



Society for Growing Australian Plants (Queensland Region) Inc.

Cairns Branch
PO Box 199
Earlville Qld 4870

Newsletter No. 77
MAY 2008

Society Office Bearers

Chairperson	Ann Mohun	40 310 551
Vice Chairperson	Mary Gandini	40 542 190
Secretary	Greg Keith	40 981 130
Treasurer	Robert Jago	40 552 266

Membership Subscriptions- Qld Region- Renewal \$39.00, New Members \$44, each additional member of household \$1.00

Cairns Branch Fees -\$10.00 Full Year

To access our Library for loan of books, please contact David Warmington

Dates to remember

Cairns Branch Meetings and Excursions – third Saturday of each month.

NEXT OUTING will be held on Saturday May 17th, at Cattana Wetlands. We will tour the proposed site prior to the works. **Standby for further information including times and directions from Greg who will email the details soon.**

Tablelands Branch – Sunday following the meeting on the 4th Wednesday of the month.
Any queries please phone Ian Evans 4096 5770.

Townsville branch will hold their next General Meeting at 8.00pm Wednesday 14 May at the Community Centre–Annandale Shopping Centre

Looking Ahead

We will be making our annual visit to Cooktown Botanic Gardens on Sat/Sun 21/22 June. As usual there will be plenty to do including installing some new Cooktown Orchids (provided by the Tablelands Branch) around the property. Please mark these dates in your diaries.

Trip Report

REDDEN ISLAND EXCURSION

Sat 19 April 2008

We gathered for lunch at Keith Edwick Park in Machan's Beach, and our new President Ann conducted a short and efficient business session. We then walked across the Gundy Anton Bridge over Redden Creek to explore the island. Redden Island forms the north bank at the mouth of the main arm of the Barron River and is part of the Barron delta. We followed the swamp along the creek bank for a distance then cut across the back dunes to the river bank near the mouth and came back to our starting place along a well-defined track.

Vegetation varied from dense swamp, open grassland, and varied eucalypt/melaleuca growths with slight variations in elevation of the dunes governing the type of plant cover. The swamp adjoining Redden Creek at the bridge is very close to the creek mouth and was dominated by *Rhizophora stylosa* with its distinctive flying buttresses reminiscent of the architecture of ancient cathedrals in Europe. Some flowers were present, and very long propagules – to 50 cm – were ready to drop. A white flowering *Sonneratia alba* about ten metres high was the only representative of this species that was seen. Further upstream the *Rhizophora* gave way to many large specimens of *Heritiera littoralis* with their distinctive silvery leaf undersurface.

Heritiera, or Looking Glass Mangrove, are very good epiphyte hosts and these did not disappoint. Masses of Pencil orchids – *Dendrobium teretifolium* – competed for space on the rough bark with Elkhorn ferns – *Platycerium hillii* – in clumps up to a metre in length. Robin, the fern enthusiast, and Pauline the Orchid Lady, enthused at find after find in the swamp, totally ignoring the biting midges and green ants that dropped from above to savage exposed flesh. Robin was mystified by the absence of Mangrove Fern – *Acrostichum speciosum* – which should have been here in

abundance, but pleased with the *Drynaria rigidula* which appeared in every suitable niche. Robin found a slightly elevated ridge in the swamp which was covered in dozens of oak leaved *Drynaria* – *Drynaria quercifolia* – seeming a bit like *Acrostichum* to me but producing their typical oakleaf nest leaves as they clasped the base of nearby trees.

The find of the day was when Pauline pounced on a large specimen of the orchid *Chiloschista phyllorhiza* spreading across the trunk of a *Heritiera* like a many-armed green spider. This fascinating orchid is not rare, but is rarely seen because of its cryptic habit and unusual appearance. The plant has neither leaves nor stem since the flattened roots, up to 15 cm in length, act as both leaf and anchor, being inflated with a load of chlorophyll. The inflorescence is borne from the centre of the root rosette on a wire slim peduncle which bears a few small, beautifully crystalline flowers with a pale yellow labellum. *Chiloschista* are colony orchids and we subsequently found what would amount to many hundreds of specimens in this rich piece of swamp. No flowers; we usually associate flowering with the cooler weather though Jones' book says "Nov – Feb or sporadic". Liz offered to monitor the plants and let us know when flowering commences – it will be a wonderful sight among the mangrove columns. We saw such a flowering of *Chiloschista* on an island in the Daintree River some years ago.

Other orchids sighted for the day included several large clumps of Onion Orchid – *Dendrobium canaliculatum* – surviving on exposed limbs of dead/dying large Melaleuca trees, and healthily growing specimens of our old favourite, Golden Orchid – *Dendrobium discolor* – reaching the light above the swamp canopy at intervals. One terrestrial orchid – *Geodorum densiflorum* – was found by Andrew in a colony beside the track in the dunelands. These had developed almost mature fruits and the typical "Shepherd's Crook" appearance of the peduncle had straightened and elevated in preparation for dispersal of the millions of seed contained in each fruit.

Numerous *Xylocarpus* (Cannonball Mangrove) seedlings to 40cm high and still attached to the parent fruit segment appeared at the swamp edge. These had drifted thus far during the river's wet season high flow and were doing their efficient pioneer job of extending the mangrove area's dimensions. We left the green ants and midges to look for other victims and moved to the dune country. Numerous Native Arrowroot – *Tacca leontopodioides* - were in late fruit and the leaves were fading away. Large specimens of Carbeen – *Corymbia tessellaris* – and Burdekin Plaum – *Pleiogynium timorense* – appeared, along with stands of *Melaleuca* - possibly both *leucadendron* and *quinquinervia* . Many of the large old *Melaleuca* were dead or dying while other stands remained in a healthy condition. Perhaps the deaths were caused by a protracted dry season in recent years which had allowed an incursion of subsoil salt water to poison their roots. Ant Plants – *Myrmecodia beccarii* – and some Button "Orchids" – *Dischidia nummularia* – appeared on the *Melaleucas*, an expected seaside combination.

We were very impressed by the size and number of Cowley Myrtle shrubs growing in the sandy soil. These ranged in size from tiny seedlings to three metre high and wide shrubs covered in profusion with their delicate myrtaceous flowers in shades of pink. *Lithomyrtus obtusa*, formerly *Myrtella obtusa*, occurs just inland from the seafront along numerous beaches in the Wet Tropics. It would be a highly desirable garden specimen but to my knowledge (and experience) is impossible to propagate successfully. This plant would be a rewarding challenge for a keen propagator, I believe that the commercial spinoff would be limitless.

Only a few weeds were seen, in particular the awful *Sansiveria*. I understand that there is an organisation that has been caring for Redden Island, and they have planted many small trees in an extensive re-vegetation project. It was heartening to see that each small tree is marked with flagging tape, carefully planted and mulched, and not a

sign that any had been stolen. There was some discussion about the suitability of the particular species planted and whether they were of those species native to this small area. Re-vegetators face the everpresent problem of obtaining suitable planting material of appropriate provenance and perhaps some of the plants, although certainly native to the larger vicinity, would not have appeared here naturally. This is a difficult area of discussion.

The riverbank leading to the open sea of Trinity Bay had a timeless appearance, with driftwood logs and numerous people fishing from the banks. A large trimaran was moored close to the bank in what must have been an idyllic spot for a maritime holiday. Our time was running out and we made our way back across the bridge for smoko and a pleasant chat about the wonderful place on the doorstep of Cairns city that we had been privileged to explore and to appreciate in convivial company.

By Don Lawie

Web Review

Check out

<http://www.chippynews.com/worldclock.htm> for an interesting perspective of the world.

If you have any book reviews, pictures, notes on growing tropical Australian plants or trip reports you'd like published in this newsletter, please send them to me: Tony Roberts – email travelling_botanist@yahoo.com.au

Andrew Picone