

# Friends of Geelong Botanic Gardens Inc.

## Annual Report for Year Ending 30 June 2024

**Patron: Stephen Ryan**

### **Committee of Management:**

President: Denise Feldman (retires at Annual General Meeting 2024)  
Vice Presidents: Jan Cheyne, Carol Richardson  
Secretary: Rosslyn Jablonsky  
Treasurer: Judy Fyfe  
Ordinary Members: Charles Pond  
Barrie Satchell  
Tilly Brunton  
David Murdoch  
Helen Zournazis (retires at Annual General Meeting 2024)  
Liz Bennetto (attended when a Wadawurrung report was presented)

### **Workplace Health and Safety:**

Elected Health and Safety Representative: Ian Martland (retired on June 30, 2024)  
Committee Work Health & Safety Representative: Charles Pond

### **Friends Part Time Staff:**

Administration Officers: Tracey Tilbury and Sally-Ann Bird

**Botanic Art Tutors:** Amanda Blake-Sutterby  
(Contractors) John Pastoriza Piñol  
Craig Lidgerwood  
Amanda Ahmed (sabbatical Jan-June 2024)

### **Memorandum of Understanding Working Group:**

Jayne Salmon  
Bruce McGinness  
Judy Fyfe  
Liz Bennetto  
Rosslyn Jablonsky  
Denise Feldman  
Jan Cheyne

### **Coordinators of Subcommittees:**

Botanic Art: Pammi Pryor  
Events: Allison Martland  
Growing Friends: Bruce McGinness and Norma Shepard  
Guides: Gwen Anderson

### **Team Leaders:**

Heritage Rose Growers: Margaret Ward  
Perennial Border: Jan Cheyne and Heather Boyd  
Weeders: Marg Oates  
Library: Luanne Thornton

### **Friends' Policy Writer and Reviewer:**

Rosslyn Jablonsky

**Editorial Team (Jubaea):** Tracey Tilbury, Anne Bourke and Luanne Thornton

**Website Managers:** Sally Ann Bird and Judy Fyfe

**Graphic Designer (honorary):** Pammi Pryor

**Special Projects:**

- Rose Calendar 2024: Rosslyn Jablonsky and Natalie Jablonsky. Funded by the FGBG
- Rose Lovers Guide: Rosslyn Jablonsky. Funded by the FGBG
- Wadawurrung Project: Liz Bennetto. Funded by a City of Greater Geelong Grant
- Volunteer Uniform Project: Denise Feldman. Funded by a Commonwealth Volunteer Grant
- Trall Fountain Project: Allison Martland and Denise Feldman. Funded by Heritage Victoria

**Pro Bono Lawyer:** Matthew Kinross-Smith

**Grant Writers:** Denise Feldman and Allison Martland

**Induction Officers:** Denise Feldman and Allison Martland

The Financial Year 2023-24 has been one of adjustment. The Committee has reviewed the role of the Friends over the past 39 years which allowed us to see how we have evolved to become the not-for-profit organisation we are today. The Friends of 39 years ago is very different from the Friends of today, but it is still a vibrant organisation advocating and supporting the Gardens. Into the future the Friends will need to continue to evolve to ensure that we remain a vibrant, viable and vital entity fulfilling our roles and purposes in supporting the Gardens. We will take our learnings from the past, retain all the positives of our group and consider the changes we will need to make as we move forward and continue to evolve.

One area we have already reviewed is our *Policies and Procedures*. We have updated many of our policies and procedures- including *Work Health & Safety, Code of Conduct, Child Safety* and *Funds Management*- and added new ones which comply with current legislation- including *Privacy, Confidentiality, Diversity and Inclusion*. The Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) has required the introduction of policies regarding *Conflict of Interest, Cybersecurity, Electronic Data Management* and *Social Media*.

Thanks to the hard work of our staff we have completed our transition to a new on-line membership management system known as *Tidy HQ*. This has enabled us to streamline membership renewal and event booking processes making it more efficient. Also *Tidy HQ* enables us to better manage our mailing lists which now include regional Garden Clubs and similar organisations. There are many more features in *Tidy HQ*, such as webpage and newsletter management, which will begin to explore in the future.

We have also now completely ceased our COVID era of online activities and replaced them with face-to-face lectures and classes. This has been appreciated by our members who have enjoyed having opportunities to meet and share these experiences.

The *Friends Gift Fund* are distributed to projects and programs within the Gardens. The Treasurer report will give more detail. Any requests for a specific purpose (such as a water fountain or a memorial seat) are now referred to the City who have policies and procedures to manage these requests.

### **The Friends Committee of Management**

In the 2023-24 Financial Year eleven Committee meetings were held as well as several special Committee meetings. At the regular meetings we received reports from the various Friends subcommittees. We also received verbal reports from the GBG Coordinator, passed on by our Secretary, on a regular basis. The GBG Coordinator also provided face-to-face reports to several Guides meetings.

### **Membership and Volunteers**

The membership number of the Friends has dropped the past 12 months currently being 255. As at 30 June 2024, 70 members had not yet renewed their membership. The number of volunteers has remained steady. With a 39-year-old organisation such as ours we are sadly beginning to lose some of our foundation members and this is reflected in our numbers.

### **Workplace Health and Safety (WHS)**

A highlight of WHS this year is the ongoing development of an effective and readily accessible communication channel, by which any volunteer can express concerns or participate in discussions about possible WHS issues.

Several factors may have facilitated this, being, not in any order of importance;

- The implementation of regular three-monthly WHS meetings open to all Friends volunteers
- The selection of a WHS representative to attend an initial OHS Training Course at the Gordon TAFE East Geelong campus.
- Representatives of the Friends working together with the City to align WHS policies and procedures of the FGBG with those of the City. Into the future this will make a more effective, simpler and accessible system.

***Charles Pond, Elected WHS Officer***

### **Geelong School of Botanical Art**

In November 2023 we held the *Inspired by Nature 7* exhibition at Deakin University Waterfront Campus gallery, adjacent to the Alfred Deakin Library. Over seventy botanic works were on display. Belinda Taylor won the *Best Emerging Artist award* and Nicky Coats *Best in Show award*. Once again, the exhibition was well attended. We appreciated the contribution of Deakin University for the use of their gallery for five weeks. Gift vouchers were donated by the *Frame Factory* and *Cavalier Art Supplies*. In addition, we greatly appreciated the provision of wine for the opening night from *Scotchman's Hill Winery*. Our sincere thanks to our four Tutors for their support and advice in assisting their students to prepare for the exhibition. Pammi Prior, Botanic Art Coordinator, steered the preparation and day to day running of the exhibition in a highly professional manner which made the process doable for our staff and volunteers.

This year Amanda Ahmed took sabbatical leave with assurances that she will be back. We look forward to Amanda's return and her much valued tutoring in graphite and coloured pencil.

Blackberries, sweet chestnuts, turkey acorns, liquid amber seed pods – all things prickly and spiny, softened by lovely leaves and luscious florals were the varied subject matter for classes this past term. Our Tutors do like to challenge their students and as a result even the most experienced and talented of our artist/students continue to learn so much! Wintertime sees many of our students heading for holidays in the warmth.

All images for inclusion in our much-anticipated *2025 Desk Diary* have been received from our students and tutors. Thank you to Deb Chirnside and Amanda Blake-Sutterby for selecting the images and it is heartening to see all who submitted images will have some of their work represented. Thank you too to Jayne Salmon and Judy Fyfe for their unenviable work in checking the plant names and finding the correct ones for those more elusive plants. Work is in progress putting it together for printing later in August.

Progress regarding the establishment of a florilegium is perhaps moving more slowly than some of us may wish, but we are awaiting responses from outside sources. Hopefully our patience will be rewarded. Our tutors and some students continue to contribute their work to other florilegia in Australia and overseas as well as exhibiting their work

nationally and internationally. Some tutors also run classes for the Friends of the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne and other venues in Australia and overseas.

*The Wagtails*, a group of experienced artists, struggled to meet on a regular basis due to the Friends Building Licence no longer allowing them use of the Meeting Room on Wednesday afternoons. Negotiations are currently in progress to review room use for this group.

***Pammi Pryor***

### **Growing Friends**

Judy Fyfe and Liz Bennetto were co-coordinators from July-December 2023. The plan is for two coordinators in the role for a twelve-month period. We would like to thank them for being coordinators of the nursery at short notice and managing the difficult transition following the retirement of Leanne Barnes. They continue to be a source of inspiration and help.

- We thank and acknowledge the staff of the Geelong Botanic Gardens, who work with nursery volunteers in a collegial spirit. Requests for plant material, potting mix and fertiliser are dealt with in an efficient way, and we look forward to nourishing this good relationship.
- The strength of the grower's group is the knowledge and experience they bring to the nursery. Everyone brings a different lived experience coming from a diverse cross section of the community.
- The growers' resilience and camaraderie make coming to the nursery a joy for all concerned. The public visiting the nursery get this vibe and enjoy their visit and we continue to be an important gateway to the Geelong Botanic Gardens.
- A healthy, robust range of plants continue to be propagated representing a diverse cross-section of the plants grown at the Geelong Botanic Gardens.
- We are strong advocates of GBG and direct visitors to where they can see mature specimens of the plants we grow and share experiences of growing the same plants in their gardens.
- We grow and supply plants that are not available elsewhere in Geelong at very good prices. Pelargoniums, geraniums, salvias, perennials, grasses, succulents and much more are grown to a high standard by knowledgeable volunteers, who have specialised in a particular type of plant and provide an amazing resource of information in their field.
- This diverse range of specialised expertise is shared with the public, especially on sales days. Visitors come seeking help with plants and are given good advice or helped where to where to find answers to their questions.

***Norma Shepherd and Bruce McGinness***

### **Heritage Rose Growers**

- Our Rose Group numbers have shrunk to just six but we are covering the main tasks with help from the Gardens staff.
- Tasks during summer were deadheading and tidying. Summer pruning was undertaken by Rose Group and the Gardens staff (Claude).
- Winter pruning happened in July with a combined effort of the Gardens staff, Rose Group and Weeders Group. The day was very productive with beds 1, 2, and 3 completed. The Rugosas will be pruned in August.
- Some replacement of special roses is necessary, and sourcing these types of roses continues to be difficult. It will be addressed in 2025; special orders will be placed in January to be propagated and delivered in winter.
- Our main event for the year was the *Rose Lovers Day* we held in November which was a great success and the roses looked magnificent. Speakers featured Jane Edmanson and eminent rosarians, Peter Ades and John Nieuwesteeg. Two publications were produced in time for this event- the *Rose Lovers Calendar* for 2024 and the *Rose Lovers Guide* about the Heritage Roses at the Gardens.

***Margaret Ward, Team Leader, Heritage Rose Growers***

### **Weeders**

- The amount of weed regrowth throughout the gardens has significantly decreased as we revisit areas previously worked on.
- There is great camaraderie within the group.

- The team has developed a strong working relationship with the Gardens staff.
- Our role has broadened- we have assisted the Rose Growers at pruning time and assisted the Gardens staff with massed planting and harvesting vegetables which are sent to Geelong Food Relief
- Being out in the Gardens we are very visible and have frequent interactions with the public, promoting the gardens - a valuable ambassadorial role.
- The grant secured by the Friends for uniforms will identify our volunteers which will enable visitors to the Gardens to be clearer about our role.

***Marg Oates, Team Leader, Weeders***

## **Library**

Our small band of volunteers shrank by two this year. Meralyn Roberts retired from regular work owing to health concerns. She has worked for the Friends and GBG Library for over 20 years and her knowledge of the early history has been very valuable. During her time, she compiled various photo books and books of newspaper and magazine cuttings about the Friends and their activities, as well as information about the GBG. A valuable resource for our history. Dale Gordon joined to share her editing prowess but has taken leave of absence to have cataract and shoulder surgery. We look forward to her return in good health later. Nadia Zacchigna has taken on the role of keeper of history and indexes each issue of *Jubaea* as well as reading meeting minutes to collect information for our Friends' historical timeline.

Recent changes to the library work arrangements have meant the loss of our editing program *Adobe In Design*, which had come with the second-hand library computer purchased from the Inverleigh Progress Association. The program, originally purchased by the association did not transfer to the new computer, requesting us pay a subscription. It has meant we had to transfer the work into MS Word which is OK but not perfect as yet.

After much negotiation by the Committee, we still have the library catalogue available near the library shelves for users to look up material and do any database management. No extra material can be kept in desk drawers, which is not ideal, but we are managing. The Guide's material was moved from their regular shelves to another bay which is tidier and has more space. The Guides need their resources to be readily available if they are to research walks etc. We have not been buying much material for the library, but occasionally receive donations which we can keep or sell at plant sales, if conditions are favourable. Investigations are underway into a more modern catalogue, but there is a bit of uncertainty about the future of the library.

Decisions to be made are how we publish the Timeline and other possible celebrations for 40 years of the Friends. Thoughts are for a small cookbook of favourite shared recipes enjoyed by our group with botanical art images.

***Luanne Thornton, Library Team Leader***

## **Events**

Promotion and public engagement are the cornerstones of success for any institution. With the continued demise of horticulture-based community groups in the region, the role of the *Friends' Events Programme* takes on increased importance. Provision of events which promote public engagement, education and recreation involving Geelong Botanic Gardens and horticulture, has always been core to the Friends' purposes. The social focus on environmental awareness, and the benefits of being involved with the natural world, is embraced when planning the annual events calendar. All activities aim at attracting the public to become involved, whilst promoting the Gardens as well as providing social engagement with members. People, plants and the GBG are the reasons for the Friends' existence.

With a large membership base of nearly 300, the Friends are fortunate to be able to draw on the expertise of members to join our subcommittees. The Events team currently has seven volunteers, ranging in age from 23 years to 80+ years, with a range of experience in event planning, catering and networking with external agents. This enables us to bring together fresh ideas as well as old favourites, to form a diverse program that caters for a variety of interests and budgets, but all with horticulture or education at their heart.

Self-drive garden tours are increasingly popular, as they enable easy access for those less mobile or having special needs. The garden tour of four inner Geelong properties attracted 100 participants. Tours also attracting great interest were Beleura historic house and garden in Mornington and a coach tour of the Alister Clark Memorial Rose Garden and Villa Verde garden in Greenvale. The coach tour to the Otways, with a guided fungi foraging talk and walk through the forest, was informative and very restorative.

The guest speaker program continues our focus on public education, featuring talks as diverse as Friends' patron Stephen Ryan's talk at the AGM about gardening trends and plant selection; Geelong's pioneering vignerons and orchardists by Gail Thomas. In addition, the Winter Lunch was held in the Davison Room at the Gordon TAFE where the role of botanic art in capturing rare and threatened indigenous plants was the topic of the guest speakers' presentations.

The Friends' Annual Seniors Week event, which this year attracted 100 seniors to the Gardens, is held by the team with financial assistance from the City of Greater Geelong's *Positive Ageing* grant. Morning tea and a guided walk through the Gardens in late summer has become a firm public favourite on our calendar.

A supper with movie night and a cooking demonstration focusing on seasonal produce, are included each year to connect those who can no longer engage in active recreation but need to remain involved with others.

Welcoming major groups to the Gardens with catering provided by the Friends' Events team continued in 2023 until the reopening of the Teahouse. A major contribution to the promotion of the GBG was the Events team catering for the *Botanic Gardens Australia and New Zealand Networking Meeting* at the Gardens. Over 80 delegates were provided with a 3-course meal, and guided walks by the Friends Guides contributed to a very successful meeting hosted by the GBG.

Two High Teas were held to welcome new members. These events have several purposes:

- to help new members to feel welcome and valued,
- to provide them with information about the Friends
- for the Friends to learn what attracts new members to the Friends,
- and what skill set members who are interested in volunteering bring with them.

Many thanks to the Events team for another wonderful year of stimulating and engaging events and activities. They are always most appreciated by all who attend, and help maintain the high profile of Geelong Botanic Gardens and its most supportive Friends.

***Allison Martland, Events Coordinator***

### **The Guides**

Thirty-nine years ago Jayne Salmon was asked to form a Guides group for the GBG to enable visitors to learn about the history of the GBG and its plant collections. Today there are 20 guides who come from a diverse range of backgrounds, but what they have in common is their passion for the GBG and a desire to communicate what they know to visitors.

In the 2023-24 Financial Year the Guides hosted 765 visitors from Australia and overseas. In addition, if no one is at the front gate waiting for a tour the Guide on duty spends time in the garden making themselves available for visitors to ask questions.

On one Sunday a month for nine months of the Financial Year 2023-2024, David Johnson organised a Discovery Table which displayed a collection of interesting plants, seed pods and flowers for people to view and ask questions. Two hundred and thirty-five people stopped and spent time with David and walked away better informed.

In addition the Guides provided booked walks for several groups.

Several guides retired in the financial year and new guides were recruited and trained.

Despite having the Tea House functioning again our numbers for the walks have not improved. We are very concerned about the lack of publicity for our walks. Since the Gardens have insisted on taking over this role through their own marketing department, publicity about all that the Guides offer has simply not happened. There has been a distinct lack of signage at the gates, and also no sign of any Self-Guided Walk sheets for those who visit the gardens. The Garden Highlights flyer has had to be abandoned because it cannot be distributed when there are no walks on offer. In general, we are held back by a failure of communication.

We also lost one of our very committed Guides, Annie McGeachy, who has been a volunteer at the gardens for over 40 years as she passed away on the 15<sup>th</sup> July.

We are hoping that 2025 will see morale amongst the guides improve greatly and we have plans to do training again later in the year as we still need more new guides.

***Gwen Anderson, Guides Coordinator and Tilly Bunton, Guides Roster person***

### **The Perennial Border**

The Perennial Border is a lovely part of the Gardens with something of interest to see every season, but it is at its best in summer and autumn. This year we have been working hard to create a shady border under the large trees to the north. The garden staff did an amazing job to clear the area, removing many Crinum and tree stumps. We sourced plants from near and far, and Julie (Gardens staff) is busy making labels for them. We are hoping that with warmer weather coming it will soon spring to life and look amazing.

***Jan Cheyne, Perennial Border Team Leader***

### **Special Projects:**

#### **Wadawurrung Connection Project**

The aim of this project is to establish a strong connection between Geelong Botanic Gardens and the Wadawurrung, by working collaboratively to develop community awareness of Wadawurrung culture, with emphasis on their use of plants for food, medicine and materials, their conservation of resources and their methods of land care. This will be done through enhanced plantings, signage, walking trails and community education. A large sign at the entrance to the Gardens will acknowledge the Wadawurrung and interpretive signage will explain their use of plants. Guided walks will be held regularly, and self-guided walks will be made available on-line via the website and printed in hard copy. Celebrations of the project will be held with Wadawurrung and the general community.

The Friends received a grant from the City of Greater Geelong under the *First Nations Cultural Heritage Grants* at the end of 2022 to deliver this project. We have been working with Sheree Parker, Kellee Reissinger and Reese McIlvena from the GBG.

2023 – 2024. The project has progressed slowly during the last year, but we will get there soon. The plantings in the Wadawurrung Resources Bed have done well, but those in the circular bed near the entrance have not thrived. We may need an alternative plan here. We have a Language Agreement with the Wadawurrung Traditional Owners, and they have supplied Wadawurrung names for many of our plants. The Project Steering Group has agreed on the format for plant labels and interpretive signage for the Wadawurrung Resources Bed. Acknowledgement signage at the front gate is still under discussion. Consultations with the Wadawurrung confirmed their preference for a sign in their language indicating that we are on Wadawurrung Country. We are currently in discussion with the City to find a solution which fits with their marketing/signage policies. This should be resolved soon, and the signage completed.

The Guides are working on content for a self-guided walk which will be available on-line and in print. This October's Themed Walk will feature First Nations use of plants.

Wadawurrung Elders will be visiting the Gardens in October to see the plants, talk about the project and suggest ways of involving the First Nations community.

Heartfelt thanks to all the Friends who have supported this project, especially Lynne Clarke, Helen Zournazis, Jane Laidlaw and Denise Feldman.

**Volunteers Uniform Grant**

Late last year we successfully applied for a grant from the Commonwealth Volunteer funding program. The purpose of the grant was to provide uniform for our volunteers which would improve health and safety (sun, heat/cold and skin protection) as well as make them identifiable to the public while working in the Gardens. We recently supplied all our volunteers with hats, shirts and jackets. This created a lot of excitement amongst the volunteers. All these items have the Friends logo embroidered on them.

**Trill Fountain**

This project funded by *Heritage Victoria*, with the approval of the City, has not progressed as the fountain has further deteriorated since the grant application was written. *Heritage Victoria* approved for the grant funding to be spent on a professional assessment of the fountain which would assure its future. Once the structure of the fountain is assured the City will complete further cosmetic functions.

**Closing:**

As I now complete my third and final year as President, I would like to thank Treasurers, Barrie Satchell and Judy Fyfe, and Secretary, Rosslyn Jablonsky, who have made the last two financial years much less onerous.

In addition, with the Committee of Management's conscientious input and advice we have been able to maintain the integrity of our organisation through difficult times. We look forward to the future as the City has committed to provide additional support, offering to assist us with training opportunities for volunteers and advise on how to best market Friends' activities which is in line with the City processes.

My heartfelt thanks goes to the Friends' Volunteers who consistently offer their time, knowledge and gardening and horticultural skills at the Geelong Botanic Gardens.

***Denise Feldman  
President, FGBG***