

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Being the fourth year of my term as President of the Friends of the Australian National Botanic Gardens, this is my last President's Report to Members

Since the last Annual General Meeting, two of our Council Members resigned their positions, the first being Masumi Robertson, who resigned in May 2024 and secondly Marg Nicholls in August 2024. I would like to thank both Masumi and Marg for their contributions to the Friends through the Council. Chris Mackay was appointed in June 2024 to fill the casual vacancy at that time

MEMBERSHIP

Friends membership has continued to hold up well. As at 30 September 2024 we had 2,142 memberships comprising 2,883 individual members (households and groups comprising more than one person).

Membership is available for one year or three years, and an increasing number of renewing members are choosing the three-year option.

FRIENDS GIFT FUND

This year the Australian Government changed the rules relating to environmental funds, and that includes the Friends of the ANBG Public Fund. The Register of Environmental Organisations has been abolished effective 1 January 2024, and along with it our Public Fund. Supervision of environmental organisations has passed from the Department of Environment to the Australian Taxation Office.

The new rules require that we maintain a Gift Fund, and all donations to the Friends are quarantined in the Gift Fund. Providing we comply with the rules, full tax deductibility for our donors is maintained.

In the year ended 30 June 2024, the Public Fund and Gift Fund received a total of \$29,254 in donations.

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS

Changes to the Friends Public Fund have necessitated amendments to our Constitution. A Special Resolution to amend the Constitution is on the Annual General Meeting agenda, and requires 21 days notice. Special Resolutions such as this one require a three quarters majority of voting members present at the meeting.

PROJECTS

Several projects have been funded in 2023-24 and significant amounts are committed for future projects. Projects funded this year were:

General Fund	
Online Education Resources	\$ 20,000
Visitor Centre Upgrade	\$ 82,000
Gift Fund	
Online Education Resources	\$ 30,000
Conservation Video	\$ 9,500
Don Beer Research Scholarship	\$ 7,500
Other Research Scholarships	\$ 17,000
Fogging System	\$ 60,000

GROWING FRIENDS

Growing Friends had another very successful year and has a very good level of active membership.

The Group held monthly propagation meetings every month and weekly working bees to pot-on newly rooted plants, to maintain the health of stock in the nursery and to do general maintenance

around the facilities. All these activities were well attended.

The Group held two public plant sales over the year. The combined plant and book sale in September 2023 raised \$7,335 and the sale in March 2024 raised \$7,552. During the year, the group commenced a project to upgrade its aging propagation facilities and to also improve the working conditions for its members, and this project is continuing.

BOTANIC ART GROUP

Monthly meetings of the Botanic Art Group were held on a regular basis and were well attended by a growing number. Total Group membership is 130 individuals. The Group also organized a number of courses for beginners.

The 17th annual art exhibition ran from 6 April to 5 May 2024, with the title "Bush Fragrance", and all Friends were invited to a preview and sale of artworks on Friday 5 April. The art works featured Australian native plants. The Friends purchased *Hakea platysperma* by Sue Grieves, for \$490, which was donated to the Gardens for addition to their collection. The Group is grateful to the horticulturalists who provided specimens from the Gardens as art subjects.

PHOTOGRAPHIC GROUP

This year has again been one of strong growth for the Photographic Group. The Group gained 22 new members during the reporting period and we have continued to grow, including a social media presence.

The total membership of the Group at 30 June 2024 was 185.

The 10th photographic exhibition - titled "Illuminate '23" was held from 23 November to 10 December 2023. The exhibition comprised forty-five framed images from 20 exhibitors, cards, unframed prints, calendars, bags, earrings, magnets and bookmarks, all items for sale. It was financially successful with \$1,285 raised for the Friends.

Two new competitions were initiated for the 2023 Exhibition including the inaugural David Cox Memorial Flora Award: Acacia, and the Fauna Award. We engaged two external judges for these awards: Karleen Minney, Photographic Editor, Canberra Times, and Brian Rope, Canberra Critics Circle.

After a successful learning curve in 2023 the Group again managed the production of the 2024 Gardens Calendar.

As in past years the Group has run a popular monthly program of talks about photography or the plants and animals we encounter. These have included Tobias Hayashi on orchids, Gavin Smith on snakes, Dr Michael Mulvaney on NatureMapr, Cristy Froelich on water bugs, Jed Pearson on Waterwatch and Heino Lepp on fungi.

PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION

After a few years' absence, we have been delighted to have the 24th Photographic Competition for students of Australian schools and colleges this year. It provides an excellent opportunity for students to become aware of the value and beauty of the ANBG and, by exercising their photographic skills, to share that beauty with other visitors.

Categories are:

Secondary schools & colleges Years 7—12	Monochrome Colour Altered Reality for images that have been manipulated digitally or through dark room processes.
Primary schools Years 1—6	Monochrome Colour

Prizes are Cash awards for winners and their schools, along with certificates. Schools who have winners will also receive celebratory plants provided by the ANBG Growing Friends.

	Award to student	Award to school or college
First Prize	\$250	\$200 + celebratory plant
Second Prize	\$150	\$100
Third Prize	\$100	\$50

This year is the first time images must be submitted digitally. The portal for the digital entries became operational on 1 July 2024, and entries started arriving as soon as it was opened. Presentations of prizes and display of award-winning photographs took place in September and October 2024.

THURSDAY TALKS

Thursday Talks took place on 42 weeks in the financial year of 2023-24; no talk was scheduled for Anzac Day 25 April 2024, and the speaker scheduled for 23 May cancelled at short notice because of COVID.

The total audience for the year was 2011 (an increase of approximately 16% compared to the previous financial year) and almost \$3,000 in donations had been received, similar to last year.

A booking system, Trybooking, has been in place for all talks. It has been very useful, particularly for the very popular talks. If a talk is heavily booked, the people who have booked seats have priority. There is usually a waiting list for the fully booked talks, who fill cancellations. A number of people wait in the foyer to see if a person who booked has not arrived. On most occasions there are places to seat the people who are on 'stand-by', and only a couple when waiting people went away.

The team has publicised the talks externally as well as by Friends ANBG, and the ANBG, which has had positive results.

There were several talks that were heavily booked, and are shown below. The program has included scientific research undertaken by ANBG staff and partners, along with other speakers from CSIRO, some research departments at the ANU, and other organisations. The speakers covered a wide range of topics related to botany as well as current and historical environments.

HEAVILY BOOKED THURSDAY TALKS 2023-24		
Date	Speaker	Topic
6-Jul-23	Dr Liz Reed	Australia's fossil caves: underground archives of past biodiversity
13-Jul-23	Dr Peter Caley	Identifying drivers of decline of the bogong moth
27-Jul-23	Dr Anna Howe	Pepper Trees grow in the Old School Yard'
21-Sep-23	Em Prof Valery Kirk AM	Plant Stories: Woven Tapestry Narratives
16-Nov-23	Margaret Saul	Botanic Art & Illustration
18-Apr-24	Em Prof Dave Rowell	A whirlwind tour of Brachychiton
2-May-24	Rachael Dawes, Carma Sweet, Sam Ning and Jo Wallner	Canberra's trees: the plans, the problems, and the progress
20-Jun-24	Professor David Lindenmayer AO	The Forest Wars
27-Jun-24	Em Prof Jim Hone	Birds of Namadgi National Park

PLANT SCIENCE GROUP

The Plant Science Group conducts talks on the second Monday of each month. These talks concentrate on topics with a scientific focus. The monthly talks are free of charge, and Friends Members are asked to register their name on an email list. Those persons whose names are on the email list receive notification of forthcoming topics each month.

PLANT RECOGNITION GROUP

The Plant Recognition Group was approved in September 2023, and its first workshop was held that same month.

The following workshop have been fully booked with long waiting lists, as there are 57 Friends who have registered for one or more workshops. Workshops are limited to 11 people because of space available and number of microscopes.

Workshops held during the year are listed below. Two workshops were cancelled because the respective leaders were ill at short notice.

Topic	Leader
Fabaceae with focus on acacia genus	Rosemary Purdie
Proteaceae	Rosemary Purdie
Native herbaeaceae	Isobel Crawford
Introduced Herbaceous species/taxa	Isobel Crawford
Proteaceae – with focus on grevillea genus	Rosemary Purdie

A survey of interested people was conducted December 2023, which showed:

1. What they hope to gain from the sessions? Strong interest in greater familiarity with botanical terminology, and increased confidence in using plant identification keys.
2. What they liked about the sessions? Seasonal topics. Lots of information but practical use of plant specimens and plant id keys. One-on-one help available.
3. Which families or genera they would like to know more about? Led to a list in frequency order of preferences to program sessions.
4. Interested in local or Australia-wide taxa? Stronger interest in Australia-wide taxa.
5. What Plant data sets they would like to know more about? Workshop on listed datasets desired, including Australian Plant Name Index (APNI), Lucid keys, other online keys for identifying plants in Australia

6. Whether they would like to bring their own plant to sessions? Most preferred not to bring their own specimen, but that may change in time.
7. Which day of the week they preferred for the sessions? 50% Monday, 50% Thursday. Desired pattern of 3rd Thursday in even months, and 2nd Monday in odd months.
8. Would they would like more time for practical work? More than 75% were interested in practical work.
9. Which areas of PRG work they would like to be involved? Led to more members joining the PRG team.

Fresh specimens were used in the workshops collected by workshop leader with help of a Ranger on occasions.

We are looking forward to more workshops in the coming year. It is a challenge to meet the level of interest in these workshops.

An issue is the lack of dried specimens, and the low resolution of images of digitized specimens that are available publicly. A solution to access to dried specimens still needs to be found, as well as accessing higher resolution images.

There have also been some problems with available equipment such as the digital microscope, and the smart screen.

A big thank you to the PRG team, workshop leaders, and the ANBG staff who have been involved. Also, a thank you in anticipation to the continuing and additional team members for the coming year.

FLOWERS FRUIT AND FOLIAGE

Ros and Ben Walcott have together collected material for a three-fold, in-colour FFF brochure on Sunday each fortnight in 2023/4. Ros selects 15 plants with interesting foliage, fruit or flowers and Ben photographs each plant. Ros writes a description of each plant, including a note on any particular interesting feature and the area where the plant is native. Sometimes the derivation of the plant name is included or the accepted discoverer of the plant since European settlement. Ben then creates the brochure using Publisher software and it is sent to the Friends, where it is uploaded to the website, and to the Rangers for printing and distribution. The Rangers report that we have a devoted group of ANBG visitors who follow the walk each fortnight. The brochure is also popular with the general public and with the ANBG guides

NATURE JOURNALING 2023 report

Nature Journaling is into its fourth year at the Gardens. The Group meets on the first Monday of each month, at 10.00am at the Visitor Centre. Members decide what they would like to observe and record, and then they regroup at 11.30am to discuss their findings. A couple of sessions had to be cancelled because of inhospitable weather.

SOCIAL EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES COMMITTEE

Activities organised by the Social Events and Activities Committee included the very popular "Wake up with the birds" this year. Two visits to the Walcott native garden in Red Hill on 7 & 8 October 2023, were attended by 40 Friends of ANBG, with a big thank you to Ben and Ros Walcott for their generously hosting these visits. Two fully-booked butterfly walks were held in January 2024, led by Dr Suzi Bond.

VISITING OUTREACH

Pat and Warwick Wright are Voluntary Ambassadors of ANBG & Friends. As self-appointed Ambassadors of the Friends of ANBG Pat and Warwick make themselves available, if anyone needs a speaker. In the past year, Pat and Warwick delivered 12 talks to 357 people. Since July 2002, Pat and Warwick have addressed 9,015 people. Whilst talks have tapered off, bookings still come in.

MEMBER COMMUNICATIONS

Fronde is the widely read Friends journal. The *Fronde* Team consists of 4 people who work as a team to publish three issues of a year, in April, August and December. We have a graphic designer, and all team members share the job of finding and writing articles, contacting and liaising with authors and all the Friends Groups who contribute. The role of editing and proof reading is also shared. The cost of printing and mailout of *Fronde* is paid by the Friends, covered by membership fees. The cost of the program (Adobe InDesign) to design *Fronde* is also paid by the Friends.

In addition to *Fronde*, the Friends also have a regular eBulletin. The eBulletin email goes out once a month, plus ad hoc emails when special announcements are made.

The other key communication tool is the Friends website which keeps us informed of all measure of announcements, news and details of activities. A new and updated website is under construction and should be rolled out throughout 2024. A replacement Membership Database is also being investigated.

All of the communication activities require a great deal of effort from their various teams. We thank the people involved for their dedication and hard work.

VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION

Each year the Gardens and the Friends jointly hold a Volunteer Recognition Ceremony which is a formal thank you to those people who give freely of their time to contribute to the ANBG Volunteer Programme, and to the Friends Special Interest Group activities. A ceremony was held in November 2023 and certificates of appreciation were presented. A similar event has been planned for later this year.

Neville Page
President