



Newsletter of Menai Wildflower Group May 2022

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Plant sales at the Quarterly. M Hedges.

Autumn Quarterly Gathering

A big thanks to everyone who helped to make the regional meeting in March a success. The garden and nursery were looking great after a big cleanup and the sales tables, full at the start of the day, were left a lot lighter by the end. As well as making over \$300, the day gave us a great opportunity to promote our group's activities. The presentations in the afternoon were well attended and interesting and culminated in a delicious afternoon tea. A successful day all round with a good roll-up of regulars and new faces as well.

The weather held up for us, enabling visitors to wander the gardens of the Illawong Fire Station, planted out and maintained by MWG. The garden was a bit water logged and the weather had slowed down our propagation and maintenance operations, but nevertheless the garden presented well and it didn't rain on the day! As well as our own plants, East Hills, Phil Keane and Peter Olde had plants for sale and we saw a steady stream of customers.

There were a dozen people at the walk at Delardes Reserve where Greg pointed out the historical details and Peter and Pam added some information on the plants. You can read all about the area in Greg's report of a previous tour from one of last year's newsletters on the [MWG webpage](#). Be fascinated when you read about castles, escaped crims, the road to the South, the punts that used to ply these waters, pleasure grounds on the river and the ferries from Como train station that took folks up the river.



Members enjoying Delardes Reserve, P Forbes.

After lunch, Chris Gambian from the Conservation Council summarised the state of our environment and discussed how we can influence policies to improve the response to the challenges of land clearing, loss of species and climate change. Chris provided us with some interesting facts regarding the destruction of our native plants in Australia. He cited Queensland's record of destroying one football field's area every 17 seconds – not something we should be proud of. Chris raised these issues to encourage us all to become more active in the political process and suggested that 10 phone

calls from interested parties was a more influential way of getting politicians' interest that 10,000 signatures on a petition.

After a delicious and very generous afternoon tea, we got some general updates from APS NSW leadership before hearing from Lloyd, MWG's Vice President and Nursery Manager, about the Glossies in the Mist program. Lloyd explained that he and his team had been involved in a number of projects with National Parks and other organisations. On the Big Island of the Five Islands group off Port Kembla, they worked clearing and replanting native species. But the latest project is the immense task of providing some 15,000 seedlings of species *Eucalyptus racemosa*, *Leptospermum polygalifolium* and *juniperinum*, *Allocasuarina littoralis*, *Hakeas dactyloides* and *sericea* for the "Glossies in the Mist" project. Reports on the enormous effort of both these projects and MWG's involvement can also be found on our website.

As is often the case, one of the most important parts of days like this is the interaction of members and the interested public as they come together, discuss and encourage the love of our wonderful native plants. It is an ongoing process to bring more people into this environment, but the rewards for the individuals and community is immense. These were the overwhelming messages from Heather and John Aitken who thanked members of the MWG as they closed the meeting.

G. Davies and M Hedges



Banksia on Curra Moors, P Forbes.

May meeting

Nearly thirty members and guests turned up at the fire station to hear John Knight present a very interesting talk on plants we no longer grow. John has been involved in horticulture for many years, 20 years at the Eurobodalla Botanic Gardens. John

started with a historical overview of some botanists who studied and grew native plants, beginning with Banks and Solander, 1770, through Caley c. 1800, Peter Good from Kew Gardens, and Alan Cunningham from 1817. These early botanists started cataloguing and propagating Australian plants, often sending samples back to Kew Gardens in London.

Fast forward to the twentieth century when people started creating indigenous gardens and growing plants for sale. Maranoa Gardens ran from 1901-1927 and the Parry family who established "Floraland" in 1908, was producing 50,000 waratahs for sale by 1945. In 1947 the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria formed a group to study Australian plants. From this the Australian Growers of Australians was established in 1957. Not surprisingly, this group went through several name changes, for example, Australian Growers of Australian Plants until it eventual became the Australian Plant Society.

Small nurseries produced a huge range of Australian plants up till the 1980s, with individual nurseries selling 100s or even 1000s of varieties. Now big nurseries dominate the market but supply a very limited number of species each year, maybe only 25. This makes it hard to find many varieties of indigenous plants and shows the worth of other sources such as the SSC nursery, our own nurseries and suppliers like Brian Roach. The catalogue of Australian plants in 1975 held information on 1000 species, increasing to 1500 species by 1988. John illustrated his talk with many photographs of gardens large and small from the 1960s to 90s including some of his own lovely garden. His engaging style and extensive knowledge made this a very enjoyable presentation.

G Jackson

Coming events

Jun 11 **Ruby Paroisein** who we have seen before talking about Pink Flannel Flowers, will return with her results on research on the **Gynea Lily's Fire Response**.

July 9 **Peter Olde** will present his talk on a **Botanical Ramble through Old Sydney Town** which was postponed after technical issues at an earlier meeting.

Aug 13 Local koala enthusiast **Tom Kristensen** will be updating us on the

koala population in the Shire and his lockdown project with Steve Anyon-Smith to assess where they are and what they are up to. Bushcare volunteers heard this talk last month and it was very entertaining.

Sep 11-16 ANPSA Biennial Conference, Kiama. Australian Flora – Past Present Future at the Kiama Pavilion, Saturday 10 to Friday 16 September
\$140/day or \$600 for full conference
More information at <https://austplants.com.au/ANPSA-Biennial-Conference-2022>

We are using a Covid-19 safe protocol and activities are subject to remaining NSW Government restrictions.

Editor



Bees in Gynea Lily. P Forbes.

Farewell Heather Woods

It is sad to report the passing of our longest serving, and first life member, Heather Wood.

Heather achieved the admiration of many colleagues and friends with her dedication to her many interests over the years. She never stood back when anyone or organisation needed help, from fund raising and office holding for the Smith Family and Guide Dogs to gardening and craft.

Heather held an avid interest in gardening from the onset. She heard about MWG and joined in 1986 when meetings were at the Gurema Centre, Menai. Over the years she held all the major positions: Secretary and Editor (1989 - 1994); President and Editor (1994 - 1995); President (1995 - 1997); Assistant Treasurer (1998) and Treasurer (1998 - 2009).

Heather worked tirelessly for MWG in those early days, always putting her hand up to assist with whatever popped up; finding guest speakers, offering gardening advice or cooking something delicious for supper.

For the past few months Heather resided at IRT Kirrawee, earning the admiration of staff for her lovely, gentle nature. Even as her health slowly declined, she maintained her interest in plants, caring for her small array of pots on her balcony and enjoying the display of blooms as they matured.

She will be sadly missed.

Vale Heather.

M Payne

Saving Delardes' Snake Tongue Orchids

Lloyd, Pam F. and Greg are Bushcare volunteers at Delardes Reserve. This is an interesting piece of land as discussed in the March report and it's more than just history of interest. It is a small reserve on the Georges River, near the old Lugarno ferry crossing, and contains some remnant vegetation which is being regenerated and extended by Bushcare. The atypical geology means the reserve is a transition zone between the standard sandstone forest and the Turpentine-Ironbark ecological community.

This community is now endangered, becoming restricted to small remnants as Sydney has developed and expanded. It typically appears on moderately wet sites where Wiannamatta shales have decayed to clay soils, mainly on the Cumberland Plains and adjoining plateau. Delardes is a small patch that meets these conditions. Some of the plants found include *Eucalyptus crebra* and *paniculata* (Narrow leaved and Grey Ironbark) and the smaller *Acacia parramattensis* (Parramatta Wattle), *Breynia oblongifolia*, *Notelaea longifolia* (Mock Olive), plus a number of native grasses (*Themeda triandra* and *Microlaena stipoides* (Kangaroo and Weeping Grasses) At Delardes we also see *Angophora backeri* and a range of local wattles, geebung and other shrubs.



Snake tongue orchid flower, P Forbes.

One of the treasures in the park is a patch of *Pterostylis ophioglossa*. These native orchids are uncommon in Sutherland Shire, favouring the

Cumberland Plains further up river. In the autumn, the rosette of small round leaves appears flat to the ground and a flower stalk grows to hold a green, brown and white flower similar to a standard greenhood.

With the recent rain, the grass around these little gems was tall enough to swamp them so some judicious trimming was in order.



Lloyd and Bushcare Officer Sabrina, clearing grass from the orchids, P Forbes.

More on Koalas and the Bush Turkey

The SSC Autumn Bushcare gathering included two great speakers on two topics of local interest – koalas and bush turkeys. Steve Anyon Smith and Tom Kristensen described their lockdown project: tracking down koalas in the Heathcote National Park and more broadly in Sutherland Shire. Koalas are surprising in many ways –

- They can travel 10km in a night; they are mainly nocturnal.
- They are faster than you expect on the ground and can out run a dog over short distances.
- They are very well camouflaged up in the canopy
- They can be detected by their scats which are dry, friable and smell pleasantly of eucalyptus, unlike possum poo.
- They leave 3 deep scratches on trees as they climb them.

Come along to the August meeting to hear more of this interesting project. Lloyd may also update you on work he is doing to identify koala habitat at Lucas Heights.



Koala in Woronora Valley, P Forbes.

The other talk was on Brush Turkeys, also featured in our last newsletter. In a collaborative project with Sydney University, Taronga Conservation Society and the Royal Botanical Gardens, PhD candidate Matt Hall is using historical and contemporary data to investigate the social habits and migration of the turkeys in urban environments. Their numbers plummeted over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, due to hunting and habitat loss, but since they became legally protected, numbers are improving, especially in suburban areas which seems to suit them. Matt recognised a number of factors that allows them to adapt to human environments, such as being flexible about food and housing and fairly relaxed with people.

But this close contact with people can be problematic due to the turkeys' foraging and nesting habits and because the independent chicks immediately venture into the dangerous suburban environment.

Matt developed a new app which allows the public to record sightings, noting behaviours as well as location. As well as these sightings, researchers also observed and tagged birds to better understand their movements and behaviour.

You can download the Big City Birds app from Spotteron to your phone and add to this valuable citizen science project. Sightings and other information can be found [here](#). More information on Matt's work at

<https://www.sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2018/10/22/brush-turkeys-in-suburbia--there-s-an-app-for-that.html>

P Forbes



Coastal Banksia, P Forbes.

More on Glossies in the Mist

MWG has run a nursery at the Lucas Heights Resource Recover Centre (aka “The Tip”) for years. The site now owned by Cleanaway, was originally owned by WSN, a quasi-state government company tasked with the regenerating the Lucas Heights site with natural bush grown from locally sourced seed. After being privatised and operated by SUEZ that goal of regeneration was abandoned and the nursery lost its purpose. So, other outlets had to be found for the nursery. First, thanks to Barry Hodgson we started to supply existing stock to Georges River National Park regeneration projects. By word of mouth this led to Pat Nagle asking us to grow plants for the coastal walking track in the Royal National Park. Next came Dharawal National Park with Rowena Morris, through mutual friend Chris Lloyd and most exciting for all of us at the time, replanting of Big Island in the Five Islands Reserve. During a lull in the Big Island project we received a call from Pat Halls, then a Scientific Officer with the Southern National Park. At the time Pat was looking after the shore birds, but was concerned about the fragmentation of the Great Western Wildlife Corridor that offered flora and fauna a connection between the Blue Mountains and the coast at Morton National Park. This fragmentation was particularly problematic for the endangered Glossy Black cockatoos, known as ‘the Glossies’. When Pat received an enquiry from the Committee

for Bundanoon’s 150th Anniversary for an appropriate project to celebrate the occasion, she suggested offering 150 Allocasuarina seedlings for Bundanoonies to plant to help save the Glossy Black cockatoos.

When the day came to hand out the tube stock they were completely overwhelmed by the response. There were not only more people wanting plants than there were tubes, but many people wanted them by the hundreds. National Parks, led by Lauren Hook took up the challenge and the Glossies in the Mist campaign was formed to supply Allocasuarina seedlings to those who wish to plant them. Menai Wildflower Group supports the project by propagating and supplying the seedlings to be distributed. With funding from Save Our Species, the project has expanded to also supplying crews to plant the seedlings. Up to 2021 Menai Wildflower Group has supplied 13,000 plants. This year we are hoping to supply 15,000.

L Hedges

Seed Dormancy

Most of us have taken a packet of vegetable seeds, scattered some on a damp garden bed, covered them up then enjoyed a warm satisfied feeling when 2 or 3 weeks later a mass of seedlings pushed their way into the sunshine.

This quick, near 100% germination is not natural though. It is the result of thousands of years of selective breeding where we have selected the seeds, genes, of the most desirable plants to sow next year. Most plant species have mechanisms to ensure that all the seed does not germinate at the same time as that could lead to a local collapse of the species if a disaster like fire or drought strikes. Owing to the unpredictable nature of our climate, many Australian plants have developed complex methods of ensuring that their seeds germinate at the time when they have the maximum chance of survival.

Some store their seed in the canopy (often called serotiny) in hardened outer cases that preserves them against drying out, predators and fires. They often remain there for many years until released by fires or the death of the branch they reside on. Then they germinate readily once good rain arrives. Eucalyptus, Banksia and Hakea are examples. The seed of other genera like Acacias (Wattles) and Fabaceae (Peas) have a very hard but variable outer coating that resists the entry of water and predators. This wears at different rates so preventing germination of them all at once. This is called physical dormancy.

There are other germination inhibitory mechanisms. Physiological is the most common. It is a form of chemical dormancy that will prevent germination even when water and oxygen can enter the embryo. Factors that have a role to play in terminating this kind of dormancy include light/darkness, after ripening period, smoke, ambient temperature and the seasonal day/night temperature cycle.

We have a long way to go to understand these mechanisms and how we can get around them and germinate seed in the nursery. At present we can only reliably germinate the seeds of about 30% of the species we have in the local bush.

MWG is putting money into research to solve these problems. They have some very bright people in UNSW Centre for Ecosystem Science who deserve more support.

In 2015 we were fortunate to hear about some of the fabled Pink Flannel Flowers (*Actinotus forsythii*) in flower and were taken to see them. We collected seed and after a year of trials, managed to get a good germination. This might sound like a long time with negative results but we were very happy that such a cryptic species responded so quickly for, in the wild, it germinated so rarely that many people who had lived in its area for years had never seen it.

This fire ephemeral species naturally spends the majority of its time as a seed. We are talking about decades. You could consider being a seed is its natural state. Then when the season is propitious it decides it is time. It germinates, grows, sets seed and dies within a year.

L Hedges

Of interest

Keep in contact with upcoming events at APS NSW using the calendar [here](#), or enjoy a range of past presentations on the NSW APS Youtube channel. Go to Youtube and search for the NSW APS channel for more.

Volunteers are needed for the APS Conference at Kiama 12 - 16 September. Some members have already volunteered but more are needed. Don't feel intimidated - there are lots of jobs. Welcoming with smiles, set up/tear down chat rooms, checking people on and off buses for excursions, giving out information, are just the tip of the iceberg. To volunteer contact Margaret Gaul at mgaul7@gmail.com and get yourself booked in for the introduction and training zooms. It will be fun. Georges River Harbour APS Group had several interesting articles in their latest newsletter that is well worth a read. They also recommended the Facebook resource [NSW Native Plant Identification](#)

This sounds a great way to ID that new plant you saw on your walk. You can upload photos of plants you wish to identify and moderator Joel Cohen, from the Royal Botanic Garden, and his expert team will hopefully identify it. More details in Harbour George River May Newsletter.

It's Reconciliation Week with interesting programs and discussions on a range of media. More [details](#) online. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land and sea. We pay respect to elders past and present and to indigenous communities.

The latest contributions for the photography challenge are up on our Facebook and we look forward to entries in the June theme, Members having fun, one or many on walks, meetings, nursery or gardens.

Coming up -

- July Winter, something botanical that is emblematic of winter.
- August Spring, bright start for the botanical year.
- September Flowers, a single bloom or a flowery field.
- October Garden friends, insects, birds, lizards or mammals that share our gardens or bush.
- November Leaves and bark, it's not just flowers that are beautiful.
- December Season's greetings, something that represents the festive end of the year.

Editor



Amazing caterpillar at fire station, P Forbes.

News from the Nurseries

Winter is a slow time for propagating at the nurseries. Adrian and Janine are propagating some locally collected seed for their co-operative projects in the Southern Highlands. Some of our Allocasuarinas have been picked up for

distributions down south too, and we are ready with more for spring plantings. The germination of Flannel Flowers has been affected by the unusual weather but we are getting some up now. The Nursery has also suffered from the continuing wet weather with the bogginess compounded last week when the nearby water tank overflowed.



The overflowing tank, P Nagle.

Pat Nagle has joined MWG and our Tip team bringing her experience as a NP ranger, supervising volunteers and regen projects. Lloyd, with help from Pat and Greg, braved the chilly weather to clean up the roof of the propagation shed. We really need more sunlight!



Lloyd, Pat and Greg on maintenance duty. P Forbes.

The Compound nursery is also pottering along, with things slowing down as the weather cools.



Vibrant flowers at flagpole, fire station, M Jackson.

Thanks, as usual to all the volunteers.

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