



*Society for Growing Australian Plants  
Cairns Branch*

**NEWSLETTER**

*Newsletter No 250*

*May, 2025*

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*SGAP Cairns Branch - Outing Sunday, 18 May, 2025.*

On Sunday, 18 May, we have planned something out of the ordinary. We will be joining Mulgrave Landcare at one of their planting sites. President Stuart will be introducing a mobile phone app used around the world for observing, recording and identifying plants and animals.

Meet at midday at the end of Ross Road, Deeral. The nearest toilets are at the boat ramp (which you will pass on the way). There will be Mulgrave Landcare signs to follow. Bring sun smart/wet weather gear, closed shoes, lunch, water and a chair.

12 noon to 1 pm. Lunch, meeting, meet and greet with Mulgrave Landcare and Madjaybana Rangers.

1 pm to 3 pm. Demonstration of iNaturalist app and practice.

3 pm onwards. Commencement of tree planting. SGAP can join or disperse

If you wish to participate in the iNaturalist training, make sure you have the app installed on your phone, and have set up an account (see below).

We are joining Mulgrave Landcare to learn about iNaturalist. This incredibly powerful phone app allows you to make observations of plants and animals in the wild and have them identified by experts. Findings are shared with scientific data repositories like the Atlas of Living Australia and the Global Biodiversity Information Facility to help scientists find and use your data.

Instructions for setting up the app commence on page 4



*This is the story of the collection of the first recorded specimen of *Elaeocarpus elliffii* (Mountain Quandong) from the Malbon Thompson Range.*

The over 180 000 pressed, dried specimens of the Australian Tropical Herbarium are an invaluable scientific resource used by researchers from around the world. The collections were largely sourced from the Wet Tropics bioregion: from the peak of Mt Bartle Frere to cracks in the pavement of Abbott Street, Cairns; from the dry rocky slopes of Rattlesnake Island to the back yard of the Lion's Den Hotel near Cooktown. But not all collecting locations are easy to get to, nor are they safe. One such location is Bell Peak North, a 1,018 m high peak on the Malbon Thompson Range, about 12 km directly east of Gordonvale.

### Specimen No. CNS 145517, *Elaeocarpus elliffii*

Bell Peak North is the highest peak on the range, and is only accessible with the permission of the landowner at the peak's base. Once permission is gained, and the guard dogs have been bypassed, the ascent is long and slow, following a relentlessly steep spur that stretches east from the peak. There is no



Medical evacuation from Bell Peak. Botany can be dangerous

path, just scattered plastic tapes tied to trees, and the scattered remains of a Cessna aeroplane that crashed into the mountain in the 1970s. Above the 900 m contour is a tiny island of mountain cloud forest, roughly 20 hectares in

extent, supporting a remarkable range of mountain species. In 2016, as part of a mountain forest survey project, the Australian Tropical Herbarium sent three botanists by

helicopter to explore both Bell Peak North, and the very poorly known Bell Peak South.

However, whilst the botanists were traversing the saddle between the two peaks, a large rock came loose and smashed the hands of one of the trio, causing him much pain, bleeding and dismay. Eventually, emergency services were called, and the injured botanist was airlifted to safety just as the sun disappeared below the horizon.

The other two botanists continued their explorations the next day. One of the specimens they collected was *Elaeocarpus elliffii*, the Mountain Quandong, the first specimen of that species recorded on the peak.

*The first recorded specimen of *Elaeocarpus elliffii* (Mountain Quandong) from the Malbon Thompson Range.*



Herbarium specimen

### *April's "Wednesday Night at the Stratford Library"*

Helen Lawie

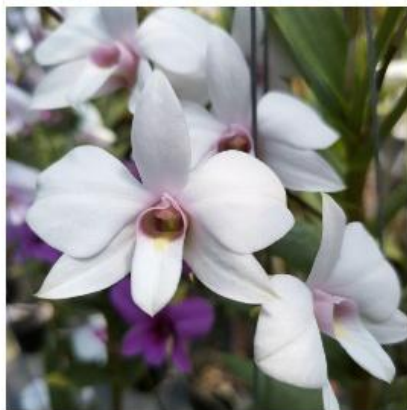
Our special guest speaker for April was Branch President, Stuart Worboys. His presentation "Portland Road to the Tropic of Capricorn" described a recent work project conducting vegetation mapping for many islands in the Great Barrier Marine Park.

Complex bureaucratic changes in tenure affecting almost 100 islands led to this 18 month long project providing information for management decisions. Some islands had never had vegetation surveys done before; other surveys were out of date. Fieldwork on a cross section of islands involved tape measures, raincoats, sunscreen, binoculars, drones, and sea sickness medication!

Along with the various challenges, the rewards were many, and perhaps one or two undescribed plants were discovered along the way. If you get the chance to see Stuart present this thought-provoking topic and beautiful photographs, I highly recommend you take the opportunity.

## COOKTOWN ORCHID

April and May are peak flowering times for Cooktown Orchids. We're all familiar with the dazzling purple-pink typical of our State floral emblem, but there is a surprisingly wide variety of mutations and sports to be found. The photos here shows the huge variety of colours, shapes and patterns that can occur in Cooktown Orchids. All of the plants were originally collected from the wild and have been maintained by growers in shadehouses and gardens for many years. The growers call the flower in the top right "Tozer Stripe", another in the group is called "Compactum".



### *Torres Strait in April*

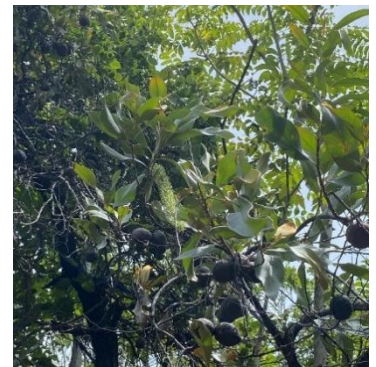
Words and photos Helen Lawie

Our family enjoyed a trip to Torres Strait during the recent Easter School holidays. After landing on Horn Island Ngurupai, we took the ferry to Thursday Island Waiben to our accommodation. On our first day trip we headed South again and travelled by boat for over an hour from Thursday Island to Albany Island Pabaju, just off the mainland.

The trees and plants we saw were very similar to those found in the rest of the coastal Cape country. The wet season had been light, with only recent rain giving the islands a beautiful tropical green. It seemed a pretty harsh environment for trees, hard rocky ground, and constant wind for the six months of the year that the South Westerlies rule supreme.

Albany Island showed a marked difference between low sparse vegetation on the windy side, and tall, diverse trees on the calm side of the island.

Frequently and easily observed due to their long-lasting seed pods, aka Bushman's Clothes Pegs, was *Grevillea glauca*. The new leaves had a golden glow even in sharp midday sun, and we observed a flower that was too early or too late for the 'July to September flowering season'.

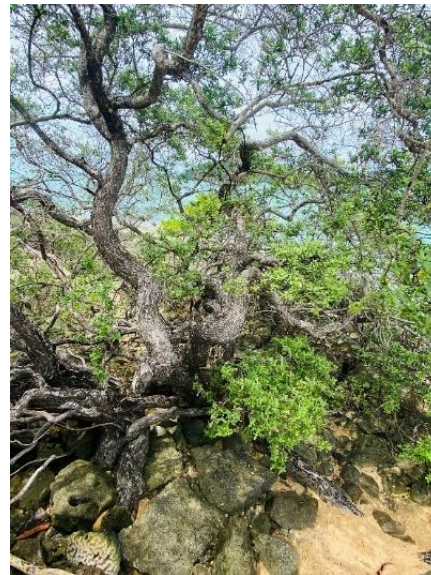


*Grevillea glauca* with seed pods,  
Flower and golden underleaves

A natural spring on the calm side was exploited by rainforest with thick vines and dense canopy all the way to the sand. *Lygodium*, climbing ferns, figs and native Turmeric, *Curcuma australasica*, all grew within a few meters of salt water.



Contrasting trunks of *Zanthoxylum rhetsa* (?) and *Grevillea glauca*



Down by the jetty a grey trunked twisty wizened bush looked ancient and hardy. President Stuart kindly identified it from photos of its small leaves and perfect white flowers *Pemphis acidula*. It was naturally bonsai-ed by

its location on rocks at the beach but grew strong and tenacious. Maybe it will still be there should we ever return one day.



*Manilkara kauki* with green 'plums' due to ripen from June

The following day our visit to Friday Island Gealug included a sensational sushi lunch hosted by Kazu Pearl farm. Our treehouse bistro was sheltered by a Wangai tree, *Manilkara kauki*, and we were introduced to the folklore that if you eat the fruit, you will return.



Dainty leaves and flowers on *Pemphis acidula*



## How to get started with iNaturalist

If you wish to participate in this exercise, you will need to download and install the iNaturalist app before 12 noon on Sunday 18 May. Search for and install either "iNaturalist" or "iNaturalist Australia" on Google Play or in the Apple Store.

You will also need to set up an account. An iNaturalist account can be created on the mobile app or on the iNaturalist website ([inaturalist.org](http://inaturalist.org)). iNaturalist accounts are free to create and to use, they charge no fees. You will need an account in order to post any observations to iNaturalist or to add content (such as an identification) to another user's observation.

When creating an iNaturalist account, you will be asked to enter an email address, a username, and a password. A username is the unique handle linked to your account, and what your public content such as observations and identifications will be credited to. Your username does not have to contain your actual name. A username must be unique, begin with a letter, contain no spaces, and use only letters, numbers, dashes, and underscores.

If you have any questions, email or text Stuart.

Email: [worboys1968@yahoo.com.au](mailto:worboys1968@yahoo.com.au)

Phone: 0488 788 768



Please join us for our next Wednesday night at Stratford Library, 7.30 pm, 11 June. Guest speaker to be announced shortly.



Branch fees of \$10 can be paid on line: BSB 034 167 account no 850790