



16th Australasian **Botanic Guides Conference**

Beauty rich and rare
Kings Park and Botanic Garden Western Australia

16 - 20 September 2019

WALK SUMMARY: BANKSIA BONANZA

The banksias are magnificent relics from the super continent of Gondwana. They are a genus from the family Proteaceae and are diverse, conspicuous in the bush, resilient and great survivors. Western Australia (WA) is home to an amazing range of banksias. This walk introduces you to some growing naturally in Kings Park and to others selected as uncommon or remarkable.

At the latest count there are 173 banksias species across Australia including the Dryandras, which entered the genus in 2007. In WA there are to 150 species known to science. The most recently added species is the arid-land *Banksia rosserae* in 2001.

The **Banksia Garden** displays 2800sqm of carefully curated plants. It was created in 1965 and redesigned in 1997 solely for WA species. Currently, it displays around 94 banksia species and throughout the garden there are flowering spikes to be seen all year round.

The walk introduces you to our ingenious banksias and also covers their place in history, human threats, artistic interest and their significance to Aboriginal people and to conservation.

Banksias are woody evergreen plants and range from prostrate ground covers to small shrubs and trees up to 25 metres tall. They survive and thrive in harsh conditions of nutrient-poor soils, prolonged summer drought and bushfires. Like many southwest flora, they have tough and spiny foliage, woody seed capsules and ingenious ways of obtaining limited soil nutrients and water or regenerating after fire. Banksias are recognised by their spectacular flowers. Clusters of many very small flowers are arranged in familiar cylindrical, or spherical or cone shape spikes which vary in size from tiny to enormous.

Pollinators are attracted to the often brilliantly coloured displays of yellow, orange, red, purple or green.

6 banksias grow naturally in Kings Park

- *Banksia grandis* or Bull Banksia – the first banksia species collected for science in WA
- *Banksia attenuata* known as Slender Banksia – named for its leaves narrowing towards the base
- *Banksia ilicifolia* or Holly-leaved Banksia – grows on sandy, low-lying flats
- *Banksia menziesii* or Firewood Banksia – the central motif in the Kings Park corporate logo
- *Banksia prionotes* or Acorn Banksia – the partially opened flower spike resembles an acorn
- *Banksia sessilis* or Parrot Bush – a nectar-rich ex-dryandra growing in the Park bushland

6 prostrate banksia species grow in southwest WA

Banksia blechnifolia, *B. chamaephyton*, *B. gardeneri* var. *gardneri*, *B. goodii*, *B. petiolaris* and *B. repens*. There is ongoing research on the possible ex-dryandra prostrates.

Threats to the Garden include dieback pathogen *Phytophthora cinnamomi* and the drying climate.

Traditional resource use. Aboriginals chewed young bud shoots, soaked flower cones for a delicious sweet nectar drink and carried smouldering banksia cones as firesticks when moving to a new camp.

Banksias Seats and Mosaics. Designed by WA Artist Philippa O'Brien, the seats of Bull Banksia wood from the park and wrought-iron seatbacks show the zig-zag leaves. Upper seat mosaic marble depicts 6 Prostrate Banksias; the lower seat marble depicts 5 Banksias native to the park and their pollinators.

In the garden, you may spot some of author May Gibbs's Big Bad Banksia Men (Gumnut stories).

Sir Joseph Banks (1743 –1820) Botanist accompanied Captain James Cook and stepped ashore at Botany Bay, NSW 28 April 1770. Banks collected with Dr Daniel Solander, 4 banksia specimens later named by the younger Carl Linnaeus, as *Banksia serrata*; *Banksia integrifolia*; *Banksia ericifolia* and *Banksia dentata* (shares with PNG). Linnaeus had suggested that New Holland be called Banksia!