

Blandfordia



North Shore Group
(ABN 87 002 680 408)

DECEMBER 2022

Sue Bowen's message

As this will be our last *Blandfordia* for 2022 I wish everyone all the very best for Christmas and the New Year. With the weather finally looking summery we will all be able to get out and enjoy our gardens!

I hope to see some of you at our Christmas Party on Friday 9th December at Caley's Pavilion. This will be our first evening Christmas Party for 3 years (due to Covid) and while we will have our usual scrumptious buffet dinner, our entertainment will be a little different this time. By popular request, Helen Smith (our spider expert) will lead a night walk to see which nocturnal small creatures are out and about at the Ku-ring-gai Wildflower Garden!! I am really looking forward to this!!

(Ed. note: It is a non compulsory walk with socialising to continue for those who wish to stay at Caley's).

Please consider taking on one of our vacant Committee roles next year. In particular, we need a new correspondence secretary. This non-onerous job requires you to receive and distribute our email correspondence, report on this to our monthly Committee meetings and make our hall bookings. Please contact me on suzanneebowen@gmail.com if you are able to help with any position.

On **FRIDAY 9th December 6.30pm for 7pm**

APS NSG will once again be able to have our **Christmas Party** in the evening in Caley's Pavilion KWG. As in pre-pandemic days, people will be asked to contribute to create a delicious meal.

*****RSVP Friday 2nd December *****

Please let Sue Fredrickson on 0401 362 921 or paulandsuefreddo@bigpond.com know the following: name/s of attendees, what you would like to contribute (categories: nibbles, mains or dessert) and your contact phone number. APS NSG will provide a non alcoholic punch (BYO for other drinks). Please bring your own drinking glasses and mugs for tea or coffee.



If you plan to come on our spotlighting night walk (at about 8.30pm) looking for insects and spiders please wear enclosed walking shoes and bring a torch.



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APS NSG November Meeting Helen Smith spoke on Huntsman spiders

Thanks to Wendy Grimm for providing this report of Helen's talk.

Our speaker, Helen Smith, is an arachnologist with the Australian Museum Research Institute, Sydney, as well as a NSG member. Helen set out to try to familiarise the audience with huntsman spiders, so they are better able to cope when one appears unexpectedly. The classic spot is from behind the sun visor, just when you have launched your car into a busy stream of traffic.

The general characteristics of huntsman spiders include 8 eyes in two more or less straight rows, broadly oval and flattened carapace, laterigrade legs, second leg usually longest, two claws with dense claw tufts and usually dense scopulae (described below). Within this general layout, huntsman spiders are quite diverse. There are some that are often mistaken for wolf spiders (and one tropical one that even acts like a wolf spider).

In our area there are two subfamilies containing 9 genera: *Heteropoda* is in **Heteropodinae**; the rest of our local fauna is in the subfamily **Deleninae**: *Delena*, *Isopeda*, *Holconia*, *Isopedella*, *Pediana*, *Neosparassus* (*Olios*), *Typostola* and *Zachria*. In Sydney most of these are quite clearly delimited, but in some parts of Australia, telling them apart is a bit more difficult. Most of these genera only have one or two species in the area. There is one introduced species that is still spreading and is of concern. The main diversity of huntsman spiders is in northern Australia. There are 143 species in 16 genera already described in Australia. Helen then spoke about more general aspects of huntsman spiders, their biology and behaviour.

Most huntsman spiders live in 'thin' or enclosed habitats – under peeling bark or in gaps between rocks. Under your house they might slip in behind a box against the wall. If it is just a hiding place, they often don't make any web structure. But if a mother-to-be is about to make an egg sac, then they will often make a tough silk chamber. The social *Delena* species have a permanent home colony, so they also make tough silk walls, which helps keep the loose bark attached to the tree as well as protecting them from attack. *Neosparassus* species are not as flattened as many other huntsman species. They are more likely to make a retreat among foliage. Some species even make lidded burrows, but this can be seen inland rather than in the Sydney area.

Huntsman spiders begin life in an egg. Then, like other arthropods, huntsman spiders grow by going through moults until they reach adulthood. At this point araneomorph spiders such as huntsman, stop moulting. But huntsmans can still live for quite a time as adults, and total lifespan can be several years. Minibeast Wildlife report *Holconia immanis* living for 2–3 years and regular huntsman keepers have reported that life spans of 5 years may be reached for larger species.

As with many spiders, the appearance of males and females is slightly different. Males (R) need to be mobile so have long legs, while females (L) are stockier to enable capture of larger prey and with larger body size to maximise egg production.

Where do huntsmen get their 'superpowers' from - their amazing climbing ability, agility and speed?

Huntsman are what we call 'laterigrade' meaning their legs tend to fall sideways, rather than forming a strong 'M' shape you might see when looking at a wolf spider head on. The tarsal (foot) joints have extra flexure due to membrane sections, and this allows legs to flatten bent sideways and the tarsi to swivel to keep their feet in contact with the substrate. The excellent grip comes from the dense microdivided hairs that cover their feet and lower legs (scopulae = dense field of hairs) which give a huge surface area—part friction and part electrostatic forces. This is combined with a low profile so the weight of the body is close to the same plane as the feet.

Huntsman spiders are fast and active predators and through their various instars feed on many differently sized prey species. As such, they are important predators in our bush ecosystem, especially around human habitation where cats have decimated most of the small marsupial predators such as *Antechinus*. Although their main food is insects, they have famously been filmed with everything from mice to lizards and toads.

Huntsman, in turn, are food for many other animals. Birds, small mammals, as well as insects such as spider wasps, ectoparasitoids and endoparasitoids such as mermithid worms. Huntsman spiders are also one of the most common 'prey' items of fungi – often found still hanging on to a leaf with white fungal mycelium and hyphae growing out of the joints.



Sexual Dimorphism in *Isopeda villosa*

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Helen suggested how to relocate a huntsman safely. Huntsman have good eyesight and will see you coming. Some may put on a threat display – rearing up or whirling around to face you. A deep see-through tub is the best option – deep so your hand doesn't need to get too close and alert the spider. It should be see-through to make it more difficult for the spider to work out what is happening as well as allowing you to see where the spider is. She advised to slowly move the tub in place over the spider. If you move quickly, it will jump or run – keep your nerve! Then slide a piece of cardboard underneath so there are no gaps and either take it straight outside or place the lid over the top while you carefully remove the cardboard.

This of course is a time that you might just get bitten. The bite of huntsman spiders on the whole is of little consequence, although some of the tropical badge huntsmans, *Neosparassus*, have been reported to be more severe. A very few unlucky people might have an allergic reaction, but allergies to spider bite are rare – far rarer than reactions to hymenopteran (ant, bee, wasp) stings or tick bites. If you do get bitten, keep the bite site clean and use ice to reduce any swelling and pain. The effects are mostly local. Occasionally systemic effects such as nausea or a headache are reported. It shouldn't last long – if you are worried, see your doctor.

One local native species, *Heteropoda longipes*, is mostly found in moist sandstone gullies and only rarely enters buildings, whereas the Brisbane huntsman, *Heteropoda jugulans* is suited to the slightly warmer environments in and around buildings. It has spread through the Inner West and is found at the Wildflower Garden. It occurs in coastal bush gullies and may be excluding other native predators. Helen visited an area on Central Coast where this species was very abundant and no native huntsman were noticed. Maybe over time populations will settle into a new balance, but at Helen is a bit concerned about this northern species. The light 'knee' stripes and a dark 'V' beneath the abdomen are a good indication of 'the invader'.

So *Heteropoda jugulans* in particular, but also some other species, do tend to turn up indoors. Because they seek out narrow spaces such as between clothes hung in a wardrobe, bites are quite common.



The main danger from huntsman spiders is the fear reaction when drivers or others in vulnerable situations are caught by surprise. Minibeasts Wildlife actually sell a couple of huntsman species as pets. One of their blog posts is about how they supplied spiders (and a wrangler) to a car insurance company for an ad for their car insurance. Becoming accustomed to huntsman and their habits and being able to temper any panic response is probably one of the most useful survival tools in a human environment.

Helen then worked through some of the local species of huntsman in the second subfamily, the **Deleninae**. She emphasised that the appearance of males and females is slightly different. Her photos were a mix of live spiders and ones that had been prepared as specimens for the Australian Museum's Spider exhibition.



Delena cancerides, the single local species, is infamous as used in 'Arachnophobia'. Unusual, in that it lives in colonies with a single adult matriarch and several successive cohorts of juveniles and adult males. Family harmony breaks down when daughters mature. Fighting induces adults and subadults to disperse to start new colonies. It can be disconcerting if you pull a sheet of dead bark off and hundreds of huntsman spiders run everywhere, including up your trouser legs. They are not always on trees and can be under any sheet-like items on the ground.

Isopeda and *Isopedella*: the standard 'brown huntsman' spiders, we have one local species of each genus, *Isopeda villosa* and *Isopedella pessleri*. As the -ella suffix suggests, *Isopedella* species are generally smaller than *Isopeda*. Additionally, *Isopeda* has a broad flat carapace, compared to a low dome in *Isopedella*.

Holconia species are the famed stripey horrors that can reach a fearsome size. Of the local species, *H. immanis*, has a prominent anterior black stripe on the dorsal abdomen, while *H. insignis* doesn't.

Neosparassus / *Olios* - badge huntsmen. *Neosparassus* has not been revised in Australia. The two most common species in our area are probably *Neosparassus diana* and *N. calligaster*. Badge huntsmen flip to display their strongly coloured undersides as a threat display, and some have a nasty bite. Many *Neosparassus* are green as younger juveniles but most do not retain that colouration to adulthood.

Pediana species are not very well known but *P. regina* is quite common in some areas locally. This is one of our smaller huntsman species which is best found in Sydney Sandstone woodlands at night. It is common in a Mount Colah ridgetop reserve, but not a hundred meters away on the south facing slope. *P. regina* has a different eye pattern compared with *Neosparassus* and *Isopeda* species and is differently shaped to most species.



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Typostola species. (Giant Green Huntsman) are occasionally reported in our area and NSW in general through to Vic; more common to the north. This huntsman is not green! However, it has strongly green coloured haemolymph, which is visible through the joint membranes.

Zachria oblonga is poorly known and only a few specimens are in the Museum collection. However, someone recently sent in a photo of one in Thornleigh, found on a grass tree. One of the described specimens was also found on a grass tree. Spiders are rarely associated with a particular kind of plant in terms of prey specialisation, because most species are polyphagous. Plant structure and related microhabitat can be of importance, and the likelihood of two specimens of only the handful known being found on the same kind of plant may provide a clue for where to look.

Helen observed that respect is an important component of the relationship between humans and the other life forms we share the planet with. They all have a place and play a role in keeping ecosystems in balance. Huntsman spiders are no exception and, given a chance, will play a part in keeping our gardens healthy. When you find one behind the compost heap, or among those stacked pavers, let it be. They aren't out to hurt us, but they are rightly scared of us and may defend themselves as best they can. So don't corner one unless you need to, give it an escape route to a secure hideaway and you will both benefit.

Edited by Wendy Grimm

What did this image in November *Blandfordia* have to do with spiders?

It is the Williamson's true and tested method of catching spiders, (not funnel web spiders), inside the house. This is a family "tradition" though not sure whether from the maternal or paternal lineage.



The spider is rolled between the two dusters and then held there gently while it is escorted outside.

Helen's response was "I think your duster technique would be perfectly humane - very clever!"

The feather dusters are also useful to clear away spider webs.

While we concentrate on the showy flowers of plants the foliage is there all year. The new growth on this callistemon always cheers the soul.



Jan W

Bruce and Tania were very excited the weekend immediately after Helen's talk to see this *Isopeda* sp. spider immediately after a moult at their property near Wollombi in the Lower Hunter Valley. Bruce took the photo and Tania dazzled their guests with her knowledge. The exoskeleton is above the live spider.



2022 & 2023 Activities

CONTACTS

Walks and Talks at KWG	Wendy Grimm	0419 323 035
Propagation at KWG	Tania Lamble	0415 043 671
Bushcare at KWG	Sue Bowen	0478 957 951
The Knoll	Michael Griffith	0417 026 111
Flower Display at KWG	Jan Marshall	0403 908 042

Walks & Talks see page 1

Propagation & plant sales 14th December

During 2023 our shade house at KWG will be open to members on these dates from 1-4pm for propagation, plant sales (cash only) and growing advice. Our white shade house is behind the Visitors' Centre and Wildflower nursery.

Other enquiries: Contact **Tania Lamble** 0415 043 671 or **Sue Bowen** 0478 957 951

Bushcare 14th December

The Knoll Friday 2nd December 10am to 1pm Please contact Michael Griffith michaelgriffith1@gmail.com or 0417 026 111 at least one day before hand as Michael will then bring extra tools.

Are you keen to grow native plants at your place but lack the space?

Sue Bowen suggests that you try planting a range of natives in pots. I have recently moved into a new home with an exotic garden and decided to plant natives in large pots while transforming the garden into a largely native one. I have planted a range of small shrubs and groundcovers in pots and am thrilled that hover flies and blue-banded bees have already found their way to my flowers!! The plants have all been grown by our propagation group at our Ku-ring-gai Wildflower Garden shadehouse and are planted in a well drained native potting mix and watered daily.

Give growing natives in pots a go and send us your photos!!

photo 1 shows a mix of swamp herbs planted in a large ceramic bowl, photo 2 is of shrubs and groundcovers planted in a 30cm plastic pot placed inside a larger ceramic pot while photo 3 shows two of my planted 30cm plastic pots.



Next APS NSG meeting AGM and General Meeting

Friday 10th FEBRUARY 2023
7.30 pm for 8pm

at Beatrice Taylor Hall, Willow Park Community Centre
25 Edgeworth David Ave, Hornsby

Speaker: Peter Ridgeway

Topic: Cumberland Plain vegetation

Welcome to New Members

Welcome to David K. and Harriett S. We hope that you enjoy your association with our group.

We look forward to meeting you and sharing in our appreciation, knowledge and love of our wonderful native plants.

Jeff Howes writes:

I am currently writing up Plant Profiles for APS NSW in conjunction with our Environment officer, Dan Clarke, and came across this great example of plant name changes that I would like to share with you.

Baeckea virgata was one of the first plants I planted in my garden and they are now over 40 years old. They grow to 4 metres high and have white flowers that appear in groups of three to seven between October and April. A hardy very prunable plant. It is now known as ***Sannantha pluriflora***.

It was first formally described in 1855 by Victorian Government Botanist Ferdinand von Mueller and given the name *Camphoromyrtus pluriflora*. It was placed in the genus *Babingtonia* in 1997 and in 2007 it was placed in the newly created genus *Sannantha*.

For many years the name *Baeckea virgata* was misapplied to this species. *Baeckea virgata*, currently *Sannantha virgata*, is endemic to New Caledonia.

The species has been cultivated for many years under various names. Cultivars include: 'Clarence River', 'Golden', 'La Petite' & 'White Cascade'



A stroll around Jan's garden in late November reveals a seemingly happy little spider on the Bird's Nest fern, *Asplenium australasicum*, and *Goodenia ovata* brightening up a shady spot.



Another name change from Jeff Howes

WAS *Rhododendron lochiaie*

NOW *Rhododendron viriosum*

I was looking at John Wrigley and Murray Fagg's 6th edition of their excellent book *Australian Native Plants Cultivation, Use in Landscaping and Propagation* and I am sure we are all familiar with it.

I came upon an interesting name change for what we all knew as *Rhododendron lochiaie* and is now *Rhododendron viriosum*. The following is their explanation for the name change:



"It was long believed that Australia had only one Rhododendron, however a second species was described in 1996 and given the name of R.notiale. Further research showed that this species was the one described originally by Mueller in 1836 as R.lochiaie. This necessitated giving a new name to the species in common cultivation. R.viriosum was thus described in 2002 and applies to the one commonly grown."

Committee Contacts

Vice President:

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Treasurer: Helen Ray

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The preferred method for Membership Applications & Renewals is to go to the APS NSW website and follow the instructions at <https://austplants.com.au/about-membership>

Do you want to know more about native plants?

Have you tried <https://austplants.com.au/> and within that site <https://resources.austplants.com.au/plant-database/> ?

More plants for sale

Brian Roach (APS NSG member) at Westleigh Native Plants
Contact westleighnativeplants@gmail.com

November 2022 Committee Meeting Notes

- Meetings and speakers 2023
- Meeting bookings for 2023
- Christmas Party 9th Dec 2022
- 2023 committee unfilled positions

Newsletter submissions: Deadline for submissions is the third Friday of the month.

For the February 2023 edition is Friday 20th January 2023 Editor: janw7531@gmail.com

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