

FRIENDS OF THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL BOTANIC GARDENS INC

23rd Annual General Meeting, 3 November 2011

President's Report

I am very pleased to be able to present my first report as President of the Friends. While it has certainly taken a fair bit of my time on occasions I am happy to report that has almost entirely been in a spirit of cooperation and willing help by a large number of the Friends and the staff of ANBG.

The Friends of ANBG is a special group that I feel plays an important role at this vital national institution. I understand that we are the largest Friends group at any Australian Botanic Gardens. We are a totally voluntary group and when you look at what we do I think that is a great achievement. It means that the money we raise and our in kind contributions go almost totally to support the Gardens.

This AGM is the second in 2011, which is a bit unusual. However it became necessary following a change to our constitution at a Special General Meeting held on 21 June 2011. This was necessary to bring the financial years of the Friends and the Public Fund into line, as required by the Office of Regulatory Services. I hope we can return to one General Meeting per year in the future.

Looking at what the Friends have done during the past 9 months I am quite proud of what we have achieved. The 4th Botanic Art Exhibition was launched on 12 April by the member for Fraser, Dr Andrew Leigh. There were over 100 paintings in this year's exhibition and a very high standard was set.

One of the key objectives of the Friends is to raise money to support projects in the Gardens that will enhance visitor experience and expand the collection and the way it is used. One arm of the Friends funding efforts is the Public Fund, a tax deductible opportunity to give money to the Gardens through the Friends. The Fund was particularly active in 2011, supporting two new projects that meet the key criterion for the Fund – environmental benefit. On 10 March the lichen website was launched at an event involving Professor Jack Elix, Dr Judy West and Heino Lepp, who put the site together. This was followed on 9 May by a launch of the Environmental Monitoring Stations by Dr Janette Lindesay, Associate Professor of Climatology at the ANU. There are two stations, one in the rainforest gully and the other in the eucalypt woodland, just off the main path. There is also a kiosk in the VIC where the information from both stations can be viewed. Not only does this project provide an interesting addition for visitors, especially school children through the education centre, but it will provide a long term database of key environmental information to assist research in the Gardens. I want to record my thanks to Bev Fisher, who was instrumental in establishing the Public Fund. Bev Stood down from the Management Committee at their meeting on 25 October.

The 15th Friends Schools Photographic Competition was opened on 22 October. The number of entries and the quality of the Photographs was up this year and the exhibition is currently on show in the VIC until 27 November. I see this as one way the Friends are working to engage young people more fully with native plants and the gardens and we want to explore additional ways of doing this. Our thanks go to Shirley McKeown and to Carol Summerhayes who stepped in to help Shirley this year.

The Friends cooperated with the Gardens to mount the display at Floriade this year and from all reports it was a most successful effort. The guides provided their wattle walks and additional walks through the Floriade period. I understand the wattle walks were particularly well patronised and our thanks go to all the guides who participated. Breakfast with the birds was again provided over the Floriade period and that was very popular as always. Sincere thanks go to Louise Muir and all the volunteers who helped with Breakfast with the Birds.

We were greatly honoured that His Excellency Michael Bryce, AM AE agreed to become the Patron of the Friends from 28 May. We have had a long association with Government House that has been very positive for the Friends and the Gardens. Mr Bryce's first official duty as Patron took place just before this AGM when he launched the most impressive brochure on the birds of the gardens. I also want to thank Marlena Jeffery most sincerely for her support while she was Patron and am very happy to tell you that Marlena has agreed to stay involved as the Vice Patron of the Friends. Many of you would have been at the launch of the bird brochure today and I hope you will agree that it is a marvellous addition to the information available to visitors to the Gardens. Our sincere thanks to Louise Muir and Jenny Bounds for managing this project and particularly to the artist, Frances McMahon, for her marvellous work.

The Growing Friends have continued their excellent contribution to the gardens, with a plant sale in April and a further sale coming up in November. The Botanical Resource Centre was supported by a dedicated band of explainers and broadened its activities during the year with monthly talks by experts on various aspects of taxonomy and related subjects. During the year the Friends established a photographic group, which commenced in April this year. Like all new ventures it has taken a little while to find its feet but I am very hopeful that it will become a firm part of what the Friends can offer at the Gardens. My thanks to Sheila Cudmore, who acted as convenor for the first period but has now stepped down due to other pressures.

It is always sad to know that a number of Friends have passed on during the year. I don't want to try to name all those who have passed on as I would be sure to miss someone but just to say that the Friends Council and members are always moved when this happens. I must, however, mention Alison McKenzie, who passed away earlier in the year. Alison was the organiser of the guides

roster when I first became involved with the Friends in 2002 and immediately I was struck by her friendly (but firm) approach and her great involvement in many aspects of the Gardens. I took on organizing booked walks for the guides for a couple of years and Alison was always one who would put herself out to help. The bird brochure just released has been dedicated to Alison, who was a keen bird watcher.

Looking to the coming year I am confident we can build further on the successes of 2011. A key element and challenge will be working with the Gardens to achieve the key priorities identified in the new Management Plan for the Gardens, to be released for public comment on 23 November. A special briefing for the Friends will be given by the Executive Director of the Gardens at an extra Thursday lunchtime talk on 1 December. This new Plan has been a very long time coming but I am hopeful it will contain many exciting ideas that the Friends can engage with. Our relationship with Gardens management and staff is excellent at the moment and to build on this the Friends have indicated they want to see the establishment of an advisory body, to give some wider input into decision making, especially as the elements of the new Plan are addressed. There will be a special Thursday lunchtime talk on 1 December by Dr Judy West on the new Management Plan.

There are only two positions on Council up for election at this meeting. One of those is Treasurer and I am pleased to note that Marion Jones has agreed to stand again. The other position is that filled by Don Beer, who is standing down after 4 years on Council. Don has made a real and meaningful contribution to the Council and the Friends through his role with the guides. He will be missed and I pass on my most sincere thanks and that of all Council members.

Our membership continues to grow and I put the number at the end of September at 1765, compared to 1625 at the time of the last AGM in February. The membership team of Barbara Scott, Lesley Harland and Les Fielke continue to do an amazing job to keep our membership system working very efficiently on a totally volunteer basis.

Our Newsletter, Fronds, continues to set a high standard and I can only thank most sincerely the team of Barbara Podger, Margaret Clarke and Anne Rawson. Again all this work is totally on a voluntary basis. I would like to remind all Friends that the Newsletter team is always keen to get contributions.

Alan Munns has been coordinating a review of our website and the input to that review of David More has been greatly appreciated. The process is well advanced and I am hopeful that we will have a new site up and running not far into 2012. Our thanks go to Shirley Mckeown for her continuing role as website manager.

Alan Munns has also steered the Projects Group through 2011. This group is key to identifying the projects to be funded by the Friends. Projects that are approved in principle and well advanced are a set of reusable banners for the Friends to be used for a variety of events, a people mover for the Gardens, lighting in the rainforest gully and a Eucalypt Discovery walk. Moves are also under way to re-establish a group to update a Public Art program and to identify how the Friends can help with the new Red Centre garden. The third year of the alpine project is now underway and the Friends will make their final contribution of \$22000 shortly.

The Thursday talks program has continued to be a major drawcard for the Gardens and our thanks go to Warwick Wright for his terrific effort to put this program together. Warwick has decided to stand down from organising the talks at the end of 2011 and we cannot thank him enough for what he has done to build this program. A small group has been formed to organise the talks for 2012 and they are in the process of finalising the first group of talks, which will be advertised in the next Fronds. Lesley Jackman is convening that group and I am sure she would be very happy to have any suggestions about speakers.

One thing I do want to look at in the coming year is how better to tap in to the skills, experience and enthusiasm of our members. There is plenty to do but we don't always make the connection between people who put their hand up in a general way and the opportunities to be directly involved.

In the near future we have our event "Death in the Gardens" to be held on 9 and 10 November. I think all tickets may have gone by now but if you are interested see Barbara Podger can better inform you about that. I am going and I don't quite know what to expect, which is exciting. The summer concerts program is also well advanced and will be held on the four weekends in January. There will be more information in the next issue of Fronds that you should get in early December. I can only say that the Friends and the gardens are now working very well together on the concerts and it should be a great success this year. This is one thing we will need volunteers for (bucket donation collectors, children table etc) so let us know if you can do that.

One of the problems with a report like this is that one can't name all those who have contributed to the success of the Friends in the past year. I can only most sincerely thank everyone. This job of President is challenging but satisfying but only possible with the active support of so many people. That is especially true of the Council members, all of whom have taken on specific responsibilities, and those who convene the various groups.

David Coutts
3 November 2011