

Flourish

ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS
VICTORIA

SUPPORTER NEWS
SPRING 2025

ISSUE 20

Arboriculture Scholarships

A Home for All

Botanical Illustration Studentships

Seat Dedications from the Heart





Royal
Botanic
Gardens
Victoria



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A Habitat Worth Flying Home For

With the restoration of Wylies Creek underway at Cranbourne Gardens, a particularly well-travelled and intrepid bird – the Latham's Snipe (*Gallinago hardwickii*) has returned to the area.

The re-wilding of the Southern Grasslands has created a more abundant and appealing home for the migratory species, with sightings recorded by the Gardens team over the last few months.

A delight to birdwatchers and conservation specialists alike – the Latham's Snipe's status is listed as 'vulnerable' – this discovery is just the beginning of the many rare and threatened species expected to call the re-vegetated habitat their home.

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.



Welcome to the refreshed Spring Flourish!

Dear supporters,

With the equinox behind us, we can look forward to longer, warmer days and the hive of activity that spring brings to the Gardens. Across both our landscapes, new growth is unfurling, signalling a season of renewal and discovery. A sea of pink Everlastings (*Xerochrysum bracteatum*) has again transformed the grassy meadow area of the Australian Drylands Precinct, and the successful propagation of the rare Rosella Spider Orchid (*Caladenia rosella*) under the shade cloths at Cranbourne Gardens continues.

It was a pleasure to welcome so many of you to the launch of *Lightscape* in June. This year's trail was our most ambitious yet, with 20 breathtaking installations highlighting First Peoples culture and our scientific and horticultural work. Now in its fourth year, *Lightscape* is not only a captivating experience, but a vital contributor to our financial sustainability and ability to connect with new audiences. Thank you for being part of its continued success.

We were especially proud to host the opening night in the elegant surrounds of *The Observatory*. If you are yet to visit, I warmly encourage you to experience the European-inspired cuisine and local wines. Set amid the lush surrounds of Melbourne Gardens, it's the perfect spot to spend a spring moment with friends and loved ones.

Looking ahead, *Live at the Gardens* returns in November, transforming the Observatory Precinct into a vibrant live music destination. This year's series features rock legends *Franz Ferdinand* alongside the much-loved musical quiz show *RockWiz*.

For a different kind of journey, you might join a tour of the *Melbourne Observatory*. The Astronomical Society of Victoria's passionate members will take you on an unforgettable voyage through time and space. Or you could retreat to the depths of Fern Gully for a transformative *Forest Therapy* session, connecting to nature through 'bathing' in greenery for improved wellbeing.

There's never been a better time to step into the wonder of the Gardens. Thank you for your continued support; we simply couldn't achieve any of this without you.

Chris Russell
*Director and Chief Executive,
Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria*

Creating Pathways at the Gardens



For two years, Henry Blackmore has served as the Gardens' first resident Trainee Arborist. He has immersed himself in the apprenticeship program, which is training the next generation of tree experts at the Gardens.

📍 Charlie and Henry in front of a *Cupressus cashmeriana*, a shared favourite tree at Melbourne Gardens.

“Before starting at the Gardens I had some industry experience – mainly cutting around powerlines. It’s interesting but terrifying work. Now, working in the Gardens, going on seed collecting trips, and navigating ginormous trees – it’s surreal and a huge contrast to other jobs in the field.”

Henry Blackmore, *Trainee Arborist*

The traineeship connects emerging arborists with the Gardens’ world-class experts. Henry has been learning alongside his mentor, Charlie Carroll *Manager Arboriculture*. Charlie’s appreciation for Henry’s passion, skill and drive is evident in the bond they share and the impact Henry has made in the role.

“It’s been a crazy experience, from looking out over city skyscrapers to databasing the Australian Garden and bushland trees. Gaining exposure to three contrasting landscapes isn’t something you get in an everyday job,” says Henry.

Recently, Henry joined *Digital Collections Advisor* Nimal Karunajeewa and *Research Scientist* Rebecca Miller on a field trip to Portland, Victoria. They collected seed from mana gums for crucial restoration work in collaboration with First Peoples conservation groups. “To have the science knowledge pays off massively when making the right cut,” explains Charlie. “It plays into the need for sustainability within the sector and the responsibility we have at the Gardens to champion that.” The program’s strength lies in its holistic approach, blending technical skill, hands-on learning, and plant knowledge to nurture arborists who can think globally and ecologically.

Henry’s strengths extend beyond the canopy. “I’m fairly tech savvy – so I’ve picked up the whole tree data collections side of things down in Cranbourne,” he shares. Working with Horticulture staff, Henry has helped convert the data recording system, transitioning from paper to digital.

“So far, I think we’ve saved around 10 trees,” beams Charlie. “Between the bushland and the Australian Garden, we’ve databased approximately 2,800 trees – which is only about 10–15% of all the trees down there.” It’s a huge step forward in monitoring tree health, safety and longevity, with the ripple effects benefitting both the Gardens and broader tree research.

Prior to the apprenticeships, there was no formal pathway for arboriculture succession within the Gardens. “In welcoming new people to the team, we can really focus on futureproofing and planning,” says Charlie. “We can capture new ideas that make for exciting changes – but it’s so dependent on a trainee’s can-do attitude.”

To build on Henry’s learnings, the Gardens created a new two-year Diploma program, extending the traineeship. “We have the amazing internal ability to support someone’s development through their career,” says Charlie. The Diploma will give Henry the chance to work closely with veteran Gardens arborist James Shugg, helping to preserve over two decades of invaluable tree knowledge.

The donor-supported program has sparked significant interest, receiving 86 applications for the next scholarship. The Gardens are evolving in the arboriculture industry. “By looking outward and connecting with TAFE and hosting the Victoria Tree Industry Organisation, we’re greatly increasing dialogue,” reflects Charlie. “Our next apprentice is phenomenal; she’s going to make waves in the industry and bring such great energy to the team.” Thanks to generous funding from donors Meg Bentley, Lady Southey AC, Betsy Polasek, Leon and Judith Gorr, and Bridget and John Patrick, Elaine Jenny Bautista began her scholarship in August – and is already reaching new heights – speaking volumes about how the Gardens champion diversity in a male-dominated industry.

“We’ve become the place where young people want to come to learn and build a career in trees,” smiles Charlie. And that’s something to sing from the treetops. ●

If you are interested in supporting the Arboriculture or Horticulture Scholarships, please reach out to Nicola Kaufman *Manager Philanthropy* on +61 3 9252 2713

Lightscape Returns to the Gardens

After a mild start to winter, the first coldsnap of the season coincided with the opening week of our annual light show Lightscape, where many of our donors braved the chill to celebrate its preview launch.

In our fourth installment, we hosted many of our wonderful donors at *The Observatory*, our new eatery, before their exclusive preview of the all-new *Lightscape* trail.

Guests enjoyed the pre-event mingle and an opportunity to meet up with old and new friends.

Lightscape won the Gold Award in the Major Festivals and Events category at last year's Victorian Tourism Awards, followed by a Bronze Award in the Australian Tourism Awards. It's testament to the magic of the experience for our audiences, and to the incredible team who bring it to life.

The new trail featured unique lighting installations, including First Peoples storytelling on the Ornamental Lake, as well as a jaw-dropping light show across Dog Flat Lawn. ●



① Lachy Hannah, Virginia Heywood, Tim Sansom
Executive Director, Living Collections and Environment
and Sylvie Heywood.



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⬆ Sybil Langley-Jones and Alice Cavina.

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⬆ Chloe Edmonds, Emma Edmonds and Nicole Butera.



⬆ Prof Liz Tudor AM, MITS student Keelan Nawudba, Jan Johnston, and Prof Emma Johnston AO.

GROWING BEYOND EARTH

Launching STEM Futures in Regional Victoria



Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria is proud to be leading the Growing Beyond Earth Project in Australia, a global initiative bringing cutting-edge space science and plant research to regional Victorian classrooms.

📌 Growing Beyond Earth plant growth chamber,
designed by Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden.



“In a world facing climate change, biodiversity loss, and increasing pressure on food systems, students need more than just scientific knowledge – they need curiosity, creativity, and a deep appreciation for the role plants play in sustaining life.”

Sally Fierenzi, *Acting Creative Producer Community Engagement and Outreach*

The innovative and immersive Growing Beyond Earth 2025 program has been made possible through the generous support of the Toyota Community Trust. Currently underway in 36 schools, including 15 regional secondary schools, the program empowers students through real-time scientific inquiry while also addressing critical gaps in STEM education.

According to the Department of Education, the average 15-year-old from remote Australia is around 1.5 years behind metropolitan students in science achievements. These outcomes are often influenced by limited resources, staffing challenges, and the tyranny of distance.

“In the next two years, we hope to expand the program even further, setting up more support services outside of Victoria,” says Sally Fierenzi, *Acting Creative Producer Community Engagement and Outreach*, who has seen project participation and impact skyrocket this year.

Developed in collaboration with La Trobe University’s Plants for Space program, Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden in Florida, and NASA, the project enables students to contribute to NASA’s ongoing research into growing food crops in space. Each participating school receives a specialised plant growth chamber, modeled on the “Veggie” system aboard the International Space Station. Over the course of the school year, students conduct structured plant experiments, monitor growth, and directly submit data.

The Gardens’ Learning team coordinates educators and supervises the course content, while La Trobe University’s researchers provide local expertise in plant experimentation, specialist presenters, and – crucially – examples of pathways for future STEM careers.

Thus far, over 400 students have taken part and thousands more have shared in the results through school activities and presentations. By connecting over 30 regional science teachers and providing them with valuable professional development, the program lays the groundwork for long-term sustainability. In the coming years, these teachers will independently maintain the program, creating a lasting educational legacy that will benefit future students.

With a focus on building scientific literacy, the project also fosters a strong sense of global citizenship and environmental awareness across the regional classrooms. The support from the Toyota Community Trust for the 2025 program has ensured that geographic and financial barriers do not stand in the way of opportunities for these curious young minds. Sally adds, “It is a great example of what partnerships can grow into. The work we are doing goes well beyond our Garden gates, and earth as we know it!” •

If you would like to support the future of the Growing Beyond Earth Project in regional Victoria, please reach out to the Philanthropy team at philanthropy@rbg.vic.gov.au or on 9252 2332.

① Amy Padolf (Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden) and Sally Fierenzi (Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria) meeting with students from Catholic Regional College, Caroline Springs.

A Home for All

Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria exist as a sanctuary for people as well as the myriad of organisms that underpin the resilience of our landscapes. Biodiversity is integral to the longevity of the Gardens – and impacts how visitors benefit from time spent in nature.

It may come as no surprise that the decisions made by our teams in planning, planting and maintaining the Gardens are a key element to visitor's well-being. "There is a lot of research to suggest that when we are caring for the bugs and birds, everyone benefits," shares *Landscape Architect* Andrew Laidlaw. "The research shows that people sitting in landscapes surrounded by diverse plantings, and sensory experiences, have definable better mental health outcomes."

At Melbourne Gardens, the richly planted landscapes of the Sensory Garden, the Fern Gully, and the Australian Drylands Precinct provide greater opportunity for such immersive experiences – not to mention the wonder and possibilities for exploration in the Ian Potter Foundation Children's Garden. "When we dive into the planting design in these spaces it's important that we use a diverse range of plants, and consider all the layers of the garden," says Andrew.

In maximising the use of the plants' texture, form and colour, the sensory experience of being in nature is amplified. This variety is also a huge draw card for attracting local fauna. An abundance of flowering plants helps provide habitat for insects and birds, just as planting low, prickly shrubs and ground covers is advantageous to lots of smaller birds seeking refuge.

Andrew notes, "the other incredibly important layer is that we try to encourage wildlife by always having water available, leaving leave litter in garden beds, maybe adding an insect hotel or two, and linking our green spaces together." With so many elements at play, the cohesion and connection felt in the Gardens is no coincidence. Neither are the happy faces! •



➡ A male Superb Fairy-wren (*Malurus cyaneus*) with its unmistakable blue breeding plumage spotted at Cranbourne Gardens.



← Exploring the conservation bushland at Cranbourne Gardens.

↓ Inquisitive young minds inspecting plant life with *Learning Facilitator* Joe Blake at Melbourne Gardens

“It’s really important that we keep this garden for the people of Melbourne. Not only do we contribute to people’s wellbeing but also to ecological health – for the whole biodiversity of Melbourne actually.”

Andrew Laidlaw,
Landscape Architect.



Cultivating Creativity and Critical Insight



Thanks to the generosity of the Maxwell/Hanrahan Foundation, a unique opportunity for early-career botanical illustrators has taken root at Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria and is now thriving.

“Getting to spend time looking at specimens under a microscope, dissecting their tiny features and translating that into a visually pleasing image was pure joy”

Jessica Lazner

The Botanical Illustration Studentship was launched at the Gardens in 2022 after *Manager of Biodiversity Services*, Alastair Robinson, introduced the Maxwell/Hanrahan Foundation to the urgent need for technical illustrations of specimens held in the State Botanical Collection. Alastair championed the program noting that many specimens lacked diagnostic images – essential tools for identifying and distinguishing certain plant groups.

The inaugural studentship was awarded to Peta McDonald, which resulted in exquisite illustrations of leafy liverworts. Her work demonstrated the value of such a program, laying the groundwork for additional funding from Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria Foundation. In a pivotal second year, the Maxwell/Hanrahan Foundation’s renewed support, alongside that of the RBGV Foundation, allowed for two concurrent studentships. This year’s recipients, Jessica Lazner and Rosie Pettenon exceeded expectations with the remarkable quality and volume of their work.

Supervised by *Mycologist Principal Research Scientist* Tom May, Rosie Pettenon’s studentship homed in on the fungi family. “It was fantastic getting to learn new techniques and skills associated with scientific illustration style, whilst trying to show the plants in their best form” reflects Rosie, who is in her final year studying Fine Arts at the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA). “I really enjoyed being in such a supportive, collaborative team environment, and to have the opportunity to draw and produce work for two whole months was so fulfilling”, she says.

Meanwhile, Jessica Lazner’s project continued the exploration of leafy liverworts. Guided by *Senior Research Scientist*, Daniel Murphy, Jessica brought both scientific and artistic prowess to the role “One of the most exciting things for me was getting to work with the collection, hands on, and seeing the plants up close” Jessica recalls. With a background in science and the arts, having just finished her honors researching plant genetics, Jessica will commence a PhD in plant science next year. “Getting to spend time looking at specimens under a microscope, dissecting their tiny features and translating that into a visually pleasing image was pure joy”, she beams.

The detailed, scientifically rigorous illustrations have brought clarity to some of the collection’s more elusive plant species. This year, the studentship achievements led to an exciting development: a proposal from Alastair to name the program in recognition of the Maxwell/Hanrahan Foundation’s ongoing support. The Foundation responded with enthusiasm, committing to three additional years of funding and increasing their grant to support two students annually.

Now entering its third year, the Botanical Illustration Studentship continues to attract national interest, particularly among students in biological sciences and the arts, as well as from the broader naturalist community.

Reflecting on the studentships’ success, Alastair shares with pride, “The artworks produced by our students are exceptional, a real testament to their skills. Their work admirably showcasing both the value and beauty that scientific illustration brings to botany and education.” •

☉ Rosie Pettenon (left) with her illustration of *Microporus xanthopus*, showing a microscopic depiction of the pores, the young form of the fungus, and its habit amongst leaf litter, alongside Jessica Lazner (right) holding her composite set-piece of the leafy liverwort *Colura pulcherrima*.

A story about the power of kindness, place and belonging

Caroline Ryan has been visiting Melbourne Gardens regularly since relocating to East Melbourne from Queensland in 2011. Her favourite spot is a particular seat in the sun nestled in the Herb Garden, dedicated to Professor Ian Thornton, a celebrated scientist and academic. His wife, Ann, decided to dedicate a seat in his honour after his passing in 2002.

She became fascinated by the seat's heartfelt plaque: *"IN LOVING MEMORY OF ZOOLOGIST Emeritus Professor Ian Thornton DSc FAA 14 July 1926 – 1 October 2002. Who Enjoyed Sitting Here Doing 'The Times' Crossword. Always Remembered, Annie"*.

Caroline looked into Professor Thornton and learnt of his research and career as a Professor Emeritus of Zoology in the School of Biological Sciences at La Trobe University. One Sunday morning last year, she noticed that the dedication plaque for the seat was no longer in its usual place. She reached out to the Gardens, a decision that echoes Professor Thornton's life story of resilience and kindness.

With the permission of Professor Thornton's widow Ann, Caroline renewed the dedication to continue sharing the memory of Professor Thornton. She laughs that her first thought was, "It would be wrong for this seat to be dedicated to someone else. I didn't know Ann or Professor Thornton – but this place meant enough to her at some point to ensure that it was acknowledged that this was where he sat and did his Times crossword!"

As part of the dedication renewal, Caroline met Ann via email. What evolved is a beautiful connection between two strangers; Ann has since sent Caroline one of Professor Thornton's most well-known books on Krakatau, and articles with further insight into the Professor's

life, work and adventures. Caroline sent photographs of the reinstated seat to Ann, who was overwhelmed with Caroline's profound act of kindness.

"The Gardens were a place of peace, tranquillity and inspiration for him," reflects Ann. "He just adored them. We married in 1980 and went to the Gardens one Saturday afternoon – and fell in love with a nearby home for sale. We ended up moving there and walking to the Gardens together every Sunday afternoon for a coffee at the Observatory Café for a good 20 years!"

"He was an amazing man with an inquisitive, intelligent, searching mind," says Ann. "After I cleared out his office at La Trobe, I came across a sketch of the Botanic Garden by Melbourne artist Stuart Wade. I made the decision to donate the sketch to the State Botanical Collection." A gesture that expressed deep gratitude for the meaningful impact the Gardens had on their lives. Ann now resides on five acres at Mount Martha, a move she made in 2014, to be closer to her son and grandchildren. Surrounded by oak trees that attract her "fly in, fly out friends" – sulphur-crested cockatoos, and a flock of ducks – she misses living in the area. "The Gardens played such an important role in our lives; a source of beauty and tranquillity, a place to go and reflect. I can see it in my mind now. We are very lucky."

For Caroline, "the seats are a wonderful memorial –there are so many stories that are sitting there in the Gardens. Ann and Professor Thornton's story needed to continue." Professor Thornton's seat now remains in the Herb Garden for the next 10 years thanks to Caroline's thoughtful donation. "I can't express my gratitude enough to Caroline", says Ann. "I'm sure he's looking down, feeling very honoured, and gently smiling to himself". •



- ① Caroline Ryan on the seat in the secluded Herb Garden at Melbourne Gardens.
- ② A photo taken of Ann Thornton visiting Professor Thornton "Thorny's" seat.

"The Gardens played such an important role in our lives; a source of beauty and tranquillity, a place to go and reflect. I can see it in my mind now. We are very lucky."

Ann Thornton



Safeguarding Victoria's Rare and Threatened Plants

Thank you to all the donors who supported our recent tax-time appeal. This appeal has helped support our horticulture teams to undertake critical expeditions in the Gariwerd (Grampians) region to collect plant material from threatened species. These efforts are helping to safeguard some of Victoria's rarest plants for generations to come.

With combined expertise from our teams at Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne and Melbourne, our horticulturists have collected an incredible 43 plant species across the Little Desert National Park, focusing particularly on the unburned western areas.

Eleven threatened Victorian species — including five endangered and six critically endangered — are now part of Cranbourne's Living Collection. Some have also been transferred to Melbourne Gardens, where they are being carefully propagated for planting in the Australian Drylands Precinct. Among the highlights were the Feather Bush-pea (*Pultenaea penna*) and Small Darwinia (*Darwinia micropetala*), two remarkable species with very small populations and limited distribution.



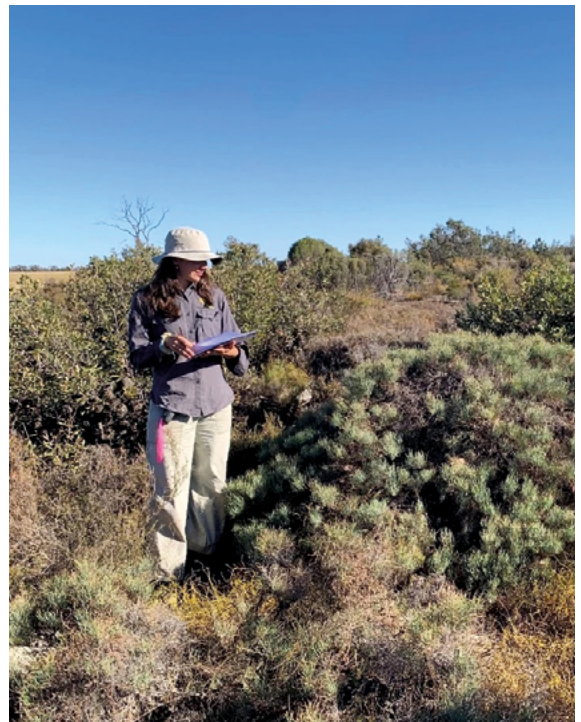
🕒 *Darwinia micropetala* – Small Darwinia



These trips also play a crucial role in preventing plant extinction by strengthening partnerships with local nurseries and growers such as the Dalki Garringa Nursery and Australian Plants Society Wimmera Growers as well as with local landholders, on whose land we ultimately hope to return these species.

The conservation work of Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria would not be possible without you. With your continued support, we can protect more of Victoria's rare and threatened species and ensure a stronger, more resilient future for our natural heritage.

- 📍 *Pultenaea penna* – Feather Bush-pea
- ➡️ Little Dessert Field trip





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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"I have been enjoying the Royal Botanic Gardens for approximately 73 years. Grateful for your work."

Louise Rijs

"Very important work, thank you."

Alison Hawkins

"RBGV is one of my favourite places in Melbourne – and great work well beyond the beautiful Gardens."

Sue Finnie

"I'm involved with my local seed bank at Knox Environment Society, so I was pleased to hear there is one for Gariwerd."

Sharee Harper

"Thank you to everyone at RBGV for your continued hard work in this important rescue mission to preserve our plants and animals."

Liz Balogh



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

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