

## Gang-gang: Our Powerful Owl recalls Kate Carnell's Canberra

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The words and the sentiment of the "Welcome to Canberra – Experience the Power" poster that decorates today's column will ring bells in the belfries of lots of readers.

While we're giving you time to remember what those bells are clanging about we confirm that, yes, the owl in Geoffrey Dabb's poster is of course the fabled Powerful Owl (popularly known as the Powl) of Turner. That fowl has been much reported on and portrayed (often with Dabb's own singular photographs) in this owl-wise column. We can neither confirm nor deny reports that the ACT government is thinking of using Dabb's composition for huge welcome-to-Canberra signs erected at the airport and the main highway approaches to the city.

And while you're trying to remember what the poster's words remind you of we will go off at a green tangent for a few paragraphs. We note that while we all look up to the Powl (and to almost all of the birds we watch), in the Nature-blessed ACT there is a lot for the nature-conscious to look down and around for. Our flora is wondrous.

And now, being launched this Thursday by Minister for the Environment Simon Corbell, there is a cerebral new smartphone app of great ecological and botanical import. From Thursday you will be able to snaffle a free public download of the app from the Canberra Nature Map (CNM) website.

The app will be invaluable to the CNM project and, for apposite app background, we explain that map is a community and ACT government brainwave. It maps the whereabouts of the ACT's rare plants (and soon also animals) using smartphone and GPS mapping technology. It was imagined by Aaron Clausen (and developed with lots of assistance from others). He rejoices that "in a little over 18 months of trial operation, the project has kicked some huge goals in terms of the discovery of many highly significant species and new colonies of plants within the ACT".

The app, a botany-conscious Canberra nature rambler's dream come true, contains information (of course including pictures) about almost every plant a rambler may come across in the ACT outdoors. What's more, Clausen enthuses, it can be made a specific guide to the flora of the specific portion of the Nature Park you are rambling in (Mount Ainslie, say). So using the app you can try to identify exactly what you're ogling, while taking a picture of it and taking notes about it so that you can easily frisbee to government an "information transfer" of this data. The ACT government needs this information so as to know what's out there and what needs to be cosseted. Already, pre-app, Clausen advises, a planned gas pipeline on Mount Majura was re-routed so as not to monster a cluster of a rare plant species.

Clausen's story of where his idea began in his bosom will resonate with lots of outdoorsy Canberrans. We know how easy it is to always be on the lookout for the conspicuous (like big, bright, buzzard-sized birds) while being clodhopping (sometimes literally) about teeny and exquisite things around our feet.

He testifies that one day he was out and about, mountain biking on a bush path, when he had a damascene experience.

"On this one particular crisp September day, I had briefly dismounted to take a rest, and was stomping around on foot. I noticed something unusual and yellow shining vibrantly. Upon closer inspection, I had found a leopard double tail orchid ... [Then] as I trudged back to my bike I almost stepped on a perfect waxlip orchid. My curiosity was stirred.

"So I came back again the next day and found [more orchids]. A transformation occurred of the old, ignorant mountain biker me into the new, reformed, orchid-consumed me. I found myself standing right in the middle of a huge patch of the endangered Canberra spider orchid. They were all staring up at me, almost as if to say, 'You almost rode over us, but we still love you!' That was the last day I rode my bike on an unofficial trail."

So, after that little flower-bedecked ramble, have you remembered what the words "Welcome to Canberra – Experience the Power" remind you of?

Yes. Correct. In 1998 during the colourful reign of Kate Carnell as our chief minister her government issued car registration plates bearing the legend "Feel the Power of Canberra".

This generated some angst because of course then, as now, Canberra was suspected by envious and misguided Australians of being a privileged, narcissistic spot where far too much power was wielded. This sentiment on Canberra number plates seemed to show us swaggering, with lots of tickets on ourselves. There were fears that Canberrans travelling interstate with such number plates might attract hostility from seething locals. Lots of Canberrans declined to adopt the plates.

Geoffrey Dabb confirms that he had the Carnell plates imbroglio in mind with this composition although the immediate trigger for him was news of an audience the Powl, in its Turner setting, gave last Friday to Senator Katy Gallagher.

Yes, it was only a matter of time before the Powl, the most famous living Canberran, began to exert an influence on our politics. Will any candidate in the forthcoming ACT elections dare to shun the owl, to not pay it a respectful visit?

*This story was found at: <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/act-news/canberra-life/ganggang-our-powerful-owl-recalls-kate-carnells-canberra-20150623-ghuzsw.html>*