



AUSTRALIAN PLANTS SOCIETY
SOUTH EAST MELBOURNE REGION INC.

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JUNE NEWSLETTER 2020

Meetings are held on the first Tuesday of each month, February to December except November.

The venue is the Hughesdale Community Hall, Cnr Poath and Kangaroo Roads, Hughesdale (MEL 69 C7)

Visitors are always very welcome.

COMMITTEE:

PRESIDENT: John Thompson thomme@netspace.net.au
 SECRETARY: Helen Appleby
 TREASURER: Norm Seaton normarjs@bigpond.com
 PUBLIC OFFICER: Helen Appleby
 NEWSLETTER EDITOR: Marj Seaton normarjs@bigpond.com
 APS VIC DELEGATE: Marj Seaton
 COMMITTEE: Amanda Louden amandalouden@icloud.com

Please forward any newsletter contributions, comments or photos to Marj at 36 Voumard Street, Oakleigh South 3167 or to the email address above.

*******Note: Deadline for the JULY newsletter is JUNE 26th*******

JUNE MEETING

Cancelled

Once again, we have to cancel our meeting due to the coronavirus. We were to be given a talk by Chris Long on the topic "Boronia Oil". This will be postponed until we are able to hold meetings again, maybe July?

In the meantime, please send any stories and/or photos to Marj for our next newsletter – favourite plants, interesting growths – just about anything really as it's a battle to find material without our regular specimen table and speaker reports.

RAINFALL RECORDS for 2020

Red numbers indicate rainfall for the same month in 2019 – quite a difference

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
Oakleigh South	98 11.4	90.5 17	77 35.2	167.5 18.4									433 82
Highett	114 7.5	76 9.9	26.7	9.3									190 53.4
Hampton	119 6	5	27	7									119 45
Cranbourne South	99 30	64 24	72 25	167 24									402 103
Caulfield Sth	127 5.6	70.5 10	62.5 12	148 12									408 39.6
Elsternwick	120 7	86 7	67.5 14	141.5 12									415 39.6

Like so many groups. The Victorian Native Bonsai Club had to cancel its April exhibition. They have very kindly made their exhibition available to everyone to look at online. The following link will take you to this showing:

<https://www.vicnativebonsai.com.au/32nd-aabc-national-bonsai-convention/>

Helen has already chosen her favourite. What is yours?

Not from the Specimen Table

I'm sure we all have plants growing in our gardens that we wish we could bring in and show on the specimen table. As you know in normal circumstances we meet 10 times a year which means there are gaps from our October meeting to the December meeting and likewise from the December meeting to the February meeting. Plants in the gardens don't stop flowering over these periods so I'm going to tell about a particular plant of mine, *Cuttsia virburnea* which does its best work in late October to the end of November and is finished flowering before our December meeting, hence I have never had a chance to bring a specimen to the meeting.

Cuttsia virburnea is small tree to 10 metres tall from the subtropical and warm-temperate rainforest, especially along margins and in regrowth, often along smaller watercourses from north of Newcastle to Noosa Heads with a few inland outliers.

It is quite bushy with obovate to elliptic leaves up to 20cm long. The white flowers are produced from October to December in panicles near the end of the branches and are both profuse and conspicuous. They are heavily honey scented and attract an array of small insects.



It grows best in a semi shaded aspect in well drained soil that doesn't dry out. Supplementary watering is required over the hotter, drier times of the year. It also makes an excellent plant for a large container. My plant is now in a 500mm plastic container and is thriving. Pruning is recommended to keep the plant bushy and if grown in a container, from becoming too large. Propagation is from cuttings that strike relatively easily.

Cuttsia is a monotypic genus endemic to Australia. It is part of the family Rousseeaceae, a family of four genera and c. five species. *Abrophyllum* and *Cuttsia* are endemic to Australia with *Roussea* confined to Mauritius, *Carpodetus* occurs in Malesia, Vanuatu and New Zealand although several species have been acknowledged from New Guinea.

The generic name, *Cuttsia*, is after J. Cutts, retained the collections of explorer Ludwig Leichhardt (1813-1848). The specific name, *virburnea*, is from the similarity that the flowering panicles have to the exotic plant, *Viburnum*.

John Thompson

WANTED

I am starting to knit a 'throw/afghan' to offer as a raffle prize for our Quarterly gathering in September next year. Although I have quite a few balls of my own, I am seeking any oddments of wool members may be able to donate (wool preferred, though synthetic will be acceptable and 8 ply if possible, but I can double up if needed) in shades of blue, green, teal, purple or pink they could supplement my supply with please? I'm particularly seeking fluffy wools to add some textural interest – mohair, 'feathers', multi-coloured etc.

If you can assist, please email me (address on page one) and I will collect from you at a time of your choosing.

Marj Seaton

Sustainability in the Garden

Some items taken from a recent Glen Eira Council's Newsletter

Nature Next Door:

- To monitor insects, download the free [CAUL Urban Wildlife](#)* app.
- To monitor birds, download the free [Birdata](#)* app.
- Create a simple [insect hotel](#)* with just an old tin can, twine, twigs and leaves.
- Set up a pollinator observatory in your backyard. Simply select a flowering plant and have children observe all the insects that land on the plant over the course of ten minutes. Don't forget to record your findings in the CAUL app. Use our [Bug Hunt Data Sheet](#) as a guide.

The following are some descriptions of the apps mentioned above:

Urban Wildlife App: CAUL Hub has released a citizen science app, which lets you help monitor native wildlife in Australian cities. There are three citizen science modules: Bell Frogs project, flying foxes project and one on beneficial insects.

You can record sightings of bell frogs, beneficial insects and flying foxes, view all of your previous records, and see a map of where other citizen scientists have recorded sightings in your area. Users from all states and territories in Australia can participate.



The data you record about the behaviours of urban wildlife will help scientists at the CAUL Hub to better understand how we can manage native wildlife and their habitats so that their populations can persist and co-exist with humans.

Available on [Google Play](#) or the [Apple Store](#)

Welcome to Birdata



Welcome to BirdLife Australia's new Birdata web portal. Here are a few things you need to know to make your birding count.

Birdata is the way we collaboratively and scientifically collect data to gain insight and protect Australia's birds.



[New Birdata feature: Bushfire Assessment](#)

In order to map the impact of the recent fires on our native birds and their habitats, we've added a Bushfire Assessment feature to our Birdata surveys. The next time you go birding with Birdata, please include a Bushfire Assessment in your survey.

Birdata app available on [Google Play](#) or the [Apple Store](#)

Garden Crafts



Bundle sticks and twigs in a can and hang in the garden for nesting and hibernating insects.

Lizards like to loll in the sun as they are cold blooded creatures that need to warm up to get themselves going. Set up a few flattish rocks somewhere in the garden where they can have sun baths.

Australian Pea Study Group re-formation:



The reactivation of a group to study plants with pea flowers has been approved by the ANPSA. A paragraph about the group is provided below. Shirley McLaran has accepted leadership of the Australian Pea Flower Study Group

A study group has been reactivated to study plants with pea flowers and has been renamed Australian Pea Flower Study Group. In the past, a study group for this purpose has operated under the name Fabaceae Study Group, as pea flowers were previously recognised as a separate family. If you are interested in the identification, classification, cultivation, propagation or conservation of Australia's pea flowers, consider joining the Australian Pea Flower Study Group. The study group webpage can be found here: <http://anpsa.org.au/pea-flowerSG/index.html>. If you would like to join the group, there is a section on the webpage that can be completed and submitted on-line. Membership for emailed newsletters is free.

PHOTO GALLERY

From Helen:

Eucalyptus sideroxylon



Grevillea "Red Hooks"



5.

Confusion in Ray's garden. His *Bossiaea walkeri* is supposed to flower in spring but look at it!



Up close:



Helen found this pea in Ormond – anyone hazard a guess at an ID? It may not even be native.



Betty sent in a grevillea too:



PLANNED DIARY FOR 2020 (All subject to COVID19 Rules).

June 2	Chris Long: "Boronia Oil" (Cancelled)
July	TBA
August	AGM and members' slides
September	Dr Sandy Webb and Dr Marilyn Olliff: "The Jawbone Sanctuary"
October	Marg and Ivan: "South Western Australia"
November	Kuranda nursery and café.
December	Christmas wind-up, "Clear the Decks" plant sale and members' slides
<u>Plant Sales and Shows 2020</u>	
July 25, 26	Cranbourne Gardens Friends Winter Plant Sale, 10am – 4pm

NEXT MEETING (Whenever that is)

Write-up: Marj Seaton

Supper: Amanda Loudon (Please bring milk)

The following article has been taken from the newsletter "Beating around the Bush", republished for free, under Creative Commons licence.

Grass trees

Author: John Patykowski, Plant ecologist, Deakin University

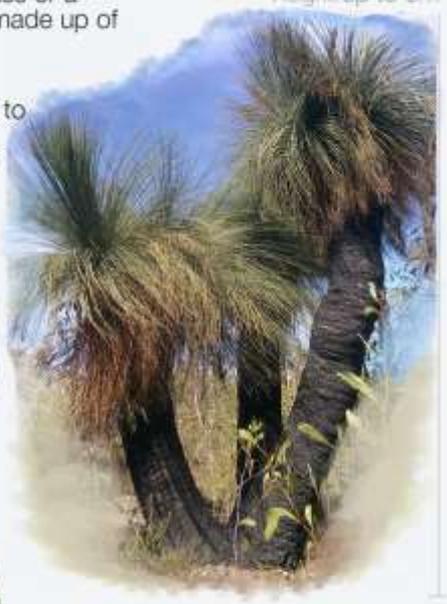
Grass trees (genus *Xanthorrhoea*) look like they were imagined by Dr Seuss. An unmistakable tuft of

Grass Trees

Genus: *Xanthorrhoea*

Grass trees aren't a grass or a tree: their "trunks" are made up of tightly packed leaves. Height: up to 8m

They can take 20 years to flower, growing stalks covered in hundreds of tiny flowers.





Trunk-less *Xanthorrhoea* grow out of underground stems.

They can live for up to 600 years, surviving both bushfire and drought.

The Conversation 

wiry, grass-like leaves atop a blackened, fire-charred trunk. Of all the wonderfully unique plants in Australia, surely grass trees rank among the most iconic. *Xanthorrhoea* have no real trunk – just tightly packed leaves. The common name *grass tree* is a misnomer: ***Xanthorrhoeas* are not grasses, nor are they trees.** Actually, they are distantly related to lilies. *Xanthorrhoea* translates to "yellow flow", the genus named in reference to the ample resin produced at the bases of their leaves.

All 28 species of grass tree are native only to Australia. *Xanthorrhoea* started diversifying around 24-35 million years ago – shortly after the Eocene/Oligocene mass extinctions – so they have had quite some time to adapt to Australian conditions.

Wander through remnant heathland or dry sclerophyll forest, particularly throughout the eastern and south-western regions of Australia, and you'll likely find a grass tree.

Perfectly adapted to their environment

Xanthorrhoeas are perfectly adapted to the Australian environment, and in turn, the environment has adapted to *Xanthorrhoea*. Let's start the story from when a grass tree begins as a seed.

After germination, *Xanthorrhoea* seedlings develop roots that pull the growing tip of the plant up to 12cm below the soil surface, protecting the young plant from damage. These roots quickly bond with fungi that help supply water and minerals.

Once the tip of the young plant emerges above ground, it is protected from damage by moist, tightly packed leaf bases, although shoots may develop if it is damaged. The leaves of *Xanthorrhoea* are tough, but they lack prickles or spines to deter passing herbivores. Instead, they produce toxic chemicals with anaesthetising effects.

All *Xanthorrhoea* are perennial; some species are estimated to live for over 600 years. Most grow slowly (0.8–6 cm in height per year), but increase their rate of growth in response to season and rainfall. The most "tree-like" species grow "trunks" up to 6 metres tall, while trunkless species grow from subterranean stems. Grass trees don't shed their old leaves. The bases of their leaves are packed tightly around their stem, and are held together by a strong, water-proof resin. As the old leaves accumulate, they form a thick bushy "skirt" around the trunk. This skirt is excellent habitat for native mammals. It's also highly flammable. However, in a bushfire, the tightly-packed leaf bases shield the stem from heat, and allow grass trees to survive the passage of fire.

Fire burns the outside leaves but the centre survives.

Xanthorrhoea can recover quickly after a fire thanks to reserves of starch stored in their stem. By examining the size of a grass tree's skirt, we can estimate when a fire last occurred.

It can take over 20 years before a grass tree produces its first flowers. When they do flower it can be spectacular, producing a spike and scape up to four metres long advertising hundreds of nectar-rich, creamy-white flowers to all manner of fauna. Flowering is not dependent on fire, but it stimulates the process. The ability of grass trees to resprout after fire and quickly produce flowers makes them a vital life-line for fauna living in recently-burnt landscapes.



Grass trees provide food for birds, insects, and mammals, which feast on the nectar, pollen, and seeds. Beetle larvae living within the flower spikes are a delicacy for cockatoos. Invertebrates such as green carpenter bees build nests inside the hollowed out scapes of flowers. Small native mammals become more abundant where grass trees are found, for the dense, unburnt skirt of leaves around the trunk provides shelter and sites for nesting.

Indigenous use of grass trees

For Indigenous people living where grass trees grow, they were (and remain) a resource of great importance.

The resin secreted by the leaf-bases was used as an adhesive to attach tool heads to handles and could be used as a sealant for water containers. This valuable and versatile resin was an important item of trade.

The base of the flowering stem was used as the base of composite spear shafts, and when dried was used to generate fire by hand-drill friction. The flowers themselves could be soaked in water to dissolve the nectar, making a sweet drink that could be fermented to create a lightly alcoholic beverage.

When young, the leaves of subspecies *Xanthorrhoea australis* arise from an underground stem which is seasonally surrounded by sweet, succulent roots that can be eaten. The soft leaf bases also were eaten, and the seeds were collected and ground into flour. Edible insect larvae residing at the base of grass tree stems could be collected. Honey could be collected from flower stems containing the hives of carpenter bees.