Association of Societies for Growing Australian Plants

ACACIA STUDY GROUP NEWSLETTER

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From The Leader

Dear Members,
We have had some nice autumn rain and continue to receive sporadic showers through the winter including snow in the Victorian Alps. With these icy temperatures they tell me, "you should be used to it" after experiencing the minus 20's in Europe. Ha Ha! None-the-less, I desperately await the warming rays of spring. A hint of the coming season has definitely started in my garden with a glorious warm glow from my rather vigorous *Acacia cardiophylla*. Being completely covered in bright yellow blossoms a beautiful fragrance hits you in the face as you enter the part of the garden that my girls lovingly call 'Mummy's Blue Country'. (Blue-gray being the colour of the paths in this area as opposed to the 'Red Country' in the other area). Along one of the fences we have the sweet smelling Vanilla Wattle, *Acacia redolens* prostrate, espaliered on the fence dotted with very cute, compact flowers as a bonus. At least I am able to imagine the temperatures are warmer than what they really are.

Once again it's hard to believe that another year has passed all so rapidly. There is a nice increase in our membership every year. The 2008/2009 year saw **21 new members** join the ranks of wattle lovers from different areas across the country. We are happy to say that makes a grand total of **49 new members** since June 2007, newsletter 97. Sadly there has been one less, due to the untimely passing of Irene Cullen, long standing member of the SGAP Queensland and Acacia Study Group.

As of 1st July 2009 **membership fees are due for the 2009/2010 year.** Also a reminder that those members who have paid for 2 years or more can breathe easy while renewal forms will only be sent to those whose membership fees are actually due. No receipts will be issued unless specifically requested. One method of payment that is becoming increasingly popular and easier is that of **direct credit**. Our account details for this are on page 12. Please remember, though, to email your details and by listing your name in the description line save me time and energy in trying to match payments with members. The financial statement has been included on page 13 of this newsletter.

An exciting event to look forward to this year is that of the

ASGAP 2009 Conference in Geelong, Victoria. As it is being held from **28 September - 2 October 2009** there may still be quite a few Acacias in bloom. The theme this year is "Australian Plants in the 21st Century". For more details please see the following web site: www.asgap2009.apsvic.org.au Here you can view the different topics in the program and also view the itinerary, including accommodation. The main **Study group meeting** is planned for **Wednesday, 30th September 2009 at 15:30.** Once again, if there are any issues of concern please don't hesitate to contact me as soon as possible so I can arrange the meeting schedule. I have also booked a hotel and paid the registration fees for the whole week, so I will be looking forward to meeting many of you in person and finally putting faces to names.

Cheers, Esther Brueggemeier

Welcome

A special welcome to the following new members and subscribers to the Newsletter:

Ross McDonald, Upper Ferntree Gully, Vic
Leo O'Keefe, Malvern East, Vic
Rachelle and Vaniah Zieler, Westlake, Vic

Ross McDonald (who is a former President of APS (SGAP) Victoria) writes as follows:

"We live on a ridge at the southern end of the Dandenongs. We bought the block of land in Spring 1969, after a bushfire had been through the previous Summer.

The rains produced a massive growth of blackberries, boneseed, broom, and other assorted weeds, plus several Acacias - *A. melanoxylon*, *mearnsii*, *leprosa* (which was chosen as the floral emblem of the local Foothills Group of SGAP) plus one we class as a drop-in, *A. longifolia*.

There is no depth of soil, which is all now lying at the bottom of the hill, but the rocks do provide some stability to plants once established.

Sadly, all the indigenous *A. leprosa* have departed, however, we have had some success with other Acacias - *A. verticillata*, *A. elata* (which grew so rapidly that we had to take it out), *A. pravissima* (grew very quickly in virtually solid rock, but shaded the kitchen window so much that it had to go), *A. acinacea*, *aculeatissima, baileyana*, *buxifolia*, *calamifolia* (looking very second-hand, but has survived for some 30 years), *cardiophylla*, *drummondii*, *glaucoptera*, *iteaphylla*, *mitchellii*, *podalyriifolia*, *pulchella*, *pycnantha*, *retinodes*, *rigens* and *spectabilis*.

The main casualties of the recent heatwave were *A. longifolia* - none received any water other than the minimal rainfall, and an *A. beckleri*, which received some storm-water runoff, but maybe that was too much for it.

Having spent many years in administration of SGAP, and as I am now semi-retired, I hope to spend more time propagating and nurturing more natives in our difficult conditions."

Small and Interesting Acacias –Part 2

by Neil R Marriott, Stawell, Vic

In this article I intend only to talk about medium to large sized acacias. This certainly does not mean that there are no interesting large or tree acacias – far from it - perhaps that is the subject for another article in the future. However we need to promote acacias to the average gardener and for most gardeners there will only be room in their suburban gardens for small or medium sized shrubs. Our Society needs to get good garden plants out into the public arena so they can be appreciated by the masses – just imagine how lovely it would be if most suburban gardens had one or two wattles in them!

Acacia aphylla – A most unusual looking plant variously known as 'Cactus Wattle' or 'Leafless Wattle'. It always attracts attention in the garden where it makes a spectacular feature plant 1.5-2m tall and wide. The glaucous blue-grey stems are leafless and look so different to everything else in the garden, while the yellow ball flowers are merely an added bonus. A rare plant from the Darling Range in the West, yet in the garden it can occasionally become a bit weedy and for this reason it should not be planted near bushland. Reasonably drought hardy, but dieing out in extremely hot weather. It germinates readily without pre-treatment from the abundant seed it sets so there is no problem in replacing it if it does die due to the drought. Plants can also be propagated by cuttings.

Acacia baileyana **"Prostrate"** – An amazing mutation of the Cootamundra Wattle that starts off prostrate, but gradually mounds on itself to reach up to around 1.5m high and 3-4m wide. It is a most attractive feature plant for large gardens and fortunately it doesn't appear to become weedy like its big brother! Plants usually do not flower as well as the normal form, and most plants grown by seed from "prostrate" forms revert to normal upright plants, although a certain percentage develop into low to medium sized shrubs. Occasionally seedlings are completely prostrate and these should be selected and then grown by cuttings to retain this desired habit. I have just done this and have a selection that is completely prostrate and several metres across.

Acacia celastrifolia – This beautiful small to medium sized shrub 1.5-2.5m high and wide appears to be very much like a Western Australian version of *Acacia myrtifolia* the Myrtle Wattle. It has similar though larger glaucous leaves with beautiful contrasting mid and marginal veins. These are best displayed when backlit by the morning or afternoon

sun, and its positioning in the garden should bear this in mind. It flowers with massed creamy yellow flowers during late winter-spring. Once established it is hardy to long dry summers and possibly even drought. It grows best in a sunny to dappled shade site in well drained sandy to clay loam.

Acacia celastrifolia

Acacia covenyi – A rare species from the south coast and southern tablelands of NSW, but now becoming a popular garden plant, and often being found in the nursery trade. It is named in honour of Bob Coveny of the NSW Herbarium. It is a most beautiful medium to large shrub with spectacular dense silver leaves massed along the stems. It grows as a dense erect plant 2-4m high and 2-3m wide, but can easily be kept smaller with regular pruning. When in flower during spring it is a mass of superb yellow ball flowers that smother the plant. It tolerates cold wet winters and long hot dry summers and even drought. It grows best in an open sunny to dappled shade site in a range of clay to sandy loam soils.

Acacia covenyi

Acacia denticulosa **'Sandpaper Wattle'** – undoubtedly one of the most unusual of all acacias, with large rough sandpaper-like leaves and spectacular large almost golden-orange rod flowers in spring. Unfortunately it has proven to be rather temperamental under cultivation, demanding perfect drainage. However when this is provided it grows rapidly into a large open spreading shrub several metres tall. It is hardy to long dry summers and drought once established, and makes a wonderful focal point in the garden. Due to its very open nature smaller plants can be readily grown under it.

Acacia denticulosa

Acacia infecunda **'Dwarf Snowy River Wattle'** – now included in *Acacia boormanii* as an unusual suckering form that does not set seed, reproducing entirely by root suckers. It is finer and shorter leaved than *Acacia boormanii* and is spectacular when in full flower during winter-spring. Plants eventually develop into a low dense thicket, and as a result it may not be suitable for small gardens. However it is a most beautiful small to medium sized shrub for farms and larger gardens, and has proven to be extremely hardy and drought tolerant once established.

Acacia merinthophora **'Zig-zag Wattle'** – this would have to be one of my most favourite of all wattles, with its lovely pendulous leaves on curious zig-zag stems, and massed short rod flowers for many months during winter and spring. It grows to around 3m high and 3-4m wide and needs a well drained sunny site in the garden. Again, once established it is extremely hardy and drought tolerant. Due to its open habit, it is an ideal overstorey plant under which can be grown all those plants that do better in a dappled shade site in the garden.

Acacia merinthophora

***Acacia phasmoides* 'Phantom Wattle'** – One of our rarest wattles being confined to small patches on Pine Mountain on the upper Murray River in NE Victoria. It grows naturally on granite and prefers a well drained site in the garden. It has fine erect curved linear leaves and curious short cream flower spikes at the base of the leaves, and grows as an upright shrub 2-3m tall and 1.5-2m wide. Once established it is extremely tough and drought hardy. An amazing discovery made when our property was burnt out in the 2006 bushfires, was the fact that this species rapidly recovers by massed root suckers when burnt off. This has resulted in a small colony of plants where I originally had the one plant.

Acacia spectabilis – well known and loved by many gardeners, this is a most beautiful rounded open shrub to around 3m x 3m. It has wonderful glaucous large open pinnate leaves, and masses of rich yellow flowers in spring. It is an adaptable species, preferring an open sunny site in well drained sandy to clay loams. It is hardy to cold frosty winters and extended hot dry summers, even drought. One problem is that plants can become open and branches can split during windy weather. As a result, plants should be kept compact by regular light pruning or grown in sheltered sites in the garden.

Revision of A. verniciflua and A. leprosa

A revision of the species *A. verniciflua* and *A. leprosa*, by Bruce Maslin and Dan Murphy, is shortly to be published in the July 2009 edition of Muelleria. Our thanks to Dan for providing the following abstract of the paper.

A taxonomic revision of *Acacia verniciflua* and *A. leprosa* (Leguminosae: Mimosoideae) in Australia

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Abstract
A revision of a taxonomically complex group of species allied to, and including, *Acacia leprosa* Sieber ex DC. and *A. verniciflua* A.Cunn. is presented. These species predominate in temperate regions of eastern Australia, mostly on landforms associated with the Great Dividing Range, extending from southern Queensland through New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory to the Grampians Range in western Victoria; there are disjunct occurrences in Tasmania and the southern Lofty Range in South Australia. Two new species are described, *A. rostriformis* Maslin & D.J.Murphy and *A. stictophylla* Court ex Maslin & D.J.Murphy and one, *A. exudans* Lindl., is resurrected. *Acacia leprosa* is treated as a highly polymorphic species comprising five varieties, four of which are described as new, namely, *A. leprosa* var. *uninervia* Maslin & D.J.Murphy, *A. leprosa* var. *graveolens* Maslin & D.J.Murphy, *A. leprosa* var. *magna* Maslin & D.J.Murphy and *A. leprosa* var. *crassipoda* Maslin & D.J.Murphy. *Acacia verniciflua* is similarly variable but no formal infraspecific taxa are recognised within it.

Problems with the Cultivation of Acacia cognata cultivars

by Neil R Marriott, Stawell, Vic

In a recent Acacia Study Group newsletter *Acacia cognata* and its wonderful cultivars were featured and discussed. I have been growing most of these for a number of years now and I use some of them regularly in landscaping jobs I am involved in. Most are wonderful plants with huge potential for both the home and commercial landscapes alike. However experience has shown that most grow larger than the sizes listed on the labels. For example *Acacia* 'River Cascade' grows vigorously to 1.8m x 2m – considerably larger than it is promoted. However it is such a lovely plant that we regularly cut it back to maintain size and its beautiful weeping habit.

Another serious problem is the dense foliage in these cultivars promotes the infestation of Acacia Scale on the hidden branches. The first sign that something is wrong is when whole branches start dieing. Unless treated immediately this will debilitate the plant and lead to its ultimate death. We now treat all plants with 'Pestoil' every 3-4 months, ensuring that the oil is sprayed thoroughly onto all inner branches and stems. *Acacia cognata* 'Limelight' tends to be the worst to suffer from this pest.

The third serious problem we have encountered is the way plants suffer from 'sunburn' in very hot summer days. This has affected several different cultivar varieties but once again *Acacia cognata* 'Limelight' tends to be the worst to suffer from this problem. This is probably due to its soft, pale green foliage compared with most of the other varieties. This is such a pity as this pale foliage is so dramatic when landscaping with the more typical grey-greens of other native plants. For this reason we are now using *Acacia cognata* 'Mini Cog' as a substitute for 'Limelight' – its darker green foliage so far seems to be able to withstand the hot summer sun more effectively, though

we have lost that soft green effect. We now only use 'Limelight' in dappled shade sites.

Recently we have planted out a number of the new *Acacia cognata* 'Fettucini' and so far these look fabulous. It will be interesting to see how they survive the first few summers, as most other varieties tend to require some summer moisture to keep them happy. I would be interested to hear from members how they cope with these problems and how they deal with them. Which varieties do you find the hardiest?

Acacia assimilis ssp. *atroviridis*, a lovely garden plant

by Tony Cavanagh, Ocean Grove, Vic

About five years ago, I obtained seed of what I was told was probably *Acacia inophloia.* I was quite happy to try it because even though it was supposed to be a small tree, I knew that in my conditions, it was unlikely to grow too large, and I thought that its wispy bark on the trunk would make it an attractive garden plant. I raised a couple of plants and planted one fortunately in a good situation in the garden where it grew happily and within a couple of years, formed a shapely shrub around 2m by 2.5m. I looked in vain for the wispy bark, in fact it hardly had any trunk, and none of the numerous upward growing branches showed anything but smooth, brown bark so I began to suspect that it probably wasn't *A. inophloia.* When it flowered, I took a couple of pictures which I sent to Bruce Maslin. He said that he would really need to see specimens to be sure but he thought that it was probably not *A. inophloia* but could well be one of the forms of *A. assimilis.* Subsequently Bill Aitchison offered to run its characteristics through the Wattle CD and came up with a number of possibilities including *A. assimilis* but it was still not particularly definitive. I was finally able to get a flowering specimen to Bruce and he said definitely *A. assimilis* and probably subsp. *atroviridis* but it was lacking a couple of the defining characteristics for this taxon. So that's where its name sits at the moment.

The things that I like about my plant are its beautiful shape - whether in flower or not, it is a rounded dome of dense green "leaves" or a ball of gold, as I hope the pictures show, and the intricacy of the flower heads in close up. It flowers for several months in spring and the flowers really are the intense yellow the pictures show. It is growing in a lightly shaded situation in well drained soil and rarely needs watering once established. I did however, receive a fright in the heat wave in early January when we had three days in a row over 43 º, two of them reaching 46 ºC, and I noticed a carpet of green under the plant. It had shed masses of its phyllodes, a standard plant protection strategy in times of stress, and I hastily poured a couple of buckets of water around it. The plant recovered and I am looking forward to its flowering again this spring.

Has anyone else had experience with this Acacia?

Acacia maxwellii

Neville Marra (Horsham, Vic) has sent us the following photo of *Acacia maxwellii* (previously *A. ramosissima*).

Neville explains that the plant is growing in a neighbourhood garden, and he has been watching it for about six months. When it was planted it was no bigger

than 6cm across and is now around 1.5mtrs. It really grew in the hot weather across the pebbles. (Horsham's weather from October to March was very hot, including four weeks of 30-36 degrees C with only 30mm of rain).

Neville has taken a particular interest in this plant, because it was an expanding/growing groundcover that appeared to be thriving on heat and, from what he could tell, little water.

Long time member of the Acacia Study Group, June Rogers, also lives in Horsham, and June tells us that she is not currently growing this species in her garden, but she has previously grown it and very much likes it.

Letter from Matt Cosgrove

We received the following interesting letter from Matt Cosgrove (Tamworth, NSW) following our previous Newsletter No. 104.

Esther and Bill
Great newsletter, I really enjoyed it. The article on *Acacia peuce* was a fascinating read, it brought some very interesting points across, and considering that one of the first wattles I became interested in was mentioned, it really held my concentration and trust me when I say "that's pretty hard to do". The Acacia that I mentioned is *Acacia carnoreum*. The first time I saw it was a photo in an outback magazine and they had it labelled as the purple wood acacia, and the photo was of this medium to large shrub being twisted and bent in all directions in an area that looked more like a moonscape than anything else, I was amazed and had to find out more. As I didn't have a species name to chase up I put our local plant information guru Bill Hardin onto trying to find out more. The name he came up with was *Acacia carnei* and as we know now that is what it used to go by (I think). The information trail got a bit confusing with every different profile not sort of matching up, but what I am lead to believe is that it doesn't set seed that often and when it does a majority aren't viable, and so clonal colonies due to suckering form, a bit like the *Hakea pulvenifera* which is a rare plant found in our area. It's a pity that it doesn't set seed all that often as I feel it has a heap of potential as a cultivated plant in areas that it could be grown successfully. Is or has any member grown it?. Can it be grafted onto a common rootstock? I've never heard of acacias being grafted or it could be that I'm only new at this.

The article about Judy Barker and her potting mix dilemma is one I've gone through also. I reckon I've just about tried every mix on the market as well as trying to make my own, but one I'm using at the moment and found it to be not too bad is Searle's Native Mix. I think on its own it sits heavy in the pots so I mix some perlite through to lighten it up a bit about 2/3 mix to 1/3 perlite. I've found it pretty good for what I want to do and works well for just about anything I try to grow, but I think some things just don't like pots at all. I can't trick a few into doing well, mainly *A. enterocarpa*, *A. nyssophylla*, *A. stenoptera*, and *A. baxteri*. Any tips?

A product that I'm going to try this winter and was wondering if anybody has tried it or similar is ENVY. It supposedly lessens the degree of frost by about 4 degrees. I'm going to try it on mainly *A. aphylla*, *A, denticulosa* and *A. alata*. Last winter we had a few minus 8 mornings and those especially were hit pretty hard. To my surprise I found them to still have a couple of green shoots at the base so that's where I cut, nearly to ground level and bugger me if they didn't come back, not all that shapely but back, so if anyone has tried it or similar I would love to hear about it and how it went.

Once again thanks for a great newsletter with wonderful information.

Matt Cosgrove

Some reactions to Matt's letter

Matt makes reference to *Acacia carnoreum* (purple-wood acacia), Interestingly, this acacia was referred to in the ABC Landline program on Sunday 21 June 2009, This program had a segment about a Bush Heritage property named Boolcoomatta near the South Australia NSW border. Prior to its purchase by Bush Heritage, it had been a sheep station for 150 years. One of the plants found on this property was purple-wood, and the program noted that this species is rare and vulnerable. The population *of A. carnoreum* on this property covers an area of about 100 hectares (the total size of Boolcoomatta is 63,000 hectares.

Has anyone had success growing *A. carnoreum*, and does anyone have any general comments on Matt's question on grafting of acacias?

Matt also referred to the product Envy and this prompted us to ask Study Group member Helen van Riet (Wangaratta, Vic) for her comments, as we knew that she had experience with it. Helen comments as follows:

"I've used Envy and another similar product "AntiStress" which are some sort of polymer that protects the plant cells when it gets below freezing. I've used it extensively for a couple of years, and found it fantastic in protecting plants down to minus 4 deg., and after that, to some extent. You have to apply it every six weeks, so that is one application in late autumn, another in about mid-July, and another at the end of August.

It's expensive - about $100 for 5 litres. It is diluted 10 to 1, and you need to cover all the leaves and stems (under and over). I use about 5 litres each winter, and you know the extent of our garden. I only use it on plants that I know are

frost-tender (especially those which are young and tender). I haven't used it on Acacias, as most of ours are pretty tough. An example of its effectiveness is on a young *Brachychiton discolor*, which I have sprayed for the last 2 years, and this has come through with no frost damage - now about 3 metres high.

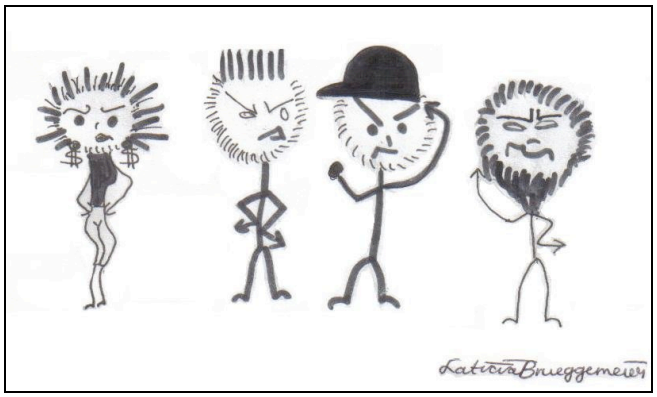
Envy is also effective to protect from heat stress, especially when planting out new seedlings or transplanting. It is diluted 1 to 20 and I have used it from time to time, but not a lot for this purpose.

The Nursery (in Wangaratta) where I do voluntary work use Envy on their small plants in forestry tubes as the danger of frost in Wangaratta is even more severe than here. Up here in the Warbys our coldest nights hit to around minus 7 deg., whereas in Wangaratta it is even colder and more prone to linger longer."

Matt's Cranky Wattles

In our previous Newsletter, Matt Cosgrove referred to his "cranky wattles", these being wattles that he enjoys and that often have spines, spikes, are grass-like or even leafless. Laticia Brueggemeier, (Esther's daughter), liked Matt's coining of the term "cranky wattles", and has drawn the following cartoon of "cranky wattles".

Laticia's cranky wattles each have names.
The first (from the left) is Miss Mi Mosa before she came to fame (see page 11). Next we have the tuff bloke, Para Doxa then the kinda cute Gui Netii (like Guy). Last but not least, we have the bushy Mr Cypero Phylla.



Acacias – Summer Survivors

Trevor Blake lives in Ringwood, an eastern suburb of Melbourne. He recently compiled lists of plants in his garden that have survived, and plants that have suffered or died, during recent drought years.

In total he listed 70 species of Acacia, and of these 69 were recorded as being plants that survived well through heat and drought (and with virtually no artificial watering).

These 69 species listed as survivors were:

Acacia acinacea, *aculeatissima*, *alata*, *amblygona* (prostrate), *argyrophylla*, *aspera*, *boormanii*, *buxifolia*, *calamifolia*, *chinchillensis*, *cognata*, *conferta*, *congesta*, *continua*, *covenyi*, *decora*, *dictyoneura*, *drummondii*, *ericifolia*, *filifolia*, *fimbriata*, *flexifolia*, *genistifolia*, *gladiiformis*, *glaucoptera*, *gracilifolia*, *guinetii*, *hakeoides*, *handonis*, *harpophylla*, *howittii*, *hubbardiana*, *imbricata*, *implexa*, *infecunda*, *iteaphylla*, *jibberdingensis*, *lanigera*, *laricina*, *lasiocalyx* (prostrate), *leprosa*, *linifolia*, *macradenia*, *paradoxa*, *patagiata*, *phasmoides*, *phlebopetala*, *podalyriifolia*, *polifolia*, *pravissima*, *pycnantha*, *redolens*, *rigens*, *sclerophylla*, *spectabilis*, *stricta*, *tindaleae*, *trigonophylla*, *triptera*, *triquetra*, *ulicifolia*, *ulicina*, *uncifera*, *verniciflua*, *verticillata*, *vestita*, *wattsiana*, *wilhelmiana*, *williamsonii*

The only species listed as not surviving was *Acacia myrtifolia*, which Trevor noted had died in a number of places, and quite early in the drought period. These deaths occurred despite the fact this species occurs naturally around Melbourne (including in the Ringwood area). In my own garden (also in eastern Melbourne) we have also had difficulty keeping *Acacia myrtifolia* alive. It does seem that this is one Acacia that does not like conditions too dry. It is probably also a species that is naturally not long lived.

Interestingly, I think I am right in saying that *Acacia myrtifolia* is the only Acacia that occurs naturally in all states of Australia (but not NT nor ACT). Within this wide geographic range, it must be very variable. Trevor Blake comments that he has seen it in the Little Desert in western Victoria, with thick leathery grey leaves, and rather smaller and compact. Trevor would expect this form to be more hardy than say our local Melbourne form.

In talking to Trevor, he comments very favourably on one of the species that has survived well in the dry, *Acacia hubbardiana*. This must be tolerant of a wide range of conditions, as it occurs naturally in south eastern Queensland in Melaleuca swamps.

Acacia pycnantha (1) – Hugh McInally

As advised in our previous Newsletter No. 104, Hugh McInally has provided to us a copy of an essay that he has written, "The history and biogeography of *Acacia* in Australia with special reference to the appropriateness of using *Acacia pycnantha* as Australia's National Floral

Emblem". If any Study Group member would like a copy of this please advise Esther or Bill.

The following are a few selected extracts from this essay:

The history and biogeography of *Acacia* in Australia is very much a reflection of the tectonic and climatic history of Australia, and the development of a national identity following colonisation. From Australia's origins as a part of Gondwanaland with its characteristic flora, the steady migration to the north together with its ongoing isolation from other land masses has led to a very distinctive flora with a high degree of endemism. *Acacia*, together with *Eucalyptus*, form the iconic flora of Australia, a fact recognised in the recent reclassification of the *Acacia* group. As such the use of *Acacia pycnantha* as the National Floral Emblem is highly appropriate.

There is no question that soils are also a major factor in the distribution of *Acacia.* Australia is dominated by kaolinite soils with limited free phosphorous. They are also low in many other nutrients as a consequence of extensive leaching due to their age (Specht and Specht). The dominant climatic region of Australia is the arid zone, and the dominant flora of the arid zone are the *Acacia*s. Three of the 23 recognised vegetation groups in Australia are dominated by *Acacia*, and occupy these arid regions. The dominant species within these groups are *A. aneura* (mulga) and *A.harpophylla* (brigalow) (audit.deh.gov.au). The distribution of these two Acacia can be clearly linked to a combination of soils and rainfall. *Acacia aneura* is the most widespread of all Australia *Acacia*, typically occurring in areas receiving 200 to 500mm of annual rainfall on light textured red earth soils with extremely low phosphate levels. *Acacia harpopylla*, by contrast, is found on clay soils receiving annual rainfall between 350and 900mm (Johnson & Burrows 1994).

There is little doubt that Acacia's position as our National Floral Emblem is well justified, being the most widespread genus of trees and shrubs in Australia. The first recorded use of wattle as a floral emblem in the colonies was at a regatta in Hobart in 1838 (Maslin(b), worldwidewattle). In 1899 Archibald Campbell founded the Wattle Club in Victoria to promote the celebration of Wattle Day on September 1st, and to promote wattle as our national floral emblem. His campaign in support of wattle culminated in the 1921 publication of a book titled "Golden Wattle: our national flora emblem". This promoted *A. pycnantha* as the recommended species, following the lead of the Adelaide branch of the Wattle Day League in 1912. Support for this was not universal, however with a push led by R.T Baker to adopt the New South Wales' floral emblem, the waratah (*Telopea speciosissima*), as the National Emblem. (Maslin(c), worldwidewattle). The prevailing attitude to wattle at this time is nicely summed up by J.H Maiden: "The wattle is essentially a flower of winter and early spring… they are themselves an emblem of sunshine. Wattles do most of all plants to decorate this sunny land with beautiful flowers" (Maiden, 1906).

Despite a stylised version of wattle having been incorporated into the National Coat of Arms in 1912, the question of a National Floral Emblem was not resolved. After the activity at the early 20th Century the subject more or less disappeared from view, although most people generally considered wattle to fill the role. Wattle Day was still recognised, but little celebrated. As the Bicentennial approached, however, active support for wattle as the National Floral Emblem steadily increased again. The first step toward recognition of *Acacia* occurred in 1984, when the Governor General proclaimed the colours of wattle, green and gold, as our national colours (Panter, 1996). On 1st September 1988, *Acacia pycnantha* was finally gazetted as our national floral emblem (anbg.gov).

A handsome tree or large shrub occurring primary in South Australia and Victoria, *A. pycnantha*'s original claim to fame was its economic value as a rich source of tannins, a large industry base on the bark of Acacias at the turn of the 20th century, and there is little doubt that this was the major factor in its early promotion as our Floral Emblem (Maslin(b),worldwidewattle). Despite this it is a very appropriate choice. Wattles are usually a fairly sparse, open and often unattractive plant, however *A. pycnantha* has dense foliage with large, bright green phyllodes and very large, showy ball type flowers in Spring (anbg.gov). The virtues of wattle as our floral emblem were nicely summed up by Panter in 1996, where he pointed out that Wattle Day is Australia's celebration of the values of growth and renewal in Spring, of being Australian, of our history, and of our environment.

All in all the Acacias are inextricably linked with both the ancient and modern history of Australia. From its Gondwanan origins, it has evolved to become a unique and dominant component of the Australian flora. You can't help but admire their resilience, and they have rightfully attracted a great deal of attention from researches.

Acacia pycnantha (2) – Some thoughts from Peg McAllister

Peg McAllister now lives in Croydon, an outer eastern Melbourne suburb. One of the plants that she grows in her garden (which has been open in Australia's Open Garden Scheme) is what she refers to as the Goldfields form of *Acacia pycnantha*. We thank Peg for sharing some thoughts on this plant.

"Once again back to the old days. I'm talking eighty years for a start. Golden Gully on the outskirts of Bendigo was a place of modest houses all with their paddocks separating

neighbours with mining finished and golden wattle re-establishing itself all over. We left when I was ten years old but my little brother and I considered it our playground for our young years.

Nobody told us but we discovered how good the gum on the trunks was to eat. When you peeled the knobs off it could be juicy inside – all the better.

I don't know the whole range of what I call the Goldfields form but Maldon, Castlemaine etc are the same. In later years I've seen what to me are inferior forms - big chunky bushes with broad leaves down to ground level and on Mt Arapiles a cream flowered form.

I like slim trunks with tan bark powdered white, narrow leaves (or is it phyllodes?) and flowers held out and above. They have grown taller here as conditions are too good but I won't give up."

In a footnote, Peg laments the loss of the golden wattles from the area where she played as a child 80 years ago:

"My brother's wife Mary Washington, the last of us still in Golden Square, tells me that it's hard to find our old home and our wattles as Golden Gully is built up over all the paddocks and space."

Peg also tells us for about the last 50 years she has had a photo of *A. pycnantha* hanging on the wall of her house. This photo was taken at Golden Square in Bendigo by her brother Eric, who was a talented photographer and artist. In those days we only had black and white photography, so after the photo was taken it was then coloured by Eric. This photograph is shown below.

Acacia pycnantha (3) –- Naturalisation into WA

***Acacia pycnantha* occurs naturally in Victoria, NSW and SA. It has become naturalised in south western WA and part of Tasmania. The following is an article that appeared in the West Australian newspaper on Monday 20 May 1889. We thought it was interesting as it provides some background as to how this species may have been introduced into that state.**

"WATTLE CULTIVATION

We have received from Mr. A. R. Richardson, Lowlands, Serpentine, a parcel of seeds of the **Acacia pycnantha**, known in the other colonies as the broad leaved or golden wattle.

This and the A. decurrens, or black wattle, are the two most in vogue amongst our eastern neighbours for their bark. Amongst them it holds a place similar to that which sandalwood holds here, and on that account is known as the "farmer's friend," as during the dull time, it is a regular practice to put the men on to strip the bark. The silver wattle, or A. dealbata, is of very little use.

Baron von Mueller, in his work on "Select Extra-Tropical Plants," describes the golden wattle as a tree of rapid growth content with almost any soil, important not only on account of its bark, but also for its copious yield of gum. In 1887, when the Royal Commission on Vegetable Products, in Victoria, were engaged in collecting evidence, one of the witnesses they examined was Mr. J. E. Brown, F.L.S., Conservator of Forests, S.A., who stated that the golden wattle contained a larger percentage of tannic acid than any other wattle tree, and amongst other interesting particulars, furnished the Commission with valuable information with regard to the method of sowing the seed. He had two modes of preparing the seed, one by tho roasting, and tho other by the boiling, process.

Referring to the first process he said; "I have a heap of brushwood, which I burn till the embers are dying out, then I shovel the seed in and stir it up - that is, as soon as all the flame is gone, leaving only charcoal and hot ashes."

The other process, and that which is most in vogue, he described as follows: "The seed is put into a vessel, and boiling water poured upon it, and is left in the water for 24 hours; afterwards the seed is put in bags, . . . and put into the sun, and kept moist for two or three days, until it begins to germinate. Then it is sown."

In the report of the Wattle Bark Board of Inquiry, Victoria, in 1878, it is advised that wattles should be grown on loose

sandy patches, or where the surface has been broken up for agricultural or other purposes." Where the young trees have attained the height of 3 or 4ft., the lower branches should be pruned off, and every effort afterwards made to keep the stems straight and clear, in order to facilitate stripping, and induce an increase in the yield of bark." To this we may add that the seeds, when sown, should not be covered thickly with earth, so as to allow the heat, upon which they depend for germination, to reach them.

We have, as already mentioned, a supply of seed, for gratuitous distribution, and will be happy to forward a half-ounce packet to anyone who applies for it. If it could be introduced here, it would be a great source of wealth, as it can be grown with very little trouble, soon arrives at maturity, and as shown above, possesses, on account of its rich properties, a high commercial value."

Acacia pycnantha (4) – A Link With Adelaide

Janet Edstein now lives in Canberra and is a keen native plant grower and a member of ANPS in Canberra. However, she originally comes from Adelaide where her father, Noel Lothian, was the Director of the Adelaide Botanic Gardens for 33 years from 1948.

Janet tells us that her father worked very hard to get the acacia as the Australian floral emblem in the 1970s. She recalls her father telling his family that it was a most suitable plant to represent Australia, as somewhere in Australia a wattle was flowering each day of the year.

Janet also recalls her father telling her about the rare *Acacia peuce*, and how these had been planted in the Gardens by Madigan from seed he collected from his Simpson Desert Expedition in the 1930s (it survived for about 10 years).

In 1952 at the age of 16, David Whibley began work in the Adelaide Botanic Gardens under Noel Lothian. (David Whibley (1936 – 2002) was an Acacia specialist. He was author of the book Acacias of South Australia, named several new species of Acacia, and had *Acacia whibleyana* Maslin named after him).

Wattle Recipe Corner

Our Wattle Recipe Corner segment in our previous Newsletter has resulted in a number of comments and feedback.

Vic Cherikoff reminds us that not all wattle seeds are edible – many species have seeds that are toxic so be very careful with the seeds that you use in trying any recipes. You can of course buy ground seeds online at www.cherikoff.net/shop.

Matthew Alexandra (Bacchus Marsh, Vic) also warns against using toxic seeds. Some time ago Matthew used seeds of *Acacia elata* in a recipe, and he had a very bad reaction. On the other hand, he recalls using seeds of *Acacia penninervis* in making bread, and the result was absolutely fabulous bread. He also used these seeds to make an excellent drink which he describes as being half way between soy and carob. Matthew does suggest that, as with other types of food, different people can react differently, so be careful when trying anything new, even if you understand it to be quite safe.

Matthew also raised a question as to how to grind wattle seeds. He has tried doing this with an electric coffee grinder, with the result that the bottom rim of the lid was broken. Matthew suggests that a better alternative is to use an appropriate flour mill, and notes that in his understanding the Schnitzer Flour Mills are well regarded. These are distributed in Australia by Skippy Grain Mills, which is based in Katoomba, NSW (www.skippygrainmills.com.au). Their website lists a number of different flour mills, and we asked them for their comment as to which mill may be best for grinding wattle seeds.

John McPhail commented as follows:

"Yes, we have several customers grinding Wattle Seed with success. The electric grinders do the best job - Billy100 or Grano as choice. Please send us a small sample and we will grind for return inspection. Please include a postage paid return bag of same weight. This way your members can be 100% satisfied of the outcome."

In relation to the problems presented in grinding hard wattle seeds, **Tony Rinaudo** (East Burwood, Vic) notes that seeds do vary in their degree of hardness. For example, *Acacia colei* is not so tough, but *Acacia murrayana* is very hard. Tony also suggests that one approach could be to apply pre-germination treatment first (boiling water), but he is unsure of the extent to which this may alter the taste.

Of course, if you buy commercially available seed already ground, this problem does not arise.

Brendon Stahl (Deans Marsh, Vic) has noted that the ABC 'Landline' program on 26 April 2009 was about Neville Bonney and John Delfabro of South Australia growing Acacias for food plants on Mr. Delfabro's property. There was no mention of any species. Riverland Growers, Mark and Jennifer Lucas were also mentioned. They stated that they received their best crops from trees of three to five years old. Again no species was mentioned. The program can be accessed at http://www.abc.net.au/landline/content/2008/s2551875.htm

Thanks to **Vic Cherikoff** for the following recipe:

Paperbark Smoked oil with Wattleseed and Fresh Bread

Almost every Australia restaurant serves freshly sliced bread with olive oil and aged balsamic. You'd think we were in Italy. Why not try the Aussie version. A combination of Paperbark Smoked oil with Wattleseed extract.

25ml Paperbark Smoke Oil
5ml Wattleseed extract
freshly baked bread

Simply pour a little Paperbark Smoked Oil into a shallow dish such as a ramekin. Then add the teaspoonful of Wattleseed extract to substitute for balsamic vinegar. Serve with the fresh bread as a dipper.

Photo © Vic Cherokoff

WATTLE NEWSFLASH (1) Mimosa - 2009 Colour of the Year

The Pantone Color Institute, which is the global authority on colour, has chosen mimosa, "a warm, engaging yellow", as the 2009 Colour of the Year. The colour mimosa is inspired by the "abundant flowers of the Mimosa tree …". (Acacias are called Mimosas in Europe).

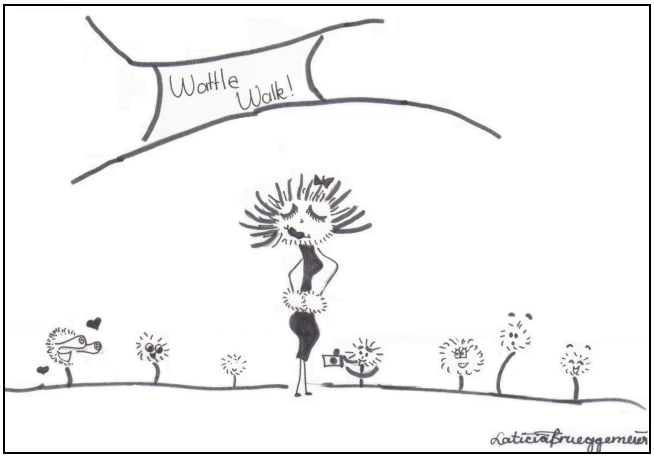
In making the announcement, Pantone noted that in a time of economic uncertainty and political change, optimism is paramount, and no other colour expresses hope and reassurance more than yellow.

"The colour yellow exemplifies the warmth and nurturing quality of the sun, properties we as humans are naturally drawn to for reassurance", explained Leatrice Eiseman, executive director of the Pantone Color Institute.

We expect that many Acacia Study Group members will agree that the yellow of wattle flowers combines superbly with many other flower colours, whether in the bush or in garden settings. This view is shared by Pantone who state that "mimosa is a versatile shade that coordinates with any other colour".

So, don't be surprised when you see mimosa yellow showing up this year, in accessories in fashion, home and garden. Interestingly, First Lady Michelle Obama chose the colour lemongrass, a hue of yellow, for her inaugural outfit, which commentators said symbolized hope and optimism.

The following cartoon, from **Laticia Brueggemeier**, shows Miss Mi Mosa strutting her stuff down the wattle walk (forget the cat walk).



WATTLE NEWSFLASH (2) New Pink Wattle

by Esther Brueggemeier

"The latest news down through the ol' wattle vine, has brought to light another incredible discovery to the fabulous age of cultivars.

A particular form of Acacia with stunning pink flowers was found in the wild. Propagation has been moving along nicely and the clever plant breeders responsible (to remain quiet until established) are hoping to release this beautiful plant in Autumn 2010.

Keep your eyes peeled in future newsletters for more juicy information as it becomes available."

WATTLE NEWSFLASH (3) Wattle Exhibition in Canberra

We understand that a Wattle Exhibition is to be held in Canberra, over a 6 week period commencing 1 September. Unfortunately we do not have any further information, but if you live in Canberra or will be visiting Canberra during this period, you may wish to look out for it.

Can You Help? - Acacias – Short lived or long lived?

Can you help with some information?

We know that some people are reluctant to grow acacias because they hold the view that they are short lived and therefore not worth buying. We are planning to include an article in our next Newsletter addressing this question of whether acacias are short lived or long lived.

We would very much appreciate any feedback as to your experiences and thoughts. For example, any information on particular plants that you may be familiar with, or general comments on species that you find are short lived or long lived, would be appreciated.

Please give your comments to either Esther or Bill.

Can You Help? - Request for Seeds

We have received the following request from **Honghua He**. If you can help, please contact Honghua at heh01@student.uwa.edu.au. (our Study Group Seed Bank does not have seeds in the quantity that Honghua requires).

"I am Honghua He, a PhD student in the School of Plant Biology, UWA. I am now doing some research on the nutrient use strategies of four *Acacia* species, namely *A. stipuligera, A. ancistrocarpa, A. stellaticeps and A. synchronicia.* But I have problem to get enough seeds for my research, especially for *A. synchronicia*. I have seen your seed list and found you have got seeds of *A. synchronicia*, and I am wondering whether I can get some seeds from you and how many seeds I can get at most. I need at least 300 seeds for each species. Could please tell me what I need to do if I want to get seeds from you? Your kind help would be greatly appreciated."

Study Group Membership

Acacia Study Group membership for 2009/10 is as follows:
$7 (newsletter sent by email)
$10 (hardcopy of newsletter posted in Australia)
$20 (hardcopy of newsletter posted overseas)

Subscriptions may be sent to:
ASGAP Acacia Study Group Leader
Esther Brueggemeier
28 Staton Crescent
Westlake, Victoria 3337

Subscriptions may also be paid directly to our Account at the Bendigo Bank. Account details are:
Account Name: ASGAP Acacia Study Group
BSB: 633-000
Account Number: 130786973

If you pay directly to the Bank Account, please advise Esther by email (wildaboutwattle@iprimus.com.au)

Seed Bank

An updated list of species held in our Study Group's Seed Bank was included in Newsletter No. 102 (September 2008). Requests for seed should be directed to Esther.

18 packets maximum in each order (negotiable). Limit of 3 orders per member per year. Please include $2 in stamps to cover the cost of a padded post bag and postage.

ASGAP ACACIA STUDY GROUP FINANCIAL BALANCE SHEET 2007-08			
INCOME	Balance at 1.7.07	$891.00	
	Members' subs and donations	$681.75	
	Total	$1.572.75	$1,572.75
EXPENSES	Stationery	$87.05	
	Printing	$224.00	
	Photocopying	$115.20	
	Postage	$89.70	
	Sundries	$24.95	
	Total	$540.90	-$540.90
BALANCE	**Balance at 30.6.08**		**$1,031.85**
ASGAP ACACIA STUDY GROUP FINANCIAL BALANCE SHEET 2008-09			
INCOME	Balance at 1.7.08	$1,031.85	
	Members' subs and donations	$1,047.00	
	Total	$2,078.85	$2,078.85
EXPENSES	Stationery	$55.16	
	Printing	$431.00	
	Photocopying	$174.00	
	Postage	$218.25	
	Seed	$391.93	
	Archive/Library	$12.00	
	Sundries (including Wattlegrow)	$265.06	
		$1,547.40	-$1,547.40
BALANCE	**Balance at 30.6.09**		**$531.45**