

A EARLY DRY SEASON TOP END FLOWER



Eucalyptus bigalerita with a with feathered friend

Monthly Meetings

Top End Native Plant Society (TENPS) general meetings are held at 7 pm on the third Thursday of the month.

From McMillans Road turn into Farrar Road and follow it for approximately 700 m until you reach the intersection with Brandt Road. Turn left onto Brandt Road. After 300 m, turn right onto the sealed road into the **Knuckey Lagoon Recreation Reserve**. Follow the road for approximately 300 m until you reach the parking area and see the hall. Park here. The meeting will be on the first floor of the hall.

There will be balloons / signs leading to the Knuckey Lagoon Recreational Reserve. If you get lost, call Sean Stieber (0401 117 439) or Plaxy Purich (0435 027 116).

The presentation on 18th June will be by Anna Richards CSIRO on "**Fire Management Research**". Bring a favourite (or as many favourites as you like) plant name along to share and learn with each other.

Follow directions above and consult location the location map on page 7

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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May 2026 fieldtrip: Fig walk

By Roland Muench

This walk reminded me how important it is to retain heritage trees, for what else is there of the habitats of distant past. The retention and care of such trees should be seen as a mark of respect to prior landscape. This was a short walk across the Darwin Government Precinct, which suited all participants. The attached map locates the main attractions on the yellow dotted line and the numbers are in order where we stopped and observed more closely.

1. We looked at *Stenochlaena palustris* (Climbing Fern) of the Family Blechnaceae grown in semi-shaded irrigated garden beds. It is a dimorphic species (two-formed). The sterile fronds are recognisable by their very narrow leaflets and brown sori at the margins. The sterile fronds are widely eaten raw or cooked in Asia. Local natural populations are commonly observed in monsoon forest areas such as Holmes Jungle. This species can easily be propagated from rhizomes.



Stenochlaena palustris - Photo Roland Muench

2. On the next stop we saw *Asteromyrtus symphyocarpa* previously *Melaleuca symphoricarpa* of the Family Myrtaceae, an attractive small multi-stemmed tree and displayed best in group plantings. It features yellow-orange flowers and prolific seed development in form of woody capsules. They are commonly found along the margins of lagoons such as McMinns Lagoon or Knuckey Lagoon.

3. We walked through an area which featured huge old trees, some on the significant NT tree register including *Calophyllum inophyllum* (Beauty Leaf), *Samanea saman* (Raintree, exotic), *Khaya senegalensis* (African Mahogany, exotic) and *Alstonia actinophylla* (Milkwood) and together providing deep shade. The temperature under such trees is up to 10 degrees lower compared to out in the open sun. They can be successfully under-planted with shade tolerant ground cover plants such as tropical ferns.

4. In the distance we could hear the calls of Figbirds in a very large Fig behind the historic town hall ruins, the birds feeding on the fleshy receptacles.

5. We kept moving through an area with a mix of impressive large canopy trees including Darwin Banyans (*Ficus virens* var *virens*).

6. Moving on to the City Council Offices we had a closer look at the 'Tree of Knowledge' (known by the Larakia people as Galamarrma) a huge and ancient heritage listed Banyan tree (*Ficus virens* var *virens*). The exact age is unknown but it is documented to have been here before development of urban Darwin.



'Galamarrma' - Photo Roland Muench

7. "Galamarrma" is only one of several such trees in the Government precinct and we moved on to an equally impressive specimen not far away and being successfully retained in a courtyard of the Common Law Courts. The Darwin Banyans are cherished as prolific producers of fruit attractive to a number of birds and mammals and this specimen was loaded with it.

8. We crossed a road on the way to the Chinese Temple and observed a lithophytic manifestation of the Darwin Banyan growing on porcellanite rock (sometimes called coffee rock), a bed rock that underlies much of Darwin CBD and forming striking coastal cliffs. Darwin Banyans are commonly found hugging such local coastal cliffs. Just around the corner near the shaded Southern entry to the Chinese Temple, several fern species grow in fissures of porcellanite rock including *Pteris vittata* (Chinese brake), *Lygodium* sp, *Microsorium grossum* (a popular hardy fern) and *Selaginella* sp taking advantage of the shady southern aspect and perhaps of increased stormwater run-off and quite unusual to be here in CBD.



Pteris vittata with fertile fronds - Photo Roland Muench

9. After entering the Chinese Temple grounds we observed a large planted *Ficus religiosa*, which is highly significant to Buddhists. Interestingly the tree has no

visible aerial roots or fruit and was host to mistletoe plants.



Ficus religiosa - Photo Roland Muench

10. In the open area of the temple there is an excellent collection of religious sculptures, most notably a very intricate 2m rock carving of the Chinese zodiac.

11. We made our way back across to the historic Old Administrator Office stone building which has a small landscaped backyard with interesting flowering plants and a huge birdnest fern.

12. Keeping the best to last we appreciated another impressive huge Darwin Banyan tree, a must to see for visitors and locals of Darwin. In this instance a board walk had been built around the tree which allowed the

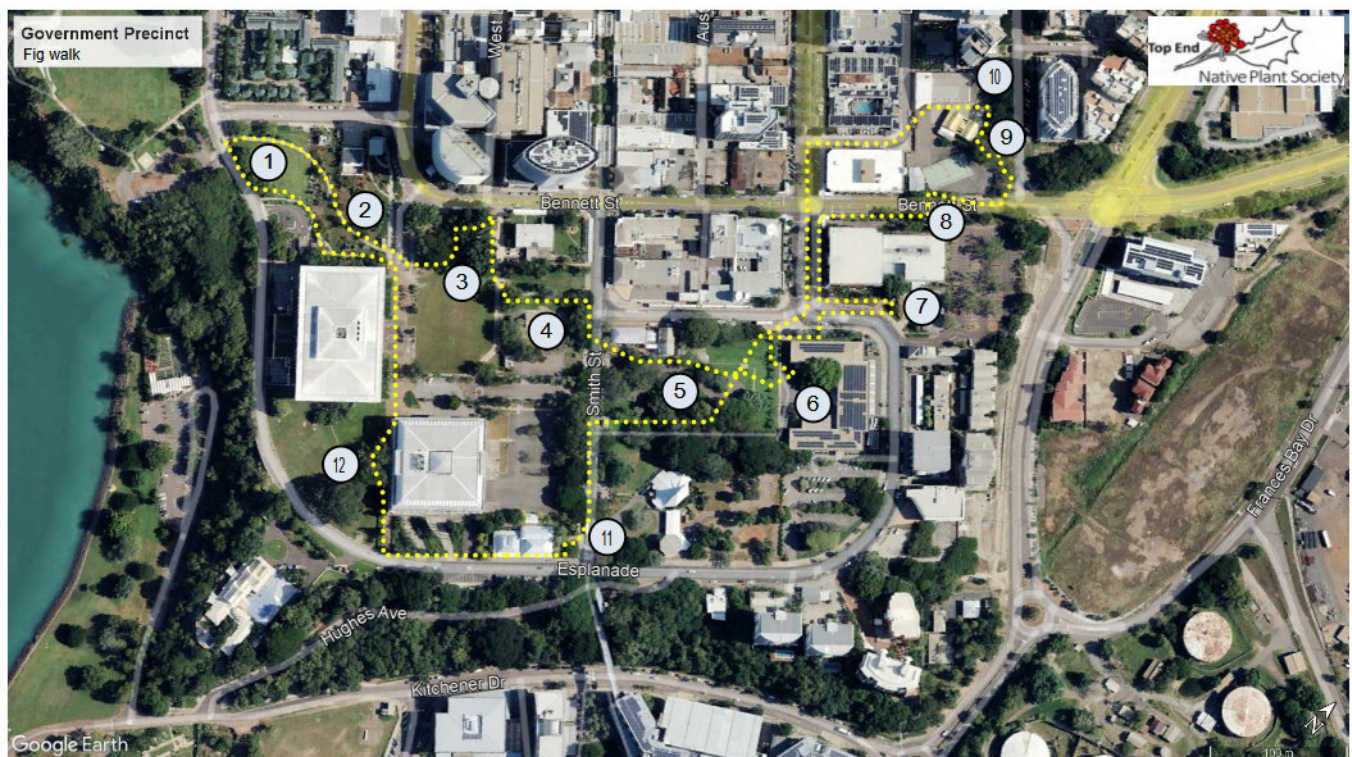
aerial roots to develop freely and the tree to spread. This specimen is thought to be equally as old as the 'Tree of Knowledge' and is located in sight of both the NT Supreme Court and the NT Parliament.



Supreme Court Banyan Tree Photo Roland Muench



TENPS members in front of *Ficus religiosa* Photo Plaxy Purich



- | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| ① <i>Stenochlaena palustris</i>
Climbing Fern - In garden beds | ④ Historic Town Hall Ruins with
<i>Ficus benjamina</i> and other figs | ⑦ Darwin Banyan at the
Common Law Courts | ⑩ Religious figurines display
In the temple grounds |
| ② <i>Asteromyrtus symphyocarpa</i>
Flowering tree | ⑤ A mixture of huge canopy trees
including Darwin Banyans | ⑧ Darwin Banyan – Lithophytic
Growing on rock | ⑪ Gardens of the Historic
Administrator Offices |
| ③ A mix of huge shade trees both
local and introduced | ⑥ "Galamarma"
Tree of Knowledge | ⑨ <i>Ficus religiosa</i> – growing inside
the Chinese Temple | ⑫ Splendid Darwin Banyan -
near the Supreme Court |

Plant of the Month – *Crotalaria* L.

By Claire Hewitt

Crotalaria spp. are in the pea family – Fabaceae. They are known as rattlepods due to the sound the loose seeds make in the inflated pods. The name derives from the Greek word *krotalon* which means rattle. As well the inflated pods, *Crotalaria* spp. are often covered with simple hairs and the inflorescence is a terminal raceme, in other words a stalk of flowers occurring at the top of the plant. Normally, the flowers are yellow but can be blue or mauve, for example in *Crotalaria verrucosa* (Figure 1). The leaves of *Crotalaria* spp. can be simple, 1-foliate (a compound leaf reduced to a single leaflet) or palmately compound with between 3 and 7 leaflets (Figure 2). All leaves have stipules which are small structures at the base of the leaf which often look like small leaves (Figure 3).



Figure 1. *Crotalaria verrucosa*
(I. D. Cowie, 2013)

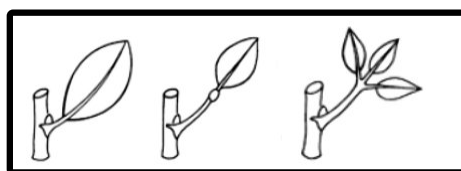


Figure 2. Some *Crotalaria* spp. leaf types. From left to right - simple leaf, one-foliate leaf and palmately trifoliate leaf (PlantNet, 2026)



Figure 3. Diagram of stipules
at base of leaves (ANBG, 2009)



Figure 4. *Crotalaria goreensis* (Sheldon Navie, 2016)

Native and introduced species of *Crotalaria* occur in the Top End and can sometimes be confused, particularly as some native species, such as *C. retusa*, also grow in disturbed areas. *Crotalaria goreensis* (Gambia pea) and *C. pallida* (streaked rattlepod) are commonly occurring introduced species which both have palmately trifoliate leaves. The seeds of *C. goreensis* are orange-red and the pods are shorter (up to 20 mm), rounder and tend to be situated at roughly right angles to the stem (Figure 4), whereas the seeds of *C. pallida* are pale yellow and the pods tend to be longer (up to 45 mm), more cylindrical and droop down from the stem (Figure 5).



Figure 5. *Crotalaria pallida*
(CSIRO, 2020)



Figure 6. *Crotalaria novae-hollandiae*
subsp. *novae-hollandiae* (Btcpg, 2014)



Figure 7. *Crotalaria retusa*
(Mokkie, 2014))

These introduced species can be distinguished from the commonly occurring native species *Crotalaria novae-hollandiae* subsp. *novae-hollandiae* (New Holland rattlepod) (Figure 6), *C. montana* var. *angustifolia*, *C. brevis* and *C. retusa* (wedge-leaved rattlepod) (Figure 7) as these native species have simple or 1-foliate leaves.

However, *Crotalaria medicaginea* var. *neglecta* is 3-foliate (Figure 8) but the leaflets tend to be linear and narrower (up to 6 mm wide) as opposed to the rounder and wider leaflets of *C. goreensis* and *C. pallida*.

This list is not exhaustive but other species which may be observed in the Top End are *Crotalaria alata* (stipules look like wings on the stem), *C. calycina* (pale yellow flower) and *C. crassipes* (grows on sandstone plateau country). Also, *Crotalaria quinquefolia* which is distinctive as it has 5 leaflets (Figure 9).



Figure 8. *Crotalaria medicaginea* var. *neglecta* (Fagg, M. 2013)



Figure 9. *Crotalaria quinquefolia* (J. M. Garg. 2024)

It is important to note that *C. retusa* and *C. novae-hollandiae* subsp. *novae-hollandiae* are known to cause ‘Walkabout’ disease in horses and cattle as they contain toxic substances called pyrrolizidine alkaloids which can damage the liver of the animal. Other *Crotalaria* spp. may also contain these toxic substances.

Native *Crotalaria* spp. provide important resources for Top End butterflies and moths.

Sources:

Australian National Botanic Gardens, Australian Native Plants Society, Australian Tropical Rainforest Plants, Flora NT, NT Naturalists, PlantNet, Plants of the World Online, Useful Tropical Plants and Weeds of Australia.

Jenni Risler on "Demystifying taxonomic nomenclature - the meaning behind plant names."

by Plaxy Purich

Top End Native Plants recently had the pleasure of attending a fascinating talk by Ms Jenni Risler on "Demystifying taxonomic nomenclature – the meaning behind plant names", which explored the principles behind the scientific naming of plants. The talk explored how botanical names are often derived from Greek and Latin words that describe distinctive characteristics of plants and reveal something about their history, appearance, or origins. Jenni explained that these names can be grouped into categories such as descriptive names based on physical features, names reflecting resemblance or mimicry, geographical names indicating where a plant is found, commemorative names honouring people, and names describing a plant's habitat or uses. By breaking down the meaning of scientific names into these categories, she transformed what can seem like a complex subject into an engaging and accessible exploration of language, history, and botany.

One particularly memorable example was *Cardiospermum halicacabum* (Balloon Vine). Jenni explained that *Cardiospermum* is derived from the Greek word "cardio" meaning "heart" and "spermum", meaning "seed," referring to the distinctive heart-shaped marking found on each seed, while *halicacabum* relates to the plant's inflated, balloon-like fruit capsules. This example perfectly illustrated how scientific names often provide clues about a plant's appearance and characteristics. The talk was both intellectually stimulating and highly practical, equipping the audience with tools to better understand and remember plant names. Judging by the enthusiastic response and lively discussion throughout the presentation, everyone was delighted by the insights it offered and left with a greater appreciation of the stories hidden within botanical nomenclature.

The meeting was also notable for being the first to be held at our new venue, the Knuckey Lagoon Recreational Reserve, which will serve as the location for future society meetings. Members were impressed by the excellent facilities, which include a comfortable undercover hall, a shaded BBQ area, walking trails, basketball courts, a flying fox, and a children's playground. Set within attractive natural surroundings adjacent to the Knuckey Lagoon wetlands, the reserve provides a welcoming

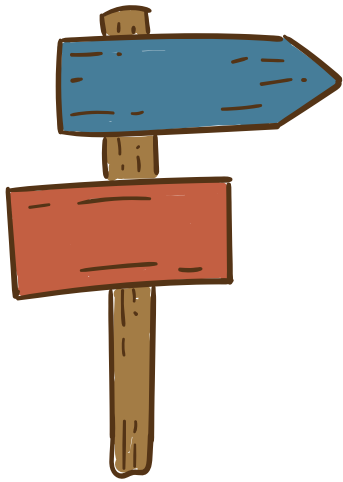
environment for meetings, social gatherings, workshops, and community activities. The combination of quality facilities and easy access to nature presents many exciting opportunities for the society's future events and engagement with the wider community.



Cardiospermum halicacabum
Fruit Photo by Ian Cowie



Cardiospermum halicacabum
Seed Photo by Generic



June 2026 Field Trip

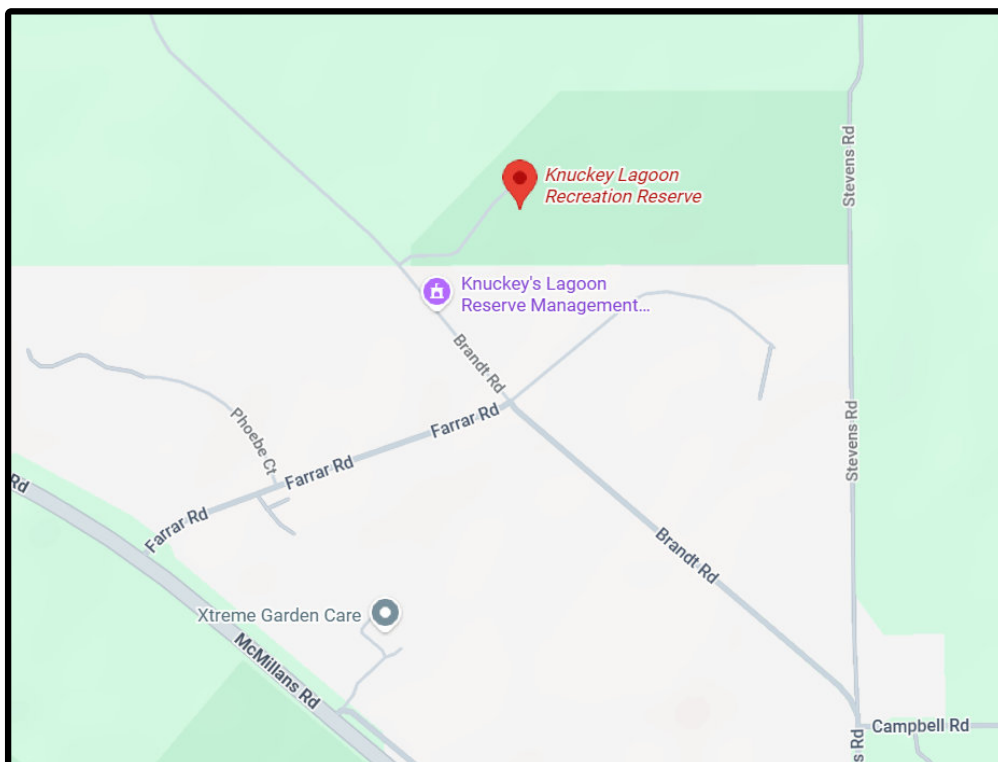
This month's field trip will be exploring the Woodland loop which is a section of the **Gurumbai Trail** close to Darwin International Airport. Gurumbai is the traditional Larrakia name for Rapid Creek and means 'elbow'. This section, although being a relative 700 m short loop covers both healthy unburnt natural open forest and fringing swampy areas and has a seemingly relative high biodiversity. You will most likely see a variety of birds and other wildlife.

We meet on **Saturday the 20th of June at 8:30 am at the end of Larkin Avenue** as shown on the 'You are here' location on the map below. From MacMillans Rd enter Henry Wrigley Drive and then take a left turn at the second roundabout into Sir Norman Brearley Drive and again turn left into Larkin Avenue.

The walk is on a compacted gravel path and is suited for all skill levels.



Map
Monthly Fieldtrip Venue
Woodland Loop



Map
Monthly Meeting Venue
Follow directions shown on page 1



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MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION
(Due annually on 1st July each year)

New Membership ☐

Renewal ☐

Membership fees are:

Individual Waged: \$35.00

Family Waged: \$45.00

Individual Unwaged: \$15.00

Family Unwaged: \$20.00

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.

Guest speakers are a feature of meetings and field trips are undertaken each month to a diverse array of habitats.

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

Or pay in person at meetings or events where cash or card will be accepted.

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