

ASGAP PALM & CYCAD STUDY GROUP

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Leader : Kerry Rathie, Lot 5, Salston Road, Greenbank 4124.

phone : (07) 3200 0268

Email : krathie@powerup.com.au

Mea culpa : Again a late newsletter, with no convincing excuses. Just a cluttered year with a lot of minor happenings which stole a lot of time. Also, on October 1st. Qld. SGAP lost its secretary with the untimely death of study group member Ian Waldron, at 53. As Ian was also chairman of our local branch also the newsletter editor, & my wife Annabel was vice-chairman, she became acting chairman and I got the editor job, among others. I never fully realised how many tasks Ian was doing. At least he lived to see our local branch get it's field guide book, 'Mangroves to Mountains', finally get published in April 2002. This had also taken a lot of time for all seven co-authors, but most for Ian. He is much missed.

Membership matters : Welcome to new member Christine Wadey, of North Eltham, Vic.3095. She probably thinks I had forgotten about her.

Weather & plant behaviour : The former was peculiar once again, with a mild early winter, then 23 frosts, some down to -6 degrees, between late June & mid August. Most of the coastal areas of S-E Qld. & N.S.W. had a series of the most severe frosts on record. A lot of people I knew who thought they lived in frost-free areas woke to find bush-houses full of black plants, even many who lived right on the ocean.

September was warm, in the 30's (all temperatures are given in degrees Celsius), & late October & early November had 14 very hot days of 39 to 42, then cooler (in the 20's), then 5 hot days in early December, then normal (30 to 35) till mid-January 2003, then 8 days over 36, a few cool days in early February, then back to over 36 in mid & late February. March has been normal, with 28 to the low thirties. The last 2 years has been the worst drought period ever recorded, over almost all Australia except parts of W.A. Qld. has been the worst affected, but perhaps less so financially as it has a lower area sown to crops. The dams near me are already empty, & some towns are having household water carted in by road. The south side of Brisbane is getting it's water piped in from a large dam on the north side, & pipeline extensions are proceeding frantically. Despite the El Nino being officially on the decline, the two biggest dams in NSW are both less than 8 % full.

In mid October '02 my big *Cycas canalis* ssp. *carinata* (which used to be an atypical form of *C. armstrongii* until Ken Hill re-did many of the N.T. cycads a few years ago) started to flush, about 2 weeks earlier than usual, but with only 20 fronds instead of its usual 30. By 6-3-03 it was starting to shut up shop, with the margins of all pinnae showing about 2 cm of white. In mid November '03 my biggest *C. maconochiei* threw up a 4-leaved sucker about 4 inches from the main caudex, which has rotted a little on top & is leafless. Got too wet over winter, I suppose, although I had it under cover most of the time. The leaves on this sucker are starting to look tatty, but still greenish. My biggest *C. kennedyana* started to flush in early December '02, with 32 fronds. It still has immaculate-looking fronds in late March.

A number of large (caudices 2 to 3.5 m in height, with some caudices weighing over a tonne, minus leaves & roots) of *Macrozamia moorei*, 'potted' up at the same time over two years ago, have shown large differences in frond (& presumably root) growth since that time. Some never looked back, some grew new fronds slowly, some lay dormant for a year or more & are now growing vigorously, & some are still dormant & one died. The fluctuating temperatures may be part of the cause, & due to the drought I have not been able to water as much as I would like, but I suspect differing starch reserves at harvest is the main factor. Fifteen plants with 0.5 to 1m caudices, but quite bulky, were in my nursery area proper, & watered very regularly, & all have grown well, although one lay dormant for a year & now, a year later, looks just like all the others.

Letters : Don Stallard from WA was interested in the article by Tom Broome in newsletter no. 83. This related to salvaging semi-rotted cycads by cutting back to firm tissue, soaking in fungicide, thoroughly drying, & planting in sterile sand or perlite. Don had had success in sand with an *Encephalartos* caudex that had sat for a decade with no sign of growth. I have some *C. megacarpa* that have been leafless for 3 years now. May try the knife next spring.

Books : The new book titled 'The Cycads' by Lauren Whitlock is excellent, & I finally got a few copies at \$95 as against the PACSOA price of \$125 (& up to \$175 overseas!). Can probably get more if anyone needs one.