

**S.G.A.P. ACACIA STUDY GROUP**  
**NEWSLETTER NO. 15**  
**JANUARY 1974**

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I'm afraid this letter is going to be full of "I's" – almost unavoidable as practically no correspondence has been received from members during the last six months.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

Remains unchanged since last N/L. New members list is enclosed. Please destroy old one.

## **FINANCE**

Balance at date of last N/L \$56.30. Now increased to \$57.30. I don't propose to ask for a sub at the moment, although by the time you receive this about \$30 will have been paid out for seed list, members list, seed envelopes, seed on order from WA and postage.

## **SEED LIST**

A new list is enclosed. Please destroy the old one. One lot of seed sent in purports to be "*A. pravissima*, low growing weeping form from Lauriston, Vic". This is NOT the prostrate form and is not listed separately but order if you want to try it. The parent of seed supplied earlier as "dwarf decurrens" has now reached the alarming measurements of 8ft high and 20 ft wide. So if you don't want anything so vast, pull it out before it's too late.

A parcel of *A. obliquinervia* dated 24/2/73 and collected at Mt Buller has been received. Many thanks to the donor – I can't find any name on the parcel.

Mrs Michie has seed of some acacias from the Soudan – unidentified. If anyone would like to try these please write direct to her.

## **ACACIA PURPUREAPETALA**

Following directions given me by Mr C H Gittins, who collected this acacia in 1962 I found a collection of about 30 or so plants within 20 to 30 yards of the actual entrance to the mine shaft on the old workings of the Lass o' Gowrie mine in the Stannery Hills district, some 15 miles from Herberton in Queensland. The last three miles were not negotiable by my VW Campmobile, and a very kind local resident took me on the first occasion in his landrover. Knowing nothing whatsoever of plants, native or otherwise, he was somewhat stunned by my jubilation and excitement on viewing for the first time this rather insignificant plant sprawling on the ground at his feet.

Not wishing to impose unnecessarily on his kindness, I spent only 10 to 15 minutes there, having immediately decided that I would walk there the following day. This I duly did and spent several hours taking photographs, making measurements and notes, collecting seed and searching for other plants. I found another smaller collection on the track out from the mine shaft about ½ mile away.

Sad to relate, the plant is anything but spectacular. It is many stemmed and virtually prostrate, with long "streamers" up to 3' 6" long. Flowers are produced at irregular intervals, usually only on the last 8" to 10" of the branchlets, and open only three or four at a time. Flower heads are on single peduncles and are fairly widely spaced. Also, unfortunately, many of the branchlets bear no flowers at all. It has attractive lanceolate phyllodes, light green and somewhat hairy and the growth habit is attractive. The colour of the flower is a good deep mauvy-pink and flowers are 1/4" to 5/16" in diameter.

It is possible, of course, that if we could ever get it going in cultivation, judicious pruning might improve its florescence. First reports from a few people who have had some seed suggest that germination is 40% to 60%, but the seedlings are very likely to succumb within the first 4 to 8 weeks.

My observations lead me to believe that the plant is a very slow grower; and my experience has been that slow growing species are much more difficult to rear than fast growing species.

Continuing the account of my trip:- from Daly Waters I went across to Top Springs, Timber Creek and Kununurra, down to Halls' Creek west to Derby and south to Port Hedland. Here I turned inland to Wittenoom, and after a day and a very wet night in and around Dale's Gorge, set out for Meekatharra. On enquiring from a truckie what the road was like, I received the laconic reply, "Well, lady, it's 300 miles to Meeka – 100 miles of water and 200 miles of mud," and so it proved to be.

For two days I didn't take my eyes off the road and waded through many long stretches of water before taking the Kombi through. After "turning the corner" at Roy Hill the worst was over and I was able to enjoy the magnificent display of flora all the way down through Newman, Meekatharra, Cue to Mt Magnet. An entry in my diary reads:- "For the last three days I've been driving through the Garden of Eden."

From Mt Magnet I went across to Geraldton where I stayed a week with Gary Phillips and his wife. Miss Alison Ashby, well known painter of wildflowers was also staying there.

In collaboration with the WA Herbarium, and with much assistance from Gary, Miss Ashby has undertaken to tag as many of the lesser known WA acacias, in order that flowers and fruit may be obtained from the same plant, thereby enabling the Herbarium to be absolutely positive of identification. This has proved quite a stumbling block in the past as many people collect flowers, but are unable to return later to collect seed from the identical plant. Tagging is done by means of a strip of red knitted wool which withstands the weather and is easily seen. An aluminium tag with identification number is also affixed and exact records of location are kept in a field book.

Miss Ashby, now in her seventies, spends several months each year collecting and painting in the Geraldton district. Gary does a lot of driving for her and is able to follow up the collecting of seed when Miss Ashby is not there. She has instituted a similar program in the Kosciuszki district where she also spends some time each summer. Mr Maslin, acacia expert with the WA Herbarium, visited the Phillips household during the time I was there and was extremely enthusiastic and grateful for this work being done by Miss Ashby and Gary Phillips.

From Geraldton I went south and tried to find *A. echinata*, a recently described species, completely prostrate and known only from one locality; and *A. denticulosa*. Although I had the Herbarium locations for both these plants I had neglected to contact the people who actually found them (as I took the precaution to do with *A. purpureapetala*) and was unable to find either.

Four delightful days were spent with the Knox family on their farm 27 miles north of Esperance. Harry and his wife are devoted to the care and preservation of our flora and fauna, and have left more than 1,000 acres in its natural state for their benefit. Kangaroos and emus can also be seen every day of the year feeding on the best pastures. Harry knows his acacias and their whereabouts with the certainty of a true bushman, and took me unhesitatingly to a dozen or so species on his property. Two of these turned out to be new species. In fact, I was lucky enough to collect in WA 15 new species, two new varieties and one first collection for WA.

Esperance to Norseman then three days across to Ceduna, down the western side of Eyre Peninsula to Port Lincoln to see Tom Story, up to Port Augusta and down the Yorke Peninsula to Bute where I stayed a week with the Copley family, and whilst there visited Ken Warnes, leader of the Eremophila Study Group, to whom I had sent many seedlings.

Going south through the Barossa Valley I then called on Mrs Harvey. She is a very successful grower of acacias and had many flourishing two and three year olds to show me.

After that my luck ran out. I was smitten with a very virulent virus which deafened me, robbed me of my voice, made my throat so sore that for a couple of days I was on a liquid diet, and turned the whites of my eyes a bright geranium red. Quite a frightening sight! After a few days in bed with complete strangers, and not even ASG members, at Berri on the Murray, I staggered down to relatives in Melbourne and (Dr) Ross MacDonald ministered to me by telephone. I was later able to go on a splendid day's outing with Ross and his Maroondah Group, but was unable to fulfil my promise to talk and show slides at their monthly meeting. I was bitterly disappointed to have to let them down in this way.

The only other member I was able to visit in the suburbs was Myer O'Donnell. We had a great morning together, discussing not only acacias, but the woes of the world in general. I then spent a week recuperating in the National Park at Wilson's Promontory. This was absolutely glorious and I recommend anyone who has the opportunity to visit it to do so. On the way home from Wilson's Promontory I called in to see the Cane family at Maffra and made the acquaintance of our youngest member, John, and his father and mother. As mentioned earlier, John, now aged only 14, already has a collection of acacias of which any member would be proud.

My knowledge of acacias has been increased a hundredfold as a result of this long and somewhat exhausting trip, for in my opinion there is absolutely no substitute for seeing plants (of any genera) in their native habitat, where one has the opportunity to compare growth and characteristics of hundreds of plants of the one species; and very revealing it is to see that in so many instances the one species can vary, at maturity, from 5ft to 30ft.

I collected in all about 600 specimens (in triplicate), of which probably 550 or so were acacias. Inevitably there were plenty of duplicates amongst them, but in all there would be close to 350 species. The tremendous variation in shape and size of phyllodes of different species was a constant source of surprise and joy. Some are unbelievably intricate in shape and design; several are almost circular; many innocent looking species have quite large phyllodes which hide the most vicious spines; quite a number have neither leaves nor phyllodes, and very beautiful these are – amongst them *A. restiacea*, *A. spinescens*, *A. exocarpoides*. Another very attractive group are those dainty low-growing shrubs related *A. lycopodiifolia* – *A. galioides*, *A. perryi*, *A. adoxa*, *A. spondylophylla* and several others.

There are also a number of completely prostrate species which hug the ground with such tenacity that it is quite difficult to dislodge a specimen piece. There was absolutely no seed to be had, even on the ground, of any of these very desirable species, but at least we now know the names of some which would be absolutely outstanding garden subjects if they can be successfully grown. The next thing is to explore all possible avenues to obtain seed.

Must now tell you that I have informed Regional Council of NSW that I wish to resign as Leader of ASG; and as there was some unpleasantness at the time of my appointment because other states had not been informed, I have asked NSW Council to be sure to advise other States and to call for someone to volunteer to take over. I am sorry to have to do this but I find the task too time consuming. Of course I will carry on meantime, but if anyone has the time to take on this very interesting and rewarding job, please come forward and say so, because I just can't do it indefinitely. In order to minimize work meantime I propose to send out only three circulars annually instead of four. The next one will therefore be in May. At that date, whether leader or not, I hope to be able to make some specific and constructive recommendations about small acacias which we should try to get hold of, and with any luck may have a little seed of some.

## **HOMEWORK**

A very small "assignment"! Will anyone who has EVER had seed of *A. multispicata* from this seed bank please send me, without fail, a specimen of phyllodes (foolscap envelope size) and full description of plant, growth etc.

Goodbye for now

Inez Armitage

## **ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1973**

We lost a few members this year – some of our passengers disembarked. The enthusiasts remain.

In the course of a 12,000 mile trip round Australia I was able to call on about 20 members, including some as far afield as Townsville, Geraldton, Part Lincoln, Maffra.

Thanks to invaluable advice given to me by Mr C H Gittins of Epping, NSW, I was able to locate *Acacia purpureapetala*, the only known pink acacia in the world, in the Stannery Hills district about 15 miles from Herberton, Queensland; and was fortunate enough to be the first person ever to collect seed of this species. Mine is only the sixth reported collection of the species itself since it was first discovered in 1904.

In WA I was lucky enough to discover 15 new species and two new varieties. Two of these new species came from the property of Mr H E Knox, one of our members, whose farm is 27 miles from Esperance.

In Geraldton one of our members, Gary Phillips, in association with Miss Alison Ashby, well known South Australian painter of wildflowers, and in collaboration with the WA Herbarium, is tagging, recording and collecting many of the lesser known acacia species in WA, so that the Herbarium can be absolutely certain that flowers and fruit are taken from the same plant.

In WA also I saw many low growing acacias and at least eight completely prostrate species, one or two of which hug the ground with such tenacity that it is difficult to dislodge a specimen piece. These are the acacias we would

dearly love to be able to try in cultivation. Unfortunately, obtaining seed is going to be very difficult indeed, but we must keep trying.

I collected in all about 350 different species, and as a result of this trip my knowledge of acacias has been increased a hundredfold, for in my opinion there is absolutely no substitute for seeing plants (of any genera) in their native habitat, where one has the opportunity to compare growth and characteristics of hundreds of plants of the one species.

Although I wish to resign from the leadership of the Group, the knowledge and information I have gained can still be made available for the benefit of all via the Group Newsletter.

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