

ASSOCIATION OF SOCIETIES
FOR GROWING AUSTRALIAN PLANTS

BIRDS AND NATIVE PLANTS
STUDY GROUP

NEWSLETTER NO. 18

JULY 1990



Dear members,

Since I accepted the position of your Study Group leader 3 months ago, I've prepared several rough drafts of an introductory newsletter, but now feel I have procrastinated long enough, so this is it!

Although I've always loved gardening, the bush, its plants and birds, I've only "officially" been around S.G.A.P. for the past 11 years. I started with the Redcliffe Australian Plants Club in 1979, soon becoming their Secretary/Treasurer for a 6-7 year span. Second marriage to a Samsonvale banana farmer meant moving from Redcliffe to the neighbouring Pine Rivers Shire, and I joined Pine Rivers S.G.A.P. and Wildlife Preservation Society of Qld., but stayed with the Redcliffe group, for whom I now organise activities and prepare a newsletter. Membership of the Queensland Region of S.G.A.P. followed, and in August 1988 I was a foundation member of the Samford branch of S.G.A.P., it being the closest to home. With Pine Rivers group I've been Plant Recorder and Excursions Officer, and presently lead their Acacia & Hibbertia Study Groups.

So my interest in native plants (and birds) extends from the coastal species - Wallum or heathland, and woodland - to the scrub & rainforest species of the hinterland ranges where I now live, surrounded by acres of beautiful, untouched Eucalypt forest and lots of birds. The Wallum plants were my childhood introduction to the Australian bush, and remain my favourites, especially the wildflowers. Redcliffe is a small coastal city directly north of Brisbane, Samsonvale a former farming region, and Samford a rural township, both in the Pine Rivers Shire, which shares boundaries with Brisbane to its south and Redcliffe to the north-east. Therefore my study of native plants has been concentrated in south-east Queensland, but I can see that my horizons will be widening somewhat from now on, and I'll be learning much more about birds and plants Australia-wide. Just looking to see where you all live was a Geography lesson in miniature.

Never having been a large Study Group leader before, I have much to learn and hope you will all bear with me until I become more familiar with the job. I plan to continue in similar style to Judy Smith, and retain the "Bird and Plant per newsletter" system. Members who have helped with contributions and drawings, please keep up the good work. I can draw to a limited extent, but find it very time-consuming. What is in my mind doesn't come out at my fingertips - I am far better with a camera than a drawing pencil. I'm sure Judy won't mind if I quote a paragraph from her first newsletter back in May 1983, as it expresses my feelings perfectly. That newsletter made excellent reading, covering most aspects of a Birds and Native Plants Study Group's work.

"Observation and recording will no doubt play a large role in this study group, but experiments with different species and structural arrangements in the garden could also be rewarding. Observations on the propagation and cultivation of bird-attractive plants as well as the birds themselves will be valuable."

I am a very amateur bird-watcher, up till now content to note which birds visit my garden, and to simply enjoy their presence. I provide suitable plants and water, and that is it. I have done very little technical research, just recording what I've learned from my observations.

We need records of our Australia-wide birdlife, and their uses of native plants, some of which I never really considered very closely till now. Because of my own interest in photography, I feel that a collection of slides could be one of our aims, eventually putting together an audio-visual. Are there any more keen shutterbugs out there? Our Study Group includes some very knowledgeable bird people, and their expertise combined with the plant-growing experience of S.G.A.P. members, can provide our group with some very valuable information.

For a start, I'll be doing at least 2 newsletters per year, perhaps 3 (time permitting) but I won't be too ambitious at first. Not knowing what expenses I would incur with the study group, I set membership at \$5, but this should allow me to prepare decent newsletters. For our next newsletter, I've chosen the following birds and plants. If all contributions can be back to me by 17th August, I should be able to prepare the newsletter for distribution in September.

WHISTLERS: Rufous
Golden
Gilbert's
Red-lore

EUCALYPTUS: ficifolia
leucoxydon
calophylla
torquata

I hope the choice of several species of both will allow a wide cross-section of members to provide information. The local Whistlers frequent my house garden during Winter, so I hope yours have the same habits. Red-flowering Eucalypts are always eye-catching, but mostly confined to the West of our continent, with us Easterners trying to grow some of them in spite of their dislike of our humidity, up here in the sub-tropics anyway.

When I came to live at the farm, I inherited a neglected garden, comprising of mostly exotics - Frangipanni, Pride of India, Bauhinia, Oleander and such-like. A much larger area than my suburban Redcliffe garden, it inspired me to convert it to a shrubbery of predominantly Australian plants. The house is on a ridge (up here it is all ridges and gullies), with the front garden sloping to a bank which drops about 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ m. to our road. Sometimes the slope makes things difficult, especially mowing, so I decided to eliminate that for a start. With soil which is 70% shaley rock and 30% good loam, spades & forks are useless for gardening. A mattock must be used for digging holes for the plants, so most of the advice about the type of hole to prepare just gets ignored. With sparks flying, I dig a hole just big enough for the plant and its soil, then in it goes with the words "Grow as best you can". As evidence that most of the plants do grow, and have flourished over the 10 years, I have been rewarded with a shrubbery one friend (with a neat town garden) called a "Madwoman's Garden". But I love it, and so do the birds. My husband says I can't bear to see any bare ground, and simply have to get another plant for that empty space. However, from knowing very few plant names 10 years ago, he can now conduct friends around the garden and name most of my trees and shrubs, even using the correct botanical names! Although I am the S.G.A.P. member, it is often he who sees plants first if we are bush-walking, and many are the times when he brings in something he has found up in the banana "patch", or nearby bush, for me to identify. This way I have learnt much of what I now know about the local flora. If I ask him if he saw such-and-such bird, the answer is usually "I haven't got time to sit around watching birds all day", but his eyes are keen enough to spot them and tell me.

My garden shrubbery attracts many birds, large & small, and my dream is to be able to spend just one whole day on the front verandah or in the garden, doing nothing except watching all their activities. 4 years I was conned into feeding a pair of partly-tame Pied Butcher-birds, who have each year now brought along their offspring. Somehow the message has spread, with now a surprising number of the smaller insect-eaters coming for the tiny mince crumbs. But more about them in later newsletters.

For now, I am eagerly waiting to receive your birds and plants news,

Barbara Henderson.