



Botanic Gardens Day celebrated with our Autumn Fair — Robert Beaument and Ken Page



Thank you to the hundreds of people who attended the inaugural Autumn Fair and Botanic Gardens Day held on Sunday 26th May.

The weather was perfect and the gardens and grounds looked beautiful. It was wonderful to see so many families enjoying a picnic lunch, exploring the gardens and looking over the market stalls.

The popular Western Lake Macquarie Concert Band was sensational and we received a number of requests for a return performance.



Our resident botanist, Kevin McDonald, was kept very busy with visitors enthralled by his interesting botanical displays.

The popularity of our orchid collection is certainly growing. Curator, Chris O'Keefe and her volunteer helpers were pleasantly surprised by the large number of people who were keen to tour the orchid houses.

Our plant stall was well supported with one of its best ever days of sales. Many of our visitors were happy to take home a bargain or two and receive some garden advice from the nursery team.

Special thanks to our Events Coordinator, Belinda Blanch and all of the volunteers who worked so hard to make the day such a great success.



Botanic Gardens Day is an event promoted by BGANZ, the organisation of Botanic Gardens of Australia and New Zealand. The 2019 day, which is the fourth to be celebrated, saw over 100 Botanic Gardens and Arboreta participating. The event received extensive publicity in the press and on television garden programs which contributed to its success. Joining our Autumn Fair with Botanic Gardens Day has created a successful event for the Gardens.

Botanic Gardens Day 2020 will be an even more special event, celebrating the 250th anniversary of the voyage of Captain Cook's ship *Endeavour* to Australia with the botanists Joseph Banks and Daniel Solander. This voyage marked the beginning of scientific botany on the Australian continent. It played a seminal role in the development of botany and the modern botanical gardens. Exhibitions and displays to mark the event will be held in botanic gardens across Australia and New Zealand, including the HRBG.



Chairman's Report

— Ken Page

As foreshadowed in our February edition, autumn has been a very busy period in the Gardens with a number of major projects under way.

This edition reports on the opening of our new Orchid Nursery. In addition, volunteers are hard at work on paving in the rainforest garden, and the redevelopment of gardens at the entrance to the Visitor Centre. These projects are supported by grants from the NSW Government and AGL.

Our new electronic entrance sign has been installed and is being put into service.

Weather conditions in autumn have been

mild and favourable, allowing us to undertake new plantings to repair some of the damage done to the living collection by the past two hot summers.

We have also had a season of successful events including Mothers' Day and Botanic Gardens Day which have brought more visitors to the Gardens. Botanic Gardens Day has also proved to be an excellent time to hold our Autumn Fair, and we look to continuing this arrangement in future years.

The next few months should be no less busy. Our major projects will continue, and the Gardens will be the venue for an exciting sculpture exhibition, RESPONSE, which has been organised by our Deputy

Chair, Lynda McPherson, in conjunction with the University Gallery at the University of Newcastle. I would encourage everyone to take the trail to the Rainforest Garden and explore the installations. Winter is also an important period for group visits to the Gardens.

The autumn has also seen ceremonies held at the Gardens to mark the passing of two of our volunteers, Alison Woolard and Chris Coulthard. Both made significant contributions to the Gardens – Alison over more than 20 years and Chris over a much shorter period. Our thoughts are with both their families.

Grevilleas in the Gardens

— Kevin Stokes

Many gardeners have at least one *Grevillea* in their collection. It's not surprising as this genus has a wide variety of flower shapes and colours and very diverse foliage. Most people appreciate colour in their garden, but some plants don't flower all year, so foliage is always an important consideration when planning an attractive garden. However, there are many hybrid *Grevilleas* now available that do have extended flowering times.

The genus *Grevillea* is a very important component of the Australian Flora with around 360 species and new species being found or described constantly.

At the Hunter Region Botanic Gardens the importance of this genus is recognised by a large theme garden devoted to growing as many species, including rare and endangered plants, as possible.

As most gardeners would know, many *Grevillea* sp. can be short lived if not cared for, and that frequent pruning is needed to keep fresh new growth and enhance the number of flowers. *Grevilleas* also benefit from regular applications of suitable

low phosphorus fertilizer and about 50mm of mulch kept well away from the stem.

The *Grevilleas* are as confused as everyone about the changing weather and in this year, May has seen a number of them flowering early—perhaps they think it's Spring.

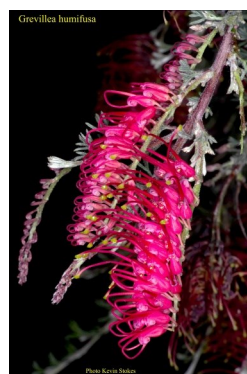
The weather over the past couple of days (3rd and 4th June) should convince them otherwise. It will be interesting to see if the floral bloom continues after the cold and wet conditions.

Among the *Grevilleas* flowering at present is the naturally occurring form of *Grevillea dielsiana*. What a stunning sight this plant is when covered in blooms (see photo at left).

Other beautiful *Grevilleas* starting to show are *G. humifusa* and *G. stenomera*. *G. refracta* has also flowered as has *G. decurrens*. Others to bloom are *G. bronwenae* and *G. wilsonii*.

It looks as if Spring will see a bounty of blossom this year and attract nectar eating birds and perhaps a few visitors to the Gardens.

Grevillea dielsiana



Grevilleas in the Gardens



Ryan Palmer and Ken Page



Ryan Palmer, Chris O’Keefe, Ken Page, Peter Gesling and Lynda MacPherson

On Monday 20th May, a ceremony was held to open our new Orchid Nursery. The Orchid Nursery completes a series of buildings developed to grow and display the Gardens’ large collection of orchids. The Gardens collection includes species orchids and cultivars from all over the world, and many of these orchids require special care including the correct conditions of light, temperature and moisture.

The Orchid Nursery, along with existing growing spaces in our nursery, will be used to grow and maintain the collection, while our existing tropical and temperate orchid houses will continue to provide beautiful displays to the public.

The Orchid Nursery was primarily funded by a grant from the Australian Orchid Foundation. The Australian Orchid Foundation is a voluntary organisation based in Melbourne, which is devoted to the preservation, protection, promotion and cultivation of all orchid species and hybrids. It raises funds from voluntary contributions, which are applied towards projects that further these aims. Projects include research and publications, orchid collections in public gardens, and educational activities. The foundation provided support in 2012 for the development of the Tropical Orchid House.

Port Stephens Council also provided support for building approval services.

The opening ceremony was attended by a large group of enthusiastic volunteers. Among the guests were the Mayor of Port Stephens, Ryan Palmer, members of the Board of Directors, orchid pioneer, Noel Winney and his wife Delma, Curator of Orchids, Chris O’Keefe, orchid specialist, Stu Webb and other members of the orchid collection team.

The Chairman, Ken Page, acknowledged the support and advice of the Australian Orchid Foundation in relation to the development of the project, and in particular their Chairman Helen Richards OAM. He noted with regret that the Foundation was not able to be represented at the opening.

Chris O’Keefe acknowledged the work of the design and construction team of Gardens volunteers and the role of Port Stephens Council.

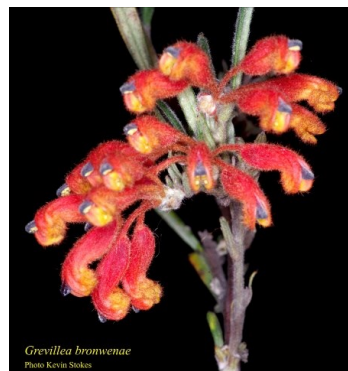
Plaques to mark the opening and recognise the construction team were unveiled by the Mayor.



Grevillea refracta
Photo Kevin Stokes



Grevillea decurrens
Photo Kevin Stokes



Grevillea bromwenae
Photo Kevin Stokes



Grevillea wilsonii
Photo Kevin Stokes

Grevilleas in the Gardens



Hibiscus insularis, the Phillip Island Hibiscus, is found on Phillip Island which is a small island located just off Norfolk Island. This was once one of the rarest plants in the world. By 1988, it had been reduced by goats and rats to just two clumps, and it was thought that both were one genotype - i.e. there was really only **one** plant left. When rats and goats were removed from the island it started to recover. By 2001 there were three clumps, but the third had been propagated from cuttings, so there was still genetically only one plant. In 2003 there were less than 50 mature plants, but there were some seedlings. This is important for increasing the genetic diversity of the species. It can take 10-20 years before seedlings flower, so there was still danger of losing the plant. The plant remains on the Australian list of critically endangered plants.

Cuttings had been sent to the Royal Botanic Garden Sydney, where they were propagated, and then to other botanic gardens. This means there are now plants available in Australia, but the hibiscus remains at great risk from disease in the wild because of the very low genetic diversity.

At Hunter Region Botanic Gardens we have successfully propagated cuttings from our original three plants, and have also propagated two plants from seed. Plants grown from cuttings can be bought from the plant stall when available, but seed grown plants will be kept and planted in the gardens.

RESPONSE

Winter Solstice Sculpture Exhibition

Response is an exhibition in which an invited group of Hunter Region art practitioners present installations which respond to the natural environment of the Gardens and reflect the passing of time in nature.

The exhibition will be held in the sub-tropical rainforest area of the Gardens and visitors will be invited on a special, self-guided walk to view the installations.

The Gardens has hosted many sculpture and other art events over the years, but this one is special in that the artists have developed works which specifically respond to the environment of the rainforest.

This exciting and intriguing exhibition is a partnership between the University Gallery at the University of Newcastle and the Hunter Region Botanic Gardens.

What's Happening?

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| 22 June -
4 August | - Response
Sculpture Exhibition |
| 9 July | - Children's Discovery Day |
| 13 July | - Orchid Winter Fair |
| 17 July | - Nature is Fun |
| 28 July | - National Tree Day |
| 10-25 August | - National Science Week |

Keep an eye out for special events happening in the Gardens throughout the year

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