

Association of Societies for Growing Australian Plants
EREMOPHILA STUDY GROUP NEWSLETTER #75

December 2001

Several events have occupied my time in the past couple of months. Firstly the ASGAP Conference, held in Canberra during late September, early October; the SA Region's Spring Plant Show and Plant Sale and more recently our Study Group Display at a local nursery in Adelaide. Details of each of these activities will appear under separate headings later in the Newsletter.

At the meeting of Study Group Leaders on the Saturday prior to conference activities, a number of matters were raised, but none which I consider to have great impact on our activities. On looking at the current subscription rates for the other Study Groups, it is apparent that their fees are significantly higher than ours. I mentioned the possibility of raising rates in a previous Newsletter and now propose that our Eremophila Study Group Subscription be raised to \$5 per year.

The only matter which I think impinges on the Study Group is membership of a Study Group only for those who are members of ASGAP Societies. I have altered the category for those who wish to subscribe to the Newsletter and keep in touch and who are not involved with ASGAP Societies. They will be referred to as subscribers. Such contributors will not be covered by ASGAP for insurance and the like. This has been done to cover a few people who have been involved with the Study Group for many years and for one reason or another have not continued their membership of an ASGAP Society. Their continued, valued contribution is always welcome.

We have, for the past five years, been relying on the income from the small profit from sales of the publication *Eremophilas For the Garden*, from occasional sales of the ESG booklet covering the first 31 issues of the Newsletter and back issues of the Newsletters. Whilst they still bring in a small income this is not sufficient to cover the extra costs of postage. In addition we have relied heavily on the goodwill of the Adelaide Botanic Garden & State Herbarium now housed in the Plant Biodiversity Centre.

In addition, the increased income may enable us to introduce some colour into the Newsletter. I would like some input from you the members to ascertain if there is anything else which you think we could be doing to 'upgrade'. It is important to remember that whatever is suggested depends on members providing the back-up support via articles etc.

One extra this time is a scan which Russell Wait sent to me a few weeks ago. When it arrived as an attachment to an email message I was quite surprised by the clarity and detail in the transmitted 'picture'. Maybe we can incorporate a few more like these. Could be better than line diagrams, yet I do think that they are of great importance for detailed information.

FROM YOUR LETTERS

Russell Wait - Natya, Victoria

This is a pressing of *E. 'viscimarginata'* to try. The bush is 0.4m high by 0.5m wide. Plants were found growing on the side of beakways in spinifex and in some cases under *Acacia* sp. and regrows from a 'stump' after fires. The flowers are light blue.

I don't think that 'stump' is the right word; they regrow from just under the ground.

There are some species that will regrow from the 'stump' after fires, like *E. forrestii*, *E. 'arguta'*, *E. 'hygrophana'*, *E. ovata*, *E. obovata*, *E. spinescens* *E. 'fallax'* and any others which sucker.

How they perform in the garden to pruning as either cutting grown, grafted or seedling grown plants I feel is probably related to how vigorous the root system is. With grafts you will probably get a lot of root stock suckers.

The trip to WA, via SA and the NT was good, but not as good as in past years. It was dry when I was there even though there had been a lot of rain earlier in the year. Laverton had received 20 inches to the end of August and had received a total of 25 inches in the previous year. Most of the bushes I saw looked dry.

New plants which I hope to grow from the most recent trip include *E. 'viscimarginata'*, *E. 'arguta'*, *E. 'congesta'*, a new one from the *E. 'hygrophana'* group, one from the *E. sturtii* group and an unknown species related to *E. decussata*.

(A second email from Russell received just as I was about to have this printed tells me that in November he was advised that his collection of eremophilas has been registered as a collection with OPCA, the Ornamental Plant Conservation Association of Australia. This is good news and another form of recognition of the excellent work which Russell has been doing with eremophilas.)

NORTH HAVEN NURSERY - EREMOPHILA DISPLAY

A special thankyou to Ray & Betty Isaacson for making available a great range of grafted *Eremophila* plants for this occasion. Thanks also to Bob Chinnock, Peter Hall and Ray for the good range of cuts brought along to add to the few I managed to cull from our garden. Altogether we were able to make up a table-top of nearly sixty species.

Colin & his wife Myrnie organised the basic materials needed and with the help of Ray, Betty, Peter and Ken Warnes on Saturday morning we were able to have the full display finished by about ten o'clock, the opening time of the nursery.

There was a steady flow of people on Saturday morning, but numbers fell away in the afternoon. Sales of plants were steady, but I think that the total turnover was a bit lower than we might have expected. It was a pity that more SA members of the Study Group were not able to avail themselves of the opportunity to pick up some very rarely seen species at very sensible prices.

Thankyou to Ray for making a portion of his sales over to the Eremophila Study Group. We benefited to the tune of \$100.

I am not sure if we will do this again. It takes a lot of work for a few people. The exercise was good from the point of view that there are now quite a few more people who know about eremophilas, and I guess that this is one of the aims of the Study Group. We did sign up one new member, and welcome Harvey Thornton of Netherby, SA to our membership.

By Sunday afternoon at 4pm. we were looking forward to the end and the cleaning up. Thanks to Bob Chinnock's arrival at about 3.30 we had one extra pair of hands to make this task just a bit quicker.

2002 SA REGIONAL CONFERENCE - ALICE SPRINGS

This is an opportunity to have a look at some of the eremophilas of the Centre, both tamed in the gardens and wild in the surrounding bushland areas, as well as other species unique to this area.

The Conference is to be held on the weekend of 25 & 26 May 2002. Registration cost is \$75 per person, (including the Saturday evening dinner), or \$35 if you just wish to register for the Conference.

There is a limitation on the number of registrants due to the facilities available, so if you are contemplating a trip to 'The Alice' then get in early.

Anyone interested in making this a stopping-off point whilst touring or making it a port of call especially for the event, should write to:-

Conference Secretary, Gary Bastin, PO Box 3358, Alice Springs, NT 0871

ASGAP CONFERENCE - CANBERRA

I was most impressed with the organisation of the Conference and the facilities which were on offer. Despite a couple of small hiccups we managed to put together a very satisfactory display.

On the way over Myrnie & I called in, around breakfast time, on Ray & Betty Isaacson at Geranium, in the SA Murray Mallee, to collect a couple of boxes of grafted eremophilas which Ray had promised. These were all in flower and were used as a backdrop for the final display. (I could have taken a lot more, for they were soon sold and then collected when we took down the display on Wednesday afternoon.)

Bob Chinnock arrived about ten minutes ahead of us, he was driving to Sydney to make a connection with a flight to New Zealand. (Ansett had gone to the wall a few days earlier and this was his only avenue of 'escape'.)

At Piangil, in the NE Victorian Mallee, we met with Russell Wait, with whom I had arranged for a selection of cuts from his extensive collection. Adding several buckets of cut flowers to our load we pushed on to our overnight stop.

At Yarrawonga we called in to Jan Hall's nursery and although only managing a short stay had a good look at her eremophilas, which range from old, and well established to some very new plantings, both in the garden and in pots. All looking rather healthy.

We arrived in Queanbeyan on Saturday morning and after organising our motel accommodation headed off to the Conference site to set up the display.

The display consisted of a back-drop of photographs, together with a set of educational posters dealing with the collection and treatment of wild material. On the Wednesday afternoon, following the Study Group lecture sessions, I was able to present a continuous showing of selected slides of eremophilas to accompany the live material. (A reprint of the paper which I presented is included with this issue.)

Thanks to the contribution of Jan & Myrnie we managed to get the display completed by closure time of 5pm. The grafted plants from Ray together with the cuts from Russell and a couple of larger pots provided by Jan we put before the registrants a very well received display. There were approximately sixty species on show and as a result there were many questions, since a good percentage of the species used were not commonly seen, some having only recently been introduced into cultivation.

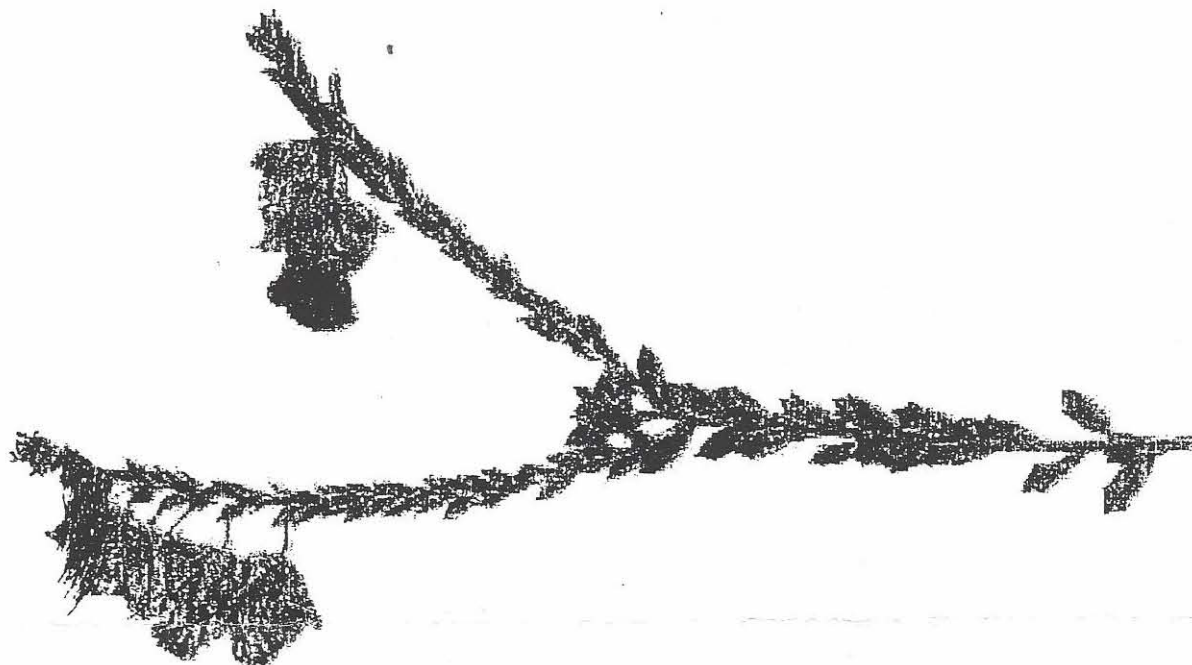
The Study Group Meeting on Saturday evening did not produce anything of note which needs to be reported here. It was however, an excellent opportunity to hear what other leaders have to say about their respective Study Groups and to meet with them.

Finally I would thank the organisers for inviting the Study Group Leaders to present papers and for offering time and space to promote their groups. I feel that it is essential for the development of the groups that these opportunities are made available and just as important, that they are taken up by the Study Groups. These biennial conferences are held in a different state each time and this allows for a wide diversity of people to attend, although it does allow for us to meet with 'old friends' each time that we can attend. (unfortunately the airlines problem curtailed the mobility of quite a few and there were a number of apologies from those who would have normally attended - hope to see them in Tasmania in 2003!)

EREMOPHILA 'VISCIMARGINATA'

The scan on the following page, from Russell Wait, refers to the species in his letter above. It gives a rather life-like 'pic' of the material collected.

It must be noted that all material collected by Russell is with permits appropriately applied for and granted. Members should be aware that this is an essential part of any collecting done. If you want further details contact Colin Jennings.



EREMOPHILAS IN A CHANGING WORLD

Currently there are 214 recognised species of *Eremophila*, with a further 12 yet to be described.

There has been quite a deal of exploration during the last year or so, particularly in Western Australia, and this has brought to light a number of species which do not fit the current key and appear to be new species.

Of significant interest is the research which is being done currently, both here in Australia and also in Canada.

The Australian student working in Canberra is using DNA sampling to establish relationships within the genus *Eremophila*. Still in its early stages, there appear to be some interesting outcomes for the future. Whilst much of the initial work indicates that the physical features used in determining genera and species is accurate, there is some indication that all may not be as it seems. We await the outcomes with some measure of interest.

In Canada, a student is carrying out a developmental analysis of the floral features of the entire family Myoporaceae. This will examine the development of the family from its early stages using the floral structures and determine the relationships between the genera within the family.

Since the floral and leaf features of the species are used diagnostically and are the basis of keys used in the determination of the eremophilas, this latter work may be of interest and further applied to corroborate this data.

The Eremophila Study Group has been largely responsible, through its members, for finding and also introducing to cultivation a significant percentage of the currently grown species. We have, due to our membership which is widely spread across the continent, been able to trial the introduction of many of the species and establish criteria for their better cultivation in pots and gardens. It is significantly harder to grow the semi-arid species from Western Australia in places like Sydney and Canberra.

Trials in gardens have been very successfully carried out in Melbourne and suburbs, whilst there have been some very productive results from a couple of growers in Sydney. A report from the Canberra Region of SGAP, in the April issue of the Study Group's Newsletter #73, indicated that they have been relatively successful in raising plants from cuttings. This indicates the effort which some people will make in order to promote this interesting and challenging genus.

As newly found species are collected, we have been able, through the interest of several of our members, to have them propagated and trialled. This has been mainly done in the Mallee country both in South Australia and Victoria.

Without going into details, propagation has been successful with cuttings. Although it has been found difficult to 'strike' some of the species. Grafting - using *Myoporum* spp. as the stock, has been far more successful, and this is the preferred method of taking that first step in establishing species. Once growing it is then possible to take cuttings from the 'tamed' plant.

Grafting methods have changed. Formerly the most common technique was to use established stock and large scion pieces. Results were haphazard, although some mastered the method and were reasonably successful; but the results could not be reliably duplicated by others, using different environmental conditions.

Currently the most successful procedure is to use fresh, young *Myoporum* sp. stock which is vigorously growing. The most commonly used species are *M. insulare* and *M. montanum*. Young tip growth of the species to be grafted is taken, being placed into a modified wedge structure. The scion must be soft, with actively developing cambium material, as must the stock. Using this technique union is achieved within ten to fourteen days and the scion is soon growing rapidly. The results have been excellent, with healthy plants available for planting out within six months.

The important point to note is that this method can be duplicated and is not significantly dependent upon location. A protective box to maintain ambient temperatures seems to be best, with each new graft separately covered with a small plastic bag shield. The best time to do this has been found to be in January or February.

A pleasing feature is that eremophilas have become more recognised as pot-plants. Both grafted and non-grafted plants of selected species are ideal for this purpose. Several newly introduced species are compact in their growth habit and do not have the tendency to become 'leggy' with age. Pruning has been found to be most important to maintain the shape and form of the plants. With the trend in many places to smaller gardens and to patio gardening, it seems logical to trial some of the better suited eremophilas for this purpose. The key factors seem to be in the selection of the species and the use of a potting mixture which is best suited to the needs of the plants – often a problem with using all-purpose mixtures for a wide range of plants with different requirements. This latter factor needs to be examined more.

Technology is now in place for us to be able to promote eremophilas via CDROM and via the internet. We have in recent times had some exposure via an article on the ASGAP Website, thanks to the work of Brian Walters, and I understand that it has attracted a significant number of hits. It may be possible to have an interactive key, similar to that which is in place for the acacias and eucalypts, produced in the future for all to access. This is currently being investigated in WA and may not be too far off.

Propagation from seed still presents an interesting challenge. Although a number of members have attempted to raise plants from seed, there has been little correlation in the results achieved. Those who have excised seed from the fruits have managed to obtain better results, than those who have sown intact fruits. This could be, in part due to the fact that when full fruits are planted there is no guarantee that they contain viable seed in the locules, hence results may be very misleading. Still the best data is that which I referred to in my presentation at the National ASGAP Conference held in Adelaide, as presented by Dr. Guy Richmond in his thesis.

Exposure to the genus via books is still important and it is hoped that the imminent release of the major work on the family Myoporaceae will place before us the most up to date information.

I would like to thank the organisers for allowing me this opportunity to further promote the genus *Eremophila*.

Colin Jennings
Leader – ASGAP Eremophila Study Group

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