

# FRIENDS OF THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL BOTANIC GARDENS INC

## 20<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting, 10 February 2009

### President's Report

I will start this year's report with the same topic I started last year's, that is, the Friends' concern about resourcing of the Botanic Gardens. Over the past 12 months, Friends' Council has continued its campaign to demonstrate to government the very high level of public support for the Botanic Gardens and the need for increased funding. In April 2008, members of Council's Executive met with the Minister's environment advisor. In August, Executive members met with senior officers of Parks Australia. In October a public forum on *The Future of the Australian National Botanic Gardens* was convened by Senator Kate Lundy with the support of the Friends and the Australian Native Plant Society, Canberra Region (ANPS). The Forum was attended by over 130 people. In November Council and ANPS members met with the Minister and Senator Lundy to inform the Minister of the Forum and its outcomes. The main points discussed were the Gardens' need for increased resources, reinstatement of an expert advisory body and greater statutory independence for the Gardens. We will be talking with Senator Lundy about a proposed second Forum, focusing on the role of the ANBG as a national institution and in tourism and education.

I now turn to the details of other aspects of the Friends' year.

**Activities Sub-committee:** Warwick Wright and his team put together another wonderful program of lunchtime talks this year. Talks were held every Thursday from the start of February until the end of November. One talk last October, by Senator Bob Brown, was held in the Burbidge Amphitheatre to cope with a large audience. The 2009 season commenced last week with an over-capacity audience in the Theatre for a talk by Canberra gardening identity and ABC TV weather presenter Mark Carmody. Warwick and the sub-committee are to be congratulated and thanked for putting together a highly informative, stimulating and enjoyable program.

**Bernard Fennessy What's in a Name Award:** This event was held for the second time in 2008. It honours the memory of our late colleague Bernard and his contribution to the Botanic Gardens, especially the volunteer guide program. The winning entry, by John Turnbull, was published in the July Newsletter and two other excellent entries were published during the year. We thank Professor Ralph Elliott for judging the entries and Brendan Lepschi for his advice on technical details. Doreen Bowdery helped with administrative matters and we thank her. Bernard is also remembered at the annual Bernard Fennessy Memorial Lecture held in early August. The guest speaker in 2008 was Dr Brian Cooke, a one-time professional colleague of Bernard.

**Botanic Art Groups:** The Art Groups' first exhibition of work was held in the Visitor Centre Gallery in April 2008, opened by the Federal Member for Canberra, Annette Ellis. The exhibition was highly successful. It attracted large numbers of visitors to the gallery. Many works were sold, with a commission on sales going to the Friends. Robin McKeown convenes the groups and she and all the members are to be congratulated on a very fine exhibition. A second exhibition will be held in 2009, from 1 to 14 April, again in the Visitor Centre Gallery.

**Botanical Resource Centre:** The Centre was opened in May 2008 by our Patron, Mrs Marlena Jeffery. The Centre is located in the Ellis Rowan Building, adjacent to the Friends' Lounge, and consists of the Public Reference Herbarium, computers, reference books and a microscope. The Friends funded much of the cost of setting up the Centre. Some 20 Friends have trained as facilitators to help members of the public identify plants of the ACT and southern NSW. Facilitators attend the Centre at advertised hours and meet regularly to develop their botanical skills.

**Financial Support for the Gardens:** In last year's report I expressed some frustration that few opportunities had arisen in the last couple of years for the Friends to fund projects in the Gardens. During 2008 the Projects sub-committee, convened by David Coutts, has worked with Gardens' staff to identify a number of projects which Council has agreed to fund. They are:

- Spring flower display - \$7,000. This is now complete.

- Lichen website – \$15,000. This is a proposal from the Cryptogam Herbarium, along the lines of the Bryophyte website which the Friends' funded. The work will be done over the next 6 months or so.
- Extension of the Rainforest Gully fogging system - \$15,000. Council has agreed, but work is yet to commence.
- The Friends agreed to support an application to the Australian Research Council for funds to enable the Gardens, in partnership with the ANU and the Friends, to carry out scientific research into Australian plant conservation, specifically seed banking, and how Australian alpine plant species can be expected to respond to predicted climate change. If successful, the Friends will provide \$22,000 a year for 3 years, plus volunteer support valued at a similar amount. The ANBG will provide significant in-kind support. The funding sought from the ARC is \$110,000 a year for 3 years. We expect to know within the next few months if the application is successful. If it is, there will be opportunities for members of the Friends to be involved in field and laboratory work. A long-lasting outcome will be an alpine garden in the ANBG to display and interpret the results of the research.
- Other projects which have been given in-principle support and are being further developed are signage for plants featured in *In Flower this Week*, and production of a souvenir brochure and DVD on the Gardens.

**Growing Friends:** The main purpose of the Growing Friends is to learn techniques of plant propagation. In the process they produce plants for sale to the public and so raise funds for the Friends. In 2008 two very successful plant sales were held which, in total, raised nearly \$10,000. Friends Council provided funds to the Growing Friends to replace damaged and worn shadecloth and further develop their working area. Andy Rawlinson provided valuable technical support for which the Growing Friends are very grateful.

**Guides:** A highly successful training course for 18 new guides was run in July and August 2008. The selection process and the course itself was run by Guides' Convener Don Beer and existing guides. This was a major undertaking and we are very grateful to Don and his colleagues for their work. The graduates of this course are now leading daily guided walks in the Gardens and making a very positive contribution to visitor enjoyment.

There is some concern that guide numbers continue to fall, and thought will be given to the need for another training course this year or next.

Guides continue to conduct 2 guided walks every day, with an additional early morning walk in January and February. During Floriade an extra *Spring Flower* walk was run every day. No other Australian botanic garden provides anything near this level of visitor service. We sincerely thank and congratulate our guides for their enthusiasm and commitment.

**Membership:** We now have 1520 members, which is close to a 10% increase on the number at this time last year. The membership team of Barbara Scott (Membership Secretary) and Lesley Harland, with IT support from Les Fielke, have further developed the membership database this year. The introduction of optional 2 and 5 year terms for membership has made the membership renewal mailing process more complicated. For that reason, the mailing was done by the team in 2008 rather than by mailing house. We thank them for their work.

Les Fielke has stepped down from Council at this AGM, but has kindly offered to continue providing IT support for both membership and website functions. We thank him for his past work and will gratefully accept his offer for continued help.

**Newsletter:** The Newsletter Sub-committee of Margaret Clarke, Barbara Podger and Anne Rawson produced 3 high-quality newsletters in 2008. Improvements included production of the *What's On* section in full colour, use of recycled paper, new printers to give better print quality and producing a digital version of the Newsletter for the website. The Subcommittee needs an additional person with desktop publishing experience to provide back up. If anyone can help, please contact Barbara Podger.

**Photographic Competition:** The 12<sup>th</sup> Friends' photo competition for ACT and region schools and colleges was held in 2008. The number and quality of entries was as good or better than in previous years. This year the entries were initially hung for 3 weeks in the Visitor Centre gallery, after which the winning entries were moved to the foyer of the Administration Building for 2 months. The Friends regard the photo competition as a way to attract young people to the Gardens and at the same time encourage the development of their artistic skills. We are very grateful to Barry Brown and Denise Ferris for judging the competition again in 2008, and to Shirley McKeown for her painstaking work running the project for the Friends.

**Social Events Sub-committee:** Convened by Louise Muir, this group looks after the Friends responsibilities for a range of social activities in the Gardens. The most significant of these is summer concerts. In my report to the last AGM I expressed Council's disappointment that Gardens' management had reduced the length of the 2008 summer concert season to just four evenings. We pushed strongly for the 2009 season to be lengthened and are delighted that management agreed to an 8-concert season. The season was highly successful. Audiences were very large, with the greatest being well over 4000 people and many nights over 2000. The net amount raised by the Friends was over \$14,000 which will be directed to financial support of the Gardens. While the financial result is very pleasing, our greatest satisfaction is in attracting such large numbers of people to the Gardens.

Other social activities during 2008 included:

- The Twilight Dinner in February, with guest speaker Bill Bachman. The theme for the evening was Central and Northern Australia.
- Breakfast with the Birds in September, which again was booked out.
- Guided tours of the Canberra International Arboretum and Gardens.
- A visit to Government House in July 2008 in which our Patron, Mrs Marlena Jeffery, gave a guided tour of the building and gardens.
- Graze in the Gardens was held in late November and, for the second year in succession, it coincided with wet weather and had to be moved indoors. The Social Committee will be looking at possible alternatives to this event.

**Website:** During the last year Shirley McKeown, our website designer and administrator, made significant design improvements to the website aimed at making it easier for users to find their way around the site. Also, with the agreement of Gardens' management, the website was moved from the Department of Environment server onto a commercial server. The advantage of this is that the website can be updated more or less immediately. We are very grateful to Gardens' staff, especially Murray Fagg, for help with website updates over many years. We thank Shirley for her work on the redesign and site transfer, and Les Fielke for his expert IT help.

In closing, I once again thank all members of Council and many other Friends who have provided help, counsel, friendship and support during the last 12 months. Countless hours of volunteer time are provided in support of the Gardens by Friends who are committed to supporting and promoting this institution as one the world's major botanic gardens and communicating their enthusiasm for Australian plants. And, as always, the dedication, professionalism and enthusiasm of Gardens' staff is a constant support for the Friends.

Alan Munns

10 February 2009