

A.S.G.A.P. INDIGENOUS ORCHID STUDY GROUP

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Our September issue attracted some responses re Captain Cook's Orchids, and changes to group names in SGAP -they are printed herein:

From Margaret Bradhurst: " I was interested in the article on Captain Cook's orchids because living close to Botany Bay & Kurnell where Captain Cook first landed with Joseph Banks and Daniel Solander, I am a frequent visitor (in an orchid-hunting and whale-watching sense) to the area.

Botany(South) National Park (soon to be renamed I believe) is located on the Kurnell Peninsula, together with the large Caltex Oil Refinery, Abbott's Laboratories and the Carbon Black Factory. I try to ignore these, and the continual noise of planes taking off from Sydney Airport across the bay!

However, further to your article on the orchids collected by Joseph Banks and Daniel Solander at Botany Bay, I have located the two species you mentioned, i.e. *Prasophyllum striatum* & *Pterostylis revoluta*. I found *Prasophyllum striatum* for the first time last year in moist low heathland, growing on the sandstone rock platforms which are common in the area. The pretty white and green flowers had purple veins and the frilled labellum recurved noticeably. The flowering stem was only about 12cm tall.

There are three separate species of *Pterostylis revoluta* occurring in NSW, Vic or Q'ld (according to Tony Bishop's " Field Guide to the Native Orchids of NSW & Victoria), two of which are as yet unnamed species, but related to *P. revoluta*. The *P. revoluta* type from Kurnell is slightly smaller and grows in deep stabilised dune forest in grey sandy soil . I have seen the tiny rosettes come up each year ,but never any flowers - it is very frustrating!

Approximately 40 species of orchids have been recorded from Botany (South) National Park. I have located most of them including *Pterostylis sp. aff plumosa* which is one of three species of *Pterostylis* listed as "Endangered" in NSW under the Threatened Species Conservation Act. These are closely watched by ANOS and the National Parks Threatened Species Unit.

I am surprised that Banks & Solander collected only two species of

orchids from the area, considering the number that we know can be found there today. There should have been other species flowering at the time that they were there..... "

Thank you, Margaret, for that extra information on some of the plants that were perhaps the beginning of scientific study of our Australian Flora. Banks & Solander collected a vast range of plant types between 28 April and 24 August 1770, from eleven different localities. Mr Banks was always in the first boat ashore, and he and Dr Solander went to great effort in their plant-collecting forays, especially during the stay at Endeavour River. The Cooktown Botanic Gardens have a dedicated "Solander Garden" in which as many as possible of the almost 200 plants collected by B & S in the area are grown, including of course the three *Dendrobium* from the area - the *Dendrobium canaliculatum* make a mass display in the large *Melaleuca angustifolia* trees (also collected by B & S).

And the Queensland State Emblem, the Cooktown Orchid? Not a mention by Banks, Solander or Lt Cook! Just as mystifying as the collection of only two out of 40 species at Botany...

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Barbara Henderson wrote to us in September: " A note on your comments about " Study Group" or "Interest Group". As another S.G. Leader ( *Ed: Barbara is the dedicated Leader of the Wallum & Coastal Heathland Study Group*) I am quite happy with "Study Group" - the term never worried me. If we have our "Study Groups" it leaves the way open for "Interest Groups" to be formed in cases where we would prefer to have fewer restrictions, by-laws & regulations. ....ASGAP Study Groups cater for SGAP members ,while other people who do not wish to join SGAP (some can't afford to as are heavily involved elsewhere ) can join the more informal "Interest Groups" either in SGAP (Small Plants Interest Groups) or in their own areas/organisations. I think we have to draw a line on changing everything, as seems to be the norm these days. I can't see where "Study Group" intimidates, we do study, in that we research our particular field, we learn & teach, we produce facts and provide information on our chosen subject - yes, it is a type of "study", and I'll stay with " Study Group" thanks.

ED: I think that Barbara has made the definitive statement on the subject, and we too will stay with "Study Group". I would think that most SGAP members belong to other Horticultural-type groups, and costs of membership have to be taken into account, even the very modest cost of joining a SGAP Study Group, given that a large number of ASGAP members are no longer in the first flush of youth and have left the top income earning bracket.

Barbara wrote to us again in September: " Could have had some lovely shows from my little Dendrobiums/Dockrillias ,mostly from D.kingianum if not for those blasted little orange beetles! Now matter how vigilant I was,they beat me nearly every time. Even a lovely mauve and white Crucifix orchid didn't escape. Apart from netting everything what do I do?? HELP!!

Lots of pale blue Thelymitra at the Maroochy (Qld Sunshine Coast) airport,but I missed most of their flowers back in August. A near-beachfront area at Marcoola,between airport and beach,usually has the white Diuris alba,but construction of more high-rise tourist accommodation seriously impacted on their territory this year. Although there was no actual building on this last corner, trucks etc used it for access. Not good for ground orchids and wet wallum. So we've lost more ground orchid territory this past year in a couple of places, and others are being degraded by weeds and rubbish. I have no guilt about "rescuing" orchids from such situations and am presently watching the budding stem of what I think is Cryptostylis erecta,which I brought home from degraded bushland west of Peregian Beach earlier in the year.

Ed: Queensland Law is quite Draconian about collection of native plants. Rescues can only be carried out legally if one has a permit,applied for beforehand and specifying the species and number of plants to be rescued. This is quite impractical for situations where one finds a broken branch with attached epiphytes on the ground. In practice we usually position the branch as high as possible in an adjacent tree, and this method does have a high success rate,but trampled ground orchids are beyond much help. I recall checking a favourite clump of Zeuxine orchids at Henrietta Creek last year (between Innisfail & Millaa Millaa) to see whether they had re-appeared,and found that workers had cut up a fallen tree and piled the bits all over the Zeuxine clump. I did manage to peel a small Dendrobium racemosum from one of the tree pieces,and thus committed a criminal act!

Over the years we have occasionally regaled our readers with our rainfall reports. This year, even in the wettest part of the Wet Tropics,we are experiencing a dry year. We had only 0.18 inches of rain in October,and at 1 December we had received 89 inches over 138 days since 1 January. That may sound like heaps to most of Australia,but compare it with year 2000:260 inches over 198 days, and 1999:262 inches over 200 days. How plants cope with such variations is one of Nature's miracles.The lithophytic plants in the rainforest are shrivelled and desperate,but they will come back with the first good rain.The epiphytic orchids seem to have enough reserves in their pseudobulbs to carry them through a dry spell,and we are having a profuse

flowering of rainforest plants. This may have been triggered by the unaccustomed extra hours of sunshine from the fine weather, accompanied by higher than usual leaf-drop in the rainforest, thus allowing more sunlight to penetrate the usually closed canopy. It is reminiscent of the period in Feb 1978 after we experienced cyclone Winifred, which stripped many leaves and branches and resulted in a mass flowering and fruiting of lower-level plants. The downside of that was the emergence and canopy dominance of the native vine *Merremia peltata*, which still covers much of the canopy in exposed areas and will contribute to the destruction of their host trees in the next cyclone by presenting great wind resistance.

In common with much of Northern Australia we are experiencing 24 hour high temperatures and hot dry winds while we await the monsoon storms. This is known as the "mango madness" time, and in tune with that spirit, Pauline has given us a story about orchids, from "Blue's Country" magazine, story by one Alf Ingles: "For many years I was stationed at Kuranda railway station, just up the hill from Cairns. Kuranda was noted for its nice gardens, the foundations of which began in 1915. One display of which we were particularly proud was the Cooktown Orchid display. We had the hollowed out trunk of a tree just outside the stationmaster's office door on number one platform. In the hollow of the trunk there was a number of Cooktown orchids which flowered in profusion. These were suspended at a height well out of reach of sticky fingers.

One morning a circus train drawn by a steam engine pulled into number one platform. It had to come into number one because that's where the water hydrant and ash pit were located. On coming to a halt over the pit, who also came to a halt directly opposite the Cooktown orchids? The elephant in his nice opentop waggon. He delicately threw out a coil around the first orchid and stuffed it into his cavity and came back for more. Panic. The gardener ran up to the engine to get the crew to move the train ahead but it was too late. They had just dropped the fire and had the hydrant connected. It took about three minutes to pump up the air to release the brakes. In the meantime I had run across the line to the riverbank to gather an armful of nice juicy green grass, which I offered to the elephant as a bribe for not eating our orchids. Nothing doing, and he continued to make Cooktown orchids permanently extinct from Kuranda station for evermore.....

I hope that little story will lighten the mood of our readers for a while. This is our 27th newsletter since we took over from Len Butt seven years ago and we look forward to producing many more, with the help of our Study Group Members and Friends.