



THE ROYAL
BOTANIC GARDENS
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From garden labourer to seed scientist - a rainforest journey

When Graeme Errington started work as a garden labourer at the Australian Botanic Garden Mount Annan he had no idea that his new-found career would ignite a passion and fascination with plants that would set him on a path to a PhD in rainforest seed conservation some 15 years later.

While working as a labourer Graeme first completed a Certificate in Horticulture, shortly followed by a Certificate in Arboriculture (tree surgery). Then an opportunity to look after a rare and threatened species garden sparked Graeme's interest in conservation.

Soon afterwards Graeme was offered a temporary roll at the Australian SeedBank based at the Australian Botanic Garden.

'The work gelled with me straight away', said Graeme. 'I was so attracted to this whole area of seed biology and seed germination.'

Since then Graeme has completed an Honours Degree in Environmental Science and a seed conservation course at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

Now Graeme has his sights set on completing a PhD in Seed Biology looking, in particular, at seed dormancy in Australian rainforest species.

'My research will look at the best ways to store rainforest seeds to ensure their long-term conservation', said Graeme.

'Some can be stored by using the common drying-and-freezing technique but around 50 percent of rainforest seeds cannot be successfully stored this way so we need to find alternative methods.'



Graeme is currently in the first year of his PhD at Wollongong University and is being co-supervised by Manager Horticultural Research Dr Cathy Offord at the Australian Botanic Garden.

Australian Botanic Garden Manager Natural Heritage Peter Cuneo said 'the Australian PlantBank team is looking forward to supporting Graeme in this important research working towards unlocking the secrets of our rainforest seeds.'

More great scientific output from the Rainforest Seed Conservation project seems assured, with the recent announcement that Technical Officer, Graeme Errington will commence his PhD on seed dormancy in Australian rainforest species.

Since starting with the rainforest seed project at its inception in 2012, Graeme and the PlantBank team have tested many rainforest seeds looking at both desiccation tolerance and dormancy.

As is often the case in nature, the seed behaviour of rainforest plant diversity does not fall into neat categories! This area of rainforest seed biology has received relatively little research attention, and Graeme's PhD with Wollongong University (co-supervised by Cathy Offord) will examine the different types of seed dormancy that exist in our rainforest flora, and if there is a link between seed desiccation tolerance and dormancy.

The externally funded Rainforest Seed Conservation project is a great example of the opportunities available to staff at BG & CP to combine work with further research and study.