

# BUDAWANGIA\*

AN E-NEWSLETTER FOR ALL THOSE INTERESTED IN THE NATIVE PLANTS OF THE NSW SOUTH COAST

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*Aims: To connect those interested in the native flora of the NSW South Coast, to share up to date information on the flora of the region and to broaden the appreciation of the region's native plants.*

## Editorial

The sunny autumn days were welcome after the very wet April, which has prompted many fungi to appear on the forest floor, a bit late this year. The flocks of Pied Currawongs and White-headed Pigeons in town at Jamberoo heralded the coming of the cold weather of winter, while I was away in warmer climes for two weeks. So the veggie garden has been planted up with members of the cabbage family (Brassicaceae) and some are well on the way to the first crop.

This edition contains a piece on Cotton Bush and its relationship with the Wanderer Butterfly. Two readers have sent in their plant photographs after last month's newsletter; these are always welcome. A new mystery weed is once again presented. Possumwood is a fairly common high altitude tree in rainforest and near escarpments throughout the region, although it is quite uncommon south of the Shoalhaven River. As you will read herein, it has an interesting life history. Another plant of the month and a note on a new naturalised *Asparagus* species for the region finish off this edition.

As usual, readers are quick to identify editorial corrections for the Newsletter. The first line of last month's editorial brought the following response from Garry (North Nowra): "I have heard of it raining cats and dogs but now rainforest - wow it was heavy with Kangaroo Valley getting over 400 mm." So much for computer correcting and my editing skills late at night!

*But a weed is simply a plant that wants to grow where people want something else. In blaming nature, people mistake the culprit. Weeds are people's idea, not nature's. - Anon*

I would be pleased to receive appropriate articles, however small, on interesting observations, new discoveries, plant name changes, etc., up to two A4 pages, including some photographs. Deadline is one week before the end of the calendar month.

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\* *Budawangia* is a monotypic, endemic genus restricted to the Budawang Range on the western edge of the South Coast region. The genus was named by Telford in 1992; the species *Budawangia gnidioides* (Ericaceae) was previously *Rupicola gnidioides*.

## Cotton Bush and the Wanderer Butterfly

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The plant known as Narrow-leaved Cotton Bush *Gomphocarpus fruticosus* (Apocynaceae) is a common sight in paddocks and along roadsides in the region. Stands of this plant, originating from South Africa, are often attended by the brown and black Wanderer Butterfly *Danaus plexippus*, also known as the Monarch Butterfly. Neither the Cotton Bush genus nor the butterfly is native to Australia; the Wanderer seems to have turned up here in about 1871.

The caterpillars of this large butterfly feed on the leaves of the Cotton Bush plant, upon which the female Wandered Butterfly deposits her eggs. The milky sap in the Cotton Bush makes the caterpillar and the butterfly toxic and distasteful to predators, so the species obtains a protective benefit from feeding on this plant. The rather bright colours of the larvae and the butterfly warn would-be predators that they are poisonous and should not be eaten.

Right. Plant of Narrow-leaved Cotton Bush, showing flowers and the inflated fruit body covered in soft spines.



Above. Adult Wanderer Butterfly feeding on the flowers of Cotton Bush.

Right. The brightly coloured caterpillar of the Wanderer Butterfly on Cotton Bush flowers.



Cotton Bush produces wind-borne seeds. These are attached to long, silky hairs that facilitate long distance dispersal of the seed by the wind. Where large patches of Cotton Bush occur, there are sure to be many Wanderer Butterflies around. The species is rather long-lived and will congregate in camps where thousands of animals can be seen hanging from the trees.

Right. The seeds of *Gomphocarpus fruticosus* with their attached silky hairs.



## Mystery Weed

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This weed is a tree that in some areas in the northern part of state is a major invasive species. Answer next edition.



## Plant of the Month – *Coprosma quadrifida*

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Locally, the small shrub *Coprosma quadrifida* (Rubiaceae) can be found at higher altitudes and occasionally in rainforest on the slopes of the escarpment at lower altitudes. The species occurs from the tablelands of northern NSW south to Tasmania. On the South Coast this species is primarily found in rainforest and moist tall eucalypt forest, including regrowth on the edges of forest. The genus *Coprosma* occurs from New Zealand to the Hawaiian Islands, through southeast Asia to Australia. Endemic species occur on various Pacific islands, including Lord Howe Island and Norfolk Island.

Right: The small leaves and ripe red fruit of *Coprosma quadrifida* on Knights Hill.



## The strange tale of the Possumwood Tree

The life cycle of the Possumwood *Quintinia sieberi* (Paracryphiaceae, following several changes in recent years) is an interesting one. This species almost invariably starts life as an epiphyte upon the trunk of a tree fern (*Dicksonia* or *Cyathea*). In due course, the tree fern falls over with the weight of the growing tree and eventually dies. The remains of a tree fern can often be seen amongst the trunk of the Possumwood trees in high altitude rainforest in many places. This evidence can even be observed on very large old trees. All stages of this process can be observed in Robertson Nature Reserve, from small seedlings on tree fern trunks to large old trees, often showing some of the fibrous trunk of the original tree fern. Trees are often leaning as a result of the tree fern bending under the weight of the tree earlier in the life of the tree.



*Quintinia sieberi* seedling on tree fern trunk.



Large old tree with remains of tree fern trunk.  
All photographs taken in Robertson Nature Reserve.



Small tree growing on the side of a tree fern trunk.

Etymology of the taxonomic name: *Quintinia* - after the French botanist Jean-Baptiste de la Quintinie (1626 - 1688); *sieberi* - after the Czech botanist Franz Wilhelm Sieber (1789 -1844). Origin of common name Possumwood is unknown - does anyone know ?

## Ferns on the South Coast

I am undertaking a major review and field investigation of the fern flora of the south coast (Port Hacking to Batemans Bay). I would be interested in any 'strange or unusual' ferns that people may come across; this includes naturalised species. I am happy to identify any species, either by photograph or specimen. Please do not collect material within conservation reserves unless you have the appropriate permit.

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## Reader's Photographs



After reading about *Coreopsis* in last month's newsletter, John (Naremburn) sent in the attached photograph of *Coreopsis lanceolata* covering the Gore Hill Memorial Cemetery; it is quite picturesque amongst the headstones.



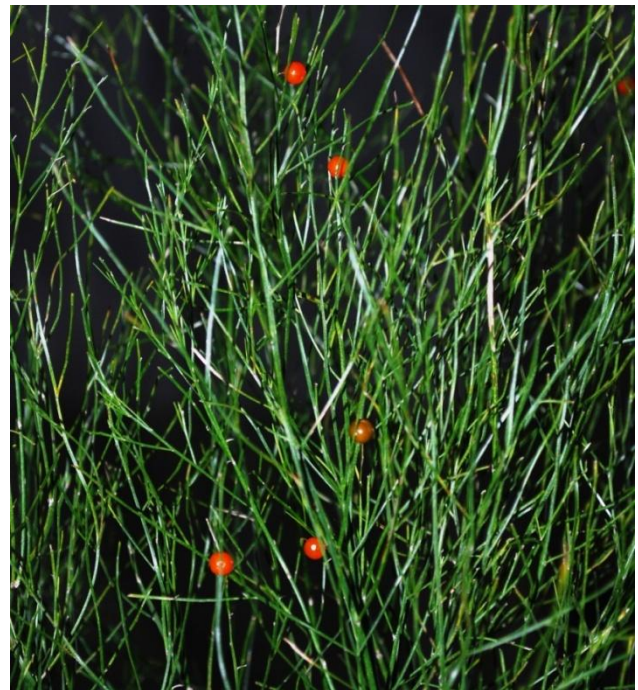
Bob (Jamberoo) read about epiphytes last month and promptly went off to Minnamurra Rainforest to take this photo of a large boulder covered in small Birds Nest ferns. Bob asks "surely these fellas cannot survive on a wet rock?"

### Another naturalised *Asparagus*

Several species of asparagus were discussed in Newsletter Number 34, January 2015. Well, another has turned up locally, which is said on PlantNet to be rarely naturalised. The species is *Asparagus virgatus* (Asparagaceae). I have driven past this plant for months, each time thinking I must stop and check it out. There are several clumps along the Minnamurra Falls Road. This species, presumably originally introduced as a garden plant, comes from eastern and southern Africa. The cladodes are very narrow, giving the impression of a 'naked' plant. The accompanying photographs were taken next to Minnamurra Falls Road.



Clump of *Asparagus virgatus*, about one metre tall.



Stems and fruit of *Asparagus virgatus*.