

# Flourish

Supporter News Summer 2023

## ISSUE 15

Fascinating botanic research

Nature-based learning in  
regional Garden

Welcome to our new Board



Royal  
Botanic  
Gardens  
Victoria





**The new Board of Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria with the Executive Team**

LtoR: Fiona McLaughlin (Executive Director Corporate Services), Clare Kiely (Executive Director Land & Environment Policy, DEECA), Chris Cole (Executive Director Melbourne Gardens), Damian Holmes (RBGV

Board), David Harland (Director and Chief Executive), Penny Fowler (Chair, RBGV Board), Arianne Rose (RBGV Board), Chris Russell (Executive Director Cranbourne Gardens), Jason Hay (Deputy Chair RBGV Board), Peter Langkamp (RBGV Board), David Sheehan (Director Land Governance, DEECA). Absent: Christine Wyatt, Felicia Mariani.

**COVER**

*Clivia miniata* in Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria.

# Welcome to Flourish Summer

Dear Supporters,

With Summer now in full swing, our gardens are bursting with life and colour. Melbourne's Arid Garden and the native garden near the fallen oak tree are putting on a dazzling show while, over at Cranbourne, the Future Garden and Eucalypt Garden beckon you for leisurely strolls.

In this edition, we invite you to explore the role our gardens play in the realms of research and discovery.

The Jim Willis Studentship provides invaluable professional experience to aspiring botanists. Established in honour of the late Dr. James Hamlyn Willis, this scholarship stands as a tribute to his lifelong dedication to botanical education and the safeguarding of plant species. The Studentship provides a unique opportunity for promising students to engage in hands-on research, mentored by experts.

In our Supporter Spotlight, we're delighted to introduce you to Angela and Peter Matkovic, two individuals whose appreciation for the beauty of nature is equalled only by their commitment to environmental preservation. Their story is an inspiring testament to the transformative power of our gardens.

Additionally, we are thrilled to share details about the Nurturing Minds and Nature Outreach Program.

This initiative is making a positive impact by offering free educational workshops to approximately 500 students in key regional botanic gardens. Schools participating in this program have the flexibility to choose workshops that align with their specific educational goals from our existing suite of programs.

I eagerly anticipate the opportunity to meet you at our end-of-year supporter event, where we can celebrate the remarkable achievements and discoveries made possible by your support. Together, we continue to foster a deeper connection between people and the natural world, ensuring a more sustainable and harmonious future for our planet.



Best wishes,

**David Harland**  
Director and Chief Executive  
Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria

# Paying it forward

## The Jim Willis Studentship

**The Jim Willis Studentship is a shining opportunity, guiding promising students with a passion for botany and environmental conservation.**

Established by the Cybec Foundation, the Studentship embodies the legacy of the late Dr. James Hamlyn Willis' dedication to botanical education and the preservation of plant species. Dr. Willis, a distinguished botanist and Assistant Government Botanist at the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne for over 30 years, produced *A Handbook to Plants in Victoria* which remained a definitive reference for Victoria's flora for decades and formed the foundation for the *Flora of Victoria*.

The young Roger Riordan, later to become founder of Cybec Foundation, shared a passion for the natural world and formed a friendship with Dr. Willis which lasted until his death in 1995. In honour of his memory, Roger created the James Hamlyn Willis Memorial Scholarship. Open to third and fourth-year Science degree students with a passion for plant and fungal systematics, this program offers the unique opportunity to engage in hands-on research under the guidance of experts empowering them to develop their skills, expand their knowledge, and establish connections in the field.

To date, 48 students have been awarded the prestigious Jim Willis Studentship. The students have undertaken important research in a wide range of areas, from the development of *microsatellite loci* in the endangered

Victorian grassland shrub *Pimelea spinescens*, to capturing pollen diversity in the Buckwheat Family *Polygonaceae*, to the study of ear picking fungi *uriscalpium* (ear pick fungi). Harv Orel discovered a new species of wattle *Acacia cineramis* during his studentship in 2018/19.

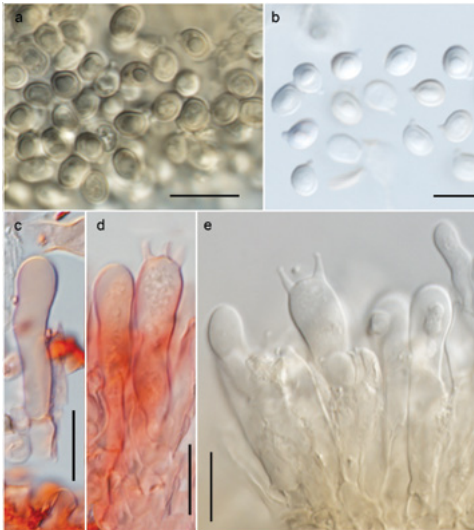
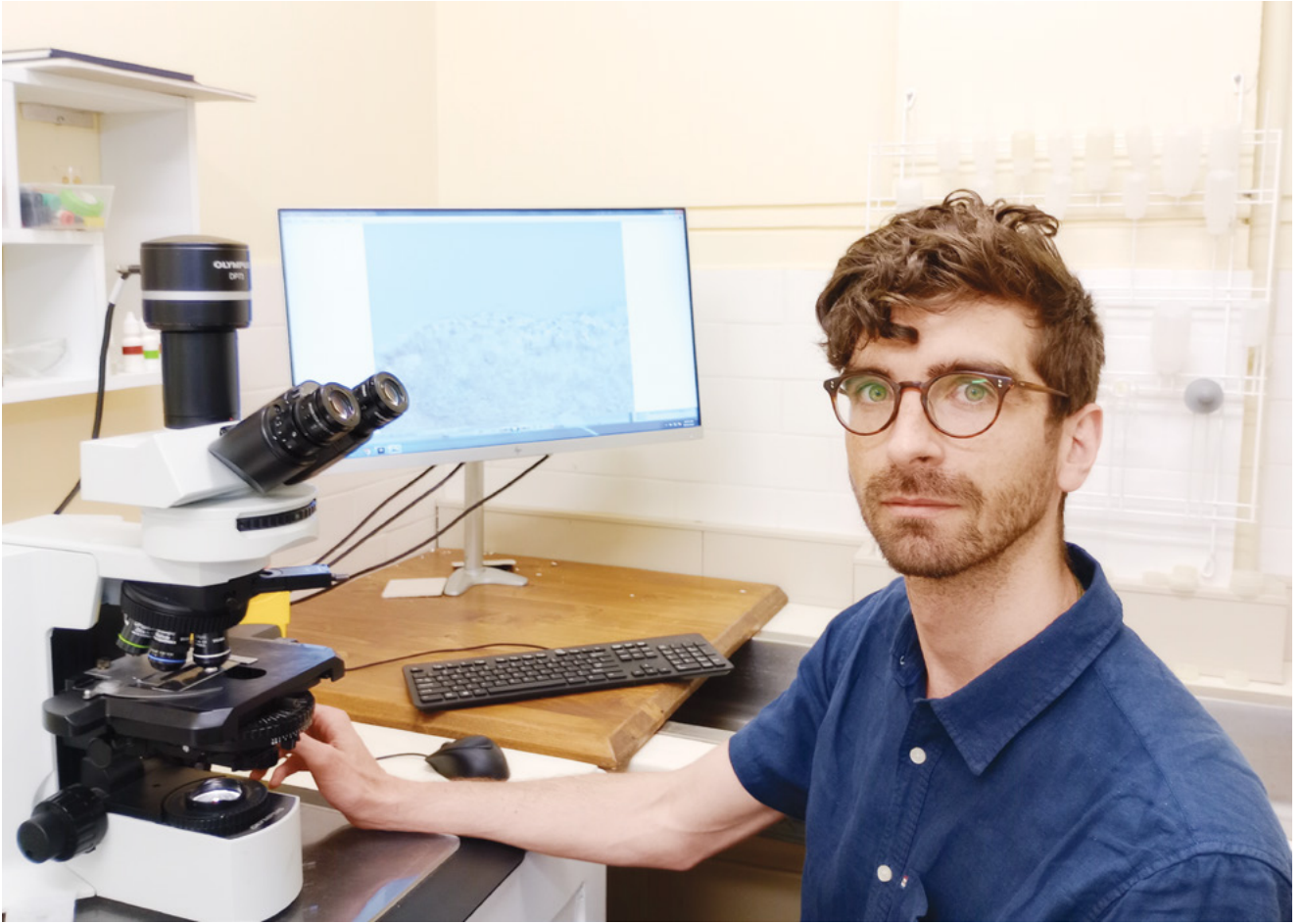
We look forward to welcoming new students to the program this Summer.

By nurturing this next generation of botanists and conservationists, the Jim Willis Studentship aims to safeguard the future of our environment. These students embody Dr. Willis' and Roger's vision of preserving plant diversity, understanding our natural world, and confronting the environmental challenges of our time. It is a legacy of knowledge, a tribute to a life well-lived, and a testament to the enduring bond between passion and education.

**“An extraordinary chance to witness a field of science in action, actively engaging and contributing to the often hidden processes that advance the Herbarium's scientific endeavors.”**

**– Sam Craig, Jim Willis Studentship 2023.**





**ABOVE**  
Sam Craig, recipient of the 2023  
Jim Willis Studentship.

**BELOW**  
Research paper on fungal systematics by Sam Craig and  
the Mycology team. Image courtesy: Noah Siegel and  
Luke Vaughan.

# Events

## Orchid Tour at Cranbourne Gardens



In September, a group of orchid enthusiasts enjoyed an exclusive, behind-the-scenes visit to the Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne.

Led by Senior Research Scientist Dr. Noushka Reiter, Executive Director (Science) David Cantrill, Executive Director of Cranbourne Gardens Chris Russell, and the newly appointed Director and Chief Executive David Harland, donors explored the Garden's Eureka Prize-winning native orchid conservation program.

Dr. Reiter and Research Scientist Alex McLaughlin showcased their 'portable-converted' lab and the shade houses that protect some of Australia's rarest and most endangered native orchids, including the Queen of Shiba and Large Crimson Spider orchid. The day concluded with refreshments and conversations about the researchers' remarkable work. We extend our gratitude to our dedicated attendees!

#### LEFT

Helen McLean in the orchid shade house.

#### TOP RIGHT

Director and Chief Executive David Harland with Christina Millot.

#### MIDDLE

Dr. Noushka Reiter at afternoon tea with Elizabeth Xipell.

#### LOWER RIGHT

Wendy Miller, Sue Broadbent and Meg Bentley catching up after the tour.



# Wendy's Gift



In 2021, Wendy Dodd reached out to Tom May, Principal Research Scientist (Mycology) at Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria. Wendy wanted to know how she could support mycology in Australia. She had an interest in fungi and attended events run by Alison Pouliot, a fungi educator and photographer whose workshops explore fungal diversity and ecology.

On Tom's suggestion, Wendy supported a project to accelerate the description of new species of fungi. The introduction of a new role allowed the team to examine fungal sporing

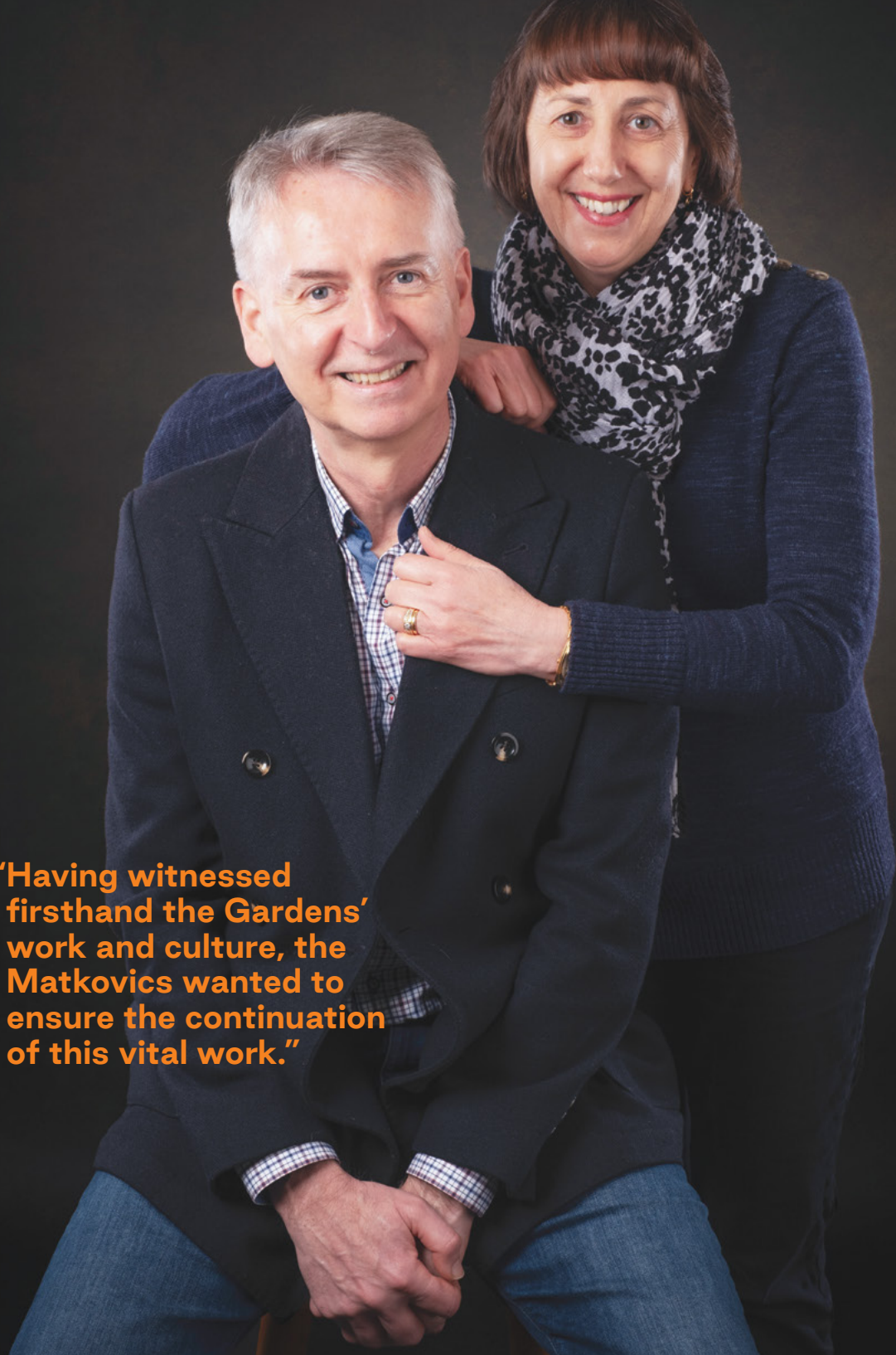
bodies, assemble DNA sequence information and prepare the formal descriptions of new species and accompanying illustrations. The first paper from the project has just been accepted in Australian Journal of Taxonomy, with more to come.

We were saddened to hear this year of Wendy's passing. Tom and the Development Team shared wonderful conversations about her passion for nature and the world of fungi. Wendy's contribution to the Gardens and the field of Mycology is remembered with gratitude.

## ABOVE

Principal Research Scientist (Mycology), Tom May.

## Supporter Spotlight: Angela and Peter Matkovic



**“Having witnessed firsthand the Gardens’ work and culture, the Matkovics wanted to ensure the continuation of this vital work.”**



Angela and Peter Matkovic share a profound admiration for the beauty of nature and an unwavering commitment to environmental preservation. Their journey as supporters of Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria exemplifies their deep affection for the natural world.

Angela, a medical scientist, originally hails from country Victoria but now calls Melbourne home. She vividly remembers her first encounter with the Melbourne Gardens when she arrived in the city at 17 years old. The green sanctuaries served as a source of solace, offering respite from the urban bustle, and a reminder of her rural roots.

Now, living in proximity to Melbourne Gardens, Angela and Peter have embraced the joy of marathon running and their favorite route is around The Tan.

Peter, a business owner, finds solace in meditation and frequents Fern Gully for moments of peaceful contemplation and both find Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria to be a source of inspiration, calm and upliftment.

Angela and Peter's story does not end with their personal appreciation for nature. Their passion for the environment and commitment to climate change led them down a path of philanthropy that began with a simple act. During the pandemic, the couple decided to renovate their backyard. They faced the bittersweet task of relocating a beautiful Birds Nest Fern that had thrived there for nearly two decades. Angela and Peter reached out to Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria, sharing images of the fern and inquiring if the Gardens might be interested in receiving it. To their pleasant surprise, the Gardens enthusiastically accepted the fully-grown fern. Coincidentally, the Gardens were in the process of revamping Fern Gully, making this donation especially timely. The couple remained engaged with the Gardens



throughout the project's evolution and were even treated to a behind-the-scenes tour upon its completion. The Matkovic's cherished fern was prominently placed next to the Birds Nest sculpture.

This personal connection sparked their desire to contribute to the Gardens' conservation efforts and witness the tangible impact of their involvement. Angela and Peter's inspiring story has become a cherished anecdote among their friends and family. Their travels to botanical gardens around the world have only deepened their appreciation for Melbourne Gardens. They proudly introduced overseas visitors to this gem, showcasing the splendour that lies within its boundaries.

Beyond their generous donations, Angela and Peter Matkovic have left an indelible mark on the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria by leaving a gift to the Gardens in their Wills. Having witnessed firsthand the Gardens' work and culture, they wanted to ensure the continuation of this vital work. Their legacy will nurture the Gardens and support their mission long after their lifetimes.

Angela and Peter Matkovic's partnership with Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria serves as an example of how the people who love the Gardens make a meaningful difference in preserving our environment and protecting the fragile beauty of our natural world.

# Education

## Nurturing Minds and Nature

**“The Trust is very pleased to offer a different type of experience to rural students who might not otherwise have this opportunity. This hopefully opens their world up to a safe and beautiful place they can freely access as well as undertake learning in a practical and more interesting environment.”**

**– Alison Beswick, Executive Officer, The Marian and E.H. Flack Trust.**





The Victorian Education Outreach Program provides students in regional Victoria with the opportunity to participate in Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria's nature-based learning programs.

Ben Lui, Creative Producer of our Learning and Participation programs, recognises the educational disparity faced by regional students, who encounter significant geographical and financial obstacles to learning.

With the generous support of the E.H. Flack Trust, the Gardens proudly introduced the Victorian Outreach Program.

The program harnesses the extensive network of regional botanic garden partners to deliver a series of free education workshops to around 500 students in key regional botanic gardens, effectively extending the reach of their educational programs into regional Victoria.

Within this initiative, schools can select workshops aligned with their learning priorities from the Garden's existing suite of programs including *Designed by Nature*, the *Biomimicry STEM Program* and *Nature Play*. Offered at regional botanic gardens, the programs are accessible to local students and facilitated by members of the Royal Botanic Garden Victoria's Learning Team. To date, four regional programs benefited 364 students across gardens in Sale, Bendigo, and Geelong. The reduced travel costs and shorter distances significantly lowered participation barriers for regional schools, enabling local engagement in their own botanic gardens.

The program is a testament to the transformative power of knowledge. It acknowledges the intrinsic connection between humans and the environment. Students of all ages and backgrounds are immersed in the fascinating realm of plants and nature, sparking curiosity and exploration.

The collaborative partnership between Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria and the Flack Trust demonstrates the impact of philanthropy in expanding education beyond the physical confines of the Gardens.

By empowering the younger generation and instilling a sense of stewardship for the environment through engaging learning experiences, this initiative is cultivating a brighter and more harmonious tomorrow.

**ABOVE**

Children enjoying the interactive learning experience at *Nature Play*.



A close-up photograph of a flower, likely a Banksia, showing a dense cluster of bright red stamens and a fuzzy, white and orange base. The background is a soft-focus green leaf with serrated edges.

**Conservation Research at  
Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria  
addresses the challenges we face  
today and in times ahead.**

The importance of research to help save fragile endangered plants and fungi from extinction to ensure endangered Australian species are protected has never been more apparent, both for our own wellbeing, as well as the planets. At Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria, we will continue to uncover the knowledge and discoveries we need to be the best possible custodians of our unique natural heritage.

**It is through the generosity of  
our donors that the Gardens will  
continue critical conservation  
research.**

Show your support today by making a fully tax-deductible donation as we continue our efforts in world-class science and horticultural research, landscapes and public programs.



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

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