



SOCIETY FOR GROWING AUSTRALIAN PLANTS

RAINFOREST STUDY GROUP

GROUP LEADER

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INTRODUCTION

I have taken on the leadership to reactivate our Study Group from its dormancy. If there have been unanswered enquiries or contributions to the Newsletter not yet included, please send a copy to me at the above address. I undertake to handle these in the appropriate manner, promptly.

There is much knowledge and expertise among group members as there is among individuals and interested groups in the wider community. It is imperative that a constant flow of information, theory and research be disseminated in regular newsletters. I propose to issue 2 further newsletters this year and 2 or 3 annually in the future. But this depends on receiving a steady stream of contributions from you, our members. Doesn't matter how brief or how detailed items are as long as you send them.

I also intend to put together a list of organisations and individuals who are engaged in rainforest-associated activities and to approach these people requesting items for newsletters, and as a means of increasing membership. Could members pass on to me the names and addresses of people and groups who may assist us if requested?

SUBSCRIPTIONS AND MEMBERSHIP

As yet neither the bank account nor up to date membership details are available to me and as far as I am aware, there has not been a request for subscriptions since March 1986. Would you therefore forward your membership subscription for 1990 of \$3.00 at your earliest opportunity. You will get value for this, so please do not let your membership lapse because of any past disappointment with lack of contact.

There are a number of members who even in 1986 had moved from their listed address and not advised their new location. If you know any of these people could you ask them to send me their current whereabouts so that we may resume contact.

SUBJECTS FOR FUTURE NEWSLETTERS

We need more in depth items on special subjects. Would members report on the success or otherwise of propagating considered difficult species from seed. Another important matter is to collate information on species that are difficult to grow on, e.g. from personal experience, *Orites excelsa*, *Pleogynium timorense*, *Sterculia quadrifida*, *Syzygium hodgkinsoniae*. There are many others. Members should submit their own list of species for publication, others could then either agree on the degree of difficulty or to pass on their methods of overcoming problems of germination or along the growth cycle of hard to grow species.

Other specific topics that should be published are:-

- Victorian rainforests
- Southern N.S.W. rainforests
- Northern N.S.W. rainforests
- Central Queensland rainforests
- South East Queensland rainforests
- Rainforest recovery or otherwise after fires.
- Restoration of degraded areas.
- Tourist involvement and income potential.
- Happenings around your district.

Could people with knowledge of these particular aspects forward something for me to print. I would also like to run a regular "Letters to the Editor" column to cover general matters, problem solving, threatened areas where support would be helpful, special seed treatment etc.

Of course, virtually anything dealing with all matters of rainforest environment, ecology and economy would be of interest to us all, so please send me whatever you can, and make ours the most informed study group within S.G.A.P.

BARBEQUE - BUY, SELL AND SWAP DAY - SUNDAY 18th MARCH

The last one got washed out but that held at Graham's was well attended and educative, so lets try again. Bring most of what you need, otherwise take pot luck here (depends on what is in the garden and whatever roams through it). Plenty of firewood - chopping down the Eucs. to make room for more rainforest species! Come in time for morning tea (supplied), say from 11 a.m. wet or fine. Phone 02. 85-6015 for further information or directions. The address is 18 Skenes Avenue, Eastwood.

FRANCY THAT!

Fossilised Coachwood fruits 50 million years old have been found in South Australia.

MEETING OUR MEMBERS

Current membership was included in Newsletter No. 5 and I feel sure that we would all encourage and welcome fellow members by extending general hospitality, advice and assistance when they are in the vicinity.

Beryl and I personally extend an invitation to our country and interstate members - and Sydney ones as well - to call on us if you are in this area, but naturally phone prior and confirm we are home. There is a small, overcrowded plantation of about 100 species which may be of interest to others. Always some plants to swap as well.

MEETINGS AND OUTINGS

Our membership covers 30 interstate, 29 N.S.W. country, 38 Sydney and nearby. Would somebody be prepared to organise a time and location for a weekend, or longer, family campout for study/discussion/information exchange/relaxation purposes between say Nowra and Taree? Also suggestions for suitable spots would be welcomed for later gatherings. Best times would be mid Autumn or early Spring for pleasant weather and to allow sufficient time for people to arrange time off work or whatever.

Perhaps someone from northern N.S.W. where about 10 members are within reasonable distances, south east Queensland with 8, and North Queensland also 8 but further spread, could arrange something to bring local members together and even encourage others to make a longer trek to explore new areas and meet distant members.

CHANGES OF ADDRESS

Please advise the leader immediately. It saves time and cost, avoids problems and ensures that you receive your newsletter immediately after publication.

WET TROPICS OF NORTH EAST QUEENSLAND - HERITAGE LISTING

At long last the bitterness, division, and legal challenges that this decision aroused are being relegated to the chronicles of history.

The initial proposal to protect this section of our National Estate goes back about 5 years and includes the most important forests between Townsville and Cooktown that remain in public ownership. There are only 700,000 ha. of rainforest left in north east Queensland but some sites have existed continuously for more than 100 million years. Thirteen of the World's nineteen truly primitive flowering families are found here, and many individual trees have been found to be extremely ancient. A MacIntyres Boxwood, *Xanthophyllum octandrum* on the Atherton Tableland was estimated to be around 2,600 years old (sad to kill something that old). They contain the highest diversity of animal life of any area in Australia and the only habitat remaining for numerous threatened species. The butterflies are spectacular, and there are very many insects that are as yet unnamed or even described. Plant lists also include large numbers of unidentified species. Many known species are found in only one location which raises questions as to their chances of survival in the long term. There is still destructive "development" in sensitive areas, subdivision, illegal logging, road construction and mining leading to weed infestation, spread of feral animals, soil erosion and siltation of streams.

The Daintree - Bloomfield Road was a straight-out act of bastardry and under normal circumstances would be beyond belief that such official vandalism could occur. Fortunately, State Government representatives involved have been generally removed from office, and it is hoped that never again will we see their like holding important or influential positions.

FREELY SUCKERING SPECIES

Mention has been made of problems arising from these, particularly in areas of limited space and within closely planted garden situations. Many of the genus *Rubus* are inclined to spread very quickly, fortunately not as badly as the introduced *R. fruticosus* group, but nevertheless somewhat difficult to control.

Commersonia fraseri gives indications of invasive spread, and others known to sucker to some extent are *Choricarpia leptopetala*, *Citriobatus pauciflorus*, *Euodia micrococca*, *Pittosporum revolutum*, *Polyscias sambucifolius*, and *Scolopia braunii*. Maybe some or all of these sucker only when roots are damaged by cultivation or insect attack. Any comments?

Further information is sought in adding species to this list and suggestions to either overcome or reduce this sometimes undesirable characteristic. It is, of course, an advantage in many situations, but generally not in urban backyards.

WONGABEL BOTANICAL WALK - ATHERTON NORTH QUEENSLAND.

This is 2.6 k. long, via a well constructed track in Wongabel State Forest, 8 k. south of Atherton on the Ravenshoe Road. A brochure listing the number, location and name of 190 marked trees is available at the start of the walk. Mostly commercial timber species of mature size, so it is mainly an exercise in bark, stem form, buttressing or otherwise characteristics. We found it to be a very pleasant stop off and recommend that anyone passing through with a couple of hours to spare should wander through. It certainly beats stopping at Ravenshoe and reading the crude, rude, sometimes misspelt signs of ineffective and hate that were directed at southerners and the environmentally concerned on display in 1988. Hopefully some intelligent newcomers have settled in the town since then and have had a benign influence on the locals and have caused them to think about the future and the unquestionable benefits of low key tourism.

MT. BINGA - BLACKBUTT RANGE, SOUTH EAST QUEENSLAND

In October 1989, we visited relatives whose property is very near Mt. Binga State Forest of Queensland, approximately 80 kms. north of Toowoomba. We were very sad to discover that the Blackbutt office of the Department of Forestry had cleared another large area and were about to "fire" it. The method of clearing involved a very long chain connected to two bulldozers which dragged it through the forest felling everything. The "rubbish" was then pushed up into windrows and burnt.

The type of vegetation was dry rainforest containing bird nest ferns, staghorns and numerous species of orchids, especially *Dendrobium speciosum* that were in vast numbers. We were given permission, along with members of the Native Orchid Society of Queensland Inc. to collect some orchids. More than 20 members collected many huge specimens of *Dendrobium speciosum*, some plants needing two men to lift them.

The Dept. of Forestry had already removed six truck loads of *Den. speciosum* to their nursery in Strathpine, north Brisbane.

We have a list collated by our relative of 112 species of birds he has personally observed in the area. We despair of the animal and bird life affected by the destruction. The Dept. of Forestry intend planting a plantation of hoop pine so the whole balance of plant and animal life has been altered.

Since then we have been horrified to learn that the Queensland Dept. of Forestry intends to clear a further 1,000 acres. They want to do it quickly before the "greenies" learn about it.

Marian and Jim Bailey.

TREE CLONES TO SAVE RAINFORESTS?

A British Company proposes to clone six million tropical hardwood trees every year to reduce global warming and replace dwindling timber supplies. They will ship disease free six inch plants to forests around the world, and state the first 2 years production is already accounted for, and that they will make a profit approaching six million dollars in the first year. Ten million dollars capital is sought for the project.

Concerns that huge numbers of a single species developed from just one strain could end up as intense monoculture systems replacing large tracts of shrinking natural areas, have been raised.

DID YOU KNOW?

Four decades of logging have reduced Thailand's tropical forests from 65% to 17% of the country. The Thais were destroying their forests faster than any other South East Asian country, at a rate of 2.6% or 250,000 ha. per year causing droughts and widespread flooding. So the Government quite wisely banned all logging. However, a senior politician, a Senator and senior economic adviser to the Prime Minister has been forced to resign after police caught hundreds of his timber company employees clearing valuable tropical timber inside a National Park. Did he learn from that dreadful Queensland mill owner who illegally logged the Daintree National Park in 1988 and who was fined a mere pittance?

HAPPENINGS AROUND SYDNEY.

The Mt. Annan Botanic Gardens west of Campbelltown is the native plant garden of the Sydney Royal Botanic Gardens and is Australia's largest Botanic Garden at 400 ha. Some original vegetation remains containing some large Kurrajongs and other dry rainforest species. An initial rainforest planting is being extended. The gardens were opened in 1988 after much engineering work. Admission is \$5 per car.

Carlingford botanic parkland is, after many years of local effort, finally getting underway. A form of bush regeneration is being carried out and the second planting day is on 18th February. The Committee is holding a large number of rainforest plants and these are to be used along an intermittent watercourse on the site after the many exotics are dealt with.

CONIFER SPECIES IN AUSTRALIAN RAINFORESTS

Hoop Pine (*Araucaria cunninghamii*) and Bunya (*Araucaria bidwillii*) are the best known, and have been extensively logged from much of their original habitat. Another important timber tree is the Queensland kauri (*Agathis robusta*) and finally the Stringybark pine (*Callitris macleayana*) which is a small to medium sized tree whereas the other three can reach large sizes.

The N.S.W. Forestry Commission highly values Hoop pine and over the years has established a number of plantations on the north coast. There are about 1600 ha. in the Casino/Urbenville District alone. Queensland Forestry Department has also planted extensive areas. This species was once used for butter boxes. When the accessible trees were cut out, butter was packed in 1lb blocks wrapped in waxed paper and packed in cardboard boxes. The wonders of modern technology.

Bunya pine was also wasted in packing cases despite its value as a food tree supplying needed starches in its nuts. Incidentally, a N.S.W. bush food Company has a product in tins "Bunya and Witchetty Grub Soup" that will, no doubt, reach the top 10 of gourmet foods. Australian aboriginals so highly valued the Bunya nuts that they actually climbed the trees to harvest the cones to collect them before native animals could beat them to fallen fruits.

The two *Araucarias* and the *Agathis* are often emergents of the forest, and in some situations can be the dominant tree. They make excellent specimen trees but take up so much space that the opportunity to use them in residential situations is very limited.

RAINFOREST BIRDS

Many species occupy various habitats as they have not developed specialist tendencies, and whilst there may be local resident populations of Crimson Rosellas or Grey Fantails for example, others such as the Rose Robin and Spangled Drongo breed in rainforest but move into more open country during the winter months. Others that spend much of their time in dense vegetation such as the Golden Whistler and Lewin's Honeyeater do forage and sometimes nest in open situations.

However, birds whose sole habitat is N.S.W. rainforest are - Crested Hawk and Grey Goshawk being diurnal birds of prey, nocturnal ones are Sooty Owl and the rare Marbled Frogmouth. The Brush Cuckoo lays its eggs in the cup shaped nests of the Rufous Fantail and Leaden Flycatcher, all 3 being summer migrants from the north. Then there is the Brush Turkey, Rufous Scrub bird and Albert Lyrebird that forage on the forest floor as does the Black breasted Button Quail which is extremely rare, being confined to the rainforests of the Macpherson Range, and the Chowchilla or Log Runner. Also very rare is the blue browed Fig Parrot, the double eyed Fig Parrot is more common.

The Noisy Pitta is conspicuous by its 3 note call, described as "walk to work" and brilliant plumage but not often seen. Like most rainforest birds they are shy and retiring and, of course, the dim light does not help in birdwatching. There are Pale Yellow Robins, Spectacled and White eared Flycatchers, Olive Whistlers, Rufous Shrike Thrush, Regent Bowerbirds, Paradise Riflebirds, Green Catbirds and the sociable but nomadic Southern Figbirds. Pigeons will be given a special section in a future newsletter.

BOOK REVIEW

The Bush Food Handbook. by Vic Cherikoff and Jennifer Isaacs. Ti Tree Press 1989 - ISBN 07316 69045.

Did you know that Bush Foods can be found all around us in city streets, gardens and public plantings as well as out in the bush? Many are rainforest species.

The BUSH FOOD HANDBOOK is Australia's first hands-on, users guide to our edible indigenous resources. It contains information on identifying foods, collecting the edible bits and preparing them into culinary masterpieces. Illustrated with colour photographs and packed with recipes and how-to information.

Many people incorrectly believe that bush foods are usually poisonous until prepared using intricate procedures refined by the Aborigines. In fact, most bush foods do not need any more treatment than conventional foods. The BUSH FOOD HANDBOOK presents a universal guide to processing any plant parts from native plants which are suspected of being edible and practically determining their edibility.

THE BUSH FOOD HANDBOOK will make an ideal gift for any gardener. Build your own backyard foraging patch and browse on bush foods for new taste treats or for the ingredients for that uniquely Australian dinner. The book also details cooking methods which may convince you to throw away your gas BBQ and most of your outdoor cookware.

GOING BUSH? Apart from all the information on bush foods, this book also gives survival information that works! Vic Cherikoff has run survival and bush skills courses in and around Sydney for over five years. This has refined the often impractical information other books on the topic present. Travellers should read the book and learn those survival skills before setting out for that outback holiday.

You can order this book direct from Bush Tucker Supply P/L., P.O. Box B103 Boronia Park, N.S.W. 2111 or from most bookshops. Around \$40.

BOYCOTT RAINFOREST TIMBERS

Each year the world consumes 130 million tonnes of rainforest timber and destroys 11 million hectares of rainforest, much of this as a result of logging.

90 per cent of the rainforest timbers we use are imported, furthering the destruction of South-east Asia's rainforests.

All the rainforest timbers used in Australia today could be replaced with plantation timbers.

Rainforest Timbers - The Hidden Cost. Rainforests are the womb of life, home to half the 10 million species of plants and animals on earth. The rainforests were the birthplace of flowering plants and most of our food crops and medicines are derived from them.

Each year humans destroy an area of tropical forest the size of Victoria. Recent estimates claim that 18 species are becoming extinct each day, mainly due to tropical deforestation. If present rates of destruction continue the world's tropical rainforests will be virtually annihilated within a single human lifetime.

The Effects of Logging. There is no known example of a sustainable logging operation in tropical rainforest.

The IUCN emphasises that "primary tropical moist forests subjected to commercial logging can be written off as such for the future, because modification reduces them to simplified, moist forest-derived systems."

Logging not only destroys rainforests directly, but logging roads give access to other activities which destroy as much forest area as the logging itself. Fire, weeds, plant diseases and feral animals follow the loggers, further degrading the rainforest. In the Third World displaced and landless people move into the newly logged areas and slash and burn for a few years before the infertile soils bake and leach away.

Quoted from Rainforest Timbers Campaign, the Rainforest Information Centre, P.O. Box 568 Lismore 2480.