

Friends of The Australian Arid Lands Botanic Garden

Port Augusta Incorporated | ABN 72 979 332 415

Newsletter



Sept 2025
Issue #206



From Left: Grey Fantail, White-plumed Honeyeater, Zebra Finches, Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater
- Andrew Kerr, at the AALBG at the Bluebush Bird Hide

President's Report by John Zwar OAM CF President



John Zwar

Hello Friends,

The Garden is looking very dry as the long drought continues, despite a little rain, and the damage to vegetation caused by kangaroos and feral animals including goats and rabbits is evident in some areas. This really highlights the need to complete the vermin proof fence around the Garden by closing the gap just inland from the Flinders Red Cliff above the Spencer Gulf boundary as an urgent priority. The Friends funded this vermin proof boundary fence (approx. \$130,000) and I understand have most of the materials needed to close the gap of about 1 km. Hopefully Council will approve

this soon so the work can be completed before hot weather returns. The toilet facility near the Arid Explorers Children's Garden is slowly nearing completion with Friends providing towards the cost. With increased visitor numbers in winter Chris Nayda reports that Friends Garden Guides are being kept busy with tours. Chris along with Jan Hopwood have been seeking new corporate members for the Garden and have signed up several. We are also keen to build up Friends memberships so please ask other interested people you know to join the "Friends" and support our wonderful Garden in this way. Our regular band of Friends volunteers continues to work in various roles at the AALBG helping the small number of paid staff keep the garden well presented. They assist with plant propagation and nursery work, providing guided tours, laying paving, building retaining walls, garden maintenance including pruning, mulching, weeding, repairing and renewing drip irrigation systems and other work as required. If you live in or near you may like to join our friendly volunteers and assist with some of these tasks.



Friends building the replacement vermin proof fence in 2018. The gap above the Spencer Gulf boundary still needs to be closed to exclude kangaroos, emus, goats, rabbits, foxes and feral cats to protect the vegetation, bird life and small native animals in the Garden. B Reichelt.

Best wishes to all Friends and supporters of the AALBG. We hope to see you if able to make it to our AGM in September.



Patricia Slattery



Patricia Sweeping for Bees

My name is Patricia Slattery, and I am a PhD student, at Flinders University, who really likes native bees (and a captive audience to listen to me ramble about them). I grew up in Quorn and was lucky enough to spend a large part of my formative years running around the arid lands in remote and unique landscapes, with some amazing flora and fauna. The interest I developed in bees came from a very unsuccessful experiment observing honeybees for my bachelor's degree; the fact I enjoyed it without any useful data suggested I was on the right path. This project led me to my Honours on sweat bees, then Masters looking at the continental visitation habits of native bees, and now PhD, where I am exploring drivers of diversification in our bee fauna.

The combination of growing up in the environment I did, and my interest in bees, led me to specialising in a very Australiana-like group, the euryglossines, or eucalypt bees. These bees are diverse and only found in Australia, with a preference for eucalypts and related flora (hence, their common name). Researching this preference is what led me to understanding more about our native bees and their pollination/visitation habits, on a larger scale. Most experiments on this

subject are at the species level, looking at interactions between a single insect and/or a single plant. What interested me most was the larger scale relationships between bees and flora, and testing for any potential reliance on each other. For example, if bees only visit one type of flora, then if that flora goes extinct, or changes its flowering time, then it all has flow-on effects, especially if it's happening on the larger scale.

I've since explored the pollination habits of a lot of native bees and seen the differences between different groups. This included learning more about the needs of different flora, and the unique ways that bees have evolved to address this. These interactions are what I will be talking about in my presentation, along with a more general introduction to our native bees.

Australian bees are so much more interesting than people expect, and a crucial part of maintaining a healthy and productive ecosystem, though they are at risk in the current climate. This is part of why I am so often spouting bee facts at whoever will listen, and whoever wants to help. I'm really looking forward to your questions and introducing you to some of the coolest bees in the world!

NEXT MEETING & ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Date and Time:

Saturday 6th September 2025 at 1.00pm

Venue: WMC Meeting Room, AALBG

Guest Speaker & Topic:

Patricia Slattery 'Native Bee Pollinators'

Bird Talk from The Garden by Peter Langdon

The "dry spell" continues (I have only recorded 21mm to end of June) but still seeing a few birds.

June produced a few surprises. Five White fronted Chats (*Epthianura albifrons*) were seen briefly at the Chenopod Bird Hide at the start of the month, but they did not hang around, just passing through. (No green pick, no caterpillars, no Chats).

A few of our regular winter wanderers have been present, at least two Grey Fantails (*Rhipidura albiscapa ssp alisteri*) seen and a female Red-capped Robin (*Petroica goodenovii*), an old bird by the colour and extent of her red cap.

Two, maybe three, Grey-fronted Honeyeaters (*Ptilotula plumula*) were seen feeding in a flowering *Eucalyptus socialis* on the edge of the mallee region. This is only the third recording of this species that I know of for the Garden.

A female plumaged Rufous Whistler (*Pachycephala rufiventris*) was seen around the Sandhill Bird Hide which is a regular winter species to the Garden. But what really rattled my cage was a full coloured male Western Golden Whistler (*Pachycephala occidentalis*) in the Gawler Ranges Region at the end of June. I have seen female and juveniles of this species in the Garden a few times but not a coloured-up male, Gorgeous!

Going to and from home to the Garden I have seen a small flock of Pink Cockatoos (*Lophochroa Leadbeater*), also four Emu (*Dromais novaehollandiae*) going into the Bunnings Hardware site obviously unaware it has not opened yet.



Grey-fronted Honeyeater



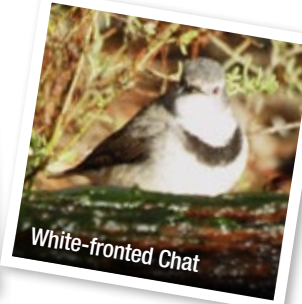
Red-Capped Robin



Western Golden Whistler



Western Golden Whistler



White-fronted Chat

News from Adelaide

by Anne Campbell

The Adelaide Botanic Gardens are revamping their Eremophila garden and using gravel as the mulch as shown together with the new signs as well as the temporary advisory one.



B.I.G. FAALBG Bonsai Interest Group by Jim Hayward

During June 2025 I had great fun preparing and presenting a series of Bonsai workshops to a small group at the Encounter Bay Community Centre in Victor Harbor. Each of the four sessions went for an hour and a half:

Week 1: Introduction to Bonsai and potting mixes ... there are many potting mix recipes but I use 2 part of Australian native potting mix, 1 part perlite, 1 part zeolite, and add some coconut coir.

Week 2: Building your own Bonsai ... it can be a little bit scary taking a plant, removing a lot of the soil, and fitting it into a bonsai pot. And did you know that pots are 'male' (square) and 'female' (with curves). At least, that is what I have been told!

Week 3: Bonsai care and maintenance ... because plants die if they don't get enough water... and if they get too much water... and then there is the pruning and wiring.

Week 4: Australian Natives as Bonsai ... we looked at Acacia, Banksia, Brachychiton, Callitris, Eucalyptus, Eremophila, Grevillea, Hakea, Kunzea, Melaleuca, and even my Pearl Bluebush. And you can be sure the Arid Lands Botanic Garden got more good publicity!

Each participant potted on and took home a beginner bonsai and an Australian native bonsai ... here are some of them looking pleased with themselves.



Peter's Plants by Peter Hall

Acacia undoolyana is a shrub or tree that grows in the East MacDonnell Ranges and is listed as vulnerable, its major threat being bushfires.

It can grow from 1 to 15 metres in height, and its phyllodes are sickle-shaped giving it its common name, Sickle-leaf Wattle.

It was found on the cattle station, Undoolya Station, hence the name, and it is where the main population grows.

As can be seen from the photograph it can be rather magnificent, flowering from June to September, with a yellow cylindrical spike.



Acacia Undoolyana



The weather has continued to be dry with a couple of small showers which at least washed the dust off the plants.

Volunteers, supervised by Garden staff member Perry Jones, continue to propagate plants for sale in the Café Gift shop. This team regularly produces a variety of quality plants.

Christine Nayda and her team have recently managed an increased number of coach, school, and visitor tours, with demand higher in the past few months than in previous years.



Garden Volunteers have completed irrigation inspection boxes, mulched the old Eremophila Garden, and begun upgrading the Arid Smart Gardens, starting with Flinders Courtyard. They have also performed general maintenance such as pruning and weeding.



Plumbing for the toilet block is pending. Once done, Garden Staff and Volunteers will landscape the area and add paths, preparing the facility for opening.



Book Review by Anne Murrie

Down the Garden Path: from bald hill to bush and native garden, by Judy Baghurst, 2024

Judy was on the list of speakers at the local library and I was intrigued as she had been a friend of and fellow chorister with my mother many years ago, so I went along.

Judy and her husband Andrew had for many years grown seedlings for Trees for Life, and eventually bought a small block near Port Elliot to actually plant some. They had great success and were inspired to get more land, so they sold the small block and in 1997 bought 21 hectares next door to it. The block was degraded pasture containing ancient olives, boxhorn, briar rose and blackberry. There were very few remnant native plants.

The book outlines, in beautiful prose, poetry and photographs, the journey of both revegetating the larger block, and creating a smaller native garden around the house they eventually built there. There is no water supplied to the block so they have invested heavily in large rain water tanks to provide water for the garden. Water, via rainfall, has been extremely variable and one of the greatest challenges. Judy outlines some of the battles with invasive weeds, a lot of rock in the earth, high winds, and rabbits. There have also been successes and failures with a range of different plants. Judy describes their

delight as the increasing canopy and ground covers have attracted many birds, lizards, frogs, kangaroos and echidnas.

The SA government set up an award scheme for gardens in 2006, during the millennial drought, to encourage use of native plants and reduce water use. Judy and Andrew submitted an entry and won the inaugural Home Garden Prize. This led to several features in SA Life magazine and an invitation to participate in the Open Garden Scheme in 2010. The garden was also featured on Gardening Australia with Sophie Thomson in Sept 2021. This episode is still available. A joy to read.



DIARY DATES

FRIENDS MEETINGS 2025

1.00pm WMC Meeting Room, AALBG

- **6th September:** Patricia Slattery
Topic: 'Native Bee Pollinators'
- **6th December:** Brian Reichelt
Topic: 'Achievements in the Garden 2025'

FIELD TRIPS

Bird Watching Field Trips for the Birds SA PORT AUGUSTA GROUP

Friday 12th - Saturday 13th - Sunday 14th September:

Gluepot Reserve.

Meet at the Gluepot Visitor Centre at 12.00pm (Camp out. Facilities available. Costs apply.)

Sunday 12th October:

Bernie's Block, Mambray Creek.

Meet at the Augusta Highway Parking Bay at 8.00am.

Sunday 9th November:

Whyalla Wetlands,

Effluent Ponds & Cowleds Landing.

Meet at the Whyalla Wetlands at 8:30am.

Please bring: binoculars, sturdy footwear, hat, sun protection, morning tea and lunch.

Contact: Bernie 0419 863 834
b.haase55@outlook.com



2025-2026 Corporate Members

The Friends of the Australian Arid Lands Botanic Garden, Port Augusta Inc acknowledges its wonderful Corporate Members and requests that you support these businesses whenever you are able.



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We also welcome any additional business owners/ managers supporting us by becoming Corporate Members. For more information, contact Brian Reichelt on 0418 896 995 or email breich@bigpond.net.au

Reminder Are you financial?

Renewals for Memberships for the 2025-26 year were due 1st July, 2025. Discounts for the purchase of meals and gifts in the café and gift shop only apply to the Friends Membership card holder/s and cannot be transferred to family and friends who are not members.

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Issued September 2025 by Friends of the Australian Arid Lands Botanic Garden, Port Augusta Inc. Designed, Produced and Supported by Multi Print SA Port Augusta ~ Telephone: (08) 8641 0900

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Individual (due annually 1st July).....\$30
Includes 1 membership card

Family (due annually 1st July).....\$50
2 adults & dependant children under 18
Includes 2 membership cards

Corporate (due annually 1st July).....\$250
Includes 1 membership card per business

To join or renew please fill in form and make payment to:

The Secretary
The Friends of the Australian Arid Lands Botanic Garden Inc
PO Box 2040, Port Augusta South Australia 5700

Cheques: Please make membership cheques payable to
The Friends of the Australian Arid Lands Botanic Garden Port Augusta Inc.

Direct Debit Details: Pleased use your name as reference
BSB: 035 065 Account: 164604 Account Name: FAALBG

Online: visit www.friendsaalbg.org.au/membership

Please tick a box: New Membership
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Enclosed is my: Subscription \$ _____ . _____

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