



*Society for Growing Australian Plants  
Cairns Branch*

NEWSLETTER

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President

Stuart Worboys

Treasurer

Val Carnie

Vice President

Rob Jago

Webmaster

Tony Roberts

Secretary

Helen Lawie

Librarian

Coralie Stuart

[Secretary@sgapcairns.org.au](mailto:Secretary@sgapcairns.org.au)

Newsletter Editor

Pauline Lawie

[lawiepm@gmail.com](mailto:lawiepm@gmail.com)

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*Excursion Sunday, 20 October, 2024.  
Hartley's Creek Walking Track*

Stuart will not be able to join us as he will be working, but he has supplied the following:

Flat Rock on Hartley's Creek is a beautiful and quiet swimming hole just inland from Wangetti Beach about 40 km north of Cairns. There are some very nice rock pools and even a spa shaped pool to swim in here. The walk to Flat Rock Swimming Hole is 2.2 km one way. It is a medium grade hike with a few ups and downs. There is partial shade along the hike, but it can be a hot hike when the sun is out. If you follow the path further up, you will find Hartley's Creek Falls and a large swimming hole beneath the falls, but that's not part of the plan for Sunday.

From Cairns head north along Captain Cook Highway towards Wangetti Beach. Just before you cross Hartley's Creek you will see Hartley Street on your right. Turn immediately left and park on the opposite side of the road to Hartley Street. Walk west along the dirt track. For a short distance there will be a chain link fence on the right. Continue along the path to the swimming holes.

As usual we will meet at 12 noon for lunch at Wangetti Beach, which isn't pretty but it has toilets. Bring chairs as well as your usual SGAP kit. The aim will be to commence the walk at 1 p.m. and PLEASE email [secretary@sgapcairns.org.au](mailto:secretary@sgapcairns.org.au) if you are coming.



# September Excursion Report Cassowary Forest Nature Refuge, Speewah

Helen Lawie

Liz welcomed us to her family property, a place she has known for some 40 years. The long driveway rises up to the house which was built into the ridge back in the 1980s by her parents. Level at the front, the slope drops away sharply at the back of the home which is made up of multiple rooms connected by verandah pathways. The rainforest has reclaimed the space around the house and a variety of bird species and even the odd python come and go very comfortably.

One of the key themes of this property is the story of the rainforest regaining a footing in what might otherwise be a sclerophyll forest. Certainly, if the vegetation on neighbouring places or across the highway is any indication, flame retardant eucalypts are the norm. But, buffered from fire (managed or otherwise) and off limits to a zero turn ride-on mower (scourge of acreage lots!), the rainforest has emerged from creek bed refuges, and along with it paddymelons, echidnas, cassowaries, buff breasted kingfishers, Victoria's riflebird and plenty more.

The biodiversity here, with the intersection of climate and species type, and its geographical location alongside State Forest, has helped Liz achieve her desire to have the property granted as a Nature Refuge. To obtain this recognition is no small undertaking, and requires great dedication on behalf of a landowner. The high level of multigenerational planning and management was in evidence as we took ourselves on an appropriately paced SGAP walk.

A beautiful grevillea garden had some treasures blooming. As well as hybridised showstoppers there were also the more subtle but long lasting non-cultivars such as *Grevillea venusta* beloved by birds for weeks on end.

A commercial mango plantation of around 100 trees has been removed, and rainforest trees have regenerated here naturally, augmented by targeted planting, weed control and knowledge of the microclimates of the property. Not all self starter trees are equal

though. *Alstonia lleriana* would proliferate if not discouraged. The phrase 'benefits from disturbance' flipped the script for me as I attempted to conceive of 'pioneer trees' outside a colonial world view framework.

Another delight is the *Glochidion*



*harveyanum* with little fairy pumpkins of a delicate blush colour 12-14mm in diameter. Its tiny yellow flower, and the dehiscent seed packets were of great assistance in a positive identification.

Less co-operative were the many 'swamp mahogany', their rich red trunks quite recognisable even if the botanical name eluded us.

Next to ignite my wonder was the concept of ever learning to identify native grasses as we



were introduced to *Themeda triandra*, Kangaroo grass, and the distinctive black stems of the

*Arundinella nepalensis* The dried up leaf sheaths reminded me strongly of bamboo, only for me to learn later that bamboo is actually a grass! So follow me down that line of inquiry by clicking here.

<https://keys.lucidcentral.org/keys/v3/AusGrass/key/AusGrass/Media/Html/GENINFO/taxonomy.html>



But it is the *Cryptocarya murrayi* tree well established not too far from the driveway that I'll mention last. Impressively large for 'regrowth' (a term that itself could do with a makeover), covered in black



purple fruit and distinctive with its slippery-dip shaped branches.

We walked down to a lovely creek, rich with edgy sedges, and types of lomandra cool and soggy in the shade. It would have been an ideal spot for a group photo, had I taken one.

## Cordyline

The genus *Cordyline* comprises about 23 species, inhabiting tropical & subtropical regions, from Asia to New Zealand, Polynesia, and South America. Australia hosts about 9 native species, three of which occur in our local area: *Cordyline cannifolia* (native cordyline), *Cordyline manners-suttoniae* (giant cordyline) *Cordyline murchisoniae* (dwarf cordyline).



*C. cannifolia*<sup>(1)</sup>

Since its creation, the taxonomic journey of the genus has been rocky, gaining and losing species often and being placed in numerous families. This week, the Australian National Herbarium place it in Asparagaceae and the Queensland Herbarium in the Laxmanniaceae. The generic name *Cordyline* is from the Greek word for club, *kordyle* describing the club-shaped roots of some species.



*Cordyline manners-suttoniae*<sup>(2)</sup>

### Description<sup>(3)</sup>

"Erect or sprawling glabrous shrubs to 5 m high; stems woody with annular scars when young. Leaves crowded on tips of branches, narrowed into a petiole or not; base of petiole widened into a sheath. Inflorescence a terminal or lateral panicle. Flowers bisexual, regular. Sepals and petals united at base. Stamens 6; anthers medifixed; filaments inserted at base of perianth. Ovary superior; stigma capitate or 3-lobed; ovules 2–16 in each locule. Fruit a berry. Seeds black, shining."



*Cordyline murchisoniae*<sup>(4)</sup>



Throughout most of their natural distribution, cordylines are held in high esteem and have been used for food, clothing, cooking, medicine, marking out land plots, warding off evil spirits, making dye, religious offerings, fibre and to flavour drinks.



*Dancers Hiva Oa (Author)*

I find it interesting that there is very little use of cordylines by indigenous Australians mentioned in the literature. I did find a report of the root being boiled and consumed as an emergency food and a dubious report on the edibility of the fruit.



Today, Cordylines are a widely planted as ornamentals. The nursery industry is constantly introducing new cultivars of varying colour, shape and size, to keep landscapers interested and consuming.

1. [Cordyline cannifolia \(tanetahi\) 002.jpg - Wikimedia Commons](#) Accessed: 07Oct24
2. [Cordyline manners-suttoniae: blkvulture Record: Observations:185192199 | Occurrence record | Atlas of Living Australia \(ala.org.au\)](#) Accessed: 07 October 2024

3. L. Pedley. *Cordyline*, in (ed.), *Flora of Australia*. Australian Biological Resources Study, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water: Canberra. <https://profiles.ala.org.au/opus/foa/profile/Cordyline> [Accessed: 07 October 2024]
4. [Cordyline murchisoniae.jpg - Wikimedia Commons](#) [Mark Marathon](#) Accessed: 07Oct24

A month ago Val wrote “Arrived home yesterday afternoon and this is what greeted me. A second flowering of Wilderness White our Mary Callistimon. Just stunning”.



Pauline: I too have a Mary tree. It is a *Neofabricia myrtifolia* which Mary grew from a cutting for me when I admired one in her garden.

## Flowering Natives for your Garden Patsy Penny

Growing around my house in East Russell I have two species of Rubiaceae whose cut flowers make beautiful arrangements in a vase. They also attract butterflies and bees in their thousands when they flower.

The first one is a shrub. *Pavetta australiensis*. This was a favourite of Don's and we often compared our flowering. It has clusters of perfumed flowers at the end of small branches. These sometimes completely cover the bush. It does like to have access to sun to enable a good cover of blossoms.

Garry Sankowsky writes in *Growing Australian Tropical Plants*, that these are host to several day flying bee hawk moths.



When I took this photo I tried not to disturb the hundreds of bees that were humming around the flowers. This shrub sits in my garden very happily amid the exotics.

It was named after a Scottish gardener who collected many plants in North Queensland.

The second plant, *Tarenna dallachania*, also has clusters of perfumed flowers which present beautifully in a vase.

### *Flowing at East Russell*

Patsy took these photos of the *Alloxylon flammeum*. It is, of course, a tree from a higher altitude and I believe this glorious flowering is due to a recent very dry spell after extended wet weather. I have had large branches fall from old trees and a green leaf fell from an Alexandra palm.



*Terenna dallachania* is a fast growing pioneer tree, which likes the edge of the forest. It can grow to about 10 metres but can also be pruned and kept small. When it flowers it too is covered in bees and butterflies. The perfumed blossoms can be smelled many metres away especially in the early morning and late afternoon. They start out white and slowly change to yellow and almost orange.

Both these natives are ideal substitutes for exotic *Ixora* in your garden.

