Episode 2 – Oak Lawn

A note on the transcript for this episode – the voices of visitors have been captured as deidentified 'Vox pops' (the opinions of people recorded talking informally) or in a group style interview.

The list of oak species featured in this episode are provided at the end of this transcript (p.12)

[00:00:00]

Introduction: You're listening to Sonica Botanica, stories and sounds from the Gardens. Created by Patrick Cronin and Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria.

We acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which this episode was created and on which the Gardens are sighted and pay our respects to Elders past present, and future.

Episode Two - Oak Lawn.

[00:00:35]

Lenka Vanderboom: If you look around you, and you think that this is my office ... pretty good isn't it? [laughs] For me as an Aboriginal person, traveling across Australia, across the world. I guess everyone has that [you know] desire to know where they are. Understanding that I'm on Boon Wurrung, Wurundjeri, Bunurong Country, wherever I might be around Melbourne, is really important.

My name is Lenka Vanderboom, and I'm a Yawuru descendant from Northwest Australia. And I'm an Indigenous Learning Facilitator at the Botanic Gardens in Melbourne.

Yeah. We look after little bubups from the age of kinder kids to diverse groups of people [who] come in and visit and use our space.

[00:01:18]

Kim Coleman: There's certain places that we might go in the Gardens where you just know that children are going to light up with excitement.

My name's Kim, and I'm one of the Learning Facilitators here at the Botanic Gardens.

Something about that place, [that], that particular vista or that particular little nook that they get excited about.

[00:01:36]

Episode 2 – Oak Lawn

Tim Entwisle: Oak Lawn is one of my favourite parts of Melbourne Gardens. It really is the place I go to if I come into the Garden and I always want to walk through it, even if I'm going somewhere else. When you return to this place, you start to pick up more about plants. You might get it on the second or third or fourth visit, that makes it a really good, ahh botanic setting.

I'm Tim Entwisle, I'm the Director and Chief Executive of Royal Botanic Gardens, Victoria.

I'm originally a phycologist, so I work on algae, but I've sort of grown from [that] those small beginnings to take an interest in all flowering plants, gardens, you know right up to trees of course, as well, but, um, you know, a botanist.

[00:02:16]

Peter Berbee: One thing I love is seeing, ah the oak leaves on the ground with a little pool of water in them after the rain. There's something right about that.

My name is Peter Berbee. I'm an arborist and I'm involved with everything to do with tree maintenance, and specifically I look after the Oak [ah] Collection.

When I'm an arborist, I'm concerned about, you know, is my chain saw sharp? How am I going to prune this tree [to], to maintain its health and maintain its life. Um, but there's times during that day that I'm amazed being up a tree that I'm suddenly transported into the life of the tree.

[00:02:49]

Susan Joachim: I've been a nature connected person I would say all of my life. I migrated from Sri Lanka, and we went through quite a bad period with the civil war, which meant we didn't get much of an opportunity to go out and enjoy nature. Even though it's a beautiful country with lots of diverse nature.

My name is Susan Joachim, I'm a forest therapy guide and President of the International Nature and Forest Therapy Alliance.

Coming to Australia, I really felt this sense of freedom. There was so much of a diversity of, um, nature that we could go into safely and enjoy.

[00:03:26]

Tim Entwisle: Oak Lawn, in some ways it's [a] a typical botanic garden landscape, but it's also got this sense of being a little bit naturalistic or a little bit like a park land because the trees are separated by these lovely sort of green spaces. If someone said to me, you know, what's an oak tree look like, immediately, like anyone else, I start to talk about the English

Oak. Those leaves, the nicely lobed leaves ... acorns. I talk about [a] a tree that has long arching branches, shady, and a large presence, a very dense kind of strong presence.

[00:04:05]

Susan Joachim: It feels like a tree that's a welcoming tree. It has its sort of arms open out to you.

[00:04:12]

Vox pop (Visitor): For me it's the trunk and then the size of the tree.

Vox pop (Visitor): I love the bark. I love all the different barks.

This is what I have been imagine[ing], when I was reading those fairy tales as a kid.

All the squiggly branches. I like the ones that come right down low.

Vox pop (Visitor): You get the feeling if you're stood under an oak in a rain storm you wouldn't get wet.

Vox pop (Visitor): They are big. They give a lot of shade? I don't know what's more to say I'm not expert [laughs].

Vox pop (Visitor): The term *Quercus* is an accurate one. There's something quirky about the oak.

[00:04:42]

Background Voices: "Quercus robur - English Oak, etc." [voices recite Oak species names in the background].

[00:04:45]

Vox pop (Visitor): They're not a straight up and down tree.

[00:04:47]

Background Voices: [Voices continue to recite Oak species names]

[00:04:52]

Tim Entwisle: A lot of the oaks have those characteristics, but they can vary in size and shape. The bark is different textured; they can be more upright; there's little scrubby ones; there's one that sort of creeps along the ground almost. You realize very quickly that they come not just from the UK.

[00:05:08]

Peter Berbee: Most of the Oaks in the world come from [ah] Mexico. There's 160 different species. The most species in the world, followed by China. Yeah, I think Europe's a fair way down the path, there's around about 20 species in [ah] Europe.

[00:05:28]

Background Voices: [Background voices continue then fade]

[00:05:33]

Lenka Vanderboom: I use these oaks to talk about diversity and to talk about different groups coming from all over the world. And if you put that, up on the map of Aboriginal Australia - even though these plants are not from here - I translate that I guess into "where have we all come as people visiting this country?"

[00:05:58]

Tim Entwisle: It's interesting to think about this place before the Botanic Garden and before the Oak Lawn. It would have been, not far from the Yarra River, it would have been river red gums and vegetation around that river, bits of which [are] are still in the Botanic Garden.

[00:06:13]

Lenka Vanderboom: This is a living space. It was a really important meeting place.

[00:06:17]

Kim Coleman: We talk about what the land was like before the Gardens were established. We talk about the local indigenous plants versus some of the exotic plants that have been brought in subsequently, like the oak trees.

[00:06:30]

Susan Joachim: I think even the first Directors of these gardens recognized that there need to be trees that are more suitable to the Australian climate.

[00:06:41]

Tim Entwisle: The first Director of the Gardens was very keen on oaks. He planted particularly cork oaks and holm oaks. These are really tough oak trees from the Mediterranean region; they hold their leaves all year; they do really well in a dry climate. They do grow usually a bit quicker than they do in the Northern Hemisphere because we don't have the really cold winters. So you almost get them growing twice as fast. And it may not live quite as long.

[00:07:09]

Kim Coleman: The White Oak I believe lived for about 160 years, which in [the] terms of the general lifespan of an oak tree is not a very long time.

[00:07:17]

Tim Entwisle: So an oak tree can live to be reputedly 900 or a thousand years old. In a place like the Botanic Gardens here, we expect 150 or 200 years perhaps.

[00:07:29]

Kim Coleman: So it's something that's been affected by the climate and the conditions that it's experienced here, as opposed to where it might naturally grow.

[00:07:36]

Susan Joachim: The White Oak tree that fell recently, there was such an outpouring of grief around this tree!

[00:07:42]

Kim Coleman: It just felt really dramatic, because it had been such a huge feature.

[00:07:46]

Tim Entwisle: So I was visiting my family in Sydney, and I got a phone call in the middle of the day saying that [ah] half the White Oak had fallen over. We were concerned about this tree; we'd seen a crack in it, so we'd put up a very extensive fence around it. And then I get a call later in the day saying "ah, now the other half has fallen over"!

[00:08:04]

Peter Berbee: We expected a sizeable portion of some large branches to fall off but we didn't expect the whole tree to fall down.

[00:08:13]

Kim Coleman: It was a big event when it happened. There was lots of discussion about what's going to happen now and...

[00:08:18]

Tim Entwisle: My first thought was, we need to remove the tree, remove the wood - but we left it for a bit longer. We thought about it, and the idea emerged - which I think [is], has turned out to be a wonderful idea - is celebrating that tree through the fallen limbs, placing them more or less in the way they fell.

[00:08:37]

Kim Coleman: It's sort of a contemporary approach to what a Botanic Garden can do.

[00:08:41]

Tim Entwisle: So we had the Woodworkers Guild help us to do some lovely sort of, uh, seats that you could sit on; to make some joins in the wood; some really, really kind of creative ways of making that fallen wood just slightly more attractive and a little bit gentler and softer, and also making it safe.

[00:09:00]

Vox pop (Visitor): It's just a little bit different rather than just, you know, getting cut up and towed away for firewood.

The craftsmanship of it, I'm noticing these wonderful dovetails, the way in which these seats [and] have been cut out. Really impressive!

It looks like one of those big spiders. If you just stop and start looking around, you start giving it a shape and kind of being creative and your imagination is kind of flying and you can just create your own story without being told.

Vox pop (Visitor): I was so happy to see this, it's a brilliant idea. I don't know what happened to this tree, this poor tree, but he's still contributing to this garden!

[00:09:37]

Tim Entwisle: And it was a tree that had a lot of meaning to people. People started to tell us about when they picnicked there, or the first time they'd been to the Gardens, or the tree that they remembered when they came through that gate.

[00:09:48]

Lenka Vanderboom: It's no longer a healthy, happy, pretty, autumnal tree, but it is a place to stop and reflect on things that might've fallen in their own lives.

[00:09:57]

Peter Berbee: When a tree falls, it's still got a life, even if it's like the dead branches lying on the ground, but there's a whole section of biodiversity that's involved with that. It's got lots of little hollows and hidey-holes for insects and bugs to live in.

[00:10:09]

Lenka Vanderboom: We see now, this big White Oak playground, And it's the only place that you're allowed to climb a tree!

[00:10:24]

Tim Entwisle: The Oak Lawn like everywhere else has [ah] a hidden world to it.

[00:10:27]

Kim Coleman: There is a lot more going on underneath the soil. Most people are thinking, oh wow, the autumn leaves or the branches, or I'd love to climb that, but there's also a whole (n)other world going on underneath their feet.

[00:10:40]

Peter Berbee: So there's enormous amount of fungal mycelium growing under the soil that we never see, it's a whole world.

[00:10:45]

Tim Entwisle: You've got fungi, bacteria, algae, all kinds of organisms on and under the ground that are creating another whole ecosystem, helping that tree to survive. They effectively allow the root to have a much greater surface area. It can stretch out further through these connections and the fungi and the roots can work together. So there is a kind of what we call a symbiosis. The two are helping each other in a sense, and you get this network of probably interconnected plants.

[00:11:19]

Kim Coleman: The question of how we think about plants or trees communicating with each other or existing together or existing in part of an ecosystem is a really interesting one.

[00:11:29]

Susan Joachim: I very much think that trees are connected. We have reference to [a] mother tree that actually can identify it's seedlings and will transport nutrients to it through its underground network.

[00:11:42]

Tim Entwisle: There's, uh, a lot of work going on at the moment about how interconnected these plants are and what that means.

[00:11:47]

Lenka Vanderboom: We get to tell the kids about some of the new studies around mycelium. And we tell the story of the mycelium being a little bit like a telephone line under the earth or a carrier between a grandmother tree and the younger trees around them.

[00:12:05]

Kim Coleman: One student once asked me whether they could think like humans do and whether they had brains. The kind of language that we use to try and describe systems in nature [can], can leave them with all sorts of other questions. A tree doesn't have a brain, no, but it is still responding to things in nature. So, you know, you might say that it's thinking, but other people might describe it in a different way.

[00:12:30]

Vox pop (Visitor): I agree with the fact that they're, you know, like a part of a community? That's the way I look at it.

I get the impression the more we learn about non-human species, the more we realize there are similarities between other species and our own.

Like a fungus, they create a lot of networking.

Vox pop (Visitor): I've never thought of it like that. What's going on underground!

Vox pop (Visitor): Oh, it doesn't seem in any way far-fetched or crazy or unrealistic to me, no.

[00:12:54]

Tim Entwisle: The idea of a 'wood-wide' web, an interconnected network if you like; I think it's a lovely way to start thinking about what's going on under the ground. And perhaps take[ing] a different perspective to what we've done in the past. I worry a little bit that where we're hitting with these discussions around networks under the ground - and looking at these mutually beneficial relationships - that we then start to put value on those and say, look, actually, they're not only just amazing organisms that do fantastic things, they're like humans, they're like people, and that somehow is meant to make them better? Whereas, in my mind as a botanist or as a person that loves plants or someone who just likes to sit under a tree, I don't need to see them as human. I'm happy to like them for what they are, enjoy what they are and appreciate all the things they do. In the end, the way you come at a plant or the way you see a plant or the way you interpreted it is really your own journey.

[00:13:55]

Lenka Vanderboom: One of my favorite trees on Oak Lawn is this beautiful remnant Banksia integrifolia. You can kind of hear the wattlebirds in the background, having a feast from this

tree, it's a really rich resource. [And] you can see the remnant base of it, which has been here since pre-contact. And you can see the next generation that's continued to grow and provide nutrients.

[00:14:26]

Susan Joachim: Forests have provided homes, shelters, food, medicine. It's in our DNA. So when we need a tree or we come into green space, it doesn't take very much time to connect.

[00:14:40]

Peter Berbee: Just watching a bird interact with a tree or, looking at some lichen, growing on the roots. It's taking the time to slow down. And just to step back a little bit and just be [ah] receptive.

[00:14:53]

Susan Joachim: So in Japan, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries developed the term 'forest therapy' in 1982. There was a recognition that there was illness, [and] lifestyle diseases showing up in response to a techno-stressed society. The government decided, we have a long history and culture and connection to forests, why are we not going back to our roots of connecting people to nature? So the Japanese coined this word Shinrin Yoko, Forest Therapy. And that was to describe making contact with, and taking in the atmosphere of the forest. We want to experience nature, not only through our eyes, but through all of our senses.

So, what we do is we just gather people in a circle. Get people to stretch and breathe, and then we get them to close their eyes, take in a deep breath, smell the air, the soil, the trees, the flowers, the subtle smells. We walk around the tree. We look up, we look down into its roots, like we really take in, this life. This, [this, this] tree has had an amazing life. And suddenly it's just like this letting go. Your body softens. You have given yourself permission to slow down.

[00:16:15]

Peter Berbee: I remember as a kid, whenever I wanted some peace and solitude, I'd [say to] say to mum, can I go back to the pines? These old big *Pinus radiatas* back in the sheep paddock. And I used to go out there and just sit in amongst the pines. I just remember feeling really ah, peaceful

[00:16:31]

Vox pop (Visitor): It's incredibly calming [to] to walk through, through the bush, or through any sort of forest.

Vox pop (Visitor): I certainly feel a connectedness to trees as a human being, walking around. I tell little kids, sometimes don't pull those leaves off! [laughs] You know? Thanks hurting the tree.

I always feel great, like I feel, um, charged again, you know? That's kind of the energy from the nature that charged me. Yeah.

Vox pop (Visitor): I pretty much grew up [in a], in a farm in Colombia, but it was also, a lot of forest. And now when I talk to my mom and she [is] just close to that forest, I can hear the birds. And the sound as well, like the wind and that sort of thing[s]. You miss that connection.

[00:17:20]

Susan Joachim: There's no Wi-Fi in the forest, but I guarantee, you we'll have a better connection.

[00:17:29]

Tim Entwisle: One of the lovely things we do in the Oak Lawn, is leave the leaves on the ground.

[00:17:34]

Kim Coleman: It's a really magical time to have children visiting the Gardens. They're so delighted and thrilled.

So you can kick the leaves, you can walk through them, you can rustle through them and we leave them on the ground as long as we can.

[00:17:49]

Peter Berbee: I love anticipating seeing kids play in the fallen leaves, and adults too.

[00:17:53]

Tim Entwisle: In a botanic garden where people think [you know] we're so tidy and neat.

[00:17:57]

Peter Berbee: Just watching the people it seems like it's pure joy.

[00:18:01]

Susan Joachim: There is a reason for balance in nature. Nature is always showing how there needs to be, a balance.

[00:18:08]

Lenka Vanderboom: We do start a lot of our programs on Oak Lawn with a Smoking Ceremony, or at least an Acknowledgement of Country.

[00:18:15]

Sam May: If you come around here at about 11.30 in the morning you'll get a nice smell of the Smoking Ceremony, and it just wafts down Oak Lawn into Prince's Lawn all throughout the Gardens. So if you come through at that time, you know, you might get a touch that smoke and, you know, feel that cleanliness in the land, talking to you. Yeah.

[00:18:35]

Susan Joachim: Not knowing the name of the tree, I stood in the flood of its sweet scent. Matsuo Basho, Japanese poet.

[00:18:51]

Peter Berbee: Maybe there's something primal in us that, because we've had[a] such a long relationship with trees, there's something [that] really just resonates in our bodies. We seek out a tree to sit next to. It's something that's deeper than our normal [ah] consciousness.

[00:19:19]

Outro and Credit: You've been listening to Oak Lawn, Episode Two of Sonica Botanica. Sincere thanks to Peter Berbee, Kim Coleman, Tim Entwisle, Susan Joachim and Lenka Vanderboom. A very special thank you to Chris Andrews, Sam May, Didier Sepúlveda and the visitors who shared their stories, impressions, and observations of Oak Lawn.

Sonica Botanica is created and produced by Patrick Cronin and Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria. All interviews were recorded onsite at Oak Lawn, Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne.

Music, audio editing, and sound design by Patrick Cronin. Thanks for listening!

[00:19:57]

Background Voices: "Quercus Petraeus, etc." [voices recite oak species names in the background, then fade].

[Transcript End]

Episode 2 – Oak Lawn

Quercus species featured in this episode

- *Quercus acuta* (Japanese Evergreen Red Oak)
- *Quercus acutissima* (Bristle-tipped Oak)
- *Quercus agrifolia* (Coast Live Oak)
- *Quercus aliena var. acutiserrata*
- *Quercus alnifolia*
- *Quercus bambusifolia*
- *Quercus berberidifolia*
- *Quercus bicolor* (Swamp White Oak)
- *Quercus buckleyi*
- *Quercus canariensis* (Algerian Oak)
- Quercus canariensis (hybrid)
- *Quercus castaneifolia* (Chesnut-leaved Oak)
- *Quercus cerris* (Turkey Oak)
- *Quercus coccifera* (Kermes Oak)
- *Quercus cornelius-mulleri*
- *Quercus crenata*
- *Quercus dentata* (Daimyo Oak)
- *Quercus dentata subspecies yunnanensis*
- *Quercus douglasii* (Blue Oak)
- *Quercus dumosa* (Nuttall's Scrub Oak)
- *Quercus durata*
- *Quercus elliottii* (Running Oak)
- *Quercus emoryi* (Emory's Oak)
- Quercus engelmannii (Engelmann Oak)
- *Quercus faginea* (Portuguese Oak)
- *Quercus frainetto* (Italian Oak)
- *Quercus garryana* (Oregon Oak)
- *Quercus glaucoides*
- *Quercus greggii*
- *Quercus ilex* (Holm Oak)
- *Quercus ilicifolia*
- *Quercus infectoria*
- *Quercus laurifolia* (Laurel-leaved Oak)
- *Quercus laurina*
- *Quercus lobata* (Valley Oak)
- *Quercus lusitanica*
- *Quercus macrocarpa* (Mossy-cup Oak)
- *Quercus mexicana*

Episode 2 – Oak Lawn

- *Quercus minima*
- *Quercus mongolica*
- Quercus montana (Basket Oak)
- *Quercus muehlenbergii* (Yellow Chestnut Oak)
- Quercus oblongata (Grey Oak)
- *Quercus oglethorpensis* (Oglethorpe Oak)
- *Quercus pacifica*
- *Quercus palustris* (Pin Oak)
- *Quercus petraea* (Durmast Oak)
- *Quercus phillyraeoides* (Ubame Oak)
- *Quercus pubescens*
- *Quercus pubescens x Q. petraea*
- Quercus pyrenaica (Pyrenees Oak)
- *Quercus* robur (English Oak)
- *Quercus robur 'Atropurpurea'*
- *Quercus robur Cristata*
- *Quercus robur 'Fastigiata'*
- *Quercus rubra* (Northern Red Oak)
- *Quercus rugosa*
- *Quercus salicina*
- *Quercus serrata*
- *Quercus sps.* (Bothwell Castle Oak)
- *Quercus suber* (Cork Oa)
- *Quercus tomentella* (Guadalupe Island Oak)
- *Quercus turbinella*
- *Quercus variabilis*
- *Quercus vaseyana*
- *Quercus velutina* (Black Oak)
- *Quercus wislizeni* (Californian Live Oak)
- *Quercus xalapensis*