

Flourish

Supporter News Summer 2024

ISSUE 18

Australian Drylands Precinct

The Ian Potter Foundation
Children's Garden

Raising Rarity



Royal
Botanic
Gardens
Victoria



Memories of the past, Visions for the future

Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria is a place for making cherished memories that live on through many generations.

Prior to the opening of the Australian Garden at Cranbourne in May 2006, Chris Russell, *Director and Chief Executive* has wonderful memories of attending community planting days with his partner Jacqui and eldest daughter, who is now 29 years old. He fondly recalls putting some of the first plants into the landscape. The communal effort of staff, Friends and volunteers resulted in the planting of more than 40,000 plants by spring 2005.

"It's fascinating to look back at old photos of the Australian Garden, of what was a disused sand mine with some early experimental plantings and faint paths. By the time we finished the planting stage, the landscape had taken on a new form."

Reflecting on his children growing up with the Gardens, "the parallel growth of family and kids getting older, sitting aside a living landscape and watching them both mature and change over time. There's something poignant and beautiful about that," says Chris.

COVER

Chris Russell *Director and Chief Executive* in the Australian Drylands Precinct.

ABOVE

Chris Russell and Phil Moors, then *Director and Chief Executive* (1992–2012) inspecting topping trials for the Red Sand Garden at Cranbourne. Photo by Rodger Elliot.

Welcome to Summer Flourish

Dear supporters,

As we near the end of spring and the beginning of summer, both Gardens are bursting with colour, scents and all kinds of pollinators from bees to butterflies and birds and the darting of dragonflies. At Melbourne Gardens, the Arid Garden is beginning to bloom with bold and bright flowers appearing on our cacti and succulents. At Cranbourne Gardens, the Stringybark Garden is at the tail end of its spring glory, while the redesigned Ephemeral Garden and Dry Riverbed are looking amazing in their first spring since replanting.

In this edition, we invite you to explore our world leading conservation projects as we keep our eye set on the future preservation of our landscapes. With updates on our developments, achievements and celebrations, it is most fulfilling and rewarding to see the visions for the future of the Gardens coming to fruition.

In late October 2024 at Melbourne Gardens, we officially opened our new Australian Drylands Precinct and Flowering Meadows. The Australian Drylands Precincts rejuvenates the border between Domain Gate and Guilfoyle's Volcano in a design that showcases Australian native plants that have been selected to survive in a future warmer and drier climate.

The new development includes wild-collected plantings, a winding walkway and two circular seating areas. An exciting new learning hub for students will also be constructed in the coming years. We are grateful to the Edward Wilson Estate, Rosemary Simpson, Jane Edmanson, Betsy Polasek, Brain Little and the Maud Gibson Trust, and other generous supporters for making this development possible.

The Flowering Meadows are a stunning addition to Eucalypt Lawn and feature an array of native Australian wildflowers that have added spectacular colour to the area throughout Spring and into Summer. It has already become a favourite photo spot for visitors. We extend our sincere thanks to Joan Darling and Annabel and Jamie Montgomery for their support in making the Flowering Meadows a reality.

This year marks the 20th Anniversary of the Ian Potter Foundation Children's Garden. We are grateful to the Foundation and to patron Lady Potter AC for helping us to create this innovative Garden that was ahead of its time. We were thrilled to have Lady Potter visit the Garden once again for the 20th Anniversary celebration and to reflect on the way it has shaped the lives of the children of Melbourne and beyond.

I hope to see you in the Gardens over the summer, into the new year and beyond, as we celebrate our milestones and look ahead to achieving our future vision together.



Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Russell'.

Chris Russell

*Director and Chief Executive,
Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria*

Events

The Art of Botanical Illustration

One Monday evening in late September, Domain House opened its doors to our Garden's supporters who were treated to a private viewing of the 17th biennial *The Art of Botanical Illustration* (TABI) exhibition.

Organised by the Friends of Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne, the exhibition boasted a selection of over 150 botanical artworks submitted from local and international artists. TABI is one of Australia's leading botanical exhibitions and this year's event was a feast for the eyes, with some of the proceeds of the sale of artworks directed to supporting Melbourne Gardens.

An intimate artist talk followed by morning tea was held for our Perennial Gardeners, supporters who have kindly decided to leave a gift in their Will to the Gardens. Guests in attendance had the pleasure of hearing from renowned artist Dianne Emery, whose work is held in public and private collections across Australia and overseas. Learning about Dianne's inspirations and process evoked a deep appreciation for the beauty and fragility of the plant world.



LEFT
Elizabeth Montgomery, Pauline Cleary and Geraldine Hare.



RIGHT
Virender and Anita Barar.



Australian Drylands Precinct Launch

The newly established Australian Drylands Precinct demonstrates the beauty and diversity of Australian plants in hot and dry climates.

Over the last few months, our team have been busy transitioning a large section of the Gardens near Domain Gate using a palette of climate-suited native plants. The garden highlights the value of Australian plants for Australian gardens, with an emphasis on preservation of threatened species through ex-situ conservation and engagement with other botanic gardens.

As visitors travel along a serpentine path, there is a strong focus on how individuals can take direct action to protect these plants and the planet.

They can take time to sit in the open-air nodes, surrounded by range of new species that have been sourced through collecting trips and collaborations with our scientists and other partners.

The Australian Drylands Precinct represents our commitment to actively transitioning Melbourne Garden's landscape and plant collections to be more resilient and climate adaptive. The project is the first of its kind in any botanic garden and will provide a demonstration site to other urban land managers who wish to transition their landscapes. We look forward to the construction of the new learning facility in the near future as the project enters its final stages.

ABOVE

Nursery Horticulturalist Nicoletta Centofanti collecting seeds in the Australian Drylands Precinct.

Supporter Spotlight

Rosemary Simpson and Jane Edmanson

Highly accomplished gardeners and greatly valued supporters, Rosemary Simpson and Jane Edmanson OAM, have made generous contributions to the Australian Drylands Precinct by funding the creation of two outdoor learning spaces.

Born nearby in 1929, Rosemary Simpson reflects on the change that has occurred since Alexander Avenue was 'just a rough track'. Her fondness for Melbourne Gardens originates from having spent a "good deal of my early days at the Gardens".

The Fire Node, to which Rosemary has generously donated in memory of her late husband Bob Simpson, resembles a distinct post-fire landscape. Rosemary's love for native plants and trees cemented her connection to the Fire Node, with its display of grasses and epicormic regenerating foliage.

It is a space to stop, sit and reflect, representing Rosemary's appreciation for the bush. "I think both old and young need to meditate and enjoy the calming effect of bush, on the rare moments of quiet in our very busy lives".

Rosemary takes great joy in sharing her passion for nurturing and creating gardens with her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. Through her experience in caring for many a country garden, Rosemary's passion for sustainable Australian landscapes drove her to support the project, "I hope that children will learn to live in a drier Australia and treasure what we have". Remembering when her property in the Yarra Valley fell in the path of the 2009 bush fires, Rosemary's hope is that the Gardens in the future will employ careful and sustainable water management in our quickly changing climate.





Jane Edmanson is a horticulturalist, author, television and radio personality whose donation supported the construction of the Palm Node. The area is close to Jane's heart, with fond memories of quiet moments spent reading and picnicking on the lawn under the Eucalypts. She is thrilled that the area of the Gardens will now host a hive of activity, adding, "it is a great story about the value of the Australian plants and how they've adapted over thousands of years".

Jane's interest in ancient Australian plants spiked when Andrew Laidlaw presented the plans for the garden to her. Amongst the featured plants is the *Livistona australis* (Cabbage tree palm) which sounded most interesting to Jane, "I have seen them in Queensland, and they are spectacular. Most of the plants in Australia are ancient, this species has an ancient rainforest origin."

Jane previously trained as a Secondary School teacher and her wish is that the garden will encourage kids to "get outside, explore the bush and develop a curiosity in the natural world."

We are so grateful to Rosemary, Jane and other significant donors for their support in making this important garden a possibility.

"All botanic gardens are vital for conserving and saving plants and trees and providing lovely green spaces. It is important that they are recognised. We need more and more garden spaces all over Victoria and everywhere."

— Jane Edmanson OAM

LEFT

Four generations at the Fire Node. Rosemary Simpson (centre) with her daughter, Sarah Wood (left), granddaughter Maddy Burgess (right) and two great grandchildren, Francesca (far left) and Charlotte (far right).

ABOVE

Jane Edmanson with Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne staff Georgie Moy, Bronte McVeity, and Pascale Jacq.

The Ian Potter Foundation Children's Garden 20th Anniversary



At the end of October, the Gardens celebrated the 20th Anniversary of The Ian Potter Foundation Children's Garden. We were delighted to host patron Lady Primrose Potter AC and fellow Governors of The Ian Potter Foundation along with several significant donors who provided important funding for the Garden 20 years ago, as part of this special occasion.

The Ian Potter Foundation Children's Garden is a joyous and celebrated part of Melbourne's cultural life, providing a place for children to revel in nature, explore, socialise and grow. In 2004, the Garden was well and truly ahead of its time, and unlike other playgrounds and spaces of the day, allowed children freedom to play, to use their imagination, and experience the magic and wonder of nature.

Designed by long-serving *Landscape Architect*, Andrew Laidlaw, who's vision was inspired by his own children's connection to nature-based play. Andrew reflects on the garden as, "a place of being, where children become immersed in space and lose track of time and move into their dreaming and imaginative places. Time spent in these sorts of places gives children greater awareness that they are only a small part of a much bigger world."

The Ian Potter Foundation Children's Garden has inspired a generation of children who have now brought a love and care for nature into their adult lives. It has become a space of international significance, where landscape connections are fostered, and knowledge is shared across generations.



"Children are the future and we need to look after them. When I was young, most people had a backyard where children could play cricket and games. Today, high rise buildings are going up and children are getting stuck to their screens. This garden gives children a place to go. Over these 20 years, it's been a joy to see children playing under the fountains, finding a nook to play in or digging up mud while their Mum's enjoy their coffee nearby."

– Lady Primrose Potter AC

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Ian Potter Foundation, whose visionary support was vital to the creation of this special place for children and their families.

LEFT

Children absorbed in nature-based play.

ABOVE

Andrew Laidlaw and Lady Primrose Potter AC in The Ian Potter Foundation Children's Garden in late 2023.



Raising Rarity 'Citizen-science' conservation action

Raising Rarity unites the expertise of our science, horticulture, and learning teams to conserve and manage rare and critically endangered plant species facing imminent extinction.

The project aims to foster a collective responsibility for safeguarding threatened plant species across Victoria, by leading hands-on conservation initiatives and offering direct support to schools, local councils, and regional botanic gardens. The mission is to empower communities to act from the ground up, ensuring a shared vision for protecting our state's unique botanical heritage.

In 2024, the Ian & Shirley Norman Foundation provided a generous grant to support the Raising Rarity Schools Outreach Program. Their support has enabled us to pilot the program with three schools in the Gippsland area working with the perennial *Craspedia canens* (Grey Billy-buttons) and three schools in the Metropolitan area working with the native daisy *Xerochrysum palastre* (Swamp Everlasting).

Coralie Nichols, Chief Executive Officer of the Ian & Shirley Norman Foundation said 'We are pleased to support Raising Rarity as the project's aims align with our purpose to encourage and support organisations that are capable of responding to social and ecological opportunities and challenges'.

In this unique yearlong 'citizen science' conservation program, the Raising Rarity team helps students set up research beds in their school and then collect growth data to report back to the Gardens throughout the year.



The seed is then harvested and deposited into the Victorian Conservation Seed Bank at the National Herbarium of Victoria, boosting the future security of the species. The enthusiastic response from participating students is most encouraging, as they have a chance to reconnect with nature and inspire collective action. One student from Rosedale State School reflects, "This year, I hope we can get heaps of schools to grow seeds so we can make a difference and make these flowers popular again."

Long-term, the Garden's vision is to roll this program out across Victoria so students from around the state can have a lasting impact on the conservation of threatened native species.

"The future for conservation lies in a holistic approach that reaches and draws upon all parts of the community. Essentially, conservation needs to be democratised and have actions from everyone, not just a select few specialists."

– Ben Liu, *Programming and Audience Development*

OPPOSITE

Student inspecting a Swamp Everlasting.

ABOVE

Rosedale students and their research garden bed proudly displaying Grey Billy Buttons.



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.



YES, I would like to support the Garden’s mission to see life enriched and sustained by plants.

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"Throughout my childhood, Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria was a favourite place for my parents to bring us to picnic and meet with friends, just as they had in their own childhood. Each corner of the Gardens I turn is full of beautiful hazy summer memories of my brother, sister and I playing next to the lake near the swans, my parents and their friends lazily chatting on the lawns and, after much pleading, gobbling icy poles from the kiosk."

Nicola Kaufman, *Development Lead*,
Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria



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