

Preface to *Nuytsia* Volume 26, a special issue celebrating 50 years of the Western Australian Botanic Garden

This special issue of *Nuytsia* commemorates the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Western Australian Botanic Garden at Kings Park, on the flanks of Mt Eliza in the heart of the city of Perth. To its many millions of visitors every year, this popular and important attraction provides a stunning introduction to, and insight into, the spectacular flora of Western Australia, particularly in spring when the more than 3,000 native species on display are in full bloom.

Many visitors, however, perhaps remain unaware of the important science – the exploration, discovery and taxonomy – that lies behind the floral displays showcased in the Garden. Visitors may also be surprised to learn that discovery of new species is a continual activity in Western Australia, boasting as we do one of the highest rates of discovery of new plant species anywhere on Earth. Discovery of new species, and its important corollary – the careful naming, painstaking description and authoritative documentation of the flora of Western Australia – is the context for this special issue.

Staff at Kings Park and Botanic Garden have for many years played an important role in taxonomic discovery in Western Australia. Former Directors such as John Beard and Stephen Hopper, and former Director of Science Kingsley Dixon, have both encouraged and been directly involved in survey, discovery, taxonomy and conservation of Western Australian plants. Many staff and students, both past and present, have travelled widely in the State, often for the purpose of collecting plants and seeds for the Garden, and in doing so have discovered new and noteworthy species.

This special issue, in which 50 new Western Australian species are named, represents an outstanding contribution by staff from Kings Park and Botanic Garden, particularly by the principal authors, Russell and Matthew Barrett. Crucial also have been the contributions of a wide range of co-authors, and of the dedicated technical and curatorial staff at Kings Park and the Western Australian Herbarium, without whom works such as these would be almost impossible.

Kings Park and the Western Australian Herbarium in many ways play complementary roles in understanding and conserving the flora of Western Australia. Much of the work of Kings Park is focused on the display, conservation and research of living plants and the State's Botanic Garden. The Herbarium has as its core Western Australia's State Collection of scientific specimens of plants, algae and fungi. This collection, and the expertise of the Herbarium's taxonomic and curatorial staff, provides the underlying basis for understanding Western Australia's rich flora, and are the key resources through which specimens of potential new species may be compared against existing taxa and understood in the context of a dynamically evolving taxonomic framework.

The long and fruitful collaboration between the Western Australian Herbarium and the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority at Kings Park continues in this special issue of *Nuytsia*. So too, through the papers herein, does the important task of documenting and naming the globally important flora of Western Australia.

Many new, remarkable and exciting species have been discovered in the last 50 years; many more will be discovered in the next 50 years. These contributions are a step along the way of a large and important task, one that requires collaborations such as this, and the dedication of large numbers of people, to ensure that the wonderful flora with which we share our State can be better understood, and hence better conserved for future generations.

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