

DECEMBER 2019-JANUARY 2020 WALK FROM THE LOWER CAR PARK



The map on the reverse is an enlarged section of the general map of the garden inside the brochure and shows the location of this month's plants

From the Information Panel walk past the bank of currently flowering *Cotoneaster*. Then look across the colourful Meadow Mix of wildflowers to see **(A) *Isoplexis canariensis* Canary Island foxglove**. Superficially, this has the appearance of the related foxglove (*Digitalis*) but with tawny apricot-orange flowers, arranged on dense spikes. Endemic in a narrow altitudinal band of forest margins on the islands of La Palma, La Gomera and Tenerife these are uncommon in the wild and relatively rare in cultivation. The amazing flowers bloom for long periods. A Botanic Gardens staff member donated one original plant to the Nursery which has enabled several plants to be propagated and in turn more than 100,000 seeds collected and now stored. Researchers believe that the bird pollinators with which the species may have evolved are now extinct. Experimental data has shown that sporadic pollination by non-specialist, flower-visiting birds, such as the canary, is enough to maintain seed production and population survival in the species. Extended flowering time and nectar composition supports this theory.

Continue along the main path toward The Chris Steele Scott Pavilion. On the near side is a low shrub *Daphne x transatlantica* **'Eternal Fragrance'**. Fine-tuned over 30 years this hybrid was created by the English plant breeder, Robin White. The result is a hardy plant that tolerates a range of conditions. It has delicately-perfumed flowers for most of the year, according to Botanic Gardens of South Australia Nursery Curator, Matt Coulter. At the far end of the pavilion is *Salvia microphylla* **'Hot Lips'** with an eye-catching display of red and white flowers for most of the year. The species originates from the mountains of Mexico. This is one of numerous hybrids and cultivars brought into horticulture. The specific epithet *microphylla*, from the Greek, means "small leaved". When crushed, these have a strong mint-like fragrance.

Further along on the left-hand side of this path is **(B) *Acer pseudoplatanus* sycamore maple** from Central Europe and Western Asia but now naturalised in parts of North America and Australasia. Large palmate leaves borne on long reddish stalks (petioles) have upper surfaces bluish-green (glaucous) while their undersides have an orange brown tinge. These gradually change to a yellow-brown colour before being shed during autumn/winter. Winged seeds called samaras, are borne in pairs and twirl to the ground when ripe. The specific name *pseudoplatanus* refers to the superficial similarity of the leaves and bark to those of plane trees in the genus *Platanus*. The common name "sycamore" originally applied to the fig species *Ficus sycomorus*, being the sycamore referred to in the Bible.

Nearby is **(C) *Pinus flexilis*, limber pine** which occurs naturally in the mountains of the Western USA and on Canadian Rockies. Some are documented to be over 1,000 years old. Both the specific epithet and common name refer to the tough, flexible branches. Note the clusters of yellow pollen cones (microstrobili). In 1894 the naturalist John Muir observed "that miners, shepherders, and other rural residents in its range used its timber for cabins, fencing, mine timbers, and doubtless, firewood."

As you approach the next pathway to the left, within the inside corner can be seen a fast-growing large rainforest tree *Toona ciliata*, **Australian red cedar**. These grow to 40–60 metres in their natural range of southern Asia, through New Guinea into southern Queensland and northern NSW. It is now essentially commercially extinct as it has been extensively logged since European settlement; the timber was highly desirable in cabinetry for its softness, texture and rich red colour. This tree is one of Australia's few native deciduous trees; the leaves will fall in autumn and grow back in spring with new green leaf growth displaying shades of pink.

On the outside of the corner is **(D) *Syncarpia glomulifera*, turpentine tree**. In its native range of Qld and NSW it grows straight-trunked up to 45 metres tall. Crushed leaves have a taste and smell reminiscent of turpentine. The thick brown bark is fibrous, with deep vertical furrows. Cream flowers are fused in groups of up to 7 compound heads, in contrast to the individual woody fruits of eucalypts. Trees are thought to live up to 500 years and the hard, durable timber with high silica content is used in heavy-traffic flooring, for poles, outdoor decking and is one of the most difficult timbers to ignite. Surviving areas within the Sydney Basin Bioregion have been recognized as an Endangered ecological community under the Threatened Species Conservation Act.

Up this track toward Fern Gully, on the left is **(E) *Cyathea robusta***, the endemic Lord Howe Island tree fern endemic, but widespread in cultivation outside its natural range. The trunk-like structure elevating the fronds above ground level is a modified rhizome, and woody tissue is absent. Like other ferns, they never flower or produce seeds but reproduce from spores that grow on the undersides of the fronds.

(F) *Elaeocarpus reticulatus*, blueberry ash is a small tree currently sporting fruit. Its natural habitat is warmer temperate areas on the east coast of Australia. Soon to appear will be masses of white-pink flowers which are cup-shaped with a fringed edge resembling small hanging skirts, hence common name of "fairy petticoats". The extended fruiting season (April-October) often sees the fruit remaining on the plant into the next flower season (October-January).

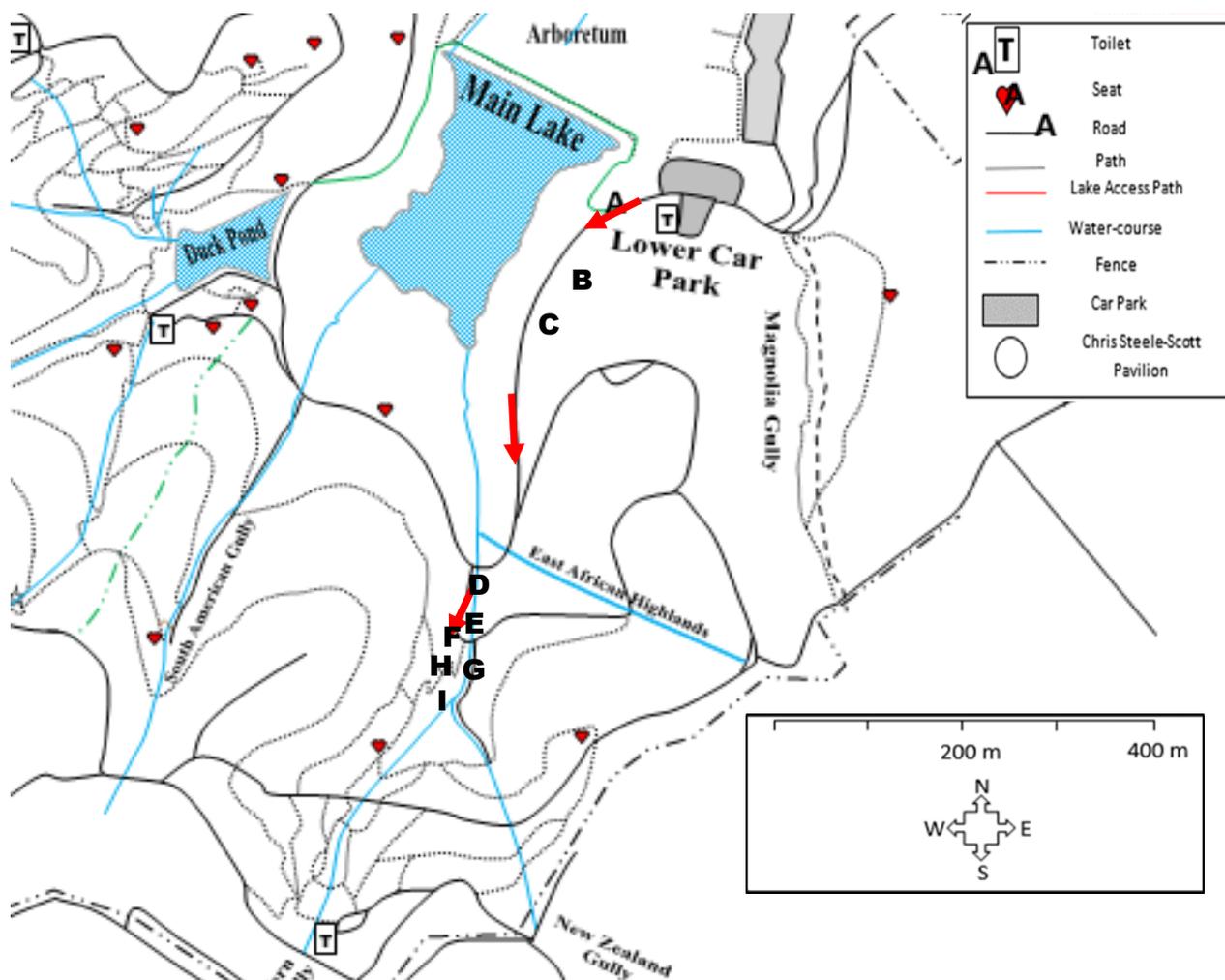
On the left-hand side of the entrance to New Zealand and Fern Gully is (G) *Dietes robinsoniana*, **Lord Howe wedding lily** which is endemic to the Island. This little-known species features large white flowers and is the tallest species of *Dietes*, a genus of the iris family. It was introduced to mainland Australia in 1869 by Charles Moore, Director of the Sydney Botanic Garden who collected it during a South Pacific scientific expedition. Although short lived a sequence of large pure white flowers with yellow markings (nectar guides) toward the centre are produced; each on stems which stand 1-2 metres above the ground.

On the right-hand side of the path is (H) *Syzygium luehmannii*, **small-leaved water gum** native to Australian riverine, littoral, subtropical or tropical coastal rainforest of northern NSW and Qld. Note the new pink leaves amongst the small, shiny green lance-shaped leaves. In its natural form this plant can grow into a tree large tree with a buttressed base. In summer it produces red pear-shaped fruits about 13 mm long, covering a single seed. Otherwise known as **riberry** or **lilly pilly** they are mostly used to make a distinctively flavoured jam. Several varieties are also available for garden purposes.

Further along the left-hand path is *Cordyline fruticosa*, **palm lily** native to SE Asia, PNG, Melanesia and NE Australia. It is cultivated throughout Polynesia where its starchy sweet rhizomes are eaten and its leaves used to thatch the roofs of houses and to wrap and store food. The spirally arranged clusters of broadly elongated leaves at the tips of slender trunks make the species a popular ornamental plant, with numerous cultivars, many selected for green, reddish or purple foliage. Long panicles of small scented yellowish to red flowers mature into red berries (as can be seen here at present). Further on is a (I) *Platycerium bifurcatum*, **elkhorn fern** (PNG, Qld, NSW). Known as a bracket epiphyte they occur in or near rainforests (epiphytes don't require soil and simply live off the nutrients from the air and water from their surrounds). Spores are produced on the under-surface of the end segments of each frond. The spore producing areas are coloured tan brown and have the texture of velvet cloth.

About 10 metres further up, and 10 metres back from the opposite side of the path look out for a small tree having a brilliant display of crimson pincushion-like flowers amongst oblong, leathery, dark green leaves. This is *Metrosideros excelsa*, **NZ Christmas tree, hutukawa or kahika** which is an evergreen in the Myrtaceae (myrtle) family native to coastal areas of New Zealand. Farming and leaf browsing by introduced pests like the Australian brushtail possum have reduced pōhutukawa forests by over 90%.

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For information about the Friends and/or guided walks, please telephone 8222 9367