



# Newsletter of Menai Wildflower Group September 2020

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## President’s message

Probably this should be headed “President’s musings”, as I sit here thinking about what I have observed lately. First, all those small disappointments in life with Covid: the holidays that had to be postponed or cancelled, the birthday parties that could not go ahead, the social gatherings that we can no longer have. Then I called in to see the “Tuesday Mob” at the Illawong RFS - happy faces, busy hands, plenty of social distance available and all that sunshine after rain! I saw the tube/pot fillers, carpenters and fix-it men, photographers, weed experts and harvesters of finger limes and warrigal greens, plus the delivery crew bringing more supplies of potting mix. Who needs a Men’s Shed? Our “shed” is quite non-discriminatory and extra friendly too.

I mention all this because I think such gatherings may have to provide the social interaction that our meetings and workshops traditionally gave us. Zoom meetings will be with us for most of the year. Not really a bad twist of fate, when we don’t have to manhandle seating, cook suppers, wash cups and sterilise everything, plus we can see and hear all the speakers so well. Any technical hitches can be seen as entertainment among friends, as we all become more adept at using online devices. I can s

see that we may even become more interested in graphics, stage makeup and stagecraft! So far, the Tuckfields would win the prize for best background settings, whilst Mary’s native flora-inspired jewellery is reaching a wider audience. I am pleased to report that the sale of our tubestock at Grevillea Park’s recent Open Days netted our Group a sizeable cheque and this will provide the funds for purchase of more gardening supplies, as well as covering the cost of the new label printer for our tubed plants.

So let’s look forward to planting some edible specimens after the August meeting and checking out what’s on offer in the coming months.

See you on Zoom!

*Pam Pitkeathly, President*



*Grevillea vestita*, firestation garden P Forbes

## Changes to future meetings

To make the best use of resources in this pandemic we made some minor changes to this year’s remaining meetings.

The September meeting will be our hosting of the APS NSW regions as planned, but this will be an online meeting via ZOOM. It will start at 3PM, a different time, so do note this in your diary. There will be more information on this in coming weeks.

The October meeting will really be one to look forward to: a walk-and-talk around the gardens at the Olde family property at Oakdale. Plenty of fresh air and spring flowers to cheer us all! Arrive about 11AM on 10 October for morning tea provided by

our hosts and Menai Group. Bring your own lunch, etc, but please, do **email Margaret Olde** ([margolde@aapt.net.au](mailto:margolde@aapt.net.au)) to let her have number of visitors to expect! Peter will show us what's in flower at "Silky Oaks", **140 Russell Lane, Oakdale**. I think of this as our reward for disciplined behaviour during the time of social distancing!

So the November meeting will be our AGM as usual, and I know how much you all look forward to AGMs, but this one will be enlightened by hearing Peter Olde tell us about "What's happening to Hakea?" Thanks to Peter for being so flexible about fitting our requirements. Now that leaves only our social evening in December. I prefer to keep arrangements for this gathering rather fluid just now. Being the eternal optimist, I am hoping that Santa can arrive as in normal times at the Illawong Fire Station. Keep watching our Facebook page and/or web page for information.

*Pam Pitkeathly (with help from Mary Hedges & Marg Olde).*

## Coming events

Due to the changing conditions regarding Covid19 restrictions, plans may change. Monthly meetings will continue on Zoom as outlined in previous newsletters.

**1 Sep Wattle Day. More about the history of Wattle Day at**  
<https://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/articles/2752>



**12 Sep NSW APS quarterly gathering online from 3pm, with a presentation by Phil Trickett. Details will be published later.**

**10 Oct Visit to Oakdale from 11am. Peter will show us what's flowering in Olde's lovely garden. Morning tea will be provided but you should bring a picnic lunch.**

**11 Nov AGM followed by Peter Olde telling us what's happening with hakeas. Meeting, format TBC but probably Zoom.**

## Walk on the too wildside?

Also published in Sutherland Bushcare Bulletin, Spring 2020

A walk at Cape Bailey has turned out to be my last bushwalk for a while. So, as I sit beneath an elevated leg with very few possibilities of activity left please bear with me if I turn a short walk into a lengthy story.



Lloyd immobilised with a torn ligament, M Whatman.

The path to Cape Bailey lighthouse winds through various heaths and along rock platforms. Resurgent ecosystems were revealed as the area had been hammered by a fire in September 2017, followed by a drought. The recovery has been uneven.

Shortly after the fire, where the rock shelf was close to the surface and moisture could be accessed, a mass germination of many species took place. One species was the prostrate and not often seen *Commersonia (Rulingia) hermannifolia*. This rapid grower essentially held the sand together and prevented erosion while other seedlings got



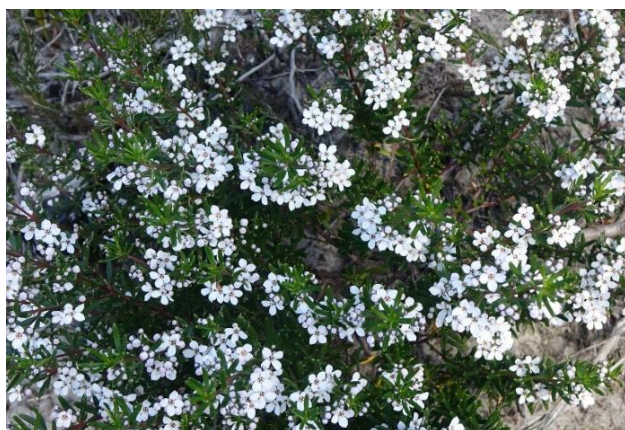
underway. It seems to be a fire ephemeral. Fire ephemerals are short lived plants that depend on fire to germinate their seed, very much like the Pink Flannel flowers we have been growing at Menai. I would like to know more about it to confirm this assumption.

The regeneration of the melaleuca/banksia heath slowed to almost a stop in the drought that followed the fire, though the attractive prostrate grey-leaved *Themeda triandra* on the edges of the heath, where sand meets rock, seem to have completed a cycle or two.



*Philotheca salsolifolia*, Kurnell, L Hedges.

On the deeper sands, moisture stayed around less and reestablishment of new plants was slower. But it is now approaching its peak with plants jostling for position and resources after the recent rains. There are several eyecatchers like *Philotheca salsolifolia* and the *Zieria pilosa* in flower is a sight worth catching if you get the chance. A curiosity is several Green Spider flower *Grevillea mucronulata*. This species is better known as an understory plant from shaded gullies so why is it here? The position of the plants, close to where you cross the seepage lines, gives the answer. There is a reliable source of water not far below.



*Zieria pilosa*, Kurnell, L Hedges.

The flowers that elicit the most comments are the Flannel flowers. a variable beast. In the forests and mountains it tends to be wispy and short lived. Here it is a strapping, robust, perennial shrub a reversal of the observable trend of coastal plants being smaller or even stunted by the sun, salt and wind on the coast when compared to their more inland cousins. Why is it so?



Flannel Flower, fire station, P Forbes.

Perhaps the best way to look at it is to start with its distinctive grey/white appearance which is caused by the woolly hairs that cover the entire plant. These hairs reflect the sunlight and reduce moisture loss. This makes the plant a moisture miser and able to tolerate and make use of the full blast of the sun. In the forests or bush these adaptations have no advantage. This leaves *A. helianthi*'s role in the bush to be one of an opportunist. When it is afforded a high level of sun such as when the bush is disturbed by tree falls, track clearing or fires or where rocky positions eliminate the competition for the sun, they seize the opportunity, germinate and grow. After fires is a particularly advantageous time as there are plenty of minerals available and the Flannel Flower seed contains an inhibitory mechanism that is cancelled by the chemicals in smoke. Hopefully they get one or two flowerings and seed sets before the shade reclaims the area. The coastal plants are not shaded by trees and as they have found a position on the rocky east edge of the heath they will not be shaded out and can remain functioning and flowering for many years. So very much a case of the fittest form for the conditions.

Lloyd Hedges

## March Meeting

Marg Olde has kindly negotiated a transcript of Brian Roach's talk 'Aussie Plants - The Pick of the Crop for Sydney Gardens' which Brian delivered for our March meeting. Thanks to Brian for generously supplying it for us to publish. It is a great plant list if you have some space in your garden and remember many of these plants are available from Brian's great native nursery. Contact Brian via his email address [westleighnativeplants@gmail.com](mailto:westleighnativeplants@gmail.com) for details.

We in Sydney are particularly blessed with our temperate climate which is amenable for growing a wide range of plants and so 'The Pick of the Crop for Sydney Gardens' is easier to assess by looking at what native plants are problematic - that is, to think about what plants don't grow well.



*Boronia ledifolia*, P Forbes.

Let's start with the great paradox- some of the most difficult plants to grow in Sydney gardens are plants that are endemic to the Sydney bushland! They grow in shallow, impoverished soil, mainly over Hawkesbury Sandstone or, in Western Sydney, on Wianamatta Shale over sandstone. It is near impossible to replicate this in the garden! Some of the most beautiful plants - the Waratah - *Telopea speciosissima*, Sydney Boronia - *Boronia ledifolia*, the Pink Waxflower - *Eriostemon australasius*, the Native Rose - *Boronia serrulata*, Native Fuchsia - *Epacris longiflora* and the Geebung - *Persoonia pinifolius* are very difficult to grow in the garden. So why do these plants flourish in the Sydney bush and drop dead in Sydney gardens? Something happens in our gardens that doesn't happen in the bush. In the bush, the seed germinates where it falls and the tap root wends its way down through the sandstone to find the right conditions - moisture and some nutrient to sustain its life. When we put a plant from a pot into the garden, the taproot never does the job that it does in nature. Even if the plant is in fact propagated by seed - by the time we get to put

it into the ground, the tap root is spiralling and doesn't do the job the it is meant to do. The majority of plants that we buy are grown by cuttings. They have no tap root!! The roots formed are called adventitious roots, which means 'not by nature'. They don't do the job that the tap root does in nature. Even plants grown from seed usually don't develop a viable tap root because it spirals from an early stage once potted.



*Epacris longiflora*, P Forbes.

So, we need to think about what plants we wish to put in our gardens that will withstand the types of conditions we saw in the last 3 months of 2019. Those 3 months were horrendous. Not only did we have no rain to speak of, but we had exceptionally hot weather and I have no doubt that most people would have lost quite a lot of plants from their gardens. So, we have to think about whether we want to pump more and more water into our gardens or do we grow plants that we know can cope with those extreme conditions? We are sticking our heads in the sand if we think that those 3 months were a one-off. Those sorts of conditions are here to stay! So, we need to put in plants that can cope with those extreme conditions. In saying that I don't for one minute suggest, especially for us native plant enthusiasts, that we shouldn't be trying to grow those plants that are by reputation difficult to grow. It would take a lot of fun out of what we are doing if we shied away from those plants. But we also need to keep in mind that we need to be substantially growing plants in our gardens that can cope with these extreme conditions.

A lot of the wonderful plants we like to grow come from Western Australia. A lot of them are very difficult to grow over here because the West Coast has alkaline soils; hot, dry summers and wet winters while the East Coast has acidic soils; hot, humid



summers and generally dry winters. So it is asking a lot to grow WA plants. Two examples of WA plants that are particularly difficult to grow are *Anigozanthos manglesii* and *Leschenaultia macrantha*.

Here are a few of the native plants from all over the country that, in my experience, have proven to be very suited to Sydney gardens: *Pattersonia occidentalis* - native Iris from WA. Does extremely well, clumping, wonderful display in October. (*P. sericea* is our local one).



*P. sericea*, P Forbes.

*Libertia paniculata*- good border plant, clumping, self seeds without being a nuisance, lovely white flowers, takes shade.  
*Conostylis aculeata* - from SW corner of WA flowers through winter and into spring, spreads, easy to propagate, (vulnerable to frost). *C aurea* from WA is also lovely.  
*Goodenia ovata* - wonderful ground cover, great spillover plant, shade.  
*Chrysocephalum apiculatum* - 'Yellow buttons' – flowers through spring and early summer, stunning grey foliage, loves hot, dry conditions.  
*Austromyrtus dulcis* - 'Midgen Berry' - wonderful fruit, (great on cereal - supposed to be high in Vitamin C), does well in shade to full sun, effective ground cover, easy to grow (but watch out as female bower birds love it!).  
*Grevillea thelemanniana* - low-growing, spreading, good colourful ground cover.  
*Chorizema cordatum* -'WA Flame Pea'- my favourite, good shade plant, (though snails like it).



*Chorizema cordatum* flourishing in fire station garden. Lots available for sale, Tuesday morning! P Forbes.

*Eremophila racemosa* - lovely orange bud opens to pink flower.  
*Melaleuca thymifolia* - flowers well, will cope with both wet and dry conditions, very hardy, frequented by the blue banded bee.  
*Homoranthus prolixus* - 'Golditops' - hardy, horizontal habit, a great plant, lovely grey foliage, makes a wonderful floral display.  
*Grevillea Spider Mist* - Came up in Brian's garden (probably Fireworks x Arenaria), dense to the ground, good hedge, soft foliage, flowers July-August.

*Maireana oppositifolia* – Bluebush, beaut grey foliage about 1m high, in pot or garden, very tough.  
*Acacia conferta* - a beautiful little wattle, brilliant in colour.

*Ceratopetalum Johanna's Christmas* - Dwarf form of NSW Christmas Bush.

When we gardeners travel overseas, what do we want to see? We want to see plants that are unique to the country we are visiting. What about overseas gardeners who come to visit this country? Australian native plants have developed in isolation from the rest of the world over millions of years. Let's show them off!

Brian Roach



Waratah, P Forbes.



Egg and Bacon, *Dilwynnia retorta* P Forbes.

### Pea Flower Study Group reactivated

A study group has been reactivated to study plants with pea flowers and has been renamed Australian Pea Flower Study Group. In the past, a study group for this purpose has operated under the name Fabaceae Study Group, as pea flowers were previously recognised as a separate family. If you are interested in the identification, classification, cultivation, propagation or conservation of Australia's pea flowers, consider joining the Australian Pea Flower Study Group. The study group webpage can be found here: <http://anpsa.org.au/pea-flowerSG/index.html>. If you would like to join the group, there is a section on the webpage that can be completed and submitted on-line. Membership for emailed newsletters is free.

*Shirley McLaran*



*Grevillea vestita* flowering for the first time in the firestation garden, P Forbes.

### Personal news

We were sorry to hear of the death of Gail Fraser last week. Our thoughts are with her husband Ron, long time supporter of MWG, and their family.

I remember Gail's great support for Christmas parties and more personally, how she was able to keep me supplied with large shoeboxes to make my great granddaughter, Isabel a new bed for her favourite long doll.

We sent a floral tribute made from flowers from the Illawong fire station gardens to the Fraser family from all of MWG members.



Pam P and Helen preparing a bouquet from the garden, M Hedges.

Lloyd recently found the “downside” to bushwalking (see earlier article) and whale watching when he was near Kurnell, rupturing a quadricep tendon and having a marathon effort to get back to the car park. Luckily Mary was able to chauffeur Lloyd to a succession of medicos to get the treatment he needed. Now enduring an awkward convalescence after surgery (note that “patient” was not mentioned) Lloyd is showing improvement, in that he can leave home on crutches, just to oversee his plants and that new labelling machine. He was very happy to see the Tuesday mob hard at work at Illawong last week.

*Pam Pitkeathly, President*

### Of interest

**Deadline for contributions to the next newsletter is Sunday 1 November.**

Any items suitable for inclusion in the newsletter may be sent to the Editor (Email [mwfeditor@gmail.com](mailto:mwfeditor@gmail.com)) **before** the deadline. Preferred format is **unformatted** text in a **Word** file



and separate photographs as .jpg. If you are writing a report on a meeting, early submission is appreciated.



Annette with her Gymea Lily, *Doryanthes excelsa*, R Tuckfield.

**Subject to Covid19 restrictions, our activities have restarted but please do not feel an obligation to return until you are comfortable and of course, 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 with some big orders for spring, extra volunteers would be welcome.

Please contact Lloyd (95431216) for more details on these opportunities.

Keep up to date with our [Facebook](#) page or [website](#).

**Meetings** look like they may be online for the rest of the year. If you miss them, they are also available online on the APS Facebook channel, with those of other groups. See [APS NSW youtube channel](#) Visit the APS NSW website [www.austplant.com.au/](http://www.austplant.com.au/) to check out the many online opportunities which you can enjoy and find what other districts are doing, particularly our neighbours East Hills and Sutherland: <http://easthills.austplants.com.au/> <http://sutherland.austplants.com.au/> .

Lloyd Hedges

## Nursery news

### The Tip

The irrigation in the glass house has been causing problems. Not surprising as it must be 30 years old. SUEZ have replaced the controller with a much more modern and tuneable one. Greg has just added some cover for the controllers to protect them from irrigation.

The Pink and White Flannel Flowers are coming along. We do not have as many Pinks as past years but still had enough to attract attention to our sales table at the Grevillea Park open day. They hardly made it to the table. Much the same with the White Flannels. We did well and thanks go to Anthony for taking the load of plants down to Bulli.



Some happy Gymea Lilies, up and thriving, P Forbes.

The she-oaks ordered for the Glossies in the Mist campaign have all gone to the Southern Highlands and been distributed already. Therefore, we are going to be short for spring. We have sown more seed and are already tubing some up and will be growing more as quickly we can. Thanks Marian and Pam for all that tubing. And more to come. (Don't worry Lloyd, we find it a lot less stressful than the Pink Flannel Flowers! Pam and Marian).





Pink Flannel Flowers, P Forbes.

### The Compound Nursery

We are attracting plenty of help to the nursery on Tuesday mornings when Anne and Jan are regularly joined by Donna and the gardening/handyman crew of Rudi, Anthony, Neil, Greg, Pam, John P, Mary, Tony, Marion P and others.



Rudi's Orchid bed is a site to behold and the tool shed he has fixed up is fit for a master fitter. We have been forced to suspend the Public Propagation days for the time being.

*L Hedges*

### MWG has a New Label Printer

Thanks to a lot of work by Robin T we now have installed and operational a new Godex 500 label

printer. This means our labels are not only much more professional but we can store information on our plants in a database which can be easily modified and added to. We already have 190 species. We can print out any selection of plants in a run of labels, producing the exact number of labels needed. Instead of taking up to two or three days to manually write labels, professional labels are now quickly available and we hope they will boost sales.

If you are looking for plants to get in before the warm weather and while we are enjoying good rains, there is a fair selection available Tuesday mornings at fire station.



The old label printer, a Zebra GK420t, desktop Thermal Printer is looking for a new home. It is in very good condition and can be used to print barcodes etc. It can print on paper or plastic labels of the right format and can print waterproof labels, given the correct software and inks. If you know of anyone who is interested in buying a good second hand printer, price negotiable, please contact Lloyd.

*L Hedges*

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