

ASSOCIATION OF SOCIETIES FOR GROWING  
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HIBISCUS AND RELATED GENERA STUDY GROUP

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This Newsletter continues to deal with the Hibiscus section *Furcaria* DC (Malvaceae Family) In the previous issue we looked at ***Hibiscus heterophyllus*** in some depth and I would suggest that you refer back to the images for comparison with those of ***Hibiscus divaricatus*** appearing in this issue.

Below is a bloom image of ***Hibiscus divaricatus*** taken during the early afternoon in October 2005 after some of the pollen had discharged onto the petals following dehiscence. I hope that the red line surrounding the scarlet petal blotch will show up when I print the scan.

One of my particular interests is tracking the distribution of this interesting plant. It is almost certainly restricted to Queensland eastwards of the Great Divide, though one record supposedly from the Victoria River in the Northern Territory collected during the voyage of H.M.S. Beagle 1839-40 is very likely incorrect. During my visits to the Victoria River localities I have noted two yellow Hibiscus as being common in that area, namely ***H. diversifolius*** and ***H. pentaphyllus***.



## S.G. News. 2

An interesting reference occurs in the Wikipedia Encyclopedia under the heading Hawaiian Hibiscus - quote : "**Hibiscus brackenridgei** A Gray – ma'o hau hele is a tall shrub with bright yellow flowers, closely related to the widespread **H. divaricatus**". Whilst **H brackenridgei** does resemble the **H. divaricatus**, the latter is certainly not widespread as claimed.

Recently I read the most interesting pioneering book Titled "S'pose I Die" – "The Evelyn Maunsell Story" by Hector Holthouse.

Ref. Page 71 –

"Most of the northern stations made their own drinks. The Boss , (Charlie Maunsell) told me that stations around Stratmore all made a very good effervescent drink from the wild rosella plant. The leaves were boiled up with sugar and the liquid was strained and bottled".

Note :- Mt. Mulgrave station where the Maunsells lived was on the Little Mitchell River, north of the Walsh Telegraph Office. It would be interesting to find out if these wild rosella plants have survived many decades of cattle grazing and to determine which species the pioneers used.

A friend of mine, Peter Radford now in his eighties, who once lived at Mareeba told me that a yellow bloomed Hibiscus occurred north-westwards from the township. When shown **H.**

**divaricatus** in my garden he thought that it was the species that he had seen many years ago.

During 2002, Colleen Keena gave me a plant acquired at a market in Cairns. In 2004 (ref. E-mail on file) she informed me that this Hibiscus species was collected originally by Peter Radke at Rocky River on Silver Plains, east of Coen. This rather prickly specimen bloomed quite well for two years before dying off and unfortunately no seed was saved. Though the plant had been identified as **H. heterophyllus**, there was some morphological resemblance to **H. divaricatus**.

My son, Ross Harvey, (a horticulturalist) recorded a yellow Hibiscus at Etty Bay just south of Innisfail believed to be **H. divaricatus** and a friend Svenning Prytz also a horticulturalist, told me of yellow, pink and white Furcaria section Hibiscus seen in gullies during bush walks in the Tully hinterland. The above illustrates that there is a lot we don't know about Hibiscus species and distribution in northern Queensland and I am hoping that plant people with experience and time there, can fill in some of the gaps in our knowledge. When visiting a remote area a certain amount of luck is involved in being able to find and observe plants in flower. Recently named species from Cape York are **H. fosterii** F.D. Wilson and **Hibiscus saponarius** L.A. Craven. David Hockings photographed some interesting Cape York Hibiscus, some of the images appearing in past issues of the newsletter.

Below are some of my recordings of **H. divaricatus** that may be of interest to those passing through the places mentioned. Unless in bloom, the plants are very hard to spot, however there appears to be some blooms about for this species whatever the season.

My most southerly recording of **H. divaricatus** was on a scrubby range, being part of the Wonga Hills property owned by Janice Carlyle. Her father Reg Markwell first found the Hibiscus during the 1920's. David Hockings accompanied me on a trip to inspect this Hibiscus, which is located approx. 26 deg. S – 150 deg. E., being on the boundary of the Darling Downs and Burnett Pastoral Districts. **H. divaricatus** occurs near Gayndah and Mundubbera, sometimes in localities that would be subject to substantial winter frosts. I have seen a specimen between Ban Ban Springs and Gayndah that had lost all its leaves in a grass fire, but was covered in blooms. Hibiscus in these localities would have been known as **H. heterophyllus subsp. luteus** until the name change as recently as 1995.

A web site outlining Townsville City Council Draft Revegetation Strategy lists **H. divaricatus** and **H. meraukensis** as occurring on 'Old Plain' and 'Recent Alluvial' soil types with an autumn-winter fruiting season.

Keith Williams in his book "Native Plants of Queensland" volume 1 gives the distribution of **H. divaricatus** as Cook, South Kennedy, Port Curtis, Leichhardt, Burnett, and Wide Bay Pastoral Districts.

The Qld. Herbarium lists the following Pastoral Districts for **H. divaricatus** : Cook, North Kennedy, South Kennedy, Port Curtis, Leichhardt, Burnett, Wide Bay, Darling Downs and Moreton.

Records from other herbariums cover a distribution from 26-50 to 20 degrees latitude and 148 to 152-60 degrees longitude. As can be seen, the species occurs in a much wider distribution than was recognised a few years ago.

**H. divaricatus** has been sold by Fairhill Native Plant Nursery on the Sunshine Coast in recent years. Labels identified Biggenden Qld. as the place of origin for these plants. Colleen Keena has an attractive dwarf form of the species from the Biggenden locality.

**H. divaricatus** also grows on the median strip of the connecting road between the Bruce Highway and Maroochydore. These sturdy plants originated from near Marlborough Qld. and were grown by a Brisbane Nursery for the Maroochydore Shire Council.

**H. divaricatus** is also grown in the Maroochydore Regional Bushland Botanical Gardens at Tanawah and in the Lake McDonald Botanical Gardens at Cooroy on the Sunshine Coast. Due to these and other plantings eg. private gardens, it is highly likely that wild populations will become established in south-east Qld. thus extending the range of this species. To date only one roadside hybrid has been discovered from near Cooloom (reference Peter Topham) and brought to my attention. Seedlings have established under the original bushes along the Maroochydore Road median strip.

#### **Further Populations Observed in the Wild :**

1. Common in the Carnarvon National Park to the north of Roma and Injune.
2. Growing in gullies at Rubyvale and Sapphire Gem Fields west of Emerald. Blooms seen in autumn and winter.
3. Blooming at Comet 3/7/05, beside the highway about 3 km east of the town – very large blooms, pedunculate.
4. Clermont, north of Emerald.
5. Near Westwood 2/1/03 on the road from Rockhampton. **H. meraukensis** also seen.
- 6 60 km east of Emerald : 2/1/03.
- 7 75 km north of Biloela : 2/1/03 on the southern side of hilly country. The pale orange petal blotch had no stripe which is normal in this species as shown in the image on page 1. Several flowers were examined.
- 8 75 km north of Miriamvale : 10/1/03
- 9 Common between Rockhampton and Yeppoon and Emu Park and Rockhampton : 11/1/03
- 10 Near Possum Park, about 15 km north of Miles – (ref Archie Sinnamon)
- 11 In hilly country on the road to Mt. Morgan – ex Rockhampton – 19/9/02. Growing in road cuttings and gullies, the bright orange/yellow blooms are much darker than normal.
- 12 Occasional plants on roadside from Mt. Morgan to Biloela : 19/9/02. One population near the McDonalds Rd turnoff, 57 km from Biloela had an impressive burgundy edge to the petal. The blooms were guarded by very active ‘meat ants’ that seemed to keep the plants free of other insects. The ants were feeding from the foliar nectaries. Flat land adjoining the roadway was under cultivation. The soils looked like- ‘old alluvials’.
- 13 **Along the Bruce Highway** : 10 km sth. Of Gladstone turnoff : 3/3/05. Heavy blooming after first Gladstone turnoff. : 3/3/05. Heavy blooming 2 km north of Gladstone turnoff : 18/9/02. Moderate blooming at Etna Caves turnoff north of Rockhampton : 3/3/05. Blooming at Yaamba : 3/3/05. Blooming at Marlborough : 3/3/05. Blooming 20 km north of Marlborough : 3/3/05. Heavy blooming 20 km north of Marlborough : 3/3/05 Blooming 3 km sth of Marlborough on west side of road : 2/7/05. Blooming 32, 29, 27 and 2 km nth. of Childers : 2/7/05. Blooming 16,30,44,55 and 56 km north of Gladstone turnoff on 18/9/02. Blooming 20

Continued from page 3 :

In autumn 2003 **H. divaricatus** plants were examined on the steep banks of a creek bed 25 km west of Marlborough and also growing in the sandy alluvial soils beside the creek. Most plants had been tip grazed probably by marsupials as no cattle were present. The tips of branches containing buds, flowers and seed capsules would be the most nutritious part of the plant. Abundant young plants to 30 cm high were extremely prickly. Is this a survival strategy against grazing animals?

**Name Changes :**

**H. divaricatus** includes **H. heterophyllus subsp. luteus**, **H. heterophyllus subsp. heterophyllus** and what was once known as **H. fitzgeraldi** F. Muell. I think that **H. divaricatus** needs an updated botanical description as all specimens seen have yellow flowers – not white. Old plants average about 3 meters in height – rarely 5 meters. The flowers mostly have a red stripe surrounding the petal spot, foliar nectaries are present, the calyx sparsely stellate-pubescent and/or aculeate, the indumentum not distinctly coloured. **H. divaricatus** is easily distinguished from **H. heterophyllus** when viewed from a distance as the blooms are bent over, not presented in an upright position. When used for breeding the yellow bloom colour is a dominant characteristic.

**Please note :** Any information what-so-ever on **H. divaricatus** would be appreciated : to include distribution, opinions, corrections etc.

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**From Colleen Keena :**

**Hibiscus heterophyllus**, which occurs in s.e. Qld, is in the same group of plants as *Hibiscus sabdariffa* (Rosella). The petals of *Hibiscus heterophyllus* can be used to make tasty jam, syrup and cordial, Flowering occurs in spring and early summer. Plants should be pruned by 1/3 after flowering.

**Cullinary uses :**

The flavour of the flowers and buds is very mild. Flowers only last for one day but if they are to be used at night, they can be picked as they begin to unfurl in the morning, then stored in the refrigerator crisper and if taken out in the late afternoon, will open and stay fresh well into the evening. The flowers make a colourful edible ornament for a salad. Buds can be pickled or boiled as a vegetable, flowers can be stuffed, made into fritters or tea.

**AUSTRALIAN NATIVE HIBISCUS RECIPES :** (Microwave method : Times based on 600 watts on high. Adjust times as needed according to Microwave being used).

FOR ALL RECIPES :

**Petals only from 10 large Hibiscus flowers.**

(**Hibiscus heterophyllus** is recommended for the following recipes. Buds can be picked over several days and stored in the fridge until required.

**¼ cup of orange juice**

Detach petals from calyx. Chop petals finely and place in a very deep pyrex bowl. Cover petals with juice.

**Australian Native Hibiscus Preserve :** As above plus :

**½ cup of boiling water**

**2 cups of sugar.**

Microwave petals and lemon juice on high for four minutes. Add boiling water and sugar and stir well. Cook 2 minutes then stir. Cook another 2 minutes, stir and the cook two minutes more and stir. Let cool for one hour. When cool, cook for 2 minutes then stir. Test whether preserve gels by placing a small amount on a cold plate. If needed, keep cooking but no more than 2 minutes at a time. Pour into a sterilised jar.



**Hibiscus divaricatus** – above left .Note banding to petal edge and coloured calyx. Basal leaf lobed; upper leaf : narrowly ovate 13<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> cm long.

The Hawaiian sp. **H. brackenridgei** that resembles **H. divaricatus**.



Colleen Keenas 'Ians Lemon' : from a cross between **H. meraukensis** and **H. divaricatus**. Note the flower stalk articulation between the pedicel and the peduncle

This recipe produces a rich red spread with the consistency of honey. It has a distinctive flavour and is delicious on toast or scones. Can be used as a glaze or diluted with white vinegar for sauces or marinades.

**Australian Native Hibiscus Syrup** : as above plus :

**1 cup of boiling water**

**1 cup of sugar**

Microwave petals and lemon juice on high for 2 minutes. Place water and sugar into a heavy-based saucepan and heat until the sugar has dissolved. Add the petals and lemon juice and bring mix to the boil. Lower the heat and simmer gently until the volume is reduced by a third (about an hour). Remove from the heat and strain through a fine sieve to remove the petals. Pour into a sterilised jar. This syrup will keep for 12 months if refrigerated.

**Australian Native Hibiscus Cordial** : As above plus :

**½ a cup of boiling water**

**½ a cup of sugar**

Microwave petals and lemon juice on high for 2 minutes. Dissolve the sugar in the boiling water. Add petals and lemon juice. Place a small quantity in the bottom of a glass and fill with cold water and ice. Stir well before drinking.

**Disclaimer :**

Be sure plants are accurately identified. Exercise caution with unfamiliar foods. Although *Hibiscus heterophyllus* is usually considered safe, adverse reactions in particular individuals cannot be ruled out.

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