



Newsletter of Menai Wildflower Group

March 2023

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Membership numbers over the last 18 months have hovered around 50, gaining a few members and losing an equal number. Given the decreasing size and enthusiasm of MWG one solution to the big work load would be that we consider amalgamating with Sutherland or Harbour Georges River.

P Forbes & G Davies

New Committee for 2023

The AGM resulted in the predictable outcome. We have no President, but Graeme has taken on the role of Vice President as well as remaining as Secretary, with assistance in his role from Marion, who is also in charge of communications/promotions. Jan continues her valuable job as the Treasurer, and Lloyd remains Propagation Officer till he makes a move to Canberra. He'd love to hear from anyone interested in apprenticing in that role. The speakers' program is being organised by Helen Patience, as Speaker Convenor. She is already close to a complete program with interesting speakers each month. However we are looking for people to write up a short report after each meeting. Please let Graeme know if you can help. Mary, famous for her delicious slices, is Supper Convenor and will ensure that we have provisions for our afternoon teas. Alan remains on, and we welcome Patsy to the committee.

Remember that this small group appreciate all help offered so if you can assist, please come forward. Many hands make light work! We always need weeders, propagators, chair movers, cooks and meeting reporters and lots of other small jobs crop up. Food for thought.



Still raining, P Forbes.

November Meeting

Pam Pitkeathly expressed the feelings of all MWG's members when she thanked Marg and Peter Olde for their work as 2022 President (and the woman behind the big man). Aside from that position, Oldes have supported MWG, and more generally APS NSW, in official positions, volunteer

work and in finding out more about Australia's wonderful flora. Graeme similarly thanked Mary and Lloyd Hedges who have also contributed through their various positions in the APS as well as hours of propagating, weeding, constructing, maintaining and networking for MWG. Lloyd has run the nurseries for many years and organises the fire station garden. And lastly, both Mary and Marg can be relied on to ensure there is cake and a cuppa at any event.

At our Christmas Social it was Pam Pitkeathly's turn for recognition of her enormous contribution over the past many years.

After the AGM we enjoyed a seasonal floral presentation by Helen Patience. Helen used a selection of Australian natives in seasonal colours to create a Christmas table centrepiece. Helen used a ring of Oasis, available at Wholesale Floristry Supplies at Padstow, which she filled with Billy Buttons, with their bright spherical flowers and grey foliage, Christmas Bush, fairly essential, soft, furry Flannel Flowers, and vibrant red and yellow Kangaroo Paws, on a base of Leather Fern with silver sprayed gumnuts. Candles could be added. Thanks, Helen, for the inspiring festive ideas.

G Davies



Yellow daisy near Guthega, P Forbes.

February Meeting

Beth Mott, whom you might be familiar with from the Powerful Owl Project, has now moved to the Glossies in the Mist section of the Save Our Species Program run by NSW Environment and Heritage (NSW Government).

Saving our Species (SoS) is a conservation program that involves volunteers, scientists, businesses and community groups. MWG Tip Nursery has propagated almost 30000 *Allocasuarina* and other plants for the Glossies program. We were therefore interested to hear Beth's update on the progress.



Female glossy black-cockatoo, centre.
Photo: Charles Dove

Image from SOS Black Cockatoo Factsheet, NSW Environment and Heritage.

Beth introduced us to the Glossy Black Cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus lathami*), one of three species of black cockatoos in NSW and listed as Vulnerable. More information on these lovely birds is available in a [factsheet](#).

She outlined the Southern Highlands program which is an initiative to encourage revegetation by private landowners to support the cockatoo population. It is hoped to create a "Great Wildlife Corridor" running from the Blue Mountains to Morton NP which will allow the cockatoos, and many other species, to move between food sources and habitation at different seasons. Beth came on board when the initiative expanded to include plantings not only by private landowners but also by NP contractors. Beth has more planting days planned for the future so if you would like to be involved, please contact her at beth.mott@environment.nsw.gov.au.

More information on the program is available at the NSW Environment and Heritage website.

Thanks Beth, for such an informative and engaging talk and to various members for their input to the report.

Editor



White Daisy, Mt Stilwell, P Forbes

Maddens Falls Walk

In January, eighteen APS and National Park Association members gathered at Darkes Forest on a warm but dry day for this excursion led by Lloyd Hedges to Maddens Fall.



Some of the excursionists above the falls, L Hedges.

Because of recent rain, the falls were going well and, as we would expect at this time of year, there were many orchids seen on the short walk from the car park down to the falls.



Cryptostylis erecta, L Hedges.



Maddens Falls, G Jackson.

G Jackson

Snowy Mountains Trip

Menai members joined Sutherland APS for the biennial mountain holiday at Pygmy Possum Lodge, Charlotte Pass, in February. Around 35 enjoyed the walks in stunning scenery delighting in a range of alpine flora. Each time we visit showcases different plants or different aspects of their growth. There were plenty of daisies, *Wahlenbergia*, *Euphrasia*, Leek Orchids and *Stylidium* flowering but I also noticed many interesting seeds this year, as we were visiting later than normally. As usual the iconic Snow Gums were gorgeous. See the later article for an update on the threats they face.



Getting ready for the Mt Stilwell Walk, P Forbes.

John Arney again provided his fun selection of great walks through different sections of the park. A new one for this year was the recently opened walk along the Snowy River from Charlotte Pass to Guthega. The track is a pleasure to walk on, with raised board walks and well paved paths but it proved harder than expected as the day warmed up and we found the last few steepish hills ended with a tall temporary staircase around track works.



The end of the PaluboWalk, L Hedges

We walked to Mount Stilwell and from Sawpit Creek to the Thredbo River which also had an upgraded board walk beside the river. The most hardy conquered the Main Range Walk, a long, arduous but satisfying challenge. Sawpit Creek

Waterfall loop was one of the easy walks people used to recover and we ended with the traditional Rainbow Lake and a quick stroll up to Charlotte Pass Dam. The Rainbow Lake walk provided excitement in the form of at least two snakes and many annoying march flies.



Stackhousia and Bidgee Widgee, P Forbes.

Look out for Liz Aitken's video presentations. We appreciate very much the effort she put in to document the wonderful Snowy stay.



Dora captured this misty morning at Charlotte Pass.

We wended our way home weary but happy, luxuriating in not having to walk and missing it terribly. Sydney welcomed us with heat and humidity!

P Forbes

Another perspective

Our recent trip to Pygmy Possum Lodge at Charlotte Pass, led by John Arney of the Sutherland APS and with eight from the Menai Wildflower Group headed by Lloyd, was a great success.

I, as one of the older members, and still feeling a bit of post-viral fatigue, did not go on the tougher walks, but Pygmy Possum is still a lovely place to spend a week. The surroundings are beautiful, and the balconies are great for sitting and reading, working with wire (or other "craft"), or just chatting to and getting to know better some of the other members of the group.

We were a great bunch of people. Cooking and sharing food was fun too.



Lunch on Guthega Walk, L Hedges.

The longest walk I did go on, the 9km Charlotte Pass to Guthega walk, was just beautiful and well worth the effort. Maureen and I were the two stragglers but John Arney stayed behind looking after us. I am sure he was very happy when we both staggered up the daunting flight of stairs at the end, to the cars. We were walking above the Snowy River most of the way, and the scenery was magnificent. Lots of lovely and interesting flowers too, and experts to identify them.



Stairs on Guthega Walk, L Hedges.

Thanks, John, for being a great organiser and leader and looking after us so well. And thanks to Lloyd, and all the group.

Mary Hedges

Coming events

Please note the **variations** from those published in the last newsletter. Remember that meetings have moved to the **first Saturday** of the month at **2pm**, but because of clashes with the Sutherland Quarterly and Easter we have moved the dates of the March and April meetings.

4 Mar **Tony Porritt** will tell us all about his experiences in **Arnhem Land**.

11 Mar **APS Quarterly Gathering at Bundeena**. Come along to support our Sutherland friends. Besides the usual talks and discussion, Lloyd will be taking plants to sell and there will be a walk with John Arney, starting at Bundeena Camping Ground boomgate. More details at the NSW APS website.

1 Apr TBA

13 May TBA

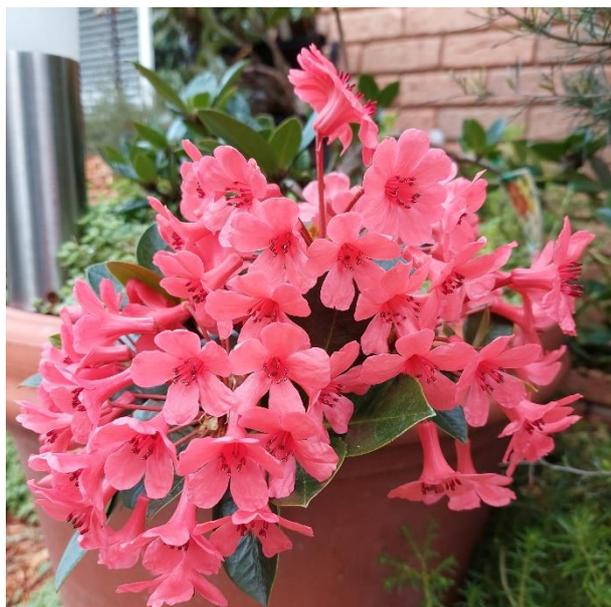
Members Gardens

Thanks to Graeme and Joy Davies, Marg and Peter Olde and Helen Patience who have shared some of their favourite plants from their gardens.

Graeme Davies writes -

“Here are a couple of plants in our garden that we really admire. Hope you might too.

The first is *Rhododendron lochiaie*. It is just a beautiful plant in flower - quite spectacular. We have it in a pot with morning sun and shade from about midday on.



Rhododendron lochiaie. G Davies.

The Native Gardenia is also a potted plant in our garden. It's the beautiful white flowers that make this plant so lovely. I suspect it needs a bit more fertiliser as it's not quite as floriferous as we would like so we'll feed it up over the next months to see if we can improve flowering. It's always a talking point though when those superb white flowers come out”.

Graeme may be the writer but admits that Joy does all the gardening – “We used to have "discussions" over plants and planting but when we moved to our new house, I decided I would leave her to do whatever in the garden and I would stick to the orchids. Works well and what's more we're still married!”



Atractocarpus fitzalanii. G Davies.

Here's some information about the plants mentioned that Graeme has supplied.

Rhododendron lochiaie is a small shrub which, in nature clings to cliffs by sending roots down into crevices in the rocks. It has also been described as growing as an epiphyte (i.e. on trees).

The species has glossy, oval-shaped leaves about 75mm long. The red, bell-shaped flowers occur during spring and summer. The flowers are about 50mm long by 30mm across and occur in terminal clusters of up to six.

R.lochiaie can be grown successfully in a moist, shaded, well-drained position. The species also makes an excellent plant for growing in a container and that's how we grow it. As it is not especially fast growing, it does not require annual re-potting.

Native Gardenia (*Atractocarpus fitzalanii*), sometimes called a Yellow Mangosteen, is considered to be good bush tucker in the Aboriginal

cuisine of its native region. It's a common plant found in coastal forests and beach regions from Far North Queensland down through Mackay, and is a hardy dry rainforest specimen. Its hard-shelled fruits are 6-7cm in diameter, containing a pale, soft and sweet segmented fruit with many small white seeds. Similar to a mangosteen in size, shape and flavour, they may be enjoyed raw on their own or used in salads, tarts, cakes and other desserts.

In spring, the Native Gardenia blossoms with white, beautifully fragrant, star-shaped flowers. These later turn into brown fruit that ripens slowly over winter, turning yellow when ready for harvest.

Native Gardenia, when left to grow as a tree, can reach heights of up to 6m. We prune ours regularly as we grow it in a pot. It makes a fabulous display plant during flowering season.



Swainsona formosa. H Patience.

Helen is enjoying a Sturt's Desert Pea (*Swainsona formosa*) bought at Altra Nursery in the new year. Helen repotted it using a native mix with a small amount of Seasol and has it flowering already. Sturt's Desert Pea, *Swainsona formosa*, is a member of the Fabaceae family with stunning red and black flowers. It is an iconic wildflower named in honour of the explorer Charles Sturt although it was first described by Europeans in 1699 by William Dampier. Sturt explored from Sydney and Adelaide in the early nineteenth century, in part searching for the elusive inland sea. After all our wet weather he might have had more luck this year. Sturt's Desert Pea is found in the arid interior in all states except

Victoria and is the state flower of South Australia. It is now highly sought after as a cut flower plant.

Sturt's Desert Pea is usually a prostrate, sprawling plant of creeping stems up to 2 m long but occasionally there is a shrubby erect form more suited to pot culture. It needs an open free draining mixture and watering from the bottom to prevent root rot. It's surprisingly a heavy feeder and regular applications of a slow release fertiliser will help it grow and flower. It's normally treated as an annual but can be propagated from seed or cuttings.

Reference [ANBG website](#)

Many members are familiar with Peter and Marg's garden at Oakdale which includes this rainforest gem. *Aceratum ferrugineum* (Rusty Carrabeen or Flamingo Bells) is an ornamental tree to 10m with large rusty leaves, very showy pink flowers and yellow, fleshy, edible fruit. While not slow growing, it needs a protected site in light shade with extra care until it is established. More information at [NSWAPS](#), DL Jones, Ornamental Rainforest Plants Australia and in Wikipedia.



Aceratum ferrugineum, flower and fruit. P Olde.

My Christmas Bell (*Blandfordia grandiflora*) made an effort post-Christmas and produced some lovely bells. Maybe next year it will be more seasonal.

There are three different species of *Blandfordia* in NSW. *Blandfordia grandiflora* which occurs in Sydney and both north and inland of it, is reasonably common in coastal heathlands such as in Royal National Park and in the local Menai bush. They seem to like areas like road gutters where some water collects, at least in autumn/winter and the distinctive flowers make them obvious when flowering occurs. They mostly flower around Christmas time but I have seen them at least a month before and after. At other times they are just a clump of attractive grassy leaves.



I won the potted plant at a meeting and on Lloyd's advice, have been ignoring it; my kind of plant! They like some water over winter but can stand the summer heat. This is the third time it has flowered and by far more impressive than last time, when the colours were much less vibrant. I plan to reward it with some native plant fertiliser.

Editor

Snow Gum Threats

Snow Gums are iconic, coming second to the river Red Gum in the [2022 poll](#) for Australia's favourite tree. You can see more about the top three in the poll — the River Red Gum, Mountain Ash, and Snow Gum — in a two-part [Catalyst special](#) exploring the lives of eight of Australia's oldest, largest and most distinctive trees.

Every trip to the Snowy invariably brings many comments about the beauty of the Snow Gums but

we have also noticed many dead trees, although some skeletal crowns are filling with new growth. Snow Gums (*Eucalyptus pauciflora*) thrive in cooler, wetter conditions. Australia's six sub-species of Snow Gums grow in isolated pockets of mountains from Victoria, to southern Queensland, as well as Tasmania.



Snow Gums near Guthega, P Forbes.

While they can grow above the snowline, they can also be found as low as Bega on the south coast of NSW. But as temperatures warm, these iconic trees are being threatened by drought, fire and disease.

Because of the relatively small area around the snowline in Australia, the trees can't retreat up the mountains as temperatures rise and they can't compete well with faster growing plants at lower altitudes.

Adding to this problem, warming temperatures both encourage the growth of more fire-prone heathlands and directly bring more fires. This reduces the chance to colonise new areas even more. As they regenerate from lignotubers, Snow Gums are better adapted to fire than some other mountain species like Alpine Ash (*Eucalyptus delegatensis*), which only recovers from seed.

Even though fire takes out the crowns of Snow Gums, established trees can resprout from an underground lignotuber that stores carbohydrates. This explains the resprouting we see on dead-looking trees. Eventually the burnt, dead trunks will decay and fall away but it can take 40 years or more to create the iconic mature shape. However, repeated fires hinder and eventually exhaust regrowth from their lignotubers so as the frequency and intensity of fires roaring up from the foothills increases, older more iconic trees are less likely to survive.

Another problem is attack by a type of Longicorn Beetle. The Phoracantha beetle has infested Snow Gums living in elevations above 1,600m, across the Alps from Victoria to the ACT, and also the Weeping Snow Gum (*Eucalyptus lacrimans*),

which only grows in a small area lower down the mountains near Adaminaby.

The wood-boring *Phoracantha* ring-barks trees and when the tree resprouts in response, it ringbarks more till the tree exhausts its reserves and dies. Regrowth from lignotubers after a fire is particularly vulnerable.



Dead Snow Gums, Rainbow Lake, with detail of borer tracks. P Forbes.

Currently, evidence suggests that the beetles thrive when water in the atmosphere drops, causing the bark to dry out. The live, wet tissue also keeps fungi and insects out so once that protection weakens, the tree faces multiple attacks.

Read the full stories on the ABC website, including [Snow gums threats](#) and [Longicorn beetle attack](#)

P Forbes

Of interest

Keep in contact with upcoming events at APS NSW using the calendar [here](#), or enjoy a range of past presentations on the NSW APS YouTube channel. Keep up to date with MWG activities at [our Facebook page](#). Both have reports of the Snowy trip.

Editor



Yellow daisy, Rainbow Lake, P Forbes.

News from the Nurseries

The nursery had a well deserved Christmas party before the summer break but we have continued to tube up *Allocasuarina* through January and February and have just started sowing seed for the autumn.



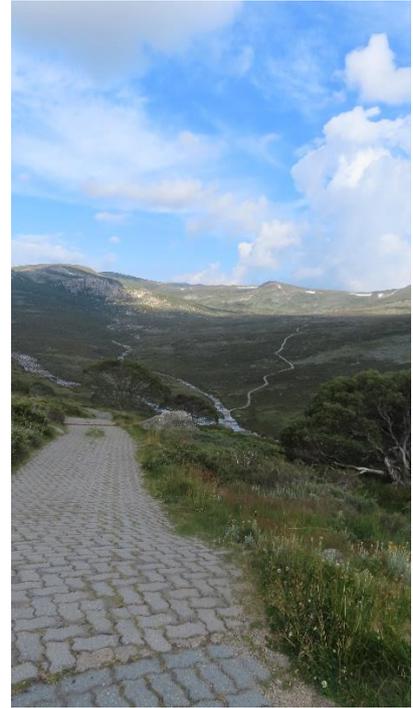
Christmas celebrations at Tip. P Forbes, L Hedges.

Beth Mott picked up another batch of plants (2600) for the Glossies Project and Patsy let us know that the plants supplied to RNP have been planted near Garawarra (sometimes spelt Garawarra and sometimes Garrawarra). The historic hospital site on the Old Princes Hwy remains a health facility. It is on the old road to the Illawarra, was a Tuberculosis Sanatorium from 1911 till after WW2 and then became an Aged Care Home. But the nearby Garrawarra State Conservation Area was reserved in 1934 then declared as a Conservation Area in 1987. As well as offering spectacular Hawkesbury sandstone ridge and gully landscapes and open forests, it protects rainforest in the upper catchment of the Hacking River and forms a link between the rainforests of RNP and those of the Illawarra Escarpment and the water catchment areas to the south and south-west. Hopefully the few hundred delicious koala trees will attract more of these iconic marsupials into the area.

For best planting results the characteristics of the site: climate, slope and elevation as well as soil,

water and shade conditions and the suitability of trees for the site, should all be considered. Soil compaction can prevent the roots from developing correctly so digging large and unevenly shaped planting holes can improve success. Shallow-rooted trees blow over in wet windy weather and are unable to draw water from deeper in the earth to endure dry weather. Trees guards protect the new plantings from animal grazing, wind and drying out. Getting all these factors right maximises growth and gives new trees that are long-lived and healthy.

The Fire Station Nursery has been joined by Annie, an APS member from Inner Sydney who heard about our propagation activities and came out to Illawong IRFS to join in. Annie has degrees in interior design and accounting and is also qualified in floristry where she is currently working. Annie has joined in our sessions with enthusiasm and a deal of promise and is considering tertiary qualifications in native plant conservation. It is very encouraging to have her join with our younger members, Cameron and Matt. Matt has had to drop out of our Tuesday activities due to pressure of work but looks forward to joining in as work allows.



Alpine Meadow. Snowy River below Charlotte Pass. P Forbes.



Planting at Garawarra, P Nagle.

L Hedges, P Nagle and P Forbes



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