

FRIENDS OF THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL BOTANIC GARDENS INC

21st Annual General Meeting, 4 February 2010

President's Report

The Friends of the Australian National Botanic Gardens was inaugurated on the 14th October 1990, when over 100 people attended a public meeting. Later this year we will celebrate the 20th anniversary of that event. The Friends' Constitution which emerged from those early meetings includes, as one of our aims, that we will *promote the continued development of the Gardens*. I doubt whether those who wrote the Constitution envisaged that those words *promote the ... development* would involve the kind and extent of political lobbying that has become necessary, 20 years later, to try to convince government of the Gardens' need for support and funding.

Last year Council members met with Peter Cochrane (Director of National Parks) and Peter Taylor (Assistant Secretary, Parks South). We greeted the Minister, Peter Garrett, on two visits he made to the Gardens. We engaged with the media on many occasions. We supported and participated in a second public forum on the future of the Gardens, again hosted by Senator Kate Lundy.

Positive developments

There were some positive and very welcome developments this year. In October 2009 it was announced that the Gardens would become part of a new science-based branch within Parks Australia. Dr Judy West was appointed to head that branch and also became Executive Director of the Gardens. The Friends think this is a very positive development, which will give the Gardens the kind of senior executive representation within Parks Australia that it has not had for many years. We know Judy well from her many years as Director of the Centre for Plant Biodiversity Research and look forward to working closely with her. We have thanked Anne Duncan, the previous Director, for her work for the Gardens and wished her well for the future.

Another very welcome development was the inauguration by the Minister, in December 2009, of the project to enable lake water to be used within the Gardens. We understand that construction will start within a few weeks and lake water will be used within the Gardens next summer. This will be a major boost for the Gardens, and will enable the living collection to recover from years of drought and water restrictions. In saying this, I'd like to especially thank the Gardens' horticultural staff whose skills and dedication have nursed the living collection through the long dry years.

We also welcomed the announcement that, during this 40th anniversary year of the Gardens, work will start on remediation of the old nursery site. This site, at the very heart of the Gardens, has been an eyesore since the nursery moved to its new buildings, although recently installed explanatory signs have explained what is happening. We would have preferred full-scale redevelopment of the site, but appreciate that a start is being made.

Gardens' Management Plan and Friends' Strategic Plan

During the year the Friends were very actively engaged in the process of preparing a new management plan for the Gardens. Many of our members attended consultation sessions and Council developed and submitted our ideas about what the plan should contain. The draft Management Plan will be released for public comment shortly. Council will be responding on behalf of the Friends. In addition, we strongly encourage all members to closely examine the draft Plan and submit comments individually.

Also during the year we looked at our own Strategic Plan, as we normally do each year or two. We will soon have an updated draft Plan for consultation with members.

Membership

Our membership numbers have held up well this year. We now have 1570 members, a small increase on the number I reported last year. We thank Barbara Scott and Lesley Harland for their conscientious work again this year, and thank Les Fielke for computer support.

I now turn to details of the Friends activities for the last year.

Wattle Day and Exhibition

Our highest profile event this year was on 1 September to celebrate Wattle Day and the opening of the Wattle Exhibition. This event marked the 21st anniversary of the proclamation of Golden Wattle as the national floral emblem. Sir William Deane and Lady Deane, and Environment Minister Peter Garrett, were our guests and Sir William opened the exhibition. We are very grateful to Pat and Warwick Wright who put an enormous amount of time and effort into developing the exhibition.

Summer concerts

An annual high-profile event is the ever-popular summer concert series. This year the Gardens' budget for public programs was greatly reduced and the concerts only went ahead because the Friends agreed to use concert takings to pay for costs the Gardens had previously covered, mainly advertising. That is in addition to paying for bands and the sound system from takings, as has always been done. The weather was not kind to us and 2 concerts had to be cancelled. Consequently, the amount going into Friends' funds from the concerts this year will be only around \$5000, compared with \$14,000 last year. Nevertheless, Council took the view that fund raising is not the sole or indeed the main reason why we support the summer concerts, and we were willing to forego some income to ensure the season went ahead. Audiences were large and very appreciative.

Financial support for the Gardens

In my report last year I expressed some frustration about limited opportunities for the Friends to fund projects within the Gardens in 2008. Those frustrations continued in 2009, exemplified by the Friends agreeing to a Gardens' request for nearly \$20,000 to enable a spring flower display to be mounted for a second year, only to find that the Gardens was unable to take up the offer and the display did not happen. We are hopeful that this kind of problem will not recur.

Projects which we funded or agreed to fund during 2009 are:

- Alpine research project, roughly \$22,000 a year for 3 years. This is a joint project between the ANU, ANBG and Friends to research the effects of climate change on Australian alpine flora. It has attracted funding by the Australian Research Council of \$253,000. The Friends, in addition to providing cash inputs, will encourage members to provide voluntary support with field work and laboratory work.
- Extension to the rainforest gully fogging system, \$14,000 – the work is complete and a 'launching event' will be held soon;
- Souvenir booklet, \$8,000. The Newsletter subcommittee have almost completed the process of writing and designing a 40-page full-colour booklet which will be on sale in the Botanic Bookshop within the next few months. Most of the expenditure will be recovered from sales.
- A photographic DVD *Impressions of a Year in the Gardens* was produced by Sheila and Peter Cudmore for the Friends. More than 100 copies have sold, with proceeds to the Friends. We thank Sheila and Peter for their work.
- An illustrated brochure on the birds of the ANBG is now in production, for an estimated cost of around \$6,000. Original artwork has been commissioned. Friends' members Louise Muir and Jenny Bounds are leading the work. The brochure should be available for release within the next few months.

Last year I mentioned that we were funding a website on the lichens of Australia, proposed and developed by the Cryptogam Herbarium. This work is well advanced. The funding, of about \$15,000, will now be covered by the Public Fund rather than through the Friends project system.

The Friends Projects Subcommittee is working with Gardens' management to reintroduce a formalized system of regular requests to, and funding by, the Friends of projects within the Gardens. We hope that such a system will be in place by mid-year 2010.

Guides

Volunteer guides led 2 scheduled walks every day and a number of booked walks. Those who were new guides at this time last year are now seasoned veterans, and we are contemplating another intake of new guides this year. Don Beer has again offered to look after that process, helped by a number of existing guides and with staff support. The guides are, in a very real sense, the *public face of the Gardens*. Council tends to call on the guides for help in a variety of tasks in addition to guiding, and that help is always willingly provided. We are enormously grateful.

Growing Friends

Up to 30 members of the Growing Friends attended monthly meetings during 2009 to learn more about native plants and propagation techniques. Plants they produced were sold at 2 plant sales, which added around \$8600 to Friends' funds.

Other Friends' activities

Time and space prevent me going into details of a range of other Friends' activities that operated very successfully this year. They include lunchtime talks, two visits to the gardens of Parliament House, the Botanic Art Groups who held a very successful exhibition, facilitators for the Botanical Resource Centre, the Newsletter team which produced 3 informative and attractive editions, the Bernard Fennessy *What's in a Name* Award, the schools photographic competition, *Breakfast with the Birds*, a twilight dinner and the website. We are enormously grateful to all those who have helped make these activities so successful.

Concluding thanks

A little earlier I singled out Gardens' horticultural staff to thank them for their skills and dedication. I'd like to broaden this to include all Gardens' staff who have willingly helped the Friends throughout the year. We admire your professionalism and commitment to the Gardens and we value your support.

To my Council colleagues and all those who have helped with Friends' ventures, I express my personal thanks for your hard work, enthusiasm, and friendship throughout the year.

I would like to especially mention and thank two Council colleagues who are not re-nominating at this AGM. Louise Muir has been a member of Council for 4 years and has convened the Social Events Committee during that time, has been responsible for *Breakfast with the Birds* and been an active guide. We thank Louise for all she has achieved and are grateful she will continue to be involved 'from the backbench'.

Bev Fisher has decided to stand down after 16 years as Treasurer. For much of that time, and earlier, she was also heavily involved in organising social events for the Friends, including summer concerts and Grazing in the Gardens. In recent years Bev has been the keeper of the corporate memory for the Friends – an important role and one we will miss. This is truly the end of an era with Bev's departure, although she will continue as a Trustee and Treasurer of the Friends' Public Fund Management Committee. We thank Bev for the enormous contribution she has made to the Friends over so many years, and extend to her and Ron our very best wishes for the future.

And finally, it seems to me that a sign of a healthy community organisation is how readily members come forward to take on new tasks when long-serving members stand down. On that score, the Friends of the Gardens is in excellent health.

Alan Munns

4 February 2010