

# CALGAROO

*A journey into nature*

October 2023



*Eucalyptus parramattensis* - Calgaroo

***Newsletter of the Parramatta and Hills District Group***

**Australian Plants Society NSW Ltd**

***Our vision: inspiring people to admire, grow and conserve native plants***

## WHAT'S ON IN 2023

- 11 October Wednesday:** Propagation
- 21 October Saturday:** Picnic for Nature – See page 15
- 28 October Saturday:** Bushwalk Vineyard Creek Dundas. Leader Jennifer Farrer  
See page 2
- 8 November Wednesday:** Propagation
- 25 November Saturday:** Members' meeting and end-of-year celebration  
Speaker Lyndal Thorburn: *"An Eremophila for every garden"*
- 6 December Wednesday:** Propagation

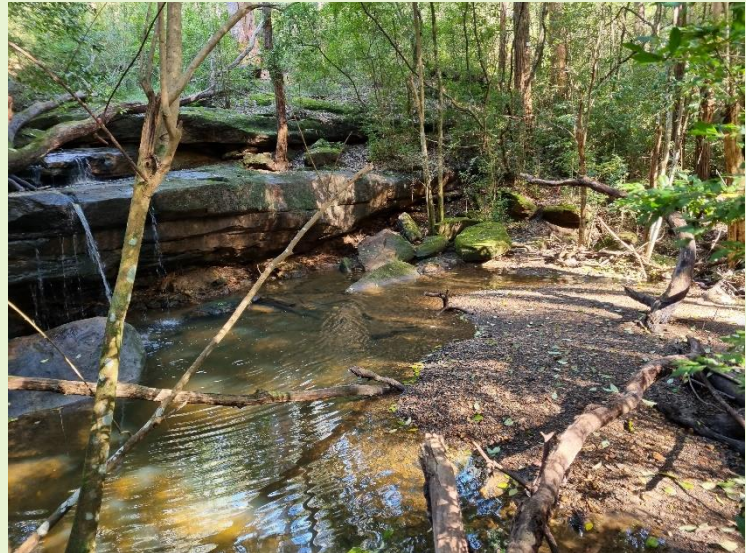
*If you'd like to come to our propagation days at Bidjiwong Community Nursery and haven't been before, you can get details from Lesley Waite - phone 0438 628 483*

## Saturday 28 October, 2 pm: Bushwalk at Vineyard Creek Reserve, Dundas.

Jennifer Farrer

We'll explore the upper valley of Vineyard Creek, a tributary of the Parramatta River. The creek is named for the vineyard which was established at its junction with the Parramatta River by Phillip Schaeffer in 1790.

Where we will be walking is not country for planting grape vines. Be prepared for a steep



walk down to a hidden fern gully and then an easier walk to the dam created to provide water for the Oatlands Golf Course. Below the dam, the walk is among tall trees - blackbutts, angophoras, bloodwoods and turpentines - in a beautiful shady valley. Some of the more interesting understorey plants include *Trachymene incisa* and *Astroloma humifusum*.

**Meet at the entrance to the Reserve in Robert Street Teloopa at 1.45 pm for a 2 pm start. Please don't be late!**

Please register for the walk beforehand at [apsparrahills@gmail.com](mailto:apsparrahills@gmail.com)

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## **Pittosporums – are they really weeds?**

Barry Lees

Many people regard Pittosporums as a nuisance weed. They say they take over and don't allow other more desirable plants to grow, so they should be eliminated. But are there other considerations?

There are two types of Pittosporums growing in this area – *Pittosporum revolutum* and *Pittosporum undulatum*. They are both natives. *Pittosporum revolutum* is a small shrub (mostly to 1.5m tall) that presents no problems. There are many in Carrs Bush (Fagan Park) and I like them, especially when the big yellow seeds open to show red flesh, advertising to all that “dinner is served”.

*Pittosporum undulatum* is very different, growing to about 15m tall and wide, with lots of leaves causing dense shade underneath. This is the plant that many people don't like.



Before Europeans arrived in Australia 250 years ago, Pittos (*Pittosporum undulatum*) grew naturally in rich soils between the coast and mountains from Southern Queensland to Victoria. Regular bushfires controlled their numbers. However, Europeans changed the soil conditions in much of this area by adding fertilizers and water to grow crops, and exotic plants, and to keep extensive lawns green. Bushfires are now severely limited, especially in developed areas. Bare soil in gardens and on construction sites resulted in soil erosion. The enriched soil washed into infertile sandstone gullies and also settled on areas that were already fertile.

Pittos responded eagerly to these changed conditions, spreading far beyond their original range. Botanists referred to them as “environmental weeds” and agreed to their selective removal in some places. It seems that over time, many people have forgotten these constraints and now regard them as simply “weeds” that should be removed everywhere they grow.

**But let’s stop and think for a while.**

- Pittos are local native plants that belong in the bush. Unless they are creating a major problem, leave them alone, and learn to like them. If growing in suitable conditions they have green leaves all year, will survive droughts and flooding rains, have sweet-smelling cream-coloured flowers in Spring, orange berries in Summer and Autumn, and provide habitat and food for birds and possums and shade to sit under on a hot day. Best of all, they need no maintenance.
- They can be used as a barrier to prevent weeds from crossing into a weed-free area. Very few weedy shrubs and groundcovers will grow in their dense shade.
- In remnant bushland in urban and peri-urban areas, they add native biodiversity.

**That’s the good news. Could there be a downside?**

Where soil is rich and water plentiful, Pittos might become “over-represented”, causing excess shade and loss of other valued native plants. If this is so, check if fertilizer or irrigation is being used anywhere uphill. Reducing this might solve the problem. If no other management issues are present, it might be OK to do what a low-intensity bushfire would do – you could remove some Pittos to increase the light level in that area and leave more room for other natives. Do not remove them all. It would be responsible to leave the mature Pittos to ensure a continued seed supply.

**The bush will love you for caring!**



*Pittosporum undulatum* - Photos Brian Walters

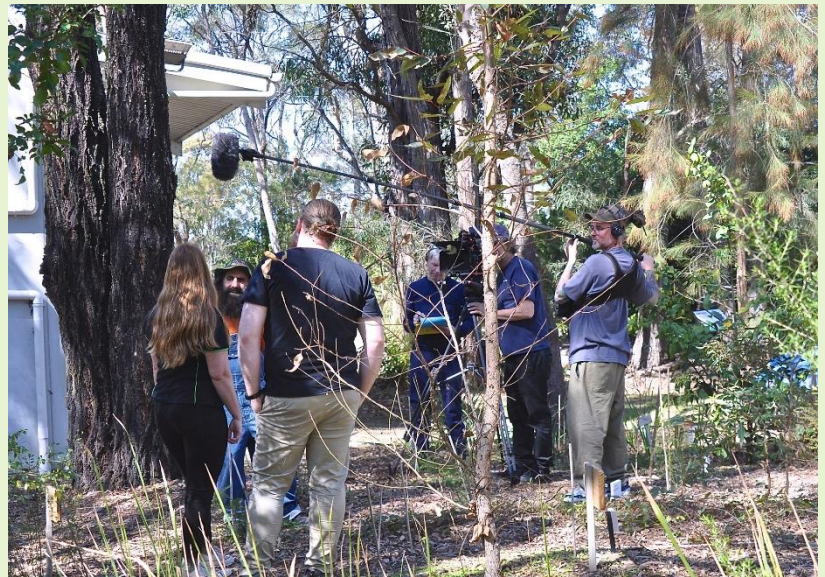


## Gardening Australia at the Community Environment Centre, Annangrove

Several members of our Parramatta/Hills Group work as volunteers looking after the lovely demonstration native, bush tucker and vegetable gardens, and the growing food for wildlife garden. If you'd like to visit, come on any Thursday 10am-4pm or Saturday 10am-2pm



Costa and the Gardening Australia crew spent two days filming here on 5/6 September. Filming was aimed mainly at the Food for Wildlife project. Costa and his team commented a few times on how great filming was at the Community Environment Centre and what a beautiful space it is!



It's expected that the segment will be broadcast on 10 November.

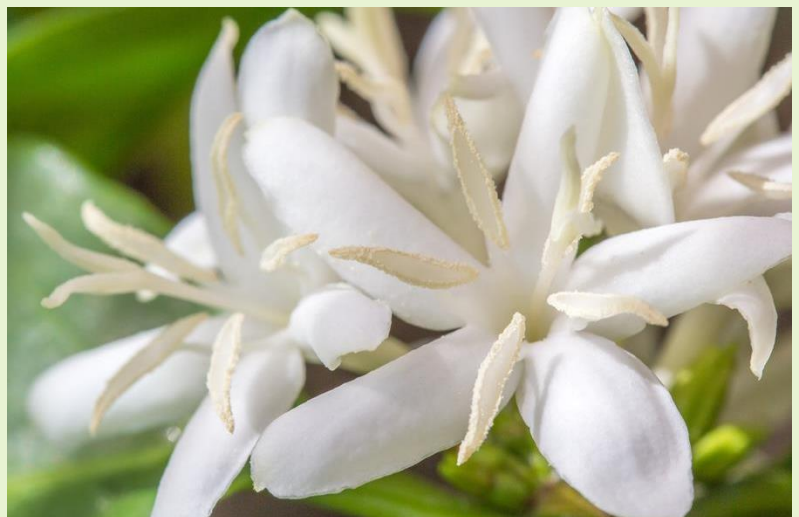
*Jess and Shaun with Costa.  
Photos Lachlan Turner*

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## Stressing trees to make them flower

*From North Queensland Gold Coffee*  
Published with permission.

The coffee trees will soon enter a period where they receive no water or nutrition, which is referred to as 'stressing' trees. Stressing is generally undertaken for a period of 4 - 6 weeks, and we start each year in September.



The stressing is over when we begin to water the trees again or when we receive significant rain. It is then that something

amazing happens - all our trees flower at the same time!! In turn, this means that our coffee all matures at the same time, meaning we only need to harvest once a year.

It's what makes this region so special - our long dry spells allow us to synchronize our flowering, and this is something not many other coffee-growing regions can do.



## “Gardens for Life”

Hosted by Australian Plants Society Victoria 30th Sep – 4th Oct 2024

<https://apsvic.org.au/anpsa-biennial-conference-2024>

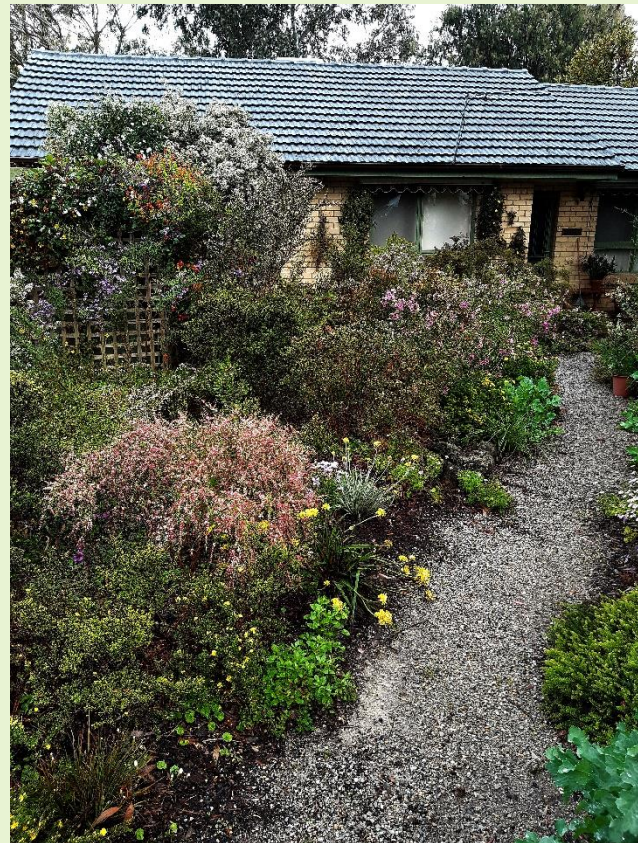
Held at the Melbourne Conference and Exhibition Centre, the conference topics include Gardens for Wildlife and Habitat, Restoration and Revegetation of Wetlands, Grasslands and Verges, Care for the Rare, Insects and Biodiversity, Garden Design, Indigenous Food Plants and many more.

Tours before and after will go to Victoria’s best wildflower areas, and day excursions will feature new botanic gardens, private gardens and wild areas.

### Bev Fox’s garden will be one of the gardens to be visited.

Bev’s house and garden are on a ¼ acre site at the foothills of Melbourne’s Dandenong Ranges, with the back garden facing west. In 2003 she decided to redesign her garden, starting at the back with the front to follow. Roger Stone, a landscape gardener and long-time friend, designed and installed the hard structure – the shaping of paths, division of space, rock work, stone paving and change of levels.

With no lawn anywhere, the garden could be described as a stroll garden. Bev’s extensive experience of growing Australian plants meant she took charge of the planting design. As a keen propagator, Bev has an area set aside, which includes a glasshouse, to follow this passion. It is discreetly positioned off to the side and out of view from the house.



Bev’s garden showcases a great diversity of plants, but she is careful to repeat some plants and keep low ones lapping the edges of her paths. Taller plants are used to hide or at least distract from the fencing. There is a large eucalypt in the front garden and more than one in the back along with a mature *Hakea multilineata*.

These tall plants are important as design elements to make the space appear larger, and provide wildlife corridors, habitat, and shade.



Although this is not a big garden, the experience of being in the very private back garden will transport you out of suburbia into a place of peace and tranquillity. A place to unwind and breathe easy. A place that wildlife likes to visit too. In more recent years Bev has planted out her nature strip using largely indigenous plants including grasses. This has increased the feeling of space in an otherwise modest front yard.

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Our September Meeting . . .

## ***“The Critically Endangered Regent Honeyeater and the Superhero Plant Saving the Day”***

**Ricki Nash**

Our guest speaker on 23 September was Dr. Mick Roderick, who is the current Manager for the Woodland Bird Project with Birdlife Australia which is the largest bird conservation and research organisation in Australia. In this role, Mick manages a suite of projects aiming to protect and recover threatened woodland birds, especially the critically endangered Regent Honeyeater, which together with the much-maligned mistletoe was the focus of his fascinating talk.

Mick is based in Newcastle and is the Vice President of the Hunter Bird Observers Club where he also organises pelagic birdwatching trips out to the continental shelf to see a variety of seabirds. However, it is not just birds that he has a passion for but also his work as an ecologist with a particular interest in Sydney sandstone flora.

We learnt that in 1995 there were thought to be about 1500 Regent Honeyeaters (*Anthochaera phrygia*) flourishing in the wild, but ongoing habitat loss through land clearing for farming and urban expansion has seen their numbers dwindle alarmingly, and today there is thought to be only 250- 350 birds left. The species has been upgraded to Critically Endangered and is listed as a threatened species under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 and with the International Union for Conservation Network (IUCN).



Photo Lachlan Hall, from *The Conversation* 13 January 2022

The bird is described as a “medium-sized honeyeater, about 200-300 mm long and weighing approximately 31-50 grammes. The plumage is predominantly black with bright yellow edges to the tail and wing feathers. Body feathers, except for the head and neck, are broadly edged in pale yellow or white and there is a large patch of yellowish to pinkish, bare, warty skin surrounding each eye” (The National Recovery Plan for the Regent Honeyeater DPIE 2016).

The current distribution for the bird is scattered with the limit of its range being in Bendigo, Central Victoria. On the western edge of NSW, it occurs as far inland as Narrabri,

Warrumbungle National Park, Dubbo, Parkes, and Finley. The birds use a variety of areas in different years depending on food availability. With its current distribution, there are four known key breeding areas where the species has been regularly recorded and these are Bundarra-Barraba Important Bird Area which lies in the Northern Tablelands, Capertee Valley, and the Hunter Valley District of NSW. Also, Chiltern in NE Victoria, Warwick in southern Queensland and in the ACT. There was a recent sighting last year just outside the boundary of Scheyville National Park and according to Mick Roderick, it was this same pair that subsequently built a nest in the grounds of Fernhill Estate at Mulgoa.

Birdlife Southern NSW together with Capertee Valley Landcare and Taronga Conservation Society have been involved in an extensive tree planting program as part of the National Recovery Effort to help these endangered birds. Hundreds of volunteers have participated in the project over the last 30 years and altogether approximately 277 hectares of land have been revegetated with 118,000 saplings to support the Regent Honeyeaters' food and nesting requirements (Birdlife Action Network; Taronga Conservation Society).

The Honeyeater's food is primarily nectar but also includes insects, for instance, lerps and their exudates and occasionally fruit. However, most of the time the birds look for suitable nectar, which is obtained mainly from tall, large eucalypts as these produce more nectar and from mistletoes. According to the DPIE (2022), some other food species include: -Mugga (or Red) Ironbark, *Eucalyptus sideroxylon*; Yellow Box, *E. melliodora*; White Box, *E. albens*; Yellow Gum, *E. leucoxylon*; Swamp Mahogany, *E. robusta*; Needle-leaf mistletoe, *Amyema cambagei*; River Sheoak, *Casuarina cunninghamiana*; Box Mistletoe, *A. miquelii*; Long-flowered Mistletoe, *Dendrothoe vitellina*.

The birds also face increasing competition from larger and more aggressive nectivores such as the Noisy Friarbirds, Red Wattlebirds, and the Noisy Miner. Recent research also suggests that nest predation by the Noisy Miner, Brush Tailed Possums, Sugar and Squirrel Gliders, Pied Currawongs, Australian Ravens, and Pied Butcherbirds consuming the eggs, hatchlings and fledglings has led to a further decline in their populations across its range.

In addition, there are also issues surrounding the ability to find each other through hearing their songs. In the captive breeding program and prior to birds being released into the wild, recordings of the birds' songs are played to the birds in the hope that this will help them find each other once released (Reported on ABC Central West News).

Mick also mentioned the captive breeding and release program involving Taronga Zoo which has been in progress since 2008. In 2021, 58 birds were released which was a great success as these joined wild flocks enabling breeding and the raising of chicks to take place. In late 2022 there were several releases into the Tomalpin Woodlands, south of Kurri Kurri (Hunter Valley). The first release consisted of 26 out of a total of 50 Zoo-bred birds, 19 of which were fitted with a radio transmitter so their movements could be tracked. The second cohort saw 24 birds released of which 20 had radio transmitters. Although many of the birds remained within the Woodlands, one was found 10km to the south feeding on Silky Oak blossoms. Two birds were later found deceased and their deaths were investigated.

Although captive breeding programs are expensive to maintain, they are an important conservation tool for managing threatened species. Captive breeding provides the endangered species a safe place to breed allowing the young birds or animals to become strong and resilient before being released back into the wild. It also helps the scientists to

create genetically diverse populations and an opportunity to learn about their life cycles and particular characteristics (2022 NSW Regent Honeyeater Captive Release Community Update #1. Nov 25, 2022; NSW Dept. of Planning and Environment 2021).

Whilst eucalypt blossom provides some of the nectars, so too do mistletoes, particularly the Long-flowered Mistletoe, and this is found throughout the Tomalpin Woodlands. The mistletoe also provides a place for the birds to build their nests within its supportive structure and so to do a lot of other arboreal birds take advantage of the plant for this reason.

Mistletoes as Mick pointed out, are not “the bad apples of the plant world”. Worldwide there are 1500 species with approximately 100 being endemic to Australia. The species is semi-parasitic and grows on a host tree or shrub, obtaining its water and nutrients from the host plant but can produce its own energy from photosynthesis. Generally, they are found in dense clumps either in the crowns of trees or towards the end of outer branches.

A feature of the mistletoe is its long flowering and fruiting season, which enables it to be a rich food source for a variety of birds and small animals, particularly during dry weather when there is little else to eat. The flowers are pollinated by insects and birds with seed dispersal being performed by the latter, especially the Mistletoe Bird which has a unique way of obtaining the seed from the fruit. As the bird does not have a gizzard, the seed passes straight through the bird’s gut and is deposited on the side of a branch where due to its sticky and slippery nature slides underneath the branch where its root can either pierce the bark or latch onto a rough section where it begins to grow once it has accessed the tree’s nutritional system. To understand this more fully, Mick suggested watching Sir David Attenborough’s video (YouTube) titled “BBC 2 The Private Life of Plants- Mistletoe Partnerships”.

Mick also spoke about some of the myths associated with mistletoes which includes that the plant kills Eucalypt trees. However, the tree dying has nothing to do with the presence of the mistletoe and it may have perished for other reasons such as changed soil nutrient levels, soil compaction or changed water and fire regimes. There is some thought that mistletoes should be removed from trees, but mistletoes have many side benefits such as providing small animals with food and shelter and nutrient-rich leaf litter; 33 bird species have been recorded feeding on mistletoe fruit and 41 bird species feeding on the flowers. In addition, 245 bird species have been recorded nesting in the plants. Mistletoes have succulent leaves that provide a wide variety of nutrients to invertebrates such as beetles, caterpillars, spiders moths and butterflies to name a few and the plant is a sought-after bush food by First Nations people (Breaking down myths about Mistletoes - [Fact Sheet](#))

However, whilst eucalypts might recover to some extent following a bushfire, mistletoes do not survive, especially after high-intensity fires.

The talk generated much discussion afterwards including ways in which more mistletoe seeds might be collected and attached to trees, and Mick shared one ingenious method which is currently being trialled with London Plane Trees (*Platanus x acerifolius*) in Victoria. Melbourne City Council was persuaded to plant 800 mistletoe seeds in perfectly healthy street trees around the inner city and the CBD. This was undertaken by workers using elevated platforms to stick the seeds to the underside of the branches. The hope is that the



plants will grow and attract more biodiversity to the city (ABC Everyday “Unveiling the misunderstood magical mistletoes of Australia “).

He also mentioned the work of Professor David M Watson (Charles Sturt University, Albury-Wodonga) who has undertaken extensive research and written a book, especially about Mistletoes, which he recommended, titled “Mistletoes of Southern Australia” published by the CSIRO. More of his research and work involving mistletoe seed dispersal can be found at <https://ecosystemunraveller.com>

In summary, it was a fascinating talk by Mick about a remarkable little-known plant and the way it supports a unique bird- both of which need to be saved, especially the latter from what seems like inevitable extinction.

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## The Misunderstood Mistletoe

Lesley Waite

*Originally published in 'Blandfordia', the newsletter of the North Shore Group of the Australian Plants Society, November 2002. Revised and updated in September, 2023*

On a visit to Burrendong Arboretum (near Wellington, New South Wales) way back in 2002, I was struck by what I thought was an unusually high number of mistletoes that we saw in the eucalypts there. Not knowing a lot, but aware of some of the scurrilous myths about them, I thought I'd do a bit of research. This is what I found out:

- Contrary to their much-maligned image, none are weeds, none are introduced. They exist in all ecosystems where there are trees.
- Mistletoes are semi-parasitic native plants. They undertake photosynthesis to produce organic matter, but derive water and mineral nutrients from their host. There are 85 species of Australian mistletoe, mainly in the Loranthaceae family.
- Mistletoes like lush, healthy trees, so they can actually be considered an 'indicator plant' for environmental health.
- They are very efficient organisms - there is better food value in mistletoes than in the host tree, so they are more attractive to birds and animals. They usually mimic the host, and sometimes the mimicry is so close that they are almost impossible to detect, e.g., the she-oak mistletoe (*Amyema cambagei*) on *Casuarina glauca*. Amongst eucalypts, they can be distinguished by the thickening of leaf distribution, and the sometimes olive green, sometimes purplish colouring.
- Mistletoes are mainly spread by the tiny Mistletoe Bird. These birds only visit areas abundant in mistletoes. They have a tubular tongue for sucking up nectar, and have also adapted to eating mistletoe berries. They lack a gizzard for grinding their food, so the bird can absorb the glucose-rich pulp before berries pass very quickly through the bird's gut without much change. When pooped, the still-sticky, gelatinous seed can adhere to the branches of the trees from which the mistletoe grows.



**From this position, the mistletoe bird will shuffle along the branch, dislodging the sticky seed from his butt so that it can attach to the wood.**

- Mistletoes contribute much to the ecosystem in which they grow:
  1. Birds depend on the mistletoes' highly nutritious nectar and fruit for food. Many native birds, including honeyeaters, lorikeets, bowerbirds, emus and cockatoos are known to feed on them. In fact these 'occasional mistletoe munchers' have the hugely important job of introducing mistletoes to *new* areas. Gliders supplement their diet with clumps of nectar-rich mistletoe flowers, and possums also feed on fruit and flowers.
  2. Possums, koalas, sheep, cattle and many insects also graze on the leaves.
  3. The dense leafy clumps also make ideal nesting sites for many birds, as they are protected from bad weather and predators. Many bird species, including the endangered Regent Honeyeater, prefer nesting in mistletoe clumps.
  4. There are about 25 species of butterflies which feed on mistletoes during the larval or caterpillar stage.
  5. The mistletoes generally occur in the tree canopy, but their influence extends towards increasing biodiversity on the forest floor, too. Mistletoes shed their leaves whilst still plump and nutritious, boosting nutrients, accelerating decomposition, and increasing food and habitat quality for species from the tiniest insects, all the way up the food chain. Indeed, mistletoes have been shown to be *a keystone process that will increase the resilience* of wildlife populations to drought, habitat loss and predators
- Australian mistletoes are not well equipped to cope with drought and are sensitive to fire. There has been a lot of work and research recently to help mitigate the damage done to mistletoe communities by extreme-heat/fire events.



Mistletoes often have a distinctive 'clumping' shape (left). They can also have very colourful flowers as shown by *Dendrophthoe vitellina* on *Hakea francisiana* (centre) and *Amyema miquelii* on *Alectryon oleifolius*, Rosewood (right).

### So, regarding that age-old claim, do mistletoes kill trees?

The most likely reason for the mistletoe becoming a threat to trees is the human activities which have interfered with the natural ecological balance, like excessive tree clearing which can lead to isolated trees in cleared paddocks and along roadsides. Fewer trees means a depleted ecosystem, that there are fewer available hosts, and that each tree is more vulnerable to parasitic invasion.



## The Answer?

Given the value of mistletoes to such a wide variety of Australian fauna and to overall ecosystem health, the imperative is to work towards restoring the natural balance with, for example, regeneration, reducing soil compaction, assisting pollination, controlling invasive species, and/or establishing well managed fire regimes.

A balanced ecosystem that includes the mistletoe obviously makes far more sense than eradicating the mistletoe, and along with it the valuable contribution that it makes to the country's ecology.

See “How we brought Mistletoes back to the trees of Melbourne – while warding off hungry possums” from *The Conversation* [HERE](#).

## Growing Blandfordias (Christmas Bells) in Pots

Ian Cox



Growing Blandfordias in pots is not difficult. They are slow-growing plants, so patience is needed. You'll be well-rewarded in summer though, with the spectacular bell-shaped flowers on 50cm stems ranging in colour from all yellow (rare) to red with yellow tips.

Possibly the biggest challenge you'll face in growing Blandfordias is obtaining them in the first place!

The Blandfordia most likely sold in native plant nurseries is *Blandfordia grandiflora*, and as the name implies it has the largest flowers of the four species of this genus. It is popular as a cut flower, both locally and overseas.

Blandfordias can also be grown from seed. They will usually start to flower in the third or fourth year after germination.

Blandfordias are deep-rooted plants, so choose a pot that is at least twice as deep as it is wide. When they have outgrown their pots every two years or so, replot into a larger and deeper pot, in early Autumn.



A potting mix I've used with good results is 50% coco peat and 50% coarse river sand. In the wild, Blandfordias usually grow near swamps and other places with a high water table. Because of this liking for water, the pots shouldn't be allowed to dry out, especially during hot weather. Reduce watering in winter.

Blandfordias need feeding, so give them slow-release fertiliser. They also like liquid fertiliser in spring to prepare them for flowering. A good liquid fertiliser is the liquid from a worm farm, heavily diluted to the colour of weak tea.

Place the pot in a sheltered place that receives morning sun. A north-easterly aspect is ideal. When the flower spikes appear and buds form, usually in November or December, the pot can be moved out of the hot sun into a shadier place where the flowers will last longer, and where they can be admired. When flowering is finished, return the pot to its usual position.

Flowers usually appear in summer, but *can* occur at other times. After the 1994 bushfires when our Blandfordias were exposed to smoke over many days, the plants flowered continuously the following year!

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At the Kenthurst Fair on Sunday 10 September, Fresa from The Hills Council's Bidjiwong Community Nursery was giving away native plants to residents. I was very surprised to see one of these plants – it was Red Cedar (*Toona ciliata*).

Now, having a rather inquisitive mind, I did a Google search, and came up with this great article from *The Conversation* about Red Cedar:



## Majestic giants of the rainforest

Gregory Moore, Doctor of Botany, The University of Melbourne

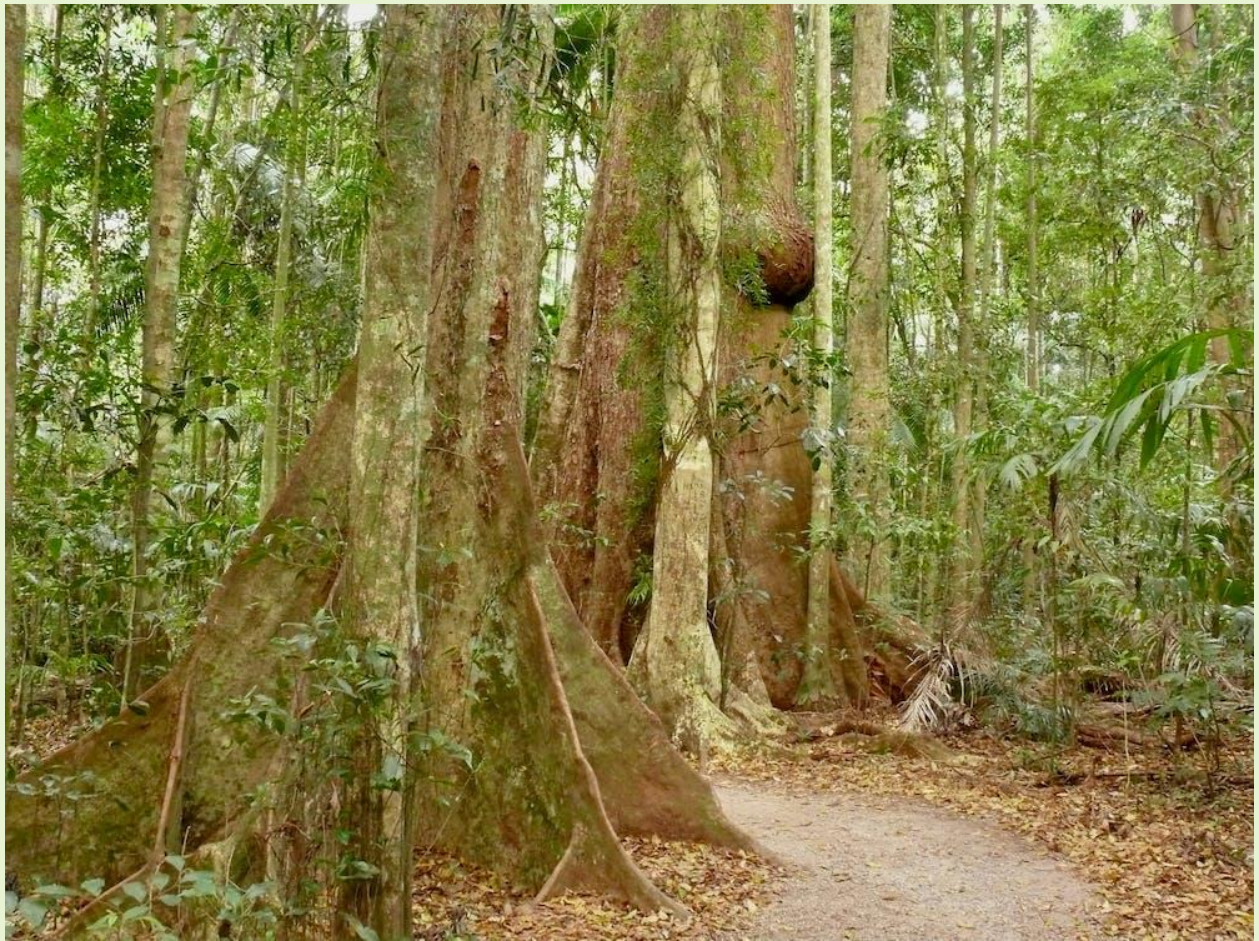


Photo Shutterstock

I first encountered red cedar trees in the sub-tropical rainforests of Queensland and New South Wales in the 1980s. Then, its scientific name was *Cedrela toona*, and later *Toona australis*. Now, it's recognised as *Toona ciliata*. The various names reflect a taxonomic history in which the Australian species was once regarded as being separate from its Asian relatives, but all are now considered one.

The trees are awe-inspiring. Under the right conditions, it can grow to 60 metres tall (occasionally more) with a trunk diameter of up to 7m. After losing its foliage in autumn, the new foliage in spring often has an attractive reddish tinge. In late spring it has small (5 mm) white or pale pink flowers, but they usually go unnoticed in the rainforest because of their height or the density of other tree canopies growing beneath.

Older red cedars have wonderful buttresses at the base of their trunk, a characteristic shared by many tall tropical trees. These buttresses have long been considered an advantage for species that can emerge above the canopy of a rainforest where winds are much stronger, with the buttresses and expanded root systems providing greater strength and resistance to the wind. These buttresses also greatly increase the surface area of the base of the trees exposed to air, which facilitates the uptake of extra oxygen as the activity of micro-organisms in the soil can leave it oxygen-depleted.

### **Logged to near-extinction**

With a wide distribution throughout Asia and Australia, its uses in ancient times were many and varied. In traditional medicine, bark was used for digestive remedies as well as wound dressing and its resin was used for treating skin conditions. Dyes, oils and tannins used for preparing leather could also be extracted by boiling various plant parts. Today the wood is used for culturing shiitake mushrooms, which are much in demand in restaurants.

But the recent history of red cedar is a typically sad colonial tale. The species belongs to the same family as mahogany (Meliaceae) and, not surprisingly, was exploited for its timber from the early days of colonisation. The timber is durable, lightweight and suitable for naval use and so was very heavily logged, right along the east coast of Australia from the early 1800s until the early 20th century.

The rich deep red colour of its timber and the fact it was soft and easily worked meant it was used for furniture, and ornate carvings in public buildings, town halls and parliaments, such as the State Library in Melbourne. It was also used for implements and handles, and sailing and racing boats. You've probably had a close encounter with the lovely red banisters on some of these old buildings that were made of red cedar, often darkened under the patina of so many hands.

This once common and widespread species was logged almost to extinction along the east coast by the mid-1900s, and to the point of practical commercial extinction with little timber available to industry by the 1960s.

So valued was the timber that in the late 1970s, a plan was hatched to remove red cedar from Queensland National Park rainforests using helicopters. Luckily, the idea did not fly and so some great trees persist. The species has a conservation status of concern, but is not considered to be endangered at present.

### **A terrible pest**

The fact they are deciduous makes them potentially very interesting and useful for horticultural use, but that potential remains largely unrealised. And given the value and quality of its timber, you may be wondering why it's not being grown in plantations across the continent.

The reason is a native moth called the cedar tip moth (*Hypsipyla robusta*), which lays its eggs on the main growing shoot of the tree. When the eggs hatch the larvae bore down the shoot, which not only results in shoot dieback but also causes the trees to develop multiple stems and branches which reduce their timber value. Despite this, they are still planted as quick-growing ornamental trees for their shade in other parts of the world, such as Hawaii and Zimbabwe.

The moths are attracted to the scent of the tree, so they're very difficult to control. The moth does not attack the trees in South America, for instance, because the moth has not been established there, so there are large plantations of red cedar in Brazil.

It's an interesting reminder: often it's the little things in ecology that can affect success or failure. When we humans meddle without knowledge, things don't necessarily go to plan, usually to our cost.

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## Annangrove Picnic for Nature

October 21, 2023

**Organised and supported by:** Nature Conservation Council NSW

**Hosted by:** Cattai Hills Environment Network with Hills Shire Council Community Environment Centre.



All welcome! BYO food and drink (and something to sit on), and enjoy the day with friends, family, and the local community. There will be some fun activities, and you'll have the opportunity to engage with your local environmental groups and learn about what they do to protect nature.

Enjoy a tour of the Environment Centre from the volunteers. On this tour, you will be able to admire their beautiful native garden and their sustainable produce garden, and learn how you can grow your own at home!

### **WHEN**

11 am - 2 pm

### **WHERE**

Community Environment Centre,  
Currie Ave Annangrove.

## Share your stories . . .

Your contributions to *Calgaroo* are always welcome.

If you have interesting observations of plants in the garden or the bush, photos, or any other news, please send them to me at [itcox@bigpond.com](mailto:itcox@bigpond.com) for the next edition.

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*In the spirit of reconciliation, we acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of our Country, the people of the Dharug Nation, whose cultures and customs have nurtured, and continue to nurture, this land since time immemorial. We honour and celebrate the spiritual, cultural and customary connections of Traditional Owners to Country and the biodiversity that forms part of that Country.*

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## **Parramatta and Hills District Group**

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