



Society for Growing Australian Plants (Queensland Region) Inc.

Cairns Branch
PO Box 199
Earlville Qld 4870

Newsletter No. 81
September 2008

Society Office Bearers

Chairperson	Ann Mohun	40 394 942
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 (\$29.00 concession), 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

September 20th

Mount Lewis. Meet near the Highlander Hotel, at the intersection of the Mount Lewis Road and the Mossman Mount Molly Road, Julatten. 9:00am. From here we will drive up to the gate. See map on last page.

NEXT MONTH

Potentially, **Yarrabah**, but I am not certain. Who is organising? If its not organised then behind the Yorkeys Knob school then...

Tablelands Branch

Sunday following the meeting on the 4th Wednesday of the month.

Any queries please contact Chris Jaminon on 4095 2882 or hjaminon@bigpond.com.

Bramston Beach

Don Lawie

A perfect sunny winter day saw us meet for lunch and a chat at the carefully tended picnic area on the beach foreshore. We decided to walk along North Bramston towards Tom's Rock, about 3 km from the end of the road.

The normally land-locked creek was flowing strongly across the beach, so it was shoes off and trousers rolled for a paddle across the ice-cold fresh water, with Andrew gallantly assisting Pauline when her footing slipped on the loose sand.

Items of botanical interest began appearing immediately. Pauline and I had walked this area several times last year in our assessment of the Golden orchids (*Dendrobium discolor*) but today the botanical expertise of Mary and Ing gave us a deeper understanding of the vegetation that crowds right down to the high tide mark. David's geological studies were of value also as he "read the rocks" for us, giving us a fascinating tale of 600 million year old subduction and obduction, schists that came from deep below the surface and carried pieces of other molten rock with them, which then awaited our passing to interpret and admire.

Just a few of the species that interested me particularly were: a Kwila tree (*Intsia bijuga*) which is the source of a very hard, heavy and durable timber much used in the

tropics for such things as wharf construction and outdoor furniture – familiar to me from our New Guinea days. This tree is easily grown from seed, but in my experience is a very slow grower - I have some seedlings

planted at home from seeds taken from the Kwila tree in the grounds of James Cook University at Smithfield during our SGAP visit there several years ago and they are still very small.

Noni tree (*Morinda citrifolia*) was a large specimen growing almost at water's edge and fruiting sparsely. Our next door neighbour has a farm of these trees, with his cultivar producing mango-sized fruit, whilst the "wild" tree fruit were not much more than a large, warty, mulberry size. Many medicinal claims are made of this fruit, and it is a traditional bush medicine. Gus, our neighbour, gave me a bottle of his juice recently when I had the flu, and I reckon that it ameliorated my symptoms and a second bottle prevented Pauline getting it at all.

A newly famous "diesel tree" (*Pongamia pinnata*) was the next item to marvel at; a member of

the Fabaceae family, *Pongamia* produces small bean-type fruit with a large kernel. When crushed, this kernel produces a light, fixed oil which is reputed to be good enough to use in a diesel engine's fuel tank without any further treatment. The trees are common along the Russell River.



Wedelia biflora, a shrub that thinks it's a vine, was prolific in areas of almost pure sand. This is one of the plants collected at the Endeavour River by Banks and Solander in 1770, and a specimen is planted in the Banks/Solander Garden at Cooktown Botanic Gardens. It loves the area of better soil in the garden and we have to cut it back severely on each of our annual visits to tend the garden.

We reached the beginning of the masses of Golden Orchids, which grow in thousands on the edge of the rock cliffs and were flowering very prettily today (top photo previous page). We had both Mary and Pauline with us and what would be an outing

with that pair if it didn't include orchids? They examined flowers on various plants and discussed the interesting variations in flower size, shape, colour and form, even though all were growing in identical, harsh seaside conditions.

And all of a sudden it was time to turn back, return to the picnic area for smoko – pausing only to examine some Bottle brush (*Dendrobium smilliae*) orchids, which were not yet in bud (middle photo previous page), and reflect on another top day in top company.

Mount Spurgeon to the Upper Daintree

Andrew Picone

Mount Spurgeon, on the other side of the McLeod River, behind a locked gate and up a long track is seldom visited. It is also one of the best places to see well developed and un-logged upland rainforest and the most intact old-growth wet sclerophyll forest in the Wet Tropics.

It was from Mount Spurgeon that Ing and I began a fairly arduous walk to an even more remote place called Rose Gum Flat. Our plan was to spend some time amongst the Yellow-bellied Gliders that live in the wet sclerophyll forests and to visit a series of waterfalls on the upper Daintree River.

Walking along an old carriageway, apparently cut by tin miners a while back, we passed through a fine old forest of Rose Gum, *Eucalyptus grandis*, with an Epacridaceae understorey of either *Acrotriche aggregata* or a *Leucopogon* species. The transition from sclerophyll to rainforest was sharp, and soon we were walking beneath tall Mt Spurgeon Black Pines (*Prumnopitys ladei*), Purple Kauri Pines (*Agathis atropurpurea*) and tall *Oraniopsis* palms amongst many other species.

Leaving the carriage way we weaved through the rainforest following flagging tape, which would eventually lead us to our campsite, at least 15 km away. Pretty soon we

were back in wet sclerophyll forest but this time with *Eucalyptus resinifera*, *Syncarpia glomulifera*, *Allocasuarina torulosa*, *Banksia aquilonia* with a diverse understorey of grasses, sedges, lilies and vines.



Throughout much of the open forest were colonies of terrestrial orchids including *Caladenia* (left) and *Thelymitra*. There were also spectacular flowering clumps of *Dendrobium* on rocks and often in the *Allocasuarina*.

After traversing many kilometres, up and down a few hills, crossing a couple of creeks, and up a very steep climb we were in rocky, dry and wind-swept ridge top vegetation of *Eucalyptus reducta* and other dryer, heathy species. Finally, after heading down to the valley floor we were amongst a fine stand of Rose Gums, signalling a much anticipated arrival at our camp for the next three nights.

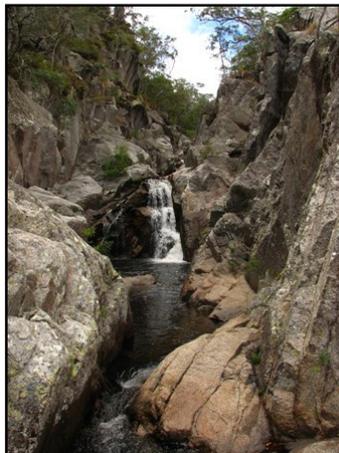
Heading out to the falls the next day we passed through open grassy forest of *E. reducta*, *resinifera*, *Syncarpia* and *Allocasuarina*. Occasionally there were shrubby areas of *Leucopogon* and *Banksia spinulosa*. We dropped in to see a colony of Ant Plants, *Myrmecodia platytyrea-antoinii*, that are growing mostly on rocks but also in a few of the surrounding trees (photo, next

page). Closer to the falls, the vegetation becomes drier with Bloodwoods and Ironbarks, *Xanthorrhoea johnsonii* and *Lophostemon confertus* amongst the rocks above the falls.

The upper reaches of the Daintree River meander in a northwest direction through upland rainforest until it reaches the western escarpment of the Carbine Tableland. Here, where Ing and I had walked, the sudden drop in elevation combined with aspect see the river plunge through a labyrinthine granite boulder field surrounded by dry open forest and woodland. Turtles, snakes, water dragons and frogs inhabit this wondrous rocky habitat.

The falls (right) were too big to explore in a single day so we didn't actually make it through all of them. There is the possibility that there are crocs and the bottom of the falls as there are in the not too distant Adeline Creek falls, so I'm told. We'll have to find that out next trip.

The Yellow-bellied Glider, sometimes called Fluffy Glider, feeds primarily on the sap that drips from incisions made in the sap wood of the tree (right). There are about 50 *Eucalyptus resinifera* trees marked around Rose Gum flat



that are known to be or have been active feed trees for the Yellow-bellied Glider. This area has been the subject of a biennial glider census for a number of years. In 2007 the count was about 22 animals in just under 250 hectares (R. Russell pers.com.).

Eucalyptus resinifera, obviously vital to the survival of the Yellow-bellied Gliders in the Wet Tropics, plays a further significant role in the local ecology. The incisions made by the Gliders are also exploited by a variety of other animals. In 2007 a Striped Possum, Feather-tail Glider and Sugar Glider were also observed feeding on the sap. In addition Antechinus, and a variety of birds visit the trees to feed during the day.

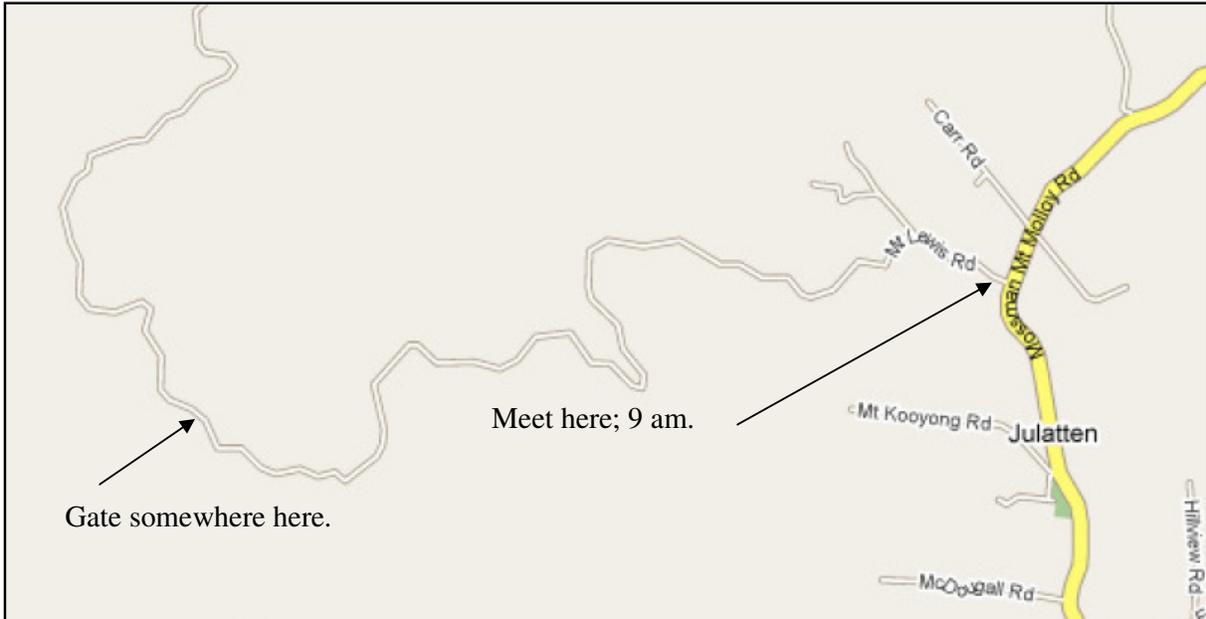
The wet sclerophyll forests of the Carbine and adjacent Mount Windsor Tableland represent the northern most occurrences for a number of cooler climate east coast species of flora and fauna. The forests themselves are likely to have originated during cooler times. The survival of the northern population of Yellow-bellied Gliders and a range of other northern sub-species depends on how we manage these forest and how they adapt to climate change.

On the subject of Kwila

Kwila, otherwise known as Merbau, is still being harvested, apparently at an unsustainable rate, from rainforests of New Guinea. The link below goes to an interesting website with an informative interactive map of New Guinea forests.

<http://www.greenpeace.org/new-zealand/news/the-end-of-kwila>

Mt Lewis Map



Newsletter Contact:

For any editorial matters please email: sgapcairns@yahoo.com.au with newsletter in the subject box.

This newsletter by Andrew.