

Newsletter

*For Friends of the Christchurch Botanic Gardens Inc
To Promote, Protect, & Preserve*

No 86, Summer 2011

President's Report

I will begin this report with the quarterly activities of our guiding and propagation groups. Both groups have been very active, but the earthquakes have had an effect on their activities to some extent.

The volunteer guides roster themselves to guide visitors round the Gardens on a daily basis. Each guide has been trained, and they meet monthly for discussions on various topics. They provide an informative, guided walk at a level suited to the group and is a valuable service in making that visit to one of Christchurch's best assets a memorable one. The drop in overseas visitors to Christchurch has made the guides' job more difficult, they like to be busy. We are hopeful that the new temporary Information Centre that is to be situated just inside the entrance of the Gardens, by the museum will attract more people for our guided walks. If you would like a trained guide to show a group of people round the Botanic Gardens, phone Pat Whitman at 384 3475 for more information.

The two propagation groups had a very successful plant sale last month, raising well over \$1100. It is heartening to see the results of a lot of hard work coming to fruition, and the plants in such demand. There are four plant sales a year, and the trolley of plants that are for sale outside the Botanic Garden Information Centre are also grown by the propagation groups. We are in discussions with the Curator and Operations Manager regarding where our nursery area might be situated when the current nursery area is demolished and the new nursery area and Botanic Garden Centre is built. The propagation groups have been thinking about focusing more on rare and endangered species, and the move to a new nursery area may be the time to do this. The reason for this change in focus is twofold. Firstly, it will provide another platform for us to learn more about such plants, and help introduce them into gardens. Secondly, we are constantly aware of people growing plants for a living, and the last thing we want is to be seen as a competitor. The change in focus will provide the Friends with a point of difference.

I was involved with a joint submission on behalf of the Friends on the Draft Central City Plan. Representatives from the Garden City Trust, the Canterbury Horticultural Society, the Christchurch Beautifying Association, and Christchurch Community Gardens were the other participants in the joint submission. We elected only to comment on the "Green City" section of the plan. Our submission included only the points where there was consensus, and each group was free to include other material in separate submissions if they chose. There was not time to ask the membership for their views, but interestingly, most of the other representatives were also members of the Friends of Christchurch Botanic Gardens. I hope that I represented you well; if you would like a copy of the submission e-mailed to you, let me know, phone 348 5896 or e-mail nzcharles.graham@gmail.com. It will make easier reading if you have a copy of the Draft Central City Plan in front of you when you read it.

The Committee has decided to look into providing talks for the Friends on various subjects relating to horticulture, science, and the Botanic Gardens. Alan Hart is in the process of drawing up a list of talks with quality speakers to make recommendations to the Committee. These talks will add to the quarterly demonstrations, and monthly themed walks, and of course this Newsletter. Being a Friend of the Christchurch Botanic Gardens is really good value.

I hope you all have a good Christmas period with friends and family.

Charles Graham

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An Invitation

The Friends Christmas Social is a chance for members to get together and socialise and have a bit of fun. It will be held on Saturday 10 December at the CHS rooms in Riccarton Avenue, and will begin at 4pm. It is a "bring a plate" affair but drinks and Christmas cake are provided. A variety of plants grown by our propagation groups, and a couple of bottles of wine will be up for grabs in the raffle.

Nancy Tichborne has kindly agreed to talk to us about her water-colour art, which I am sure you are all familiar with. This will be a real treat for me, as I am sure it will be for you.

We look forward to seeing you there.

Charles Graham

Distribution of Newsletter

We distribute the Newsletter by email to those members who have given us their email addresses and who have not requested otherwise. If you would prefer to receive the Newsletter by mail, rather than electronically, please contact Philippa Graham – phone 348 5896 or email philippa.graham@gmail.com

Enquiries about membership should be made to Philippa Graham (phone number above)

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Gardens' News

From Curator John Clemens

7 November marked the start of the bedding plant changeover; that late spring period of intense activity when the flower beds on the Armstrong Lawn, elsewhere in the Botanic Gardens, and at Mona Vale, are laid bare before ground preparation and replanting with seedlings for midsummer colour.

Some other Botanic Gardens activities are less obvious. Inside the conservatories and outside in the grounds, there has been plenty happening in recent weeks that might have escaped the attention of Friends. I would like to tell you about two of these in this report.

While the bulk of the conservatories remain closed to the public, staff have been making repairs and improvements to the buildings and plant collections inside. Friends and visitors will have a pleasant surprise when we are able to reopen the doors to at least some of the collections.

In contrast – and not requiring any engineering expertise or approval – three knowledgeable University of Canterbury students have started to undertake their November to February summer scholarship projects outside in the grounds of the Botanic Gardens. A fourth student is being supervised in wider Christchurch, examining the effects of liquefaction on plant-insect interactions.

Conservatories

We hope that we will soon be able to open Townend and the smaller Gilpin and Garrick houses, although we heard recently that Cuninghame House presents greater problems for public safety. While it is disappointing not to be open, Darren Tillet reports that it has been a great opportunity to revamp areas that needed attention. This included the necessary removal of a large *Pritchardia* sp. palm, which was threatening the roof of the conservatory, and a large-leaved banana, *Musa* 'Red Dacca', which had reached the end of its life span. The palm has been replaced with a slow growing bottle palm (*Hyophorbe lagenicaulis*) from Mauritius. The banana site is still awaiting a new introduction but this has not been decided yet; other, smaller banana plants continue to thrive and bear fruit. Collections on the lower floor have also been repotted to maintain their vigour and health.

A revamp of Gilpin House is also on the cards. This includes a general clean and repaint of some areas, a total replant of the garden area, and the addition of a purpose-constructed "tree" to mount epiphytes. This has been custom built from fibreglass to replicate a cork oak.

We are also in the process of importing new plants from a nursery in the United States for our collections. These will arrive shortly and will be quarantined for several months out at Landcare in Lincoln.

Without the attentions of visitors, it has been possible to undertake general cleaning of stonework, and painting of heating pipes. The existing floor in Townend House has been improved. The floor was replaced several years ago with exposed aggregate but it was very hard to keep clean. It has now been ground down to a smoother finish, and sealed.

Marble statues, which were damaged in the earthquakes, have all been assessed and will be repaired in the up-coming months. New signage for the conservatories has also been added.

Apart from that, the hard working staff in the conservatories have been tending to their charges to have them in a state of readiness for opening the doors once again.

Summer Scholarship student projects

The 2011/2012 Botanic Gardens summer scholarship projects were developed during the winter in collaboration with staff of the School of Biological Sciences at the University of Canterbury. The University encourages its students to apply for these scholarships to foster their interest in further study and to give

them a “taste of research”. Many students will go on to enroll for MSc and doctoral research degrees and tackle substantial research problems.

This summer, we have students studying the wildlife of our plant collections and ponds. Pollinator behaviour is the focus for Amanda Peterson and Christie Webber in the *Botanic Pollinators in Action* project. They have been recording bird and insect visitors in the New Zealand Section and elsewhere in the Botanic Gardens, especially the diverse and showy Herbaceous Border and our Australian plants. We know bird and insect pollinators are active in these places but their behaviour and effects on plants have not been described, nor has the potential been exploited as much as it might in discovery trails and educational programmes.



Amanda Peterson



Christie Webber



Matt Kippenberger

Native pollinators (eg bellbirds, native bees) tend to specialize on native plants, and exotic pollinators (eg honeybees, bumblebees) on exotic plants. We will use the mixture of native and exotic plants in the Botanic Gardens to test this hypothesis, which affects how current “blended” ecosystems are functioning in New Zealand.

Several species of small native bees were identified in the first few days of study, and bumblebees have been spotted making holes in the tops of the narrow, tubular flowers of the Australian fuchsia heath (*Epacris longiflora*) to access the nectar. Say a friendly “hello” to Amanda or Christie if you see them out and about, and ask them to show you their latest bird or insect visitors. They (the students) might sometimes be found with their supervisors (myself and Professor Dave Kelly).

Matt Kippenberger has been busy in the ponds and streams of the Botanic Gardens addressing the question posed by his project: *Is aquatic life any better off in a botanic garden?* Of course, several of these freshwater areas drained and dried out following the February 2011 earthquake. They were dredged and relined with clay before being refilled. Others, such as the New Zealand Section pond and rockery pool are little changed, and the Kiosk pond had its muddy top layer removed. This makes for an interesting comparative study for Matt who will be able to track the recolonisation of the more devastated areas. We feed the ponds from various sources of water, and this too might affect the recovery of their biodiversity. Matt is an enthusiastic student of freshwater ecology, supervised by Dr Phil Jellyman.

The Friends of the Christchurch Botanic Gardens has a knowledgeable membership. If you are reading this as an expert in pollinator behaviour or freshwater ecology, or an acute observer of Botanic Gardens wildlife, please feel free to make contact if you think you might be able to assist these young people, or would like to know more about what they are doing.

Events in the Gardens

From Lynda Burns, Visitor Services, CCC Botanical Services. 941 7585 or 027 559 0181.

Coming events include:

The Breeze Lazy Sundays

A free concert of local music on the Archery lawn. Between 3.30 – 5.00pm, Sundays from 8 January to 4 March, except 22, 29 January & 5 February.

Sunday Bandstand

A free concert of big band music on the Weather Station Lawn. Every Sunday from 5 February to 25 March, 12.00 – 1.30pm.

Kids Pitch - World Buskers Festival

Archery lawn. Friday 20 to Sunday 29 January, 11.00am to 3.00pm.

Be a Busker Competition – World Buskers Festival

Archery lawn. Friday 20 to Sunday 29 January, 3.30 to 4.30pm.

McDougall Art Gallery Pitch – World Buskers Festival

Friday 20 to Sunday 29 January, 11.30am to 2.30pm.

A guided walk

A walking tour “**Plants of China**” through the Gardens with Friends of the Gardens’ guide Diana Madgin. Commencing Saturday 21 January 2.00pm from outside the Information Centre. \$2.00 per person.

The Complete History of Christchurch - Anthony Harper Lawyers Summer Theatre

A free performance by The Outwits on the Daffodil Lawn. From 1 to 21 February, Tuesdays to Sundays (except Sunday 5). Tuesdays to Fridays 7.00pm, Saturdays & Sundays 2.00pm. Cancelled if wet.

Colour me beautiful christchurch - Festival of Flowers

Friday 17 February to Sunday 4 March. Pick up brochure from either Information Centre.

A guided walk

A walking tour “**Gondwana Plants**” through the Gardens with Friends of the Gardens’ guide Neil O’Brien. Commencing Saturday 18 February at 2.00pm from outside the Information Centre. \$2.00.

Veteran Car Club Display

Pre 1918 vehicles will be on display near the Weather Station Lawn. Sunday afternoon 19 February (postponement date Sunday 26).

Ellerslie International Flower Show

North Hagley Park. Wednesday 7 to Sunday 11 March

Articles

Backyards - the most important room in the house.

At the Australasian Conference of Volunteer Guides of Botanic Gardens held in Adelaide in 2007 one of the key note speakers was Professor Chris Daniels. Following the Conference a report of his speech was prepared by Christchurch guide Nedra Johnson. We repeat Nedra's report in this Newsletter because it seems rather relevant as Christchurch faces the rebuilding of many of its suburbs.

Chris's concerns were that backyards were seriously under threat due to infill housing and developments of gated and other subdivisions with large houses on small sections with high fences and concrete yards. He considered that backyards, which in the past were used for family parties, barbecues and games of cricket or other activities, were becoming a thing of the past. The loss of these spaces, which he saw as reservoirs for health and for biodiversity including wildlife, would mean that future generations would grow up knowing nothing about birds, butterflies, insects and reptiles.

Sections were traditionally separated by trees and bushes, and these provided shelter and places for birds and other fauna to live. Many roads were planted with trees either on the edges or in the centre also providing for birds, etc. Backyards were used to produce vegetables and fruit but as developers seemed to be using every inch available for sub-divisions all the open spaces were disappearing.

Another problem Chris was concerned about was the management of water in the concrete jungles that were increasing. There were no lawns to soak up rainfall. There was no understanding of caring for plants and learning about nature. One example he gave was that 55 people had died when watering their Christmas trees with the lights still on!

Developers were known to try to influence the population by saying that people don't want to have backyards any more. (It is my view that they want to fit more houses in an area and backyards would use up too much space!)

This was an inspiring and inspired address and raises issues that we need to take very seriously if we don't want our city to become controlled by greedy developers.

Chris Daniels would be a great speaker to convince our city planners and councillors of the dangers of allowing over-development in our Garden City. We could lose the Garden City image if we don't listen to the experts who have the ability to look into the future and see the effects of unwise planning.

Small is beautiful and productive

Su'eina Lokeni-Tcherkézoff is a vivacious Samoan woman married to a French academic of Russian extraction. They were in Christchurch in time for the 22 February event, but they normally live in the south of France, where Su'eina works at Les Olivades, a very old family farm owned by a couple in their sixties, Daniel and Denise Vuillon. As the name implies, the farm was originally an olive orchard, but in the last ten years it has changed dramatically.

In 2001 the Vuillons were visiting their daughter in New York and walking the streets one day they saw numbers of people carrying fresh vegetables. Turns out these were members of an association of farmers outside New York who deliver freshly picked organic vegetables to their members in the city. Members sign a contract agreeing to buy a basket of assorted vegetables weekly for six months or a year.

This type of association of organic farms began in Japan in 1965 by a group of Japanese mothers who

were concerned about the effects of industrialisation on local agriculture. People had died from high concentrations of mercury in the food chain. These women established *Teikei*, an organic food organisation, beginning with a milk co-operative to which people subscribed for fresh, uncontaminated milk.

By the late 1960s, the movement had spread to the US, and now, thanks to the Vuillons, it's been adopted in France. Les Olivades was the founding farm of an organisation known there as AMAP, *l'Association pour le Maintiens de l'Agriculture Paysanne* (The Association for the Preservation of Traditional (Organic) Agriculture).

We are talking small farms here. The Vuillons continue to work their 8-hectare farm along with three paid workers, one of whom is Su'eina. This team does everything: making volumes of compost, establishing seedbeds, planting out, harvesting, packing the paniers of fruit and vegetables and distributing them.

The farm lies halfway between Marseille and Toulon, where a Mediterranean climate heralds an early spring (end of March) and a very warm summer. Les Olivades is renowned for peaches, plums, apples, strawberries, grapes, watermelon; many varieties of watermelon are grown, including red, yellow and pink fleshed. The farm grows an enormous Moroccan melon with cream skin and yellow flesh.

Lots of different vegetables thrive in this organic paradise, but the tomato reigns supreme. Forty varieties are grown with a special focus on old-fashioned species, some on the edge of extinction. "The Vuillons are very passionate about tomatoes," Su'eina explains. "Rare varieties with green, yellow, black and white fruit are produced from tiny to large and irregular shapes. Twenty years ago, no one wanted to see such biodiversity, but today it's embraced, and people love the flavours."

A subscription to AMAP is the basis of the business. The weekly panier costs €35 in the summer and €25 in the winter, members acknowledging the much reduced seasonal variety. Most people within a 40km radius of the farm collect their own vegetables from Les Olivades. If travel is a problem, paniers will be delivered, as they are to classy restaurants, where a *choufleur* (cauliflower) costs as much as NZ\$20.

AMAP is designed to motivate people to taste wider, to think sustainably and to be motivated to grow their own fresh food. And they have. Les Olivades has developed exponentially since the day in January 2001 when the Vuillons first proposed the concept as a solution to the crisis caused by Mad Cow Disease. Three months later, the first open day was held; potential consumers in the district of Aubagne gathered to hear the Vuillons speak of the long history of their farm and the common interest they shared with the district in "defending these beautiful and nourishing lands."

They explained how the concept is built upon trust, and true to that principle, gave details of their mode of production, costs, biodiversity, and their commitment to produce fruits and vegetables in season with strong nutritional value. One week later, AMAP's first distribution was to 40 families in Aubagne.

Requests for information in support of their model spread, so that other AMAPs followed quickly. Just six months after the launch, the Vuillons themselves set up a second AMAP within the same region, each with distributions to 50 families. By the spring of 2003, Aubagne was 100% committed to AMAP, and a growing number of farms have joined the Association. "The Vuillons encourage even the smallest producers to become organic, offering them seeds and advice," Su'eina says.

With a masters degree in organic farming, Su'eina specialises in the planting and harvesting at Les Olivades. As well, she has created her own two-hectare AMAP, and she's passionate about it.

Diana Madgin

The Woodland in the Gardens - More Than a Place for Daffodils.

This article has been developed by Alan Hart from a guided walk lead by him in September 2011 in the daffodil woodlands.

The daffodil woodland in spring is one of the most beautiful and famous parts of the Gardens, but what about the trees? Why is this group of trees called a woodland? Such groups of trees, where the emphasis is on activity under the trees as much as on the trees themselves, have a long human history and many cultural connections.

The term woodland is often used rather loosely when referring to groups of trees but ecologically, woodlands are ecosystems containing trees that are widely spaced with the crowns not touching. Among the trees are open areas with plenty of sunlight and limited shade. Regeneration of trees often takes place in thorny scrub. Woodlands may be very old, and have been frequently developed and maintained by humans. They may be very productive of animals and plants useful to humans. Large grazing animals are frequently present - pigs, cattle, deer, sheep. The trees may be coppiced. Timber and charcoal are just two traditional plant products.



Woodland area, Christchurch Botanical Gardens

The principal trees in the daffodil woodland are oak and ash. No timber is harvested there of course, but the economic uses of these species are well known. Both species can be coppiced where appropriate.

In the past, before the daffodils were planted, the woodland could lay claim to some animals. The land it occupies was leased by the Canterbury Horticultural and Acclimatisation Society from the Domains Board between 1864 and 1930. The Society established a menagerie of animals; it was hoped that some at least might prove suitable for liberation in Canterbury. The menagerie included silk worms, deer, ferrets, kangaroos, angora and cashmere goats, opossums, monkeys, wallabies, llamas, a lemur, a tortoise, a Californian bear and an emu called Jack. It was open to the public and became known as the Zoo. Today, there is a plaque at the edge of the woodland marking the introduction of brown trout into Canterbury.

Woodlands have also been enjoyed for their aesthetic appeal. As the late Denis Dutton (Canterbury University) pointed out in his consideration of artistic taste and human evolution¹, humans find vistas of groups of trees interspersed with open spaces particularly attractive. Woodlands have been a popular subject of landscape painters for centuries and, on a wider scale, appear in paintings which seek to show grand landscape vistas. The landscape gardeners of the eighteenth century included woodlands in country parks in the United Kingdom.

The woodlands of the great landscape gardens often contained art in the form of sculptures, temples and picturesque, albeit artificially created, ruins. In this tradition, the daffodil woodlands contain some art.

There is a bronze drinking fountain, designed by Phil Price, commissioned and gifted to the City of Christchurch by the Canterbury Branch of the Institute of Foundrymen in 1993 and cast at the Woolston Foundry. A terrazo sculpture of two entwined bodies, "The Wrestlers", by Llew Summers, frequently evokes comments from passers-by. A glimpse of the band rotunda through the trees serves as a reminder of the fondness for classical architecture evinced by the owners of eighteenth century estates.

The daffodil woodland is essentially an exotic import. Woods and woodlands are not a common part of the landscape in New Zealand. Could we make a woodland of native species? There would appear to be no absolute silvicultural reason why not but I suspect many of us like to think of native trees as growing in a more or less naturalistic setting such as in the Cockayne Garden, ideally with tall trees among a fairly dense undergrowth.

Dense, impenetrable, native bush with a closed canopy has been an important conservation ideal in New Zealand, no doubt inspired by the experience of apparently pristine bush by European early settlers and their Maori contemporaries, and by the ecological theory of successional stages (from bare ground to grasses and herbs to forest) promoted in the northern hemisphere from the early 20th century onwards². The picture of dense forests as a final successional stage may have a flaw, in that any herbivores present were thought not to have a significant effect on the succession. Lately, it has been suggested that a more realistic view of the pre-human landscape in Northern Europe, at least in temperate regions, is one of groups of trees interspersed with open areas containing herds of grazing animals². New Zealand, kingdom of the birds, did not have grazing mammals but it did have grazing moas and other herbivorous birds (e.g. shelducks, pukeko). Over the past 25 years, ecologists in New Zealand have come to suggest that before the arrival of humans the forest landscape may have been a great deal more open and akin to a woodland landscape (particularly in the eastern South Island) than has been commonly supposed³. What the early European settlers saw was forests that had been responding to the absence of moas for nearly 300 years; they saw the ghost of "herbivory past"⁴.

In 1933, the Curator, James McPherson, initiated the planting of daffodils. In the first year, 16,000 bulbs were publicly donated and planted. By 1943, 500,000 bulbs had been planted. Today, nearly 70 years on, the flowering of the daffodils in spring reminds Cantabrians of those ancestors who came from the northern hemisphere, and no doubt delights everyone. If a new woodland is ever planted in the Botanic Gardens, perhaps it could replicate as far as possible a pre-human Canterbury woodland - with its own feathered phantoms.

References

1. Dutton, D. (2009) *The Art Instinct: Beauty, Pleasure and Human Evolution*. Oxford University Press.
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3. Lee, W. G., Wood, J. R., Rogers, G. M. (2010) Legacy of avian-dominated plant-herbivore systems in New Zealand. *NZ J Ecology*: 34, 28-47.
4. Fadzly, N., Burns, K. C. (2010). Hiding from the ghost of herbivory past; evidence for crypsis in an insular tree species. *Int. J. Plant Sci*: 171, 828-833.

Look at that plant - *Kalmia latifolia* - calico bush, mountain laurel, spoonwood

K. latifolia or calico bush is a species of flowering plant in the blueberry family, *Ericaceae*, that is native to the eastern United States. Its range stretches from southern Maine south to northern Florida, and west to Indiana and Louisiana. Mountain-laurel is the state flower of Connecticut and Pennsylvania.

Kalmia was named by Linnaeus to honour his friend the Finnish botanist Pehr Kalm, who collected it in eastern North America during the mid-18th century. Earlier Mark Catesby saw it during his travels in Carolina, and after his return to England in 1726, imported seeds. He described it, a costly rarity, in his *Natural History of Carolina*, as *Chamaedaphne foliis tini*, that is to say "with leaves like the Laurustinus".

The botanist and plant-collector John Collinson, who had begged some of the shrub from his correspondent John Custis in Virginia, wrote, when his plants flowered, that “I really think it exceeds the *Laurus Tinus*”.



Kalmias are popular garden shrubs, grown for their very showy, decorative flowers. You will find a collection of different cultivars of *K. latifolia* in the Gardens in a bed south of the Information Office pond.

Kalmia latifolia

It is an evergreen shrub growing 3–9m tall. The leaves are 3–12cm long and 1–4cm wide. Its flowers are round, ranging from light pink to white, and occurring in clusters. There are several named cultivars today that have darker shades of pink, near red and maroon pigment. In New Zealand it blooms in November and December. Roots are fibrous and matted.

The plant is naturally found on rocky slopes and mountainous forest areas. It thrives in acidic soil, preferring a soil pH in the 4.5 to 5.5 range. The plant often grows in large thickets, covering great areas of forest floor. In North America it can become tree sized on undeveloped mountains of the Carolinas but is a shrub farther north. The species is a frequent component of oak heath forests.

All parts of *Kalmia* plants are poisonous. Sheep are particularly prone to poisoning if they eat the leaves, hence the name lambkill used for some of the species. Other names for *Kalmia*, particularly *K. angustifolia*, are sheep-laurel, calf-kill, kill-kid, and sheep-poison. “Kid” here refers to a young goat, not a human child, but the foliage and twigs are toxic to humans as well. It is definitely not recommended for planting anywhere stock can graze it!

In case you are getting worried it is not toxic to dogs, cats, or small household pets!

While it has never been a viable commercial crop, as it does not grow large enough, the flowers are used for wreaths and the wood for furniture, bowls and other household items. It gained the name spoonwood because Kalm was told by Dutch settlers of North America that native Americans made spoons from the wood. The wood is heavy and strong but brittle

K. latifolia is a food plant of last resort for gypsy moth caterpillars, utilized only during outbreaks when moth densities are extremely high.

Bill Whitmore

Friends News

Subtropical splendour

This was the chosen title of the recent 12th conference of the Australasian Volunteer Guides In Botanic Gardens in Brisbane on 12th -16th September 2011. Four of our members attended; Faye and Neil Fleming, Russell Moffat and me, Alan Morgan.

The venue, the themes, the walks and talks, the weather and indeed Brisbane itself all reinforced the appropriateness of the title. Most of the programme was in the “new” Botanic gardens at Mt Coot-tha, not to be confused with the older City Botanic Gardens in the heart of Brisbane. The latter is beautifully situated in a loop of the Brisbane River and is well endowed with magnificent trees, most well over a century old. Particularly notable is the collection of fig trees (*Ficus sp*) with their huge fluted trunks and aerial roots some as thick as power poles supporting the lower branches. The labelling and interpretation and the historical information panels really add interest and information but it is not the real McCoy in terms of Botanic Gardens; that can be found at Mt Coot-tha about 20 minutes away.

Mt Coot-tha Botanic Gardens, now officially called the Brisbane Botanic Gardens, was started about 40 years ago when it was realised that the city site was too small and flood-prone to do justice to the job required of a Botanic garden. It is set in a relatively hilly site which gives lots of opportunities for lakes and streams in the valleys and diverse habitats for different plant communities. With 52 hectares there is plenty of room, not only for collections but also for the Queensland State Herbarium, a planetarium, exhibition hall/conference centre, etc.



Brisbane Botanic Gardens – guide with *Bunya* cone

The programme followed a familiar pattern of previous conferences, running from Monday evening to Friday mid day. At the welcoming function the Lord Mayor of Brisbane made special mention of the heroic team from Christchurch who made the journey regardless and that was the sentiment we got right through the conference. They all knew that the next conference was to be in Christchurch and after being reassured that earthquakes would not deter us, most people said that they were not just thinking about it but “We are coming”. Indeed, after the official invitation was presented at the conference dinner I asked for

an indicative show of hands and I estimated between 80-90% of the approximately 200 attending had their hands up.

The Tuesday, Thursday and Friday morning programme was made up of a mixture of plenary sessions with excellent speakers and specialist guided walks and talks. The speakers ranged from the Gardens Curator with an overview of the Garden's development given that he has been involved in some capacity since it started. Other speakers spoke on the philosophy of botanic gardens and how this can be conveyed to the public and a well-seasoned, leading guide from the Brisbane Art Gallery gave some very practical do's and don'ts of guiding (such as don't use small photographs to demonstrate a point). We were then able to check the skills of the folk leading our guided walks against that ideal - and most were found wanting! It will prompt some introspection about our own guiding techniques.

Being on the receiving end of guiding was a novel and salutary experience for us all. The subtropical flora is relatively unknown to us and even for experienced plants-people the eyes start glazing over after about six unfamiliar plants unless there are some good stories attached.

On the Wednesday there were full-day bus tours with three choices of venue; our team managed to cover all three, all with positive reports. One enduring memory though is that it is impossible to communicate with a busload of 50 in single file on a bush track with no loudspeakers!

With our turn coming next we were carefully watching for features good and bad and we are confident we can match or better what was, overall, a hard act to follow. Bring it on!

Kidzone page in Newsletter

We would like to include a "kidzone" page in the Newsletter. This would be four times a year. Is there anyone who would have the skills and interest to take responsibility for this? If so contact Leith McMurray at leith.mcmurray@paradise.net.nz

Note from the editor

I, and members of the Committee, always welcome any suggestion that you might have on the Newsletter. Do you have any criticism, positive or negative? Could the content be improved, and if so how?

Would you like to contribute an article on the Gardens or related plant or horticultural matters to a future Newsletter? Such an article should not exceed 1500 words. Preferably the draft would be in electronic format and emailed to billpauline@ihug.co.nz.

Merry Christmas