

S.G.A.P. ACACIA STUDY GROUP
NEWSLETTER
AUGUST 1965

A C Keane
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Members recently joined are:

Mr T Gillis	135 Queen Street, Woolshare, Sydney, NSW
Mrs H Cumpston	24 Holmes Crescent, Campbell, Canberra, ACT
Mrs E E Chandler	20 Honiton Crescent, Carlingford, NSW
Mrs O McHaffey	Berringa Road, Park Orchards, Victoria

Therefore, we have seven newcomers over the last eight (8) months. It was decided to enable these members to catch up and so the usual Newsletter was omitted and a special one sent to new members explaining our aims, objects, work done, work to be done etc. This idea was assisted by a series of very good questions about the group asked by Mr O'Donnell. Two of these may be of general interest. Here they are with my answers:-

Q. Is there a monthly Newsletter? Who produces this? Presumably you and the Acacia Group?

A. A Newsletter is sent to members 2 monthly (the words "twice monthly" were erroneously used in the June Newsletter). The Group Leader prepares this. The Study Group plays some but not a sufficient part in its production. In short we have a number of what may be called "poor correspondents" and it is becoming increasingly difficult to find matter for the letter. In view of this I suggest a report from each member every 6 months, material from these reports to be incorporated in the 2 monthly screed where possible. It is hoped your Leader will not be deemed unnecessarily demanding if it is insisted that the twice yearly communication be a condition of your membership. Any information will be welcomed: observations, suggestions for new work etc. Long reports are not essential; a few lines will do if they cover a matter of interest.

Q. Have you any members in the vicinity of Greesborough, Victoria and surrounding districts?

A. No, the Group is a national one. Members live in different states and one resides in the south of France. Victoria has 8 members, NSW – 5, Tasmania – 2, South Australia – 1, Western Australia – 1, ACT – 1, and France – 1. Only 3 members live in or close to the City of Melbourne and we meet occasionally at general gardening outings.

From early last Spring through until the end of Summer, I planted a number of Acacia seeds at intervals. The vast majority were purchased from G W Althofer, and came from New South Wales and Queensland; so many were dry area types. Ten seeds were sown in each case, the pre-sowing treatment was by the boiling water method which in previous experiments seemed as successful as any other. The seeds were planted 24 hours after the initial treatment, irrespective of whether they had swelled or not. Only apparently healthy seeds were used and all were purchased in either 1963 or 1964. The soil medium used was sandy loam, with the exceptions mentioned below; this on the advice of an experienced nurseryman who uses no other. Each set of seeds was planted in a 4 inch diameter terracotta pot and placed in the open sun. They were inspected at least 6 times a day and every precaution taken to keep them just moist. Vermiculite was used in a limited number of experiments, strictly according to the instructions given by Mr Holliday. In all cases germination was considered complete after 6 weeks and a percentage count taken.

There appears to be no advantage mentioning the names of the species used, but these can be supplied if anyone requires. Here are the results:-

8/9/64 Two Victorian species planted in error without previous treatment. No germination after 10 weeks.

10/9/64 No. 1: 0% 2: 20% 3: 80% 4: 30%

15/9/64 No. 1: 50% 2: 70% 3: 10% 4: 0% 5: 0% 6: 0%

28/9/64 Planted in Vermiculite
No. 1: 10% 2: 40% 3: 0% 4: 50% 5: 30% 6: 10%

8/10/64 Three sets of seeds (not the same in the two cases) planted in
(a) Loam: 1: 0%, 2: 20%, 3: 0%
(b) Vermiculite: 1: 10%, 2: 20%, 3: 0%

17/10/64 Planted by Michael O'Dwyer at Montrose:
No. 1: 0%, 2: 20%, 3: 20%, 4: 0%

23/10/64 No. 1: 10% 2: 50% 3: 10% 4: 20% 5: 0% 6: 100%

19/11/64 Vermiculite
No. 1: 0% 2: 10% 3: 10% 4: 20% 5: 0%

12/12/64 Seeds from Wattles indigenous to South Africa, five species each gave 50%

11/2/65 No. 1: 0% 2: 20%

16/3/65 6 from South Africa
No. 1: 50% 2: 0% 3: 0% 4: 0% 5: 0% 6: 50%

Just before the last planting it was suggested that slaters eating the seeds are a not uncommon cause of failure to germinate and that I should sprinkle the top of the soil after planting with metaldehyde and bran. This was done. The germination in the last 2 successful cases occurred after 2 weeks and the seedlings appeared exceptionally healthy. With the onset of the cold weather all of No. 1 died as did 2 of No. 2. The balance look sickly and are unlikely to go on. This mortality could be due to planting too late in the season.

The average germination for loam planting was 24% and for vermiculite 15%. This compared with last year's average of 45% with the boiling water method and 43% by nicking the seed. No remarks will be made personally at the moment on these very bad results. But comment and above all, criticism is invited and indeed expected. To the vermiculite protagonists one must say that perhaps the experiments were too few and of all I ask the question. Are dry area seeds more difficult to sprout in the climate of southern Victoria? Next year we will take an equal number of southern and dry area seeds and see if there is any difference in the germination rate, under the same conditions. In addition, direct comparisons will be made using vermiculite on the one hand and a more usual medium on the other. It may then be possible to sum up the seed position.

Earlier in the year Mr Payne suggested we obtain a list of as many Australia's Acacias as possible. Knowing that Mr Croll was at work on this matter, I wrote to him and received the following reply:-

“Over the past 8 years I have compiled what I believe to be the most complete list of Acacia species in Australia (indeed the world). It far exceeds in detail any list possessed by any Herbarium in Australia and this I have checked myself. Within the next few months, I hope the CSIRO will publish it in a “draft for comment” form for circulation to taxonomists who may have variations to suggest as a result of specific studies. I believe I will have sufficient copies of this to provide some for the Acacia group, and will let you know as soon as they come to hand. The list, by the way, not only shows what are regarded to be valid species but also the synonyms that appear in the literature. The meaning of each specific name is also given, the author of each specific name and the date on which the name was conferred. Information on states of

occurrence will also appear and this is the main item which needs checking because there is still considerable unreliability of record to be disentangled. My suggestion, therefore, is that instead of your endeavouring to compile a list of names independently, you await this publication. In any case a list is of little use without synonyms also appearing and the task of compilation is an enormous one – the list embraces well over 1,000 entries. This number comprises 650 or so valid species and the balance of synonyms. Mr Payne wrote to me in the last couple of months asking whether I had anything to publish. I shall be writing to him to say that in view of the fact that this activity of mine is being conducted as a research project, the CSIRO will be printing the various products of the work. The next product after the list (and quite a few years hence) will be a comprehensive key to the Australian species.”

Thank you, Mr Croll. We are looking forward to your publication and all it means to Acacia enthusiasts.

I trust all will have read Mr Fred Rogers excellent article in the June edition of “Australian Plants”. Just in case, I stress and repeat this information obtained from the National Herbarium, and referring to Wattles and Hay Fever. “Certainly some Wattle pollens are known to irritate the eyes and noses of a few highly sensitive people. However, since the flowering season is brief, the trouble will soon pass. Wattles in general have been listed among the first 30 species of plants investigated for Hay Fever and found to be positive by the Commonwealth Serum Laboratories, but, in order of importance, 20th on the list. They rank lower than a number of popular garden flowers (Poppy, Sunflowers, Dahlia, Cosmos etc) which it would be unthinkable to exclude from garden culture.”

As few people will hear of expert opinions such as the above, it won't help a great deal in correcting a public misconception but the following extract from the Melbourne “Herald” of some weeks ago was widely read and made some impact:-

“Mind Over Matter – They removed the flowers from the lounge of a suburban Hotel when the woman complained they were bringing on her Hay Fever. She said later that she stopped sneezing as soon as the flowers were taken out. She does not know that they were artificial flowers.”

If you have any doubts about the damage this Hay Fever business can do to the cult of the wattle, read this extract from the “Ringwood Mail” dated July 1965. (Ringwood is 17 miles from Melbourne).

“Well the sneezing season is almost upon us again and soon what is left of the countryside will be bathed in the golden light of the Wattle. Few will argue against the beauty of the Accacia and I've known it to bring real tears to the eyes of some, but not always tears of admiration. A surprisingly large percentage of the population is allergic to pollens of which the Wattle is our chief source in early Spring. A few years ago in Croydon there was talk of eradicating the Wattle as a health precaution and in Great Britain and the Continent the florists dress it up with yellow baby ribbon, call it Mimosa and charge 2/6 to 5/-, a small sprig for it. Atchoo!!”

As you may have noticed the writer does not even know how to spell “Acacia” correctly, but who would plant Wattles after reading the above. Mrs McHaffey and I have separately written letters of protest and explanation and I am glad to say the paper published that of Mrs McHaffey and gave it the same cover as the article complained of.