



Association Of Societies For Growing Australian Plants
Banksia Study Group Newsletter

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Rare & Threatened Banksia #6 – *Banksia elegans*

I have moved onto the one of the next rarest species, namely *Banksia elegans*, which is listed as Priority 4 by CALM (i.e. Taxa which are considered to have been adequately surveyed and which, whilst being rare, are not currently threatened by any identifiable factors. These taxa require monitoring every 5–10 years.).

Introduction: James Drummond collected this distinctive banksia on his sixth collecting journey, which took place from 1850 to the end of 1851 and Meissner described it in 1855. Alex George felt it had no close relatives in the genus and placed it in series *Cyrtostylis*. He did note its unusual characters; a spherical inflorescence and the very few, tuberculate follicles. He noted the leaves resembled *Banksia ashbyi* but the perianth and pistil were like *B. lindleyana*. The pollen presenter is shrivelled at anthesis and the few follicles rarely produce viable seed. The form of the follicle and seed is somewhat like those of the *Isostylis* group – *Banksia ilicifolia*, *cuneata* and *oligantha*. George also noted inflorescences of both the *Isostylis* group and *Banksia elegans* have an ovoid axis.

These last two observations are interesting as subsequently Kevin Thiele in his cladistic analysis felt it a sister taxon to the *Isostylis* group or basal to all other species, and Mast in his molecular analysis has it as part of a clade containing the *Isostylis* group and *Banksia attenuata*.

Description: *Banksia elegans* is a lignotuberous stout-trunked shrub to 4 m tall. Its tessellated bark is a pale grey colour. Stems are tomentose-hirsute, glabrescent. The leaves have a 2–4 cm long petiole and are broadly linear, 20–45 cm long and 12–18 mm wide. The flat leaf margins are dentate with many triangular teeth. Both leaf surfaces are tomentose-hirsute, glabrescent except fine pits on lower surface. Flowering from October to November, the terminal inflorescences are generally spherical with a diameter of 6–7 cm. Buds can be greenish yellow with mature blooms pale yellow in colour, including styles. Plants to the east near Mt Adams have a mauve or aqua tinge in bud. The perianth is 32–33 mm long including limb of 4–5.5 mm and is closely pubescent outside, pubescent on margins inside; limb glabrous. Pistil straight, 31–32 mm long, glabrous except a few hairs above the ovary; pollen presenter narrow, 1 mm long, usually not properly formed, irregularly ribbed and muciculate. Old flowers soon fall. Follicles 1–5, obliquely ovate, curved, 20–25 mm long, 9–13 mm high, 11–14 mm wide, warted, initially tomentose, glabrescent.

Distribution & Habitat: *Banksia elegans* occurs in W.A. near the west coast between Walkaway and Mt Peron in deep yellow acid sand (pH ~5) in low woodland and in tall shrubland, often near winter wet depressions or lakes.

Fraser Road Form: A population with distinctly larger inflorescences was described by George near Walkaway in 1981 after a collection by AC Burns in 1977. This became known as the Fraser Road Form. This collection is much removed from those further south – being at least 50km north of the Irwin River.

Alanna Chant of CALM in Geraldton reports that the *Banksia elegans* Fraser Road form (AC Burns 27) is no longer considered a current name. It is therefore likely that the difference has been considered not significant. However file notes refer to this as "the northern large flowering form" so it must have been considered a different form at one stage.

Unfortunately the land there has since been cleared from agriculture. Most of the plants were lost and the form was considered extinct

Subsequently, 3-4 plants were discovered on a road verge near Walkaway in 1988 by Mr Dan Carter (Dept Agriculture, Albany). This was confirmed by District Wildlife Officer Phil Roberts in Nov 88, when he recorded 22 plants in bud, flower and fruit.

In 1994, around 5 plants were recorded at the site by Sue Patrick of the WA Herbarium. Sue adds that they looked only on the road verges, which were very thickly vegetated at that stage, so they may have missed some. They didn't look on uncleared private property nearby where there may have been more plants.

When Alanna surveyed on November 8 2000, she recorded 9 plants flowering. Two plants appeared to have regenerated via coppicing. She also recorded the area had been burnt in 1996-7 and that flora markers are in place.



(Fraser Road form in late bud – both photos Alanna Chant – CALM Geraldton)



Flowering occurs from October to November in its natural habitat, but this seems to become later as one moves south – a cultivated plant in Byford south of Perth flowers in early December while in Mt Barker in mid to late December. Sue noted there were two fresh flowers in January in the Fraser Road population.

Cultivation: Due to the scarcity of viable seed, this plant has only been very rarely cultivated. Its suckering habit may indicate a better response to cutting or grafting – though there has been little success with the former and few trials of the latter (only known to have been trialled twice (by Colin Wilson in Victoria) on *B. integrifolia* and once on *B. serrata* with death within 4 months.

Banksia kingii

The photos are of a leaf and cone of *Banksia kingii*. The fossils came from a tin mine at Melaleuca Inlet in far southwest Tasmania. Deny King, the well known and loved resident of Melaleuca, dug up this fossil material (hence the name of the species!) These fossils are important because they represent the most recent example of a pre-European plant extinction in Australia. They are at least 43,000 years old, and probably less than 120 000 years old. Other fossils in this fossil deposit include Huon Pine, Celery Top Pine, Myrtle Beech and a range of species of tea tree, melaleuca, epacrids and other heathy species. This rainforest plants are interesting because most of them now grow nowhere near the fossil site and indicate that the vegetation at that time (soon before Aborigines arrived) was more rainforestry than it is now. However, there are clear signs of fire (charcoal and fire dependent species).



Banksia paludosa paludosa in the Jervis bay Area

In May I visited the Nowra group of the Australian Plants Society and they kindly showed me some interesting populations *Banksia paludosa paludosa* in local bushland (sadly, a lot of which is threatened by development). I had advised them of some locations to try, originally seeking out a form with long orange spikes which Alf Salkin had collected and identified as having horticultural potential. We failed to find this but did find other interesting plants. Plants in general were ~1m tall and of fairly dense habit with quite leathery leaves with intermittent serrations. Many did have the usual brownish budded and brownish yellow inflorescences. However some were a brick orange, others yellow with grey tips in bud (scattered plants in the Falls Creek/Tomerong area), and one plant found seemed to have an all yellow (but very damaged) spike. This last plant and a specimen with old spikes up to 15cm high were on elevated heathland above Vincentia.

I also visited the Stanwell Tops area, which has plentiful *Banksia paludosa*, and felt the Vincentia forms generally had larger, more varied and more attractive inflorescences.



(Above – contrast between grey-tipped and orangey budded forms)

(Left – inflorescences on trunk, Vincentia – both photos Suellen Harris)

I was also shown Greenfields Beach, near Hyams Beach, and we discovered around 50 plants just inland of the shore which appeared to be hybrids between *Banksia paludosa* and *B. integrifolia*, which was an abundant coastal plant here. These plants were spindly 2-2.5m high shrubs with persisting old flower parts on old spikes, but spontaneously opening follicles similar to *B. integrifolia*. The undersides of the leaves differed from *B. integrifolia*, being similar to *paludosa* and inflorescences had intermediate characteristics – all yellow and uncrowded in bud and ageing to yellow styles on a darker yellow/tan (akin to *paludosa*), and they smelt halfway between the strong musky odour of *paludosa* and no smell of *integrifolia*. The adult leaves were of similar shape and dimensions to *integrifolia*.

but with the odd serration. Though they clearly had characteristics that suggested they were hybrids, the population appeared remarkably homogeneous in appearance.

Funnily enough, a week later we collected a mystery banksia at Stanwell Tops, which also appears to be an *integrifolia/paludosa* hybrid, though a more vigorous plant to ~4m, and a specimen of this has been deposited in the NSW Herbarium.



Reticulated pattern on hybrid leaves on left vs. integrifolia on right – Suellen Harris

Hybrid late bud (left) and older bloom (right) – Suellen Harris



Aboriginal Names For Banksia Species

I have been collecting names – Tony Irvine reports that the Jirrbalngan people from Tully in Queensland call the local *Banksia aquilonia* jingana (pronounced 'Jing –ana') in their language Jirrbal. The same term is used further south in Girramay of the Girramaygan people, referring to plants at Bishops Peak, Cardwell. These were initially thought an outlying population of *Banksia integrifolia compar* but later shown to be *B. aquilonia* as well.

Brett Baker, a linguist from Armidale University, has been doing work with the Wubuy of Eastern Arnhem Land, where rilidili is the local word for *Banksia dentata*.

Aerial layering of *Banksia integrifolia monticola* at Banksia Farm

Kevin Collins reports;

In September 2004 a 40cm branch broke off a 15m tall, 20year old *B. integrifolia* subsp. *monticola*, and we observed it had developed roots from the cambium layer on the detached branch section. (This was found whilst cutting up the branch with a chainsaw). The roots were up to 1cm in diameter and branched to smaller sub roots.

Later we found on the same tree approx. 3m from the ground another damaged lesion on a branch junction and roots are visible on the damaged outer bark.

Then in March 2005 a large shrub form of *B. marginata* around 4m tall and 6m wide with trunk of 50cms with a low branching fork also split in a wind storm to reveal the same type of root development. Branches are around 25cms in diameter.

Banksias of Bishop's Peak, North Queensland

Peter Abell writes;

'Adjacent to Hinchinbrook Island Off Queensland coast is a range running from Ingham to Cardwell. The separation of the Island and the mainland is known as Hinchinbrook channel (see panorama). Towards the southern end of this range a peak, Bishop Peak is an interesting place for banksias, being the site of the known mainland colony of the Hinchinbrook Banksia (*Banksia plagiocarpa*) and the southernmost occurrence of *Banksia aquilonia* (*Banksia integrifolia* subsp. *compar* is found at Proserpine, some 400km south).



I have been interested in *B. plagiocarpa* for some time in part due to its rapidly growing stature as a cut species. for which it is cultivated quite widely. My initial quick look along the range provided no views of this species and there is basically no access onto the range. An email to Cas had a locality, Bishop Peak. so can I get there to see it? As I am occasionally known to do, seeing this species became an obsession and I rehashed my plans to have a look.

It's worth noting that *Banksia aquilonia* occurs in small populations along the highway here and is seen north of Cardwell. This species is worthy of more horticultural attention as it can be found at intermediate altitudes (Wallaman Falls) around this latitude. A specimen growing outside the NSW Herbarium has been there for over 20 years!

'So.... I began my plan to check out this rare and rarely seen on the mainland species. Cas had speculated that if it grew with *B. aquilonia* there was a possibility of hybrids. Not so as I noted but my excursion was brief and not too detailed. I did note that the two species in question have a number of similarities and at distance or a glance are easy to confuse. I'd say closer to one another than *B. integrifolia*.

'What I did (story follows) has some risk. It should not be considered without planning and due assessment of the risks, the biggest one in this case was a solo bush walk. I knew them and assessed constantly what I was doing. I looked at maps, topographic maps I have on my laptop before leaving. Loaded a couple of waypoint from there to my GPS (not enough in hindsight) and considered the trek. The waypoints were the peak and the closest point to the base of the peak plus the start of the ridge. What was missing was a few more points to follow, as it proved quite difficult to see enough to best navigate my way up. I looked at the altitude and carried what I figured was enough fluid times two and considered my level of fitness.

'It's a hell of a climb the 1500 feet (sorry about the imperial measures but my GPS operates this way and so do planes....) to the best of the *Banksia plagiocarpa*. Its probably the hardest bush walk/climb I've ever done and I've done a few.... at times over 45 degrees inclined... It is granite all the way with a liberal splattering of 300mm and larger boulders amongst the grass and forest floor vegetation. one step forward and half back was common. I thought of giving it up several times starting with around 250 feet....What kept me going was the GPS. Every time I felt too knackered to go on I'd look at it and it would tell me I'm another x% closer I guess thinking now it was my company and my most valuable aid later on... It took around three and a half hours in all around 2hrs to do the climb. I was stuffed beyond imagination... I guess like athletes after their events and it took me most of the rest of the day to recover and rehydrate.... you see my fluid assessment was short by probably 50% but time about right. I rationed my fluid from around 1000 feet (going up) to ensure some for my descent, which fortunately needed only what I had... I never however thought that I took too great a risk. In summation, the tropical climate, temp and humidity were not allowed for correctly.

'Cas has suggested that I stick in a bit about less reduction in size of plants on elevated areas seen in warmer climates but in this case I can't... Up on Bishop it doesn't happen. What occurs here is



B plagiocarpa – Fructing cone with follicles



B plagiocarpa – habit, next to granite boulder
Both photos - P. Abell

an opening up of the vegetation and I saw no evidence of stunting. I put that down to the climate and adequate supply of moisture.



(*B. plagiocarpa* - colours of inflorescence in late bud and with flowers opening – P. Abell)

Banksia plagiocarpa is not ever common just occasional with a plattering of mature and juvenile plants. I don't believe it hybridises with *B. aquilonia*.

‘The latter plant starts really from the base (sea level) and gets quite common from around 800feet.

I recorded waypoints identifying where different things occurred like first *B. plagiocarpa*, and thick stands of *B. aquilonia* on my trek along with a track plot. The first plagio, a young plant, was a beautiful plant growing amongst small granite boulders which makes getting around so difficult. when you see them growing together as they do above 1300 feet they are easy to recognise. *B. aquilonia* outnumbers *B. plagiocarpa* 4 or 5 to 1.

‘It was a rare and tremendous experience. This species is more amazing in the field than in cultivation. I feel from some crystal ball gazing and asking questions that it will colour up better (bluer) in cooler areas? any experience or comments?

Further work for the committed, fit and adventurous: There is another peak not far north of Bishop. This peak, Duncan Bluff is 11.76km north of Bishop's and 100m higher. It may be possible to get there from a foot track that crosses the range in the in that area. Just west of Cardwell there are some forest tracks at the base of the Range. One I identified on the map and found (with difficulty) in weather not conducive to safe travel appears as though it may run to the top of the range. It looks a likely place and then the ultimate would be to traverse the range and log all occurrences. Trust me the view would never be boring and even when knackered you'd feel it was worthwhile....

Correspondence

Lorraine Mathews of Koraleigh (near Swan Hill) wrote in December 2004;

“We have had 3 days of soaking rain here & the plants are loving it. *Banksia baxteri* is in flower along with *B. pilostylis*, *B. sceptrum* & *B. lemanniana* 4 years after seed. *Banksia burdettii* is coming into flower.”

(Good to hear of successes with these banksias in south-western NSW - thanks for the feedback Lorraine. I would love to hear of other people's updates)

Liesbeth Uijtewaal has sent an update of her banksia growing in Holland;

“Found quite a few first-time buds on several banksias like *Banksia speciosa* and *B. burdettii* (both sown September 2002, of either species two plants each and on each plant one cone). *Speciosa* is almost flowering, *burdettii* is developing much slower. Other bud on *brownii* (5 years old now) and lots of buds in 'Honeypots', from cuttings that were sent over in Feb 2003. Lovely stuff. *Dryandra praemorsa* has finished flowering, didn't take more than three weeks I think. Banksias are much nicer really since each stage in flower development looks great. *D. drummondii* is about to flower, there's six buds in my two years old seedling.”

Margery Stutchbury of Bundaberg wrote in December 2004;

“Banksias in my garden:

- 2 x *B. plagiocarpa* about four years old. Enclosed photo of the more vigorous of the two; the other one is probably less vigorous as it is planted near a large *Brachychiton acerifolius*.
- 2 x *B. integrifolia* - one young plant from a local nursery and the other is about 20 years old grown from local seed
- 2 x *B. integrifolia* prostrate- one is about 8 years old and is vigorous but has never flowered; the other is a nursery seedling growing well, only planted this year and I have high hopes of it flowering!
- 6 x *B. robur* - two 5 yr. old, others new this year. Older plants last year produced many flower spikes right at ground level, but also have some further up.
- 2 x *B. oblongifolia*- new this year.
- 1 x *B. aquilonia*- about 6 years old-tall, nice habit, lemon yellow flowers.
- 1 x *B. paludosa* - new this year, thriving.
- 1 x *B. ericifolia* - 10 yrs old, struggles a bit in our heat, but revives after a good drink, and has several flower spikes each year, a fairly open specimen.
- 1 x *B. spinulosa* - nice bushy habit, flowers well, 10 yrs old.

“Regarding small banksias: I have a 6 year old *B. spinulosa* “Birthday Candles” which has lots of foliage but has only ever had two flowers, hidden at the base of the plant, and nearby *B. spinulosa* 'Stumpy Gold', about 4 years old and not a sign of a flower yet, so I have found these two disappointing.

“I have twice tried to grow *Banksia* 'Giant Candles' . The first one was about 5 years old, never a flower and became sickly, so I took it out. The second one died while a young plant. The banksias here tend to go a bit yellow which I treat (usually successfully) with some chelated iron.

“Banksias growing locally are *B. aemula*, *integrifolia*, *oblongifolia* and *robur* in our wallum coastal areas. My husband and I had a small involvement in the Banksia Atlas and I am the person on the left (in the hat) on the cover photo of the book, photographed at Coonar near Bundaberg.”

“I would be interested to try to grow some of the new forms of eastern banksias, and also try some of those western ones which may be okay over here. I expect we would have to build up a sandy garden here before planting any W.A. banksias. In summer we have heat to about 35 degrees C and high humidity. Rainfall has been erratic the last few years, but recent good rain has noticeably improved the banksias. However we are back into hot, dry, humid conditions again. Our soil is sandy and the water goes straight through.”

(Marg raises some interesting points – have others noticed some eastern forms from the south shy to flower at points further north?)

Scientific News

Austin Mast has published a paper this year in Australian Systematic Botany looking at both previously published (in 1998 & 2002) and new DNA evidence for the nesting of *Dryandra* within *Banksia*. Further genetic material from different areas ‘provide strong molecular support for paraphyly of *Banksia* with respect to *Dryandra*’

Mast notes that to retain *Dryandra* as a genus with 93 taxa would require the splitting of *Banksia* into two or (likely) more genera to place the remaining species in the subtribe into monophyletic genera. Doing this now would be premature because the three DNA datasets do not agree on phylogenetic relationships in the /Cryptostomata (e.g. the sister to *Dryandra*). Moreover, splitting up *Banksia* would split a widely recognised genus with distinctive character states (their dense, elongate inflorescences and woody follicles) into genera distinguished by more obscure shared characteristics.

Mast reports that sinking *Dryandra* into *Banksia* represents a far less disruptive generic realignment. Publication of the name *Banksia* (Linneaus 1781) predates *Dryandra* (Brown 1810). No new generic names would be created, and workers would need to learn only 18 new specific epithets. Three of the four synapomorphies (shared characteristics) for the expanded *Banksia* could be diagnostic in the field (all but wood vasculature). *Banksia* would become the seventh largest genus of vascular plants in Australia, behind *Acacia*, *Eucalyptus*, *Grevillea*, *Melaleuca*, *Eremophila* and *Leucopogon*.

Mast concludes:

“It would also probably confer greater research attention to the species of *Dryandra*. They make the well-studied adaptive radiation of *Banksia* even more striking, and their inclusion in any comparative study with 'exhaustive' taxonomic sampling of *Banksia* would become certain. Sinking *Dryandra* would remove a genus from the list of those 92 flowering plant genera endemic to the south-western corner of Australia because *Banksia*, as currently circumscribed, is more widely distributed. Of course, it does not change the species richness or number of endemic species in the south-west Australian flora, nor does it change the resolution of that region as the cradle of the subtribe Banksiinae.”

Study Group Objectives & Projects

After 3 years of reading and talking to people about banksias during my time so far as Banksia Study group leader, I can see areas emerging that are begging for one or more keen person to delve further. I am here listing for the first time some of these. I would

be grateful if anyone took me up on any of these and searched further (much like the Eyre Peninsula group did in the Gawler Ranges, the Nowra Group in Jervis Bay area) and be able to report in the future.

Botanical

- Exploration and description of forms of *Banksia sphaerocarpa* complex in WA and investigation into possible distinctive forms in Nannup and looking at intergrades between northern forms and *B. micrantha*
- Looking at *B. sphaerocarpa dolichostyla* in the field. Is it distinct enough from the other subspecies of *B. sphaerocarpa* to be a separate species? Kevin Thiele in his 1996 analysis felt that the persistent styles on old inflorescences were stout and did not curl around the globe like the softer styles of var. *sphaerocarpa* and var. *caesia*. Alex George felt that old styles did curl to varying degrees and that this character was not strong enough to raise it to specific rank. It grows near Hyden, so this is near Wave Rock and would make an interesting detour.....
- *Banksia violacea* is nonlignotuberous yet some collections of the plant in the northwest of its range (near Woodanilling) were lignotuberous. Are they distinctive in other ways? Is there a mixture of forms there?
- Looking at northern form of *B. elegans*; are there other characteristics that distinguish it from typical plants?
- *Banksia ashbyi* is a small tree in the southern part of its range (south of Shark Bay), and a lignotuberous shrub north of Carnarvon to Exmouth. Are there intermediate forms in the middle and are the northern forms merely adapted to a more coastal environment?
- Exploring area near Sandstone. Reports of undescribed banksia just east.
- Area from Mt Magnet to Kennedy Range southwards has suitable sandy soils. Are there new populations of banksias there?
- The easternmost banksias on the WA south coast are *Banksia media*, *B. epica* and *B. speciosa* from around the Point Culver area. Do any exist further east?
- A population of *Banksia conferta conferta* was recently reconfirmed from Coorabakh National Park near Taree on volcanic soil. Could there be other populations of this species between Taree and the Queensland border?
- The Banksia Atlas lists a single collection of *Banksia marginata* from Queensland, the Springbrook Mountains SSW of Southport, which is not recorded in their Herbarium records. Is the species still extant there (if the original record was correct)?
- Do the current taxa (*spinulosa*, *collina*, *cunninghamii* & *neoanglica*) accurately represent relationships within the *Banksia spinulosa* complex? *Banksia spinulosa collina* is a form of inland gorges and tablelands in Central Queensland but coastal on the NSW central and north coast, while *B. s. spinulosa* is coastal there and in NSW south of Sydney. Similarly, *Banksia cunninghamii* is widely separated between NSW and Victorian forms (where the longer leaved form was originally called *B. prionophylla* by Meisner). Notably both *spinulosa* and *collina* in northern Queensland have old spikes bare as opposed to them having persistent old flower parts in NSW and Victoria. Mast's DNA study showed *collina* & *neoanglica* as sister clades with *spinulosa* & *cunninghamii* flanking these. A molecular study with specimens of each subspecies from the 3 mainland eastern states they occur should shed light on this.

- *Banksia marginata* is found as a large (~10m) seeding tree or a small (1m) suckering non-seeding shrub in the Colac region and also some distance west in the Grampians. Molecular analysis could show whether locality or morphology shows closer relationship.
- Masts study shows a much closer relationship between eastern *Spicigerae* and *salicinae* than previously thought. To date no interseries hybrids have been found. Could they be out there somewhere?

Horticultural

- Work continues in the grafting field. Peter Henson (Far North NSW), Mark Ross & Nathan Kirkwood (Sydney) & Phil Trickett (Canberra) are currently doing some *Banksia* grafting. Get out the scalpel and contact me (and I'll get you in touch with them) if you want to have a go.
- An interesting horticultural form can crop up anywhere. Exposed coastal areas make a good place to start for suitable dwarf forms.

Old Banksia Study Group Newsletters

The first three newsletters from my time as leader of the group are available at <http://farrer.riv.csu.edu.au/ASGAP/banksSG/index.html> on the internet, on the national website of the 'Society. I plan to get the next 3 newsletters from the financial year just go up there too soon. Previously, *Banksia* Study Reports were produced and Reports 7 and 8 are still available. I plan to scan the others and make them available electronically at some stage.

Seed Bank

If you have a large excess of seeds, consider donating some to your local seed bank (or even another state!) as banksias are popular and the Regional seed banks rely on donations. Alternately, why not let me know and I can leave a memo in the next newsletter.

- Nindethana Seeds (08) 9844 3533
- Banksia Farm (08) 9851 1770 phone/fax
- Your Region seed bank will usually have a selection of species

If you are unable to find a particular species, please contact me and I may have some ideas.

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