

AUSTRALIAN NATIVE PLANTS SOCIETY (Australia) Inc.

EPACRIS STUDY GROUP

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

NEWSLETTER

No. 30

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SPRING 2010

Greetings to all Epacris Study Group members,

Regular readers of our Newsletters will have noticed the following note which was added to page 1 of our Autumn 2010 issue, just prior to it going to press.

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.

Fortunately all turned out well in the end, as the next morning an Epacris Study Group renewal form was delivered with a \$5 note stapled to the corner.

Our very nice Post Office manager advised that it had been found on the floor of the district sorting office. He went on to explain that many of today's envelopes have a very effective self-sealing strip and if there is any air left in the envelope when the seal is fastened envelopes can 'pop' at the bottom as they go through the rollers of the sorting machines.

This is certainly something I had not personally considered previously, but I felt it is very useful information for us all to be aware of. All of my letters will be squashed down firmly in future to avoid this potential problem. I hope the information may also be helpful to other readers of this Newsletter.

Well it certainly has been a winter unlike others of recent years in many regions of Australia. Water storage reservoirs have been topped up, and very importantly the moisture in the soil has increased which will be very welcome particularly to large trees which have been suffering stress through several years of below average rainfall and falling moisture levels in the soil.

The increase in rainfall has also been welcomed by *Epacris* plants. Who knows what may follow in regard to the coming summer, but at least our plants have had a good drink this winter and they certainly appear to be smiling at the moment.

On the other side of the coin there have been strong winds and even severe storms in some areas and we hope you have not suffered major damage in any of these. It's amazing how resilient some of our plants can be, and I guess we must also exhibit the same tenacity.

Warm greetings, and happy gardening,

Gwen E.

News & Notes

Welcome to a new Study Group member -

A very warm welcome is extended to **Merele Webb** of **Lilydale** Vic. who has now joined the Epacris Study Group.

Merele has been involved in the design and construction of native plant gardens for many years, and her experiences in the cultivation of Epacris will certainly be a welcome addition to our Study Group.

And welcome to Geoff Lay

who is now our National Study Group Co-ordinator -

Study group members who have not yet met **Geoff Lay** may be interested to know a little more of our Australian Native Plants Society, National Study Group Co-ordinator.

Geoff is now retired from full time employment as an actuary, which allows he and his wife Jannie to spend much more time travelling around Australia. He also has more time now for his involvement as a volunteer with the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne including participating in several field trips with botanists to collect seed for the Millenium Seedbank.

One of Geoff's main interests is in fungi and he works as a volunteer on the Australian Fungimap database.

Geoff's services are eagerly sought for the presentation of talks on fungi and flora to various plant societies as well as to Field Naturalists, Landcare and similar groups.

Thanks go to Geoff for accepting the position of Study Group Co-ordinator following in the steps of Phillip Robinson.

Information sought on *Epacris impressa* 'Bega'

Plants known as *Epacris impressa* 'Bega' have been popular for cultivation in New South Wales, Victoria and possibly other Australian states now for over 40 years.

It is one of the most successful forms of *Epacris impressa* for gardens, being able to tolerate a wide range of soil and climatic conditions, with plants growing to about 1 m tall.

The flowers are a bright scarlet-red and Epacris Study Group members have recorded the flowering period of this selection to be from January through to November.

It is assumed that the plants originally introduced into cultivation in the 1960s or earlier were propagated from cuttings obtained in the area near Bega in New South Wales, but this may not necessarily be the case.

A recent report has been received that a nursery in country Victoria has plants of *Epacris impressa* 'Bega' for sale and that these plants are very similar to the selection which has been available for many years as *Epacris impressa* 'Bushy Pink'.

If any Epacris Study Group members or other readers of this Newsletter have knowledge of the origins of this *Epacris impressa* 'Bega' or other information on this selection we would be very pleased to receive this information.

One *Epacris longiflora* survives 45.7°C

Julie Brownell's garden in **Fullarton** South Australia experiences some very hot summer weather including a temperature of 45.7°C on 28th January 2009. One of the plants to live through these extreme conditions was *Epacris longiflora*.

Unfortunately however Julie was away from her garden earlier this year and the *Epacris* didn't survive in her absence.

Perhaps it is worth another try Julie.

News & Notes

Growing *Epacris* in England

We again thank Study Group Member **Jeff Irons** in England for this latest snippet on his cultivation of *Epacris*.

My experience of growing *Epacris* has been a painful one, with many losses along the way. Some species died after one year, others took as long as ten years to die. I am left with only two species.

It took a long time for me to understand that the deaths were the result of incorrect soil acidity.

My garden has soft yellow clay about 2ft down and alkalinity from the clay rises up through the soil, gradually raising the pH. I did not realise this until a blue hydrangea began producing first purple, then pink flowers.

Now I dose regularly with agricultural sulphur. Surprisingly the upward movement of alkali is greater in wet than in dry summers.

Other species too have shown the effect of pH by suppressing anthocyanin colours. Until the soil acidity was corrected *Eucryphia milliganii* 'Pink Whisper' produced white flowers, as did *Leptospermum rupestre* 'Highland Pink'.

Many other *Epacrids* behaved in the same way as *Epacris* - dying !

The two remaining *Epacris* are *E. serpyllifolia* and *E. gunnii* - double-flowered white form. I find that they are vigorous when growing in a bed composed of equal parts by volume of peat and sand, but in the ordinary silt soil of the garden they make small plants less than one foot high. Quite why this is so is a matter for conjecture.

Note:

Many thanks for these comments Jeff. We wonder whether it could be that sand and peatmoss provides more air around roots than your garden silt soil. This may be one reason for the better development of plants in the sand/peatmoss mix than in the garden soil of your region.

If any Study Group members have additional thoughts, please let us know.

Epacris Research by the Australian Flora Foundation

Study Group members will be interested to hear that one of the research projects recently approved by the Australian Flora Foundation for funding in 2011 and 2012 is to investigate the pollinators of the rare and endangered *Epacris* species in Tasmania.

The objectives of the project are as follows

- to determine the pollinators of Tasmania's threatened *Epacris* species
- to understand the relationships between pollinators, floral morphology, flowering times and habitat
- to outline the potential impacts of introduced insects, such as the exotic bumblebee and honeybee, on the pollinator relationships of threatened *Epacris* species
- to assess the implications of this new knowledge for the conservation of *Epacris* and plant pollinator interactions.

The research will be carried out by Karen Johnson, a PhD student at the University of Tasmania. Her supervisor will be Dr. Peter McQuillan, Senior Lecturer, University.

Information on the Australian Flora Foundation was included in our Autumn 2010 *Epacris* Study Group Newsletter, or can be found on the website -www.aff.org.au

News & Notes

One *Epacris* has learnt how to cope with adverse conditions.

On a recent working bee in the **F.J.C.Rogers Reserve** in **Heathmont** Vic. our Australian Plant Society local group members observed a sturdy and showy plant of a pink-flowered form of *Epacris impressa* in full bloom.

It is not a young plant, and has been there for some years but this year it has been putting on a quite spectacular display of flowers, perhaps due to the good rainfall in recent months.

We also noted that the root system is beneath a large piece of Eucalyptus bark, about 40cm wide and 80cm long, with fissures in the bark which allows moisture to penetrate to the soil below. The bark undoubtedly also acts as a mulch, maintaining moisture in the soil and protecting the soil and the root system from heat during the summer. Being in a bush reserve the plant receives only the moisture which falls from the sky, and no supplementary watering is provided. The stem has developed horizontally beneath the bark then emerged to become erect at the side of the slab.

It obviously enjoys the conditions provided, and we also enjoyed the display of flowers.

Often when walking through our Australian bushland areas we notice plants growing in seemingly inhospitable places and wonder how they survive there, particularly when the same plants struggle in our gardens, where we also try to provide them with some additional help.

It's amazing how adaptable and versatile plants can be when their survival depends on such skills. Roots seek out moisture wherever it is available, perhaps finding their way into crevices between rocks or other similar situations.

We can all learn so much from observing plants in the wild, and I know our Australian Plant Society working bee members felt this way when we saw this very healthy *Epacris impressa*.

Australia's Open Garden Scheme

The 2010-2011 season of **Australia's Open Garden Scheme** commenced in August, and once again there is a superb collection of gardens which will be open on set dates through to May 2011, including 84 which are described as including Australian native plants.

In New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory there are 23 gardens listed in the Australian Plants category. There are 16 in Queensland, 4 in South Australia, 1 in Northern Territory, 9 in Tasmania, 22 in Victoria and 9 in Western Australia

Now is the time to get a copy of the 2010-2011 AUSTRALIA'S OPEN GARDENS GUIDEBOOK so you can mark in your diary the dates when gardens you would like to visit in your area will be open.

If you are planning to travel interstate the GUIDEBOOK will also provide extremely useful information which will enable you to see a wide range of plants in cultivation.

For further information you can contact www.opengarden.org.au

Profile Page in Next Newsletter

In Newsletter No 31 we will be having a look at the plant family **Ericaceae**, to which *Epacris* and other genera previously included in Epacridaceae now belong.

If you would like to contribute to this profile page please send in any items of interest by the end of January 2011. All items will be very welcome.

AUSTRALIAN NATIVE PLANTS SOCIETY (Australia) Inc.

EPACRIS STUDY GROUP Plant profile

Epacris obtusifolia Smith

Blunt-leaf Heath

For this issue of our EPACRIS STUDY GROUP NEWSLETTER we have referred to the website of the AUSTRALIAN NATIVE PLANTS SOCIETY (Australia) Inc.

The information provided below is from this website - <http://anpsa.org.au/e-obt.html>
The Website Manager is Brian Walters of New South Wales.

For those who have not yet accessed the ANPS website, this is a sample of the wonderful information which can be found there. You are encouraged to check it out and to contact Brian if you would like to assist with a contribution.

Australian Native Plants Society (Australia)



Epacris obtusifolia



Family:	Ericaceae (subfamily Styphelioideae)
Distribution:	Heath and open forests of coast and adjacent ranges from southern Victoria to south-east Queensland and Tasmania.
Common Name:	Blunt-leaf heath
Derivation of Name:	<i>Epacris</i> ...from Greek, <i>epi</i> , upon and <i>acris</i> , a summit, referring to the altitude where some species occur <i>obtusifolia</i> From Latin <i>obtusus</i> , blunt and <i>folius</i> , a leaf, referring to the blunt ends of the leaves of this species.
Conservation Status:	Not considered to be at risk in the wild.



Epacris obtusifolia
Photo: Brian Walters

Epacris obtusifolia

Additional information from Australian Native Plants Society (Australia) Inc. website - <http://anpsa.org.au/e-obt.html>

General Description

The plant family Ericaceae (heaths and heathers) is widespread in many parts of the globe, particularly Europe and South Africa. It contains a number of widely cultivated plants such as *Erica*, *Rhododendron* and *Pieris*.

Like most of Australia's members of the Ericaceae, *Epacris* belongs to the subfamily Styphelioideae, which was formerly classified as a separate family, the Epacridaceae. *Epacris* consists of about 40 species of mainly small shrubs. Most are endemic to Australia but a few species can be found in New Zealand and New Caledonia. They occur in a variety of habitats from alpine areas to coastal heaths.

Epacris obtusifolia is typically an erect shrub up to 100 cm high comprising several long branches. The leaves are small and elliptical with a blunt end (in contrast to other species which are often prickly). They are about 10 mm long by 2 mm wide. The white flowers are tubular, up to 10-14 mm long and occur in a massed display along the branches from the leaf axils. They contain nectar and are frequented by honey-eating birds. Flowering occurs mainly in late winter and spring.

The species is well known in cultivation and is suited to temperate and subtropical areas. It prefers a well drained position in semi shade and should not be allowed to dry out. It is also a very attractive plant for a container.

Propagation of *E. obtusifolia* is usually by cuttings of firm current season's growth. Like most epacrids, the roots are very fine and easily damaged during transplanting. Cuttings are probably best placed into individual small pots or tubes to minimise root disturbance. The species can be grown from seed but this is not readily available.

We express sincere thanks to Brian Walters and all who are assisting in the provision of valuable information such as this for our ANPS Website.

Some additional notes on *Epacris obtusifolia*

James Edward Smith -

the botanist who named *Epacris obtusifolia*

Sir James Edward Smith was born in 1759 and died in 1828. He was a friend of Sir Joseph Banks. He founded the Linnean Society of London in 1788, becoming its first President, a position he held until his death.

Smith travelled extensively and spent the last thirty years of his life writing books and articles on botany.

He contributed 3348 botanical articles to *Rees's Cyclopaedia* and 7 volumes to *Flora Graeca*, the only major botanical publication of the 18th century. Sir James Smith named several plant genera including *Conospermum*, *Lambertia*, *Persoonia* and *Xylomelum* in Proteaceae family.



Space for additional information on *Epacris obtusifolia*

EPACRIS STUDY GROUP ANNUAL REPORT to June 2010**Australian Members - as at 30.6.2010**

Dawn & Lyn Barr,	Swan Reach Vic. 3903
Sue Bendel,	Doncaster 3108
Winifred Bennett,	Greensborough Vic. 3088
Dr. Elizabeth Brown,	National Herbarium of NSW
Julie Brownell,	Fullarton, SA 5063
Dick Burns,	Penguin Tas. 7316
Faye Candy,	Berwick Vic. 3806
Shirley Carn	Monbulk, Vic, 3793
Chris Clarke,	Thornbury, Vic, 3071
Gwyn Clarke,	Kungala, NSW 2460
Jeanette Closs,	Kingston Tas, 7050
Ian Cox,	Kenthurst NSW, 2156
Dr. Ron Crowden,	Kettering Tas 7155
Betty Denton,	Eltham Vic. 3095
Simone Disney,	Leichardt NSW 2040
Glenis Diix,	Gerrington NSW 2534
Gwen Elliot,	Heathmont Vic 3135
Kay Geeves	Port Huon Tas, 7116
Wayne Griggs,	Acton Park Tas 7170
Margaret Guenzel,	Ocean Grove Vic. 3226
Bill Gunn,	Ocean Grove Vic. 3226
David Lightfoot,	Surrey Hills 3127
Pat Macdonald,	Langwarrin, Vic, 3910
Dr. Max McDowall,	Bulleen, Vic 3105
John Mahoney,	Mt. Duneed, Vic. 3216
Malcolm Reed,	Epping NSW 2121
Jill Roberts,	Ulverstone Tas 7315
Barbara Rooks,	Montrose Vic 3765
Karen Russell,	Blackburn Vic. 3130
Kris Schaffer,	Murdunna Tas, 7178
Marion Simmons,	Legana Tas. 7277
St. Kilda Indigenous Nursery,	Port Melbourne 3207
Trish Tratt,	Emerald Vic. 3782
Phil Watson,	Mt. Rumney Tas 7170

Overseas Members

Jeff Irons,	Heswall, Wirral, England
Mary Sue Ittner,	Gualala, California USA
Anthony Parry,	Würenlingen, Switzerland

Epacris Study Group Newsletters are also sent to the ASGAP Study Group Co-ordinator, State Secretaries and State Newsletter Editors of each State member body of the Australian Plants Society, as well as to Botanic Gardens and Universities where research on *Epacris* is currently being undertaken. Several regional groups of the Australian Plant Society are also affiliated with the Study Group and receive each Newsletter as issued.

Epacris Study Group FINANCIAL STATEMENT
for year 1.7.2009 - 30.6.2010

<u>STUDY GROUP BALANCE - as at 30.6.2009</u>		\$ 651.23
<u>Receipts</u>		
	Memberships,	\$ 270.00
	Credit Union interest + refund	\$ 14.72
		\$ 284.72
<u>Expenses</u>		
	Newsletter printing -	\$ 155.20
	Postage,	\$ 92.35
	Credit Union fee	\$ 0.90
		\$ 248.45
	Surplus for financial year 1.7.09-30.6.10	\$ 36.27
	BALANCE as per MECU Statement	\$ 687.50

MECU (Maroonah Credit Union) Accounts -

S 1 - Access Account -	Balance at 1/7/2010	\$ 175.25
S 5 - Club Deposit Account -	Balance at 1/7/2010	\$ 512.25
	Total Assets as at 30.6.2010	\$ 687.50

Epacris Study Group - Membership information.

Membership of The Epacris Study Group and other Study Groups of the Australian Plant Society / Society for Growing Australian Plants is available to all members of the A.P.S. / S.G.A.P.

Membership of any Australian state group, not necessarily that of the area in which you reside, entitles you to membership of one or more study groups.

You can join the EPACRIS STUDY GROUP for just \$5.00 for 1 year or \$10 for 2 years renewable in June. Overseas subscriptions - \$10 Aust. p.a.

Membership renewal date is shown on address label of current Study Group members.

Memberships should be sent to P.O. Box 655, Heathmont 3135.

Please make cheques payable to The Epacris Study Group.

Sender:

EPACRIS STUDY GROUP

P.O. Box 655, Heathmont Vic. 3135