

AUSTRALIAN NATIVE PLANTS SOCIETY (Australia) Inc.

## **EPACRIS STUDY GROUP**

(ISSN 1038-6017)

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### **NEWSLETTER No. 36** **SPRING 2013**

Greetings to all Epacris Study Group members.

I don't know about you, but to me spring seems to come around more quickly every year. How fortunate we are to be able to enjoy *Epacris* and many of our other very beautiful native plants in flower in every month of the year, not just at springtime.

While it is not yet summer, our thoughts are very much with friends in the Blue Mountains and other areas of New South Wales which have been severely affected by bushfires. Several species of *Epacris* occur in the fire regions and we will need to wait for some time to see what re-growth occurs.

In the September 2013 edition of GROWING AUSTRALIAN, the Newsletter of APS Victoria Inc., the Editor, Lachlan Garland asks in his editorial "Do you know what the official logo of APS Vic. is? Or what's the Victorian floral emblem?" Epacris Study Group members will undoubtedly know that it is *Epacris impressa*, the Common Heath.

Lachlan goes on to say that he was recently passing a road verge that had been re-planted with local native plants, including *Epacris impressa*. Although once commonly seen in the Sandringham area where he lives, with locals picking branches to use as cut flowers, it is now very rare to see the heath growing in the area, either in the wild or in gardens. He suggests that APS members work towards bringing *Epacris impressa* back into wider cultivation as the Society's logo as well as for its natural beauty. Study Group members will certainly agree with this thought.

Epacris Study Group members have been recording the flowering times of *Epacris* in their gardens and in native habitats for almost ten years now, so we feel it is high time we started to share this information. We will begin doing this in our next Newsletter, which will be in autumn 2014 and you can read further of these plans on page 6 of this issue.

While I am happy to continue as Study Group Leader until someone else puts their hand up to take over, the invitation is still out there for a new Leader to come forward. One of the very pleasant aspects of being a Study Group Leader is that you will receive each State Newsletter of the Australian Plant Society's affiliated groups, all of which provide interesting and fascinating reading. Do let me know if you are interested.

In the meantime we hope that this spring and summer will be kind to you and your plants.

Happy gardening,

*Gwen Elliot*

## **A sad farewell to a long-time Epacris Study Group Member**

It is with much sadness that we recognise the death of Study Group Member, **Jeff Irons** on April 18th this year.

Jeff joined the Epacris Study Group many years ago, and was also an active member of several other Australian Plant Society Study Groups, including the Asteraceae, Acacia, Callistemon, Leptospermum and Melaleuca groups. He was also instrumental in the establishment of Britain's Australasian Plant Society.

Jeff and his wife Betty lived in Heswell, Wirral, in north-western England where his garden contained a wide range of Australian plants, most of which Jeff had propagated from seed or cuttings obtained from friends in Australia or taken home during one of his numerous visits "down under".

He was always keen to extend his knowledge of plants including their propagation and cultivation and would be constantly thinking of ways in which he could obtain better results in the glasshouse and the garden. He was also very willing to share his experiences with others and contributed articles for many of the Study Group magazines in Australia.

Our Epacris Study Group Newsletter of October 1999 contained a full page article supplied by Jeff on "**Growing Ericaceae and Epacridaceae Plants from Seed**" and in March 2000 he followed up with a two-page article on "**Vegetative Propagation**".

Jeff was always trying new methods and one of his successful experiments with seed cultivation was to try to mimic nature by allowing moss to grow on a pot of compost then sowing his Ericaceae seed in the moss. This was also at the time when there was considerable experimentation happening in regard to the use of smoke in seed germination. Jeff enjoyed a smoked kipper for breakfast, so instead of throwing out the water in which the kipper had been cooked he used it to soak the seed and then water it in after planting.

In regard to cuttings, Jeff believed that several species struck better if the base was just below the level of the propagation mix, rather than buried more deeply. To achieve this he would use a toothpick as a small stake for each individual cutting.

Jeff continued to supply numerous items of interest over the years.

At one stage while he was in Australia for a month in November his pots of Epacridaceae plants were immersed in the garden which became flooded during his absence. It was the wettest winter in the region since records began in 1766. After Jeff returned in December there were severe frosts with 3 successive nights of -7°C and daytime temperatures of only 2-3°C. Jeff was delighted that a plant of ***Epacris myrtifolia***, obtained from Dick Burns had survived the flooding and subsequent frosting. From Jeff's experiences and his willingness to pass on information we have been able to learn so much.

In 1997 Jeff was co-author of the 306-page book, **AUSTRALIAN PLANTS - A Guide to their Cultivation in Europe**. The other author was Thomas Ross who held a degree in botany from the University of Frankfurt in Germany. Sadly Thomas died shortly after the completion of the book. It was published with the support of his Estate and did not have a wide distribution but copies are undoubtedly available in major botanical libraries. *Epacris* species covered included *E. gunnii*, *E. impressa*, *E. paludosa*, *E. petrophila*, *E. stuartii*, *E. tasmanica* and *E. virgata*.

We are sad that **Jeff Irons** is no longer with us, but we are all much richer for having known him and shared some of his passion and knowledge in regard to Australian plants and their cultivation in England.

Gwen Elliot

### NOTE -

As a special tribute to Jeff we have included in this Newsletter a reprint of the *Epacris myrtifolia* Profile Page, as published in our Newsletter of March 2002. It acknowledges Jeff's contribution and includes a photograph of his very healthy garden plant of *Epacris myrtifolia*

ASSOCIATION OF SOCIETIES FOR GROWING AUSTRALIAN PLANTS Inc.  
**EPACRIS STUDY GROUP Plant profile**

***Epacris myrtifolia*** Labill.

**Thick-leaved Coastal Heath; Myrtle Heath**

*myrtifolia* = leaves similar to those of the *Myrtle* genus

Distribution - Tasmania

Special thanks to Dick Burns of Tasmania who has prepared the major part of this *Epacris* Profile, to photographers - Ron Crowden and Jeff Irons and to Alice Talbot for the illustrations.

Photograph - Ron Crowden

Photograph - Jeff Irons



*Epacris myrtifolia* generally forms a dense shrub, sometimes erect, sometimes spreading. In my garden, at Penguin Tasmania, it has formed a low mound about 40 cm tall but at Cape Pillar, Tas. plants in forest reach over 2 m tall.

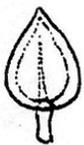
Leaves are crowded on thick firm stems, spreading and generally elliptical-ovate in shape with varied degree of pointing at the tip. They are about 5 mm long, thick and dark green.

Flowering is profuse. The white flowers (to about 5 mm long) are shortly stalked and solitary in leaf axils towards the tips of stems. Because of the crowding the flowers appear to be in dense spikes. Sometimes the clustering appears corymbose.

The main floral display occurs in spring so that in November as you walk through a grove, the ground is white with fallen corollas. My garden specimen starts flowering in July.

ILLUSTRATIONS by ALICE TALBOT

Upper side of leaf



Underside of leaf



Leaf attachment



Leaf scars



Flower



Flower



Ovary, style and stigma



## ***Epacris myrtifolia* Labill.** Thick-leaved Coastal Heath; Myrtle Heath

### Natural Habitat

In Tasmania all species of *Epacris* apart from *E. impressa* produce white flowers. There are currently 18 species named and listed as being endemic to the island with at least another three awaiting description. Tasmania shares only 6 species with the mainland. Many of the endemic species have short tubes to their flowers (compared with *E. impressa* or *E. reclinata* for instance.) Their flowers tend to face up and the lobes are regularly large making an attractive plant with a delicate appearance. Some are proving difficult to propagate or establish in cultivation but there are a few, while delicate in appearance, that are hardy garden plants.

I have found *E. myrtifolia* the best of these species.

Many of the endemic species have a restricted distribution. *Epacris myrtifolia* has a wider range than some. It is mostly found on the Tasman Peninsula, the south-eastern tip of Tasmania, but there are populations on Freycinet Peninsula and Maria Island on the east coast, and on South West Cape.

It is clearly a low-altitude species. I have found it growing in coastal rocky outcrops just above the reach of the save splash of high tide. Inland it occurs in coastal heath, woodland and open forest. On the southern extreme of Tasman Peninsula it occurs in the Cape Pillar scrub, coastal heath that grows on top of cliffs rising 300 m out of the ocean.

Mostly *E. myrtifolia* grows in clay soil derived from dolerite (a rock with the chemical makeup the same as basalt), but it is also found in sandstone and granite country. 'The Student's Flora of Tasmania' by Curtis (our main botanic reference) states that this species grows in wet places, but I have found it in some very dry spots as well.

### Propagation and Cultivation

I grew my plant from cuttings, probably 20 years ago. I use a 3:1 sharp sand: peat moss mix, and at that time I was probably using powder hormone. With epacrids I have found it best to use separate tubes for each cutting because of the delicate roots. It is planted near a brick wall in poor clay soil that remains dry. The wall faces close to north, so the *Epacris* gets a lot of sun.

### Common Names

*Epacris myrtifolia* is sometimes known as Myrtle Heath.

The Tasmanian Parks & Wildlife Service botanists have assigned the 'common' name "Thick-leaved Coastal Heath" to this pretty plant, a not particularly useful appellation, and rather confusing. Does the name describe a plant or some community?

Dick Burns, August 2001

### *Epacris myrtifolia* Labill.

The botanist who described and named *Epacris myrtifolia* was Jacques Julien Houton de Labillardiere. Labillardiere was born in France on 28th October 1755 and died in Paris on 8th January 1834. He studied both medicine and botany and spent 18 months in England studying exotic plants, during which he became acquainted with Joseph Banks. In 1791 he was selected to go on the French expedition under Bruny d'Entrecasteaux and on this voyage he collected some 4000 botanical specimens, including material from south-western Australia and Tasmania. His name is sometimes written as La Billardiere and the genus of *Billardiera* commemorates his contribution to botanical research.

### Member comments on the Cultivation of *Epacris myrtifolia*

A robust shrub. - Ron Crowden & Yvonne Menadue in 'Australian Plants'

A very satisfactory garden plant. It thrives in my sandy loam soil at Kingston Tas, but also did well in a black clay loam when I lived at Taroona. It survives for many years. The flowers are well displayed over many weeks and it is easy to keep the plants shapely. George Wade, (1998) -

Unfortunately George's plant died during the summer of 2001.

Grown with *E. marginata* in a rocky wall facing east. Flowered profusely every year, but died after about 15 years. These species seem to do well close to each other. Yennie Lawrence, Burnie Tas.

John Emms of Loch Vic planted *E. myrtifolia* in a tub with *E. mucronulata*. They flowered when in a sunny spot but were reluctant to flower in shade.

Likes a well-drained cool site - Plants of Tasmania Nursery, Ridgeway

Plants 10 years old. Grows well in a container. Has survived frosts and flood in the garden of Jeff Irons, U.K.

## **Determining the pollinators of Rare and Endangered *Epacris* species: implications for Conservation**

The above is the title of a 24-page report prepared for the **Australian Flora Foundation** by **Karen Johnson and Peter McQuillan**, in **December 2012**.

The main objective of the research was to determine the pollinators of eight of Tasmania's threatened *Epacris* species and to explore the relationships between pollinators, floral morphology, flowering time and habitat.

Of 28 *Epacris* species in Tasmania 12 are listed as threatened, 6 are nationally endangered and 3 are regarded as critically endangered.

*Epacris* species have generalised pollination systems attracting at least 33 different pollinators, including flies, bees and butterflies. Four introduced species also visited the *Epacris*: honeybee, bumblebee, drone fly and cabbage white butterfly.

The report aims to increase our understanding of critical life history parameters, with the main objective being to (1) determine the pollinators of Tasmania's threatened *Epacris* species; (2) examine the relationships between pollinators, floral morphology, flowering time and habitat; (3) outline the potential impacts of introduced insects such as the bumblebee and honeybee; and (4) assess the implications of this new knowledge for the conservation of *Epacris* species and pollinators.

The report includes particular reference to ***Epacris apsleyensis*, *E. barbata*, *E. exserta*, *E. glabella*, *E. graniticola*, *E. limbata*, and *E. virgata***.

Full details regarding this Report can be found on the website of the Australian Flora Foundation ([www.aff.org.au](http://www.aff.org.au)).

### **The Australian Flora Foundation**

The Australian Flora Foundation Inc was established as a non-profit body in 1981. It arose mainly from the desire of members of the Australian Plants Society and plant scientists to see more research carried out on Australian flora. The inaugural meeting was held in Sydney in conjunction with the International Botanical Congress at the University of Sydney.

Donations and government grants are distributed by the Foundation to approved research projects. Every cent in every dollar donated to the Research Fund goes to the researchers' projects. Volunteers do the administration so expenses are kept to a minimum.

Each year a call for applications is made in which researchers are asked to submit projects for funding; anyone in Australia may apply. Projects are assessed on scientific rigour, likelihood of success, originality and importance of, and need for, this research by the Foundation's Scientific Research Committee, ensuring that donations are used in the most effective way.

Membership of the Australian Flora Foundation is open to anyone who supports its objectives. The annual Membership Fee is \$30.00. The Foundation is an "Approved Research Institute" as defined in the Income Tax Assessment Act and donations over \$2 are tax deductible.

Further information can be found on the website of the Australian Flora Foundation or by contacting the Secretary, Ian Cox at the Australian Flora Foundation, P.O. Box 21, Dulwich Hill NSW 2203. Ian is also a member of the ***Epacris* Study Group**.

## **Recording the flowering times of *Epacris* species**

For some years now members of the Epacris Study Group have been recording the flowering times of various *Epacris* species, mostly from plants being grown in their gardens, but also in some instances of plants in their natural habitat.

We feel it is now time that this information was shared and made available to those interested. We have already been able to send information on *Epacris impressa* to researchers at Latrobe University in Melbourne, and now plan to begin including the details supplied by members in our Epacris Study Group Newsletters, commencing with the autumn 2014 issue.

**We will begin with the species commencing with the letters A to C, so would appreciate any details you can supply relating to *Epacris acuminata*, *E. barbata*, *E. breviflora*, *E. calvertiana*, *E. calvertiana* var. *versicolor*, *E. celata*, *E. coriacea*, *E. corymbiflora*, *E. crassifolia*, and *E. curtisiae*.**

**In our spring 2014 Newsletter we will continue through to *Epacris impressa*, covering *E. exserta*, *E. franklinii*, *E. glabella*, *E. glacialis*, *E. grandis* and *E. gunnii*.**

If you have been recording flowering times and have not sent in any information noted, then now is the time to do so, either by email or in a written note. Contact details are on the cover page of this Newsletter.

If you have been just filing away the recording sheets in our newsletters there is still time to get out a pen, take a walk in the garden, and fill in flowering details, particularly for the late spring and summer flowering species.

As you will appreciate, it will take several Newsletters for us to cover all the species through to Z, and all information received will be very much appreciated, right through to the end of the alphabet.

The actual years in which flowering is recorded is also important, as it may be that the flowering period will change over a period of years, in line with a long-term change in weather patterns.

Our usual Recording Sheet is included on pages 7 and 8 of this Newsletter.

Any photos or other comments in regard to species of Epacris you are growing or observing in their natural habitat will also be gratefully received for our records.

## **Some thoughts for the busy gardener**

A garden is never finished.

Lean on your hoe from time to time

Look at weeding as one of life's therapies

Listen to your plants, as well as talking to them



**Recording the flowering times of *Epacris* species****JANUARY 2014**

Date

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**FEBRUARY 2014**

Date

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**MARCH 2014**

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**APRIL 2014**

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In BUD

In FLOWER

Flowering finishing

\_\_\_\_\_ *Epacris* \_\_\_\_\_

In BUD

In FLOWER

Flowering finishing

AUSTRALIAN NATIVE PLANTS SOCIETY (AUSTRALIA) Inc.

## **EPACRIS STUDY GROUP**

(ISSN 1038-6017)

Study Group Leader: Gwen Elliot, 81/ 72 Kangan Drive, Berwick 3806

### **ANNUAL REPORT - Year ended 30.6.2013**

The Epacris Study group has continued to produce newsletters in spring and autumn, with a print run of 80 copies. These are sent to Study Group members as well as to the ASGAP Study Group Co-ordinator, State Secretaries, Study Group Liaison Officers and Newsletter Editors of State member bodies of the Australian Plants Society.

Newsletters are also sent to Botanic Gardens and Universities where research on *Epacris* is currently being undertaken. Five regional groups of the Australian Plant Society are affiliated with the Study Group and receive each Newsletter as issued.

The option to receive Newsletters electronically was introduced in Spring 2012 and currently 50 copies are being sent by email. This has considerably reduced our costs.

We were all thrilled when in January 2013 the founding Secretary/Treasurer of the Epacris Study Group, Dick Burns, received an Order of Australia Medal in the Australia Day Honours. It is certainly a very well-deserved award. Later, in April we were saddened by the death of Jeff Irons, an English resident and *Epacris* enthusiast who was also a long-standing member of the Study Group and a regular contributor to our newsletters.

The Australian Flora Foundation has been involved in funding research to determine the pollinators of rare and endangered *Epacris* species in Tasmania and the implications for their conservation.

Research on *Epacris impressa* is also being undertaken at Latrobe University in Melbourne, concentrating on the various colour forms and factors relating to the colour variability, including which colours occur together in nature and the pollinating insects or birds which are attracted to the different flower colours. The Epacris Study Group has been able to provide some assistance from our years of recording the flowering times of *Epacris* species, both in the wild and in cultivation.

During the year we received a very generous donation from a member who has now moved from his home and garden to a hostel in NSW. We are very grateful for this support and plan to use the funds to enable further distribution of information on *Epacris* and their cultivation, as has been specifically requested.

A Powerpoint Presentation on *Epacris*, in the form of a CD without commentary, has been prepared and is now available for Australian Plant Society groups to use if requested.

The address for the Epacris Study Group changed during this year from Heathmont to Berwick in Victoria. As mentioned previously, I would be very happy if someone else would like to now step into the role of Epacris Study Group leader and anyone interested in receiving further information can contact me by email at [gwenelliot@optusnet.com.au](mailto:gwenelliot@optusnet.com.au) or contact our National Study Group Co-ordinator, Geoff Lay at [gjmk.lays@bigpond.com](mailto:gjmk.lays@bigpond.com)

Gwen Elliot

**AUSTRALIAN NATIVE PLANTS SOCIETY (AUSTRALIA) Inc.**  
**EPACRIS STUDY GROUP**  
 (ISSN 1038-6017)

**FINANCIAL STATEMENT for year 1.7.2012 - 30.6.2013**

<u>STUDY GROUP BALANCE - as at 30.6.2012</u>		\$ 650.14
<u>Receipts</u>	Memberships,	\$ 155.00
	Donation from member	\$ 200.00
	Credit Union interest	\$ <u>6.61</u>
		\$ 361.61
<u>Expenses</u>	Newsletter printing -	\$ 55.95
	Postage,	\$ <u>28.70</u>
		\$ <u>84.65</u>
	Surplus for financial year 1.7.12 - 30.6.13	\$ 276.96
	BALANCE as per MECU (Credit Union) Statement	<u>\$ 927.10</u>
<u>Maroondah Credit Union Accounts -</u>		
	S 1 - Access Account -	Balance at 30.6.2013 \$ 390.06
	S 5 - Club Deposit Account -	Balance at 30.6.2013 \$ 537.04
	<u>Total Assets as at 30.6.2013</u>	<u>\$ 927.10</u>

**AUSTRALIAN NATIVE PLANTS SOCIETY (AUSTRALIA) Inc.**  
**Epacris Study Group Membership**

There are now two options available to members of the Australian Plant Society / Society for Growing Australian Plants and affiliated groups to also be members of the Epacris Study Group.

Members who wish to receive the Newsletters by post in spring and autumn each year can do so for a membership fee of \$5 per year for Australian members or \$10 p.a. for overseas members. Your membership expiry date is printed in the top corner of the postage label.

For new members who wish to receive the Newsletters by email a joining fee for both Australian and overseas members will be \$10.00 which will cover receipt of all Newsletters issued through to June 2015. Current members receiving newsletters by email are financial through to this date also.

For any queries regarding membership, please contact the Study Group Leader,  
 Gwen Elliot, Villa 81, 72 Kangan Drive, Berwick 3806 Email - gwenelliot@optusnet.com.au

**Epacris Study Group Membership form.**

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....POSTCODE.....

Phone.....Region of APS/SGAP Membership .....

I/We wish to receive future Epacris Study Group Newsletters by

- a)  MAIL                      b)  EMAIL to E-mail.....

Please make cheque or money order payable to Epacris Study Group  
 and post to Mrs. Gwen Elliot, 81/ 72 Kangan Drive, Berwick 3806