



Society for Growing Australian Plants Cairns Branch

Newsletter 152

July 2015

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JULY 2015 EXCURSION REPORT - CAIRNS SGAP VISITS GOLDSBOROUGH VALLEY

Don Lawie

A cool crisp winter day, sun shining, beautiful countryside, good company – all the ingredients were there for an enjoyable day out. Goldsborough Valley lies between two spurs of the Bellenden Ker range, runs south to north for about twenty kilometres and is drained by the upper reaches of the Mulgrave River. Formerly a rich source of gold, much of the area is now National Park. Vegetation is mostly tropical rainforest

A National Park campground is established about 11 km in from the junction of the road with the Gillies Highway, and we met for lunch at the day use area. Lunch in a sheltered area led to an extended Show and Tell session, with a wide variety of botanical specimens that members had brought in for discussion. Dave Barrow produced a flowering branch of Bancroft's Quandong *Elaeocarpus bancroftii* with its softly perfumed, pale cream bell-shaped flowers covering the stem and twigs most attractively. This plant is the floral emblem of Cairns Branch SGAP and so had particular significance to us. A tall rainforest tree, it is not often that one obtains a close-up of the flowers. The fruit has a very hard shell that is usually found gnawed open by the incisors of White Tailed Rats (*Uromys caudimaculatus*). If a fruit is found intact it takes about a year to germinate – if one is lucky. Dave's wife Desley ventured out with us today for the first time – Welcome, Desley!

Patsy Penny showed a branch of Bollywood (*Neolitsea dealbata*) bearing numerous small inflorescences of tiny flowers. This plant is fairly common, but I had never previously seen it in flower. The leaves have conspicuous veins and the underside is a curious dirty white colour which gives rise the species name which means “whitewashed”. The plant grows abundantly along the upper Gillies Range and is conspicuous at this time of year with masses of soft velvety new leaves.

Both Dave and Patsy had other interesting items to show and discuss and we all joined in to pool our collective knowledge.

We set off on the 1.7 km rainforest walk to Kearney’s Falls; the track is well defined and cared for by NPWS with handrails and strong steps in the steeper places. The entrance was a mass of vines – *Merremia peltata*, *Faradaya splendida* (October Glory), and masses of separate plants of male and female *Clematis glycinoides* (now *C. pickeringii*) climbing into the trees in masses of flower. Male flowers are small and grow in chains that resemble bridal tresses. The female flowers are almost head size, fluffy and creamy coloured. They can be used to cure a headache by plunging one’s face into the mass of flower – Rob says that is similar to a sudden inhalation of smelling salts.

A large Ylang Ylang (*Cananga odorata*) tree grew adjacent to the toilet block and had a few bunches of the curious, strap shaped butter yellow flowers. The flowers are highly perfumed, the species is widespread in the tropics. They are plantation-grown in Malaysia as a source of the rich Ylang Ylang perfume. At our home, late on a summer day the perfume drifts

down from the trees in the surrounding forest and make a delicious olfactory end to the day.



Zanthoxylum nitidum - Cat's Claw Vine

We strolled along the track, identifying and discussing numerous plants which ranged from the scrambler *Pothos longipes* with its leaf blade which extends into a leaf-like flattened stem (to



Dendrobium prenticei (source Dale and Deni Borders via orchidspecies.com/denprenticei.htm)

obtain extra light) shaped just like a candle flame, to majestic Lords of the forest such as Spur Mahogany (*Dysoxylum peltigrewianum*), Blue

Quandong (*Elaeocarpus angustifolius*), Poison Peach (*Trema orientalis*), and Cairns Pencil Cedar (*Palaquium galactoxylum*) among many others.

Boyd told us that he had been working on the Cairns Pencil Cedar title and had found 12 quite different species with that name. Regardless of name, the timber is a beautiful flame colour and works easily for a craftsman to make items of beauty. I have a *Palaquium* that I grew from a seed collected from this area about 25 years ago. It is shooting for the sky and already commencing to produce the distinctive rocket fin buttresses .

The forest floor is a mass of fallen leaves, sticks and old logs, well turned over by the Scrub Fowl (*Megapodius reinwardt*), though we only saw one, old, nesting mound. Kearney’s Falls are well worth the walk as they

slither down the sloping granite face in a mass of lacy spray. There is a viewing platform where the falls are framed by the leaves of a tree which I did not I.D. but which bore an extensive colony of miniscule *Dendrobium prenticei* orchids – too high for us to appreciate the small yolk-yellow flowers.

Few orchid species were seen for the day, but there were more Cinnamon orchids (*Corymborkis veratrifolia*) than I have ever seen before; every few metres, on either side of the track, were metre high spindly dark green plants, some bearing fat fruit as proof of last summer’s flowering. By Christmas time this walk will be a cinnamon perfumed delight as the orchids come into flower. It would be a perfect place for a woodland wedding with a picturesque set of steps leading to a great granite boulder...

The rainforest is Beauty and the Beast country: if the Cinnamon Orchids are Beauty, a definite Beast lurks nearby. *Zanthoxylum nitidum* is one of the most confronting vines I have seen, even rivalling Nicker Nut (*Caesalpinia bonduc*) for its confronting size and weapons. *Zanthoxylum* grows to 30 metres in length with stems up to 40 mm across, with large corky spikes, each tipped with a needle-sharp brittle thorn, all over the stem. I foolishly tested the tip for sharpness and was rewarded with a bloody fingertip.

The return walk was faster – for a SGAP walk, but we had to pause for Rob to expound on a fruiting and flowering *Pseudevania mulgraveana subsp. mulgraveana*. (shown on the front page). This small tree is only found in a small part of the Mulgrave-Russell River Valley and is remarkable for its flower and fruit. The flowers are axillary and solitary, quite small, and give rise to a cluster of fruits – up to 15 – because the flower has an “apocarpous gynoeceium”. (I confess that I had to look that up in my ancient textbook, so modern terminology may differ).

We lingered for coffee and chat but the day was fading and the cool night was approaching so we made our farewells until next month.

SGAP EXCURSION - 21 JUNE 2015

VISIT TO JARAGUN RE- VEGETATION SITE

Don Lawie

Jaragun is a fairly new natural resource management organisation in the Wet Tropics. Started about ten years ago by Liz Owen and Dennis Ah Kee, Jaragun is supported by grants and its associated charity, the Wet Tropics Biodiversity Foundation. They've employed several indigenous rangers, and have with some impressive aims: they are working towards eradicating the invasive aquatic glush weed¹ (*Hygrophila*

costata) and blue thunbergia vine (*Thunbergia grandiflora*) from the Russell River National Park, and re-planting the disturbed areas with locally provenanced plants. Chosen species for re-planting will lean heavily in favour of cassowary food plants in the hope of re-energising the local, dwindling population of the endangered bird.

Cairns Branch of SGAP was invited to inspect the Jaragun plant nursery at Gordonvale, then visit the re-vegetation site on the south bank of lower Babinda Creek. Jaragun directors Dennis and Liz made us very welcome on a damp day and gave us a run-down on their achievements so far. Their propagation unit, based on two well set-up shade houses and overflowing into the residence, was close to mind-boggling; Styrofoam boxes by the dozen were filled with propagating mix and their surfaces had dozens of seeds of plants such as cassowary plum (*Cerbera floribunda*), Onionwood (*Syzygium alliiligneum*) and an array of other, mostly cassowary food. Advanced seedlings were bagged in a very interesting mix, based on vermiculite, which looked as though the plants could not help but thrive. Not a weed was in sight.



Glush weed (*Hygrophila costata*) – a new and serious weed of the Russell River. Source: www.noosanativeplants.com.au

1 Named in ironic honour of the late John “Gary” Lush, who is reported to have released the species into the wild..



We drove to Babinda to inspect a site where WTBF are working, and paused for lunch at Rotary Park beside Babinda Creek. The park is at this time of year filled with travellers from southern states escaping from winter. The park is a free camping, Cairns Regional Council - controlled area with coin in the slot hot showers, barbecues and a dump point, popular for most of the year. The track to the planting area involved some unmade road and sodden ground so we car-pooled into 4WD vehicles for the short trip. Fortunately, the passing showers were light and brief and anyway, what would Babinda be without a bit of rain? We donned light raincoats and soldiered on.



Liz Owen and Dennis Ah Kee at Jaragun's Babinda Creek rehabilitation site.

World Environment Day, 5 June last, was chosen by WTBF for an extensive re-planting of a degraded creekbank area to link two remnant pieces of natural forest – an Alexandra Palm (*Archontophoenix alexandrae*) scrub and a swampy Leichhardt dominated (*Nauclea orientalis*) area. Before the 1970's this area was variously known as Babinda Swamp or the 47 Swamp. It was drained for cane planting and

adjoins a massive drain which was formerly Niringa or Cope Creek,



Hessian felt pinned to the ground with wire - a clever way to protect new seedlings from frequent floods along the lower Babinda Creek.

flowing from Miriwinni and entering Babinda Creek shortly before its junction with the Russell River. The confluence of the three streams results in frequent flooding of the bridge to East Russell after only moderate rain.

Preparations for planting had included clearing and poisoning a rampant covering of Singapore Daisy which had formed an impenetrable low mass on the ground. A good attendance of volunteer planters put in over 1 000 seedlings on the day. Our visit was just 16 days later and so far almost all plants are surviving. Weed regrowth in this area is phenomenal, as I know from my own experience at home nearby, and the wide spacing of plants will



The beautiful fruits of *Helicia nortoniana*

necessitate a lot of weed control before the area canopies

sufficiently to suppress weed germination. An intriguing, and I think very effective way to protect the young plants, was the pinning of a square of felt-like material about 30 cm square around the stem of each seedling. The site is subject to flooding several times a year and these mats should assist in anchoring the plant.

Another planting day is planned for sometime in August and I look forward to attending on the day. Details can be obtained by emailing dennis@wtbf.org.au.

Jaragun Nursery Species List

Archontophoenix alexandrae
(Alexandra palm)

Beilschmiedia tooram
(Tooram walnut)

Castanospermum australe
(black bean)

*Cerbera floribunda*²
(cassowary plum)

Cerbera inflata
(cassowary plum)

Endiandra montana
(coach walnut)

Garcinia warrenii
(native mangosteen)

Nauclea orientalis
(Leichhardt tree)

Phaleria clerodendrum
(scented daphne)

Pleiogynium timorensis
(Burdekin plum)

Sterculia quadrifida
(peanut tree)

Syzygium hemilamprum
(satinash)

Syzygium tierneyanum
(river cherry)

- How to tell these two species apart at seedling stage? The seedling leaves of *C. floribunda* are bullate, or textured like they're quilted; the seedling leaves of *C. inflata* are flat.



Inside a tiny fragment of remnant feather palm forest on lower Babinda Creek.

**Lower Babinda
Creek – Rainforest
remnant species list**
Ferns and fern allies

POLYPODIACEAE

Pyrrhosia longifolia
(felt fern)

WOODSIACEAE

Diplazium deitrichianum

Basal angiosperms

LAURACEAE

Beilschmiedia obtusifolia
(blush walnut)

Monocots

ARACEAE

**Dieffenbachia picta*
(dumb cane)
**Syngonium podophyllum*
(arriwgead vube)

ARECACEAE

Archontophoenix alexandrae
(Alexandra palm)
Calamus australis
(lawyer cane or hairy mary)
Calamus moti
(yellow lawyer cane)

Calamus radicalis
(vicious hairy mary)

CYPERACEAE

Thoracostachym sumatranum

FLAGELLARIACEAE

Flagellaria indica
(supplejack)

ORCHIDACEAE

Dendrobium teretifolium
(rat's tail orchid)

Eudicots

ACANTHACEAE

**Hygrophila costata*
(glush weed)

APOCYNACEAE

Ichnocarpus frutescens

ASTERACEAE

Sphagneticola trilobata
(Singapore daisy)

CLUSIACEAE

Garcinia warrenii
(native mangosteen)

COMBRETACEAE

Terminalia microcarpa
(damson)

CUCURBITACEAE

Trichosanthes pentaphylla

EUPHORBIACEAE

Macaranga tanarius
(macaranga)

LAMIACEAE

Gmelina fasciculiflora
(northern white beech)
Faradaya splendida
(potato vine)

LECYTHIDIACEAE

Barringtonia racemosa
(freshwater mangrove or
cassowary pine)

MORACEAE

Ficus benjamina
(Benjamin fig)
Ficus congesta
(red-leaf fig)

MYRTACEAE

Ristantia pachysperma

PROTEACEAE

Helicia nortoniana

RUBIACEAE

Atractocarpus fitzalanii
(brown gardenia)

RUTACEAE

Melicope elleryana
(pink euodia)

SAPINDACEAE

Toechima erythrocarpum

VITACEAE

Cissus hastata
Leea novoguineense
(bandicoot berry)

BEAUTIFUL PLANTS OF THE WET TROPICS

Lomandra – the mat rushes

One of the most widely planted native garden plants are the mat rushes, or *Lomandra*. These are a group of hardy, grass-like plants that seem to thrive on neglect.

Over the years, the family placement of *Lomandra* has been uncertain – it now sits in the family Asparagaceae. The Flora of Australia recognises 50 species of *Lomandra* in Australia, with seven or eight of these occurring in the Wet Tropics. I'll focus on four of the most common species here. Two of these species, *Lomandra hystrix* and *Lomandra longifolia* are widely planted, but quite difficult to distinguish to the untrained eye. However, there are other species that are appealing in their own way and worthy of cultivation.



Lomandra banksii

Straggly shrub.

Grows on coastal sands from Cowley Beach north.

Grows from seed. An unusual and distinctive species, worthy of a native garden.

Lomandra filiformis

Tufted growth form (*i.e.* all leaves originate from a central, basal stem), similar in habit to mondo grass.

Leaves 0.5 – 4 mm wide, often rolled.

Tip of leaf usually with 2-3 tiny teeth.



Lomandra hystrix

Robust tufted growth form, with many leaves.

Grows in rainforest near streams.

Leaves flat, thin, 5 – 10.5 mm wide; 2-4 small teeth a couple of cm from the leaf tip.

Inflorescences branched. Flowers fragrant – like port wine. Branches arise at nodes along the inflorescence stem – usually four branches at each node. Spine-like bracts associated with branches 2-9.5 cm long.

Lomandra longifolia

Robust tufted growth form, with many leaves.

Grows in a variety of habitats, including open woodlands and sunny locations.

Leaves flat or slightly () - shaped, 4.5-7.5 cm wide. Leaf apex with 2-3 teeth, the middle one larger.

Inflorescence branched. Branches arise at nodes along the inflorescence stem – usually 2 branches per node. Spine-like bracts associated with the branches.



WHAT'S HAPPENING

Cairns Branch

Meetings and excursions on the 3rd Sunday of the month.

Sunday 16 August 2015

Gillies Range Lookout at the top of Robson's Track - a Tablelands destination. To get there...

1. Drive up the Gillies Range.
2. About 1 km past the top of the range, turn right on to Boar Pocket Road - it's the first right turn, and is the road that takes you to Cathedral Fig.
3. Continue down this road towards Cathedral Fig. A little before you get to Cathedral Fig, a clearly signposted gravel track takes you down to the Gillies Lookout. You may have to go through a gate at the start of the track.
4. Be there at 12 noon on Sunday 16 August!

Sunday 20 September 2015

To be advised.

Tablelands Branch

Meetings on the 4th Wednesday of the month.

Excursion the following Sunday. Any queries, please contact Chris Jaminon on 4091 4565 or email hjaminon@bigpond.com

Townsville Branch

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

See www.sgaptownsville.org.au/ for more information.

