

AUSTRALIAN PLANTS SOCIETY

Southern Highlands Group

...your local native garden club

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How wonderful to walk along a country lane near your home in the late afternoon of a hot summer's day. Not much in flower after the big spring flush of wild flowers, but it doesn't seem to matter.

In this issue . . .

This month I have changed the ordering of the newsletter. You will notice that Snippets and Upcoming Programs come at the end instead of the beginning. You can begin with reading some interesting and stimulating stories from our contributors.

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Starting from Scratch (40+ years ago)

Bill Mullard

The property of St Maur was started by Mr Everest York Seymour as a Guernsey Stud and the building of a state-of-the-art milking facility. On his death the farm was continued as a dairy farm by a local businessman and Councillor who in 1971 subdivided the grazing portion of the farm on the Southern side of Sally's Corner Road as part of the Westgrove Estate. The estate comprised 69 blocks ranging from 1 to 64 acres. We purchased our block of 25 acres (10ha) in 1976, built and moved into our partly completed home in 1979 and called the property 'Trewynd' (trees and wind). Our portion of the block is now 8ha.



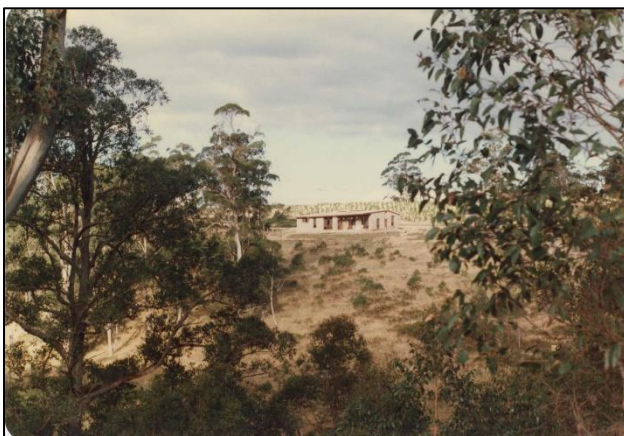
Valley below the house 2008 after the exclusion of cattle for 15 years

The land had been heavily grazed by cattle and sheep and had been extensively cleared during subdivision as evidenced by the numerous windrows of partially burnt timber. Fortunately, as our preference was for native vegetation, we were able to choose a block with some remaining old growth trees, particularly on the steeper slopes. By this time however, the blackberries had taken a firm hold over the property.

We continued with a small number of cattle until 1995 while gradually fencing off areas to allow for regeneration, clearing most of the windrows and eradicating the blackberries (almost). In the meantime, we accepted anything offered in the way of plants for the house yard and ended up with a mixture of natives and exotics to complement the regrowth of the endemic trees and groundcovers.

After returning from an 11-year hiatus in Sydney in 2006 we became more serious about regeneration of the land and planting native species. As there had been no cattle on the land since 1995 regeneration was well on the way including, unfortunately, a resurgence of blackberry which must be dealt with on a continuing basis. At this time, we entered the Vegetation Conservation Program (now Land for Wildlife) with Wingecarribee Shire Council.

The predominant species evident when we purchased the land were *Eucalyptus quadrangulate* (white-topped box) on the North facing slopes, *E. glodoidea* (white stringybark) on the south facing slopes and *E. obliqua* (messmate) along the water courses, with a groundcover of *Poa labillardieri* (silver tussock) and a mixture of other native and introduced grasses. Now a well-established understorey is also present, consisting mainly of



House site from northern ridge 1980



House site from northern ridge 2021

Lomandra longifolia (spiny-headed mat-rush), *L. filiformis* (wattle mat-rush), *L. multiflora* (many-flowered mat-rush), *Acacia melanoxylon* (blackwood) and *Hardenbergia violacea*

(purple coral pea). There are also some pockets of *Indigofera australis* (Australian indigo) regenerating.

In 2012 we had an Ecological Survey carried out which identified 68 endemic plant species on the property which is part of the Southern Highlands Shale Woodlands in the Sydney Basin Bioregion classified as an Endangered Ecological Community occurring on clay soils on Wianamatta Shale.

Planting of natives is continuing in the 'house yard' and driveway now numbering some 500 plants representing 230 different species. Surprisingly, we have not had too many failures, about 15 in all, considering our abundance of large Eucalypts, their root systems and shade and our reasonably heavy soil. Some plants have been saved by moving them to a sunnier position with better soil beside the driveway.



Early days. Driveway to house site 1978



Driveway to house 2021

From here on we think we will concentrate on 'filling the gaps' and refurbishment rather than establishing new gardens.

Waratah Legends – How the Waratah Turned Red

Jane Pye

Indigenous Dreamtime stories of the creation are many and varied, and are perhaps the oldest in the world. Legends told by Aboriginal tribes and nations in many languages offer spiritual explanations of the world and their environment. Anyone who is interested can find that many are available both published and online, though some are covered by copyright.

In 1915 RT Baker published a work *The Australian Flora in Applied Art, Part I The Waratah* which included a long story with chapters entitled Origin, Expelled, The Fight, The Scourge and The Kiss. This was an amalgamation of waratah legends rewritten by Lucien Henry in language and sentiment popular at the time. Henry was a French political emigre, artist and stone carver who took inspiration from the motifs available in Australia including conspicuously the waratah.

In 1925 CW Peck published the first substantial collection in *Australian Legends, Tales Handed Down from the Remotest Times by the Autochthonous Inhabitants of Our Land*. He was a teacher and poet, and collaborated with Aboriginal elder and storyteller, Ellen Anderson, of the Illawarra, until her death in 1934. A total of 51 stories were published, primarily from the East Coast of Australia. He was supportive and sympathetic towards the Aborigines but he presented the legends in an anglicised style and omitted the spiritual aspects of the stories. He was for many years the secretary of the Waratah League whose aim was to have the waratah declared the Australian national flower. Peck's extensive collection can be found on a University of Wollongong website documents.uow.edu.au.

Two of Peck's legends indicated a very long history of Aboriginal storytelling. One tells of war brewing between rival groups. As tensions grew, they were alarmed by an earthquake and volcanic lava flow emerging in a cave where some of the tribe were sheltering at Mount Wilson. The elders knew that waratahs had heat resistant qualities which enabled the tribe to control the fire and escape. Another legend concerned meteors falling to earth and creating more fire and craters, and turning the waratah bloom red. Many of the legends describe how the flowers turned from white to red, suggesting perhaps that once waratahs were white.

However, the story I wish to give in full is from the website dreamtime.net.au which sets out to tell creation stories and 'enable people of all backgrounds, races, religion and gender to step into the world of the Aboriginal Dreamtime'.

"This story is about how the White Waratah became red and the story starts off about these two little pigeons, a little pair of Wonga pigeons. Now, when the Wonga pigeons mate, they always mate for life and whatever they do, they always do it together. If they're building a nest, they build it together. If they're rearing their young, they do it together too. These two little pigeons decided they wanted to go and gather food this morning and when you see pigeons, you never see them sitting up in the trees eating, you always see them walking around on the ground, picking up things.

"So these two little Wonga pigeons were walking around on the ground, picking away, picking away, gathering food and they had a rule never to get out of one another's sight. As they were picking around, the little female looked up and she couldn't see her mate, but she didn't take any notice for a little while, so she picked around on the ground by herself. She kept looking up every so often, then after a while she started to worry about her mate, because there was no sign of him.

"So she started calling out and still no reply. This went on for a little while and their rule was never to fly up above the canopy of the trees, either, because the hawks would get them. So she flitted around in the lower branches, calling out to her mate and still no reply. She got to the stage where she thought 'the only thing I can do now is fly up above the top of the trees and have a look up there'.

As she flew up above the tree tops, sure enough, the big hawk grabbed her and he grabbed her on the breast.

"Hawks always have their favourite places to take their food and eat it. So as this big hawk was flying back to his favourite spot to eat this little pigeon, somehow she wriggled and

squirmed and broke free of his grip. As she tore away from the hawk, she also tore her breast open too and started bleeding.

“She couldn’t fly anymore because she was wounded, so she floated down to the ground and the first thing she landed on was the White Waratah. The blood from her wounds started to turn that White Waratah red. So as she went from Waratah to Waratah to White Waratah, they all became red.

“So that little Wonga never found her mate and she died eventually herself, but that’s how the White Waratah became red.

“The Red Waratahs have just finished flowering, but if you go up to a Red Waratah while it’s in flower and poke your finger into the flower itself and bring it out, you’ll get a red stain around your finger. That red stain represents the blood from the pigeon.”

How the Morton Fire Made the Creeks Run Free

Melissa Cady

The catastrophic Currowan Fire morphed into the Morton Fire in late December 2019. By 10.1.20 its ferocity, hunger and intensity consumed my land, like so many others in its unquenchable thirst for territory. Fortunately our house was saved, but gardens, orchard, fences, tanks, outbuildings, all burnt.

We live in a remote location, in the bush in Bundanoon. Devastation met our eyes, as we assessed the damage on the 11.1.20. All organisms that needed oxygen to breathe were vaporised, vanished, absent.

The fire crowned through our property. Only charcoal and ash was present. So hot the fire, that sandstone boulders that lined our cliffs and creek shattered.

From the unnamed creeks that transect our property all the biomass was removed by the fire. I then understood why it was called ‘leaf litter’, the forgotten haphazardly discarded twigs, leaves and branches shed by the forest. The denuded landscape revealed something novel to my eyes. The rocks, hidden for over 50 years, under its burden of leaf litter. Now new heroes, the freed creeks could now flow freely. Bubbling and gurgling, mini waterfalls cascading from our heights of 610m above sea level, descending. Its destination, eventually is, of course, the sea. The precious cargo of life giving water, destined to fill up the long dry waterholes, lakes and swamps that make up New South Wales southern intermittent lakes. Delivering a home for all the water fowl, reptiles, yabbies, frogs and insects to live and reproduce in.

As the calamity passed, regrowth inched it way up. First, only days after the fire a probably pyrophilous fungus lay on the ground, its pinky/orange colour perplexing locals, asking the question....was that fire retardant dropped from the Hercules aircraft? But no, a secret fungus, that had waited many many years to surface.



*Helichrysum
bracteatum* Photos
Melissa Cady

Bush Tomatoes, *Solanum aviculare* Kangaroo Apple thrive, I'd guesstimate I'd have hundreds of kilos of fruit on our property. *Helichrysum bracteatum* Paper Daisy flower tall as my shoulder feeding a spectacular variety of butterflies, Australian Painted Ladies, Yellow Admirals, Common Browns and Monarchs, Blues and more. A treat to our eyes.

Then seedlings of our mainstay forest trees burst through. Casuarinas, Black Wattle *Acacia decurrens*, Golden Wattle *Acacia longifolia*, the Eucalypts – Silvertop Ash *E. sieberi*, Grey Gum *E. punctata*, Narrow Leaved Apple *Angophora bakeri* all carpet the ground. Fascinating to watch as time passes, who will be the winner of each square metre of earth. It's over shot, hundreds of seedling all competing for real estate.

Other unsung heroes are finding their time to shine. Hop bush *Goodenia*, Fringe lily *Thysanotus tuberosus*, Donkey orchid *Diuris aurea*, Native Iris *Patersonia* all flourish due to the richness of the ash and reduced canopy of the forest. And there are many many more.



Fringe lily Thysanotus tuberosus
Photo Trisha Arbib



Donkey orchid Diuris aurea.
Photo Melissa Cady

European Wasps

Erica Rink



*European wasps look different to bees.
They are very aggressive to humans and
animals.*

A couple of years ago we had too many European wasps in the garden. Drinking from the bird baths and generally not wanted. We haven't seen any this summer. The method used was very successful.

This involves the use of a chemical known as Fipronil which is a pesticide used in flea treatments for dogs. We are going to use it for a different use

namely the killing of wasp nests. Be sure to follow any safety directions on the packing of the Fipronil containing product you are using.

I bought mine from Big W in Mittagong in the pet section. It cost about \$18 so not cheap. It comes in a packet 100g/L Fipronil. It is contained in a 1 x 1.34ml pipette.



Contains Fipronil

Fipronil can kill bees and other insects if they come into contact with it. HOWEVER, the solution we are preparing here will not attract bees, will deliver a small amount of poison directly to the hive and there is significant literature to suggest that bees will not be affected.

Anyway enough scare mongering. For those of you worried about pesticides Fipronil is used to spray locust plagues and has been around for decades so please don't fret.

You need a container into which you make a couple of entry points e.g. a 1 litre yoghurt container. To get the wasps used to the trap and feel safe coming and going put some smelly fishy cat food (birds and bees don't do fish) in the trap. You could make the food a bit wet. Dine Sardine is good. I left mine there for a day, the wasps were happy getting the free feed. A wasp nest needs about 5-10mg of Fipronil to kill the queen at a minimum. Our dosage is about double that so put about 4 drops of the 100g/L fipronil into the cat food. Mix it well and put some bait back inside the trap. I put the trap on top of our insect house - it has a flat roof of aluminium, we don't have pets so very safe there. The unsuspecting wasps take the poison back to the nest.

The wasps will die and the contaminated food will kill the queen.

No more queen, no more nest.

No more nest no more wasps!

I made the mistake of putting too much Fipronil on one batch of cat food and the wasps were dead before they could take off.

Hope if you have European wasps this does the trick.

Editor's Note: I suggest doing your own research if you are at all concerned about the safety of this chemical. It is banned in some countries as it is toxic to bees, but in this method as Erica explains, the Fipronil is contained within the trap.

Snippets

Garden Visits 14th November 2020

The visit to the Bowral gardens of Kris Gow and Sarah Cains was a great success. Both gardens were looking fabulous and showed what can be achieved with Australian native plants in a small space. As well as the 23 who had registered (Covid requirements) to attend each garden, several visited off the street after signing the attendance sheet.

Kris Gow and Eileen Burnus had propagated a large number of native plants for sale, many quite unusual. These were intended for the cancelled NSW APS weekend. The editor of this newsletter got quite carried away and had to take out an IOU.

***A Guide to the Yarrowa Brush* – Reprint to be released March 2021**

Verbatim extract from REPS President's Report, *Eucryphia Newsletter* 168 (October 2020)

Subject: Yarrowa Brush Book Reprint, to be released March 2021. Kindly sent to the newsletter by **Deanna Pryke-Abertillery**.

"As mentioned in last year's report, we decided to reprint our 1993 book, *A Guide to the Yarrowa Brush*, under the stewardship of Dr Cathryn Coutts. I am pleased to report that project is nearing completion. We hope to launch our book in March 2021 with a lot of community participation. After all, this book is all about our Robertson rainforest. The amount of voluntary work involved by Cathryn and her committee is many thousands of hours and I can't thank those involved enough. We were very fortunate to receive some grants to complete the book: \$5,000 from The Commonwealth government through local federal member, Stephen Jones, \$3,000 from NSW Environmental Trust Bush Connect program (via the Thin Green Line project) through David Rush, and \$5,000 from WSC community grants. We have also applied to The Veolia Trust for funds to upgrade our website to bring it into the 21st century.

During the year we made two submissions to Council on proposed Robertson developments. REPS aims are To Protect and Enhance the Robertson Environment. As our remaining unique Yarrowa Brush rainforest has been proclaimed critically endangered by the NSW and Australian governments, we feel we should make our Council aware of this when considering development proposals in Roberson.

On a personal note, what I like most about our village and surrounds is: the people, the Yarrowa Brush rainforest, and the climate. I can't change the people or the climate but I can work towards protecting the rainforest (The Yarrowa Brush), which makes our area unique. Why wouldn't anyone work to protect and enhance our unique rainforest?"

Wollemi Pines - Protected Status

The original stand of Wollemi pines is to become the first site in NSW to be given special protected status after being saved from ferocious bushfires in 2019/2020. The efforts of fire crews during the giant Gospers Mountain fire prevented significant loss of mature trees but many juvenile plants were severely burnt, many failing to re-sprout. The state parliament amended the National Parks and Wildlife Act last year to give the environment minister, Matt Kean, powers to make such a declaration.

The minister chose the Wollemi pines first because only a few hundred are known to remain in the wild and fossil records show they existed up to 200 million years ago. As you know, they were thought to be extinct until the site in the Blue Mountains, the precise location of which is kept secret, was discovered about 30 years ago. It's a very small site which is the only one in the world of Wollemi pines.

Kean said the new declaration would bolster protection for the site and included a requirement that the government develop a dedicated fire management strategy to ensure the survival of the species. There would also be a requirement for ongoing ecological monitoring and management.

Scientists fear that more frequent and intense fires due to climate change could cause the species' extinction. There is also the threat of Phytophthora, a fungus that can get into the soil and cause root rot. The strategy and other protection measures are still to be finalised.

From The Guardian 15/1/21

Wollemi Pines – Local History

It is interesting in this context to read the letter that **Jenny Simons**, member of APS Southern Highlands and former President, wrote to Wingecarribee Shire Acting General Manager and Councillors last August.

"I write to express my pleasure at the new planting, in Bradfield Park, Bowral, of a replacement Wollemi Pine.

As some of you may be aware, the first Wollemi Pine that Council reared was a gift from an anonymous donor (now deceased) and presented through the Southern Highlands Branch of the Australian Plants Society on her behalf. The Branch also distributed Wollemi pines to all schools in the shire.

Initially the Council's tree was planted in the courtyard of the Council Chambers at a ceremony organised by Council. When the tree grew too large for this situation it was transferred to the park and tended carefully for years. After growing tall and bearing tassels and cones, it eventually died. Now it has been replaced with a new tree and a new planting of Australian native plants at its base.

Congratulations."

Caladenia testacea, yellow form



Photo by Kris Gow, in bushland Willow Vale, October 2020

This ground orchid, commonly known as honey caps or honey caladenia is endemic to New South Wales and has a single, sparsely hairy leaf and up to three flowers.

Something to look out for next spring. They are generally found in coastal areas of New South Wales south from Newcastle and on the central highlands, growing in heath, woodland and forest. These were growing in Willow Vale. Flowering is stimulated by summer fires and by light clearing.

This beautiful image was obtained from Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository, where it had been posted by **Kris Gow**, who photographed it. When you enlarge the photo you can see every little detail down to the hairs on the stem.

“ Your Say Wingecarribee” - Climate Change

This is Wingecarribee Shire Council's community engagement hub. The site for SHAPS members, and others, to have their say about what action Council should be taking following their declaration of a Climate Action Emergency is:

https://www.yoursaywingecarribee.com.au/climate-change?utm_source=ehq_newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=ehq-WSC-Consultation-News&utm_campaign=website&utm_source=ehq&utm_medium=email

The survey closes at 9am on 8th February.

There's a real chance to think deeply about what the priorities are and how we can all be involved. Native plants, animals and climate change are all intertwined.

Go to <https://www.yoursaywingecarribee.com.au/> for other local concerns that you might want to have your say about.

Volunteers Needed to Water Planter Boxes at Coles

The three planter boxes outside Coles in Bowral are making a grand show. And displaying to many shoppers how attractive Australian native plants can be. You will have seen them, and read about them in earlier issues of the newsletter. If you live in Bowral it would be great if you could give Kay a hand in watering them. Please contact the committee at southernhighlandsaps@gmail.com if you would like to help. There is a tap nearby and it would only take a short time, say once a fortnight. And you will have the pleasure of knowing that you have had a hand in the plants continuing to flourish.

SHAPS and Community Radio

We have been looking at how to further spread our message of native plants throughout the Wingecarribee Shire. Adam Stokeld, station manager of 107.2 Southern Highlands community radio, would be happy to have a regular, perhaps monthly, spot talking to members of SHAPS. His program is on Fridays from 12–2. Can you see yourself as one of the volunteers? Please contact the committee at southernhighlandsaps@gmail.com for a chat about what is involved. It sounds like fun.

Southern Highlands APS (SHAPS) Web Page

Committee members are planning to upgrade our page on the NSW APS website. With this in mind, Erica Rink recently sent out an email asking how often, if at all, you look at the Southern Highlands APS web page. It is just as important to know if you never look at the web page. The committee would love to hear from you if you haven't already replied. Please contact us at southernhighlandsaps@gmail.com

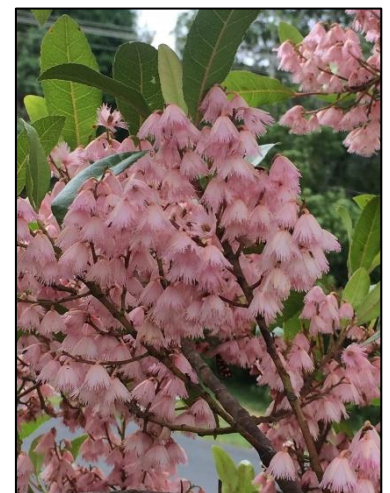
To directly connect to our own section of the APS NSW website, follow the link below:
<https://austplants.com.au/Southern-Highlands>

SHAPS Xmas Party, 3rd December 2020

Because of Covid this was a low key affair with members bringing their own picnic lunch to Gambell's Rest, at the entry to the Bundanoon end of the Morton National Park. A great site for fair weather. It was overcast and cool but the rain held off and there was lots of chat as you can see. There were plants for sale, a popular raffle, and wine. About 17 members took part. I don't think anyone went for a bush walk but we saw a beautiful white *Elaeocarpus reticulatus* in full flower in the car park.



Elaeocarpus reticulatus at Gambell's Rest. Photos Barbara Eckersley. The pink form in her garden is just as beautiful.



Upcoming Program

Thursday 4th February**Garden visit to member Robyn Kremer's garden**

Robyn kindly offered to share her garden with us last year, but events conspired. This is a beautiful garden set on a 1 acre block which was formally part of Frensham farm. You can read Robyn's account in the SHAPS newsletter May 2020.

Address: 26 Payten Street, Mittagong

Time: 2pm

**Thursday 4th March**

Planning is afoot. To be advised.

Thursday 1st April**Talk on native cottage gardens by Sarah Cains and Kris Gow**

Long awaited and sure to be fascinating. So much writing space is given to large gardens it will be so useful to learn what can be done, both with particular plants and design, using Australian native plants in small gardens and courtyards.

Address: Bill and Fran Mullard's home at 150 Devon Road, Exeter

Time: 2pm

I'd like to thank Bill Mullard, Jane Pye, Melissa Cady, Erica Rink, Deanna Pryke-Abertillery, Jenny Simons and Kris Gow, all of whom contributed to this newsletter. It is wonderful how so many of you are happy to write for our newsletter, and to write so well, of things of such interest.

Contributions are always welcome. Please write to me at trisharbib@gmail.com with suggestions.

MANY THANKS
to all
contributors to
this newsletter.

