



SGAP Cairns

August 2011
Newsletter 113

Society for Growing Australian Plants (Queensland Region) Inc., Cairns Branch
PO Box 199 EARLVILLE QUEENSLAND 4870. www.sgapcairns.org.au

Babinda Boulders Excursion – Saturday 16 July 2011

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By Don Lawie

Typical Babinda weather. Cloud, Overcast, light drizzle – perfect for viewing this wettest portion of the Wet Tropics. Our two cyclones earlier this year were not kind to the Boulders; the lookout track was closed for some time by fallen trees and associated debris and Cairns Regional Council have done their usual excellent job in re-opening the area. A variety of exotic weeds has become established – Bluetop (*Ageratum conyzoides*), Knobweed (*Hyptis capitata*), Snakeweed (*Stachytarpheta sp.*) etc. in the newly-opened areas and Council has responded by whippersnipping the track edges in places. The view upstream from near the Gorge Lookout has been opened out by loss of trees and this is a spectacular sight.

We lunched in the big shed and enthused at a sighting of an adult male cassowary who had patrolled the parking area perimeter for a short time before returning to his rainforest habitat. We were privileged today to have Robin Smith, a noted fern expert with us. With a combination of Robin, and Babinda's own Rob Jago, the vegetation of the area became an open book for them to read to us. Enthusiasm ran high with discoveries of fascinating plants, ranging from tiny Filmy Ferns to giant old trees. An ancient *Syzygium hedraiophyllum* (formerly *Waterhousea hedraiophylla*), its inner trunk long eaten out, was host to a plant regime typical of the site. The fascinating Filmy Fern *Crepidomanes saxifragoides* thrived in what must be a symbiotic association with equally tiny mosses and lichens covering much of the tree's trunk. Filmy Ferns are fragile, mostly tiny ferns with fronds only one cell thick. This makes them reliant on constant aerial moisture and they are in abundance in this area. *Crepidomanes* are noted for an involucre growth form and the tiny fronds projected from their wiry rhizomes looking for all the world like a forest of tiny eyelashes regarding us.

Fern Allies were also in abundance: *Selaginella*, which is always found near water, exhibited both the large *S. longipinna* species and the mat-forming *S. australiensis*. The Skeleton Fork Fern, *Psilotum nudum*, found niches in areas of broken bark, and we detected several tiny specimens of Tassel Fern at eye level.

“ We... enthused at a sighting of an adult male cassowary who had patrolled the parking area perimeter for a short time ”

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Interested in conserving native plants? Lodge a written submission to the Protected Plant Conservation Plan review:

Email:

Plants.Policy@derm.qld.gov.au

Post: Protected Plants

Conservation Plan Review

Vegetation Management Branch

Department of Environment and Resource Management

GPO Box 2454

Brisbane QLD 4001"

Review of the Queensland Protected Plants Conservation Plan

Kerry Walsh reminds us that the rules governing collection of native plants from the wild are up for review. The Department of Environment and Resource Management is reviewing Queensland's Nature Conservation (Protected Plants) Conservation Plan 2000. The review aims to improve the conservation of protected plants in Queensland and provide a more streamlined regulatory framework for government and the community.

Interested persons are invited to submit suggestions on the management and conservation of protected plants in Queensland. Your submissions will help to develop a new regulatory framework, which will be released for further consultation in early 2012.

More information on the review can be found online at www.derm.qld.gov.au/vegetation/protected_plants.html

Lodge a written submission by 1 September.

Babinda boulders excursion from page 1

With Mary on sick leave it was up to Pauline to find orchids for us and she did well – a colony of large *Cadetia* and a giant *Pomatocalpa macphersonii* were admired just near the steps to the swimming area. Further down the track Pauline pointed out *Dendrobium prenticei* in flower, a chain of *Bulbophyllum baileyii*, and a lone *Dendrobium tetragonum* exposed by cyclonic damage, high in a surviving tree. A welcome find was a small colony of terrestrial *Zeuxine oblongata* in the Johnstone River Hardwood area – a colony long thought to have disappeared – but the *Corymborkis veratrifolia* (Cinnamon Orchid) that we had previously admired were gone, buried under a pile of debris. (Rob revived Pauline's spirits by spying several healthy *Corymborkis* plants beside the gazebo where we had our afternoon tea later in the day).

Back to the pteridophiles paradise... the genus *Cyathea* was of course well represented, with tall *Cyathea cooperi* tree ferns looming up from wet gullies and many large specimens of *Cyathea rebecca* with shiny fronds and slender trunks formed clumps in favoured areas. Robin spotted a *Cyathea woolliana*, normally an upland species on the bank of a small creek. At least three species of *Diplazium* were identified, and where there was too much shade for weeds along the trackside, drifts of halberd fronds of *Pronephrium triphyllum* covered the ground. An interesting discovery was *Gonophlebium percussum*, a fern that is common north of the Daintree but rare south of the river.

A note on some of the trees : Sour Hardwood (*Ristantia pachysperma*) was a valuable endemic Wet Tropics timber tree , and grows prolifically here along Babinda Creek. As the track rises, the soil changes from granitic to basaltic and the dominant trees become Johnstone River Hardwood – *Backhousia bancroftii* – interspersed with large specimens of Onionwood – *Syzygium alliligneum* – and Rob identified a cyclone felled magnificent specimen of Black Oak (*Stenocarpus reticulatus*) which would have furnished sufficient timber to build a suite of beautiful furniture.

Just another SGAP walk in wonderland with an amiable group of friends!!



Crepidomanes saxifragoides growing with companion mosses and lichens

Cooktown Botanic Gardens Excursion

Reproduced from Tablelands SGAP Newsletter, July 2011

To SGAP

I would like to express the appreciation, on behalf of the gardens staff and of the community for once again, your magnificent contribution of your time and energy for the benefit of Cooktown Botanic Gardens.

We are always grateful and hope you enjoyed it as we did. Thank you all for your invaluable time and assistance.

regards

sandy

Sandy Lloyd

Curator, Cooktown Botanic Gardens

Parks & Gardens

Cook Shire Council

07.4069 5672 0437 910883

www.cooktownandcapeyork.com/do/nature/plants/botanic_gardens



Cook Memorial, Cooktown foreshore

International Botanical Congress, Melbourne



The International Botanical Congress, held in Melbourne last month, made national news more than once – unusual for what most would consider a relatively sedate and obscure conference.

The congress, held only once every five years, offers researchers an opportunity to present the outcomes of their research in an international forum. But there are so many things happening, so many interesting talks, so many symposia and poster sessions, that attendees (including several from the Australian Tropical Herbarium) often find themselves bewildered by the surfeit of choice. I've summarized a few choice items below, just to show the breadth and diversity of botanical discussion on show.

Researchers announced the sequencing of the flooded gum (*Eucalyptus grandis*) genome. This is the first *Eucalyptus* species to have its genome mapped, and will be of immense interest to those who wish to improve the quality of farmed timber trees, as well as helping us understand the rapid diversification of this group since the drying of the Australian continent begun about 5 million years ago.

Else Friis, a Swedish palaeobotanist, reported new fossil discoveries of diverse flowering plant floras from the early Cretaceous (145 million years



Truly grand: Eucalyptus grandis in NSW (Source: Poyt448 Peter Woodward, Wikimedia Commons)

ago). At this early stage of flowering plant evolution, most species were herbaceous, aquatic or small shrubs. However, by the end of the Cretaceous (a point marked by the extinction of the dinosaurs) a diverse large woody plant flora had evolved, including the oak family (Fagaceae), laurels and their allies, the American dogwood family (Cornaceae) and primitive allies of the *Rhododendron* (Ericaceae).

Mike Crisp spoke on the evolution of the Australian flora since the end of the Cretaceous. Amongst other insights, he revealed the rather deflating conclusion that the famous *Livistona* palms of Palm Valley in the Northern Territory, are the result of a recent introduction (birds? Aborigines?), and are not an ancient relict population left behind after the desertification of the continent.

The taxonomic sessions resolved two items of international significance – firstly, **Australian *Acacia* species will remain with that genus name** – most African species will now be placed in the genus *Vachellia*; and secondly, descriptions of new species can now be published in English or Latin, and can be published in selected electronic journals.

Finally, a Monsanto representative spoke about the company's improvement of crop yield through genetic engineering. He concluded: "*Leveraging advanced enabling technologies such as high-throughput genome sequencing, functional genomics, and systems biology in both plant breeding and biotechnology disciplines will be required to help deliver the next generation of traits in agricultural crops.*" I welcome translations of this sentence into English.

SGAP CAIRNS 2011 COMMITTEE

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Stuart Worboys

Ph. 4058 1730

Secretary

Bob Jago

Ph. 4055 2266

Newsletter

Stuart Worboys

email: worboys1968@yahoo.com.au

Webmaster

Tony Roberts

Ph. 4055 1292

August Activities

SGAP CAIRNS BRANCH OUTING

Saturday 20 August

Ellie Point, near Cairns Airport. Meet midday at the mangrove boardwalk carpark on the road into the Cairns Airport. Bring tropical strength repellent. I expect the Golden Orchids will be in flower for this walk!

After lunch and a quick meeting we'll explore the nearby mangrove and dune floras.

SGAP TABLELANDS BRANCH OUTING.

Sunday 28 August

Any queries please contact Chris Jaminon 4095 2882 or hjaminon@bigpond.com

TOWNVILLE SGAP

Meets on the 2nd Wednesday of the month, February to November, in Annandale Community Centre at 8pm, and holds excursions the following Sunday.