



Growing skills and strengthening community

The Perth Hills Discovery Centre provided the backdrop for an ArbWest event that united the industry.

WORDS AND IMAGES: **PIA FINNIGAN, ARBWEST.**



The rigging station was supported by some of WA's top competition climbers.

ArbWest's Arbor Day 2026 was a hands-on training session that brought together arborists, climbers, apprentices, and industry supporters from across Western Australia for a day of learning, connection and inspiration.

Sponsored by RelyOn, the event combined practical skills development with important discussions about the future of arboriculture, tree retention and habitat conservation.

Knowledge shared

From aerial rescue and rigging to chainsaw maintenance, habitat creation and tree retention, participants rotated through a series of interactive stations designed to reflect real-world arboriculture challenges. The emphasis was on learning by doing, with attendees

encouraged to ask questions, try new techniques and share experiences with some of WA's most experienced arborists.

ArbWest President Dave Crispin said the event highlighted the value of practical training and collaboration within the industry.

"Arboriculture is a hands-on profession, and events like Arbor Day give people the opportunity to learn practical skills from experienced professionals. When arborists come together to learn, share knowledge, and talk about best practice, everyone benefits – including the trees we work with."

Reflecting on the day, Crispin was delighted with the enthusiasm shown by participants.

"Everyone had a smile on their face. Even novices gave it a go," he said. "The day brought home the importance of spreading the message of tree retention and supporting our native wildlife."

Investing in skills and safety

Major sponsor RelyOn supported Arbor Day as part of its ongoing commitment to professional development within the arboriculture sector. Philip Price, Vegetation Management Qualifications Manager at RelyOn, said quality training is fundamental to both safety and good tree management.

"Caring for trees begins with equipping people with the right knowledge and skills. High-quality training reduces risks, elevates professional standards, and ensures tree care decisions are based on



Pascal Oosterik (pictured) and Jolyon Joly Elliott handled the aerial rescue tutorial.

sound science and best practice,” he said.

Price believes events such as Arbor Day strengthen the entire industry.

“By investing in training and supporting the people who care for our urban forests, we’re helping build a safer, more knowledgeable, and more sustainable future,” he said.

Learning from the best

One of the most popular stations on the day was aerial rescue, led by experienced climbers Jolyon (Joly) Elliott and Pascal Oosterik. Participants learned rescue techniques, casualty care, and safe lowering procedures while gaining climbing experience.

“We wanted to create a day where arborists could get hands-on experience,” said Elliott. “It was good to see people of all levels getting involved, even those who had never climbed before.”

The rigging station, led by ArbWest Committee member Donny Byrne and supported by some of WA’s top competition climbers – including Riki Peterson, Luke Osborne and Lucas Burt – focused on lowering techniques, friction management, and load control.

“We made sure everyone had the chance to participate and use equipment they might not be familiar with,” said Byrne. “Understanding the physics behind what we do leads to safer and more effective practices.”

Participants were able to gain practical experience with a range of

equipment while learning the principles that underpin safe and efficient rigging operations.

Next generation

Chainsaw maintenance may not be the most glamorous part of arboriculture, but it remains one of the most important. ArbWest partner Tim Stuart from Coastline Mowers led a practical session covering machine care, troubleshooting, and chain maintenance.

For Stuart, Arbor Day was about more than machinery.

“The best part of Arbor Day was creating connections with attendees and helping them learn new skills to strengthen their position in the industry,” he said. “Handing over skills to up-and-coming arborists is critical. They are the future of this industry and play an integral role in saving our trees.”

Stuart praised the collaborative spirit of the industry, acknowledging the organisers, volunteers, and station leaders who willingly shared their knowledge throughout the day.

From tree removal to tree retention

A key theme throughout Arbor Day was the evolving role of arborists in protecting and enhancing WA’s urban forest.

ArbWest Committee member Zana Sheary led a discussion focused on tree retention and how arborists can influence better outcomes through early

planning and design.

“We need to stop defaulting to removal and start designing for retention,” Sheary said. “The Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA) template for Tree Retention Policy gives us a framework to protect WA’s canopy and make smarter, long-term decisions.”

“It was encouraging to see so many enthusiastic young arborists participating in the activities.”

Arborists supporting wildlife

Another standout session was led by Dean Arthurell from Carnaby’s Crusaders, focusing on habitat creation and the role arborists can play in biodiversity conservation.

Arthurell brought along some of his cockatoos and highlighted the urgent need for habitat – a reminder that arborists can play a key role and offer habitat creation as a valuable service. He made the urgency of the situation clear: Baudin’s Cockatoos are on the verge of extinction due to habitat loss.

The session reinforced a powerful message: arborists are not just tree workers. They are custodians of urban forests, wildlife habitat and community wellbeing.

Building a stronger future

Arbor Day 2026 demonstrated the strength, generosity and professionalism of WA’s arboriculture community. From seasoned professionals sharing decades of experience to newcomers climbing for the first time, the event showcased an industry committed to learning, collaboration and continuous improvement.

As challenges such as canopy loss, workforce development, and environmental stewardship continue to grow, events like Arbor Day provide a platform for building skills, sharing knowledge and strengthening connections across the profession.

By combining practical training with meaningful conversations about sustainability and conservation, ArbWest’s Arbor Day is helping shape a more capable, connected, and forward-thinking arboriculture industry – one ready to protect and grow WA’s urban forest for generations to come. **AA**

Visit arbwest.com.au to see future ArbWest activities.



ArbWest Committee member Zana Sheary with ArbWest President Dave Crispin.



Phil Price, Vegetation Management Qualifications Manager at RelyOn. Image: RelyOn



Dean Arthurell from Carnaby’s Crusaders and his cockatoos highlighted the urgent need for habitat.

Tim Stuart from Coastline Mowers led a practical session covering machine care.

