ASSOCIATION OF SOCIETIES FOR GROWING AUSTRALIAN PLANTS Inc.

EPACRIS STUDY GROUP

Group Leader: Gwen Elliot, P.O. Box 655 Heathmont Vic. 3135

NEWSLETTER

No. 29

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AUTUMN 2010

Greetings to all Epacris Study Group members. It's hard to know what to say in regard to the cultivation of *Epacris* in Australia in recent months. For many it was a very challenging summer, while for others the conditions for growing plants have been much kinder than in recent years. The one thing which is definite is that it has been a season of weather extremes, including heat and drought, heavy rains and flooding, as well as severe and damaging hailstorms.

All of these situations highlight the importance of sharing our plants around, propagating more than we need ourselves so that we can give some to friends in other places. If we don't do our own propagation we can at least offer cuttings to friends, particularly if we have any unusual plants in our gardens which are not widely available commercially. We can also make a major contribution by supporting our state and regional botanic gardens and also our local parks and reserves. Many of these areas now include a commitment to the preservation of rare and endangered species and they usually have a real need for the assistance of keen volunteers.

The Australian Plant Society provides us with many opportunities to share both plants and knowledge of our flora. It is a privilege and also I think a responsibility to be involved in this way so that future generations can continue to enjoy our flora as we are able to do.

Several Australian Plant Society regional groups are having PLANT SALES in the coming months. You can check your local State newsletter for details of the plant sales closest to you.

These plant sales provide a great opportunity for social contact with other Australian plant enthusiasts, and often allow us to purchase plants such as *Epacris* which may not be readily available through commercial nurseries. Autumn to early winter is an excellent time for planting throughout most of our country, so we hope you are able to pick up some real treasures to add to your garden this year.

Warm greetings, and happy gardening,

Gwen E.

NOTE: I have just received in the post an envelope addressed to the Epacris Study Group, posted from Hobart on May 2nd, 2010. Unfortunately the envelope was slit along the bottom and was totally empty. There was no information regarding the sender, but if you have sent such a letter in recent days, please let me know, and perhaps cancel any cheque sent.

News & Notes

A PARCEL OF GOODIES for our EPACRIS STUDY GROUP Files

Our Study Group collection of information has been considerably enriched since our last Newsletter, by the receipt of a parcel of Botanical Papers and Publications on Epacridaceae plants, from Professor Anne Ashford of the University of New South Wales.

Volume 77, Number 4 of the ANNALS OF BOTANY printed in April 1996 was devoted entirely to Epacridaceae. This international plant science journal was founded in 1887 and published by Academic Press for the Annals of Botany company, a registered charity based in England.

Papers we have received which were published in the 'New Phytologist' include the STRUCTURE AND COMPOSITION OF THE THICK WALL IN HAIR ROOT EPIDERMAL CELLS OF *WOOLLSIA PUNGENS* by C. L. Briggs and A. E.. Ashford (2000), and the BIOLOGY OF MYCORRHIZAL ASSOCIATIONS OF EPACRIDS by John Cairney and Anne Ashford (2002). Also received was a 2002 paper on SEASONAL CHANGES IN HAIR ROOTS AND MYCORRHIZAL COLONIZATION IN *WOOLLSIA PUNGENS* by Emily Kemp, Paul Adam and Anne Ashford, published in 'Plant and Soil' by Kluwer Academic Publishers and printed in the Netherlands.

An interesting 10-page report on some of the work being undertaken on *Woollsia pungens* by Anne Ashford and her colleagues, including John Palmer, was included in the June 2004 issue of AUSTRALIAN PLANTS magazine, which will be on the shelves of many of our Epacris Study Group members.

It is really great that such detailed research is being undertaken by Australian botanists, and any research on plants in the Epacridaceae or Ericaceae families could have relevance to plants in the genus of *Epacris.*

Sincere thanks to Anne for all her work, and for sending these publications for our Study Group collection of material. We will undoubtedly be able to refer to them on numerous occasions in the future and to pass on items of relevant information when these topics are discussed in the Newsletter.

Edible EPACRIDS

Lenore Lindsay, leader of the **AUSTRALIAN FOOD PLANTS STUDY GROUP** has contacted us seeking information on any edible Epacridaceae plants.

The publication **WILD FOOD PLANTS OF AUSTRALIA by Tim Low** published by Angus and Robertson in 1988 does include a section on HEATHS, indicating that at least nine heath genera have species with edible fruits, although it is not known if all species within these genera are edible. The genera mentioned are *Acrotriche, Astroloma, Brachyloma, Cyathodes, Leucopogon, Lissanthe, Monotoca, Pentachondra* and *Styphelia.*

Sadly the author goes on to state "Most other heath genera like *Epacris* (and some *Leucopogon*) do not produce succulent fruits and may be discounted as foods.

While fruits of native heaths provided the main source of food it has also been recorded that Aborigines also sucked nectar from the flowers of some heaths.

If you have any information at all in regard to edible Epacrids, Lenore would love to hear from you. She can be contacted at 323 Philip Avenue, Frenchville Qld, 4701.
Email: lenorelindsay@hotmail.com

We would also be very interested in this information for future EPACRIS STUDY GROUP Newsletters.

News & Notes

Growing *Epacris* plants in New South Wales

Study group member, **Ian Cox** has been growing Australian plants for many years, and has kindly sent an item regarding his experiences with *Epacris.*

"Tamara and I have a 2 ha block in north-west Sydney. The soil is moderately impoverished and derived from sandstone. It varies in depth from an inch or two, to probably half a metre or a little more.

The location is botanically diverse, being situated geologically in the strata between the Hawkesbury Sandstone and the richer Wianamatta shales. Most of the block is open sclerophyll forest with heath understorey. Trees are mainly *Eucalyptus haemastoma, Corymbia gummifera, Allocasuarina littoralis* and *Banksia* (four speces).

The smaller plants are many and varied. During late winter and early spring the bush comes alive with the most brilliant displays you could imagine.

Epacris microphylla grows naturally in the shallow pockets in the sandstone, seemingly where little else will grow. From July to September it warms us with its glittering floral display along with the similarly-coloured flannel flowers and that of its relative, *Woollsia pungens.*

Epacris pulchella (pink form) favours the slightly deeper soils and although not as showy as ***Epacris microphylla*** it flowers for most of the year.

We are in a bushfire-prone area and after hazard-reduction burns have noticed that both the above ***Epacris*** germinate readily after fire within about two years.

Because of our desire to protect the natural vegetation, we have limited the garden to the area close to the house.

In the garden we grow ***Epacris purpurascens var. purpurascens,*** which is listed as vulnerable under the NSW Threatened Species legislation. It grows naturally within a few kilometres from here in shale soils, but does quite well in our sandy loam.

Other ***Epacris*** plants we have in the garden are ***Epacris longiflora*** and the Bega form of ***Epacris impressa.*** Both these are growing well on the edge of our fern garden."

Australian Flora Foundation

In addition to being a member of the Epacris Study Group, Ian Cox is also a busy person in his role as Secretary of the Council of the Australian Flora Foundation.

The Australian Flora Foundation's role is to foster research into the biology and cultivation of Australian plants. This is done by providing a small number of research grants each year. To date about 90 projects have been financed by the Foundation.

The Society for Growing Australian Plants, as our Society was previously known, was largely responsible for the establishment of the Australian Flora Foundation in 1981. Members have generously supported the Foundation since that time and continue to provide donations and bequests to continue the work of the Australian Flora Foundation. All donations over $2 are tax deductable as the Foundation has been registered as a charity by the Australian Taxation Office.

Membership of the Foundation is also available for $25.00 per year and members receive twice-yearly newsletters and are eligible to vote at general meetings of the Foundation.

Some superb projects have been funded by the Australian Flora Foundation. If you would like further information on the Foundation it can be readily obtained on the Australian Flora Foundation website, or by writing to the Australian Flora Foundation at
Box 412, Holme Building, University of Sydney, SYDNEY 2006 NSW

News & Notes

Growing *Epacris* from seed - with the help of Eastern Spinebills

Peg McAllister of Croydon, Victoria has been growing Australian plants since the days when she operated a small native plant nursery in Box Hill in the 1960s. She has years of experience and certainly very green fingers. She has kindly supplied the following item for our Newsletter.

I thought you may like to know how I first succeeded in growing ***Epacris impressa*** from seed.

I had established plants of all colours and had the wonderful company of Eastern Spinebills to share my heaths with. They did a wonderful job apart from bombing me if I turned a corner and met them head-on.

One year I cut the stems when I saw the seeds opening from the bottom up. I laid them in a barrow in the shed and let the summer do the work. Everything had left the stems bare, leaving a heap of leaves underneath. So I spread these "leaves" on trays of soil with sand added.

I never saw an actual seed, but I was well rewarded in a few weeks time. I potted up 200 seedlings one day and never lost one.

Of course I was able to give them around and plant some myself. They are now most of m,y present plants - pink predominates in all shades.

After about ten years they are my mainstay but alas no seeds because there are no Spinebills any more. They with the Bell Miners have gone from along the railway line at the back and I've got the wretched Noisy Miners, you can guess the rest.

Seeds start to form but it withers away.

Miraculously I find a self-sown seedling in the garden now and then, so am still "with it", whatever "it" means.

Of course these old plants need pruning so I take off the ones that have branched out along the stems in furry clumps as I like the straight clean spikes of flowers.

I don't know how to describe the base of the plant, but if it was a Eucalypt I'd call it a lignotuber. There are always new shoots ready and even a sucker or two.

I always thought autumn was flowering time but it seems some are into winter-spring.

I'm crowded out with Flannel Flowers at the moment but it's good to have something to take over in the hard season.

I can thank the heath for introducing me to my botanist neighbour Trevor Edwards, as that is what caught his eye. I gave him cuttings from my plants last winter.

New book for Australian plant enthusiasts
COLLECT AND GROW THAT SEED - Small Australian Plants

In our October 2009 Newsletter an article was included outlining research on propagation by seed being undertaken by some of the members of the former Australian Daisy Study Group.

This work has now come to fruition in the form of a self-published book by **Judy Barker, Ailsa Campbell, Faye Candy, Peg McAllister** and **Maureen Schaumann.**

Epacris Study Group founding leader, **Dr. Ron Crowden** of Tasmania, **Professor Anne Ashford** from the University of NSW and **Dr. Elizabeth Brown** of the National Herbarium of NSW provided assistance to the authors, as mentioned in our Newsletter and this has been generously noted in the acknowledgements.

The main species of ***Epacris*** included are ***Epacris impressa*** and ***E. purpurascens*** and plus almost a full-page illustration of ***Epacris reclinata*** at the conclusion of Chapter 1.

The front and back covers feature a wrap-around photograph of the garden of Peg McAllister in Croydon, with a display of cottage-type Australian plants to rival any colourful garden of introduced species.

This is a publication written by Australian plant enthusiasts, for Australian plant enthusiasts, and is recommended for those seeking to grow some of our small Australian plants from seed. It is available from the Australian Plant Society book services in the various states, or by contacting Judy Barker at 9 Widford Street, East Hawthorn 3123. Email: barkeri@bigpond.net.au

Congratulations to all involved, and grateful thanks for this addition to the information available to us all.

EPACRIS STUDY GROUP Plant profile

Epacris glacialis (F. Muell.) M. Gray

glacialis = "of the ice"

Distribution - New South Wales and Victoria

Epacris glacialis is a low spreading species from the Mount Kosciusko region of New South Wales and the Bogong High Plains in Victoria.

Plants are prostrate or to 50 cm tall with a width of 50 cm to 1 m. The small, green, thick and leathery leaves are somewhat obovate to about 4 mm long. They need to be fairly tough, because are often covered by snow in winter. The wiry branchlets are also well-adapted to their environment and can self-layer by developing adventitious roots.

Flowering is during late spring to late summer when small leafy clusters of white flowers of about 1 cm across are produced near the ends of the branchlets. The floral bracts are conspicuous and reddish-brown and the short floral tube is 2 - 3 mm in length. Flowering can be abundant, making this a very showy species when in bloom.

Plants are found primarily in moist, peaty soils of moss beds and gravelly soakages in and around the margins of subalpine creeks and bogs.

Photograph - *Epacris glacialis* in Mt. Kosciusko Naational Park
© Rodger Elliot

Illustrations *Epacris glacialis*
© John Armstrong

Epacris glacialis (F. Muell.) M. Gray

Cultivation

Epacris glacialis is not widely cultivated but is certainly worthy of greater recognition. Plants appreciate some protection and are likely to prefer positions with filtered sun or shade for part of the day. Their preference is for moist but well-drained soils with a fairly high content of organic matter. Cultivation in containers is also well worth trying.

Propagation

Propagation of *Epacris glacialis* can be undertaken using cuttings, using barely firm young growth. Plants can also be successfully propagated using the self-layering stems. Seed is not known to be commercially available.

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Epacris glacialis was originally described as a subspecies of *Epacris heteronema* by the botanist Ferdinand von Mueller, who gave it the name *Epacris heteronema* var. *glacialis* in 1868.

Baron Sir Ferdinand Jakob Heinrich von Mueller K.C.M.G., Ph.D., F.R.S. was born in Germany on 30 June 1825 and died in Melbourne on 10th Oct 1896. He was the most significant Australian botanist of the 19th-century, dedicating his whole life to his botanical pursuits. He studied botany in Germany then in 1847 was advised to move to a warmer climate for health reasons and travelled with his two sisters to Australia. In 1853 he was appointed as the first Government Botanist of Victoria.

He travelled widely throughout Australia, often under difficult conditions, and on one trip alone he collected nearly 800 species new to science. In 1857 he was appointed Director of the Melbourne Botanic Gardens, a position he held until 1873. He wrote extensively including over 800 botanical papers, and is noted for his letter writing, being estimated to have often written over 3000 letters in one year.

He was widely decorated for his work and commemorated in numerous awards.

Within the genus of *Epacris* he named *Epacris calvertiana*. *Epacris muelleri* was named in his honour by Otto Wilhelm Sonder.

Epacris glacialis was elevated to the status of a separate species, *Epacris glacialis* by Max Gray, a systematic botanist with CSIRO's Herbarium Australiense.

In 1963 Max Gray was co-author with N. Burbidge of PLANTS OF THE ACTand in 1979 he was co-author of KOSCIUSKO ALPINE FLORA with A. Costin, C. Totterdell and D. Wimbush.

Space for additional notes on *Epacris glacialis*

Recording the flowering times of *Epacris* species

This page is for recording the flowering times of *Epacris* in own garden, or in community gardens, botanic gardens, bushland areas or other sites in your region.

There is no deadline for sending the information to the EPACRIS STUDY GROUP. It is an ongoing project, with results being recorded on computer as received. The information received will also provide a reference for comparisons relating to any climate change in the future.

IF INSUFFICIENT SPACE PLEASE USE EXTRA PAGE

April 2010

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May 2010

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June 2010

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Recording the flowering times of *Epacris* species

July 2010

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August 2010

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September 2010

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October 2010

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Significant native plant gardens for sale in Victoria

It is not every day that a significant garden of Australian plants becomes available for purchase, but it just so happens that at least two such properties are currently being offered for sale at the current time.

Katandra Gardens - home of Bob and Dot O'Neill

49 Hunter Road, Wandin 3139 Vic

Wandin is about a one hour drive from Melbourne, in the Dandenong Ranges / Yarra Valley region. Bob and Dot O'Neill have been gardening on their 8-acres here for several years and have planted many thousands of Australian plant species, including numerous EPACRIS. The garden also reflects their strong interest in Correas.

Bob spent several years as APS Study Group Liaison Officer for Victoria and received the national award of the ABC Gardener of the Year in 2005.

In addition to the extensive garden area Katandra Gardens also has 4 Bed and Breakfast Cottages. The Gardens are open throughout the year for private or group visits and tours and a meeting room for groups is also on site. If you would like further information in regard to Katandra Gardens you can contact Bob and Dot on 03) 5964 4523 or via their website - www.katandragardens.com.au

The Blake home and garden in Ringwood East Vic.

Also being offered for sale by active Australian Plant Society members is the home and garden of Trevor and Beryl Blake in Ringwood East.

This 'Land for Wildlife' property has significant areas of indigenous vegetation and is a valuable habitat zone as well as containing numerous native plant species.

Trevor is a former leader of the Banksia Study Group and is well known as a guest speaker and tour leader for many APS groups throughout Australia. Trevor and Beryl have a strong desire for the property to be passed on to someone with a keen interest in the environment, and this would certainly be an ideal home for such a person. Further information can be obtained by phoning them on 03) 9870 4379.

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Study Group Renewals

Most Study Group renewals fall due in June/July each year. Many Epacris Study Group members choose to renew on a 2-year basis, as each year seems to come around quite quickly and a 2-year renewal saves on time, bank cheque fees and postage costs.

Your current membership expiry date is listed on the top left corner of your address label. The following Renewal Slip is provided for those whose membership is due this year.

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