



MEDIA RELEASE

Cate Blanchett backs Australia's seed banks as 'enduring beacons of hope'



As Australia's native plants face an increasingly uncertain future, Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria is marking 15 years of national action to safeguard species through the Australian Seed Bank Partnership.

The Partnership is a national alliance of 10 conservation seed banks, botanic gardens and conservation organisations working together to collect, research and share knowledge about Australia's native seeds. Together, it holds collections from over 70% of the country's known native flora, including 983 plant species threatened with extinction.

Backed by Academy Award-winning actor and conservation advocate Cate Blanchett AC, the anniversary highlights the critical role seed banking plays in protecting biodiversity, supporting restoration, and helping species recover from threats like climate change, habitat loss and bushfire.

As ambassador for Wakehurst Kew in the UK, Ms Blanchett says seed banks have never been more important.

'Life begins with seeds - and so does our best chance to save it,' she says.



'The Australian Seed Bank Partnership is a vital part of this global story, safeguarding over 18,000 native plants for future generations. As they celebrate 15 years, I'm proud to support their work conserving Australia's unique flora'.

Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria (RBGV), home to Australia's oldest scientific institution, the National Herbarium of Victoria, holds more than 1.5 million specimens of dried plants, algae and fungi, and thousands of seeds gathered from across the country and the world.

The Victorian Conservation Seed Bank is built season by season, species by species, and represents one of Australia's most important biological safeguards. It acts as an insurance policy against the threat of extinction. The Gardens team of world-leading scientists collect, document and store seeds from rare and threatened native species before habitat loss, fire, drought or climate change can erase them permanently.

"The Seedbank and our partnerships with organisations such as the Australian Seed Bank Partnership are critical for safeguarding biodiversity in Victoria and further afield. Our team of experts work at the cutting edge of scientific research to protect our remarkable flora against catastrophic events," shares Andre Messina, Seedbank Botanist, Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria.

Some notable projects Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria has recently undertaken to help preserve Victoria's biodiversity include:

- **Rare Bloom Project** : A three-year national collaboration with World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Australia and ASBP Partners which saw the conservation of more than 153 species of wildflowers across Australia. Partners involved in this project delivered 262 seed collections, 218 germination trials, 11 propagated species and 14 rapid flora assessments.
- **Project Phoenix:** Supported native seed and plant supply for bushfire recovery and landscape restoration. Seeds of 10 threatened taxa were collected and banked, including new collections of *Brachyscome riparia* (Snowy River Daisy) and *Australopyrum retrofractum* (Comb Wheat-grass), never before held by the Victorian Conservation Seed Bank. 26 population assessments were carried out for fire affected species.
- **Myrtle Mayday:** Post fire surveys over two seasons that monitored the regeneration habits of fire affected flora. This resulted in over 16,000 seeds being collected for *Gaudium jingera* (Stringybark Tea-tree) which is a critically endangered species federally. This allowed for germination trials and long-term secure storage in the Victorian Conservation Seed Bank.
- **Enduring Eucalyptus:** A project being carried out to assess the long-term viability of eucalypt seeds stored in seed banks across Australia. It's critical to assess seed viability rates to ensure long-term conservation efforts remain effective.

END

See over for supporting and background materials



Safeguarding Victoria's remarkable biodiversity at Australia's oldest scientific institution

Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria (RBGV), home to Australia's oldest scientific institution, the National Herbarium of Victoria, is proud to mark 15 years of collaboration through the Australian Seed Bank Partnership. With more than 1.5 million specimens of dried plants, algae and fungi held at the Herbarium, and thousands of seeds gathered from across the state, this anniversary reflects a sustained and urgent commitment to conserving Victoria's extraordinary botanical heritage.

The seed bank Collection is built season by season, species by species, and represents one of Australia's most important biological safeguards, like an ark to Victoria's flora. Its focus is clear: to collect, document and store seeds from rare and threatened native species before habitat loss, fire, drought or climate change can erase them permanently.

"The Seedbank and our partnerships with organisations such as the Australian Seed Bank Partnership are critical for safeguarding biodiversity in Victoria and further afield. Our team of experts work at the cutting edge of scientific research to protect our remarkable flora against catastrophic events," shares Andre Messina, Seedbank Botanist.



*Andre Messina, Seedbank Botanist at Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria examines seed in the field.
Photo: RBGV.*

Each collecting season runs from spring through summer, beginning in Victoria's northwest and tracking the flowering cycle southward to the alpine regions. Leading the effort is RBGV Seedbank botanist Andre Messina, who collects seeds from at least 10 newly targeted threatened species each year.

Collecting is not simply a matter of gathering seeds from wherever they grow. Every collection is carefully planned around timing, location and population health. Seeds must be collected at peak ripeness from multiple individual plants to ensure the genetic diversity of a given species is adequately represented. Once collected, a pressed voucher specimen accompanies each seed

lot into the Herbarium's reference collection. This is a scientific record linking every stored seed to the living plant from which it came.



Pressed voucher of a plant held in the Herbarium's reference collection. Photo: RBGV.

Seeds are first placed in a dehumidifier to dry slowly, reducing their moisture content and slowing metabolic activity to extend their viable lifespan. They then undergo a multi-stage cleaning process: sieving to remove debris, separation by aspirator, and where necessary, careful hand-cleaning under a microscope.

Quality assessment follows. An X-ray machine allows scientists to visualise the internal structure of each seed, identifying which seeds are likely viable. A collection where 60 per cent of seeds appear viable is considered a strong result. A germination test then confirms what the X-ray suggests, though for rare or unusual species, coaxing a seed to germinate can itself be a research challenge.

Once a collection passes quality checks, it is counted, documented and sealed. The sealed collection enters long-term cold storage in the seed bank where it may remain for decades.



Botanists examine seed collections at the National Herbarium Victoria. Photo: RBGV.

Seeds are not stored and forgotten. Every collection is retested at five and ten-year intervals to verify that viability has been maintained. Where seeds are found to have lost quality over time, or where genetic diversity in the original collection was limited, botanists return to the field to gather fresh material from additional populations.

This ongoing work is underpinned by active research into seed longevity. Research aims to discover how different species respond to seedbank conditions, which require more frequent collection cycles, and how best to maximise the long-term effectiveness of stored material. RBGV contributes to a global network of seed banks engaged in this shared scientific mission.

Victoria's landscapes are fire-prone, and many of its plant species are naturally adapted to regenerate after fire. The seed bank is not intended to replace that natural recovery. The Collection exists for a different, longer-term purpose: as an insurance policy against catastrophic or cumulative loss.

An emerging strategy is the use of banked seeds to establish off-site insurance populations. These small, managed plantings in locations separate from a species' naturally restricted zones create a buffer against localised extinction events. These seed production areas also serve a long-term conservation function, supplying seeds for future restoration work.

About the Partnership

Across the country, the Partnership now holds conservation collections from more than 18,000 species (~70% of all known native plants), including 983 nationally listed threatened plants (~65% of all listed plants), helping safeguard biodiversity before species are lost.

'The strength of the Australian Seed Bank Partnership lies in its national collaboration, bringing together expertise and local knowledge to deliver real conservation outcomes across the country.

Behind every seed banked is the potential for a species to survive!'

"The Victorian Conservation Seedbank (VCS) at Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria works with the Australian Seed Bank Partnership to protect Victoria's most threatened plants against extinction. By banking seeds, testing them to understand their germination and storage needs, and supporting recovery after fire and other disturbance, we are creating a practical, long-term insurance policy for our native flora. Our work matters today but will come to matter even more as climate and habitat pressures increase," shares Alastair Robinson, Botanist.

Anniversary events

The anniversary runs from 18 May to 30 June 2026, bringing together partner gardens across the country to showcase the national impact of seed conservation. It includes a national



celebration day on 24 June, featuring a special [PlantChat anniversary webinar](#), local seed events, and a series of online stories highlighting the people and science behind Australia's seed banks.

Looking ahead to the next 15 years

The need for seed conservation has never been greater or more urgent. The Partnership has launched the '[Banking the Bush](#)' appeal raising funds to help expand and strengthen national seed collections, ensuring Australia's unique flora can be protected, studied and restored for generations to come.

- For further information on the Partnership and the anniversary contact Dr Kathryn Eyles on 0418 955 661, coordinator@seedpartnership.org.au. Ms Sue McDougall AOM is available for interviews.
- For interviews about Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria please contact Andie Dittman, andie.dittman@rbgv.vic.gov.au, 0457 227 347.
- Learn more: Seedpartnership.org.au/ASBP15/
- Follow: @Seedpartnership (Instagram) | @Australian Seed Bank Partnership (Facebook, LinkedIn)
- Download anniversary content: [ASBP15 anniversary images](#)
- Download Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria content: [RBGV images](#)

ENDS

