

AUSTRALIAN PLANT SOCIETY – NORTHERN GROUP
NEWSLETTER – FEBRUARY 2011

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.

A **Committee (business) meeting** will be held separately from normal meetings at least every three months as and when required. Notice will be sent by e-mail.

Propagation Sessions are held on first Saturday of each month at Sharon Percy's place at Grassy Banks, South Bridgenorth Road. Time is from 1 pm to 3 pm. Remember that Potting Mix is available at the nursery for \$6 a bag and Osmocote native plant fertiliser for \$4 for 500 g.

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

Activities since October 2010 newsletter:

19 October General Meeting: Peter Voller, manager of DPIWE Land for Wildlife programme replaced our scheduled speaker, Iona Mitchell who was unable to attend.

We were told about 'Gardens for Wildlife' a new voluntary nature conservation scheme that aims to encourage and recognise people who are providing wildlife-friendly spaces and environmentally sustainable practices in urban and suburban gardens. It does not matter how small the garden is – it could be plants in containers, a courtyard, roof top garden, deck or larger space – the provision of any of these can contribute to the survival of wildlife by providing suitable places (habitat) for birds, insects, frogs and other animals. The programme provides an opportunity for the wider community to get involved in conserving native species and to show their support for protecting our natural environment

Suggestions were given for improving or establishing environmentally friendly practices in our backyards including growing plants native to our area, encouraging local birds and insects in to help control garden pests, using garden rubbish like grass clippings, weeds and food scraps in a compost heap or bin to improve the garden soil, especially in the vegie patch and reducing the use of water through using mulching in the garden.

Membership fee is \$16.50 and members receive an attractive 'Garden for Wildlife' sign featuring a red robin for display on the front gate or letter box, a copy of the 'Gardens for Wildlife – Sharing our gardens with wildlife' booklet, GFW sticker and membership card. The other aspect Peter dealt with was 'Land for Wildlife', a volunteer private land conservation programme where the Department works with landowners for sustainable management and conservation of natural values on private land. Landowners may enter into a covenant to manage defined areas specifically for nature conservation. These covenants are legally binding and are registered on the land title. Support and advice is offered to covenant holders on management issues as well as help with conducting scientific monitoring of protected natural values and give support developing applications for funding. The covenanted area is exempt from land tax and some councils allow rate rebates. Through these covenants an important contribution is made to nature conservation in Australia through the National Reserve System.

Members brought in an interesting colourful display of flowering specimens for others to see and appreciate. As well a wide variety of native plants were available for sale at the meeting.

Plant of the Month *Hakea epiglottis* was chosen by Maureen Johnstone. Its common name is 'beaked needlebush' and it belongs to the family Proteaceae. Its distribution is widespread and frequent, especially in peaty heaths, from sea level to 3500 feet. It is endemic to Tasmania

Hakea epiglottis is a stout, densely branched, evergreen shrub or small tree 2 – 5 m high, carrying crowded, terete, pungent pointed leaves that usually curve shortly above the base, becoming stiffly erect. Flowers are sweetly scented, creamy yellow and borne in sessile axillary clusters. They are similar to those of *Lomatia tinctoria* although very much smaller.

Flowers are functionally unisexual, the shrubs being dioecious (with unisexual flowers, male & female on different plants). In fertile flowers, the distal end of the style is expanded into an oblique, almost flat pollen collecting disc, from the centre of which a short, broadly cylindrical stigma develops.

The fruit is an S shaped woody follicle, 14-18 mm long, having thick, solid valves and a short inflexed beak. It persists on the shrub for some years. When the fruit dries, noticeably after fires it splits open along the centre of the upper surface causing the woody valves to be torn apart on the opposite side. The valves separate widely and two winged seeds are released.

We have a young bush in our garden, and examples can be seen at Tailrace Park, along with many other native bushes and trees. (Notes with thanks to Maureen)

16 November – General Meeting – Plant of the Month was presented by Sharon Percy who chose Tasmanian endemic species *Eucalyptus risdonii* (Risdon peppermint) a small tree with distinctly bluish-green foliage that grows 3-8 m tall. The trunk is smooth after shedding of bark, leaving it an ash-grey colour. It has a unique leaf form from juvenile to adult, the juvenile leaves are fused across the stem and adult are lanceolate, stalked and alternate. A distinguishing characteristic is that it is the only known example in the subgenus *Monocalyptus* that retains juvenile foliage on reproductive branches. It is found within the greater Hobart region at Risdon and Grass Tree Hill with most northerly population near Mangalore. The main threat is from subdivision and dumping of rubbish.

This species has the power to regenerate from lignotubers and epicormic buds as well as from seed after disturbance especially after fire. It also has the ability to regenerate after coppicing, illustrated by Sharon showing the amazing new growth of a tree in their yard.

'Outback Odyssey - Flora, Fauna and Places'

The main speaker was local member Julie Nermitt who gave a very well-received talk and slideshow on her travels in the Outback. She showed slides of different habitats and scenery around Innamincka, Coongie Lakes, Birdsville, Simpson Desert, Birdsville Track, Oodnadatta Track and in the Alice Springs area, places such as Trepkina Gorge and Palm Valley and from the Canning Stock Route. With each area Julie showed a selection of native plants in their habitat (eg banks of the Cooper Creek, sand dunes etc) and included close-up shots showing plant detail with scientific and common names as well as showing photos of the prolific birdlife along the Cooper and the Coongie Lakes.

(Thanks for the notes provided by Julie and Sharon)

10 December – The end-of-year Christmas Party held at Max Fry Hall was a most enjoyable happy occasion with about 30 members present. Tables were set up in the hall as the usual room was occupied by large gym equipment. We thought that having more room to move freely from our tables was a plus as this previously had been more difficult in the crowded smaller room.

The Christmas fare, that is the meats provided by the Northern Group and a great variety of salads and desserts by members, provided us all with a delicious meal. Our thanks to the organisers.

The photo competition called 'People, Plants and Places' was held again this year. Perhaps it was not as well supported as previously, but the entries were of a high standard with interesting and varied subject matter. After viewing the entries members voted for their preferences. The resultant winners were invited to choose three plants each from a box of plants donated by Habitat Nursery, for which we thank them. Second place winners chose two plants and third place one plant each. It was a great evening out.

Propagation Sessions – Sharon has reported that a lot of nursery work was achieved in January (7) and February (16 members) with others coming to work in between. Members brought a variety of cutting material to plant and with a lot of our previous cuttings with roots and ready to pot on we had jobs for everyone. Also there were very necessary pot and tray washing tasks and we even had time to put in some more seeds. The nursery was a hive of activity with the shadehouse bursting at the seams, with 46 trays of plants in all. The 3 existing shelves are full and things are in place for the 4th shelf to be moved in shortly. As they say, many hands make light work.

We continue to focus on what we think will interest the majority of the market, popular smaller shrubs for the suburban garden. We are building up quite a variety. Plants being grown, to name a few include Correas, Callistemons, Eremophilas, Leptospermums, Melaleucas, Prostantheras and Westringias.

We are getting very well set up for our working bees and are pleased to say we start another year at “Grassy Banks” with our “own” work area outside the shade house which is filling rapidly now the warmer weather is encouraging good growth and development. The shed space has been tidied and set up as a proper work area with those 3 lovely galvanized workbenches spread around to cater for our growing number of interested helpers. Another solid table was purchased to take the heat bed when that is needed once the cooler weather arrives. We have 2 good sized folding trestle tables that can be utilised for extra work benches if needed. The automatic sprinkler system is working well, which certainly saves a lot of manual work. It is an absolute necessity in this hot weather. Many thanks again to all who participate. (Thanks to Sharon for the report)

Heritage Forest Native Garden Report –

‘I attended another Heritage Forest Advisory Committee meeting in December. Since the previous meeting there has been an official opening of the learner bike track near the Hoo Hoo Hut attended by the Mayor and The Examiner who published an article on the event. In the past few months there has been a lot of work done in other parts of Heritage Forest by a Green Corps team.

They are about to start working in the Native Garden. They will be working to make the grassed areas into garden beds with a covering of mulch and a rest area with table and benches installed. This team will also redefine and pebble the paths in readiness for the Active Garden project which will start in March. Hopefully this will bring the garden some publicity as it is promoted quite well.

The Launceston City Council has agreed to erect a sign at the garden to acknowledge the contribution to the establishment of the garden by the Australian Plants Society. There is also talk of an official opening during the Active Garden project. This would be held at the end of one of the sessions at noon so I hope some other APST members will be able to attend. I am hoping when the Active Garden sessions start that the regular volunteers will be able to come to some of the sessions too as well as those who were unable to attend on Thursdays. The more people who attend the more successful the program will be judged and the more likelihood of it being extended. The program starts on Tuesday **8th March** from 10.00 - 12.00 and continues weekly for 12 weeks.

The weather this summer has been ideal for the growth of weeds. It hasn't been possible for me to have regular working bees but my volunteers and I have been doing a weeding session when we can and the LCC staff have mown the grass and chopped off some of the weeds. Once the Green Corps start work this should improve a lot.’ (Report thanks to Lynne)

Programme for the year:

16 February: The first meeting will be the important Annual General Meeting with most positions available.

16 March: Speaker will be Fred Duncan, well-known botanist from Hobart. His subject will be the interesting one of 'Tree Ferns'

20 April: Speaker will be Eleanor Cave, her subject be 'Early Botanists in Tasmania'. She is at present doing a PhD on this area at the Tas. University.

Launceston Field Naturalists Club Meetings:

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. Contact 6344 2277

March 1 Members Night with members providing a varied programme

April 5 Speaker: Debbie Searle. Her subject will be Water Monitoring

Next newsletter will be issued in April 2011.

Marion Simmons