



Newsletter of Menai Wildflower Group

June 2021



Lambertia sp, flowering in Menai, April. P Forbes.

Coming events

- Jun 12** Justin Collett- Germinating difficult Australian native plants 1pm
- Jul 10** Rhonda Daniels - Seeds and Pods of Australian Natives 1pm
- Aug 14** Tony Porritt - Northern NSW Parks Saturday- 1pm
- Sept 8** Back to Wednesday night, 7pm
Peter Olde - Spring

Covid19 restrictions continue. We are still using a Covid-19 safe protocol and subject to last minute changes. Please confirm meeting details before all events.

Editor

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Grevillea, P Forbes.

Reports from Meetings and Activities

Grevillea Hybrids

We usually associate hybrids, particularly Grevillea hybrids, with nursery plants bred for use in the garden. However, the first record of hybrids comes from nature itself and the diary of George Caley (1770–1829) who reported various colours now associated with hybrids on his ‘Journey to the Sea’ in February 1805. Caley came upon these variants at Thick Brush Hill on February 21 1805, which has been identified by the late Joan Webb and others as a hill northwest of Narrabeen Lagoon and which contains even today a swarm of hybrids between *Grevillea speciosa* and *G. sericea*. In the 1970s John Rose, then the proprietor of Sydney Wildflower Nursery at Terrey Hills made collections in the area and introduced and named *Grevillea* ‘Collaroy Plateau’.



Grevillea ‘Collaroy Plateau’

The presence of these hybrids predates European disturbance or introductions such as the European honey bee which now is seen regularly pollinating *G. sericea*.

A second natural hybrid that has been introduced to cultivation is *Grevillea gaudichaudi* from the Blue Mountains. It was named after Charles Gaudichaud-Beaupré (1789–1854) who was attached as botanist to the Freycinet expedition that visited Sydney between 19 November and 26 December 1819. During ‘An Excursion to the Town of Bathurst’ by a small party which consisted of Quoy, Pellion and Gaudichaud, they set out from Regentville, the property of Sir John Jamieson on November 29 returning on December 7 1819. Its intermediacy and hybrid nature between the two co-occurring species, *Grevillea acanthifolia* and *Grevillea laurifolia* was not recognised for more than a hundred years after its discovery up until which time it was treated as a

full species. Its occurrence is strongly associated with the building of the road over the mountains in 1814–15 by William Cox and associated disturbance to the natural environment. There is considerable variation in the existing wild population at Clarence, New South Wales but the form consistently propagated and sold in the nursery trade dates from at least 1970 (Austraflora). However it is believed that Sid Cadwell, a NSW nurseryman who published no catalogue, sold it and possibly introduced it before that time.



Grevillea gaudichaudi

The first manipulated hybrid did not occur in Australia at all but in England. It was exhibited at the fortnightly show of the Royal Horticultural Society Show in Vincent Square, London on March 24, 1936. The exhibitor was Miss F.E. Briggs of ‘Fursdown’, Crown Hill, Plymouth and the plants from the Show were taken to Wisley where they were grown on. The cross was made in 1926 or 1927 using pollen from *Grevillea juniperina*. At the urging of the Grevillea Study Group, cuttings from the hybrid were transferred to Australia through Richard Johnston, Mt. Annan Botanic Garden in 1994 via P & S Allanson, Jurby, Rhendhoo, Isle of Man, U.K. Following its establishment here the plant quickly attained a degree of popularity and is now widely cultivated in parts of Australia. It was given the name *Grevillea* ‘Semperflorens’, which in Latin means ‘always flowering’. Another interesting feature is its lack of fertility and therefore it can be planted without worrying about unwanted seedlings, a trait valued particularly by environmental planners. The second parent is probably *G. preissii*, a Western Australian species and we could therefore refer to this cultivar as an ‘East-West’ hybrid, all of which are notable for their lack of fertility.



Grevillea 'Semperflorens'

Among the first important hybrid producers was Leomin 'Leo' Hodge (1904–1994) who developed over 50 cultivars on his property 'Poorinda' in the Victorian high country, many of which came up as volunteer seedlings in his garden. He named them mostly after girls and family members in his life. Leo was supported by the local nurseryman Bill Cane, who, although he never produced a catalogue, was an excellent propagator. Bill Cane came up with a method of producing Eucalypts from cuttings. The 'Poorinda' hybrids were extremely popular initially but in temperate areas that received summer humidity they rarely flowered well and often died prematurely. Some well-known cultivars of the 1970–80s were *G.* 'Poorinda Constance', 'P. Leane', 'P. Beauty' - now extinct, 'P. Blondie', 'P. Queen' and 'P. Tranquillity'. The plant he named after his wife *Grevillea* 'Poorinda Joyce' became so quickly extinct that I never saw it, despite an interest in the genus from the late 1970s. Ultimately, with the exception of a few such as *G.* 'Poorinda Royal Mantle' they fell out of favour., illustrating yet again the importance of a propagator-supplier to the nursery industry for their commercial success. One of the characters of the nursery industry was Sid Cadwell (1911–1995) who was a particularly testy bachelor with an interest and skill in the production of Australian Plants. He operated 'Boongala Nursery' at Annangrove and produced a couple of memorable cultivars, *Grevillea* 'Boongala Spinebill' and *Grevillea* 'Sid Cadwell' both of which do better if grafted. Sid was a friend to Dave Gordon in Queensland and was one of the first to successfully propagate *Grevillea* 'Robyn Gordon' which arose spontaneously in the latter's plantation in Myall Park, Glenmorgan, Queensland.



Grevillea 'Boongala Spinebill'



Grevillea 'Robyn Gordon'

Grevillea 'Robyn Gordon' was a sensation when it was first introduced. It changed the average person's appreciation of native plants from acceptance to admiration. Not long after it appeared a similar look-alike was produced by the late Merv Hodge, *Grevillea* 'Superb' with golden style-ends and the fractionally different *G.* 'Coconut Ice. It launched a long career in hybrid introductions for Merv who spent many years advocating and developing them. These hybrids marked the introduction of the tropical hybrids, utilising the large cylindrical racemes of the tropical species, especially *G. banksii*. In the late 70's early 80s there appeared several cultivars that have persisted among them *G.* 'Honey Gem', *G.* 'Misty Pink', *G.* 'Moonlight', *G.* 'Pink Surprise' and *G.* 'Sylvia'. The first of these is especially valued for its ability to produce a range of attractive seedlings spontaneously, some of which have been registered for PBR. Fairhill Nursery from Ninderry Queensland is responsible for a good share of excellent *Grevillea* cultivars, among them *Grevillea* 'Golden Lyre' and *G.* 'Coorora Cascade'. They did a lot of experimenting with *G. formosa*, the species with largest flowers in *Grevillea*, crossed with *G.* 'Honey Gem', resulting in *G.* 'Crowning Glory'

and *G.* 'Amber Carpet'. The last cultivar is extremely popular with people in the Sutherland Shire for one reason. There is an impressive plant in cultivation at Sydney Wildflower Nursery at Heathcote. Everyone who sees it wants one. Are you one of them?



Richard Tomkin

In recent years the most prolific and successful breeder to emerge is Richard Tomkin from Bargara, Queensland. He has produced some of the most beautiful new cultivars, among them *G.* 'Flamingo', *G.* 'Billy Bonkers', *G.* 'Lana Maree', *G.* 'Ivory Whip' and *G.* 'Soopa Doopa'. All were promoted initially as grafted plants and the last-named performed poorly, and was unsuccessful. However, it does much better ungrafted and it is a showy low plant to around 40 cm high that is worth growing in any garden. A recent release *G.* 'Miami Pink' is another worthy garden plant.



G. 'Soopa Doopa'

Peter Olde (text and images)

Illawong's Deep Past

At our April meeting we were treated to a talk by Mr Bruce Howell. Bruce has been active in indigenous culture and history for many years. He is a retired maths teacher, Deputy Chair of Sutherland Shire Council's Aboriginal Advisory Committee and has worked with the Illawarra Prehistory Group since 2012, recording and registering Aboriginal sites across the Sutherland Shire and Illawarra region. His talk, accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation, was most interesting, focusing on the Menai and Illawong area and what he knows of the deeper history of this area. The Mill Creek catchment was of special interest being an area that many of us are familiar with. This area had a large indigenous population and contains many rock engravings, hand stencils and rock shelters of significance. He also talked about some of the plants and bush foods he has come across in our area.

Paraphrasing Bruce, the landscape speaks of a place of stone tool manufacture. There are multiple sites in the valley where there are grooves in the rock that have resulted from shaping stone axes. It is also a place of artistic expression with rock engravings, and several shelter sites that contain charcoal and red ochre art. These tell us something of what was important to the people who occupied the valley over thousands of years. Some local sites have been radiocarbon dated, to around 1,500 to 3,000 years BP.



First Peoples' artwork Oatley Park, photograph by Alan Fairley, OFF.

The signs left by Aboriginal people are a powerful reminder of the deeper history of this place and we acknowledge and pay our respects to those people. Bruce has assumed the mantle of the late Les Bursill as the foremost authority on indigenous history in the Sutherland and Illawarra region and we thank him for his interesting presentation.

Greg Jackson

May meeting

Our May meeting unfortunately had to be cancelled at short notice due to the Covid scare. Sorry folks, but please understand the difficulties faced and, as warned, check event details before attending. If you didn't get email advise, please let the editor know at mwfeditor@gmail.com. Justin's talk on seed dormancy and how interactions between season and fire effect germination of Australian native plants will be rescheduled to June. In the meantime, here's an update from Lloyd...

The Other Side of Fire in the Temperate Zones

Australian temperate zone plants meet many challenges. The rainfall is adequate on average, but its unpredictability results in months and years when it is not. Wet periods followed by drought result in strong growth followed by high loads of drying fuel waiting for the spark. So the plants need the ability to survive not only the droughts but also the resulting fires.

Some of the drought adaptations are vegetative adaptations: rapidly developing taps roots, reduced leaf areas etc. The fire adaptations include epicormic buds that emerge after the growing tips are lost and lignotubers packed with dormant buds. There are also the contractile roots of Gynea Lilies and Grass Trees to draw the plant and meristem under the soil surface to a protected position. There are also the seeds retained on the plant in hard fire-resistant cases. But that is not all. There are other fire/drought defences hidden in the seeds.

With seed germination, timing is everything. It needs to happen at the right time to be successful. The most obvious control mechanism is Physical Dormancy (PYD). This has the seed enclosed in a hard case that resists predators and water as well as desiccation and fire. Germination happens after the case is damaged by abrasion or fire and water enters.

Physiological Dormancy (PD) is a resistance to germination even when conditions are perfect according to normal parameters. This type of dormancy is based on the seasonal temperature cycle and ensures germination at the right time of the year.

Unfortunately, we did not get to hear Justin Collette because the May meeting was cancelled but hopefully we will hear him in June discussing seed adaptations. It is surprising the strides the botanists have been making in this area.

Lloyd Hedges

MWG visits Delardes Bushcare

On one Wednesday each month, members Lloyd, Greg and Pam F, with Alan Cole and some itinerant weeders (feel free to join us!) join SCC Bushcare officer Sabrina to regenerate the river side reserve at the old ferry site at Illawong. Albert Delardes Reserve is a small park on Griffin Pde with a patch of remnant bush around a grassed play area. It has some interesting plants as the soils here are slightly richer than the common sandstone, perhaps due to some remnant Wianamatta soils slipping down from the hill above. That area, now the shopping centre, used to harbour an ironbark (*Euc. creba*) plantation. Other non-sandstone species found in the reserve include *Linum marginale* (Native flax), *Bursaria spinosa*, and Snake Tongue Orchids (*Pterostylis ophioglossa*). As well as interesting plants, it has a surprisingly rich history. The Delardes Reserve is without monuments or obvious ruins but it nevertheless contains some of the oldest European history in the Sutherland Shire.

As part of April's Senior's Week celebrations, our Bushcare Group invited visitors to enjoy the park and see what Bushcare is up to. Sabrina introduced the site and talked about its vegetation then Greg talked about its European history. Several MWG members joined the audience to meet the Bushcare volunteers and enjoy the tour and talk.

Aboriginal occupation had produced a substantial midden at the end of the reserve, which was robbed early in the nineteenth century to feed the lime kilns. John Alford, operating out of nearby Lime Kiln Bay, had a contract to supply lime for building the Lennox Bridge so he may be the culprit. Timber getting, another early industry, denuded the local area of trees. In the early nineteenth century, cattle were driven across this convenient crossing of the Georges River, allowing access to the Illawarra and soon a ferry was installed.

West of the reserve, Old Ferry Road terminates at the landing for the familiar Lugarno ferry that operated from 1887 till 1974. What is not so well known is that there was an older, ferry crossing which ran from 1843 till 1860. On the northern bank in Edith Bay, traces of the convict road and the original ferry master's house have been destroyed by road works. But in Delardes Reserve you can still see remnants of the last convict built road in NSW (including Thomas Mitchell's original survey marks) once the main road to Wollongong. The road was cleared by a gang of 25 convicts and finished in haste by a gang of contractors. The completed road was poor, really only a bridle track, and the ferry service failed in 1860 due to poor patronage (1 passenger a day). The road was subsequently

rerouted to the line of the current Princes Highway and in 1871 the first wheeled vehicles were able to travel between Sydney and Wollongong via Bottle Forest (Heathcote).



Lugarno ferry at northern side of river with Illawong in the distance (c.1900). Picture Sutherland.

Thomas Mitchell had proposed a bridge across the Georges River at Lugarno but the proposed bridge, despite being across one of the lower river's narrowest points, would have involved considerable rock work and was never attempted. For Mitchell this site had the virtue of landing on one of his many land grants, on the southern side of the river. Today this would be called a 'conflict of interest'.



Paddle steamer Telephone heading to Delardes Reserve from Como. Picture Sutherland.

At the end of the nineteenth century, pleasure grounds sprang up along the river and the stone wharf on the river's edge dates to that time. A pleasure ground, known as Lugarno Park, was opened with kiosk, summerhouses and dancehall and it is said that Henry Lawson used to visit. A paddlewheel steamer brought tourists to the park from Como Railway Station.



David Albones, proprietor of pleasure ground, in a summerhouse. Picture Sutherland.

The site's history doesn't stop there. It was the proposed site for a large coal fired power station which was overturned in late 1950 and the infamous criminal Darcy Dugan was captured there while on the run also in the 1950s.

This interesting presentation was a great way to showcase a small, pleasant reserve. For more information, see Greg's Academia page- <https://sydney.academia.edu/GregJackson> or turn up for Bushcare and chat as you weed.

Graeme Davies, Greg Jackson and P Forbes.



Pittosperum revoluta seed opening, L Hedges.

Grevillea Park Success

The Grevillea Park had its second open weekend of the year from 8-9 May and MWG had the opportunity to sell some of the plants produced by our brilliant team of propagators - a huge thanks to them!



The weather, and hence attendance, was good and although the grevilleas were not yet at their peak, the display of banksia was worth a visit.



Dwarf Banksia spinulosa, Grevillea Park, J Prats.

We were able to make over \$800 on plant sales making a great financial contribution as well as raising our profile. Pink and White Flannel Flowers were the top seller. The next open day should see a better display of grevillea blooms so keep your eyes open for dates.

Editor



Grevillea simplex (Banana custard plant), J Prats.



Grevillea leucoptera (Old Socks grevillea), J Prats.

APS NSW Quarterly

The quarterly gathering started with the Banks-Solander walk in Kurnell, attended by approximately 40 people. The walk starts from the Visitors Centre and passes over and by a swamp and some transitional soils to a small example of Turpentine forest then back through open, dry Sclerophyllic forest; a lot of variation in a 20 minute walk! I hope to write a more in depth article about it in the near future.

The AGM was conducted very quickly. John Aitken was retiring after six years and Heather Miles was coerced into the role of President with John Aitken becoming Vice-President. Harry Loots remains treasurer but Heather's old role of Secretary remains unfilled. Hopefully that will be sorted soon. I think the result was a positive for the Society as Heather is most capable and experienced in the director's chair.



Heather Mills addressing meeting, L Hedges.

After the AGM, Dan Clark gave an entertaining description of the Endeavour's voyage out to Australia based on Grantlee Kieza's book on Banks to set the scene for the 'Arrival'. John Arney continued with a short and punchy description of the plants they found. The supper was up to the usual standard expected of Jan and the crew. P.S. We made \$132 from plant sales.

Of interest

Deadline for contributions to the Winter newsletter is Sunday 15 August.

Items may be sent to the Editor (Email mwfeditor@gmail.com) **before** the deadline. It makes it **much** easier to compile if everything is in on time! Preferred format is **unformatted** text in a **Word** file and separate photographs as .jpg. Subject to Covid-19 restrictions and rising immunisation rates, our face-to-face activities will continue in 2021. Of course, **please do not come if you feeling unwell. Please confirm that events are on before attending.**

A combined propagation day and garden working bee is held at Illawong Rural Fire Station every **Tuesday morning from 9am**, and is a great opportunity to be involved in interesting projects and learn new skills. Members can assist in MWG ventures or propagate species for themselves or they can join the maintenance team weeding, planting and tinkering in the garden and compound.

We also propagate at the **Tip nursery on Monday** morning and extra volunteers are always welcome. Please contact Lloyd (95431216) for more details on these opportunities.

Keep up to date with our [Facebook](#) page or [website](#). **Meetings** are back at the fire station but you can revisit last year's Zoom meetings and events via the APS NSW Facebook channel. See [APS NSW YouTube channel](#)

The APS NSW website www.austplant.com.au/ has details of the many online opportunities which

you can enjoy and what other districts are doing, particularly our neighbours East Hills and Sutherland:

<http://easthills.austplants.com.au/>

<http://sutherland.austplants.com.au/> .

Editor

Lucas Height Tip Report

The north wall foundations have been completed, the planning for recycling sites awaiting formal approval and grass established on the final cap. Leachate was removed to Spring Farm for processing to improve process control. Nursery propagation continued for local users. Odour problems were reduced due to quick complaint assessments. Gas monitoring program on landfill and organics has been wound up. Leachate has been reduced over the last 4 months. Ground water, landfill and organics monitoring reports are available at Suez websites.

Susan Ley has forecast that all green waste will be mixed with compostable product to simplify recycling throughout Australia.

This will not be easy to commission with all the diverse inputs from industry, all as experienced in Newcastle trials.

Doug Patterson

MWG Wins Gold at Easter Show

Exciting news! We entered all 17 categories in the RAS floral competition. We got 8 first prizes, 4 seconds and 1 third. We also won the Grand Champion with one of Helen's large mixed arrangements! Pam F and Joan entered the miniature category. An excellent representation for MWG.

Mary and Lloyd cut flowers from the fire station garden and flowers were also donated by Joan Sutton, Graeme Davies, Helen and Olde's garden at Oakdale. We had a magnificent collection. Lloyd won a first with his pot of foliage native plant and our new member Matt won a first with his pot of a flowering Crowea. Pam P also entered a flowering orchid.

Joan, Pam P, Mary, Lloyd and Marg gave Helen a hand throughout the day. Thanks to all, but we particularly appreciate Helen's massive effort which we acknowledged at the April meeting. Member Mary Hedges, often inspired by her love of native plants, came first in the Craft Class - beaded article constructed using knitting,

crochet, macramé, knotting or plaiting techniques. Mary created a necklace and earrings using Brazilian agate flat beads and randomly twisted and knotted copper coated wire. Congratulations to all the winners!

M Olde and M Hedges

Re-Greening's Efforts Go Bush

What can a group of 30 passionate and caring people do to save our planet? New member Adrian, has used his links with the Scouts and OFF to place tube stock from our nursery where it is needed.

On May 1st, the Kyle Bay Sea Scouts and members of Oatley Flora and Fauna assisted the property owner, family and friends in planting 350 very healthy native trees and shrubs on a 30acre property on the banks of the Wollondilly River near Marulan, NSW.



Planting in progress, A Polhill.

The majority of the eucalyptus, acacia, casuarina tube stock was grown by Menai Wildflower volunteers at the Tip Nursery. Planting event coordinator, Adrian Polhill, said, 'This action was small in proportion but hugely significant as together we try hard to turn around the dire consequences of ignoring the signs that clearly show that we need to care for the land'.

Further planting events are planned later in the year at Crookwell, Gunning and High Range near Wombeyan Caves. Contact Adrian Polhill (0424 478498) if you would like to join one of these fabulous planting events.

Adrian Polhill

Some Other Opportunities

For the photographers amongst you, Birdlife Australia's annual photography competition opens at the end of May. See <https://www.birdlifephotoaward.org.au/> for more details or to enjoy past winners.

If you are a keen observer of the wildlife in your garden you might be interested in Taronga Zoo's Wildlife in your Backyard stories at <https://urbanfieldnaturalist.org/>



Bluetongue Lizard has now settled in for cold weather, P Forbes.

News from the Nurseries

The Tip nursery has done well this year. We have the Glossies in the Mist plants already tubed up with 2000 ready to go and another 2000 which should be ready for the spring planting. That should bring our contribution to 7000 by the end of the year. The other item we are growing at the moment is flannel flowers, pink and white. It was a rough start to the year for these, with the rain and high humidity causing heavy losses but they are growing well now. A great effort from the T-I-C (tuber in chief, Marian W) and the T-I-C2 to keep it all rolling along. As well, at the tip we have been hosting OFF members, Adrian and Janine Polhill, who are growing tube stock for the revegetation of farmland (Re-Greening's Efforts Go Bush). It will be interesting to watch how this develops. Adrian and Janine have now joined MWG.

The Compound Nursery is supplying a steady stream of cutting grown plants for sale. Between these and the Flannels we made \$800 from the Grevillea Park sales. It is going to take a lot of effort from the nursery crew to keep this rate going. The revitalisation of the IRFS gardens continues. When you consider that we have now been there for 19 years it is about due.

Lloyd Hedges



Banksia Serrata, P Forbes.

Glossies in the Mist Planting at Penrose

On Thursday 20 May, Anthony Jackson and I accepted the invitation from NP's Save Our Species Officer Lauren Hook to join in with a mass planting of trees, which included many of the *Allocasuarina littoralis* seedlings we had propagated.

My trip down did not get off to a good start because an accident on the highway past Liverpool brought the traffic to a halt and movement was intermittent for the next 5k. So I was 30 minutes late. Still, we got an enthusiastic welcome from Lauren and Pat Hall who sung MWG's praises to all concerned.

The site was a farm that was being returned to bush. Much planting had already been carried out. The site was about as good as you can get. The soil was a rich loam and a water course meandered down the middle to a pond. The holes had already been dug with an auger and so it was just a matter of clearing away the low grass and dropping some water pellets down the hole followed by the plant and soil.

The plant guards were a new design made from recycled cardboard with holes in it to let in a little light. How effective they will be time will tell.



Anthony Jackson planting, L Hedges.

It all went at an impressive pace. There were probably about 30-40 enthusiastic volunteers and so the 500 plants were in the ground and watered before lunch. We then retired to the Country Women's pergola for a lunch of tomato or pumpkin

soup before various cake offerings and a leisurely chat before weaving our way home.



Planting team with Anthony beside Bec Wood, Lauren Hook and Pat Hall of the SOS team, L Hedges.

I dropped another 600 plants at the local Council nursery on the way.



Chiloglottis (Wasp Orchid) are out again. L Hedges.

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