



**Menai  
Wildflower  
Group**



# Newsletter of Menai Wildflower Group March 2018

## Thank You Jason

We would all like to thank Jason Cockayne for his long service as President of the Menai Wildflower Group. He served for a mammoth five years, representing us in the community and chairing our meetings. No one was better at making visitors feel at home with a warm welcome to our sometimes draughty meeting place. For a time, Jason was also President of Oatley Flora and Fauna, serving as liaison between our groups.

He brought greatly appreciated Hurstville volunteers to help us out on the Mounds which accelerated and enlarged the scope of the project beyond what was originally envisaged. He regularly comes to the IRFB after hours and battles to bring the weeds under control.

We hope to see a lot more of him in the future.

*Menai Wildflower Group*

## Contents

<b>Thank You Jason</b> _____	<b>1</b>
<b>New Look for 2018</b> _____	<b>1</b>
<b>Coming Local Events</b> _____	<b>2</b>
<b>Treasurer's Report and Membership Renewal Information</b> _____	<b>2</b>
<b>APS Group Activities</b> _____	<b>2</b>
<b>Christmas Cheer</b> _____	<b>2</b>
<b>Tip News</b> _____	<b>2</b>
<b>Of Bugs and Plants</b> _____	<b>3</b>
<b>Special Interest</b> _____	<b>3</b>
<b>Nurseries Report</b> _____	<b>4</b>
Tip Nursery.....	4
The IRFS compound nursery.....	4
The Mounds.....	5
IRFS Gardens .....	5
Orchids .....	5
<b>Snapshot of 2017</b> _____	<b>6</b>

## New Look for 2018

We have an exciting program of speakers lined up for the coming year and a slightly different format for meetings. Our Facebook page is still the best way to keep up to date with activities, including meetings, working bees and walks.

As we do not have a President this year, the MWG committee will be sharing presidential duties. Hopefully this will involve more people, giving extra variety and 'zing' to our meetings which will keep our audience on the edge of their seats! Various members will take the organisational roles necessary for chairing a meeting, introducing and thanking guest speakers and making any reports that are topical. This will lighten the load for the executive and encourage others to practice their latent skills in organisation, advocacy and public speaking in small, non-threatening doses. We are seeking your input to meetings too. Have you a favourite plant that you can tell us about? A photograph, or even a sample, would be a good illustration.

If you would like to be involved please add your name to the list that will be circulating at the February meeting. Write your name and preferred month if you would enjoy introducing or thanking a guest speaker. Of course, the kitchen elves love having a new recipe to set out for supper too!

*Pam Pitkeithly*



Correa "Dusky Bells" in my garden. P. Pitkeithly.

## Coming Local Events

- 13 Feb Seed Bank visit (Mt Annan Botanic Gardens).** Meet at Illawong RFS 9am to carpool. Then meet at Mt Annan café at 10am. Please let **Lloyd** (0400 431 216) know by Monday **at the latest** if you are planning to attend.
- 14 Feb Meeting at IRFS 7pm, Peter Chia from Muru Mittagarr.**
- 3 Mar IRFS Propagation from 1pm**
- 8 Mar Working Bee at IRFS from 9am**
- 21 Mar Meeting at IRFS 7pm, Ann Young on Upland Swamps.**
- 7Apr IRFS Propagation from 1pm**
- 12 Apr Working Bee at IRFS from 9am**
- 18 Apr Meeting at IRFS from 7pm. Matthew Clark, APS Environment Officer.**
- 6 May IRFS Propagation from 1pm**
- 10 May Working Bee at IRFS from 9am**
- 16 May Meeting, at IRFS from 7pm. Topic and speaker TBA**

## Treasurer's Report and Membership Renewal Information

We will no longer be providing financial information i.e. bank balances at our monthly meetings. For those interested, as at 31 January, 2018 Current A/c was \$8,948.74. When your membership is due you now need to renew online at <http://austplants.com.au/about-membership> However, if you have problems or do not have access to the internet, Sharon is happy to collect your cash, cheques or credit card payments and process them in the new system for you. Membership fees are: Individual \$56, Individual concession \$48, Joint \$66, Joint concession \$58. If you wish, you can renew for 3 years. *Sharon Pearson*

## APS Group Activities

Don't forget you can also attend meetings with other groups – Sutherland and East Hills aren't too far. Details of their planned events are available at APS NSW [www.austplant.com.au/](http://www.austplant.com.au/), <http://easthills.austplants.com.au/> and <http://sutherland.austplants.com.au/>

## Christmas Cheer

The festive spirit was in abundance at our annual Christmas social with carollers from Wearne Bay Cubs presenting a medley of old favourites plus the 12 Dogs of Christmas – a canine take on the classic. The catering reached its usual high standard, a testament to the many great cooks who love Ozzie plants. Thanks to all who contributed and particularly to the set up and take down volunteers.



Red flowering Gum, Fowler Rd, Illawong. P. Forbes

## Tip News

Doug Patterson, MWG's delegate on the LHRRP (Lucas Heights Resource Recovery Park) Community Reference Group, reports on activities at the tip. Suez minutes are available, if requested, from him.

The low rainfall has greatly reduced the number of complaints about odour with only one significant spike in mid-winter.

The new compliance scientist at Suez reported that the Council have inspected the mulch windrows and made recommendations on weed control. Suez will start on Milk Vine and Lantana and Council will also use their high pressure sprays on the Caster Oil plants. Suez reported that they rely on Lloyd and co-workers as well. I requested that the actions be included in the Suez Q/A logs.

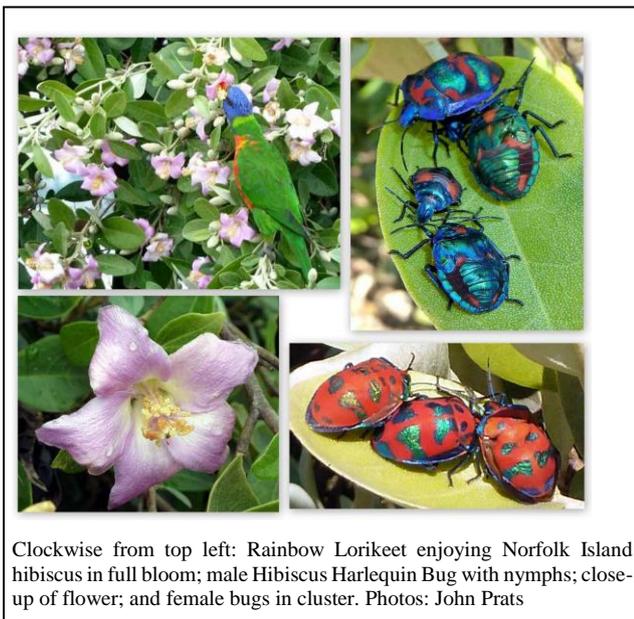
The tip will open one hour earlier at 5am soon and the weighbridge out lance has been duplicated to allow number plate recognition of commercial vehicles. This should make it safer and reduce traffic at peak hours.

Barden Ridge has a new children's playground opened in November next to the Sutherland Shire Christian School.

*Doug Patterson*

## Of Bugs and Plants

It's amazing what people find while walking their dogs: perhaps a stash of illegal drugs, bones or even dead bodies! Fortunately for me, while walking our dogs along the beachside walk at Sandringham a couple of years ago, I found none of these. As Toby and Mitzi sniffed under a tree, my attention was drawn to numerous colourful bugs on the tree. You couldn't help but notice them as parts of the tree were literally glistening with these iridescent insects. I took photos and after some googling back home found out that they were Hibiscus Harlequin Bugs *Tectocoris diophthalmus* also known as Cotton Harlequin Bugs as they are a minor pest of cotton plants. An even less flattering name for them is "Stink Bug" as they emit a foul odour when disturbed.



Clockwise from top left: Rainbow Lorikeet enjoying Norfolk Island hibiscus in full bloom; male Hibiscus Harlequin Bug with nymphs; close-up of flower; and female bugs in cluster. Photos: John Prats

The females are orange with small patches of metallic blue scattered over their body while the males are red with metallic blue patterns over their body. The patterns in both differ between individuals. They grow to about 2cm. The

female bug lays eggs and attaches them around a stem during early summer.

Their favourite food is the hibiscus plant family (Malvaceae), but they will also eat Illawarra Flame Tree flowers, grevillea and bottlebrush saplings. As mentioned, they also like cotton plants and can be a pest as they can introduce a fungus that rots the cotton boll.

I wasn't quite sure what species of hibiscus they were on. My plant identification book revealed three, two on the east coast of Queensland and one in Norfolk Is. Curiosity aroused, I took a clipping to the Sydney Botanical Gardens Herbarium and was advised that it was from the Norfolk Island Hibiscus, *Lagunaria patersonia*.

As I regularly walked this path, I noticed that from about August to October the tree was full of the bugs. But, around November, not one could be seen and by this time the tree was in full bloom with magnificent pink flowers – no wonder it is widely cultivated as an ornamental tree!

While I have mentioned the virtues of this tree, it was only later on that I found out that it has one unpleasant characteristic - one that would stop many from planting them in their gardens, especially close to neighbours, i.e. the seed pod is covered in hairs that may cause severe skin irritation. I found this out when I touched one of them: the effect was immediate – I felt the fine needles penetrate my fingers. Luckily there was a faucet nearby and I quickly managed to wash and scrape the sharp hairs off my hand.

Still, despite this, when planted in the right spot, this tree adds a pleasant feature to our suburban landscape. The Harlequin Bugs, however, when present, make this tree even more special.

References:

[http://www.brisbaneinsects.com/brisbane\\_stinkbugs/Harlequin.htm](http://www.brisbaneinsects.com/brisbane_stinkbugs/Harlequin.htm)

<http://www.ozanimals.com/Insect/Hibiscus-Harlequin-Bug/Tectocoris/diophthalmus.html>

*John Prats*

## Special Interest

**Deadline for contributions to the winter newsletter is Sunday 6 May.**

Any items suitable for inclusion in the newsletter may be sent to the Editor (Post to Secretary or email [mwfeditor@gmail.com](mailto:mwfeditor@gmail.com)) before the deadline. Preferred format is **unformatted** text in a **Word** file.

We are trying a new day for **working bees**. They will be held on the **second Thursday** of the month at IRFB starting at 9am. Come along and enjoy the garden while you weed, mulch and munch. Many hands make light work!

**Propagation days** at Illawong Rural Fire Station on **Saturday 1pm** and **Tuesdays 9am** are a great opportunity to be involved in interesting projects and learn new skills. Members can assist in MWG ventures or propagate species for themselves. Please contact Lloyd (0400 431 216) for more details regarding any nursery opportunities.

Keep up to date with our **Facebook page** or **website**, <http://menaiwildflower.austplants.com.au/>.

**Meetings** are held at the Illawong Rural Fire Brigade Headquarters each month except January. Most meetings are held on the second Wednesday at 7pm but over winter (June to September) this changes to the second Saturday of the month at 1pm. New members and friends are welcome.

*Lloyd Hedges*

## Nurseries Report

If you would like to learn more about propagating plants and help produce plants for MWG sales or the many exciting and valuable programs we are involved in, you can join the nursery group at any, or all, of the following times and locations.

- Monday Tip Nursery, 9am (contact Lloyd for details)
- Tuesday, 9am Illawong Rural Fire Station
- First Saturday, 1pm Illawong Rural Fire Station

You do not have to commit to attend every week or for the entire session – the Fire Station in particular suits just dropping in when the feeling and the time suits. Come when you can and enjoy the friendly and productive community. Please contact Lloyd (0400 431 216) for more details on these opportunities

## Tip Nursery

Marian W has got the Tip Nursery's year off to a good start, tubing up 600 Sheoak (*Allocasuarina littoralis*) seedlings for the **Save the Glossy Black** campaign being run by Pat Hall of the Southern Highlands NP's. Land clearing has reduced this vital food source for the Glossy Blacks causing the numbers to decline.

Several fitting failures have cost us tube stock during this passage of extremely hot weather and Ron has his hands full keeping up with the maintenance. Like me the nursery is feeling its age.



## The IRFS compound nursery

The nursery at IRFS is seeking new and interesting species to propagate to broaden the range of plants we have to offer members. Any propagating material is welcome. Annette saved the *Eremophila* specimens that Lyndal Thorburn had left behind when she talked to our group, and brought them to the nursery over one week later. Despite their age, we were very successful, and now have a whole bunch of new species available.



Anne and Ruth are producing plenty of new plants. They are also tubing up a lot of both white and pink flannels which we hope will be

available by autumn. We are trying out a theory that early sown Pink Flannels will flower in Spring instead of mid-Summer as they normally do.

## The Mounds

The soil on the mounds has been so dry that we have had to do some watering to avoid damage to the newer planting and the rain forest trees. The combination of heat and dryness this summer has been brutal.

**SSC Bushcare** has lent us a hand to keep a handle on the Morning Glory threatening the Mounds gardens. On Thursday 1 February, Brad Van Luyt brought the materials, equipment and knowledge and led Pam F, Greg, Alan Cole and myself into battle. Before the morning ended we ran out of healthy MG and moved on to the privet, lantana and asparagus fern. A very worthwhile effort. Thanks Brad and SSC Bushcare. This was an exercise worth repeating.



If you have a chance, take a look at the small euc on the top of the middle mound next to the caesia. The first flower buds are still forming but the developing bright red of the bud cap can be seen. It will open to reveal yellow flowers. Illyarie is the common name for *Eucalyptus erythrocorys*.

## IRFS Gardens

We are going through a rebuilding phase as some of the older specimens give way to the new. In the front garden the grevilleas so robustly pruned by Ray Brown received plenty of water and were coming back beautifully but they have received a setback. The NBN crew

tunnelled under the road to put in a 110mm conduit. Where did the drill head emerge? Right next to the pruned grevilleas. There has been some root damage but they should survive. The other grevilleas nearby have responded to the extra water available by flowering heavily in February.



Out the back the Ivory Curl tree (*Buckinghamia celsissima*) is in full flower and looking magnificent. Unfortunately, the flowers are best seen from below. It should still be looking good at the February meeting.

## Orchids

Unfortunately, we no longer have Graeme's impressive collection of native orchids. This is a great loss to the group. When he donated them several years ago we built a shade house for them, but I declined to take charge of their upkeep as I already spend too much time on MWG matters.

As they came into flower they sold like hot cakes and the group raised much money. No one was willing to take over their upkeep so the quality declined and Graeme, to his disappointment has had to take them back to his place for some TLC.

He has offered to give them back when they are in flower but I have refused the offer as we do not deserve them.

Our loss is not only financial, because when we had demonstration days Graeme and his orchids were always the crowd pullers.

*Lloyd Hedges*

## Snapshot of 2017

Sharon prepared this report on the group's activities for 2017 for APS administration.

Indicator	Number
Total number of activities held during 2017	<b>119</b>
Number of these activities that involved <b>talks</b>	<b>11</b>
Number of these activities that involved <b>walks in bush land</b>	<b>2</b>
Number of these activities that involved <b>garden visits</b>	<b>0</b>
Number of trips away (involving overnight stays)	<b>1</b>
Number of these activities that were open to and attended by <b>non-members</b>	<b>31</b>
Number of <b>conservation activities</b> , e.g. submissions in response to proposed developments that impact on local and other bushland (please list submissions), bush regeneration (please list sites)	<b>0</b>
Number of activities that facilitate <b>propagation and planting of Australian plants</b> (i.e. nursery management, plant propagation).	<b>91</b>
Number of community events (non-APS) where the district group had a presence (e.g. stall, speaker, demonstration)	<b>12</b>
Number of other activities not covered by the above	<b>2 (Xmas evening, SSC plant survey &amp; seed collecting)</b>
Number of district group members who actively <b>volunteer</b> in APS activities (e.g. organise group events, lead walks, staff stalls)	<b>10</b>

## 2017 Highlight Activity/Event

In 2017 we decided to host a practical demonstration of a problem common to many gardeners: how to prune Grevilleas successfully.

First we engaged Ray Brown for a Saturday afternoon in October (knowing of his great work in establishing Grevillea Park at Bulli) and then advertised as widely as possible via social media and local avenues, including neighbouring APS groups and community centres, making it clear that everyone was welcome to watch the show. Added attractions were the splitting of the native bee hives our members had set up in the Illawong Rural Fire Services gardens, some great raffle prizes, a tour of the gardens and an appealing afternoon tea.

Ray armed himself with serious "boy toys", much to the envy of all the dads watching, then proceeded to do his trademark savage pruning. He enjoyed the horrified gasps from those who had never seen his unique approach to pruning and progressed around the grevilleas, making the manipulation of heavy tools look so effortless whilst he commented on various types and even answered questions from both beginners and experts. It needed several stalwart members of MWG to keep clearing away the "clippings" as Ray worked his way around the gardens. He assured us that the pruned specimens would show new growth very quickly and that has proved to be so. This practical session was so enjoyable and instructive that the audience ignored the light rain falling and tried to keep pace with the magician with the brushcutters, secateurs and loppers until we rounded them up for afternoon tea of homemade goodies and a chat with friendly members, both regular features of our meetings at Menai region.

*Sharon Pearson*

Please address all correspondence to the Secretary,  
PO Box 3104 Bangor NSW 2234

Website is [www.menaiwildflower.austplants.com.au](http://www.menaiwildflower.austplants.com.au)

E-mail is [menaiwildflower@austplants.com.au](mailto:menaiwildflower@austplants.com.au)

President	Vacant	
Vice President	Pam Pitkeathly	9771-9789
Secretary	Annette Tuckfield	9543-1490
Treasurer	Sharon Pearson	0405 508 552
Editor	Pam Forbes	
Publicity Officer	Marion Payne	9543-1040
General Committee	Margaret Olde	9543-2242
	Jan Riley	95434727
	Mary Hedges	9543-1216