

**ASGAP PALM & CYCAD STUDY GROUP**

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Leader : Kerry Rathie, Lot 5, Salston Road, Greenbank 4124.

phone : (07) 3200 0268

Email : [krathie@powerup.com.au](mailto:krathie@powerup.com.au)

**Mea Culpa :** This time I have broken all previous records on late newsletters, partly due to slackness, partly due to leaving newsletters until flowering etc. information was all at hand, & finally due to a bout of illness which put me into hospital with a mystery bug which caused hallucinations, fever & heart irregularities. All this went away, then my wife was operated on for 2 broken ankle bones & a 95% severed ankle tendon. She is now just out of plaster, but can't walk yet. Before all this, the May & June newsletters were on my computer in draft form then my CPU died, so they were finished on a shining new computer that runs under Windows Professional XT, instead of the previous Windows 98.

I have edited items so that, for instance, all the weather bits are in the May newsletter, despite some June '04 dates, to make easier reading.

**Membership Matters :** Welcome to new member Helen Kennedy, of Wheelers Hill, Vic. Subs are still \$5 in Australia & \$10 for overseas, & run from July in one year to June in the next. The 1-line table below shows your status as per my records, where a tick means paid up.

'98-'99      '99-'00      '00-'01      '01-'02      '02-'03      '03-'04      '04-'05

ASGAP, at its last (Launceston) meeting in January '04, ruled that only members of member societies of ASGAP could be full members of study groups. But study group leaders can have corresponding members who provide useful information, such as botanists & surveyors. We also have to be a bit more business-like re finances & so on, & have our books audited, although a member can do this, & I will call on someone in Brisbane to help out.

**Weather & Plant Behavior :** The weather here at Greenbank (40 km S-W of Brisbane), & most of eastern Australia, has been more peculiar & variable than usual. My longest drought - 3 years of no creek flow - appeared to break in mid-January '04 with a useful fall then, & creek running from non-local water in early Feb. & early March. But not a drop since, & the grass is white again. The winter of '03 was fairly normal, with 12 or so frosts, while Sept. alternated every few days between maxima around 20 & in the high 30's (all temperatures in degrees Celsius). October was cooler, with maxima mostly between 22 & 27, until hot weather (31-36) & some dust storms from Oct.21. November started cool, around 27, then in the 30's by the 11<sup>th</sup>, with Dec. 30 to 39. Early Jan. '04 was all hot, 35-42, with Qld. records falling daily. The rest of January was normal, in low to mid 30's. Early Feb. was around 35, then several hot days, 36-44, from Feb. 14 to 23. On the 15<sup>th</sup>, Brisbane had a night minimum record of 26. The 21<sup>st</sup> had the hottest day ever (by 5 degrees) on the Gold & Sunshine Coasts, & 44 here. All these records were slightly exceeded the next day, then the rest of February returned to normal, around 33 degrees. Early March, back to high 30's, with several record highs (for March) in western Qld. April was normal, & May cooler than usual, with frosts of -2 on the last 2 days of the month. Usually I get no frosts before July. June stayed cold.

This fine detail given above is given because so many plants behaved unusually in spring/summer of '03-'04. My hundred or so plants of *Dendrobium kingianum* & its hybrids failed to flower in 95% of cases, & my 60 or so *Sarcochilus* flowered poorly or not at all, & those that did flower, flowered before or with the *D. kingianum* & its hybrids, some 6 weeks earlier than usual.

Plants in scores of genera flowered at an unusual time or not at all. Most northern *Brachychiton* spp. failed to flower, or had their flowering periods cut by 50% or more. Even some of the usually totally reliable *B. bidwillii* plants failed to flower. Wattles mostly flowered normally.

**Plant behaviour :** A couple of *Macrozamia moorei* plants with about a metre of caudex had some relatively new fronds mildly damaged by a -6 frost in June 2003; a brown tinge was imparted to the leaves, mainly along the leaflet margins. The same frost killed the new leaves on 2 plants out of 8 of one of the green-leaved subspecies of *Encephalartos trispinosus* (I have been told this species has 16 subspecies in all).

Knowing how cold-hardy the commonly-seen ultra-spiny blue form is, I had expected the green-leaved form to be equally hardy. The 6 plants without new leaves suffered no damage. The same 2 plants again had a June flush of new leaves this winter, but I had cloth screens which protected them. The -4 frosts had no effect on newly-flushing adult *M. moorei*.

A *Cycas arnhemica* that I brought here in June '03, after it had spent 10 years with my brother in Darwin, did not kill its leaves until mid-August '03. It started to flush again in late Jan. '04, with 3 leaves about a metre long, & a caudex about 20 cm tall, & those leaves are still immaculate as of early July '04. It is in a spot where it is 2 metres or so from being actually frosted. My largest *C. canalis*, collected from halfway between Darwin & Katherine c 16 years ago (its likely female parent is shown in my 'photo on p. of Hill & Osborne's book, 'Cycads of Australia'), had a slightly later than usual flush date of 24-10-03, with 27 leaves, & had a second flush of 13 leaves on 8-2-04. As of early July '04, it had killed the first 27 leaves, but the latter 13 looked fine. On previous occasions when it had 2 flushes in a year, it killed all leaves simultaneously at the next autumn/winter. This winter it has probably been just out of direct frost. In earlier years it has killed all leaves by June, whether frosted or not; in some years there has been no frost.

An adult (2 metre tall caudex) *M. moorei* in my garden area was transplanted from near Springsure in inland central Qld., with all leaves & roots removed by chainsaw before transport. It grew new leaves almost immediately, & after 6 years has recently simultaneously killed the leaves produced in the first 4 years. Some 90 *M. moorei*s in my nursery area, with caudices between 1.3 & 3.3 m in height, & 2 or 3 years after transplanting (& similar severe pruning), have not killed any leaves except short stubs of leaves extruded after most of the leaf was pruned off. They take 3 years to produce a near-normal set of leaves here, but only about 1 year in the Asian tropics.

A group of *C. megacarpa* that I collected about 15 years ago, on Boolbunda Station S-W of Mt. Perry, were growing on the foothills of Boolbunda Rock, while the steeper ground was devoid of *C. megacarpa* but dripping with grasses & *Macrozamia montperriensis*. All grew normally for a decade or so. One of 3 adult plants had been leafless for over 3 years, for no obvious reason, but started to flush on 29-8-03, with 11 leaves. A second adult killed all its leaves in early October, & then flushed in early November, with 17 leaves. A smaller plant killed all its leaves in Feb. '04, & flushed on 8-4-04, with 3 large leaves. None have yet coned.

The 10 *C. angulata* are, as usual, at all stages of their annual cycle, & paying no attention to the actual seasons here, as they have done for the last 9 years. My big female *C. 'kennedyana'* flushed 2 months later than usual, on 7-1-04 with 23 leaves, after it coned in late October '03. It coned the previous spring also, but I then had nothing to fertilise it with.