



Society for Growing Australian Plants

Cairns Branch Inc.

Newsletter 256, November 2025

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October Excursion – Cattana

Wetlands

Helen Lawie

Armed with a copy of Sharren Wong's handy 'Walking Guide to the Trees of Cattana Wetlands' we ambled around the Kingfisher Pool in a neat circuit. Revegetation planting at Cattana began in 2009, with trees, understory and epiphytes being added in various tranches. Several *Aristolochia* vines (host plant for Cairns Birdwing caterpillars) were an example of recent additions, surviving adequately for this time of the year.

The tropical native plantings can be a little deceptive-although quite fitting to the location, some trees are outliers – they do not occur naturally in this part of the Wet Tropics. This caveat aside it would be easy to forget we are on the site of a rehabilitated sand quarry. The plantings, and remnant Alexandra Palm *Archontophoenix alexandrae*, are supplemented by lush regrowth providing an incredible array of species. The broad flat pathways and accessibility made for an easy learning experience as our botanists kindly introduced many plants and rekindled our knowledge of plenty more.



Acacia Cedar *Falcataria toona* (above): looks like a jacaranda at first but is native to Central Queensland and up through the Cape, possibly to New Guinea.

Red Beech *Dillenia alata* (next page): the flower was easily observable, so we didn't need to rely on the red flaky bark to identify this tree. The centre of the flower is a universe in miniature and would translate well into a line drawing of central red carpels and rings of yellow stamens.



The flowers of *Terminalia arenicola* (above) are tiny in contrast to the large leaves. The scent was like vinegar honey. Without a botanist to identify this tree, I would have assumed *Terminalia catappa*.

If you look at the leaves carefully, you can plainly see the differences, however I can easily muddle Leichardt trees *Nauclea orientalis* with the large leafed *Terminalia*'s. They can both lose their leaves around August to September. The *N. orientalis* often looks like a triangle Christmas tree shape, but sometimes so do the *Terminalias* depending on how old they are, or what kind of triangle shape ...

Our recent walk along Freshwater Creek at Goomboora Park had so many examples of trees that could fit in either category based on geography and habitat. Some had recovered from flood and had multiple trunks, some were so old and tall it was hard to see the leaves well. However, at Cattana many *N. orientalis*, quite a few of which are self-seeded according to the Wetland's website, are currently just 10-15 m tall. To find them in flower was a joy, the gold and white baubles easily within sight on the low branches, and I could identify the trees with certainty.



Barringtonia calypttrata: buds just about to burst.



Leichardt tree *Nauclea orientalis* flower. The stunning spherical flower head is an easy diagnostic, if you can catch the trees in flower. A return trip to Goomboora a week or two later did not reward us with the same confidence. We had missed the flowering. Most of the flowers had fallen off and weren't even on the ground (eaten?). Only a few trees at the far end of the walk were still holding dead flower heads. So, like Friar Mendel and his peas, we could continue to observe as time passes.

We can return when the trees are in fruit and crane our necks to see which fruiting branch is connected to which trunk. And we will probably return to Cattana Wetlands again too. Even after many visits it still captivates our interest.

Species list

We had Rob Jago's list with us on the walk, prepared back in 2010. We managed to add a few new species to the list: plants that had been included in the revegetation, or plants that had been dropped by incontinent birds. These were:

ANACARDIACEAE *Buchanania arborescens*

ANACARDIACEAE *Rhus taitensis*

APOCYNACEAE *Cerbera floribunda*

APOCYNACEAE *Gymnanthera oblonga*

ARISTOLOCHACEAE *Aristolochia acuminata*

BIGNONIACEAE *Deplanchea tetraphylla*

COMBRETACEAE *Terminalia arenicola*

LAURACEAE *Beilschmiedia obtusifolia*

LECYTHIDIACEAE *Barringtonia calypttrata*

MORACEAE *Ficus racemosa*

MYRTACEAE *Lophostemon suaveolens*

RUBIACEAE *Tarenna dallachiana*

RUTACEAE *Murraya koenigii*

SAPINDACEAE *Harpullia ramiflora*

SALICACEAE *Scolopia braunii*



Rainforest Plant Identification Workshop

The Australian Tropical Herbarium and the Wet Tropics Management Authority will be presenting their annual Rainforest Plant Identification Workshop from 5 to 7 December. Now in their fifteenth year, the workshops have been developed all plant enthusiasts, ranging from curious beginners to those more experienced.

December's workshop will be presented at James Cook University's Daintree Rainforest Observatory, their classroom in the rainforest. Accommodation and lunches are included in the enrolment price.

For more details of how to enrol, visit

<https://www.jcu.edu.au/events/2025/december/rainforest-plant-identification-workshop>



My Favourite Tree

Val Carnie

Dillenia alata commonly known as Red Beech is my favourite tree.

A medium size tree with the most amazing red papery bark and glossy dark green leaves. It has bright yellow flowers with red centres and amazing red seed pods.



To me it is a happy tree which grows close to where I live.

I was surprised to learn that the petals seeds and arils are edible.

Species from the genus *Dillenia* have been widely used in medical folklore.

What's

Happening?

Cairns

Sunday 16 November 2025.

Meet 10 am Perrotas Cafe, corner Abbott and Shields Street. After a well deserved coffee (and maybe cake) proceed to the gallery to view the current exhibitions: "Tania Major. Kowanyama – When Rain Falls, When Earth Sleeps" and "Fred Williams. Weipa Series – Collection in Focus"

Sunday 14 December 2025

10 am Talk and Tour of Cairns Botanic Gardens. Gardens staff will discuss the new gardens Master Plan.

11.30 am Christmas breakup at the Edge Hill Bowls Club. Remember to bring goodies for the raffle.

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