

AUSTRALIAN PLANT SOCIETY – NORTHERN GROUP
NEWSLETTER – FEBRUARY 2010

Meetings are held on third Tuesday of each month (except December and January) at Max Fry Hall, Gorge Road, Trevallyn at 7.30 pm when the Northern Group library is available to members.

If necessary and notified a **Group business meeting** will be held each month prior to the General Meeting from 6.30–7.15 pm. All interested members are welcome to join in.

Welcome to new members: We look forward to seeing you at our meetings or other events.

Activities since October 2009 newsletter:

20 October General Meeting – Plant of the Month was presented by Janet Hallam who chose a tree growing in her garden *Eucalyptus sideroxylon*, commonly known as red ironbark or mugga. The botanical name means sider - iron; oxylon – wood. It is found on the western plains and the drier foothills of the Great Dividing Range from Victoria to Queensland.

The tree grows from 12-18 x 6-8 m and seldom forms stands. It has grey-green weeping foliage, reddish brown to jet black deeply fissured bark which can be up to 10 cm thick and lovely pink to cream blossom from May to October. The timber is red. The black of the bark is caused by resin seeping through the bark and then drying. The blackness occurs right up to and includes the branches. A beautiful flowering specimen was handed round the meeting.

Speaker for the evening Dr. Marco Duretto of the Tasmanian Herbarium talked about the new online Tasmanian flora that has been launched recently. He spoke of the shortcomings of the hard copy version, the time it takes to produce and how quickly it becomes out of date. He stressed the urgent need for a new flora that can be easily kept up to date, (the last flora was published about 40 or 50 years ago and is drastically out of date) that is easily accessible, portable and free to consumers. Any problem with the new plant identification keys can be quickly and easily corrected when they arise. He demonstrated just how easy it was to use the new programme.

Marco mentioned some of the changes that had already taken place. These included the Epacris family that has been transferred to *Ericaceae*, *Tetracarpaeaceae* is now accepted as a family, *Liliaceae* family have all been changed and *Blandfordia punicea* (Christmas Bells) is now in its own family.

Although the new 'Flora of Tasmania online' is far from complete, the work that has been completed can be accessed on www.tmag.tas.gov.au/floratasmania

17-18 October- An **OPEN GARDEN AND PLANT SALE** was held at Judy and Ross Flint's property at 31 Craythorne Road. It was a very successful event, a beautiful and interesting garden to wander around and a great venue for a plant sale! We banked over \$430. Our thanks to all who contributed in any way and especially Judy and Ross for providing the venue and to Sharon Percy who offered to take the remaining eleven trays of plants and look after them at her property.

23-25 October – East Coast Excursion. About 20 Northern Group Plant Society and Launceston Field Naturalist members took part in a very enjoyable, successful event. The main part of the group stayed at Sea Breeze units. For those who arrived on Friday morning a walk was organised by Roy in the Wielangta area.

24 October – On Saturday the group started off for Buckland at 9 am, where we turned north on to the Woodvale road, parking at a point about 20 km in. This was the take off point for the walk to the beautiful Bluff River Gorge. The majority of the party walked to the Gorge. The plants seen

represented an interesting range of East Coast heathland flora with a good number in flower, some photographed were *Bossiaea cinerea* (Showy Bossia), *Tetratheca labillardierei* (glandular pinkbells), *Pultenaea juniperina* (prickly beauty), *Oxylobium ellipticum* (golden shaggypea), *Ozothamnus sp.*, *Dodonaea viscosa* (broadleaf hopbush), *Hibbertia sp.*, *Pimelea sp.*, *Indigofera australis* (native indigo), *Olearia lirata* (forest daisybush), *Ajuga australis* (australian bugle), *Comesperma voluble* (blue lovecreeper) *Pterostylis nutans* (nodding greenhood) to name a few.

As arranged we all attended dinner at the Blue Waters Motel on Saturday night.

25th Sunday morning– The walk along the old convict road on the north side of the Prosser River was very interesting. We walked beside a large pipeline that presumably supplies water to Orford. Plenty of plants were in flower with a number different from those seen on the previous day. On the riverbank we noted *Beyeria viscosa* (pinkwood), *Acacia melanoxylon* (blackwood), *Notelaea ligustrina* (native olive) *Pomaderris apetala*, *Bedfordia salicina* (tasmanian blanketleaf), very tall specimens of endemic *Pimelea nivea* (bushmans bootlace), *Ozothamnus sp.* and *Dodonaea viscosa* (broadleaf hopbush).

The group then drove south to the **Tasmanian Bushland Garden** having lunch on arrival. The gardens are beautiful and a credit to those involved with its development and upkeep. So many lovely and rare Tasmanian plants were established there and in flower, some we had not seen before. The cameras worked overtime!

Next a quick visit to the **Pulchella Nursery** next door. Rain came at this point and umbrellas were soon provided so we could continue our looking. After purchasing some interesting plants we started off on the trip home. A very successful well organised weekend. Our thanks to Roy.

17 November – General Meeting – **Plant of the Month** was given by Maureen Johnston. She chose *Dodonaea viscosa subsp. spatulata* (broadleaf hopbush), a dark green foliated shrub or small tree to 6 m tall with sticky shiny green leaves that are oblong spatulate to 6 cm long, broadest near the usually blunt tip. Flowers are small and occur in terminal clusters from November-December. Each flower is without petals but has 4 sepals, 8 stamens longer than the sepals and thick anthers. Its conspicuous fruit consists of masses of reddish brown papery 3-winged capsules that are broader than long. It is widespread in coastal woodlands and rocky hillsides in Tasmania, as well as Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and New Zealand.

A hardy plant that requires good drainage, prefers full sun and withstands dry periods. It makes a good hedge plant. Spectacular forms with varying fruit and leaf colour are available. Propagate chosen form from cuttings

Speaker Tim Rudman is a botanist with the Biodiversity Monitoring Section in DPIWE and has been working with plant disease issues in native vegetation since the mid 1990s, in particular the introduced plant pathogen *Phytophthora cinnamomi*. Tim gave us an extremely informative and important talk on the history of the fungus in Australia and in Tasmania in particular.

Introduced from south-east Asia, it is commonly known as cinnamon fungus because it was first discovered affecting cinnamon trees. Since then it has moved to different parts of the world killing many different species of plants that have no defence against it. It cannot be seen except by microscope, it attacks the roots of plants where it produces enzymes that dissolve plant cells preventing nutrient from making its way to the foliage. Grass trees dying in our heathlands represent a typical response to its presence. Some plants like teatrees can 'wall' it off whereas others like the pea family do not recognise it as a threat.

In nurseries damping off can be caused by this pathogen. In gardens a series of native plants can be affected as well as azaleas and rhododendrons (i.e. proteaceous plants). In Queensland avocado orchards and some members of the Protea family like Dryandras and Banksias and in Western Australia the jarrah forests (*Eucalyptus marginata*) have been devastated. In Tasmania Forestry has found that introduced *Eucalyptus nitens* is subject to attack by the pathogen until 2-3 years old.

Wet or moist soil and warm conditions create the perfect scenario for the pathogen's survival. It produces spores that wait in the drier soil until conditions are damp and it becomes active once more. Also the spores can be present in dams or in creeks. It is spread by mud on vehicles, heavy machinery, walkers and by animals. Treated water from our water systems is OK to use on plants or gardens, however creek or river water can harbour the pathogen. A Tasmanian distribution map showed that this killer disease is present pretty well all round the State except in the very dry country and the central plateau where it is too cold and wet and where there is little road access. Buttongrass plain and coastal heath plants are very susceptible to attack.

What is the risk? The pathogen attacks about 30 species of native plants. For example, our rare East Coast endemic *Epacris* are particularly at risk of extinction.

What to do? There is no final solution. West Australia has spent millions of dollars on possible control measures. It seems the best methods of control are:

- control of access
- preventing plant material import from outside the area
- washing down all equipment, vehicles and footwear and improving drainage of the area
- inhibit the disease by use of Phosphite, a benign chemical that helps some plants to suppress the disease. Unfortunately not all plants respond, i.e. *epacris*
- sterilise the soil
- breed plants that are resistant to the disease
- wash down with water from town systems or rainwater only

In the plant nursery or garden:

- raise pots off the ground onto benches and keep separate
- use town water or rainwater only
- use organic rich potting mix – no gravel or sand – quarries are a source of the disease
- manage drainage
- clean down all tools
- don't import soil
- sterilise pots etc. before re-use

A sentinel plant like lupin can be grown to signal if phytophthora is present in your soil or soilmix. Seeds and cuttings are OK to share with others, they are not affected by the fungus.

EXCURSION TO HOBART – 21–22 November 2009

Despite rather inclement weather, about ten northern group members turned up at the Royal Tasmanian Botanic Gardens on Saturday morning for a tour of the Tasmanian sections of the Gardens, conducted by David Marrison (who had been our speaker in June).

These sections, which are developing quite rapidly, are a credit to David and his colleagues. They offer people a chance to see how Tasmania's native plants, including several rare and endangered species, can be very impressively displayed in a garden. The plants are arranged by region or habitat e.g. rainforest, Hobart area, east coast, and there is a section to honour our early botanists with information on each of them surrounded by plantings of species named after them.

I was particularly impressed by the wonderful display of daisies (and was even inspired to follow up with a visit to St Patricks Head to view the *Xerochrysum papillosum* which grows near its summit.)

One of the highlights of the visit was a look behind the scenes, including the section where highly endangered species are propagated. Some of these species are so rare that ex situ propagation may be the only way they can survive. One such species, *Lomatia tasmanica*, which only grows in a limited area near Port Davey, was shown to us (with strict instructions not to touch, because of its susceptibility to disease). We were, however, allowed to photograph its beautiful maroon flowers.

After lunch at the Gardens we headed further south to the Peter Murrell Reserve near Kingston where we were shown around by Hans and Annie Wapstra who, as well as being orchid experts, are on the board of the management for the Reserve. We saw quite a range of orchids including bearded orchids and several species of Caladenias and many dicot species in flower.

Sunday morning saw us gathering at the Tasmanian Herbarium for a conducted tour by Dr. Marco Duretto (our speaker for October 2009). Marco had come in on a Sunday to show us around, a sacrifice well beyond the call of duty! As well as learning about the general operation of the Herbarium we were shown the main collection (which the public rarely sees). Particularly fascinating were some of the specimens collected by people like Banks, Rodway and Gunn. These specimens were accompanied by notes in their collectors' own handwriting! A real sense of history was palpable. Because it was now raining and quite cold, the proposed trip to Mt Wellington was cancelled but, despite this, I think most of us felt we had enjoyed a very special weekend. (Report thanks to Roy)

State Get Together on 27-29 November gave members the opportunity to visit two of three properties in the Port Sorell area. Saturday dawned with lightning, claps of thunder and persistent rain; not an auspicious start for garden visits. Members separated into two groups one to visit Robin Garnett and Phil Colliers' property, the other to Maryanne and Brad. Stagg's.

Umbrellas were the order of the day for the first part of our tour! We visited the Stagg garden this time, it is quite beautiful, well planned and laid out imaginatively with raised areas giving height and featuring several ponds and a small waterfall. When sufficient water is available it is then channelled into a structured creek to divert moisture to nearby plants. The choice of plants is wide with many interesting and unusual species chosen, many of which were in flower. The kangaroo paws, tall and imposing were a feature.

In the afternoon we joined Riita and John Boevink to walk around their wonderful coastal garden where wind, sea breezes and wildlife combine to present some trying conditions. However, they have succeeded extremely well growing a mixture of native and some exotic shrubs that tolerate these conditions. A huge pond that is covered with Azolla is the home for countless golden bell frogs and many were to be seen on the water lily leaves. The cameras were busy!

The layout of the garden was master-planned before work commenced to ensure the wonderful view was enhanced and not lost. A major water feature was a very large banana shaped dam with its attendant vegetation, which included many outstanding banksias and eucalypts as well as other species chosen to create a windbreak. A very successful and inspiring garden!

11 December – Christmas party at Max Fry Hall was a great success with a hall full of happy people. The photo competition proved popular although there were not as many entries as last year. Some very impressive prints were exhibited in the three categories 'People, Plants and Places'. The winners were arrived at by popular vote and as prizes winners were given a choice of native plants provided by Sally and Herbert Staubman of Habitat Plants.

The meat was provided by Northern Group with a variety of salads, nibblies and delicious desserts brought in by members. Our special thanks to Jill Clark and her helpers for arranging the feast.

PLANT PROPAGATION

Propagation Sessions will be held on a regular basis at Sharon's place 'Grassy Banks', 636 South Bridgenorth Rd 12 km up Ecclestone Rd. from the Riverside Pub, turn right into South Bridgenorth Road opposite Launceston Zoo, first driveway on the left, from 1-3 pm on the first Saturday of each month.

Our appreciation to Sharon for taking on this important task on behalf of Northern Group.

Several working bees have been held and a functional demountable shadehouse has been erected by a small group including Trevor Yaxley, Roy Skabo, John Duggan and John Simmons who designed the transportable unit. This has proved invaluable especially with the very hot weather that we have experienced since then.

Thanks to Bob Reid's generosity Northern Group was given seven large trays of plants of different species to join those we already had. These needed urgent repotting and several sessions were held to ready the plants for their new situation. Sharon arranged for temporary benches to be set up where all the plants could be watered.

6 February- A very successful plant propagation session at the new venue was held with 14 members present. The plants looked in really good condition. Members checked, weeded and pruned the plants where necessary while others prepared and planted new cuttings and sowed seeds. Plans were discussed for the new benches and the doors to the shadehouse were installed. A possible plant sale in April has been suggested. Details later.

REPORT ON HERITAGE FOREST GARDEN (Report with thanks to Lynne).

'The letter drop requesting assistance in the vicinity of the garden has born fruit. The resident who lives right next to the laneway has offered to keep an eye on things for us. He came and made himself known to us while we were there on Thursday (21st). Hopefully in time we can generate more interest from the area.

I have started the process of setting up a 'Friends' group for the Heritage Forest. I will become its initial coordinator but I need some others to become members. We need people from the Northern suburbs badly. I am open to suggestions from members to encourage participation. It would not be a huge commitment as it will be a while before it gets going and I think this group would work best if it has lots of people at special events a few times a year instead of a small group regularly like we do with the APS Garden. It has been my experience that the Launceston City Council takes community concerns more seriously if there is an organised group for the area.

I had six helpers on Thursday who did a sterling job of weeding and pruning. They all worked so hard we were finished by 6.30 pm. Another great pile of weeds and prunings is outside the gate waiting for collection. The Council has been mowing the grass and spraying weeds on the paths more regularly and therefore our job is getting easier. Some of the plants are looking a bit stressed at present but they will hopefully pick up again once we get some more rain. We'll need a major replanting later on to fill the gaps.

I think my attendance at the Heritage Forest Advisory Council meeting in December is getting some results. Quite a lot of mowing has been done all around the Heritage Forest but it is particularly improved near our garden. I also recently had an offer from the Council of Conservation Volunteers Australia coming in to do work in our garden but I said they would be better utilised in the area outside our garden. Maybe they did the cleanup'.

Launceston Environment Centre – Northern Group's representative, Maureen Johnston advised that our LEC membership has been paid for 2010 and that their extensive library is available to members from 9 am to 5 pm at their rooms opposite Design Centre in Tamar Street.

16 February -Tuesday -Annual General Meeting will be held at 7.30 pm. Our meeting will feature illustrated presentations by three of our members who attended the national conference last year and an introduction to our upgraded website by Trevor Yaxley, whose son Ben is our website designer.

16 March –Tuesday - Our guest speaker Dr. Miguel de Salas will speak on "carnivorous plants". These fascinating plants capture and digest small animals and extract from them nutrients which are often lacking in the soil in which the plants grow. This group of plants, including several species native to Tasmania, has a variety of techniques to catch prey. Dr de Salas, who does research at the Antarctic Division in Hobart, studies and grows carnivorous plants as a hobby.

Launceston Field Naturalists Club Meeting:

APS members are welcome to attend LFNC meetings held on the first Tuesday of each month except January – at Scotch Oakburn College, Penquite Road at 7.30 pm.

2 March - Marine Biology by David Maynard of Australian Maritime College

6 April - Telescopes and their uses by Peter Warren followed by a weekend night viewing at the Club property at Myrtle Bank.

Next newsletter due in April 2010.

Marion Simmons