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Association of Societies for Growing Australian Plants

EREMOPHILA STUDY GROUP NEWSLETTER No. 78

December 2002

I have some very sad news to report to you all. I received a letter from Betty Denton (Eltham North, Victoria) in mid-October. Her sister Pam King was tragically killed in a road accident near Lakes Entrance in the Victorian Gippsland Region. On September 30th she was on her way, with friends to a Bird Observers Club outing to breakfast on the beach at Lonely Bay. Betty said that she died doing what she enjoyed, bush walking, birds and plants. Both Betty & Pam travelled to the three workshops which we have held and have been keen contributors to the Study Group. We offer our condolences to Betty.

I have also been informed by Jan Sked that Ian Waldron passed away suddenly at his home on 1st October. Ian joined the Study Group in 1997 and has contributed several articles. He was the Leader of the Australian Water Plants Study Group as well as being the Regional Secretary of SGAP Queensland. He was very much involved in many aspects of their Society. Our condolences to his wife Carolynn and family.

This Newsletter is a little later than initially anticipated due to a rather small amount of material received by my proposed mailing date. Fortunately I have received some in the last few days and so it is now somewhat larger.

From all reports so far received there is a very great lack of water across the country, with but a few locations having received sufficient water for their domestic as well as their other needs. As a result, many plant enthusiasts have had to rely on their plants' abilities to cope with the drought.

I have had a number of contacts from people, not involved in the Study Group, over the past few months. Many have asked for help with their eremophilas, but at the same time have stressed that they are most impressed with the ability of their plants to cope with the dry conditions and still look relatively healthy; something that they could not say about many other genera in their gardens. I hope that I have encouraged a few of these people to join the group and hence add to our combined knowledge.

My wife & I spent ten days in WA early in October and were able to travel as far north as Kalbarri, inland as far as Pindar, then via Morawa, Perenjori, Wubin & Wongan Hills to Northam and on to the Stirling Ranges & Albany, returning to Perth via the Margaret River. What a contrast, between the area to the east of Kalbarri and that around Mount Barker! From the height of the cereals in the northern region one could clearly see the results of a lack of meaningful rainfall this year. It will be interesting to see how the eremophilas further to the east around Mount Magnet & down towards Williuna fare – perhaps if Russell Wait heads that way again in 2003 we will find out. Maybe one or two of the WA members would care to write about the plants of their areas and add to our knowledge of them in the field – many of our members only know eremophilas as garden plants and hence know little of their 'wild' habits.

In addition to touring we managed to see the display in Kings Park as part of the Festival. Not many eremophilas shown as cut flowers, but we did notice *E.* "lucida" (labelled as *E. viscida*). We also noted that they are well up with the reclassification of eremophilas as members of the Scrophulariaceae family. I spoke to Steven Hopper, Director of Kings Park, at another unrelated function and he confirmed that this was published in 1999. On returning home I asked Bob Chinnock of the change and he confirmed the publication. I first heard of the proposed change at the ASGAP Conference in Canberra when one of the speakers mentioned it in passing.

For anyone who might be interested, the reference for this is:

Disintegration of the Scrophulariaceae. Richard G. Olmstead *et al.* *American Journal of Botany*: 88, Pt 2. Pages 348-361. (2001)

I did not get any response to the request for information about the influence of mycorrhiza on the growth of eremophilas. (See Sue Oldfield's letter in # 77). Does anyone have any comments or know of any articles written on the subject?

EREMOPHILAS FOR THE GARDEN

I still have copies of the book *Eremophilas for the Garden.* Cost is $8.50, which includes postage, for members of the Study Group. This book covers about 70 of the more popular species in cultivation, each one colour illustrated and with description. In addition there are still copies of the booklet of the edited versions of the first 31 Newsletters. These can be purchased for $8.75, postage included. Copies of all issues of the Newsletters can be obtained as single copies @ 50 cents each, postage paid.

FROM YOUR LETTERS

Pam King – Eltham North, Victoria

(Pam writes (Oct.) about her comprehensive collection of eremophilas, many grafted but quite a few are growing on their own roots. I have not recorded the list but have mentioned a few which she has written about in some detail. Some of the eremophilas which Betty has growing and worth mentioning because they are not so common in general cultivation include: *E. hughesii* (grafted), *E.* "lucida" – pink form (G), *E.* "mirabilis" (G), *E. virens*, & *E. barbata*. Colin J.)

In my garden the eremophilas are doing well. *Eremophila saligna* is in full bloom. It is 8 years old and 3m tall and looks really good. My garden enjoys full sun in the morning or late afternoon - has very little top-soil over shale which has to be broken down with a mattock & gypsum applied before planting. It is very dry & has no extra water, relying only on rainwater.

Helen Lane – Dubbo, NSW

(Helen joined the Study Group in July. She visited a number of members of the Study Group in SA & Vic, as part of her TAFE studies. Colin J.)

Since meeting you & joining the Study Group three months ago I have set cuttings of a number of species & read through past Newsletters with great interest. My enthusiasm has just this morning (14th Oct) had a great/much needed boost on finding roots protruding from the base of several cells occupied by *E. racemosa* cuttings and also *M. montanum*. They had been in for two months. So I am ready to try grafting – armed also with some Parafilm supplied by Ray Isaacson when he kindly demonstrated his grafting technique for me (in mid winter).

Although I use a cold frame my cuttings suffer from uneven moisture conditions, & I think it will be useful to experiment with media. Something other than a coir (from bricks) / sand mix might be less subject to uneven moisture in the prevailing conditions.

In your article on cutting grafts in Newsletter #66 you used 1 part coarse sand to 1 part perlite – I will try this. I was also interested in your use of the polymer spray to protect against water loss. (I have Stressguard – It is a Yates product and appears similar.) I will try this on both cuttings & grafts.

The Study Group members I visited in South Australia & Victoria in July shared a wealth of knowledge with me. Their time & the hospitality they showed me is much appreciated.

Charles Farrugia – Seven Hills, NSW

I visited Noel Gane's garden five week ago and what a delight. First to meet him and second what a magnificent garden. Even when not in flower, the different shades of colour in the foliage make it worthwhile growing eremophilas. I left Noel's with 2 bags of cutting material from which I got around 200 cuttings.

I believe the nursery trade underestimates the potential of eremophilas. Last year I gave a few work-mates (who grew only exotics) *E. maculata* (red & yellow forms) and *E.* 'Summertime Blue'. This year they are impressed with the flowers they have on their plants. I showed them a cutting of *E. racemosa* with yellow & white flowers and immediately I had five people inquiring where they can buy this plant or if I had any to spare.

In my garden I am experimenting with:

1. Every summer I use grey water to water the fruit trees but was not sure if I should try it on the natives. This year because of the drought in NSW I use grey water twice weekly on two potted

eremophilas, *E. bignoniiflora* x *E. polyclada* & *E.* 'Summertime Blue'. So far these plants are in full bloom and healthy.

2. Planting eremophilas in the garden. When I am planting them in the garden I take a larger size pot than the one in which the plant is growing, cut of the bottom of the pot and place it in the planting hole. I then flood the hole with water and wait for the water to drain away. I plant the eremophila in the pot in the ground. Planting medium used is Amgrow Native Plant Mix, Hortico Potting mix & cow manure in a ratio 4:4:2 plus a couple of spoonfuls of Nitrophoska Slow Release Fertiliser & plenty of Blood & Bone and then water the plant in and spread mulch around. Normally this is the last time the plant is watered but because of the long, dry spell the newer plants are being watered once a fortnight. The plants seem to be growing a bit slower but are doing well without any losses. I even moved an *E. maculata* to a new location using this method without any ill effects. I have planted in this way *E.* 'Summertime Blue', *E. racemosa*, *E.* (*bignoniiflora* x *polyclada*), *E. nivea*, *E. drummondii* & *E. decipiens*.

{I have been using grey water for some time on a range of plants in our garden – the soil is very open and sandy and so allows for the water to drain rapidly. So far I have not found any problems with any plants native or exotic. There may be some problems with the Health Department if you use water which is untreated; due to associated health risks. We use the rinse water from the washing machine and occasionally dilute the wash-water, which has not been used for heavy, greasy washing, diluted 1:1 with tap water or rain water (if available). We also make sure that we are using a biodegradable detergent and one which is not high in phosphates. Colin}

Bonnie Addison-Smith – Junabee, Queensland

{Bonnie asked (24th Oct.) for a selection of cuttings to try. This short summary of her comments with the request and a follow-up letter are given here. Colin J.}

.....I would also be interested in any cuttings of 'frost-resistant' eremophilas. I have most of the ones available from the 'plant shops' (not a huge number) so would be happy to receive almost any. I have never been able to keep *E. racemosa* alive for long but have been successful with others.

.....although the extreme cold of Warwick in winter requires more patience with cuttings.

A letter dated 9th Nov. reads:
Most of the cuttings I received have so far survived moderately well, some very well & one or two not so well. At present, after encouraging eremophila growing at Warwick, the branch is about to order a consignment of eremophilas from Dianne Akers at Charleville, so we may soon have more enthusiasts in the area. I must say that the current problems with the lack of water and adverse climatic conditions favour the growing of eremophilas above quite a few other popular native plants.

EREMOPHILA STUDY GROUP MEMBERSHIP

The following information has been taken from the most recent Study Group Update which Jan Sked has provided to ASGAP, based on the membership list I forwarded to her earlier this year.

Our total membership is now 135 plus 16 groups/clubs etc. This total of 135 ranks the Eremophila Study Group third largest behind the Grevillea (257) and Rainforest (148). The further breakdown into states/territories is as follows: ACT 7, NSW 20, Q'land 13, SA 41, Tas 0, Vic 44, WA 9, Overseas 1.

STUDY GROUP WORKSHOP

I have been approached by Russell Wait about the possibility of having another Workshop for members of the Study Group. This would be sometime in the latter part of 2003, most likely in Mid-October & would be at his property at Natya. Natya is about 20km north of Piangil. Timing would be dependent on availability of accommodation at nearby Tooleybuc, & also the commitments of Russell, who has his harvest to consider. Tooleybuc is on the NSW side of the river & is within easy driving distance of Russell's home.

Members who are interested in this workshop are asked to contact Colin by February next.
Depending on the interest shown we will be able to take it to the next step; details will be put in the next Newsletter, due to come out about April 2003. The workshop would be conducted on Russell's property, with the use of the nearby local hall for activities better suited to indoors.

Russell has made some preliminary enquiries at the Motel complex at Tooleybuc where we could stay and have our Saturday evening meal. Rates are quite reasonable and if we get in early we should be able to almost take the place over.

Our previous workshops have been very successful and we hope that this one will cater to your needs as well. Any suggestions re topics can also be passed on to Colin; this will help in the formulation of a programme.

EREMOPHILA 'THUNDERCLOUD'

Concerning the origin of the name 'Thundercloud' for a form of *E. maculata*, I confess to being the guilty party unless someone else coined the name. However, try as I might, I can't recall the origin of the plant. Victorians who have seen my plant say that it is very much like Alby's 'Big Blue', Alby being Alby Lindner from Vectis South with whom I shared plants at the time. Alby was a great traveller and plant collector, but I have no way of knowing if he collected the original plant. My guess, (educated I hope), is that the plant came from the NSW/Q border and would have been selected from a mixed population. The name was purely my own and never intended as a cultivar name, however, someone has obviously carried it forward and although unregistered it is appropriate and descriptive. The Gawler (SA) nursery, which Colin mentioned, collected cuttings from me so that may be the link. (Green Gully Nursery, now closed, was run by a Study Group member, Phyllis Dadswell.)

Ronda & Peter Hall at Pinery Nursery (SA) sell large numbers of a similar form, but their plant has much lusher foliage and the flower is purple-plum in colour compared with the indigo tones of 'Thundercloud'. The Hall's plant is prominently featured in the Arid Lands Botanic Garden at Port Augusta (SA).

To further show the risk of coining pet names is the story of another *E. maculata* which I call 'Traffic Lights', a chance seedling among many that occur here from time to time, resulting from cross-pollination of selected cutting grown plants. Now the seedlings are cross-pollinating and as Bob Chinnock says "Ken, you're making an awful mess of *E. maculata.*" Anyway, back to 'Traffic Lights'. This is a typical River Murray form that is a bright green bush (GO), covers itself with bright orange buds (SLOW), then covers itself with bright red flowers (STOP). Hence the name! As an F1 hybrid it is a very good form, but the F2 seedlings are a very ordinary lot. No future, but the name had reached Victoria.

The problem of cultivars has been discussed for some time without any real progress. The name 'Carmine King' was registered for a low growing form of *E. maculata* that was, and still is, common in cultivation, but the name has never been adopted by the nursery trade. (Newsletter # 29, Aug 1984). I've toyed with the idea of registering some of the hybrids that have evolved from my collection, but the problem of ensuring the names are correctly applied seems insurmountable. The aforementioned 'Thundercloud' and Hall's plant would be near enough for most, but they are clearly different plants.

Names such as 'Kalbarri Carpet', 'Peaches and Cream', 'Winter Gold', 'Lipstick', 'Summertime Blue', 'Yanna Road' and many more are starting to appear. In these examples the first four are selections of named species, the latter two are bush selected hybrids, but no distinction is made in their use – all of them are unregistered.

Other hybrids are sold as such, e.g. *nivea* x *drummondii*, *glabra* x *denticulata*, *bignoniiflora* x *polyclada*, *bignoniiflora* x *alternifolia* and *duttonii* x *maculata*. Other hybrids such as *scoparia* x *oppositifolia*, *rotundifolia* x *drummondii*, *serrulata* x *oppositifolia*, "decussata" x *caerulea*, *christophorii* x *pamonii* and *verticillata* x *microtheca* are being grown and will no doubt escape into general cultivation in time. Then we have the inter-generic hybrids such as *E. alternifolia* x *Myoporum platycarpum* and *E. caerulea* x *Diocirea violacea*.

Is the listing and registration of these plants something the Study Group should revisit or do we leave it to "market forces"? At the very least I believe that we should try to ensure that the species name is included in selected forms, e.g. *E. glabra* 'Kalbarri Carpet', *E. racemosa* 'Peaches and Cream' and *E. maculata* 'Winter Gold'. Where a genuine hybrid is involved I believe the cultivar name should be established, but who would make the choices?

Personally I like the names such as 'Summertime Blue' and 'Winter Gold', they're poetic and descriptive, whereas 'Yanna Road' has only historical value. (Yanna is a property between Cunnamulla & Charleville (Q) where the late Lance Cockburn collected the original plant, (information passed on to me by his daughter Robin.) I believe it is *latrobei* x *gilesii*, but I have never visited the area.

Where to from here?

Ken Warnes (Owen SA)

GIBSON DESERT

In August 2002 I joined a party of 14, travelling in three vehicles on a journey across the Nullarbor Plain and through the heart of the Gibson Desert. Despite having a collecting permit and armed with cameras, plant presses and green bags, the results from a Study Group viewpoint were minimal. Opportunities to collect were very limited and I became very frustrated as we drove past many plants of interest.

I relied on the 1981 *Flora of Central Australia* plus accumulated knowledge as reference sources and identified 39 species, some in various forms, plus a few others I did not know; that's about one in six from Bob Chinnock's list. Most of the country was very dry, despite the heavy rains of August 2001, but at several camps I collected six or seven species despite being well east of the main concentration of species.

The highlight was *E. arachnoides* subsp. *arachnoides* (I think) along the David Carnegie Road, many hundreds of plants in full flower, much denser and more colourful than I had expected. I'd kept my eyes open for *E. arachnoides* subsp. *tenera* as we crossed the Nullarbor, but I suspect it is north of the railway line. I had hoped to collect *E. delisseri* at Cook but the 1971 collection, 3km north, is no longer there and there was no chance to drive to the recent collection 31km north. A small leafed *E. willsii* was collected at Barton RS, *E. hillii* at Ooldea RS, an outstanding *E. maculata* at Hughes RS, (c.f. R. Chinnock N/L #22) and *E. dendritica* at Rawlinna.

(Ken has since advised me that the *E. arachnoides* subsp. *arachnoides* was in fact *E. pantonii*. Colin J.)

Through Plumridge Lakes and Lake Rason we came on the first *E. forrestii*, seen later over much of the trip with very little variation in form and mostly in fresh condition. It appears to be a species which comes after burning which is widespread in the areas over which we travelled. *Eremophila homoplastica* and *E. punctata* on the contrary were very drought-stressed through here. Others include a tall form of *E. clarkei*, *E. paisleyi* (or was it *E. caperata*?), *E. abietina* and *E. miniata*. East of Laverton, *E. fraseri* was very fresh, growing alongside a grey leafed species. Also found here was much *E. margarethae* and *E. latrobei*.

Eremophila latrobei was of particular interest, so many forms varying from green leafed, red flowered on the Nullarbor to grey. Obovate leafed, pinky-red flowered further north. Some of these forms I didn't immediately recognise as this species. They are very desirable plants but difficult to propagate and keep alive. *Eremophila platythamnos* appeared wherever the sand became coarse enough (with one notable exception, see later) and *E. willsii* on sand ridges along the WA-NT border. A single plant of *E. falcata*, a lone patch of *E. youngii* and several stands of *E. pachomai* were seen. *Eremophila* "pallida" was collected as dry sticks and *E. battii* and *E. gilesii* were generally quite desiccated. I suspect the latter two were a result of last year's flood rains as they made dense colonies under *Acacia* spp.

Despite material arriving back in visually good condition, (some of it within three days), very little has been successfully propagated in numbers. Single cuts or grafts of some interest include what appears to be a form of *E. platythamnos* from the David Carnegie Road. I saw this plant on several occasions over a short stretch of road from a moving vehicle, spindly plants 1m high with a few terminal flowers growing on stony rises in similar areas to *E. eriocalyx*. When I was able to collect *E. platythamnos*, no flowers were on the plants. Grafts prepared look hopeful.

The trip, while frustrating, was a good introduction to the remote areas we covered and will be useful in planning a private expedition in the future. 15 flat tyres and 1300km between fuel stops were problems to be overcome.

Ken Warnes (Owen SA)

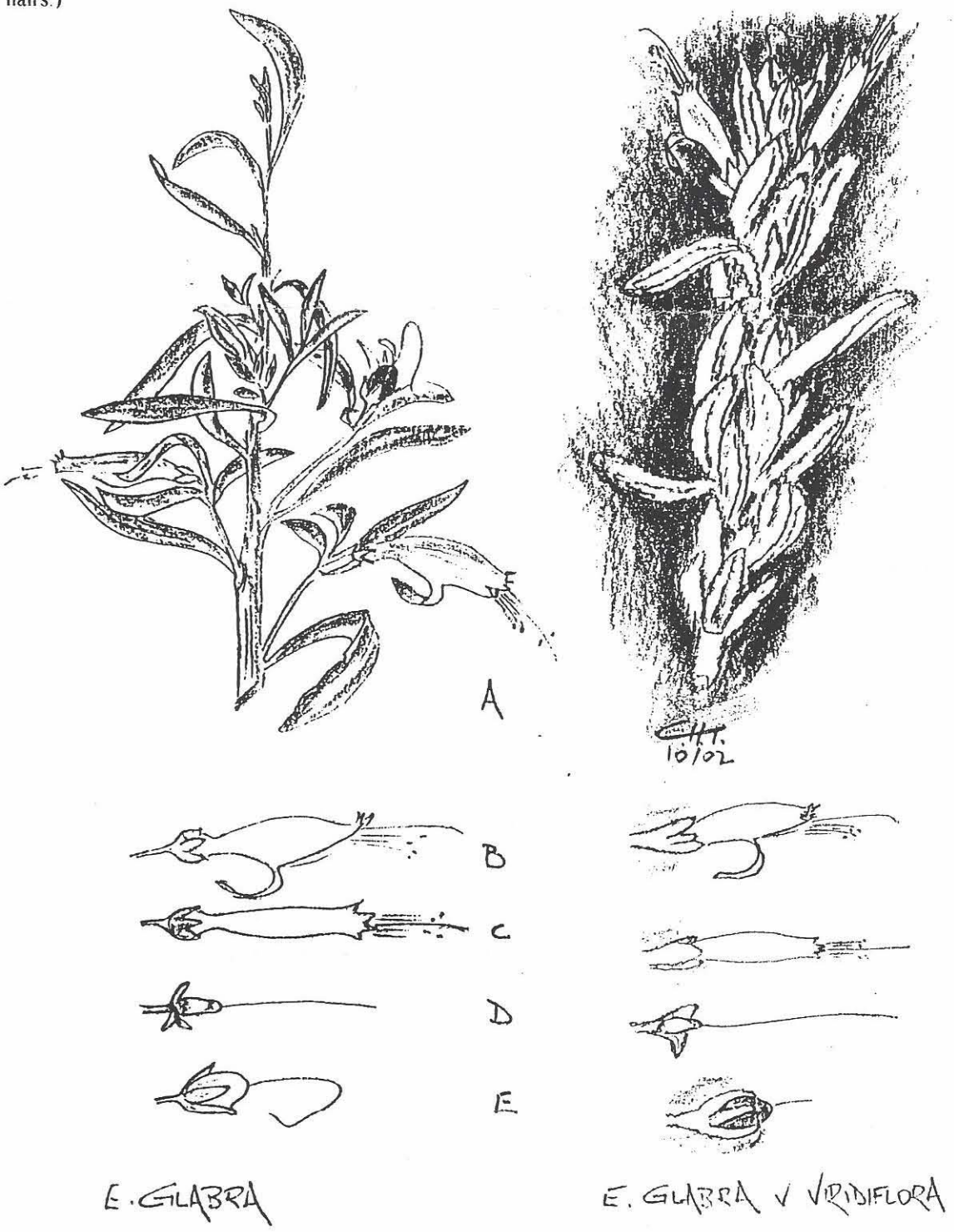
EREMOPHILAS IN THE GAWLER RANGES

(These notes & drawings were received from Colin Theakstone just before I finished typing this Newsletter. Black: *Flora of South Australia* has the species described as *E. glabra* var. *virdiflora* – it is now a form of *E. subfloccosa*. Colin & Merelyn are touring the 'outback' & Colin has been using Black for his SA part of the trip. Colin J.)

Merelyn & I have spent some time in the Gawler Ranges (SA). We found two eremophilas on Yardea Rd, about 5km south of the Gawler Ranges National Park, which we have identified. I've enclosed drawings which I hope you can use, together with some rough notes. Both species were found growing very close together. Only three specimens of *E. subfloccosa* were found whilst *E. glabra* was widespread in the area. Each of the *E. subfloccosa* was found in the graded soft dirt on the edge of the dirt road, possibly supported by water run-off from the road.

Plants of *E. subfloccosa* were totally covered in a mat of dense grey/white hairs except for the corolla (pale green) which had few hairs. The lower parts of the branches were almost bare, the hairs had either dried or been abraded off, with foliage only on the top 15-20cm of stem.

A – habit, **B & C** – corolla side & top (*E. glabra*: bright red, *E. subfloccosa*: pale green), **D** – gynoecium with sepals removed, **E** – developing fruit (both glossy, dark green but the calyx of *E. subfloccosa* densely matted with grey hairs.)



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