



#71
June 2026

FRIENDS

FRIENDS OF THE NATIONAL ARBORETUM CANBERRA NEWSLETTER



Chair's Note - Winter 2026

Greetings Friends

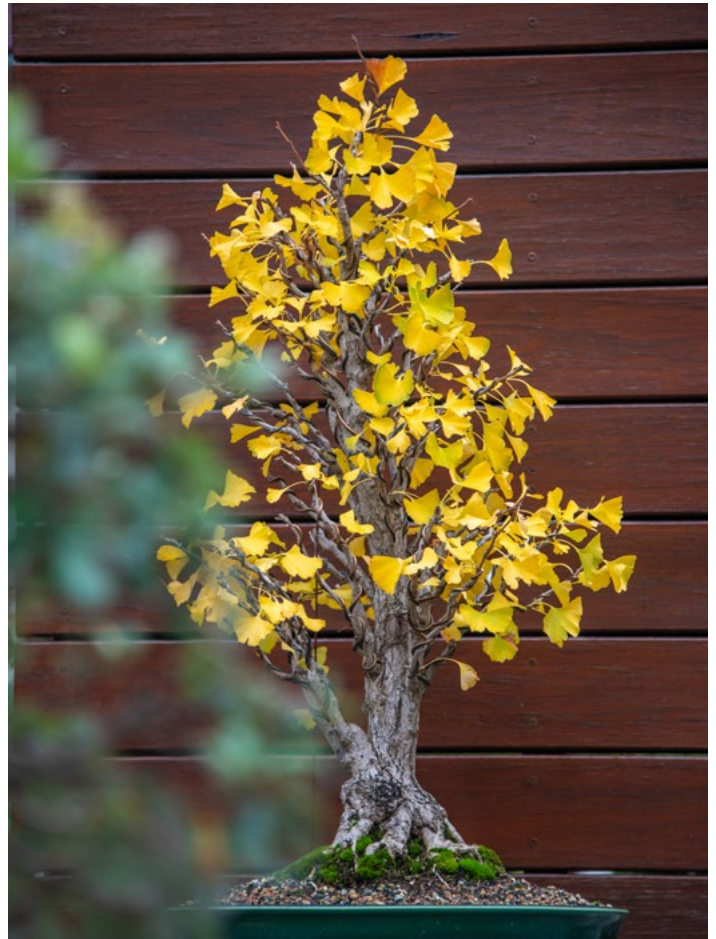
It's not often that you can still pick some outdoor cherry tomatoes in Canberra on the first day of winter – as I did. I'm still hopeful also that one or two of my self-seeded pumpkins will ripen sufficiently.

The unusual autumn this year has translated into some great autumn colour across the Arboretum – as well as inside the bonsai collection.

I am also very pleased to report that, as I write this note to you, the proof of a reprint of The Arboretum Book (Second Edition) has been signed off and is with the printer. We decided on a reprint with some minor revisions, rather than a new edition because, apart from the growth of the forests and gardens over the last 5 years, there have been only minor changes which would affect the content of the publication. Regardless, a simple sounding 'reprint with minor revisions' has taken a dedicated team of Friends' more than 6 months to review, edit and check. A big thank you to our designer Mariana for helping the Friends produce such a beautiful and informative resource for the Arboretum.



▲ Trident maple, Artist: Ray Nesci



▲ Maidenhair tree, Artists: Antouan Kumruyan and Dean Shaw



▲ Ellis Rowan- 1873, Wikipedia

This edition of the newsletter sees the final installment of Dr Jenny McEwen Mason's series of articles spawned from a conversation about pollen (and spores) with Jenny more than a year ago. Jenny has provided us all with a great series of articles in this and the previous three Friends newsletters, which explain the role of pollen and what we can learn through the field of palynology. In this article we coincidentally meet artist Ellis Rowan.

continued...

Chair's Note (continued)



Warm Trees 2026 is almost upon us and as I previously mentioned, this year sees a change in the format with the theme – Getting to know your Arboretum. The Arboretum team has joined with the Friends' Warm Trees event by creating the 'Winter in the Woods', a concurrent series of activities from late June to early August. You can read more about 'Winter in the Woods' on page 4.

The 2026 Friends AGM was held on 12 May this year. The key outcomes were that Marelle Rawson has taken on the role of Deputy Chair, essentially switching with Fran Hinton who was re-elected as an ordinary member. Thanks Marelle and Fran. Thanks also to Lyn Rees who continues as Treasurer and to the whole Council team for running the Friends. The Friends is an important 'partner' of the Arboretum and could not operate without a professional and dedicated team on Council. Many other Friends' volunteer their time to provide significant support to activities such as direct assistance to the Treasurer as well as memberships, parking passes, donations and website management.

At the time of the AGM, while annual financial statements were provided showing the Friends operating and trust accounts in sound order, a completed audit report had not been received in time for it to be presented at the meeting. The financial statements were accepted pending their confirmation on receiving the audit report. I'm pleased to advise that during the period I have been preparing my note to you, the audit report has arrived endorsing the accuracy and completeness of the financial statements.

At this year's AGM I also reported that our website provider will be winding up their business due to the increased cost of competing in a fast-moving and technically more challenging market. We have been investigating options that will meet the Friends needs- to manage membership efficiently, support flexible communication with members, and provide a simple website management interface. We are currently experimenting with a product called HubSpot which we feel meets the above criteria.

Please enjoy the read below and Winter in the Woods.

Mike



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Winter in the Woods



Step into Winter in the Woods - a magical seasonal escape *where nature warms the soul*, even on the coldest days.

This winter, rug up as the Arboretum comes alive with firelight, food and forest adventure. Wander through crisp landscapes, explore Warm Trees wrapped in vibrant knitted scarves, and enjoy marshmallows, mulled wine, toasty treats and evenings beneath star-filled skies.

Spark creativity with hands-on, nature-based art workshops and lantern making, and connect with culture through First Nations experiences woven throughout the program. Journey through the southern forests of the Arboretum by accessible bus or experience the landscape from a new perspective on a seasonal guided walk.

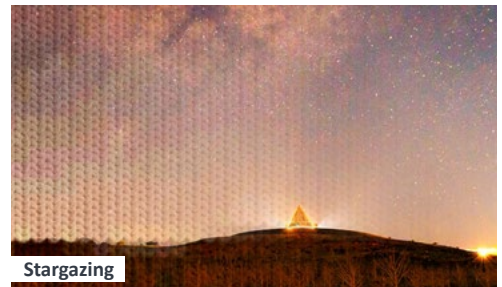
Families can enjoy nature play, storytelling, craft activities and school holiday programs that keep kids entertained and connected to the outdoors. Visitors of all ages will find space to explore at their own pace, unwind, create and connect.

From 26 June to 9 August, this is winter reimagined in the heart of the forest.

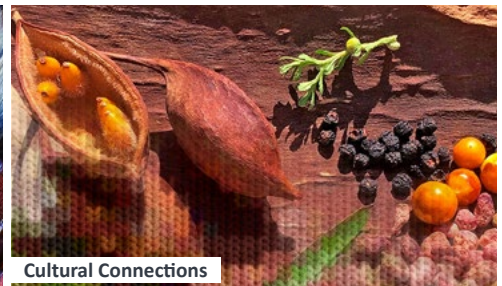
[Plan your winter itinerary](#)



Science & Seasonal Walks



Stargazing



Cultural Connections



Teenie Beanie Craft Kits



Photography Workshops



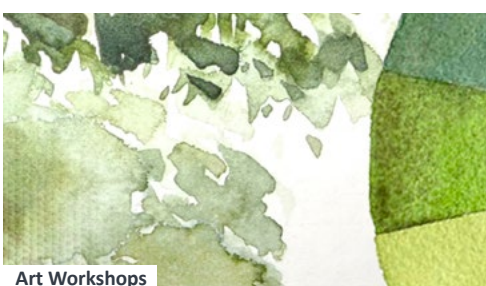
Winter Wildlife Quests



Lantern Making & Parades



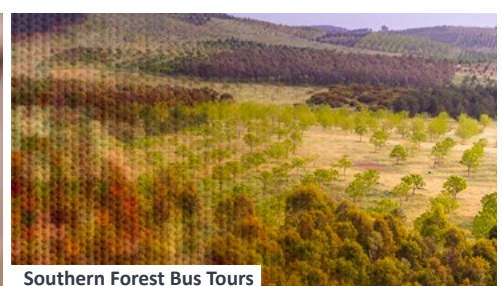
Warm Trees



Art Workshops



The Village Food Hub



Southern Forest Bus Tours

Arboretum Poems - Janet Klimpsch

Arboretum Haiku

Glorious-ness is
Arboretum greenery!
Lungs of earth. Forests.

Forests, our green lungs.
Leaf alveoli, branch out
In symbiosis.

Mixing all sources
These leaf net refineries
Mesh air, soil, make food.

All year greenery?
Add colour deciduous.
Oxygen Magic!

BUNYA

Its feast time, watch out
When heavy Bunyan
cones
Hit the ground, thudding.
Assemble your mob
Extract the nuts
Make merry while eating
Let's have a party,
Bunya tasty. Bunya hearty

What is your favourite tree?

Let Janet know and she will create a poem inspired by it:
janet.klimpsch@gmail.com

Key Diary Dates

22 June, 1630 - 1730 Bugang Room
Bonsai Volunteer Meeting

26 June - 9 August
Warm Trees

26 June - 9 August
Winter in the Woods

11 July, 1000 - 1400 Village Centre
Harvest Stall

1 September
National Wattle Day

8 September, 1230 - 1330 MWP
Seasonal Talk

19 September, 1000 - 1400 Village Centre
Harvest Stall

21 September, 1630 - 1730 Bugang Room
Bonsai Volunteer Meeting

December
Friends End of Year Event

'Friend'ly Reminders

Support the Arboretum

The end of the financial year is almost upon us. If you are able to support the Arboretum with a tax-deductible donation, it would be a great time to do so. The current options available can be found at: <https://friendsarboretumcanberra.org.au/support-us>

Parking Pass Reminder



Please check the expiry date on your parking pass and renew your pass if needed.

Parking Operations have noted an increase in expired Friends' parking passes.

Are you on Instagram?

@FriendsofNACanberra
@NationalArboretumCanberra
@STEP_Canberra
@TheCuratoreum
@TheGingerGroup.CBR
@NationalRockGarden

Follow us...



Bonsai Artist in Residence

Expressions of Interest for the NBPCA Artist in Residence Program close soon, on **30 June 2026**.

Mike and the Palynologist Part 4 - Dr J McEwen Mason

A chance discovery in an op shop: How pollen can help identify the authenticity of an artwork.

Mike, have you ever heard of an artist called Ellis Rowan? Let me tell you about her and my potential extraordinary find.

It was a chance discovery of a painting, surrounded by a battered frame, resting among other random pieces of discarded art. A painting of a bird of paradise. It was hidden behind filthy glass, but I saw the potential in it and bought it for \$5, took it home and cleaned it up. The signature uncovered was that of Ellis Rowan.



My subsequent research revealed that she was born in 1848 during the time of Queen Victoria's reign. She was one of seven children and lived in Victoria on 26 acres at Mt Macedon.

She became a botanical artist who was meticulous in her observations of nature, especially in the spheres of botany, birds and butterflies. Her work took her to New Zealand, Europe, the Himalayas, the USA, the Caribbean and the highlands of PNG.

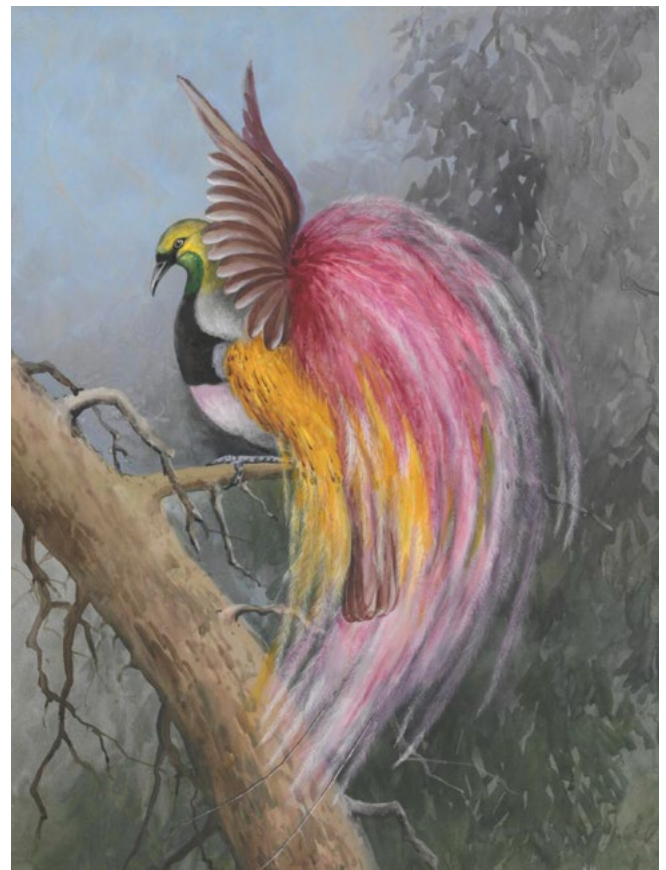
She has been described as an obsessively committed artist full of ambition and self-promotion. Working in a field dominated by men, she won many awards and medals for her artworks, which were prodigious, creating over three thousand pieces throughout her lifetime. Many of these are housed today in the National Library of Australia here in Canberra. I discovered that she had returned to PNG in 1917 in the hope of painting every bird of paradise. My surprise find was looking promising. I also discovered that many of her works were done under primitive conditions and, although she battled oppressive heat and humidity, malaria and fatigue, she managed to paint 25 different species of birds of paradise from live specimens. In addition to this, she also painted about another 26 species from birds stuffed and held in the Museum of Victoria.

How could I prove that my Ellis Rowan was the real deal? There are all sorts of ways art can be tested to see if it is genuine. These include brush strokes commonly used by the artist, the correct old-fashioned paper, the artist's signature, the pigments used in paints, and even tree rings associated with the frame. Yet some of these techniques can be tentative in their outcome.

For example: the artist may have signed their signature differently through time; the signed work could have actually been created by the artist's apprentice; the paper used could have been sourced from inside covers of old books; or the paint pigments used could have been made from rocks similar to those actually used by the artist.

The style within the painting and whether the artist drew preliminary sketches for the main work, can help determine if the work is original or not. The provenance of the work is also a vital part of the reconstruction of authenticity, determining where the work has been bought or sold and by whom.

My Ellis Rowan was found in an op shop. There is one technique I have not mentioned that could add additional weight to my painting's authenticity. That is pollen analysis. Pollen can be found on the painted image. Many of Rowan's works were done in situ and this especially applies to her PNG paintings of birds of paradise. If I have a fake painting, painted outside of PNG, the pollen found within the paint will reflect this.



▲ Red-plumed bird of paradise - ER 1917

continued...

Mike and the Palynologist Part 4 - Dr J McEwen Mason (continued)

Half her birds of paradise were painted from specimens held in the Melbourne Museum, which she obtained access to in 1918. Pollen analysis, in this case, should reflect not only an absence of pollen types associated with the vegetation of the PNG highlands (montane rainforest), but should rather contain pollen derived from vegetation associated with the grassland and sclerophyll forests that surround Melbourne.

However, if the pollen found within the painting is typical of pollen found in the highlands of PNG, then that will add weight to its authenticity.

In the PNG highlands, where the birds of paradise are found, are three distinct types of rainforests which change with altitude. Between 1,000m to 1,500m, the forests are dominated by broadleaf evergreens which include laurel, *Araucarias*, *Lithocarpus* and *Elaeocarpus*.

Higher up, between 1,500m to 2,500m, the forests are dominated by *Nothofagus*.

Between 2,500m to 3,000m, is the realm of the conifers including *Dacrycarpus*, *Dacrydium* and *Araucaria*. Broadleaf trees in the Myrtle family also grow in these forests.

Luckily for me, the pollen contained within the pigments of my Ellis Rowan, were composed of highland varieties of pollen typically found in PNG. This together with Ellis' signature, her distinctive style and known interest in painting birds of paradise, lead me to believe that my Rowan is indeed the real thing.

The National Library of Australia holds hundreds of Ellis Rowan's artworks, and should you wish to explore them:

[Click here to view](#)

They are well worth a look!



What I have written, is purely an example, based on Rowan's substantial artworks and my understanding of how pollen can be used to enhance several lines of in-depth analysis, in understanding if an artwork is authentic or not.

Much of the information for this article has been extracted from a book called *The Flower Hunter Ellis Rowan* by Patricia Fullerton and produced by the National Library of Australia, 2002.

By **Dr McEwen Mason**

(written for the *Friends of the Arboretum newsletter*)

▲ Twelve wired bird of paradise 2- ER 1917

▲ Yellow-plumed bird of paradise- ER 1917

▲ Rothschilds bird of paradise- ER 1917 [Trove]

Happenings in STEP - Southern Tablelands Ecosystems Park, Forest 20

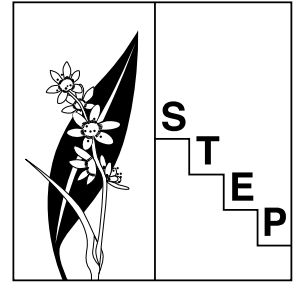
Forest 20 is showing the benefits of the wonderful and unseasonally mild and rainy autumn weather. This has given us the opportunity for some late autumn plantings while the ground is moist and still a little warm. So lots of new plants have been put into the ground across much of the STEP site. We have been sourcing our plants from many different places, including interstate, and are most grateful for the support we get from them and our local backyard growers and nurseries. It may not be too much longer before we will need to cease planting and fully move to the winter maintenance program.

That is already underway by some of our volunteers, but it will ratchet up over the winter months. While there is always weeding and mulching, a recent task has been the dethatching of the dianellas and lomandra. Removing the dead thatch enables the new shoots to emerge better, but it is a delicate task. The dethatching effort of STEPPers is captured in the photo of the overflowing trailer.

Visitor numbers have been quite high, reflecting the fact that STEP is now becoming better known and is perhaps being promoted more by the Arboretum Information Desk. We participated in Tree Week- having guided walks on both weekends. Our visitors were fulsome in their thanks for the knowledge imparted by David, Judy and Jane on the many wonders of STEP trees. One of the visitors uses gum leaves for dyeing, so she was particularly interested in Jane's explanations of our eucalypts.

The program of the Australian Association of Environmental Educators includes a guided walk through STEP – it is gratifying to see such use made of our efforts.

Bill Handke OAM
STEP President



The She-oak nook gathering space has been refreshed, and is another great spot for a picnic.

Enjoy the soft, dappled winter light and peaceful surrounds; bring a blanket and settle in.

The She-oak nook is accessed by a Grade 2 path (wheelchair accessible with assistance).

Harvest Group & Discovery Kitchen Garden - Update

We had our second Harvest Stall on 2nd May 2026. There were lots of people visiting the Arboretum and our Stall. We had harvested about 16kg of tomatoes in April from the Discovery Garden which we used to make Green Tomato Chutney and Hot and Spicy Tomato Relish. All of this was sold in May.

Cynthia and her team from the Discovery Garden had many seeds, seedlings and lavender bags for sale which were very popular. Cynthia also made some small cloth carry bags that sold very well.

We sold a huge amount of produce at the May Harvest Stall and raised a total of \$2,240!

If anyone has any suggestions or ideas of anything we may be able to sell at the future stalls, we would love to hear from you. We may be able to have regular craft making sessions at the Arboretum if we have enough interest. Please get in contact if you are interested.

Thank you to all the wonderful people who help us make these stalls happen to raise money for the Friends to put back into the Arboretum.

Rosy Pate

Harvest Group Coordinator



Warm Trees 2026 - "Getting to know your Arboretum"

As the colourful autumn days come to an end and the temperatures drop, then it must be time to put on our warm jackets and wrap ourselves in our favourite scarves. Of course, it's also time for the wonderful event, Warm Trees, initiated and supported by the Friends of the National Arboretum Canberra.

Enthusiastic volunteers have been knitting and crocheting colourful scarves to add to our stash — so be prepared for colour, colour and more colour in the forests. The scarves will be back in their usual forests so that you can enjoy them as you take short walks from the Visitor Centre, or picnic at the BBQ at the Himalayan cedars, or marvel at the view from Dairy Farmers Hill, or just drive around the loop road.

As in previous years, there will be display panels on the Gabion Wall as you walk into the Village Centre - with the theme "Getting to know your Arboretum".

We have chosen to focus on five iconic native trees that you will recognise immediately- the Golden wattle (near Forest 2), the Blue grass tree (Forest 15), the Camden white gum (Forest 30), the Silky oak (Forest 51) and the Drooping sheoak (Forest 100) .

▼ Glossy Black-cockatoo, David Rees



Winter is a fabulous time to visit the Arboretum where your experience will be enhanced during Warm Trees — by the colourful scarves across the forests as well as the amazingly creative and informative displays along the Gabion Wall.

PS Don't forget to cross the road to visit STEP (Southern Tablelands Ecosystems Park), and the National Rock Garden for super scarf surprises.

Each tree is displayed with an awesome creature that feeds on it.

- Everyone loves the handsome Glossy Black-cockatoo which feeds almost exclusively on the female cones on the drooping sheoak and the ever-so-cute Sugar gliders which feed on the nectar and pollen from flowers on trees such as the Camden white gum.
- The beautiful Yellow Admiral Butterfly is attracted to the nectar-filled clusters of tiny flowers on the woody spikes of the Grass tree.
- The distinctive Noisy Friarbird, a large honeyeater, is attracted to the nectar in flowers on large Grevilleas such as the Silky oak.
- The weirdly wonderful larvae of the Wattle Notodontid Moth feed on species of wattle.

Sue, Lyn & Marelle

2026 Warm Trees Coordinators

What's new - The Curatoreum



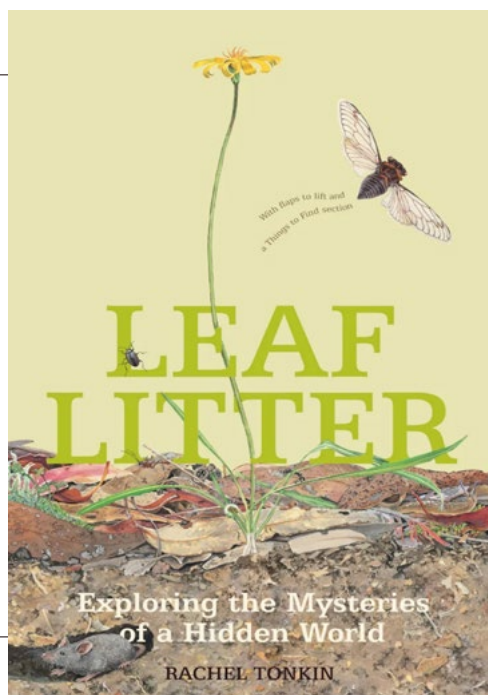
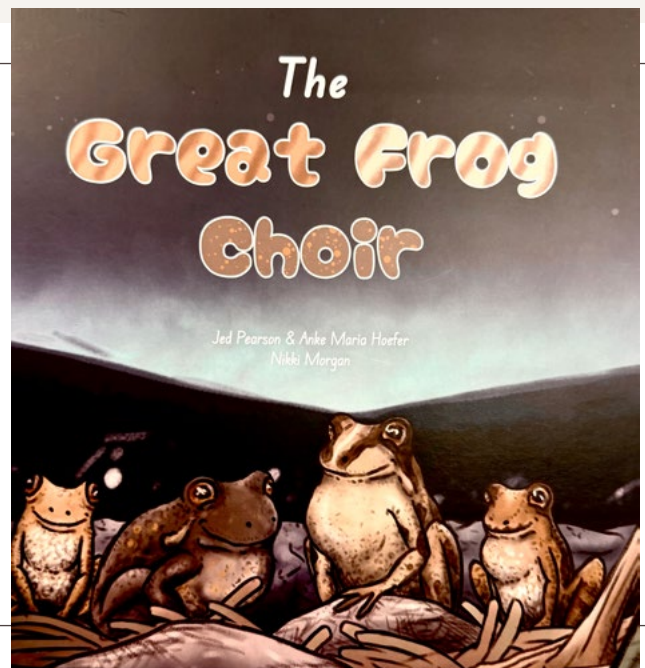
Winter is perfect for curling up with a hot cuppa and a new book. We've included some exciting new titles that might inspire an adventure out into the cold- just make sure you rug up! We've got you covered there too.

Happy reading,

Happy dreaming, **Abbey, Mel, Pinal & The Curatoreum team**

The Great Frog Choir, by Jed Pearson, Anke Maria Hoefer and Nikki Morgan (Illustrator) \$20

From the Ginninderra Catchment Group's FrogWatch comes this fantastic kid's book- The Great Frog Choir. Join eight delightful frogs on an adventure through the wetlands, where you will discover their secret songs and lively rhythms. From the deep loud bonk of the eastern banjo frog to the maniacal cackle of the Peron's tree frog, let the night guide you to the hidden wonders of south-east Australia's frog-filled wetlands.



Leaf Litter, by Rachel Tonkin \$34.99

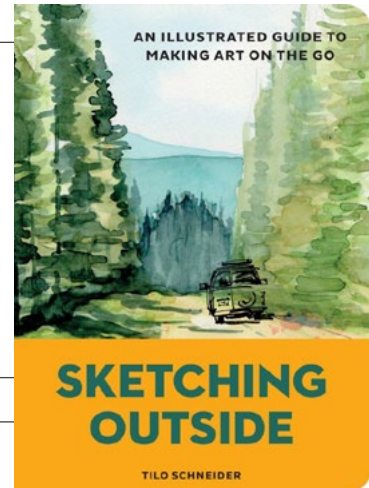
Put simply, Leaf Litter is Stephen Beisty's Cross-Sections meets Where's Wally with lift-the-flaps- from an ecological point of view! In a time when respect for and understanding of our environment are paramount, Leaf Litter is an excellent introduction to the intricate and complex relationships that exist in our natural world.

We love that this book encourages young readers to look closely at what collects on the forest floor and to discover a secret world we hardly ever see. Incredibly intricate illustrations throughout and a great list of things to look for at the back.

What's new - The Curatoreum

Sketching Outside, by Tilo Schneider \$45

Discover a new way to engage with nature and travel in this beautiful, approachable guide to outdoor sketching for artists and journalers. Each chapter demystifies an aspect of making art outdoors with practical exercises to work through. With tips about capturing wind and weather patterns and turning a landscape into a strong composition, this book will inspire and take your art to a new level.

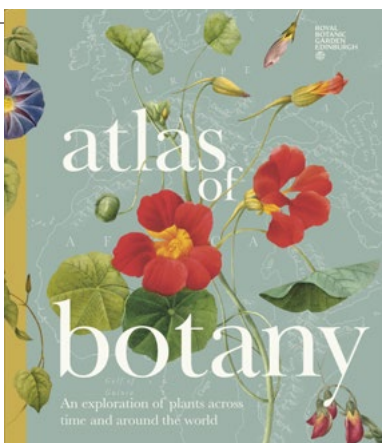


Uimi scarves \$149

If you're sketching outside, stay warm with a beautiful Uimi scarf. Made in Melbourne from fine Australian merino wool, these scarves are a glorious addition to any wardrobe. The Nordic-inspired snowflake design of the Heidi scarf captures the beauty of the season. We have the Heidi scarf in merlot (pictured) and moss, as well as other designs and colours online and in store.

Compost after Reading, by Cassandra Marketos \$34.99

With wry and brilliant writing, Cassandra Marketos brings the culture, beauty, community, and philosophy of compost to life in this work of narrative nonfiction. This book shares multiple compost how-tos and insights on topics like dealing with odours and critters, transitioning your compost pile for colder weather (yes, please!), how to compost things you're told not to and more. This is an accessible guide to everything you need to know about compost, with actionable advice for beginners and experienced composters.



Atlas of Botany, by Dr Gregory J. Kenicer (lead author), Dr Zoe Goodwin, Dr Alexander J. Hetherington, Dr Jess Rickenback, Dr Louis Ronse De Craene and Dr Michael Sundue \$65

This lovely DK book maps the changing conditions and continents of the ancient world and the biomes of the modern one, to explore how plants have overcome the challenges of survival and interacted with pollinators and people along the way. Blending science, geography, and history, Atlas of Botany uses fascinating maps and stunning botanical illustrations interwoven with sumptuous photography to tell the story of how plants evolved and survived – and continue to thrive.

Friends Council Members

Chair: Mike Woolley
Deputy Chair: Marelle Rawson
Treasurer: Lyn Rees
Secretary: Vacant
Publications Officer: Nicole Pietrucha
STEP representative: Jude Smith
NBPCA representative: Sandra Corrigan

Members: Alison Purvis
Barry Langshaw
Carolyn Thomas
Fran Hinton

Other positions, non-Council Roles:

Public Officer: Del Da Costa
Donations & Sponsorship Manager: Colette Mackay OAM
Web Manager: Vacant



▲ Heath Banksia, *Banksia ericifolia*, styled by Peter Hanrahan



We ask all Friends to check your membership card for your renewal/expiry date!

And if you haven't joined already, then the time is right to become a Friend!

[Renew or join now](#)

Thank you to all our Sponsors and Contributors

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

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.

