

SGAP PALM & CYCAD NEWSLETTER No. 79
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Membership matters: Subs were due as at 1-7-98, still \$5 within Australia, \$10 overseas. It is best if overseas members send notes (US\$ or A\$), or cheques for several years at once. Don't send money orders, as bank charges eat up 90% of the value on \$10. Cheques are nearly as bad, for small amounts. Internet banking may eventually solve this problem. If there is an x between the asterisks on the next line, my records have you as in arrears: ***** *****

Weather & plant behaviour: The last year has been most peculiar, weatherwise, here in Brisbane. A long El Nino drought period started to break up in autumn. A mild winter was followed by a cool spring, with good rains in September (usually very dry) & then a dry spell until mid-November, & moist since. Through spring & early summer there were occasional really cool days. The mild winter caused (I presume) the poorest flowering of Dendrobium orchids (kingianum & speciosum, & their hybrids) that I can remember. The cool spring caused gingers & aroids to be slow to re-emerge, often a month later than usual, & some N.T. cycads are still (as at Jan.30th.) totally dormant.

My largest *Cycas armstrongi* lost its first flush of leaves in early August '98, & its second set (from Feb.'98) in early Nov.'98. It started what would normally be its spring flush on 5-12-98, 32 days later than the previous year. The *Cycas maconochie* are still totally dormant, while my lone *C. canalis* stuck a single leaf out in early October (should have 10 or so), & then went on strike. The *C. calcicola* only started on Jan. 23rd, 2 weeks later than in '98.

The *Cycas megacarpa* have joined the *C. angulata* in each plant 'doing its own thing'. One flushed vigorously in mid-October, after killing off its old fronds; 2 have dead (2-year-old) fronds only, 1 has healthy old fronds only, & a teenage plant kept its old fronds & grew 2 new ones in early Jan.'99. All *C. cairnsiana* & *C. ophiolitica* flushed in October, as usual. My largest *C. kennedyana*, about 15 years old, started to cone in early December '99; it is a girl. A largish sucker, still attached, began to flush on Jan. 29th, while the coning caudex has made no new leaves yet. The sucker flushed out of synchrony with its 'parent' last summer also. Peculiar when they must be sharing the same set of hormones & so on, as they are still well connected.

Publications: The PACSOA book on cycads is nearly ready to go to press, & I hear is just waiting for another dollar or two to roll into the PACSOA Publication Fund coffers.

Palms: my palms have still not been caught doing anything newsworthy. The 2 *Livistona* sp. Victoria River, about 13 years old, are starting to grow a little faster at long last, but don't look quite as blue as the ones in the Territory. Their extremely harsh leaves still proved quite attractive to grasshoppers late in last summer, to my

surprise, & these weren't fresh leaves either. The 12-year-old *Livistona* sp. Blackdown Tableland, now *L. fulva*, are now starting to grow a bit faster too, with 10 or so metre long fronds each. I gather a botanists "demarcation dispute" delayed this long-known species, & some other *Livistonas*, from being officially described for a decade or so. My oldest *Carpentaria*, about 12 years old, suddenly dropped dead recently after surviving much colder winters. It may have been out-competed by a vigorous nearby bamboo, but seemed fine until recently.

Exculpation in advance: This newsletter, & the next one or two, will be a little scrappy as I have over-committed myself once again. The federal (ASGAP) biennial SGAP conference is in Brisbane this coming July, & myself & 5 colleagues are putting together a field guide to the local plants, hoping to sell many copies to the delegates. So many computer hours will need to be put in very soon, while the good season has put a real growth spurt on all the weeds in my nursery.

General: Belated best wishes to all for a happy New Year & good growing/propagating conditions. As always, any snippets of news or views would be most welcome. Some more letters & calls came in as people learned of Len Butt's death.