Flourish

ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS
VICTORIA

SUPPORTER NEWS
WINTER 2026

ISSUE 22

Celebrating 20 Years
of the Australian Garden

Susie Hamson and the
Stringybark Boardwalk

Restoring the Arbours
of Melbourne Gardens



Royal
Botanic
Gardens
Victoria

RBGV staff collecting seeds
at Cranbourne Gardens, 1997.
Photo taken by Warren Worboys.

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Botanic Gardens Greening the Future

Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria's Landscape Succession Strategy (2016–2036) has set ambitious targets to adapt Melbourne Gardens to our increasingly warmer and drier climate.

Melbourne's temperature in 2070 is expected to be 3.0°C higher – akin to present-day Dubbo – and with 15% less rainfall. Around a quarter of the species in Melbourne Gardens today may not survive. The strategy aims to guide us towards having 75% of plants that are more suited to future climate conditions by 2036.

"Projects like The Australian Drylands Precinct are already providing other botanic gardens and arboreta around the world with a best-practice model for landscape succession," says *Director and Chief Executive* Chris Russell.

The Drylands' collection is essentially a living experiment, trialling sustainable water use, new plant species and horticultural practices to explore how our landscapes can thrive in the future. The strategy is helping to shape resilient landscapes and preserve the Gardens' unique biodiversity, heritage and character for generations to come. •

Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work and learn and pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

↑ *Apprentice Horticulturalist* Charlotte Stone in The Australian Drylands Precinct.



Welcome to Winter Flourish

Dear supporters,

In this special winter edition of Flourish, we invite you to celebrate 20 transformative years of the Australian Garden at Cranbourne Gardens. This occasion is particularly close to my heart, as I had the great honour of seeing the landscape evolve into the internationally recognised garden is it today. Within these pages, we take a moment to acknowledge just a handful of the passionate supporters who shared our vision of a garden dedicated to displaying and conserving Australian native plants. Thank you to those who joined us in marking this momentous achievement during celebrations across April and May.

In March, we had the privilege of hosting Their Majesties Queen Mary and King Frederik. Being selected as the venue for the Danish State function was a significant honour, allowing us to showcase our Melbourne Gardens to over 400 guests from Australia and Denmark. RBGV Chair Penny Fowler and I had the honour of presenting a Huon Pine to the Queen and King. We explained the significance of this endemic Tasmanian specimen, a slow-growing species at risk due to logging for its valuable timber. They were impressed to learn it can live up to 3,000 years and excited that it will now be planted in the Gardens to commemorate their visit.

Late last year, I was fortunate to spend time admiring the Stringybark Boardwalk at Cranbourne Gardens with the wonderful Susie Hamson. The Hamsons' contribution to the boardwalk development, in honour of Australian Garden Fundraising Committee Chair, the late Michael Hamson, helped to improve visitor experience of the area and protect the Living Collection. Thank you to Susie and her family for their kindness and care in supporting this initiative.

As the days get shorter and the vibrant colours of autumn fade, we are keeping minds, hearts and calendars full with a suite of events and memorable moments to enjoy together at the Gardens. We are honoured to continue our commitment towards truth telling and reconciliation through engagement with NAIDOC Week activities in early July. Working closely with Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong peoples, staff and volunteers will participate in a program that recognises the critical knowledge and contributions of First Peoples in furthering plant conservation.

This year, the pinnacle of our major event calendar, Lightscape, promises to be an unmissable spectacle in its fifth instalment at Melbourne Gardens. To see how the event has evolved into a winter tradition, enjoyed with family and friends, is very rewarding. There truly is no better way to celebrate winter in Melbourne.

I look forward to seeing you at the Gardens in the coming months!



Chris Russell
Director and Chief Executive,
Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria

Climate Adaptation in Action



"CCABG unites botanic gardens around the world to safeguard the plants we all depend on. When we share knowledge, we don't just protect landscapes, we give future generations the chance to live in greener, healthier, more resilient cities."

Tim Sansom
Executive Director Living Collections and Environment

Initiated and nurtured by the passionate horticulturalists of Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria, the Climate Change Alliance of Botanic Gardens (CCABG) is a worldwide network of botanic gardens coming together to create a global centre of excellence for climate change adaptation and biodiversity conservation.

The Climate Change Alliance of Botanic Gardens was formed in 2018 at the Climate Change Summit hosted by Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria under then *Horticulture Curator* Peter Symes. Since then, our Gardens have acted as custodians, nurturing the Alliance to its current impressive membership of more than 600 organisations from over 100 countries including the UK, North America, Spain, Mexico, Venezuela, South Africa, Vietnam and Zimbabwe.

The Climate Change Alliance taps into the highly diverse plant experience across this range of communities, cultures and continents to create a global community helping one another to manage complex landscapes. "We recognise that botanic gardens are uniquely positioned to make a significant impact on climate adaptation," says *Executive Director Living Collections and Environment* Tim Sansom.

One of the resources offered is the Landscape Succession Toolkit, a first–of–its–kind guide to help botanic gardens and arboreta to transition their collections so that they thrive in future climate conditions. Then there is the Climate Change Assessment Tool (CAT).

The CAT was developed by Dr Dave Kendal, Alliance member and globally recognised expert on urban nature and ecology, biodiversity conservation, along with several international partners. The CAT uses predictive climate modelling to guide plant selection in a changing climate to help communities around the globe. By simply selecting a species, users can gauge the potential for these plants to perform under the future climate conditions of their location. Currently the CAT has 59,000 trees available, and next steps will be to add a broader palette of plants including shrubs, climbers, ground covers and perennials to the tool.

And so much more is planned! Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria and the Alliance aim to empower botanic gardens to lead on climate change, supporting them to build ever–stronger climate adaptation strategies, helping governments deliver the proven benefits of green spaces, and earning global recognition for innovative approaches to landscape succession. With ambition, collaboration and care, we are planting the seeds for healthier, more resilient landscapes—and communities—for generations to come. •

If you would like to know more about supporting the Climate Change Alliance of Botanic Gardens, please contact *Philanthropy Manager* Nicola Kaufman on +61 3 9252 2713

RBGV Horticulture staff planting oaks for the future – a wild collected *Quercus gravesii* on the Oak Lawn at Melbourne Gardens.

SUPPORTER SPOTLIGHT

Susie Hamson's Lasting Connection to the Australian Garden



Susie and her late husband Michael Hamson shared a long connection with Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria. After arriving in Melbourne in the late 1960s, the couple settled near Melbourne Gardens and quickly fell in love with the area, never feeling the need to move elsewhere. The Gardens became part of their everyday lives.

"The ancient grass trees of the Stringybark Garden, with their unique form and impressive scale, have always captured my attention."

Susie Hamson



Both Susie and Michael Hamson came to Australia from overseas. Michael hailed from Scotland, while Susie was raised outside New York. From an early age, Susie's family nurtured a love of gardening, instilling in her a deep appreciation for flowers that has stayed with her throughout her life. Today, Susie's fondness for the natural world continues through her passion for botanical art and capturing the wonder of plants.

Michael played an important role in creation of the Australian Garden at Cranbourne, serving as Deputy Chair of the Royal Botanic Gardens Board from 2006 to 2011. Susie fondly recalls how Michael, a natural fundraiser, enjoyed bringing people together to support meaningful causes.

When Susie first arrived in Australia, the botanical landscape was entirely unfamiliar to her. "I never grew up with Australian flora," she reflects. "So, it was all a learning curve." A sense of discovery became one of the great joys of her enduring connection to the Gardens. When Michael was appointed the Chair of the fundraising committee for Cranbourne Gardens, tasked with raising much needed funds for the set–up of the Australian Garden, Susie found herself increasingly fascinated by the diversity and unique beauty of Australia's native plants. The distinct design of the Australian Garden was also deeply compelling, and it was there that her affection for Cranbourne Gardens truly took hold.

Susie's support of the Stringybark Boardwalk project was inspired both by the landscape and by her wish to honour Michael's legacy. Many of these remarkable trees have survived numerous bushfires and stand as quiet witnesses to centuries of change. Protecting the trees' fragile root zones from pedestrian compaction through the creation of the elevated decked walkway resonated deeply with Susie. The project also offered a meaningful way to honour Michael's love and involvement in the development of the Australian Garden. Supporting the boardwalk became a way for Susie and her family to create something lasting in his name, a place they could return to and remember him.

Susie believes giving is simply about sharing good fortune. "If you are lucky enough in life", she says, "it feels natural to give back, so others can enjoy places like the Australian Gardens too." Because the Gardens are free to visit, Susie believes community support plays a vital role in ensuring they can continue to be cared for and enjoyed well into the future. "It's about giving back and making sure this important place is here in perpetuity."

During a recent visit to the Stringybark Boardwalk, Susie was struck by the knowledge and passion of the Gardens' Horticulture team. "It was wonderful to see how much they care," she says. "They clearly love their work, and care deeply for the place, and the betterment of plants and wildlife." For Susie, that dedication gives her confidence that Cranbourne Gardens will continue to flourish for generations to come. "I hope these Gardens receive the recognition they deserve, and become a top Australian tourist attraction," she says. "It feels like this first 20 years is only the beginning. So many more people will come to discover, cherish and enjoy this beautiful place." •

Susie Hamson and *Director and Chief Executive* Chris Russell at the Stringybark Boardwalk.

Michael Hamson meeting Queen Elizabeth II at the Royal Horticultural Society's Chelsea Flower Show in 2013, where the 'Trailfinders Australian Garden' won Best in Show, a first for an Australian team.

Moonlight Thrillers and Donor Events

On a crisp March evening, we welcomed Director's Circle supporters for our annual Moonlight Cinema event. On the green slopes of Melbourne Gardens' Central Lawn, guests enjoyed pre–film bubbles and popcorn while connecting with new and old friends, before reclining into lounges for a screening of new heist thriller Crime 101.

We were thrilled to host long–term Gardens supporter Geoff Steinicke and his fellow Rotary Club of North Balwyn members for an informative, inspiring talk and tour of the Australian Garden. Guests were treated to a discussion about the history and latest projects at Cranbourne Gardens by *Director Horticulture Cranbourne* Tex Moon and *Landscape Architect* Andrew Laidlaw. The event showcased the many layers of conservation action that exist within the considered design and management of our unique landscapes.

We were equally proud to host retired GHD Directors and their partners for a reunion event. The group enjoyed a behind–the–scenes tour of Cranbourne Gardens with Tex Moon, accompanied by *Executive Director Living Collections and Environment* Tim Sansom, who shared their expert knowledge on the Australian Gardens' abundant biodiversity and plans for future developments at Cranbourne.

Thank you to our dedicated supporters for introducing the Gardens' teams to wonderful new visitors. It was an honour to be able to share the beauty and wonder of our Gardens' surrounds for such memorable occasions of connection. •



Rotary Club of North Balwyn President Greg Ross and Gretta Williams with *Donor Services Officer* Yvonne Lai.





Landscape Architect Andrew Laidlaw and Geoff Steinicke perched in the new How to Garden at Cranbourne.

Director Horticulture Cranbourne Tex Moon during a tour of the Australian Garden.

Creating a Corridor of Biodiversity



After a successful start in 2025, the Wylies Creek Riparian Restoration Project is heading into its next stage of biodiversity enrichment and growth.

↑ A Swamp Skink *(Lissolepis coventryi)* photographed by *Urban Rivers Project Officer* Rory Hall in a tree trunk at Wylies Creek.





Funded by the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust under the Urban Rivers and Catchments Program, the Wylies Creek land regeneration project will form a 2–km corridor of restored vegetation. Alongside this, the Southern Grasslands at Cranbourne Gardens will introduce new access points for the community, an area generously supported by Nola Foster.

The project commenced with seed collection, plant preparation, fauna monitoring, and a cultural heritage assessment in consultation with Bunurong Land Council. Already, this vital work has revealed threatened species in the area: the endangered *Pseudemoia rawlinsoni* (Glossy Grass Skink) and a remnant population of *Dianella amoena* (Matted Flax–lily).

The discovery of endangered species is especially meaningful because the Wylies Creek project is creating a haven of native conservation. The site, which *Environmental Systems Manager* Ricardo Simao describes as a "precious green space", will provide habitats, food resources, and migratory pathways where animals and plants can thrive.

Now in its second year, the restoration is moving on to an exciting new phase: the revegetation of 600 satellite plots will begin. "These clusters are small, deliberate pockets of biodiversity, designed to mimic natural patterns of vegetation spread," says *Natural Systems Team Leader* Tricia Stewart. "Each one is a step towards the bigger picture: a continuous, connected habitat corridor that stretches its arms across the Wylies Creek landscape."

Over 29,000 plants will be planted in the 30 hectares of former bushland, which was historically cleared for agriculture, including many rare and vulnerable species. The creek's ephemeral floodplain will be reinstated in the approaching 2026/27 summer, after which critically endangered plants will be introduced into the revegetation.

Conservation is a community effort, and Cranbourne Gardens visitors can get involved through citizen science action. There are community planting days planned for the Raising Rarity Schools Outreach Program, and visitors will be encouraged to record biodiversity observations through iNaturalist. The Natural Systems team look forward to creating opportunities to engage people in biodiversity initiatives while ensuring this critical piece of nature remains protected.

From "frog saunas" — where frogs can relax on hot rocks — to bandicoot shelters, the ecological corridor will contain a wealth of homes for native and threatened fauna. Plants will be propagated to form insurance populations, including critically endangered flora such as *Coronidium gunnianum* (Pale Swamp Everlasting) and *Craspedia canens* (Grey Billy–buttons). And this green space will form a vibrant sanctuary for humans as well. Researchers and conservationists, nature enthusiasts and gardeners, bushwalkers and birdwatchers will all find something at Wylies Creek to educate and inspire. •

↑ *Team Leader Natural Systems* Tricia Stewart giving a project presentation to a group of conservation volunteers. Photo taken by Ollie Sherlock.

→ *Senior Curator Horticulture* Matthew Henderson on site near Manks Road collecting seeds in September 2025.

Celebrating 20 Years of Conservation and Comradery

This year we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Australian Garden at Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne, an award–winning display of the diversity and beauty of Australian plants.

For thousands of years, the woodlands, wetlands and grasslands of the Cranbourne area were the ancestral home of the Bunurong people of the Kulin Nation. Following European displacement, parts of the land were cleared and later used as a military reserve, before becoming a sand mine. Recognising the site's potential, the Victorian Government purchased the land in 1970, thanks largely to the generous funding and persuasive efforts of Dame Elisabeth Murdoch and other members of the Maud Gibson Trust. After years of planning and initial revegetation works, Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne officially opened to the public in 1989.

Then *Director & Chief Executive* Dr Philip Moors AO led the charge in rehabilitating the landscape through strategic and environmentally conscious practices. Joined by a young Chris Russell, and countless others who helped to promote and protect Cranbourne Gardens and its growing population of rare and threatened native Australian species. Their tireless efforts were realised with the opening of the Australian Garden on 28 May 2006, transforming the once desolate sand mine into the dramatic and lush botanic landscape visitor's experience today.

The Australian Garden was designed by landscape architects Taylor, Cullity and Lethlean with Paul Thompson as plant designer. The impressive scope and vision of the design was activated through the numerous helping hands of volunteers, Cranbourne Friends, staff and their families, who planted out the initial garden beds. Twenty years later, the Garden is now home to 100,000 plants from 1,900 plant varieties. Set across 15 hectares, the Australian Garden follows a journey of water from the arid inland landscapes of central Australia, along dry riverbeds and down mighty rivers to the coastal fringes of the continent. Surrounding the Australian Garden, is 350 hectares of remnant bushland and grassland, dedicated to in–situ conservation, re–vegetation, and restoring habitat for the many precious native animals that have returned to the area.

The Australian Garden's vibrant and contemporary design and its inhabitants have not only captivated the hearts of international visitors but enriched the daily lives of local communities. Not to mention the numerous school groups who have had the chance to learn and grow alongside the arid and often fragile landscape. This fostering of collective conservation and an appreciation for sustainable planting has driven learning programs, research projects and landscape management to create a truly unique visitor experience.

We've been celebrating the 20th anniversary over the school holidays with a wonderful array of fun activities. Children and their families enjoyed performances of the Big Bandicoot Backyard by Born in a Taxi, posted wishes on the Wishing Tree, learnt traditional string–making and enjoyed music by local performers. Meanwhile, the Gardens' horticulturalists led fascinating tours of the living collections, allowing the community to understand the behind–the–scenes world of Cranbourne Gardens.

In May, the Garden's leadership came together for an exclusive luncheon with those who have significantly supported the development of the Australian Garden and the wonderful work of

"The Australian Garden is a place to be inspired by the beauty and diversity of Australian flora and landscapes, and to learn about how to utilise Australian plants in your own garden, for pleasure and for conservation."

Chris Russell
Director and Chief Executive

Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria. Amongst all the celebrations of the creation of this exceptional landscape, we are equally excited about its future. With a new Cranbourne Gardens Masterplan underway, we look forward to sharing new projects and the future focuses for the Gardens. •

If you would like to learn more about future developments at Cranbourne Gardens, please contact *Philanthropy Manager* Nicola Kaufman on +61 3 9252 2713.



↑ Chris Russell with Anna and Simon Ainsworth at the Australian Garden opening event in 2006.

↓ Staff, volunteers, and friends planting out the Australian Garden according to a flag system. Photo by Warren Worboys.



Restoring Heritage Garden Structures



Nestled within the landscape of Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne are eight exquisite iron arbours, each whispering stories from centuries past.

"...erect some bowers in localities of the Gardens from whence the most cheerful views can be enjoyed."

Baron Ferdinand Von Mueller, 1862

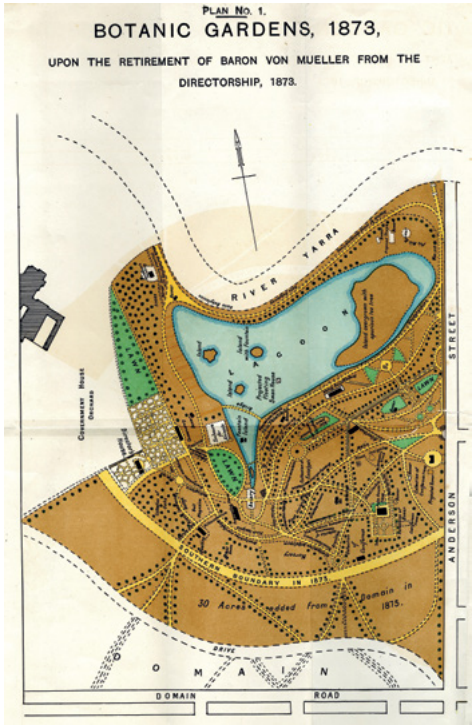
Created in the 1860s, during Baron Ferdinand von Mueller's directorship, the heritage arbours were positioned with care and intention within the landscape. Today, these structures remain a testament to the Gardens' enduring vision of beauty, tranquillity, and connection to the natural world.

A restoration project is underway to breathe life back into the five seated arbours and three elegant iron arches dotted about Melbourne Gardens. Designed as places to pause, rest and observe, the enclosed seated bowers can be found among the Conifer Beds on the eastern boundary, standing near Government House on the western boundary, in the African Tunnel Bed and the Director's Residence Garden. The three iron archways, one at the entrance to Northern Gate and two on approach to the Herb and Medicinal Collection, acted as decorative moments capturing attention along the Gardens' paths.

All eight of the arbours are presumed to date from the early 1860s. After more than a century and a half, these unique features are in urgent need of repair and rejuvenation. The project will preserve their intricate structural design and restore the arbours to their original splendour for visitors to enjoy once more.

Each arbour and archway has been carefully assessed, with bespoke restoration plans crafted to suit their unique conditions. From heritage–accurate ironwork to seating restoration, every detail has honoured their place and von Mueller's vision. The recent work completed on the external fence and iconic Tecoma and City Gates provides examples of the quality and craftsmanship that will complete the project.

The Gardens are incredibly grateful for the support of the Friends of Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne towards the restoration of these living pieces of Melbourne's cultural and horticultural history. •



A postcard showcasing one of the historic bowers that used to frame the William Tell Rest House.

Historic map titled 'Plan No. 1 Botanic Gardens 1873' detailing the initial bower locations.

Uncovering Australia's Hidden Subterranean World

We are touched by the support for our current campaign *Nature for our Future* which has highlighted how Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria is leading research that is transforming our understanding of Australia's remarkably diverse soil fungal communities. Housing one of the largest fungarium collections in the southern hemisphere, the Gardens have become a global leader in the study of fungi, enabling scientists to uncover species and complex ecological relationships that were previously unknown.

Beneath our feet lies an extraordinary world that remains largely unexplored. Just one gram of soil contains between 5,000 and 10,000 species of microorganisms and several metres of fungal mycelium. Yet scientists estimate that a vast proportion of Australia's fungal communities remain undescribed. Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria is helping to reveal this hidden subterranean world and better understand the biological networks these communities sustain.

Gardens' scientists are discovering previously unknown fungi both in the field and by re-examining historic Herbarium specimens.

Using cutting-edge molecular phylogenetic and genomic approaches, our scientists are documenting novel species and mapping intricate relationships between fungal lineages. The discoveries are essential for understanding how these underground ecosystems function and how they will respond to environmental change.

The team have developed a world-leading bioinformatics tool that maps soil fungal diversity across Australia. Our scientists are using environmental DNA (eDNA) techniques to characterise fungal diversity in soil, animal scats, and plant roots. Through greenhouse experiments, they identify key functions of mycorrhizal fungi, which form symbiotic partnerships with native tree roots. These vast underground networks facilitate essential ecosystem services such as carbon storage, plant nutrition, and soil stabilisation. This pioneering research is helping to predict how fungal communities respond to environmental stressors including drought, rising temperatures, nutrient imbalances, and altered fire regimes, and in turn provide critical knowledge about their role in ecological resilience.



Mycelium photo taken by Stephen Axford details the intricate network.

Research Scientist (Mycology) Camille Truong out in the field collecting samples.

"Identifying and naming fungi is essential if we are to conserve them. Fungi are nature's great recyclers. They underpin healthy soils, help plants absorb water and nutrients through underground networks, and provide food and medicines that humans rely on."

Dr Camille Truong, *Research Scientist (Mycology)*



The team's research is also revealing the intricate web connecting fungi, plants, and animals. Many small native mammals — including wallabies, potoroos, and bettongs — depend on fungi for survival. In turn, these animals play a crucial ecological role by dispersing fungal spores as they move through the landscape, helping establish new mycorrhizal networks that support healthy plant communities.

Gardens researchers are documenting these relationships by studying the fungal diets of native mammals and assessing how their dispersal activities help establish new fungal and plant communities in recovering habitats. This knowledge is already informing conservation and habitat restoration programs across Australia.

The Gardens provide a uniquely powerful setting for this important work, combining world–class scientific collections, cutting–edge genomic technologies and leading ecological expertise. With your support, researchers can continue cataloguing fungal diversity, advancing environmental metagenomics, and protecting Australia's extraordinary green heritage for future generations. •



For Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria to be the best possible custodians of our unique natural heritage, we need to continue to uncover plant knowledge and save the rarest Australian flora and fauna from extinction.

It is through the generosity of our donors that the Gardens continue our efforts in world-class science and horticultural research, landscape development and public programs.

Show your support today by making a fully tax-deductible donation.

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"As a guide at the Gardens, I'm aware of how hard the staff work (both as curators of living collections, and in the admin areas), and how much this precious patch of Melbourne means so much to many people."

Rosemary Cotter

“Thank you to all RBGV staff for your hard work and dedication to preserve and protect our unique plants.”

Liz Balogh

"Having enjoyed a wonderful 80th birthday celebration at Gardens House yesterday I decided in lieu of a gift to donate to RBGV, as a place for all to enjoy!"

Happy Gardens Supporter

"I love the Gardens and visit each time I stay in Melbourne."

Paul Frater (TAS)



Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria

To support our work or learn more please contact us on:

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