



Society for Growing Australian Plants Cairns Branch

Newsletter 159

May 2016

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EXCURSION REPORT - APRIL 2016

A visit to Patsy's place

Don Lawie

The Arab word for *Paradise* translates into English as *A Garden*. If Omar Khayyam had dropped in on us on Sunday he would have declared that we were picnicking in Paradise. And we would have agreed. Peter and Patsy Penny have taken a piece of weed infested land with a long history of various uses, judiciously eradicated the unwanted plants and replaced them with a variety of local rainforest volunteers.

A large table and chairs was set up on a mown space adjoining a softly rippling creek that wound its way past us, with an Alexandra Palm (*Archontophoenix alexandrae*) forest on the opposite side, ready to flower and fruit and attract a variety of doves and pigeons.

The day was fine and sunny (for a while anyway) after some heavy rain two nights previously and the air was fresh and cool. We enjoyed lunch and a catch-up and a plant raffle which resulted in the planting of two Brown Silky Oak (*Darlingia darlingiana*) trees in an intriguing little rainforest gem named Annie's Forest. Annie's arose after the creek burst its banks some years ago and deposited debris and plant seeds washed down from the 660 metre mountain in torrential rain; Peter consolidated it all into a circle of seedlings and mowed the space between forest and creek, just a few hundred metres from their home. A Mueller's Stag Beetle fluttered to the grass and the sunshine displayed its multi-hued iridescent beauty. The sun seemed to be bothering the large insect so after many



Mueller's Stag Beetle (*Phalacrognathus muelleri*: LUCANIDAE)

photographs it was carefully put up into a leafy tree.

We welcomed Barry Jago, who is noted for his intricate photos of rainforest flowers which are often tiny and out of reach, and also for his crafting of realistic reproductions of rainforest fruits – a selection of which were on display. Hope to see more of you, Barry. We missed Barry's cousin Rob, our guru doyen who is



Mischocarpus exangulatus in fruit

undergoing therapy – our hopes and goodwill go to you, Bob.

A walk down to the Russell River disclosed a variety of mangrove plants and a flowering *Mischocarpus exangulatus* with masses of silvery



Aglaia sapindina

inflorescences which will produce orange/red, dewdrop shaped fruit to delight a variety of birds.

A prolifically flowering vine in the riverside treetops defied identification and we will await its fruit - if any. Barry found a fruiting specimen of *Aglaia sapindina* and a *Pittosporum rubiginosum*, also fruiting with attractive red seeds on display. A light shower and wading across a flooded causeway didn't dampen the mood of the day and we made our way back to Annie's for smoko. President Tony suggested that we try to find the two new species of mangrove plants that have recently been discovered by a researcher in the Cairns City environs; we'll do some general mangrove I.D. at the same time so it promises to be a fun and educational.

MANGROVE

MADNESS

Last month's newsletter (www.sgap Cairns.org.au/Newsletters/158_Apr16.pdf) reported the first Australian record of the large mangrove tree, *Bruguiera hainesii* - right in the suburbs of Cairns!

This month, Cairns SGAP will visit the small population of this rare tree in Portsmith.

What is a mangrove?

A mangrove is not a species, it's a lifestyle.

The word mangrove can refer either to the tree/shrub dominated ecological community that exists in the intertidal zone, or the plants that grow within that community. This is a tough life, but it comes with many benefits. To survive in these conditions, the mangroves must cope with salt-filled water supplies, living breathing root systems that pass through oxygen free muds, and the occasional onslaught of storms and cyclones. Mangroves cope by excluding or excreting excess salt, they have fascinating and devious root structures that help get oxygen into their under-mud root systems, and they have proved surprisingly resilient in resisting storms. Indeed, after the terrible Boxing Day Tsunami of 2004, communities protected by mangroves were generally far less damaged than those on open coastlines.

Diversity in the mangroves

Norm Dukes excellent book, *Australia's Mangroves*, lists 41 flowering plant species and hybrids grow in the intertidal zone. Although these different mangrove species share a common habitat, they come from a broad diversity of flowering plant and fern families. They include species from the eucalypt family (*Osbornia octodonta*: Myrtaceae), the gardenia family (*Sciphyphora hydrophyllacea*: Rubiaceae) and the primula family (*Aegiceras corniculatum*: Primulaceae).



Within the mangrove community, it's fascinating to see how tiny variations in elevation, freshwater input and salinity can influence the distribution of individual species. At Cairns airport, for instance, you'll find black mangroves (*Lumnitzera*) on the salty landward flats, whilst right on the channels you'll find stilt mangroves (*Rhizophora*) and grey mangroves (*Avicennia*).

The family with the most mangrove species is the Rhizophoraceae, which includes the familiar and spectacular stilt mangroves (*Rhizophora*), the

orange mangroves (*Bruguiera*) and the yellow mangroves (*Ceriops*). The family also includes the familiar terrestrial tree, *Carallia brachiata*.

Distinguishing *Bruguiera hainesii*

The target of our excursion this month, *Bruguiera hainesii*, is recognised as Critically Endangered by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. Across south east Asia, less than 200 trees are known, and wild populations are subject to ongoing clearing for coastal development. This makes our Cairns trees internationally significant, both as a range extension and for the conservation of the species. So why have they remained unknown for so long? Partly due to the lack of an educated eye to find them, but also because the whole genus is bloody hard to identify.

So when you're trudging through the mud, remember *Bruguiera hainesii* is characterised by:

- like all *Bruguiera*, flowers have a calyx of 8-15 rigid pointed lobes
- it matures to a large tree up to 20 m tall
- flowers are large, more than 20 mm across. Unlike other large-flowered *Bruguieras*, they are usually borne in clusters, not singly.
- flower petals have a bristles on the tip, and a deep cleft with a single long bristle.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

Cairns Branch

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

15 May 2016 – Portsmith Mangroves. Meet 12 noon at the western end of Spence St (see map). Don't be deceived by the little dogleg in the road where Spence crosses Lyons. Bring lunch, sandfly repellent and mud-proof shoes.

21 May 2016 - "Walks of the Wet Tropics" talk by Paul Curtis, 10 am, Botanic Gardens Visitor Centre.

12 June 2016 - Community Bike Ride. Starts 10 am. Meet at Centenary Lakes freshwater lake picnic area on Greenslopes Street. www.wettropics.gov.au/wet-tropics-events-april-august-2016.html for details.

June 2016 – Stannary Hills

July 2016 – Emerald Creek Falls

August 2016 – Julatten (to be confirmed)

September 2016 – Cattana Wetlands, Smithfield

7-9 October 2016 - Yabba Capricorn - see , p 4 & 5 for details.

October 2016 – Jumrun Nature Walk, Kuranda.

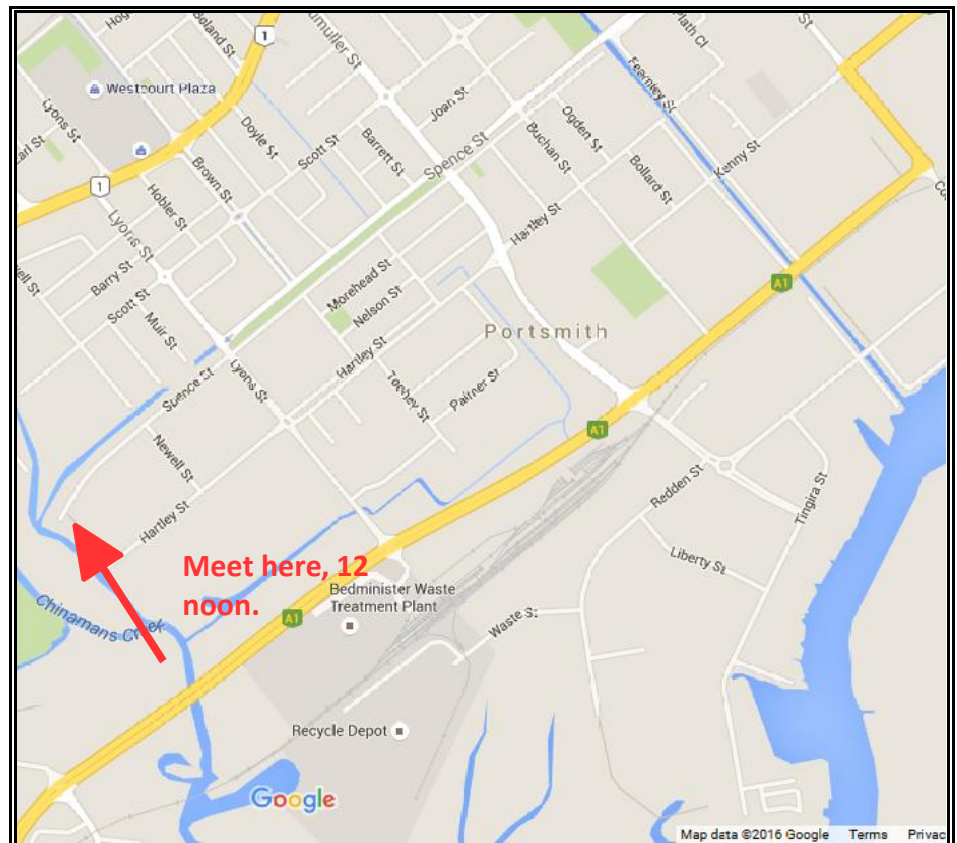
Tablelands Branch

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.



SGAP CAIRNS BRANCH 2016 COMMITTEE

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