



Australian Plants Society

South East NSW Group

Newsletter 196

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Corymbia maculata Spotted Gum and
Macrozamia communis Burrawang

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Dear Members,

Each month we move through the year and the seasons come and go. This month has had me thinking about Islands that join and separate from the mainland and weather systems that come and go. We all draw on our own experiences to understand what is happening around us. My experience includes when I was living in Victoria. A very unseasonably wet period was followed by a very long drought. I remember the rain in February bucketing down and then it just stopped. No winter rain came.

This is a different century, a different state and who knows what is ahead. I look to the Scientific Government agencies to guide me and I am taking heed of an increased likelihood of El Nino settling in. It is not certain (70% chance). The days of the inappropriately planted (I think) indoor plants looking good in my moist garden are over for now. I am going to prepare for drier, warmer times ahead. Out goes the *Ctenanthe setosa*, and in go more of the acclimatised local plants and other low water need natives such as Correa and Phebalium. I just hope there is some rain coming to help get them established.

Just for your interest, one common name of *Ctenanthe setosa* is Never Never Plant. I am taking that advice.

If you would like to read more on the weather predictions see the **Expert Commentary: 2023/24 El Niño for Australia from CSIRO.**

<https://www.csiro.au/en/news/all/news/2023/june/expert-commentary-el-nino>

As gardeners and people interested in the natural environment it is fascinating to observe the seasons and the plants around us. It is always interesting to learn as much as we can and I am grateful that I live in such a place where so many people share that interest, knowledge and love of this environment.

Di



Ctenanthes setosa Google Images

Next Meeting

**Saturday 1st July 2023,
Meeting at 10.00 a.m.**

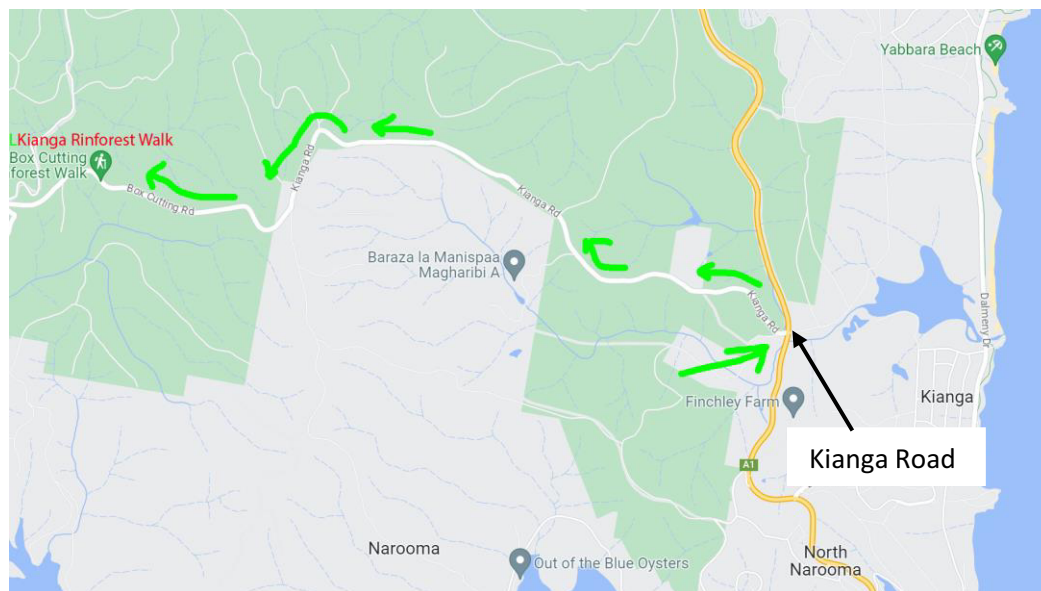
Arrive at the Kianga Rainforest Walk entrance (see map below) around 10am for morning tea, and our walk will commence at 10:30am.

This month we will be visiting two sites of very different ecosystems. In the morning we will meet at 10am for a cuppa and a chat at the start to the Kianga Rainforest Walk. The meeting point is about 2km up the Kianga Forest Road and is signposted. If we have too many cars here on the day we will send some along the road to the lookout turnoff and car pool back. The parking issue will be resolved prior to the event and you will be advised on the day, so don't be too concerned. Just head for the Kianga Rainforest Walk start unless told otherwise. The walk heads down the hill into the rainforest and what a beautiful place it is. You will see plenty of orchids, ferns, fungi, mosses lichens and ancient trees.

The walk is a loop walk that goes down through the rainforest and then up through the forest back to the road just down from the start. There are a few steps heading down into the forest, so a stick may be useful for those that use them. We were not bothered by leeches a few weeks ago, but it always good to be prepared. This is a short walk of about 800 m but may take plant lovers



***Syzygium smithii* at Kianga Photo Daniel Bateman**



longer to traverse than other groups.

Travelling south on the highway, Kianga Rd is on your right, 2.8km south of the main Dalmeny turnoff.

The turnoff is signposted.

After the Rainforest walk we will drive back to the highway and head to Bodalla Forest rest area for lunch. There are a few picnic tables here and toilets. We plan to walk the Mummaga Lake track, which is also a loop walk.

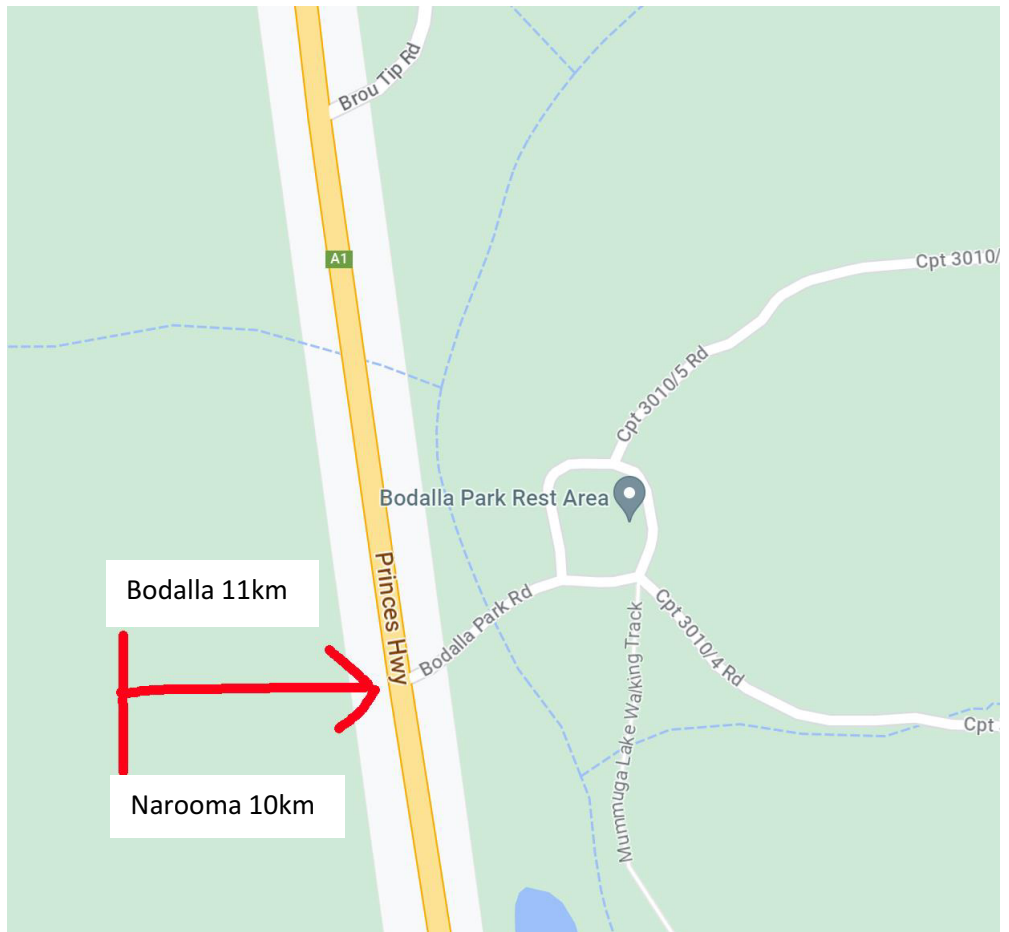
The walk heads along the north shore of Mummaga Lake through stands of *Corymbia maculata* and Macrozamia forest.

Epiphytic orchids *Dockrillia teretifolium*, Bridal Veil Orchid are found in the Casuarina along the shore and terrestrial orchids including *Caladenia picta*, depicted here by another of Daniel's photos, further uphill in the forest.

The complete walk is about 2km and is considered to be an easy grade. See map below for directions.

On returning to the highway, turn left out of Kianga Road, heading back towards Bodalla. The Bodalla Forest Park rest area is prominently signposted, and is on your right.

The plants recorded on the Mummaga Lake walking track demonstrate the huge diversity of the surrounding forests. The group previously enjoyed this walk in February 2015, during a very dry spell, so it will be interesting to observe the changes following recent wet years.



Acianthus fornicatus Pixie Caps, recently photographed by Daniel at Mummaga.

Remember the days when we were younger, and our knees enabled such scrutiny close up, without complaining.

Last Meeting , (pictures are sourced from Roger’s Powerpoint Presentations)

The morning session featured Insect & Plant Ecologist, Dr Roger Farrow, discussing the post-fire regeneration of vegetation of the Nerriga Heathlands and the Tallaganda Forests.

He posed the question; is recent fire a ‘remarkable’ phenomenon or a natural occurrence?

The mega fires of 2019-2020 in south east NSW completely incinerated the shrub and forb layers over large areas in Morton and Tallaganda National Parks, as well as those of many other National Parks and Nature Reserves, as shown below of a section of Morton National Park.



The impact of the recent bushfires on the vegetation have been invariably described in the media in terms of superlatives.

First, the ‘destruction’ of the plant landscapes by the fires and later by their ‘remarkable’ recovery.

The severity of these fires has also been seized upon as a consequence of global warming.

The immediate public response was that many plant species could have been lost in the conflagration.

However, Roger’s observations over the last 3 years in these burnt areas show that all the species present before the fires have regenerated in different ways and at different rates and that more species are now present post fire than before the fire, due to recruitment from the seed bank.

As Roger pointed out:

- **Australia’s flora is dominated by fire- dependant, flammable sclerophyllous trees and shrubs, notably eucalypts.**
- **Flammable biomes (distinct biological communities) go back to the start of the Paleogene 50 million years ago era when the climate became markedly drier (Crisp et al 2011) so the plants have become adapted to recover from fire, however severe.**
- **Eucalypts and other Myrtaceae regenerate foliage destroyed by fire by the activation of meristematic tissue buried deep under the bark, by regrowth from underground lignotubers and by seed.**
- **Shrubs and forbs regenerate from the SEED BANK where seeds remain dormant for decades**

The intensity of the recent fires was, in Roger's opinion, primarily due to the dryness of the vegetation. By December 2019, understory shrubs across large areas of forest, woodland, and heathland of south-eastern Australia were observed to be completely desiccated or dead. Eucalypt foliage was similarly affected, especially in local Southern Tablelands Dry Sclerophyll Forest.



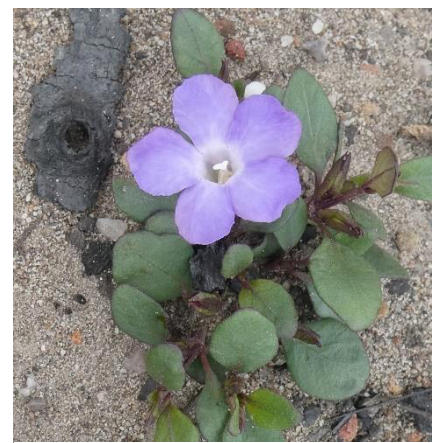
What at first appears a landscape damaged beyond redemption, was within 3 months of the fires showing determined and vigorous signs of life. On the left, circled, are seedlings of Eucalypts germinating in the ash bed, whilst from *Eucalyptus sieberi*, epicormic shoots and *Banksia paludosa*, basal shoots sprout with positive intent.



Mass germination of seed



Germination of *Commersonia hermannifolia*



Fire induced flowering of the tiny blue yam, *Brunoniella australis*

Many herbaceous plants take advantage of the additional light and nutrient available in the few years immediately after fires, with the spring and summer flowering of orchids and herbs often overlooked due to the covering of foliage.



This picture shows the ephemeral Pink Flannel Flower, *Actinotus forsythii* in full splendour. This species grows rapidly after fire, sets seed and then virtually disappears until the next opportunity to flourish.

All of the areas revisited by Roger over the past 3 years have shown similar signs of recovery. Each plant, adapted according to its own requirements, either germinated via a stored seedbank, or from shoots from within the tissue of woody plants.



Plants which are very noticeable following removal of the understory, are orchids. Visits to any area following fires will reveal species which may not have been recorded from these sites previously, such as *Cryptostylis leptochila*, the Small Tongue Orchid.

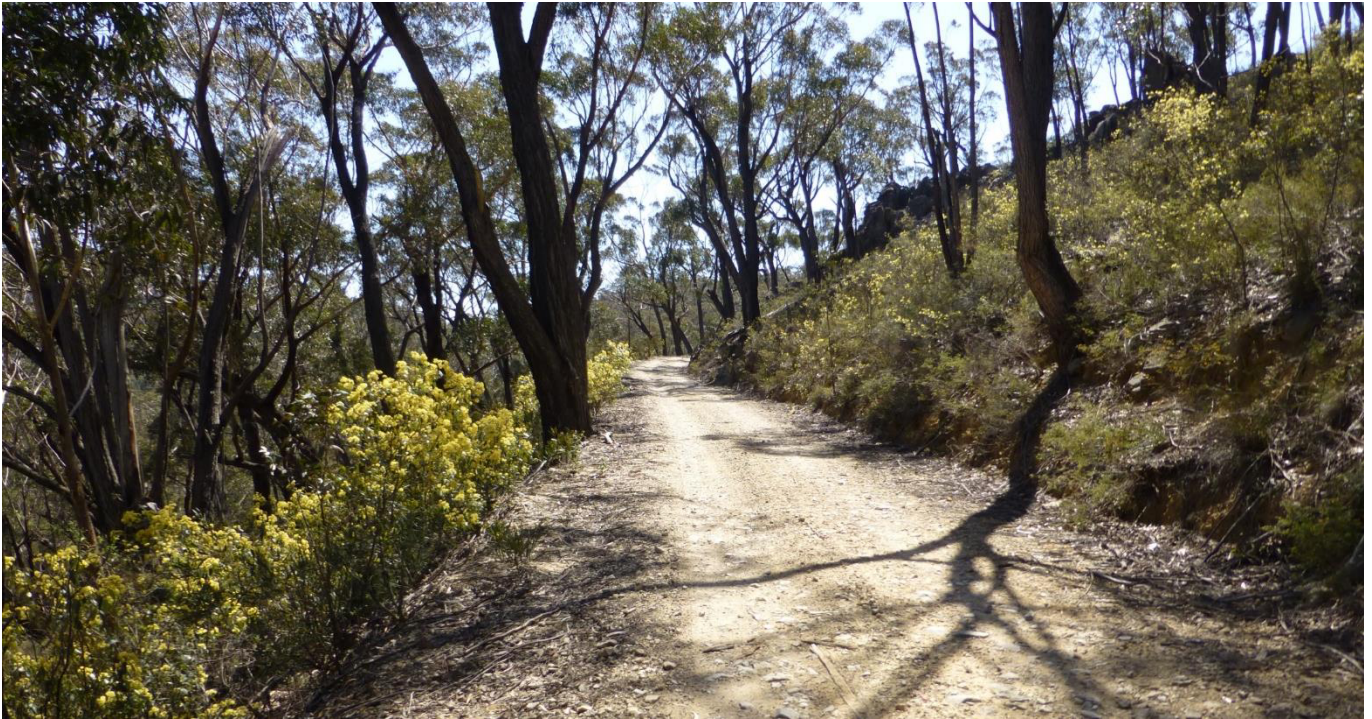
Morton National Park is known for its populations of Midge Orchids, *Corunastylis* species. Starting in March 2020, there was a mass emergence of these orchids out of the ashes, comprising seven species, some of which had never been seen before, presumably because they were concealed among the shrubs. It is clear that terrestrial orchids can survive extreme fire events because of their underground bulbs.



The endangered Pink Midge Orchid, *Corunastylis superba*



Heaths are also given a renewed lease of life, the removal of heavy shrub cover allowing smaller herbs and sub-shrubs a chance to shine. The yellow flowers are of *Asterolasia trymalioides*, a small plant in the Rutaceae family.



Tallaganda National Park, situated west of Braidwood on the Great Dividing Range, features the prominent Mt. Major, 1331m, and Mt. Palerang, 1264m. Previously State Forest, the area is heavily wooded, with *Eucalyptus dives*, Broad Leaved Peppermint a prominent component. The photo above is of Mulloon Fire Trail which meanders through the northern section of the forest. The park was severely impacted by the recent fires, and due to the danger of damaged trees falling, has only recently been opened to visitors.



Fire removed all of the understory and the canopy, and recovery has been slow. However many herbs and grassy plants have been advantaged, and are flowering whilst the opportunity avails. Shrubby plants, such as Acacias and Pomaderris are also flourishing, holding the fragile soil until the canopy can re-establish. This tough highland environment presents different challenges for the flora, but as with the plants in Morton N.P., are making strong recovery.



These observations confirm that the Australian flora outside the rainforest is highly fire-adapted and even fire-dependant and suggest that hot wild fires are more important than cool burns in maintaining floral diversity.

***Acacia mearnsii* is quick to take advantage of the open canopy**

Our SHOW and TELL session featured a single specimen brought in by Marjorie. The West Australian *Beaufortia squarrosa* is a small to medium shrub related to Melaleuca. Plants are usually red flowered, but Marj's plant is a lovely orange colour. This attractive garden plant mostly flowers in spring, so this specimen is either very early, or late!

Beaufortia is rarely seen in cultivation in our area, possibly due to summer humidity, but Marj's plant is thriving in her cooler Currowan garden. Flowers of *Beaufortia* species range from purple, mauve, all shades of red, and orange, and are always well displayed terminally.

Plants are best suited to well drained and drier environments, growing well west of the Divide. Being closely related, plants can be successfully grafted onto Melaleuca for added hardiness.



After lunch, we joined with the Friends of Eurobodalla Regional Botanic Gardens for hear from Helen Moody – author of South Coast Islands, New South Wales.

A Sydney girl, Helen has had a varied career, working overseas on foreign aid to Africa for 18 years before returning to Australia, firstly to live on the edge of Ku-ring-gai National Park, where she was a volunteer guide, whilst also working as a horticultural writer and PR consultant. Her interests include bushwalking and kayaking, and when she moved to Ulladulla, began leading walks and kayaking trips for the local National Parks Association.



Merriman Island, Wallaga Lake. Photo Phil Warburton. From South Coast Islands Book

During her various trips with this group, questions were often raised as to what island that might be, what was its history, and how is it used today. This interest was the catalyst for researching the islands of the south coast, and with fellow NPA member Mike Jefferis, Helen spent almost 5 years, from 2018,

interrupted by Covid, gathering details of the 61 islands along the coast. The resulting publication honours their work, offering readers a detailed insight to information discovered during their research.

As Helen said, the book isn't just a travel guide for walkers and kayakers. It's a book for South Coast residents, visitors to this area, and anyone who loves nature and discovering wild places. It tells of Aboriginal connections to the islands, the history of South Coast exploration, and the arrival of settlers and convicts.

It covers the geology, flora, lighthouses, shipwrecks, bird life and environmental values of the islands. With more than 200 photographs, from over 20 photographers, and maps and description of how to visit every island, whether on foot or by boat, the publication is just as valuable as a book to browse, and dream..

Di Clark

In my garden

The winter garden can often seem bereft of flowers. At this time of the year we can always rely on Correas to cheer a dull day. Whilst there is a seemingly endless choice in the newest cultivars, particularly those with *Correa pulchella* parentage, there is always a spot for our reliable local forms of *Correa reflexa*. The pink flowered form collected at Abrahams Bosom area near Jervis Bay is a hardy small shrub to around 1m., with flowers around 50mm long adorning the plant from April through to September. Plants prefer a drier site, and cope well with shade. Tip pruning during spring keeps the plant bushy.

The cream and green flowered plant was collected at Menai, and propagated by Jan Douglas. It is producing its first flowers now, and although few, the colour is brilliant in heavy shade. Bells are only 30mm long, but eagerly sought by Eastern Spinebills.

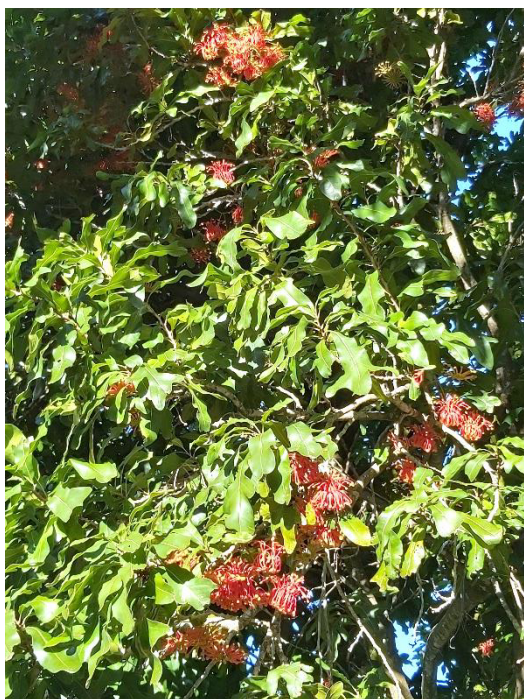
Correas are amongst the easier plants to propagate by cutting, and with the cooler weather upon us, now is an ideal time to try some.



Following on from our propagation day at ERBG, I have been looking at suitable heat beds for smaller propagation set ups. On the day, we talked about various products available, and I decided to see what might be purchased without much cost. The Inkbird heating pad pictured seemed an ideal product for those wanting to do just a few cuttings, or to germinate a few seeds.

The mats come with a built in thermostat and probe. The unit runs on 240V, and has an output of 30W, easily maintaining a temperature of 22 degrees even on these cold nights. I have set the low temperature at 19° and the higher temperature to 22°, and have found the probe is accurate enough, within about 1.5°.

Norm Hulands lent me a couple of seriously accurate scientific temperature probes to verify the readings of the thermostat, and I must say that for an outlay of only \$40, I was very pleased with the performance of the units. (I purchased 2 mats, which can be joined together with just a single thermostat and probe for that cost). The units were purchased online from Lerway, and arrived within 3 days of order. So far, quite happy.



Stenocarpus is a Genus of Proteaceae plants, with about 25 species ranging from New Guinea and New Caledonia to Australia, where there is 10 known species. Most Australian species occur in the north of the country. The two species I am growing, *S. sinuatus* and *S. salignus*, are both adaptable plants which flower reliably.

Stenocarpus sinuatus is well known as the Fire-wheel Tree, for its delightfully symmetrical inflorescence. Plants, found naturally from Nth Q'land to Nth NSW, are slow growing in the garden, eventually reaching 8m. or so. Foliage is dark green, and the leaves have wavy margins, hence the specific name sinuatus.



Stenocarpus salignus Scrub Beefwood, occurs from Cape York, all the way down to Durras. Plants are more shrubby than tree-like, with a fairly erect habit. In cultivation, my 8 year old plant is now 5m tall, but only 1m. wide, growing in a shaded site. Flowers may occur at any time, and quite often, when the plant is setting fruit, new flowers are developing.

Flowers are generally white with a greenish tinge, and are well displayed outside the foliage. Both birds and bees are keen to visit.

Stenocarpus is named for the slender seedpods (narrow fruit) which hold a number of winged seed. This seed germinates reliably, but old seed loses viability quickly.

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