



Newsletter of Menai Wildflower Group

November 2022

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Spring is in the air

A few sunny days remind us of our usual spring weather but the gardens of sandy Menai are generally enjoying the abundance of rain. We are coming to the end of the year with the AGM and the December social to look forward to. We are looking for some help with weeding and sprucing up the fire station garden so it looks its best for the end of year celebration and also for some new faces on the committee.

The President, Vice President and APS Delegate offices will be vacant but the Treasurer, Secretaries and Propagation Officer are continuing, along with three general committee members. We are planning to move to a more collegiate management as used by Sutherland but even so, we are potentially putting the full load of managing the group on six people, most of whom have been serving for a number of years already. So even if you are not able to volunteer as an office holder, please consider joining the committee as a member so that the

workload is shared more fairly and easily across a larger number of people. None of the jobs is terribly difficult. There's something to suit everyone and mentoring, support and cooperation are always available.

One particular job we need to cover is sorting out speakers for next year's program. Do you know someone who could give an interesting presentation? Please let the committee know. Are you prepared to supervise the speaker roster or liaise with the speakers and arrange their introductions? Can you write up a summary for the newsletter? We'd love to hear from you.

A huge thank you to the committee for their efforts this year and particularly to Peter and Marg for leading the crew. As usual, we appreciate the huge amount of time and thought that Lloyd puts in at the nurseries, with added efforts from newcomer Patsy. Thanks to all the clever, energetic and friendly members who are so ably supporting them. And finally, thanks to our amazing photographers who make such an interesting Facebook page!



Hoverfly enjoying nectar from flower at Illawong RFS.
J Prats.



Great year for orchids, Bearded Orchid at Lucas Heights. P Forbes.

Pressing Matters

Member Patricia Nagle shared her experience with herbariums in our September meeting. Patsy is both a NPWS ranger and instructs university students at the Janet Cross Herbarium. Patsy started by explaining why MWG might be interested in cataloguing the diversity of flora in our area before explaining how an herbarium is created and maintained.

Menai has a surprising variation of plants because of the many different environments in a small area. Topographically Menai includes the confluence of two rivers with mudflats supporting mangroves and saltmarsh, creeks from fresh to saltwater, hanging swamps, hot, dry ridgelines, cooler wetter valleys and forested steep slopes. There is both Ashfield Shale (sub-unit of the Wianamatta group of shales) on high ridges, creating soils that are rich and have good water-holding capacity, but more commonly Hawkesbury Sandstone on the low ridges and slopes, and consequently low water-holding capacity and low nutrient soil. In some places, riverine 'riparian' alluvium has been deposited from upstream over millennia, creating deep, rich, wet and variably saline soil.

Turpentine (*Syncarpia glomulifera*) in abundance, together with Grey Ironbark (*E. paniculata*), White Stringybark (*E. globoidea*), and Forest Red Gum (*E. tereticornis*) grow on the shale soils. The Forest Red Gums suggest affinities with the drier woodlands of the Cumberland Plain further west. The poorer sandy soils harbour our iconic Angophora and Grevilleas. This wide variety of conditions encourages plants to diversify to find a niche where they can flourish. Within 10km of Menai, BioNet lists 450 species of fauna species, including 55 that are listed as threatened or vulnerable and 1560 species of plant including 12 threatened or vulnerable species. *Hibbertia stricta* subsp.

furcatula (known to MWG as *Hibbertia 'bangotbypassii'*), *Acacia pubescens* or Downy Wattle and a salt loving Greenhood, *Pterostylis saxicola*, are three examples. The pattern of development has impacted the ridges in particular and they continue to be under threat.



An herbarium page from Janet Cross Herbarium.

So, an herbarium could be a way to document this ecosystem before the area is further developed.

An herbarium is a collection of pressed plants that acts as a reference for the plants of an area. Famous herbariums include those at Kew Gardens (which includes the specimens collected by Banks in 1770), Australian National Herbarium CANBR, Canberra, (~1.2million specimens in 2020), the herbarium at the RBG at Mount Annan, Janet Cosh Herbarium, University of Wollongong (13,000 specimens) and Flora of Bankstown, CB Council by Bankstown Bushland Society (>1000 species). Some of our local plants are in these collections.

Generally, an herbarium sample should capture diagnostic features such as

- Adult and juvenile leaf shapes
- Leaf arrangement, shape, colour and vein patterning
- Flowers
- Bark

as well as collection data such as collector, location and date. All this information should be clearly and artistically laid out on the page. Patsy went through how to press, dry and mount the specimen, then discussed maintenance.

Keep in mind that as well as practicalities like researching your plants, getting your equipment together, finding the plants, keeping good field notes and finding a repository for your specimens, your first step would be to **get an authority to collect**. Maintenance and access also need to be considered. This could be an interesting and useful project but may exceed the capabilities of the group.

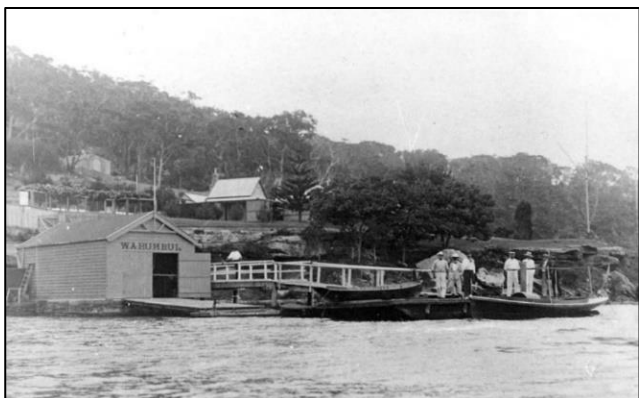
Summarised from Patsy's Powerpoint

Warumbul Excursion

Nine intrepid MWG and National Park Association members gathered at Warumbul in June in unusually fine weather for this excursion led by Lloyd Hedges and archaeologists Pam Forbes and Greg Jackson.

Warumbul, and the river front land north was freehold land purchased before the dedication of the park in 1879, and although useless for agriculture, its scenery attracted wealthy holiday makers who built a variety of houses and cottages on the river, starting with Charles Gogerly in 1847. The park trustees built a guest house - initially only two rooms - as an angler's lodge in 1891 and the sea baths in 1895. By 1900 Warumbul had a post office (moved to Lilli Pilli in 1901) and a telephone. The guest house was expanded in 1902 but was destroyed by fire in 1925 and never rebuilt. Other private dwellings were built nearby with some of these becoming a complex of Anglican youth camps and conference centres.

Boatshed and wharf, 1905. Picture Sutherland



On the excursion we saw remnants of some of these dwellings and the boatshed as well as some local bushland.



Atypical, old *Angophora costata*. L Hedges.

We are looking forward to the next archaeological excursion to the old Parkesvale Pleasure Grounds.



Some of the Warumbul excursionists at the remains of the seawall. L Hedges.

G Jackson

Coming events

12 Nov AGM including the formation of the Committee for 2023. Helen Patience (remember last year's lovely wreath and centrepiece?) will then discuss and show members how to make Xmas decorations using native plants from their own garden.

12-13 Nov **APS Quarterly** meeting Southern Highlands. Tickets \$45 (morning tea, lunch and sessions) or \$90 including Saturday dinner. Please [register](#) on the APS website.

Exeter, Sutton Forest and Moss Vale on Saturday, Bowral on Sunday.

Activities include presentations, garden visits, walks, plant sales.

Main speaker Dan Clarke on The Vegetation of the Wingecarribee Area.

10 Dec End of Year Function from 5pm at the fire station. Usual format: please bring drink and anything you would like to barbeque as well as something to share. If you are organised enough to know what you are bringing, please let Marg know so we can have a balance of savoury and sweet treats. You can avoid waste by bringing your own plates, cups and crockery.

Jan **No activities.** Sit and watch the garden grow.

Change of Meeting Dates for 2023

In 2023 meetings of MWG will move to the **first Saturday** of the month at **2pm**. This change was necessary so that MWG dates would not clash with APS Regional and other meetings. So, the start of 2023 looks like this -

4 Feb Beth Mott will update us on the Glossies in the Mist and the ongoing plantings in the Southern Highlands. MWG has been raising seedlings for this project for many years (see last quarter's newsletter) and we have just delivered a further 2200 seedlings for planting as part of this environmental restoration project.

4 Mar In the March meeting we will hear from Janine Baines from the National Botanic Garden.

1 Apr Tony Porritt will tell us all about his experiences in Arnhem Land.

Editor



Burchardia and Dampiera on Wise's Track RNP. P Forbes.

Flannel Flowers

Joan has sent in a lovely photograph of Flannel Flowers in her garden, showing that like last year they are flowering well.



Actinotis helianthi in Joan's garden. J. Sutton,

Check out the [ABC report](#) of the flowering near Port Macquarie this year for further proof or head off to another fantastic display at Kurnell – going soon.



Flannel Flowers at Kurnell, 2022. P Forbes.

Flannel Flowers, *Actinotus helianthi*, are shallow rooted plants that require good drainage and full or partial shade. They are often prolific after fires have cleared away the competition and provided a more fertile soil. Although they only last a year or two, with luck you will be rewarded with copious soft, creamy flowers and they can self-seed, especially if you water some smoke water around existing plants. They will also grow well in large pots.

We nearly always have some in tubes available from sale (and there are currently some freebies that have outgrown their tubes at the fire station) but they do not like root disturbance so be careful when you are planting. Depending on conditions and plant variety they can be leggy or bushy but either way their relatively brittle stems need to be protected from winds and traffic. Light pruning after they flower will encourage denser growth but they will not reshoot from woody stems. They benefit from mulching, fertiliser and while they don't need a lot of water may need some in long dry periods. Conversely, too much moisture can cause root rot and fungal damage. The older leaves naturally die

off and form a scruffy brown collar round the lower stem. This can be removed to improve their appearance in the cooler months of the year.

The flowers are a great cut flower with a long vase life. Flannel Flowers are prone to stem air embolisms so recut stems under water after picking. Blooms should be harvested when the lower flowers on the umbel are just beginning to open and the vase life may be extended by overnight treatment in 1% sucrose and 0.5% citric acid). In fact, they are grown commercially for florists, being popular in bouquets round the world.

Flannel flowers are in the Apiaceae plant family, along with carrots, celery and parsnips and there are approximately 18 species of *Actinotus* worldwide, with 14 occurring in Australia and one in New Zealand. MWG grows *A. forsythii* as well as *helianthi* and our bush walks usually pass by the diminutive *A. minor* (who could possibly call this delicate beauty the Lesser Flannel Flower).



Actinotis minor at Barden Ridge. P Forbes.

There are species around Australia such as the Western Australian White Headed Flannel Flower (*A. leucocephalus*). The flowers are predominantly white, cream or greenish in colour, a daisy-like structure consisting of a simple umbel surrounded by radiating woolly bracts. This arrangement leads to the romantic generic name from the Greek meaning 'furnished with rays'.

References

Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney website,

[Australian Plants Online](#)

Commercial value at [Agrifutures](#)

Editor

Grevillea kennedyana

On a recent trip to Sturt National Park we were fortunate to see *Grevillea kennedyana* in flower. This species is restricted to the Corner Country with 95% of plants being in Sturt NP and the other 5% just over the border in Queensland. Those growing in the park are in three different areas but the terrain they are growing in is very similar.



Landscape of Sturt NP. T Porritt.

As shown in the photo, the terrain they prefer is quite stony ground with a slight slope to it. They tended to grow in quite a narrow band on the slope and it appeared that they did not grow higher or lower than this band. The ranger was unsure if this banding effect was due to water runoff or some particle soil formation.



Grevillea kennedyana. T Porritt.

The 2 groups of plants we visited seemed to have around 30 to 40 plants in them and the ranger said the third group was similar. Currently in one of the groups a number of the plants have had wire cages erected around them to protect them from predation. The rest have been left and a study is under way to see what transpires. The flower colour is quite stunning & the complexity is interesting.

T Porritt

ANPSA Conference

Menai Wildflower Group members may not have flooded to the Kiama conference but we were not unrepresented. Peter Olde performed talks on Grevilleas for small gardens while Margaret put together a display for the Fern Study Group. Also, Patz Nagle's talk on Community Involvement in Conservation

Projects was well attended and she featured some photos of MWG members at the Tip Nursery propagating plants for the Save Our Species, Glossies in the Mist campaign.



MWG nursery among other volunteer groups, L Hedges.

I helped out on the Five Islands revegetation stand in Rowena's absence but her replacement did a great job and I was little needed. It was great to see photos of Menai members featuring strongly and we got a rap from the speaker for supplying the plants and turning up to assist planting them. I found the time to catch Patz' very interesting talk and was very pleased to see our youngest member, Cameron, among the attendees.

Ralph Cartwright has advised that you can enjoy some of the presentations on NSW APS YouTube channel. See Youtube details in "Of interest" later in newsletter

L Hedges

Stunning bird photos

Seventy one beautiful images of birds have been shortlisted by the judges of the 2022 Birdlife Australia Photography Awards. The final winners for each category will be announced in November, but in the meantime you can browse through the short list [here](#).



John P's great photo of a kookaburra at Illawong, eating a Golden Crown snake .

Don't forget you can also encourage birds in your garden by implementing the tips on the [Birds in Your Backyard](#) page on Birdlife Australia's website.

Editor

No Robins needed, but are you a Batman?

Another Saving our Species project (like the Glossies in the Mist program) is starting up focusing on micro bats. The citizen science project set up by SOS at the Department of Planning and Environment in partnership with Western Sydney University and the NSW Department of Primary Industries, is calling for volunteers to locate insect eating bats and determine how they use different landscapes. At the moment the first phase is monitoring Narrabri, Wellington, Western Sydney and Grafton. Not our area at the moment but it may expand.

Dr Haddock from the project said that small, insect-eating bats are found in remnant bushland which provides hollow-bearing trees, clean water and green spaces. Because of their voracious appetite for insect pests – mosquitoes, biting midges and crop pests, they help gardeners and agriculturists. Each bat species has preferred habitat and food.

Volunteers in the Bats in Backyards program will record bat calls, using a bat detector which picks up the high frequency, inaudible sounds bats use to echolocate. The unique pattern of these calls lets experts recognise particular bat species from the recordings submitted and hence map out where different bats are.

To find out more and register your interest if you are lucky enough to be in test areas, visit the [Bats in Backyards](#) website.

Reference SOS online.

Editor

projects. We are looking for some small (under 200gm) jars with lids for seed storage. They can be dropped off with Lloyd on Tuesday mornings at the Illawong Fire Station or at a meeting. Cleanaway has asked for an assemblage of plants from shale-sandstone transition forest species for enrichment plantings on some small patches round the tip site, particularly in front of the Waste to Energy Power Plant, and we have started propagating some koala fodder trees species. We continue to support local council and NPWS projects in Royal, Heathcote and Georges River National Parks. It's a fantastic sense of accomplishment to support these valuable projects. If you are interested in joining the team, talk to Lloyd.

The Fire Station Garden put on a beautiful display of flowers over the last couple of months and is still well worth a look. There are some interesting plants and an opportunity to see what we can grow in the area and what looks good together. Remember there are also plants for sale to members on Tuesday mornings. The weeds are unfortunately as prolific as the flowers, so the garden working bee would love to see you if you can spare even an hour or two on Tuesday mornings. As well as a sense of achievement, some light exercise and chit chat, we offer volunteer gardeners and propagators free morning tea, tips and tricks and possibly some free (slightly pot bound) plants.

The work bench which supported one of our propagation beds at the fire station nursery became terminally terminated and was visibly sinking. Rapid action was required so with Greg and Robin, we pulled it out to reveal the foundations for the lunchroom were also affected. A visit to Kennards to hire some jacks soon had the affected piles out to be replaced by concrete blocks and H4 treated pine. A galvanized steel table replaced the bench and hopefully will provide a more comfortable work area for the propagation team. Mary also sewed a new cover to replace the previous failing one. We are now ready for many more years of propagation. We really appreciate the time and effort that Lloyd, Greg, Robin, Pam F and Mary put into the maintenance and running of the nurseries.

Robin has also got the label printer back on track so we can once again provide professional looking tubes for sale. Cameron has diligently sorted the existing labels into order making it a lot easier to label tubes for sales.

L Hedges, P Nagle and P Forbes



Fixing the lunch room. P Forbes.

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