

CULTIVATING GREEN AWARENESS - SPECIALIST TRAILS, THEATRE AND ACTIVITIES FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

The recently opened Centre for Environmental Education at the Australian National Botanic Gardens has greatly expanded the opportunities for students and has lead to increased demand for the Gardens' educational services.

During 1992 almost 20,000 students from all parts of Australia visited the Gardens to take part in educational programs.

This workshop will consider the experiences of the Education Section in establishing specialist children's trails, environmental theatre and holiday activities.

RESUMEN

El Centro de Educación Ambiental del Jardín Botánico Nacional de Australia ha ampliado enormemente su oferta de servicios para los estudiantes y esto ha producido un incremento en la demanda en los servicios educativos del jardín.

Durante 1992 unos 20 000 estudiantes de todos los lugares de Australia visitaron el Jardín para tomar parte en los programas educativos.

Este taller considerará las experiencias de la Sección de Educación en el establecimiento de monitores especiales para niños, teatro ambiental y actividades lúdicas.

INTRODUCTION

Canberra, the Australian Capital, is a modern city with a population of about 300,000 people. The Australian National Botanic Gardens (ANBG), was established 21 years ago and occupies an area of 90 hectares close to the centre of the city. It contains the world's largest collection of Australian native plants with more than 6,000 species represented. Its objectives are to increase knowledge, appreciation and enjoyment of Australia's plant heritage. Approximately 360,000 people visit the ANBG every year and many of these visitors come in groups which include children. The Gardens had offered very little specifically for these children. Recently however craft activities, theatre and temporary trails have been provided. These have also been available to student groups.

TEMPORARY CHILDREN'S TRAILS

Leaftail

This trail was established in the Rainforest Gully. It was based on a children's book, *Leaftail*, the story of a Leaf-tailed Gecko (lizard). It remained in place for three months and this included the summer holidays.

As part of the holiday activities the writer was brought from Queensland to conduct a number of workshops, in which children were involved in creative writing and print making. Funding for

her visit was provided by the Friends of the Gardens.



Part of flyer for *Leaftail*

The success of the Trail was due to the creative work of many of the Visitor Services staff in preparing the signs and making animal models, including 10 Leaftails which were so lifelike they were attacked by kookaburras! Staff from other areas assisted in setting up the trail and maintaining the trail.

At each stop along the trail the story and some artwork from the book were displayed. The story was read to younger children as they searched for Leaf-tail and friends, which included a frog, a pademelon and bower bird - up a tree or under a log.

The trail was very open-ended, parts of it could be visited at any time. Maintenance was required to keep the signs clean and ensure that the model animals had not been attacked by animals or hidden by children.

Snugglepot and Cuddlepie

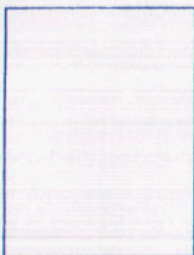
Another trail for young children titled *Snugglepot, Cuddlepie and their Friends* was also a great success judging from the numbers of people who made return visits with children. This trail took children on a ramble through many areas of the ANBG. Before commencing the trail they collected a story sheet, map and activity booklets. At each of 8 stops the children were read part of the story and they then completed drawings or similar activities in their booklets.

A trail such as this has a limited life because plants finish flowering, their fruit are eaten by the parrots. We replaced disappearing fruit with large beads hanging in the tree and flowers were replaced with cut-out laminated repli-

cas hanging in the bush. The children were happy to accept these. This trail required a considerable amount of maintenance.

The signs and markings for the trail were attached to electric fence posts. The only problem was older children interfering with the signs. Each morning the trail had to be checked and sometimes also during the day. This trail was in place during the final month of the school year and was widely advertised to schools. Many schools took the opportunity to use this trail and most groups also had a picnic lunch in the Gardens, a great way to finish the year. Prior to commencing the trail students were introduced to some of the characters and plants they would encounter.

Stop 1



Draw one of the mountain devils on the bush

Why do you think they are called mountain devils?



Blue Wrens told Snugglepot and Cuddlepie about humans they had seen in the city?



Have you seen any blue wrens in the Gardens to-day?

Stop 8

What is Lilli Pilli's skirt made from?



from the activity booklet *Snugglepot, Cuddlepie and Friends*

SPECIALIST TRAILS FOR STUDENTS

Wattle Week Trail

During Wattle Week a trail was in place which took students on a tour of the ANBG past wattles of special significance. Particular emphasis was placed on the Wattle sections of the ANBG where a large number of Australia's approximately 1000 species of wattle are grown. Yellow paint dots placed at intervals indicated the trail and each wattle plant was shown by a small yellow wooden stake with a number. Each number coincided with a number on the teachers' resource notes.

It was left to the teacher to decide how many plants were to be studied and what types of questions or observations were to be made. This idea of *providing the notes and leaving it to the teachers to decide how to use them with students*, will be used more in future. Teachers then have more control over their classes' activities and can fit the excursion to the needs of the students.

Also available in the ANBG were activities which could be done in conjunction with the Trail. These included propagation of wattles, with the emphasis on species which grow naturally in the areas from which the students came and on species which are endangered. Children's notes on how to grow wattles were taken back to school along with packets of seeds. For young-

Celebrate Wattle Week
at the
Australian National Botanic Gardens



1 - 8 September

Learn about Australia's many beautiful wattles by

- walking the Wattle Trail*
- completing the Wattle Activity sheets*
- growing a wattle*
- Wattle seeds available*
- Notes and slide sets available for loan*

*For bookings phone Environmental Education
250 9535 or 250 9547*

part of Wattle Week flyer

ger students we prepared a series of activities in the wattle section of the ANBG. These were very popular. Students learnt about endangered wattles and about Australia's floral emblem - *Acacia pycnantha* - the Golden Wattle.

Bird Month

This was celebrated in the ANBG during September 1992. About 1200 students of all ages participated. The ANBG provides a variety of habitats for a great diversity of birds, with over 160 species being seen here. September was chosen because it is a time when

many birds are becoming active, collecting material for nests or food.

The purpose of Bird Month was to increase awareness of :

◆ the characteristics of birds

◆ the diversity of birds in the ANBG

◆ the role of birds in ecosystems, particularly their relationship with plants.

What

Bird

is

That?



September

is

Bird Month

at the

Australian National Botanic Gardens

Visit the Gardens and discover:

- *how to tell an Eastern Spinbill from a Silvereye or a Noisy Friarbird*
- *which birds like to nest in gum trees*
- *what birds eat for dinner*
- *why birds need plants*
- *how to tell a Willie Wagtail's nest from a White-winged Chough's*
- *how to get birds to visit your school or home garden*

Come on our special tours

- see our slide/tape shows

*For bookings phone 'Environmental Education
250 9535 or 250 9547*

Bird Month flyer

Preparations for Bird Month included production of a package called *Discover the Birds of the Gardens*. This contained information/activity sheets, maps for locating specific bird groups, information on cats and their effects on birds and other wildlife, references and colourful stickers of endan-

gered birds. A photographic display was prepared. Binoculars were available for groups, disused nests were collected for use with students and wooden mobiles and jigsaw puzzles were particularly popular with younger students and those with disabilities. Tapes of bird calls and a slide show were

prepared. An inservice course for teachers was very well attended. The Rangers took many tours. It was an unusual exercise for many children - to be quiet and listen.

THEATRE


Treehouse

This was a play for young children performed by a local theatre group.

The performance took place on World Environment Day, 1992. *Treehouse* sensitively combines mime and movement to explore the magic of the Australian bush and the cycles of life. This play taps into the young child's imagination, a world in which everything is possible. Trees think, talk and become a variety of native animal. At the end of the play the young audience was taken on a discovery ramble through the Gardens.

TREEHOUSE

TRUCKLOADS OF FUN!



BY BRUCE KELLER AND JIGSAW THEATRE COMPANY

A World Environment Day Presentation
for 3 - 6 year olds
at the
Environmental Education Centre
Australian National Botanic Gardens

part of *Treehouse* flyer

The Cat Makes Tracks

This environmental musical for the young was performed in the ANBG during the Australian Science Festival in March 1993. It tells the story of Contes-

sa, a pleasant Manx cat who likes TV and eating tinned cat food much more than roaming in the bush. Her owner lets her wander into the bush in pursuit of what she thinks is a big mouse, but is really a baby pygmy possum. This

experience leads Contessa on an interesting adventure which she shares with the audience. We learn that cats should wear bells and be desexed. That cats and other creatures like crocodiles are not good or bad, that they are just doing what they have to do.

Cats, whether domestic or feral pose a great danger to wildlife in Australia and while this message was presented gently, it was also very clear.

This play was 40 minutes long and was seen by over 1200 children during 22 performances.

Associated with the play was an exhibition of 11 large, colourful cartoon paintings titled *Battle for the Spinifex*. These paintings tell the story of the feral animal problem in Australian deserts. A booklet of children's activities relevant to the paintings (including the script for a play) accompanied this exhibition.

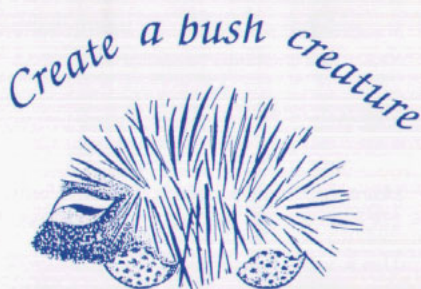


a character from *Battle for the Spinifex*

OTHER HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES

Create a Bush Creature

Activities for children in which they learn about native plants and make bush creature using their woody fruits and nuts are very popular holiday activities. Four sessions were held in January 1993. Volunteers were recruited to assist with this program. Advertising was placed in the local media and a charge of \$4.00 covered costs.



*A holiday program for children
at the*

Australian National Botanic Gardens

a bush creature

PREPARATION FOR TRAILS / THEATRE / ACTIVITIES

ANBG based

Establishment of a trail - it is important to have discussions with the gardens' staff responsible for the area through which the trail will pass. Some-

times a path will need to be changed slightly, the area may need upgrading, extra plants may need to be included. Discussions with staff at this stage will ensure problems are identified and if necessary resolved. For many good reasons staff are often apprehensive about the idea of large groups of students moving through the areas for which they are responsible.

Prior to final installation and publication of the trail it is useful to ask some people unfamiliar with the gardens to walk the trail. They will be able to identify problems related to instructions, directions and interpretation.

Maintenance of a trail

A trail must be suitably maintained. Maintenance must take place daily and any problems rectified immediately. This is best done by the staff who have installed the trail. Some trails can be very time consuming to maintain - a semi-permanent low maintenance trail would be very popular with visitors and staff. Trails must be marked clearly, it is extremely frustrating to be lost with 20 - 30 children! Maps must have landmarks such as bridges or seats shown clearly to assist people with orientation.

Curriculum based

When preparing trails/activities for use by student groups consideration must be given to ways in which a trail or activity meets certain requirements of the curriculum. What are the objectives of the trail/activity? These must be clear when the proposal is prepared. Clear objectives also make evaluation of the trail or performance easier and more worthwhile.

Advertising should include a description which will help teachers decide on the value of the activity to their students. In the case of theatre, performing arts consultants from the Education Department assess the plays for their relevance to the curriculum and then recommend them to schools.

The experience of the ANBG's Education Service with special trails, theatre and craft activities has been very positive. With improved co-ordination with other ANBG staff and assistance from volunteers they will continue. Of concern is the large numbers of local students (and relatively few from distant areas) having access to them. Forward planning and advertising to schools beyond the local area is one way of rectifying this.