

Australian Plants Society

Grampians Group Newsletter

Gari-Word

April 2023

NEXT MEETING

7:30 Tuesday 18th April

Pomonal Hall

Chris Clarke: Native Grasslands

Supper L - Z

Next Meeting

Chris Clarke is our APS Victoria immediate past President, having just finished his three year stint with great distinction.

Chris comes from the Keilor district and is an active member of this APS group. He has travelled widely around Australia, photographing every plant he comes across, and then submitting these to iNaturalist. His photographic skills are well known, and Chris will also show us how we can also become involved in iNaturalist.

Chris will tell us about his beautiful Keilor Plains native grassland as well as native grassland plants that are such beautiful horticultural subjects. Chris was heavily involved in the production of the wonderful field guide to grassland plants produced by the Keilor Plains APS Group. This will be a wonderful meeting for all interested in native grasslands.

Neil Marriott

21st March Guest Speaker

Kevin Collins: Banksias

As outlined in the last newsletter we were very fortunate to have Kevin Collins, accompanied by his wife Kathy, to speak to the group on all things 'Banksia'. From Mt Barker, 50 Km inland from Albany WA, they are leaders of the Banksia Study Group and provide consultancy in England, USA, and France as well as in Canberra. Despite having no formal training in botany, their extraordinary knowledge means they are now considered some of the top advisors on banksias in the world. They have grown every single known taxon of banksia on their property as well as having an extensive knowledge of the other flora of SW Western Australia.

When Kevin and Kathy first purchased their 21 acre property their intention was to give their children a chance to grow up away from the city and to revegetate and gain Land for Wildlife status. Approximately half the land had been extensively farmed so the fertiliser levels, in particular phosphorus in the soils made it not conducive to growing natives. Kevin explained that subsurface clays may hold dangerous phosphate levels for many years and will kill Proteaceae species. The other half of the property had no fertiliser history. Initially 100 Banksia coccinea were planted (intended for the cut flower market) but after one year only 13 remained. Undeterred, they ripped and mounded, ran guinea fowl to eat the grasshoppers and eventually had 400 in production.

Over the years the gardens became established and the collection of banksias grew. Kevin and Kathy initially avoided/ignored tourist interest but once the word was out they gave in and opened to the many who were keen to view the extensive displays of Banksia and Dryandra sp., and the Joseph Banks Gallery. Today it is open by appointment only for select groups and friends.

It would be difficult to cover all the fascinating knowledge Kevin imparted during his talk but hopefully the following give a snippet of just how interesting this group of plants is.

Banksias grow naturally predominantly around the coastal border of Australia with some 79 species, 65 of which are found in WA. Except for one species, all are endemic to Australia. One species, *B. plagiocarpa* comes from the mountaintop of Hinchinbrook Island and was the last species to be added to the collection.

- Many of the banksias are very adaptable to different climates, but soil pH and degree of mineralisation were critical to the successful growing of *B. plagiocarpa* in particular.

- All banksias have different foliage when young and the pale leaves are a coping mechanism for impoverished soils.

- The banksias are known to be some 70 million years old, unlike the dryandras at 30 million. There is now some debate about adding banksias to the dryandra group but Kevin is strongly against this.

- There are a large range of colours, textures, leaf types and flower spike forms from small, spherical, and long, and highly contrasting growth habits are seen. Some examples include *B. baueri* (woolly or possum banksia), *B. occidentalis* (red) and *B. blechnifolia* (groundcover). Some banksias have pendent flowers (hanging beneath the branches) and only come from WA. e.g. *B. nutans*.

- Aborigines used the banksia cones as fire carriers as they hold their shape, as 'hot water bottles' at night and to create a sweet drink from

flower spikes soaked in water.

- Fire ecology and banksias are inextricably linked, with the seeds protected inside the cone. The velvet on the cone is fire retardant and the plants have evolved to control when they release their seed, which is predominantly after fire. Some eastern species, such as *B. marginata* only require heat but many western species require not only fire, but the follicles do not release the actual seed till they have also been soaked by water.

Growing Tips: Most banksias will grow in well drained but impoverished soils and any species will grow in a pot.

If kept inside they will grow but are unlikely to flower unless they receive half a day in sunlight each day.

Some eastern species will release their seeds by simply placing them in a hot oven at 120 degrees for an hour but western ones will need fire and to be dunked in water following this.

Pruning - only tip prune unless they are a species which has a lignotuber.

If so, prune after flowering and don't prune lower than the leaves. Leave 3 or 4 healthy leaves below the cut and above the previous season's cut junction.

Overall Kevin's talk was brilliant, with so much information, delivered with lovely humour, and huge encouragement for anyone wishing to embark on a Banksia adventure.

For further information you might like to purchase the book *Banksias* (second edition) by Kevin and Kathy Collins and Alex George. It contains not only species details but history, ecology, propagation and growing details.

Margot Galletly



Banksias Flowering In the Garden Now

Neil Marriott

After the wonderful presentation on Banksias that Kevin Collins gave us last month, we had a small number of members come along to our garden and then on to Ross and Carole's the next morning to wander around and admire our Banksia plants and listen to Kevin talking about each species and how to grow it successfully. The following were some that we looked at and admired:

***Banksia integrifolia* –Kurnell Peninsula Dwarf**

This beautiful small plant to around 1.8m comes from the Kurnell Peninsula which is the very spot where Sir Joseph Banks and his fellow botanists landed at Botany Bay when Captain Cook "discovered" the east coast of Australia. One of the many plants that Banks and his team collected was *Banksia integrifolia* –perhaps it may have even been the very same plant from which this one in our garden was grown!! Highly unlikely, however it is still of great interest that it is from the same site where Banks landed, and therefore from the same population! Of course when they landed here and collected this Banksia he had no idea that the genus would later be named in his honour! We did lots of cuttings of this form at the last APS Grampians propagation morning at Phil's so hopefully there will be a few to share around with members!

It is a lovely bushy plant that is attractive even when not in flower with its large green leaves that flash silver from the under surface with every breeze. It needs a well-drained site and a good watering during dry summers, but is otherwise hardy.



Banksia integrifolia –Kurnell Peninsula Dwarf



Banksia integrifolia –Kurnell Peninsula Dwarf habit



Banksia rosserae

Banksia rosserae

This amazing Banksia from the outback of Western Australia near Mt Magnet must think it is at home in our garden with our hot dry climate, as our plants have all thrived, and are now flowering every year and even setting beautiful seed cones. I even had the honour of being able to give Kevin a seed cone to take back home!!

A few of the other Banksia we admired as we wandered round the two gardens



Possum Banksia *Banksia baueri*



Swordfish Banksia *Banksia elderiana*



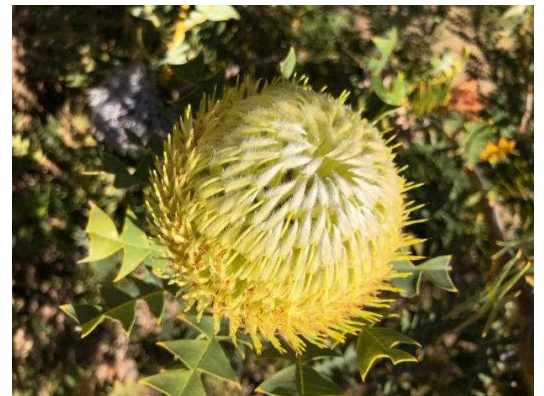
Ironcaps Banksia *Banksia sphaerocarpa ssp dolichostyla*



Acorn Banksia *Banksia burdettii*



Banksia burdettii with unusual cone-shaped bud



Cut-leaf Banksia *Banksia baxteri*



Of course we couldn't fail to admire our beautiful Peak Charles Grevillea *Grevillea beardiana ssp nov.* Peak Charles NP, WA which was in full flower.

Eucalyptus olivina Olive Leaf Mallee

We planted this lovely small mallee many years ago, but it was burnt out during the 2006 bushfire that ran through our property. We lost the label for the plant but it re-shot and is now a beautiful rounded low mallee around 3x4m. It is a very heavy flowerer in autumn with masses of beautiful orange to red buds, opening to perfumed cream flowers. It is currently looking beautiful in our Mallee Garden, and when in bud it has been popular with Fiona for her cut flower business.

Neil Marriott



Eucalyptus olivina Olive Leaf Mallee

This mallee was identified by Dean Nicole, expert botanist and owner of Currency Creek Arboretum where we went on a trip a number of years ago. We are extremely fortunate to have Dean coming to the Grampians to talk at our spring Pomonal Flower Show this year. If YOU have any gums you need identified make sure you bring a specimen along to the show and Dean should be able to identify it for you.



Eucalyptus olivina habit



Eucalyptus olivina Buds

APS Propagation Workshop

Held on 29th March at Phil's nursery the workshop was very well attended by an enthusiastic group of members and guests keen to improve their skills at propagation by cuttings. Neil gave a master class on the preparation of different types of cuttings from the wide variety of plants from members themselves or collected from the gardens surrounding the nursery. A follow up workshop will be held in a few weeks when the cuttings have produced roots and are ready to be potted on.



Members and guests practising preparing cuttings



Checking on the cuttings safely installed in the newly renovated propagation house.



A selection of the huge variety of interesting plants we can look forward to potting on in a few weeks time.

The newsletter will only continue if it has material to include. If you value the newsletter and enjoy reading it please consider making a contribution.

Contributions in any form, physical or digital are welcome. Items submitted on paper, for example photos, will be scanned and returned. Subject matter need not be limited to native plants, but can also include anything you think members may find interesting.

Email: <mailto:grampiansnewsletter@apsvic.org.au> or by phone: 0438 566 250 or by post to: Phil Williams P.O. Pomonal 3381

Thanks to everyone for their contributions to this issue.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/APS-Grampians-Group-960723023989990/>

APSVic Grampians Committee Until October 2023

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President: John King

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