

Society for Growing Australian Plants Cairns Branch

NEWSLETTER

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Tecomanthe burungu in its natural habitat in the Daintree rainforests. The green calyx lobes are keeled, distinguishing this species from *T. hillii*.

Tecomanthe burungu

One of the Wet Tropics' most spectacular flowers, *Tecomanthe* sp. Roaring Meg, has been formally described as *T. burungu* by Frank Zich and Andrew Ford of CSIRO. The species name *burungu* was chosen in consultation with Eastern Kuku Yalanji Traditional Owners and is a place name for Roaring Meg Falls.

It is most easily distinguished from the related *T. hillii* of southern Queensland by its keeled (*i.e.* raised centreline) calyx.

Rainbow Gums in Indonesia

Stuart Worboys, rainbow gum images by Gary Wilson



In the 1870s-1890s, the mountain ash of South Gippsland were felled indiscriminately, and their logs burnt. The massive stumps lasted well into the 20th century, and were sometimes repurposed as schools or stables.

restricted to Australia. Some readers may be familiar with the rainbow gum, *Eucalyptus deglupta*. Named for its spectacularly colourful bark, it is a native of New Guinea, Indonesia and the Philippines, and is occasionally cultivated in Australia. The tree is tall, reaching 80 m in the wild.

Gary Wilson of Kuranda recently visited the unlogged lowland forests of Seram, in eastern Indonesia. Here he and his companions came across rainbow gums reaching proportions rivalling their Australian relatives. Even at this size, the gorgeous colour in the bark was still evident. These are his photos, taken whilst on expedition.

The giant eucalypts of Australia are a familiar and impressive component of the nation's wet sclerophyll forests. In the far north we have *Eucalyptus grandis*, in the continent's west is the enormous karri (*Eucalyptus diversicolor*), and in the south east are *Eucalyptus globulus* and, of course, the mountain ash, *Eucalyptus regnans*. An individual of this species, "the Centurion" in Tasmania, was recently measured at 100.5 m, making it the world's tallest flowering plant.

But the giant eucalypts are not



RHODODENDRON LOCHIAE, R. NOTIALE AND R. VIRIOSUM

Gwen Elliott. First published 2015 by the Australian Plant Society, Maroondah.

A point of discussion at our November specimen table, was the identification features of the Australian Rhododendron, or Rhododendrons.



Rhododendron lochiae, in cultivation at the Dandenong Ranges Botanic Gardens (formerly the National Rhododendron Garden). This plant's parents originated on Bell Peak. Note the curved floral tube and red anthers.

Rhododendron lochiae was named by Ferdinand von Mueller in 1887, from a specimen collected on Mt. Bellenden Ker in northern Queensland. Other *Rhododendron* plants were subsequently found on a small number of other mountain peaks in Qld, and were introduced into cultivation. They were grown by Australian plant enthusiasts and also by members of the Rhododendron Society around the world. It was found that they hybridised fairly readily with other closely-related non-Australian species in the vireya group from south-east Asia and Papua New Guinea and numerous cultivars were developed.

In the 1990s botanist Lyn Craven and Bob Withers were studying *Rhododendron lochiae*, and found some distinct differences from the species originally described by Mueller.

The flowers of the original type specimen had a curved, pinkish-red corolla tube, with the stamens all at the top, designed to achieve effective bird pollination.

Nearly all of the plants in cultivation had a brighter red, straight floral tube, with the stamens sometimes continuing right around the tube. Because these were the plants being widely known and grown in

cultivation, Craven and Withers proposed that the name *R. lochiaie* should be conserved for this selection, and in 1996 they proposed the new name of *Rhododendron notiale* be applied to the plant originally described by Mueller.



"*Rhododendron viriosum*", a name not currently recognised by the Australian Plant Census. This variety, occurring north of Cairns, has larger flowers with straight floral tubes and black anthers than the varieties that occur south of Cairns.

significantly from the original plant of *R. lochiaie* as named by Baron von Mueller.

Being a Botanist is not always easy. Botanical studies will continue, and who knows how the next generation of botanists will decide to treat the Australian *Rhododendron* species (singular) or species (plural).

Although this was designed to be a stabilising action, it was not supported by the committees responsible for the nomenclature of flowering plants. The name of *R. notiale* was declared to be invalid and in 2002 the plants widely cultivated, and with the straight floral tube, were given the official name of *Rhododendron viriosum*.

Thus, according to an article by Lyn Craven in the Journal of The Australian Rhododendron Society, Vol. 43, 2003, "People are going to have to get used to thinking *viriosum* for pre-1996-2002 mention of *lochiae*, and having to nut out what is meant by *lochiae* in the post 1996-2002 literature (i.e. does it mean *lochiae* or *viriosum*?) There will be no quick fix. Rather than becoming vengeful we should recall the words 'forgive them, for they know not what they do'."

But the saga does not end here. The most recent edition of "The Australian Plant Census" now recognises only one Australian species of *Rhododendron* - i.e. *R. lochiaie*. with both *R. notiale* and *R. viriosum* currently regarded simply as synonyms of *R. lochiaie*.

This has undoubtedly been done in an effort to solve the confusion previously caused, but the fact still remains that the majority of the Australian *Rhododendron* plants in cultivation differ

WHAT'S HAPPENING...

Cairns Branch

Meetings and excursion at 12 noon on the 3rd Sunday of the month.

Sunday 17 February 2019

Tour of the Australian Tropical Herbarium and campus gardens at James Cook University Cairns Campus. Heading north from Cairns, follow the signs to JCU, turn right into McGregor Road, and take the second entrance into

the campus. Park in car park 9 (see map), and meet at the front entrance to building E2 - the Sir Robert Norman Building (circled).

Bring lunch, mosquito repellent and your curiosity.

Townsville Branch

Meetings at 8 p.m. on the second Wednesday of the month, February to November, in Annandale Community Centre. Excursions the following Sunday.

Contact: johnelliott@sgaptownsville.org.au

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Tablelands Branch

Meetings on the 4th Wednesday of the month. Excursion the following Sunday.

Contact: Chris Jaminon on 4091 4565 or email hjaminon@bigpond.com

