



# Newsletter of Menai Wildflower Group September 2021

Oct 13

**Nov 10** 

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Ringtail Possum enjoying lockdown P Forbes.

## **Coming events**

Sep 8

Our next meeting is Spring Night. It is the beginning of our **Wednesday** night meetings, but because of the Covid lockdown the meeting will be held via Zoom at 7pm on Wednesday. Peter Olde will present a range of flowers that herald spring. They will be photos of plants growing in the

garden and he will talk about the flowers presented and what can be grown in and around the Sydney area. So tune in and be inspired!

Wednesday, 7pm. Karlo Taliana talking about our local Native Orchids. It has been a great year for orchids locally so this should be very interesting.

Wednesday, 7pm. AGM followed by Helen Patience giving us tips for handling and caring for native cut flowers. Great with Christmas coming up. Helen is famous for her brilliant flower arrangements (remember her key role in the team who achieved Easter Show successes). Helen will also do an arrangement which will go in the raffle - that is if it is not a Zoom meeting!!

**Dec 8** Hopefully we will be able to get together for our Christmas Social.

Covid19 restrictions look set to continue for some time! We are using a Covid-19 safe protocol and activities are subject to last minute changes. Please confirm meeting details before all events.

Editor



Cheerful pots of paper daisies H Patience.

### **Reports from Meetings and Activities**

### **Exploring Northern NSW**

At our August Zoom meeting Tony Porritt gave a slide presentation showing some of the flora and fauna seen when he and a group of friends visited several of the northern NSW parks in September 2020. The group stayed a few days at each of Culgoa, Toorale, Gundabooka, Nocoleche and Paroo-Darling parks to survey flora and fauna.

There had been unusually high rainfalls in these parks throughout autumn and winter 2020 resulting in an abundance of flora and profusion of colour not seen for many years. The Peery Lakes had a significant amount of water in them and the Darling River was flowing after many years of drought in the area.



Bright flowers against the red earth T Porritt.

The presentation highlighted the various types of environments found within the parks and the types of plants growing in these habitats. There were a number of slides showing general views of these habitats to highlight the many different plants growing in an area and how the colours of their flowers and leaves coalesced into a panoramic kaleidoscope.

Following this, a selection of photographs from the over 180 species of plants identified during the trip was shown, grouped by family/genus. These individual plant photos showed the variation of form within a genus and often within a species. Included in this group of slides were *Goodenia nocoleche* which is an aquatic species of a plant normally associated with arid areas of Australia. It is an extremely rare plant and probably only previously seen by a handful of people. Also shown was *Calotis erinacea* (Tangled Burr Daisy) which had never before been recorded in north west NSW.



One of the many daisy species T Porritt.

Also shown were a number of slides featuring birds seen during the trip, including the ephemeral Bourke's parrot, an inland species that is mostly only seen following rain in an area.

The results of the surveys of flora and fauna compiled were submitted to Mount Annan and the Bourke and Broken Hill offices of NSW Parks for their records.

Tony Porritt

Thanks Tony, for a most interesting talk and for writing it up too! If you missed it, it is available here.

\*\*Editor\*\*

### **Wonderful Wattles**

Whether we venture into the bush, our gardens, or our local footpaths, splashes of bright yellow are brightening our gloomy lockdown as the Acacia flowering peaks in spring. There are over 900 species of "wattle" in Australia, usually shrubs or small trees which all have large fluffy, sweet smelling flower heads almost hidden by long stamens. They can be either rounded or elongated clusters and flowers can vary in colour from cream, pale yellow to gold. There is even one species, Acacia purpureapetala, which has purple flowers and a form of Acacia leprosa with red flowers. The belongs to the genus Acacia sub-family Mimosaceae in the pea family Fabaceae, and they share the typical pea seed pod. The seeds are protected by a hard coat and to propagate they need to be scarified before sowing.



Wattles in Menai bush P Forbes.

Another interestingly Acacia characteristic is that they don't have leaves but commonly use phyllodes. Acacias' first leaves after germination, are the distinctive feathery true leaves, but these are lost as they mature and are replaced by phyllodes; modified leaf stems (petioles). These phyllodes function like leaf blades, an adaptation to hot climates and droughts. A few species go even further, using simply modified stems (cladodes) to function as the leaves. It is amazing that scientists can identify this! Acacias, like Eucalypts and others, evolved their drought and fire resistance millions of years ago when the continent dried out and they now form dry, open forests with Allocasuarina, Eucalyptus and Callitris.

You may have seen recent news that Australia held on to the name Acacia when the genus was recently split, even though the first species, including the original type species, came from Africa. They are the largest genus of flowering plants in Australia and are found all around the country. Allegedly there is one flowering somewhere all year round. So, it is not surprising that our national colours are green and gold and a wattle is our national flower, Acacia pycnantha. A. pycnantha, the Golden Wattle, is found growing in New South Wales, ACT, Victoria, Tasmania and Western Australia. It has beautiful and very fragrant flowers which are used in making perfumes and potpourris. We even celebrate wattles on an official day. Check out

Wattle Day activities coming on 1 September, at the official website.

The local species that you are likely to find include; *Acacia terminalis* (Sunshine Wattle), *A. linifolia* (Flax Wattle), *A. suavolens* (Sweet Wattle), *A. ulicifolia* (Prickly Moses) and Sydney Golden Wattle, *Acacia longifolia*, but you may see species from around Australia in gardens.



Acacia terminalis P Forbes.

Acacia terminalis is a dense shrub up to 2m in spread by 3m high. The ferny, dark green pinnate leaves contrast nicely with the somewhat reddish stems. It seems to prefer a little better soils and moisture along the creek lines.

We have three varieties of wattle commonly called Prickly Moses; *A. ulicifolia, A. brownii,* and *A. echinula*, which are similar but with variations for example in flower colour. *A. brownii* is a lower shrub with deeper gold flowers. It can be found below Windle Place but generally grows slightly further afield in Sutherland. They are not the prettiest plants and live up to their prickly name, but they do cope well with our dry sandy soils.



A. ulicifolia P Forbes.

Acacia longifolia, Sydney Golden Wattle, is a large attractive shrub, up to 6m, and it is living up to its name at the moment being covered with flowers.



Acacia longifolia P Forbes.



Acacia suaveolens P Forbes.

Acacia suaveolens, Sweet Wattle (for its sweet fragrance) is a small, sparse, but still attractive, shrub again contrasting red stems with olive green leaves and pale flowers. It's happy on the drier, higher slopes.

Acacia linifolia is a sparse shrub, 2-5m high with fine leaves and a pretty, slightly weeping habit. The flowers are pale yellow balls. Supposedly tolerant of heavier soil and part shade, mine is in sandy soil and receives a lot of sun. The species was introduced into England in 1790, being among the first plant importations from Australia and was recorded as growing in a London nursery in 1810.



A. linifolia P Forbes.

Acacia decurrens (Green or Black Wattle) is similar to A. terminalis but is recognised by the ridges that run up the stems and continues up branches.

It is also worth checking out some of the different wattles in the fire station garden. One of my standouts, with weird sandpapery leaves and beautiful golden brushes, is *A. denticulosa*, in the front garden.



Acacia decurrens P Forbes.



Acacia denticulosa at firestation P Forbes.

A. aphylla is also amazing, making up its lack of leaves with an architectural tangle of grey green stems. You will find one at the back of the far mound.



Acacia aphylla at firestation P Forbes.

So many to enjoy! Hope you have the chance to see and smell these iconic treasures.

References Wrigley and Fagg, Australian Native Plants, 5<sup>th</sup> Edn Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney, <u>website</u> Australian National Botanic Gardens, <u>website</u> Wikipedia Gardening with Angus <u>website</u>

P Forbes.

### **Exploring the Georges River**

Continuing our historical investigations, Greg has again contributed an article. This one examines the

many Europeans who have, or may have, explored the Georges River.

The names that spring to mind when considering the exploration of the Georges River are George Bass and Matthew Flinders who together with a young William Martin took the small dingy *Tom Thumb* up the Georges River to about Casula in 1795 on an expedition lasting about nine days. But was this the first exploration of this river?

The many middens and engravings show that the indigenous inhabitants of the Sydney region had intimate knowledge of the Georges River, all its tributaries and valuable resources. They had been custodians of the river since the last ice age. But possibly the earliest European representation of the Georges River is to be found in the Vallard Atlas<sup>1</sup>. The Vallard Atlas is an atlas produced in Dieppe, Northern France in 1547. Although it is ascribed to Nicolas Vallard, there is a degree of uncertainty over its authorship. Nowadays, it is believed that the Vallard Atlas was developed from an earlier Portuguese map.

This atlas, and its implications for Portuguese exploration of Australia's east coast, have been explored in several books, most notably McIntyre in 1977<sup>2</sup> and in 2007 by Canberra-based science journalist Peter Trickett<sup>3</sup> who maintains Portuguese seafarer Christopher de Mendonca left irrefutable evidence of his historic voyage in a detailed and uncannily accurate map of Australia's entire east coast. Image 1 shows a small portion of this beautiful map of 'Jave la Grande' which certainly bear a likeness to Botany Bay. If this is indeed a map of Botany Bay, then about 10km of Georges River has been mapped although not in detail, with bays and creeks omitted.



Image1: A section of the Vallard Atlas purporting to show Botany Bay and about 10km of the Georges River. The writing is upside down as this atlas had the south

pole up. The orange-shaded areas are hazards to navigation (sandbanks, and rocks). Portuguese map makers deliberately exaggerated these features. The most southerly hazard is possibly the dangerous Bare Island bombora.

The Portuguese may well have been the first

European explorers of the Georges River some time before 1547, travelling from Botany Bay up to approximately the modern suburb of Illawong. The next known exploration of the Georges River was by James Cook in 1770, during his brief stay in Botany Bay. Image 2 shows a map produced by Cook showing the Georges River up to about Kangaroo Point although other evidence suggests

that Cook ventured as far up the Georges River as

the junction with the Woronora River at Como<sup>7</sup>. The

Georges River had not been named at this time.

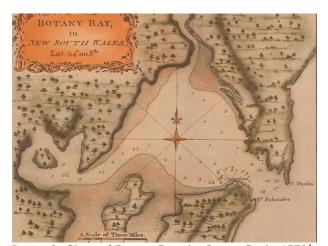


Image 2: Chart of Botany Bay, by James Cook, 1770<sup>4</sup>. Depth soundings in fathoms and feet. Note the sandbank at the entrance to the Cooks River in a similar location to the hazard shown in the Vallard Atlas.



Image 3: Modern Image of Botany Bay from SIX maps for comparison with Image 1 and 2. Note that Cooks River was rerouted when the airport was built.

With the arrival in Botany Bay of the First Fleet in 1788, exploration of the Georges River continued as Governor Phillip and his officers searched for a suitable place for the first settlement, being dissatisfied with Botany Bay. The Georges River

still had no name. It was usually referred to as 'the South West Arm', 'the west river', or 'the head of the Bay, distinguishing it from the 'north east arm' (the Cooks River)<sup>5</sup>. The lack of a name for Georges River and its tributaries and bays has obscured its early exploration by the First Fleet.

The account of the first major social exchange between the British and the Eora is well known; it is described by Philip Gidley King in his diary and referred to briefly by others. Following a careful reading of King's diaries in 1981 the location of this incident was located at least as far up the river as present day Oatley<sup>6</sup>. Phillip was also present at the incident in another boat, as a suitable location for a settlement was actively being sought. It would appear from King's diary that the Woronora River was explored as far as Bonnet Bay and Lime Kiln Bay was explored to its tidal extent<sup>8</sup>. Probably King's exploration of the Georges River proper extended as far up as Lugarno<sup>8</sup>.

There was another possible player in exploring the Georges River in 1788. Just days after the arrival of the first fleet in Botany Bay, two French ships under the command of Jean-Francois de Galaup, Comte de la Perouse had arrived in Botany Bay, to the complete surprise of the English. They were on a combined scientific/spying expedition and wasted no time exploring their surrounds. In his diary Lieutenant Tench describes Botany Bay and the Georges River and its exploration: 'It is of prodigious extent, the principal arm, which takes a south west direction, being not less, including its windings, than twenty four miles from the capes to the entrance, according to a report of the French officers, who took uncommon pains to survey it<sup>9</sup>. Why had the French taken 'uncommon pains' to survey 24 miles of an obscure river on the other side of the world? Hayworth suggests three possible reasons<sup>10</sup>:

- 1. Although the entrance to the Georges River is shallow, 10m deep pools in the lower Georges River could harbour a large fleet making the Georges River a possible future defensive asset.
- 2. The French had lost two whaleboats in an altercation with natives in the islands to our north. To replace these boats suitable wood was required and upstream, in the rainforest around Prospect and Cabramatta Creek, Australian Red Cedar (*Toona ciliate*) thrived. This would be a very suitable timber for boatbuilding, far easier to work than the ubiquitous eucalypts around Botany Bay.
- 3. The French expedition were there to explore. They would have noted the fertile river flats

up the river and the substantial freshwater stream above the river's tidal extent at Liverpool.

The first fleet moved on to Sydney Cove and with the discovery of the Hawkesbury River and its fertile river flats attention shifted north. There was however, low level but continuous exploration of the Georges River before Bass and Flinders. For instance, Phillip reports that he spent five days surveying Botany Bay in November, 1788<sup>11</sup>. The emphasis on the Hawkesbury River and unfavourable reports, particular by Watkin Tench <sup>12</sup> in 1789, stalled interest in the Georges River until the Bass and Flinders voyage of 1795.

A re-reading of the historic documents show that the Georges River had been explored and charted long before the *Tom Thumb* voyage, possibly even as long ago as the sixteenth century. What Bass and Flinders achieved was a reassessment of the possibilities of the Georges River as a transport corridor and an agriculturally productive area. Their report was instrumental in the establishment of the towns of Bankstown and, later on, Liverpool.

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- 6. Hayworth R. op. cit., Page 2
- 7. Hayworth R. op. cit., Page 6
- 8. Hayworth R. op. cit., Page 13
- Hayworth R. op. cit., Page 17 citing L. F. Fitzhardinge (ed.), Sydney's First Four Years: Being a Reprint of A Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay and A Complete Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson, 1788–1791 by Captain Watkin Tench, North Sydney, 1979, p. 209.
- 10. Hayworth R. op. cit., Page 18
- 11. Hayworth R. op. cit., Page 23
- 12. Hayworth R. op. cit., Page 25

#### Joan's Lockdown

Joan, like many of us, has been spending lockdown walking in her local bushland and sent in these photographs of The Glen Reserve. She suggests you enter from Tudor Rd, take first left track along waterboard land as it's so pretty, and follow the track to the waterfall. Most enjoyable.



The Glen Reserve is a large bushland reserve in Bonnet Bay with walking tracks that connect to Koolangarra Bushland Reserve and Burnum Burnum Sanctuary. Council and Bushcare volunteers have developed a network of walking tracks through these bushland reserves where a range of Sydney's ecological communities can be experienced.



J Sutton

### Helen's Photography/Garden

I'm looking forward to Helen's floral tips at our meeting in November. Helen also grows some lovely plants in her garden as seen in the beautiful paper daisy pots and noticed this spectacular flower at the fire station garden. Here's her photograph of the vibrant flowering *Xanthostemon chrysthanus*.



Xanthostemon chrysthanus H Patience.

**Editor** 

### Sprinter in the Pam's Courtyard

No, I am not writing about an Olympian escapee. In our recent Zoom meeting, we learned that "sprinter" is a season when spring overtakes winter before the calendar says it's due. In my case, I had been waiting for some energy to clean out my original plantings in my small courtyard. Nine years had somehow left the garden looking a bit ragged.

Now I do prefer au naturel to manicured, when it comes to garden design, but my old favourites were being overtaken by the red geranium/pelargonium inherited from my dear old neighbour, Edna. With so many residents passing by on their exercise walks, all gardens were being examined quite closely, and people wanted to know the names of my Aussie natives, so I had to unveil those that were hiding.



Ernie in Pam's courtyard garden P Pitkeathly.

When I lassoed the *Chorizema cordatum* so its pea flowers could be photographed, I discovered that my *Grevillea racemosa* (ground cover type) had lost

its battle with Eremophila maculata. That was sad, but it did vacate a spot for Ernie the echidna, the metal sculpture sent up by daughter, Ann, with the note: "Another native for your garden". So that is why you are getting a shot like this to help our hardworking editor acquire some copy for the next issue. Whilst I have your attention, do advise me what I should do with the leggy Philotheca which has lived through a couple of name changes, the Thryptomene saxicola that comes back into flower whenever I go to remove it and the potted plants that are screaming out for release! I can only think that I have to join the new APS NSW interest group on plants for small places. In the meantime, send all good ideas this way! Pam Pitkeathly (MWG Life Member and very retired person).

### More online adventures in lockdown

We can't get out for many adventures (well apart from our fantastic local walks as Joan demonstrates) and we are mostly too old/decrepit/lazy to adventure far anyway, but you can watch other people adventure for free in August https://adventureplus.com/orders/customerinfo?o= 59983. You have to register so check details first. Age doesn't have to be a barrier to adventure as you will see in this story about an older couple walking the Heysen Trail in SA. For something a little less exciting but just as interesting, check out the new series of Branching Out, the RBG Sydney's podcast, or ABC's latest Off Track broadcasts (singing fish, powerful owls and lots more). In fact ABC is a treasure trove where you can find how to offer your backyard tawny to David Attenborough for the filming in his next documentary (actually they are looking specifically in Melbourne) or find out about intelligent fungi or keeping Australian animals as pets or the problems with weeds. Gardening Australia is back on Friday evenings and usually has something about natives. Back to Nature is a new series on ABC TV about engaging with Australian nature. Watch on Tuesday nights or stream on IView. Gardening Australia is back on air (the first episode had an interesting segment on a farm growing Australian natives for cut flowers). Sutherland Library has frequent author talks and activities online, such as the history of Australia seen through a rum bottle or the war graves at Woronora Cemetery. For more details see their What's On.

Fill in some useful time as a citizen scientist at Hoot Detectives where you can identify owl calls. Saving our Species (we are part of their Glossies in the Mist program) began a series of 30 minute podcasts this year, available at The Business of

Biodiversity. Download a poster of the state and floral https://www.environment.gov.au/science/abrs/publ ications/posters/floral-emblems-australia , check out some plant facts at the Australian National Botanic Gardens or read about bush tucker plants.

There are many Citizen Science Project that let you contribute to research in many areas. At Digivol there is a range of projects you can participate in, often processing data like photos or videos or digitising historical information. The State Library of NSW has a similarly broad range of opportunities to digitise the library's collection. From birds, edible insects, and dunnarts to cataloguing fossils and meteorites, there is lots of choice.

And if you are just fed up with Covid, Dr Susan McLaine from the State Library of Victoria used her expertise as a bibliotherapist, to create her podcasts capitalising on the healing power of literature to nourish and comfort us during challenging times. Check the episodes focused on the feelings that arose during Victoria's lockdown. For descriptions and to learn about bibliotherapy, visit the State Library Victoria website.



Grevillea bronwenae flowering well at the fire station P Forbes.

Now you have mastered online shopping, you may need some inspiration for new meals. Remember as Mark Twain said, "Part of the secret of success in life is to eat what you want and let the food fight it

out inside". Both Coles and Woolworth have recipes on their website but ABC's Delicious magazine or their English version of the magazine, has many more delicious recipes. BBC has a similar magazine with a selection of recipes. And for our gourmet members, Australian Gourmet Traveller will give you some exciting choices. Alternatively, you can watch free lessons from top chefs; for example Delicious magazine has this <u>list</u>. And for a drink, checkout this story on gins inspired by the local WA from ABC's Landline https://www.abc.net.au/landline/gin-spirit-towns:wa-towns-embrace-the-spirit/13469624 where there are lots more stories for gin aficionados. And for crossword enthusiasts, here's one with a native plant theme. Thanks to Mary, Lloyd and Jan for contributing tricky questions. Answers will be printed in next newsletter.



- name
  12. Snuggle Pot & Cuddle Pie are ... babies
  14. If you want to clean bottles you need a ...
  16. The Pink Flannel Flower is Actinotus ...
  17. Usually the floral display and Toyota makes one
  18. Croweas have 5 petals but these have 4
  20. I used to be Eriostemon
  21. This genus name indicates a moist time
  22. A family of many forms
  23. Small genus of moisture loving shrubs with pink-purple flowers, endemic to eastern Australia

- 1. What month is Wattle Day in?
  2. I'm not really sarsaparilla
  3. Flower part is unchangeably male
  4. Allocasurarina for which friends in the mist?
  6. Loroic genus named after one of the botanists on Cook's voyage.
  9. First European botanist to survey the flora of the Georges River
  13. Acacias have no leaves but instead ...
  15. Black and white genusl
  19. Part of a flower, nix the healthy brassica

Editor



Local G. buxifolia P Forbes.

### **Erythrorchis in the Woodpile?**

I have been (and still am) waiting for a flower on the orchid which has tangled its way through my woodpile. I've been watching it for well over a month and now there are 4 stems about 3-4mm diameter and 4m long that thread through the logs and climb up a couple of nearby shrubs. They all have numerous sprays of yellow brown buds which I hope will soon create a great display, although Lloyd thinks I'll be disappointed.

I have previously been surprised and delighted by Dipodium sp., a.k.a. Hyacinth Orchids popping up, and this latest orchid has a similar spotty look. However, Lloyd has identified it as *E. cassythoides*, with a climbing habit and less impressive flowers. Hopefully I will have a flower photo, to confirm the ID in the next newsletter.



Boronia ledifolia P Forbes.



E. cassythoides, the Black Shoelace Orchid P Forbes.

Erythrorchis, commonly known as bootlace orchids, is a genus of two species of climbing, "leafless" orchids (I didn't notice any leaves, but RBGS's Flora Online describes them as scale-like, triangular, 4–20 mm long and 5–10 mm wide). They climb or scramble up tree trunks or rocks, clinging with small roots. They have multiple branches of flowering stems with many densely crowded flowers. Having no leaves, they form parasitic or symbiotic relationships, for example with fungi, which I guess explains the attraction of the woodpile. Erythrorchis grow in forests on eucalypts, stumps and logs, in near-coastal areas and nearby tablelands between the Blackdown Tableland in Queensland and Waterfall in the Royal National Park, New South Wales.

P Forbes

### **News from the Nurseries**

The Tip and Fire Station nurseries are in a holding pattern as Covid restrictions prevent operation of our working bees. Lloyd is keeping things ticking over, particularly our Allocasuarinas and Pink Flannel Flowers. Plantings for the SOS project may be disrupted by Covid, which means we may have an oversupply of sheoaks. As mentioned in the last meeting, you may be able to "click and collect" plants when Lloyd is up there. Ring him if you need

something. And remember we can **only allow 2 people** at a time, all wearing a mask. **Please do not congregate** to chat. And if you have some spare time (ha ha, don't we all!) drop in and pull out some weeds from the fire station garden (again on your own or in households) – most of us are very capable of doing this without supervision. The bonus is that you can exercise and enjoy the flowers at the same time.



Again, you can ring Lloyd if you need direction and again, remember we can only have **2 people** together at any time and you still need to practice Covid rules with regard to distancing, masks, hygiene e.t.c! Finally, Lloyd would like to share this commendation from NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment which he recently received. Great work propagation team!

Dear Lloyd and the Menai Wildflower group,

The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment would like to thank you and for your generous contributions to the Feed the Birds and Glossies in the Mist Project. We extend our thanks to the Menai Wildflower group itself. By propagating all of the habitat trees that have been planted in the Great Western Wildlife Corridor, they are helping secure the local Glossy black-cockatoo population into the future.

Your continued and ongoing support through propagating trees has been a major contributing factor to the success of the Feed the Birds and Glossies in the Mist project. Thank you for undertaking this valuable work propagating native plants and educating the community in seed collection and propagation. With this kind contribution of over 19 000 trees, large areas of the Great Western Wildlife Corridor have been replanted, reconnected and enhanced.

The tree planting has engaged many more landholders and community members to get involved in private land restoration and conservation. We hope that the group will continue to be supported by SUEZ and the Australian Plant Society as it is a vital part of our project.

Yours sincerely,

Pearce Thomas and Lauren Hook

Bushfire recovery and Threatened Species Officers, Ecosystems & Threatened Species team South East Regional Operations



Hakea laurina, the Pincushion Hakea P Forbes

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