



Alstonia australis

Society for Growing Australian Plants Cairns Branch

NEWSLETTER

Newsletter No 254

September, 2025

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Cairns Branch Excursion Sunday, 21 September 2025 Goomboora Park, Brinsmead

Meet at 12 noon for byo picnic lunch. Byo chair as we will find somewhere shady, but the tables may be busy. After lunch the walk will follow Freshwater Creek upstream along the gravel mountain bike path; it is flat and wide. The start of the path is between the playground and the toilet block where a concrete bridge crosses the creek.



August excursion Report and Photographs

Helen Lawie

Our August excursion was to the Penny's property at East Russell, via Babinda. The air was crisp and clear and the sunshine warm without being hot. Shaded by the great Milky Pine, *Alstonia scholaris*, our hosts Patsy and Peter welcomed us with a picnic table of coffee and cake. While our kids ran off to look at the cows we admired the growth of the plantings around us. Many of these date from the SGAP Cairns excursion in May 2023 and they are very well established now, some having recently flowered.

More recently the Penny family has planted an additional 60 trees along the creek line and within the flood zone. These new plantings will encourage the natural expansion of the tree line into the old cattle paddocks. One day they will shade out pasture grass, and hopefully even out-compete a patch of pond apple, *Annona glabra*. A designated weed, the fruit of the pond apple is spread by cassowary and feral pig alike and germinates prolifically. Tolerant of swampy areas it can expand into a monoculture. But once cattle are removed, native plants start to restore balance or at least hold their own when on a level playing field.

One small fern that occupies this habitat is the *Pronephrium triphyllum*. When water rises it holds soil together and in the dry it traps dropped leaves.



Pronephrium triphyllum grows in swampy ground at this location, but has no trouble in the dry season, and is not restricted to this micro-climate in distribution.



Syzygium growing along the creek. When it fruits, we'll get a little closer to an identification.

We also saw several Davidson Plum, *Davidsonia pruriens*, the tallest being knee height.

The multiple quandongs, *Elaeocarpus grandis*, give us ample opportunity to learn their silhouette: lance shaped leaves (with a couple of red ones), diamond shaped sky between the leaves, whitish trunks, and - on this occasion at least - a Wompoo fruit-dove.

The other obvious avian pairing to the quandong is the cassowary, and we were lucky enough to see three or four depending on your eyesight: a male with a medium sized chick, a solo male, and the dominant female. While there was plenty of evidence to suggest these birds take their role as rainforest seed dispersers seriously, it was fresh muddy footprints that drew our attention. Different sizes and opposite directions, some showing claws, their steps were clearly documented.

The skin of the cassowary foot could be observed in relief: almost honeycomb and strongly reptilian. We each had a 'Lark Quarry' moment, as we took it in turns to point out these details as we worked our way along the track.



Cassowary footprint showing three toes and skin pattern. Unfortunately, I was so busy being amazed I didn't include anything in the photo to show scale.

After lunch we turned to the slope leading up to the property boundary with the Wet Tropics protected Graham Range. We followed Jack Penny who drew our attention to the bright sunlight over the creek where the canopy doesn't meet. Wait-a-while prospers wherever the light penetrates; it grows if there is soil left between the big granite boulders that haven't been washed further down the creek in wet season downpours.

A two-foot tall *Lepidozamia hopei* enjoyed a spot by the creek, and there were a few more scattered about also.

A glade of Yellow Grass Orchids, *Apostasia wallichii*, were inconveniently not flowering, but it was easy to imagine their yellow stars and a kind of magical quality to the rainforest here. It is hard to believe that selective logging took place on this property in the 70s.

After that the incline rose steeply and we had to work a little harder for the rewards. Our destination was a Kuranda Quandong, *Elaeocarpus bancroftii*, its red trunk standing out among the others. Close by was another solid presence, the dense straight trunk of a Johnstone River Hardwood, *Backhousia bancroftii*, with creamy yellow colouring. By contrast with these trunks the *E grandis* looks as white as a ghost gum. We made our descent carefully, spotting anything we had missed on the way up.

A *Polyalthia* grows near the water tank, and to the uneducated eye looks the same as any other non-descript sapling of indeterminate age ... 5 years, 30? Should it flower and fruit one day we may be able to identify an East Russell variant.

As we left at the end of our visit, I saw two large plump Cairns Birdwing caterpillars! Each fence post by the grand *Alstonia scholaris* supported an *Aristolochia acuminata*, the host plant to the Cairns Birdwing butterfly. It was a final reminder that the plants and birds and butterflies which flourish here are encouraged by Patsy and Peter's thoughtful management choices, sustained effort and love of our native rainforest ecosystem.



Species List

Lower East Russell – Peter and Patsy Penny
Sunday 17 August

Achronychia vestita
Heptapleurum actinophylla (Schefflera)
Polyscias australiana
Archontophoenix alexandrae
Entada sp.
Calamus sp.
Pandanus sp.
Atractocarpus fitzalanii
Elaeocarpus grandis
Symplocos sp.
Cordyline sp.
Helicia nortoniana
Carallia brachiata
Piper sp.
Castanospermum australe
Hibiscus tiliaceus
Phaleria clerodendron
Melicope elleryana
Annona glabra
Crinum pedunculatum
Xylocarpus granatum
Acrostichum
Pongamia pinnata
Heritiera littoralis
Myristica sp.
Rhodamnia sp.
Syzygium graveolens
Glochidion
Guioa
Davidsonia pruriens
Raspberry
Alphitonia

There's an app for that!

Says one of our travellers

On a recent visit to Cloncurry, in Northwest Queensland, I dropped into the Cloncurry/Mary Kathleen Memorial Park. The park is home to the Cloncurry Unearthed Visitor Information Centre and Museum, a lookout, and plantings, some of which are labelled. The park is administered by the Cloncurry Council. It is a great place to spend some time, with exhibits to keep you busy for an hour or two.

On my short trek up to the lookout I recognised some plantings of the Restricted Invasive Plant *Tecoma stans* (yellow bells). On the way down, I noticed a specimen of *Hakea lorea* incorrectly labelled as *Grevillea striata*.

I informed the Visitor Information staff of my discoveries, only to be met with a blank stare.

It was then that I remembered that some years ago I had installed the 'Snap, Send, Solve' app on my phone. This app was developed to enable the public to report 'issues' to local councils and utilities with a minimum of fuss and effort.

The app allows users to photograph the problem and send a report along with the snaps taken. The report is forwarded to the relevant authority for action. I have used the app a number of times, not only to report weed outbreaks, but also water leaks and potholes.

Available from the App Store and Google Play.

Entada phaseoloides

Leesa Carlisle-Brown

You might have seen *Entada phaseoloides* hanging around, a vine in the Fabaceae family sporting a huge woody pod, initially green, turning brown on the vine.

Pods and seeds found on the ground here are frequently decayed. As the vine is growing in the yard, a pod was chosen to be taken inside and dried, this resulted in seeds that are in good condition. Measuring 4.5-5cm across, these are dark chocolate brown in colour, with the surface having more of a sheen than a shine.



Seedpod measuring 128cm
drying inside



Seedpod study in charcoal,
smaller specimen at 49cm

It was easier to observe flowers on the vine, with stems cascading down to the ground bringing them to eye level. Each flower spike is covered with buds that open in progression from the base to tip over a day or so, the flowers turning from cream to gold when no longer viable, this creates an attractive

gradient down the length of the spike. Mild, not unpleasant scent, (described in Jones and Gray as 'musty').

Recognised as a food plant for the Tailed Green-Banded Line Blue butterfly.



Fresh flower spike study in progress,
pencil, ink, watercolour

References:

Jones, D., & Gray, B. (1988). *Climbing plants in Australia*. Reed Books Pty Ltd.

https://apps.lucidcentral.org/rainforest/text/entities/entada_phaseoloides.htm



Excursion for 19 October

A visit to Cattana Wetlands has been pencilled in.

Penny's house is just past the end of the bitumen on Kruckow Road. Do remember, as well as your lunch, that this is the wettest area in Queensland and that right now you would need good sun protection. However, if rain decides to bless us again in the previous week, some insect repellent could be useful.

