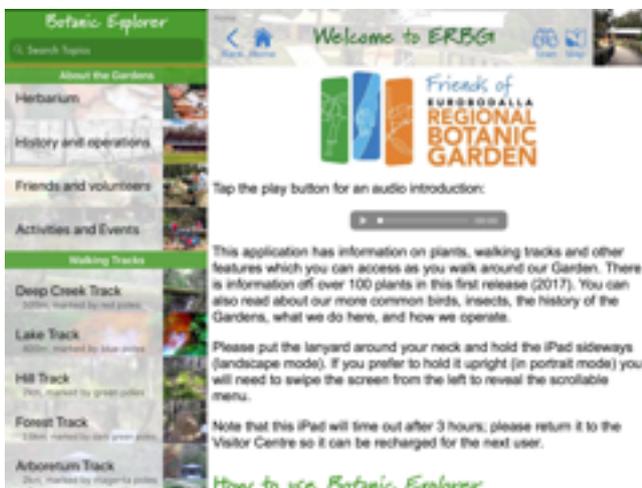




Innovative self-guided information system at the Eurobodalla Regional Botanic Garden

The Friends of Eurobodalla Regional Botanic Garden have developed a computer tablet-based self-tour information system for guides and visitors, called **Botanic Explorer**. Using iPads, visitors can walk around at their own pace, scanning signs and browsing information to learn about plants, insects, birds, walking tracks and other features.

The main focus is on the native plants, including details on their natural range, where they can be found, tips for identification, when they flower, and the origin of their name. Presently there is information on over 100 plant species and their groupings, and also information on birds and their calls, major insect groups, and the walking tracks and other features. More information is being added over time - in 2018 information will be added on Aboriginal food plants, frogs and grasses as well as more flowering shrubs and trees.



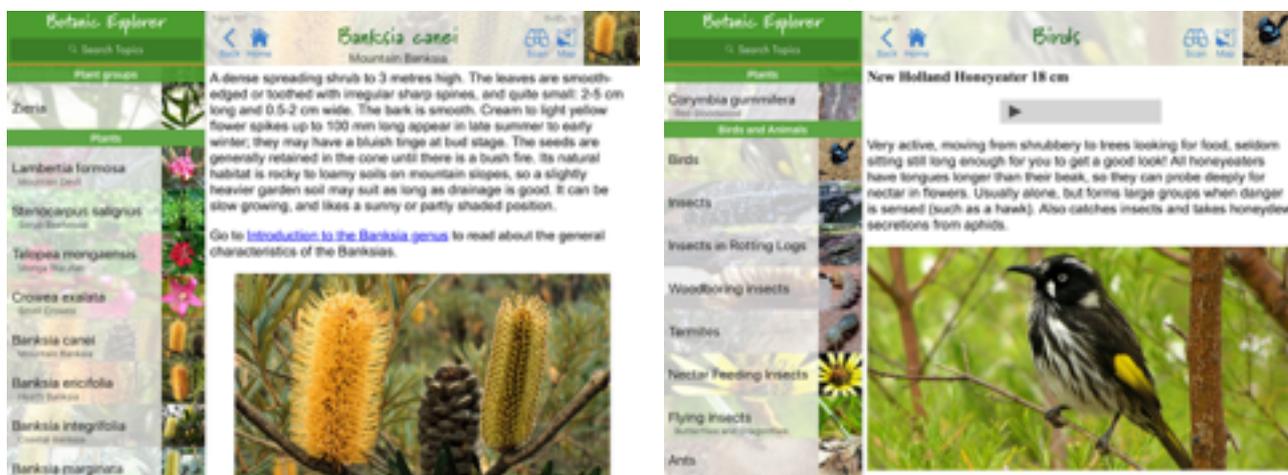
The home page has instructions and a welcome message. All topics can be scrolled on the left and are grouped under broad categories. Navigation tools along the top

A system was needed which could cope with a large amount of information in a readily accessible way and which would be easily amended and expanded. The Friends looked at other botanic gardens and outdoor attractions, art galleries etc for an application which would do the job, but could not find anything able to deliver on all of the identified requirements: robustness, portability, screen size, ability to accommodate text, visuals, audio and video, scanner, readily amended/content added; and no reliance on internet coverage or proximity beacons.



*Using **Botanic Explorer** in the field - scanning a QR code will bring up details of the plant species*

The use of multi-media helps broaden appeal to people of different ages and different levels of computer literacy - QR codes dotted around the garden can be scanned, topics can be searched, titles can be browsed, photos and sketches help display special features of the plants, and a map helps users find their way around. Audio clips are used to help present some of the information and enrich the user experience - such as bird calls - and there is a provision to include video clips too. As the content grows, **Botanic Explorer** will develop into an information-rich tool to assist our guides, inform our visitors, and expand our education program.



Two examples of topics - the bird topic includes an audio clip

Content is prepared so that it appeals to a wide range of users. The content needs to be factually and scientifically correct, but devoid of complexities and jargon that would put off the non-specialist. As well as engaging users who already have an interest in botany, the Friends hope to encourage others to learn something about the local plants, plants in general, and the broader environment. The app collects feedback and usage data which shows how the user navigates through the various access options and between topics: different interest levels across different content, and preferred methods of using the app can be deduced, so that structural changes or content bias can be modified to reflect user preference.

The underlying app

The underlying app is called 'Self Tours' (copyright T8Software), available free from the Apple App Store and Google Play. It can be configured for different users, so it has potential to be adapted for different types of venues wanting to provide self-guided information tours for visitors. See separate description of 'Self Tours', which includes indicative costs.

There are two operational modes:

- [1] *preloaded app and content* - computer tablets need to be purchased and managed; or
- [2] a *downloadable app* - an internet service such as a hotspot is needed so that users/visitors can download the app and content onto their own device (ie smartphone); after the download no continuing internet coverage is necessary.

Signage is an additional cost; signs with QR codes need to be made and installed if you choose to use the scanner function, or you may opt for a simple numbering system.

At ERBG the preloaded option is in use; iPads are hired out for ½ day slots. We plan to install a wifi hotspot in future so that **Botanic Explorer** can be downloaded onto private devices.

Friends of ERBG are happy to discuss the details of this system with you.

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