



## MARCH MEETING

**Wednesday 27 March, 2024**

Knox Park Primary School, Kathryn Rd,  
Knoxfield. 7.45pm.

### Jason Caruso: Small Eucalypts

Would you like a eucalypt in your garden but feel they're just too big?

Luckily, there is a huge variety of eucalypts that are worth trying in smaller gardens and Jason's talk will highlight some interesting smaller eucalypts. Even if you still don't have the room, there is the option of trying one in a pot. Come along and be inspired to plant an unusual eucalypt in your garden!



### Grevillea rhyolitica – again!

Chris Larkin shares more insights into *Grevillea rhyolitica* on page 6.



### ANPSA early-bird registrations now open

Early-bird registrations for the ANPSA Conference, 30 September to 4 October, 2024, are now open.

Visit the website for more details:

<https://www.anpsa2024conference.com/>

## Hi Everyone,

What's happened to our mild wet summer! The weather never ceases to surprise us for better or worse. The windstorm on Tuesday 13 February was vicious and did a lot of damage. Nothing major here, like a whole tree being uprooted, but plenty of broken branches and debris. Day after day spent cleaning up. I wasn't home at the time, I was at Pinewood, where I had a good view of the wild wind but nothing like the view I would get at home. Driving back not a single set of lights were operating and the amount of tree damage along the roads was quite amazing. I restrain myself from complaining too much about wind damage because nothing compares with the damage my garden suffered from after the hailstorm in 2010.

In the last 12 months I have lost several plants due to winds – two immature callistemons and a *Eucalyptus macrandra* which has been cut back to its lignotuber. It's a waiting game with the Euc. macrandra to see if a good-looking sturdy tree can be sorted from all the new growth that is shooting away. The arborist says to give it a couple of years before we take a critical look and make some important decisions.

What would be welcome at this stage is some good soaking rains. Seems an age since we had any worthwhile rainfall.

We have hit the ground running this February with not one, not two, but three activities! We made a reasonably last-minute call to change the afternoon working bee at Knox Park Primary School from a nasty hot day to Thursday 15 February when the weather was quite mild and lovely. Nine members turned up, so we powered through a lot of work, mostly around the entry. We were rewarded with pizzas eaten in the *Eucalyptus cephalocarpa* forest. I must say I do enjoy these working bees – we work but we also get a chance to socialise. Thanks workers!

On Saturday 24 February we held our propagation morning at the school and nine members was the magic number again. A lot of good quality cutting material was brought along from a wide range of plants. Thanks Kerry for organising the mix, Shirley for making the school available to us and everyone who helped with setting up the tables and cleaning up. Once again at the end of the activity we gathered in the shade of the eucalyptus forest for morning tea and chat. The weather was perfect which is a bonus when doing cuttings.

The third activity was our monthly meeting on 28 February, with Shirley Smith and three Field Nats friends treating us to some information on the faraway islands of the Cocos and Christmas Islands. See a report on the meeting in this newsletter.

### **Foothills Committee meeting report**

At our last committee meeting, held in February, we decided, with advice and assistance from our treasurer Deb, to change our Bendigo bank account to accounts that would give us higher interest rates. Of the approximately \$10,000 we have, it was decided to put \$7,000 in a term deposit for 6 months at a rate of approximately 4% and the rest on call at the current rate of 1.45%. We have had insignificant interest with the way our accounts have been organised, so this change should be welcomed by all of us.

At the meeting Nicky announced she was stepping down from being secretary immediately. Nicky is co-convenor, with Miriam Ford as convenor, of the ANPSA Conference. She is a busy lady with a bunch of other commitments. She has been secretary several times over the last few decades and her recent stint has been around 5 years. On behalf of Foothills, I would sincerely like to thank Nicky for all the work she has done for the group as secretary. In particular, her networking skills have proved invaluable in making suggestions for speakers. I hope we can still ask for her help on that front in the future.

This means there is a vacancy on our committee which must be filled. If you think you can help then please let me know and I can give you more information on what is involved. There are five main duties: check regularly for emails, collect information and distribute agendas for the committee, type up the minutes of the meeting, provide new members with a welcome letter/email (proforma available) and send letters/emails to speakers (proforma available). Foothills committee normally only meets four times a year, and via Zoom which makes it very convenient to be able to attend meetings.

**Chris Larkin**

## **February Meeting – Christmas and Cocos (Keeling) Islands**

Our February meeting was a delight with four presenters covering different aspects of a tour to Christmas and Cocos (Keeling) Islands in the north Indian Ocean.

Barabara Lloyd gave us the history and geography of the islands, Alan Veevers told us about the birds and the geology, Shirley Smith covered the plants and Hazel Veevers talked about the crabs.

Barbara got the ball rolling by telling us they flew to Perth and then across to Christmas Island, which is close to Jakarta, where they spent eight days before going across to Cocos Island for three days.

Both islands were seen by early seafarers in the 1600s on their spice trade routes, but neither had been settled until a British businessmen established businesses on them – in 1826 on Cocos, and in 1888 on Christmas Island. The islands are both Australian territories.

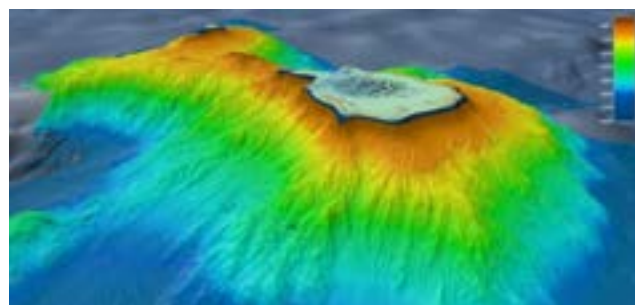
The Cocos (Keeling) Islands comprises 27 islands although only two of the islands are inhabited and have permanent settlements; namely Home Island and West Island. There are about 500 inhabitants and most of the people live on Home Island where they travel around on small

electric vehicles. The island is very flat, and mostly covered in coconut palms. In 1826 Alexander Hare started a coconut industry on Cocos Island, and he was followed by John Clooney Ross who also established a business on the Island.

Christmas Island is very different. It is an old volcano and has a very rugged coastline. About 2000 people live on the island. It has a very different history too. An early naturalist discovered there was a lot of phosphate on the island and persuaded Queen Victoria to annex the island so that they could start a phosphate industry, and the Island was annexed by the British in 1881.

Phosphate mining is still going but on a very limited scale. The phosphate mines are open-cut mines as they large deposits. Working conditions in the phosphate mines were very poor and early labourers were not treated very well. There is a port with a loading facility to transport the phosphate. The coastline is mostly thick jungle and very rocky. The rocks are very rough, sharp basalt and there are only a few places where you can access the sea, so getting onto the island is difficult. Limestone caves also dot the shore.

Alan Veevers told us about the birds and geology of the islands. Christmas Island is the top of an old volcano that has been gradually worn away. Different sea levels have resulted in cliffs and terraces. A very thick layer of limestone was built up from guano deposits. This is rich in phosphorus and it is this layer that is mined for phosphate.



**Stunning detail the seafloor in the Cocos (Keeling) Islands Marine Park © CSIRO**



Cocos (Keeling) Islands is essentially a coral cay, mostly lagoon with very little actual land above the water level.

The first birds they saw when they got off the boat were Frigate Birds. The Christmas Island Frigate birds are unique to the island although they didn't see the birds with the red ballon at their throats as it was not the breeding season. The Golden Bosunbird (White-tailed Tropicbird) is a Christmas Island icon and has gold-tinged feathers and very long tail feathers.

The list of birds that Alan went through and showed us was quite extensive, and apart from birds like Abbots Booby which exists only the island, we discovered there are many bird species there to entice both birdos and twitchers alike.

They then went to Cocos Island which was very different. It is very flat and there were hardly any birds. One of the interesting birds they did see was the White Tern. It is a white bird with an impressive royal blue beak and is also found on Lord Howe Island. The group got around the islands in motorised outrigger canoes. They found migrant bird species in the lagoons and were also lucky enough to see the rare Saunders Tern which comes from Africa.



**Palm forest**

Shirley Smith gave us an account of the plant life on the Islands. The most noticeable thing was that there is lots of green, lots of coconut palms, lots of tropical rainforest, and sadly lots of

weeds, although Shirley said that all of that still combined to make it into a wonderful place.

She said given the isolation of the islands, it's not surprising that there is a low diversity of plants, especially given the land clearing that has taken place to make way for the coconut palm plantations and mining activities. Cocos is effectively a monoculture, and human beings are largely responsible for the invasive species on the islands.

Christmas Island is a volcanic oceanic island which wouldn't have had any plants or animals on it to start with so the species that have colonised the island must have floated, swum, been blown in or brought by birds. The origins of these species can generally be traced to the coastal areas of SE Asia, northern Australia and the islands between them.

Greta beach on the east coast of the island is a trap for seeds that have floated across to the island, and a visiting scientist picked up the seeds of 63 species on the beach. However not all of these seeds necessarily germinate or become established on the island. 67% of Christmas Island is national park and most of that is tropical rainforest. There are 237 native species, of which half occur nowhere else in Australia. 17 of these are endemic species. 230 non-native plants have been introduced by humans, 80 of which are noxious weeds and are impacting the unique island ecosystem.

There are four main vegetation types on the island. Primary rainforest has tall trees, ferns, young palms and is found on the deep soils of the plateaus and terraces. In the semi-deciduous marginal forest, the trees are smaller, there are thicker patches of young pandanus palms, and fewer ferns and lilies than in the primary rainforest but still lots of epiphytes. This vegetation type is found on the shallower soil of the slopes and coastal terraces. The scrub forest, sometimes referred to as open forest or vine forest, consists of deciduous trees, scrambling shrubs and vines. It is found on steep slopes and inland cliffs where the soil layer is thin. Open herbland consists mainly of small

pockets of prostrate herbaceous plants, sedges and grasses. It is found along coastal cliffs that are exposed to salt air.

Some of the more interesting plants on Christmas Island include the Arenga Palm (Christmas Island Palm), Octopus palm, Strangler Fig, Pandan Screw Palm, *Scaevola taccada* (Cabbage Tree), and Crinum Lilies.

The low-lying and remote atolls of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands have floras with low diversity and low endemism. Only 61 plant species have been recorded, and only one endemic subspecies. Shirley says the Cocos Islands have the feel of a tropical paradise.

Hazel Veevers then told us about the 'best bit' which was the crabs! There are 20 different types of land crabs. The robber crabs are the most impressive, being the size of a football and weighing up to 6 kg. They have very strong claws, so are able to easily break open a coconut. They also have an excellent sense of smell. They are in effect the top predators on the island and will eat smaller crabs, bird's eggs, birds, and plant material. The crabs are protected as they have no predators apart from human, so while they are apparently good to eat, you are not allowed to eat the crabs.



**Robber crab**

Blue crabs vary in colour from overall blue to a bluish-white. They are only found near fresh water. While they can breathe in the air, they

have to live in fresh water so that they can get rid of waste products.

They saw only a few of the red crabs which Christmas Island is famous for, even though there is an estimated 180 million of these crabs on the island. They didn't see the mass migration of these crabs as they were there in the dry season when the crabs stay mostly in their burrows. In the wet season, the crabs all go down to the shore so that the females can lay their eggs. To protect the crabs in the breeding season there are barriers along the roads to prevent them all getting squashed and there are tunnels and a special crab bridge so that they can get across the road and continue down to the sea. The crabs live on the plateau so are used to climbing over things to get to and from the sea, and can easily navigate the bridge. The females incubate their eggs underneath them and when the moon and tides are right, they all simultaneously release their eggs into the sea. The majority of eggs released into the sea are eaten by whale sharks, other sea animals and fish but enough eggs survive to grow into baby crabs which are able to sustain the population.

Hazel also showed us some of the hermit crabs and cute sea crabs they saw, as well as the many beautiful fish they saw while snorkelling on Cocos Island.

It was great evening and having four speakers each covering a different section made for a very interesting presentation. Thanks again Shirley, Barbara, Alan and Hazel for taking us to visit Christmas and Cocos Islands with you!

**Janet Hodgkiss**

## Grevillea rhyolitica – again!

In May last year I wrote about *Grevillea rhyolitica* and three of its hybrids. At the time I said that *G. rhyolitica* had produced a seedling close by. Imagine my surprise to find this seedling has yellow flowers. I did have a yellow flowering one in the area but that was quite a long time ago – maybe as many as eight years ago. Amazing that seed has remained viable for that length of time.



***G. rhyolitica* yellow-flowering form**  
(Photo: Chris Larkin)

A few of us were in discussion about those hybrids so just to recap, the big one is *Grevillea* 'Lady O' which is a hybrid of *G. rhyolitica* x *victoriae*. The smaller ones which are a better size for the average garden are *Grevillea* 'Ruby Jewel' which is a cross *G. rhyolitica* x *victoriae* and *Grevillea* 'Cherry Cluster' which is a hybrid of *G. rhyolitica* x *juniperina*.

*Grevillea* 'Cherry Cluster' is the lowest growing one of the three, it's a bit like a smaller 'Lady O'. There are several subspecies of *G. victoriae* and they are not identified in the hybrids so I can only assume this is the reason for the very different leaf forms and growth habits.



***G. rhyolitica* red form** (Photo: Chris Larkin)



In the picture of the leaves above, top left is *Grevillea rhyolitica*, top right is *Grevillea* 'Lady O', bottom left is *Grevillea* 'Ruby Jewel' and bottom right is *Grevillea* 'Cherry Cluster'. Because *Grevillea* 'Lady O' is such a big plant there is a tendency to think its leaves are bigger than what is shown in the picture. Must be some trick of the mind.

Chris Larkin



# APS FOOTHILLS INC.

## CONTACT US:

Email: [foothills@apsvic.org.au](mailto:foothills@apsvic.org.au)

Postal address: Foothills Secretary,  
c/o Unit 9/51 Herbert Street, Boronia, 3155

## Phone Enquiries:

Chris Larkin: 9752 7837

## Find us on Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/apsfoothills>

## Visit our Webpage:

<https://apsvic.org.au/aps-foothills/>

## MEETINGS

Venue: Knox Park Primary School, Kathryn Rd,  
Knoxfield. (Melway 73 C3)

Date: 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of the month (Feb-Nov)

Time: 7.45pm

## Newsletter Contributions

Please email contributions for the next  
newsletter to Kerry Davis by no later than:  
8pm Monday 8th April 2024.

Email: [foothillsnewsletter@apsvic.org.au](mailto:foothillsnewsletter@apsvic.org.au)

## COMMITTEE

Leader: Chris Larkin

Secretary: vacant

Treasurer: Deb McMillan

Newsletter Editors: Kerry Davis; Janet Hodgkiss

Other Members: Betty Wright; Janet Hodgkiss

APS Vic Delegate: Janet Hodgkiss

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We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the  
land on which we meet. We pay our respects to First  
Nations People throughout Australia  
and to Elders, past, present and emerging.

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## VISITORS WELCOME!

## Find us on Facebook and the Web

### Foothills

<https://www.facebook.com/apsfoothills>

### APS Victoria

<https://www.facebook.com/APSVic>

## Stop Press!

Another *Grevillea rhyolitica* hybrids – I was at Yarra View Nursery today (4 March 2024), only to find there is now a *Grevillea* ‘Gold Cluster’ which is a cross of the yellow form of *Grevillea rhyolitica* x *juniperina*.

### Chris Larkin



**Chamelaucium ‘Lemon Drops’**

(Photo: Kerry Davis)



**Persoonia chamaepitys** (Photo: Kerry Davis)

<b>APS Foothills Calendar 2024</b>			
<b>2024</b>	<b>Date</b>		<b>Topic</b>
<b>March</b>	27	Wednesday	Jason Caruso – Small Eucalypts
<b>April</b>	20 or 27	Saturday	Autumn Working Bee: Knox Park Primary School 10.00 am – 12 noon <i>(date to be confirmed)</i>
	24	Wednesday	Alex Stalder – Plants of the Victorian High Country
<b>May</b>	22	Wednesday	Bill Aitchison – Nature or Nurture
<b>June</b>	26	Wednesday	Member’s Meeting – Five Slides
<b>July</b>	24	Wednesday	AGM & Trivia
	27	Saturday	Winter Working Bee: Knox Park Primary School 10.00 am – 12 noon <i>(to be confirmed)</i>
<b>August</b>	28	Wednesday	Paul and Sue Birch – Dandenong Ranges <i>(speaker and topic to be confirmed)</i>
<b>September</b>	25	Wednesday	Deb McMillan – Garden Design <i>(topic to be confirmed)</i>
<b>October</b>	23	Wednesday	Jean Bellis – Geraldton to Perth
<b>November</b>	27	Wednesday	Chris Larkin – Melaleucas
<b>December</b>	7	Saturday	End of year get-together <i>(venue to be confirmed)</i>



**Bracteanther 'Mallee Star' with wildlife** (Photo: Kerry Davis)



## Shows, conferences, plant sales and other items of interest

20 to 24 March 2024 – Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show (MIFGS), Carlton Gardens and Royal Exhibition Building.  
Website: <https://melbflowershow.com.au/>

23 & 24 March 2024 – Cranbourne Friends RBGV Autumn Plant Sale. 10 am to 4 pm. Wide range of plants, plant list available one week before sale. Website: [rbgfriendscranbourne.org.au](http://rbgfriendscranbourne.org.au)

6 & 7 April 2024 – APS Wangaratta take part in Off-Grid Living Festival & Campout, Chiltern Racecourse & Recreation Reserve, NE Victoria. Will showcase Australian plants and sell plants propagated by the group.

13 April 2024 – APS Geelong Australian Native Plant Sale, 8.30 am to 4.00 pm. 'Wirrawilla', Lovely Banks.

20 April 2024 – APS Yarra Yarra Autumn plant sale. 10 am to 4 pm. Eltham Community and Reception Centre, 801 Main Rd, Eltham.

20 & 21 April 2024 – Yarra Valley Autumn Plant Fair & Garden Expo. 10 am to 5 pm. 125 Quayle Rd, Wandin. Phillip Vaughan will launch his new range of Native Perennials at the Expo.

27 April 2024 – APS Mornington Australian Native Plant Sale, Josephine's Lawn Area, The Briars, Nepean Highway, Mt Martha. 10 am to 3.30 pm. No dogs. Free talks on propagating plants, pruning and maintenance, book sales and kids corner.

Early May 2024 – APS Victoria Committee of Management Meeting. To be advised.

11 May 2024 – APS Melton Bacchus Marsh Plant Sale, at St Andrews Uniting Church, Bacchus Marsh, 9 am to 1 pm. For more details contact David Pye, Ph 0417 289 369.

27 and 28 July 2024 – APS Bendigo host COMM and full weekend of activities.

5 September 2024 – Wimmera Biodiversity Seminar. Further details to follow.

7 September 2024 – APS Mitchell Expo and Plant Sale, Wallan Multipurpose Centre, Bentinck Street, Wallan.

14 & 15 September 2024 – APS Yarra Yarra Australian Plants Expo. 10 am to 4 pm. Eltham Community and Reception Centre, 801 Main Rd, Eltham.

21 & 22 September 2024 – APS Grampians Pomonal Native Flower Show, Pomonal Hall.

21 & 22 September 2024 – Angair Wildflower Show & Art Show, Anglesea Memorial Hall, McMillan Street, Anglesea. 10 am to 4 pm. Wildflower display, indigenous plant sales, art show and painting sales.

30 September to 4 October, 2024 – ANPSA 2024 Biennial Conference, Melbourne, hosted by APS Victoria.



5 October 2024 – Echuca Moama Native Flower Showcase. Details to follow.

19 & 20 October 2024 – Cranbourne Friends RBGV Spring Plant Sale. 10 am to 4 pm. Wide range of plants, plant list available one week before sale. Web: [rbgfriendscranbourne.org.au](http://rbgfriendscranbourne.org.au)

November 2024 – APS Wangaratta host APS Victoria Committee of Management meeting and AGM. Details to follow.

2025 15<sup>th</sup> FJC Rogers Seminar 2025 on Epacridaceae hosted by APS Mornington Peninsula.

2026 ANPSA 2026 Biennial Conference, planned to be held in Alice Springs.