



Gardens Volunteers Honoured on Australia Day

— Ken Page



At ceremonies each Australia Day, Port Stephens Council presents Annual Awards which recognise the outstanding contributions made to the Port Stephens community by various groups and individuals. Awards are given for voluntary work in a range of areas including welfare, sporting and cultural activities.

The Port Stephens Medal is awarded to individuals, organisations or groups for distinguished service to the community of Port Stephens over the previous 12 months or a number of years. This year, an award was made to the volunteers of the Hunter Region Botanic Gardens for our more than 30 years of effort in developing and maintaining the Gardens.

The Chairman, Ken Page, received the Port Stephens Medal on behalf of all volunteers at ceremonies held at Raymond Terrace and Nelson Bay on Australia Day. It was humbling to take our place among a range of volunteers and groups undertaking important work across the community.

International Women's Day Breakfast at the Gardens

— Ken Page



The annual Port Stephens International Women's Day Breakfast for 2019 was held at the Gardens on Friday 8th March, with over 150 people attending. The Federal Member for Paterson, Meryl Swanston, said

"What an incredible turnout of inspirational women at the second annual Port Stephens International Women's Day Breakfast, hosted by Kate Washington MP - Member for Port Stephens and me.

"Thank you to everyone who joined us, especially the female students leaders from Irrawang High School, Hunter River High School and Tomaree High School who shared their goals and visions for the future.

"A huge thank you also to the incredible staff and volunteers at Hunter Region Botanic Gardens for hosting us. Happy International Women's Day!"

This event, which was held in our newly enhanced volunteer area is an important community event which attracts many new visitors to the Gardens.



In recent months, the Gardens has been the recipient of two important awards.

In our November issue, we reported that the Gardens had received the Port Stephens Examiner Business Award for Best Tourist Attraction in Port Stephens for 2018. This award recognises the contribution that the Gardens makes to tourism in the Hunter and Port Stephens as one of the premier environmental and cultural attractions in the region.

On Australia Day 2019, the Gardens was also honoured to be awarded a Port Stephens Medal as part of the Port Stephens Council Annual Awards. These awards are primarily given for voluntary service by individuals and groups within the Port Stephens Shire. The Port Stephens Medal is awarded to individuals, organisations or groups for distinguished service to the community, and the award to the Gardens

is a recognition of our work as a volunteer organisation over more than 30 years.

The Gardens has survived through another hot dry summer. While there has been some damage, we did not face the same spells of extreme heat and high winds as affected us last year. In spite of some technical difficulties, our irrigation system made a huge contribution to keeping plants alive.

We are now looking forward to an autumn period when we will be able to revive and replenish the Gardens, when flowers return and the milder weather, along with the end of the mosquito season, encourages visitors.

As you can read elsewhere in *Burrawang*, we have a very active work program planned for the autumn including redesign

and replanting of the gardens near the entrance to the Visitors' Centre, and a large section of additional paving.

We also have a number of exciting events planned including the new Autumn Fair on 14th April. This event will be different from our old Spring Fairs, with a wide range of market stalls and a strong focus on garden products. Autumn is the ideal time to prepare and plant gardens in the Hunter Region, and this fair will be an opportunity for visitors to find many of their garden needs. Our own plant stall will be well stocked and volunteers will be on hand to provide garden advice.

Finally, *Burrawang* is a publication for all members and volunteers and we welcome contributions. We are particularly keen to have more articles in which members and volunteers tell us about their botanical interests.

Volunteering at the Gardens

– Ken Page

The Gardens has always prided itself on being an organisation run by and for volunteers, and our recent awards are an opportunity for us to think a little about what this means.

First and foremost, we are an organisation with a purpose, to develop and maintain the Gardens, and to use the Gardens both to conserve the plants of the Hunter Region and to educate the community about plants and their importance to our lives and well-being. While we do not have a partisan political agenda, our educational and conservation role has become increasingly important at a time when there are overt challenges to the whole idea of acting to maintain the earth and its biodiversity for future generations. Our role has also become increasingly important as many people in urban communities are becoming less connected with the natural environment.

Second, we are a self-managed organisation. This provides some challenges in terms of ensuring that we have the financial resources and technical and managerial expertise needed to keep the Gardens running, but it does mean that we can pursue the Gardens' objectives free from external political or bureaucratic agendas.

Thirdly, we are a community of volunteers. We can, as we should, give our first priority to the health and well-being of our members, offering our friendship and support as needed. For some volunteers, we provide workplace training that may assist them in moving to paid work. For others we can ensure that we provide tasks that are suited to their current skills, abilities and state of health. Some voluntary organisations, such as our friends in the Men's Shed movement, base their whole operation on the principle of supporting the physical and mental welfare of their volunteers. For us, we are able to combine this with the pursuit of our scientific and cultural objectives which contribute to the regional community.

While we currently have quite a large volunteer group with some 200 people on the books, we are always looking for new volunteers. People we particularly need include:

- People with managerial and technical skills to help run the gardens. This includes managerial and office skills, tradespeople, and most importantly people with botanical or horticultural expertise;
- Café staff;
- Guides and educators; and
- Gardeners, particularly people interested in committing to work in and take responsibility for parts of our theme gardens.

While skilled people are important to us, we can provide training in most of the work we do.

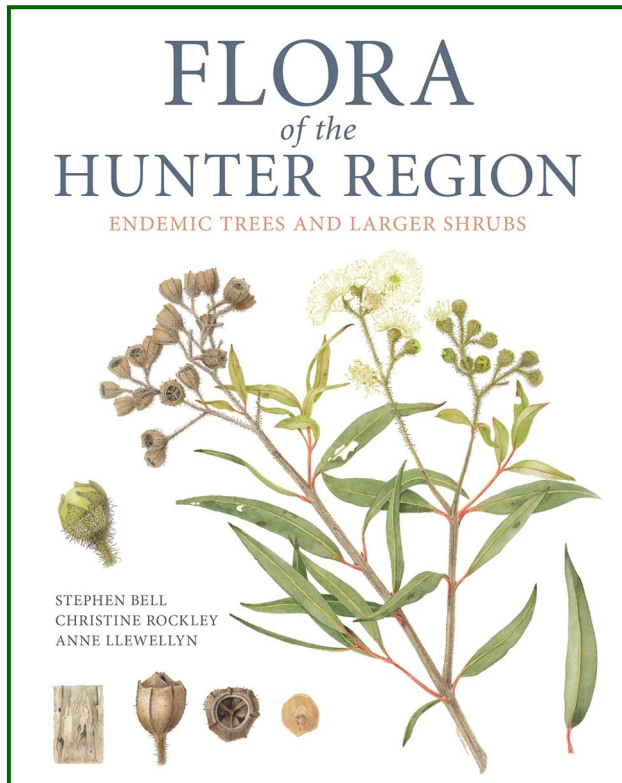
The core of our volunteer group are, of course, retired people and the mature aged unemployed. These are people who can make a sustained time commitment to the Gardens and who can benefit from our work environment.

We are, however, always interested in younger people seeking training and work experience in the areas in which we work.

We need to develop better opportunities for working people and others with limited time available to contribute to the Gardens and develop a long term relationship. This could involve working bees, short term consultative roles, or areas like guiding and education where it is not necessary to be at the Gardens on a regular basis. This is the way I became involved with the Gardens. I began assisting with IT and communications issues in 2001, and never left.

Existing volunteers and members are one of our most important sources of new volunteers. Do you know someone who would benefit from working at the Gardens and who might be interested in trying it out? Volunteer inductions generally take place on Mondays and our volunteer coordinator, Anne Mitchell will guide new starters through the process. Potential volunteers are also welcome to talk to me or any of the other Directors about opportunities available.

Book Review: Stephen Bell, Christine Rockley and Anne Llewellyn
Flora of the Hunter Region: Endemic Trees and Larger Shrubs



The Hunter region is an area of very great botanical diversity with landscapes and habitats representative of coastal, tableland and western slopes environments with diverse soils, climate and elevation. These ecosystems support an estimated 4000 to 5000 species, many of which also occur in similar conditions elsewhere in NSW. There are a relatively small number of species, around 100, that are endemic solely to the Hunter. Some of these plants are widespread within the region, but many belong to isolated populations in specialised habitats. Some of these plants have been known to botanists since the first surveys of the region in the early 19th century, while others are recent discoveries.

This book is a collaboration between botanist Dr Stephen Bell and artists from the Botanical Illustration program at the University of Newcastle. It is the first of a planned two volumes which record the region's endemic plants with comprehensive botanical descriptions and botanical illustrations. This book covers 54 trees and large shrubs, while the second will focus on smaller plants. The botanical illustrations are the work of some 13 artists, but are of a uniformly high standard with detailed drawings of the significant plant structures. Like all of the best botanical illustrations, they combine scientific accuracy with artistic sensibility. The drawings are based on freshly collected plant material as well as dried herbarium specimens. A few critically endangered plants were drawn from photographs. Some illustrations include drawings of the plant's growth habit, and it would have been valuable if this had been more widely featured in the illustrations.

The plant descriptions are comprehensive. Maps are provided to show the range of each plant. The descriptions include flowering periods, key diagnostic features and a comprehensive taxonomic description. There is a welcome focus on the plant's habitat including the conditions and ecological communities in which it is found.

This is a very handsome book which will appeal to collectors of botanical works and works about the Hunter region. It is also an eminently practical guide for those of us who are interested in identifying, preserving and growing the region's unique plants. It is part of the important project of identifying and recording the things that are special about our region. The illustrations are reproduced to a standard which is more than adequate for study purposes, however some readers may wish that it had been possible to print in full fine art quality. The exhibition of enlarged prints of the drawings, on show at the Newcastle Museum to mark the publication of the book, enables people to see the illustrations in their full glory.

A number of the plants in this book are grown at the Gardens, and we are looking to introduce additional plants that are suited to our climate and soils.

Bequests to the Gardens

– Ken Page

As part of the development of the Gardens' Strategic Plan in 2017, the Board reviewed the range of funding and sponsorship opportunities available to the Gardens, and it was suggested that there may be people interested in making a bequest to the Gardens as part of their wills.

Bequests are an important source of income for many charitable organisations. A bequest to the Gardens will enable the donor to contribute to the work of developing and maintaining our Gardens into the future, support the Gardens' work and advocacy for preserving the plants and natural ecology of the

Hunter Region, and support the Gardens' educational role in enabling future generations to understand and appreciate their living environment. The Gardens represents a permanent living memorial to all those who have built, maintained and supported it.

In conjunction with our Honorary Solicitor, I have now prepared a guide for persons who may be considering making a bequest to the Gardens, and their legal advisors. Copies of the guide are available from myself or the CEO, and we are available to discuss the matter with anyone who may be interested.



Gardens volunteers and staff welcome Tomago Aluminium's Nicki Harvey, visiting to see completed work in the volunteer area and to meet some of the construction team.

Thanks to the continuing hard work of our Grants Committee, the Gardens has a number of sponsored projects underway or about to commence. The major projects are:

- Upgrade to the Volunteer area (sponsored by Tomago Aluminium). This upgrade, which provided for an expansion of the covered area to provide more shelter for volunteers and visitors, and improvements to the kitchen is now complete and has been supplemented by painting of the whole area.
- New orchid shade house (sponsored by the Australian Orchid Foundation). Construction and fitout of this new growing area for the orchid collection is now almost complete.
- Upgrade of the Rainforest Garden (sponsored by AGL). Landscaping, including the development of streams and ponds through the Garden, is now complete. The ponds are planted with water plants and are attracting birds and other wildlife. Paving associated with this project is about to commence.
- Paving (sponsored by NSW Government Community Building Partnership). Funding has been provided for a significant addition to our paved paths. The work will focus on the Botanic Walk in the Rainforest area.
- Redevelopment of gardens at the entrance to the Visitors' Centre (sponsored by AGL). This area will be redeveloped with the assistance of a professional designer as well as gardens volunteers to create a high impact display garden featuring native plants.
- New entrance sign (sponsored by Hunter Water, Newcastle Coal Infrastructure Group and the NSW Government). Development approval is currently being sought for our new illuminated information sign

Along with our regular work to maintain and enhance the living collection, we have a very busy period of work in front of us, but one which will enhance the Gardens experience for visitors.

Memorial for Don Barnett

- Ken Page



On Saturday morning, 16 February, 2019 an informal ceremony was held at the Gardens to honour and celebrate the major contribution made by the late Don Barnett OAM in establishing and developing the Botanic Gardens. Don was a former Chairman of the Gardens (1984 to 1993) and played a major role in the design and development of the Gardens.

The ceremony was organised by the Barnett family, and was also attended by Gardens pioneers Kevin Stokes and Kevin McDonald.

At the ceremony a plaque was unveiled, with wording describing Don's major achievements, together with the planting of a young specimen of a Flame Tree (*Brachychiton acerifolius*), a favourite species of Don's.

What's Happening?

8 March

- International Women's Day Breakfast

23 March

- Sausage Sizzle at Bunnings Heatherbrae

14 April

- Autumn Fair

17 April

- Nature is Fun

24 April

- Nature is Fun

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

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