

# SGAP Cairns

Society for Growing Australian Plants Inc., Cairns Branch  
Celebrating our 40th year

**NEWSLETTER 199 APRIL 2020**



## 2020 Annual General Meeting

*Don Lawie*

### AGM, lunch and a garden walk

The Spanish language has two words for a gardener; the first, *jardinero* simply means one who tends a garden, but the second, *plantista*, indicates that we are dealing with a highly superior *jardinero*.

As we pulled up in front of No. 10, it was immediately obvious that we were visiting a *plantista*. The entranceway is a steep slope leading down to the house, with only a narrow strip of garden above the building. Given that we were in Cairns – capital of the Wet Tropics of Queensland – one could well think that we were visiting somewhere Out West.

A healthy clump of thriving *Banksia robur* revelled in the reflected heat from a low wall of algae-blackened local mudstone - itself a handsome

feature – and led us to a flowering *Brachychiton vitifolius* in a stone surround followed by a large mat of prostrate *Grevillea*. Opposite was a healthy specimen of *Carmona retusa* (now called *Ehretia microphylla*) then a bed of *Gardenia scabrella* took us to the front door and another meeting of our group of SGAP friends.

Lunch and chats over, sated with Stuart's decadent hummingbird cake, we set off for a garden inspection. First attention grabber was yet another anomaly – a *Scaevola taccada*, Sea Lettuce, which as the name implies belongs to the beach and not to the steep Redlynch Valley. This specimen was as good as any seaside plant, displaying its delicate white hand-like flowers redolent of the legend of the eponymous Roman warrior who sacrificed his hand to prove his integrity.

A circular bed of delicate white purple-tipped *Orthosiphon aristatus*, Cat's Whiskers, featured as a centre piece a three metre high grafted *Brachychiton vitifolius*, continuing the dry country illusion. The property back wall was masked by a row of native trees, notably a *Diploglottis berniana*, its trunk naked for three metres,



**SOCIETY FOR GROWING AUSTRALIAN PLANTS INC., CAIRNS BRANCH**

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#### 2020-2021 COMMITTEE

President: Tony Roberts

Vice President: Don Lawie

Secretary: Matt McIntosh ([secretary@sgapcairns.org.au](mailto:secretary@sgapcairns.org.au))

Treasurer: Val Carnie

Webmaster: Tony Roberts

Newsletter: Stuart Worboys ([worboys1968@yahoo.com.au](mailto:worboys1968@yahoo.com.au))



topped by a profuse foliage of the typically enormous pinnate leaves. This tree produces a delicious apricot-size and coloured fruit, a cassowary magnet [Editor's Note: I look forward to the cassowary visits to the yard.]



A shrubbery-lined path provides access to the back garden, with shadehouse in one corner, and vegetable beds in another.

Next was a *Melicope rubra*, formerly *Evodiella muelleri*, a host tree for the Blue Ulysses butterfly, about to burst into a mass of lolly-pink flower. Corner position was ably taken by a *Xanthostemon chrysanthus* cultivar which may reach a height of four metres and delights the birds and butterflies with its golden, nectar-laden blossoms.

Stuart's orchid house and fernery occupy an elevated concrete pad and contain a select collection of plants to please the eye. Pride of place was taken by the biggest *Vanda hindsii* that I have seen, a plant that is destined for life after death as a specimen in the Australian Tropical Herbarium.

The foregoing just touches the edges of what we saw; suffice to say that we were impressed, not just by the plants and their apposite siting but also by the spick and span appearance and total lack of weeds. This garden really must be entered in the Council Garden Competition this year, Stuart and Joe.



*Brachychiton vitifolius*

Still breathing heavily from the excitement of the garden inspection, we plunged into the humdrum of the AGM. All positions were rapidly filled, with Tony Roberts leading us

for another year and Matthew McIntosh assuming the secretary job since Sandy is leaving us for Darwin. We bade a regretful farewell to Sandy who has become a key person in the executive and has charmed us all with her ever-cheerful efficiency. A hard act to follow but Matt is equal to it.

The year's programme was discussed and we came up with a mixed set of garden and bush walks and our hosting of the Yabba in August. Our group can look forward to another year of Education, Conservation and Preservation and, in the light of current events, let us hope that each one of us is preserved.



*Banksia robur* - Tropical Banksia.

### Excursion Plans for 2020.

April - Private garden, Edge Hill

May - Greenbush, Gordonville

June - Cooktown Botanic Gardens

July - Burra Range / White Mountains

August - Mossna, Gorge

September - The new bike path from Glenoma Park to Goomboora Park, Brinsmead

October - Wolpen Creek

November - Davies Creek Falls and Christmas Party

**Cancelled**  
**UNTIL FURTHER**  
**Notice**

# History of the branch - the last 20 years.

## *Stuart Worboys and SGAP Cairns Branch Members*

*This article follows on from Mary Gandini's "History of the Branch", which can be found on the Home Page of the SGAP Cairns website ([www.sgapcairns.org.au/index.html](http://www.sgapcairns.org.au/index.html)). Both this article and Mary's piece will be published in the Native Plants Queensland Journal to mark the 40th anniversary of the Cairns Branch.*

In its early days, the Cairns Branch of the SGAP actively promoted the cultivation of native plants through propagation and planting. This role has now been taken on by local Natural Resource Management Groups such as Treeforce and Trees for the Evelyn and Atherton Tablelands. Instead, the last 20 years, the role of SGAP in Cairns has become more focussed on educational and promotional aspects of the organisation's charter. With Cairns Branch lying at the heart of the Wet Tropics, the nation's most biodiverse bioregion, there is a lot to promote!

Long-time Cairns Branch members, Donald and Pauline Lawie, were SGAP Indigenous Orchid Study Group leaders after taking over from Len Butt in 1995 until they resigned in March 2011, during which time they produced 42 newsletters. The Study Group was then closed as no new leader emerged. Is it because Don and Pauline were just too hard an act to follow! Although officially retired, they remain our principal orchid experts, kindly sharing their knowledge of propagation of this difficult group, and still able to spot the difference between a *Pomatocalpa* and a *Sarchochilus* at 40 paces.

Perhaps our most significant long term project has been our annual trip to Cooktown Botanic Gardens. In conjunction with our friends in the Tablelands Branch, each dry season we make the 300 km journey to Cooktown for a weekend of work and nature exploration. Although fluctuating membership and energy lead to a few interruptions in the mid-2000s, the commitment has renewed over the last couple of years. Our work has contributed to the development and maintenance of two garden beds at the gardens: one devoted to plants collected at the Endeavour River by Joseph Banks and Daniel Solander, the other a more eclectic mix of local native species donated over the years by SGAP members. We have also provided inventories of the gardens and nursery. The latter venue is not without its surprises - very large native tarantulas lurk beneath the pots and can provide quite a fright to arachnophobic botanists. But the hard work is not been without its rewards. After a day's work on Sunday, we usually head off on an excursion to see some of the far northern region's marvellous flora.

Our group continues to explore the botanical diversity of the Far North. Each month we visit a different garden or bush location, usually producing a species list which appears in the next newsletter. Some of the sites are parks and private gardens close to



*Most years, Cairns and Tablelands SGAP hold a weekend-long working bee at Cooktown Botanic Gardens. It's a great opportunity to catch up, share propagation skills, and explore the unfamiliar flora of Cooktown and surrounding areas. In 2005, the ladies were potting up seedlings in the nursery.*



the city, others are remote and require special permissions or four wheel drives to access.



*Coralie Stuart, at the end of the SGAP Russell River trip, October 2020.*

On occasion we will join up with other north Queensland groups, as individuals or as a group. Joint trips have visited distant and floristically fascinating areas such as the Burra Range, Stannary Hills, the Cape Bedford sand dunes, and the Babinda Boulders reserve. For the Cairns group, standout excursions have included:

- the diverse and beautifully maintained garden of Mary and David Gandini (now sadly sold);
- the walk through upland rainforest to see a stand of *Stockwellia quadrifida*, one of the largest and rarest trees in the Wet Tropics;
- a weekend camping on the the Australian Wildlife Conservancy's Brooklyn Station;
- the orchid-filled complex mesophyll rainforests along Harvey Creek, at the foot of Mt Bellenden Ker.

A favourite destination is a property owned by the family of one of our members, which lies near the mouth of major Wet Tropics river and is only accessible by boat. Believe me, there is nothing—absolutely nothing—half so much worth doing as simply floating down a tropical river with friends and spotting orchids, rainforest trees and rare pandans.



*In June 2016, members from Cairns, Tablelands, and Townsville branches met in Herberton on a grey and drizzly morning. We guessed 30 people met for a day exploring the unusual heathland flora growing on the highlands to the west of the Atherton Tablelands.*



*End of year gathering at the Cairns Botanic Gardens, 2003. L to R: (standing) Rob Jago, David Warmington, Tony Irvine, Ian Walker, Pauline Lawie, Barbara Collins, Val Carnie, Jan Elder, Dr Ing Toh, Browyn Hookey, Helen Irvine, Mary Gandini. (at front): Don Lawie, Bianca Jago, Stuart Worboys.*

Our membership is diverse and many are active in the community outside of SGAP. One of our members,

Sharren Wong has been involved with the conservation and rehabilitation of a Cattana Wetlands, an important local wetland reserve. She has produced a beautifully illustrated book on the natural history of the wetland. Our treasurer, Val Carnie, each year liaises with the Cairns Show Society to provide a special prize for outstanding native flower displays. Our president of some years, Tony Roberts, is curator of the Cooktown Botanic Gardens and

has been a prime organiser of celebrations marking the 250th anniversary of Cook's first voyage and

the scientific work of Banks and Solander. Stuart Worboys, a botanist at the Australian Tropical Herbarium, teaches university botany and prepares our monthly newsletter. Rob Jago has been a member since the start. He is a fine field botanist with an eye for the unusual and new, has rediscovered extinct species and discovered new species, and has contributed many thousands of specimens to the Queensland Herbarium. In December 2018 he was awarded an honorary Doctor of Science in recognition of his significant contribution to the study of botany in north Queensland.

In 2020, SGAP Cairns remains a friendly group whose meetings are as much opportunities for social outings in diverse natural settings as it is for scientific enlightenment. Members appreciate having a chat about the plants they're passing and also a bit of a laugh as we ramble along at SGAP pace - generally acknowledged as 800 m per hour. We have welcomed several new members in recent years who have brought a youthful enthusiasm and hope for the long-term survival of the group.



*The great Stockwellia deep in the rainforest at Boonjie, one of the biggest trees in the Wet Tropics, and a favourite destination for SGAP. For scale, can you see the person standing at the centre of the photograph?*

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## Orchids of the Melville Range

*Stuart Worboys*

In February's newsletter, I reported on an expedition to the Melville Range in remote Cape Melville National Park, 320 km north-northwest of Cairns. Sponsored by a Japanese documentary film-making crew, and with the support of National Parks and Traditional Owners, the expedition took a diverse group of zoologists and natural historians to a remote and rarely visited range of high bouldery hills covered in rainforest.

The Melville Range is small, covering roughly 100 square kilometres and with barely 1,700 ha of that area rising above 400 m elevation. The highest peaks rise to around 600 m. Although not particularly high, it is enough to trap moisture-bearing winds blowing from the Coral Sea, and it is estimated to receive 1,800 mm of rain each year.

Much of the landscape is a boulderfield of enormous granite tors. And yet, at its heart is a stretch of rainforest full of palms, hidden streams and mysterious endemic reptiles. On ridges and peaks, elegant hoop pines rise above the rainforest canopy, their outstretched branches raking moisture from the passing clouds. The constant

drip-drip-drip maintains a damp habitat their vicinity even when the clouds have not released their rain.

Although focussing on birds, reptiles and invertebrates, several of the expedition's participants harboured a secret passion - orchids! We were fortunate to be joined by Lewis Roberts OAM, an orchid expert and dedicated and energetic field naturalist ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lewis\\_Roberts\\_\(naturalist\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lewis_Roberts_(naturalist))). With so many pairs of eyes on the hunt for orchids, I was able to give my attention to other plant groups, although it was impossible to ignore the excitement of new and unexpected discoveries.

The following discussion reports all orchid records from the Melville Range, including the foothills. The records include not just those from the November 2019 expedition, but also observations made by Lewis Roberts and David Baume (September 2018), and scientific collections made by Conrad Hoskin and Harry Hines (December 2013) and others.



### ***Bulbophyllum baileyi***

Widespread on the east coast from the Torres Strait to Cardwell. First recorded by Conrad Hoskin on the Melville Range in 2013.

### ***Bulbophyllum newportii***

Found in the Eungella Ranges west of Mackay, and widespread in the Wet Tropics. Recorded from the Melville Range once by Conrad Hoskin and Harry Hines in 2013 - the northernmost record for the species, and the first for the Cape York bioregion.

### ***Cadetia taylori***



*Cadetia taylori*, growing deep in a rock crevice on the Melville Range.

Now known to be a *Dendrobium*, this modest and pretty orchid has been collected in mountain rainforests from the Iron Range to Tully. Collected on the Melville Range during the 2019 expedition and by Hoskin and Hines in 2013.

### ***Cheirostylis ovata***



*Cheirostylis ovata*, photographed on Black Mountain near Kuranda.

### ***Cymbidium madidum***

A common and familiar orchid that occurs from NSW to the Iron Range. Although we saw this on the Melville Range during the 2019 expedition, we didn't collect it - a shame as it had not been previously recorded.

### ***Dendrobium bigibbum***



*Dendrobium bigibbum*. This specimen was photographed near Coen in 2013.

The legendary Cooktown Orchid was not seen in 2019, but was observed by Roberts and Baume the previous year.

### ***Dendrobium canaliculatum***

The common and very pretty Brown Tea Tree Orchid should be common in the lowlands around the Melville Range.

### ***Dendrobium discolor***

Possibly Australia's biggest orchid (more on that later), the Golden Orchid was observed in lowland vine thickets on the boulderfields in 2019.

### ***Dendrobium jonesii***

The Oak Orchid is common in mountain rainforests from the Iron Range to the Paluma Range. Although previously observed, the 2019 made the first scientific collection from the Melville Range.

### ***Dendrobium semifusum***

Another of the Tea Tree Orchids, this fragrant species was first observed by Roberts and Baume.

### ***Dendrobium smillieae***



*Dendrobium smillieae*, photographed in woodlands near the Daintree River in August 2017.

One of my favourite native flowers, the species was first observed on the Melville Range by Roberts and Baume.

### *Dendrobium speciosum*

The widespread and well-known King Orchid occurs as far south as Victoria. It was first collected on the Melville Range by Hoskin and Hines in 2013. The collection represents a range extension of 200 km for the species, and a first record of the species on Cape York. It was relatively common around rocky outcrops near our campsite.

### *Dendrobium teretifolium* (syn. *D. sulphurea*)

A species of pencil orchid was observed by Roberts and Baume. However the species could not be confirmed.

### *Dendrobium tetragonum*

The distinctive and aptly named Spider Orchid occurs in rainforests from Kiama to the Mcllwraith Range, with one old record from the Iron Range. In 2019, it was spotted growing low on rainforest tree trunks, but this was not the first time it was seen on the range. It had been collected back in 2013 by Hines and Hoskin.

### *Dendrobium trilamellatum*

One of the rarer Tea Tree Orchids, it has been reported in the vicinity of the Melville Range, although not seen by our crew.

### *Dendrobium wassellii*



*Lewis Roberts' Cucumber Orchid flowered in cultivation at James Cook University, and herbarium specimens have been taken.*

scientific specimen.

### *Pholidota imbricata*

The Common Rattlesnake Orchid is widespread from Townsville northwards, across the top end and throughout tropical Asia. This unremarkable lithophyte was collected for the first time on the Melville Range in November 2019, where it was found in a boulder-lined creekline.

### *Plectorrhiza brevibras*

The aptly named Small Tangle Orchid grows as a loosely attached epiphyte. It always appears as an untidy mass of roots hanging in vegetation. It was reported by Roberts and Baume, but as yet there are no scientific collections for the Melville Range.

### *Podochilus australiensis* (syn. *Appendicula australiensis*)

The Native Stream Orchid was reported by Roberts and Baume, but as yet there are no scientific collections for the Melville Range.

### *Pomatocalpa macphersonii*

This small attractive orchid was collected as a flowering specimen during the 2019 expedition. It is a widespread epiphyte in rainforests north from Rockhampton, however this specimen was the first from the Melville Range.

### *Robiquetia gracilistipes*

A robust orchid well known from Cape York and the Wet Tropics, the Large Pouched Orchid had previously been collected from the range by Hines and Hoskin. On the 2019 trip, it was found growing on boulders along a shaded creekline.

### *Taeniophyllum baumei*

*Taeniophyllums* are a group of tiny leafless epiphytic orchids. This particular species was observed by Lewis Roberts and the orchid's namesake, David Baume, on their 2018 trip. Their record is both a significant range extension for the species (previously only known from north of Coen), and the first for the Range.

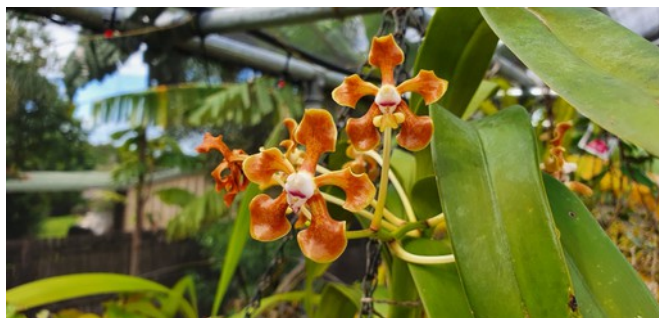
### *Thrixspermum congestum*

The Cupped Hairseed Orchid is an untidy epiphyte, recorded from the Northern Territory, Cape York but most common in the Wet Tropics. The collection made on the 2019 expedition was the first from the Melville Range, and the first record from between Cairns and Bamaga.

### *Trachoma*

The Spectral Orchids are a small group of rather pretty epiphytes. The individual recorded by Roberts and Baume in September 2018 could not be identified to species.

### *Vanda hindsii*



The Cape York Vanda vies with the Golden Orchid for the



title of Australia's biggest orchid. Although it doesn't produce the massive long canes that are so distinctive of *Dendrobium discolor*, it does produce a sprawling branched mass of stems that blanket their exposed bouldery habitat.

For nearly 30 years, there have been anecdotal reports of the Cape York Vanda on Cape Melville - the Range was mentioned as an unconfirmed occurrence when the Commonwealth listed the species as "Vulnerable".

More recently the species was one of the 20 or so observed by Baume and Roberts in 2018. However, the two specimens taken on the 2019 expedition were the first scientific collection of the species from the Melville Range, and the southernmost wild record of the genus anywhere in the world. The specimen illustrated here has only just flowered (April 2020), and is destined for the collection of the Australian Tropical Herbarium and Queensland Herbarium.

### ***Zeuxine oblonga***

The Common Jewel Orchid is a widespread ground orchid.

It was observed by Roberts and Baume in September 2018, the first record of the species in Cape Melville National Park.



*The 400 m high bouldery slopes of the Melville Range are a formidable obstacle to explorers. From the helicopter, these boulders don't look much, but they're really as big as cars!*

# Upcoming events

## **NEWS FROM NATIVE PLANT QUEENSLAND REGIONAL COUNCIL**

Notice has come through from Qld Region that YABBA 2020 is being postponed to 2022. The plan is that arrangements will stay the same as a lot of work has already gone into the planning. It has moved 2 years because 2021 is national conference for NSW around the same time.

On a more prosaic note, please be advised that Fees are due 31st March. Members can either pay Queensland Region fees themselves (Queensland Region postal and direct deposit details are in the Native Plants journal) or direct deposit into the branch account. Please note that branch fees are NOT to go to Queensland Region. Please email Val Carnie (via the Secretary) to organise fee payment.

### **Cairns Branch**

Sadly, all meetings and excursions have been cancelled until further notice.

### **Townsville**

Townsville Branch advise "Regretfully, our meetings and outings are cancelled as per recent advice, until circumstances make it safe to resume."

Website: [www.npqtownsville.org.au](http://www.npqtownsville.org.au)

### **Tablelands**

Tablelands Branch advise "Meetings have been cancelled until further notice."

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