

A WET SEASON TOP END FLOWER



*Xanthostemon* with *Polyrhachis* Ant

## Monthly Meetings

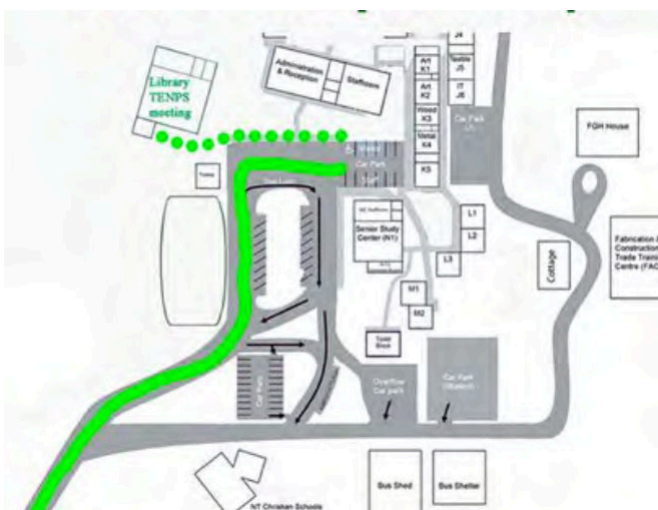
Top End Native Plant Society (TENPS) general meetings are held at 7:00 pm on the third Thursday of the month at Marrara Christian College library on the corner of Amy Johnson Ave and McMillans Rd.

Bring your plants to swap, sell or have identified over a cuppa. Note this item, unlike previous meetings will be after the monthly talk. Please be there at 7 pm sharp so not to miss the presentation.

This month's talk will be by Samuel Amini, our scholarship recipient and will be a follow up on his honours on Sawfish Conservation.



NEXT Meeting: February 19th



TENPS (Top End Native Plant Society)  
Committee Members

President: Plaxy Purich  
(0435027116)

Vice President: Sean Stieber

Secretary: Johanna Stieber

Treasurer: Graham Zemunik

Publications: Roland Muench

General Committee Member: Claire Hewitt

Webmaster: Amanda Lockwood

Public Officer: Dave Liddle

Publicity: Vacant please inquire

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[www.topendnativeplants.org.au](http://www.topendnativeplants.org.au)



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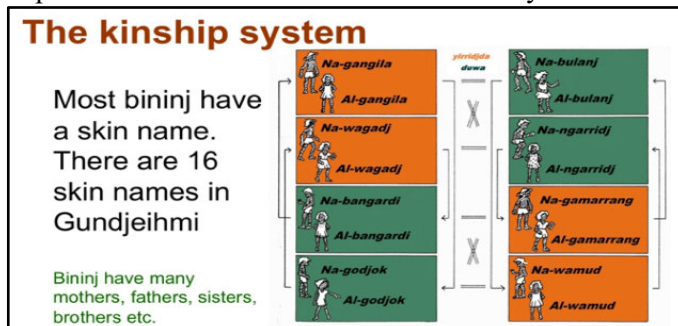
**Kakadu National Park – an historic perspective of a living landscape - presented by Ian Morris**

Ian Morris is no stranger as a speaker to the Top End Native Plant Society in he has gifted us more talks than any other member, in fact 44 for the count. Well published on the topic of natural history we expected another very insightful lecture and we were not disappointed on that.

The wording of the title ‘Kakadu ..... living landscape’ gave us an important clue in that as many people tend to think of landscape as something static, landscape in fact is ever changing not just from season to season and from impact of catastrophic events such as fires and cyclones, but also from the grinding change over the space of thousands of years in adaption to the flux of ice ages and resulting rise and fall of oceans as well as geological folding during tectonic plate movements. Many Aboriginals seem to be attuned to even the most minute changes in landscape and recognise ‘country’ as living organism of which they themselves are an integral part within the body. Kakadu could be interpreted as such a body.

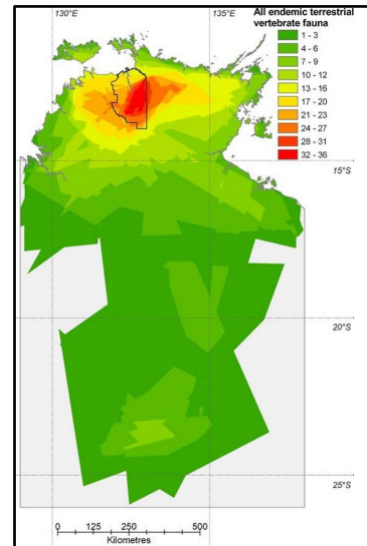
Ian started his presentation by saying his talk is to be understood as a personal reflection of the first few years of the inception of Kakadu National Park and pointed out that a lot has changed since then. Four major uranium mineral resource deposits placed in what is now park, played a key role in the early days of the gestation of the park. While eventually declared on the 4<sup>th</sup> April 1979, in 1980 the Aboriginal custodians signed an agreement under the promise and condition that the active Ranger uranium mine would be fully restored on cessation of the mine. The declaration of the park as a world heritage area came a few years later in different stages (1981, 1987 and 1992).

Against this historic background, Ian working as a school and science teacher in East Arnhem-land, found himself in a unique position to intimately interact and exchange cultural knowledge between two different worlds, the ‘Balanda’ and ‘Aboriginal’, in fact starting to document some of the ‘aboriginal science’ transmitted from the people who he was tasked to teach. One of his first projects was to document the intricacies of the Aboriginal kinship system which according to a leading expert in the field is one of the worlds best systems



The kinship system - Photo Ian Morris designed to preserve genetic integrity and avoid inbreeding in small groups. The rules of who can marry

whom are covered by one of 16 skin names as shown in photo ‘Kinship system’. For example the skin of one of the best known Kakadu elders Big Bill Neidjie is Naggamarang of the Gagudju language group. Incidentally the name Kakadu derives from Gagudju. Many of the elders of the time were traditional people and deeply involved in daily live through maintaining the landscape, as they considered themselves as part of this landscape.



Biodiversity of Kakadu - Graphic Ian Morris

This living landscape of Kadadu and connected Arnhemland habitats also happens to be one of the biodiversity hot spots of the Northern Territory containing many endemic flora and fauna species, indeed this region is home to 2000 plant species, one third of all Australian bird species and one fifth of all Australian mammals. This is quite incredible considering this diversity

occurs against the harsh climate extremes of prolonged wet and dry spells as is described in the Aboriginal Seasonal Calendar for Kakadu the ‘Bininj’. The attached photo illustrates some of the differences between our



Calendar Stone - Photo Ian Morris

twelve month calendar and the Aboriginal seasonal calendar, beautiful presented on a large 2 tonne slab of sandstone by one of the old traditional man and artist Bluey Ilkgirr, the stone which has been placed at the parks headquarters at Bawali.

Of the Aboriginal seasons, Banggerdeng or ‘Harvest season’ between March and May is particularly important as it is then when many of the traditional foodstuffs become available with little impact of harvest on the ecology of Kakadu. The harvesting itself is generally shared between man and women, the latter more specialising on plants while the man generally take care of hunting, both of which are strictly prescribed for the right time and place for each species.

While we may think of the fairly common tree species of Paperbark (*Melaleuca leucadendra*), Woolleybutt (*Eucalytus miniata*) and Stringybark (*Eucalyptus tetradonta*) as fairly ordinary trees, for the traditional Aboriginal they are indeed an extremely significant plant species. Ian said that just from the paperbark over 100 products or uses can be obtained, which is explaining the deep special respect the Aboriginals hold for certain plants. Woolleybutt are equally amazing as they benefit not just Aboriginals but a whole a range of creatures in the Kakadu web of life, including birds, insects and mammals. Likewise Stringybark, one of the most common tree species in the TopEnd is treasured as a source of excellent 'bush honey' with its many health benefits. Stringybark is also used as a housing material and other purposes and when felled responds quickly with new growth from below.

Gurrung between September and November just before the wet is a strenuous time for wildlife, particularly waterfowl such as the Magpie Geese which are not hunted during Gurrung for this reason. Uncontrolled hot fires during this season can be devastating to habitats making it even more important to practice the cool early dry season low intensity fires practiced by traditional management.

Ian then covered the importance of the stone country particularly the escarpment which holds values not just in terms of food sources but also for cultural activities such as art sites and shelter during the wet for certain clans. Indeed the escarpment contains some of the oldest Aboriginal occupation site in Australia. The escarpment habitat also provides a home for many unique flora and fauna species. These include *Allosyncarpia ternata*, a beautiful tree belonging to the Myrtaceae family and ancestor to the related *Eucalyptus* tree as well as the fabulous and colorful Leichardt's Grasshopper.

Away from the escarpment towards the coastline, the big rivers overflow in the wet and form up unique huge wetlands, home to saltwater crocodiles and amazing birdlife, indeed about one third of Australia's bird species many which use the floodplains for breeding. There are also various kinds of mammals with each species adapted to specific habitats, such as the Common Wallaroo which can be found higher up on spinifex country and have adaptations, teeth that constantly grow, to handle abrasion caused by silica within these tough to chew grasses. An important relatively recent mammal arrival are fruit bats in their role as dispersal agent for seeds between feeding and roosting areas and so helping



Thylacine - Wollaston Gallery - Photo Ian Morris

to maintain genetic integrity plants species in isolated patches of monsoon forest.

Another unusual animal but now extinct is the

Thylacine (Tassie Tiger) with evidence of its presence in the region from dating and analysing traditional art in rock shelters in both Arnhem and the Kimberly. It is thought they disappeared at around the same time as the Dingo arrived, a conflict of the Dingo, systematically hunting in groups ultimately leading to the decline of the more independent individual Tassie Tiger. Animals species were not the only ones to come and go in Kakadu by forced moving with the changing landscape, the people also came from different groups as evident by multiple layers of painting over the top of the other older layers all telling and re-interpreting the stories, the re-painting often connected by enacting the story inherent in ceremonial rites at the time. The art often allows us to



Long-necked turtle - Xray - Photos by Ian Morris

pick finer detail of observation and intent by the artist and Ian pointed out one example of the x-ray style of rockart depicting *Almangiyi* or Longneck Turtle (*Chelodina rugosa*). This painting highlights the fat deposits on front and back limbs of the turtle, the development of those deposits coinciding with the correct time of hunting as the animal is at its most vital and numerous just before it burrows for several months and disappears in the mud and to resurface at the onset of the wet. One painting in the Alalak Bene Gallery shows the beautiful and rare *Cycas arenicola* which is endemic to the remote upper East Alligator in Kakadu and Liverpool Rivers accessible only by 4WD or helicopter with all populations of this species occurring on Aboriginal Land. Other paintings depict species of animals occurring in both, the Northern Australian coastline and in Papua New Guinea, such as the Warradjan, the Pig-nosed Turtle (*Caretta chelys insculpta*) which tells the story of ancient fresh water Lake Carpentaria now inundated and called Gulf of Carpentaria.

Termites are often held in low regard by most Australians but are vitally important in the Aboriginal view of the

world in they know that Termites recycle the massive grass loads of the Savannah and gifting the minerals and nutrients in the grass and the protein contained in themselves back to the ecology of other organisms. Dry season hot fires can very detrimental to this ecological cycle as they destroy the food source of termites among other effects. The Aboriginal view of the world, that everything is connected and has worthwhile purpose, also applies to many other animals and to reptiles in particular such as lizards (Yellow-spotted Monitor) and snakes (Arafuran File Snakes), the two which also provide nutrition.

A young generation of Aboriginals as rangers and managers are now just starting to augment their traditional knowledge by using scientific methods such as tracking devices on animals. This learning can't come soon enough, as new biological threats are arising and have emerged such as the Cane Toad, Gamba Grass and many other introduced species all competing with the native flora and fauna for a place in Kakadu. Tourism also has significant negative impacts such as the substantial road kill on the Arnhem Highway. Yet tourism done the right way can help to raise ecological awareness and provide employment to remote Aboriginals in form of management of the park and correct interpretation of traditional knowledge.

Ian closed the talk with a tribute to his respected friend and late great old man of Kakadu, Big Bill Neidjie who in his words said on his death:

*“Rock stays, earth stays. I die and put my bones in the cave or earth. Soon my bones become earth.....all the same. This ground never move. I'll be buried here. I'll be with my brother, my mother. If I loose this, where I'll be buried? I'm hanging on to this ground. I'll be earth again. I belong to this earth. And earth should stay with us. Tree the same as me. When he get old he'll die. He'll be dead and burn. He'll leave his ashes behind. Tree become earth. I know I come back to my country. When I die I come to (become) earth. I love this country and this earth.”*



Nawurkibil Labrynth – Bill's final resting place - Photo Ian Morris

Report by Roland Muench

The Top End Native Plant Society held its Annual General Meeting on the 20<sup>th</sup> November 2025. There were about twenty club members in attendance and Club President Russell Dempster welcomed all as he opened the AGM at 7:11 pm. Russell expressed his heartfelt appreciation to the outgoing committee which supported him in steering the club through an enjoyable year, which included three successful plant sales events, the monthly talk and walk schedule as well as continuation of a CDU scholarship. There are also several members investing their time and effort to support and contribute behind the scenes and he made special mention of historian Lon Wallis who made an effort to compile and complete an archived digital collection of the clubs newsletter over its entire history.



The minutes of the previous years AGM, the President/Committee report and the Treasurers and Audit report were all accepted before all positions were declared vacant and Marj King as the Returning Officer took over to proceed with the calling nominations and subsequent election of the new Management Committee.

The outgoing committee:

|                      |                  |
|----------------------|------------------|
| President            | Russell Dempster |
| Vice-President       | Sean Stieber     |
| Secretary            | Johanna Stieber  |
| Treasurer            | Graham Zemunik   |
| Publicity Officer    | vacant           |
| Publications Officer | Richard Boyne    |
| Librarian            | Richard Boyne    |
| Committee member     | Claire Hewitt    |
| Committee member     | Ian Morris       |

Nominations and election for the new committee members went smoothly and the new committee will undoubtedly steer the club through another prospective year.

The new committee:

|                      |                              |
|----------------------|------------------------------|
| President            | Plaxy Purich                 |
| Vice President       | Sean Stieber (re-elected)    |
| Secretary            | Johanna Stieber (re-elected) |
| Treasurer            | Graham Zemunik (re-elected)  |
| Publicity Officer    | Amanda Lockwood              |
| Publications Officer | Roland Muench                |
| Librarian            | Richard Boyne (re-elected)   |
| Committee member     | Claire Hewitt (re-elected)   |
| Committee member     | Sarah Hurst                  |

Other business included the appointment of David Liddle as the Public Officer, the request to the Committee for consideration of continuation and perhaps increase of the value of the CDU scholarship and also the request that club membership fee structure remains unchanged with all three motions carried by the AGM.

From our librarian Richard Boyne in his own words:

"I have sad news about the passing of Patricia Rassmussen in December 2025 to cancer. She was a nurse and a horticulturalist from NSW and her family introduced many popular ornamental plants to the Northern Territory. You can thank her for the sweet-tasting Queen Pineapple, which is widely grown and eaten here. She was also very passionate about Australian native plants and the middle of last year she left me three volumes of the Flora of New South Wales, which I'll donate to the TENPS library. I attended a memorial service in late January and learned more about her life and heard some great speeches from people who knew her. I also saw the garden that she tended when she lived at the Pearl Retirement Village, which is a beautiful mix of native and exotic plants. The NT Herbarium has two specimens collected by her in Howard Springs: an *Aristolochia holtzei* and a *Centrosema pascuorum*".



A *Dendrobium sp* with memorabilia at Patria's service - Photo Richard Boyne

Richard also contributed some photos from his recent visit to Kakadu National Park and pointing out three colour variants of a *Curcuma australasica* that he saw at Burrenkuy, Kakadu a few of weeks ago (photos opposite).

Please send any interesting plant observations to our email address ([topendnativeplantsociety@hotmail.com](mailto:topendnativeplantsociety@hotmail.com)) for possible inclusion into the next newsletter.

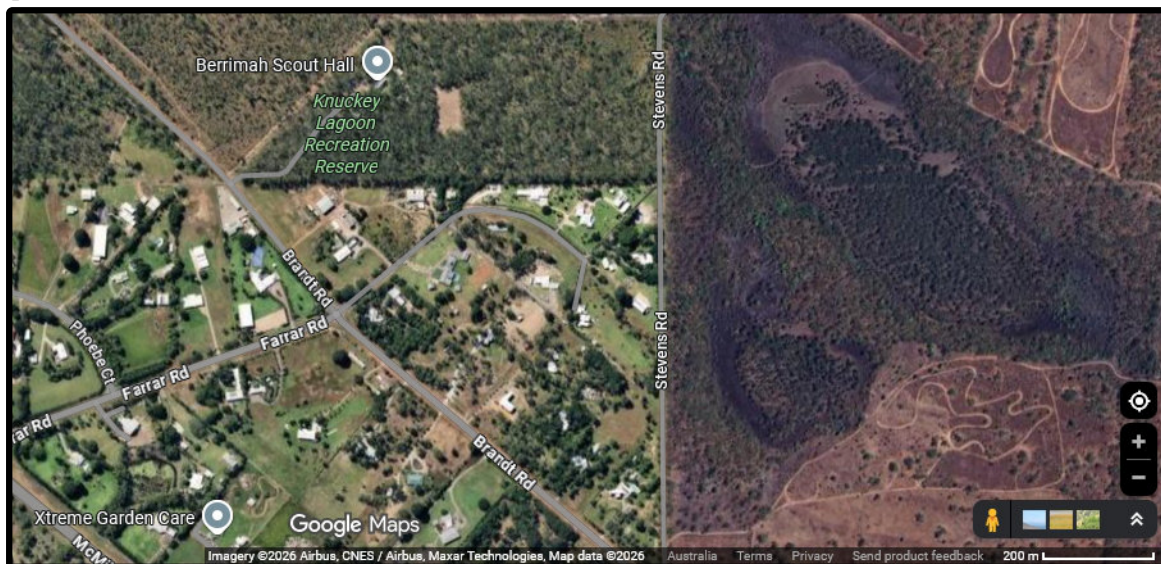


Right side: Variations of *Curcuma australasica* - Photos Richard Boyne



## February 2026 Field Trip

The next field excursion will be to The Knuckey Lagoon Recreation Reserve (see map below), off Brandt Road. We meet at the parking area near the Berrimah Scout Hall on the 21st of February at 8:30 am sharp. Note this is a new location with several established short walks on offer. Allow for an hour. Hat, sunscreen and mosquito repellent is advised. This is a great opportunity to bring your family, because there are established walking paths, toilet facilities, shade and morning tea will be provided afterwards.



## March 2026 Plant Sale

**25% OFF selected Native Plants!**

# TOP END NATIVE PLANT SALE

**WHERE:** HUMPTY DOO VILLAGE GREEN, 85 CHALLONER CCT  
**WHEN:** SAT, MARCH 28TH. 8.30-1PM

**GET YOUR PLANTS IN THE GROUND DURING THE WET!**

Create an edible garden, restore habitat and support native wildlife with bird and butterfly attracting feature plants, cyclone and termite resistant shade trees and fragrant flowering native shrubs.

**2000 NATIVE PLANTS ACROSS 120+ SPECIES!**

- Native Peanut & Nutmeg
- Eucalypts & Corymbia
- Grevillea & Acacias
- Bush Apples & Plums
- Rain & Flame Trees
- Boabs & Beauty Leaf

And much more! In all sizes up to 28ltr to suit your budget. Many species heavily discounted!

**NOW AT HUMPTY DOO!**

- Plant Society Fundraiser
- Freshly Brewed Coffee
- Ample Parking

**FAMILY FUN**

Shady playground, picnic area & skate park

**NATIVE FLORA**

Native Plant Gardening Advice and ID

Proudly supported by Litchfield Council and Darwin Community Arts



**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 END AND 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 7.00pm with a speaker starting 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

Name/s: \_\_\_\_\_

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](mailto: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.

[topendnativeplantsociety@hotmail.com](mailto:topendnativeplantsociety@hotmail.com)

[www.topendnativeplants.org.au](http://www.topendnativeplants.org.au)

Contact us by

