

ANPC member profile

Chris Findlay

What is your current position?

I am a director of Flora Victoria. Flora Victoria specialises in the seed production and direct seeding of indigenous grasses and wildflowers for ecological restoration and landscaping projects, and environmental contracting including remnant vegetation management.

What projects are you working on at the moment?

Flora Victoria is currently working on several direct seeding projects for landscape architects and local and state government. Much of our work is linked to development and infrastructure and could be categorized as landscaping, as there is currently limited interest and funding available for ecological restoration using direct seeding. We are also greatly increasing our wildflower seed production to supply extra diversity and appeal to our direct seeding projects.

We have also started an exciting project that puts us right back on the ecological restoration track, a mine project for Kalbar Resources under the direction of Paul Gibson-Roy. This project aims to restore over 300 hectares of diverse grassy woodland, native grass will be used extensively with indigenous trees and shrubs in gullies to prevent erosion. Native grass will also be incorporated into new pastures. All of this will take place on degraded farmland, some of which has been planted with Blue Gum and Radiata plantations. The plan is to set up a 15-hectare seed production area to produce up to 3 tonnes of over 100 species of indigenous plant seed per year, including endangered species to re-create a local vegetation type that is almost extinct.

How did you end up working in plant conservation?

I have always been fascinated by plants, flowers in particular. One of my first memories is the taste left in my mouth after chomping into a Daffodil bulb as a toddler. I started growing annual bedding plants as a teenager, then on to Dahlias, herbaceous borders and cottage gardens. The more flowers the better. Then one day I found myself in the bush in Spring surrounded by more flowers than I could ever have imagined. It was life changing and my career has been shaped by this experience from that moment on. I studied Horticulture at Burnley and worked in the indigenous and native gardens there for two years, developing my newfound passion by turning the indigenous garden into a collection of



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over one hundred species of my favourite grasses and flowering plants. I grew an extreme wildflower garden, enjoyment wise it was the highlight of my career. During this time, I teamed up with a friend working in the Burnley Nursery and started Flora Victoria to create flowering grassland landscapes for a Melbourne council. This lasted for three years before moving on to a job where I was introduced to the seed production and direct seeding of native grasses. After that I re-started Flora Victoria in 2005 with the aim of restoring endangered Victorian Volcanic Plains grasslands. It's been harder than expected as direct seeding has not yet been widely adopted by our industry as a viable method of revegetation. I hope things change soon because direct seeding provides the only way to increase the range of our shrinking endangered grassy ecosystems and the species that rely on them for their survival.

What is your favourite plant and why?

Brunonia australis because it is unique, beautiful and can be found in many habitats across Australia. It ranges from light to vivid sky blue, a rare hue in the world of flowers. It belongs to a monotypic genus and until recently was the sole member of the monogeneric plant family *Brunoniaceae*. Stumbling across a dense patch of *Brunonia* in full bloom is always a delight.

Why do you think the ANPC network is important and what do you see as our priorities?

To me the ANPC network is a conduit between researchers and practitioners, giving us all insight, inspiration and knowledge we can use to improve our

focus and our work. It highlights some of the fantastic work done to conserve species, the importance of genetics in restoration, field work that unveils the mysteries of plants and their ecosystems, translocation and restoration projects and much more.

I believe an important priority for the ANPC is to support and encourage the use of direct seeding, and a level of seed production capable of supplying the large-scale ecological restoration needed to halt the loss of species in this country. Offsetting lost habitat needs to include the creation of new high-quality habitat capable of supporting our rare and threatened species. There is no other way of reversing the overall loss of our unique biota.

Book reviews

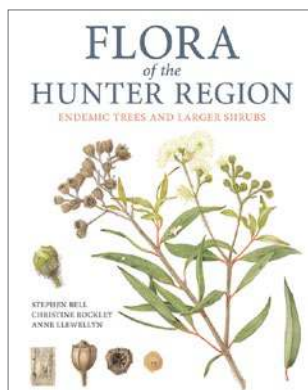
Flora of the Hunter Region: Endemic Trees and Larger Shrubs

Stephen Bell, Christine Rockley and Anne Llewellyn

Hardback. March 2019. \$79.99. ISBN: 9781486311026. 136 pages. 290 x 230 mm. Publisher: CSIRO Publishing

Working regularly with modern floras and field guides, one often notices limitations when it comes to rare and lesser known taxa. Specific descriptions, precise habitat and distribution information and indeed detailed imagery of the fine features required for their field identification are often lost in the quest to fit the overwhelming diversity of Australia's native flora into a user-friendly format. Coupled with the frequent modern preference for colourful photographs over diagnostic illustrations, it is easy to see why field identification of many of these rarities can present a challenge to amateurs and pros alike.

And so, it was with great enjoyment that I read Stephen Bell, Christine Rockley and Anne Llewellyn's *Flora of the Hunter Region*. A regional guide based on the botanically rich Hunter Valley in NSW, this book doesn't just seek to rectify the limitations outlined above, it raises the bar of what a modern guidebook with a specific focus can deliver. The beautifully presented pages combine comprehensive information about each species with detailed botanical art produced by graduates of the University of Newcastle's Bachelor of Natural History Illustration course, a fantastic concept.



Working through the book, each species is given a full two page spread. Each profile contains a wealth of information on the first page including notes on etymology, distribution, habitat, ecology, similar and related species and a summary of key diagnostic features as well as a complete taxonomic description. The accompanying distribution maps are also clearly displayed and easily interpreted. The second page is solely devoted to the botanical illustrations, providing a wonderfully presented display for easy reference to a specimen in the hand.

The illustrations really are what sets this book apart, however, with the detailed artworks highlighting the key diagnostic features of all species within. Reminiscent of the fine art found in older botanical references like Stan Kelly's Eucalypt guides from the 1960's, the images complement the descriptions wonderfully and clearly display crucial details often difficult to capture in a photograph. Their presence also means this book is not just for seasoned professionals – by displaying the diagnostic features so clearly, the often-complex terminology surrounding plant identifications is made clear for the beginner and the artworks make for a wonderful coffee table book for those with a more casual interest.