

Association of Societies for Growing Australian Plants
EREMOPHILA STUDY GROUP NEWSLETTER No. 80

September 2003

From reports received the dry/drought has broken in many of our rural areas and from our own experience in a north-eastern suburb of Adelaide we have received a total of 405mm, which is far higher than we have received to the same time for the past ten years. The only problem we now face is the imposition of water restrictions since we receive a significant percentage of our water supply from water pumped from the River Murray, and we all know the dire condition of this river and its feeders, the Murrumbidgee and Darling rivers.

One good thing to come out of this water-wise approach is that our eremophilas will survive on little water once they have been established. I have received several letters from members extolling the virtues of growing eremophilas in a wide range of situations, many of which are or have been for the past few years very much arid in their nature. They all comment on the way in which their plants have coped, survived and in some cases flourished when a lot of other genera, native and exotic have not coped at all well.

The workshop in October at Natya has been well supported by members, with numbers by the closing date of July 31st being such that I was starting to wonder if Russell would be able to cope with the huge influx to his property. I am assured that he can and the hotel at Tooleybuc, about a 20 minute drive from Russell's is able to cope with these numbers. It is fortunate that Russell booked the entire motel (16 rooms) earlier in the year – we have fully occupied them.

I must apologise for letting some of you down in the past for not supplying cutting material which you had requested. I would appreciate it if those of you who asked for material last year or early this year would write to me and put forward another request. This time I will make a real effort to satisfy your needs as best I can. It has not been easy to get a lot of material during the past year due to the dry conditions and the amount of material which was available at last year's Regional Show here in Adelaide was down a lot on previous years. Hopefully there will be more this year and I will be able to access it on your behalf. This year it is in mid-September.

Those of you who have paid your subscription will find your receipts enclosed with this Newsletter. Thank you for renewing your membership. I have been advised by Jan Sked, the ASGAP Study Group Coordinator, that our group is one of the largest.

The National Conference is to be held in Launceston in January 2004. Myrnie & I will be attending and I hope to be able to present a display of eremophilas, alas this time via a number of mounted photographs. Due to quarantine regulations in Tasmania it is not feasible to take plant material for a live display. I understand that the meeting of the Study Group leaders is to be held on Wednesday January 21st, and I will report on this in the first issue for 2004.

My report on the activities of the Study Group for the past twelve months has been forwarded to Jan to be tabled at the conference to be held in Launceston next January.

To those who have contributed to the contents of this Newsletter, thankyou. It had been my intention to get colour into this one but I am sorry to say I have not managed to fit that into my schedule. Hope I can get it to you as a Christmas present.

I have recently upgraded to a new computer system with Windows XP and have Office XP installed. I am still working my way through the systems, but am slowly getting there. Any glitches I can attribute to that.

I am most appreciative of the time and effort which Charles Farrugia has put into the preparation of an index to cover Newsletters numbered 70 – 79. I have edited it slightly to incorporate unpublished names in their correct format and to reformat it the same way in which the previous index to Newsletter #68 was prepared by Bob Drummond. I plan to have this included with the next Newsletter and incorporate #80 into it.

FROM YOUR LETTERS

Alec Hawtin – Irymple, Victoria

(Alec recently joined the Study Group and in his letter which he sent to me when he joined he mentioned some interesting things about locusts. I thought it might be of some help to those who live in 'locust-prone' areas.)

A Monistria locust, peculiar to this district was eating hell out of our bushes; I would go around with a torch at night and collect a hundred pair plus for several nights and seemed to get nowhere. I contacted the CSIRO Canberra and the Plague Locust Commission and entered into an experiment with a registered product called "Green Gard" that sorted them out.

They hope to have it for gardeners' use in one or two year's time. It has been experimented with controlling plague locusts and will not affect birds, etc. cutting out the use of poisons – hoorah for that!

Frank Fitzpatrick – Walpeup, Victoria

(Frank has established a dryland garden in Walpeup which is a public area. His contribution to the locality has been acknowledged on several occasions. It is a welcome rest spot for those travelling the Mallee Highway between Pinaroo and Ouyen.)

The Dryland Garden at Walpeup was struggling during the lack of rain. We couldn't even get our 250mm. A dripper system in the last few months has saved most of the natives. The garden is worthy of a visit by those passing through.

I would welcome it if anybody wished to stop on their way to the workshop in October, either for the garden or for our own garden. I have *E. maculata* seedlings of interest, but they will probably be finished flowering by October.

(Frank provided his phone number, but I prefer not to print that in the Newsletter for privacy reasons. If anyone wishes to avail themselves of the offer – I am sure that they can find his address and/or number by contacting me or via Telstra information – phone book or directory assistance.)

Bonnie Addison-Smith – Junabee, Queensland

Although I was disappointed in the results of my efforts at striking cuttings last time, 7 out of 15, after reading old Eremophila Study group Newsletters I hope to do better in the future. The successful cuttings were *E. metallicorum*, *E. gibsonii*, *E. 'rugosa'*, *E. georgei*, *E. clarkei*, *E. scoparia* and *E. strongylophylla*.

I have a dry garden in that, after establishment, the plants rely on rainfall only. Although we have received some rain the dams are still dry and there is no sub-soil moisture. Australian native plants, if chosen well, will survive remarkably well and eremophilas are outstanding in their ability to survive prolonged drought. I am glad to have them in my garden and to promote (locally) their usefulness.

Robin Trevilyan – Two Wells, South Australia

In reply to Ken Warnes's article in Newsletter #79 and our readers, I have had quite a number of eremophila seedlings appearing and have transplanted them with success. I have recently had access to an abundant Adelaide recycled water allocation and put most of the garden to automatic sprinklers three times a week. All sorts of plants come up, but the eremophilas - *E. decipiens* and *E. glabra* have been the most prolific and I am sick of planting them into pots! The same applies to *E. subfloccosa* also.

My pale leaf form of *Senna nemophila*, which I love so much, is dying out, except on the extremities of the garden where the sprinklers miss.

Jan Hall – Yarrawonga, Victoria

Recently Alan & I sold our home of 29 years with its garden and retail nursery. This has been a major upheaval, but we plan to build on one and a half acres on the outskirts of Yarrawonga. I've collected about forty eremophilas in readiness for the new garden. Unfortunately the block is again flat, clay farmland but at least we now have a fair idea of those we can rely on for landscaping and those which will be better as potted specimens.

Drought conditions did contribute to a few losses at "Patanga" where they were growing over a hard pan we inherited from earlier cultivation and grazing practices. I found many cutting grown plants had trouble penetrating this usually dry layer even with an effort to improve soil conditions. This makes them vulnerable during the long, dry years. We lost one old grafted *E. neglecta* and some small plants which were not properly established.

Overall they (about ninety plants) proved once again that they are real survivors and always manage some flowers. In this older garden the root competition caused other shrubs to fail but not the eremophilas. Some certainly became spindly, more due to the increasing shade from trees than from the dry conditions. I found that hard pruning during this stressful time could kill them. They would respond to a light pruning and to the cutting back of other plants to allow the light in.

Norma Boschen – Warracknabeal, Victoria

The eremophilas look quite good after a very dry year. We had 2.5 inches (63mm) of rain on the 20th & 21st of February and that triggered off some growth with lots of buds on *E. santalina*, *E. psilocalyx*, *E. dempsteri* – most of those didn't flower at all last year. A very old plant of *E. 'hygrophana'* produced a heavy flush of flowers. Also a green leafed *E. latrobei* put on lots of pink flowers – they didn't last long and all dropped off at the same time.

I took pity on three *E. falcata* plants (a narrow & a broad leaf form, two of which were grafted and one on its own roots) & watered them in November – they were heavy in bud – a month later they were dead. There was a fourth plant which I didn't water & it flowered and still looks good. I have replaced the grafted plants. It will be interesting to observe them when we get wet years. The dead plants were three years old.

Another 1999 collection, *E. arachnoides* seems to be quite happy with the dry; it flowers nearly all of the time and produces soft pink, succulent fruit in the autumn. A plant of *E. margarethae*, collected around Willuna, is a small bush about 20cm high and has been smothered with flowers for about a month. A week of rain has damaged them.

One of my favourites is *E. 'caperata'* – it has a small, narrow, linear, green leaf and pale pink flowers and comes into flower about late October and lasts for about six weeks.

Helen Lane – Dubbo, New South Wales

The eremophilas planted in June are weathering the winter well. Since a fall of 40mm on 2nd June the ground has remained damp with subsequent small falls. The site, which is shaded for part of the day at this time of the year, has also been subjected to minimum temperatures of -2.5°C. The plants are in a clay loam, which has been mounded.

I put down a metre square of woven black plastic around each, hoping it would help soil temperature-wise and a few plants that were looking a bit desiccated recovered within a few days.

Yoke Meyer – Tamworth, New South Wales

....my eremophilas have withstood the big dry very well; only one was pruned by a 'gourmet' swamp wallaby.

STUDY GROUP WORKSHOP – OCTOBER 2003

By the time you receive this Newsletter it will be **too late to register** your interest. I have received application forms from a total of 58 members, including partners, of the Study Group who have paid a deposit. This is already stretching the number that we can accommodate at Russell's home and there is, I believe, very little accommodation left in Tooleybuc, we have taken over one of the motels (16 rooms) and a number of sites at the Caravan Park. In addition there are several who are sharing the space at Russell's home in their own caravans and, we hope, able to share the bathroom facilities as well for a couple of days.

A report of the weekend will be presented in the next Newsletter which is due out sometime in November/December, depending on the amount of material I have received from you around that time.

Unfortunately I had to advise of a July 31st deadline for registration, since we had such a heavy response to the initial expressions of interest – which I sought in the December 2002 issue. It is not always easy to determine how popular such an event will be, especially when the dates are so restricting. It appears that this was not the case on this occasion.

For those who have missed out it is planned to hold another in the future, probably about 2005 – it is a bit hard to organize them annually. I have had a request for one to be held in Queensland, but this will have to be assessed in conjunction with the number who could attend. As well as us having people who can present demonstrations and workshop sessions at the time, we would also need a suitable location.

COLOUR PAGE

Because of the offer from Hans Griesser, we will be able to have some colour. The pictures have been taken by Hans and he has digitized them so that they can be presented via the scanner/computer. Hans joined the Study Group when he was living at The Patch in Victoria. His employment brought him to Adelaide where he is now living in the Adelaide Hills town of Gumeracha. His article on growing eremophilas in the cooler climate of the Dandenongs appeared in one of our previous Newsletters.

A special thankyou to Hans, firstly for suggesting that we might present some colour pictures in the near future and secondly for offering to prepare the page and to organize the printing. Fortunately the processing costs involved are now considerably lower than they were just a few years ago and I hope to be able to prepare similar pages from the next issue onwards.

A suggestion has been made that perhaps we could prepare a series of pages on which two species are covered in some detail, including the colour picture of habit & flower as well as a descriptor of the species. Printed sideways on the page they would cut down to A5 size and could be loose-leaf stored in a binder for reference. It would take some time to cover a good range of the species grown, but if we started with those not already dealt with in *Eremophilas for the Garden*, we would be well into the coverage in a couple of years.

Any suggestions about what you would like to see included, within reason, or offers of assistance with the preparation of such material would be greatly appreciated.

AWARD FOR GOODWINII NURSERY

Congratulations are in order for Denise & Geoff Winning.

At the Dinner for the Upper Spencer Gulf Export Awards held on 10th July 2003, and attended by Commonwealth Minister for Trade, Mr. Vale, the Goodwinii Nursery received the Department of Business, Manufacturing & Trading Award for “Emerging Export Business of the Year”. This follows their initial orders to both the Middle East & China earlier in the year.

Goodwinii Nursery is operated by Denise & Geoff: they have their nursery located at Stirling North, just south of Port Augusta. The nursery is well stocked and they are both willing to offer advice about growing eremophilas. They have been members of the Eremophila Study Group for several years now. We hope to hear more from them in the future about other developments.

For those able to access the internet, Goodwinii Nursery has a website. <www.goodwinii.com.au>

RUSSELL WAIT'S TRIP TO WA – 2002

Beryl & I made a trip to WA in August/September 2002. The year had been dry and little rain had fallen in the areas we visited.

We came across *E. perglandulosa* growing in a sandy area, but there were only dry calyces on the metre high bush which was growing amongst the spinifex, together with *E. platycalyx*, eucalypts and acacias. This has been propagated.

Eremophila glabra subsp. ‘psammophora’ has dull red to orange flowers and is not in my view as nice a form as some of the other forms of the species. It was found growing to about a metre high on sand dunes. It has been propagated.

Eremophila ‘appressa’, a spindly shrub with blue flowers, growing to about 1.75m high, was found on the side of a ridge near Newman. The foliage is small, and the plant develops many sticks as it ages and does not appear to be one which will be very showy and hence not a good garden subject. Although I have propagated it I am not sure how well it will grow in cultivation.

I have found *E. 'micrantha'* before, but have not managed to propagate it. This is due to the cuttings dying very quickly after removal from the parent plant together with the time it takes to be delivered to SA from WA. On this trip I collected seed instead. It generally grows in large patches, mostly on the plains, but occasionally on the sides of hills. The showy green bush grows to about 3m high, with an attractive dark trunk, but the white flowers are rather tiny.

Eremophila arachnoides subsp. *arachnoides* looks similar to *E. pantonii*, only with softer foliage and mostly pale blue flowers, followed by succulent pink fruits. It is a bush to about 4m high and grows on limestone.

In 2000 I found a patch six plants of *E. viscida*, but in 2002 I found only one plant surviving with two more looking very sickly. This is due to the salt. I looked further afield, only to find several other very old plants also in poor condition.

The upright shrub, *E. psilocalyx*, is approximately 3m high with grey-green foliage. The yellow flower has a large calyx which is persistent after the flowers drop. It was found growing amongst acacias.

In the May 2003 Newsletter some information was printed which I now need to correct.

The *E. 'occidens'* which I first collected in 1999 is now thought to be a new species.

The *E. glabra* hybrid 3619-9 is thought to be a crossing between *E. glabra* and *E. georgei* and is not from Canna but from Leonora.

Russell Wait

FROM DANDENONG TO GUMERACHA

Since moving to Gumeracha (SA) from Victoria in late May 2002, I have planted about 130 plants, of which about 50 are eremophilas; it is the most numerous genus in my new garden at present. Another 30 or so eremophila plants are in pots waiting for me to find time to plant them out. There's a range of positions available on our 10.6 acre property, from high up on a windswept hillcrest to a sheltered and treed gully with a winter creek. The eremophilas and other sun lovers have been planted in a sunny and exposed spot halfway up a hill.

The soil is a bit heavier than the acidic, friable, humus-rich chocolate loam I had in my previous garden, but on the slope the drainage is quite good, and so far there have been no problems establishing various Western Australian plants such as banksias and verticordias on their own roots without special soil preparation. The average annual rainfall is 825mm, much of it between April and October.

On hearing that I am keen to grow eremophilas, several people have commented that they would not do well in the Adelaide Hills, but I suspect that what they had in mind were the typical southerly hills landscape around Stirling and Belair, with their forests and moist winters, whereas here in the northern hills the landscape is quite open, much drier, and provides plenty of air circulation. In fact the strong winds that blow across the hill here can cause damage; several fast-growing eremophila plants, particularly *E. racemosa*, have had branches broken off in recent strong winds.

On the other hand, the windy, exposed situation has so far completely prevented the fungal attacks on leaves and stems that I experienced with a number of species in my previous Dandenong's garden. I also find that many eremophilas have grown as much here in six months as they did in three years in the Dandenongs, where most species grew rather slowly and only during summer, except for species such as *E. maculata*, *E. denticulata*, *E. racemosa*, *E. 'splendens'* and a few others. Generally growth rates have been quite remarkable and most eremophilas seem to find this soil and position much to their liking.

Most eremophilas are on their own roots, except for three grafted plants (*E. 'mirabilis'*, *E. 'lucida'* and *E. "Rainbow Gem"*). I don't think I really need grafting for this soil and rainfall. I did an experiment last spring planting two *Grevillea bronwenae*, one grafted and one on its own roots, and both are doing equally well and are currently flowering profusely.

The limiting factor for gardening here seems to be the frosts that can be quite severe. The elevation is 350m above sea level and the openness of our garden except for the treed creek line at the southern edge does not provide

protection against frost. Maybe I should put in a frost shelter belt halfway up the hill. On at least half a dozen mornings the water in the chickens' water bowl had a crust of ice; and I measure the severity of frosts by the thickness of the crust of ice, but have not calibrated that in degrees Celsius yet.

Generally eremophilas have stood up well to the frosts, but I have lost about ten young banksias – half the total number of banksias I had planted, which seems to be the most prone of the genera I am interested in. Of the eremophilas, only four plants show any signs of frost damage: *E.* "Rainbow Gem" and *E. gilesii* are looking frost-bitten with many leaves brownish or dropped, but are making new shoots. Two plants of *E. duttonii* are looking rather bad, only some green leaves left below brown, dead-looking branch tips. This surprised me: I thought that as an inland species this would not be frost prone; especially given that an equally small plant of *E. microtheca*, which has been reported to be somewhat frost sensitive, has not been affected at all. The other two taxa also come from areas where I would expect them to encounter frosts. Perhaps readers with more experience and knowledge may be able to comment.

Whereas in my previous Dandenong's garden, eremophilas were in need of considerable tender loving care and many never grew as well as for example: Western Australian banksias, dryandras and grevilleas; here eremophilas are the standouts. Most have grown fast and bushy, they now dominate the natives plantation in my garden. Here they seem so easy to grow and are rewarding with their long and profuse flowering. Thus I would like to put in many more; I certainly have the space, so it is coming down to how much time I can find to do gardening and the availability of plants or cuttings.

I would also like to learn more from more experienced growers, hence an invitation to all eremophiles to drop in and talk shop when in the area.

Hans Griesser – Gumeracha, SA

EREMOPHILA HYBRIDS

A request has been made for a list of hybrid eremophilas to be included in a future Newsletter. We did publish a list some time back, but since then there have been quite a few more identified, both natural and by chance in collections. It would be appreciated if any member of the Study Group could pass on to me any information which they have about hybrids which they are aware of, and it would also be a help if they could offer some suggestions about their origin if known, e.g. location if natural, or where first located if from 'garden' origin.

NESCOFILM

I have recently purchased a supply of Nescofilm, which I can offer to members of the Study Group. I expect to have some spare after the Workshop at Natya. It was purchased primarily to offer at the workshop, but it will be possible to make it available generally to those who wish to obtain some.

A complete roll (10cm wide x 40m long) will cost \$45 plus postage. I have broken one roll to sell by the metre, which you can have at a cost of \$1.25 per metre, plus postage.

Members who want to purchase the tape for grafting, should write to me with their request

Colin Jennings

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