The Victorian Acclimatisation Society

Many Europeans at first felt uneasy in their new land. They spoke of ‘the savage silence, or worse’ of the bush. They introduced plants and animals to make the alien environment feel more like home, to beautify their gardens, provide sport for hunters and ‘aggrandise’ the colony. But above all, they wanted to make the land economically productive.

The Victorian Acclimatisation Society was founded in 1861 by Edward Wilson, a private collector whose motto was ‘if it lives, we want it’. The Melbourne Zoo was established by the Acclimatisation Society to house imported animals prior to their release. At the same time, government botanist Ferdinand von Mueller focused on the introduction of plant species from other parts of Australia and elsewhere in the world. Some, like blackberries, initially proved productive, but became noxious weeds or pests.

Many of the specimens collected or acquired by the Acclimatization Society later became part of Museum Victoria’s collection.

Visitor Information

Several of the original specimens collected or introduced by the Acclimatisation Society can be seen in The Melbourne Story exhibition, now showing at Melbourne Museum.

Further Reading


Annual reports of the Acclimatisation Society of Victoria, from 1862.
