

## President's Report

It is my great pleasure to present the 2022 President's Report of the Friends of the Australian National Botanic Gardens. This report covers the period from the 2021 Annual Meeting in October last year to the present time. I'm pleased to report that our membership remains strong, our finances are healthy, and our activities are robust. The following is just a summary of the past year's activities.

### Project Committee

Everyone will be familiar with, and I hope impressed by the redevelopment of the East Core precinct: the lawn replanted and named the Friends Lawn, much improved pathways, and the extension of the deck outside Pollen. The Friends contributed \$285,000 toward this project, and the Friends Public Fund, a further \$30,000 for a total contribution of \$315,000. This is a huge project on which Council deliberated upon for many months.

In 2021-22 the Friends also funded interpretive signage on the Metallic Green Carpenter Bee, and the preparation of a design for a possible exhibition in the foyer of the Visitor Exhibition Centre. As well, the Friends Public Fund supported the production of an excellent video on ANBG conservation activities and additional interpretive signage in the Banksia Garden.

Consistent with tradition, Friends acquired two artworks which were presented to the ANBG: Brenda Runnegar's photograph *Flannel Flowers* and a painting by Cornelia Buchen-Osmond, *Hakea scoparia*.

Project spending during the year amounted to \$344,680 as follows:

Friends Public Fund		
Banksia Interps	\$3,950	
Conservation Video	\$9,090	
East Core Precinct	<u>\$30,000</u>	
		\$43,040
Friends Funding		
Artworks	\$600	
Metallic Bee signage	\$1,040	
East Core Precinct	\$285,000	
Visitor Centre Exhibition	<u>\$15,000</u>	
		<u>\$301,640</u>
Total		<u>\$344,680</u>

### Growing Friends

Growing Friends had a very successful year, despite Covid restrictions disrupting monthly meetings, weekly working bees and plant sales. The Group has managed to maintain a high level of enthusiasm amongst most of its members.

There is also a continuing high level of interest from Friends' members wanting to join Growing Friends. The Group currently has almost 60 members, with membership having grown by about 40% over the last two years.

A public plant sale was held at the end of August, which, due to Covid restrictions, was the first public sale the group has been able to hold since November 2019. The sale raised over \$7,500 and with other member and restricted sales over the last year, total sales income has exceeded \$13,000.

The Group has very good working relationships with Gardens' staff and rangers. It has had excellent cooperation in getting Covid plans approved for its activities and also in the advertising of, and set-up for, its public sale. The help provided by rangers in setting up for plant sales and opening up meeting rooms for monthly meetings is invaluable. Also, the Group works very closely with Gardens' staff who approve which plants can be propagated and assist in the collection of cutting material before each monthly meeting. Finally, the Gardens' nursery provides sterilised cutting mixture whenever needed and staff are always ready to provide advice when it is sought. The Group could not operate without all this assistance and would like to thank all those people involved for their ongoing cooperation, advice and support.

### **Photographic Group**

One of the four aims of the Photographic Group is to "Improve community awareness of the ANBG and of native flora". There are three main ways the Group achieves this: firstly, the annual photographic exhibition; secondly, by providing images for the ANBG Calendar; and thirdly, through the many members who post photos from the Gardens on social media. The annual photographic exhibition also achieves the aim of "Contributing to the Friends' raising of funds for the ANBG

Another of the Group's aims is to "Provide training to improve the skills of the photographers". This is achieved through a program of speakers and activities held on the last Friday of each month which also includes opportunities for members to share photographs.

Over the year the Group has been very fortunate to hear from a range of speakers. From the Gardens Peter Byron spoke on future developments and Tom North explained the crucial role of the seed bank and how volunteers photographing seeds contribute to conservation efforts. Local professional photographer Hilary Wardhaugh spoke about how she curated photographs from women around Australia into on a visual petition to parliament to address climate change. The Group also heard from Julia Landford, Director of NatureArt Lab, on how nature photography and art can be powerful forces for nature conservation. Jed Pearson, of Waterwatch, will speak to the Group on aquatic macroinvertebrates and the role of waterwatch in protecting water catchment health. Last, but by no means least, there were presentations by Group members: Rodney Garnett spoke on landscape photography and Graham Gall on bird photography.

Some of the Group's meetings have ventured outside with cameras. In July they went to Tidbinbilla and photographed in the Sanctuary. The highlight of the trip was a very photogenic and cooperative Southern Brown Bandicoot. In October Suzi Bond will present briefly on butterflies before leading the Group on a butterfly walk around the Gardens

In terms of the health of the Group, the year began in the shadow of Covid, and electing a Committee proved a challenge at first. Since that time the Group has had a number of volunteers join the Committee and there has also been a strong team organising the Exhibition. The Group has experienced steady growth over the course of the year with around 2 new members a month joining.

## Thursday Talks

Thursday Talks were affected by Covid-19 in several ways. The lock-down was in place until 20 October 2021 and the ANBG took the decision that the theatre would not be available for use from that date until the end of February 2022. Consequently, the first Thursday Talk after the lockdown was 3 March 2022. There were several occasions when speakers could not attend because they were in Covid lock-down and we were grateful for the speakers who filled those dates at short notice. The speakers who were affected by Covid-19 were also willing to have their talk re-scheduled.

Thursday Talks took place on 25 weeks in the year (compared with 44 weeks in usual years), with a total audience for these weeks being 934 (compared with approximately 3000 in other years) and almost \$1500 in donations were received (compared with average of \$4,500 in previous years).

A booking system, Trybooking, has been in place for all talks. The booking system is managed by the convenors of the Friends ANBG Social Events and Activities Committee. If a talk is heavily booked, the people who have booked seats have priority. Nevertheless, people often stand by hoping to be admitted to an empty seat if a booked person does not appear.

A small sub-group of the team has been making progress on digitally recording the talks voluntarily, and will provide an implementation plan in due course. However, changes to the government IT system at ANBG has caused problems with successful recording. We hope that this will be overcome early in this coming year.

## Plant Science Group

After a hiatus of 2 years the Plant Science Group recommenced monthly activities in April.

The monthly talks have had a conservation theme as follows:

1. April: Zoe Knaoo (ANBG, Conservation Manager) “ANBG Nursery Conservation Projects”;
2. May: Damien Wrigley (National Co-ordinator, Australian Seed Bank Partnership) Release of the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of Plant Germplasm Conservation in Australia Guidelines;
3. July: Joe McAuliffe (ANBG Nursery Manager) “Ex Situ Conservation of a Critically Endangered Fern from Christmas Island”;
4. August: Tom North (Curator, National Seed Bank) “Collecting *Hibiscus brennanii* in Kakadu National Park for Ex Situ Conservation”;
5. September: Meena Sritharan (ANU PhD student) “What Makes Plants Rare?”;

In lieu of a talk in June the Group had visits to the ANBG Nursery to see first hand the conservation work being done there.

## Botanic Art Groups

The annual exhibition in April was an outstanding success with over 70 per cent of paintings being sold and over \$5,300 being raised for the Friends. Cornelia Büchen-Osmond’s beautiful painting, *Hakea scoparia*, was purchased for the Gardens’ collection by the Friends. The

exhibition's success was very much a team effort involving not just exhibiting artists but a large number of members who volunteered at the sales desk and others who gave up a day's work to assist with hanging.

Publication of the book, *More Than Just a Pretty Plant*, was funded by the Friends in 2019. It features a collection of members' botanical art and an explanation of each plant's uses. This book has continued to sell, with many people returning to buy a copy for friends overseas. The sales have been particularly gratifying. To date the profits amount to over \$3,500. There is just a handful of copies remaining.

Regular monthly meetings of the Botanical Art Groups are being held again at the Gardens after months of cancellations due to Covid-19 restrictions. Despite this the BAG was able to offer several workshops for members wishing to enrich their skills. Chris Meadham held a beginners workshop and Leonie Norton a workshop on glazing with watercolours. The Group continued to welcome new members and the number continues to grow.

The BAG is most grateful to the horticulturists who supply such wonderful specimens to be used for their artwork, and to the Gardens for giving the space each month for their meetings. The Botanic Art Groups' email address is [botanicart@friendsanbg.org.au](mailto:botanicart@friendsanbg.org.au) for more information and details are also available on the Friends website.

BAG is also working with Sabrina Sontag at the Gardens to provide pen and ink drawings for the new Ian Potter Conservatory.

### **Flowers Fruit and Foliage**

"Flowers Fruit and Foliage", and its predecessor "In Flower This Week" have been in continuous production (minus a few Covid disruptions) for the past 37 years. Following a tradition set by Barbara Daly, Rosalind and Benjamin Walcott have been producing "Flowers Fruit and Foliage" every fortnight for many years. The popular colourful brochure is keenly sought after by visitors to the Gardens, setting out, as it does, a different walk every two weeks. The whole exercise is highly informative and educational.

### **Nature Journaling Group**

This new Group was formed in June 2021, and is now in full swing with 60 members in the Group. Nature Journaling meets 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.

### **Social Events and Activities Group**

After much disruption in 2021 the SEAC has put on a number of activities for the Friends:

1. The much postponed Sundial event in conjunction with the Garden History Society in March 2022
2. Fungi walk with Heino Lepp in July 2022
3. Bryophytes walk with Chris Cargill in September 2022
4. Bushland Precinct walk in September 2022
5. Bird walk in October 2022

## **Ambassadors**

Pat and Warwick Wright have for 20 years acted as Ambassadors to ANBG and the Friends. After a 2 year Covid affected hiatus and cancellation of all but 7 bookings and talks, this year saw a return to a somewhat normal state. From 11 Nov. 2021 to 1 Oct. 2022 they spoke to 374 people in 15 groups:

- 4 Woden Community Services
- 4 Garden Clubs
- 4 Probus Clubs
- 1 Mens Shed
- 1 ANBG New Guides Training
- 1 ANPS, Goulburn NSW

Several of these groups have since done a paid booked tour at ANBG. Pat and Warwick enjoy the opportunity to make people aware and appreciate our wonderful native plants, the ANBG and the role of the Friends. Between July 2002 and 1 October 2022, they had presented 220 talks to 8618 people.

## **Membership**

Membership of the Friends continues to be strong. At the end of September 2022 we had 2066 memberships comprising 3014 individual members (households and groups comprising more than one person). Maintaining the membership system is a major task, for which we must thank our energetic Membership Team. The Team puts in time on a weekly basis to keep our records up to date.

## **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

## **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 2021 and certificates of appreciation were presented. A similar event has been planned for November this year.

Thank you everyone for your part in contributing to what has been a successful year.

*Neville Page*

President