

scholarships

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Each year, Foundation & Friends invites staff from the Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust to apply to be considered for a scholarship to advance their work or training. We are always thrilled by the number and quality of applications we receive, making awarding the limited number of scholarships a challenging yet rewarding job for our selection panel. Here are this year's recipients.

DR KAREN SOMMERVILLE

Although rainforests cover less than one per cent of Australia, they contain more than 50 per cent of our plant diversity. This diversity is key to the survival of our native fauna and holds a significant value in terms of potential crops, wild crop relatives and sources of medicinal compounds.

Dr Karen Sommerville is a scientist working on the Rainforest Conservation Project. "Off-site conservation of rainforest plants is needed as insurance against loss of diversity and potential extinction of species, and seedbanking can be used to provide this insurance," explains Karen. "However, the seeds of many rainforest plants won't tolerate the conditions required for standard seedbanking."

Dr Sommerville will visit the National Centre for Genetic Resources Preservation (NCGRP) in Fort Collins, Colorado. She will learn methods for assessing the ideal moisture content for the storage of seeds that are only partially tolerant of drying, and methods for preserving embryos of seeds that do not tolerate any drying. This will greatly increase the Trust's capacity to conserve our precious rainforest plants.

JAMES BEATTIE

Managing the orchid collections at the Sydney Garden means horticulturist James Beattie knows his *Cymbidiums* from his *Dendrobiums*, but it's the chance to learn from some of the world's orchid experts that's earned James a scholarship to attend the combined 20th Australian Orchid Council Conference and 50th Tropical Queensland Orchid Council Conference & Show in Mackay, Queensland in 2016.

"With the new orchid plantings in the Garden, new public glasshouse displays set to open in October and The Calyx in 2016, our orchid collection will be an increasingly important focus," says James. "The opportunity to attend the conference will be an important step in

building my skills in orchid breeding and culture. I'll also gain hands-on experience in creating world-class orchid displays."

In particular, James hopes to learn growing techniques for difficult-to-grow genera, and this will allow the Trust to diversify and expand the orchid collection.

RACHAEL TAYLOR

As a horticulturist at the Australian Botanic Garden, Mount Annan, it's no surprise to learn Rachael Taylor has more than a passing interest in Proteaceae. In fact, curating the Banksia garden at Mount Annan has prompted Rachael to further her knowledge by visiting Kings Park & Botanic Gardens in Perth, where she'll work alongside their Proteaceae experts.

She is looking to gain insight into growing banksias as well as learning about the management of Kings Park's threatened species collection, and has a specific interest in how the Garden uses interpretation to engage with visitors.

Rachael will also visit the Banksia Farm at Mount Barker, to gain valuable experience in seed production, and some of Western Australia's National Parks to see Proteaceae growing in the wild.

DR MATT RENNER

Dr Matt Renner has more than a passing interest in bryophytes. He is completing a revision of the leafy liverwort family Plagiochilaceae in Australia. Interestingly, the native species have never been studied by anyone based in the country.

"It's not surprising, then," says Matt, "that fieldwork and labwork has detected entirely new species, and has also shown many Australian species are complexes of several different and sometimes unrelated entities, so real diversity is higher than currently recognised."

Matt's scholarship will allow him to travel to the Conservatoire et Jardin Botaniques herbarium in Geneva,

Switzerland, where he will study type specimens of Plagiochilaceae. He will then visit Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität (LMU) in München, Germany, where he will work with Prof. Jochen Heinrichs on placing his study of the Australian species into a global context.

Finally, Matt will visit The Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago to collaborate with Prof. John Engel – who is currently preparing a flora treatment for the same group in New Zealand – to facilitate final taxonomic decision-making for his project.

PHIL PETTITT

Sometimes opportunities arise outside of the normal scholarship application process. Such was the case with Community Greening Coordinator Phil Pettitt. Phil was invited by Dr Asimina Vergou, Head of Education at Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI) to present at the 9th BGCI Congress on Education in Botanic Gardens, held at the Missouri Botanical Garden, St Louis, in April this year.

Phil approached Foundation & Friends and, through a scholarship, was able to make the journey to the Congress, where he featured as a presenter and a panel member in the Social Inclusion and Community Engagement stream.

"The trip to the US was full of opportunities," says Phil. "The first was connecting with similar projects, in Missouri's 'Gateway Greening' and the 'Greenbridge' program at New York's Brooklyn Botanic Garden. I was also able to share ideas about projects we have developed with our Community Nurseries. In turn, I learned about volunteer programs and how trainees could be incorporated, with correct training in community development and mentoring, to assist sustaining and expanding outreach program goals."



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Photos: Stefani Carusi, Nik Venish, Carla Pettitt: © Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust.

Foundation & Friends' scholarships remain an important and valued part of our support for the staff of the Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust, and their ongoing efforts to ensure your Botanic Gardens remain world-class places for science, horticulture and education.