

Friends of The Australian Arid Lands Botanic Garden

Port Augusta Incorporated | ABN 72 979 332 415

Newsletter



Dec 2025
Issue #207



From Left: *Hakea minyma*, *Eremophila platycalyx*, *Hakea divaricata* - Brian Reichelt

President's Report by John Zwar OAM CF President



John Zwar

Hello Friends,

Despite ongoing very dry conditions in the north of the state the Garden has had many visitors, both individuals and bus tour groups, so our Friends Garden Guides have been kept busy. Many tourists visited on their way to or from sight-seeing at Lake Eyre which flooded following huge rainfalls in western Queensland last year. Following a request from Council the Friends members were asked to provide comments on the value of the AALBG so the City Manager could include relevant examples in a letter to State Government seeking and justifying ongoing funding to cover the Garden's budget shortfall. Subsequently I contacted 30 noted environmentalists who know and support the AALBG and in the short time frame available I received 14 excellent and varied responses which highlighted the Garden's role and value, so hopefully the request for ongoing funding will be successful. Recently the Friends received \$29,000, an unexpected bequest from the deceased estate of Mr Christopher Patrick Smith, through a solicitor at Elizabeth. We do not know Mr Smith but he obviously had a love for the Garden and we greatly appreciate this contribution. Several weeks ago a Mediterranean Garden Society Member, Anne Martin had an open garden organised through Open Gardens SA where her amazing mosaic art works, within her garden of native and Mediterranean plants were on show. MGS and OGSA members assisted at the entry gate, with serving teas, and on the plant stall, assisted by FAALBG members Anne Campbell, Anne Murrie and me, as the garden owner (Anne Martin) had generously agreed to donate part of the proceeds to the Friends of the AALBG. Subsequently \$2,897.50 was received by the Friends – thanks Anne. Member Elizabeth Gazzard is reviewing FAALBG documents and papers with a view to documenting some of the

Friends history which is a huge task. She is keen to focus on the human interest aspect of Friends membership over the years. The new toilet facility located near the Arid Explorers Children's Garden has been built, but the architects did not include gutters, which the Friends have since paid for; entry paths are to be laid and final approvals granted before this building can be used! Members Chris Nayda and Jan Hopwood have been busy walking the streets and successfully gained a number of new corporate members for the Friends. Well done ladies! Although it seems very early I wish all our Friends and supporters a very enjoyable Christmas season and New Year. We look forward to seeing some of you at our December meeting.

Best wishes, John Zwar.



Brian Reichelt

NEXT MEETING / CHRISTMAS MEETING

Date and Time:

Saturday 6th December 2025 at 1.00pm

Venue: WMC Meeting Room, AALBG

Guest Speaker & Topic:

Brian Reichelt, 'Achievements in the Garden in 2025'

Long-time Friend of the AALBG, Brian Reichelt is a tireless worker and passionate supporter of the Garden. Using photos to illustrate his points, Brian will outline what Friends have achieved in the past twelve months in partnership with Garden Staff. You will be amazed and delighted at the scale of contribution achieved by so few Friends.

DIARY DATES

FRIENDS MEETINGS 2025/2026

1.00pm WMC Meeting Room, AALBG

- **6th December:** Brian Reichelt
Topic: 'Achievements in the Garden 2025'
- **7th March:** Marine Ecologist and Educator Janine Baker from Whyalla, 'Marine grasses and The Great Southern Reef'
- **6th June and 5th September (ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING):**
Guest Speakers yet to be confirmed.
- **5th December:** Brian Reichelt
'Achievements in the Garden in 2026'

FIELD TRIPS

Bird Watching Field Trips for the Birds SA PORT AUGUSTA GROUP

Sunday 9th November:

Whyalla Wetlands, Effluent Ponds & Cowleds Landing. Meet at the Whyalla Wetlands at 8.30am.

Sunday 14th December:

Australian Arid Lands Botanic Garden. Meet in the Car Park at 7.30am (Christmas lunch in the Café with a Showing of the best birding photos for 2025.)

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

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

Bird Talk from The Garden by Peter Langdon

Rain remains sparse, but over 40 millimetres in July brought a welcome touch of green to the landscape. In recent months, groups of up to 15 Pied Honeyeaters (*Certhionys variegatus*), along with White-winged Trillers (*Lalage tricolour*) and small flocks of Masked Woodswallows (*Artamus personatus*), have appeared—these sightings are typical for this time of year.

We hosted a group of Churchill Fellows for a guided bird walk at the Garden in August, resulting in a productive morning during which over 25 species were observed. Notable sightings included flagship species such as the Chirruping Wedgebill (*Psephodes cristatus*) and the Redthroat (*Pyrrholaemus brunneus*).

Southern Whiteface (*Aphelocephala lencopsis*) fledged four young at the Chenopod Bird Hide, while Willie Wagtails (*Rhipidura leucophrys*) had three fledglings in the courtyard. Australian Ravens (*Corvus coronoides*) and Welcome Swallows (*Hirunda neoxena*) were also present. Chirruping Wedgebills fed an active fledgling near the water treatment plant, observed by Southern Eyre Bird Club visitors in September. Additionally, a Black Falcon (*Falco subniger*) was seen near the Arid Smart Gardens, and several Crimson Chats (*Epthianura tricolor*) were spotted around Yorkey's Crossing.

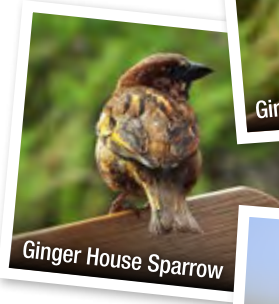
White Winged Trillers, Red Backed Kingfishers (*Todycamphus pyrrhopygius*), Rainbow Bee-eaters (*Merops ornatus*), a few Budgerigars (*Melopsittacus undulatus*), and Cockatiels (*Nymphicus hollandicus*)

are still present, though numbers have declined due to conditions. Galahs (*Elophus roseicapilla*) and Little Corellas (*Cacatua sanguinea*) are now feeding on green Acacia pods.

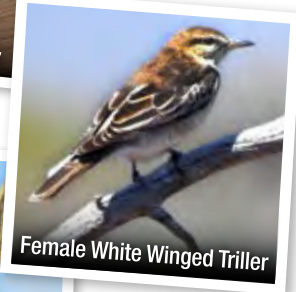
Over the past two or three years, we've observed several House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) with prominent ginger colouring. Initially thought to be due to environmental factors, we now suspect it's a colour morph, as a breeding pair produced young with the same trait, which has intensified with age (see photo of ginger male). Is this the first recorded instance of this morph, considering that white feathering has appeared in various intensities across Australia for years?



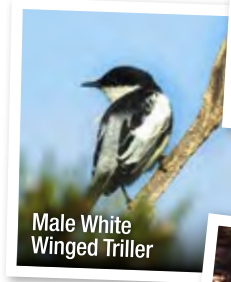
Ginger House Sparrow



Ginger House Sparrow



Female White Winged Triller



Male White Winged Triller



Immature Chirruping Wedgebill



Southern Eyre Bird Club \$100 Donation to the Friends



Southern Eyre Bird Club

Guide Report by Chris Nayda

We have had 2-3 coaches (each with approx. 30 people) per week over the last 4 months with all of them from Sydney, Brisbane, Geelong and Melbourne. Needing 3 guides per coach has kept us very busy, but we love every minute of it as they simply love the Garden, calling it The Real Australia.

Also our normal tours every week day at 10am have also been busy. I think the Garden has been FOUND. I expect next year to be even busier so...

WE NEED MORE GUIDES AS A PRIORITY.

If you know anyone who would be interested please let me know.

On 17th October we had 32 Botanic Garden Guides from Botanic Gardens across New Zealand and Australia, including Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Geelong, The Gold Coast, Perth, Canberra and Hobart, on a pre-conference tour before the Guide Conference in Adelaide on Monday 20th October 2024. It was a great day for all of us.

This has been by far the busiest we have ever been. The Garden looks wonderful with wattles, eucalypts, grevilleas, eremophilas and crotalaris (just to name a few) flowering, and we thank the staff and volunteers for all the work they have done to get it to the standard it is.



Myles McClure on Tour with Group of School Children



Irene Miller with a Tour Group



Christine Nayda with a Tour Group



Botanic Garden Tour Guides from around Australia

Peter's Plants by Peter Hall

Eremophila obovata ssp. *obovata* is a small dainty shrub which grows to no more than 40cm in height. The leaves are ovate, or egg-shaped (hence the name), and hairy, making them appear greyish. The flowers are purple.

The photos used in this article were taken on the roadside near Barrow Creek in the Northern Territory in 2009. The plants appeared to be suckering as there were many plants in a small area. I have since returned to the same place and there was not a plant in sight.



Eremophila obovata ssp. *obovata*



It never stops at the Garden; Propagation Supervisor Perry and all his wonderful volunteers have been busy propagating cuttings and seed and potting up plants for sale. Perry has also grafted several rare plant cuttings for planting in the Garden.

The outside Garden Staff ably led by Supervisor Tyler and Gardener Nikki along with volunteers have been extremely busy due to the wonderful rain we received in early September which of course caused a large increase in weed growth throughout the Garden. The weeds that were being targeted were Turnip Weed (*Rapistrum rugosum*), Onion Weed (*Asphodelus fistulosus*), Stinking Roger (*Monoculus monstrosus*) and Three Corner Jack (*Emex australis*). These were all manually removed from the Garden proper by hand, with the outer chenopod areas requiring hand removal of the Onion Weed, Stinking Roger and Three Corner Jack. The turnip weed which was in full flower was low whipper snip cut to remove the flower stems and resulting seed heads so that no seed set could occur.

The group began upgrading the Arid Smart Gardens, starting with Flinders and then Mallee Region (awaiting table and seats). Work is ongoing in the



Coastal Garden Under Restoration



Flinders Ranges Garden

Coastal Region, with the remaining gardens to follow. Peter and Mike have pruned the old man Saltbush hedge in the Explorer Garden. Once these projects are completed, focus will shift to finishing the path network and landscaping near the new toilet area.

New volunteers are always welcome; contact the Friends if you're in or near Port Augusta to learn how to become a volunteer in the AALBG.



Mallee Region Garden under Restoration



Staff and Volunteers in the Mallee Region Garden

Acacia papyrocarpa, Western Myall by John Zwar

Acacia papyrocarpa, or Western Myall is the Emblem of The Australian Arid Lands Botanic Garden at Port Augusta. It occurs naturally in the Garden on undulating sandy loam dunes with other arid zone shrubby woodland species. There are approximately 1,350 *Acacia* species world-wide with about 1,000 found in Australia. Many acacias are short lived, but some, especially those from arid regions can be very long lived. Western Myall is thought to live for around 500 years and sometimes even longer. It is slow growing and has very dense hard wood, a beautiful dark red when polished. It is used for wood craft and ornaments. In station country the wood has been used for fence posts and house stumps and is very long lasting. It has also been used as firewood and a log can last for 24 hours before being burnt to ash.

It is widespread through much of northern and western South Australia and extends well into the southern arid zone of Western Australia in areas of 150 to 300mm average annual rainfall, growing on alkaline limestone soils, clay soils and sandy loams, often in association with *chenopods* (saltbush and bluebush) and low growing open shrubby woodland and near salt lakes. It grows from 2 to 10 metres tall and at its best develops into a very attractive tree, often with an umbrella shaped crown sometimes drooping to ground level. Some forms are weeping while others are more upright. It is usually multi-stemmed with rough, grey, fissured bark. The *phyllodes* (leaves) are 4 to 12 cms long, thin and with a slight soft point. They are grey-green in colour, flat and straight. In November, particularly if there has been good rain, a flush of beautiful silvery coloured new foliage is produced, gradually fading to the duller grey-green. Bright, yellow, spherical wattle flowers are produced in spring, (August to November) and are prolific in good seasons, followed by thin, flat seed pods containing small, black seeds. In very dry country the root system extends well beyond the canopy of the tree with some near surface roots able to take advantage of occasional light rains

which do not soak into soil deeply.

Brian Powell, a foundation member of The Friends of the Australian Arid Lands Botanic Garden and a well-known conservationist, pastoralist and tree planter in outback South Australia, called Western Myall, "the Rolls Royce of bush trees". Large well grown specimens are particularly impressive in their harsh arid surroundings. They produce shade and shelter.

Western Myall is propagated by seed which needs hot water treatment before sowing unless sown fresh. Although naturally very slow growing they will grow faster with some irrigation and can make fine specimens in dry gardens with very alkaline soils. In Roxby Downs, when the new town was developed, particular importance was given to retaining mature Western Myall trees with houses being sited between them, roads and subdivisions designed around them, and some attractive groves being retained as urban parks. They are tolerant of extreme temperatures with Roxby Downs experiencing temperatures as low as -6 degrees C some winters and up to 49 degrees C some summers. With a warming drying climate in our part of Australia we may see Western Myall being planted more widely as an attractive amenity tree tolerant of very harsh conditions.



Photo by J Zwar

Many of the naturally occurring Western Myalls at the AALBG are low and bushy without a main trunk or trunks.

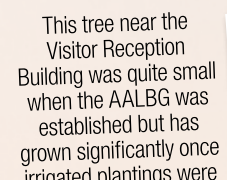


Photo by J Zwar

This tree near the Visitor Reception Building was quite small when the AALBG was established but has grown significantly once irrigated plantings were established around it.



Photo by J Zwar



Photo by J Zwar

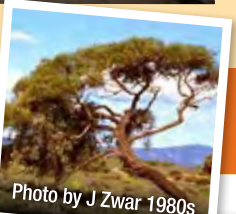


Photo by J Zwar 1980s

Western Myall at The Australian Arid Lands Botanic Garden Pt Augusta, Mount Brown, Flinders Ranges in background.

Western Myall prolific flowers in a particularly good season AALBG.



Photo by J Zwar

Retained Western Myall Roxby Downs, incorporated into front garden when town was built. Note beautiful silvery foliage.



Photo by J Zwar

Beautiful Umbrella shaped Western Myall in open woodland, Andamooka Road, near Roxby Downs.

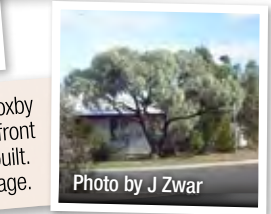


Photo by J Zwar

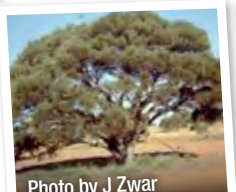


Photo by J Zwar

Western Myall in bush near Roxby Downs.



Photo by J Zwar

Young Western Myall in full bloom at AALBG

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.



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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Join or Renew

BECOME A FRIEND

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: Please 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
 Renewal of Membership

Enclosed is my: Subscription \$ _____ . _____

TOTAL \$ _____ . _____

Name: (Dr/Mr/Mrs/Ms) _____

2nd Name: (Dr/Mr/Mrs/Ms) _____
(Family Membership)

Address: _____

Postcode: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Date: _____

Donate

Donations are gratefully accepted. Donations of \$2 and over are tax deductible. Receipts will be posted with the next newsletter.

Cheques: Please make Donation cheques payable to The Trustee for FAALBG Donation Account

Direct Debit Details: Please use your name as reference & notify via email (friends@aalg.sa.gov.au) of any direct debits.

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Online: visit www.friendsaalbg.org.au/sponsor-us

Donation \$ _____ . _____

