



The Friends of The Australian Arid Lands Botanic Garden *Port Augusta Incorporated* Newsletter February 2010

News from the President

Following our last meeting for 2009 in November, the Friends celebrated 25 years of service in promoting the concept of the AALBG, fund raising, voluntary work and provision of expertise, at the annual Friends' Christmas dinner, held again at the Bluebush Cafe. It was a very pleasant evening, and thanks to Chris Nayda in particular for helping with the organisation. After the dinner our 25 years were celebrated with a decorated cake and photos were taken which included Friends who were foundation members and were able to attend the dinner. It was wonderful to see several foundation members and former office holders at the 25 year celebration.

As President and founder of the Garden I gave an impromptu talk on the role and activities of the Friends group since our formation in 1984, as I am sure newer Friends and Garden employees and senior Council personnel have little knowledge on the formation of the Garden, its early years, and the critical role played by the Friends. Although invited, no senior council personnel or Garden staff were able to attend the dinner. My impromptu talk covered the earlier years of the Friends in particular and made various comments and observations.

In 1981 I recommended to Port Augusta Council that consideration be given to establishing a botanic garden featuring arid zone plants. At the time I was the Superintendent of Parks and Gardens, a role I held for 15 years, having set up and established the Parks & Gardens Department for the Port Augusta City Council in 1975. Council allowed me to investigate the botanic garden proposal but provided no support and there was minimal interest in the concept at the time. The local Garden Club was supportive as were some individuals including some quite influential people and I promoted the garden concept through the media, by writing to many people and organisations, magazine articles and so on but there was not much progress and little council interest in the first few years.

In 1984 I called a public meeting to investigate forming a friends group for the proposed garden. It was very well attended and members of the recently formed Friends of the Botanic Gardens of Adelaide addressed the meeting, explained their role and activities and offered help and advice. Those present agreed to form a Friends group for the proposed garden at Port Augusta, which was based on the Friends of the Botanic Gardens of Adelaide with some obvious differences – the main one being that we were a friends group of a concept, a garden that did not yet exist!

'Friends' from the original committee of the FAALBG watching Fay Poole cutting the 25th birthday cake and John Zwar President standing behind her. Other past Committee members from left to right: Bruce Leane, Gwen Leane, Margaret Larson, Allan Murphy, Ursula Meese, Dennis Dobson, Wally Klau and Cam Cap.



Interestingly ours was one of the first Friends of a botanic garden in Australia, established before Friends groups of some of the major botanic gardens in Australia. Our inaugural Secretary, Pauline Schiller undertook to have our new group "incorporated" and the new committee set about fund raising, promoting and lobbying council and members of parliament for the garden and arranging regular meetings with progress reports on the proposed garden and with appropriate guest speakers. Petitions were distributed throughout northern SA and almost 30,000 signatures collected for both state and federal parliaments supporting the establishment of an arid lands botanic garden at Port Augusta. Promotional talks and displays were provided whenever there was an opportunity.

Council gradually became more interested in the proposal and a site was identified and secured for the Garden. Council formed an Advisory Group which included Friends representatives, a representative of the Botanic Garden of Adelaide (usually the Director – Dr Brian Morley at the time), environmentalist Dr Reg Sprigg of Arkaroola, and others. Meetings were held sporadically but gradually progress was made. Our inaugural Treasurer, Wally Schiller managed our finances well and gradually our bank balance grew. The most significant early injection of funds was a \$10,000 donation from the Port Augusta Rotary Club which helped establish the Friends on a firm financial footing. Memberships and donations boosted our funds along with income from fund raising events and activities. Wally and Pauline Schiller raised a considerable sum at trash and treasure markets over several years selling all sorts of donated items, large and small. We produced post cards and posters for sale. When I moved to Roxby Downs I sold plants at market days with proceeds donated to the Friends.

With a site selected, the Friends were able to provide base funding for a government grant employing long term unemployed people to clean up the site, remove rubbish, debris and weed growth. Once a master plan was developed (the first one funded with a small state government grant) the Friends provided funds for vermin proof boundary fencing which was installed by TAFE Pastoral students for practical experience.

Friends volunteers mounted a number of seed and plant collecting expeditions to various arid regions of SA (with appropriate permits) and several Friends propagated plants at home using this seed of known provenance, collected in the wild and planted them in the garden forming initial shelter belt plantings and the garden around the tourist lookout just off the Stuart Highway, looking over the Garden site.

(continued on page 4)

Next Meeting

NEXT MEETING OF THE FRIENDS AALBG

Saturday 20th February 2010

1pm at the Conference room of the AALBG

GUEST SPEAKERS WILL BE:

1. Chris Nayda with a short slide show of her trip to Hobart for the Australasian Botanic Garden Tour Guides Conference
2. Peter and Ronda Hall with some wonderful slides of plants and scenery taken on their trip in 2009 from Darwin south to Tenant Creek and then east to Camooweal just over the Queensland border.

Out and About in the Garden

Our *Acacia pycnantha* The Golden Wattle, Australia's national emblem on our coat of arms has had many visitors to the AALBG commenting on the unexpected white covering on the trunk. Pruinose (a description of the stunning powdery white covering of some tree trunks), is only seen on *Acacia pycnantha* in its 'northern occurrences' in the hot northern areas of its regions. Many visitors observe this difference, with the challenge 'this is not the same as 'our Golden Wattle"' as the same tree in other regions where it grows has a rough dark brown trunk.

The same plant observed at Melrose about one hour drive north-east of Port Augusta in the Flinders Ranges has the usual rough dark brown trunk as also seen in plants in eastern Australia. It is an interesting drive through the Flinders Ranges via the Pichi Richi Pass from Pt Augusta to Quorn observing the 'northern version' of *Acacia pycnantha*. They present a stunning display with their white trunks and masses of golden yellow flowers.

The new courtyard renovations are well under way with the lovely red sand placed around the pathways. Plantings will begin about March when most of the hot weather will be gone. Its certainly looking like the Great Victoria Desert and walking in under the archway the color really hits you. Will make a lovely setting for weddings as the center section has been enlarged with this in mind.

Chris Nayda

PLANTS FLOWERING IN THE GARDEN:

Grevillea huegelii

Eremophila polyclada x *divaricata* [Summertime blue]

Eucalyptus coolibah

Eremophila clavata

Eremophila maculata



Acacia pycnantha at AALBG

At the Nursery

NEW STAFF

We welcome Tania Danylycha to the nursery. She will be working part-time for a while helping Deon Schumann. She still works part-time at SA Arid Lands NRM Board in administration.

Tania and her husband bought a large block of land which is all native bushland in the Pichi Richi Pass about 5 years ago. With a plan from Landcare Australia they are gradually revegetating. This includes clearing boxthorn and many other weeds, taking off all stock, collecting seed and propagating native plants from their land. They can already see an amazing change in the landscape with plants not seen for a long time re-emerging after the rains.

She has been amazed at the wealth of knowledge among the volunteers and staff at the nursery and is really excited about learning more.

Her parents Jenny and Allan Murphy were original members of the Friends of AALBG and participated in the first plantings at AALBG so it is great to have her at the nursery.

Chris Nayda



Boronia crenulata

BORONIA CRENULATA

Most gardeners have at some time tried to grow a *Boronia* in their garden, most times without much luck. If you want one that does very well in Port Augusta's red sand you should try *Boronia crenulata*.

Boronia crenulata grows to about 1m x 1m, has dark green leaves and from August to September is covered with dusky pink flowers about 1.5 cm in diameter. Flowers are four petalled. Once established it will survive by being watered in line with the water restrictions.

Boronia crenulata grows naturally in Western Australia. They can be seen flowering now at the Australian Arid Lands Botanic Garden and have been used in the AridSmart display gardens there.

Peter Hall



Tania Danylycha working at Arid Smart nursery

Dates to Watch

DATES TO WATCH

Laura Folk Fair - 10 & 11 April

ABC Garden Expo - 6-8 March

We are looking for volunteers to help man the stall at the ABC Expo which is being held at the Wayville showgrounds Adelaide. This is a great weekend, lots of fun and you meet many interesting people. A roster will be made to suit peoples requirements.

We also need help to sell plants for a few hours on either day of the Laura Folk Fair.

If you are at all able to help on any of these days please contact: Michael Anlezark at the Arid-Smart nursery on 8641 9118

Bird Walk at Arid Lands Botanic Garden

Seven birders turned up for the first walk of 2010. It promised to be hot so we started at seven o'clock. From the car park, we could see Black Honeyeaters hawking insects above the Sugarwoods towards the Visitor Centre. White-plumed Honeyeaters paused there briefly also. A Nankeen Kestrel perched on a solar-panel designed to deter birds from doing that and allowed a very close look.

The dead trees by the pond at the Visitor Centre had a lovely pair of Mulga Parrots perched in them and a few Crested Pigeons. A pair of Zebra Finches flew in for a quick drink and some House Sparrows and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters made brief visits. There was a small group of White-browed Babbler hopping about in the Eremophila Garden, and more honeyeaters including a White-fronted Honeyeater.

On towards the AridSmart Gardens and a Singing Honeyeater was "sunning", low down in an acacia. There was plenty of 'sun'. The mulgas were seen again and a large flock of Tree Martins chasing insects towards the railway line. It was getting really hot. A Wedgebill was calling but declined to come out in the heat again after a brief "show".

We drove out to the Flinders Lookout and saw Rainbow Bee-eaters in the mangroves. Silver Gulls and Red-capped Plovers were seen out on the mud-bank but the heat haze made other small waders unidentifiable. By this time it was very warm in the sun, so we decided to "call it a day".

BIRD LIST AS FOLLOWS:

- Crested Pigeon
- Nankeen Kestrel
- Red-capped Plover
- Galah
- Mulga Parrot
- Rainbow Bee-eater
- Singing Honeyeater
- White-plumed Honeyeater
- White-fronted Honeyeater
- Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater
- Black Honeyeater
- White-browed Babbler
- Chirruping Wedgebill
- Australian Magpie
- Australian Raven
- Magpie-lark
- White-backed Swallow
- Welcome Swallow
- Tree Martin
- Zebra Finch
- House Sparrow

Not a big list, but considering the temperature (and time spent) not bad. The Black Honeyeaters were definitely the birds of the day. Hope it's cooler for Port Patterson etc on 7th February.

PROGRAMME 2010

Sunday 7th February - Pt. Patterson / Bird Lake
Meet at pistol club 7.30am

Sunday 7th March - Chinamans Creek / Winninowie
Meet at turn-off at 7.30am

Sunday 18th April - Quorn tour
Meet at Quorn swimming pool 7.30am

Sunday 2nd May - Bernie's Block
Meet at Mambray Creek Roadhouse at 8.00am

Sunday 20th June - Alligator Gorge / Melrose
Meet at Wilmington Pub at 8.00am

Peter Langdon



Peter Langdon (far right) showing members of the Bird Observers Group a Black Honeyeater at AALBG

The Darwin Connection



Christa and Charlie Nicholson, formally caretakers for The Charles Darwin Reserve (see article below). Charles Darwin Reserve was known as White Wells Station and is approximately 300Km north-east of Perth on the edge of the wheat belt. Charlie and Christa visited the AALBG on their way home from holidays in Queensland.

They have been long time 'Friends' and spent many hours wandering through the garden as well as a visit to Powell Gardens in Quorn. Rieck Shine also gave them a tour of the Port Augusta Council's Waste Water Treatment Plant as water conservation is high on their priorities.

Chris Nayda

Included below is a brief summary of the establishment of the Darwin Reserve. For more information, visit www.bushheritage.org.au

Late in his life the, the great naturalist Charles Darwin wrote; 'I feel no remorse from having committed any great sin, but I have often regretted that I have not done more direct good to my fellow creatures'. This poignant quote from my great-great-grandfather inspired me to use my inheritance from him to rectify this omission in his life. My wife, Jacqui and I began by researching how our 'fellow Creatures' were faring. We were horrified by what we discovered. Did you know that we are plunging into a 'mass extinction spasm' – a short period in earth's history (normally less than a few thousand years) when more than 65 percent of all species become extinct?

The fossil records show that there have been at least five mass extinction spasms. These catastrophes occur due to massive habitat changes. The meteorite that slammed into the planet during the Cretaceous caused one such event and wiped out the dinosaurs. Professor E O Wilson, one of the most respected biodiversity experts, estimates that we are losing between two percent and six per cent of the planet's species every ten years.

The cause is massive habitat destruction from land clearance. If these figures are right, well before the next millennium party begins, over 65 over cent of the Earth's species will be long gone.

Jac and I decided to use Charles Darwin money to try and slow this terrible decline. The best solution seemed to be to buy high conservation value land before it, and it's inhabitants, were destroyed. We found what we were looking for when Bush heritage discovered Whitewells Station. Jacqui and I believe that if Charles Darwin was here today, he would be delighted that his money was being used to protect this property which has been named in his honour.

We are convinced that if we do not act now, future generations will look back with dismay at the destruction of the natural world that we presided over. By creating the Charles Darwin reserve we have all helped to slow earth's sixth mass extinction spasm, and helped to save the animals and plants with which we share this beautiful planet.

Extracts taken from comments by Chris Darwin with kind permission from Bush Heritage from www.bushheritage.org.au

News from the President (continued)

(continued from page 1)

This location with its boardwalk, observation deck and shelter with interpretive signs gave people an idea of what was proposed for the site they were viewing, in the years before the Garden was established.

Bernie Haase, initially a Friends volunteer was employed for some years as a contractor providing his own vehicle and tools and with no facilities on site in the beginning. His tenure of employment changed but it was still a very poorly paid position. Despite this, his achievement in setting out the Garden, installing irrigation, propagating and planting, garden maintenance, record keeping – all by hand – he had no computer, and a host of other duties is quite remarkable. His knowledge of arid zone native plants is second to none and he was meticulous in what he did. Gradually the garden developed, facilities were provided and at times one or more additional people were employed. He was not really supported and his role was not appreciated by council. Despite his passion for the Garden he was frustrated in his role and eventually resigned to accept a position with National Parks about three years ago. At that stage Council upgraded the position to Curator and increased the salary very significantly.

The largest single fund raising event mounted by the Friends was in the 1990s when we were contracted by Telecom to rehabilitate three disturbed areas in the Nullarbor National Park around their fibre optic cable repeater stations. These sites are near the border with WA about 1,100 km west of Port Augusta. The project included collecting appropriate seed in these areas the year before, volunteer growers propagating it, and then 10 Friends volunteers taking a week off to travel to the Nullarbor to plant, make and install tree guards (for vermin protection) and then water in new plants. The logistics of getting camping equipment and supplies, plants, tools, large rolls of mesh for the approx 1,000 guards, arranging for full water tankers to be delivered to each site, insurance coverage and various other incidentals were huge as we all had our regular jobs to attend to, but all went well and despite the harsh arid conditions our plantings had a success rate of more than 90%, a very pleasing result, helped by some timely rains and a couple of additional watering by the Lutheran Pastor and members of the Yalata Aboriginal Community who carted water the few hundred km to do this. The Friends were paid \$30,000 by Telecom for this rehabilitation work and after about \$10,000 of expenses made a profit of \$20,000!

As a result of very significant WMC Resources donations, conditional on State and Federal Government contributions, with input also from the City Council, a revised Garden master plan was the basis for development work which commenced in the early 1990s. Various Friends played very significant advisory and planning roles, propagating plants, and eventually funding and establishing a nursery at the Garden which they operated until it was taken over by council last year. Other friends were involved in the preparation of all signage in the Garden until a few years ago, training garden tour guides and as garden guides, running the informal education program until recently, helping with record keeping and administration until recently, organising and running special promotional events such as the Eremophila Festival and assisting with others, developing and hosting (at no cost to council) the Garden's Web site until recently – now it is the Friends web site, promoting the garden in many ways and in various places, conducting plant sales (until recently) and of course fund raising.

Although not a complete list the Friends have funded furnishings and equipment in the WMC Herbarium/ Meeting Room, a 4WD vehicle for use in the Garden, 2 Gator vehicles for use in the Garden, a tractor and range of implements, a custom built trailer specifically set up for plant collecting expeditions, the fully equipped nursery developed over 10 years, label making machine and other plant and equipment, many interpretive signs, irrigation equipment, made several significant donations for garden developments, particularly making up budget over runs recently, Main Entrance gates, fencing, road works, plant and seed purchases, funded seed collecting expeditions and the list goes on with hundreds of thousands of dollars having been provided over the 25 years. I estimate that over 10 years we put approx \$100,000 into developing the nursery at the Garden. It was taken over by Council last year to be run as a commercial venture, but the disappointing aspect of that was that the executive of the Friends were not informed of what was proposed or happening until after the event and the Friends have not been formally thanked for that very significant "gift". We are not opposed to the concept, but very disappointed at the lack of consultation by those who organised the take over. Some more recent members seem to think we sit on our money, but we have put hundreds of thousands of dollars into the garden over our 25 years. I consider it our role to very carefully consider how we spend our money and fund those things that are unlikely to be funded otherwise.

Our funds should never be seen as an easy way of making up a budget shortfall at short notice. We should always try to ensure that our funds are donated in ways that attract further funds and provide plants and developments and equipment that can be seen, and not swallowed up by administration. Those who have worked so hard to fund raise over 25 years know how difficult a task it is and we must be good stewards of our hard earned money.

Without the efforts of our Friends group in earlier years especially, I am quite sure that the Australian Arid Lands Botanic Garden would not exist, as it was the tenacity and perseverance of a core group of Friends which eventually convinced council and governments and some sectors of industry that it was a valid and worthy development for Port Augusta. We provided base funding for many early developments. With a very small paid staff many Friends volunteer at the Garden in various ways, enabling services to be provided that otherwise could not be afforded. I am not sure that senior Council management understand or appreciate the significance of the Friends group in establishing the Garden and in its ongoing operation.

I have the distinct impression they often consider we are interfering complainers. From the initial proposal in 1981, to the formation of the Friends in 1984 it was a further 12 years before Stage 1 of the AALBG was opened in September 1996. It would certainly not have eventuated if it had been left as a recommendation to Council. It is significant though that Council eventually picked up the concept as a result of Friends lobbying and public opinion, and has funded and operated the Garden since the 1990s. Although it must have been a drain on Council finances the Garden is now a Port Augusta landmark and has helped change the formerly poor image of Port Augusta to that of "The Arid Garden City". Those members of earlier Councils who made the decision to proceed with the Garden must be very pleased with its progress and the status it has given Port Augusta, within Australia and overseas..

To all Friends who have contributed in any way to the development of "our" Garden a huge thank you. Let's hope our next 25 years will see many more appropriate developments!

(Summary of talk given by President John Zwar at the FAALBG 25 year celebration, November 2009)

Contacts

President: John Zwar Phone Home: (08) 8364 4256 Work: (08) 8372 6876 Email: johnzwar@optusnet.com.au
Secretary / Treasurer: Geraldine Davis Phone: (08) 8648 6399 Mobile: 0418 447 020 Email: glgadavis@bigpond.com
PO Box 2040, Port Augusta, South Australia 5700

Issued February 2010 by Friends of Australian Arid Lands Botanic Garden Inc. Port Augusta