

Flourish

Supporter News Autumn 2021



ISSUE 8

175 years of impact

The next generation of oaks

Recollections from our volunteers

Nature-based learning in the modern world



Royal
Botanic
Gardens
Victoria



Minister Launches 175th Anniversary

The Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio, Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change launched Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria's 175th year at a special event in March.

She said "The upcoming free events celebrate 175 years since the establishment of a garden that is important to many Melbournians, but also acknowledges the role of the site as a meeting place for Traditional Owners over tens of thousands of years."

Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria has planned a year of free events and experiences that allow visitors to explore the living collections from a new perspective.

COVER

Phuong Tran, Senior Retail Sales Assistant, Tim Entwisle, Director & Chief Executive and Oriana Licul-Milevoj, Visitor Experience Officer celebrate our 175th anniversary

INSIDE COVER

Minister D'Ambrosio and Aboriginal Learning Facilitator, Sam May Cover and current picture by Adrian Vittorio

Welcome to the Autumn issue of Flourish

Autumn is here, with golden leaves tumbling in Melbourne and newly collected Australian plants nestling in at Cranbourne. In Australia, autumn is as much a time of renewal as spring, and not just in the plant world.

Of course, Oak Lawn is a wonderful place to enjoy autumn and you may have noticed the area around our glorious fallen giant, the White Oak has been transformed. Its limbs and stump have been crafted into a meeting place for relaxing, playing or chatting. You can reflect on the 150 or so years this oak stood here, or marvel at the next generation of oak saplings, which have just been planted.

We were thrilled to kick off our 175th year with an investment of \$3.3 million from the Regional Tourism Investment Fund – Stimulus Round. We will use this investment to cement Cranbourne Gardens’ reputation as the premier eco-tourism attraction in the south-east corridor, through wildlife protection initiatives, improved entrances and upgrades to nature play and hospitality facilities.

We have an exceptional year of programming coming up too. Launched by The Hon. Lily D’Ambrosio, Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, alongside several of our wonderful donors, volunteers and board members, in early March.

Each program will celebrate Melbourne Gardens’ extraordinary landscapes and include curator talks, guided tours, workshops and self-guided activities.

Transport savvy Melburnians may have already spotted (or taken a ride on) another 175th year highlight, the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria branded tram on routes 109 and 48. Created thanks to the Yarra Trams Community Partnerships Program, it captures the joy of a visit to the Gardens, from picnics to playdates and strolls through our wonderful plant collections. In addition, if you are walking along St Kilda Road, you may spot our logo, in bloom in flowers, between Government House Drive and Anzac Avenue.

You can read more about our 175th year celebrations in this issue, as well as the highlights of donor events over the last few months. There’s also a fascinating article about remote learning.

See you in the Gardens.



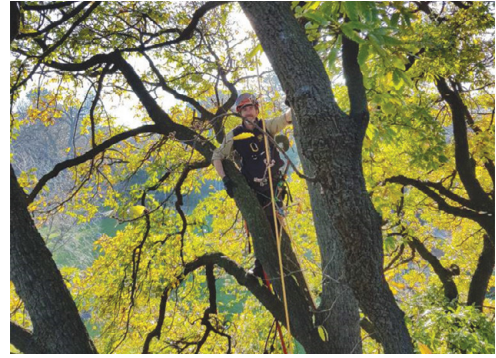
Professor Tim Entwisle
Director and Chief Executive



Oak Lawn's new attraction: Climate ready oaks

ABOVE
Former and current Board members planting the new Valley Oak

RIGHT
The oak our new Valley Oak acorn came from; Arborist, Peter Berbee at work



Nestled on Oak Lawn, three small saplings, *Quercus lobata* (Valley Oak), *Quercus rysophylla* (Loquat Leaf Oak) and *Quercus nigra* (Water Oak), begin their century long journey in the shadow of their fallen sister, the beloved *Quercus aff. Alba* (White Oak) that fell in late 2019.

Although small now, these trees are part of a sentimental project to commemorate the deceased tree's life. Last year, Landscape Architect, Andrew Laidlaw chose to create a meeting place carved into the fallen limbs instead of wood chipping the debris. The decision called for complementary trees with the potential to survive Melbourne's future climate.

"It's the end of something, but it's also the beginning," says Arborist Peter Berbee, who hand-collected two of the new tree's acorns overseas. "Before I chose the acorns, I conducted assessments on several species to ensure that those chosen would be suitable for planting in Melbourne from a climate-risk perspective."

Peter collected the *Quercus lobata* acorns while attending the 2018 International Oak Society Conference at UC Davis in California, thanks to a scholarship he was awarded by the Friends of Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne. During the conference tours he had the opportunity to see the region's 19 species of endemic oaks.

"While on a tour to Mendocino County in northern California I was able to collect the *Quercus lobata* acorns from a grove of remnant trees at a private ranch," says Peter. "I was lucky to get permission from the owner of the land, and that the trees were producing acorns that year."

Peter collected the *Quercus rysophylla* seedling from a private collector's farm in the Dandenongs.

"He has been collecting oaks for several decades and has one of the largest collections in Australia," says Peter. "This species is not widely planted outside its native range, but it has a beautiful form and foliage and should be suitable for Melbourne's warmer future climate."

The third new sapling is *Quercus nigra*. Its acorn was obtained from The International Oak Society Conference acorn exchange. Attendees brought acorns from their country and city of origin and made them available for other attendees to take home.

The White Oak project is now complete and already a favourite for Melbourne Gardens visitors.

"It's gratifying to be able to contribute to the planting of these new oaks," says Peter. "Much work goes into the collection of seeds and raising young plants, so it's rewarding to see them planted and beginning to grow well."




175 YEARS OF MEMORIES: STORIES FROM OUR VOLUNTEERS

If only the trees could talk. No doubt they would have some very interesting tales to tell of the past 175 years at Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria.

We thought we would share some of our volunteers' more humorous and memorable recollections of the Gardens over the years.

"Some years ago Fern Gully was a place to be avoided. It was infested with thousands of flying foxes. Oh the noise, the smell and the damage to the trees. The creatures were encouraged to leave without harm and Fern Gully is now a delight to visit especially on a hot day."

- DAVID PLANT OAM, VOLUNTEER GUIDE



At a performance of the opera "Lohengrin" at exactly the moment when Lohengrin and the swan were meant to appear in Act 1, a real white swan sailed into view on the lake!

- VALERIE CLARKE, FORMER VOLUNTEER GUIDE



"American airforce personnel took over the Herbarium for their H.Q. during World War 2. The Department of Defence informed the Director on a Friday that all the books from the Library had to be moved by Monday! The specimens were moved to a big iron shed around the back."

- JENNY GOLD, FORMER VOLUNTEER GUIDE



"Every morning Harpist Michael Johnson went to Picnic Point to play his harp. One day a swan swam up to the edge of the lake beside him as he played, tucked its head under its wing and went to sleep."

- OLGA BARTAK, VOLUNTEER GUIDE

"One morning I came across a woman wheeling a pram; two children walked beside her, and two ducks waddled behind. She told me her pet ducks enjoyed a walk and swim in the lake. One of the children noted the ducks was getting tired – "Oh well, pop them in the pram" was the response."

- CAROLYN TOMKINS, FORMER VOLUNTEER GUIDE

"The tallest tree is the Taxodium mucronatum in Fern Gully, at 38m. Decades ago someone hung a large bell high up in this tree for a joke; the idea was that it would peal on windy days; but alas it failed to ring. The bell may still be up there!"

- IAN POLMEAR, FORMER VOLUNTEER GUIDE

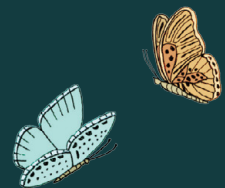




PHOTO 2021: Exploring art in nature

In March, a group of our dedicated donors attended a special tour of the exhibition *Garden Variety: Photography, Politics and the Picturesque*, RBGV's offering in PHOTO 2021 at Melbourne Gardens.

PHOTO 2021 is part of a global arts and photography movement that promotes and commissions new images and ideas. The works displayed in the Gardens were created in response to their specific locations and challenged the viewer to explore the theme of 'Truth'.

Our donors learned about the artists, their works, the complex process of installation in the Gardens, where there are no flat surfaces, and more. In addition, we were very fortunate to hear directly from artist James Nguyen, whose work on Long Island spoke to his experiences as a refugee. His Acknowledgement of Country, given in both his first language, Vietnamese, and English, was a highlight for all.

A big thank you to Kara and Mark, from our Programming Team, for stepping in for the Curator, Isobel Parker Philip, when the event was delayed by 2 weeks due to the snap COVID-19 lockdown.

Supporter spotlight: Frank Van Straten

Frank Van Straten has lived across the road from Melbourne Gardens for almost 80 years. A noted historian and curator in the performing arts in Melbourne, Frank has seen the area develop over those eight decades, with small trees turning into sentinels in the landscape and many new landscape, scientific and community engagement projects finally realised.

Sneak peek!

Recently, Frank was interviewed for a very special book commissioned to mark the 175th milestone year for Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria. Our 175th book of photographic essays will be launched to a special VIP audience in June 2021 and will be available in shops from late July. This publication celebrates the many people who have helped make the Gardens what they are today, from donors, to staff, to members of the public.

Frank and his partner, Adrian Turley, are committed donors to the Gardens and continue to cherish their 'front garden'. We are very grateful to Frank and Adrian for their many years of support.

Please keep your eyes open for the announcement of the Gardens' new 175th book called *Wonder: 175 Years of Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria*, co-authored by Sophie Cunningham and Peter Wilmoth (Spectrum Media) with publishers Hardie Grant. **If you'd like to be added to our pre-order list, please email the Development Team at development@rbg.vic.gov.au.**



Book excerpt (by Peter Wilmoth)

As a child the Gardens were [Frank's] playground. "My parents built this place in 1942," he says. "I've got very vague memories of coming here when the floor was going in, and so on, as a six-year-old. It was in the middle of the war and we lived not far away while this was being built. How they managed to build at that time, I have no idea."

The young Frank didn't have to go far to explore real and imaginary worlds. "The Gardens have always been part of my life. My very earliest memories are of a rather strange rockery just inside a gate off Anderson Street – Gate B. It's a man-made grotto, the sort of thing that was very popular in the 1900s. When I was a kid growing up, it was just a magical construction with shells built into the stonework and little plantings here and there. My parents told me that that's where the elves, the goblins and the fairies lived, and that they only came out after the gates closed. I used to fantasise about all these little creatures who lived in the grotto. That's my very earliest memory of the Gardens."

ABOVE

Frank at the entrance to the Children's Garden with the gate he donated in memory of 'Morrie', his childhood nanny.

Nature Based Learning in the modern age

Stephanie is searching for bugs. But she's not in the garden, she's in her flat in Wangaratta. At the same time, Sam is learning about Biomimicry from the veranda of his parent's sheep farm in Horsham.

As we navigated our way through the challenges of 2020, our Learning and Participation team hit uncharted territory as onsite programming was cancelled and Victorian students were directed to learn from home during Terms 2 and 3.

Aware of the importance of continuing to educate and engage these students, the team worked together to provide

Victorian teachers with support and resources for digital learning.

The team transitioned the popular Gardens' onsite learning programs into online experiences that captured the essence of an excursion to the Gardens. These digital garden experiences focused on science, sustainability, indigenous knowledge, health & wellbeing, nature play and STEM.

Eighteen digital garden experiences were created, catering to early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary levels, and since July of last year, over 15,000 students, like



Stephanie and Sam, have participated in these digital programs.

“It has been fantastic to see a 145% rise in participation from regional schools, which are not always able to visit the Gardens due to travel distances,” says Ben Liu, Creative Producer, Learning and Participation.

“I’m happy we could help a new group of students experience the joy of the Gardens, which is why we will continue these Digital Garden Experiences.”

The learning and participation team also spent time creating the innovative, STEM-based Designed by Nature Biomimicry Program for the Victorian Challenge and Enrichment Series. Supported by the Department of Education and Training, this series nurtures high-ability students, and gives them a chance to observe biological strategies and patterns in

nature and learn how to use nature for design inspiration and problem-solving. STEM is an essential area of educational focus, as not only does it foster ingenuity and creativity, it also encourages teamwork and a love for and respect for our planet.

The Gardens’ Learning and Participation team will continue to adapt their learning programs to the current environment and create new opportunities for students across Victoria to learn, grow and understand the importance of caring for the world around us, wherever they may be.

BELOW
Nature-based learning in action





Botanic Gardens on Wheels

Yarra Trams is transporting the beauty of Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria into the suburbs. An eye-catching Gardens branded tram has been unveiled to help encourage people to spend more time in nature, thanks to Yarra Trams' Community Partnerships Program.

The tram wrap is part of Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria's 175th anniversary campaign, which aims to inspire people to engage with and protect nature.

The tram wrapping was designed by Melbourne based artist, Annie Davidson, who drew on her personal knowledge of the Gardens to create an eye-catching artwork that commemorates the wonderful memories many Victorians have made with loved ones at the Gardens.

The tram will travel Route 48 or 109 until 25 May 2021.



Royal
Botanic
Gardens
Victoria

Contact us:

Nichola Lefroy
Development Lead
03 9252 2713
Nichola.Lefroy@rbg.vic.gov.au

ISSN - 2652 - 4325