

## Chair's Note

Dear Friends

As the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the Arboretum draws to a close, and I reflect on the year, I can't help but wonder 'where it all went'. It has been quite a busy one for the Friends, as well I bet, for the Arboretum staff. It's also been a good time to reflect on how much the Arboretum and its trees have grown. Below is a shot from Forest 71 *Araucaria bidwillii* in 2014 and just recently ... the bunyas pines have been thriving and producing cones. Many thanks to Wayne Cassidy, one of the Working Bee volunteers, for sending in the 2014 photo to remind us all of how far we have come!



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## Chair's Note Continued

For me, 2023 began with an informal dawn gathering on February 1<sup>st</sup> with Arboretum staff, and some long-term supporters of the Arboretum, acknowledging the anniversary of the public opening of the Arboretum 10 years ago. Jon Stanhope AO was there and provided some interesting anecdotes related to its early years of development.

At the same time, the Friends were keenly awaiting a preview of the documentary we commissioned to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. We had engaged SRH Filmmakers, a local documentary and promotional film making company to interview key stakeholders in the establishment of the Arboretum over the 20 years since the 2003 bushfires. This was previewed at the Arboretum 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala Celebration in May. That event saw almost 250 attendees enjoy an evening of great entertainment and food. The menu was created and delivered by The Ginger Group.

The evening was hosted by Alex Sloan AM and apart from the preview of the Friends documentary covering the first 20 years of the Arboretum 😊, William Barton, supported by the Ellery String Quartet provided a truly memorable performance. William's dedication of a solo rendition of 'Bird Song at Dusk' was outstanding and brought the Village Centre audience to their feet with loud acknowledgement and applause. Music was also provided throughout the evening by Wayne Kelly, jazz pianist.

Many attendees were able to reunite with friends and associates closely connected to the development of the Arboretum with whom they had not connected for perhaps the last 10 years or more. For some more info and images, here's the Arboretum Top Story summarising the event.

[National Arboretum Canberra Celebrates 10 Years - National Arboretum \(act.gov.au\)](https://www.act.gov.au/national-arboretum-canberra/celebrates-10-years)

At about the same time as our May Friends Annual General Meeting, the Wollemi Pine Propagation project was concluding. After nearly four years since inception, the Friends contract with Yarralumla Nursery for the propagation and care of the Wollemi concluded – and by September, 132 Wollemis, born of the trees at the Arboretum, had been sold or gifted across numerous parts of eastern Australia.

The project realised a profit of more than \$11,000 while also providing trees to Government House, the Australian National Botanic Gardens, the New Zealand High Commission, Jon Stanhope - and a dozen trees to the Arboretum and planted back into Forest 32 – the Wollemis. The project also led Dr Roger Hnatiuk to publish a scientific paper on previously undocumented characteristics of Wollemis that appeared in some of the 132 trees grown. Next year will be the 30<sup>th</sup> year since the discovery of the Wollemis.

You'll remember that in July we released the documentary – The National Arboretum Canberra – a Twenty-year story. I hope everyone reading this has now viewed it at least once and shared its link with friends and family. Here's the link in case you missed it ... If you can, view it on a smart TV !

[National Arboretum Canberra: A Twenty Year Story - National Arboretum \(act.gov.au\)](https://www.act.gov.au/national-arboretum-canberra/a-twenty-year-story)

A reminder also that, in the background to the more obvious activities this year, the Friends have swapped to a new website platform and have been updating information and processes associated with the new site. <https://friendsarboretumcanberra.org.au/>

We have been particularly keen to make our membership joining and renewing process easier, just remember to hit this button which is at the top of every page!

[Join/Renew](#)

Membership fees provide a major source of income for the Friends to be able to undertake projects that support community engagement at the Arboretum. I am pleased to say that our efforts around membership are producing results, with more than a 20% increase over the last 6 months. Here is Fran Hinton, Acting Deputy Chair, working hard at the Curtin Pots to Plots Spring Fair stall trying to attract new Friends!



We are also grateful for the efforts of the volunteer Harvest Group who grow and sell produce and items at market days throughout the year and donate all their profits to the Friends. This is also a significant source of income. With the Friends' bank balance in relatively good shape, we are discussing options with the Arboretum for future projects that the Friends could undertake or participate in, that would

further enhance the Arboretum from the perspective of its visitors. Stay tuned ...

Other work associated with the Friends website has been the updating and redesign of the accessibility of the Guide Resources. Access to up-to-date Guide information had fallen away but Council, through Barry Langshaw, is working with Rhu Donald, Acting Community Engagement Officer, to review documents and introduce new material.



Another 10-year anniversary celebration was held on October 13<sup>th</sup> - it was a splendid day for the volunteer breakfast in the Margaret Whitlam Pavilion provided by the Arboretum. There were about 100 attendees who enjoyed refreshments and got to catch up with lots of other volunteers from the various roles they fulfil – many of them also Friends. There was also a 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary birthday cake to share !



Last, but not least, we have just confirmed that our diplomatic partner for the 2024 Warm Trees event is the Embassy of Chile. This will be the first South American country that we have joined forces with and is a great fit as the Arboretum is host to at least seven species of tree found in Chile – not the least of which is the Monkey Puzzle – their national tree emblem! Jan Morgan is heading up the 2024 Warm Trees event and I'm sure those of you on her 'list' will be hearing from her soon – or maybe I'm already too late.

Hope to see you on the 12<sup>th</sup> of December at the End-of-Year Volunteers and Friends Celebration and/or at the Arboretum soon!

Mike  
Chair  
Friends of the National Arboretum Canberra

## Note of thanks about the Wollemi Project from Colette MacKay OAM

On 18 October 2023, Colette MacKay OAM wrote to key staff and Friends congratulating them on the success of the Wollemi project. Colette wrote: 'It was amazing being part of



this inspirational project. Ange McNeilly's commitment and attention to every detail was relentless and precise. I thank her for letting me be part of her space.

Roger Hnatiuk's help was critical and comforting, gave the project added direction and Ange and I confidence. I again congratulate him for having his scientific paper published.

The Arboretum is also to be thanked for allowing the project to proceed and for supporting it. Michelle's work with the brochure was very special. Even the Bonsai people have helped providing space when Ange needed it. Thanks Scott, Amalie, Leigh, Owen, Michelle and all of the Arboretum team.

Thanks also to Trish Keller OAM and the Friends for believing in the project and financing it. Thanks also to the many volunteers that helped and also purchased Wollemis.

Spero Cassidy's work to get the project up on the new website was much appreciated and helped enormously with promoting the project and with sales.

The project is the beginning of many scientific outcomes for the Arboretum.

I remember years ago being with Jon Stanhope AO and a group of scientists and one saying that the Arboretum will be famous for its' tourism but it will be more famous for its scientific outcomes and I truly believe this.

This project has been achieved by an exceptional volunteer who has put her heart and soul and an extraordinary number of hours into it.

Well done!  
Colette”

*Colette joined others to plant several of the Wollemi at the Arboretum in September this year.*



## Warm Trees is off to South America!

For Warm Trees this July we partnered with the South African High Commission. Our team of very willing volunteers knitted or crocheted scarves, then installed around 500 of them, then took them down, washed them and made them into wraps and rugs to donate to local charities. They also made a stunning display featuring the national symbols of South Africa. Our youngest contributors were 10 years old, and our oldest was a keen knitter who donated a scarf on her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday.

The Arboretum's figures show that there were over 30,000 more visitors in July than there were in June. And there were plenty of very positive comments from the visitors. So now we turn to 2024, and I am delighted to announce that our Embassy partner next year is Chile! This will be our first partnership with a country from South America. We have seven forests at the Arboretum that have Chilean trees, including the Monkey puzzle (*Araucaria Araucana*) which is their national tree.

### More knitters and crocheters please!

We don't seem to have had as many new scarves this year as we have had in previous years. We did, however, have two unexpected new sources which might prompt you to think of other people who might be interested in knitting.

First, are there other young potential knitters out there? Can you teach your children or grandchildren how to knit? We arranged for our two 10 year olds to come to the Arboretum with their families to wrap their scarves around trees on the Events Terrace. Perhaps a group of young knitters from another school could do the same.

### The men who knit for love

And secondly – are there any men in your life who can knit, or could be encouraged to try? The inspiration for this came from one of our volunteer knitters who donated scarves that her father had knitted. He started knitting when he was recovering from lymphoma of the brain several years ago, as part of his relaxation and to keep his brain active and his fine motor skills going.

And just in case you think this is a one-off, the boys who live on an island in Lake Titicaca in Peru learn to knit a special cap called a chullo. When they are adult and find a potential wife, her mother will only give permission if he has knitted a good chullo! And they are real works of art, as you can see!



If you would like to be involved with Warm Trees 2024, please send an email to [contact@friendsarboretumcanberra.org.au](mailto:contact@friendsarboretumcanberra.org.au).

Jan Morgan  
Warm Trees Convener 2024

## Key Diary Dates for Friends

**6pm 12 December: End-of-Year Celebration for Volunteers and Friends at the Arboretum**

### U3A Trees of the Arboretum Courses 2024

The popular U3A 'Trees of the Arboretum' courses are again being offered next year, starting in January. There are four courses, each running for 6 weeks in a classroom, plus two walks. Each session runs from 10 am to 12 noon. Please check the U3A website ([u3acanberra.org.au](http://u3acanberra.org.au)) for further details, including how to enrol.

Wednesday 24 **January** to 6 March 2024, **Course 1:** Hughes Community Centre, Room 3

Tuesday 2 **April** to 14 May 2024, **Course 3:** Cook Community Centre, Room 1

Friday 23 **August** to 27 September, **Course 4:** Hughes Community Centre, Room 3

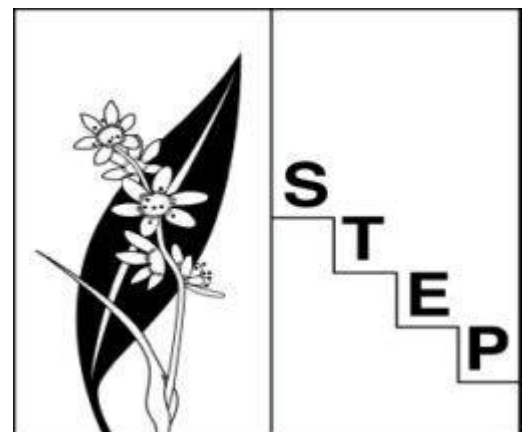
Thursday 17 **October** to 28 November 2024, **Course 2:** Hughes Community Centre, Room 3

## News from STEP – Southern Tablelands Ecosystems Park Forest 20.

Hello all

As we progress into the dryer, warmer months the rhythm of activity down in Forest 20 has changed from constant weeding to constant watering!

We are still managing to put new plants in the ground, but this comes with added responsibility. Our volunteers make sure everything gets a deep soaking in the weeks after planting and that mulch and tree guards are in place. The Wattle Walk and central gardens have been filled with aroma, as the Late Black Wattle *Acacia mearnsii* (pictured below) is flowering profusely this year.







Pollinators such as insects and birds have been spoilt for choice, as the newly planted members of the Pea family near the STEP entrance sign spring into bloom. These “egg and bacon” plants are a hardy group of species and will brighten even the smallest garden.

Some of our volunteers conducted guided walks as part of the inaugural Festival of Nature, which was coordinated by the ACT branch of

Landcare. The aim of these tours was to demonstrate the range of local native plants that are suited to ACT gardens and to give participants tips on how best to grow them. Walkers enjoyed the serenity of the Forest 20 gardens and spotted many birds, kangaroos and even one echidna. STEP was one of several organisations that had nature-based activities on offer over October and November and it was an excellent opportunity to network and exchange information.

We hope to see many more visitors exploring down in Forest 20 once the school holidays start. Now that the trees are larger and offering more shade it is the ideal spot to take a stroll, do some bird watching and learn about Southern Tablelands native plants.

Regards  
Jane Cottee  
STEP President

## Discovery Kitchen Garden and Harvest Group Update

*(Article and Photos by Ange McNeilly unless otherwise specified.)*

### Kitchen Garden

At the end of November, the garden team removed all broad beans and sweet peas to save seeds and to make space for planting Jack-Be-Little mini pumpkins, climbing spinach and Lebanese cucumbers. The remaining unsold rainbow silver beet and French marigolds were planted in the garden so that there would be fewer plants to care for in the service court over the summer.

With a hot and drier summer expected, produce yield is uncertain. Productivity may be better than the last few years as some crops failed to mature due to cooler temperatures and shortened seasons.

*Right Cynthia and Tralie working in the kitchen garden.*



Tomatoes, chillies, eggplants, Warrigal greens and rhubarb are all growing well as are nasturtiums, fennel and alyssum. Crowding strawberries and their runners have been removed for transplanting elsewhere. The English lavender in the Sensory Garden is due for harvesting and drying in January.

The garden team will be 18 strong in the New Year and sincere thanks go out to these wonderfully dedicated volunteers for their ongoing commitment to showcasing this beautiful and inspiring garden to the visiting public.



*Above: Dianthus*



*Above: Sunflower*



*Above: Cornflower*

### **Harvest Group**

This year has been one of the Harvest Group's busiest with nine market stalls held to sell the enormous quantity of fig items produced from this year's bumper harvest.

Takings from the Stalls have been very healthy and for the year to date, the Stall has generated more than \$12,000 in profit to boost Friends' fundraising activities. This is in addition to the more than \$11,000 raised by the Wollemi project.



*Above: Wreaths made from natural botanical seedpods and nuts sold at market stalls from August through to November 2023 to raise funds for the Friends.*

*Right: A happy customer with her wreath purchase*





Right: Jon and Metta, Lorraine (seated), Maggie, Ange (seated) and Debbie at Lanyon Homestead market stall on 23 September 2023.



Many thanks to the irrepressible Harvest Group and hoping that 2024 will be just as successful! Merry Christmas, Happy New Year, and Happy Gardening!

## Vale John Gray OAM

### Dr John Gray OAM – a remarkable ‘man of the trees’

Recently Dr John Gray passed away and all those interested in not only the landscape, but specifically the ‘treescape’ of Canberra, and elsewhere, should pause to thank him. John was in many ways a direct link to that great chain of Charles Weston and Lindsay Pryor, our ‘founding fathers’ when it comes to Canberra landscapes in general, as well as the aesthetic and environmental benefits that we get from great tree planting programs. John once said to this author “We can’t afford to ignore the way in which the planet works. We cannot afford to ignore its natural ecosystems and the resources we’re benefitting from”. And he lived a life trying to achieve that.

With a cadetship from the NSW Forestry Commission in 1948 he studied at Sydney University then the Australian Forestry School in Yarralumla before taking up positions with the Commission in their Queanbeyan and Bateman’s Bay offices. Returning to Canberra with the Timber Bureau he ran their seed laboratory at a time of great demand, especially from overseas, for eucalypt seeds.

Following, in some respects, Professor Lindsay Pryor’s path, he joined the Parks and Gardens Section of the Department of the Interior and the National Capital Development Commission. He was excited by the prospect of working on the landscaping for the future Lake Burley Griffin as the person delivering the design concepts of the late Richard Clough. John planted many of the significant areas of the National Capital in this time especially in the Parliamentary triangle as well as new suburbs in Woden and Belconnen.

But this led him to ‘upscale’ his design credentials and he and his wife Pixie went to the University of California, Berkeley, where he studied under the famous US landscape architect Garret Eckbo, whose seminal work was *Landscape for Living*, (1950). Returning to Australia he taught at the Canberra College of Advanced Education then joined the NCDC, again to work beside Richard Clough, whom he succeeded. He was always a major contributor to professional bodies in his field serving as National President of the Royal Australian Institute of Parks and Recreation as well as in the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects. He left the NCDC when it closed down in 1988.

However, John's long interest in garden and landscape history led him to undertake a successful PhD in 1999 titled "Thomas Charles George Weston (1866-1935) – a critical review of his contribution to the establishment of the landscape foundation of Australia's national capital" (available online at the University of Canberra sit). After 'retiring' from the public sector he undertook a number of landscape design projects which are a testimony to him at Old Parliament House, the Australian War Memorial and Magna Carta Place.

He was always a gentle and reflective man who could be a great companion in a grove of trees! Hopefully another 'legacy' of John's will come to fruition in a biography of Charles Weston, written by Robert Macklin with John Gray, which we hope to see published in 2024!

Max Bourke AM  
20 November 2023

## Christmas at The Curatoreum

We would like to extend a big thank you to the Friends of the National Arboretum for all your support this year. We hope you enjoy this selection of gift ideas for the nature lovers in your life.

Wishing you a safe and merry festive season from Mel and The Curatoreum team.



**National Arboretum Candles** – small \$13, large \$19  
Just in time for Christmas, we are pleased to share with you a range of candles inspired by the botanicals of the National Arboretum. Our team recently had the opportunity to work with the local Canberran candle connoisseurs at Lucian to develop three unique scents: Wattle Walk, Forest 20, and Hidden Forest. The candles are a wonderful stocking stuffer and thoughtful way to share the scents of the Arboretum this Christmas.

**My Family Tree: A Family History, Ancestry and Genealogy Record Book** by the Royal Horticultural Society. \$32.99

Every family has its own story and an increasing number of us are taking the time to search out these histories and record them for this and future generations. My Family Tree is a beautifully designed book to record your unique family story, with space for family and individual records, census records, ancestry charts, family traditions and achievements, events and photographs.

It offers helpful tips and advice, useful sections to guide your ancestral research, and allows you to gather all the information from both sides of your family in one place.

**Sophie Conran Precision Secateurs** by Burgon & Ball. \$90.50

Sophie Conran, of the well-known Conran British design dynasty, brings her contemporary country house style to this precision secateur which is both a delight to use and offers excellent control and comfort.

The handle, head and blade are crafted from a single piece of stainless steel, giving both strength and rust resistance. This precision secateur has two blades and uses a scissor action for making clean, healthy cuts on soft green growth. The pointed blade tips allow for targeted cutting, and this tool is especially useful for floristry work, even cutting through woodier stems.



A simple brass lock keeps the blades safely closed when not in use. The etched Sophie Conran for Burgon & Ball maker's mark on the blade adds a distinctive finishing touch.

For peace of mind, this Sophie Conran for Burgon & Ball precision secateur is covered by a ten year guarantee against manufacturing defects.

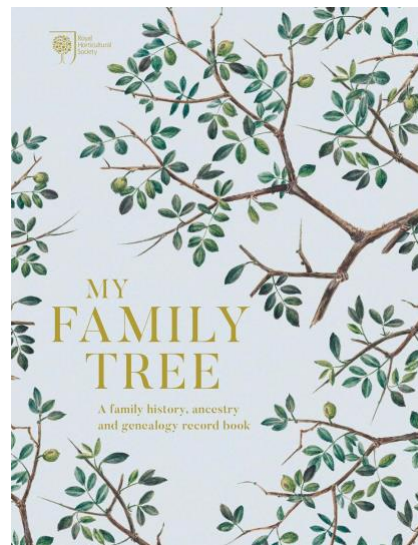
Presented in a smart box, this secateur makes a beautiful and thoughtful gardening gift.

**A Life in Garden Design** by Paul Bangay. \$79.99

Paul Bangay is Australia's most sought-after garden designer, with close to forty years' experience.

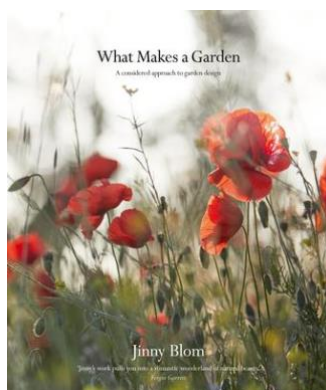
Known for his mastery of scale, balance, form and colour, Paul draws on his lifelong study of the natural and classical worlds to create gardens around the globe.

This illustrated memoir explores the evolution of one of Australia's finest design minds. A visual delight, it ranges from photos of childhood gardens and goats to hand-drawn plans for Paul's earliest designs. Through never-before-seen materials, the story behind





Paul's vision is revealed - and we see the creative workings that come to fruition in meticulous and timeless gardens.



***What Makes a Garden: A considered approach to garden design* by Jinny Blom. \$69.99**

What Makes a Garden builds upon the work of *The Thoughtful Garden*, giving a broader idea of how she thinks about garden design. In particular it emphasizes her multi-disciplinary approach, which embraces architecture, conservation and art, coupled with a strong holistic thread.

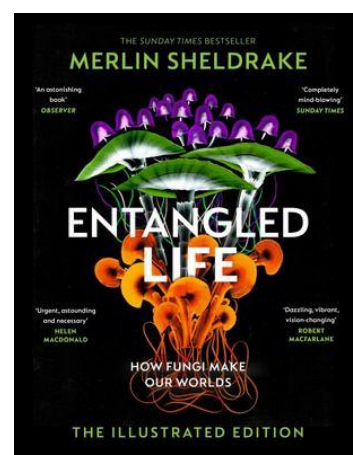
*What Makes a Garden* presents a multi-disciplinary approach to garden design, which embraces architecture, conservation and art, coupled with a strong holistic thread. This fascinating and insightful book looks at how a garden should please all five senses; how it is an alchemical mix of the inanimate and the living; and also how it has to accommodate both the effects of time and the influences of culture.

Reflecting Jinny's highly individual approach to garden design, the book is filled with warmth and character alongside her expert knowledge. With a broad appeal, this beautiful book will appeal to the widest audience of garden lovers: thoughtful yet practical and informative, it marries artistry with functionality.

***Entangled Life Illustrated: How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds and Shape Our Futures* by Merlin Sheldrake. \$65.00**

The more we learn about fungi, the less that makes sense without them. They can change our minds, heal our bodies and even help us avoid environmental disaster; they are metabolic masters, earth-makers and key players in most of nature's processes.

In *Entangled Life*, Merlin Sheldrake takes us on a mind-blowing journey into their spectacular world and reveals how these extraordinary organisms transform our understanding of our planet and life itself. This wonderful book is a Sunday Times bestseller featuring over 100 spectacular full-colour images, showcasing the wondrous and wildly various lifeform of Fungi as never before.



## What's Happening at the Arboretum

**New 'Mr Fluffy' Forest Shelter officially opened 20 November 2023 - A place of reflection**

A location in the Black tupelo forest with sweeping views of Canberra was the site chosen for the newly-opened Forest Shelter. This place of reflection provides a space to sit, learn, reflect, and acknowledge the loss of lives and homes, as well as much-loved belongings and gardens that had to be left behind for the safety of our community. It also informs new residents and visitors to this significant part of Canberra's history.



The presence of loose fill asbestos insulation, more commonly known to Canberrans as 'Mr Fluffy', was installed in properties across the ACT between 1968 and 1980. More than 1,000 homes across Canberra have been demolished due to 'Mr Fluffy', which had a lasting impact on families, communities, and tradespeople. It is important that lessons learnt from the past are not forgotten and are used to help shape a safer community now and into the future.

The forest shelter also provides a space for education about the surrounding landscape. Rocky outcrops are scattered across the Arboretum, with one located nearby this forest shelter. These rocks are colourfully covered with mosses and lichens. These delicate life forms provide habitat for small insects, slowly break down rocks to release minerals, and help to form new soil. While they may be small, the mosses and lichens play an important role in the ecosystem.

We thank the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD) for their generous donation that enabled this place of reflection to be installed. The new forest shelter is now open to visit and enjoy in the Black tupelo forest #43.

**The Arboretum is excited to announce the Arboretum's new Public Art Commission *Drawing Breath*.**

This sculpture by Hannah Quinlivan was commissioned to celebrate the National Arboretum's 10th anniversary since opening to the public in 2013 and will be the newest addition to the Forest Sculpture Gallery, which continues to grow along with the forests.



The commission was publicly announced on 17 October 2023 by Scott Saddler AM Executive Branch Manager, National Arboretum Canberra and University of Canberra Stromlo Forest Park. Making a bold welcome at the entrance to the Arboretum, this impressive work will stand at a striking 15 meters long and 5 meters high. A maquette of the design was displayed by the Ginkgo Dam where the sculpture will be situated, giving a small scale glimpse into what the final work will look like.

Ms Quinlivan states:

*'A few years ago, I found myself digging in the soil by the Murrumbidgee River, just north of Canberra. Dealing with the news of my mother's terminal cancer, I set about planting two and a half thousand trees. Each sapling served as more than a marker of my grief — they embodied a determination to reconstruct a future amid cycles of life and death. I was shaping the world not just for me, but for my children and grandchildren—turning the soil to find solace and purpose amid loss. Since that time I have become a planter. Each death and each birth is marked by new saplings placed within the earth's embrace.*

*Drawing Breath is a sculptural installation that reflects on transformation and reconstruction. It will be situated in the dam at the heart of the National Arboretum in Canberra, a site that itself rose from the devastation of the Canberra bushfires. Just as new life took root in the ashes, this artwork symbolises the beauty that can emerge from devastation, nurturing hope for the future.'*

*Drawing Breath* stands as a reminder that we must do more than remember or reflect — we must work to build a more beautiful future together.

*This 'sculptural drawing abstracts and interprets the Arboretum space, and its history and future'. The organic structure of the piece will evoke contour lines of the Arboretum landscape through three sculptural elements that will float just above the water's surface. The twisting cellular plant like forms explore 'the thematic cycles of inhalation and exhalation, human breath and plant photosynthesis.'*

Human qualities are embedded in the work via the hand textured, shaped and welded flat aluminium. It will then be coated in a glossy white finish that will be used throughout the whole composition for a cohesive look that focuses on the curves and undulations manipulated into the material. The sculpture will be installed in the Ginkgo dam, giving beautiful light interactions with the white glossy finish reflecting off the water's surface and will be illuminated at night.

With a unanimous decision from the Forest Sculpture Gallery advisory committee, artist Hannah Quinlivan was successful in securing the commission in a competitive group of five strong submissions which were narrowed down from an initial group of 49 expressions of interest.

This sculpture will be realised by Quinlivan with the assistance of Creative Road and is anticipated to be installed by late 2024.

This commission was made possible through the generous donations from the National Arboretum Canberra's 2022 Ambassador program and Forest Sculpture Gallery donors and we wish to thank all who have been involved in the process thus far.

### **International Bonsai Relationship Formalised - Omiya Bonsai Art Museum, Saitama Japan**

*In expressing our heartfelt gratitude to the Mayor of Saitama City, Mr Hayato Shimizu, for your warm welcome and unwavering support, we reflect on the meaningful journey undertaken by representatives of the National Arboretum Canberra who travelled to Saitama, Japan at the end of October this year.*





On the 1st of November 2023, Scott Saddler AM, Executive Branch Manager of the National Arboretum Canberra and Leigh Taafe, Curator at the National Bonsai and Penjing Collection of Australia (NBPCA), travelled to Japan to mark a significant moment in the history of bonsai art. A new collaboration with the Omiya Bonsai Art Museum (OBAM) in Saitama Japan was formalised by the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which the Japanese affectionately refer to as a *"Sister Museum Agreement"*.

The formal ceremony for the signing of the MoU was witnessed by an audience of influential bonsai community members from both Japan and Australia, including Australian Ambassador to Japan, Justin Hayhurst.

The ceremony was held in front of the Omiya Bonsai Art Museum's most famous bonsai, the Japanese white pine named *"Higurashi"*. This bonsai was taken from the mountains (also known as yamadori) and placed into a pot over 90 years ago.

The OBAM is considered the most respected and influential public collection of bonsai in the world. The OBAM has similarities with the NBPCA in that both are publicly-run bonsai collections staffed by government employees. Both collections strive to educate visitors through the representation of the art of bonsai as they exist in each respective country. One of the differences between our collections is that OBAM is a museum in the true sense of the word, with history and artefacts on display for public viewing, whereas the NBPCA is simply a living collection of bonsai and penjing grown in Australia.

The OBAM has an outdoor display of bonsai set amongst a beautiful garden, indoor displays of bonsai and other items, and a large reception area and shop.

Following the ceremony, Scott had an opportunity to deliver a presentation about the NAC and NBPCA. This was also a good time to exchange gifts. Scott and Leigh were honoured to receive a beautiful artwork, gifted to the NBPCA. A lovely Suiseki (viewing stone) was gifted to Mayor Shimizu on behalf of the NBPCA, a World Bonsai Friendship Federation Cooperation Centre. This dan seki (plateau stone) was collected from the Mary River, which is a major river system in the South East and Wide Bay–Burnett regions of Queensland, Australia. The river was traditionally named Moocooboola by the indigenous Kabi people, and hence the stones from this area are referred to as Moocooboola stones. The suiseki was collected by Mr Lindsay Bebb, Chairman Emeritus of the World Bonsai Friendship Federation. He also carved the daiza (stand) from Tasmanian Myrtle, an Australian timber.

The essence of this agreement is one that emphasises collaboration and the exchange of knowledge between two renowned bonsai institutions. Our Curators at the National Bonsai & Penjing Collection anticipate the invaluable learning experiences that await them. The Omiya Bonsai Art Museum, a beacon of excellence in the world of public

bonsai collections, is poised to become a rich source of inspiration and insight for our Curators.

Our Japanese colleagues are equally enthusiastic about the collaboration. Their anticipation extends not only to the exchange of knowledge but also to the cultural and ecological enrichment that Australia has to offer. One of their keen interests lies in exploring the art of Australian bonsai, with a particular focus on the unique native Australian tree species. They are also excited about immersing themselves in Australian culture and embracing the breathtaking landscapes that Australia is known for. The cross-cultural sharing of perspectives promises to be a rich and exciting exchange of art, culture, and knowledge.

On subsequent days after the official ceremony, staff and Australian delegates had the opportunity to visit a number of influential bonsai artists and their gardens around the Saitama Prefecture, expertly guided by Mr Yoshihiro Nakamizu from Bonsai Network Japan, who also kindly hosted a reception at the Bonsai Restaurant in Omiya Bonsai Village.

All-in-all, the Japan trip should be considered a great success for the future of Australian bonsai, the NBPCA and the NAC. This agreement will assist in forging very strong international relationships in the world of bonsai along with forming a very special relationship with the City of Saitama, Japan.

Leigh reflects on the garden visits:

#### **Mr Kobayashi's garden visit**

When we arrived we were quickly whisked away to a restaurant a couple of blocks away to have lunch with Mr Kobayashi and his Curator, Mr Yasafumi Jin. After a quick lunch, back to the garden to have a tour of the indoor Tokonoma (indoor bonsai displays), then a very brief look around the garden. Sadly each visit on this day was rushed, we did not have much time to soak everything up. Mr Kobayashi's garden was immaculate (as were all gardens), it was very busy with other tourists also. Mr Kobayashi was very busy running around making sure all visitors were being cared for and the garden was looking its best.

#### **Next, Mr Kimura's garden**

Mr Kimura is Japan's most awarded bonsai artist and is internationally referred to as "The Magician" for his ability to create bonsai that nobody believed would be possible. It was a more peaceful garden as we were the only visitors at the time, aside from the Shin kanzen (very fast train) zooming past on a nearby track. We had a little more time here and were able to get quite close to view some of his bonsai creations. Mr Kimura has won 27 Prime Minister Awards for Japan's best bonsai, the next closest artist has only won four. He had a lovely koi pond with some very large fish.

#### **Mr Morimae's garden**

Mr Morimae is the owner of S-Cube bonsai. The name was derived from the 3 founders all having a name beginning with S. S-Cube is world-renowned for selling some of the highest valued bonsai around the world. When I was there in 2017, they had just sold three bonsai for around \$1.3M (AUD) each to a Chinese businessman. Mr Morimae also has a YouTube channel that is very popular [WABI CHANNEL - YouTube](#)

### Mr Kawabe's garden

It was a privilege to visit Mr Kawabe's garden as it is not open to the general public. Mr Kawabe has some very old bonsai, some over 1000 years old, possibly even 2000. He is a master of artistically carving deadwood on bonsai. All the tools he uses are made by hand. He is an engineer by trade and very skilled at building things. He created a sandblaster to give a weathered effect on his deadwood. He and his wife were very kind, we had to translate everything via the Google App.

### The Shuga-Ten Exhibition

The Shuga-Ten Exhibition is Japan's annual shohin bonsai show featuring the country's best small sized bonsai. There were three floors of exhibition at a venue called The Green Club. Outside there were around 50 vendors selling everything to do with mini bonsai.

### And more has been happening with the National Bonsai and Penjing Collection!

In a unique fusion of ancient traditions, Australian First Nations man Kie Barratt was invited to delicately carve a coolamon from a bonsai at the National Arboretum.



A video of Kie carving is available on the Arboretum's website:

<https://www.nationalarboretum.act.gov.au/top-stories/a-fusion-of-ancient-arts-and-traditions-at-the-national-arboretum-canberra>

In what we believe to be a world-first endeavour, the coolamon was meticulously carved from a 15 year old River red gum using tiny handmade tools. The miniature coolamon measures just under 10cm and the tree has commenced the process of being styled as a bonsai.





During his visit, Kie also carefully selected a Camden white gum in Forest 30, where he carved another coolamon measuring approximately 40cm long - a common size for a coolamon, traditionally used to collect food or cradle babies.

It is anticipated the tiny coolamon and bonsai will be displayed at the National Bonsai & Penjing Collection of Australia. Stay tuned, we'll let you know when they are on view!

## Stories I tell about silver birch by Joanne Maples

A while ago I tried to find some poetry about specific tree species. While leafing through Robert Boden's 1993 book 'Favourite Canberra trees', I found he has done the same. About the silver birch, he quoted a snippet from James Russell Lowell's 'An Indian-Summer Reverie':

*'The birch, most shy and ladylike of trees.'*



Left: Silver Birch in Queenstown Gardens March 2018

The silver birch is growing, as you know, all around Canberra in parks and gardens and is one of the forests planted at the National Arboretum Canberra. There, it is right beside the Tuggeranong Parkway, so it has been easy to watch as the trees grow. It was densely planted in rows along contour lines in 2008. Some later interplanting occurred between trees in the rows and in an additional 'block' of trees right against the parkway. Those later plantings were of 'Spanish' birch and added to only 24 Spanish birch originally planted in 2008 in a grove at the top of Forest 44; all the rest being 'common' silver birch. As a guide at the Arboretum, I was taught that the Spanish birch was an endangered separate subspecies being 'hosted' by the common silver birches.

Now, due to a review of the taxonomy of birch species in the last decade<sup>1</sup>, the story I tell about there being two subspecies of *Betula pendula* in Forest 44 has changed.

<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Ashburner and Hugh A McAllister. 2013. *The genus Betula: a taxonomic revision of birches*. A botanical magazine monograph. Kew Publishing. (Reprinted with corrections, 2016.)

It seems that taxonomists now agree that what was *Betula pendula* subsp. *fontqueri*, or Spanish birch, is not sufficiently different from *Betula pendula* subsp. *pendula*, or 'common' silver birch, to stay as two separate subspecies, which they had been since 1988.



Photo of Silver Birch in the Arboretum Forest 44 in May 2017 showing white bark and yellow autumn colour.

That's all well and good, but how do I explain difference in the trees as seen by visitors I take on walks in Forest 44? There is difference in bark colour for the 'Spanish form'; the young 'Spanish' trees have light tan rather than the white, papery bark that landscape architects seem to love. Both are lovely and

we'll see as time goes on if mature trees of both forms have bark that looks gray, even black, and fissured. Certainly, they already show dark inverted 'V' scars above which lost branches came away from the trunks and the narrow horizontal lenticels which allow gas exchange.



Left: trunk of silver birch with darkened and cracked bark

Right: trunk of silver birch with 'V scars' close to here

For now, I'll tell visitors that differences are due to differing genetic makeup coming from seeds from differing sources—the 'Spanish form' having come from seeds from Spain while the seeds of the others must have

derived from other European sources.



The Arboretum did start out wanting to plant only the Spanish form, which is found in scattered localities in the central and south-east mountains of Spain and in the Rif Mountains of Morocco.

More generally, silver birch grows naturally in almost all countries of Europe from the Mediterranean to Scandinavia, and across the English Channel to the UK. It is also found naturally in Asia, where its range extends right across Siberia in a deep band to its east coast and sweeps down into parts of China as far as northern Thailand.



There are pockets in the mountains of northern Turkey, the Caucasus and northern Iran, as well as Kazakhstan. Silver birch doesn't grow right up to the extreme north coast of Siberia, though other birch species do grow further north than silver birch and in North America and coastal Greenland. The genus *Betula* is pretty much a Northern Hemisphere exclusive.

In the Northern Hemisphere, silver birch can create their own birch woodland ecosystem with a variety of mosses, grasses and flowering plants—primrose, violet, and bluebell, can grow beneath the open canopy, attracting insects and birds. It grows well in heath and moor areas but can also be found in mixed deciduous and coniferous forests. A large number of beetles, moths, butterflies and other insects feed almost exclusively on the leaves and other parts of the birch. Here in Canberra, creating such a woodland would be a challenge!



Above: Forest 44 viewed from Roman Cypress Hill in July 2021 showing a 'blur' of taller trees at the back, which are mostly 'common', and in front a 'blur' of shorter, later-planted trees, which are 'Spanish'.

Catkins are a feature of silver birch. They appear as separate male and female structures on each tree and are there before spring leaves come through. The males are longer than the females, yellow-brown, pendulous and hang in groups of 2–4 at tips of shoots. They are formed one year before flowering, go through winter dormancy, then shed fine pollen in spring. The females are shorter than the males, green, and appear as singles. They are dormant in winter while young, becoming erect before pollination and obvious when new leaves come through. They persist on the tree, then droop, turn brown and break up in autumn into numerous papery winged seeds (achenes) separated by scales, scattering in the wind. Here in Canberra, silver birch seeds are reported to be attractive to eastern rosellas and other seed-eating birds such as the gold finch.

The Finns consider silver birch the most beautiful native tree in their forests—so much so that it has been their national tree since 1988—and they use it as part of their Finnish sauna culture. A forest of silver birch certainly puts on a fine display of yellow and brown during autumn—in Canberra, early in May! The weeping branches and white bark are very attractive. The Swedes chose a variety of silver birch known as 'Dalecarlica', or the Ornäs birch, as their national tree in 1985. *Betula pendula* 'Dalecarlica' has very deeply indented leaves and is a natural variety successively grown on from a single tree. For Russians, silver birch timber has been useful throughout their history and the tree competes sentimentally with Siberian fir (*Abies sibirica*) to be that nation's unofficial national tree.





Silver birch wood is light in colour. It has been used for pulp, plywood and veneers, parquet blocks, furniture, kitchenware, farm implements, skis and even aircraft propellers. The branches make racecourse jumps and, according to Robert Boden, great besoms. I had to look besoms up. A besom is a coarse broom made by bundling birch twigs together. Nylon bristled garden brooms have long replaced besoms.

Left: Birch Besom

Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Broom.jpg>

Other uses consigned to the past, or as craftworks, are for making paper, baskets, shoes and shingles from the bark. Undoubtedly, using the bark to bulk out bread would not conform to Australian food laws, but that was done in the past in Europe, particularly during famine. It would certainly improve fibre intake!



Right: Drawing of some Finnish traditional shoes made from silver birch bark strips.

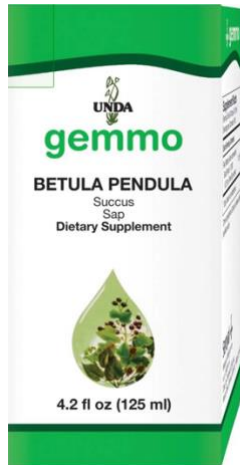
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One use for the bark of silver birch has been to make birch-tar. Birch bark when heated makes a particularly good quality dark tar or pitch that is liquid when heated but makes a good water-resistant adhesive when cool. Neanderthals produced birch-tar using an underground production method as early as 200,000 years ago, which they used as a backing on small stone tools. Birch-tar can also be made by burning birch bark near smooth vertical surfaces in open air or by heating it in a pot under air-tight conditions. Birch-tar has the molecules *betulin*, which has antiseptic properties, and *lupeol* in it, both coming from the birch bark. Perhaps chewing birch-tar treats toothache because samples of birch-tar chewing gum dated over 5,000 years old have been found in Finland and southern Denmark.

Birch-tar was certainly widely used for its adhesive qualities, for example, for fastening the blades of rawhide-lashed axes and the ends of arrow fletchings, and for repairing (and decorating) ceramic containers. The mummy of Ötzi the Iceman, who lived around 3,350 to 3,105 BC, was found with tools hafted with birch-tar. Hafting is the process of attaching arrowheads, spearheads and axeheads to useful handles, etc. The development of hafting is considered by archaeologists to have been a significant milestone in human development. So, maybe birch-tar was chewed to make it pliable for hafting? Birch-tar was also used to seal or waterproof a variety of items, probably including watercraft. Certainly, tars and pitches made from a variety of woods has been used in sealing the hulls of ships over the centuries.

More recently, birch-tar was used as a major ingredient in Vishnevsky or balsamic liniment, which was widely used in the Soviet Union, including by the Soviet army in World War II. In 1927, Alexander Vishnevsky, a Russian surgeon, developed this topical medication to treat wounds, burns, ulcers and suppurations. These days, better remedies are available for those conditions.

In spring, large quantities of sap rise up the trunk of silver birch and can be tapped, rather like sap from the sugar maple, *Acer saccharum*, which is tapped to then be concentrated down to maple syrup. Silver birch sap contains around 1% sugars and can be drunk fresh, or concentrated by evaporation, to make for example a hair tonic, or fermented into an alcoholic birch ‘wine’.



The sap is also used as a ‘dietary supplement’, at least in producing the product pictured, which will cost you \$44 for 125ml. The website tells us that the manufacturer uses the extracts of fresh buds, young shoots, rootlets, or saps from developing plants, ‘where the plant’s life essence is at its peak in the young growths’. But it doesn’t tell us what the product will do for you!.

*Left: Dietary supplement made of silver birch sap.*

*Source: <https://supplementfirst.com/products/pharmax-betula-pendula-sap>*

Let’s not forget the leaves. As for many plants, the leaves of silver birch have been used as herbal tea. It is meant to have a diuretic effect. Leaves, buds and bark are all used to make herbal medicinal products. To finish off on a use with a cosmetic touch, Robert Boden says that in Scotland the buds were used to make a fragrant hair rinse.

I mentioned Finnish sauna culture, as Finns are known to use birch sticks to beat themselves with after a sauna. Another cultural association with silver birch is the use of birch (or elm) rods of about 1.5 m long to wrap an axe. The bundle of an axe surrounded by birch rods was tied with red cord and called a fasces (pronounced FASS-eez; plural of the Latin word *fascis* meaning ‘bundle’). In classical Roman times, to be granted a fasces by someone with higher authority meant that you had been given some form of penal power or were administering justice or had some kind of authority. You would present your fasces to indicate your authority among the people. To lower your fasces in front of a higher official was a salute.

*Left: Logo with a Roman fasces as used in the 1921 Italian elections.*

*Source:*

*[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Logo\\_Fasci\\_di\\_Combattimento.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Logo_Fasci_di_Combattimento.svg)*



In 1919, Benito Mussolini’s *Fasci Italiani di Combattimento*, an Italian organisation with a reputation for using paramilitary violence against its political opponents, adopted the fasces as its symbol. Two years later the *Partito Nazionale Fascista* or National Fascist Party was founded, ruling Italy from 1922–1943, and used the same symbol. Hence the term ‘fascist’, with its paramilitary overtones. Robert Boden reminded me that the birch cane has also been used as a preferred tool of punishment and discipline. He says in his book, mentioned above, that branches were used ‘for betynge of stubborne boyes’.

There are also less authoritarian and violent symbolic meanings for the fasces. A coin minted in the US between 1916–1945, known as the US mercury (or winged liberty) dime, depicts a fasces with an olive branch entwined. In this case, the fasces symbolizes unity and strength, and the olive branch, peace.

Some people are allergic to birch pollen! Prime time to avoid birch for these allergy sufferers in the ACT is September and October. Some areas in Australia might have a slightly more extended season. Not being an allergist, or a GP, I'm a little lacking knowledge on this topic, so I went straight to my search engine. Only to find that there seems to be a lack of readily available authoritative information sources about silver birch allergy. It does seem to be more likely to occur in those who have hay fever. One source (from the UK) says that, when less problematic, silver birch allergy shows as nasal symptoms, like sneezing and a stuffy nose, or itchy watery eyes. I don't suffer from hay fever or silver birch allergy, but they seem to have similar symptoms. However, that UK source also says that three-quarters of people with silver birch allergy will display Oral (or Pollen) Allergy Syndrome. Oral Allergy Syndrome most commonly shows as redness, itching, burning and swelling of the lips, inside of the mouth, tongue and soft palate. This sounds a lot more serious and definitely not pleasant!

Now, I finally come to why silver birch is named as it is:

- *Betula* is Latin for 'birch' and derived from Gaulish *betu* meaning the bitumen extracted from bark.
- *pendula* is Latin for 'hanging' and refers to the drooping growth habit of young branches. A well-regarded German physician and botanist, Albrecht Wilhelm Roth (1757–1834), named *Betula pendula* in 1788 in the first volume of his *Tentamen Florae Germanicae*.
- silver: the colour of the bark when trees are young, though they don't stay white; as trees age the bark becomes dark grey or black and fissured.
- birch: comes from Old English *berc* or *beorc*, taken from the earlier Proto-Germanic *\*berkjon* which was taken from an even earlier Proto-Indo-European root *\*bhergo* meaning 'to shine' or 'bright' or 'white' referring to the bark. The verb 'birch' means 'flog' and was first-used in 1830 because bunches of birch twigs were routinely and punitively used for flogging people (not as a skin stimulant after saunas).
- Spanish: the ones formerly described as *Betula pendula* subsp. *fontqueri* come from the western and southern part of silver birch's natural distribution, including from Spain. The Spanish Embassy were keen on the idea of planting some at the Arboretum and helped acquire the seed for those plantings.

There do remain two separate subspecies of *Betula pendula*, being subsp. *szechuanica* and subsp. *mandshurica*. That is why *Betula pendula* subsp. *pendula* is still an accepted name with the subsp. *pendula* name remaining. Other common names for silver birch are European birch, European white birch, weeping birch, European weeping birch, Eurasian weeping birch, common birch, warty birch and sand birch. When you come from so many countries, I guess you get a lot of names!

If you have more stories about silver birch, I'd love to hear them.

Joanne Maples



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If you have ideas for articles, or items that might be of interest to the Friends such as stories or photos from the Arboretum or further afield, please contact me Nicole Pietrucha on: [pietruchanac1@gmail.com](mailto:pietruchanac1@gmail.com). Many thanks to the people who have contributed articles and photos for this and previous issues of the Newsletter, and given generously of your time to write, read and proofread. I could not do it without your help.

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