

# THE RHODODENDRON NEWSLETTER

July 2013

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Australian Rhododendron Society, Victorian Branch Inc. (A5896Z)  
P.O. Box 500, Brentford Square, Victoria 3131  
Email: [secretary@vicrhodo.org.au](mailto:secretary@vicrhodo.org.au)  
Telephone: 0418 340 240  
Editor: Simon Begg Ph: (03) 9728 4466  
email: [simonwbegg@gmail.com](mailto:simonwbegg@gmail.com)  
ARSV Website: [www.rhododendron.com.au](http://www.rhododendron.com.au)  
Picture site <http://picasaweb.google.com/ARSVic>



‘AUSTRALIAN RHODODENDRON SOCIETY’ WEBSITE:

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SECTIONS ON PLANT CARE, PLANT ID, RESOURCES, NEWSLETTERS, ARS  
JOURNALS, GALLERY AND MUCH MORE.

## 2013 PROGRAMME

### AUGUST

**SATURDAY 17<sup>TH</sup> 2.00pm Planting Day in the new Vireya House.** Join the Volunteer Group in the planting of vireyas and be fully informed about the project by John O’Hara and Andrew Rouse.

### SEPTEMBER

**SATURDAY 7<sup>TH</sup> Visit to Otto Fauser’s Garden. 2.00pm** Combined garden tour with Ferny Creek Horticulture Society Rock Garden Group. Meet at FC Hort Soc. Hilton Rd FC to car pool at **1.45** or park at The Cuckoo restaurant and walk up to Otto’s house. He lives at 6 Bella Vista Rd Olinda but there is **NO** parking in the street. Please bring a plate of afternoon tea to share.

### OCTOBER

**FRIDAY 18<sup>TH</sup>-SUNDAY 20<sup>TH</sup> ARS National Council Convention in Adelaide.** The keynote speaker being Steve Hootman the director/curator of the Rhododendron Species Foundation in Seattle, Washington in the USA. He is a world leading expert in rhodo’s.

### NOVEMBER

**SATURDAY 2<sup>ND</sup> & SUNDAY 3<sup>RD</sup> RHODODENDRON SHOW** in the new Vireya House or nearby.

**FRIDAY 15<sup>TH</sup> 8.00pm ARSV AGM @ Nunawading (unless otherwise advised).**  
**Speakers:** Prue and Francis Crome will describe their trip to Burma..

### DECEMBER

**SUNDAY 8<sup>TH</sup> Christmas lunch?**

## **VIC. BRANCH PRESIDENTS REPORT JULY 2013**

Dear members,

Winter is here and I am left with little to report, save some updates on projects at the Gardens and to highlight some up-coming events.

At the Gardens the plant identification crew is working away identifying rhodos, engraving labels and placing them at the base of each plant. This will help identify plants for the benefit of the public and ARS members for many years to come. The task however is somewhat like painting the Sydney Harbour Bridge; it will take many years to substantially finish the job and when done will no doubt need to begin again with, by then, new technology not yet available.

The Vireya House is essentially finished and we are now ready to fill it with plants. Elsewhere in this newsletter and in an email is a request for vireya species any member wishes to donate to the project. The intention is to have every species in cultivation in Australia growing in either the Gardens or in the Vireya House. So we are hoping members offer a wide range of species, but we will be choosy. I am hopeful members make the most of an afternoon (2:00pm Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> of August) set aside for a planting day in the Vireya House.

One experiment we will be conducting in the Vireya House is the use of tree-fern fibre, produced by running tree-fern trunks through the mulcher at Olinda, in combination with potting mix to produce a bedding medium. This bedding medium will be used as a 200mm thick layer over a very thick layer of gravel (see photos of beds and the whole gang moving the gravel). This arrangement will ensure perfect drainage as well as providing some height and contour to the beds in the glasshouse. We will report the outcome of this technique as the plants develop in future newsletters.

The national convention is in Adelaide this year on the weekend of 18, 19 and 20<sup>th</sup> of October with the keynote speaker being Steve Hootman the director/curator of the Rhododendron Species Botanic Garden in the USA. This should be a rewarding weekend and I encourage member's involvement. Steve will be staying on in Australia for a short while after the convention and will be spending some time in Melbourne, so we may have an opportunity to hear from him of some of his experiences.

The last up-coming event I will mention is a visit organised in conjunction with Ferny Creek Horticultural Society to Otto Fauser's wonderful garden, full of bulbs, alpines and Rhodos. This visit takes place on Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> of September (2:00pm) at Otto's 7 Bella Vista Crescent, Olinda. Parking in this street is limited so best to park near the Cuckoo and walk from there.

**JOHN O'HARA**

## **ARS PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

Over the last few years there have been numerous occasions at the Australian Rhododendron Society National Council meetings where the topic of what the relevance of National Council is and also the merit of the Australian Rhododendron Society as an entity.

My passion is plants. Not just Rhododendrons. There are some plants that grab your attention for a lot longer than others. For me Rhododendrons are one of those genres of plants.

When I decided to join a plant society it was because of that interest that the genus Rhododendron has had for me over the whole of my horticultural career that I chose to join the Australian Rhododendron Society.

What benefit has being a member of this body brought to me?

I have come in contact with like minded people from local and interstate groups that have enabled me to increase my knowledge and understanding of the genus while being able to have pleasant social contact. I have been able to meet overseas rhododendron enthusiasts that have also done the same. This in turn has widened my horizons to look at where these plants grow and when opportunity has arisen I have been able to see these plants in their wild habitat.

This experience may not be for everyone but it means that when required there is a level of experience and understanding there to be used by the rest of the members of the society as a reference. I am not alone.

There are many members that have a similar level of knowledge or greater than I and they also are willing to pass on their knowledge. This is part of the reason a society gets formed and forms the basis for why it should continue.

If you look at all the Rhododendron groups, whether the American Rhododendron Society with all its chapters in the world, New Zealand Rhododendron Association or England with the Royal Horticultural Society Rhododendron Camellia and Magnolia group, they all have the same ethos. Currently the Australian Rhododendron Society is looking at - where to from here?

How do we make our society relevant to the next generation?

How do we generate income to be able to continue to promote gardeners to grow Rhododendrons in their gardens?

I encourage members to look at the reasons they join. Make the most of their membership. Attend the Annual convention, speak your mind on these and other issues, go on the National Website, join facebook and contribute to it, increase your involvement and enjoyment as well as your knowledge of rhododendrons.

At the Annual General meeting this year this will be one of the main topics of discussion but between now and then talk to your delegates and make your views known.

I joined the Australian Rhododendron Society to have a good time as well as learn about rhododendrons. I have done both and anyone who joins should be able to do the same as there is a great diversity of people in the group locally and nationally.

Make plans to come and visit South Australia in October and listen to a great Rhododendron expert and enthusiast in Steve Hootman. I look forward to seeing you.

**ROBERT HATCHER**

### **GREETINGS TO ALL RHODO LOVERS.**

Mid winter in southern climes this year does not seem to be as cold somehow. I note with interest Sir Robert Peel is starting to flower at Mt Lofty Botanic Garden and that is probably 6 weeks early. Some of our Magnolias are in full bloom. The perennial question arises - is this a trend?

I will be overseas in the northern hemisphere over late July through to Mid August and will be checking out gardens in Northern Italy around Lake Como and Hiking around Mt Blanc. I will fill you in on what sights have impressed me on my return.

In the meantime a quick update on the *Rhododendron lochiaie* and *viriosum* epoch.

The application to collect vireya samples hinges on a couple of things coming to fruition.

Firstly we need to negotiate with the traditional owners in the Daintree. I have made contact with the CEO of the Jabalbina Yalanji Corporation, which is the representative body for them, and have had positive feedback from him. I have asked to get a time to go up and sit down and talk about it on my return from Europe. No firm date as yet but it will happen.

Secondly we have to get a guaranteed DNA analysis agreement from a recognised institution, either the Australian Tropical Herbarium or similar, to do the DNA testing of our samples. This I will pursue after getting the traditional owner agreement

While this may seem to be a drawn out process this is the procedure all plant collecting from the wild is going with the Convention in Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and the Convention in Biodiversity Development (CBD) two binding agreements that Australian Governments' are all signatories to. If you are interested you may peruse these two marvellous pieces of work on the Internet at any time you have a hankering to do so.

Meanwhile the planning here in SA for the annual Convention of the Society in October is well under way and I encourage people to come over and enjoy Steve Hootman's presentation and some great socialising here in South Australia.

I look forward to seeing you there. This may be the last communiqué I get to write between now and then so I wish you all a fun time enjoying any early flowers you may have.

Hopefully I will get to see some *Rhododendron hirsutum* and *ferruginium* in the Alps if not in flower then perhaps with some seed on them!!

Regards

**ROB HATCHER**  
**ARS PRESIDENT**

## UPDATE: RECENT FLOWERING OF HYBRIDS

It has been some time since I circulated photos of hybrids of mine in flower, so I thought timely to provide an update of some hybrids that have flowered in the last few 6 months.

*R loranthiflorum* 'Sri Chinmoy' x *R* 'Simbu Sunset' (Figure 1)

Bushy, upright shrub, 1.5m in 10 years, 8-14 flowers in an open truss, flowers very pale white-green flushed to pink at the petals. Flowers May-June.

*R luraluense* x *R psammogenes* var *inundatum* (Figure 2).

Registered 2013 as *R* 'Vicky Griffith' after my wife. One of a number of hybrids using *R luraluense*, which has proved to be an excellent species for hybridising.

Upright, stiff branched shrub, 1m x 1/2m in 10 years, 6-10 flowers in an upright truss, flowers white throughout. Flowers March.

*R macgregoriae* x *R luraluense* (Figure 3).

Provisionally registered as *R* 'Sarah Ormiston', after a recently deceased life-long friend of the Rouse and Griffith families.

Open, bushy shrub, ~ 1 x 1m in 8 years, 5-8 flowers in an open truss, flowers pale lime green flushed to light pink, very floriferous. Flowers May-June.

*R radians* x *R christiana*e (Figure 4).

An open shrub 1/2m x 1/2m after 4 years, 6-8 tubular flowers in an open truss, flowers pale white-lime green flushed to pink. Flowers June.

*R suaveolens* x *R laetum* (Figure 5).

A stiff and multi-branched shrub, 1m x 1m after 11 years, 8-12 flowers in an open truss, flowers creamy white flushed to a very pale pink on the petals. I've used *R suaveolens* in a number of crosses, in pursuit of branching plants with > 8 flowers per truss. This and *R suaveolens* x *R rutteni*, which I failed to photograph when in flower, along with the cross below, and the better of the *suaveolen* hybrids.

*R loranthiflorum* 'Sri Chinmoy' x *R suaveolens* (Figure 6).

A stiff and multi-branched shrub, about 1/2 m x 1/2 m after 6 years, up to 20 slightly curved tubular flowers in an open truss, flowers white throughout. Flowers June-July. This cross has the greatest number of flowers per truss arising from my hybridising.

I've started to propagate these from cuttings with the aim of making them available to members at a plant distribution day.

**ANDREW ROUSE**

## **.THE SPECIES COLUMN.**

***Rh. tapetiforme*** -Subsection Lapponica.

Subsection Lapponica contains a number of small-leafed and dwarf species which are well adapted to cold climates and high altitudes. They are essentially plants for bare windswept mountainsides and are often covered in snow for most of the year. Not all of these species can be grown here, but perhaps half of them will survive at Olinda. Our plants of *tapetiforme* do particularly well in the main rockery and their dwarf creeping habit is ideal for this area. (see photo page 7)

### **Name:**

The name means “carpet-like”, in reference to its habit of carpeting large areas with a dense mat of these plants.

### **Distribution:**

Tibet-Burma-Yunnan border regions 3500-4600 metres, covering large areas of open moorland.

### **Characteristics:**

This is a compact shrub up to 1 metre, but usually much less in cultivation. Leaves 0.4 to 1.5 cm. long by 0.3 to 0.8 cm. wide, elliptic, dark green above with translucent scales, lower surface densely covered with rust-coloured scales. The flowers vary from mauve to deep violet.

We have a number of species in the Lapponica Subsection in the garden:

*hippophaeoides*—A fine species with lavender-blue flowers which can be identified by its yellowish-buff scales under the leaves. Most of our plants are the Haba Shan form.

*impeditum*—This is similar to *tapetiforme* but is a slightly larger plant which can be distinguished by its smaller scales. *polycladum*(*scintillans*)—More upright than the other species with some of the deepest blue flowers in the genus.

*websterianum*—Quite tall (1.5) metres, and fairly vigorous, with unusual greyish-green leaves.

### **Where to See These Plants:**

Unfortunately many of the original Lapponica species were planted in exposed positions with inadequate watering, and did not survive. However we now have a reasonable collection in the rockery;

*tapetiforme*—Two plants, one at the top of the rockery steps and one at the bottom, flowering mid-October.

*hippophaeoides*—Three plants.

*impeditum*—Nine plants in the rockery and four more in other locations.

*polycladum*—Two plants near the Glasshouse path.

*websterianum*—Six plants located.

**Alan Kepert.**



*Rh. tapetiforme*



*Rh. hellwigii*  
July 2013, NRG



(Figure 1) *R loranthiflorum* 'Sri Chinmoy'  
x *R* 'Simbu Sunset'



(Figure 2). *R luraluense* x *R psammogenes*  
var *inundatum*



(Figure 3). *R macgregoriae* x *R luraluense*



(Figure 4).  
*R radians* x *R christianae*



(Figure 5). *R suaveolens* x *R laetum*



(Figure 6). *R loranthiflorum* 'Sri  
Chinmoy' x *R suaveolens*



Above: *R. beyerinckianum* in PNG



Above: *R. rarum* and its habitat.



Nepenthes and Medinilla in PNG



Alan Walker's Farewell BBQ  
lunch at NRG, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2013



Andrew Rouse's *R lanceolatum*  
flowering in his glasshouse for the  
first time.

Prue Crome, Andrew Rouse, John  
O'Hara and Michael Hare working  
in the Vireya House.



## THE TRIBULATIONS OF DOWNSIZING

Marcia and I have downsized from “Beechmont” in Olinda to Montrose. At Montrose our predecessor planted a long line of *Magnolia grandiflora* “Little Gem” to hide the unattractive monster next door. They are doing such a good job of hiding the house we may yet christen our new property “Little Gem”. Nothing, sadly, will hide the eucalypts that have died next door with recurrence of drought at the beginning of the year. These have said “We have survived 10 years of drought and had a couple of good recovery years. More drought is just too much. We give up.” Hundreds of eucalypts, hereabouts, have given up. For me moving was a necessary evil; but evil none the less. Marcia views the move far more favourably. What leaving “Beechmont” has meant is leaving our diverse range of trees and plants, our sweeping lawns and hundreds of *Vireya* species and hybrids planted there. Some very special in ground species were moved to NRG to preserve them but the rest remain to be visited and, I expect, to provide cutting material as needed.

We moved two big benches from a “Beechmont” shade house along with all my *Vireya* pots, species and hybrids. Initially I was going to build a shadehouse but found a natural one under trees. With quite a few weeks work all the species have been sorted, repotted as necessary, and put in alphabetical order. Quite surprisingly, after almost a year’s neglect with travelling and moving, almost all have prospered as if I had tended to them as I should have.

The question is “What now?” At Montrose, experience so far is we will not suffer damaging frosts but we expect much more severe summer conditions than at Olinda. I have planted as many big hybrid potted *Vireyas* as I could find shade for and a few species where I had multiple copies. The remainder are on the benches or our deck. From these ARSV can select those needed for NRG in the new *Vireya* House, of course, but also in ground.

My aim is to identify *Vireya* species that have prospered in ground at Olinda or, judging from the pots, are likely to do so. These are species that produce good root systems and are of sufficient size not to be smothered by weeds or neighbours. My hope is that examples of these can be grouped in a display garden that can be integrated with the new *Vireya* House. The combination could be emulated in very few locations. And not where the world’s best collections of *Vireya* species are located; Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh; Bremen: Rhododendron Species Foundation Seattle; Pukeiti New Plymouth New Zealand. The benefits for *ex situ* conservation of *Vireya* species endangered in their native habitat seem obvious to me. It is not just preservation of all *Vireya* species; it is the opportunity to study them all together in optimal conditions. Paradoxically collecting *Vireyas* in their places of origin is getting harder as they become more endangered. Brisbane based Queensland authorities, who have jurisdiction over the habitats of *R lochiaie* and *R viriosum*, Australia’s native Rhododendrons are particularly difficult. These authorities seem not only resist attempts to collect and study these plants *ex situ* but they place at least as many obstacles in the way of *in situ* study as anywhere else on the planet

**Simon Begg**



Above: Simon's natural 'shadehouse' at Montrose & pots on the deck.



*R. tuba* growing happily beside the 'creek'.  
*R.* 'Penny Whistle' settling into a garden bed.



Fifty *Camellia sasanqua*'s waiting to be planted along the rear boundary.

## VIREYA SPECIES COLUMN

*R hellwigii* [photo page 7]

### **Classification**

**Section *Schistanthe* subsection *Euvireya*.** This accords with the classification proposed by Craven *et al* **Vireya Rhododendrons: their monophyly and classification (*Ericaceae*, *Rhododendron* section *Schistanthe*)** Blumea 56, 2011: 153. The classification proposed by Argent *Rhododendrons in subgenus Vireya* RHS 2006 had *Vireya* as a subgenus and this species in section IV *Phaeovireya*.

### **Name**

The species is named for Franz Carl Hellwig who collected it in 1892

### **Origin**

The species is found in the wild in a limited area in Papua New Guinea, being the Huon Peninsular on the Finisterre and Saruwaged mountains at from 1065-3050m. There it is locally common and mostly epiphytic.

### **Introduction to Cultivation**

Argent reports an introduction from the 1964 expedition of Jeremy and Sayers but these did not persist to flowering. The first living plants that flowered were collections of seed from the Finisterre Mountains by Paul Kores in 1976 distributed widely, and mistakenly, as *R superbum*. The first confirmed flowerings were reported in March 1988 simultaneously in Melbourne and Pukeiti, New Zealand. The Melbourne flowering was reported by Dr Bob Withers and Dr John Rouse who confirmed the plants were *R hellwigii* not *R superbum*. The Edinburgh plants from this collection first flowered in September 1989. Obviously there is a long wait from seed to first flowering, though cuttings flower quicker. Argent reports some natural hybrids with *R superbum* with deep pink flowers. At Olinda there are red hybrids that are, to non experts, easily confused with the real thing. I had an opposite surprise. For half a dozen years I had watched a plant, given to me as *R phaeocephalum*, that I had planted in ground next to my species shade house. It prospered and turned into an ideal vigorous garden plant. As few, if any, others had this species, so I thought, I took cuttings from it. When Marcia and I felt we had to move from Beechmont I thought I should dig this plant up and replant it at NRG. I was headed into unknown growing conditions at Montrose [much hotter in summer] and wanted to ensure its survival. It was about to flower for the first time as I moved it. As I write the flowers have opened and it has proved to be *R hellwigii*. Confirmed by Andrew Rouse. As with many [not all, of course] other *Vireya* species, epiphytic or terrestrial, that come from the tropics at 2000m or thereabouts it likes Olinda at 500m, frost free and temperatures seldom above 37C in summer, with shelter from north and west and Olinda soil.

## **Description**

*R hellwigii* is a shrub or small tree, mostly epiphytic, with an attractive compact growth habit though its leaves are of comparable size to *R konori*, the blade being 80-160 x 50-100mm. But the leaves are ovate to ovate-elliptic to almost semi circular with an obtuse to rounded apex and an entire margin. They appear solid and robust, heavily veined with the mid vein strongly raised below. The flowers are among the most striking of Vireyas being large and dark blood red in an umbel of 2-6 florets held horizontally or slightly hanging.

**Simon Begg**

## **ALAN WALKER'S FAREWELL**

A very pleasant BBQ lunch was held by Parks Victoria today in honour of Alan Walker who is retiring from the Tuesday Volunteer Group after many, many years and moving closer to family. As a member of the ARSV he has worked tirelessly as a volunteer, often going to the NRG twice a week, spending days on duty at shows, holding propagation classes for the local school children and encouraging many members of the public to grow rhododendrons and join the Society. With Olinda Primary School students and teachers he has planted rhododendrons around the Olinda township. Some can be seen flourishing outside the 'new' Olinda Police Station. Another of his favourite plant groups is daphnes and wherever he lives he takes along or propagates a large selection of species and hybrids.

Since Parks Victoria took over management in the 1990's Alan has worked closely with staff and their appreciation was much in evidence today by the large group that attended the lunch. Glenn Maskell, Manger of the NRG, made an excellent speech listing Alan's diverse array of contributions to the NRG and presented him with a Photo Book of memories in which friends could add a remark. ARSV President John O'Hara followed up with the presentation of a daphne for his new garden.

## **Rhododendron rarum and Rh. beyerinckianum in PNG**

I have just returned from a work trip to the southern highlands of PNG. Whilst there, I was continually scanning the rainforest for rhododendrons, having compiled a long list of species recorded in PNG and highlighting the likely species for this specific area.

The forests in this region are on limestone karsts, very steep rugged terrain with numerous sink holes. As the wet season had begun the cloud layer constantly rolled through the site we were surveying at 1600m. There were occasional glimpses of a world beyond but most of the time visibility was about ten meters. This continual cloud supported an extravagant abundance of moss, wrapping every limb in the canopy right down to the jumble of broken branches and roots at ground level. This green carpet of moisture-laden moss was populated with ferns, orchids, an array of creepers and, I was hoping, many species of epiphytic rhododendrons. Our first glimpse of a small pink flower was garnered from scanning the canopy at an elevated site and at around 50m away the flower was just an enticing dot. I was very glad that I had included in my suite of cameras and lenses a small Canon SX50 HS that

had 1200mm telephoto capacity. Occasional small pink flowers were found on the forest floor over the subsequent days, showing evidence of canopy occupation.

This rhododendron proved to be *Rhododendron rarum* named not due to its scarcity but the sparseness of branches and looseness of its elongated leaves. It has a delicate weeping habit growing in the boles of moss high in the canopy as well as on small deposits of humus gathered on limestone outcrops. *R. rarum* was equally happy growing amongst tangles of *Nepenthes* and ferns on the limestone rubble deposited when clearing the site 8 years ago.

I asked our assistants to keep an eye out for any other rhododendron species. The station had a small garden in which some relocated terrestrial vireyas were planted but there were no flowers so I was unable to identify them. From my photos, Andrew Rouse suggested they were *R. javanicum* “ish”. I did find one plant on the edge of a track in the regrowth at this site but that was it.

Three days into our stay one of the staff came in with a new rhododendron. I was shown the location and it seemed to be an isolated plant on the top edge of revegetated rubble. I didn't encounter it anywhere else for the rest of our time there. The vireya was coated in a very dense layer of dendritic scales covering the growing tips and continuing down the branches and persisting on the underside of the older leaves. The leaves were very rugose and there were just two very moth eaten pink flowers with curved corollas. I endeavoured to key it out using Dr. G. Argent's book and had established it was in the *Phaeovireya* group but was led to plants that didn't fit the description. By just working through each description the closest was *R. beyerinckianum* but the photo was difficult to compare. The points of difference were around the degree of impression of the veins on the leaves and the scale density on the leaves and corolla. I had no access to the internet so couldn't search for better images.

When we returned to the main accommodation camp at 1000m there were numerous *R. beyerinckianum* along the high embankments of the road cuttings. The plants were up to 2m high and their strident upright nature and the rich rust colour of the new shoots stood out even in the mist. The flowering was patchy but I did manage to take some distant images showing the curved corollas and clustering of the stamens. As for other species, there might well be many more vireyas in this region but when plants are not flowering their vegetation blends in with all the other lush green vegetation of the exuberant tropical forests.

On returning to Melbourne I looked at Chris Callard's site, 'vireya.net' and compared the images and with the help of Andrew Rouse and other ARS VB members was happy with my identification even though the images of the PNG plants looked quite different from our *R. beyerinckianum* at Olinda.

Once again seeing vireyas in the wild has given me a slightly better understanding of their cultivation requirements; constant supply of moisture with impeccable drainage, just sufficient medium to enable the roots to gather the water and nutrients needed, a sunny position and good air flow. The temperature range is on the cool side, given the proximity to the equator in PNG one might think it would be very warm but the high altitude and constant passing cloud ensure the extremes of cold and heat are moderated.

**PRUE CROME**

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## OFFICE BEARERS AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS 2012-2013

|                                   |                  |             |  |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|-------------|--|
| <b>PRESIDENT</b>                  | John O'Hara      | 9523 7017   | johnohara@optusnet.com.au  |
| <b>VICE-PRESIDENT</b>             | Graham Price     | 9639 4493   | lithic01@bigpond.net.au  |
| <b>TREASURER</b>                  | Prue Crome       | 9489 8094   | prue.crome@fcpl.net.au   |
| <b>SECRETARY</b>                  | Mick Hare        | 9844 2232   | burrow@netspace.net.au   |
| <b>COMMITTEE</b>                  | Simon Begg       | 9728 4466   | simonbegg@gmail.com  |
|                                   | Francis Crome    | 9489 8094   | francis.crome@fcpl.net.au  |
|                                   | Val Marshall     | 98034434    | valerie_marshall@bigpond.com                                       |
|                                   | Elizabeth Xipell | 9859 9934   | lizax@melbpc.org.au  |
|                                   | Alex Pottage     | 5786 1595   | <a href="mailto:niceplants53@gmail.com">niceplants53@gmail.com</a> |
|                                   | Dan Macleod      | 0400 594319 | dan.macleod@parks.vic.gov.au                                       |
| <b>NEWSLETTER EDITOR</b>          | Simon Begg       | 9728 4466   | simonbegg@gmail.com  |
| <b>NATIONAL COUNCIL DELEGATES</b> | Simon Begg       | 9728 4466   | simonbegg@gmail.com  |
|                                   | Prue Crome       | 9489 8094   | prue.crome@fcpl.net.au   |