AUSTRALASIAN PLANT SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER

PENTACHONDRA

ISSUE 36 MAY 2006



AUSTRALASIAN PLANT SOCIETY

Newsletter No.36
May 2006

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Photographs.....thanks to Jeff Irons for supplying the picture of *Pentachondra pumila* for the front cover. Also thanks to Pat Anderson for his photograph of *Thysanotus multiflorus* which is the illustration for the back cover. Tim Darrington provided the photos for the middle pages. Again, many thanks.

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Editorial

Once again, a big thank you to everyone who submitted articles/pictures for this issue.

Please remember that this is your newsletter; a chance for you to share your interest with others, an opportunity to discuss successes, and failures (yes, we all have them from time to time, and by talking about the losses, we may be able to determine the reason for the demise and remedy it - so don't be afraid to dwell on the negative side).

I know time, or lack of time, always seems to be an issue, but if you just jot occasional notes on your calender or in your diary, about what is happening in your 'Antipodean World', you will find that by the end of summer, you'll have the backbone of an article. If you don't want to put the article together yourself, just send me your jottings, and I'll do it for you.

Dates for your diary

The regional get-togethers are proving popular and once again we have dates for both a Southern and Northern one.

Southern Meeting will be held on **3rd June, at Canterbury, Kent**, the home of APS members Jeremy and Hilary Spon.

Northern Meeting will be **17th June** at the home of treasurer Tony Entwistle & his good lady, at **Delamere, Cheshire**.

The **National Annual Meeting** will be on **22nd July** at **Birmingham Botanic Gardens**.

Details of all three social events can be found elsewhere in your newsletter.

Many thanks to everyone involved for arranging these meetings, especially the regional ones, and allowing members to peek into their private gardens.

Seedlist 2006 To apply for a seedlist, (available from 31st March) send a SAE (at least 6" x 9") to :-

RJ Christmas
Osborne House
Wrexham Road
Pen-y-ffordd
Chester
Flintshire CH4 0HT

An electronic version can be obtained by contacting - morayacacia@aol.com

Annual Meeting

Birmingham Botanical Gardens
22nd July 2006

These are the venue of our annual meeting this year, and they are nowhere as well known as they should be. Founded in 1828, the original gardens were laid out by Loudon and the current layout still largely follows his original design. The Tropical house dates from 1852, the subtropical house from 1871 and Terrace Glasshouse from 1873. Joseph Chamberlain was President of the Society in 1876 and Neville Chamberlain its Treasurer from 1902 – 1907. And "Chinese" Wilson trained here a century ago. If you would like to know more about the gardens and use the Internet, then their website

www.birminghambotanicalgardens.org.uk will tell you more.

If that's not enough of an attraction, then you will gain **free entry** when attending our meeting!

Our plan for the day is:

10.30 – 11.30 Meet for tea and coffee, chat and bring along anything you would like to share with us

11.30 – 12.30 Talk by Bev Hanson – Bev is an entertaining speaker and one of the leading landscapers and Aussie gardeners in Melbourne. Her talk will be geared towards the kind of questions a British gardener has about Aussie plants. It will explore garden worthy plants that have a reasonable chance of growing here in the UK, and will also consider what constitutes Australian Garden Design.

12.30 – 1.45 Break for lunch. Either bring a picnic to eat in the garden, or there is a good café.

1.45 – 2.15 Annual General Meeting

2.15 – 3.45 Guided tour around the Gardens by member Simon Gulliver who is on the staff of the gardens. Although the gardens don't have any specialist Australasian Plant collections, there are quite a number of Australasian Plants around as well as many other plants of interest. To my mind the really attractive aspect of the gardens is that they're large enough to have plenty of interest, but not so large as to exhaust you before you've gone around only a fraction of them.

We need to know who will be attending so that you will be allowed free entrance (and numbers will be limited). Please either send an e-mail to secretary@anzplantsoc.org.uk, or phone Nicky Zanen on 07950 428527

Please bring with you any plants you might wish to sell or swap (or even donate to the Gardens – I'm sure they'd be pleased to receive them), display plants or any pictures to share with us. The room we're meeting in has access via a spiral staircase, so nothing too large, please! And unfortunately the room has no disabled access although the rest of the gardens do.

If you don't know the area, Birmingham and its surroundings have much to offer which you might like to combine with this visit.

So please make a note in your diary now, and let us know that you will be coming. I think you'll enjoy the day we've put together.

Nicky Zanen would like to make the most of her visit to Birmingham and spend the whole weekend there (see further article in this issue).

How to get to BBG

To reach the venue by car head for the Edgbaston district, and the gardens are well signposted. By train you can go to New Street station and buses 10, 21, 22, 23, 29 and 103 from Colmore Row nearby stop close to the gardens, or it's a 20 minute taxi ride. You can also go to Fiveways station and turn left on leaving the station to the roundabout and then follow the signs – about a 10 minute walk. Further detailed instructions to find the location are on their web site. Please use the gardens and not the banquet entrance.

The Winter in Cheshire

Tony Entwistle

It is premature to write this at only the end of February, but I can say that there has been much more damage than in the '04-'05 winter, when most Australasians survived with little foliage damage.

This winter, many look badly burnt, or dead above ground level; many Acacias, including a 5m *A. retinoides*, even many hebes, and Correas.

We've had more frosts than last winter though none very severe (worse than -7C), and none prolonged enough to penetrate the ground deeply, so I hope that most will reshoot. I suspect that a lot of the damage was caused by the prolonged mild wet muggy autumn, which meant soft, unhardened shoots.

Location : Kilravock, Durrus, Co. Cork, Eire

In the autumn of 2003 we were bitten by the fern bug, so where in the garden could we indulge our passion. The most suitable site at the bottom western end of the garden was deemed the ideal spot, being sheltered and shaded from the prevailing southerly salt laden winds by a large *Eucalyptus nitens* , Bamboo, Hawthorn, Holly and *Magnolia grandiflora*. Shelter being of the utmost importance as this spot is only 27ft from Dunmanus Bay. The acid soil is constantly damp due to the presence on an underground stream and some parts are wetter than others which would allow us to plant a greater variety of ferns according to their individual moisture requirements. Our average rainfall is between 1000mm - 1250mm, frost is a rare occurrence as is snow.

The big problem was that this area was already planted with various Magnolias and shrubs. Friends were invited to come along dig up a Magnolia and take it away with them, which delighted them and salved our consciences somewhat!

Two tree ferns had already been planted in this area some time ago. Our first *Dicksonia antarctica* planted 10 years ago now has a trunk 5ft tall with a circumference of 32" with 25+ fronds some 7ft long and *Cyathea smithii* planted in 2002 with a trunk now 34" tall, circumference 21" and 12 fronds 45" long. As they are both flourishing this was a good indication that other ferns would grow well in this area.

Now came the exciting part - sourcing and buying and planning where to plant. We decided to plant several different tree ferns and underplant with terrestial ferns and small trunked ferns such as the Blechnum family. As they say here in Ireland 'we do not have the years' to wait for tree ferns to form trunks, so funds and opportunities permitting we have acquired quite a few trunked specimens.

The following is a report of their (and our) progress to date. (January 2006)

Cyathea *australis* (Rough Tree Fern) Planted May 2004 now has 10 fronds 5ft long with a trunk 32" high and a circumference of 26" with

2 new croziers emerging. Fronds are dark green above and lighter green below. Will tolerate some frost. The trunk can grow to 18ft in its native Australia. Leaf bases and stipe covered with short blunt spines, hence its common name.

Cyathea *brownii* (Norfolk Island Tree Fern) Planted May 2004 has 4 fronds 49" long with 1 crozier emerging. Small fern with as yet no trunk. Fronds dark green and shiny. This fern prefers rich well-drained humus and will tolerate some frost. Needs shelter. The trunk can grow to 10ft.

Cyathea *cooperii* (Lacy Tree Fern) Planted 1999 in a sheltered spot beside the stream it now has 7 fronds 7ft long, the trunk is 29" high, circumference 16" and 3 new croziers emerging. Has beautiful long lacy light green fronds. Will tolerate some frost. Despite always being wrapped in winter it always loses its fronds, but puts them back on again at a great rate in spring. In its native Australia the trunk can grow to 8ft.

Cyathea *cooperii var brentwood* Despite this being a robust selection made in the United States this fern is not doing very well for us as yet. Planted in 2004 as a very small untrunked specimen it at present has only 2 fronds 28" long.

Cyathea *cunninghamii* (gully fern, slender fern) This is the only tree fern common to both Australia and New Zealand. Our specimen has a small trunk 8" high, circumference 10" with 7 fronds 26" long and lots of new croziers emerging. It is thriving in a very wet spot with an overhead canopy of trees beside the stream. It is said to be fast growing with mature specimens having a trunk 20ft tall.

Cyathea *dealbata* (Ponga, Silver Tree Fern) Planted in 2002 it now has a trunk 28" high, circumference 18" with 9 fronds 5ft 1" long. The fronds are a lovely light green with silver undersides and silver stipes. This fern likes a slightly drier situation and so is planted in a drier spot beside the stream in the woodland garden. A beautiful tree fern and the emblem of its native New Zealand. The trunk can grow to 20ft.

Cyathea *incisoserrata* Planted in May 2004 this is still a small plant as yet untrunked. It has 4 fronds 57" long and 1 new crozier emerging. In the Malay Peninsula it is found in forest or forest margins from the

lowland to about 1500ft. Trunk can grow to 13ft. Hardiness unknown. It is wrapped up for the winter.

Cyathea ***medullaris*** (Black Tree Fern, Korau, Mamuka) Planted in 2003. A truly beautiful (must have in our opinion) tree fern with a black trunk and stipes and long feathery fronds. The trunk is 20" tall with a circumference of 19". It has 5 fronds 7ft long with another crozier emerging. Quite tender and needs a sheltered position. In New Zealand the trunk can reach 15ft in height with fronds up to 10ft long.

Cyathea *robusta* A native of Lord Howe Island, Australia. Planted in 1998 in the woodland garden which is prone to drying out in very dry summers which has resulted in the trunk being wider in wet years and narrower in dry years, the fronds are longer in wet years and shorter in dry years. The trunk is now 35" tall, circumference at its widest 19". It has in excess of 30 fronds which are only 3ft long, reflecting the hot dry spell we had last year. Plants do better with consistent moisture. Frost resistant although some frond damage may occur.

Dicksonia *fibrosa* (Wheki, Ponga) Planted in March 2004 with a 4ft tall trunk. The trunk is now just over 4ft tall with a circumference of 28". It has about 20 fronds 38" long. Seems to be as hardy as D. *antarctica* but with shorter fronds. The old fronds hang down the side to form a 'skirt' a characteristic shared with *C. smithii*. The specific name, fibrosa refers to the matted roots making up the very fibrous trunk. (New Zealand)

Dicksonia *lanata* Another tree fern from New Zealand which was planted in May 2004. It has 8 mature fronds with 6 new fronds emerging. The mature fronds are 35" long. There are 2 forms of D. *lanata*, one forms a slender trunk as tall as 6ft, the other creeps with runners. Ours is the latter. The trunked form only occurs naturally in Northern New Zealand. The prostrate form may be found in Central and Southern New Zealand producing thickets. (Our plant is already clumping up). The erect form is more difficult to grow than the prostrate plant.

Dicksonia *squarrosa* (Rough Tree Fern, Weki) Planted in 2001 beside the stream which provides constant humidity, as it is reputed to need lots of moisture for good growth. It has grown well and now has a trunk 30" tall with 14 fronds 4ft long. Can reach a max. height of 10ft with

fronds 3-5ft long. D. *squarrosa* is one of the most common ferns in New Zealand and its fibrous trunks are often used in garden construction for fencing!!!

Lophosoria ***quadripinnata***. Planted in May 2004 as a small plant with no trunk it has at the moment 17 fronds 32" long. The fronds are pale green, feathery and beautifully silver underneath. Native of Central and South America. Can form a trunk up to 3ft tall with fronds 6ft long. Given it's native habitat it is planted in a very sheltered spot with good drainage.

Waiting in the wings in the greenhouse we have young plants of **Cyathea** ***milnei***, **Cyathea** ***tomentosissima*** and **Dicksonia** ***sellowiana*** getting lots of tlc. They are loving it!

Tree-like ferns have been present for some 275 million years. The family Dicksoniaceae have a fossil record dating back 144 million years. So they have been around for a long, long time.

Winter protection: I wrap the tree fern trunks (except *D. antarctica, D. fibrosa* & *C. robusta*) before winter with 2 layers of green/shade windbreak fabric, which I find retains less moisture than fleece in our wet West Cork winters and fill the crowns with dry leaves. I find eucalyptus and magnolia leaves are excellent as they do not retain moisture. All the ferns survived their first winter and are looking good so far this winter - so fingers crossed!

We love watching the croziers unfurl you can almost see them grow. New fronds can uncurl 2-3" in a day. Ferns provide interest all the year round and few plants can match their dramatic effect. It is well worth spending a few minutes wrapping the smaller more tender species in autumn and then enjoying the new croziers making their sudden appearance throughout the winter and spring.

If you have a shady, sheltered, damp spot in your garden and are looking for a dramatic tropical feel, why not plant a tree fern. You will not regret it.

Phemie Rose

fabulous ferns...fabulous ferns...fabulous ferns...fabulous ferns....

'We predict a hard winter' - meteorologists reported last autumn.

So far, apart from short spells of below freezing temperatures / coverings of snow, we've had yet another mild winter.

Thomas Naylor reports on his plants in his Leeds garden, West Yorkshire, with just a hint of disappointment that they weren't tested by a prolonged cold spell!

'You might call it morbid interest; you could call it anything you like, or you could, with perfect justification, simply ignore it but there are those amongst us who would like to see our exotic plantings more severely tested by our native climatic conditions. Some people claim that plants are like people and there are examples of humanity which spring to mind who have thrived for some time in foreign environments before succumbing to overwhelming odds. Rasputin transported himself from the wilds of Siberia to the heady atmosphere of the St Petersburg court and did well for a while; Ned Teach is said to have originated in the Bristol area, but it was in the entirely different conditions of the Spanish Main that he made a name for himself as Blackbeard. As everyone knows both of these gentlemen were consigned to the ranks of the dear departed when circumstances turned against them and the strength of the opposition became too much. It may seem perverse but in a parallel way there is a hint of disappointment that after such a long run of mild winters, the 2005/2006 season has not thrown more challenges at our own bold buccaneering plants from the far side of the globe.

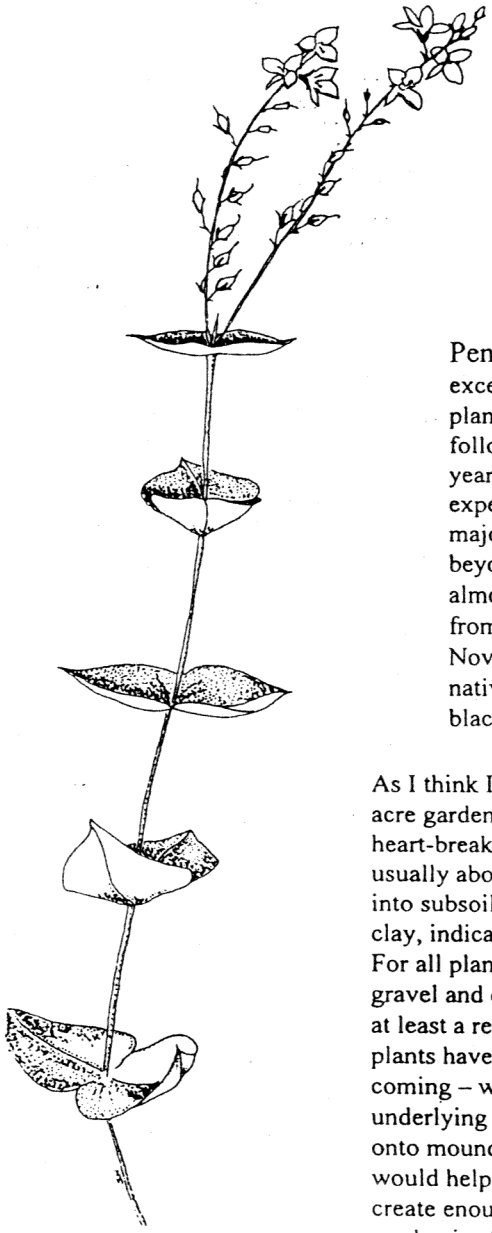
In fact by late February none of my outdoor Australasian plants seems to have been troubled at all. This comprises well-established *Callistemon citrinus, subulatus, pityoides, linearis* and newly planted *C. rigidus*. *Eucalyptus cordata, dalrympleana, glaucescens, globulus, gunnii, paliformis*, and

viminalis. *Kunzea parvifolia*, two *Leptospermum scoparium*, two *Banksia oblongifolia*, and the seemingly very tough *Cassinia* and *Grevillea* 'Canberra Gem'. The Grevillea is the only one not raised from seed. Strangely its bright red flowers are beginning to appear at least a month earlier than usual while *Eucalyptus cordata* was in flower from November onwards and the first Banksia flower spike of many began to open in mid-November rather than the mid-October of the previous two years. I hope that this delayed flowering will result in a better chance of pollination in the Spring as there are six spikes yet to open on the smaller Banksia and more than twice that number on its larger neighbour, some of them at quite an early stage of development.

I made the mistake of growing *Callistemon salignus* in a ten inch pot and though it flowered well it died through lack of watering. I have little doubt it would have survived if planted out in the ground. There are a few plants which I grow in pots and put out in summer and take in in Winter eg. *Hymenosporum flavum* and *Kunzea baxteri*. Unfortunately I was late in doing this with *Xeronema callistemon* in 2004 with the result that it was exposed to temperatures of -3C for three nights and over a year later it is still not fully recovered. At least I now know by personal experience that the minimum tolerated by this plant is around freezing point.'



Hymenosporum flavum



Derwentia perfoliata

Some Antipodeans flourishing in Sheffield

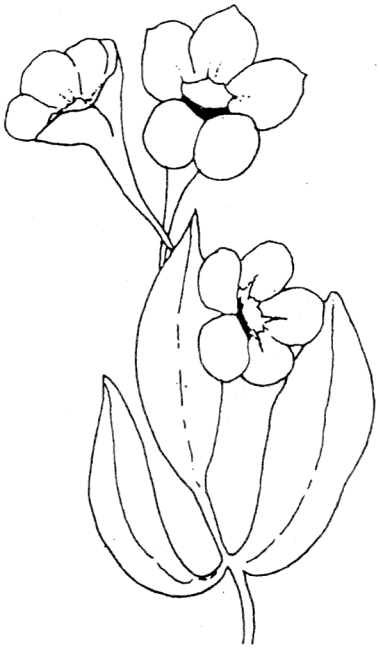
Sue Kohler, 2nd February 2006

Pentachondra provides an excellent spur for trying out new plants – outside – and the following are notes from several years of slightly nervous experimentation. The vast majority tried have succeeded beyond wildest dreams, etc. and almost all emerged unscathed from the very heavy frosts in November 2005, which left tender natives like ivy with scorched and blackened leaves.

As I think I explained before, our 1/3 acre garden is floored by intractable, heart-breaking clay. The topsoil is thin – usually about 6" depth - passing sharply into subsoil consisting of yellow mottled clay, indicating periodic water-logging. For all plants regardless of origin, sand, gravel and compost are dug in to provide at least a reasonable rooting zone, so that plants have a chance to establish before coming – well – face to face with the underlying material. I am sure planting onto mounds of better drained material would help, but have not managed to create enough of those. Much of the garden is affected by severely dry shade developed under mature ash, walnut and

oak, Leyland's cypress and Portugal laurel. A very valuable but limited flora survives these conditions, notably *Euphorbia robbiae, Ruscus aculeatus*, ivies, *Dicentra eximia* and *D. formosa, Daphne laureola, Campanula trachelium* and a few others. I have assumed that such conditions are not suitable for Australasian plants, although advice on any likely plants would be very welcome. There are two main Antipodean areas in the garden, the first being an east-facing border backed by a larch lap fence and an over-sized *Juniperus pfitzeriana* 'Aurea' . It houses a rampaging *Corokia x virgata*, heavily pruned to keep it within bounds; this shelters a large *Euphorbia mellifera* which has survived over many winters, but begins to look very sick in this one. *Melaleuca ericifolia* (seed sown 2001) is now 8 – 10' tall, but has not flowered. It may well not – inspection during the very cold dry weather in early February revealed unhappy, dried out foliage, while a sibling planted in the shelter of a high tree canopy is not so tall but seems undamaged at the moment.

The *Correa backhouseana* and *Grevillea* 'Canberra Gem' and elegant *Libertia peregrina* reported in 2001 still flourish, even though the juniper really competes too aggressively for many other plants. Nearby, *Callistemon citrinus* 'Splendens' was planted out last autumn, in desperation at lack of space under glass, and in spite of dire warnings about its tenderness. So far (early Feb. 2006) it has survived remarkably well, presumably receiving adequate shelter from the juniper at its back. On the other hand, *Pandorea jasminoides* planted (same space problem) in the shelter of a large Portugal laurel looked very poor after the November frosts, and compost-hood may well be looming. I find this very difficult to flower reliably – can anybody advise how to persuade this beauty to flower?



Pandorea jasminoides

This vigorous, twining climbing shrub produces small panicles of tubular flowers with spreading lobes 4-5cm across. Flowers are white with crimson-pink throats.

Leptospermum lanigerum still performs very well here, in spite of its shambolic growth habit, and is covered in white flowers in late summer, to the delight of the local insects. It provides a prop for that wonderful pink climbing daisy *Mutisia retusa*, which does however need "careful monitoring" as it can swamp neighbouring plants. Thick plantings here protect yellow-flowered *Impatiens omeiana*, (usually killed back by drought) and *Lobelia tupa*. The jury is still out whether the lobelia will survive the 2005/6 winter – it was never out of growth in the 2004/5 winter. Nearby, *Callistemon pityoides* (from seed 2001) remains entirely undamaged, although established plants of both *Myrtus communis* and *M. c.* 'Tarentina' display scorched terminal growth; they will survive.



Bulbinella hookeri The few New Zealand species of this mostly South African genus are known by the common name of Maori Onion. Naturally found in alpine areas, they prefer a moist but well-drained soil, and are happy in sun or light shade. They have strap-like leaves and flower spikes which resemble those of red hot pokers. The flower spikes have bright yellow starry flowers.

Further down the garden *Callistemon pallidus* (seed 2001) is growing happily in a damp border, although it has yet to flower. On a neighbouring lightly shaded bank, *Leptospermum rupestre* (?) and *Clematis* 'Moonbeam' are developing; it remains to be seen if they will get too dry when a respectable summer arrives. This part of the garden hovers on the edge of a frost pocket so that plants need to be hardy, although being on a bank should help with air drainage. *Derwentia perfoliata* grows almost anywhere, looking best on a steep slope. It is doing very well on the rockwork just inside the Main Entrance at the Botanical Gardens, where it can sprawl its grey foliage and blue speedwells to perfection. Back in my garden, *Cassinia fulvida, Olearia nummulariifolium, Bulbinella hookeri* and *Parahebe catarractae* are all permanent fixtures, no longer the subject of experimental plantings.

The other main Australasian area is in the front garden, dominated, sheltered and kept dry and somewhat starved by an enormous Leyland's cypress. A vast *Grevillea* 'Canberra Gem' does very well here, even fully exposed to the east. It flowers heavily for months, starting sometimes in mid-winter. Winter-flowering *Correa*

backhouseana is tucked in against the cypress, which protects it beautifully; the odd bucket of water is, however, desirable in dry periods. Young plants of *Callistemon salignus* and *C. pityoides* grow fairly close to the cypress, mixed with various *Cistus* species and cultivars, viburnums, *Jasminum humile revolutum* and others; all benefit from some water in drought conditions. Nearby *Olearia phlogopappa* 'Comber's Blue' could not cope with the competition from local shrubs and the cypress; another specimen in a more open site is flourishing. Fortunately cuttings root easily so it is easy to have this beautiful plant wherever there is room. Right underneath the cypress is an old specimen of *Olearia x scilloniensis*, which flowers heavily every year, in spite of the site, the shade and the competition. *Hymenanthera angustifolia* (syn. *Melicytus angustifolius*) produces its surprising white berries every year now; I find it hard to believe that this stiff, spiny little shrub is in the Violaceae....I am sorry to report that the *Billardiera longiflora* which grew against the house north wall simply died after many years quietly surviving. There was no obvious reason, and the supporting *Jasminum officinale* is as rampaging as ever.

After too many years (7? – sorry, records are sketchy) *Bursaria spinosa* has at last started to produce its creamy white flowers. This bush is growing on one of the few mounds created in the garden, with lots of shelter but also good sun for much of the day. It is forming a dark-leaved, very columnar plant, with flowers on the tips of slender branches. Cuttings will root, but it needs courage, not to say masochism, to prepare them; the *spinosa* specific name is an understatement.



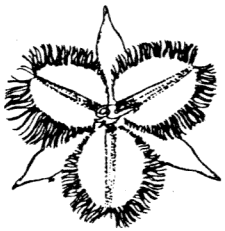
Bursaria spinosa

It is a great pleasure to find that so many of these beautiful plants will flourish on Sheffield clay and in the Pennines climate. I hope to expand the range grown here as more is found out about their hardiness; reading of other people's experiences with these plants is hugely important when we decide to live dangerously and plant things deemed to be entirely unsuitable....

Thysanotus - more on the Fringed Lily

In the previous Pentachondra, **Helen Beaufort-Murphy** mentioned that she had sown seeds of four *Thysanotus* species: *T. dichotomus*, *T. multilflorus*, *T. pattersonii* and *T. thrysoides*, and was looking forward to seeing if and when they would germinate. Hopefully, Helen will update us on their progress in a future issue.

There was also a report on **Pat Anderson**'s experience of growing the fringed lily *Thysanotus multiflorus*. Its worth repeating what he did and achieved.



Thysanotus multiflorus
Many-flowered fringed lily

Herbaceous plant growing to 45cm high. The fringed flowers are blue-mauve, about 25mm across.

A pot was filled to within 2cm of the top with moist sandy soil, which was wetted thoroughly and compressed. Seed was thinly sown and covered with a thin layer of soil. 7cm of dry leaves was placed on top and set alight.* Unburnt pieces were removed. Pot was watered well, covered with clear polythene, and placed in a warm shaded position.

To compensate for the lack of naturally-occurring mycorrhiza, Pat mixed a teaspoonful of subsoil from a patch of lawn clover, into the compost used for transplanting the seedlings. Five seedlings went into each of two x 10" pots. As well as the the clover underlay, one pot got an additional ingredient : a small amount of soil from a pot containing a *Eucalyptus pauciflora*.

Good growth resulted. Winter was spent in an unheated greenhouse. In April, one pot was placed outside. By late May some flower buds had appeared, between four and 16 on each of four stems. It was almost two months before the first flower opened, early one morning, only to shrink and close by 3pm! The rest of the flowers did the same over a period of days. Despite its brief life, each flower is a stunner : deep purple petals with pink/lilac fringes, a white centre and black stamens.

These articles interested **Jeff Irons** because he is waiting for *T. tuberosus* to flower.

'When in the Blue Mountains, in the southern summer of 2000, I saw it in bloom. The next day I went back to

the spot, armed with a camera and could not find a single flower to photograph. Subsequently I discovered that each flower lasts for less than a day and that this is one of those genera where flowers are strictly for the morning only. Later on I was able to photograph a flower and even later in the trip a native plant grower in the ACT gave me some seeds. They were sown in May 2001 and germinated quickly, with no artificial aids, such as Pat's smoke. The seedlings were transplanted into tubes, using a mixture of equal parts of peat, leafmould (conifer+deciduous) and garden soil. At the end of the summer they were put into my greenhouse bed. I noticed that every seedling had tubers on each of its roots. At that time I did not know that Thysanotus are winter growers, so regarded the dying down at the end of summer as being part of normality. When they did not make new leaves in the spring, I thought the plants had died. Far from it! When new leaves appeared in August it became plain that the non-appearance in spring was simply part of the adjustment to a normal growth pattern, which is winter growth, followed by leaf disappearance. Flowering is in summer, while leafless. Thinking about it, this growth pattern enables the plants to shed seeds in autumn, falling into soil that is warm and moist after the summer rains. The seedlings then grow on throughout winter and lose their leaves in the dry weather that precedes summer. This is a pattern familiar to those who grow South African bulbs.

Whereas Pat's plants flowered quickly, mine had not flowered by summer 2005. Perhaps one reason why is that they do not receive much water. I give only the equivalent of an inch of rain each week. In the wild they receive up to 40-50 inches of rain in the first 3 months of the year. My low water level is because I reason that evaporation in my greenhouse (which receiving sun for only part of the day is quite cool) is lower than it would be in the open air. Whatever the explanation, I hope to see flowers in 2006. If they do not come then I shall hope for some in 2007.'

***Why use smoke to aid germination**

Many Australian and South African plants appear to germinate more successfully after their seeds have been exposed to smoke, which helps remove germination inhibitors. It used to thought that it was the heat from bush fires that triggered germination. More recently it was discovered that the constituent responsible for inducing germination is a butenolide chemical. The chemical remains on the soil surface after a bush fire, and is washed into the soil with subsequent rains. A simple measure for smoke exposure is to light a fire in a metal container, place it in the greenhouse, with the seeds, and add some green leaves. Leave the greenhouse door closed for at least an hour.

NZ's Top Ten

Based on information supplied by Brian Halliwell.

A poll held over several months by the New Zealand Plant Conservation Network on its website www.nzpcn.org.nz has revealed an 'interesting' list of the world's top ten New Zealand native plants.

Top of the list is *Lepidium oleraceum*, otherwise known as Cook's scurvy grass (Captain James Cook fed it to his crew to prevent scurvy). A fleshy plant with serrated leaves and small white flowers, which used to be common along the coast. Now only found on islets inaccessible to wild goats and farm stock.

2. *Sophora chathamica*. This tree with golden pea-like flowers is indigenous to the northern half of the North Island.

3. *Xeronema callistemon*, Poor Knights lily. Iris-like foliage with red bottlebrush-like blooms. (Greg Plenty wrote an excellent article in the last issue of *Pentachondra* and the plant featured on the cover.)



Xeronema callistemon

4. *Metrosideros bartlettii*, Bartletts rata. This tree has shiny bright green wavy leaves, papery bark, and white flowers. Only discovered in 1975, it is now listed as a threatened species due to its scarce numbers.

5. *Rhopalostylis sapida*, nikau palm. This is a slow-growing palm with a bulbous trunk. Flowering doesn't start until the palm is at least 30 years old, when tiny pink-purple flowers hang down below the leaves in large drooping spikes.

6. *Cordyline australis*, cabbage tree. There is probably no need to describe this plant! We've probably all grown one at some time or another. As a mature tree, it has a long trunk topped with long sword-like leaves and clusters of fragrant creamy flowers.

7. *Clianthus maximus*, kaka beak, kowhai ngutu-kaka. This is a sprawling shrub with large bright red flowers and ferny leaves.

8. *Carmichaelia williamsii*, Williams broom. This is a rare broom, with wide flat branchlets and lemony flowers, found on some offshore islands.

9. *Myosotidium hortensia*, Chatham Island forget-me-not. With its large shiny leaves and brilliant blue flowers, this is a popular plant with NZ gardeners (and indeed with UK gardeners). Although frost tender, it can be easily grown in containers. Established plants will usually survive

an average winter over much of the British Isles. The preferred compost is rich, lime-free and well drained.



Myosotidium hortensia

Plants perform better in areas of high rainfall, where the soil water content and humidity remain high. They are hungry plants and love a mulch of leaf mould, or better still, a mulch of rotten sea weed.

Following pollination of the brilliant blue flowers, nutlets develop about 1cm in diameter, each containing a large flat seed. Seed has a short viability and should be sown as soon as possible when ripe. Insert each seed vertically into small pots of ericaceous compost and keep in a warm place. Germination can take upto 4 weeks. Keep seedlings frost free and don't let them get thirsty. Pot on the young plants when they fill their existing pots with roots. If you wish to experiment growing them in the open ground, plant out in late spring, when hopefully the worst of the frosts have passed.

Since the majority of New Zealand's flowers are white or yellow, its perhaps easy to see why *Myosotidium hortensia* has made the top ten. (The reason for the predominance of white flowers is said to have resulted from the kinds of pollinating insects which exist there. Moths pollinate white flowers, which are more easily seen by these nightflying insects. Yellow flowers seem to be pollinated by flies.)

10. *Pisonia brunoniana*, bird-catcher tree - so called due to the extremely sticky seed pods that can capture small birds (if the seedheads are removed before ripening, these potential tragedies can be avoided). Capable of growing to 6m, it is adaptable to pot culture, preferring a semi-shaded position. Its a good choice for tropical planting due to its large oval glossy dark green leaves which can be upto 40cm long.

Its obvious that some of these plants have been chosen because of their rarity and a need to conserve them. But, taking away this concern, what would you include in your top ten NZ native plants? Let the APS know. Perhaps we can create our own top ten Australians as well!

Dates for your diary

Southern Members Meeting Saturday 3rd June 2006

As we enjoyed last year's meeting so much, we have volunteered to host a meeting this year, and hope that as many members as possible who can get to Canterbury will join us. Our garden is very different to that of Judy Clark, who was our host last year, being out in the country, quite large and in parts rather wild. Winter permitting, there should be some interesting Australasian plants to see; we will provide lunch, and encourage everyone to swap plants and advice; and after lunch, we have arranged to visit Tim and Gillian Ingram's garden, Copton Ash, at nearby Faversham. This should make up for any deficiencies in our garden, as Tim grows many rare and unusual plants, including a good range of Southern Hemisphere ones, and also has a very interesting nursery. For more details, please contact us on 01227 780038, or jeremy.spon@care4free. Nearer the time we will try and send reminders to all members who look as if they might be within striking distance, but of course any member, however far away will be most welcome. You will probably need directions to find us, so it is best to let us know if you are thinking of coming; this will also help us plan the food.

Jeremy and Hilary Spon
1 Iffin Cottages
Iffin Lane
Canterbury,
Kent CT4 7BE

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Northern Members Meeting Saturday June 17th 2006

Tony Entwistle will host a "northern" get-together on Saturday June 17th.

Members should arrive about midday; a light buffet lunch will be provided. In the afternoon there will be a visit to the nearby garden of member Louise Worthington, who has kindly agreed to show us around her lovely large hillside garden (Pleasant View). Afterwards, those who wish can get light refreshments before journeying home, as her garden will be open to the public on that day.

Please advise me if you intend to come and I will send you a map. We are only about 25 minutes from junction 19 of the M6, or junction 12 of the M56, but the M6 route is much easier.

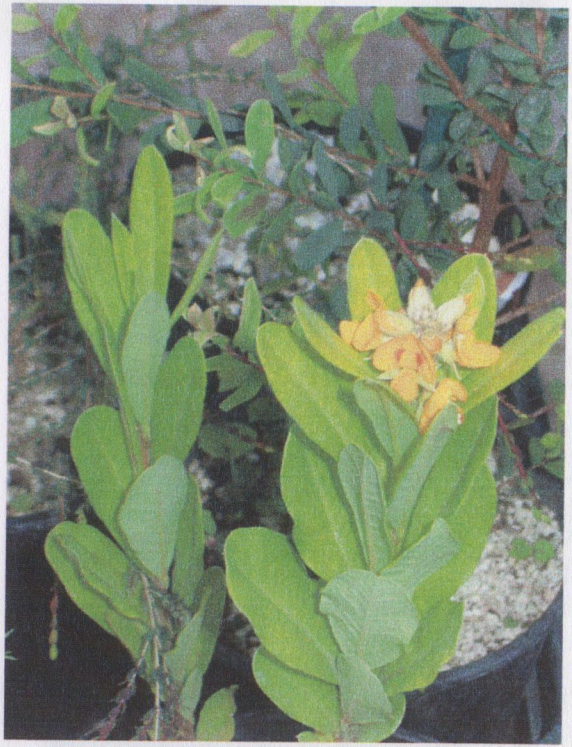
Tony Entwistle
113 Station Road
Delamere
Cheshire
CW8 2HZ

For more details contact me on 01606 882306, or
Tonyentwistle@doctors.org.uk

Photographs to accompany Tim Darrington's Article



Calothamnus quadrifidus



Oxylobium lanceolatum

Some photographs to accompany Tim Darr

Swainsona formosa



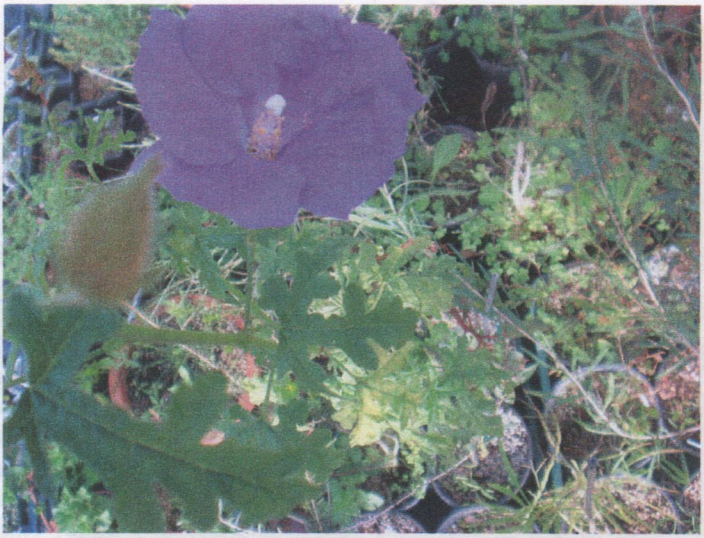


Leucospermum glabrum x tottum

ington's article *'Report from the Rhone Valley'*

Callistemon rigidus





Gossypium sturtianum

Photographs to accompany Tim Darrington's Article



Grevillea 'Desert Flame'



Senna odorata

An uncommon quartet

Jeff Irons

G and J Forster, who were naturalists on Captain Cook's second voyage to Australia, gave the name *Epacris pumila* to one of their discoveries. Nowadays, some 200 years later, it is called *Pentachondra pumila* and is an alpine that is almost unknown in British gardening circles.

Found in south-eastern Australia and also (having migrated there) in New Zealand, *Pentachondra pumila* is a small mat forming evergreen shrub with thick shiny leaves. In spring it is dotted with white flowers that on close examination can be seen to have corollas with attractively bearded inner surfaces. In the wild the previous year's fruits ripen at the same time as the current year's flowers are open and the combination of flowers and fruit makes the species very eye catching. Unfortunately the cultivated plants being grown in Britain at the present time do not bear fruit. This is because they are self sterile, so fruit will only be obtained if two genetically different plants are grown. Nurserymen propagate by division of existing clumps and there appears to be only one clone in commercial cultivation. Consequently until additional clones are available we have to be content with flowers only. Nevertheless I believe that *P. pumila* is a desirable alpine and it is certainly one that is ideally suited to container cultivation. Grown thus the beauty of its flowers can be studied without stooping.

There are three other pentachondras. I grow two of them, both from Tasmania. The third is a recently discovered species (*P. dehiscens*) from New South Wales. It appears to have little horticultural value.



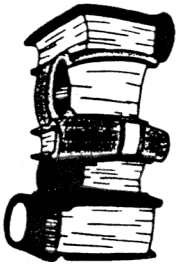
Pentachondra pumila

P. ericifolia is a late summer and autumn flowering species, up to 40cm high. Though small its white flowers are borne in profusion over several weeks. It too appears to be self incompatible, for my only plant never bears fruit. That is no loss, for the fruits are not showy. The late spring flowering *P. involucrata* is perhaps the best garden plant in the genus. It has the largest flowers and though usually much less, can be up to about 1m high. It also has fruits of no horticultural value. Neither of these two species is alpine and as well as being a sub-alpine, *P. involucrata* can be found at quite low levels.

Although commonly found where the soil is moist, the thick leaves of pentachondras enable them to withstand quite dry conditions. In spite of that they have been found to be decidedly difficult to grow in south-eastern England, where not only the soil but also the air are dry in summer. Things are different further north and in Scotland, north-west England and Northern Ireland their cultivation poses no problems. Northumberland too will probably provide good growing conditions, though east Yorkshire could be more problematical.

Acid soil is needed and I use a compost containing unsterilised soil and plenty of leafmould (mixed conifer and deciduous leaves, 4 years old) and peat. So far it has not resulted in any problems. My reason for using unsterilised components is that in common with several other epacrids pentachondras can sulk for years after transplanting. Using unsterilised materials and taking at least some of the soil from a bed in which other heaths grow helps to ensure that the potting mix is innoculated with suitable mycorrhiza. However a Tasmanian government website states that *P. ericifolia* is susceptible to *Phytophthora cinnamomi*. It may be that all species are susceptible and sterilised soil could be desirable. In his book Growing New Zealand Alpine Plants Cartman wrote that seed of *P. pumila* germinated well after 3 or 4 winters. I have not tried N.Z. seed, but like others before me, my experience with Tasmanian seed has been that germination is almost impossible. After more than 20 years of trying I have succeeded (by luck) in getting just two seedlings. The only practical solution is to copy nurserymen and use vegetative propagation. Cuttings taken in early spring or late summer root equally well.

Footnote: I have referred to *Pentachondra* as being epacrids. Historically *Epacridaceae* was a genus containing the southern heaths. With their increased knowledge present day botanists prefer to regard them not as a separate genus, but as part of the *Ericaceae*. They are in the sub family *Epacrideae*.



Looking for a book?

Try Keith Larkin's book website -

Www.keithsplantbooks.co.uk

All stock can be viewed in an easy to browse way, and includes many Australasian, South African, Monographs etc, new, discount and second-hand.

Two Gardens To Visit

While having a tidy-up recently (i.e. rearranging piles of paper from one table to another) I came across some notes I made during a visit to The Hillier Arboretum in April 2000, and these in turn reminded me of a brief stop at Wakehurst Place last August on the way back from holiday.

Although both gardens are probably well known to most members, if only by reputation, I thought it might be of interest to record a few impressions.

It goes without saying that both gardens are essential places to visit for anyone interested in trees and shrubs – The Hillier is said to have the largest collection of temperate woody plants in the world, and Wakehurst has all the resources of RBG Kew behind it. However, of specific note to APS members is that both have impressive collections of Australasian plants, with the size of some specimens being perhaps the most striking feature.

At The Hillier Arboretum, my notes refer to *Leptospermum flavescens* (sic., now regarded as a synonym for *L. polygalifolium*), *Podocarpus hallii* (possibly a variety of *P. totara*), *Phyllocladus alpinus* and *Eucalyptus vernicosa* (the last of which I have frustratingly failed to get established in my garden here in Kent, despite having grown some healthy looking seedlings.) Most memorable of all were two Hakeas, *H. lissosperma* and *H. microcarpa*, both in excess of 20 ft high, and the latter absolutely smothered with small white flowers, and looking for all the world like a flowering pine tree. All these specimens were in an area in front of the house (formerly the home of the Arboretum's creator, Sir Harold Hillier) containing a wide mixture of what could loosely be described as Mediterranean plants, growing in gravel beds. Elsewhere there is a veritable grove of eucalyptus, under-planted with various acacias (sadly my notes don't record which species.)



Atherosperma moschatum

At Wakehurst more recently, it was again the sheer size of many of the plants which astonished. In the absence of notes (I will try harder next time) I cannot give many particular species. I do remember a giant *Eucalyptus coccifera* because of its really beautiful bark colours, and

Atherosperma moschatum, an attractive evergreen shrub with aromatic leaves, and many flower buds which superficially resemble those of *Crinodendron hookerianum*. However, leptospermums, grevilleas, hakeas, callistemons and melaleucas, many of nearly tree size, testified to a long sequence of winters without significant cold damage. While The Hillier Arboretum has the advantage of being quite close to the Solent, and a degree of maritime influence, Wakehurst is in the Sussex Weald, and the 'average climate' is described in 'Gardens of The National Trust' as 'moderate' (in a range from 'frost-free' to 'very cold'.) Of course Kew has access to numerous plants from wild-collected seed and Wakehurst has benefited from their policy of experimentation, but there is certainly plenty of encouragement for all of us who hope to get these plants permanently out of our over-crowded greenhouses. Stephen Lacey comments in the afore-mentioned book that a day at Wakehurst is never enough, and the same could be said of The Hillier Arboretum – any member who has not visited either is strongly recommended to do so if they can.

The Sir Harold Hillier Garden and Arboretum (to give it its full name) is in Ampfield, near Romsey in Hampshire. Wolfgang Bopp, formerly in charge of the Welsh National Botanic Garden, who some members heard speak (very entertainingly) at the RHS seminar on Australian plants last year, is now the Curator, so doubtless the Australian collections will be developed. The Arboretum is open every day except Christmas and Boxing Day from 10 – 6pm, or dusk if earlier. For more details see www.hillier.hants.gov.uk. This website includes a searchable database of plant records, so you can check if they grow a specific plant you are interested in, and where in the arboretum it is – brilliant!

Wakehurst Place, near Ardingly, West Sussex, is open daily, except Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, from 10 – 6pm from 1st March to last day of BST, and from 10 – 4.30pm from first day of GMT to 28th February. See www.kew.org for more details.

Jeremy Spon

Picture Library

The APS 'Library' has about 500 images of variable quality. To keep improving and adding to this collection, the Society welcomes additional pictures in the following formats : slides, photos, floppy disks or CDs. If you can help, please send contributions to:
Jeff Irons, Stonecourt, 74 Brimstage Road, Heswall, Wirral, CH60 1XG.

All items will be returned after use.

Report from the Rhône Valley for 2005 Growing Season

Tim Darrington

It's the end of February, I am away on a skiing holiday, and we are at 1400m so its rather cold to go out in the evening, so here is my report for last year's growing season, which was my 6th season growing Australasian plants. I should start perhaps with 2 important general topics which have required some effort, the questions of greenhouses and of watering.

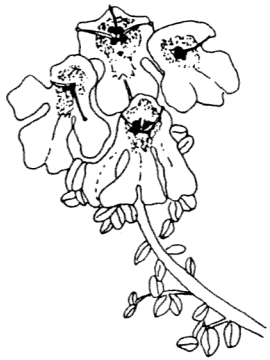
We live at Vienne in the Rhône Valley at about 45° N, with summer temperatures > 35°C every summer and the coldest winter night temperature is typically between -15°C and -10°C. The garden is on a rather exposed, steep N facing slope which is well drained. Needless to say most of my Australasian plants are grown in plastic containers or terracotta pots and are overwintered in a 6 x 4 m poly-tunnel greenhouse.

I also try to overwinter some in a cool (~8°C) basement but I don't think they really get enough light as the window is N facing. That said, at the moment, a young *Isopogon dubius* ou *roseum* (from seed collected by Tony Entwistle) looks as if it has 3 or 4 buds. As I have progressively "improved" the greenhouse as far as its protective capacity against excessive winter cold goes, first by the addition of a domestic extractor fan which draws air from the basement into the greenhouse at the rate of > 60 m^3 / hr, and then by the addition of a small paraffin heater and bubble wrap, this latter which I found impossible to fix satisfactorily to the polypropelyne using bath sealant, but after a painstaking job of drilling holes into the metal hoops a year later, in September 2005, it is now doing a good job, such that, despite a night when the outside mid-field temperature dropped to -14°C, the temperature inside the greenhouse was no lower than -4°C. Compared with the previous winter where temperatures in the greenhouse fell to -6°C (because bubble wrap was insufficiently fixed) the improvement enables an increasing range of Australasian plants to be successfully overwintered, and that using the paraffin heater on only the coldest of nights (3 nights this winter).

As I now have about 400 pots or containers which need watering every day in summer, I have experimented with various semi-automatic watering systems. During a visit to Greece in 2003, I visited a nursery near Athens where all the specimens were watered by a drip system with an individual dripper spike in each pot. Previous watering arrangements in my greenhouse by sprinklers were not really satisfactory, as it was difficult to get even coverage and it increased the humidity in the greenhouse, so in Spring 2005 I invested in "spiders" to

water each pot. I recommend the lowest possible capacity for each dripper (otherwise you soon reach the maximum capacity that a typical domestic water supply can manage). The other problem of which I became slowly aware of was the problem of our very hard water. An increasing number of plants were becoming affected by chlorosis due to pH "poisoning" (e.g. a number of Acacias and Proteaceae, *Anigozanthos rufus*, *Callistemon speciosus*, a (double dark pink) *Leptospermum scoparium*, *Oxylobium lanceolatum*, *Leucospermum glabrum x tottum* and even a *Hibiscus syriacus* hedge!) I obtained the figures from the local water board in early 2005, and discovered that our water brought the equivalent of 270g of chalk with every cubic metre of water. As a plant in a 7-litre container drinks in a season over 100 litres of water, this the equivalent of putting on two tablespoons of lime per year, so it's not long before the nice peat or peat-substitute potting mix has changed from pH 5 to pH 8.

The immediate solution was to buy a 20 litre gerry-can of concentrated nitric acid and mix the correct quantity (about 60cm³ for 200 l of water) with tap water in a 200 litre drum to reduce the pH to about pH 6, and then use this water for the plants, which was painstaking. I also gave emergency treatment to some very chlorosed plants either by dunking them in a solution of nitric acid 5 times stronger than the neutralising quantity or by repotting them. I have since added two collectors to our downpipes to collect rain water in two 500 litre plastic butts and I have recently installed a pump to deliver water from the butt to the greenhouse drip system at the correct pressure. Collecting rainwater makes good sense with increasingly regular water shortages and watering restrictions in



Prostanthera cuneata

France, however the capacity I can store is unlikely to be sufficient in summer as we regularly have periods of over 1 month without any significant rainfall, just as my 400 Australasian plants require maybe upto 100 litres / day, so I will still have to acidify tap water. These remarks may seem banal to experienced gardeners, but prior to getting into Australian plants, my horticultural interest was limited to fruit trees and bushes cultivated under an English climate!

The only Australasian plant which I have flowering regularly outside is *Prostanthera cuneata*. It is not touched by -14°C and flowers at the end of May and in June. Cuttings taken at end of August 2003 have multiplied this plant. Otherwise I have outside a *Grevillea "Canberra Gem"*, a replacement brought in spring 2004 for one which was killed by a cold snap (-12°C) three years ago. This new plant survived a very still cold night on 28th Feb / 1st March 05, when the mid field temperature dropped to -14°C, but it is in a sheltered spot. It was just beginning to flower in December 2005 when another night (29th to 30th December) at -14°C burnt off all the buds. I also have a *Callistemon rigidus* which soldiers on, being cut down to the ground in cold winters and flowering irregularly in summer. *Callistemon rugulosus* is also regularly cut down to the ground and has never flowered. The only other species which seem to like being planted out are *Callistemon pityoides* and *Eucalyptus pauciflora*, both of which I planted at the bottom of a N facing cliff in Autumn 2003. They both look healthy, the Eucalyptus now about 3m high however the Callistemon now nearly 4 years old has never flowered . It looks like I have lost two container grown specimens of *Eu. pauciflora* left outside on the terrace this winter.

Now to the majority of plants, which I grow in plastic containers (2l or 7l rose containers) or standard terracotta pots of various sizes. I have tried various potting mixes over the years and my favourite for the moment is 1 part of pouzzoulain, 1 part of perlite and 2 parts of acidophile peat-substitute horticultural substrate. The pouzzoulain grade is between about 6mm and 12mm and is excellent for improving drainage. I should add that at the beginning I used sand but have discovered that the sand supplied here is also very alkaline.

A *Grevillea "Desert Flame"* which I brought cheap but in poor condition in March 2005 (it had probably been badly frosted) has recovered well and has been absolutely covered with flowers during February 2006 (see photo). A *Grevillea juniperina* brought at the same moment but in rather better condition now has lots of "grapes" but these are not yet (on 1st March) really open.

In the greenhouse I have a small (~1m²) cold frame, a "double greenhouse", which is just frost free. In these conditions, a *Kennedia prostrata*, sown in spring 05, and *Anigozanthos bicolor* have been flowering all winter. The kangaroo paw is very easy to divide, and I hope that other specimens kept in slightly colder conditions will flower in the spring, as in 2005.

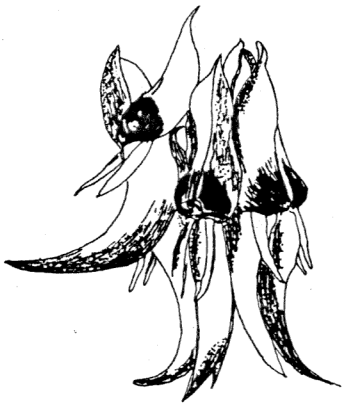
After discovering the secret of getting *Gossypium sturtianum* to germinate in spring 2004 (boiling water treatment with smoke granules), several of these plants flowered throughout the summer of 2005. The other species

which likes this same treatment is *Thysanotus multiflorus*. I then sow it early in the year (February) in a propagator in the basement which keeps seeds at a more or less constant 18°C. Having overcome the dormancy, I discovered, first that slugs are rather partial to them, and second that they are rather difficult to pot on because their white translucide roots are extremly fragile.

Since September 2005, the *Hakea laurina* (a standard about 1m high in a 7l plastic container) has for the first time 5 well swollen buds of about 12mm diameter. Despite the plant looking healthy, the buds have not moved since then and I am awaiting further developments as spring comes. The other plant which is in a similar situation is a 3 year old *Eucalyptus occidentalis* standard, now about 1,5m high in a 12l plastic container and beginning the typical bark shedding.

When over-wintered in the greenhouse, *Melaleuca gibbosa* flowers at the end of May and on into June. The specimen outside regularly gets cut down by winter cold and so has never yet flowered. Cuttings take easily in a couple of months in summer.

Oxylobium lanceolatum flowered in early July 2004, just 15 months after sowing and produced a few seeds. In mid April 2005, a 2 year old *Acacia lanigera* planted in soil of greenhouse flowered. In June 2005, a 2 year old *Leptospermum polygalifolium* planted in the soil of the greenhouse flowered sparsely. As it was growing rapidly, I had to prune the top off after flowering and I hope to end with a lollipop shaped standard with a rather more profuse blooming. Several 2 year old, seed grown *Calothamnus quadrifidus* specimens flowered in May 2005. A 1 year old *Senna odorata* put on a good display from mid April to June 05 and produced



Swainsona formosa

several pods of seeds. Another prolific flowerer was *Mimulus "Orange Glow"* which when in full sun flowered throughout the summer. As we had a cool spring, many of the *Swainsona formosa* seeds damped off after germination (after hot water treatment or filling). A few went on to produce flowers in July, but it was a poor year compared to 2004. I have never got this plant to either survive more than 6 months or to set seed.

In mid March 2005, I bought an *Acacia longifolia* in flower and it subsequently set lots of fertile seeds which I collected during the 3rd week of June. Equally a *Ozothamnus rosmarinifolia* bought at the same time, finally came into flower in June. Cuttings taken in mid March struck easily, with bottom heat at least at the beginning.



Telopea speciosissima

I have found that various species of proteaceae put up with being over-wintered in a warm living room (20°C all day) better than most other families of Australasian plants. At the moment I have the company a *Telopea speciosissima*, *Hakea victoria* and *Banksia serrata*, all 1 year old in front of the S facing window. In February 2006, the pride of the house was the *Leucospermum glabrum x tottum* bought by my wife 21 months previously (yes, I know this is not Australasian) which produced its first two flowers since suffering from severe chlorosis in 2005. Interestingly the first flower had both male and female organs whereas the second flower had only male organs. It looks like several other flower buds are on their way for later this spring.

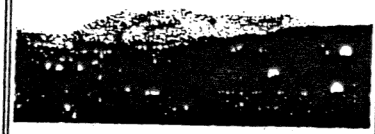
I am still at the beginning and have a lot of young seed grown shrubs in containers that have not yet flowered. Losses continue and I arm myself with patience, when reading in Alex George's "Banksia book" that they nearly all need at least 5 years from seed to flower. With my successes, I have not yet managed to attract "nectar feeding birds" despite what "native" seed packets say!

BED AND BREAKFAST

Murray and Irene MacDonald

Hillview
Hill Place
Staffin Road
Portree
Isle of Skye
IV51 9GS

Tel 01478 61 2722



There are some lovely gardens to visit on Skye, and APS member Murray MacDonald will give you a very warm welcome and lots of valuable info.

News from APS Secretary Nicky Zanen

More On The Birmingham Weekend

Our speaker, Bev Hanson started her career working with Ellis Stones. She studied landscape architecture at Burnley and did her masters degree at Melbourne University. She has been a lecturer in landscape design with the Council of Adult Education. Since 1998 Bev and husband John have taken part in the Australian Open Garden Scheme displaying their 4 hectare bushland property which has a Trust for Nature covenant. No doubt she will give us more information about this interesting scheme during her talk.

While in Birmingham I would like to take the opportunity of exploring the area and making a weekend of it. A meal somewhere in the evening, accommodation in a reasonably priced B&B, and several options for Sunday including Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery with its pre-Raphaelite paintings, or the Barber Institute of Fine Arts with Renaissance masterpieces; St Philip's Cathedral, England's smallest cathedral with magnificent stained glass windows and the National Sealife Centre. Here we have an opportunity of visiting the second largest city in the UK which most people have never visited! Please let me know before the 30th June if you would like to join me. Phone 07 950 428 527. Nicky.

Kew Gardens

I mentioned in our last newsletter that I felt guilty having planted a *Adenanthos sericeus* in the garden in Winchmore Hill. Seeing mention of the Wollemi Pine, I have to admit to a sadness to see the plant Kew has, isolated and imprisoned in a sturdy enclosure in the middle of lawn area near the White Peaks. Secure against a nick of pruning, no doubt, but it looks so sad and bravely surviving.

Nearby, however, is a group of Eucalypts. On the day I visited it was 30 degrees. I was potently aware of the strong 'gum' smell as I approached the White Peaks area, as well as the call of rainbow lorikeets screeching as they swiftly flew over. A feeling of nostalgia came over me, though I believe these birds are regarded as a pest by the locals. (This is a role reversal as in Australia the starlings, sparrows and blackbirds are so regarded.)

Included in this collection is an exquisite *Eucalyptus perriniana*, a Tasmanian *E. urnigera* which I thought looked very much like a *E. gunnii*, and an enormous *E. viminalis* (one of the few koala fodder trees). Additionally *E. gunnii* which responds well to coppicing and a magnificent *E neglecta*, the white Omeo gum. The *E. delegantensis* with its silver trunks so reminded me of a *E. caesia*. Additionally, two Victorians, the white peppermint, *E. pulchella* which is found in the Grampians, and an enormous *E. chapmaniana*, the Bogong Gum from the Australian Alps. These trees grow magnificently at Kew – do any of you grow these as well?

Out and About

I received the Kuranga Native Nursery newsletter Bush Telegraph, this week. They have now closed their Ringwood nursery and moved lock stock and barrel to 118 York Road, Mt Evelyn. If you are in the Melbourne area, they are definitely worth a visit, as well as Bob O'Neill's garden Katandra, in Wandin and the Karwarra Gardens at Kalorama. These are all in the Dandenongs.

The reason I mention Kuranga, though, is that they will have Wollemi Pines (*Wollemi nobilis)* for sale from 1st April. I am not sure how easy it is to get these to the UK, but prices are $55 for 6" pots, $95 for 8" and $525 for 17" pots. You need to apply for a Certificate of Authenticity – some of these are still available. It may be that

you have to ask someone in Victoria to purchase a plant on your behalf if you desperately want one.

If you are in Melbourne, Victoria, try and visit the Royal Botanic Gardens Annex in Cranbourne. There is an extensive area of native bushland, and a great deal of anticipation and excitement about the new 'Australian Garden' being constructed. The first 11 hectares of the landscaped Garden will open on 28 May 2006. It will be a garden unlike any other, showcasing the diverse plants and landscapes of Australia and exploring the connections that exist between landscape, plants and people. The developed Australian Garden will be 26 hectares when completed. The website for an armchair visit is http://www.rbg.vic.gov.au/australian_garden.

And one more, if you happen to be in Australia at the end of August, the Maroondah Group in Melbourne is hosting the FJC Rogers Seminar. This is a biennial seminar focussing on a genus, and this year the topic is Wattles. If you would like more information please contact Nicky on 07 950 428 527. The dates? 26 to 28 August 2006. If you can't get there, the papers are always worth getting.

Weekend in Netherlands

The visit to the Netherlands during the bank holiday weekend at the end of May is going ahead. For more details please contact Nicky on 07 950 428 527.

Eat Your Greens!

My favourite greens is *Tetragonia tetragonioides*, or Warrigal or New Zealand spinach. I got given a small piece of this succulent, commonly found on sand dunes around Melbourne, and once it was planted, I got plenty of fodder off this plant. Unfortunately I don't have any of this in the UK, but I should imagine that it would be an easy plant to grow. As tough as nails. However, I was warned that it contains a high amount of

calcium which can cause kidney stones, so the recommendation was to throw away the water that you cook the spinach in. Its distribution is widespread, and with *Tetragonia implexicoma*, formed an important part of the Aborigine diet.

Arctotheca populifolia

By Bob Foulds
Bearsted, Kent

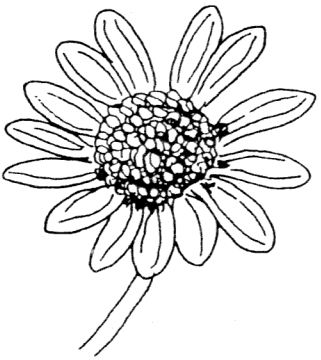
This composite member is an unusual looking straggling plant which I have grown for many years from seed originally collected at Albany in Western Australia.

It caught my eye on sea-shore margins occupying a very similar niche to our seakale on UK shores.

Named "populifolia" perhaps because of its poplar shaped leaves, upto 30mm wide, which are white-felted, its growth habit is very lax and "floppy".

Flowers, 25mm across, are a dull yellow in globular felty heads; not at all showy. To me, the plant has an unusual charm but I think its a species that you either love or hate.

I grow it as an annual, but I suspect that it is a perennial lacking hardiness. Seed has been sent to our seed manager but as its not perhaps a true native of Australia, I leave it to him to decide whether it should be put on offer in the 2006 seed list.



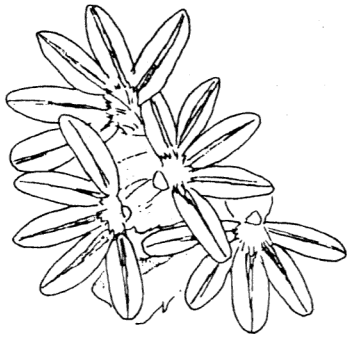
Arctotheca populifolia is a native of South Africa, commonly called the Beach Pumpkin, which has acquired a foothold along the coasts of Australia, particularly Western and NSW.

Bedders

This is the time of year to pop along to your garden centre and pick up some of those 'plug' summer bedding starter plants. Amongst them you will find several Australians.

For example, you may find several fan flowers, *Scaevola* sp, including 'Zig Zag'. 'Zig Zag' is an unusual

Scaevola in that it is a lot less lax in habit than previous cultivars. It produces neat, bushy, compact plants and bears lots of fan-shaped bicolored flowers of blue-purple and white. The actual colours will vary with the heat and light intensity. With a 25-30cm spread, it is ideal for pots and containers



Scaevola 'Zig Zag'

Another plant worth investing in is *Isotoma (Laurentia) axillaris* 'Blue Stars'. Forming a neat, compact mound of finely cut leaves, it is covered during the summer with a profusion of starry lavender flowers.

For foliage interest, look out for *Plectrantus argentatus* 'Silver Shield'. Native to Australia, 'Silver Shield' rapidly forms a dense, well-branched plant, 60-75cm high and wide, with big 4" leaves of grey-green covered with a silvery sheen, giving them a frosty appearance. It makes the perfect compliment to the more colourful bedders, especially those of pink, white and purple tones. It is very tolerant of heat and humidity.

World Garden of Plants

Question: How many eucalyptus trees can you fit in 200 sq. metres?

Answer: If you are Tom Hart-Dyke, quite a lot!

Tom is the man behind the World Garden at Lullingstone Castle in Kent, a plant hunter who briefly became famous when he was captured and held hostage by gunmen in Colombia in 2000. He escaped clutching a plan for a garden to be built at his family home when he returned to England.

The big idea was to base the layout on a map of the world, and grow plants in the appropriate bed for the country from which they originated. (This is claimed to be a first for this country, although I suspect Ray Brown at Plant World in Devon might have cause to dispute this!)

Last year, the garden (laid out with the help of local designer Adam Bailey, though not yet fully planted up) opened to the public for the first time, and I thought Pentachondra readers might be interested in some impressions of it. (Although I would certainly recommend anyone who is in the area to go and make up their own mind – any reservations I have should not put you off seeing what is potentially an exciting project.)

To return to my opening question.

Obviously, given the concept, part of the garden is given over to Australian plants. The first thing you notice in this bed is not the plants, but the model of Uluru (Ayers Rock) in the middle of it. This is the sort of feature that borders on the kitsch – I rather hope it isn't repeated elsewhere in the garden, with a miniature Mount Fuji or Eiger, for instance. But it is the planting densities that, on closer inspection, really had my eyebrows shooting up. In an area that really cannot be more than 200 sq. metres, there are tens (I didn't actually count them) of eucalyptus, many of which will ultimately be large, even giant trees. The mind boggles at the thought of what this area will look like in even ten years time if the majority of the species thrive. Some probably will not; no doubt, having collected seed of many plants himself, Tom is keen to try as many as possible outdoors, and a proportion will succumb to future winters. But even so, and conceding that we are all guilty of planting too closely in our own gardens, this does seem a bit mad, especially as eucalyptus are just the start. Callistemons, leptospermums, hakeas, grevilleas – all the usual shrubby suspects are also here!

The ultimate aim is to have some 10,000 species in this 'world-in-an-acre', and given the preponderance of trees and shrubs among what has already been planted, it seems certain that every part of the map is going to be pretty crowded.

Yet, having spoken to him briefly during my visit (or rather having been spoken to – he's *terribly* enthusiastic,) I suspect Tom will not mind being accused of being slightly mad, and the general air of eccentricity about the project is part of its charm. For APS members, however, the biggest attraction is likely to be the chance to see how many species rarely tried outdoors in the S. E. of England cope with the local climate. The site, near the bottom of the Darenth valley, is potentially a frost-pocket, but at least waterlogging should not be a problem. The mixture of chalk and river silts has already been exploited by an extensive lavender farm nearby. The site lies within an old vegetable garden the walls of which give shelter, and recent winters have of course been relatively mild and dry. So this is definitely a garden to return to over coming seasons. (Which makes it a bit frustrating that you have to pay the full admission price, including entrance to the Castle, every time.)

And if you cannot get there in person, apparently the BBC will be showing a series about the making of the garden this spring – one thing Tom is certainly good at is getting publicity!

The World Garden is at Lullingstone Castle, between Eynsford and Shoreham north of Sevenoaks, and opens Fridays, Saturdays (both 12 – 5pm) and Sundays (2 – 6pm) from Easter Sunday, April 16th. Admission is £5.50. More details from www.lullingstonecastle.co.uk where there is an aerial view which gives a good idea of the scale of the garden.

Jeremy Spon

List of Members

Included with your newsletter you should have received a list of current members, including postal address, telephone number and email address, where supplied. This is in response to many members wanting to contact others, often as a result of reading an article in *Pentachondra*, or just to find out who their nearest enthusiasts are. Hopefully you'll find it useful and a good way to exchange experiences.

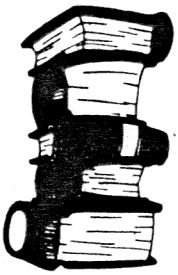
Nursery Closure

APS member Christine Yeo reports that her Devon nursery, 'Pleasant View', will close at the end of September. Visited by some members after the 2004 AGM, it specialises in *Salvia* and unusual shrubs for the garden and conservatory.

Pay it one last visit this summer and, who knows, you may pick up a bargain!

Book News

Chairman & Webmaster Keith Larkin will shortly have some sets of Olde & Marriott's "The Grevillea Book", lavishly illustrated three volumes with a total of 768 pages, Published 1994/5, brand new, for £50 (RRP £105 without delivery) including delivery UK only (overseas please enquire).



Phone 01926 422596
Or 07770 608930

E-mail
keith@keithsplantbooks.co.uk

Get it right!

Wollemi Pine - a lesson in pronunciation

Now I have to admit to being a fan of TV gardener Alan Titchmarsh. I just love his Yorkshire humour. But just because people often get his name wrong ('Titmarsh' for example), that's no excuse when it comes to getting the wrong pronunciation of a plant, even an unfamiliar one (which is just what happened on a recent TV programme!) So, Alan, if you are reading this : **Wollemi** is pronounced **wo-lemm-EYE**, not **woll-A-my**.

Treasurer's Report 2005

As expected, our expenses rose by £400 compared with 2004, and £250 was removed from our reserve. Our income fortunately did rise, due to a welcome, though "one-off" influx of new members following the "Down Under" day at the RHS in London.

But with the rise in subscriptions we should be in good financial position for future years.

Membership reached 193 in 2005. The current total (March 06) is 159, and there have been seven resignations.

Tony Entwistle

Correction

Following on from Tim Longville's article 'The Garden at Gorwell House, Barnstaple' in the previous newsletter, in which Tim enlists the help of members to identify/give info on a couple of plants seen which he was told were named *Electryon* and *Wixtonia unigemmata*, several members came to the rescue.

Ursula McHardy, of Edinburgh, suggested that the plant Tim thought he heard as *Electryon* is in fact *Alectryon*, a genus found in Polynesia as well as other places.

Jeff Irons also made the same suggestion.

Deadline for the Autumn Issue is October 1st.

Articles can be sent on floppy disk or CD. Acceptable formats are Microsoft Word, RFT and TXT.

Typewritten reports are welcome as are short handwritten reports but please print place/botanical names.

If writing about success/failure in your own garden, please try to include information about your local climate, soil type, shelter, growing aspect etc.

Please send to Sue Hyams, Applegarth, Knayton, Thirsk, N. Yorks, YO7 4AS;
Email : sue.hyams@ic24.net
Tel: 01845 537407

Stuart Fraser, Oregon, USA, also put pen to paper:

'In the December issue of Pentachondra, I read with very great interest Tim Longville's article on his visit to Gorwell House, Barnstaple.

In the article, he mentions a plant *Electryon*, but could not find it in any plant dictionary. I think he probably misheard for *Alectryon excelsus* which is described in Yvonne Cave and Valda Paddison's 'Encyclopaedia of New Zealand Native Plants' as an attractive small tree upto 8m. It grows in lowland forest from North Cape to the Banks Peninsula. It has pinnate leaves and is easy to grow.'

Ed: could *Wixtonia unigemmata* be *Wikstroemia gemmata*, sometimes known as *Daphne gemmata?* A native of China, it is a much-branched, deciduous shrub upto 100cm. Bright yellow terminal clusters of Daphne flowers are produced for months on end.

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