

President's Message

For at least the last five years, I have been asked, at various times by various people. 'Are you open to the public?' 'When are you going to have an official opening for the Gardens?' To which I usually answered, 'When we have toilets available for use by the public.' Over time we have spent time and energy in trying to achieve this and sometimes wondered if we would ever accomplish our aim.

However, when it was decided to build the Environment Education Centre (EEC) adjacent to our Useful Plants Gardens – with toilets - suddenly things started to happen. The official opening was arranged to coincide with the official opening of the EEC, and was organised by Kevin Trustum and the Waste Facility staff. As a result we now have sealed path into the new building, and hard paths through the Uncommon Plants Garden and the Useful Plants Garden and easy access between these two. We also have access to the new EEC and are able to hold our meetings there and use the small office – and access the toilets there!

On 5 June, the Mayor of Lismore, Jenny Dowell declared the Lismore Rainforest Botanic Gardens officially open. Unfortunately, I was struck down by the dreaded lurgy so was unable to be there, but from all accounts it was a great occasion and



Friends including some of the original members at the Official Opening of the Gardens

all those present had a wonderful time.

Now we are investigating other activities at the Gardens such as training days, group visits and possible fund-raising activities. I do hope those of you who were unable to attend the opening will take an opportunity to visit and enjoy all the advances that have been made

Jan de Nardi

Echonetdaily
THE NORTH COAST'S INDEPENDENT NEWS



Photo from Echonetdaily showing Thomas George, Jenny Dowell, Pat Offord, Kevin Trustum and Dirt Girl participating in the official opening of the Gardens on 5 June 2013. It was a great occasion with lots of visitors including some of the original Friends of the Gardens who were excited to see their dream become a reality. There were groups of children from seven local primary schools and activities were organised for them throughout the day.

Next Sunday Workday 25 August

Gate open 8am to 8.30

Contact Denis 0431 223340 Email friendslrbg@bigpond.com

Wednesday Work Group

Each week starting at 9 am

Contact Ros 6628 2909 Email rnrlittle@southernphone.com.au

Wear protective clothing and bring insect repellent and something for morning tea.

***Geissois benthamiana* (syn. *G. benthamii*)**

Red Carabeen - Family *Cunoniaceae*

The Red Carabeen is a common tree in Subtropical and Warm Temperate rainforest, particularly in mountain gullies, from the Manning River in New South Wales north to Mt Mee, in SE Queensland. A medium to large, generally buttressed tree it can grow up to 35 m with a diameter of 1.4 m. Red Carabeen is a fairly slow growing tree, which is moderately frost and drought tolerant once established.

The small yellow flowers are about 6 mm across and appear in slender racemes 9 to 15 cm long. Pollination is via a range of insects, including native bees and night flying moths. Leaves are compound, pinnate with three toothed elliptic leaflets from 5 to 15cm long, green on both surfaces, with the underside being slightly lighter. Both leaves and branchlets are smooth and hairless. There are distinctive paired, opposite, round stipules 10 to 25 mm in diameter at the base of the main leaf stem, making identification of this tree much easier. The new foliage is a striking brilliant red - this is a highly decorative tree. (see photo)

The fruit is a downy capsule 15 - 18 mm long, with two cells each containing several seeds of about 4mm in length. Propagation is by fresh seed with no special preparation required.

This is an excellent tree for farm forestry producing a soft, straight and fine-grained red timber that



The new foliage on this seedling adds a distinctive splash of colour to the rainforest

takes a high polish. It has been used for plywood, furniture, cabinetwork and veneer.

The *Geissois benthamiana* can be found in the Gardens in the Walker Estate with a permanent label .

References:

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- Floyd, A.G. 1990, *Australian Rainforests in New South Wales, Vol's 1& 2*, Surrey Beatty & Sons, Sydney NSW.
- Floyd, A.G. 2008, *Rainforest trees of mainland south-eastern Australia*, Terania Rainforest Publishing, Lismore, NSW.
- Harden, G.J. (ed) 1993, *Flora of New South Wales, Vol 2*, New South Wales University Press, Kensington, NSW.
- Harden, G., McDonald, B. and Williams, J. 2006 *Rainforest trees and shrubs: a field guide to their identification*, Gwen Harden Publishing, Nambucca Heads, <http://plantnet.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/cgi-bin/NSWfl.pl?page=nswfl&lvl=sp&name=Flindersia~schottiana>

From Peter Gould

Report from Waste Facility Coordinator

The last few months have seen some big changes at the Lismore Recycling and Recovery Centre and Botanic Gardens. Firstly, World Environment Day on June 5 saw the official opening of the new Environment Education Centre. This facility will be used by Council and community organisations to improve environmental education for schools and the community. The day also saw the official opening of the Botanic Gardens to the public. The opening of the Gardens has seen an increase in the number of visitors going through the gardens, with visitors seen in the gardens most afternoons.

Another achievement has been the planting of the first section of phytocap over an old landfill cell. This new landfill capping method uses native vegetation to absorb rainfall and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Further plantings are planned in the future. The phytocap has been planted out with koala feed tree species and will become valuable koala habitat in time.

Council has been working with the Friends group to develop a Memorandum of Understanding between the Council and the Friends. There has never been a formal agreement between the two organisations and the MOU will provide future directions and clearly outlines roles and responsibilities. The MOU is being presented to Council at its August meeting for consideration.

The warmer than average winter and the transition to Spring has seen the Botanic Gardens come alive, with plants coming out in flower and an increase in wildlife activity. The Gardens continue to provide Waste Staff with an interesting working environment and staff are really enjoying using the Gardens as a recreational space.

Kevin Trustum

The Friends AGM will be held at the EEC at the Gardens on Saturday 17 August – starting at 9.15am

Since our official opening the role of the FLRBG members is gradually changing. While we still need people to plant and care for the rainforest we are also looking for non-gardening people who are willing to get involved in the organisation of events, group visits, guiding, expanded publicity, record keeping, preparing IT material and the myriad of other jobs that arise in a functioning botanic gardens. If you think you can help in any way please

contact Denis : Phone 6689 5261 Mobile 0431 223340

Email friendslrbg@bigpond.com

Organiser's Report *from Pat Offord*



Juanita Marcantelli, Cameron Rosa and Cael Hosie from LPS, with Rosemary Blakeney, planting at the Gardens on National Tree Day

We celebrated National Tree Day twice this year. On 26 July, five students from Lismore Public School with their teacher Jodi Leitch, spent two hours at the Gardens. Rosemary Blakeney took the group for a walk to explain the features of a rainforest and then they planted some Hoveas and Hardenbergias at the Wattle Walk entrance. We used the Education Centre for discussion and hope that it was the beginning of many schools visits.

On 28 July we celebrated again with twelve volunteers and three new members. We had prepared a special place for children to plant, but only three turned up after 10am when we had finished all the planting. We had a lovely morning tea on the verandah of the Education Centre. Rose and Jill plied us with cakes, biscuits and good coffee. Rose sold quite a few plants. Rose's granddaughter Maia attended both events and was a great help to the volunteers on Sunday.

We had a bit of hose rage recently, when all our hoses disappeared. We have hoses attached at designated taps for our watering roster. Although there is less watering needed at the moment it would be

appreciated if hoses are returned to where they were originally found. Volunteers need to be able to use a hose on workdays or when they make visits to the Gardens to check particular areas. I wish we could padlock the hoses to the taps, but the only solution is an efficient watering system set in ground.... hint, hint!

In the lead up to the opening of the Environmental Education Centre and the Botanic Gardens, we planted many plants from the LRBG Nursery. Thank you Rose and your crew. We love your healthy plants. Plants were also supplied to Kevin for the water wise garden surrounding the Environmental Education Centre.

Many of the plants beside the major paths are about to flower. If you are looking for plants for your own garden you will be able to have a look at the small flowering Grevilleas along the path between the BBQ and the Useful Plants Garden. There are 3 species to choose from.

A special planting is planned for 29 September when four species of Macadamia will be planted near the Uncommon Plants Garden. The plants are being gifted by the Macadamia Growers Association.

This day coincides with a Sunday workday and you all be invited to attend the planting and join guests for refreshments.

The GPS team has been working hard collecting data and I would like to thank Mary Harrison, Peter Gould and Mary McDermott for carrying out this very difficult task.

Lastly, I would like to ask for advice about how we can improve our work days. We need to increase the number of active members as all of us have busy lives and can't always participate. Is Sunday morning the best time for those who can come at weekends? Is Wednesday the best time for those who like weekdays? The heavier jobs are now carried out by Council Staff but so far we have preferred to plant, weed and look after the plants, propagate, conduct walks and organise Open Days. This requires a lot of organisation behind the scenes and of course volunteers to carry out the work in the Gardens. What do you think?

Contact: phone 6629 1435 email pofford3@bigpond.com



Peter Gould & Mary Harrison doing GPS work in the Uncommon Plants Garden



Grevillea sp. in flower along path

Propagating solutions

Propagation of rainforest plants is a complex process with no guarantee of success. But we in the propagation area are learning fast. We have our favourite reference books like 'Mangroves to Mountains', 'Rainforest Trees and Shrubs', 'Plants of the Forest Floor' and 'Australian Native Plants'. We also get some good ideas from the Nicholsons 'Australian Rainforest Plants'. All these books give us lots of information but often lack the detailed facts about propagation that we need.

So these days, whenever we want to know how to propagate some seeds or cuttings that we haven't sprouted on previous attempts, we get on the net. Usually we Google the plant name and go from there. Naturally we have to sift through lots of info about plant growth and plant sales etc. but if we persist we usually find something that is of use.

Just recently we had some *Gahnia aspera* (Saw Sedge) seeds. This is our fourth attempt at this particular plant, so this time I rang around some Rainforest Nursery friends but they had absolutely no idea how sprout them other than getting some bird or animal to eat them for us then WAITING for the results. So online we went. Finally a site was found where they were replicating the semi-wetland type situation by using a polystyrene box with no holes on the bottom. Instead a hole was poked out in the side of box. A layer of coarse river sand with a peat was put in the box, the seeds placed on top and then a bit more sand to cover them. It was then wet thoroughly and placed in the shade house. We are now living in hope of success this time. It may still take two years so we must be patient. If we manage to sprout these seeds the other nurseries would like to know our method and we are happy to share this information.

Late last year we collected from our Botanic Gardens some *Hovea acutifolia* seeds. Last time we sprouted them we managed to get



Hovea acutifolia
Flickr public domain image

only two plants. This time - finding a hint on the internet - we soaked them in boiling water and when they had cooled we set them in trays and we ended up with 400 plants! Just that one little bit of information made all the difference. So if you are wanting some information on propagation give us a call, that is, if you can't find it on the net!

Rose Hand FLRBG Propagation Officer

Understory plants in LRBG- the Palm Lilies



The genus *Cordyline* (Palm Lilies) are a group of erect, slender clumping plants which have prominent long leaves on fibrous stems. They belong to the family Asteliaceae (formerly Fam. Agavaceae) and consist of about 20 species of which about 8 occur in Australia, all on the east coast. In our area there are 4 species and all of these are planted in the Gardens. All except *Cordyline congesta* grow in or on the edges of rainforest and form a small but noticeable component of the flora. *Cordylines* grow in moist places in shade or semi shade in most types of rainforest except dry rainforest or areas subject to frosts.

The *Cordylines* growing in the Gardens are:

Cordyline congesta Coastal Palm Lily. This plant grows on the coastal lowlands along streams and the margins of gallery rain forest. It forms clumps to 3 metres high and has fine serrations along the leaf edges, the leaves grow to about 65 cm. Bluish flowers are followed by clusters of orange-red fruits. It is now rare and endangered in its former range due to land clearing and coastal development.

Cordyline petiolaris Broad leaved Palm Lily. This species has broad leaves to over 80 cm. long with a rolled prominent long petiole widely attached at its base to the trunk. The mature leaves are often split at the ends. It has white to mauve flowers followed by tight clusters of orange/red fruits on long stems. It forms bushy clumps to 5 metres high.

Cordyline rubra Red fruited Palm Lily. This is a slender, erect and often branched palm lily to about 4 metres high with mostly single trunks or forming sparse clumps. The leaves are 15 to 50 cm. long and it has bluish flowers followed by clusters of bright red fruit.

Cordyline stricta Narrow leaved Palm Lily. This palm lily has a slender trunk and forms clumps with many stems to 4 metres high. The leaves are 30 to 50 cm. long crowded at the tops of the stems. It has bluish purple flowers on long stems followed by dark purple to black fruits. This is the only *Cordyline* in the gardens with black fruit.

All *Cordylines* make attractive bushy under story garden plants which add beauty to tropical and subtropical gardens in frost free areas. They are generally hardy plants with ornamental leaves, flowers and fruits. They can be propagated easily by seed or by stem and root cuttings.

Further reading: *Plants of the Forest Floor* compiled by Penny Watsford.
Nullum Publications PO Box 1152
Murwillumbah, NSW 2484

Mike Fulloon

The Wilson Park Species Garden

Wilson Park Dry Rainforest planting is situated immediately to the north of the barbecue and Eucalyptus Forest area. It is planted with species that occur in a local **Dry Rainforest Alliance** called **Drypetes australasica** (Yellow Tulip) and **Sub-alliance Araucaria cunninghamii** (Hoop Pine).

Observations of remnant rainforest on the Gardens site indicate that it was originally covered by the same type of Dry Rainforest that occurs at nearby Wilson Park Nature Reserve. According to Alex Floyd, Wilson Park and Rotary Park have the highest number of tree species of any Dry Rainforest communities in NSW. The idea of our plantings, is to display species which grow well locally so that landholders and gardeners can choose suitable species for their properties.

This garden contain 118 species that are labelled and that can be viewed by walking along the southern boundary or through the centre on a soft path. A list of these species can be obtained from Pat pofford3@bigpond.com.

Some of the species include trees such as *Elaeodendron australis* (Red Olive Berry), *Araucaria cunninghamii* (Hoop Pine), *Dendrocnide excelsa* (Giant Stinging Tree), *Ficus spp.* and *Streblus brunonius* (Whale Bone Tree). Many smaller trees and shrubs are thriving including the Myrtles such as *Austromyrtus fragrantissima* and others including *Eupomatia laurina* (Bolwarra), *Randia moorei* (Spiny Gardenia) and *Desmodium acanthocladum* (Thorny Pea). As



Eupomatia laurina - Bolwarra

mentioned this garden is planted with a high number of species which makes for a variety of flowers and leaves and growth habits. The site was cleared by the Friends, Green Corps members and the Council gardener in 2008. It was covered with many weeds - large Camphor Laurels on the slope and Madeira Vines hanging from trees with thousands of tubers lying on the ground. There is a high water runoff and springs occur after rain. Despite the frustration of working in mud, tick bites and the tedious collection of tubers by hand, we managed to plant within a year. Planting began on National Tree Day 29 July 2008 and follow up plantings have occurred as new species are sourced.

The Camphors that covered the slope were killed progressively so that animals could move to new habitats without too much disturbance. The removal of the trees created open spaces similar to those created in rainforest due to storms. Pioneer species appeared naturally in the spaces such as Macaranga, Poison Peach, Wild Tobacco and the Stinging tree. This regeneration can be observed when walking along the central path. Of course some thinning of these species has to be done to allow the planted species to thrive but it is good to be able to demonstrate the process of regeneration. Most plants are thriving because they are growing in a situation that suits them which makes maintenance a little easier, but routine work is carried out to replace dead trees, record GPS, install permanent labels, weed and maintain the path, which was originally built by the Sunday work group. Eventually the path will be covered



with a hard surface but we are still refining its course and recently the Wednesday work group re-routed it to avoid muddy spots caused by springs. They also lined the sides with rocks and spread a layer of mulch. Susceptible young trees are protected from the resident wallabies with wire cages. The regular appearance of koalas in the adjoining Eucalypts adds to the interest of this area – is it truly a beautiful place to visit.

From Geoff Walker with extra information from Pat Offord

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>things to do>recreation>Botanic Gardens

Plant Biodiversity

On a recent episode of the ABC radio programme 'First Bite' the topic discussed was the importance of increasing the biodiversity of food plants throughout the world. At present less than a dozen flowering plants account for 80 per cent of our diet – a very narrow selection from the possible available food plants. A group of international scientists who attended the Crop Wild Relative Genomics meeting in Asilomar, California in December 2012 have published a paper for the latest 'Nature' magazine. They feel that climate change, water and land shortages, soil degradation and an ever increasing population are all very real threats to Planet Earth's ability to feed its people. In order to cope with the changing times, the future of a sufficient supply of food will have to involve a much more diverse group of food crops than are currently being used. The scientists argue that the key to obtaining that diversity is to open old seed vaults and refresh the gene pool with ancient and landrace species of edible plants.

'Seed banks, which store a wide variety of plants, are a massively untapped resource for feeding an ever-expanding human population', says Cornell University plant geneticist Susan McCouch. She and the other scientists called for a massive global effort to sequence the genomes of the potential food plants currently held in 1,700 seed banks across the world. 'Gene banks hold hundreds of thousands of seeds and tissue culture materials collected from farmers' fields and from wild, ancestral populations, providing the raw material that plant breeders need to create crops of the future,' McCouch stated.

<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/rnfirstbite/seeding-the-future/4823894>

http://www.salon.com/2013/07/09/breeding_the_food_of_the_future_partner/

RF - larder & pharmacy?

Rainforests are important repositories of plant biodiversity - they are a source of edible and medicinal plants. It is important that they be preserved in the wild and in seed banks so that, in time, research can be conducted into their possible uses. Already many rainforest species have become extinct. The aim of the Rainforest Seed Conservation Program of the Royal Botanic Gardens in Sydney is to identify species that can be seed banked and find ways of storing those with difficult seed storage characteristics. Our Gardens have already contributed fruit for this research and one of our aims, as a Botanic Gardens, is to be a gene pool of rainforest species of the Northern Rivers area.

The Amazon rainforest was the first place researchers started to look for edible plants and also those with medicinal qualities. In time the search expanded to other rainforests including Australia.

For the Aboriginal people of many parts of eastern Australia the rainforest was a virtual larder and supported them for millennia. However, little has been recorded about the majority of the fruits that grow there and few have been developed commercially. Reasons for this include the ready availability of familiar cultivated imported species and also the unpalatability of many of these fruits to the western palate. The chemical compounds that can make them very healthy food stuffs can also make them rather tart to eat. Dr Izabela Konczak from Food Science Australia has been investigating a range of native Australian fruit, most of which comes from the rainforest. She is specially interested in these species because of their antioxidant capacity and the presence of Vitamin C and other compounds which are essential for the growth and reproduction of plants, and help defend injured plants against pathogens. Anthocyanin (a type of flavonoid found in some of these

plants) also helps to protect and repair cells and offer great hope in fighting cancerous cell growth [in humans].

'Others that we looked at were very good sources of vitamins and minerals such as folate, iron, zinc, magnesium and calcium, which are very important for DNA replication, cell repair and general health,' says Dr Konczak.

All of the species she collected were from the wild, and this is one of the keys to their strength.



Davidsons's Plum *Davidsonia pruriens* – one of the species being studied by Dr Konczak

'Most of the fruits we analysed are quite small, with large stones and a thin layer of flesh. The antioxidants and other bioactive compounds have evolved to protect the fruit from pests and diseases, with concentrations eight times higher near the skin than in the centre. We know from commercial fruit production that the fruits produced through intensive agriculture, such as apples, have significantly lower levels of these phytochemicals [chemicals produced by the plants] than those that are grown organically, says Konczak. 'This is probably because without fertilizers, pesticides and irrigation, plants have to fight much harder to get their fruit to ripening stage, where it can then be dispersed by animals.'

Australasian Plant Conservation Vol 21 Num 3 page17 'Seed behaving badly' Graeme Errington et al February 2013

<http://www.abc.net.au/science/articles/2009/04/30/2557398.htm>

http://www.salon.com/2013/07/09/breeding_the_food_of_the_future_partner/

Young leaves and potential new medicinal

In the mid 2000s a research team from the University of Utah, led by Professors Tom Kursar and Phyllis Coley, participated in a five year study in the rainforest of Panama, looking for plants with medicinal properties. Professor Coley said: 'Rainforests are disappearing at a terrifying rate. Searching for drugs in the rainforests of developing countries might be one solution. In our research, not only are we finding potential pharmaceuticals, but we are contributing to conservation of the forests by publicising the importance of these plants and by encouraging Panamanian scientists to do the research on them in their own country.

The new study showed how potential drugs can be found more effectively by focusing on how plants make chemicals to defend themselves against insects. The research indicated that generally:

◇ Chemical activity was much greater in young leaves than in older leaves because young leaves lack the toughness that older leaves use as a defense against insects. So young leaves are more likely to contain potential medicines.

◇ Young leaves contain more active chemicals than older leaves, even from the same plant. The researchers tested 18 woody plant species, and found 10 of the species

contained toxic chemicals called alkaloids that were present only in young leaves, not old leaves. Only three species had alkaloids in old leaves and not young leaves.

◇ Plants that live in the shade are more likely to contain active chemicals than sun-loving plants. It takes longer for a shade-tolerant plant to grow new leaves to replace those eaten by insects, so the shade-tolerant plants develop stronger chemical defenses than plants that live in sunlight and can replace leaves more quickly.

http://unews.utah.edu/news_releases/a-realistic-way-to-save-rainforests/



Denis Matthews assembling furniture in our new office in the Environmental Education Centre

Elaeocarpus sedentarius Minyon Quandong



The not quite ripe fruit in late March, well protected from possible predators

In June this year we harvested the first 'crop' of four Minyon Quandong fruit from a quite small tree in the Uncommon Plants Gardens. We had been watching them grow from tiny green balls to the full-size dark fruit at maturity. We have sent two of these fruit to the Australian National Botanic Gardens in Canberra and we are in process of propagating our own new plants from the two remaining seeds. Minyon Quandongs are notoriously slow to germinate, having very hard outer shell on the seed. Fruits in the wild, lying on the forest floor, slowly weather and finally germinate when the outer shell breaks down, but unfortunately there is a high rate of seed infertility. However, we live in hope.

Gifting of Wild Macadamias to Gardens

Although Macadamia trees grow in profusion in the Northern Rivers area, the wild species from which the commercial varieties have been developed are in fact endangered as their natural habitat is cleared and hybridization occurs with the cultivated varieties. The Macadamia Conservation Trust and Lismore City Council are working together to conserve and protect wild macadamia trees by planting all four endangered species in the Lismore Rainforest Botanic Gardens. The well-known species *Macadamia integrifolia* and *Macadamia tetraphylla* as well as the rare *Macadamia ternifolia* and *Macadamia janseni* will all be planted, making it the first time that all four species have been displayed together in this region. The planting is planned for the morning of Sunday 29 September 2013.

Adapted from information supplied by Ian Mcconnachie. Image from Macadamia Conservation Trust



Macadamia tetraphylla

Letter from the Friends' first president



Laurie Chelsworth and Pat Macbeth at a Gardens meeting in the early 1990s

project, met every week in the rooms at the back of the council chambers. We were novices but persistent in all our sometimes faltering steps to achieve the goal.

The interview with Geoff Walker on ABC- radio this week brought it all back. Please keep that interview to be played eventually in

the visitors/education centre which will eventually inspire, inform and educate visitors and students from all over the world. I always said that when the visitors centre is open I would continue to be a very proud volunteer showing people what we have achieved and inspiring their own dreams. This is a good day! CONGRATULATIONS to everyone concerned.

Patricia (Pat) Macbeth
Gold Foundation Member FLRBG
First President FLRBG Inc.

We have received a grant of almost \$5000 from NRMA Community Grants for the purchase of an audio sign and the installation of QR tags on some of our signs. These tags can be scanned with iPhones to link visitors directly to the internet for further rainforest information.

5 June 2013

Dear Friends,

Thank you for the invitation to attend the opening of LRBG Wednesday 5 June 2013.

It reminded me of Laurie Chelsworth's vision all those years ago and the work of many worthy people who started the journey with one step.

The first decade was dedicated to realizing the vision and the second decade you and the team have been creating the dream. The following decades, for millennia, can only continue, renew and recall the history of the making of this special place.

I first met Laurie 20 years ago (circa 1991/2) when he was Chairman of the Technical Aid for the Disabled committee (TAD) who met at St. Vincent's Hospital in Lismore. I had been a member of a TAD committee in Sydney so it was natural for me to join the Lismore group on my return. He was inspirational when he talked of his desire and passion to build a rainforest gardens in this area but saddened it just wasn't happening.

At the time he wrote an environmental column in the local paper. One day while walking with him after the meeting I made the suggestion that using his column, he invite his readers to a meeting of like minds. The rest is now history. People of eminence, with experience in many fields, commitment and a belief in the

Visiting Schools Groups

One of the most rewarding activities on our opening day was the arrival of seven groups from Primary Schools of the area. Throughout the day they participated in a series of interesting activities ranging from water saving and vegetable gardening to koala tree care and, of course, rainforest plants. And Dirt Girl's presence added to the specialness of the occasion for the children.

With so many children on site it could have been bedlam but it wasn't. In spite of early rain everything went smoothly and enjoyably. The kids were wonderful – interested in everything and excited and co-operative in the activities provided for them.

The Friends prepared an identification exercise for the older children – matching rainforest flowers with their fruit or nuts using colour photos and a description of the fruit of each plant. It worked well. The younger children made their own rainforest cards. We supplied them with images of rainforest plants and fauna as well as colourful leaves. They loved it. All the children showed a real interest in rainforest – but those from smaller rural schools who live in or near rainforest were surprisingly well informed. Rosemary Blakeney ran the activities with support from other Friends.



The children's activities set out ready to go on the big square table in the barbecue picnic area, which was specially designed for such occasions