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~ AUGUST 2005 NEWSLETTER ~

MEETINGS AND FIELD TRIPS

We meet on the third Thursday of the month at 7:30 pm. General meetings conclude by 8:15 pm and are followed by a guest speaker beginning at 8:30 pm. There is time for a cuppa between the meeting and the guest speaker. The venue for the meeting is Marrara Christian School, on the corner of Amy Johnson and McMillan Drives. All welcome. Bring plants to swap, sell or have identified.

~ SUBSCRIPTION REMINDER ~

MEMBERSHIP FEES ARE DUE 1 JULY 2005

See the back page of this newsletter for details

~ NEXT MEETING THURSDAY 18th August 2005~

~ GUEST SPEAKER ~

“The vegetation of Namibia, a comparison with the NT”

Marj King

Earlier this year Marj visited Namibia and was struck by both the similarities and differences between the NT and the land famed for its primitive Welwitschia plants. Flora that Marj encountered included the Acacia's, a topical group given the recent Botanical Congress decision to uphold the name Acacia for the phyllodinous Australian members of this large plant group. So if you are not particularly familiar with the ferny leaved and thorny African members of the group, this will be your chance to find out a bit more.

~ AUGUST FIELD TRIP ~

Meet up with Casuarina Coastal Reserve Landcare Group to inspect the site of the proposed housing development near the hospital. An afternoon trip, meeting the northern car park at RDH. Meeting Sunday 21 August at 4pm

~ OTHER UPCOMING EVENTS ~

September General Meeting

A member's night with an opportunity to discuss the proposed changes to the constitution along with a short talk by Denise Goodfellow on Baby Dreaming in Arnhem Land.

September Field Trip

Sunday 11th and Sunday 18th

September 7th is National Threatened Species Day, the anniversary of the death of the last Thylacine in Hobart zoo in 1936. September is Biodiversity Month and activities will be conducted around Australia to focus attention on threatened species and communities. TENPS will be undertaking two surveys of Darwin Palm Habitat. At least one day will focus on a known population of Ptychosperma while the other will focus on searching rainforest habitat in an attempt to find additional populations. To assist with logistics it will be very helpful to know numbers, so please contact Dave Liddle on 8945 6809 if you are interested in attending.

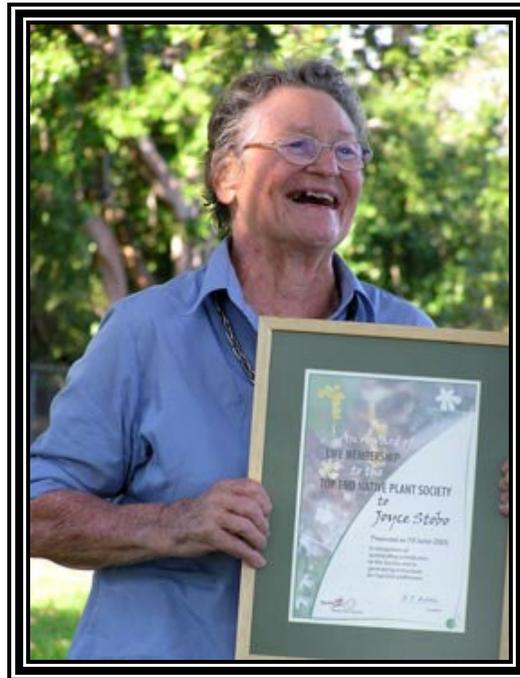
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JOYCE STOBO

August 1 2005

An inspiration to us all through her energy, knowledge and keen interest in native flowers. Joyce's enthusiasm will continue in the knowledge she shared.

Members of the Top End Native Plant Society



While I sit here feeling sad at Joyce's passing, I am consoled with the thought that Joyce did not go through the suffering of prolonged illness. I along with many other members have visited Joyce over the last few weeks and have been amazed at her brightness and acceptance of her situation. Perhaps to share an anecdote, I rang to check if it was alright to pop in and see Joyce at Friday lunch time, only to find that she was not in the hospital but instead had gone out to lunch with her family. Given Joyce was up and about on Friday, it was a considerable surprise to find that Joyce passed on over the weekend while many members were away on the plant identification workshop at Litchfield NP. It seems fitting to me that Joyce was alert and active almost to the last. Joyce has been an inspiration to myself and many other members, has made a great contribution to TENPS and more generally the conservation of our special plants in the Top End. We have not only lost a good friend, but a driving force in our Society.

After the bustle of Wednesday afternoon and yesterday, today I have had a few quite moments to contemplate the passing of Joyce; and indeed my world and our worlds are a poorer place without Joyce's humour, guidance and enthusiasm. But to focus on the positives, Joyce has inspired many people, not just TENPS members who share a common interest in plants. Let's work to keep that enthusiasm going!

I have been impressed by the actions of TENPS members who at short notice rallied to pay respect to Joyce. As I sit at my computer, our house still smells like a florist shop. Many members contributed flowers and I was struck by a number of members who brought a special flower for Joyce: an exquisite sprig of bright red *Brachychiton* flowers; the scent of *Pterocaulon*; the outstanding flower spikes of *Grevillea benthamiana*; the foliage of *Podocarpus*; and a couple of

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people even brought in some cycad leaves! We used buckets of flowers and foliage to make an impressive arrangement to adorn the coffin, about four feet long, close to 18 inches wide and composed of a most amazing array of flowers, fruits and leaves. The centre piece was a brilliant cluster of yellow *Xanthostemon* flowers. While Joyce's favourite "little" flowers would have been lost in the larger flower arrangement, at least one member has some "little swamp flowers" proudly pinned to her top. A number of bouquets were made to adorn the tables at the Trailer Boat Club and a big bunch of flowers for Caroline and family. Smaller sprigs were proudly worn by the members of Joyce's family and TENPS members who attended.



Examples of floodplain flora – the little flowers that Joyce so loved.

Sally and I were particularly honoured to represent TENPS. Sally delivered a great tribute to Joyce during the service while I had the honour of being a pallbearer. So while terribly sad, there was a focus on celebrating the rich life that Joyce has led and the wonderful privilege we have had in sharing times with her. A stranger remarked to me after the service that there were lots of people present and that "the Field Naturalists were well represented". Well I suspect there may have been some confusion between Field Naturalists and TENPS, though both groups were represented. The sentiment was clear; that Joyce's interest in natural history and particularly plants was an important part of her life. As well as flowers we gave a card to Caroline and inserted a notice in the paper. Clearly plants and TENPS were a big part of Joyce's life and Joyce has been an important person in our lives.

So thank you to those members who were able to be present, from as far afield as Katherine; to those who contributed flowers and those who dropped all they were doing to make some gorgeous flower arrangements; to those who assisted with logistics; put a notice on the TENPS web site; and to those who could not be present but whose thoughts were of Joyce. It was good to see some members whom I have not met for a while. While saddened by the event, I was heartened by the joy brought by flowers, big and small; and the camaraderie of the occasion.

- Dave Liddle 5th August 2005

Tribute to Joyce Stobo

I first met Joyce nearly 8 years ago when, on arriving in Darwin I sort new friendships by joining the Top End Native Plant Society. I went on a field trip with them in the hope of learning about the trees and shrubs of the top end. I remember this unusual lady with a posh British accent who, while all other members were looking up at the trees, she was looking down, sprouting off the names of the little flowers growing at ground level. At the time, I did not imagine that I would ever develop an interest in these little, what I thought then, insignificant plants. But Joyce's delight in them was contagious. Her enthusiasm and willingness to share her knowledge got me hooked.

Joyce had no particular interest in plants until she went on a wildflower expedition holiday in Western Australia in the mid 80's. This trip inspired her to seek out what wildflowers occurred here in the Top End. And she never stopped looking. She has displayed determination in pursuing her interest with numerous field excursions, photographing flowers, illustrating them and spending many hours peering down a microscope, and cataloguing them on computer.

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She made me, and many others, recognise that here in the Top End, we have a beautiful array of wildflowers that are of conservation significance and that their habitats are worth preserving.

Joyce has been an inspiration to many members of the Society and has changed people's attitude toward the little flowers. The seasonal wetlands of Darwin's rural area are of international significance with their diversity of carnivorous bladderwort plants and Joyce has been a driving force in bringing these small showy wetland plants to our attention. Now when we go out on field trips, I think more people are looking down at the little flowers, than up at the trees.

As well, she has made great contributions to our Society, with her active membership and time she volunteered as a Librarian and President.

I also did not imagine back when I first met Joyce, that she would become a close and very special friend. On our many forays out looking for those special little plants, not only did she share her vast amount of knowledge on flowers, but I discovered that she was a person with great compassion and a wonderful sense of humour.

I was entertained with stories of her past adventures, as a young woman driving a motor bike in War-time London; being sent by her father to finishing school in Switzerland, but preferring the ski slopes, becoming a ski instructor instead. I'm not sure if I have the chronology right, but at some stage she set off for adventures in Kenya for a couple of years, and on her return, her father, I suspect in desperation to try to settle her adventurous spirit down, let her use some of their land in England to grow flowers for a cut flower business. But after a year or so of that, she had to be on the move again and made her way to Australia. Her life in Australia continued to be active and adventurous and interspersed in her later years with travel to far-off places, such as the Gobi Desert, Alaska and Antarctica.

She talked a lot about her daughter and son-in-law, her 3 grand daughters and two great grand children. And although I only got to meet them in the last four weeks during her illness, I was struck by how well she related with them.

Joyce's friendship, companionship and instruction has had a major impact on me and I will miss her very much, as I'm sure many others will. I would have relished more time with her. However, she did live a relatively long and fulfilled life and, thankfully, did not suffer a long illness, and we should be joyous that we have been privileged to have had such an inspirational and compassionate friend with a great sense of humour. The members of the TENPS have lost a good friend. But she will remain in our hearts and minds.

- Sally Jacka

Joyce was certainly bright and a very deserving life member. She introduced me to the fact that there is more to regeneration than sticking a twig into the ground. Gave me a 'peanut tree' laconic. Thanks

- Alex Bakunowicz

~ New Constitution ~

A new Associations Act took effect from 20 April 2005 that introduced a number of specific requirements to be met for the constitutions of incorporated Associations to comply with the Act. Associations (Model Constitution) Regulations were also introduced that suggested that Associations 'may' adopt the model constitution that met all the requirements of the Act, and provided a Schedule to clarify what changes to the model constitution could be made so that the constitution so formed would meet the requirements of the Act.

TENPS formed a working group to put together a constitution that met the requirements of the Act and the Society, made up of Geoff Gaskell, Marj King and Mark Raines. With the assistance of Consumer and Business Affairs of the Dept of Justice, where Geoff works, a model constitution was provided that indicated in the text the changes that could be made. These are in fact rather few,
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made up of 'objects and purposes, minimum number of members, classes of membership, the number of ordinary committee members, eligibility criteria for committee members, the provision for members to serve consecutive terms on the committee, the quorum at general meetings and the date on which the financial year ends'. The working group has made what it thinks are the appropriate changes and the final result is available on the TENPS website for members to view and comment on, either through the TENPS email address or at general meetings.

Compared to the current constitution the draft 'new' constitution is longer and more complex in some respects, and perhaps does not seem to be 'our own' to the same extent, but it does provide much guidance in areas such as grievance and dispute resolution. When approved by the Society (with or without changes) we will need to submit it to Consumer and Business Affairs for endorsement and then it can go to a special general meeting or Annual General Meeting for final approval. It should be noted that the new constitution does not have to be in place until June 30 2006, but it would seem appropriate for it to be put forward at the 2005 AGM to be held in November. In order to provide for the effective operation of the Association, resolutions can be proposed and passed at general meetings as long as they do not contravene the provisions of the Act. A copy of the draft constitution can be seen at <http://tenpsnt.tripod.com/docs/>

~Correspondence~

Dear Editor:

I read with interest the July 2005 Newsletter. What interesting and promising things are happening in the Top End! May I make a passing observation on David Bowman's talk. David (as per usual) astutely takes us outside our immediate comfort zone and asks us to look at the bigger picture. I was interested in his comment regarding the value of the savanna systems as carbon sinks, noting that most useful storage is below ground. Indeed, most carbon stored in most terrestrial systems is in the soil (as recalcitrant humus – a useful summary reference is *Forest Soils and Nutrient Cycles* by Attiwill & Leeper, 1987 – Pub. Melbourne Uni. Press). However, the soils in Top End forests and woodlands store remarkably little carbon, even in supposed pristine condition. This contrasts with monsoon soils elsewhere, which store much more carbon than is usual in northern Australia. Because the amount of stored carbon closely correlates with plant nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus Top End soils are also notably nutrient deficient. How did this come about?

There is undoubtedly a localized nutrient flush to soils after fire, but there is also a small loss of nutrients from the system (in smoke and ash being blown away and washed away in the first rains). In addition, organic matter (litter) is burnt, leaving little to be incorporated into the soil – and it is the soil organic matter that 'holds' much of the other nutrients in the soil profile. Thus, soil fertility is reduced after many repeat fires.

Remembering that we have been burning Top End vegetation (and soils) for many thousands of years, we now have very nutrient-poor soils. Recently, we have made the situation worse by burning annually around Darwin (and sometimes more than once in a season - !). Soils are getting poorer quickly, with even less organic matter incorporated. So, they store less and less carbon – and way below what they could store with less frequent fires. The simplest (and perhaps the largest) action Australia could take to increase carbon storage is to stop burning northern vegetation as often as now happens. This is not to suggest that all burning should stop – merely to argue that the frequency should be greatly reduced and tailored to biological needs.

Would this produce a change in the vegetation? Of course it would. Would the vegetation 'cope'? Of course it would. Remember, that 95%+ of the evolutionary history of all plants and animals in the Top End pre-dates the arrival of humans and human-imposed fire regimes. The plants and animals evolved in a very different environment.

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There is an interesting set of (haphazard and unofficial) experiments in existence around Darwin. Those of us with rural blocks have often stopped annual fires. In many cases, native vegetation in rural private ownership has not been burnt for more than 10 or even 20 years. What a wonderful comparison this would present, to compare these blocks with forest, which has been burnt (often) annually. What stories we might let the vegetation tell us

- David Cheal

~ 2005 NT Threatened Species Art and Photography Exhibition ~

It's coming around to that time of the year again when artists and photographers start preparing for the annual exhibition. The theme of the event is 'NT threatened species, their threats and their habitats'. The event is open to all mediums (painting, sketch, sculpture, photography etc), will be on display at the Darwin Entertainment Centre Gallery from September 7th to 10th, the adult

overall winner first prize is \$1000 cash, and entries close 26th August. It is not a 'hard core' art event, the primary purpose is to raise awareness of the NT environment and its threats, so even if people have photographs, painting etc that aren't totally brilliant, it still would be good to have them exhibited. For contact details see below.

~ What's the TENPS Committee Meeting Up to? ~

- TENPS has a new Email address <mailto:topendplants@tenps.com>
- Work on revision of the constitution is continuing.
- A busy time in the last few weeks finalising arrangements for the plant identification workshop and the TENPS stall at the Garden Spectacular.
- TENPS will provide a speaker at the book launch for "A guide to threatened, near threatened and data deficient plants in the Litchfield Shire of the Northern Territory". The launch will be held at the Garden Spectacular.
- NT Carers are keen to seek funding via the Open Garden Scheme Grants to develop the garden at Ankalie House. A sub-committee lead by Raylene has been formed to co-ordinate TENPS contribution to the project.
- Purchase of materials for the fencing at Bankers Jungle is expected to proceed in the near future.

~ What's in Flower this month? ~



Photos David Liddle August 2005

Calytrix achaeta

A short straggly shrub up to 3 metres in height. With pendulous branched



and hairy branchlets. The trunk is covered in rough gray flaky to fibrous bark with tiny 3-sided green leaves. Stellate creamy flowers are only 1 cm across crowded on the leaf axil. The fruit is a small nut encased in the calyx tube. This flowers from January to September. It is found in sandstone country and in woodland in skeletal lateritic soils.

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Erythrina variegata var orientalis

A straggly slender tree some 5 to 10 metres in height with scattered thorns along the corky bark trunk. Deciduous. Distinctive leaves are smooth broad deeply divided into three lobules with the central one elongated – “bat winged”. Dense, tubular red-pea flowers appear in July to November. woody narrow pods follow; these split when ripe to release pale red or yellow seeds. This specimen was seen growing along the road to the Adelaide River cemetery. It was in good flower although the distinctive leaves were turning brown and looked somewhat grazed compared to the fresh one in the above photograph. Generally found in open forest on a variety of well-drained soil. Cultivated from seed or cutting when leafless. Roots and leaves are edible. A pan-tropical species. *Photos Mark Raines July 2005*



~ Plant Identification Workshop ~



The Plant Identification Workshop held at Litchfield National Park on the Picnic Day long weekend was a great success, with 30 people attending. We spent Saturday concentrating on recognising family features, and on Sunday got into the knitty-gritty of keying out to species level. On the Monday a few stalwarts took great delight in making their own keys and applying their own botanical Latin names. A more detailed report will be in next months Newsletter. *PS. A Lost Property Box of things left behind will be brought to the August meeting.*

~ Newsletter Contributions ~

Send any contributions for the newsletter to Mark Raines at rain0021@optusnet.com.au
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**NEXT MEETING THURSDAY
GUEST SPEAKER:
“The vegetation of Namibia, a comparison with the NT”
Marj King**

**SENDER: TOP END NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY
PO BOX 135 PALMERSTON
NT 0831**

TO:

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~ MEMBERSHIP DUE 1 JULY 2005~
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NT 0831**

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