

NATURELINK

NEWSLETTER OF THE CRANBOURNE FRIENDS ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS VICTORIA INC.

VOLUME 27 : 4 | SUMMER 2020



Wollemia nobilis, found in the wild in only one remote location, is critically endangered. Photo: Eva Kowal
See **President's report** on [page 3](#) for a discussion on sustainability of the world's plants.



CRANBOURNE FRIENDS

ROYAL
BOTANIC GARDENS
VICTORIA

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If print version, this magazine is printed on recycled paper

AGM 2019-2020

NEWS

At the Cranbourne Friends Annual General Meeting on 15 November, 2020, Erin Cosgriff was elected as President.

Erin, a plant lover who has been a member of the Friends since 2015 and a Friends committee member for one year, is also a Garden Ambassador at Cranbourne. Her professional background prior to retirement was as a health administrator with a focus on women's health in the public sector. She is an avid gardener and an appreciator of curated gardens who values their role in fostering interest in the beauty of our natural world and its protection.

The 2019-20 Annual General Meeting was notably more modern than previous such events, as it was conducted online via Zoom. Although this was done because of COVID-19 restrictions, the online presentation was considered advantageous by members who did not have to drive to Cranbourne to attend the meeting.

Another innovation was the production of a very comprehensive [Annual Report](#), which featured many coloured photographs. You can now access this on the Friends website: www.rbgfriendscranbourne.org.au

We thank both Jenny Potten and graphic designer Janette Wilson for creating such an impressive document. Future Annual Reports are likely to be in this format.

Important elements of the Annual General Meeting were:

- A presentation by Professor Tim Entwisle on *State of the World's Plants and Fungi 2020*.
- The awarding of an Honorary Life Member award to Helen Morrow, formerly the Friends Membership Officer.
- The appointment of an Auditor to approve the Friends financial accounts.
- Executive Director Chris Russell's report of the effect of COVID-19 on the Gardens and description of upcoming developments.



Cranbourne Friends Committee meeting on Zoom, November 2020

Top: Jenny Potten, Rosemary Miller, Erin Cosgriff (2020 President); Centre: Helen Kennedy (Secretary), Barbara Jeffrey, Janette Wilson; Bottom: Roger Watts (Immediate Past President), Richard Clarke (Treasurer). Absent from photo: Alexandra Stalder, Membership Officer.



*Helen Morrow, Honorary Life Member, with her certificate, which features a John Armstrong illustration of *Nuytsia florabunda*. Photo Tim Morrow*



*Neville Hatten, on the Ironbarks Tour in August 2007.
Photo: Rodger Elliot*

The Friends acknowledge the recent passing of Neville Hatten, who played a vital role in the Cranbourne Friends. A long-time member, he was a Committee Member for a number of years, was involved in the Activities Subcommittee and a member of Growing Friends.

Neville is described as an extremely friendly and likeable bloke who would always be ready to offer help!

It was Neville who provided "Naturelink" as the title for our newsletter.

Cranbourne Friends events 2021

Due to uncertainty about possible COVID-19 restrictions affecting The Gardens, the Friends Events committee is not yet able to plan very far ahead for 2021. All events, plant sales or other activities offered early in the new year will be notified through Quicklink, our website and social media.



A very successful Annual General Meeting was held on 15 November. Our very own guest speaker, Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria's Professor Tim Entwistle, reflected on the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew's virtual symposium, *State of the World's Plants and Fungi*, evaluating and reporting on the current state of the wellbeing and sustainability of the earth's plants and fungi. Unsurprisingly, the impact of climate change, urban development, food production practices, deforestation, the burning of fossil fuels, soil erosion, poor quality air and undrinkable water, are having profound and deleterious impacts on the earth and the future of humankind. With two in five of all plants threatened with extinction, so too may be their keys to future food, fuel and medicines. Scientific researchers believe important answers are to be found within the wonders of biodiversity. Tim dazzled us with lots of statistics and many sobering reflections. You can watch the Kew talks on YouTube and read their report at:

<https://www.kew.org/science/state-of-the-worlds-plants-and-fungi>

A new Committee for the Friends of the Cranbourne Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria was elected. We farewelled Roger Watts as our past President and thanked him sincerely for his leadership and careful stewardship during the course of the last two years. I take up the role of President but otherwise the committee membership remains the same. Roger will remain a valued member of the committee as Immediate Past President. I hope to consolidate the ongoing work of the committee whilst we regroup after this year of disruption. Whilst our committee may be small in number, there is no lack of energy or resourcefulness. We are always keen to engage with members who have time, interest and skills that could be drawn on for projects or for committee membership.

Due to COVID and its consequential impact on travel both within Australia and across the world stage, both the 7th Global Botanic Gardens Congress jointly presented by the BGCI/BGANZ Congress and hosted by the RBGV and the 17th Australasian Botanic Guides Conference planned for 2021 at the RBGV, will now be held over until 2022. Nonetheless 2021 will be an important year with two very significant events to be celebrated. One is the 175th year of the Royal Botanic Gardens and the other, the 30th year of the Friends of Cranbourne. To mark this latter occasion, we will be launching a history of the Friends and underscoring their role in advocating for the establishment of an Australian Garden in Cranbourne. As this book, written by Carolyn Landon, will testify, we owe much to this visionary and determined group, many of whom we continue to call Friends today.

We are hoping for a COVID-normal 2021, when we can once again conduct plant sales and our usual range of events. The very COVID-safe return of small bands of the Growing Friends to tend the nursery shows there is some light on the horizon. As the year unfolds, we have big projects such as our history publication and the commissioning of our administrative platform to complete.

On a personal note, I look forward to meeting and working with you all and to the challenges that will come. The Committee is always open to constructive feedback and suggestions, so do feel able to contact us at any time. We wish you all the best for this Christmas season and trust that this celebration and those to follow next year will be with our families and friends in person.

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work and learn, the peoples of the Kulin (Koolin) Nation, and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and future.



Opening up and making new Friends

One of the silver linings of this COVID-challenged year has been the new visitors who have discovered us, even though we might be near neighbours or in adjoining suburbs. Perhaps we have been on their 'must visit' list for some time, or perhaps they were simply not aware of us. Either way, it has been wonderful to meet with many locals, especially during the period of the five kilometre and then 25 kilometre restriction. The strong visitor numbers we experienced upon re-opening (for the second time!) attest to the simple truth that we all know already – you simply can't live a healthy life without some connection with the natural world, whether for clean air, physical space or emotional and spiritual wellness. The importance of access to public green space for local communities has been a strong theme right around the globe during the pandemic and, I hope, has served to reinforce the importance of providing adequate green space in the planning of new developments and protecting the green spaces that exist now. Our longstanding involvement in the planning of the new suburbs around us over the past 20 years has been an investment worth making, and it is nice to see the new residents discovering what we have to offer and how they can become involved. I am sure many have, or will, become new Friends and part of our larger family sharing an interest in nature and gardens.

Keeping the Gardens going, and a little bit more

Our periods of closure, whilst without visitors, were spent very productively by the small crew on site. We took the opportunity to upgrade some key areas within the Australian Garden, most notably the Ephemeral Garden which is viewed by gazing to the left while standing in front of the Visitor Centre overlooking the Red Sand Garden. Horticulturist Sturt Gibbs has been bravely battling poorly draining soils in this high profile location for some time, so it was great to be able to get stuck in to excavating and replacing the soil and putting in new, previously impossible to grow, plant material. Having now had a few months and a wonderful spring growing season to settle in, the precinct is looking amazing with much colour and diversity. And Sturt has a very big smile on his face... as do I!

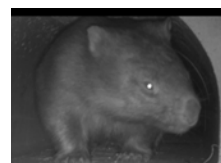


*Replacing poorly draining soils in the Ephemeral Garden, and the colourful plant display only four months later.
Photos Sturt Gibbs*

Another significant project made easier by a lack of visitors was the installation of 750 metres of fauna fence and two fauna underpasses along Philip Moors Drive. One of the tensions in managing our beautiful site is the impact of visitors on the natural environment. With our quest to attract more visitors comes an increased impact unless we can find ways to mitigate these. This is perhaps no more starkly evident than with the roadkill caused by vehicles along our entry road. We have been monitoring numbers and species affected for some years now, as well as tracking traffic volumes and speeds during different times of the year. This mitigation strategy (among others) is simply about reducing the opportunity for contact between animal and vehicle by putting a barrier on either side of the road (comprised of a specifically designed 500mm

high black plastic sheet fence) and introducing safe crossing points at the specially designed fauna underpasses. And we couldn't have done it without the assistance of the Friends and a Federal Biodiversity Fund grant of \$20,000. The job is not over though. We will continue to look to improve visitor awareness of the importance of staying below the speed limit, and reducing the number of people cutting through the site (sometimes at speed) just to get to their destination a bit faster.

In closing, a sincere message of thanks to the Cranbourne Friends committee and activity groups for your support during such a challenging year. One of our COVID-19 control measures was to establish workplace bubbles, or zones, so that if we had an infection, we could limit the extent of potential spread to a small group of people working together and not be required to send the entire workforce home. We commandeered the Elliot Centre and the Growing Friends Nursery and set up staff workstations in both, as well as utilizing the nursery facilities for our general plant and orchid propagation. With restrictions easing and the infection rate way down (fingers crossed!) we will be moving to a new COVID-normal arrangement soon.



Top: Fauna fence and road tunnel; middle and bottom, bandicoots and wombat use the tunnel.

Photos: Ricardo Simao

Much anticipated new Arid Garden opens

In November, RBGV Melbourne's new Arid Garden was finally unveiled. When private cacti and succulent collector Robert Field generously donated 3000 cacti and succulents of 400 different species to the Gardens in 2015-2016, it was a dream come true for Landscape Architect, Andrew Laidlaw. With many plants originating from South America and Arizona, visitors will experience the diversity, colours, flowers and textures that these fascinating plants have to offer, while educational signage and children's activities embedded into the footpaths will encourage visitors of all ages to understand the wonders of these plants and their importance in a warming climate.

The Garden would not have been possible without the generous donation from long time Gardens supporter, Mrs Joan Darling, and the donations of cacti and succulent collectors. Many of the plants for the new garden were sourced from the renowned 'Field's Collection' of Victorian Ralph Field, who began an extensive collection on his property in Tennyson, which has been carefully maintained by his son Robert. This collection was brought to Australia between 1936-38, when German explorer and botanist Harold Blossfeld collected cacti and succulents from South America. The rest of the plants came from collectors, including Collectors Corner and the entire collection of the late Robert Stevenson, former President of the Cacti and Succulent Society of Australia.



'Botanic Gardens have both the capacity and the expertise to display these large collections of rare and unusual plants. Without organisations like ours, many species would be lost from nature and

from our gardens – we care for the rare, and the rarely grown,’ says Professor Tim Entwisle, Director & Chief Executive.

The Arid Garden responds to the 2020–2040 Melbourne Gardens Masterplan, RBGV’s Landscape Succession Strategy and expands on the success of the Guilfoyle’s Volcano development, demonstrating RBGV’s leadership in designing landscapes that respond to a changing climate. It is one of a number of exciting projects under way at Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria, which will renew and transform the Gardens for the benefit of all visitors.

The Garden is designed by well-known Melbourne Landscape Architect, Andrew Laidlaw, who has worked at the Gardens for 22 years and also designed the Ian Potter Foundation Children’s Garden and Guilfoyle’s Volcano. This garden is a contemporary take on the classic 16th Century parterre garden, where a large space is broken into smaller spaces, with pathways between. These landscapes tend to be quite inward facing, and the design places the focus on looking at the plants. The several entries and exit points create a space that is non-prescriptive, dynamic and organic.

The arid landscapes of the Americas have also greatly influenced the design, including the strong, vertical lines of the pole cactus and the vistas of the Saguaro National Park in Arizona, where many of the plants were originally sourced. This collection is of particular interest because many of the plants have known provenance, meaning that they were sourced directly from their natural environment and we can pinpoint exactly where that is.

The original Cacti and Succulent Garden was built in 1945 - it was a post-war design which was constructed by returning servicemen and women. In the 1980s it was transformed into an Arid Garden, however, in 2013 80% of the columnar cacti and succulents were damaged in an act of vandalism.

“As a Landscape Architect, the opportunity to design a project with plant material as remarkable as the cacti from the Field and Stevenson collections, with their array of different forms, colours and textures, is a dream come true,” says Andrew Laidlaw, Landscape Architect.

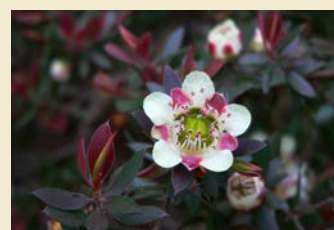


***Leptospermum* magic**

- Ray Turner and Eva Kowal



(L-R) *Leptospermum* 'Mesmer Eyes'; *L. myrsinoides*



(L-R) *L. rotundifolium* (prostrate form); *L. rotundifolium* 'Lavender Queen'; *L. macrocarpum* 'Copper Sheen', *L. myrsinoides* pink and white forms

Our November meeting normally takes the form of a 'Show and Tell' with members displaying some of their recent photographic creations and reporting on their various expeditions and other activities.

Instead, a virtual event was organised and members provided varied and interesting presentations for the November issue of the 'Cranbourne Lens' indicating that, despite lockdown restrictions, they have been extremely busy and have accomplished some significant projects.

Some members have continued photographing botanical and wildlife subjects in their own gardens or in local nature reserves and coastal regions on the Mornington Peninsula within the 5km limit from their homes, returning to visit the Gardens at Cranbourne as soon as restrictions were lifted, where they have enjoyed and recorded the wonderful diversity of flowering plants in the Australian Garden.

One member has been closely involved in the campaign to save the Holden Proving Ground bushland and other threatened areas in Gippsland (see page 10).

Several of our members entered the Friends Quirky Photograph Competition and we were delighted that one of them, Peter Williamson, has been chosen as the winning entry (see his photo below). Peter has had a successful year with his photography, as one of his images has also been chosen for the 2020-21 Friends Membership Card.

We are now eagerly awaiting the announcement that we can at last meet face to face once more and enjoy each other's company while we continue making photographic images at RBGV Cranbourne.



Membership report

Thank you to all who have renewed their membership so far for the 2020/21 membership year, and for your patience during the COVID-19 lockdown, when the delivery of membership cards was slowed somewhat by mail delays.

This quarter we are pleased to welcome five new members: Rowena & Craig Mulligan, Erica Wagner, Craig Smith and Phil Harbutt.

If you have any Membership queries, please contact Alexandra Stalder via:

- membership@rbgfriendscranbourne.org.au
- telephone: 0431 025 733

Quirky photo winner



'I know it's somewhere down there'.

Photo: Peter Williamson

Growing Friends - Marjanne Rook

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS

The Growing Friends are back - but not yet for plant sales! In late March, now 7 months ago, the Growing Friends nursery closed. In late October, when the COVID 19 situation eased considerably in Melbourne, we were invited to return to the nursery but with restrictions.

As the nursery continues to be used by the Orchid Research team from Monday to Friday, in compliance with the Garden's COVID-safe Work plan, the Growing Friends can only work on Saturdays and Sundays and only four members can attend at a time, in order to comply with COVID-19 rules.

Over the past months I have received a number of enquiries from eager members asking for a plant list, wishing to buy particular plants and/or asking when we will resume plant sales. Although in our absence, a number of the Gardens' staff looked after our 'left behind' plants as best they could in addition to their usual work, much work is needed by the Growing Friends to catch up. As soon as we can, we will compile a list of our stock which will be sent to the Cranbourne Friends members.

At the time of writing, the when and how of selling plants is not yet known. Information will be posted on the Cranbourne Friends website: www.rbgfriendercranbourne.org.au.

I hope and expect that one day we will be able to hold our plant sales in the Gardens again.



Top: Gardens staff using Growing Friends outdoor facilities; Middle: empty benches at Growing Friends; Bottom: Socially distanced and with masks, Marjanne Rook meets with staff Mandy Thomson and John Arnott.

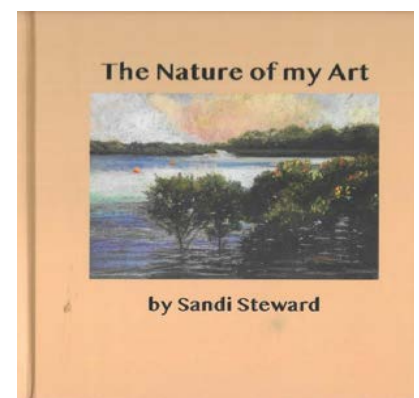
Book review - The Nature of my Art, by Sandi Stewart - Robin Allison

This little book of thirty-six un-numbered pages, holds, between the hard covers, beauty and treasure to be shared with all who open it. It is a treasure to share Sandi Stewart's love of nature, to see her beautiful artwork and photography, and experience her reflections on life and nature. The author aptly describes her writing as 'musings'.

Living in the Western Port region Sandi is drawn to the mangroves, fascinated by them, but also as an artist, confronted by the 'green and brown palette'. In resolving this conundrum, the author develops an acute appreciation of the fragile ecosystem of the mangrove swamps.

The main content of this small book is the illustrations, which include many prints of Stewart's nature-based paintings, and some complementary photographs. The text is brief, explanatory, and expressive, well supporting the illustrations.

Sandi Stewart and her husband John are both active members of the Cranbourne Friends RBGV and the publishing of *The Nature of my Art* has been Sandi's Covid 19 isolation project. What a lovely response to such a challenging situation.



The Nature of my Art
Sandi Stewart
ISBN 9781649215260
©Sandi Stewart.

The book is available for \$41.85 (incl. p & p) by contacting the author via email: sandiart@icloud.com.

Recycling memories - the story of the Label Racks

- Marjanne Rook

When I joined the Growing Friends in 2006 there were two small racks for labels in the old nursery which allowed for 111 different plant-labels. The racks were installed on the door of our small tool shed and the plant list with slot numbers hung below (see Photo 1). One tricky thing was that the labels themselves did not have a number at this point which made refiling them rather slow as the number had to be found on the list first before being able to put them back in their slot. This was taken care of by entering the slot number on the label.



Photo 1

These label racks were made by Gordon MacDonald, Pat MacDonald's late husband. Pat was a Growing Friend well before I joined. Pat is in the middle of Photo 2. She was also a member of the 'Press Gang' which now goes by the name of Herbarium Collectors.



Photo 2

Some time later along came Gwen Elliot with two large racks she had been offered by the staff at 3 Community Radio (3CR) where Gwen and Rodger Elliot were regular plant and garden advisors on Sundays. The slots in these racks were used for audio tapes (Photo 3). As 3CR was no longer using tapes, the racks were offered to anyone who could use them. Gwen, a great recycler, could see the potential for Growing Friends labels and took two of them for the GF. By turning the rack 90°, the 200 slots were perfect for our plant labels except for one important aspect, no bottom – just a couple of rods which meant the labels could easily fall through. I took them home and some off-cuts of plywood cut to size did the trick. The perfect job for my partner Alf Reiner (Photo 4).



Photo 3

When in July 2014 we set up the new shed, we had the perfect location for all six racks and that is where they are now. After a few minor tweaks they were installed by Alf and Alex Smart (Photo 5).

Some time later John Arnott, the Manager Horticulture at the Gardens visited the nursery for a tour. He was delighted to see the large racks on the wall as he too is a Plant and Garden advisor at 3CR and remembered the tape racks very well.



Photo 4

All racks combined provide us with about 700 slots – not enough for each for each plant species on our long list. Fortunately, the slots on the large racks allow us to insert multiple species clearly divided into bundles with rubber bands. Ray Turner as the label recycler/caretaker makes sure that each species is returned to its correct slot. He sorts and cleans the labels sitting at his own donated 1960s table, another recycled item which has lasted the distance well.

As our list grew to 1250 species, and given the rate we were adding to it, we would have filled all 700 slots before too long, thus providing us with one good reason to shorten the list. The COVID-19 lockdown has provided us with the time to edit and cull the list, which is now, at the end of October 2020, shortened to 1053 species. Of course, we will continue to add new species and, from time to time, remove others.

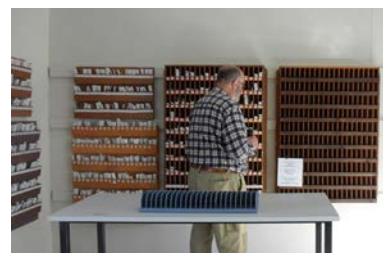


Photo 5

Recent environmental activities in South Gippsland -

Anne Heath Mennell

During the COVID-19 lockdown I had the opportunity of acting on a number of local environmental challenges, even though of course most of this was done from my keyboard while isolated at home, by necessity.

At the end of 2019, a large stand of grass trees in the Grantville Nature Conservation Reserve put on a magnificent show of flower spikes. Access to the site suddenly became problematic, with a fence indicating that the site was a buffer zone for the adjacent sand mine and was part of their lease (as reported in September 2020 *Quicklink*). Despite discussions with Council and the leaseholder the trees have now been removed and mining will take place.

Then came the realisation that if Holden was pulling out of Australia the Holden Proving Ground (HPG) might be at risk. For security reasons, to protect against industrial espionage, the entire site at Lang Lang is fenced and largely undeveloped and only lightly managed. Very few people have ever been inside this 877-hectare site, although I have luckily toured it with our local Landcare group, which helped Holden to manage the grounds. It has been an ark for flora and fauna for over sixty years and the thought of it being sold off, cleared and developed is horrifying.

Natural assets on the HPG site include various ecological vegetation classes (wet heathland, lowland forest, heathy woodland, swampy riparian woodland, grassy woodland, riparian scrub, swampy woodland); 88 terrestrial plant species, 48 bird species, including the Great White Egret; native reptiles, amphibians and mammals, including bandicoots.

Environmental groups and concerned individuals became involved, resulting in a sustained campaign over the next six months, raising awareness, advocating for the site's protection and purchase by the State Government. Early on, we became aware of a related threat - the State Government's Strategic Extractive Resource Areas (SERA) pilot project is operating in two sites, one west of Melbourne and one in South Gippsland, affecting the HPG site. The project's purpose is to ensure greater certainty for the extractive (quarrying of sand and stone) industries and prioritises the needs of these industries at the expense of any other activities.

In August, the Proving Ground was sold to Vinfast, a Vietnamese car company which intends to continue using it to test the vehicles they manufacture. The company seems willing to meet with our local Member, Council and the community to discuss ways of protecting the site into the future. The Save the Proving Ground Campaign has evolved into Save the Holden Bushland (www.savetheholdenbushlands.org/) (SHB) and is now working towards extending the last remaining areas of coastal woodland on the eastern shore of Western Port. The vision is to link the HPG and all the small reserves and wildlife/nature corridors between Lang Lang and the southern edge of Grantville into the Western Port National Park (working title).

Recently another threat has appeared via an application to extend a sand-mine in Grantville, which could involve destroying a link between two reserves which would end the possibility of linking the remnant woodland and establishing a Western Port National Park. We rushed to prepare objections to Council within a short two-week window. Time will tell whether any of these efforts will make a difference, but we have to try. Hopefully, single voices will unite and decision makers will begin to listen.



Grass tree forest in the former Grantville Nature Conservation Reserve.
Photo: Meryl Brown Tobin



Holden Proving Ground, Lang Lang



2.5 metre long lace monitor disturbed during hibernation in a hollow log at the Hurdy Gurdy reserve. Photo: Hartley Tobin

All photos from Bass Coast Post:
basscoastpost.com

Creative with Natives: Friends almost scoop the pool

IDEAS FOR YOUR GARDEN

In September 2020, Open Gardens Victoria held a *Creative with natives* competition. Three Cranbourne Friends families did well in the competition, which is perhaps not surprising since many members are interested in gardening with Australian native plants.



The judge, Kate Herd, author and garden designer, writes that it was a total joy to look at the entries to OGV's 'Creative with Natives' competition. "Every photo offered a feast for the eyes, each entry a testament to the diversity and versatility of Australian native plants and the passion and hard work of enthusiastic gardeners. The entries paint a portrait of natives as ready for anything that you might ask of them in the home garden: green roofs, potted colour, topiary, hedges, covering banks or fences, screening shrubs, flowers for picking, flowers for insects and birds, subtle foliage, feature trees, hanging baskets, or trained as bonsai.

"Whether their native garden was three years old or thirty-plus, it was striking how many of the entrants inferred their garden-making was a way of nurturing not only living plants, but also their creative selves. Their passion for gardening is especially poignant given these difficult COVID-19 times - home gardens have certainly provided wonderful solace during lockdown in 2020."

Here are the three gardens owned by the Cranbourne families:



First place went to Erin Cosgriff and Jenny Potten's garden at Inverloch. This garden epitomises a creative approach to garden making with Australian native plants. The plantings are obviously designed with specific pictorial effects in mind, such as sculptural feature plants, defined garden 'rooms' and soft 'pools' of groundcovers under trees. Overall the aesthetic is relaxed and lovely, with an interesting yet harmonious palette of plants and materials.

Great use is made of tried-and-true cultivars, with the garden showcasing the characteristics (be it pliability, floriferous-ness, form or texture) of

chosen plants with intent. Weeping forms of *Grevillea* and *Acacia* are used as standards to punctuate the middle space between taller trees, the surrounding coastal vegetation and the lower shrub layer.

Gorgeous red blooms of a standardised *Grevillea* sway above a low green mass of *Correa* 'Dusky Bells' that has been clipped into a 'cloud-hedge'. The repetition of weeping and mounded forms in this garden help establish a sense of rhythm throughout the whole composition. I also love that Erin and Jenny have taken such care to build the garden around two old trees, an *Agonis flexuosa* and a 100 year old *Banksia integrifolia* - a local remnant specimen.



Erin reports that not all their experiments with native plants have been successful, but the failures have informed new and different plantings. After all, gardening is about observation, trying, doing, assessing, making something beautiful from dirt, seeds and living plants - and it can sometimes be a wonderfully random endeavour. In Erin and Jenny's garden, a self-sown *Eucalyptus leucoxylon* 'Rosea' is a serendipitous addition to the front yard now it has been coppiced "to maintain a mallee form with prominent white trunks".

Special Mentions

David and Jenny Williams' garden at Croydon is a great example of dense and multi-layered planting with plants varying in shape, form and size. Foliage type - from the fine leaves of a grass tree, to the serrated leaves of *Banksia* and weeping ones of *Acacia*, and foliage colour - predominantly silvers and grey-greens, makes for a lively but harmonious composition.

David Williams reports that when they purchased this 2026 sq metre property (4 ½ years ago) the rear garden of over 1000 sq m was mature trees only with grass, bare ground and weeds including ivy, blackberries, oxalis and lots of ugly *Agapanthus*. Over four years they have gradually created the garden, including protecting the mature trees and creating new garden beds and pathways, adding mulch, improving the soil, as well as planting a great range of beautiful native plants.



"The "Arid bed" was one of the most difficult sites to develop, as it was a very dry and dusty spot under three mature trees -two *Corymbia citriodora* (Lemon Scented Gums) and one *Stenocarpus sinuatus* (Fire Wheel Tree). The planting of suitable grasses, ground covers and larger plants, following the addition of a soil mix containing mushroom compost, has made an amazing difference, as can be seen in the photo at left."

Another feature of David and Jenny's gardens is the presence of sculptures and bird baths they have made themselves (see the "alien" mosaic and wood sculpture at right).



By contrast, Sue Guymer and Bill Aitchison's garden in Donvale is a fabulous example of planting designed to provide habitat. The billabong in photo below is in fact a converted swimming pool and features *Nymphoides spinulosperma* and *Cycnogeton procerum* in the water, *Lythrum salicaria* and *Marsilea drummondii* in the wet margins, and *Lomandra longifolia* behind. Such an inspired use of water rocks and plants.

Sue writes that they built their house and started to establish the garden in 1988. Their philosophy was to give back to the local environment, extending the wildlife corridor along the creek. "We were very lucky to find landscaper Doug Blythe who had a great passion for the indigenous plants of our area. He provided the garden design and selection of the local species, and he and his workers did the shaping and planting. Doug recommended

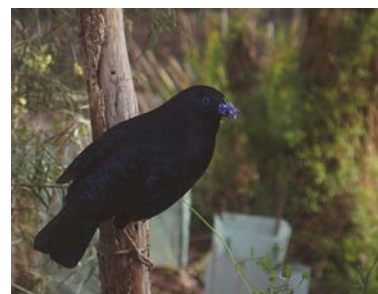


putting a lake in the bottom section of our garden, near the boundary with the creek reserve. This has proved to be a wonderful attraction for water birds as well as a beautiful feature.

We generally used indigenous plants (Australian plants that occur naturally in our local area) particularly in areas further from our house. The early 1990s was a period of good rainfall and hence the plants, particularly the trees, established well. Everything had to be planted. The understorey has been more difficult to establish due to dryness. This is due to establishing near the trees, and also because the climate was drying. Many of the very small plants succumbed.

Habitat gardening has become more popular recently – we immediately recognised that is what we have been trying to do for so long! We have learnt that “mess is good” – we leave some areas covered in leaf litter and fallen logs. When a tree falls or dies, we often leave it in situ – these are often important habitat or bird-perching sites. We have been rewarded by noticing more and more species of animal living in or moving through our garden. We have had an echidna, a kangaroo (that jumped the fence to get in), probably over 60 bird species, reptiles, frogs and a staggering array of insects.”

Visit Open Gardens Victoria online [opengardensvictoria.org.au] to find out more and to discover beautiful gardens to visit after the restrictions ease.



Thanks to David and Jenny Williams, Sue Guymer and Bill Aitchison, and Erin Cosgriff and Jenny Potten, for sharing photos of their gardens and their enthusiasm for gardening creatively with natives, with us.

Christmas Quiz answers! (The questions were in the December Quicklink)

Thank you **Charles Young** for providing us with another absorbing quiz.

A1: The name *Calanthe* is derived from the Ancient Greek words *kallos* meaning “beauty” and *anthos* meaning “flower” – beautiful flower. The genus *Calanthe* was formally described in 1821 by Robert Brown.

A2: The W.A. Christmas tree is *Nuytsia floribunda*. It was named in honour of the 17th century Dutch explorer Pieter Nuyts, the discoverer of that part of the W.A. coast where the plant is found (once dubbed Pieter Nuyts’ Land).

A3: This plant is endemic to Christmas Island, an Australian territory in the north-eastern Indian Ocean. Specific epithets taken from geographical names (like *christmatensis*) often end in *-ensis* (-e) (the t makes for a pleasing sound - euphony).

A4: The genus *Blandfordia* honours British nobleman George Spencer-Churchill, 5th Duke of Marlborough, the Marquis of Blandford. He was Winston Churchill’s great-great-grandfather.

A5: This is the Tasmanian or South Australian Christmas bush. Bright copper butterflies (*Paralucia aurifera*) lay their eggs on the leaves, the caterpillars feed on them, and then they pupate in soil chambers beneath the bush. The ants protect the caterpillars and build the chambers in exchange for the caterpillar secretions. A biological protection racket!

A6: The scientific name of the NSW Christmas ‘bush’ is *Ceratopetalum gummiferum*. It can grow into a tree 10–12 m high! Imagine if the plants in the Cultivar Garden were to get that high!?

A7: Plants in the genus *Prostanthera* have a two-lipped calyx, while the calyces in *Westringia* are divided into five segments.

A8: The common name for these plants is mistletoe. The bird is the mistletoe bird (*Dicaeum hirundinaceum*). These are the flowers of *Amyema sanguineum* var. *pulchrum*.

Chelsea Best in Show Garden

The Victorian Government is partnering with Phillip Johnson Landscapes – designer of the first and only Australian garden to win the prestigious Best in Show at the Royal Horticultural Society Chelsea Flower Show – to replicate his award-winning, sustainable design in the Dandenong Ranges Botanic Gardens. The new garden, which will be about twenty times bigger than the Chelsea display, may be built on what was formerly part of the Olinda Golf Course, land adjoining the Dandenong Ranges Botanic Gardens (previously called the National Rhododendron Garden). The Rhododendron Garden would remain as part of the whole complex.

Several Friends saw Phillip Johnson speak about this exciting project recently. Phillip told us of the huge effort in 2013 involved in creating the original display garden at Chelsea, which went on to win both the Gold Medal and Best in Show awards. The designer went all out, as it was the last year in which Wes Fleming was going to make an entry into this most famous of International garden exhibitions.

The display garden, which depicted an Australian bush landscape, was a wonder to behold. It was constructed but looked like it grew there naturally. Phillip could only use plants growing in Europe, as they could not be transported from Australia – luckily grass trees were located not far away and flowered just in time, and a bottle tree came from Sicily. Cranes and machines moved trees and plants around the country and into position, created the embankment and paths and installed a waratah-shaped viewing module. The bush atmosphere was enhanced by the sounds of frogs (recorded in Australia).

This major project, sponsored by the Education Minister and local member, Hon. James Merlino, is expected to become a major new tourist attraction for Victoria and to provide an example of development of a major garden to school and horticultural students while it is being constructed.

The wonderful soil means that hundreds of Australian plants can be grown in the garden, with 426 different species to be used. It is proposed that the Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne will supply rare and endangered plants for use in the new garden and the Friends of the Rhododendron Garden group will donate ancient Australian Rhododendron species for a special display.

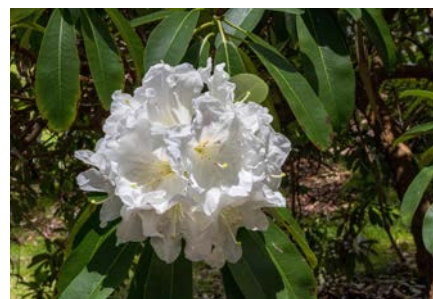
The total cost of the Chelsea Best in Show Garden is anticipated to be \$4 million. Phillip Johnson Landscaping will work closely with Parks Victoria to maintain the garden for the first ten years of its life, after construction is finished.

One thing that has not yet been decided is the name of the new garden. At Chelsea the display was called *The Australian Garden*; that name, of course, is already in use at Cranbourne.

The People and Parks Foundation is enabling people to donate to ensure the project can get started. It is an Environment Trust and a Registered Environment Organisation, and can be visited online at:
peopleandparks.org/projects-activities/chelsea-best-in-show-garden



Two renderings of how the “Chelsea Best in Show” garden is expected to look. The garden, including the constructed “billabong”, is to be developed on golf course land at Olinda, next to the Dandenong Ranges Botanic Garden.



Dandenong Ranges Botanic Garden at Olinda was formerly known as the National Rhododendron Garden. The new garden will be next door.

What's up in the Bushland: Echidnas - Mary Thackeray.

Mary Thackeray was a Customer Service Ranger at Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria Cranbourne for nine years and later also Volunteer Coordinator. She is a long term member of the Cranbourne Friends. Article reprinted from Naturelink vol 23 (3) — Spring 2016.

The echidnas on site at the RBGV Cranbourne are Short-beaked Echidnas (*Tachyglossus aculeatus*). Echidnas are our most widespread native mammal, found in almost all Australian environments and certainly anywhere ants and termites are available. They can sometimes be seen slowly wandering along beside the roads and tracks at Cranbourne with their characteristic rolling gait. This waddle is due to their legs protruding outwards and then downwards (similar to reptiles). *Tachyglossus* means 'quick tongue', referring to the speed with which the echidna uses its tongue to catch ants and termites. The echidna can flick its tongue in and out up to 100 times a minute and extrude it up to 18cm. They also eat the larvae of small beetles, moths, and earthworms. *Aculeatus* means 'spiny'. Echidnas have both strong and sharp spines (modified hairs) for defence and short, coarse hair as insulation.



Photo:
Ricardo
Simao

The Echidna's status is listed as of 'Least Concern' and they are described as relatively common. However, no one really knows how many there are in Australia and how their numbers are changing. Along with habitat fragmentation and predators (cats, dogs, foxes), threats include road accidents, bush fires and drought. Echidnas do not tolerate extreme temperatures and are more active at night during hot weather. Echidnas can live 16 years in the wild, but usually less than 10 years. One captive echidna is reported to have lived for 49 years.

Echidnas are monotremes (egg laying marsupials). The female lays the egg and incubates it in her pouch, taking about 10 days to hatch and hatching at about the size of a jelly bean. Echidnas don't have fixed nest sites except for nursery burrows (where the young puggle is deposited once its spines begin to form). They shelter under vegetation, roots or piles of debris, in caves or crevasses, and sometimes use the burrows of other animals such as rabbits and wombats.

Echidnas are mostly solitary animals but have large, mutually overlapping home ranges. In the breeding season (mid to late winter) 'trains' of echidnas may be seen for several weeks before mating eventually occurs. The female at the front leaves a scent trail and is followed by up to 10 males in single file, however three or four is more usual. The



males sometimes move from one train to another. The male who endures the courtship period, and remains closest to the female, may be the lucky one and have a chance to breed when the female is receptive.

I haven't been lucky enough to see one of these echidna trains on site but a visitor did come to the Visitor Centre one morning to say they had seen a line of four or five echidnas near the main entry road on their way in. Long time staff members Terry Coates and Warren Worboys have also seen these trains.

Signs that an echidna is about are cylindrical scats made up of a lot of soil and ant-nest material and the mark they make with their snout in soft sand and soil when they're searching for food (a small triangular furrow with a round hole at its apex). Another sign is the half-moon-shaped hollows at the base of plants where echidnas have been searching for food. These large excavations in clusters are quite obvious. The echidna is a powerful digger: the front feet have five flattened claws used to dig and tear open logs and termite mounds. The hind feet point backwards and help to push soil away when they are burrowing. Two of the claws on each back foot are used for grooming and are elongated to clean between the spines. We don't really know the numbers of echidnas on site but our ecologist, Terry, suspects that we have a fairly stable resident population of about 10 to 20. They frequently come and go on site through gates (including wombat gates) and often manage to push under the wire skirts of our fences. Diggings are prolific. They turn up on the survey cameras but in lowish numbers and their tracks are rarely seen on the sand pads that are regularly monitored.

Some interesting echidna facts:

- The echidna has small external eyes, but its sense of sight is highly developed. They have highly sensitive hearing and a good sense of smell.
- The echidna's snout has touch and temperature receptors that are sensitive to cold and heat, and electro receptors (similar to a platypus but far fewer) presumably used in searching for prey in humid ant and termite nests.
- Echidnas can also climb quite well. Dave Hunt tells me that at Mt Rothwell Conservation and Research Centre they came across an echidna on the top of their 1.8metre high floppy fence.
- Short-beaked Echidnas have the lowest, most variable body temperature of all mammals. The normal active body temperature is 30 to 33°C but can fluctuate by up to 6-8°C, dropping down to 28°C without any problems.
- Echidnas are very adaptable in their use of torpor, an energy saving strategy they can use at any time of the year, though prolonged torpor is usually in winter. They are certainly not seen as often here in the depths of winter. During hibernation echidnas have a lowered body temperature to 4°C and reduced heart rate to 4 beats per minute.

Many thanks to Dr Terry Coates, Warren Worboys and Dave Hunt for their contributions.

For more information about the life of the Echidna, watch the ABC's *Australia remastered- Wild Australians : Platypus and Echidna*, on ABC iview or at one of the following links:

- <https://iview.abc.net.au/show/australia-remastered-wild-australians#>
- <https://iview.abc.net.au/video/DO1847H006S00>

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The General Committee meets on the second Thursday of the month (except January).