

Sonica Botanica: Stories and Sounds from the Gardens

Episode 4 – Kids Get Down To Earth



Created by Patrick Cronin and Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria with Ardeer South Primary School

October 2024

PRELUDE

[00:00:00]

Students: The Botanic Garden...it's nature, I think. You stand out there, and then like, you feel so much better.

Kinda hard to describe. I could like, breathe. I feel almost as alive as I am right now.

This place is filled with nature. All sorts of different trees, plants, animals, even fungi. Same type of grass though. I mean there's no different type of grass. Grass is just grass.

[00:00:30]

My mum and dad were like, so surprised because, I told them that we're going to record our voices, and then they really want to go to the Gardens to hear my voice when they scan the QR code, and it will tell them information.

ROLL CALL

Students: Hello, my name is Aiden

My name is Ahmed.

Adriel.

Alim.

My name's Amelia.

Amira.

Aiden.

My name is Asfati.

Ayaan.

Ayub.

Benjamin. That's right, Benjamin.

[00:01:02]

My name's Bekim.

My name is Cleo.

Christina.

Dahir.

Danny.

Duc.

Eunice.

Enoch.

My name is Fajar.

My name is Fatima.

Hana.

Hasib.

My name is Henry.

Hello, my name is Indie.

My name is Jake.

Jessica.

James.

My name is John.

Jesse.

John.

Kiara.

Kirjana

Levi.

Malachi.

Mason.

Max.

Nikola.

Hello, my name's Nhu Ngoc.

Peter.

[00:01:30]

Raiden.

Rangeen.

Sahar.

Hi, my name is Souleymane.

Ruthina.

Taylor.

My name is Temrat.

My name is Waleed.

INTRODUCTION

Students: You're listening to Episode Five of Sonica Botanica.

Stories and Sounds from the Gardens.

Created by Patrick Cronin and Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria, with us, students from year five and six at Ardeer South Primary School in Melbourne's West

[00:01:58]

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands on which the Gardens are cited, and this episode was made, as well as the Traditional Owners of the land where our school is. And we pay our respects to the Elders past and present.

This episode was made in 2024, inspired by The Ian Potter Foundation Children's Garden's 20th Birthday.

The Children's Garden was created especially for kids. But, to make this episode, we've explored the whole of the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne.

We went behind the scenes to learn about plants and meet some new friends.

[00:02:30]

We can't wait for you to hear all about it.

This isn't a guided walk. You can walk anywhere you like while you're listening to our stories about everything we love about these Gardens and nature.

So put on your headphones and head off on an adventure with us in your ears.

We've got lots to say! We've got lots to say.

SETTING THE SCENE

Students: I love all the plants in the Gardens. It makes me feel like they're alive, like they can talk to me.

[00:03:00]

There's hundreds of different types of plants.

It's like our garden, but like, much, much bigger.

I explored everywhere. I found new plants I didn't know that was even a thing. I saw big trees, small trees ...

Lots of different species.

Basically the whole place is covered in plants. It's just all green

Yeah the green is vibrant, I like it.

So much oxygen here.

It's really, calming and peaceful.

It's not the same as being inside a classroom because, you can use your senses.

[00:03:32]

It was like, good to go outside, like kids were like getting vitamin D.

You're more like connected to nature.

I think learning outside, it's more interesting than learning in the class, because in classroom, we just like see or do our work, but at the Botanical Garden, we look and learn .

I feel very adventurous, I would learn something new every day.

Learning about like plants and trees, how they survive and how they live.

[00:03:59]

Before, like plants and gardens were like just a normal thing to me. But now like, I kind of say, I really love plants.

We did like fun stuff, like podcasts, we're talking on it like right now.

It feels like the Australian New York City Park.

It's like, you're living on another planet.

THE CHILDRENS GARDEN

Students: The Children's Gardens are so interesting.

We get to talk about the plants and we got to walk around the wavy leaves and the wavy trees.

[00:04:30]

There's a lot of, bushes made of like, animals?

Elephant, kangaroo.

And the fruit garden. Fruits that I've never seen before.

I liked walking on the trails in the Children's Garden.

It's pretty nice there, and I really like how you guys added scarecrows.

In the Children's Gardens they don't usually give instructions.

And you can touch the bamboo. I tried to jump off it. I got in trouble for that.

Probably it's my first time seeing bamboo, like, in real life.

They're pretty tall.

Hollow, thin, round, and as tall as a giraffe with a long neck.

[00:05:01]

And I felt short.

You could barely see the sky because of how much bamboo there were.

You could hide in there.

I wanted to take a blanket there, and sleep there.

And when you knocked on it, it made like, a little sound. It's like a better sounding kind of wood.

Play the bamboo. Felt good.

The scientific name is the Bambusa. Nicknames include Beachy Bamboo, Black Asper, Blue Bamboo, Valkua. Bamboo, Big Tree Bamboo, Cocoa Bamboo, Common bamboo, and so on.

[00:05:38]

THE FERN GULLY

If a friend of mine were going to the Botanical Gardens, I'd recommend that they go to the rainforest.

The Fern Gully?

It's really nice, there's birds that talk, chirp, and there's also the river.

Last time we came here it was like, hot and then when I went in the rainforest, the temperature dropped.

[00:06:02]

It's very cool. I think it's because of the water and trees.

Really quiet. Only thing you could hear was water drops and birch chirping.

Peaceful. There's like a lot of nature around.

There's even this river there. It's so nice.

I can hear, like, the water going down rocks.

And the Fern Gully, I'm just going to say. I've got asthma, so it makes me breathe way much more better.

There was a secret place. I pretended that little house at the start was my home and then I got ejected for not paying rent for three months.

[00:06:32]

INTERVIEW WITH LLOYD O'HANLON

Students: While we were exploring the Gardens, we had lots of questions for the people who worked here.

So, we asked to speak to some of the staff members who help look after the Gardens.

First up, we spoke to Lloyd.

Lloyd O'Hanlon: My name's Lloyd O'Hanlon. I'm one of the horticulturalists here, and I'm the curator of the Australian Forest Walk.

[00:06:59]

Student: Lloyd, What do you do as your job at the Botanic Gardens?

Lloyd O'Hanlon: So, I'm responsible for looking after the plants, making sure they're healthy, and not just the plants but looking after the whole system. Sometimes it means I'm pulling out weeds because they compete with the plants that I want to be there. Sometimes I'm planting new plants. Sometimes I'm replacing ones that have died. And it's a constant job.

Student: What do you like the most about Botanical Gardens?

[00:07:26]

Lloyd O'Hanlon: It's a place for people from all different areas and different ages to come together for free and learn about plants. The area I look after is called the Australian Forest Walk. And I'm growing a whole bunch of different Australian plants. The kind of plants you'd see in the bush. I'm trying to sort of recreate that. I like to be able to give people a sense of being out in nature, even though we are in the middle of the city.

Student: Why did you decide to do this job?

[00:07:58]

Lloyd O'Hanlon: I went to Footscray High School. I came on an excursion here, and I met horticulturalists and people working in the nursery and I saw some very happy people that were working with plants all day. And I thought that would be really cool, to be able to have a job where you're actually having fun, as well as working doing something that you know, is good for the community. So, I said to myself, I'd really like to get a job here one day. And it took me about 12 years, but I made it.

Student: Do you have a favourite plant?

[00:08:27]

Lloyd O'Hanlon: You know, it changes with the seasons, because different plants require different things at different times a year. At the moment, my favourite plant is, citronella grass. It's a little grass from Queensland. It grows about a metre tall. And the flower heads on the top, they look like big chunky bits of barbed wire. I'm in the process of removing the old seed heads, and I just find the whole process very therapeutic.

Lloyd O'Hanlon: What about. Do you have a favourite plant?

[00:09:01]

Students: It's going to be like, the tall trees.

My favourite plant in the whole botanical garden is the snake grass.

Which is also known as dianella.

The lemon myrtle, has a sweet smell

The white rose. I have that plant like right next to my room. The smell is always floating around and makes my room smell nice.

Cherry blossom , because it's pink and I love pink.

Cactus

Cactuses

A Cactus

[00:09:27]

Echinocactus grisonii. Golden barrel cactus

Uh, my favourite plant is succulents. Because they are like cactuses

I like daisies.

Eucalyptus tree.

Gum tree.

Oak tree.

My favourite plant is *Prunus domestica*. It's like a plum tree.

French Lavender

Blueberry lily.

Palm trees, they're tall. I think taller than a giraffe

Flax lily. Scientific name *Dianella*. nickname, snakegrass.

Camelia Japonica are the best flowers

[00:10:00]

Cyathea Australis. The dazzling ferns.

Lily. *Erythronium purpurascens*

My favourite plant is a fig tree. I like this because, um, tree that looks like a very old tree. This might live for more than a thousand years.

Student: Lloyd what do you like the most about the Royal Botanic Gardens?

Lloyd O'Hanlon: We're in the middle of the city and you can come here and see plants from all over the world. I've never been to California, but we have a massive collection of Californian plants. And I think it's cool to try and think about what different parts of the world look like, and how people in different parts of the world live.

[00:10:39]

Students: Every time when I go to a bamboo forest, it's like it feels nostalgic . Like in Vietnam. Very similar.

I'm Tongan. I think there are some random flowers , we call it bucca. It looks like one of those leaves.

Lloyd O'Hanlon: Are you guys growing stuff at your Primary School?

Students: Oh yeah, we call it the Urban Forest. It's basically a project where we plant a bunch of trees around the perimeter of the school.

[00:11:02]

There's like, I don't know, a million trees.

I think most students that have been to the school have planted at least one tree.

They were pretty short when we started it. And then they were a lot higher when we checked them.

And now the trees are growing and it serves as a home for animals and also as a spot in the shade.

Lloyd O'Hanlon: That is a really central part of what we do here as well. And we're very hesitant to remove trees because like you said, the importance of their cooling ability and their habitat.

[00:11:33]

Students: It's because like, the trees, they take in like carbon, and they spit out like, oxygen for us to breathe.

That's why it's really important, and we can decrease global warming and climate change.

Trees are kind of the base of the earth, so we need to keep them alive.

Getting more trees in the environment,

Makes us feel like we're doing something good.

[00:11:57]

INTERVIEW WITH BEC MILLER

Students: Thanks Lloyd. Next we spoke to Bec, who works as a scientist at the Botanic Gardens.

Bec Miller: My name is Bec Miller and my job at the Gardens is as a research scientist in seed science. And I work with our conservation seed bank.

Student: So Bec, what do you do when you come to the Botanic Gardens?

Bec Miller: My work is more in a building and less in the Garden. I work in the science division of the Botanic Gardens over in the Herbarium Building, but I get to contribute to the plants that are growing in the Garden through the research that we do. We have a seed bank, which is like a couple of big freezers in the basement of the building where we store and preserve seeds of threatened plant species, so ones that are at risk of extinction, and do research on how to grow those. When we're successful, those plants can then be grown on and planted out in the Garden.

Bec Miller: When I walk around and see some of these rare species that we've worked out how to germinate, growing in this beautiful landscape and them having a future because of that work. I feel really pleased about that.

[00:13:00]

Student: Uh, Bec, why did you prefer to be a scientist out of every other job?

Bec Miller: When I was at school I enjoyed science, and I was always really curious about how things worked in the natural world. You know, you'd observe things and you'd want to understand, why does that plant grow there and not there? Or, how did that plant recover after fire and that one didn't? You know, why are bees attracted to that flower but not to that flower? Those sorts of things, and so once you get curious like that, you start getting interested in research and doing experiments to try and understand things better.

Student: Why do you germinate plants?

[00:13:32]

Bec Miller: Conservation is the most important reason. Because we've modified the landscape so much and cleared land and because of things like climate change, sometimes species need our help to stop them going extinct. And so one of the things

we do is collect seed from those rare plants to make sure that if something happens to those remaining populations we've got some seeds stored that we can grow plants from. But It's really important that we know how to germinate those seeds, so that those species can live on. We're sort of like caretakers, you know, we're making sure that those plants survive into the future, along with us.

[00:14:04]

Student: What's your favourite plant that you've germinated?

Bec Miller: That's a tricky question. I think one of the favourite ones, is, a species of *Pomaderris*. So it's a species that grows down in Eastern Victoria, and it was impacted by the bushfires. And we had some seed collections. These seeds are sort of asleep. If you just sow them in the soil and water them, nothing will happen. So you have to work out what to do to get it to germinate. And so I experimented a bit with heat and different temperatures and I got them to germinate and those seedlings grew on, and we were able to give them to the community down near Mallacoota which was impacted by the fires, and they got to be planted out in that community.

[00:14:46]

BEC: So that was a one of those ones that was really satisfying.

Q TO BEC: How much seeds have you collected?

Bec Miller: Do you want to have a guess at how many seeds you think we might have stored for conservation in our seed bank? Throw me a number, have a guess.

Student: Around one thousand six hundred?

Three hundred and sixty four thousand?

Bec Miller: Getting big.

Student: I'd say around three thousand eight hundred.

Bec Miller: Alright, so I think at latest count, it's over 38 million seeds that we've got stored in the Herbarium. And that comes from about, 1500 different species that we've collected

Student: Oh God

Student: It's a pretty controversial topic, but do you think that plants are like, intelligent life? Because, many plants react when people touch it. So do you think that some plants could be alive?

[00:15:32]

Bec Miller: Very, very challenging question. So, I don't think they're intelligent in the way that animals have brains and can think and process information and make decisions. But in a way, plants do sort of respond to the environment around them. They've evolved and have all of these clever mechanisms for responding to things. So, you know, you have climbing plants, they sense touch.

Student: My mum has this plant at home and the plant just kept on using its vines to grow into the deck and it kept on grabbing other stuff.

[00:16:00]

Bec Miller: Yeah. They have a sense of touch. And they know which way to climb around a pole or a tree trunk. Other plants, if they're shaded, they know how to grow, which direction to grow to get the sunlight. So there's all these amazing sort of mechanisms or things that they can do, but not really intelligence, just things that they've evolved these abilities. And trying to unravel them is one of the cool things I think. Working out how they do it.

Bec Miller: I've got a question for you guys. Do you think you'd like to be a plant scientist or a scientist?

[00:16:29]

Student: I don't know what I want to be when I grow up so probably I can be a scientist. I'm up to 108 elements.

Bec Miller: Really?

Student: Yeah. I'm trying to memorize the whole Periodic Table.

Bec Miller: I'm super-impressed that's fantastic

Student: But I need 10 more.

Student: I definitely do want to be a scientist, but not a plant scientist.

Bec Miller: What sort of science interests you?

Student: Physics.

Bec Miller: Physics, Um - that's what my dad did. So you know in physics, so you can think about, how does a vine or even a really, really tall tree transport water from the ground 100 metres up? That's a problem in physics for you.

[00:17:03]

Student: There's water systems, pretty much exactly like pipes. They also go down to the roots and make the whole plant be able to grow leaves and produce bark. It's just plumbing, I guess.

Bec Miller: Pretty amazing plumbing, and I think you're going to be a fantastic scientist.

Student: Like, what do you like about the Garden?

Bec Miller: So I think I've always liked being outside. And I remember that my grandparents used to have a big vegetable garden. And I remember thinking how cool it was getting my hands dirty and helping with that, but also getting to eat the vegetables or the fruit or whatever that they were growing

[00:17:36]

Students: So um, we have this garden at the front of our school,

We have a greenhouse with lots of like, plants and stuff. And we grow lots of vegetables

We take extra good care of them.

Almost every week they get the compost bins from each classroom and then they bring it out and they dump it all in there to make dirt, and it's good for the plants.

And then once with all the vegetables, we made vegetable lasagna.

[00:18:00]

Free lasagnas for the whole school.

Bec Miller: So you got to grow all the plants yourself and then you got to harvest them and then eat them. It's just, it's fantastic.

Student: It just makes me feel responsible. Also happy because if it's like, a fruit or a vegetable, I don't have to go to the store and buy it.

INTERVIEW WITH HENRY BLACKMORE

And finally we spoke to Henry, who told us all about how they look after trees at the Botanic Gardens.

[00:18:30]

Henry Blackmore: My name is Henry Blackmore. I am the trainee arborist at the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria. Fire away.

Students: What's the highest you've climbed a tree before?

What's the best part of your job?

How do you climb trees?

Do you like climbing trees?

What's the most dangerous part about climbing a tree?

Have you ever got hurt by climbing trees?

What's your favourite tree?

What's your least favourite tree?

Student: What's, what's your job, Henry?

[00:18:54]

Henry Blackmore: Um, so I'm training to be an arborist. An arborist is a tree worker. It's looking after trees, looking after them like they're a human

Student: What got you into the job?

Henry Blackmore: When I was in High School, I was always interested with nature and, I grew up near a, a big garden in the Western suburbs and I was always fascinated by big trees and think that's what kind of made my interest evolve.

Student: Are you afraid of heights?

Henry Blackmore: To a certain point. I think I probably get to a two-story house, and then I start to get a little bit nervous

[00:19:30]

Student: I have a fear of falling. When I look down, that's when I get scared.

Henry Blackmore: It would be. unnatural not to be scared of heights

Student: Henry, what's the scariest tree you've ever climbed

Henry Blackmore: I think it was, a Californian Redwood , *Metasequoia sempervirens*, and it's up on Hopeton Lawn and it was 30 meters tall. It was my second day. I was scared but I was also excited. It's really nice to be able to look down and see the beautiful landscape that we have here and kind of connect with the tree because you can really feel it move with the wind .

[00:20:00]

Student: What do you find interesting about your job?

Henry Blackmore: I think ever since I started this job I've developed a great sense of smell. So being able to crush some foliage or leaves and being able to smell a lemon scent giving off a really great smell. That's one of my favourites

Students: We smelt all the different herbs. One smelt like lemon icypole and then one smelt like toothpaste and the other one pizza.

I'll would eat the pizza one, just to see if it tastes like it. The toothpaste one. I'm not tasting that because I've already tasted toothpaste before.

[00:20:32]

Henry Blackmore: Can I ask you a question? How do you think you would go 20 metres up in a tree, very high, and looking down and there's nothing much around you?

Students: Um. I probably have a panic attack to be honest.

Scared of heights,.

I cannot do it

Not big ones

I've never climbed a tree.

I've sat on a branch and read a book once.

So you said that you look after trees. Um, have you ever like seen a, poison tree or something dangerous?

[00:20:59]

Henry Blackmore: I think the one that I'm most afraid of, and I have to climb them every year, is the Bunya Bunya pine. They've got these big cones about double the size of my head, and it's got spiky foliage and I get scratches all over my arms. So I think that's part of the job that I don't love the most.

Student: Uh, have you ever like seen a creature in the tree as you are climbing it?

Henry Blackmore: It would have been maybe my third week at the job. And I had got my rope in the tree and I started climbing up. And I remember, it was a spiky erythrina tree and I remember putting my hand up on the branch and all these spikes went onto my hand and then I looked up and there was a possum's face just like, staring me in the eyes. I do have a little bit of a fear of possums. But the one that's the scariest is the powerful owl. A big owl. And it looks like it could hurt me.

[00:21:52]

Students: We went, bird watching

And we used the binoculars.

That little telescope thing where we had to see if we could find birds or anything?

My favourite thing was seeing some ducks, because I have never seen like, ducks in the river.

I got to look for my favourite birds, and I felt really satisfied when I got to tick off a bird on my list.

Henry Blackmore: Do any of you think you would become a tree worker or an arborist? .

Students: To be honest, never.

Absolutely not.

Not at all, no.

No, I have a fear of heights.

Never, just never.

Not even for 100 dollars.

Um Maybe? Maybe like my first job I might do it for a bit and then I'll like, move on.

[00:22:38]

THE FUTURE

Students: In the future I think the Garden will have a lot of robots around like, watering the plants, like digital stuff helping out, not really humans because a lot of the robots will take over all the jobs here.

And this place probably have, like, a big glass barrier around the entire thing. Endangered species of birds stay here and to be safe.

[00:23:01]

We probably won't have as many trees as we do now.

And if we don't have trees, we basically cannot survive. And to grow trees, we need water.

If you grow trees, it's going to evaporate so it can make the earth more cooler.

So, if there were no trees or plants, then icebergs might melt, and it's gonna be all hot, and mosquitoes might come.

There will be metal trees, and it will be fake grass.

[00:23:30]

This place is called Botanical Gardens. Botanical means plants. So, the place won't have fake grass, because like fake grass is just plastic. And it's bad for environment. And it's probably not going to get taken over by robots.

COMING BACK

This would be a great place to come in the future.

A place for people who like having peaceful picnics,

I would come back with my family.

I'll come back here when I start college. I want to walk my dog here.

[00:22:59]

My mum loves gardens and plants and she hasn't been here before, so I'll recommend her coming here, she will love it.

My grandma used to do gardening and I would help her. Last year she went to, um, Ethiopia and there was a fig tree. I recommend her to come here, and see, the fig trees. They look old,

My parents have a lot of work to do, they could come here and get their work done easily

It's like, if you had a bad day you could go there and you'd be much better.

Take one walk and you wouldn't regret going.

[00:24:33]

You should go there one day.

OUTRO

Students: You've been listening to Episode 5 of Sonica Botanica.

Kids Get Down to Earth.

Created by Patrick Cronin and Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria.

We want to give a big thank you to our Principal, Andrea Markham,

Vice Principal Grant Macell,

Teachers Stephen Christoforou and Ruth Cronin,

[00:25:00]

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[00:25:32]

And a huge thanks to us, students from years five and six at Ardeer South Primary School.

This episode was recorded on location at Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne and Ardeer South Primary School.

Music, audio editing, and sound design by Patrick Cronin.

Thanks for listening!

Thanks for listening.

Thanks for listening!

[00:25:55]

CODA

Students: Oh, I have a question!

How big is the Royal Botanic Gardens?

How was it in the past? Did you make it like that, or you just found it like that?

What's it like working there?

How much plants have you worked with?

How long have you been there for?

Question is, why have you been working here?

How old is your oldest tree?

What is the oldest, oldest tree?

In your opinion, what's your favourite tree

Do you find your job difficult?

Uh, if you guys had the chance to bring back dinosaurs, would you?

I've got a question if you can ask us more questions.

[00:26:30]