# Top End Native Plant Society NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 2025

## WHAT'S FLOWERING THIS MONTH

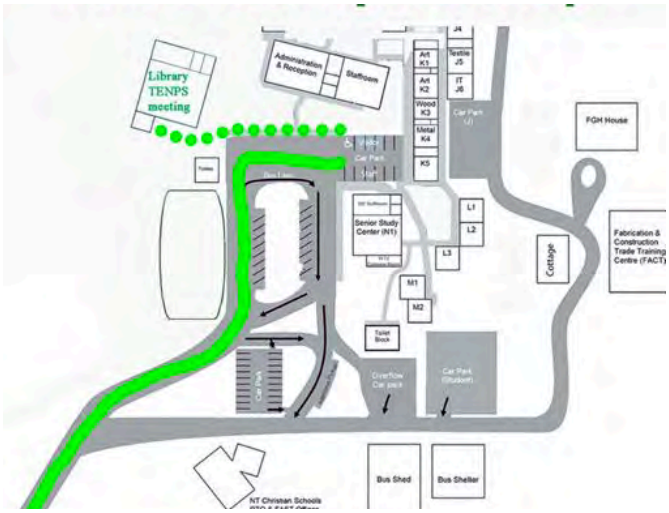
*Glycosmis trifoliata* by Russell Dempster

## MONTHLY MEETINGS

Top End Native Plant Society (TENPS) general meetings are held at 7:00pm on the third Thursday of the month at Marrara Christian College library on the corner of Amy Johnson Ave and McMillans Rd.
Bring your plants to swap, sell or have identified over a cuppa. The guest speaker presents at 8pm.

This month's talk will be by Richard Boyne on his trip to The central west region of Western Australia.

NEXT MEETING: OCTOBER 16TH 2025




**TENPS (Top End Native Plant Society) Committee Members**

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Vice President: Sean Stieber
Secretary: Johanna Stieber
Treasurer: Graham Zemunik
Publications and Librarian: Richard Boyne
General Committee Member: Ian Morris
General Committee Member: Claire Hewitt
Publicity: Vacant please inquire
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Public Officer: Dave Liddle

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www.topendnativeplants.org.au
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## August Meeting: Gulf Country by John Brock and Willie Burgess

The August meeting was jointly presented by John Brock and Willie Burgess. They shared photos, stories and discoveries on their two-week trip to Borroloola and Limmen National Park in the Gulf region.

It sounded like a wonderful trip. Willie drove his vehicle and whenever John spotted something interesting flowering in the bush, they would stop and investigate. *Grevillea mimosoides* was flowering near Adelaide River with *Calytrix exstipulata* shrubs in full bloom nearby. The *Grevillea benthamiana* population near Pine Creek has survived the railway line passing through the centre of them. These grevilleas have spectacular red flowers.

Butterfly Falls in Limmen National Park is beautiful. There was no water flowing in July, but the campsite was lovely.


A group of *Corymbia* that have white bark and paper-fruited nuts which can be crushed are now called *Blakella*. They are deciduous in the dry season and respond to increased humidity leading up. They flower, fruit and release their seeds over a very short period. The most common one in the group is *Blakella bella*; Willie and John photographed this species on the banks of the Wearyan River.

They obtained some wonderful images of *Grevillea pteridifolia* in flower with a Sulfur-crested Cockatoo feeding off the nectar. So, seed eating birds also like nectar. Birds appear to be left-handed; the cockatoo was holding the flower with its left foot. Australia's newest butterfly, Tawny Coster, were also feeding on the nectar.

The Southern Lost City is a stunning place. Only day visitors are allowed. It was in very good condition with interesting vegetation featuring *Pityrodia ternifolia*, *Senna venusta* and *Eucalyptus miniata*. *Senna venusta* is a very showy shrub, growing 2-3 metres high with lovely yellow flowers.
Bush banana, *Marsdenia viridiflora* is a vine with opposite leaves, and the edible young fruit is smooth and sweet. More mature fruit become dry and pithy, which are not so nice to eat.

Wearyan River is a tidal, salt-water river. It has large tamarind trees (*Tamarindus indica*) growing along its banks in some sections. Nearby the tall *Cycas angulata* are found up to 15 metres in height. Some have large diameter trunks; they can be wider than 44 gallon drums.

A campsite at the Wearyan River waterfall was a favourite. John and Willie found an area with about 50 *Drosera indica* plants. In the late afternoon one plant had about 30 or so Tawny Coster butterflies stuck on it. The plant is like an octopus, it was a sight to behold! Pink, white and blue flowers on the droseras were open the next morning.

Other species featured included in the presentation included *Abutilon hannii subsp. prostrate*, *Acacia ampliceps*, *A. retivenea*, *Brachychiton collinus*, *Cochlospermum gregorii*, *Cordia dichotoma*, *Corymbia terminalis*, *Eucalyptus pruinose*, *Diospyros humilis*, *Grevillea heliosperma*, *G. parallela*, *Hibiscus menzeliae*, *Livistona rigida* (Mataranka Palm), *Macropteranthes kekwickii* (Bullwaddy), *Pittosporum angustifolius*, *Polymera sp.*, *Terminalia platyptera*, *Thespesia populneoides*, *Thysanotus chinensis*, and *Tricosanthes cucumerina subsp. cucumerina*. Look out for John and Willie's photographs of these in the new edition of John's book coming out next year.


Fruits of *Terminalia platyptera* (left) and *Pittosporum angustifolium* (right) brought to the meeting

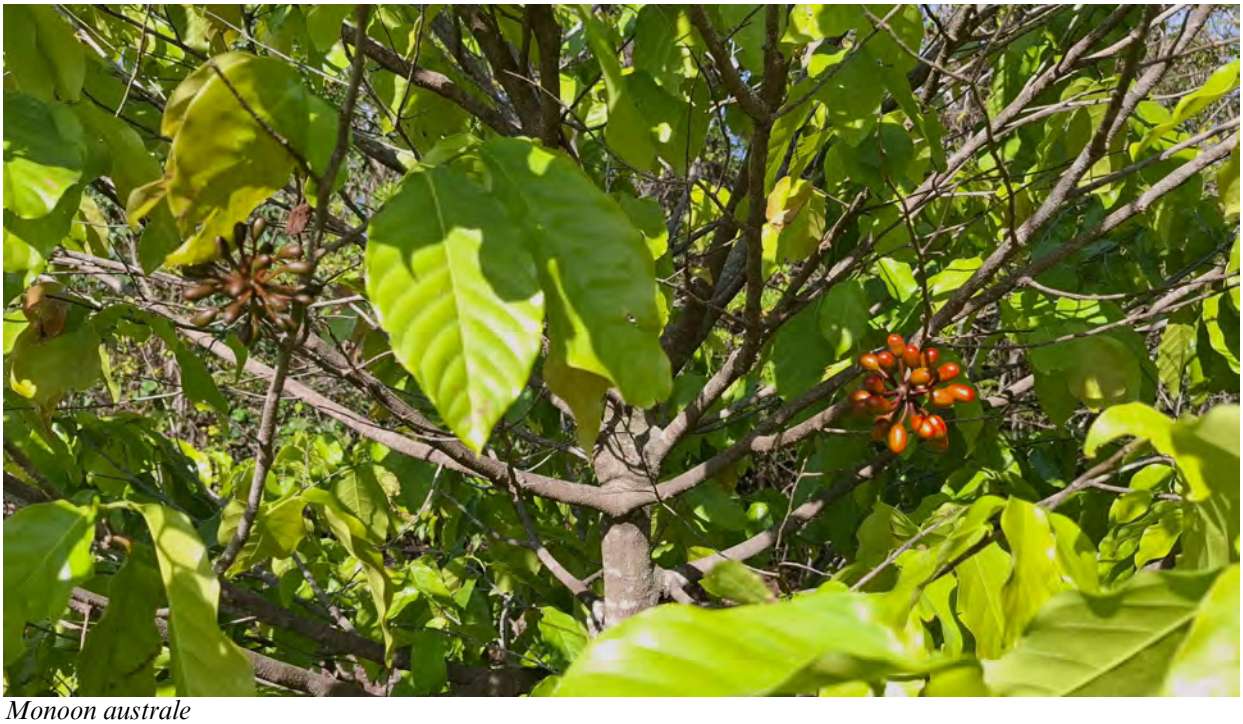
Thank you gentlemen, for a wonderful presentation of your adventure. The gifts of your time and insights were greatly appreciated by all who were present at the meeting.

Report and photos by Russell Dempster

## September field trip ~ East Point

A small group met for our TENPS field trip on Saturday 20 September. We had a pleasant morning walk along the monsoon forest trail.


*Monoon australe* (formerly *Polyalthia australis*) was fruiting in the park where we met, the immature orange-red fruit stood out from the shiny lime green leaves. Some new growth also contrasted with the older leaves, displaying their characteristic bronze colours.



*Monoon australe*

The trunks of the trees were an interesting study (*see overleaf*). The mottled colours and patterns on the trunks varied, and some species have lenticels, including *Antiaris toxicaria* and *Albizia lebbeck*. Lenticels are pores in the trunks or stems of woody plants that appear as raised spots. Air can flow through the pores enabling oxygen to reach the tissues below the surface. A couple of tree species have thorns on their trunks, notably *Bombax ceiba* (especially when young) and *Zanthoxylum rhetsa*. Other trees have fissured bark such as *Alstonia actinophylla* (Milkwood), *Mimusops elengi*, and to a lesser extent *Peltophorum pterocarpum* (Yellow Flame Tree).

*Antiaris toxicarya*

*Albizia lebbeck*

*Bombax ceiba*

*Zanthoxylum rhesta*

*Alstonia actinophylla*

*Mimusops elengii*

*Capparis sepiaria*

*Diospyros calycantha*

The thorny vine *Capparis sepiaria* was displaying pretty white flowers. *Pachygone ovata* vines had fresh new leaves.

A few Orange-footed Scrub Fowls were seen patrolling the forest floor. A couple of large active nests are obvious close to the path.

*Diospyros calycantha* were observed with their associated circular black fungal spots on the leaves. This species also often has red petioles.

*Opilia amentacea,*

*Mallotus nesophilus*

Other plants seen flowering included *Albizia lebbeck*, *Peltophorum pterocarpum*, *Mallotus nesophilus*, *Terminalia macrocarpa*, *Opilia amentacea*, and *Decaisnina signata* (Mistletoe). Other fruiting plants observed were *Sterculia quadrifida* (Peanut Tree), *Mallotus nesophilus*, *Maranthes corymbosa*, *Helicteres isora*, and *Denhamia obscura*.

The tidal change was noticeable from our commencement to the time we finished (near lunchtime) giving a very different view back towards

report and photos by Russell Dempster

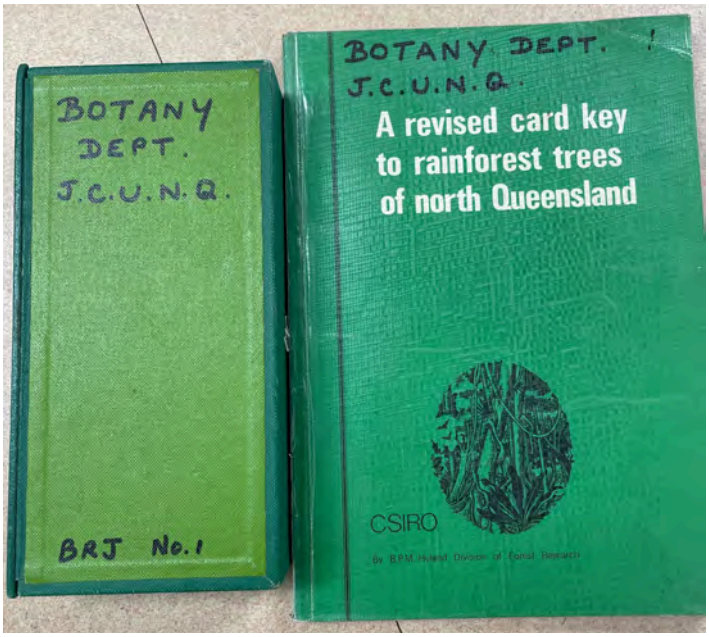
*Sonneratia alba*

## A Plant Identification Short Course and the Rainforest Key

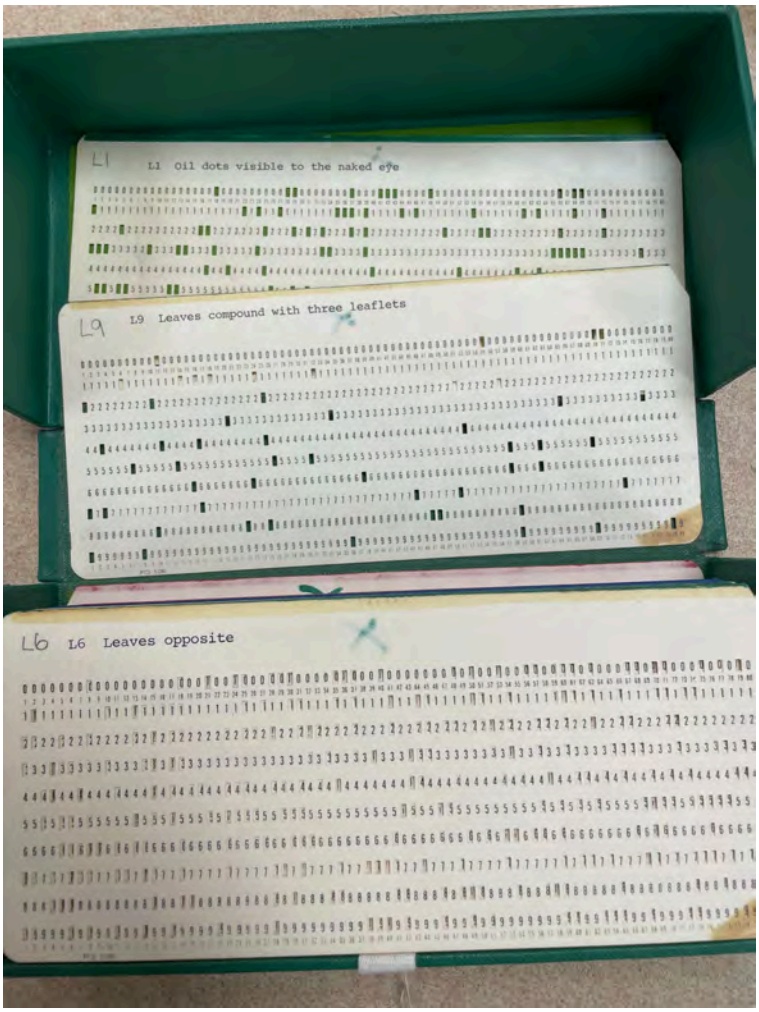
For two days in September, the NT Herbarium hosted Stuart Worboys, a botanist at the Australian Tropical Herbarium in Cairns. He conducted a short course using the lucid key for Australian Tropical Rainforest Plants (https://apps.lucidcentral.org/rainforest/text/intro/index.html), better known as the RFK (Rainforest Key). Botanists and ecologists in the Top End often consult this key when we need to identify an unfamiliar plant and this course was designed to help us use it more efficiently and precisely.

This course has been going for about twelve years in Queensland and this was the first time it's been held outside of the state. The participants included herbarium staff, staff from other teams in the DPLE, and interested amateurs.

The RFK was first published in analogue form in 1971 by the Queensland Forestry Department to help identify native trees in North Queensland rainforests. By 'analogue form', I mean actual card keys with holes punched in them in different patterns for each character. People back then had to key out a taxon by laying the right cards on top of each other. By the 90's, the key was available on discs and subsequent versions covered shrubs and vines as well as trees. The interactive online version that we know today was launched in 2010 with the help of the University of Queensland's Lucid software. This got updated every few years and now covers a wide range of woody and non-woody taxa from rainforests and vine thickets all over Northern Australia.




*Above and left*: an early edition of the Rainforest Key




Most of the herbarium staff were enrolled as students in the course. We were also responsible for setting up the herbarium as a classroom and providing fresh plant material to work with.

Other students on the course were from consulting firms, other government working groups and interested naturalists. We learned a lot about how to use the RFK efficiently and precisely.

For example, it's very useful to start by clicking the "Subsets" button : then tick the boxes for "Frequently Used" and "Leaf Characters". If you get stuck, this provides an easy way to go back and see where you might have gone wrong. Another bit of advice is to not use features that are ambiguous or debateable for your specimen. One that we were told to avoid unless it's really obvious is "Midrib appearance on upper surface", the options being "distinctly raised", "distinctly depressed" and "more or less flush". We spent the first day exploring the key and using it to identify the fresh specimens.

On the second day we went to Berry Springs Nature Park and were instructed to key out whatever we wanted from what was growing there. I had a go at *Exocarpos latifolius*, thinking it would be easy, but no matter what features I chose I couldn't get anywhere near it! I got Stuart's help on it and he worked out the problem. It turns out that the plants growing in the NT have much broader leaves than the ones in Queensland, so when I put in the leaf length-breadth ratio that I saw, I excluded it from the results. He made a note of this so that the key can be updated in the future.


A broad-leaved *Exocarpos latifolius* at Berry Springs

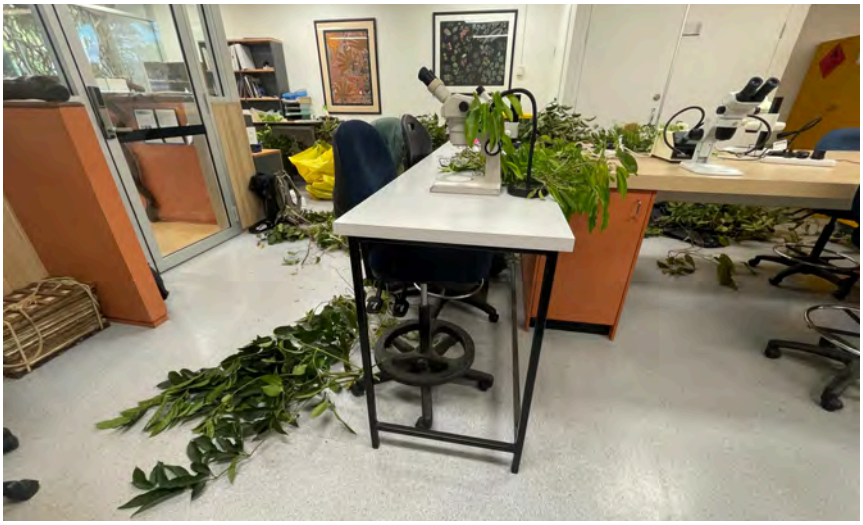
After the ID practice we took a walk along the track through the park where he pointed out trees and shrubs with distinctive features. We also encountered several greyish spikes of *Amorphophallus galbra.*


*Amophophallus galbra*

The day ended back at the Herbarium where we were tested with some unlabelled specimens. One test required us to key the specimen out using as few features as possible within fifteen minutes. I got down to *Pachygone ovata* using seven features, which was pretty good, but Graham did better than me!

Overall, this was a great learning experience for everybody and we hope that this workshop will be held here again in the future.

Report and photos by Richard Boyne



## From the Archives ~ collated by Lon Wallis

**40 years ago October 1985**

Warmer temperatures, rising humidity and some sporadic rain have triggered some dramatic changes in the Top End environment.

In our familiar open woodlands, *Eucalyptus clavigera* and *E. confertiflor*a are almost leafless and covered in masses of white and cream clusters of flowers respectively. Ixora tomentosa, one of our smaller native ixoras, is in characteristic bloom with its dense white flower heads. Buchanania obovata, the native cherry, is in dense flower and *Timonius timon* is supporting small white and orange blossoms which are sweetly scented. *Terminalia ferdinandiana*, which has been leafless for many months, is sprouting new leaves and flowering at the same time. Planchonia careya carpets the early morning ground with its large fluffy white flowers, the only sign that it was covered in flowers in the night.

At the base of the escarpment country, where dry season seepage supports pockets of moist monsoon forest, *Syzygium armstrongii* is in flower and heavy with perfume, *Calophyllum sil* (native beauty leaf) is drooping with fruit, and *Melastoma polyanthu*m (native lassiandra) contributes to a bright splash of purple.

High in the dry stoney ridges of the escarpment *Grevillea dryandri* and Grevillea angulata are still carrying seed and some of our native Gardenia species are in fruit.

In coastal areas and around the city *Peltophorum pterocarpum* (yellow flame tree) are looking spectacular with their showy yellow flowers set against the dep green foliage, and *Pongamia pinnata* (Indian beech) has shed its dusty dry season leaves and appears lush and bright with its shiny new leaves.

In the rainforest Fragrea racemosa and *Euodia elleryana* are in bud, and *Syzygium minutaliflorum* is covering the leaf litter with its small white fleshy fruit. The heavy scent of the flowering native nutmegs (*Horsfieldia australiana* and *Myristica insipida*) hangs in the air.

Throughout all of these environments you may find the stately milkwood (*Alstonia actinophxlla*) setting seed.

What a nice time of year to get out and about.

**30 years ago October 1995: There's a Ptycho in tha' Jungle**

For all those who are still bemused by the title, you must have missed Dave Liddle talking about what must be his favourite palm at our last meeting. But first a brief introduction.

*Ptychosperma bleeseri* was first described in 1928. The original specimen was destroyed during the Second World War, for many years it was misidentified as *Carpentaria acuminata*, a palm it often grows alongside. It was not collected again until the early 1980's. The *Ptychosperma bleeseri* is a member of the Arecaceae familyy of palms. *Ptychosperma* refers to the appearance of the endosperm in the seed while *bleeseri* is in honour of a Mr Bleeser, a former assistant postmaster in Darwin and an avid plant collector….

Throughout the Top End are an estimated 12,000 remnant rainforest jungles, some large, but many unfortunately small; just a few hectares in size. In the late 1980's 1200 of these rainforests were surveyed by Jeremy Russell-Smith, amongst others. Analysis of the data collected revealed sixteen different types of rainforest, with *Ptychosperma bleeseri* found in type two rainforests, that is; riverine and spring-fed. There are several dozen rainforests that fit this description close to Darwin of which eight have *Ptychosperma bleeseri*. These include Black Jungle, Whitewood Road Jungle, Crocodile Creek Jungle, Bankers Jungle and some areas near the Howard and Adelaide Rivers.

The seeds of the *Ptychosperma bleeseri* appear to be spread by gravity, flowing water or the work of birds such as the Torresian pigeon. Thus it competes with other tasty fruit that may appear at similar times in the rainforest. Once a lucky seed has found nutritious and damp ground it may germinate. It first appears as a bilobal seedling which is easily mistaken for a *Carpentaria acuminata* seedling. The experts can tell them apart at a glance, something to do with having the *Ptychosperma bleeseri* having a thinner pair of leaflets. The seedling develops into a pinnate stage, then starts to clump with one stem slowly growing up to catch whatever light makes it through the canopy.

While its life expectancy is unknown, *Ptychosperma bleeseri* probably has a life of at least 60 to 80 years and is capable of regenerating from its main stem. Plant collectors, vandals (environmental terrorists), Aboriginals (who eat the heart of the palm as bush tucker), bush fires, feral pigs, lack of nutrients, waterlogged soil, drops in the water table and finally clumsy naturalists all serve to keep the pressure to survive on *Ptychosperma bleeseri*.

Counts over the years of *Ptychosperma bleeseri* reveal a decline in the number of adult plants in several of the jungles. From the most recent count, a glimmer of hope lies in that there appear to be more juvenile plants than previously counted and if looked after it is anticipated that many of these juvenile plants will go on to maturity. Whitewood Road jungle tells a particular sorry tale. In 1990 a count revealed 137 adults and 350 juveniles, while today there are only 33 adults and 165 juveniles. Several major fires have altered the environment of the jungle, opening up the canopy and killing plants. As an example, an enormous syzigium that would be 2 to 3 metres in diameter lays uprooted.

Growing *Ptychosperma bleeseri* in the back garden may help to save the species. But community efforts are needed to control bush fires, exclude livestock, vandals and feral animals through fencing or shooting (feral animals only please) and only then will the environment these palms represent be saved from being lost forever.

There are approximately 28 related species of these tropical feather palms mostly found in New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Bismarck archipelago and tropical Australia. Related species include *Ptychosperma macarthuri* and *P. elegans* from far north Queensland. They are often cultivated from fresh seed for gardeners.

More information on *Ptychosperma bleeseri* can be obtained from "Plants of Northern Territory Monsoon Vine Forests" by Wightman and Andrews and "Native Plants of Northern Australia" by Brock.

## 20 years ago October 2005: Darwin Palm Update

In September, as part of Biodiversity month activities, Dave Liddle led field trips to various Darwin rural rainforest patches in search of Darwin Palm. While we did not find any new populations, we saw some interesting rainforests and had the chance to brush-up on our plant identification skills.

*Dave demonstrating distinguishing features of Darwin Palm on a field trip to Whitewood Road rainforest patch.*

*Darwin Palm is a thin, clumping palm, 5 to 10m high, with sprouting feather-like fronds with fine leaflets.*

In October, Parks and Wildlife staff and Australian Conservation Trust Volunteers erected a fence at Banker's Jungle in Koolpinya Station with materials purchased through a $10,000 EnvironmeNT Grant awarded to TENPS. The purpose is to restrict access to part of the jungle by cattle, buffalo and feral pigs in an attempt to save the endangered Darwin Palm (*Ptychosperma bleeseri*, now named *Ptychosperma macarthurii* by the Darwin Herbarium).

*We did not find any Darwin Palm in this rainforest patch off Gunn Point Road; it has been ravaged by fire so there were few under-canopy species to be seen.*

So far, four field trips by TENPS members have been made to assess the density and health of the Darwin Palm population within the fenced area. There is damage by feral animals and we only found 10 individual *Ptychosperma*. We will continue to monitor their progress now that the fence is complete. Trips will also need to be made to check the condition of the fence after the wet season. We have an opportunity to learn more about the palm and the effects of feral animal damage to other species and rainforest communities in general.

*Feral animals have left much of the ground bare at Banker's Jungle. Hopefully our fence will give more plants a chance to regenerate.*

**10 years ago October 2015: A Field Trip in the City by Sylvia, Lon and Ingrid**

September's field trip – A Walking Tour of Darwin's Significant Trees – was attended by just the three of us, and we really enjoyed locating the trees, and also each other's company.

We followed the map (above), starting with the Tree of Knowledge (Ficus virens) in the Civic Centre complex where an orange footed scrub fowl was busy scratching in the mulch.

We wandered up to the four remaining Milkwood (*Alstonia actinophylla*) trees outside Brown's Mart then on to the wonderful shady area adjacent to the Chan Building to enjoy the Beauty Leaf (*Calophyllum inophyllum*) and Raintree (*Samanea saman*). Many of these trees, as well as the Tree of Knowledge, are growing in built-up mounds, often with stone seating around the perimeter. Not sure why this is but the effect is very attractive, with the trees looking quite healthy.

Although not on the map, we visited this Allosyncarpia ternata (below) planted by Council in The Mall on an experimental basis. These trees, indigenous to the NT, are tall and healthy-looking and brought to mind the delightful talk given by Ian Morris in November last year on his beloved "Manbinik".

The Raintrees in Raintree Park need no explanation; the shade and coolness they provide is invaluable in the midst of the city concrete.

Sylvia led us on to Lot 6824, No. 2 Foelsch Street to Tree No 47 (below), a Milkwood described as "most likely the oldest and largest specimen of its type that still exists in the Darwin region". What a sorry sight greeted us!

The tree itself does not look at all vigorous and it has a Banyan fig growing in its fork. But much worse is the state in which it is growing – the block of land is poorly fenced and contains a huge amount of rubbish including a dumped mattress.


We all felt that a "please explain" letter to Council is needed. Lon offered to follow up by finding out who owns the land, and Sylvia took some photos of the plaque on the tree to include with any letter. We'll let you know how we get on.

Sadly trees in Darwin receive little legislative protection as shown in this excerpt taken from the DARWIN CBD MASTER PLAN

TREES IN THE CBD - A KEY ELEMENT OF OUR URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE

"A Register of Significant Trees established by Greening Australia 20 years ago established a data base of trees throughout the municipality.
Over the years, many of these trees have been lost or are at risk. No new trees have been added for decades. The current list comprises 100 trees located within both private and public land.
Of these, only six are protected under Heritage Legislation:

- Boab, (Cavenagh Street Car Park)
- The Tree of Knowledge (City of Darwin Council Offices)
- Milkwoods (Foelsche Street and Smith Street outside Brown's Mart)
- Banyan Tree (State Square)

Other well-known trees included on the Register but with no legislative protection include:

- Tamarind and Banyan in Tamarind Park
- Rain Trees in Rain Tree Park
- Milkwoods (Bicentennial Park and Civic Park)
- Beauty Leafs and Rain Trees (park in front of Chan Building)
- Banyans (Smith $ Searcy Streets, Law Courts)"

The GPO carpark was next: the trunk of the Boab (*Adansonia gregorii*) there is huge, the tree itself had only a few leaves and is believed to have been planted in the late 1800's. It was heartening to notice the recent work by the Council in resuming carpark spaces around the tree in order to reduce soil compaction. We walked on to a huge Banyan (*Ficus virens*) in the Travelodge Mirambeena grounds.

For Ingrid, the best was last, Tree No 87 the Tamarind. It's a beautiful tree and still had a few pods on it but she could not be persuaded to taste its sticky fruit.

We called in at the Duke Street Rainforest on our way home. We were impressed by the four huge *Syzygium armstrongii*, White Bush Apple trees, reaching 26 metres in height and 4.23 metres in circumference. The National Trust of Australia Register of Significant Trees lists the Duke Street Rainforest in categories 1,2,3,6,7,10 &11. This includes trees which are of outstanding aesthetic quality, particularly old or venerable, remnant native vegetation, and a group of trees making an important contribution as a habitat.

*Ingrid inspects Tree 87… a huge Tamarind.*

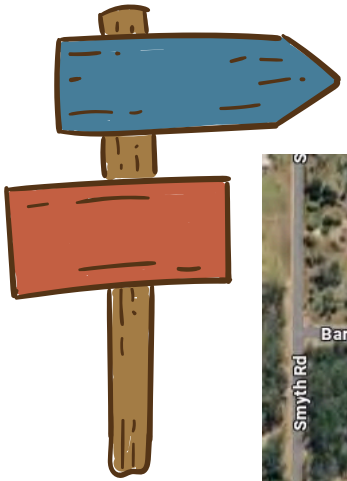
The area was very dry, had recently been burnt and some areas were still smouldering. Another victim of the spate of uncontrolled bush fires around Darwin. The fire had obviously been quite hot as the canopy showed evidence of being scorched. Neglect and rubbish seemed to dominate the pathways.. It will be interesting to see the rainforest again after the first rains.

In conclusion, it was a very pleasant morning and we were all glad that we had made the effort.

*Article & photos supplied by Sylvia, Lon & Ingrid.*

## OCTOBER MEETING

On October 16th Richard Boyne will talk about his trip to Western Australia in August. He went to Geraldton for a week to see the region's wildflowers, national parks and herbarium.



## OCTOBER FIELD TRIP


This month's field trip will be held on October 25th at Willie Burgess' place, 60 Barker Rd Howard Springs. Willie has a wide variety of interesting native plants. Meet there at 8:30 a.m. Bring a hat, water bottle and sunscreen.

# TENPS AGM

The Annual General Meeting of The Top End Native Plant Society Incorporated will be held at 7.00 pm on Thursday 20th November 2025 at Marrara Christian College, on the corner of Amy Johnson Avenue and McMillans Road.

We ask all members to make a special effort to attend the AGM. This is very important for the continued running of the society. Reports will be tabled and all committee positions will be declared vacant before a new committee is elected. Please consider if you can contribute to TENPS by nominating yourself or getting someone to nominate you for a position on the committee. A reminder that we need a new president, as Russell will not be continuing in the role. Nominations can be made to the committee before or during the meeting.

The AGM agenda is as follows:

1. Meeting open and Welcome
2. Apologies
3. Minutes of Previous AGM

3.1 Business arising from minutes of previous AGM

4. Committee Report
5. Treasurer and Auditor's Report

6. Election of Management Committee
6.1 President
6.2 Vice President
6.3 Secretary
6.4 Treasurer
6.5 Publicity Officer
6.6 Publications Officer
6.7 Librarian
6.8 Two committee members

7. Other Business
7.1 Appointment of Public Officer
7.2 Membership Subscription Fee
7.3 CDU Scholarship

Ian Morris will follow as our guest speaker for November with a presentation on the history of Kakadu National Park. Ian's talks are always interesting and informative so don't miss it!

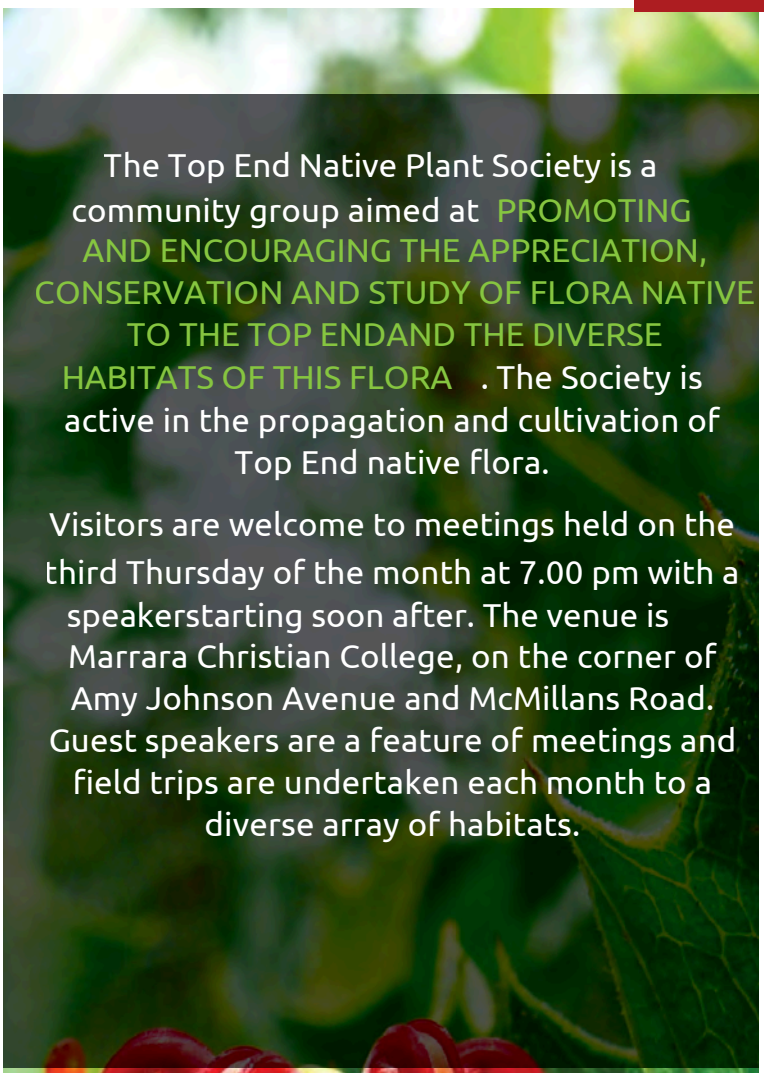
Top End Native Plant Society

# BECOME A MEMBER!

Member discounts for plant sales.

## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

(Due annually on 1st July each year)



The Top End Native Plant Society is a community group aimed at PROMOTING AND ENCOURAGING THE APPRECIATION, CONSERVATION AND STUDY OF FLORA NATIVE TO THE TOP ENDAND THE DIVERSE HABITATS OF THIS FLORA . The Society is active in the propagation and cultivation of Top End native flora.

Visitors are welcome to meetings held on the third Thursday of the month at 7.00 pm with a speakerstarting soon after. The venue is Marrara Christian College, on the corner of Amy Johnson Avenue and McMillans Road. Guest speakers are a feature of meetings and field trips are undertaken each month to a diverse array of habitats.

New Membership ☐ Renewal ☐

Membership fees are:

| | |
|---|---|
| Individual Waged: | $35.00 |
| Family Waged: | $45.00 |
| Individual Unwaged: | $15.00 |
| Family Unwaged: | $20.00 |

Payment: $_____

Family name:_____

Name/s: _____

Email address:_____

Postal address:_____

### To pay online:

Bank Bendigo Bank

:Account Name: Top End Native Plant Society

BSB: 633 000

Account: 207 974 247

Note: Please include your name in the transfer reference and email the information in this form to topendnativeplantsociety@hotmail.com
Or pay in person at meetings or events where cash or card will be accepted.

Follow 'Top End Native Plant Society' on Facebook for information on current activities and events.

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