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ASSOCIATION OF SOCIETIES FOR GROWING AUSTRALIAN PLANTS
ACACIA STUDY GROUP NEWSLETTER No. 68
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Dear Members,

It has been a struggle to get back to the keyboard after the lay-off over Christmas-New Year, but at last here is a rather late newsletter. The book I am writing continues to have problems and when it was almost ready to print the publisher ran out of money, and then more information came to light. I hope to wrap it up by about mid-year. In response to questions from several members, it is about, and critical of, the investigation and subsequent court hearings into the "Ash Wednesday" bushfire which burned through this area in 1983.

Western Australia membership of the Acacia Study Group has doubled, as Maureen Vick has joined Elizabeth George as a second member from that state. Unfortunately some members from the north and inland areas have let memberships lapse.

Several comments have been received, both from within and outside ASG about my comments on the changes to plant nomenclature. All have been different which just goes to show the complexity of the issue. Bruce Maslin of the Western Australian herbarium has indicated he would like to respond (from a taxonomists point of view) and I look forward to him doing so in the next newsletter.

STUDY GROUP LEADERS MEET: You will have noticed from most state newsletters that a Study Group Leaders workshop was held at the National Botanic Gardens in Canberra last October. The number of leaders who could be accommodated was limited. I was not available to attend and therefore not considered as a starter. ASGAP Study Group Coordinator, Jan Sked has sent most of the papers from the workshop on to leaders.

On March 13th 1993 Vic. SGAP held a meeting of Victorian based Study Group Leaders at Dunkeld. Chaired by Study Group Liaison Officer Bob Mylius, only four of the Victorian based leaders were able to attend. Unfortunately the three longest serving leaders did not. Bob passed on some information from the workshop and aspects of study groups were discussed. It was encouraging to compare the running of groups with other leaders. Much of the discussion concerned the function of groups. Some groups are very active, maintaining live collections of plants and facilitating the meeting of at least some members in metropolitan areas. Other groups seemed to have a more passive membership. Just how much actual study is undertaken depends on the enthusiasm of group members.

SEED BANK:

Deletions : alpina, sutherlandii,
Wanted: verticellata, biflorus, plus deletions.

NEW MEMBERS: I have been remiss in not making a point of welcoming new members since I took over as group leader. The following new members have joined in that period and we welcome them to our study group, Burrendong Arboretum, William Bennet, Henri Debono (France), Philip Hartstein, Bob Christie, Ian Jardine and Maureen Vick. Their addresses are on the current membership list with this newsletter. The Fleurieu Group from SA has also joined.

RECENTLY DESCRIBED SPECIES:

Five new species of acacia are described by Mary D. Tindale and Phillip G. Kodala in "Telopea" Vol.5(1) 1992. All occur in northern Western Australia or/and the "Top End" of the Northern Territory.

Ac. arafurica A round shrub to 3m. high, phyllodes are obliquely ovate-rhomboidal with the lower margin almost straight and the upper margin abruptly curved. Golden yellow flower spikes occur in April-May and July. From Darwin district and Arnhem Land. Allied to Ac. sublanata.

Ac. cataractae A shrub to 2m. high with brown fibrous bark. Phyllodes, narrow elliptical, grey-green to dark green. Yellow to bright yellow spike flowers in groups of 1-3 in the upper axils of phyllodes, during late December-January, March-July. Found in the "Top End" including Bathurst Island.

Ac. delicatula Often spreading shrub to 1.5m. high, branching from the base. Phyllodes are linear to filiform. Ball flowers are borne in January, March-April, July. Closely allied to A. subternata. Northern WA and NT.

Ac. gracilentia Often spindly shrub to 3m. high. Very narrow elliptical tapering phyllodes to 6 cm. Golden spike like flowers, April-May, August.

Ac. brockii Slender tree to 5m. high with smooth dark grey bark. Linear tapering phyllodes to 26.5 cm. long. Flowers are pale yellow spikes 20-43 mm. long in April-May, July. Found from the Darwin district to the Kakadu National Park.

Other new descriptions include:

Ac. blayana -a tree with a small open crown which grows to 25m. high with bipinnate leaves. Globular flowers are borne September-October. Occurs near the Brogo River in the Wadbilliga National Park on the south coast of NSW. (Telopea 4(1) 1990 Tindale and A. B. Court);

Ac. courtii - tall shrub or weeping tree 7-20m. high. Growing tips often tinged pink-purple. Phyllodes are dull green, flattened and linear to 18 cm. long. Pale yellow to almost white flowers are described as spicate and appear November-January. Distribution confined to a limited area between the Manning and Hastings Rivers NSW. (Tindale and Clare Herscovitch in Telopea 4(1) 1990);

Ac. paula is a low prostrate to semi-prostrate bush found on the Mitchell Plateau, north-western Western Australia. Linear phyllodes to 15 cm. long vary in colour. Yellow inflorescences described as "shortly spicate to almost obloid" occur at least from March-June. (Aust. Syst. Bot. 17 Aug. 1990 - Tindale and Stuart J. Davies)

Ac. veronica A shrub or tree 3-10m. tall, endemic to the Stirling Range WA. Phyllodes are narrow 8-15 cm. long, dark green. White to cream globular flowers from March-September. (Nuytsia 7(1) 1989 B. R. Maslin)

BIRDS AND ACACIAS: The Bird Observers Club of Australia are interested in undertaking a study of birds which feed on Acacias and see it as a means of drawing attention to the use of acacias to attract birds to gardens. A preliminary approach was made to Vic. SGAP and I suggested as that as the Acacia Study Group was only a small widely dispersed group that the ASGAP membership as a whole would be a more appropriate body to be involved.

MEMBERSHIP FEES will be due from July 1st. The group is in a sound financial position, as indicated by the balance sheet in the last newsletter. The fee for 1993-4 will therefore remain at \$4-00. Looking to the future, the slide project may be expensive if it is necessary to have a large number of slides copied. Whether it will be necessary in future to raise fees to assist with this may depend on funds being available from outside the group. If you have any suggestions as to where funds for this might be obtained please let me know.

BOOK REVIEW:

Acacias of Southeast Australia. By Terry Tame. Published by Kangaroo Press.
206 pages. RRP \$45.

This excellent publication is a source-book of information for 230 species of acacia which occur in southeastern Australia. Almost one quarter of the Australian Acacia flora is covered, including all species occurring in New South Wales and Victoria as well as many that extend to the adjoining states of Tasmania, Queensland and South Australia. The book provides keys, descriptions, illustrations, photographs and other useful information and as such it is a welcome contribution to the growing literature on this very large and important genus.

The individual species descriptions are informative, botanically accurate and demonstrate that the author has a sound appreciation of the critical characters. This level of taxonomic understanding is accentuated by the self-executed line drawings that accompany each description. Besides showing general habit, pod and seed features these illustrations commonly show enlargements of phyllode nervature and flowers; these two (cryptic) features are fundamentally important to discriminate taxa with confidence. Species distributions and habitat preferences within southeastern Australia are described; further information is given by a map which depicts the Australia-wide range of each species. Other information provided for each species includes its place of publication, the derivation of the species name, its common name, details regarding who collected the type specimen and from where, and the flowering period. The general notes included at the end of each species account are especially informative. These contain discussions on affinities, distinctive features of the plant, remarks on cultivation and aspects of the biology of the plant. Colour photographs are included in a section at the beginning of the book, with seven or eight individual images per page.

There are three short introductory chapters. Chapter 1 is devoted principally to a description of the individual parts of the Acacia plant and the terms used to describe these. This narrative, and its accompanying two figures, introduce the reader to most of the terminology that is used elsewhere in the book. Included in the second chapter, on cultivation, is an useful categorization of the species according to their stature (e.g. shrub vs tree) and climatic zones in which they occur (e.g. cool-dry, warm-humid, cool-humid, etc.) Chapter 3 is a scholarly, synoptic account of the evolutionary history and classification of the genus.

Two keys are provided, one to the individual species and the other, a pictorial key, to major groups of the species; both keys seem to work reasonably well, however, they were not tested extensively. My major criticism of this book is the lay-out of the key to species: because the leads are not indented it is very difficult to find the second couplet. This can be especially troublesome when keying species that are placed toward the end of the key. Another (slight) inconvenience is that the index to names refers the reader to species numbers rather than to page numbers.

The strength of this work lies in its thoroughness, pleasing presentation and comprehensive coverage. It is a truly professional treatment of a particularly complex group of species. At a recommended retail price of \$45 it represents good value and is a must for all lovers of this, Australia's largest genus of flowering plants.

Bruce Maslin (Western Australian Herbarium.)

ASGAP CONFERENCE DISPLAY:

Study Groups have been invited to mount a display at an Open Evening for conference goers and visitors at Robert Menzies College, Macquarie University, on Tuesday 28th September 1993 from 7.00 p.m. onwards. If any Acacia Study Group members in the Sydney area would like to arrange such a display could they contact Betty Rymer, 48 Annangrove Road, Kenthurst NSW 2156 (ACN 002 880 408); by the end of March. While this notice is late it may be worth trying in early April. We have been asked if a display board or table would be required and it has been suggested that seed may be sold at a special cut price for this evening only. Surplus seed held by our seed bank could be used for this purpose. If anyone is interested perhaps they could contact other ASG members in the Sydney region and also let me know so I can include any information in the next newsletter, prepare seed etc.

A METHOD OF ACACIA. DEANII GERMINATION: The seed of Acacia deanii is a bit tougher than the seed of other wattles. It has to withstand desert sun, flooding rain and lots of other nasties and still remain viable.

After finding the boiling water system to no avail, I tried abrading the surface coat of individual seeds - and then used the boiling water treatment. Results were spectacular. Three trees out of my original five seeds. Details of my method are as follows.

I made small indentations in the endgrain of a piece of hardwood, sufficient to each contain one seed firmly with about a quarter of its thickness protruding above the surface of the wood. The seeds were then rubbed with 100 grit wet and dry paper (dry). This was kept up until small, lightish patches showed where the seed had been rubbed.

It took about ten minutes to process five seeds, which were then put in a cup and boiling water poured on. They were left until they swelled (only four), and these were planted out in the top of a two litre milk carton.

Three flourished. When the roots found the bottom of the carton they were planted out in the garden sans carton. They have flowered continuously since last March. (Bob Phelps - Victoria Newsletter March 1993)

WESTERN MYALL (Acacia papyrocarpa) RESEARCH:

Carolyn Ireland of Adelaide University is to investigate the reasons why the shy Western Myall shows such poor regeneration throughout its range. A grant from the Australian Flora Foundation will be used for fencing enclosures and setting up disturbance experiments as she tries to find out what it is that stops the production of seedlings of this species which is the main tree in 150,000 square kilometres of arid woodland in South Australia.

Carolyn writes:- The tree has a seasonal cycle of flowering and seed setting which differs markedly from tree to tree and in abundance from year to year. Ants are predatory seed harvesters rather than seed dispersers. Scarified seed with arils germinate more successfully than seeds without arils. Seeds do, however, exhibit innate dormancy. Seed fall occurs during the most likely time for large episodic rainfall events which occur approximately every twenty years. Onward growth of seedlings appear to require more than 80 mm. of rain falling in one germination event. It may be that rare occurrence of inundation with its scarification of seeds by tumbling action and water and the burial of seeds away from the harvester ants are crucial for large recruitment events.

(Compiled from Australian Flora Reports forwarded by Inez Armitage who says A. papyrocarpa is one of her favourite acacias.)

ACACIA STUDY GROUP MEMBERSHIP LIST - MARCH 1993.

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NOTE ON BOOK REVIEW:

I looked at a copy of Terry's book very briefly during the Vic. SGAP meeting at Dunkeld. It appears to be well presented, with good photographs. It has some species in the index under the genera "Racosperma" and does not appear to have some rare species indexed, e.g. A. dallachiana and A. phasmoides. Local shops did not have copies in stock, so I could not check these original impressions later.

(Bruce Clark)

*ACACIA SLIDES: This project has received a big boost by the provision *
* of almost 200 slides along with her matching file cards by past study group *
* leader Inez Armitage. Many thanks to Inez for this very important *
* contribution to the project. I have not been through all of them yet, as *
* I feel it is a job for long winter evenings, but the wide range of species *
* will form a good basis upon which to build this project. It is my intention *
* to acknowledge all contributors on one slide in each set. *

"The Elms" PANMURE VIC 3265

Acacia Study Group Newsletter

