

Association of Societies for Growing Australian Plants
EREMOPHILA STUDY GROUP NEWSLETTER No. 108

May 2014

Thank you to all who have paid their subscription since the last newsletter was posted; your receipts are enclosed.

I seem to have been apologizing at the start of each newsletter for the lateness of the newsletter. This is no exception. I noticed that the work on this one started back in early December, soon after I received the excellent reports on the Weekend Gathering held at the homes of Ken & Elizabeth Warnes at Owen and Beverley & Ian Rice at Dutton. The reports speak for themselves and reflect the enthusiasm experienced over the weekend. Thank you Ken & Beverley for the work put into organising the event.

Since then I have made three false starts and had to stop. Firstly Myrnie had to have an arthroscopy on her left knee just before Christmas. This was followed by our daughter having to undergo surgery for breast cancer a couple of days before Christmas' this being followed by chemotherapy which continues to beyond the present. Myrnie has severe back problems resulting from disk damage and generally poor state of her spine. Needless to say there has not been a lot of attention given to a number of tasks. As a result I have decided that since you have been deprived of your three copies of the newsletter in the past year, I have placed an amnesty on your membership payment for the 2014 year – which would be due in June this year. The passbook account is very healthy and we have not paid out anything re newsletters since last October, so you will have only received one copy.

Since writing the above I have spent eight days in hospital with clots on my lungs and just after I returned home I have had a repeat of the lower back problems, with the same symptoms as I had almost 3 years ago. As a result we together are a rather poorly bunch and are limited in movement, and this time round I cannot drive.

At the National Conference, held on the Sunshine Coast last August, a matter was raised regarding the membership of Study Groups in general. According to our APS rules Study Group membership is available to members of APS affiliated clubs/societies. **Membership is NOT AVAILABLE to others.** While this matter has been raised previously it has not reached the level which it did on this occasion.. It was brought to the attention of the Study Group Coordinator that within Study Group sub-groups there are people who are attending their meetings and are not APS members.

EREMOPHILA STUDY GROUP GATHERING AT OWEN, S.A.

South Australian members of the Eremophila Study Group congregated at Owen for the weekend of September 14-15. They were joined by interstate members including the three authors of that wonderful eremophila handbook for gardeners. The two days enabled participants to exchange knowledge and ideas.

We were thrown into a presentation on eremophila hybrids. It seems that more eremophilas hybridise than we may have suspected, and finding the parents is proving a challenge in many cases. Many more eremophilas can be grown from seed than simple old maculata, so we left wanting to grow more from seed! Some hybrids have too much vigour to flower profusely, e.g. Blue Thunder which is an alternifolia x maculata. Speaking of Blue Thunder, common names are a challenge as some hybrids have many names. Keeping the original name seemed *the most appropriate.*

The issue of plant variety rights was discussed when we found some breeders enjoying financial benefit from royalties, but others were not. A variety of reasons were canvassed as to why, starting from poor communication and growers enthusiastically and naively sharing new plants right through to commercial naughtiness. Although Ken Warnes had over 30 hybrid specimens to discuss, we remember the beautiful hybrids such as nivea x christophori, oppositifolia x scoparia. To cap it off Ken showed us a chimera, which is where two species grow on the same plant.

To our surprise, some eremophilas have become weeds in parts of Australia. Really no APS member should be surprised that we learnt *Eremophila duttonii*, *sturtii*, *bowmanii* and *mitchellii* amongst others can become rampant in the wrong areas.

Keith Pitman demonstrated grafting and received many questions on the finer details. He pointed out that what works for him, albeit very successfully, may not be replicable in other parts of Australia. He finds most success with eremophilas by summer grafting and he only used wedge grafts. Keith emphasized that lining up the

cambium is critical, and in soft hairy stems, the cambium might be further in than first thought. The grafting tape Keith used to create an airtight covering – either parafilm or nescofilm was applied using a dab stick that he had previously wound the tape around. Keith showed us that plastic drink bottles make ideal covers for the finished graft, which is expensive as in South Australia they are worth 10c each for recycling! Interestingly Keith mentioned that some eremophilas such as *E. neglecta* can kill the common root stock like *Myoporum insulare*, and so alternates need to be sought. We learn a little more all the time. Keith strayed a little to tell us that verticordias graft readily onto Geraldton Wax rootstock, but I digress.

Professor Hans Greisser gave an update on his continuing research into anti bacterials derived from eremophilas over a typical country dinner. His team is developing antibacterial coatings for biomedical devices such as hip prostheses and urinary catheters. Antibiotic resistant bacteria like Golden Staph is an increasing problem and medicine would like to reduce hospital infections from these devices. Further research is still needed, but it looks promising, and who knows, commercial eremophila farms might be a result.

Visiting the historic plantation of eremophila begun by Ken Warnes in the 1960s was a treat as always, with so many species and snippets of information. It's amazing to see this collection and realise how much dedication has gone into searching for plants, propagating, growing, observing, identifying, classifying and promoting eremophilas. The combined efforts of study group members and botanists over the last 50 years has achieved a great deal. How such valuable collections of provenanced specimens can be maintained and perpetuated, now the pioneer eremophila enthusiasts have reached retirement age, is a challenge for all APS members to consider. In the 1960s when one could buy only a handful of eremophila species. Now there is a reasonable choice in nurseries but our specialist plant sales are essential to provide an extensive range of plants.

On Sunday the group travelled to Bev and Ian Rice's property. We feasted our eyes on a garden dominated by eremophila used to great advantage, such as hedges of *Eremophila drummondii*. Fortified with more great country cooking, more stories unfolded. After lunch, some of the group continued on to see an abundant stand of colourful maculata near Morgan. Everyone seemed to thoroughly enjoy the opportunity to meet other group members and indicated they liked the suggestion of another national gathering like the 2008 seminar in Horsham possibly centred around Port Augusta.

Tim & Sandra Wood

EREMOPHILA CRAWL IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Huge, huge thanks to the members of Para Hills native plants group for organising and hosting the Eremophila weekend in and around Owen and Dutton in September.

We were one of a small number from NSW and ACT who "gate-crashed" this event and trekked over from the east to join in. Tom and I flew into Adelaide and drove up to the Arid Lands Nursery at Port Augusta for the day. A fabulous experience, apart from the millions of bush flies! The highlights were the Sturt's Desert Pea in the area in front of the visitors' centre, the *Acacia papyrocarpa* (Western Myall) which was ENORMOUS and the stunning *Eremophila oppositifolia* and *E. youngii* subsp. *lepidota* in full flower.

We stayed at Clare overnight, which was delightful, and met the rest of the group at Owen on Saturday morning. We were then treated to a guide of naturally occurring hybrids by Ken Warnes, and a grafting lesson from Keith Pitman. I was quick to buy some of Keith's grafted plants in 6 inch pots – these all made it back to Canberra happily in our hand luggage and are now in the ground!

After lunch, supplied via the local church (and fantastic!!) we headed off to Ken's place where we wandered around his old and his new plantations, full of *Eremophila* with a smattering of *Dodonaea*, *Hakea* and a few other spp. Many of Ken's plants are featured in the Boschen *et al* book of Eremophilas.

Ken was amazingly generous and allowed us to take whatever cuttings we wanted (with one exception!). Again I leapt in and had to spend part of the next 4 days doing cuttings. I know that many will be frost hardy in Canberra, but we will have to trial a lot of the others through ANPS Canberra, so providing they strike it may still be some time before they get into proper cultivation. I also had another go at grafting, hopeful that the tips provided by Keith on keeping things sterilized will magically improve my success rate.

On Saturday night we had a great talk by Hans Greisser who is researching the use of *Eremophila* as antibiotics. His work aims to develop new anti-microbials that could be used to coat implanted medical devices, such as artificial hips and knees and reduce the high rates of infection that result in poor outcomes for many patients.

We drove to Nuriootpa to stay the night (slight detour when we got lost en route in the dark!) and on Sunday morning all met in Nuriootpa for the short drive to Bev and Ian Rice's place outside Dutton. This was a

spectacular garden with *Eremophila* used to great effect in pots and throughout the garden. Bev told us that the soil has a lot of clay and she brings in sand and gypsum to lighten it to grow her plants.

The garden had so many *Eremophila* in flower it was hard to know where to look, but we were particularly impressed by the use of *E. drummondii* as a low growing border for the drive (pictured); many forms of *E. maculata*, some gorgeous specimens of *E. psilocalyx* and a couple of potted (and grafted) *E. cuneifolia* and *E. mirabilis* that stole the show.

Our thanks to the SA group for all their work on the planning, keeping us fed and watered, and their generosity in sharing propagation material. We hope that we can help to continue to spread the "Eremophila word" on the east coast and prove our new species as worthy garden subjects over here.

Lyndal Thorburn

EREMOPHILA STUDY GROUP
SEPTEMBER 14/15 EREMOPHILA GATHERING IN
SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Day one. We arrived at Owen Bowling Club to stunning floral arrangements of *Eremophilas*. Just as you thought you'd seen all of the exhaustive displays showing the variety of form, texture and colour, there were more just about jumping out at you. (Thanks to the talented Liz Warnes).

Ken Warnes presented an interesting workshop on hybrids, again with an eye-catching display. His topics included:

- Hybridization tends to occur within taxonomic subgroups;
- Registration of hybrids with the Australian Cultivar Registration Authority;
- Eremophila* hybrids tend to have "hybrid vigour" but fewer flowers;
- Crosses between the Type species and a subspecies – "when is a hybrid not a hybrid?";
- Identification and subsequent re-identification of parents/difficulties with anecdotal/historical nature of some records

In the next workshop, Keith Pitman made grafting look easy, with tape pre-wound on sticks facilitating binding of the union and allowing for reduced handling of the plant material. Keith had plants showing the results of successful grafts. He had assembled material and tools for people to practise grafting and this was greatly appreciated.

At the Warnes' home in Owen, we saw magnificent displays of *Eremophila* 'Piccaninny Dawn' (*E. oppositifolia* subsp. *oppositifolia* (yellow) x *E. oldfieldii* subsp. *angustifolia*), *E. cuneifolia*, *E. gilesii*, and *E. mackinlayi* subsp. *latifolia*.

Out at the property Ken gave us comprehensive histories of his plantations, which hold an extensive collection of *eremophilas* – over 1000 plants, and over 300 variations. Another feature that I particularly appreciated was that many of these plants had been collected by Ken, or by Norma Boschen, Maree Goods or Russell Wait, who were there and could bring to life the collection details – the experience of environment, community and geographic range.

Professor Hans Greisser was the speaker on Saturday evening, outlining the progress of his research into the *medical use of antibacterial chemicals found in eremophilas*. Seventy four species had been screened for chemicals with antibacterial properties. Some of these chemicals are active against the antibiotic resistant strains of *Staphylococcus aureus*. These are being tested for their use in preventing infection on medical instruments and implants.

We appreciated the untiring efforts of Liz Warnes and team in providing us with an enjoyable morning tea, lunch and dinner.

Day two. Bev and Ian Rice were our hosts at their property near Dutton. The garden covers several acres and is filled with *eremophilas*. Bev's talent for design is striking. Keith Pitman brought a large potted *E. mirabilis* to sit on the veranda with Bev's for the day – both resplendent in full bloom. There was much banter around Bev pretending to think that Keith was giving it to her. He loaded it up at the end of the day!

As well as giving a detailed tour, Bev provided a much appreciated morning tea and lunch.

After lunch a contingent headed out to Morgan, where we saw *E. maculata* flowering. *E. scoparia*, *E. glabra*, *E. oppositifolia* and *E. divaricata* also occur there.

Thanks to Ken and Bev for organising a great weekend.

Helen Lane

VALE RAY ISAACSON

Ray was a leading member of the Australian Plant Society and his Life Membership was well earned as a member of the Parrakie and Districts Regional Group.

Ray's real interest was in rocks, "they don't die when you bring them back", he would say in his dry way and he had an impressive collection. His interest in Eremophilas began when I gave a talk one evening long ago at Geranium and as usual requested that anyone heading "outback" should keep a lookout and if possible collect propagating material. Ray and Betty were about to head for Queensland to buy rocks and he offered to do what he could along the way. So successful was he that he found nearly every Queensland species and even an un-described one.

And so it began. The next two years he collected in Western Australia and returned with many new and interesting plants. A visit to the APY Lands brought some new species to try. There were many other trips and I'm certain they weren't all to collect rocks. It was at this time that Bob Chinnock was working on a major Revision of the Genus and Ray contributed many mounted specimens to this work. He had a great eye for outstanding specimens and many of those we still grow today are the progeny of this early collecting.

Ray's farm was in the white sand country south of Geranium and even after propagating many species from cuttings they failed to thrive. His attention was drawn to the compatibility of *Eremophila* with *Myoporum insulare*, the common boobialla which grows naturally near the coast. He began experimenting with various grafting techniques with considerable success and the plantings around the farm-house made spectacular progress. In his back-yard nursery he grew many fine plants which in many ways were ahead of their time but back then (the 70s and 80s) nobody wanted to pay more than \$2 a plant, regardless of the time and effort involved. *This frustrated Ray who said he wanted a better return so that he could buy more rocks!* Now this recognised method of propagation of rare plants is providing a more suitable reward for the time and effort involved.

Thank you Ray for your friendship and leadership over many years. We will miss you but your work lives on.

Ken Warnes.

HELP AT MELBOURNE MUSEUM

I work at the Melbourne Museum as an animal keeper where we keep a lot of invertebrates. I am seeking a few different species of *Eremophila* to trial as food plants for some of our arid zone grasshoppers which were originally collected from the Alice Springs region. I was wondering if you can point me in the right direction if you might know of nurseries or growers that may stock species from the central desert. I have focused my search on the species *E. willsii*, *E. gilesii* and *E. macdonnellii* as they are fairly wide ranging and appear to grow as nice sized shrubs, but I would be happy to try anything as it is more for a trial to see if our animals will eat them (they have been observed eating *Eremophila* however the species wasn't recorded).

Any help would be greatly appreciated.

Cheers,
Jordan De Jong
Letter received 26th March 2014
< museumvictoria.com.au >

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Regards
Chris.