

# Fronds

*Friends of the Australian National Botanic Gardens*  
*Number 111 December 2025*





# Friends of the Australian National Botanic Gardens

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## Fronds is published three times a year. We welcome your articles and photographs.

The deadline for articles is mid-February for the April issue, mid-June for the August issue and mid-October for the December issue.

Email material to the *Fronds* Committee at the above email address or place in the Friends letterbox, located inside the Gardens Visitor Centre, between 9.30 am and 4.30 pm, Monday to Sunday. Editorial messages: telephone 02 6250 9548. Previous issues of *Fronds* may be found on the Friends website under the Newsletter tab.

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Friends of the ANBG is a member of the AAFBG

## Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land throughout Australia and their continuing connection to country and culture, and pay our respects to Elders past and present.

Front cover: *Hibbertia circinata*. Murray Fagg, ANBG 2022.  
Back cover: *Boronia imlayensis*. Tasha James, Mt Imlay 2024.  
See article page 11.

# Worrying trends in the ANBG Superb Fairywren population

By Damien Farine

There are few more iconic birds in Australia than the Superb Fairywren (*Malurus cyaneus*). The joy that they bring when visiting our gardens was widely recognised when the Superb Fairywren was voted *The Guardian's* 2021 Australian bird of the year. They are undoubtedly the enigmatic common garden bird across eastern and south-eastern Australia.

Common birds generally receive far more public than scientific attention. If you are interested in birds, you will undoubtedly have received many gifts featuring Superb Fairywrens. The Australian National Botanic Garden (ANBG) bookshop is packed with tea towels, mugs, and other paraphernalia that are adorned with these striking little birds.

However, this interest does not necessarily translate to research funding. Government and other funding agencies are far more concerned with finding solutions to safeguard the increasing number of threatened and endangered species than with understanding more about our common birds.

Luckily, common birds haven't been ignored by researchers. Ecologists, and volunteer ornithologists across the country have for decades been conducting numerous research programs. These typically involve standardised surveys in habitats where all of the bird species that are encountered – common or not – are recorded.

The findings of these surveys mirror those elsewhere in the world – our common birds are in rapid decline. Terrestrial birds are estimated to have declined in number by 62% between



pBGrb, a female Superb Fairywren in the ANBG Rock Garden.

Francisca Hacker

1990 and 2016, with declines over this period estimated at 83% across NSW and the ACT.

These statistics are confronting, and should raise serious concerns for the ongoing health of our wildlife. However, a major challenge for this kind of work is that these are numbers without 'faces'. They are aggregated summaries of bird counts that do not capture the plight of individual birds. They cannot really tell us exactly what is happening, nor why these species are declining and when.

## Leveraging data from long-term studies in ecology and evolution

If I had to select one word that best characterises scientists in ecology and evolution, I would choose 'perseverant'. As we ride the rollercoaster of highs and lows in academic life, we never stop our true life's work – observing and meticulously recording the lives of the animals and plants around us. This is exemplified by the many 'long-term studies' across the world.

Long-term studies involve following individuals in wild populations over many generations. For example, the study of the Great Tit (*Parus major*) population in Wytham Woods, just outside of Oxford in the UK began in 1947. Every year since then, data have been collected in the same way. This gives us a historical window through which we can better understand contemporary populations.

These often decades-long studies have made disproportionate contributions to the advancement of scientific knowledge. They have generated insights into how organisms adapt to changes in their environment, helped to test and refine theory, and even captured evolution in real time.

As the world around us changes in dramatic ways, the scientific legacy of long-term studies is becoming more important than ever, and in unexpected ways.

# Superb Fairywren population trends (cont.)

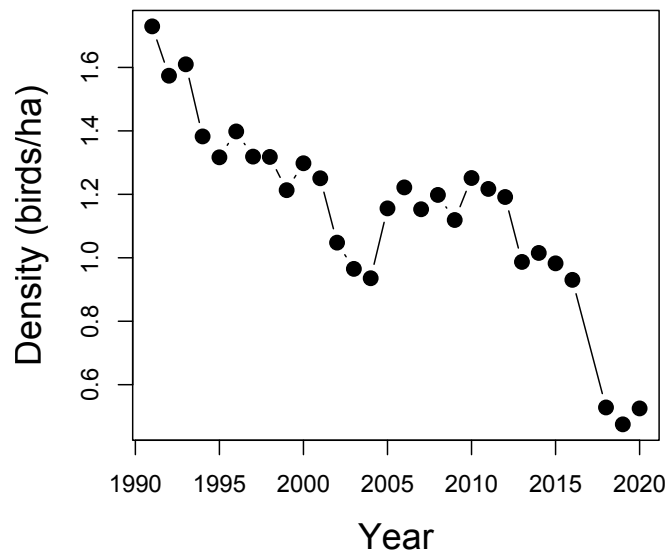
## Revealing the trends in the Superb Fairywren population at the ANBG

The ANBG has hosted one of the most important long-term studies in the southern hemisphere. Established in 1988, the Superb Fairywren project has followed the lives (notably the sex lives) of individual Fairywrens for several generations.

The pioneering genetic work by Professor Andrew Cockburn revealed that Fairywrens are far from being a model example of monogamy, and more recently he was able to reconstruct the family trees of thousands of birds over the last 35+ years. To study their behaviour, each bird was individually marked with a unique combination of colour bands. However, these data have also made it possible to track broader population dynamics.

Zooming out to the population level reveals a stark picture. Over the past 30 years, the number of Superb Fairywrens in the ANBG has declined by approximately 70%.

This drop matches the broader declines reported at a larger scale. What is important is that we know that this is a true decline, as the birds haven't moved elsewhere, and we can obtain a closer look at exactly when and where these declines are happening.



Changes in population density of the Superb Fairywren population at the ANBG from 1991 to 2020. Data from the ANBG Superb Fairywren Project.

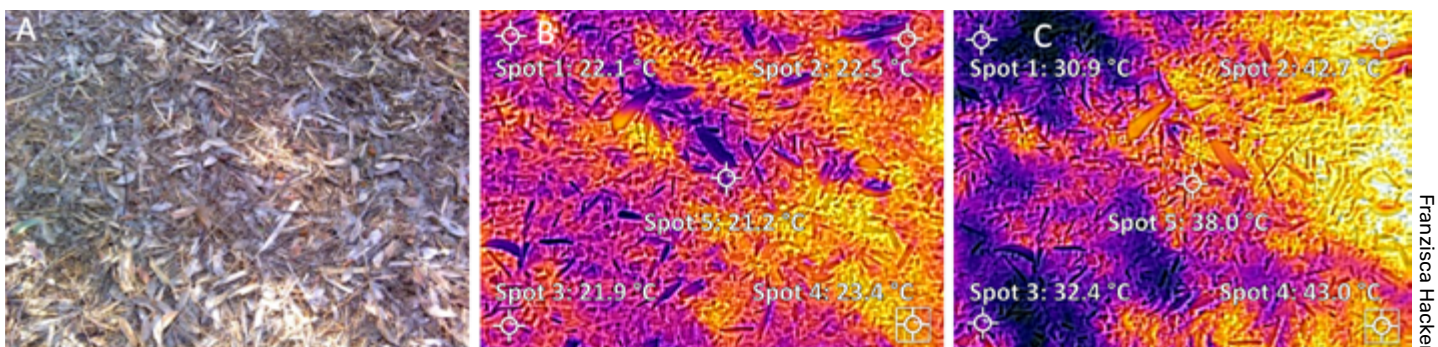
## An unparalleled loss of birds

Every week, three times per week, Samuele Ramillini and Fran Hacker, head into the Gardens to conduct their studies on the ANBG Superb Fairywrens. Both are PhD students at the Research School of Biology in ANU, and you'll likely encounter them with their binoculars and notepads in hand. Their dedicated work has revealed a frightening statistic.

The 2025 winter had a mortality of over 50% of the adult Superb Fairywren population. In March 2025, the population consisted of 72 adults and 39 chicks. By September, only 37 of the adults and 6 of the juveniles remained.

This huge loss is unparalleled in the history of the project. The previous worst declines were around 20% of birds (in the early 2000s) and a recent large drop of 43% in 2018.

Models of the week-to-week mortality risk tell us that the majority of mortality occurs during the winter, especially when warm periods are followed by a sudden temperature drop. This is exactly what happened this winter. For example, the minimum temperature on 23 May was 13°C, and this dropped to -4°C by 30 May. As predicted by the models, many birds disappeared two weeks after this temperature drop.



Temperature contrasts at very fine scales. We are investigating the extent to which microhabitats vary in thermal properties, and whether Superb Fairywrens exploit local differences in temperature. All three pictures were taken of the same location with a regular camera (picture A) and a thermal camera (pictures B and C). At 9:40 am (picture B), the variation in temperature across 5 random points was 2.2°C. By 11:30 am (picture C), the temperature variation in this same location was 12.1°C. Note that the colour scale is different in the two thermal images.

Francisca Hacker

## What next for the ANBG Superb Fairywren project?

The historical data from long-term ecological studies provide the lens through which we can understand the contemporary changes that we observe. However, continuing these requires hard work and a lot of luck. Andrew's retirement from the project at the end of 2023 coincided with my arrival at the ANU, and I have been lucky to be able to draw from my experience at running projects in Europe and Africa to continue this work.

With a change in personnel also comes a change in perspectives. While the project's core focus in its first 35 years was on cooperative breeding, we are now hoping to gain greater insights into what Superb Fairywrens do for the rest of the year. For example, we recently discovered that Fairywrens form complex societies – similar to what has been observed in primates – during the winter. The social connections the birds form provide important survival benefits that we are trying to better understand.

One key question is, of course, what predicts who survives the harsh winters. If we can answer this, then we can better understand what habitat or social features those birds had that buffered them from the harsh winter conditions. To do this, we're employing classical methods from studies of social behaviour in primates, state-of-the-art thermal imaging cameras, and advances in artificial intelligence. These are tools that researchers who established long-term studies probably never dreamt of having. The ANBG Superb Fairywren Project is as important now than it has ever been.

Unfortunately, like all long-term studies we also face an increasingly



Xinyi Jiang

Superb Fairywrens are very social, especially during the winter, but we don't yet understand the importance of this sociality. While Superb Fairywrens maintain territories from late winter until early summer (when they are breeding), territorial boundaries dissolve during the winter. This allows the breeding groups – the birds that previously bred together and some of their offspring, which always remain together – to move over larger areas. When doing so, they encounter, and join together with, other groups. Such group-to-group associations are not random, and Superb Fairywrens are only the second bird species in which this has been formally shown. The formal name for this process is that they form a multilevel society, and until recently these types of societies were only known from primates and other large mammals. One of the key questions that we seek to answer why Superb Fairywrens have such a complex society, and what benefits they gain from doing so.

hostile funding landscape. Obtaining research grants for fundamental research has never been more difficult, and all-the-while the costs of doing research are increasing. We will draw from all the perseverance that we have to find a way to continue this legacy and find the answers to these important questions before it is too late.

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## About the author

Professor Dr Damien Farine is:

Eccellenza Professor, Department of Evolutionary Biology and Environmental Studies, University of Zurich

Associate Professor, Division of Ecology and Evolution, Research School of Biology, Australian National University

Affiliated Scientist, Department of Collective Behavior, Max Planck Institute of Animal Behavior

# Lifting your game

## How to improve flora and fauna photography

**By Graham Gall**

Photography is the art of seeing: light, composition, balance, colour, pattern and space. When faced with any subject, my approach is to do a quick SWOT analysis. What are the subject's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in relation to what I am seeing?

### 1. Light

Do a recce to assess which angle will work best and when the light will be optimal. Usually early morning and late afternoon will work best, but not always!

### 2. Composition

There are good rules that we inherited from master classical artists including leading lines, rule of thirds and balance. Study these, practice them and only break them when you understand why.

### 3. Colour

Australian flora and fauna presents us with abundant rich colour. Consider colour combinations and look at your background colour as well.

Colour matching is a very useful tool and studying the colour wheel for complimentary and contrasting colour combinations will equip you to make bold decisions.

Will it work in monochrome or black and white? Sometimes an absence of colour will allow your subject to speak more loudly.

### 4. Patterns

There are patterns everywhere in nature especially on bark, in flower structures, in feathers and thrown by shadows.

Shoot patterns up-close and consider going abstract to challenge your audience.

### 5. Space

Allowing your subject room to breathe can be very powerful.

Negative space is a technique worth practising where we set our subject to one side or place it dead centre and leave nothing else in the frame. Consider 'small in the frame' as we do not always want to completely fill the frame with our subject.

### Photo competitions: What do judges look for?

As an experienced judge and educator, I strongly advise looking carefully at award winning images while you consider the following will be very beneficial to your work.



@grahamgall



@grahamgall



@grahamgall

Top: *Eucalyptus macrocarpa*.  
Centre: Gang Gang pair.  
Bottom: *Xanthorrhoea* sp.

In general, ask yourself:

- Is there a 'wow' factor?
- Is it framed well and does it present a different or interesting viewpoint?
- Does it display great technical skills both in camera and in post-processing?
- Is the content consistent with the theme and category of the competition?
- Is the image original and does it show creative style.

More specifically:

- What is the subject and is it in focus?
- Have distracting elements been avoided or removed (within the rules).
- Have the shooting angle and background behind the subject been carefully considered?
- Are wildlife subjects' eyes sharp and engaged with the lens?
- Is there a subtle vignette to enable the subject to 'pop' a little more?
- Has noise been kept to a low level or removed in post production?

The things that judges see that reduce your prospects of making the short-list or finals include:

- Poorly composed images.
- Lack of attention to all layers – foreground and background as well as the subject itself.
- Distractions on the edges of the frame.
- Not using odd numbers – 1, 3, 5 etc (not 2, 4, 6).
- Failure to use time-tested rule of thirds, leading lines and balance etc.
- Poor cropping choices not suited to the subject.
- Under or over exposed images, especially blown highlights.
- Boring wildlife images without interesting behaviour.
- Low resolution images resulting in low quality images when enlarged.
- Lack of creativity when its requested – not pushing the boundaries.

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### About the author

Graham Gall is an international award-winning photographer and passionate member of the Friends Photographic Group. You can follow and chat with him on Instagram and Facebook where his social media tag is @gallpix.



@grahamgall



@grahamgall



@grahamgall

Top: Water Dragon.  
Centre: Wedge-tailed Eagle fledgling in flight.  
Bottom: *Eucalyptus mannifera*.

# Friends Briefs

## Friends 2025 AGM

The 37th AGM of the Friends of ANBG was held on Thursday 16 October in the ANBG Theatre. Full reports from the President and Treasurer (including the audited financial statements) may be found on the Friends website at: [friendsanbg.org.au](http://friendsanbg.org.au) under 'About Us'.

## President's Report

**Vice President, Alan Henderson, represented the President, Linda Beveridge at the AGM, reporting on the year's highlights.**

Alan began by noting that it was unfortunate that Linda Beveridge was unable to present a report on her first year as President, because there was much for her to be pleased with: member numbers are at a high level and Special Interest Group activities are buoyant. As the Treasurer's Report shows, the program of projects to support the ANBG has been sustained at a high level, and the budget is strong.

Actual members at 2,888 and memberships at 2,161 are both marginally higher than last year.

On behalf of all members, Alan expressed warm appreciation for the enthusiasm and long volunteer hours, of the numerous Friends who are convenors or members of Special Interest Groups, committees or teams. There are some members who are visible, but others working behind the scenes are not so visible, like the membership and *Fronds* teams, and members like David More and Beth Tyerman, among others, who contribute toward maintaining our IT systems and website.

There was a special mention for Maurice Hermann's sterling service as the Convenor of Growing Friends for eight years, as he is about to close his innings.

The highlights of Special Interest Group activities included:

- The aggregate attendance at Thursday Talks increased by ten percent in 2024–25.
- There were 228 entrants in the 25th Students' Photographic Competition.
- The Plant Recognition Group organised 12 workshops, with a number heavily oversubscribed.
- The Photographic Group enjoyed robust growth in membership.
- The Botanic Art Group has 135 members and convenes three well attended meetings each month.
- The Social Events and Activities Committee organised numerous activities, most of which were booked out.

It was a year of transition for the Friends, with Linda Beveridge succeeding Neville Page as the Friends President.

It was also a year of notable change for the management of the ANBG, with Dr Matt Parker succeeding Peter Byron as the Director of ANBG. With Dr Judy West's retirement in 2023, and then Peter Byron in 2025, almost 30 years of experience was lost to the ANBG.

Sadly, under Peter's management the Tropical Conservatory did not open: on the other hand, at least he was able to meet King Charles III last October. It was a diplomatic triumph that King Charles and Queen Camilla's visit to the ANBG went well beyond the allotted time.

Most importantly, the Friends are pleased to have continued to have cordial and effective working relationships with Director Matt Parker and Branch Head Dr Rebecca Pirzl.

In August this year, the Council established the guidelines for the Bruce Lindemayer Memorial Lecture series. The late Bruce Lindemayer

bequeathed almost \$36,000 to the Friends in 2024. In consultation with Bruce's sons, Phillip and David, Council agreed to fund distinguished speakers for at least 10 annual lectures, with the inaugural lecture scheduled for Thursday 5 February 2026.

The aim is to have speakers that will highlight the mission of the ANBG and the Friends, and require venues much larger than the Theatre. Members should all be sure to put this event into their diaries.

Another important mission for the Friends is the Projects Fund which supports the ANBG. Specifically, the scholarship program supports three PhD scholars who are entering their third year in 2026. It is likely the Friends will be advertising for a second round of scholars next year. Each scholar receives \$7,500 to supplement their stipend.

Alan mentioned that he had focused on Friends' projects since he joined the former Public Fund Committee in 2016, and more so, once he became Convenor of the Projects Committee in 2020. There was a longstanding concern that support for scientific research was being shortchanged, despite its importance to the mission of the ANBG. Readily available projects, including interpretive signage, whiteboards or water bubblers, frequently received priority over scientific research. Satisfyingly, a scholarship program is now locked into the Friends Project Fund as a minimum annual commitment of \$22,500, for scientific research.

At the conclusion of his address, Alan acknowledged the contributions of Pat and Warwick Wright, the voluntary ambassadors promoting the ANBG, the Friends and native flora in general since 2002. He noted that in the 23 years to September 2025, they had given 225 talks to 9,275 people.



Left to right: Warwick and Pat Wright and Alan Henderson, Vice President.

In keeping with the Council's decision, Alan invited Pat and Warwick to step forward to receive recognition for their achievement and accept a gift voucher from the Botanical Bookshop. Pat and Warwick received loud cheers and applause from the AGM. Pat responded on behalf of both, with a stirring speech in reply.

**Cathy Robertson**  
Secretary

## Treasurer's Report

The Friends continue to be in an excellent financial condition, which allows us to continue our work in support of the Gardens.

Our statement for Profit and Loss for the year ended 30 June 2025 is the basis for the summary below of the Friends' finances. The Audited Annual Return is on the website at [friendsanbg.org.au/node/2270](http://friendsanbg.org.au/node/2270)

From the Audited Statement of Income and Expenditure, the crucial facts are:

Total Income	\$223,491 (2024-25) vs \$150,605 (2023-24)
Total Expenses	\$254,707 (2024-25) vs \$152,118 (2023-24)

This means there was a deficit of \$31,217 for 2024-25.

This substantial increase in expenses reflects an increase of close to \$100,000 in support for the Gardens in the last financial year, while the deficit is less than 8% of our currently available funds.

The Friends bank balance as of 13 October is \$383,837: \$47,657 in cash at the bank and \$336,179 invested in short-term deposits.

Our projected immediate obligations in support of the Gardens are: \$52,000 for water bubblers and \$22,500 for scholarships.

Clearly, there is scope for further support in 2025-26.

Further features of the Friends income and expenses are summarised below.

### Income

Membership Fee income was up at \$94,589 in FY 2024-25 and member numbers were slightly up over the year.

A large bequest of \$35,812 was received from the Estate of Bruce Lindenmayer.

Donations were \$34,159, an increase of 40% and included a further \$5,000 for the Don Beer Memorial Scholarship.

Other income included: bank interest \$10,862; plant sales \$16,140; art group exhibitions \$19,066; art workshops \$2,611; booked walks \$1,959; Thursday Talks \$3,358; and the Photographic Group exhibition \$6,704.

### Expenses

Printing of *Fronds* and postage costs were \$21,994 and other regular outlays were \$23,119.

There were three large, one-off outlays: an upgrade to the Visitor Centre foyer (\$82,000); a fogging system (\$60,136) and research scholarships (\$37,500); making a total of \$179,536.

Our finances are very healthy, especially as we have a large buffer in the Friends' term deposits at the bank.

**Rod King.**

## Welcome to new Council members

The following people were elected to the Friends Council at the AGM:

Treasurer: Rod King  
Secretary: Cathy Robertson  
General Council members: John Barrow and John Pilbeam.

Retiring Council members: Kerry Moir and Chris Mackay.

The Friends thank all retiring Council members and congratulate new members.

Council members are listed on page 2.

# Friends Briefs (cont.)

## Director's Report

It has been another huge year for the ANBG. Visitor numbers have continued their post-Covid trend, remaining high at over 552,000 visitors. Education numbers also remain strong with over 21,000 students visiting across the 2024–25 financial year.

We started the year with a bang with the first-ever flowering of our *Amorphophallus titanum* (Corpse Flower) that Glasshouse staff have nurtured for 15 years. The hugely successful public viewing event was a joint project between the Visitor Experience and Glasshouse teams. More than 1,800 visitors came to view (and smell) the flower, with a time lapse video of the flower opening going viral on social media with more than two million views.

Public engagement continued to be a focus as staff from the Nursery, Seed Bank, and Education teams headed to the Canberra Show to participate in a STEM *Extravaganza* event showcasing science and conservation at the Gardens. This was followed by a sold-out event for the *Enlighten* festival in March, and the return of our annual *MEGAfauna* event in July, wrapping up a busy first half of the year for our Visitor Experience and Education teams.

There has been progress on major infrastructure projects in 2025. The expansion of the National Seed Bank (NSB) is complete, with the official opening on 6 November 2025. The updated facility has increased the storage capacity and improved the workspace, a major step in helping us secure Australia's native plant species into the future.

Construction of the Ian Potter National Conservatory recommenced in February. FDC Construction & Fitout has been engaged to complete the works, with construction due for completion in mid to late 2026.

In the glasshouses, the Tropical and Conservatory teams have been busy developing new display options, weighing all hanging plants, and working through complex installation logistics. Earlier in the year three staff members also visited several sites in tropical north Queensland where they observed many of these plants growing in their natural environments and connected with other tropical horticulturists and botanists.

Across the ANBG our Living Collections horticulturists continue their incredible work maintaining and developing our beautiful Gardens. Recent visitors will have noticed refreshed displays near the Visitor Centre and other popular areas.

Work has also gone into cleaning up the entrance to the Bushland Nature Walk, and we have been working with the Friends of Black Mountain on weed control around the ANBG perimeter.

Around 9,000 plants have been added to the Living Collection in the spring and autumn plant outs, a huge effort from the Nursery, Depots and Plant Records teams.

With thanks to the Friends Project Fund, four additional drinking water fountains have been installed around the Gardens. Various paths have also been upgraded to improve accessibility in key areas, further improving amenity for our visitors.

As part of an ongoing project to monitor highly pathogenic Myrtle Rust, a semi-permanent monitoring unit has been installed along the Main Path near the Rock Garden. This will be in place until early next year.

In August the NSB welcomed their new manager, Dr Alyssa Weinstein. In addition to moving into the new building, the Seed Bank team have been busy presenting at the International Seed Science Conference in Perth, WA, and the Australasian Seed Science Conference in Horsham,



Dr Matthew Parker, Director of ANBG.

Victoria. Congratulations to Mitch Korda, who won a prize for his poster *Learning to connect Country and People at the National Seed Bank*.

Two conservation projects were wrapped up in 2025: the *Survive and Thrive* project (2021–25) targeting subalpine species affected by the 2019–20 bushfires, and the *Conservation of the Imlay Mallee* project (2020–25). Ongoing projects include propagation of *Pomaderris delicata* and *Swainsona recta* for translocation in collaboration with NSW and ACT Governments, respectively.

Collaboration and research remain key to our work. The Nursery team continues to work closely with the NSB on testing germination strategies and growing seedlings from germination experiments. The Plant Records team has been very busy collecting voucher specimens for the National Herbarium, processing permits, and coordinating plant identification workshops for staff.

I'd like to finish by thanking you all for your continued support. As a new Director I see the impact of the Friends support in every area of the Gardens. Your passion, advocacy and fundraising efforts are felt across the Gardens by staff and volunteers. The work of the Friends enhances the visitor experience, helps raise the profile of Australia's plant biodiversity and safeguard native species for future generations.

**Matthew Parker**

## Student profile

### By Tasha James Don Beer Memorial Scholarship recipient

From my earliest memories I have been fascinated by nature and passionate about how I can make it part of my life.

Since my school years I have been involved in conservation programs. From volunteering within predator-proof reserves undertaking catch and release monitoring of endangered fauna, feedings and refreshing beddings, to weeding, plantings, path and structure building and maintenance, and everything in between!

After school I initially began a degree in animal and veterinary bioscience, before taking time off to work in land management. I later studied environmental science at the University of Canberra. Here I developed and fostered my interest in plant ecology and conservation through research projects in grasses and work placements in glasshouses. I was also lucky enough to take part in the Botanical Trainee Program at the Australian National Herbarium in 2020, with all that encompassed from smoke and hail limitations to pandemic precautions! Despite this, I learnt a lot and found where I wanted to invest my passions.

I therefore continued research, this time into wetland plant ecology. While working at the Herbarium in the botanical ethanol collection, I achieved my Honours studying the changes in biomass and carbon content on *Phragmites australis* across different watering treatments. This included an incredible mix of field work sampling in the mud, burning material in kilns to determine carbon content, and data analysis.

I then decided to continue feeding my curiosity and start a PhD. While now working at the Australian Tree Seed Centre, I came across a dilemma the ANBG was facing regarding Mt Imlay



Tasha James, 2024



Tasha James, 2025

*Boronia imlayensis* (left) and *Hibbertia circinata* (right) on Mt Imlay, NSW.

(traditionally known as Balawan) flora. They were looking for a student and I was looking for a project, and I was honoured to have the chance to be involved with such an applicable and real-world scenario.

Mt Imlay is home to several critically endangered and endemic plant species. It is a unique and isolated environment, which has been subject to stressors including fire in 2019–20 and the presence of *Phytophthora cinnamomi* (a devastating plant pathogen).



Melea Vera

I have made the steep summit climb up Mt Imlay over a dozen times to place dataloggers, sample soil and plants, monitor plant growth and health, and fly a drone to capture detailed topography.

To understand the single populations of the critically endangered *Hibbertia circinata*, *Boronia imlayensis* and *Eucalyptus imlayensis* I have performed DNA analysis on samples from in situ and ex situ plant material. This, in combination with environmental factors, will provide an holistic approach to the conservation of these species and others like them, and considers microclimatic and reduced genetic diversity factors.

I only have a couple of sets of field work remaining before it is all down to data analysis to determine what I can discover for these endangered isolated species.

I have learnt a huge amount throughout my PhD and am excited to see what I can produce from the data I have gathered, with some of the pieces already coming together.

Tasha James climbing Mt Imlay in 2025.

# Friends Briefs (cont.)

## New Members Morning Tea

A welcome to new members was held on Sunday morning, 21 September for people who joined the Friends in the last six months. This was the second welcome event this year, and was attended by 18 people.

There to welcome them were members of the Friends Council, and representatives of Special Interest Groups and Friends committees.

The event started in the Theatre where speakers told our new members about the groups they could join, and talked about projects funded by the Friends.

Morning tea was served in the Dickson Room, where speakers and new members mingled and chatted.

Following morning tea, two guided walking tours and a Flora bus tour were offered to members, one tour taking members to the Growing Friends facility as part of their walk.

## After dark walk

An After Dark walk in September was attended by 32 people. This event was led by Gardens Education Rangers. Our thanks to the Gardens who gave us a discount on the normal cost. We can attest to the fact that there are lots of possums living in the Gardens!

## A visit to the STEP garden at the Arboretum

Our thanks to volunteers at the STEP Garden at the Arboretum who kindly agreed to take 30 people (Friends members and their friends) for a walk and talk at their garden in September. The small \$5 donation was split between the Friends and STEP.

Right: Tianna Cestino, 'Baby booby's first look'. Far right: Jayvee Mantong, 'Christmas Island wonders: A snapshot of nature's hidden paradise'.



Simone Slater



Marion Jones

Left: New members enjoyed a guided walk after the Special Interest Group presentations and morning tea. Right: One of the groups who attended *Wake up with the Birds* in September.

## Wake up with the Birds

In September, we once again offered *Wake up with the Birds* walks, for members and the public. These were held on Saturday and Sunday mornings on two weekends, and were very popular, with 127 people attending. This event, organised by our Social Events Committee, raised over \$2,000 for projects in the Gardens. Our thanks to Marion Jones and her band of expert birding guides for sharing their skills and knowledge.

## Snapshot: The 2025 student photo competition

Interest in the annual student photographic competition continues to be high, with entries from 228 students representing 56 schools. Our judges had the difficult task of choosing winners from more than 450 images across two Primary school and three Secondary school categories. Perhaps the Rangers had the even trickier task of nominating a winner for the Ranger Award, with hundreds of images to choose from.

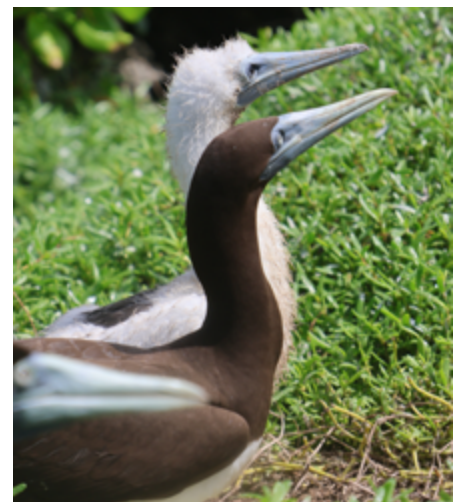


A competition requirement is that photos must be taken in the Gardens in Canberra, with the aim of encouraging young people to visit. Not surprisingly, most entries were from ACT schools, with a handful from NSW, Victoria and Queensland, and four home schools.

Several students from Christmas Island District High School were so keen that they entered photos of their unique local scenery. Unfortunately, these weren't eligible, but we wanted to share a couple with *Fronde* readers who may not have the opportunity to visit Australia's external territory.

Christmas Island is in the Indian Ocean about 1,550 km north-west of Western Australia. Most famous for its annual red land crab migration. Christmas Island is the world's only remaining nesting site for the endangered Abbott's Booby.

**Julie Hamilton**



## Congrats to our student photographers!

It was smiles all round at this year's student photographic competition awards ceremony on Saturday 27 September. A total of 35 images received prizes or commendations and guests enjoyed an exhibition of the winning photographs in the Banksia Garden.

Many thanks to our judges Cristy Froehlich, Ben Harvey and Simone Slater, who delighted the students with the opportunity to chat about taking great nature photographs.

Congratulations to our first prize winners. All prize winning and commended entries are published at [friendsanbg.org.au/activities\\_schoolsphotocomp](https://friendsanbg.org.au/activities_schoolsphotocomp)

The Friends acknowledge an Australian Government 2024-25 Volunteer Program grant to support the 2025 Student Photographic Competition.

**Julie Hamilton**



Simone Slater



Simone Slater



Steven Playford



Simone Slater

Top left: Primary Monochrome, Mako Takakusagi, Torrens Primary School, ACT with 'The forest where light returned'.  
 Top right: Primary Colour, Alexander Moen, Kinma School, NSW with 'Bees'.  
 Above left: Secondary Monochrome, Ashley Smith, Gungahlin College, ACT with 'Misty fern'.  
 Above right: Secondary Altered Reality, Bridget Henderson, Alfred Deakin High School, ACT with 'Purple whisper'.  
 Right: Secondary Colour: 'King of the Gardens', Ella Edwards, St Mary MacKillop College, ACT.



Ella Edwards



Steven Playford

Student photographers and judges at the awards presentation.

# Friendly Chatter

## Botanic Art Group

Once again we have had a productive year in the Botanic Art Group (BAG). We welcomed a number of new members and as a result of requests ran workshops for beginners in *Water Colour Techniques* and *Coloured Pencils*. Our thanks to Mignon Atkinson and Annette Dahler who volunteered their time.

Although botanical art is often associated with water colour painting, coloured pencil work is also very popular. Good quality modern coloured pencils are lightfast and available in a wide range of colours. Other mediums include graphite, pen and ink, gouache and acrylics. We plan to hold a number of other workshops in the future. Members have requested topics such as drawing, scientific illustration and expressive botanical art.

Planning is underway for next year's annual exhibition in April. We hope to feature wetland plants as well as a variety of other natives. In addition to framed works, the popular *Squares* display will once again be presented. Members contribute small squares of 12 cm which demonstrate some of the work from meetings.

Squares are available for sale at a maximum of \$50 each. Some art enthusiasts select a number of squares to be framed. More information about the exhibition will be available in the next edition of *Fronde*.

New members are always welcome. There are three meetings a month (except in January) including a Saturday group. If you would like further information about meetings or workshops please email [botanicart@friendsanbg.org.au](mailto:botanicart@friendsanbg.org.au)

**Kate Ramsey**



Jean Wiencke.

### Vale Jean Wiencke 1944 – 2025

Jean was a Friend of the ANBG and a long-term active member of the Botanic Art Group. A lover of all things art and design she found botanical art to be a special passion. She enjoyed working in many mediums including coloured pencils, watercolour, graphite and ink.

Jean was a relief convenor of the Saturday BAG meeting on many occasions. Her smiling face and positive attitude will be missed by all.

A celebration of her life was held on 19 September and many friends from BAG gathered with family to reminisce on her life.

Jean's family had the walls of the venue decorated with her framed artwork. There were beautiful native flowers arranged on every table and a postcard copy of Jean's journal art at every place on the tables.

Jean was also a well-respected member of the Gumnuts art group (where she also delighted many with her delicious homemade cakes).

**Beth Roberts**

## Growing Friends

We mentioned in the last Friendly Chatter column that Growing Friends now has a discovery walk after its weekly Tuesday working bees. This gives all members who do the walk, be they long term members or new members, the chance to discover, or rediscover, some of the less visited parts of the Gardens, and to increase their familiarity with the many plants in the Gardens.

Members often make notes on which plants they would like to include in the group's monthly propagation sessions. It is not unusual for someone to find a plant, which has been approved by the Gardens for propagation by the group, but which hasn't been propagated for many years, if ever. This is a great way of building up a list of plants for a future monthly propagation session.

Growing Friends has been making quite a few changes over recent years. This is not a sign of chaos. In the case of Growing Friends, it is a chance for the group to try new things, especially in relation to plants which are traditionally hard to propagate.

The recently acquired propagation bed has allowed the group to expand its seed propagation activities, both in quantity and the range of plants propagated from seeds. It even allowed one of our longstanding members to experiment with ways to propagate ferns from spores.



There was great interest from Friends, ANBG staff and volunteers at the exclusive October Growing Friends sale, with 100 different species or cultivars to choose from.

Growing Friends has a record of every propagation made over the last 27+ years, including what was propagated, when it was propagated, what rooting hormone was used, what cutting or seed mixture the cutting/seeds were put into and what propagation success was achieved. We believe that we are the only group in Australia (outside of professional propagation organisations) to have such a complete record.

While we already make good use of this data, we could do more with modern data tools. If you believe you could help, we would love to hear from you.

Propagation from cuttings, and especially from seeds, is not an exact science. The group is always excited when something goes particularly well. Recently, we achieved a near 100% success with growing *Xanthorrhoea glauca* from seeds. The seeds were treated in hot water and given smoke water treatment in mid-May, after which they were sown in Hiko seedling trays. The germinated plants were potted on to tube pots in mid-October. It is expected that they will be ready for sale at the group's next autumn sale.

Finally, after eight years as the Convenor of Growing Friends, Maurice Hermann has decided to move away from the administrative side of the group and spend more time propagating plants. At the December monthly meeting, Deborah Dennis will take over as Convenor. We would like to thank Maurice for his work over the last eight years and look forward to supporting Deborah in her new role.

For more information about the plants that the group propagates for its sales, as well as how to join the group, please email [growingfriends@friendsanbg.org.au](mailto:growingfriends@friendsanbg.org.au)



Rose Hurley



Lisa Molvig



Angela Braniff

## Nature Journaling

The Nature Journaling Group met in September and was led by Lucinda Lang. The October gathering fell on the Labour Day public holiday, but we still had a good turnout.

If you would like to join us, please contact [lespage26@gmail.com](mailto:lespage26@gmail.com)

**Lesley Page**

Top *Telopea speciosissima*. Watercolour by Rose Hurley.

Above left: Tree. Charcoal by Lisa Molvig.

Above right: Yellow pea. Watercolour by Angela Braniff.

# Friendly Chatter (cont.)

## Friends Benefits

### As a Friend you are entitled to:

- Three issues of *Fronde* a year
- Three hour free parking pass

### Discounts at:

- Botanical Bookshop (most items)
- Pollen
- Jindii Eco Spa
- Cool Country Natives, Pialligo
- Australian Choice, Canberra Centre

### You also receive:

- Advance details of lectures
- Advance bookings for some events
- Discounts on some events
- ANBG library membership – borrow books, serials, videos and DVDs, and use computers and interactive CDs
- Special rates for functions at ANBG

### You can join:

- Botanic Art Group
- Growing Friends
- Photographic Group
- Plant Science Group
- Plant Recognition Group
- Nature Journaling Group
- Assist with ANBG research projects
- Become a guide

And you can relax with tea/coffee and interesting reading material in the Friends Lounge in the Ellis Rowan Building, open 9.30 am to 4.30 pm.



Volunteer Guides enjoying a field trip to Morton National Park.

## Volunteer Guides

### Guides' Big Day Out

On Wednesday 24 September a group of 29 Volunteer Guides from ANBG went on a professional development trip to look at plants and ecosystems at Morton National Park.

There were two main walks during the day. In the morning we did the Erith Coalmine Loop Track, entering from Gambell's Rest at Bundanoon. Along the way there were 23 pre-arranged stops, at which several iconic plant species were discussed. Most of the plants studied were flowering shrubs and perennials, although we did look at some trees like the Scribbly Gum *Eucalyptus racemosa* and Turpentine *Syncarpia glomulifera*. Our aim was to learn more about the Sydney region flora, especially those species that are also growing at the Gardens.

After a picnic lunch at the Echo Point Shelter, the Guides set off in pairs to find plants or objects whose initials could correspond to each letter of the alphabet. Their walk took them to Bonnie View Lookout and back via the Wishing Well rock formations. This 'treasure hunt' provided opportunity for participants to get to know each other and to apply their skills of observation and plant recognition.

Some special plants were recorded, such as the King Fern *Todea barbara* and Mountain Devil *Lambertia formosa*.

Thank you to ANBG for funding the bus charter and Sue Norman for her support with administration and equipment. The trip would not have been possible without Pam Cooke, who meticulously planned and implemented all aspects of our Big Day Out.

**Jane Cottee**



## Photographic Group

It has been a busy and productive few months for the Friends Photographic Group.

By the time you receive this edition of *Fronds, Illuminate 2025*, the Photographic Group's annual exhibition, will be underway at the Visitor Centre. It is open every day from 9.30 am to 4.30 pm until Sunday 14 December.

Not only are the framed photographs on sale, you can also purchase cards, calendars and bookmarks as well as meet the photographers.

Entries to the exhibition are again of a remarkably high standard. In fact, the response has been so enthusiastic that we have had to limit the number of photographs included in the exhibition.

Come along to enjoy, and perhaps purchase, beautiful and creative images of the flora and fauna of the Gardens and beyond.

The lively monthly meetings of the Photographic Group continue to provide stimulating and eye-opening presentations. In August we heard a fascinating exposition of the challenges and artistry involved in photographing moths and butterflies from Dr Yi-Kai Tea of the Moths and Butterflies Association. Cristy Froehlich and Julia Landford from NatureArt Labs provided a stimulating insight into nature inspired art, photography and travel at the September meeting. And most recently we hosted Helen Cross, an accomplished photographer, who works with Bush Blitz, a species discovery program which is conducting fauna and flora surveys in remote, under-surveyed areas of Australia.



*Oxylobium ellipticum.*

Deb Howard

The program of talks at the Photographic Group's monthly meetings is always interesting. Keep an eye on the Friends online calendar for upcoming speakers and topics.

A significant role of the Photographic Group is to provide members with opportunities to develop their photographic skills. In October Graham Gall, Steven Playford and Simone Slater conducted a workshop on macro photography. With the burgeoning interest in capturing images of insects and fungi this was a welcome and timely chance to learn new techniques.

The Photographic Group works hard to promote the ANBG and assist the Friends and the Gardens to lift public knowledge of and engagement in the ANBG. Members of the Group continue

to submit photographs to support the Gardens' social media presence and provide images to support articles in *Fronds* and the Friends website. Recently the group provided images for the 2026 calendar and parking permit and supported judging of the Student Photographic Competition.

Each month we convene a *Cameras and Café* photographic walk in the Gardens. These take place on weekends to enable broad participation. Attendance has been enthusiastic by experienced and developing photographers alike. Participants enjoy this opportunity to share skills, inspiration, and stories.

If these walks or any other of the Photographic Group's activities interest you, remember membership is open to all Friends.

**Phil Green**

# Gardens Shorts

## Introducing our new Director

In July the ANBG welcomed a new Director, Dr Matthew Parker.

Matthew grew up on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country and has been living on Ngannawal Country for the last 15 years. With a background in horticulture, conservation, facilities management, business, policy and senior leadership, Matthew brings a wealth of experience to the role.

Matthew completed a Bachelor of Applied Science (Horticulture) and PhD in arboriculture at the University of Melbourne. He worked as a consulting arboriculturist in Melbourne before moving to Canberra in 2009 where he has worked in various Commonwealth and ACT Government roles. Matthew comes to the Gardens from the ACT Government's Yarralumla Nursery, where he was General Manager since September 2021, and was responsible for implementing a new online inventory and sales system.

Some career highlights include:

- Investigating tree management in the ACT at the Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment.
- Executive Officer and Advisor to the Australian Chief Plant Protection Officer and responding to emergency plant pest incursions of Banna Freckle and Cucumber Green Mottle Mosaic Virus.
- Director of Operations and Facilities at the National Arboretum Canberra, including events such as the live broadcast of the Australia Day Awards.
- Infrastructure Specialist at the Office of Australian War Graves to investigate sustainable ways of honouring the sacrifice of Australia's veterans.

Matthew has been settling into the role for three months now; so be sure to say hello if you see him walking around the Gardens.



Left to right: Caitlin Conroy, Carol Dale and Kathryn Scobie (Tropical and Conservatory team supervisor).

ANBG

## Tropical collaborations

Earlier this year, tropical horticulture staff from the Gardens visited the UNESCO World Heritage listed wet tropics of Queensland to prepare for planting in the Ian Potter National Conservatory. The research trip included visits to Cairns Botanic Gardens, Mossman Gorge, the Daintree and Babinda Boulders, as well as visits to private botanical collections.

The team developed an understanding of the natural environments represented in the Conservatory, including climate and soil conditions, light and plant behaviour. The opportunity to see plants like *Angiopteris*, *Ideospermum*, *Huperzia*, *Dischidia* and *Myrmecodia* growing freely in their natural habitat was incredibly exciting, enlightening and valuable.

The trip also provided the opportunity for staff to connect with other tropical horticulturists and botanists, and they returned to Canberra full of ideas and inspiration.

## Phil Hurle retires from ANBG

On 19 September the Gardens bid farewell and happy retirement to Phil Hurle. After approximately 36 years working at ANBG, Phil is one of our longest-serving staff members.

Phil started as a seasonal Gardener Grade 3 in City Parks in 1988, joining ANBG as a seasonal gardener in July 1989 while studying horticulture at TAFE. He became ongoing in 1990 and the rest, as they say, is history.

During his time at ANBG Phil has had a hand in almost every section and team. As a horticulturist he has worked from both Top and Bottom Depots as well as in the Nursery and Glasshouse collections. He spent many years carefully curating and cultivating the Rock Garden, one of the most heavily visited and best-loved sections of ANBG.



Phil Hurle outside ANBG's Bottom Depot.

From 2012, he has held various leadership roles including Depot Manager, acting Curator and Horticulture Manager, and finally Trades Manager.

Phil's dedication to the Gardens' Living Collections extended beyond the working week, organising (and staffing) the weekend watering and out-of-hours on-call rosters.

Phil's skillset is not restricted to horticulture. Drawing on his mastery of budget management, in 2018 Phil spent 10 months leading ANBG's Administration and Finance team. This was followed by a stint working in grants and business management for the Australian Biological Resources Study.

Phil has also supported his colleagues as a union representative. A WHS champion, he served as First Aid and Emergency Chief Warden.

With his wide-ranging expertise, incredible corporate knowledge and welcoming attitude, Phil has been the 'go-to' person for many staff. A much-valued colleague and member of the ANBG community, he will be greatly missed.

## A holistic conservation approach to save the Tuggeranong Lignum

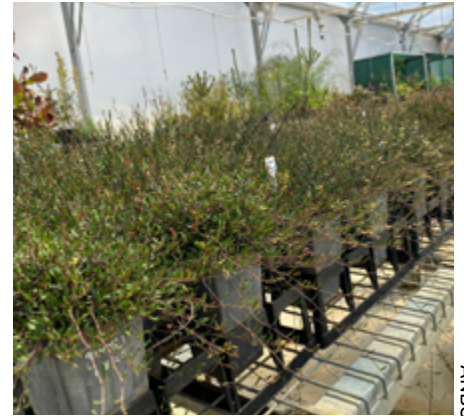
Since the discovery of the the ACT's most endangered species, *Muehlenbeckia tuggeranong*, in the 1990s, the ANBG has worked with the ACT Government to establish an insurance ex-situ collection of plants from cuttings. These plants captured all the genetic diversity available for the species, including many lineages now extinct in the wild.

In 2022, the ex-situ *M. tuggeranong* plants produced a small number of seeds for the first time, enabling the first ever germination trials for the species. As a result, a new generation of plants were grown and found to be more genetically diverse than the parent plants. This increase in genetic diversity brought renewed hope that we might be able to save this species from extinction.

This year, in collaboration with the National Seed Bank (NSB), the ACT Government and the Native Species Program, the ANBG Nursery began working towards creating a genetically informed *M. tuggeranong* seed orchard. The goal is to generate enough seeds for seed banking and research, and to potentially restore the species in the wild.

Many more seeds were produced during summer 2024–25. With them, our colleagues at the NSB have discovered that a cold stratification pre-treatment is key for maximum germination. As a result, 81 new seedlings are now part of the ex situ collection at the Nursery, and their growth and development are going to be monitored to better understand the species' breeding system.

Later this year it is hoped that genetic studies of the entire collection of *M. tuggeranong* plants, carried out by colleagues at the University of



Top: Tuggeranong Lignum plants in the potted collection.

Above: Seedlings recently germinated at the NSB.

Canberra, will identify genetically diverse individuals and crossings to enable us to optimise the genetic diversity of a seed orchard here at the ANBG. Genetically diverse seeds would, in turn, optimise the chances of survival if translocation of plants back to the wild becomes an option.

By investigating *M. tuggeranong* holistically, including its breeding system, seed biology, seedling survival, and genetic diversity, along with insights from cultivation, we aim to identify the barriers to its survival in the wild. This knowledge will help to guide effective ex situ conservation and future translocation strategies.

**Veronica Briceno Rodriguez**  
**Conservation Horticulture**  
**Manager**

# Gardens Shorts (cont.)

## Shining a new light on evening tours

Ultraviolet (UV) torches have added an exciting new tool to the repertoire of the Gardens' Education Rangers, allowing them to explore the world of fluorescence (non-living materials) and biofluorescence (living organisms) on evening tours.

Each year thousands of school students visit the Gardens after hours for Ranger-guided *Twilight* tours. During this exciting night-time experience students learn about Australian plants and meet some of the resident nocturnal fauna.

Exploring the Gardens using UV torches, Education Rangers and students have discovered a range of biofluorescent organisms including plants, fungi, lichen and millipedes. Much of the observed fluorescence has come from rubbish – particularly manmade fibres – providing an opportunity to talk about human impacts on the environment.



Elizabeth Izatt



Elizabeth Izatt

Moss under white light (top) versus UV light (below).



Elle Cheney

During the removal of mud from the Crosbie Morrison pond.

## Spring clean for Crosbie Morrison pond

Water features are an integral part of the ANBG landscape, providing amenity to visitors, habitat for wildlife, and allowing us to display aquatic and riparian plants. They are also used by our Education Rangers to teach school students about aquatic ecosystems in the popular *Pond Dipping* program.

In October, the ANBG Living Collections team undertook a major clean of one of the largest ponds, located next to the Crosbie Morrison lawn. Accumulated mud and plant matter had left the water murky and smelly.

Using excavators, hoses and lots of elbow grease the team removed about 30 truckloads of mud and debris. While excess vegetation has periodically been removed, this mammoth effort was the biggest clean undertaken in over 25 years.

The pond has now refilled and local fauna are already thriving in the clean water, confirmed by enthusiastic young Pond Dippers!



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No discounts given on redemption of gift vouchers or sale table items.

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**[botanicalbookshop.com.au](http://botanicalbookshop.com.au)**

# Botanical Bookshop book reviews



## **A field guide to reptiles and frogs of the ACT. 2025**

**By Brian La Rance, Wesley Read and Bridget Lunn**  
**Colour photographs and maps. Paperback, 208 pages, \$35**

This comprehensive field guide covers all the 79 turtle, lizard, frog and snake species that have been recorded in the ACT. Beautifully illustrated with full colour photographs and location maps, this new guide complements our other very popular book *Reptiles and Frogs of the Australian Capital Territory* by providing an additional 27 recorded species, keys to help with identification, information about biogeography and local ecosystems, plus an introduction to animal classification and snake bite prevention, including first aid information.

This book will be popular with both naturalists and those keen to discover, identify and learn more about the native fauna in the ACT region.



## **One koala: One hundred trees. 2025**

**By Leesa Allinson. Illustrated by Heather Potter and Mark Jackson**  
**Hardcover, 36 pages, \$25**

Dad and I find an injured koala on our property. My heart breaks when Wildlife Rescue tells us she might not survive. This heartfelt story is told by a young girl who is touched by the plight of an injured koala. After a visit to the local Koala Hospital she learns what she can do to help keep koalas safe, and, with support from her father they gather an army of helpers and do one task that can make so much difference! Packed with interesting koala facts and information, this book has an important and urgent message about koalas and the recently announced Australian Koala Foundation's Koala KISS project.



## **On this ground: Best Australian nature writing. 2024**

**Edited by Dave Witty**  
**Paperback, 327 pages, \$35**

A unique collection of works showcasing a selection of Australia's most prominent and original writers and their relationships with the natural world. Combining short stories, poetry, politics and spiritual connections, this book is an opportunity to explore their perspectives and their unique writing styles whilst working amid the current climate crisis here in Australia.

Editor David Witty (*What the Trees See*) opens on the note of the looming climate emergency during this past century up to now, and the underlying tone of climate anxiety lingering in all aspects of modern life. Witty also reflects on how written works have influenced our attitudes towards appreciating, protecting and nurturing Australia's natural landscape.

A great book to dip into when there are some small quiet moments; the short story style makes for a wealth of information delivered in easily digestible chapters.

# Alexandre Descubes' illustrations

In January of 2024 the ANBG Library and Archives was the very fortunate recipient of a beautiful and unique set of botanical illustrations.

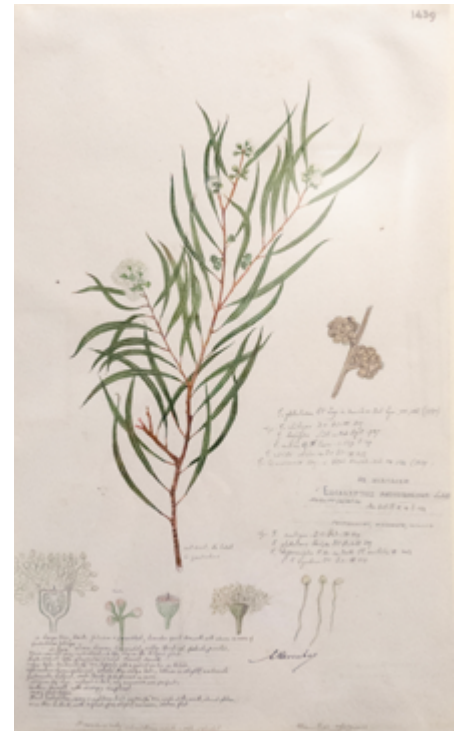
Julie and Keith Campbell were downsizing and no longer had room for the four framed eucalypt watercolours but were “happy to hand on their care and appreciation to a wider audience.”

They had purchased the artworks whilst on holiday in Washington DC nearly 25 years ago and had them treated and framed by a conservator on their return to Australia.

These valuable artworks give a fascinating insight into the life of the artist, Alexandre Descubes, and the eucalypts growing in Tamil Nadu, southern India.

Alexandre Descubes was a botanist and cartographer who lived and worked in Mauritius and southern India in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His birth and death dates are unknown, but it is thought he was born in Mauritius and worked there as a surveyor and draughtsman for the Public Works Department before moving to India in the 1880s. There, he surveyed and mapped forests, rising to the position of Superintendent, Forest Map Records<sup>1</sup>.

Our four eucalypt illustrations are numbers 1433, 1436, 1439 and 1455 from a collection of approximately 5000. The Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden in Virginia, USA, holds nearly 3000 of the works, which depict a wide range of plant species primarily from India and south Asia<sup>2,3</sup>.



Clockwise from top left: *Eucalyptus crebra*, *Eucalyptus amygdalina*, *Eucalyptus resinifera* and *Eucalyptus hemiphloia* (*moluccana*). All photos by Christine Fernace.

## References

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2. Holland J. Ginkgos, Kew & Descubes. Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden e-news [Internet]. 2013 19 August 2025. Available from [lewisginter.org/ginkgos-kew-descubes](http://lewisginter.org/ginkgos-kew-descubes)
3. Holland J. Demystifying Descubes at Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden. Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden e-news [Internet]. 2010 19 August 2025. Available from [lewisginter.org/demystifying-descubes-at-lewis-ginter-botanical-garden](http://lewisginter.org/demystifying-descubes-at-lewis-ginter-botanical-garden)
4. Gowrie Galleries. The mysterious Monsieur Descubes: A botanical thriller. Antiques & art in New South Wales. 2012:63.

It is not known who commissioned the illustrations, but some are marked with the official stamp of the Imperial Institute in London, so it is possible they were Descubes' sponsor<sup>1,4</sup>.

The illustrations display a deep understanding of botanical anatomy and include references to where the plant name was first published in the scientific literature and common names in English and Indigenous languages.

Descubes' last known artwork is dated 1919 and some accounts suggest he died during the 1919–20 influenza epidemic in India, whereas Julie and Keith were told he died in penury in New York. We may never know, but we can enjoy his skill and artistry due to the Campbells' generous gift of four eucalypt illustrations purchased to relieve the homesickness they felt for Australian plants while travelling overseas – a feeling many of us can empathise with!

The watercolours can be viewed by appointment. Please contact the Librarian on [anbg.library@dcceew.gov.au](mailto:anbg.library@dcceew.gov.au) or 02 6250 9480 to arrange a time.

**Alex Petrie**  
Librarian



## A message of thanks

As Friends of the ANBG, many of you will be aware that the National Parks Conservation Trust (NPCT) has recently ceased operations. After six years of supporting transformational projects across Australia's six Commonwealth national parks, 60 marine parks, and the ANBG, the Trust formally closed on 30 June 2025.



This decision, taken by the Trustees in mutual agreement with the Parks Australia Executive, was not made lightly. It followed a thorough review of the Trust's mission, impact, and long-term sustainability within today's environmental philanthropic landscape. While we were saddened to conclude this chapter, we are immensely proud of what has been achieved with your support.

Some of the Trust's most significant projects have focused on the ANBG, undertaken by its dedicated staff, together with the generous backing of donors and partners. We are deeply grateful for your contributions and for the thoughtful engagement that made this work possible.

A few highlights include the *Seed the Future* online auction in 2021, which raised vital funds for specialised equipment to be incorporated into the new National Seed Bank, and the *Survive and Thrive* post-bushfire research project, where the Gardens' conservation horticulture and seed science teams collaborated in the development of new approaches to propagation and long-term management of 12 fire-affected plant species across their natural ranges.

Although the NPCT has now closed, its mission lives on through the people, communities, and projects it has helped to nurture at the ANBG and across our national parks and marine parks.

On behalf of the Trustees, thank you for being part of this important journey. Your generosity has left a lasting legacy.

Finally, we would like to remind you that while the NPCT no longer operates, you can continue to make charitable, tax-deductible donations directly to the ANBG. Importantly, the Gardens is the only Commonwealth national park with charitable status, and your support will help ensure its vital conservation, research, and education activities continue to thrive.

The ANBG welcomes support from generous individuals and corporations to help maintain high standards of excellence in horticultural practice, scientific research and community education. The ANBG has deductible gift recipient (DGR) status, with donations over \$2.00 being tax deductible.

Please contact [anbgadmin@anbg.gov.au](mailto:anbgadmin@anbg.gov.au) for more information and to discuss options.

**Judy West**  
On behalf of NPCT Trustees

# What's on at the Gardens

## December 2025 to April 2026

Details are correct at the time of printing. Please check the Friends website [friendsanbg.org.au](http://friendsanbg.org.au) or the ANBG website [anbg.gov.au](http://anbg.gov.au) for changes and updates.

### Walks, Tours and Trails

#### Guided Walks

**11.00 am and 2.00 pm daily  
Free\***

Enhance your visit to the Gardens by going on a free guided walk with a Volunteer Guide. Every guided walk is different as Guides share stories about the fascinating array of Australian plants on display.

#### Self-guided walks

**Free**

Collect a map from the Visitor Centre to begin the trail.

### Flora Explorer Bus Tours

**Saturdays, Sundays and Public Holidays**

**11.30 am and 1.30 pm  
\$8 adult, \$5 child and concessions  
Book on ANBG website**

Sit back, relax and be taken on a 45 minute highlight tour of the Gardens.

### Book a Private Tour

**Costs apply**

Tour the Gardens with your own tailored guided walk or Flora Explorer bus tour to suit your special interests, or purchase as a gift. Conditions apply. For more information contact [bookedwalks@friendsanbg.org.au](mailto:bookedwalks@friendsanbg.org.au) or [floragroups@anbg.gov.au](mailto:floragroups@anbg.gov.au)

\*Meet at the flag near the cafe bridge. No booking required for individuals, but groups of more than six people should contact [walks@friendsanbg.org.au](mailto:walks@friendsanbg.org.au) a week in advance.



### Flowers, Fruit and Foliage

**All year  
Free**

The *Flowers, Fruit and Foliage* brochure is your self-guided tour to what's flowering in the Gardens. Armed with the guide, you can take a tour anytime the Gardens are open.

Knowledgeable and dedicated Friends Rosalind and Benjamin Walcott write and illustrate a new guide every two weeks, so it's always up-to-date.

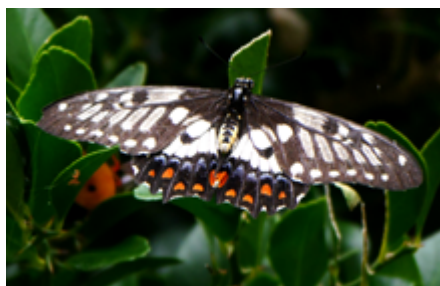
The current version of *Flowers, Fruit and Foliage* is always available from the Friends' website [friendsanbg.org.au](http://friendsanbg.org.au)

You can print your own hard copy or pick one up from the Visitor Centre. Alternatively, you can view the guide on a mobile device while walking in the Gardens.

### Storytime in the Gardens

**First Friday of the month  
10.00 – 11.00 am  
\$5 per child, adults and infants under 12-months free  
Crosbie Morrison Lawn  
Book on ANBG website**

Join us on the first Friday of every month for family fun with stories about Australian plants and animals. Each themed session is packed with stories, songs and craft. Suitable for pre-schoolers.



Dainty Swallowtail.

### Sunset Cinema

**20 November – 28 February  
6.30 – 11.00 pm  
Eucalypt Lawn  
Costs apply**

Enjoy latest releases, children's and classic films in the beautiful garden surrounds. Bring a picnic or purchase your dinner and popcorn at the event.

To purchase tickets, see Sunset Cinema website [sunsetcinema.com.au/canberra](http://sunsetcinema.com.au/canberra)

### Snakes Alive!

**12–18 January  
Four sessions per day  
10.00 am – 3.30 pm  
\$9 adults, \$8 concession, \$7 child  
Banksia Centre  
Book on ANBG website**

The ACT Herpetological Association invites kids and carers to get up close and enjoy live displays of snakes, lizards, frogs, turtles, crocodiles and more.

### Butterfly Walks

**Sunday 18 January  
10:30 am to 12:00 pm or  
1:30 to 3:00 pm  
\$10 (goes to ANBG)  
Bookings essential: [trybooking.com/DGXFX](http://trybooking.com/DGXFX) (numbers are limited)**

In summer we see not only how colourful butterflies are when they fly, but also how well camouflaged they are when resting on logs or rocks.

Join our local expert Dr Suzi Bond on a special walk to hunt for Imperial Jezebels, Australian Painted Ladies, Common Brown butterflies and others. See and hear about butterflies and the plants they like in the ANBG.

Meet: Outside the Visitor Centre.  
Bring: Binoculars, water, snacks.  
Wear: Sturdy walking gear, including hat and stout shoes.

Enquiries: [events@friendsanbg.org.au](mailto:events@friendsanbg.org.au)

Cilla Chapman



Linda Swift

Bonsai Cider Gum, *Eucalyptus gunnii*.

## Bonsai Exhibition 2026

**21–22 February**

**9.30 am – 4.00 pm**

**\$5 adults, \$3 concession, under**

**12 years free**

**Crosbie Morrison room and  
theatrette**

Have you ever wondered whether Australian plants make good bonsai? Well, bonsai artists think they do! This annual exhibition showcases the best of Australian bonsai from the local Canberra Bonsai Society. Banksia's will be a special feature this year, along with many other Australian plants with over 40 bonsai on display. Demonstrations will be held at 11.00 am and 2.00 pm.

## Growing Friends Autumn 2026 Native Plant Sale

**Saturday 14 March**

**9.00 – 11.30 am (unless sold out  
earlier)**

**Banksia Centre Carpark**

There will be hundreds of plants to choose from at the next Growing Friends plant sale: grasses, groundcovers, small and large shrubs. All plants are sourced from within the Gardens, and cost only \$6 a pot.

Sales by card only. All proceeds go to the Friends to support the Gardens.

A full list of plants will be available on the Friends website closer to the sale.

## Exhibitions

**Visitor Centre Gallery**

**Open Daily 9.30 am – 4.30 pm**

**Free**

**28 November – 15 December 2025**

**Illuminate 2025**

The Friends Photographic Group exhibition will feature plant portraits, close-ups of flowers, birds and insects, intimate landscapes within the Gardens and fauna from our local region.

All photographs exhibited are for sale and given the exhibition's timing they make great Christmas presents. Other items for sale include unframed prints, cards, tote bags, fridge magnets and specialty calendars by individual members.

**17 December 2025 – 11 January 2026**

**Hidden realm: The unseen world of fungi**

Unnoticed but indispensable, fungi form the foundation of resilient ecosystems. *Hidden Realm* by Networks Australia is a textile exhibition that reveals the unseen world of fungi: their microscopic structures, symbiotic partnerships and role in nutrient cycling, highlighting their critical function in sustaining soil, plants and life itself.

**14 January – 8 February 2026**

**Postcard from Black Mountain by Morgyn Phillips**

Black Mountain is the inspiration for this exhibition of postcard-sized images featuring the landscapes, slopes, tracks, flora and fauna found there. Why postcards? Why Black Mountain? Historically, postcards were collected as souvenirs of a special place and the sender shared special moments through a message. In my imagination and drawings, I am sending an affectionate message to the mountain and in reply the mountain is reminding me of its fragility and the need to protect its natural wonders despite being in the middle of a city.

**11 February – 8 March 2026**

**Flora to finery: Paintings and jewellery**

Four Canberra-based artists, two painters and two jewellery makers, have been coming to the ABNG for decades and have seen it transformed from Black Mountain bush and dry gully to a microcosm of the Australian landscape which features a wondrous rainforest at the entry to the Gardens.

# Thursday Talks

February to April 2026

One hour talks are held at 12.30 pm every Thursday from February to November in the ANBG Theatrette. We welcome donations by gold coins, notes or electronically. The Friends use the donations received to support Gardens programs and development and thank all those who have donated. It is a good idea to reserve a seat at the talks that you wish to attend; talks can book out very quickly. The booking link is on the [friendsanbg.org.au/calendar](https://www.friendsanbg.org.au/calendar) entry for the talk. Bookings can be made about 30 days in advance of the Wednesday night before the talk.

The Friends of the ANBG thank the speakers who volunteer their time and talents to further the knowledge of all attending events in the Gardens. Some summaries or PowerPoint presentations of talks are available from the ANBG library. Please direct queries to [talks@friendsanbg.org.au](mailto:talks@friendsanbg.org.au)

## Bruce Lindenmayer Memorial Lecture

Thursday 5 February, 6.00 pm

Check Friends website for venue details

**Distinguished Professor David Lindenmayer**

**Reimagining fire in the land of fire**

Australia is the most fire-prone continent on Earth. The relationship between fire, fire management, fire risks and biodiversity is complex and often very poorly understood by the vast majority of Australians. This talk discusses many new insights into the ecology and management of wildfire and other kinds of fire in Australian landscapes. It charts a new path towards better understanding fire and its management in the land of fire.



## February

12 February

**Roger Farrow**

**Back from the brink or a resilient survivor: The case of Key's Matchstick Grasshopper, *Keyacris scurra***

Roger, an unretired CSIRO entomologist interested in native plant ecology, will tell a tale of mystery and suspense involving two geneticists, some cemeteries, a taxonomist, a survey, sheep, habitat loss, citizen scientists and a sceptic.



Craig Moritz

19 February

**Craig Moritz**

**Discovery diversity across Australia's tropics**

Evolutionary biologist Craig Moritz has surveyed animal density across Australia's vast monsoonal tropics and found that we have massively underestimated its true species diversity. This matters for science, conservation and informing ecological management, especially in areas owned and managed by our first peoples.

Surveys suggest that species diversity in Australia's monsoonal tropics has been underestimated.

26 February

**Chris Mobbs**

**Bragg Street Park, Hackett- Increasing biodiversity through water harvesting**

Residents near a neighbourhood park in Hackett came together to solve a drainage problem. They ended up creating an urban oasis with a diversity of native plants, five frog species and a bearded dragon.

**March**

5 March

**Bernadette Duncan**

**Indigenous plant names and tea tasting**

Kamilaroi woman Bernadette Duncan works with her community bringing people to language and knowledge through local teas. Taste the teas as Bernadette leads a talk about using native plants for teas and bush medicine.

Kim Pullen



Kristie Gould



Bruno Ferronato



Left: Bogs and fens create habitat for fauna, including dragonflies. Above: One of three sites for rehabilitation on Ngunnawal country. Above right: Bruno Ferronato is monitoring turtles in Canberra.

**12 March**

**Kim Pullen**

**More treasures: Insects in fens and bogs**

Kim will discuss bogs and fens as an insect habitat, the variety of ecological niches that insects occupy and some threats to the fauna. She will give some local examples of the fauna of this habitat.

**19 March**

**Kristie Gould**

**Conserving Canberra: Healing country through restoration'**

Kristie works with Ngunnawal Cultural Advisors, specialised bush regenerators, a spatial ecologist and volunteers to improve restoration of bush through development of spatial planning tools, delivering on-ground work at three key sites.

Left: Latham's Snipe. Right: Some native bonsai trees on display in an exhibition.



Lori Gould

**26 March**

**Lori Gould**

**Movement and behaviour of Latham's Snipe at Jerrabomberra Wetlands: The results are in**

Lori will present the findings of the tracking research she has carried out over the past three years at Jerrabomberra Wetlands as part of the Latham's Snipe Project. They provide an exciting insight into the behaviour of Snipe during their non-breeding season in Canberra.

**April**

**2 April**

**Linda Swift**

**Australian plants as bonsai**

Linda is the manager of the Canberra Bonsai Society's *Australian Plants as Bonsai* exhibition, *The Secret to Looking Old*, at the ANBG in February 2026. She will share some tips and techniques for creating a mature aged-looking bonsai tree, illustrated with images from the exhibition.



Linda Swift

**9 April**

**Bruno Ferronato**

**TurtleWatch ACT: Citizen-science, monitoring and conservation of turtles in Canberra**

Bruno will talk about the biology of Eastern Long-necked Turtles, their adaptations to flood-dry cycles in Australia, their active life in suburban areas, and the recent findings on the turtle monitoring program in Canberra.

**16 April**

See website for details.

**23 April**

**Leo Joseph**

**12 birds, 3 books, 5 cities and 3 continents: An ornithological life not yet finished**

Leo recently retired as Director of the Australian National Wildlife Collection of the CSIRO. He will look back on his travels and study of birds and their evolution in Australia and South America.



*Friends* of the  
Australian National  
Botanic Gardens

*Helping The Gardens Grow*