



# THE ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY CENTRAL SUSSEX GROUP



NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2010

## Ms JOANNA WENHAM TASMANIA – AN AWE INSPIRING WILDERNESS

Funded by five organisations including Kew's seed bank at Wakehurst, the Forestry Commission and the Tasmanian Botanic Garden, its seven member team collected seed from a number of Tasmania's vegetation types - rainforest and related scrub, wet and dry eucalypt forest and woodland, highland treeless vegetation, and moorland. After a brief stop in Sydney with views of the famous bridge and opera house, the team was assembled in Hobart's botanic garden where the planning of the trip was organised. This is overlooked by 1270m high Mt. Wellington from where there are spectacular views of the city and the coastline,

First to the country's first national park (1916) Mount Field, 60km north west of Hobart. The landscape ranges from eucalyptus temperate rainforest to alpine moorland, rising to 1,434 metres (4,705 ft) at the summit of Mount Field. Its diversity with 374 plant species provides a field class for the School of Plant Science in the UTAS. An endemic member of the Protea family, the Mountain Rocket *Bellendena montana* is a subalpine shrub with white flowers and brilliant red or yellow fruit. The Climbing Heath *Prionotes cerinthoides* is another endemic with pendulous, narrow cylindrical crimson flowers. On the boggy plateau of the Rodway Ridge, there are splendid views eastwards to a landscape of lakes and tarns and at the base of the ridge the Tarn Shelf a boardwalk for viewing below *Astelia alpina* the Pineapple Grass with tufted rosettes of stiff greyish-green leaves and greenish flowers in their centre, the small Chestnut Pine *Diselma archeri*, white flowered *Perso(n)ia gunnii* (Proteacea) an erect shrub which takes four years to germinate, the woody endemic *Dracophyllum milliganii* with a long white or pink flowered spike and on the rocky slopes above, ablaze with the gold, red and orange foliage in April and May, the Tanglefoot *Nothofagus gunnii* and



*Nothofagus gunnii*

*Eucalyptus regnans*, the tallest species which elsewhere can grow to 100m. A grove of another Tasmanian endemic, the Giant Grass Tree (to 12m!) *Richea pandanifolia* with red or pink flowers in dense stalked heads in the leaf axils, lines Lake Dobson.

Eucalypt forests, also known as sclerophyll forests, have the highest diversity of plants and

animals of any Tasmanian plant community; 15 of the 29 eucalypt species found in Tasmania are endemic. South east of Hobart around the Huon River in dry sclerophyll forest, there are 18

species of which collections were made from 15. Among them fast growing *E. subcrenula*. There was also *Richea dracophyllum*, with long white, dense terminal spikes, some on a cliff face and *Dianella tasmanica*, a blue lily with prominent yellow stamens and blue-purple berries.

Northwards to Tasmania's Central Plateau with its big mountains perforated by many lakes and tarns, tleft over by an ice cap 65km in diameter. In the northern part of the Midlands lies Lake Country where around Lakes Ada and Augusta there are *Gentianella ?diamensis* and ground-hugging *Gaultheria tasmanica*. Around Pine Lake in fog and among slippery and dangerous boulders *Richea* and four endemic trees of high rainfall: *Athrotaxis cupressoides* the Pencil Pine with tapering trunk, *Phyllocladus aspleniifolius* the Celery-top Pine, so named because the so called leathery leaves (cladodes) are reminiscent the shape of celery leaves, *Athrotaxis selaginoides* the King Billy Pine with claw-like foliage and globose cones with 20-30 scales and is threatened by out of control bush fires and *Lagarstrobus franklinii* the Huon Pine with a dense pyramidal crown, each of the scales containing a single seed; with very hard wood, it is another tree in danger because of over-logging. A view of the team recording one data sheet/collection, preparing herbarium samples including *Clematis aristata* and cleaning 20,000 seeds/collection – this is when madness sets in! West to the Cradle Mountain-Lake St. Clair National Park and Cradle Mountain itself, perhaps Tasmania's most iconic photographic landscape when seen across the lake at its bottom. Although at 1545m it is 57m less than the country's highest (Mt Ossa), the climb was made in not the best of weather, the initial stage along a boardwalk cut into the cliff, the final 600m among plenty of rocks. En route Christmas Bells, *Blandfordia punicea*, a spectacular lily with long linear leaves and red, sometimes



*Milligenia densiflora*



*Blandfordia punicea* K. Corbett

yellow, bell-shaped flowers in a terminal raceme, but taking 6 years to flower, endemic *Milligenia densiflora* from the lily family with wide grass-like leaves from the base and yellow flowers growing on vertical cliffs and dwarf mountain conifers (cf. *Pinus mugo* in Europe) of the Strawberry Pine *Microcachrys tetragona* and taller (to 2m) *Microstrobus niphophilus*. From the terminal plateau views to Dove Lake and later in evening light, another view of the mountain itself. Around Lake St. Clair moss covered temperate forest with ferns and *Billardia longiflora*.

The West is the wildest side of Tasmania, some scarred by over 100 years of mining - lead, zinc, silver. Near Zechen *Blandfordia punicea* again. Further south is the Franklin-Gordon Wild Rivers National Park which featured in much controversy in the second half of the last century over the construction of hydro-electric dams. In this often impenetrable rain forest with *Dicksonia* and

waterfalls, *Billarida meisophylla* with purple lantern-shaped purple berries. Back to Lake St. Clair one of the wettest area with leeches in moss covered temperate forest with ferns.

Back to the east coast and the Freycinet Peninsula, Bicheno's natural harbour and the white sands, but freezing water of Wineglass Bay. Lots of birds and on the shore *Pelargonium australe* with pinkish-white flowers and reddish markings. In fissures *Leptospermum grandiflorum* and the Blackboy *Xanthorhoea australis* with long grass-like, spirally arranged leaves and a dense columnar spike up to 1.5m long of small white flowers; fire is essential for its persistence. Curiously this was the first collection made of the plant in Tasmania. On the last day with sunset over Bicheno Bay, Fairy Penguins and ripples in shallow water, our visit to Tasmania came to an end. So many thanks to Jo for braving Tasmania's wilderness in often uncomfortable and difficult circumstances and entertaining us with stories of some of its vegetation, mainly its endemics.



*Xanthorhoea australis*

With the collaboration of five organisations, in all 115 collections were made and since returning more than 30 species of seed collected have germinated. In all. SeedSafe has secured 930 seed collections in the first four years, over 940 field records and 2,400 herbarium specimens added to the Tasmanian Herbarium. In the past two years seed material has been collected from plant species that had not been seen in mainland Tasmania for 20 years. The seed bank facility has so far conducted over 2,000 germination tests on 405 collections. Of the almost 2000 native plant species 320 are endemic and 420 are classified as threatened., hence the importance of these collections and their conservation. There is a listing online of all Tasmanian plants in the 2009 Census of Vascular Plants and a less complete, but with other useful information in the Sorell Plant Species List also online. Some Tasmanian species can be found at Wakehurst in Coates Wood, the Southern Hemisphere Garden and the National Collection of Nothofagus.

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## **MEETING 20 MARCH 2010 7.00pm**

### **BHUTAN – MUD MOUNTAINS AND FLOWERS JOANNE EVERSON**

The Yunnan talk is not yet ready, hence change of title and an opportunity for another look at the wonders of Bhutan from another perspective. So from an island in the Southern Ocean to an island state in the Himalaya with an increase in altitude.

Joanne began working for Kew in 2001 and became team leader of the rock garden a year later. She has studied plants in Bhutan, Tibet, California, Oregon and Yunnan and in 2006 co- led a seed collecting expedition to South Island New Zealand for 6 weeks collecting for Kew and Wakehurst place. Previously she worked at Hever, in National Trust gardens at Cliveden and Scotney Castle and in commercial nurseries.