonda serbica* clustered on the rock face in river gorges ...

We travel through magnificent scenery, with a day at the traditional Vlach village of Metsovo on the highest peaks of the Pindhos, to reach Meteora where we visit the famous monasteries in breathtaking surroundings. Our final days are spent at Delphi, sacred to Apollo and home of the Oracle, where we explore the ancient sites and walk on the slopes of Mount Parnassus.

Contributing to the leisurely nature of this tour, we spend time at four hotels only during our 22 days in Greece. These are all of a very high standard with en-suite accommodation. We'll also enjoy many lunches and dinners at traditional tavernas and fine restaurants.

May is a perfect time to visit this part of Greece, with mild to warm temperatures, before summer's heat, witnessing the peak of spring flowering, particularly in the higher regions.

To register interest or for further information, contact

Caroline Davies Garden Tours
Tel/fax 03 9827 6944
In conjunction with Acland
Travel Agency Licence No. 30016
(Until 5 June, please contact
Gate Lodge on 9650 6398)
A detailed itinerary will be available in June 2007.

Gardens, Art and Houses of the Southern Highlands

This is a delightful air and coach tour designed in consultation with the Friends of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne travelling from 31 October - 4 November 2007

The itinerary for this tour of the Southern Highlands of NSW which was published in the Autumn edition of *Botanic News*, includes a range of outstanding houses and gardens as well as memorable meals in idyllic surroundings.

This tour is now fully booked. However, we are happy to include your details on our waiting list.

EVENTS

Winter Insiders Walk

ABORIGINAL HERITAGE WALK

Wednesday 20 June at 10.00am
Meet at Gate Lodge (opp. Shrine)
Cost: $10 MEMBERS ONLY
NUMBERS LIMITED
RSVP by Friday 15 June
on enclosed booking form

Join the Friends for a walk in the footsteps of the aboriginal tribes whose ancestral grounds lay where the Botanic Gardens are today.

Gain a deeper understanding of the aboriginal peoples' spiritual connection to the land as we learn about the hunting and food gathering practices and the utilisation of all parts of certain plants and animals for their food, medicines, clothing and tools. Learn also about ceremonial practices and tradition.

Prior to our walk, we will meet at Gate Lodge for a 'bush food' inspired morning tea and a brief introduction by our aboriginal guide, Trevor Gallagher (pictured left) before he takes us on a fascinating journey.

Gardening In A Drought

ILLUSTRATED TALK BY SARAH GUEST

Tuesday 26 June
at 10.00 for 10.30am
Mueller Hall, National Herbarium
Cost: $20 (Friends $15)
RSVP by Friday 22 June
on enclosed booking form
Please join us for morning tea before the talk

Sarah Guest shares her experiences and thoughts on how the drought has affected her small inner-city garden and neighbouring park. Should we go native; plant cactus; coat all open space with concrete; wield the feather duster; develop effective rain dancing skills; collect roof and grey water or rely on common sense and our thrifty natures? Or, should we just sit back and let it happen? Armed with little more than common sense, experience and a lazy nature Sarah will consider these important issues.

Sarah has written seven books on Australian gardens and plants and contributed to several major horticultural plant listings. Besides writing for many different magazines she has also written for *The Age* newspaper for over twenty years.

Winter Guided Visit

THE GROWING FRIENDS' NURSERY

Friday 20 July
Meet at Gate Lodge at 10.30am
COST $5 MEMBERS ONLY
RSVP by Wednesday 18 July
on enclosed booking form
BOOKINGS ESSENTIAL AS NUMBERS WILL BE LIMITED

Winter is the perfect time to plan some new plantings for the garden and trees and shrubs are best planted now. Our nursery currently holds a wide selection of suitable material for the home garden.

Now is the time to find out where our nursery is located. This morning is especially suitable for new Members and for others, who are not familiar with the whereabouts and workings of our Growing Friends' Nursery. We will meet at Gate Lodge for a brief morning tea and to meet some fellow plant loving Members. You will then be guided down to the Growing Friends' Nursery (open Friday mornings to Members only), for a brief overview of the nursery and to make purchases. There will be some Winter specials available.

If you plan to buy a number of plants think about bringing your shopping jeep or market trolley to help carry your purchases home.

EVENTS

Winter Feast of Films

Tuesday 24 July at 9.30am
The Lodge, Melbourne Grammar School,
355 St. Kilda Rd, Melbourne.
Morning tea will be served before the films which will commence at 10.00am sharp
Cost: $20 Friends $15
RSVP by Friday 20 July
on enclosed booking form
BOOKINGS ESSENTIAL AS NUMBERS WILL BE LIMITED

We are again able to enjoy the lovely surrounds of The Lodge at Melbourne Grammar School for the viewing of two excellent one-hour films of wonderful gardens.

The first is *Beth Chatto's Gardens*. The film tells of how this leading plantswoman and designer established her East Anglian garden. It is one of England's very finest gardens in an area which endures Britain's lowest rainfall.

The second feature is *Diarmid Gavin's Irish Gardens*. This is a personal journey through some of Ireland's most beautiful gardens through the eyes of a very well known and colourful British television presenter. We see him return to his native land in a somewhat reflective mood, seeing places of formal splendor and tiny rock gardens, the informal, the old and the new, large and small, serious and humorous.

Winter Fit Friends' Ramble

WILLIAMSTOWN AND THE CONVICT-BUILT ROAD

Thursday 2 August at 9.00 sharp
Meet at Platform One, Collins Street end of Southern Cross Station, Spencer Street, Melbourne
Cost: $20 Friends $15
RSVP by Monday 30 July
on enclosed booking form
BOOKINGS ESSENTIAL AS NUMBERS WILL BE LIMITED
Please notify Friends on mobile phone 0407 335 644 by 9.00am if you are unable to come at last minute

We will catch the train to North Williamstown Station then walk through parkland and the former rifle range. At Jawbone Marine Sanctuary, we'll see a variety of water birds and views of the bay, the You Yangs and Point Cook.

We'll walk through the Botanic Gardens (planted in the 1850s), along the foreshore to the convict-built road to Point Gellibrand, the Coastal Heritage Park and the Timeball Tower to historic Gem Pier and HMAS Castlemaine (also the departure point for the ferry to Southbank and St. Kilda), then stroll along the Strand for coffee and icecream.

We'll return to Spencer Street via Williamstown Beach station. You may choose (at your own cost) to stay for lunch or take the ferry back to the city. This is a long walk, around 3½ hours, for keen walkers. Please ensure comfort by dressing appropriately for the conditions.

Winter Talking Plants Morning

HELLEBORES

Friday 6 July at 10.00am
Meet at Domain House
Dallas Brooks Drive
Cost: $15 Friends $10
RSVP by Wednesday 4 July
on enclosed booking form

Refreshments will be served during the morning

Please note this is a July date.

The Winter 'Talking Plants' theme will be 'Hellebores'. Hellebores are the perfect winter plant with most having beautiful flowers all through the bleak months, as well as having tough green drought-tolerant foliage.

The 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, show some beautiful samples of hellebore flowers and have cultivation hints for us.

All those attending are invited to bring a piece of a favourite plant or flower (Hellebores if possible) to show and share.

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

EVENTS

Greece – A Plant Odyssey: Corfu/Epirus/ Meteora/Delphi

ILLUSTRATED TALK BY CAROLINE DAVIES AND DAVID MARTIN

Wednesday 15 August
at 6.00 for 6.30pm
Mueller Hall, National Herbarium
Cost: $15 Friends $10
RSVP by Friday 10 August
on enclosed booking form.
Please join us for a glass of wine and savouries before the talk.

We welcome Caroline and David to revisit *Greece- A Plant Odyssey*, their sell-out talk in 2006. Now we are delighted to be undertaking a special tour to Greece with CDGT in May 2008.

This illustrated talk will enable those who were unable to attend last year, as well as those who are considering taking the tour, to see the richness and variety the Greek landscape offers, particularly during spring.

While the stark landscape of Greece in summer has a certain grandeur, 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 Spring colours are pure and clear.

The talk will also include Greek Mediterranean gardens, village pot gardens and ancient olive groves, which contrast nicely with the spectacular virgin forests of hornbeam, firs, beech and maples such as those found in the Pindhos mountains.

National Herbarium Tours

WITH HELEN COHN

Thursday 23 August
Two tours: 10.30am and 11.30am
National Herbarium, Birdwood Avenue, South Yarra
Cost: $10 Members Only
Numbers limited
Tour time and instructions will be confirmed after booking
RSVP by Friday 17 August
on enclosed booking form

The National Herbarium of Victoria, founded in 1853, houses approximately 1.2 million preserved specimens. It is particularly rich in 19th century collections, and also includes material from Cook's voyages in the Pacific and Burke and Wills' ill-fated expedition to Northern Australia.

Take this opportunity, during Science Week, to discover, maybe for the first time, the scientific richness of a herbarium, which is a cross between a museum of priceless artefacts and a warehouse of birth certificates for plants.

The works on display will range from the scientifically exact to the purely decorative. Helen Cohn, Manager of the Library, will introduce us to a selection of the artworks in the RBG collections. This is your opportunity to see some of these beautiful works and to gain an understanding of their value to the Gardens' programs.

Meet The Authors:

CHARLES QUEST-RITSON(UK) AND RICK DARKE(USA).

In conjunction with the Australian Garden History Society
Wednesday 5 September
at 6.00 for 6.30pm
Mueller Hall, National Herbarium
Cost: $30 Friends $20
RSVP by Friday 31 August
on enclosed booking form.
Please join us for a glass of wine and savouries before the talk.

We invite you to meet two prominent international authors – Rick Darke (USA) and Charles Quest-Ritson(UK). Rick Darke is recognised as the world authority on ornamental grasses and recently authored and will speak on his magnificent book *Encyclopedia of Grasses for Livable Landscapes*. For many, Darke was the outstanding speaker at the 2005 Australian Landscape Conference.

Charles Quest-Ritson has just completed a monumental new book, *The Gardens of Europe: A Traveller's Guide*, featuring over 600 gardens. Following the introduction of the authors, Charles Quest-Ritson will give an illustrated talk: *The Most Beautiful and Romantic Garden in Europe*.

Speakers will then be available for questions and for signing their books which Bloomings Books will have available for sale together with some other gardening books.

ILLUSTRATORS

Classes

Term 3 will start in the week beginning 23 July 2007.
Classes will be held on Tuesday evenings and in the daytime on Mondays (two sessions), Wednesdays (two sessions), Fridays and Saturdays.

2.5hr classes $255 (incl GST)
Friends $215 (incl GST)
3hr classes $295 (incl GST)
Friends $255 (incl GST)

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

Whirlybirds

The Whirlybirds are a group of Friends who meet on Tuesdays in the Whirling Room, to paint together and develop our botanical illustrations. It is an informal gathering where we have an opportunity to share ideas.

On Tuesday 13 March we enjoyed a talk by Louise Coronel who gave us an insight into the formation and development of the botanical illustrators' group of the Friends.

If you would like to join the group, please ring Sandra Sanger on 9598 9532 for further information.

Lactarius Deliciosus *by Dianne Boak*

Botanical Illustrators Quarterly Meeting

Tuesday 12 June, 10.00 for 10.30am in the Whirling Room Studio
'Malmsbury to Madrid'
$5.50 (inc GST). Pay on the day.
RSVP: Friends' office on 9650 6398.

John Pastoriza Piñol, who has exhibited internationally and was awarded Gold, Silver Gilt and Silver medals over the past four years at the RHS, will give an illustrated talk about his experiences in London, opportunities through Austrade, and how to mount an international exhibition.

Arisaemia griffithii
by John Pastoriza Piñol

Chestnut Workshop

Saturdays 23 and 30 June
and 7 July from 9.30am - 12.30pm
Cost: $ 140 Friends $100 (incl GST)
NUMBERS LIMITED

Botanical artist John Pastoriza-Piñol will be conducting this workshop on the above dates. It will focus on techniques that capture the different textures of the subject, such as the chestnut's outer spines and smooth polished kernels.

GARDENS

Gondwana: The Australian-Antarctic Connection

RBG Cranbourne
Wednesday 22 August at 6.30pm
Cost: $15 Friends: $10
Bookings Required on 03 5990 2245

RBG Melbourne
Thursday 23 August at 6.30pm
Cost: $15 Friends $10
Bookings Required on 9252 2429

The Royal Botanic Gardens will celebrate National Science Week 2007, with the theme of *Antarctic Science*, by organising several programs for visitors and school groups. We will be celebrating the connection between Australia and Antarctica through the super-continent Gondwana. These programs will be delivered at Melbourne and Cranbourne and will include some hands-on activities and a tour of the relevant collections, with experts at each site.

Visitors will be invited to attend presentations by Royal Botanic Gardens staff member Luke Saffigna – experienced Antarctic tour guide and Prof. David Cantrill – Director of the National Herbarium and former Senior Scientific Officer with the British Antarctic Survey. The presentations will explore Gondwanan flora and how the break-up of Gondwana affected Australian and Antarctic plants, through fossil evidence and scientific accounts.

Right: Fossilised tree among the rocks. Below: Two of the Antarctic research camps.
Photos: David Cantrill

Botanic Birds

A CHAT WITH THE DIRECTOR

In January this year David Plant and Tony Delves interviewed the Director and Chief Executive, Dr Philip Moors, about aspects of the birdlife of the Royal Botanic Gardens. Dr Moors was once the Director of Birds Australia and has continued his interest in matters avian.

Q: How do you see the drought affecting the bird population?

Director: There hasn't been a great change. With the water level in the Ornamental Lake down between 30cm and 40cm, the water birds may be the most affected. The Gardens watering regimes have been constant for some time now and, apart from the gradual opening up of island beds, little has been changed.

Q: How have changes to flora affected the birds – for example, the redevelopment of Long Island and the opening up of garden beds?

Director: The most notable change has been seen at Long Island, with a complete change of flora from self – sown weed to native habitat similar to that present before white settlement. For example, the planting of native grasses has encouraged Red-rumped Parrots to, at first, visit and, in the last few years, nest – and nest successfully in spite of the aggressive Bell Miners. Cumbungi planted at the water's edge has increased the numbers of Reed Warblers and some years ago, Little Grassbirds stayed for a short time before moving on to the lake at Albert Park.

Q: Many observers have noticed a reduction in the numbers of Superb (Blue) Fairy-wrens and Scrubwrens, and an increase in Bell Miners over the last few years. Do you have any theories about this?

Director: The opening up of the Island Beds might possibly be the reason for the lower numbers of Wrens and Scrub-wrens through the Royal Botanic Gardens although there seems to have been a successful breed in the Fairy-wrens at the end of last year. The Bell Miners have rapidly spread in the last 6-7 years from around D Gate, and can now be found almost everywhere in the RBG and also in Government House and beyond. However, there seems to have been a decline in the Sulphur-crested Cockatoos and Bulbuls.

Q: What changes have you observed in the bird population since you became Director?

Director: The most notable changes have been the increase in the numbers of Grey Butcherbirds, Pied Currawongs and Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos, especially in the winter months. The Powerful Owl has also been reported quite regularly in the cooler months. Unfortunately there is also a marked increase in the Indian Myna population.

The White-plumed Honeyeater is much diminished in numbers, possibly due to the aggressive Bell Miner. The lovely Spotted Pardalote is now rarely seen, nor the Greenfinch, which has not been seen for the last two years.

Birds becoming less common in the RBG Melbourne;
1. Superb blue Fairy Wren
2. Sulphur-crested Cockatoo.

Birds becoming more common:
3. The Powerful Owl.
4. Pied Currawong
5. Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos.
Photos: Bruce Sandie

Photo: Con Baltos

Common Koels

The adult male Common Koel sighting was first reported in Melbourne at 6.00 am on New Year's Day this year in a little park in Brunswick. (Picture above)

It moved on from there to the RBG on about 7 January and remained for a week or so, calling loudly especially early in the morning. It was generally seen in the highest branches of various trees, often near the Herbarium. The photograph was taken in a Manna Gum (*Eucalyptus viminalis*) on the lawn area near Central Lake.

Tony Delves

GARDENS

In the season of winter one sees a garden laid bare – without the festive adornments of spring flowers, the lush green canopies of deciduous trees in leaf, or the attention-seeking cloth of the autumn colourists. That's the theory anyway. The reality is a little different in a garden such as the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne, where much of the living landscape is evergreen, and therefore changes more subtly from winter to summer.

I suppose that this overwhelming green-ness only serves to highlight those bits that aren't – specifically areas such as the Species Rose Collection or Magnolia Bed, or trees such as the Cock's Comb Coral Tree (*Erythrina crista-galli)*, where the winter stems and limbs are given special prominence without their seasonal wardrobe.

Winter also allows us the chance to focus on some of the signs within the Gardens – they will often stand out a little more without such a weight of summer growth around them, and with the winter light coming in at a shallower angle to provide added illumination. Interpretive signs, and particularly plant labels, are some of the things which distinguish the botanic garden from the general parkland and other 'green spaces' (though this has been something of a misnomer given the drought conditions of the summer past).

The signs allow us the opportunity to communicate a little about the living plant collections, or other features of the site. Achieving the right balance between signs and the landscape is one of the many factors to consider. Too many signs, and the garden starts to look like a department store at sale time. Too few, and there are tales left untold, or plants left unannounced.

One of our constant challenges and frustrations is that, despite a history of continually producing and installing plant labels throughout the Gardens, there are never enough of them. Inevitably, the plant for which you are seeking a name is missing its label. The two plants on either side of it, which you know quite well, are still labelled. I've never understood why this happens.

Our intrepid Signs Officer

Maggie McNamara (featured in a previous edition of *Botanic News*) sees some parallels between the unending process of producing plant labels for the Gardens and painting the Sydney Harbour Bridge, though with a little less grey paint and head for heights, and understandably, more plant names.

Early in her work at the Gardens (she started in 1984), she thought that with a bit of diligence and endeavour, she would have the plants all labelled in a few years, and that would be it...Job done.

Just as Maggie was nearing the notional finish line in 1994, we changed labelling systems (from the anodized aluminium Gedakop system to the current vinyl-cut lettering). This was not done purely to frustrate and dispirit, but to keep pace with modern developments in sign-making. It was becoming increasingly difficult and expensive to source the aluminium plates (from Switzerland), and the system itself was costly in terms of time and materials.

We have been using the vinyl-cut lettering system for about 13 years, and (with Maggie's advice) are now considering changing to digitally-printed film for all signs and labels. This will streamline the process of applying the text and images, and increase the lifespan of the signs.

Plant labels also need to be replaced for reasons other than updating the 'furniture'. Labels go missing – some souvenired no doubt by visitors who confuse the labels with their own private possessions. Others meet their end with the impact of a falling limb, or an errant mower (though I can assure you that this happens rarely). Then there are the labels that become obsolete or out-of-date because there has been a change to a plant's classification as a result of a revision within the genus or family, and the nomenclature needs to be adjusted. We aim to keep visitors abreast of these breaking botanical developments.

Replacing signs and labels is no doubt a bit easier for us now than it might have been for the technicians and tradespeople who produced earlier signs and labels within the Gardens. The oldest sign material that we have in our archives is a fragment of a label made of a whitish porcelain material, which would have been inked by hand before firing. These labels would have been used during Mueller's directorship. From that time until the arrival of Ms McNamara in 1984, there was a succession of sign-writers, who painted signs by hand onto timber boards. There appear to have been at least five different folk deployed to paint plant labels over the many decades. Their styles and materials varied a little, but by-and-large they stuck to a similar blueprint. Some text was screen printed, but the rest was painted by hand.

The last of the sign-writers was Harry Taylor, who had been here for umpteen years, and was still plying his trade in the early 1980s. I had some interaction with Harry in 1980, as one of my first tasks on joining the RBG was to paint the interior of the building that we were to occupy on the Observatory site. Harry was able to mix the job-at-hand (applying paint to walls and other surfaces) with a steady flow of anecdotes and opinions on almost any topic

you would care to suggest, and some that you wouldn't. The careful brush strokes were punctuated by pauses to reflect, and to add commentary.

Harry was a craftsman nevertheless, and until they were recalled to be replaced by more modern materials, his hand-painted plant labels and other signs tended to weather the elements nobly. The building that we painted has long been demolished (it was a building of great character and few comforts, which was finally and formally condemned when we were still working in it). It was replaced by a 'demountable' structure, which subsequently was demounted and is now the office building at RBG Cranbourne.

One of the defining signs of the RBG Melbourne landscape is, in fact, the absence of a sign. Commonly in foreign parks and gardens the most prominent sign proclaims '*Pelouse Interdite*', or in whatever the local language may be: 'Keep off the Grass'. When tested, it appears that they are quite serious about this requirement. How lucky we are in our Gardens that our many hectares of turf are enjoyed by all our visitors for strolling and picnicking upon, rather than being viewed as 'out of bounds'.

Richard Barley

Above left: The 'fragment of a label made of a whitish porcelain material ... used during Mueller's directorship'.

Below left: Maggie pictured with an assortment of signs which have been used in the Gardens.
Photo: Richard Barley

Below: One of the current signs which are under review.
Photo: Meg Miller

Friends of RBG Cranbourne

LECTURE SERIES - 2007

Sunday 24 June at 1:45 for 2.00pm
City of Casey Offices
Patrick Northeast Dv, Narre Warren
Melway Map Ref 110 D4
Cost: $15 Members $12
(includes afternoon tea)

Lecture One: Breeding Better Australian Plants
ANGUS STEWART

In recent times, Angus has become a familiar face to many gardeners in Australia as the NSW presenter for ABC TV's *Gardening Australia* and as a contributor to the *Gardening Australia* magazine. For a number of years he has presented radio gardening programs on ABC 702 in Sydney. Angus has also written books on propagating and growing Australian plants, one of his main interests. His hybrid Kangaroo Paws (*Anigozanthos*), are commonly available in Australia and overseas.

Lecture Two: Antarctic Vegetation Through Time
PROF. DAVID CANTRILL

David, a renowned Melbourne-born paleobotanist (plant fossil scientist) was appointed last year as Chief Botanist and Director, Plant Sciences and Biodiversity at the National Herbarium of Victoria. He has worked at the British Antarctic Survey and the Swedish Museum of Natural History. His studies have involved fossils from Africa, Australia, South America and New Zealand. Antarctica has not always been entombed in ice with life clinging to the edges. The record of plant life preserved in Antarctic rocks reveals an extremely rich history, which is very relevant today. Did you know that plants once grew close to the South Pole? Come and find out more!

Sunday 2 September at 11.00am
Domain House, Dallas Brooks Drive, South Yarra (RBG Melbourne)
followed by BYO lunch and tour of Trials Area at Burnley Gardens, Yarra Blvd, Burnley (Melway 45 A12)

Lecture One: Australian Hedges
DAVE KENDAL

As a Burnley student Dave has been assessing the suitability of Australian native plants for hedging. This study is now three years old and has been featured on *Gardening Australia*. Some of the selected plants have performed extremely well. This is an excellent opportunity to have Dave lead us around his research plot and share his experiences. He is also a part-time lecturer at Burnley.

Lecture Two: Coppicing Eucalypts
JOHN RAYNER

John Rayner is a Lecturer in Urban Horticulture and Course Coordinator at Burnley Campus, University of Melbourne. John has established a number of research plots at Burnley to assess the growth and form of many Australian shrubs and ground covers. John's research work has been featured on *Gardening Australia*. The Rayner Garden in Emerald was opened for the first time this year in the Australian Open Garden Scheme.

For further information, phone 9702 2206 (9.00am-6.00pm)

BOOK REVIEW

The Governor's Moment

Bruce Grant

RRP $19.95
Grant Press, October 2006

This short (135 pages) novel sets the musings of a fictitious ex-Governor of Victoria against the backdrop of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne.

In the course of an afternoon the Governor and several other characters wander the Gardens, share conversations and happenings – including a photo shoot in the Ornamental Lake – and ponder the big issues. These are the nature of belonging, relationships, love, duty, beauty, politics, architecture and power – in short, the meaning of life. He also has ideas about colonialism and the role of the Governor itself.

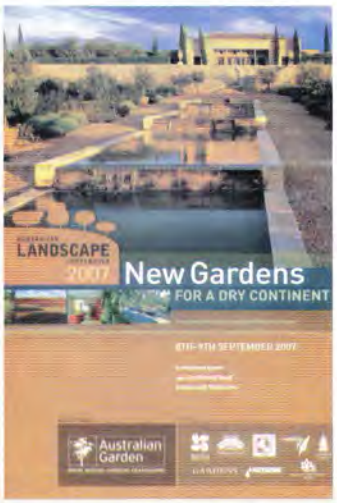
The story is peppered with anecdotes about the Gardens, and its relationship with Government House. Many Garden features, such as the bust of Von Mueller outside the Herbarium and the Temple of the Winds, provide a setting for the action and thoughts.

Bruce Grant has an illustrious background as a diplomat, government advisor, academic, journalist and non-fiction writer on world events. He has drawn on this diverse background to support his ideas and arguments, and there is certainly a lot to think about.

The book is illustrated with line drawings by Diane Masters that are reminiscent of magazine illustrations of the '50s and '60s and which provide the text with a certain quirkiness.

The Governor takes a long walk that inspires these musings. His path around the Gardens would be interesting to plot as one reads this book.

Terri Kay



For information about the Australian Landscape Conference 2007, to be held on 8 and 9 September, please see the brochure (pictured above) which is included with this edition of *Botanic News*, ring (03) 9427 9066 or go to www.australianlandscapeconference.com.au

MEMORIES

The Early Years

FROM BETH HIGGS AND GOLDA ISAAC AS TOLD TO MEG MILLER

How did our organisation begin? Take a State Government with tight purse strings, frustrated Botanic Gardens staff, and an enterprising and committed voluntary guide and plant craft cottage member, stir them together with some interested parties and watch the results. Beth Higgs was the pied piper aided by Golda Isaac, a botanist with a special affection for the Herbarium, who happily followed. They have been firm friends ever since they met.

A public meeting was called of contacts and enthusiasts all brimming with ideas. From this the Friends of the RBG evolved.

Journalists from *The Sun* (now *The Herald-Sun*) newspaper were not slow to realize that the poor state of the Garden's lake could be a cause-celebre and articles about the lake and the health of the swans began to appear almost daily. It happened that the year coincided with *The Sun*'s sixtieth Anniversary. The Tramways Board lent a tram, painted black and with the legend 'Save the Lake' and a fluorescent green swan skeleton on its side, and the public's interest was awakened.

Beth and some other interested new members spent time sitting at a table in Myers collecting donations from members of the public, some of whom had never been to the Gardens and who hastened to find out what the fuss was about. In all, approximately $200,000 was raised towards saving the lake. The State Government covered the remaining cost.

A steering committee was formed and events planned and organised. The first family picnic brought crowds to the Gardens. There were small painted faces, collages, necklaces, murals painted, magical flute music which drew interested children from all over the Gardens, a clown and, most importantly, food. Dr Churchill, then Director of the Gardens, displayed unexpected skill with the rake in the clean-up. That was the end of the first year of the Friends – 1982 .

By 1983 the Friends had

begun an organised program of events including bus tours to several well-known and interesting gardens which could last for three, four or five days each time. Golda supplied both the research and the garden notes for each tour. The first trip was to Canberra, where the visitors were warmly welcomed at Yarralumla and its beautiful gardens by Lady Stephen. Tours have continued over the years thanks to the warmth and generosity of garden owners throughout the country.

With the introduction of programs of lectures, including overseas gardeners and luminaries among a long list of interesting speakers, we began a first-class catering group.

The first botanical art exhibition, *The Banksias*, featured a lecture by Alex George and an exhibition of historic prints, paintings and drawings from the Herbarium collection. Other exhibitions followed, featuring the work of Anita Barley, Stan Kelly, Jenny Phillips and Colin Woolcock. Later there was the *Snugglepot and Cuddlepie* exhibition commissioned by Gardens Management, attended by 50,000 and running for five weeks. The sales outlet, a rose arbor frame decorated in the form of a gumnut, was staffed by Friends' volunteers.

There was an exhibition of Volumes I and II of *The Banksias* by Celia Rosser, (kindly loaned by Monash University), to commemorate the then recent publication of Volume II. This exhibition made $50,000 and part of the money was used to employ Professor Tom May for six months in the Herbarium. His was the first appointment of a mycologist to a Herbarium anywhere in Australia and was so successful that the Gardens continued his employment full time. Perhaps the most important exhibition "Our Botanical Heritage" was an opportunity to showcase the outstanding selection of paintings, notes, drawings and memorabilia held in the Herbarium, and the public response was overwhelming.

With many talented artists among us, instruction for botanical illustration was in demand, and it wasn't long before the first botanical art workshops began and later became the very successful Botanical Illustrators group, thanks to Louise Coronel.

The logo was a joint effort. It featured (the drawing of) David Wilkinson's Melaleuca, Jenny Phillips' swan and Celia Rosser's lines denoting water and tree-shadow. The whole was given a professional look by a graphic artist friend of Golda's, and has since been incorporated in our up-to-date corporate image.

Our first sales outlet was a humble table in the kiosk – weekends only – for which we produced the very first picture postcards of the Gardens. Later we added a letter card printed from a painting donated by Jenny Phillips of a rare and endangered plant growing in the Gardens – *Sophora Toromiro* . Seeds from this plant have now been sent to Chile to be germinated and ultimately returned to its native habitat on Easter Island.

Some of the pioneers who gathered at our 25th anniversary party: L to R: Margaret MacGregor, Lesley Clark, Lawrence Cohn, Jenny Phillips, David Wilkinson, Golda Isaac, Louise Coronel, Beth Higgs, Sue Higgs, Doreen Schofield, Frank Phillips, Diana McClellan. Photo: Richard Kirsner

By now we were able to make our first donation to the Gardens – $1,000 from the kiosk – and our sales activities there began to blossom into a proper retail outlet. It was stocked with appropriate tourist-centred merchandise, with professional management supported by well-trained volunteers and provided, as well as friendly retail services, help and guidance for the lost and those in need – to the trams, the nearest gate, the city and the toilets. In later years, following the Observatory Gate redevelopment, responsibility for all retail operations in the Gardens was assumed by Gardens management.

The Growing Friends, led by enthusiasts Gillian and Neil Kirk and ably supported by Dale McDonnell, began in 1987 and added to our retail operations. There would be few discerning gardeners in Melbourne who have not visited these sales. The concept has taken root and now there are Growing Friends attached to many regional gardens around the State.

From these humble beginnings the Friends have now raised and donated more than $1,300,000 – over $52,000, on average, per year – more if inflation is factored in. To hear Beth and Golda tell it, the whole 25 years of their membership has just been so much fun.

From Gate Lodge

Members are reminded that they must let the Friends' office know if unable to attend an Event which has been booked, or on the day, please ring **0407 335 644** before the advertised starting time. With limited number events there is usually a waiting list.

Please remember that you are not eligible for a discount at the Observatory Cafe, however the Terrace Tearooms (by the Lake) still offers complimentary tea or coffee with meals, scones or cakes.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

☐ **Household** (two adults living at same address) **$63**

☐ **Individual** **$43**

☐ **Pensioner, Student, Country, Interstate or Overseas** **$31.50**

Trust Fund DONATIONS
(Tax deductible, receipt issued) **$**

TOTAL ENCLOSED **$**
Cheque/Money order enclosed
OR please charge my

☐ Mastercard ☐ Visa

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Signature Expiry Date

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Age Group

☐ Under 25 ☐ 25-39 ☐ 40-59 ☐ 60 and over

I would like details of:
☐ Life Membership
☐ Gift membership
☐ Bequests and Wills

Subscription rates current at 1 January 2007

Please make cheques payable to: Friends of RBG, and post with this form to: Gate Lodge, 100 Birdwood Ave, Melbourne 3004

FRIENDS *of the* ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS MELBOURNE INC.

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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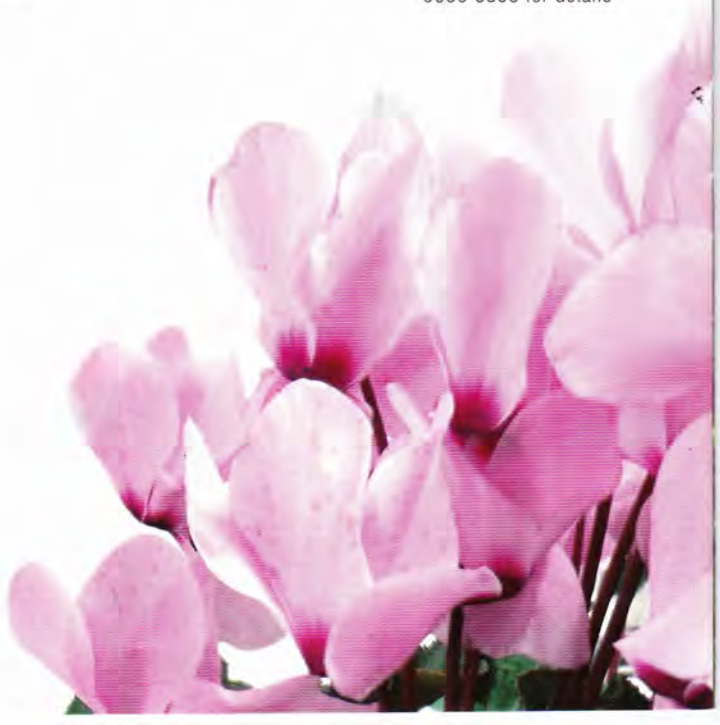

Photo: Jennifer Marshall