

# THE FRIENDS OF THE WAITE ARBORETUM INC.



## NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2001

No 26

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## BENEFIT DINNER

### 'Arabesque' - with Rosa Matto, Chef November 17, 2000

Rosa Matto is an inspirational chef. Dr David Symon is an inspirational botanist and knowledgeable story-teller. These two talented people combined their respective skills and provided the diners in Urrbrae House with an experience we shall all remember. The food was stunning and the various courses were sensitively complemented by excellent wines that had been donated by Orlando Wyndham.

David opened with the famous story of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves from "The Book of the Thousand Nights and One Night". Ali Baba's brother Kassim, tried to obtain all the treasures from a robber chief who had hidden them in a cave. As we all remember, from our childhood, the magic words needed to open the cave were "Open Sesame!" Kassim entered the cave using these words, but forgot the name of the required seed needed to escape. He thought of Oats, Barley, Peas and so on but forgot all about Sesame. Kassim finally died, in the cave.

This disaster for Kassim provided David with a list of important plants that originated in the Mediterranean countries. He also spoke of the centrality of the Arabian Peninsula in the Old World and mentioned the foods, animal and vegetable, that were domesticated in the so-called Fertile Crescent.

This introduction was followed by the **Mezze** – dips with raw fresh vegetables and deep-fried olive bread, baba ghanoush, hummus with tahini, beetroot and skordalia.

David then proceeded with a quotation from 1001 Nights, which illustrates clearly the variety of foods available in Arabia, well before the discovery by Europeans of any part of America. We were asked to note that they were not eating maize, potatoes or tomatoes.

"The keeper of the garden served them himself with a luxurious repast of chicken, goose, quails, pigeons, partridges, stuffed lamb, and baskets of fruit from the branches. As they were washing their hands with a musk soap and drying them on napkins of gold-embroidered silk, the keeper entered with a great handful of roses and said to his guests:

'Before you touch the drinks, I wish you to dispose your souls to pleasure with the colour and scent of these flowers'." Our tables were appropriately decorated by red rose petals. I cannot, however, guarantee that the keeper's orders regarding drinks were obeyed by all of us!

Then came **Soup**, in the form of Fish soup with Saffron risotto.

David went on to tell us something of the agricultural history of the region. A book in which there is a great deal of information about this subject is "Guns, Germs and Steel" by Jared Diamond, published in 1997. It seems that agriculture did not develop all over the world as man spread, there were quite limited regions in which the early inhabitants of the world could change from hunter-gatherers to those with a sedentary agricultural life-style.

Jared Diamond argues persuasively that it was the inherent resources of this Middle Eastern region that lead to its early agricultural dominance. The seasonality of its climate favoured large-seeded annuals and the range of altitudes meant staggered harvest seasons. The region was also a remarkable centre for large domestic animals. Four species of big mammals – the goat, sheep, pig and cow were domesticated very early in the Fertile Crescent, probably earlier than any animal, other than perhaps the dog, elsewhere in the world. So, said David, "In all our meal you will eat lentils, barley, wheat, peas, chick-peas – the earliest plants domesticated by man; and in the lamb and goat cheese yoghurt, two products from the oldest domesticated animals."

We then came to our **First Course**, comprising chargrilled chicken with green olive relish on chick-pea and potato salad. NB The potato was a ring-in from the Americas!

It was followed by a **Second Course**, comprising lamb "sausages" on lentil puree with spinach and raisins.

In between times David mentioned figs, olives, dates and grapes. These comprise the oldest group of woody plants that founded horticulture in the Old World. Archaeologists tell us that olives were cultivated near the Dead Sea in 3700-3500 BC. They are grown throughout the world in Mediterranean climates. At about the same time, dates, the plants most closely associated with the Arabs, were being cultivated in lower Mesopotamia. Although found in deserts, they are not drought resistant and only occur near oases, river-banks, soaks, etc. The earliest records of figs date from Syria as early as 6000 BC. Finally, the grapes, plants with which, as South Australians, we are all familiar. Wild type grape-seeds occur in early Neolithic and Bronze Age sites from 4500 to 3200 BC.

Then came **Sweets** – Lemon syrup cake with spiced goat's cheese curd.

To quote, "Can one possibly end this meal without something on Coffee?" This was a latecomer to the world's drinks, having originated in Ethiopia where the leaves were chewed before the coffee seeds were roasted. From there it spread to nearby Yemen and Arabia, where it was well established by 1500 AD. The first European mention of it came from Egypt in 1580 AD. "The Turks have a brew, the colour of which is black. It is drunk, after meals, as a delicacy and in mouthfuls. While taking one's ease in the company of friends, and there is hardly any gathering among them where it is not drunk."

Finally came **Coffee or mint tea with Almond pears**.

After this sumptuous repast, the hands of the clock had crept to about midnight. Our glass slippers were left behind and we all departed for home having given sincere thanks to our remarkable chef and her helpers and to David Symon. Thanks were also given to Jill Barge for providing the crockery and cutlery and to Cicely Bungey and Rosemary Sawley for their table preparation and decoration - red rose petals of course!

Barbara Possingham

## FROM THE COMMITTEE

A committee meeting was held on November 29, 2000. The following items will be of interest to members.

- The perimeter signs provided by "The Friends" have been completed and are in place. It is hoped that these will encourage members of the public to enter the Arboretum and obtain pleasure walking through it.
- The Botanic Gardens Services now have a Web-site that may be of interest to some of us, it is <http://www.botanicgardens.com.au>. This provides access to the Advisory Services of the Botanic Gardens. The new Web-site of the Arboretum Friends is <http://www.botanicgardens.com.au/waitearboretumfriends>. If you have the opportunity, log on and have a look!
- Robyn Barker tendered her resignation from the committee due to pressure of work. She has been a loyal and helpful member for several years and we all appreciate her contributions both to the committee and to Friends in general.

## IN THE ARBORETUM

### The oaks

#### An Introduction

The Arboretum has an established and increasing collection of Oaks. In subsequent issues of this Newsletter, various species will be discussed. This note will be an introduction to the family, the Fagaceae.

The oaks, *Quercus*, belong to the Fagaceae, which is an overwhelmingly Northern Hemisphere family. In the Southern Hemisphere they are represented by the Southern Beeches, *Nothofagus*, a famous and fascinating Gondwanan relic which occurs in South America, Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea. None survive in the Arboretum. No other Fagaceae are native to Australia.

Readers will know of the sweet chestnut, *Castanea*, harvested extensively in southern and eastern Europe for its large, tasty nuts and now being grown commercially in the Adelaide Hills. Several trees have grown in the Arboretum but none has survived without extra water. Possibly the more critical selection of Southern European stocks might prove profitable.

The beeches, *Fagus*, comprise major forest trees of Eurasia and North America, but, again, none has survived with us. Beech "mast" is an important food of forest animals.

Other genera in the family *Chrysolepis*, *Lithocarpus*, and *Trigonobalanus* are either tropical or of high rainfall origin and none thrives here.

This leaves *Quercus*, the oaks, a huge genus that dominates the family and many of the forests of the Northern hemisphere. It is immensely important not only for timber, shelter, decorative trees, cork and tannin. The acorns are major items of food for a suite of animals that consume and disperse this chunky seed. *Quercus* occurs across Eurasia, North America to Mexico and extends south of the equator into Papua New Guinea. There are something like 600 species which range from evergreen or deciduous clonal scrubs to huge trees. The flowers of oak trees are not conspicuous though the resulting acorns are often attractive. So the trees are grown for their shape and form or for the autumn colours of the deciduous species.

Oaks were amongst the first plants in the Arboretum: 1928, 1939, 1944. The choices reflected the sources and prejudices of the day so that English oaks and the colourful pin oaks of North America were well represented. Natural selection has had its inevitable result and shows the way to go. As a result we have fine specimens of cork oak, Spanish oak and later some Californian species. The collection is being expanded now.

There are one or two quite large private oak collections in Australia and there is an International Oak Society of which the Arboretum is a member

David Symon

### **Holm or holly oak, *Quercus ilex***

This species gets its name from its holly-like leaves in their juvenile phase, and holm is apparently another name for holly. The leaves have a spiny margin that is lost at maturity but can be seen in the triangular hedge near the Museum of Economic Botany in the Adelaide Botanic Gardens.

It is native to the Mediterranean, where massive trees once grew. It was planted in the U K before 1580, "affording, in Summer with its sombre foliage, a pleasing contrast to the brighter tints of every other tree in the neighbourhood!" (Rev. C.A. Johns, 1892)

The species was introduced to South Australia early and well developed trees can be seen about Adelaide. It was included in the first flush of planting in the Arboretum in 1928, 1920 and 1944. Our trees have done well, forming dense, rounded, sombre canopies. The wood is dark, close grained, heavy and hard, "It is serviceable for many uses as mallet heads, mall balls, axle trees, wedges, beetles and above all for palisades and in fortifications." Remember that!

And yet ..... and yet, with an anthropocentric stab in the bark, I find it a dull tree. As in most oaks, the flowers are inconspicuous, the acorns would never have been used by Queen Mab, and the sombre leaves lack the silvery uplift that occurs in olives. It is obviously hardy, does well by the sea, and withstands pollution. There it is with its small flowers, small acorns, sombre dull leaves; it does not even drop its bark. It is always there, always unchanged, a perpetual challenge to beds of cannas, roses or fast cars.

A black mark for this worthy tree is that a number of feral trees have been recorded in the Adelaide Hills. A possible redeeming feature is that some forms reputedly produce the edible acorn of the ancients, "which, even in perfection, are as good as a chestnut." If this is so, it fed, at least in part, the roots of Western civilisation, the shepherds followed its crops and Adonis died disturbing one of their hungry boars.

David Symon

## **ARBORETUM NEWS**

In October I attended the International Society of Arboriculture – Australian Chapter Conference in Brisbane and mounted a display on the Waite Arboretum and the TREENET project which attracted much interest. Two interstate delegates at the Conference joined the Friends.

On 26 November, the Palm and Cycad Walk was officially opened by Tony Brady, Foundation President of the Palm & Cycad Society of SA. The 60 people who attended the opening were then treated to a fascinating guided walk through the collection by Heinz Froehlingsdorf before enjoying a BYO picnic lunch/BBQ with members of PACSOSA and their families. Heinz will conduct another guided walk for the Friends' first meeting of 2001. The Arboretum volunteers and members of PACSOSA worked hard in the weeks leading up to the opening, planting new specimens, installing labels and posts, weeding and spreading mulch.

Gareth Hodges' student scholarship under the GILES scheme finished at the end of the year and the TREENET office is now staffed two mornings a week by volunteer Malcolm Woods. I would be interested to hear from any Friend who would like to participate in this project by assisting with clerical work, database entry or organising the Symposium in September.

In January, Tanya Lehmann joined the Urrbrae House team on an industry placement as part of her B.Cultural Tourism degree at Flinders University. Tanya's project is to promote the Waite Arboretum and Gardens of the Precinct. Several special events including guided walks through the Arboretum are planned for National Science Week in May.

Jennifer Gardner

## **BIRDS OF THE WAITE ARBORETUM AND THE WAITE CONSERVATION RESERVE PART 2**

Part 1 of this article discussed the bird species commonly recorded in the Waite Arboretum (WA) and the Waite Conservation Reserve (WCR). This part discusses the uncommon species that will be of interest to the more dedicated birdwatcher who is prepared to spend more time on regular visits in all seasons.

### **Water and wetland species**

Eight wetland species have been recorded in the WA. Some are quite unusual in that J Saunders (1983, 1985) reports that over 1972 to 1981, the following were recorded once or twice: Australian Grebe, Great Cormorant, Little Pied Cormorant, Little Black Cormorant, Pacific Heron, Great Egret, Australian White Ibis, Grey Teal and Eurasian Coot. The grebe and the cormorants will only be found in deep water, the grebe foraging for water insects and the cormorants for fish, molluscs and crustaceans. The heron and egret forage in shallow water or sometimes in damp grassland, for frogs, lizards and aquatic invertebrates. The Coot requires deep water for foraging on vegetation and reeds for refuge and nesting, but can be seen on grassland, often utilising food scraps.

Two additional species have been observed in recent years on or near the WA dam; they are small numbers of Cape Barren Goose in early 1995 to early 1996 and one Australian Pelican in August 1994 and 1996. While strictly not a wetland species, the Cape Barren Goose is never far from fresh or brackish water feeding on introduced grasses and legumes, much to the annoyance of graziers. The Pelican feeds on large quantities of fish and would not be satisfied by the dam for very long.

There is one old record of a Buff-banded Rail breeding in the WA.

### **Birds of prey**

By their very nature, birds of prey are unlikely to be numerous in the WA and the WCR, however most of the local raptors will be recorded if one stands looking at the sky for long enough. J Saunders (1983, 1985) reports that the following have been recorded in the WA once or twice: Black-shouldered Kite, Brown Goshawk, Collared Sparrowhawk, Peregrine Falcon, Australian Hobby, Australian Kestrel, Wedge-tailed Eagle, Southern Boobook and Tawny Frogmouth, the latter breeding in the WA in 1989 and 1992. Most of the diurnal birds of prey will be 'overhead transients' rather than 'overhead foragers' and so cannot be recorded as utilising the habitat.

The owl and frogmouth are nocturnal birds of prey, the owl mainly feeding on insects but may take small birds and mammals. The frogmouth feeds on a variety of invertebrates, mainly scorpions, spiders and centipedes with some frogs and small mammals. The owl is quite common in the Adelaide suburbs and is often heard repeatedly calling 'more-pork' or 'boo-book' on spring and summer nights. The frogmouth is less common but does live in the suburbs.

### **Aerial feeders**

In addition to the resident Welcome Swallow, Tree Martin are occasionally recorded feeding on insects well above the tree canopy in the WA and the WCR.

### **Ground Feeders**

The less common ground feeders in the WA are the: Black-tailed Native-hen, Little Corella, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Red-rumped Parrot and Willie Wagtail. The cockatoos need no further comment except that the Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, because of its strong bill, is able to feed on wood-boring grubs and the Red-rumped Parrot feeds on grass seeds.

The Willie Wagtail is a widely distributed species in Australia but never at a high density; it is usually seen close to the ground, flitting about or wagging its tail to flush insects.

The Black-tailed Native-hen is a somewhat unusual record for the WA. It is a widely distributed nomadic species with flocks likely to appear or disappear in a matter of days or hours. It usually lives near water, feeding on insects and vegetation and is usually first noticed rapidly running for cover with its characteristic head-down cocked-tail carriage.

Other ground feeders likely to be observed occasionally in the WA and the WCR are the finches. The Red-browed Finch is a native species feeding on the seeds of native and introduced grasses and sedges, berries, insects and the seeds of casuarinas. The European Goldfinch and European Greenfinch were introduced. The Goldfinch is confined to the seeds of exotic plants, particularly composite weed species and a few insects. On the other hand the Greenfinch is more adaptable, feeding on seeds from native grasses and crops; it has been observed utilising sea rocket. It can be detected in spring by its very characteristic call, a descending grasshopper-like 'birrrzzz'.

For want of a better category, I have placed the two local kingfishers in this community since they take most food from the ground. Both the Laughing Kookaburra and Sacred Kingfisher are occasionally recorded in the WA and WCR. They normally scan the ground from an exposed perch for insects (grasshoppers), reptiles, frogs, snakes and other small vertebrates, the larger bird taking the larger prey. Of interest is the fact that the Sacred Kingfisher will also perch on rocky foreshores or reefs taking marine animals.

The Apostle Bird, one of the communal breeders in Australia, visited the WA from September to December 1972 to 1975, breeding in 1972. They usually live in eucalypt woodland and mallee in inland NSW and Victoria, extending from there into South Australia with an outpost in Northern Territory. They are never far from water, needing it to build their mud nests. They are opportunistic feeders eating mainly insects and seeds and become very confiding near picnic and camping grounds, utilising human food scraps. They have been recorded catching and killing mice. They may or may not appear again in the Adelaide suburbs.

### **Nectar feeders**

One would expect that the Banksia around the dam would attract the New Holland Honeyeater and the Little Wattlebird, both recognised banksia lovers. It is suspected that the Noisy Miner, well known for its aggressive behaviour, will reduce these and other honeyeaters to low numbers. The Red Wattlebird, probably too large for the Noisy Miner to bully, is unusually low in numbers in the WA for a suburban location with an abundance of flowering eucalypts.

The Purple-crowned Lorikeet, smaller than the Rainbow and Musk Lorikeets, visits both sites occasionally to feed on nectar and pollen. Experienced bird-watchers use the calls of these three lorikeets for identification.

The WCR seems to provide more attractive habitats for the honeyeaters with the: Yellow-faced Honeyeater, White-plumed Honeyeater, Brown-headed Honeyeater, White-naped Honeyeater, Crescent Honeyeater and Eastern Spinebill present at medium to low density. In spite of these species being taxonomically grouped as honeyeaters, they exploit other food sources, eg insects (by leaf gleaning or hawking), manna, fruit, honeydew and sometimes taking insects, etc from the ground. The sources of nectar vary from the eucalypts, heath, eg *Astroloma* sp, and garden plants.

Some of these honeyeaters may drift down into the WA, to reward the diligent bird-watcher.

### **Leaf and/or bark gleaners**

The less common species in this community are the Rufous Whistler, Golden Whistler, Grey Shrike-thrush, Varied Sittella, Spotted Pardalote and Silvereye.

Two of these species were recorded in the WA by J Saunders (1983, 1985), viz the Rufous Whistler, once in 1972 and 3 or 4 Silvereye in June to December. The others, as well as these two, have been recorded in the WCR.

The cuckoos are members of this community and the Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo and the Fan-tailed Cuckoo, both being nomadic, will occasionally be recorded during in spring and summer in the WCR. Both species have diagnostic calls, parasitise fairy-wrens, thornbills and flycatchers and feed on insects and caterpillars, including the hairy variety.

### **Generalists**

The Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, also readily identified by its characteristic call, like the cuckoos, is a caterpillar-eater, but also feeds on insects, beetles, seeds and vegetable matter. This species is occasionally seen around Adelaide and J Saunders (1982) reports this species present in the WA in July 1976 and 1981; it is more common in the WCR.

### **Specialists**

The Mistletoebird, because of its wide ranging nomadic habit, searching for flowering mistletoe, is occasionally recorded in the Adelaide suburbs, the WA and the WCR. While the main food is mistletoe berries, other foods are used, such as insects and the fruit of other plants including privet, hawthorn, cotoneaster and saltbush.

It assists the distribution of mistletoe by turning sideways to deposit the sticky seed on its perch. I have seen a dead acacia bush literally festooned with dead mistletoe seeds from an adjacent live acacia liberally infested with mistletoe.

### **Historic records**

An unpublished list of bird species observed in the WA by Professor I R Falconer, dated 1963, illustrates their decline in the Adelaide foothills. He lists White-browed Babbler, Brown Treecreeper, Grey Butcherbird, Striated Thornbill and Crested Shrike-tit, which are now unlikely to be observed in WA or the WCR.

### **Epilogue**

The material in both parts of the article should help novice birdwatchers to identify and appreciate the bird species in the Waite Arboretum and the Waite Conservation Reserve. I suggest that their interest be put to use by recording the birds observed by using the record scheme and sheets available from the curator.

Saunders, J (1983). Birds of the Waite Arboretum: 1972-1981. *South Australian Ornithologist*, 29, 40-41.

Saunders, J (1995). Birds of the Waite Arboretum. *Bird Talk*, Published by the Adelaide Ornithologists Club Inc, Vol 3 Part 7. 137-138.

M Possingham

## NEW MEMBERS

A warm welcome to the following new members:

Jenny Boyer, Glen Iris, Vic.  
 Heather and Peter Cooper, Malvern, SA.  
 Megan Davies, Lower Mitcham, SA.  
 Sue Wylie-Foster, Lindfield, NSW.

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS AND DIARY DATES

**Monday, February 12, 6.00 pm**

### General Meeting of Friends

10.30 Heinz Froehlingsdorf, Secretary of the Palm and Cycad Society, will conduct an expedition through the new Palm and Cycad Walk. This will be followed by "drinks and nibbles" at about 7.00 pm. Those attending, please meet at the Palm and Cycad Collection at 6.00 pm. Members of the Palm and Cycad society have also been invited and those attending will certainly notice how the new walk has enhanced the water-course. Please pass the enclosed flyer to a friend.

**Sunday, March 18th, 10.30 am**

Although this is not a Friends' event, it may be of interest. Lynn Elzinger-Henry, who has won many awards for her fruit wines, will conduct a guided walk through the Sensory Garden, Rose Garden and Arboretum pointing out plants from which wine can be made. This will be followed by a tasting in Urrbrae House of wines Lynn has made from the fruits of the Sensory Garden and Waite Arboretum, including her 2000 Silver Medal *Butia capitata* wine. This is a chance to tantalise your tastebuds with some really exotic flavours. The event will be fundraising for the Garden of Discovery – Science Discovery Trail. There will be a charge and booking forms will be sent out shortly.

**A.G.M.**

**Monday, April 9, 7.00pm**

The A.G.M. will be followed by an illustrated address by Richard J.-P. Davies, who will talk about Mound Springs in Northern South Australia and the vegetation surrounding them.

## ART EXHIBITION

**Ian Roberts and Vida Pearson**

**"Beautiful Birds and Botany"**

**Opening : Sunday March 4, 2001, 11am, to March 18.**

Those of us fortunate enough to visit Ian's Medika Gallery in Blyth last year will surely remember his artistry. He beautifully and accurately portrays Australia's birds and flowers. He particularly enjoys painting the larger flowering eucalypts, together with the bush birds that visit these and other native flowers.

Vida Louise Pearson spent her early life in various Victorian, South Australian and Tasmanian country towns. She finished her secondary education in Dubbo in 1976. Her subsequent life has been even more geographically spaced, as she has travelled widely both in Australia, Asia, the Middle East and Europe.



In 1982 Vida began a three year Art/Craft Diploma, majoring in print-making and drawing, at the North Adelaide School of Art. In 1985 she moved, with her partner, to a five acre bush block in Victoria, where she has her studio. Her works have been widely exhibited in galleries in several Australian states and complements those of Ian.

An invitation will be sent out shortly together with a flyer. Our surveys have shown that word of mouth is the best form of advertisement; please give the flyer to a friend or post it in your library or community centre.

## NOTICES

**Request for volunteers.** Mrs Cicely Bungey is organising the manning of the sales desk for the Roberts/Pearson Exhibition. She needs quite a large number of helpers, each for several hours. If any one of you is able and willing to assist in this way, please contact Cicely directly...Her phone number is **8271 5720**. It is by mounting exhibitions such as this that the Friends are able to make money, thereby assisting significantly the work within the Arboretum.

**Sunday Guided Walks.** Free guided walks, approximately 90 minutes in length, are given at 11.00am on the first Sunday of every month. Participants should meet first at Urrbrae House. These walks would be of particular interest to any new members, unfamiliar with the Arboretum.

**Membership Renewal.** Friends are reminded that our membership year is the calendar year. This means that subscriptions for the year 2001 are now due.

The amount due is: Single membership, \$10

Family membership, \$18

Please send subscriptions to      The Treasurer, Friends of the Waite Arboretum.  
c/- Dr J. Gardner, Urrbrae House.  
Waite Campus, PMB 1, Glen Osmond, 5064.  
A membership renewal form is enclosed.

## THOUGHTS ON TREES

The true meaning of life is to plant trees,  
under whose shade you do not expect to sit.

Nelson Henderson

