

A Self-Guided Walk

December 2023 – January 2024



December visitors may be in time to track down the noisy party of tipsy lorikeets feeding on nectar dripping from the African *Schotia* species SE of the lotus pond. Otherwise, look for a video of 'the drunken parrot tree' online. The flame tree off the SW corner of the Rose Garden is also promising a spectacular display, and later in the summer the ever-popular sacred lotus should be in flower.

See over page for map

*An Australian native

- 1 *Kigelia pinnata*** (now *K. africana*) Sausage tree, worsboom South Africa to Tanzania
On the path west of the Summerhouse is another African species said to drip nectar, attracting a variety of mammals, birds and insects in its native range. In Africa, its pendulous sprays of blood-red trumpet-shaped flowers are pollinated by bats. The large sausage-shaped fruit is a woody berry up to 50cm long.
- *2 *Agathis robusta*** Queensland kauri PNG, southern and northern Queensland
One of the southern hemisphere conifers, this imposing 37 m specimen with a girth of over 6 m was listed on the National Register of Big Trees in 2009. It grows as a rainforest emergent across its range, from near sea level to over 900 m. Green seed-cones, much the same size and shape as a household ball of string, mature 18–20 months after pollination, then disintegrate releasing the seeds. The pale, even-textured, wood is easily worked, and once had many applications in the plywood, furniture and boat-building industries.
- *3 *Ficus virens*** White fig, banyan India, SE Asia, northern Australia
This unusual fig is briefly deciduous, at least in its northern hemisphere range, losing its leaves for only a week or two around the time of the monsoon. The small edible figs crowded along the branchlets usually sit directly on the stem and contain male, short-styled and long-styled female flowers. The tiny wasps which pollinate the female flowers lays eggs in the ovaries of short-styled flowers (often called gall flowers), but probably cannot reach the ovaries at the bottom of those with longer styles. White fig tolerates a range of soil types, and extended dry periods, but grows best on moist, humus rich soils with good drainage.
- *4 *Melaleuca uncinata*** Broombush WA and SA, across to western Victoria and south-west NSW
Broombush, in the NW corner of the Mallee Beds, is a tall shrub with many slender branches and globular heads of cream flowers in the leaf axils. An understory shrub in mallee woodland, it has had a long, (rather mundane) history of harvesting from the wild, or from plantations, for the brush fencing common in suburban Adelaide. In WA on the other hand, the roots of several closely-related species in the '*M. uncinata* complex' share fungal connections with a rare orchid which completes almost its entire lifecycle below ground, only the tips of the flower emerging at the surface. The association is not yet well-understood.
- *5 *Alyogyne huegelii*** Blue hibiscus, native hibiscus South-west WA, SA
A fast-growing shrub to about 2 m high and wide, it is found on sandy to sandy-gravel soils in the wild, but can be grown in a range of soils as long as they are well-drained. Its lilac flowers last only about a day, but many hundreds are produced from late spring to the end of summer. The flowers have a lobed stigma at the tip of an undivided central style rather than the '5-pronged' style characteristic of *Hibiscus*, a genus which once included four of the five species of *Alyogyne*.
- 6 *Pistacia atlantica*** Atlas or wild pistachio Iranian plateau to North Africa
Two subspecies are listed for this area of the Garden, *P. atlantica* ssp. *kurdica* overhanging the path, and the much smaller *P. atlantica* ssp. *mutica*, heavily laden with fruit, behind. The most economically important tree species in the rural west of Iran, it is used in various industries, as well as providing rootstocks for the commercial *Pistacia vera*. Oil from the fruit is used in perfumes, tannins from the leaf for processing leather, and the sap for incense. This year's heavy crop of fruit on our younger specimen highlights the traditional use of the species for food production dating back three or four thousand years.
- 7 *Arbutus grove*** Strawberry trees, madrones See text for distribution
The two species of *Arbutus* in this stand are much admired by many visitors for their smooth orange-red bark and, at this time of year, for the attractive new pale-green bark forming beneath. *A. canariensis* is endemic to the Canary Islands, growing in cloud forests dominated by laurels, whereas *A. glandulosa* (now *A. xalapensis*) grows in canyons, rocky plains and oak woodlands of arid southwest USA and NW Mexico.
- *8 *Hibiscus heterophyllus*** Rosella, native sorrel Far north Queensland to mid-eastern NSW
The Australian species of hibiscus are mostly restricted to the east coast. *Hibiscus heterophyllus* thrives in those warm, moist conditions but is tolerant of cooler winters and drier summers further south. Left to itself it can become sparse, but trimmed as a garden specimen it remains bushy, with prolific, white or yellow, showy flowers attracting butterflies, lorikeets, and honeyeaters to the garden.
- *9 *Brachychiton acerifolius*** Illawarra flame tree Qld and NSW
The Illawarra flame tree is a summer deciduous species native to coastal rainforest from central NSW to far north Queensland. Famous for its massive display of red bell-like flowers, it is most spectacular in full flower after leaf fall sometime in spring. The timing of leaf fall is variable and perhaps a little late this year, so we can see something of the resemblance of its foliage to maple leaves (*Acer* species).
- *10 Simpson shadehouse**
If the forecast for a hot dry summer comes to pass, you may need to cool off here for a while amongst the ferns and other shade-loving plants. The roof of the shadehouse is thatched with bundles of broombush (*Melaleuca uncinata*) the species we saw earlier in the north-west corner of the Mallee Section (site #4).