

THE BOTANIC GARDEN

A Newsletter for the Botanic Gardens of Australia
and New Zealand www.bganz.org.au



Issue 19 - November 2007

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EDITORIAL

BGANZ Congress at Hamilton Gardens – October 2007

The recent BGANZ Congress in Hamilton was based around the theme of 'Building Partnerships', a subject that provided the scope to look at botanic gardens from just about every angle.

A lot of work had gone into finding the right keynote speakers and this was rewarded by a good response to their presentations. The Congress was opened by Brian O'Neil, Superintendent of the Golden Gate Park system, near San Francisco. He outlined a layered and incremental approach to developing productive partnerships and attracting sponsorship. Scott Medbury, President and CEO of Brooklyn Botanic Gardens, had a less strategic approach, however he inspired us with his passion for Brooklyn's very substantial outreach and education programmes.

An overview of global conservation partnerships and the role of botanic gardens was provided by Sara Oldfield, Secretary General of 'Botanic Gardens Conservation International'. Dr Phil Moors, Director and CEO of the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne outlined the role of local Australasian partnerships. Dr Rodney Wilson, retiring Director of Auckland Museum, made some shrewd observations about Museum partnerships and promotions that are equally applicable to botanic gardens.

Three workshops and six concurrent sessions covered subjects as diverse as sponsorship, staff training, seed banks, new directions for botanic gardens, species conservation, botanic gardens as visitor attractions, community partnerships and educational programmes. Each of these sessions was based around three speakers who each offered different perspectives on the subject.

Unfortunately the weather during the Congress was 'changeable', although most Australian delegates responded to the showers with a glazed expression, while they muttered 'rain! rain!' or 'soooo green!' The weather also forced the 'Mughal Indian Barbeque' inside. It had been arranged for the Hamilton Gardens Indian Char Bagh Garden to be decorated with flaming torches, cushions, harem women, lanterns and musicians, none of which really suited the early spring weather. The other disappointment was the absence of singing, dancing man-eating plants at the Congress Dinner, although you would have to say that Tim Entwisle was equally entertaining.

The Congress itself was a catalyst for several ongoing discussions about further partnerships in areas like plant conservation and customer satisfaction surveys, and it certainly strengthened the partnership between NZ and Australian botanic gardens.

The organising committee would like to acknowledge all the people who made a contribution to this Congress; the speakers, the session chairs, the sponsors and not least the sixty five very friendly, enthusiastic Australians who made their way across the ditch.

Congress Sponsors:

Boffa Miskell Landscape Architects, Hamilton Gardens, Auckland Botanic Gardens, Naturally Native, Treescape, UNISA Centre for Tourism and Leisure Management, Botanic Garden of Wellington, Dunedin Botanic Garden, Christchurch Botanic Garden.

Peter Sergel

Director

Hamilton Gardens

Hamilton

New Zealand





photographs courtesy of Mark Webb

BGANZ COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP 2007-09

The membership of the BGANZ Council for the next two years was finalised at the Council's meeting at the Congress in Hamilton. Under BGANZ's Constitution (available at www.bganz.org.au/constitution.html), the Council comprises a representative from each of the Australian States/Territories, two representatives from New Zealand, and two representatives from the Australian capital-city gardens.

These representatives are elected or appointed by each of the jurisdictions where there is a botanic gardens network (currently New South Wales, Victoria and New Zealand), and where there isn't such a network, following discussions between the relevant capital-city garden and the regional botanic gardens in that State. The two capital-city gardens' representatives are appointed by the Council of Heads of Australian Botanic Gardens.

This system of selecting Councillors was developed to ensure appropriate state/regional representation for the governing body of an organisation covering both New Zealand and Australia, and to enable regional botanic gardens to participate at the Council level if they wish to.

The Constitution calls for office-holders to be elected by the Councillors, and these four positions were filled at the Council meeting on 12 October. The resulting composition of the BGANZ Council for 2007-09 is:

President

Dr Philip Moors

Director and Chief Executive, Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne

Vice-President (Aus)

Ms Helen Paulsen

Curator, Mackay Regional Botanic Gardens

Vice-President (NZ))

Mr Alan Matchett

Team Leader, Botanic Gardens & Cemeteries, Dunedin, NZ

Secretary/Treasurer/Public Officer

Ms Anne Duncan

Director, Australian National Botanic Gardens

Ordinary members:

Dr Trevor Christensen

Manager of Scientific Services, Botanic Gardens of Adelaide

Mr Mark Fountain

Manager, Botanical & Public Programs, Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens

Mr Jim Grant

Director, BioParks, Dept of Infrastructure, Planning & Environment, NT

Mr Paul Scannell

Curator, Albury Botanic Gardens

Mr David Sole

Director, Wellington Botanic Gardens and Otari Wilton's Bush

Mr Mark Webb

CEO, Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority, WA

Ms Annette Zealley

Director, Geelong Botanic Gardens

All the Councillors look forward to working to develop the activities of BGANZ and to promoting the interests of botanic gardens on both sides of the Tasman.

Philip Moors

BGANZ President

PEOPLE

Obituary

Judith D. Zuk, 55, Horticulturist, Educator, and Botanic Garden Executive

This article is largely reprinted from the Brooklyn Botanic Garden website.

Judith D. Zuk, President Emeritus of Brooklyn Botanic Garden, one of North America's preeminent botanic gardens, died in Brooklyn on 1 September, 2007 after a long illness.

Ms. Zuk led the Brooklyn Botanic Garden for 15 years and was only the fifth president in the institution's nearly 100-year history. Prior to coming to New York in 1990, she was the director of the Scott Arboretum of Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania.

"Judy was an extraordinary and adored leader, who guided the Garden through the planning and execution of major capital projects, the expansion of its horticultural, scientific and education programs and the creation of its master plan for the future," said Brooklyn Botanic Garden board chairman Earl Weiner. "Her death represents an enormous personal loss to all of us who loved and admired her, as well as to the worldwide horticultural community. I am consoled by the knowledge that her extraordinary contributions to the Garden will be enjoyed by visitors for many years to come."

Ms. Zuk studied botany at Rutgers University, graduating *summa cum laude* in 1973. She then received a Master's in Public Garden Administration from the University of Delaware, and was awarded a Garden Club of America fellowship to study landscape design in England. Ms. Zuk was co-editor-in-chief of *The American Horticultural Society A-Z Encyclopedia of Garden Plants*, and served on the boards of many professional and cultural organizations, including Botanic Gardens Conservation International and as chair of the Cultural Institutions Group in New York City.

Ms. Zuk was widely recognized for her leadership in American horticulture and received many prestigious awards, including the Medal of Honor from the Garden Club of America. In 2004, the American Public Gardens Association chose Zuk, its former Board president, to receive its Honorary Life Member Award, the Association's most prestigious honor. Upon her retirement in 2005, Brooklyn Botanic Garden celebrated Ms. Zuk by the naming of the Judith D. Zuk *Magnolia* Plaza there and of a magnolia cultivar developed by the Garden, *Magnolia* × 'Judy Zuk.'

Those who attended the Gardens 2001 Congress, held in Canberra in April 2001, will remember the significant contribution she made to the Congress, at which she was a keynote speaker. On that occasion she shared her significant expertise in addressing the challenges and opportunities facing Public Gardens in the 21st Century.

Dr Helen Hewson

Helen Hewson was born in Benalla and raised on a farm in the Strathbogie Ranges, Victoria. Stimulated by the native plants around, and encouraged to pursue a career in botany, she went on to study at the University of Sydney where she obtained her PhD.



Teaching and research work led her to join the Australian Biological Resources Study on the production of the Flora of Australia – progressively as a researcher, writer, illustrator, editor and manager.

From 1995 to 1997 she was Deputy Director of the Centre for Plant Biodiversity Research in Canberra, which embraces the Australian National Herbarium. Passionate about botanical art and illustration, she co-authored *Flower Paintings of Ellis Rowan* (1982) and *The Hunter Sketchbook* (1988). Her first botanical paintings were exhibited in 1999. Her beautiful book *Australia – 300 Years of Botanical Illustration*, first published in 1999, includes more than 160 illustrations drawn from major herbaria and museums in both Europe and Australia. It provides a unique overview of the way in which Australia's plants have been depicted over three centuries. An exhibition associated with the launch of this book was held at the Australian National Botanic Gardens and Helen shared her vast knowledge during fascinating lecture tours of this beautiful collection.

Helen will be remembered by many BGANZ members for providing Secretariat services for the Council of Heads of Australian Botanic Gardens from June 1999 – October 2000. She died at the end of October after a long illness. She will especially be remembered for the warmth and generosity with which she shared her considerable knowledge.

MEETINGS AND CONFERENCES

BGANZ NSW Conference 2008

Sat 6 – Tues 9 September

Eurobodalla Regional Botanic Gardens

ERBG is a community facility of Eurobodalla Shire Council.

Every two years BGANZ NSW holds a conference hosted by one of the regional Gardens. The 2008 conference will encourage the sharing of secrets of success in areas of expertise.

Further information:

www.esc.nsw.gov.au/community/gardens Includes a booking form for 2008.

John Knight, Eurobodalla Regional Botanic Gardens, Chair, BGANZ NSW:
erbgherb@acr.net.au

Heather Haughton, Hon Secretary:

heather@melbpc.org.au or **(02) 4471 3271**

ARAZPA Conference 2008

(Australasian Regional Association of Zoological Parks & Aquaria)

'Zoos, 21st Century Global Powerhouse for Conservation'

Sydney's Taronga Zoo

9-14 March 2008

The conference organising committee is planning a great conference, with oral and poster presentations, a variety of meetings and workshops, and some great social events around Sydney. A draft program will be available in coming weeks.

Further information:

www.arazpa.org.au

American Public Gardens Association (APGA) Annual Conference 2008

23-27 June, 2008

To be held in Pasadena, CA this conference will be hosted by Descanso Gardens, The Huntington Library, Art Collections and Botanical Gardens, Los Angeles County Arboretum and Botanic Garden, and Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden. The conference theme is *The Big Picture*.

APGA is the premiere association for public gardens in North America with 500 member institutions located in all 50 states. This conference is for anyone with an interest in public horticulture. Membership in APGA is not a pre-requisite.

APGA website: **www.publicgardens.org**

ITEMS OF INTEREST

Chilly CHABG meeting in Canberra

There have been two CHABG meetings since the last newsletter.

The Council got together in Canberra on the 1 June. Among the main issues discussed was climate change – a discussion paper about the proposal to develop a National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy for Australia's Botanic Gardens was circulated and planning for the workshop to be held in August was finalised.

Another major issue discussed was water management, and experiences and challenges for managing gardens in our drought struck cities were shared at some length. Progress on the Millennium Seed Bank project was discussed and it was agreed that better promotion of this work was needed. BGPA announced that a walk-in demountable seed pod was under construction and that other gardens would be able to contribute and this would be able to move around the country, promoting seedbanking activities. The Curator of Booderee Botanic Gardens (part of Booderee National Park) also gave a very interesting presentation and shared his insights on re-shaping a botanic gardens to have an indigenous focus. CHABG members also had an opportunity to have a cold and windy inspection of early progress on the ACT Government's Canberra International Arboretum and Gardens.

In October the Council had a short meeting as part of the recent BGANZ Congress in Hamilton NZ. Progress with the draft Climate Change Strategy was presented and discussed. Phillip Moors (RBG Melbourne) reported that the weed risk analysis software was complete and would be made available very soon through the BGANZ website. Members also agreed to consider the needs for national coordination of seed-banking post the current Millennium Seedbank Project and discuss this issue at the next meeting, which will be held in Brisbane in early 2008.

Anne Duncan

Director

Australian National Botanic Gardens

The BGANZ website - www.bganz.org.au

BGANZ President, Dr Philip Moors, launched the new BGANZ website at the Hamilton BGANZ Congress. Created and managed by Siobhan Duffy in the ACT, it is hoped that the website will become an invaluable tool for the Botanic Gardens community. There are currently several groups who are working towards the introduction of interactive forums for particular areas of interest and there is scope for further development of the site.

There is a page for Regional Networks and any news or notices of meetings for inclusion would be welcome.

Most of the BGANZ Hamilton Conference presentations were recorded and these will soon be available on the website.

Ideas and suggestions for inclusions and future development can be sent to Virginia Berger: virginia.berger@environment.gov.au or (02) 6250 9507

Botanic Gardens stamps

A new set of stamps featuring five Australian botanic gardens has been released by Australia Post.

Three historic gardens and two more recently established are represented: the Botanic Gardens of Adelaide (1857), Botanic Gardens Trust, Sydney (1816), Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne (1846), Kings Park and Botanic Garden, Perth (1965) and Brisbane Botanic Gardens, Mt Coot-tha, (1976).



Images include Adelaide's noted Palm House glasshouse, a rainforest walk at Mt Coot-tha, and a lovely autumnal view of Melbourne's lake. As Australia Post's Noel Leahy points out, 'While each design features a prominent aspect of the specific botanic garden, the set as a whole captures the different seasons and the diversity of garden types'.

The stamps were designed by Lynette Traynor of the Australia Post Design Studio, and the photographs were taken by Simon Griffiths, a leading photographer in the field of gardening and landscape design.

The Australian Botanic Gardens stamp issue includes the five 50 cent stamps, a first day cover, a stamp pack, booklet and set of cards. These are available at Australia Post outlets or via mail order on **1800 311 794**.

Bev Roberts, reproduced courtesy of Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne; first published in Floreo 16, Spring 2007.

FACES OF BOTANIC GARDENS – a new feature

This issue of The Botanic Garden introduces a new feature which will appear regularly in future issues. It is intended that profiling people within the Botanic Gardens community will provide an insight into interesting backgrounds, career paths and visions for the future. Over time all members of the BGANZ Council will be introduced, but Faces of Botanic Gardens will also introduce staff, both paid and unpaid, from all over Australia and New Zealand – capital city gardens and regional gardens alike.

If readers have suggestions of interesting subjects, please contact the editor:
virginia.berger@environment.gov.au



Dr Philip Moors

Director and Chief Executive, Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne

President, Botanic Gardens Australia and New Zealand

The appointment of Dr Philip Moors as Director and Chief Executive of the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne in 1992 brought this scientist down to earth, his interests preceding this appointment having centred largely around bird conservation and research.

As seems to be the case with many scientists, science and natural history appealed strongly to Philip even as a boy. Living near Sydney Harbour, he spent a lot of time fishing and fossicking along the shores, and planned to study marine biology. However the Australian National University, where Philip studied, was a long way from the nearest coast, and he became interested in vertebrate ecology instead. This led to an Honours project on a marsupial rat kangaroo, resulting in his graduation as a BSc with First Class Honours in 1970.

A move to Scotland in 1970 culminated in Philip being awarded a PhD from the University of Aberdeen in 1974, writing his doctoral thesis on the ecology of weasels in farmland in northeast Scotland from the University's field station in a small village 15 miles north of Aberdeen.

Subsequently, in New Zealand, where he lived and worked from 1974-1988, Philip studied introduced mammals and their impacts on native wildlife. An abiding interest in studying and watching birds began during this period. As a scientist and then Assistant Director, Research, in the NZ Wildlife Service, Philip developed a continuing fascination with islands and island birds, especially rockhopper penguins and other seabirds in subantarctic regions. Such a background might appear unusual for the Director and Chief Executive of one of Australia's oldest Botanic Gardens, however it demonstrates an inherent and abiding interest in all living things and a very real interest in scientific research.

Philip became the first full-time Director of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union (now Birds Australia) from 1989-92. Birds Australia, founded in 1901, is the major national bird conservation and research organisation and has a large national membership base, employs staff in several States, and is involved in a wide range of bird conservation projects. His time as Director of this organisation gave Dr Moors experience well suited to his subsequent appointment as Director and Chief Executive, Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne in 1992.

In his current position, Dr Moors heads an organisation which includes not only the Botanic Gardens at South Yarra and at Cranbourne, but also the National Herbarium of Victoria, the State's oldest scientific institution, and the Australian Research Centre for Urban Ecology.

During his tenure as Director, Philip has implemented major new programs and capital developments in visitor services, cultural activities and tourism, plant biodiversity and urban ecology research, education, and fundraising and revenue generation.

One of Australia's oldest established Botanic Gardens, RBG Melbourne has renowned landscapes and world-class collections of living and preserved plants. It includes the very popular Ian Potter Foundation Children's Garden, the first of its type in Australia, opened in 2004. In direct contrast to the historic plantings seen at South Yarra, Philip has led the creation of the Australian Garden at RBG Cranbourne, an outstanding new botanic garden celebrating the diversity and beauty of Australia's plant life. The \$14m development of the Garden's first nine hectares was opened in May 2006 and the second and final stage is planned to open in 2011. This spectacular garden showcases the Australian landscape – with areas representing the desert, dry river beds, arid areas and eucalypts. It also features exhibitions which demonstrate how people can use Australian plants in their own gardens, Australian sculpture, a water-saving garden and the Kid's Backyard.

The reinvigoration of RBG Melbourne both horticulturally and scientifically over the past 15 years and the creation of the Australian Garden are the achievements which give Philip the greatest pleasure. He sees the biggest challenges ahead as dealing with the impacts of climate change on the plant collections, especially at RBG Melbourne, and using the botanic gardens to inform and inspire the community and so contribute to changing behaviours to limit the consequences of climate change. He also sees a challenge in matching the aspirations of botanic gardens for innovation with the resources to achieve this.

Awarded a Centenary Medal 2003 for services to the community through conservation and the environment, Dr Moors is author or joint author of 45 research papers in international and local journals, and editor of a book on the conservation of island birds.

Realising the need for a chief body to promote the interests and activities of all trans-Tasman botanic gardens, Dr Moors was instrumental in the founding of BGANZ in 2004.

With the well-earned respect of his peers, staff and work colleagues, BGANZ can be grateful that, under the leadership of Philip Moors, BGANZ has been set solidly on a path that can take it forward to realise future growth and potential.



Paul Janssens

Curator Living Collections, Australian National Botanic Gardens, ACT

Dress him in khaki and engage him in conversation and the resemblance to the late Steve Irwin is striking. It's largely the inherent natural enthusiasm that comes across when talking about the environment that creates the similarity. His enthusiasm is contagious, and a walk through the Botanic Gardens with Paul opens your eyes to wonders of the natural world perhaps otherwise unnoticed.

Born in Sheffield, England in 1964, Paul moved to Canberra at age 3. Having completed his schooling in Canberra, he undertook a Diploma in Horticulture at the Canberra Institute of Technology. His reasons for doing so were unusual: he had enjoyed working on various landscaping jobs and saw a future in the horticulture industry as providing employment in an area perhaps least likely to be overtaken by the technological advances that were being introduced into most other areas. Being currently deeply immersed in the technological advances now required for irrigation and water conservation, it seems that no area is technology free! Understandably, Paul sees water availability and water security for the future as being the biggest challenges for those involved in Horticulture from now on.

Having worked in the horticulture industry since 1983, Paul has qualifications in Horticulture and Turf management and was employed for almost 16 years as a horticulturist at Parliament House in Canberra – from 1986 until 2002. During this time he moved into a management position, responsible for the turf and green keeping staff.

In 2002 Paul moved to the Australian National Botanic Gardens as a Horticultural manager and was promoted to Curator of the Living Collections in 2003. In this position, he is responsible for 23 horticultural staff working in gardens maintenance, the nursery and Seedbank at the ANBG.

Like the subject of the previous profile, Dr Philip Moors, Paul Janssens has an interest in birds. Possibly unlike Dr Moors, he is also a keen follower of English soccer!

Virginia Berger
Managing Editor

ARTICLES

Australia's botanic gardens – working together on climate change



Climate change is here now for many botanic gardens in Australia. Not only is it a strategic issue but it is an everyday operational one, as we all seek efficient irrigation systems and alternative water supplies and start to review our collections. It is already having measurable impacts on the distribution, physiology,

behaviour and life cycles of Australia's plants and animals and these impacts will only accelerate with time.

On 28th August the Councils of the Heads of Australia's Botanic Gardens and Heads of Australia's Herbaria got together in Canberra for a one day workshop to discuss how they could contribute to national efforts in relation to climate change. The workshop was organised by the Australian National Botanic Gardens and the Australian Greenhouse Office as part of the Australian Government's Climate Change Adaptation Program. It was an extremely erudite and illustrious bunch of botanists – the plant knowledge in the room was almost palpable! Everyone was thinking along the same lines and the day made good progress towards a national framework.

Prior to the workshop a quick overview of Australia's botanic gardens suggested that they are already doing a lot of activities relevant to climate change adaptation. There are 24,000 species in living collections, there are over 130 species recovery projects that gardens are involved in, three states have active involvement in ecosystem restoration programs and there are 3800 species of Australian plants in seed-banks. It was also surprising to note that there are 13.4 million visits to botanic gardens every year, which represents an amazing potential to communicate about climate change and sustainable living. However it was also notable that while much is being done it is being done mostly by each gardens operating in isolation. So there was room for a bit of collaborative thinking!

The key values of botanic gardens, which they could bring to thinking on climate change, were identified:

- Botanic gardens know about plants (botany, horticulture, taxonomy)
- Botanic gardens connect people with plants
- Botanic gardens provide an enduring bank of plant genetic resources
- Botanic gardens have credibility and longevity as institutions

The framework addresses strategies, actions and projects that make the best use of these values of botanic gardens in helping Australia address climate change.

An example of a key project required to help the further development of the strategy was the need to bring all the information about species in collections together. This can then be used to determine where the gaps are in our ex-situ conservation efforts and inform future collection priorities for all gardens so that our efforts are effective and targeted. Regional botanic gardens need to be included in this project, since many are developing significant native species collections. It was also agreed that collaboration on a range of education and awareness initiatives and perhaps development of common messages for education and interpretation programs would be a worthwhile investment.

It was a very positive and collaborative day. Thanks to all who participated and we look forward to being able to present the final document early in the 2008.

Anne Duncan
Director
ANBG

Australian Garden at RBG Cranbourne – Stage 2

The second stage of the Australian Garden at RBG Cranbourne is now under way, supported by funding of \$20.9m from the Victorian Government and a generous grant of \$5m from The Ian Potter Foundation. Major new elements to be added are the River Edge Walk, Continental Edge Gardens, Lakeside Precinct and a Weird and Wonderful garden.

Chris Russell, Director of RBG Cranbourne, looks forward to the completion of the landscape: 'It will complete the vision for the Australian Garden. The fullness of Taylor Cullity Lethlean's inspirational design, developed in association with plant designer Paul Thompson, will be realised with an additional ten hectares of garden, completing the metaphoric journey of water from the "red centre" to the eastern seaboard.'

As with Stage 1, the western side of the garden will reflect natural landscape influences, while the eastern side will be more focused on landscapes within a semi-urban context. The Eucalypt Walk will be extended to enclose the new Ian Potter Foundation Lakeside Precinct - named in recognition of the Foundation's significant support for the Australian Garden. The Precinct will be a large event space catering for up to 2000 people for festivals, functions, live music and theatre.

To the east, waterside paths will guide visitors to the Continental Edge. Like the Exhibition Gardens in:

Stage 1 the display gardens in this space will demonstrate the use of Australian plants in domestic and public settings in inspiring and innovative ways. Using the plants to create a sustainable future will be a key theme. Adjacent to the Continental Edge is the Conservation Area containing a remnant patch of wetland and heathland that will highlight the importance of conserving natural remnants and biodiversity in urban areas. The landscape completion will also create a whimsical display of 'weird and wonderful' Australian plants, presented in an artistic and sculptural way to highlight the unusual diversity of Australia's flora.

Another key development in Stage 2 will be the extension of the Visitor Centre. This will include an expanded café area and deck space with views over the Australian Garden, a function area and an education and auditorium space. There will also be an extension of the main carpark.

South of the carpark will be the Woodland Picnic Area, located in a previously cleared area adjacent to grassy and heathy woodland communities. It will be the main area beyond the Australian Garden for visitors to RBG Cranbourne, and will provide the surrounding community with an important facility for nature-based recreation.

Bev Roberts, reproduced courtesy of Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne; first published in Floreo 16, Spring 2007.

FEATURE GARDEN GEORGE BROWN DARWIN BOTANIC GARDENS - from market plot to gorgeous gardens



A SHORT HISTORY

The Darwin Botanic Gardens were established on their present site in June 1886. At that time, the town of Darwin was 16 years old and the establishment of the gardens was the third attempt to select a site suitable to grow plants that would provide an economic benefit. The area where the gardens are today was once very swampy. The site was chosen after several Chinese gardens had achieved success with crops in the area. The emphasis was then on economic gardening. The ornamental plantings which are a feature of the gardens today came much later in the 1900's. For the first 30 years the gardens thrived under curator Maurice Holtze and then son Nicholas. For many years labour was supplied by prisoners, mainly Aboriginal with occasional Europeans and Chinese.





left George Brown Botanic Gardens
below Jack and Les Agostini

As well as market gardening over the years the area has been used for experimental crop farming, cattle grazing and as a rubbish dump. During World War II, the gardens were used for military purposes and contained an anti aircraft battery. By 1944 the gardens were in total disrepair. Curator Jack Agostini who worked in gardens before the war had the unenviable task of restoration. His efforts were so successful that when the gardens came under the control of Darwin City Council in 1957, they were described as the city's most attractive feature. Severe tropical storms and cyclones in 1897, 1937 and Tracy in 1974 have wreaked havoc in the gardens. As a result of Cyclone Tracy, Darwin Botanic Gardens lost 89 percent of its trees, the fern house and the original Holtze Cottage.



After Tracy the opportunity was taken to begin a program of establishing collections of tropical trees and palms. The program was so successful that by 1979 the gardens had 20 percent more plants than before the cyclone. Much of the restoration work after Cyclone Tracy was carried out by George Brown. In recognition of George Brown's contribution to the development of the gardens, the Northern Territory Government changed the name of the Darwin Botanic Gardens to George Brown Darwin Botanic Gardens in 2002.

FROM 1990 TO PRESENT

In 1990 management of the Darwin Botanic Gardens was transferred from the Darwin City Council to the Parks and Wildlife Commission. This was a significant step in its history as the focus and philosophy of the Botanic Gardens switched from a council run park to Botanic Gardens. A scoping study was then undertaken to examine the role and function of the Botanic Gardens and to identify its place within the economic and cultural development of both Darwin and the Northern Territory. Through this scoping study it was decided to undertake the development of a Masterplan to guide the future development of the Botanic Gardens. The Masterplan was undertaken by EcoSystems and Landplan Studio Landscape Architects and was completed in 1994.

The 1994 Masterplan was to have a ten year life and accordingly in 2004 a new Masterplan for the Botanic Gardens was needed. The new Masterplan was undertaken by Clouston Associates Landscape Architects and was to propose a new and imaginative development program for the Botanic Gardens.

The 2004 Masterplan brief was to include a Visitor Centre, revamped landscapes and visitor experiences, a palette of landscape elements and interpretation signage that fitted the existing style and collections of the Botanic Gardens. The Masterplan brief further aimed to enhance the integral part that the Botanic Gardens has played in the community life of Darwin and for the Botanic Gardens to be a key educational resource.

The Darwin Botanic Gardens are seen nationally as the “state” Botanic Gardens and as the major Australian Botanic Gardens of the wet dry tropics. The collections held within the Botanic Gardens are important in understanding the flora of northern Australia, its connection to traditional aboriginal knowledge, the South East Asia region and for visitors to understand the natural habitats and conservation issues of the Northern Territory.

TODAY’S GORGEOUS GARDENS

Today the gardens contain a varied collection of cycads, palms, boabs, gingers, heliconias and tropical gingers. They are an important Darwin facility for locals and tourists alike. The Botanic Gardens are used for private functions and community events. Two of these community events are the Festival of Darwin and the Tropical Garden Spectacular.

Both these events showcase the Botanic Gardens landscapes and are a highlight of Darwin’s dry season calendar with The Tropical Garden Spectacular displaying all things horticultural and the Festival of Darwin with festoons of light and colour as the backdrop to an array of music, dance, theatre, comedy and art events.

Recent developments in the Botanic Gardens that are a flow on from the 2004 Masterplan include the Children’s Playground and planning for the Visitor Centre.

The Children’s Playground, due to be opened this month, is a vibrant space that provides a safe area for children’s play and for parents to relax. Incorporated into the design is a palette of tropical plants that includes gingers, heliconias, fruit trees and palms. A meandering creek winds its way through the landscape and is fringed by a beach on one bank and a palm jungle on the other. A little people’s maze of mondo grass provides an intriguing challenge. Three gates that have been commissioned by a local artist and donated to the Botanic Gardens by the Friends of Darwin Botanic Gardens are at the entrances to the Children’s Playground. The gates are very Darwin in style and have a Rufous Owl perched on the top with a menagerie of insects, birds and reptiles on the gate panels.

As exciting as this project has been to plan and achieve, the next big challenge for the Botanic Gardens is the Visitor Centre. The site for the Visitor Centre was identified in the 2004 Masterplan and to date the concept plan and a model for the building have been done. The Visitor Centre project team is now at the design and tendering stage with construction to begin in June 2008.

The Visitor Centre will complement the unique nature of the Darwin Botanic Gardens and will nestle itself in the existing landscape. The building will be a series of structures that sit in the already established collections and landscapes. The main structure will be an open air design with a core area (containing the all important café and bookshop) that is air conditioned for the comfort of visitors.

Present day responsibility of the Botanic Gardens rests with the Northern Territory Government, Department of Natural Resources, Environment and The Arts. This agency is tasked with the lead role in natural resource management in the top end and curation of the art collections of the Northern Territory. Not surprisingly the Northern Territory encourages traditional Territorians to actively engage in producing art works and it's this unique combination of caring for country and artistic endeavour that combines to produce the quiriness of the Darwin Botanic Gardens.

David Griffiths

Curator

George Brown Darwin Botanic Gardens

May all readers of The Botanic Garden enjoy a very merry Christmas and a happy and healthy 2008.