

## **President's Report 2021**

This report covers the period from the 2020 Annual Meeting in October last year to the present time. To say that the past year has been difficult for everyone would be to seriously understate the true situation. Nevertheless, in spite of the lockdowns and disruptions, we can indeed celebrate some great achievements. The Growing Friends managed to sell \$8,000 worth of plants using "click and collect", and just for good measure earned a Hanbury Award from the Australian Association of Friends of Botanic Gardens for an "exceptional contribution to a botanic garden". The Volunteer Guides introduced two new popular guided walks. The Project Committee managed to commit a further significant amount of money to Gardens projects. A new Nature Journaling Group was formed. And to top it off, our membership grew to almost 3,000 members. The pandemic has underscored the benefits of botanic gardens for community wellbeing. The following is just a summary of the past year's activities.

### **MOU with ANBG**

The relationship between the Australian National Botanic Gardens and the Friends of ANBG is defined by a Memorandum of Understanding, which is reviewed every three years. The latest review took place in 2020 and was signed in November of that year.

### **ANBG Management Plan**

Periodically, the Gardens prepares a Management Plan which is open to public comment, and which eventually is tabled in the Federal Parliament. The current Management Plan expires in May 2022, and the replacement Plan covers a ten year period to 2032. In February this year, Friends Council prepared a submission to the Director of National Parks for consideration in preparing the new Plan. We await the plan being available for general public consultation, expected in November 2021.

### **Growing Friends**

The Group was able to resume monthly meetings in November 2020, after six months with no meetings, but was unable to run either of its planned public plant sales, in spring 2020 or autumn 2021. After agreeing strict COVID safety plans with Gardens management, though, it was able to restart collecting cuttings and seeds for propagation and resume plant maintenance activities in its igloo and shadehouse towards the end of 2020. Also, it was able to run a number of 'order-and-collect' sales for various groups of Friends and Gardens' staff. These sales raised over \$8,000, which was a pleasing result in the circumstances.

The Group enjoyed increased membership with many new members becoming very active.

A highlight of the year was the Group being presented with a Hanbury Award by the Australian Association of Friends of Botanic Gardens Inc (AAFBG). This award recognized the group's fund raising over many years and the 'indomitable spirit' of the group to maintain a high level of activity despite the terrible summer of 2019-20, the extensive damage caused by the hail storm of January 2020 and then the 2020 shutdown due to COVID restrictions.

## Project Committee

In 2020-21 the Project Committee brought forward recommendations for a further \$67,486 for Friends and Public Fund projects. Since our inception in 1990 and the establishment of the Public Fund in 2004, we have expended a cumulative \$1.74 million on projects supporting the mission of the Gardens. To gain a good appreciation of the significance of our program of project support over the years, I commend to you an article by the Vice President, Linda Beveridge, in the December 2020 edition of *Fronde*, entitled *Friends Funded Projects*. One exciting project I wish to mention is the recently completed video on Conservation activities at the Gardens. Many of you may have had the opportunity to view it. Personally, I found it wonderful. The Public Fund will be contributing \$10,000 next year toward the cost of that video.

Another very large commitment agreed in 2020-21 was for the Friends to contribute \$235,000 and the Public Fund, \$30,000, toward the redevelopment of the East Core Precinct. At the heart of the project there will be a designated Friends Lawn, overlooked by an expanded deck outside Pollen Restaurant.

## Project Funding 2020-21

Banksia Garden	\$1,867
Artworks and photographs	\$1,825
Norfolk Island PhD scholarship	\$14,000
Australian Research Council: Thermal tolerance for arid and alpine plants	\$12,000
Voice amplifiers for educators and guides	\$4,500
Smartboard for Celia Rosser Room	\$7,580
Microscopes for students	\$10,225
Banksia Garden Interpretive signage (Public Fund)	\$8,611
International speaker at the Australian Seed Science Conference (Public Fund)	\$6,878
Total Friends	\$51,997
Total Public Fund	\$15,489
Grand total	\$67,486

## Botanic Art Group

Botanic Art Group meetings were held intermittently during the year due to COVID lockdown. The 14th Annual Botanic Art Group Exhibition was held in April 2021. This year's theme was *From the Desert to the Sea*. The Fruit, Flowers, Feathers & Fur Exhibition was held in July, displaying works by four of our group members: Wendy Antoniak, MariaBoreham, Cornelia Büchen-Osmond & Vivien Pinder.

In June 2021, two paintings were purchased by the Friends and presented to Executive Director Judy West on behalf of the Gardens to add to their art collection.

## **Photographic Group**

Two photographic exhibitions were held during the past twelve months:

1. Schools Retrospective, October-November 2020
2. Reflections, November-December 2020

Two photographs were selected from the second exhibition for purchase by the Friends and presentation as a gift to the Gardens to add to their collection. Plans are currently under way for an exhibition in November.

## **Thursday Talks**

Thursday Talks were on hold for the last half of 2020, and started again in February 2021.

The first talk during this financial year was held in the theatrette of the Telstra Tower because of construction work in the ANBG theatrette. All talks since 25 February have been held in the theatrette, in which the audience number is limited by the COVID-19 restrictions, to 40 people. A booking system has been in place for all talks. The total number of attendees from February to end of June 2021 was more than 600. The donations received during this period totalled \$914. The program of Thursday Talks has included scientific research undertaken by ANBG staff and partners, along with other speakers from CSIRO, a range of research departments at the ANU, and other organisations. The speakers included an eminent naturalist, planners from a local conservation trust, and from the National Trust.

## **ANBG Volunteer Programme**

The Friends continue to provide moral and financial support to the various Gardens Volunteer activities including the Guides, Seed Bank Volunteers, Visitor Centre Volunteers, and Library Volunteers.

In the last 12 months Volunteer Guides have been able to offer guided tours daily, from September 2020 until early August 2021. The highlight of the year has been two new guiding experiences, which have proved to be very popular: Family Flora tours on the theme of '*Secrets of the Australian Bush*' during school holidays; and rostered tours on specific, seasonal themes for one week during most months. The seasonal themes have included '*Tree Walks*', '*Off the Beaten Track*', and '*Ancient plants, ancient animals*'. These tours have been widely advertised, and attracted many Canberrans in particular, to visit or re-visit the ANBG. In addition to increasing visitor numbers on guided tours, these initiatives have generated new ideas, interesting topics and engaging stories, which we will continue to feature in a variety of tours.

Guided tours operate according to COVID-safe protocols, and the guides now use small voice amplifiers. Nevertheless, amidst the uncertainties and vicissitudes of the year, a small number of guides have retired. We appreciate their contributions and wish them well.

Throughout the year, guides have been participating in ongoing monthly meetings (online or face to face), and continue to be actively involved in regular professional development activities. The Guides look forward to again resuming duties, in greeting and guiding visitors.

During the year, the ANBG commenced a trial of Living Collections (Horticulture) Volunteers, popularly known as the "Weedy Volunteers". Tasks undertaken by the Volunteers include hand weeding, mulching and path maintenance.

## **Membership**

The Membership Team has processed just over 280 new memberships since last October, and 877 memberships that were due to expire in November 2020 have been renewed. We currently have 2059 memberships with 2984 members, an increase in memberships as compared to this time in 2020.

A very successful New Members' Welcome event was held in March 2021. Unfortunately a similar event in August had to be cancelled because of the Covid-19 ACT lockdown announced the Thursday before the planned event.

## **Member Communications**

We have three key means of communicating with Friends members at large. The E-News email goes out once a month, plus ad hoc emails when special announcements are made. We have Fronds which is a truly high quality journal published three times a year. And we have the Friends website which keeps us informed of all measure of announcements, news and details of activities. All three of these require a great deal of effort from their various teams. We thank the people involved for their dedication and hard work

## **2020 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 Group activities. A ceremony was held in November 2020 and certificates of appreciation were presented. A similar event has been planned for December.

## **30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Event**

After initially being postponed, the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of founding of the Friends organisation was finally celebrated with a gathering at the Gardens in November 2020. The ceremony included presentations to long standing members, Life Members, and Founders including Anne Joyce. Not only that but we also shared a birthday cake!

## **Flowers Fruit and Foliage**

Rosalind and Benjamin Walcott have continued to set out the Flowers, Fruit and Foliage Walk in the Gardens every fortnight. This is a very popular walk with visitors to the Gardens. The brochure produced each fortnight is highly informative and educational. An initiative this year was a video recording with commentary of each walk. This video is uploaded to YouTube and is available on the Friends website.

## **Nature Journaling and Field Sketching Group**

This new Group was formed in June 2021, and plans to meet once a month on the first Monday of each month. Nature Journaling is about the observation and recording of whatever one sees in nature, whether it be plants, birds, landscapes, people, insects or animals. Sharing this information with Group members is part of the activity. All going well, the first gathering will take place in November..

### **Significant Donations**

Over the years, Friends members have been extremely generous with their gifts to the Friends Public Fund. These donors, some of whom line up year after year, are greatly appreciated. In the year to June 2021, \$28,893 was donated to the Public Fund. Thank you for your generosity.

### **MOU with Trustees of the National Parks Conservation Trust**

The Everlasting Circle programme is an initiative of the National Parks Conservation Trust, which is affiliated with the Gardens. The Everlasting Circle is a bequest programme which invites interested persons to remember the Gardens in their will. Although the Trust supports all Commonwealth National Parks, funds raised as part of Everlasting Circle are directed to the ANBG exclusively. During the year the ANBG Friends signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Trust, supporting their initiative.

### **Seed the Future – Seed Bank Fund Raising (National Parks Conservation Trust)**

In May 2021 the Gardens launched a fund raising for the National Seed Bank, titled “Seed the Future”. The fund raising involved an auction of key components of the Seed Bank, including specialized equipment, and was launched by Costa Georgiadis, better known for his role as host of the ABC’s Gardening Australia TV programme.

Having completed one year as President of the Friends of the Australian National Botanic Gardens, I feel very positive about the relationship the Friends have with the Gardens. In particular, Executive Director Judy West, and General Manager Peter Byron, have provided enormous support to me in my role as President. I also appreciate the assistance provided by the various Gardens liaison personnel.

Council of the Friends and Convenors of the various Special Interest Groups have done a great job, and I thank them sincerely. I would like to leave you with the thought that your membership of the Friends of the Australian National Botanic Gardens is as important today as when you first joined, if not more so. Please stay in there with your support and participation, and best wishes for the coming year.



Neville Page

President