



ISSN 1035-4638
ASSOCIATION OF SOCIETIES FOR GROWING AUSTRALIAN PLANTS
ACACIA STUDY GROUP NEWSLETTER No. 67
NOVEMBER 1992

Dear Members,

Yet again my apologies for this letter being late. I had problems converting the book I have written from my word processor disc to a computer disc.

This is such a rush I have had to omit some items, including a list of current members, a welcome to new members and groups and an outline of some newly described species. I hope to have all these in the next issue - about February.

Bruce Clark

FINANCIAL BALANCE 1991-2

The Acacia Study Group financial statement for 1991-92 is in 2 parts because of the change of leadership.

STATEMENT TO 3/12/91 (Prepared by Marion Simmons)

Income

Balance 30/6/91	497.07
Subs. and Donations	33.00
Return from Petty Cash	13.51
Bank Interest	15.01
TOTAL	<u>\$558.59</u>

Expenses

Post	34.83
Copying	27.45
Bank Charges	2.96
Freight to Vic.	55.00
Cheque for balance	438.35
Total	<u>\$558.59</u>

From receipt of above cheque to 30/6/92 (Prepared by Bruce Clark)

Income

Cheque of Balance	438.35
Membership fees and donations	225.00
Payments for seed costs	45.90
Interest on Account	6.63
TOTAL	<u>\$715.88</u>

Expenses

Purchase of seeds	25.00
Newsletters (printing)	24.48
Postage, post bags & envelopes	112.26
Petty cash & stamps (on hand)	32.57
Miscellaneous	12.59
Gov't bank charges	0.38
Balance 30/6/92	<u>508.60</u>
TOTAL	<u>\$715.88</u>

SEED BANK:

The following species and variety have been added to the seed bank. *Ac. flagelliformis*, *grasbyi*, *rotundifolia*.

While preparing this newsletter I received a request for acacia seed from a SCAP member who is not a member of the Study Group. I have no idea whether they belong to one of the member groups. Although postage was included I declined to supply seed as it is largely purchased with member's funds. To clarify this situation, member groups are encouraged to seek seed on behalf of their members by forwarding a stamped addressed envelope with their requests the same as individual members.

AUSTRALIAN DRY-ZONE ACACIAS AS HUMAN FOOD.

This book published by CSIRO covers the proceedings of a workshop held at Glen Helen N.T. in August 1991. It contains 7 invited papers and summarised recommendations of working groups.

The idea is based on the traditional use of acacia seed, both green and dry, for food by Australian aborigines, the successful growing of Australian acacias in otherwise agriculturally useless areas of West Africa and the traditional use of tree seed in drought time by people in those areas. The papers are varied but include a table of characteristics of 44 acacias from Australia's dry zone with potential as human food and discussion on groups of them, traditional use of acacia seed by aborigines, nutritional composition of seeds, a report on growth of some species in West Africa and use of acacia seed during famine in Zimbabwe. Advantages of the trees as windbreaks, nitrogen enrichment of the soil and as firewood are mentioned.

Among aspects of extending the use of acacias covered are, analysis of nutritional and anti-nutritional/toxic factors, selection of the most suitable species and development for increased productivity.

The book raises interesting aspects of acacia use but much development remains to be done. It is a book for those with a special interest in the subject. Available from CSIRO Publications, 314 Albert St., East Melbourne, Vic. 3002 @ \$30 per copy (Posted) (145 pages)

ACACIA SLIDES:

A number of members have indicated they will look through their slides and let me know what they have available. I would hope to have the first set - a general introduction to acacias ready to lend to groups by the end of 1993. I feel this is a good way to promote acacias. In the history of the Warrnambool Group there has not been a meeting devoted solely to acacias so I might be able to use them as guinea pigs.

Previous group leader Inez Armitage writes; "How I wish I was in what has been my normal fantastically good health. Helping with a slide collection is the kind of thing I like doing most (except actually collecting and taking the photographs of course) but at 83 I have gone a long way down the track in the last months since an attack of something no one can diagnose which hit me last December - January." We wish Inez improved health.

REPORT FROM GERMANY:

Thomas Ross writes from Germany; "As we have cold winters here in Germany I grow most of my acacias in pots - only the most frost-hardy ones may be tried outside here. The only really hardy one is *A. alpina*, and the following species will survive mild winters, but not severe ones: *A. dealbata*, *A. pravissima*, *A. pataczekii*, *A. obliquinervia*. I keep testing, because I suppose the best provenances will prove hardier than the ones I have already tried"

"The showiest plant this year is a very attractive *A. flocktoniae*". The foliage is very nice and it has the typical "Mimosa" fragrance."

Not so long ago botanists divided the genus *Casuarina* into two and suggestions were made that *Eucalypts* should be divided into something like 7 or 8 genera. The *Eucalypts* seem to have escaped division for the present by the issue of their Volume of "Flora of Australia" and the "Flora of New South Wales". A proposal has been put forward to divide acacias (see Newsletter No.57 Aug. '89).

The consequences of any such change would immediately outdate every published work which included acacias and cause great inconvenience to plant growers, retailers and naturalists. If anything is to be gained, apart from the kudos for the publisher of such a revolutionary paper then the public should be brought into the debate.

Questions and controversy about changes in nomenclature and the complexities involved are evident from a number of current sources. John S. Beard in the introduction to his "Plant Life of Western Australia" points out that the only name changes which must be accepted are those required by the International Rules of Plant Nomenclature, that others are clearly justifiable and others more pedantry than common sense. "The public should realise that none of us are compelled to accept name changes of the kind which are not obligatory under the International Rules but only represent a taxonomist's opinion."

In the SGAP Journal (SA Region, August 1992) Ivan Holliday quotes Yee H. Hwang of the National Museum, Taiwan writing critically of the division of the *Casuarinas*, in the Australian Systematic Botany Society's newsletter; "Nearly all botanists with whom I have talked disagree with the separation of *Allocasuarina*, but only a few are enthusiastic enough to express their views. It is all right to be conservative when everything is in good order, but we cannot afford complacency when something goes very wrong." To complicate things even further, Barbara Buchanan (VIC SGAP Newsletter Sept. '92) writes of "Botanical Networking" as distinct from the traditional evolutionary trees. This is based on Barbara's thoughts from an article (in "New Scientist" No. 1302 Feb. '92) and a talk by Neil Marriot on the confused situation of varying classification by botanical taxonomists in the genus *Grevillea*.

We know some species will cross breed with others and this can provide an exchange of genetic material if there is fertile progeny and thus a basis for variation of growth form and response to environmental pressures. It is quite possible some variations of disjunct populations have arisen over a long period from the chance isolation of a single transported seed with its limited genetic variation and the selection pressures imposed on it by the environment in which it grew.

Division on the basis of one or two genetic factors and isolation is questionable. A classification key is a very useful aid to the identification of plants, but it is an artificial contrivance and should be recognised as such. Constant "splitting" and "lumping" of variations into species only outdates past keys and confuses the users. Too fine a division is futile and too coarse a division not of much use. The problem is where to strike the balance. Are we going to finish up with thousands of virtual varieties like gladiolas, fuschias, danlias, iris etc. - all of these derived from a few species and their hybrids? Interference with established higher levels of classification is even more drastic. The professionals need to be reminded to take a wide view of what they are doing, to see the broad effects and to consult.

Perhaps William Dykes put it as well as any in the introduction to his monograph on "The Genus *Iris*" published in 1913; "Doubtless, the specialist is apt to attach an altogether exaggerated and entirely unjustifiable importance to his own particular branch of the subject, but it is impossible to deny the proposition that no satisfactory definition of a botanical species can be given

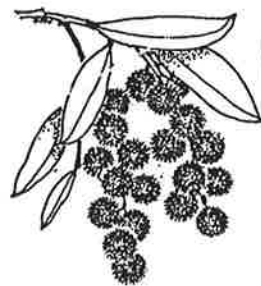
without knowledge of the behaviour of the plant under varying conditions of growth, in the wild state and in cultivation, and of the extent to which seedlings may vary within the limits of the species." The same principle applies to all plants.

As only confusion can result from the publishing of different keys and classification in journals which are obscure to all but specialists in restricted areas, taxonomists who propose changes should be accountable to the public, who fund most of them. If a change is justified then taxonomists should be able to publicly justify it. Who gave botanists naming rights anyway? Maybe we should be loudly protesting "hands off our acacias". What do the members think?

 * As I do not have access to botanical journals, Shona Sadler who is *
 * also leader of the Eucalyptus Group has forwarded a number of extracts *
 * on newly described species of acacias. I will summarise them in the next *
 * Newsletter. Many thanks Shona. *
 * *

"The Elms" PAINBURN VIC 3265

~~Mr. Jeff Irons
 Stonecourt
 74 Brinsstage Rd
 HESMILL
 WIRRAL
 ENGLAND
 Acacia Study Group Newsletter~~



FILE COPY