

All Points West

Exploring the Hamilton region of Western Victoria

SGAP Hamilton invites you to visit Hamilton on 13th and 14th November for an interesting tour of gardens, a special nursery and important reserves.

Hamilton is a major economic centre for western Victoria, with a population of about 10,000, situated 300 km west of Melbourne. It is the centre of Australia Felix – so named by Major Mitchell in 1836. Western Victoria contains about 5.5 million hectares (one quarter of the state) and about 1500 species of higher plants, but only 100 of these are restricted to the region. Hamilton's average rainfall since 1983 has been 612 mls although only 582mls for the past 12 years. As a result of continued water restrictions in the city and local smaller towns, there has been a concerted effort to establish and maintain gardens with reduced water needs. We will visit 3 gardens, ranging from 6 acres to a small garden in the main street of Hamilton, all demonstrating thoughtful use of natives.

On Saturday, we start at the reserve at the Wannon Falls, located 19km west of Hamilton. The falls, which plunge over a lava basalt cliff dropping into a large pool 30 metres below, are fed by the Wannon River that has its headwaters in the Grampians. The reserve at the Wannon Falls includes perhaps the only wildflower and native grass cricket oval in the world. In spring, a local naturalist has photographed at least 20 different wildflowers and a couple of native grass species in bloom on the oval, which is now visited more for its wildflowers than any other purpose.

We then travel to a 6 acre garden with access to the same waterfall. Ainsley and Simon Wilson were drawn to the way the 2.4 ha garden harmonised with the surrounding environment. It is difficult to believe that only 16 years ago the block was bare, apart from a handful of river gums in the gully. The original owners provided the design framework of water, native and exotic plants for the Wilsons to use as a backdrop for their creativity. A walking track around their lake leads to the falls. Abundant and varied bird life also exists in the garden and its environs.

Then it's 15km north west where we'll lunch at the Peter Francis Points Arboretum, located on the edge of the town of Coleraine. On 37 hectares, the collection contains in excess of 10,000 plants, and includes 63 rare and endangered native species. The Points contains one of the largest collection of Eucalypts in the southern hemisphere, as well as extensive collections of other Australian plants, interspersed with walking trails.

On Saturday evening, Bryan Haywood will speak about the butterflies and their food plants of SW Victoria and SE South Australia. Bryan is a biodiversity planning officer with Forestry South Australia and has had a keen interest in entomology, especially butterflies and cicadas, for fifteen years. During this time, amongst other things, he has been documenting butterfly species and their habitats. His photographic presentations are superb.

Two gardens for inspection on Sunday show great contrasts: one is an evolving, family friendly garden interspersed with native hedges, dry creek beds, raised vegie patches, a small orchard and meandering lawns punctuated with cleverly designed native garden beds set on 4 acres. The other is a small garden, only about 4 years old but with an interesting collection of cleverly arranged natives.

We will lunch at an amazing nursery and garden on the edge of Hamilton, owned by Rob Beulke, a complete plant nut who has been growing plants for more than 25 years. He has an extensive nursery/potted/bonsai collection of Australian natives, but his passion is grafting plants, including his favourites, rare Eucalypts and Corymbias, A grafted Eucalypt witches broom/sport will fascinate visitors, the grafted weeping Banksias and Acacias are stunning and Rob's large orchard and vegie garden is amazing, all set amongst native gardens. Plants from several Hamilton nurseries will be available for sale at the Beulke's on Sunday.

Those returning to Melbourne may wish to squeeze in a visit to the Dunkeld Arboretum, about 30 km east of Hamilton, to inspect a small area of remnant Victorian Volcanic Plains native grassland in the south eastern section. Over 60 native plant species have been recorded in this remnant including the vulnerable Clover Glycine. The extensive coverage of Wallaby Grass provides suitable habitat and food source for the critically endangered Golden Sun Moth.

Participants and Committee members will meet at Hamilton Institute of Rural Learning, (HIRL,) at 333 North Boundary Road, Hamilton where registration will occur from 8.30am and where the Committee meeting will commence at 9.00am on Saturday 13th November. The visit to the Wannon reserve will be from 9.30am.

Emergency phone number is 0438741223

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