

# Newsletter

For Friends of the Christchurch Botanic Gardens Inc  
To Promote, Protect, & Preserve

No 57, Summer 2003

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Dear Friends'

What an exciting time of year to be involved with the Christchurch Botanic Gardens. There are new ideas, positive happenings and a sense that things are on the move. We are looking for some additional leadership in the organisation, as I will be standing down at the end of this financial year. In the past, we have had a vice-president waiting in the wings to take over but at the last AGM the position was not filled.

We had a wonderful plant sale on October 18th. It was set around the palm tree outside the Information Centre which proved ideal. The enthusiasm and social interaction during the day was all part of being a Friend of the Christchurch Botanic Gardens. Thank you to all who helped to make this day such a grand occasion.

Your committee has set up a number of subcommittees to strengthen the running of our organisation. If anyone is keen to be involved on the Publicity, Marketing, Programme, Education or Newsletter subcommittees please contact me, as we need additional ideas. It is not onerous work or expensive of your time.

The guiding group has banked its first \$300 of earnings and looks forward to a summer of guiding tourists, locals, friends, family and school groups so please spread the word. This is a group of united, focused and enthused members, who are keen to take groups at other times than the regular walks (1.30-3 p.m. daily). I am also keen to have our guides develop their own specialised walks for members.

Like all voluntary organisations there are concerns for the safety of members and we, as Friends have to make sure we are a working within the safety rules and guidelines of the Botanic Gardens. Name badges are a must especially with a greater number of volunteers. This will mean that all regular Gardens' staff will know who is working in the Gardens.

Inside this newsletter there is a membership card for those who are financial members. It is valid until the end of this financial year 30 June 2004. It will enable you to get a ten percent discount at the Information Centre.

Enjoy our Botanic Gardens and your own home gardening.

Faye Fleming

**FCBG**

PO Box 2553  
Christchurch

### **Reminder for Bus Outing Sat 22 November 2003**

Visit to Lavender Downs (Virginia McNaughton and Dennis Matthews) and The Kitchen Garden (Diane Leighton). See booking slip on Coming Events Insert. Enquiries to Alison Fox Phone 9424989



# Gardens' News

### In the Gardens. Curator's Comments.

I have been on an interesting learning curve since July when I moved into the Botanic Gardens, the first non-horticultural curator to do so. However, what I have found is a very dedicated and hard working staff, passionate about what they are doing.

It is a great change to be working in the city. I was made aware of the very special nature of what we have in the Botanic Gardens and Hagley Park when Jeremy, the operations manager, mentioned that he had an enquiry about whether Hagley Park was the world's second largest inner city green space after Central Park, New York. We do not know but it is an interesting thought that relatively few cities have such a large area including a botanic garden so close to the city centre. Perhaps someone in the Friends has the answer.

This has been a good spring season and the annual displays, cherry trees, bluebells and azaleas are in full flower at present. I hope that you have been down here to see them. I am only just realising the amount of hard work that goes into creating these and other displays. For example, just to get the begonia displays in order means many days of hard work behind the scenes, dividing and growing the plants on, and preparing them for display. Then there is the renewing of the herbaceous border, work on new beds by the playground, river bank planting by the west entrance and so on ... it never stops!

You will have noticed that the Cuninghams House has been closed for some weeks and that the other conservatories have been closed for lesser periods. There has been a major exercise in painting, repairing and tidying up these, a new floor in the Townend House, and refurbishing and structural checking and repairing of Cuninghams. A lot of overdue repair work has now been completed, glass repaired, reinforcing steel strengthened, new doors upstairs, and a new area of concrete outside the main door. As a key focal part of the Gardens the conservatory area is one where we see possibilities for development especially as education and conservation functions of the Gardens are considered.

Jeremy Hawker has joined the Botanic Gardens

staff as the Operations Manager. He brings a lot of experience within council at the project and financial level, patience and a measure of humour. His appointment will help greatly in smoothing the running of the gardens, Hagley Park and Mona Vale, and in forward planning and setting priorities. With other Council staff we are working towards a presentation to the Council in a few weeks time, based largely on an analysis of the Gardens' present facilities and functions and what the future needs will be. Two of the important areas from my point of view, are the garden records and collections and this is a priority in working on a new strategy for the Botanic Gardens. We have to know what we have got, whether it is in the right place, what it is being used for, and its priority for the Gardens as a whole.

Remember that Mona Vale is linked with the Botanic Gardens and I plan to develop closer collection linkages between the two. Shara Barclay has responsibility for Mona Vale maintenance and we have been talking about development needs here, e.g., refurbishing the formal pond and the use of the bathhouse. I have a particular interest in the fernery, but as some may have heard access to the fernery is now cut off by the collapse of a stretch of brick boundary wall close to the entrance to the fernery. This collapse emphasizes the responsibilities that have to be exercised regarding public safety these days, something I will write more about at a later date in relation to tree aging.

In the meantime - visit us, appreciate the plants and enjoy the Gardens!

David Given

### Information Centre Displays

A reminder, wheel chairs are available at the Information Centre, free of charge for use within the Botanic Gardens. Enquiries to Information Centre phone 9417591

November	Pollinators and Pollen Haters
December	New Zealand's Christmas trees
January	Trees
February	Flowers and Romance Festival Exhibition



## Recent Events

### New Guides for the 'Friends'

Sixteen new Botanic Gardens' guides have now completed the comprehensive forty-five hour course, which began in August. We have all been impressed with the professionally run course led by Neil Fleming, and supported by Faye. Sessions included - communication skills, basic botany, plant names, Maori and pre-European history, plant knowledge, first aid, safety in the Gardens and reference resource material.

We are grateful to the Botanical Services Curator, David Given and to the section curators for their valuable contribution. Part of each of the nine days was spent getting to know the Gardens and building up guiding skills by practicing on each other and being supported so well by the experienced guides.

It has been a most interesting and somewhat daunting exercise. My love of the Gardens spans many years and I am now building a depth of knowledge, which is really exciting. The added bonus is being able to work with a remarkable and friendly group of people.

Since September 1<sup>st</sup>, we have been on daily rostered duty. At this stage, two trainees are on duty together - one to guide and one to assist. This is working out well and we continue to learn from each other. So far, the number needing guided tours is not great but we are hopeful that, as the service becomes better known, numbers will increase. Guides now have monthly gatherings for on-going training.

Daily tours operate from 1.30 - 3.00pm on Weekdays starting at the Museum entrance to the Gardens and 1.30pm on Weekends starting at the B.G. Information Centre. Cost \$5.00 per person. Children under 15 years free. For groups or tours at different times for please phone Faye 3517798.

Funds generated will go towards Friends' projects to assist the Botanic Gardens.  
Please tell your friends and bring your visitors.  
Daphne McConchie

#### The new Guides are:

Sandy Bain, Barbara Brailsford, Jen Fisher, Faye Fleming, Emma Li, Margaret Long, Anne Low, Daphne McConchie, Diana Madgin, Ineke Mulder, Leigh-Ann O'Brien, Ian Oxley, Lynne Rowe, Barbara Russell, Pat Whitman, Bill Whitmore.

### A Tribute to our Training Team Leaders.

It is a great pleasure to thank Faye and Neil, for the extremely successful Botanic Gardens' Guide Training Program they ran recently. The smooth running and high interest sessions reflected the huge amount of time and behind the scenes effort, they put into planning, co-ordinating tutors and input by established guides and staff members, organizing practical sessions and in assembling and printing resource material. In addition they ran each day so all felt included and supported.

I have been to a number of training days over the years and found myself on several occasions wondering why this course was so successful. How had a roomful of total strangers, with very different personalities, been so quickly turned into a co-operative team of friends, willing to share, support and encourage each other? How had we come to feel, that if we took a deep breath, clutched our handy reference cards and followed one of the techniques suggested, we could be successful guides? The answer was always in the very special talent Faye and Neil have in running a course that educates, encourages and empowers the participants.

Thanks are also due for the end of course party which was held at the Fleming's home to present Certificates to participants and thank all the training team. We would also like to acknowledge the members of the Friends who contributed in other ways to the course - the established Guides and those who came along as rent a crowd when we needed customers.  
Lynne Rowe.

Presenters: Neil Fleming, Faye Fleming, Dr David Given, Kevin Garnett, Max Visch, Roy Edwards, Neil O'Brien, Don Bell, Sue Hardy, Murray Parsons, Adrienne Moore. The Botanic Gardens' Section Curators led teaching walks with Brian Appleton, Sylvia Meek, Charlotte Bangma and Chris O'Sullivan assisting as mentors on the training walks. The Information Centre staff assisted in many ways.

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### Plant and Bulb Sales

Over recent years the Botanic Gardens "Annual Plant Sale" in October has suffered as a result of major competition from open markets and fund raising activities by church fairs and other organisations. For that reason the Committee decided this year not to hold an Annual Plant Sale Day but instead to conduct four seasonal sales offering plants grown by the Potting Group from stocks selected within the Gardens and most suitable for the particular season. The Plant Sale on 18 October was therefore termed a "Spring Sale" and although with less stalls than in previous years produced an excellent profit of \$3500. That sum together with the profit of \$1327 from the Bulb and Perennial sale held in September was a most welcome boost to the Society's overall funds which, as members are aware, will be applied for the benefit of the Gardens.

The next seasonal sale a "Summer Plant Sale" will be held with Families Big Day at the Christchurch Botanic Gardens on Sun 15 February 2004. In the meantime a selection of plants left over from sales days and suitable for planting at any time will be placed on a trolley outside the Information Centre and available for purchase from there.

The Committee is most appreciative for the help of all the Members who again made the recent plant and bulb sales successful fund raising activities. The helpers include the people who over many months, gathered, prepared, potted, nurtured and labeled both plants and bulbs for the respective sales. Additionally others whose work was most appreciated are those who co-ordinated, advertised and administered all the essential arrangements for the sale including last but not least those who worked long hours selling plants and bulbs on sales days, and in cleaning up afterwards. Fortunately fine warm weather made for pleasant conditions on both sales days.

Jim Crook

### Botanical Art School.

In July I had a week in Melbourne to attend a course at the Melbourne Botanical Art School. Arriving on the Sunday before the course started, I managed a quick visit to the Botanical Gardens to enjoy a stroll through the gardens on a sunny winter's day. I was rather disappointed in the size of the Heritage Rose Section but was very impressed by the shop and information centre -

modern, well laid out and very busy. While the 'Friends' House was closed on Sunday (yes they have their own building), information leaflets were available on the 'Friends' as well as the many interesting guided walk, talks, etc.

The Melbourne Botanical Art School is run by Jenny Phillips and is located in South Yarra, only a short walk from the Gardens. Classes are held in the converted ballroom of a lovely old farmhouse. The Beginner's course, which I attended, was a wonderful stimulating week and I certainly hope to return in the not too distant future to attend another of the interesting courses that are run from the school.

The facilities are excellent as is the tuition. Jenny and her assistants expertly guided both the complete beginner, as well as those with some knowledge, through the week. What a pity nothing like this is available in New Zealand. The students for this particularly course came from all over Australia, two from Japan and two from New Zealand.

Jenny Phillips herself had recently returned from Spain and England. While in England Jenny was one of eight botanical artists invited to present their painting to Prince Charles at Highgrove, for a Florilegium which will eventually raise money for the "Princes' Charitable Trust". Jenny is also helping to organise the Florilegium of Government House (situated in the Melbourne Botanic Gardens). This is expected to be finished and ready for exhibiting early next year.

It is interesting to see the strong link and encouragement between the Art School and the Gardens.

Irene McBryde

### Medley of Events

Our programme has been planned to offer a range of events of interest and information on Plants, Plants-people, Gardens, and related topics.

At our AGM **Dr David Given** spoke of his first few weeks in his new position as Botanical Services Curator. He expressed his admiration for the dedication of the staff, then of future plans for Christchurch Botanic Gardens. David's slide show expanded on the theme of - Botanic Gardens are places to showcase plants and they are Botanic as well as Gardens, i.e. not just a pleasure place. The



slides covered many overseas Botanic Gardens e.g. Montreal, Kirstenbosch, Kew, Chelsea Physic Garden, Paris, Berlin and Missouri and Botanic Gardens in Poland and Switzerland. These provided many ideas that could be modified or used here. We look forward to exciting times ahead.

The Staff-led walks each month offer first hand information about plant collections and the **Alpine walk** in August with Malcolm Shirlaw, then **Spring in the Woodlands** with Richard Poole in September, were recent highlights.

The visit to the Studio of Fabric Designer and sculptor **Tim Main** was most inspiring. Tim gave a detailed explanation of his ideas behind his fabric work and sculpture and the process of screen-printing his plant designs on fabric. Do look out for his fabric panels on sale in the new Art Gallery.

Those brave new members who joined the old hands at the **Quiz evening** declared it to be a great night, and plenty of fun amidst the odd challenging question. Our thanks to Max and his helpers.

Another springtime pleasure was the visit arranged by Alison Fox, to **Silva Dell Daffodils**, where the thousands of blooms dazzled us. Over half of the daffodils are unique to Silva Dell having been hybridized on site by David and Carolyn Campbell.

**Travelling along the Silk Road in China**, with Bill Willmott and Diana Madgin, drew a capacity crowd at our October meeting. Bill's slides showed the dramatic contrasts in geography and climate along the route and Diana described the impact of the availability or lack of water on vegetation. We were transported to another world where the local people over many centuries have faced and adapted to huge challenges.

### Spring Walk in the Gardens with the New Guides.

20 September 03

The hebes near the *Pinus radiata* at the Information Centre were our first stop. Ian shared his enthusiasm for these very varied plants named in honour of the Greek Goddess of youth and originally known as Veronicas. There are 100 or more species of hebes, which are evergreen shrubs and occasionally small trees. Most are native to New Zealand. Hebes will grow almost

anywhere and are very popular overseas where many cultivars have been developed from the original New Zealand plants. There are many leaf shapes and sizes and a variety of coloured leaves and flower spikes. Whipcord Hebes with scale-like leaves, grow particularly in mountain areas and colder areas of the South Island. *Hebe decumbens* is a low growing shrub suitable for ground cover, while others are very good for hedges.

An English visitor who felt Hebes had great value encouraged two enthusiasts, Messrs Hart and Dalton, around the time of the First World War. They travelled widely to collect around 80 species and settled them in Lawrence and encouraged the use of hebes.

We went on to view Magnolias, which are an ancient plant grown for around 1000 years by Buddhist Monks in China before they were known in the West. Magnolias are natives of East Asia, the Himalayas and Northern and Central America. They are named after Pierre Magnol, (1638-1715) Professor of Botany and Director of the Botanic Gardens at Montpellier, France. *Magnolia grandiflora*, (Bull Bay Magnolia) from the U.S.A. is a large evergreen tree with huge waxy white fragrant flowers and artistic leaves that are widely used in floral work.

The most beautiful of the Magnolias is the deciduous Yulan or Lily tree, *M. denudata*, from China with pure white, cup-shaped, fragrant flowers. *Magnolia sieboldii* from Japan was named after Philip Franz von Siebold, 18-19<sup>th</sup> century Dutch Botanist and plant collector who lived for some time in Japan. It is a wide spreading shrub with large white buds, which open to cup-shaped fragrant flowers with crimson stamens, followed by crimson fruit.

Michelias, (named after Pietro Antonio Micheli 17-18<sup>th</sup> century botanist from Florence), are evergreen trees and shrubs from the Himalayas and China and are closely related to magnolias. *Michelia figo* or Port Wine Magnolia has a powerful fruity fragrance from the creamy purple flowers usually hidden in the foliage. *Michelia doltsopa*, a scented, evergreen, slightly frost tender tree has flowered magnificently on the Harper Lawn opposite the Rockery.

Shirley talked of the Hamamelis, a genus of deciduous shrubs or small trees which originate from E. Asia and E. North America. These hardy



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shrubs with spider-like winter flowers will grow at 1300-2400ft (400-730m) above sea level, or 20 degrees Centigrade. *Hamamelis mollis* is the well-known Witch Hazel. Mollis means that the leaves are coated with fine hairs on the underside. *Hamamelis mollis* 'Pallida' was another in the Gardens with a lovely perfume.

Barbara took us to the Hellebores, also known as Christmas or Winter Rose and Lenten Rose. There are 15 species originating in Europe and West Asia. They are from the Ranunculus family, which also includes the Buttercups. The whole family is poisonous. Hellebores like a shady growing area and do not like to be disturbed. *Helleborus orientalis* comes in many colours, shades of green, red and purple as well as white. The Maple border, with mostly Japanese maples, is under-planted with Hellebores and Hydrangeas, which give stunning displays in their own season.

Our route included notable trees and early spring flowering plants - the Wellingtonias on the Archery Lawn (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*); the Cork Oak, *Quercus suber*; *Daphne bholua* with wonderfully scented flowers; *Garrya elliptica* from California and Oregon with distinctive grey-green catkins;

the Albert Edward Oak, grown from a batch of acorns sent from Queen Victoria, to a missionary, Rev Taylor in Wanganui. These acorns were grown and distributed around the country. We noted the Cherry mound, Rhododendrons, *Pinus pinaster*, (Maritime Pine) growing on one of the original sand hills; the colourful *Kerria japonica* and the Copper Beech hedge which holds its old leaves all winter; the Bunya-bunya - *Araucaria bidwillii*, the fruit of which is gathered by Aboriginal women in Australia - and *Macrocarpa*, the Monterey Cypress from California.

We finally came to the *Sarcococca confusa* hedge where Margaret told us of this family from China and the Himalayas. There are 14 species & *Sarcococca* also known as Christmas Box. They are winter flowering evergreens, frost hardy and make very good hedges, as they allow firm pruning being from the same family as the *Buxus*. *Sarcococca* are sweet scented and after flowering, have either black berries, as in *S. hookeriana* or scarlet as in *S. ruscifolia*.

This was a very interesting walk with the new guides led by Max Visch. Alison Fox.

## Articles

### Bill Sykes: Polynesian Plant Specialist

Botanist Bill Sykes had no intention of specialising in Pacific Island flora when he came from England in 1961. He was brought here by the Botany Division of the DSIR at Lincoln to work on cultivated plants, and almost immediately was shifted to 'wild introductions', i.e. weeds, because as one of his colleagues delicately put it, "You come from a part of the world where a lot of our weeds come from."

"He felt," says Bill with his inimitably self-deprecating humour, "that I'd have some special empathy for them." In fact, New Zealand weeds became a major focus from 1974 to 1988, leading to the publication of *Flora of New Zealand, Vol. 4*, "the big, fat pink book", as Bill's wife Peggy calls it. Weaving in and out of those years were botanising trips to much of Polynesia.

Soon after he arrived, Bill was sent to Raoul Island in the Kermadecs. What was supposed to be a big event, the Ornithological Society's 25th

Birthday expedition in 1964, ended dramatically when the volcano on the island blew up the second day they were there. "You didn't have to be a vulcanologist to know that something was brewing." Bill and geologist Ted Lloyd had been in the crater the afternoon before. Bill even managed to gather some specimens, but Lloyd had to get off the island and onto the ship, which sailed at midnight. The ship had to be radioed back the next day when "up she went." They could have safely stayed, Bill insists, but for the fact that their crater-lake water supply was cut off! It was a big disappointment.

The following year, Eric Godley, DSIR's director, sent Bill to Niue. Niue was part of New Zealand, and the plan was to go into cattle farming, so poisonous flora had to be identified. Bill was there for ten weeks, and it marked the beginning of his serious collecting in Polynesia. Niue, in West Polynesia, is mainly covered with tropical rain forest. "It was a totally new experience for me; plants I'd never seen before." Eventually he could identify even the rare plants and build a sizeable collection of herbarium specimens.



In 1966-7, exactly two years after the Raoul eruption, Bill went back to the Kermadecs for ten weeks and in 1969 had another brief winter visit, dropped off by a naval boat from Suva. "I collected on every island around Raoul that a mere mortal like me could possibly get to." The next year, he had a holiday on Norfolk Island, which of course included collecting plant specimens.

It wasn't until 1974 that Bill made his first expedition to the Cook Islands. Palmerston Atoll in the remote western Cooks (nearest neighbour to the east is Niue), was celebrating the bicentenary of Captain Cook's landing in 1774. "For two to three weeks I lived and collected plants in this very unique community of about seventy people, all descended from one English sailor who landed there in the mid-nineteenth century with three wives from one of the Cook Islands. The three lineages from those three wives all share the surname Masters." There is even "Masters' Law" governing every aspect of island life.

From there to the east, at Aitutaki, Bill was dropped off a ship to join a DSIR Soil Bureau team working in the southern Cooks for two or three months. "There was a soil scientist on each island, and they wanted to know what plants were growing in their soil study area." It gave Bill a chance to look more widely at the flora: he moved from Aitutaki to Rarotonga, then to the smaller inhabited islands of Atiu, Mauke, Mitiaro, and uninhabited Manuae and Takakea, and finally three weeks on Mangaia.

These two expeditions signalled Bill's specific focus on the Cooks. Nobody else, he realised, had been to all those outer islands and collected so systematically. Bill Phillipson's 1969 collection was already deposited at Lincoln, and the addition of Bill Sykes' collection meant Lincoln had the best Cook Island collection in the world. At the DSIR it became accepted that the Cook Islands were Bill's botanical domain.

Bill joined a NZ Royal Society expedition working in Tonga in 1977. "At that point, my ideas weren't clearly formed about any particular Pacific flora, except, of course, Niue, but Tonga cropped up and it was another opportunity." He teamed up with an American Peace Corps worker, Gary Buelow, who got Bill interested in Ata, an island in the south that had never been botanised. Gary

organised a boat, but they tried unsuccessfully for five days to get permission from the Tongan government to go there. Eventually they flew north to Vava'u, where they quickly got permission to go to Laté, an uninhabited volcano to the west. "Less protocol," Bill says. "The only trouble was, the boat didn't return to pick us up when it was supposed to!" There were two Tongan soldiers on Laté, maintaining a presence; more importantly, there were edible plants, fish and crabs. Eventually they got a signal out and a fishing boat came to collect them.

Late in 1979 on the way home from the UK and through America, he spent time in Hawai'i at the Bishop Museum's herbarium, "the Mecca of Pacific botany", looking at the main South Pacific collections preceding his own. "There had been a fairly comprehensive flora written on Tonga, but when Gary and I pooled our resources, we had many new records to add to that. We thought of doing a complete revision of Tonga, which has never been done."

By 1984, the goats on the Kermadecs had been eliminated, so DSIR wanted a report on the regenerating flora. (Goats had been left there by early ships as food for shipwrecked sailors.) Later that year he had another trip to Norfolk Island, "which has both similarities and differences with Raoul Island", and seven years later, the Australian Parks and Wildlife Service asked Bill to do a survey of rare plants on Norfolk, so he roped in his colleague Ian Atkinson as well.

In 1988, the volume on New Zealand flora was published, and for most of that year he studied at the Guangxi Botanical Institute in China on an exchange programme. On his way home via the Trans-Siberian railway and the USA, he studied the Pacific collections at the Smithsonian, at Berkeley, and again at the Bishop Museum.

Up to this point in his career, Bill had made his plant collections whenever and wherever there was an opportunity, rather than from having chosen any specific area to study. There was not much money for such projects, and he studied whatever flora he could get to, either adding to previous knowledge or creating an entirely new corpus.

"By the late 1980s, I was increasingly focused on the Cooks because I knew that was where the need was. The existing publications on their flora are so deficient." The first publication, T.F.Cheeseman's



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account, was written from Auckland in 1903. The only other important collection is in Hawai'i. "Each time I went to Britain, I'd look at Kew's Polynesian specimens. They had very few collectors in the Pacific. Not only did I realise how much the Cooks needed a definitive study, but it was easier to do that working from New Zealand than anywhere else in the world."

In 1990 Bill spent a long time on Rarotonga's high peaks and on the high raised coral of Mangaia. During the next two years he was on Atiu and Mauke. In 1992 money came from the French government, and he joined Jacques Florence in Tahiti for an expedition to the Austral Islands, focusing on the island of Raivavae. "Very interesting! So many links with the Cook Islands. I still use those specimens almost every day when I'm working on the Cook Islands flora. And in Tahiti, the mountains there are an extremely useful comparison with the mountains of Rarotonga."

A delightful irony in 1993: Bill received funding from the Rainbow Warrior Fund! There was a Cambridge University expedition to the atolls of the northern Cooks, where he had not been before, and for two and a half months he joined a yacht to visit Penrhyn, Rakahanga, Manihiki and Suvarrow, then Palmerston again. Two years later he went back to Aitutaki, and in 2000 he returned to Mauke "to fill in the gaps." Last year, Bill was in Rarotonga in the wet season looking at adventives (introduced wild plants) and cultivated plants. "The Cook Island women collect plants from all over the Pacific," Bill grins. "They're great gardeners, and all naturalised plants do need to be categorised, but there has to be a cut-off point towards the rarer end of what's cultivated."

Bill's reaching "some sort of latter-stage" in his study now, working on about a hundred ferns. "I've got just about all their botanical problems sorted out, so the main job is compiling the descriptions and their keys. Sometimes I spend a lot of time on one plant because my descriptions have to embrace all its variations. A rare plant with only two specimens is easier!"

Today, thanks to Bill Sykes, the world's largest collection from the Cook Islands is in the Allan Herbarium of Lincoln's Landcare Research Institute.

Diana Madgin

(Bill has been a member of the Friends for a number of years and is affectionately known as Botany Bill)

### The Weird and wonderful ways of Nature - Wisteria

These delightful deciduous twining shrubs are in flower in October –November in our Botanic Gardens. Much discussion arose amongst the new guides as to the unusual growth habits in two species. The following extracts explaining the different attributes of the Chinese and Japanese plants will be of interest to members.

Extract from *Origin of Plants* by Maggie Campbell Culver (p 188-89)

"Japan produced a wisteria, *Wisteria floribunda* collected in 1830 by Phillip von Siebold (1791-1886). Like its Chinese cousin the fragrant blooms hang in racemes though while the Chinese flowers are pale mauve the Japanese are violet blue. Both species disport velvety seedpods but their leaves differ slightly from each other and *Wisteria sinensis* is a more robust grower. There is however one fundamental difference between them which seems quite inexplicable. They twine in opposite directions.

The Japanese *W. floribunda* climbing clockwise and the plant from China *W. sinensis*, in an anticlockwise direction. One wonders if the professor of anatomy at the University of Pennsylvania Casper Wistar, after whom they are named, put his mind to such an extraordinary phenomenon."

Extract from Hillier's *Manual of Trees and Shrubs*. ("Despite the apparent anomaly, Wisteria is spelt correctly according to the International rules of Botanical nomenclature". William T. Stearn in Dictionary of Plant Names, Cassells London 1994.)

*Wisteria floribunda*: Leaves compound of 13 to 19 ovate dark green leaflets. Flowers fragrant, violet blue or bluish purple the stems twine in a clockwise direction.

*Wisteria sinensis* - leaves with 9 to 13 mostly 11 elliptic to elliptic-oblong leaflets. The fragrant mauve or deep blue flowers. The stems twine in an anti-clockwise direction."

From Jen Fisher.



## New Zealand Christmas Trees

During December, the Botanic Gardens' Information Centre display will feature the New Zealand Christmas trees. There is a Pohutukawa planted beside the Townend House facing the Fern House and a Rata on the Kiosk pond side of the path opposite the Weather Station. Both easily accessible from the Information Centre.

The brilliant spectacular red flowers of Pohutukawa and Rata are in full bloom in the Christmas season and have become known as the New Zealand Christmas Trees. Both are members of the Myrtaceae family and some others in this grouping are Eucalypts, Bottlebrushes and Feijoas and myrtles.

Stories are told of early Maori approaching the coast of Aotearoa, near East Cape when the forest was glowing with the pohutukawa flowers. In European tradition the first celebration of Christmas in New Zealand in 1814, was conducted by Samuel Marsden in the Bay of Islands and held near sprawling pohutukawa trees. Sprays of foliage and flowers were used by early settlers as decorations at Christmas time and used in place of holly on the plum pudding. Recent experience shows that the flowers can last well in water.

The popularity of Pohutukawa has meant it is now quite widespread even as far South as Dunedin but it originally only grew in coastal areas of the Northern North Island. The damage caused by possums has progressively left bare skeletons of ancient Pohutukawa and Rata. Community concern and research by the Forest Research Institute has led to the establishment in 1990 of Project Crimson. This Charitable Trust funds scientific research, community and school planting projects and environmental protection activities.

Project Crimson, [www.projectcrimson.org.nz](http://www.projectcrimson.org.nz), focuses on the mainland Pohutukawa and three Tree Rata which are the most threatened *Metrosideros*.

For more stories and information visit the Information Centre in December and watch out for the new book by Philip Simpson on "Pohutukawa and Rata – The Iron-hearted trees" due to be available mid 2004.

Adrienne Moore

## The Christmas Lily

The story of *Lilium regale*, our Christmas lily, reads like an episode from Boys' Own Annual. Ernest Wilson—"Chinese Wilson" as he became known—first went to China in 1899 for Veitch and Sons Nursery in England to collect commercially viable seed. In March 1910, on a subsequent expedition for the Arnold Arboretum in Boston, he set out to collect bulbs of the regal lily he had previously discovered in West China. In May he reached Peking from Europe by way of the Trans-Siberian Railway. He then sailed up the Yangtze to Songpan Ting, a military town on the headwaters of the Min River, some 250 miles from Tibet. "There in June, by the wayside, in rock-crevice by the torrent's edge and high up on the mountainside and precipice, this Lily in full bloom greets the weary wayfarer. Not in twos and threes...but in tens of thousands."

Wilson had come back to organise a team of collectors to harvest 6-7,000 bulbs the following October. By June he had completed the task and headed for Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan Province. Seated in his sedan chair on a narrow track 300 feet above the gorge, he was hit by a rockslide. It broke his leg in two places, ripped off his toenail and badly lacerated his leg. His bearers had to crawl down the precipitous slope to retrieve his chair. In extreme pain, Wilson made splints from his camera tripod. They were about to set off when a mule train loomed into view, unable to stop on the unstable terrain. "There was only one thing to do," Wilson wrote. "I lay down [across the path] and the mules stepped over my body. There were nearer forty than fifty of them."

Three agonising days later, his leg lashed to the sedan pole, Wilson reached Chengdu. The leg had become infected, but at the end of three months in the Mission hospital, he began his journey to Massachusetts. A year later, albeit with a "lily limp", he could walk again.

The bulbs were harvested as planned, and "encased in clay, packed in charcoal, and shipped at silk rates," they reached Boston a few months after Wilson himself got there. Planted in a garden in Roslindale, Massachusetts, the regal lily bloomed the following June.

Diana Madgin

*Lilium regale* can be viewed in the BG amongst the Azaleas near the West Bridge.



## Snippets

### Botanic Gardens' Library

The Botanic Gardens staff would again like to thank the Friends for the annual grant they donate to our library to purchase books. The new titles were on display at the Friends' last AGM. They are:-

"Frank Kingdon Ward's Riddle of the Tsangpo Gorges" edited by Kenneth Cox

"Modern Roses XI -The World Encyclopaedia of Roses" The American Rose Society, edited by Tommy Cairns 2000

"Euclid - Eucalypts of Southern Australia" CD ROM 2nd ed Brooker, Slee, Connors, & Duffy for the Centre for Plant Biodiversity Research 2002

"A Photographic Guide to Trees of New Zealand" L J Metcalf 2000

"The Story of the Dunedin Botanic Garden, New Zealand's First" Eric Dunlop 2002

"Flowers of the Eastern Mediterranean" Fragman, Levy-Yamamori, Christodoulou 2001

"The Pressed Plant" Di Noto, Winter 1999

"Hartman and Kester's Plant Propagation Principles and Practices" 7th ed Hartman, Kester, Davies Jr., Geneve 2002

"Ancient Trees - Trees That Live For A Thousand Years" Lewington, Parker 1999

Once again thank you for your generosity.

Sue Molloy on behalf of the staff.

### Some of Bill Sykes' publications:

From the article: Bill Sykes: Polynesian Plant Specialist

W.R. Sykes, 1970, Contributions to the Flora of Niue, *DSIR Bulletin* 200.

W.R. Sykes, 1977, Kermadec Islands Flora: An Annotated Checklist, *DSIR Bulletin* 219.

W.R. Sykes, 1978, The Pteridophytes of 'Eua, Southern Tonga, Lau-Tonga 1977, *Bulletin* 17, Royal Society of New Zealand.

C.J. Webb, W.R. Sykes, P.J. Garnock-Jones, 1988, *Flora of New Zealand, Vol.4: Naturalised Pteridophytes, Gymnosperms, Dicotyledons.*

Colin Webb, Peter Johnson, Bill Sykes, 1990, *Flowering Plants of New Zealand.*

### Raffle results

AGM Book Prize Jen Fisher,  
Bag prize Ann Lowe.

Meeting raffle - Book prize Charlotte Bangma

Plant sale - Plant Basket winner Dianne Morris.  
Books - First prize Daphne McLachlan,  
Second Prize Ann Mc Millan.

Thank you to all who support our raffles.

### Propagating Activities:

Apart from our ongoing activities of taking cuttings, sowing seeds, and dividing roots, we are working to improve our propagating area and the sale process. Inside the Nursery area we are in process of constructing a gravel pad on which to stand the growing plants. This will warm up more quickly in Spring and give better drainage in Winter.

As you know, we have the Sale Trolley outside the Information Centre. We have now bought a 3 x 3 metre Gazebo for our larger sales. This will carry our banners, give some shade to sellers and plants, and make a visible centre for these occasions. Creative decoration suggestions would be very welcome, should we twine artificial flowers down the poles? fly a flag from the peak? arrange scarecrows or Grung Gnomes behind the tables? Ideas, please!

Helen Constable 9809358

A Warm Welcome to the following New Members

Barbara and Rex Russell,  
Shirley Fairhall, Catherine Kenrick,  
Mervyn and Jean Osborne,  
Douglas and Judith Hunt,  
Leith McMurray, Tristan Boot,  
Ann Brunero, Douglas Matthews.



### Notes from a Friends' Volunteer

I have enjoyed the Gardens ever since I can remember. My grandparents and parents instilled in me an interest in plants and my greatest treat was a walk in the Gardens. It was my ambition to work there and I hoped to do an apprenticeship when I left school. It was the early nineteen sixties and the careers advisor told me they wouldn't take women and that I should choose a more suitable career. Naively accepting what she said, my life went in other directions, but I continued to visit the Gardens, always regretting that I couldn't be involved. Some years ago I was helping with a survey of Gardens' users for the Friends and saw the gardeners arriving for work. It all came back to me and I felt quite upset that I wasn't one of them.

Early this year I was about to go to the volunteer centre to offer some of my time, when I read the article in this newsletter asking for volunteers at the Gardens. Here was my chance at last! I was fortunate to be chosen to take part in the pilot scheme. I have been going two afternoons a week for six months now, working alongside the gardeners in the old and modern rose gardens and I cannot think of anything I'd rather be doing. Thank you to Bede, Richard and the other gardeners for being so welcoming and helpful.

Jane Vinnell

### Subscriptions for 2003-4 due by 30 November 03.

Thank you to all who have renewed their subscriptions – we value your support and membership. Our financial year runs from 1 July to 30 June and subscriptions are due by 30 November each year. (Single sub \$14 Double/family \$20).

If you did not receive a membership card in this newsletter you are not yet financial for the current year to 30.6.04.

To continue receiving our newsletter please renew now and post with your renewal form - completed on both sides, to: *Treasurer, Friends of Christchurch Botanic Gardens P.O. Box 2553 Christchurch* Enquiries please phone Alison on 9424989.

No further newsletters will be sent to those who are not financial members by 30 November 03.

### The Scholar Tree

On a country graveyard,  
Beside a lichened stone,  
Alone in drowsy sunlight  
*Sophora japonica* weeps.

Her fingertips trace hieroglyphs  
Inscribed aeons before,  
In tribute to the wisdom  
Of the scholar buried here.

Tansy buttons seize the light  
Shed as day moves on,  
Unseeing iris round his bed  
Bloom high in summer time.

Rainbow goddess dips her head  
To the God that once did fly,  
Tangible dynasty to seed,  
Shards glimpsed against the sky.

Sandy Bain

### Botanical Note:

*Sophora japonica*, Pagoda Tree is, in spite of its name, from China. Sometimes called the Scholar Tree, as it is planted near the graves of scholars. Some have been found dating from the T'ang Dynasty.

*Sophora japonica* 'Pendula' is found in the Christchurch Botanic Gardens in the circular iris bed near the lichgate into Christ's College.

*Tanacetum vulgare*, Tansy, a corruption of Greek word *athanasia* "immortality" as *thansa*, *tansy*, so called because it is "a sort of everlasting flower" (*Hortus Anglicus* vol ii p366). Both Greeks and Romans regarded Tansy as a symbol of immortality and used it at burials.

Iris is the Goddess of the rainbow or the rainbow itself, a messenger of the gods when they intended discord.

Refs: 'The Dictionary of Phrase and Fable' E. Cobham Brewer, LLD

Published by Avenel Books, New York.

### Drinkable Plants?

See some plants claimed to be drinkable on a friendly relaxed walk on Saturday 15 November. . Would they suit a suburban garden? Would you want to drink them? Exchange information while strolling, , then taste various commercial plant teas; bring a cup and \$2 contribution please.



## 12 FRIENDS OF THE CHRISTCHURCH BOTANIC GARDEN

Contact Numbers			Projects Planner	Dave Moyle	358-8914
President & Daily Guided			Education Subcommittee		
Walks Co-ordinator	Faye Fleming	351-7798	Co-ordinator	Lynne Rowe	358-8412
Vice President			Ex Officio	David Given	941-7583
Immediate Past President	Dennis Preston	351-4131		Jeremy Hawker	
Treasurer	Alison Fox	942-4989	Helpers		
Membership Secretary	Ruby Coleman	355-8811	Plant Sale	Helen Constable	980-9358
Minutes Secretary	Jim Crook	358-5845	Newsletter mail out	Sally Jebson	352-6363
Committee Members			Overseas Tour Groups		
Volunteer Co-ordinator	Charlotte Bangma	337-6610	Guide Coordinator	Chris O'Sullivan	332 8565
	Janet Begg	385-5114	Botanist	Bill Sykes	366-3844
Outings/trips	Alison Fox	942-4989	Walks	Max Visch	338-2273
Newsletter	Peter Mahan	354-1550	Enquiries	Information Centre	941-7591
Newsletter/Programme	Adrienne Moore	351-5915	Computer	Sylvia Meek & Fay Jackson	

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Friends of the Christchurch Botanic Gardens Inc  
PO Box 2553  
Christchurch  
New Zealand



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**Friends of Christchurch Botanic Gardens**  
**Coming Events from November 03**  
**Insert to Newsletter no. 57**

**Friends' Phone Contacts:**                      **President**    Faye Fleming    351 7798  
**Programme**    **Adrienne Moore** 351 5915              **Membership**    **Ruby Coleman** 355 8811

- Sat 15 Nov      1.30pm depart from Information Centre - **Walk and Taste. *Plants we can drink?***  
With Lynne Rowe and helpers. Contribution \$2. Bring own cup.
- Mon 17 Nov      **Guiding Group Monthly Gathering.** Guides meet at 10.00am in the Petanque  
Rooms followed at 11.00am by ***A Chat and Historical Reminiscences***  
with John Taylor, who first worked in the Botanic Gardens in the 1940s.  
All members welcome at 11.00am. Enquiries to Faye on 3517798
- Wed 19 Nov      7.30pm at Canterbury Horticultural Society, 57 Riccarton Ave  
**Illustrated talk on "*Raoul Island- The Northern Border*".**  
Life, Flora and Fauna, with Barry Samson. Contribution \$2. Supper.
- Sat 22 Nov      **Bus trip to *Lavender Downs & the Kitchen Garden.***  
Meet at 9.45am in BG Carpark outside Petanque Club. Bus departs at 10.00am  
returns 4.00pm. Cost members \$20 non-members \$24. Please use reservation slip  
enclosed or phone Alison Fox 9424989. BYO picnic lunch and drink.
- Tue 25 Nov      10.00am Meet at BG Library for morning tea with the staff  
10.15am ***Weird and Wonderful - Walk*** with Dr David Given,  
Botanical Services Curator
- Sat 6 Dec        **Christmas Party.** 4-6pm at the President's home 50 Idris Road, Fendalton.  
Please bring a plate of finger food and some gold coins for multi-draw raffle.  
Musical entertainment and drinks will be provided.  
**Please RSVP to Faye 3517798 by Fri 28 November**
- Sat 20 Dec      1.30pm depart from Information Centre **Guided Walk. *Forests and Birds***  
with Neil O'Brien Contribution \$2

Friends of Christchurch Botanic Gardens. **Bus Trip Lavender Downs and Kitchen Garden**

**Sat 22 Nov 03**

Names.....

Telephone no.....

Number of seats: Members... @ \$20.....Non-members @ \$24.....

Amount enclosed.....

Please send cheque made out to A.M. Fox to 77 Golf Links Rd Christchurch 8006



### Coming Events continued

- Tue 27 Jan 2004      10.00am Meet at BG Library for morning tea with the staff  
 10.15am **Guided Walk-Rides in the Wheelbarrow.**  
**The Herbaceous Border** with David Barwick, Section Curator.
- 13-17 Feb            Garden City Flowers and Romance Festival. Details in Local newspapers
- Thu 12 Feb           7.00pm depart from Botanic Gardens' Information Centre for **Guided Walk** – Seasonal highlights with Friends' Guides.  
 Cost \$5. Friends with membership card \$3
- Sat 14 Feb            1.30pm depart from Botanic Gardens' Information Centre for **Guided walk. "Plants of the Plant Hunters"** with Friends' Guides. Cost \$5.  
 Friends with membership card \$3
- Sun 15 Feb            10.30am till 4.00pm **Families' Big Day at the Christchurch Botanic Gardens.** See local papers for details.
- Sun 15 Feb            **Friends' Plant Sale** from 10.30am near BG Information Centre
- Mon 16 Feb           7.00pm depart from Botanic Gardens' Information Centre for **Guided Walk** – Seasonal highlights with Friends' Guides.  
 Cost \$5. Friends with membership card \$3
- Tue 24 Feb           10.00am meet at Meet at BG Library for morning tea with the staff  
 10.15am **Guided Walk - Ducks, Kids and other things.** Angus Allan.  
 BG Section Curator

### Plant Highlights in the Botanic Gardens-----

Many of the flowering plants in the Botanic Gardens have short flowering periods so regular visits give much pleasure all the year. Be sure to cross the Woodland Bridge soon to see the Heritage roses, peonies, and Himalayan poppies and candelabra primulas.

The annual display of Begonias is due in the Townend House from the first week of January. More details on summer displays from the Information Centre.

Please bring your membership card to our activities.