



**Menai  
Wildflower  
Group**



# Newsletter of Menai Wildflower Group April 2015

## President's Report

With our new program for 2015 up and away we have already had some interesting topics from our speakers.

The year ahead promises to be fresh and new but with familiar faces, so you are all encouraged to spread the word by passing on our 2015 program to your neighbours or friends who may be enticed to our meetings and get-togethers.

Our first weekend walk was from Spit to Manly and hosted by Pam Forbes and Greg Jackson. It was a great success, with a good number of people braving damp conditions and then having luck smile, with their way remaining dry. Pam & Greg provided many historical facts along the way as well as many floral & faunal points of interest. Thanks Pam for the historical research you gathered for this walk.

Our next speaker for our April meeting will be Brian Roach on natives for pots, courtyards and small gardens. This topic may interest people with limited space for less extensive selections but who wish to still have a connection with growing Australian native plants.

Working bee along with propagation day are scheduled every third Saturday of the month for those who want to get their hands dirty and try their skills at propagating their own plants.

The APS NSW quarterly gathering is building momentum towards the 23 May 2015 at the hosted by the East Hills Group and held at the Lugarno Uniting Church, Lugarno with possible walks in Oatley Park. So get along for this event and support your fellow A.P.S. group members.

*Jason Cockayne*

## Coming Local Events

(See Special Interest for others)

- 8 Apr Menai Wildflower Group Meeting**  
Guest speaker – Brian Roach  
“Natives for pots, courtyards,  
small gardens”- 7pm start
- 18 Apr Working Bee at IRFB 9am start**
- 18 Apr Propagation at IRFS nursery 1pm**
- 25-6 Apr Open Day- Grevillea Park, Bulli**  
10-4pm
- 2-3 May Open Day- Grevillea Park, Bulli**  
10-4pm
- 13 May Menai Wildflower Group Meeting**  
Guest speaker – Lloyd Hedges  
“WA Trip Pt 2” – 7pm start
- 16 May Working Bee at IRFB 9am start**
- 16 May Propagation at IRFS nursery 1pm**
- 23 May APS NSW quarterly gathering**

### Contents

|                                     |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| <i>President's Report</i> .....     | 1 |
| <i>Coming Local Events</i> .....    | 1 |
| <i>Special Interest</i> .....       | 2 |
| <i>Spit to Manly Walk</i> .....     | 2 |
| <i>February Guest Speaker</i> ..... | 3 |
| <i>March Guest Speaker</i> .....    | 4 |
| <i>Orchid Corner</i> .....          | 5 |
| <i>Nursery Report</i> .....         | 6 |
| <i>Group Meetings</i> .....         | 6 |

**HAPPY EASTER**

### *From the Treasurer*

APS NSW has decided to raise the membership fees in order to cover extra admin and publishing costs. The fees are increasing by \$3 for each category and this is effective from 1Jan 2015 (Note: members with a renewal date prior to 31 March 2015 will pay at the former rate). An updated membership renewal form can be found on our website.

*Sharon Pearson*

### **ATTENTION – CHANGE OF MEETING START TIME**

We are trialling a new start time. The doors will be open from 6.30pm and the meeting will start at 7pm. Why not come along at 6.30pm for a wander around the garden or chat over a cup of tea.

### **Special Interest**

**Deadline for contributions to next newsletter will be Wednesday 27 May'15.**

**Any items suitable for inclusion in the newsletter may be sent to the Editor (Post to Secretary or e-mail [fergsrus@ihug.com.au](mailto:fergsrus@ihug.com.au)) before the deadline.**

**Working Bees** at IRFB start at 9am and include weeding, mulching and lunching.

**Propagation days** are now a regular part of running the nursery at Illawong Rural Fire Station. The next two will be at 1pm on Saturdays 18 April and 16 May.

**Nursery group** held at the Tip Nursery, Lucas Heights Waste Management site most Monday mornings from 9.30am to 1pm. Please contact Lloyd Hedges if you wish to start attending.

**The Group's Website Home Page** can be easily accessed by doing a Google search using the phrase "Menai Wildflower Group" and selecting what should be the first option offered.

**APS NSW quarterly gathering** 23 May hosted by East Hills at Lugarno Uniting Church, Forest Rd, Lugarno

### **Visit a neighbouring group**

When you joined the Menai Wildflower Group you became a member of the NSW APS and therefore are welcome at other APS group meetings, bushwalks etc. This gives members a lot more activities to participate in.

Visit the APS NSW website [www.austplant.com.au/](http://www.austplant.com.au/) and check out what other districts are doing, particularly our neighbours:

Easthills <http://easthills.austplants.com.au/> and Sutherland <http://sutherland.austplants.com.au/> .

*Lloyd Hedges*

### **Spit to Manly Walk**



The early showers didn't deter 11 keen walkers heading off to the Spit to start our 11km walk. It was great to have a couple of Sutherland colleagues and Courtney was keen and enthusiastic participant. Not too many flowers but *Epacris longifolia*, *Actinotus (helianthi and minor)*, *Crocea saligna*, *Darwinia* and *Hibbertia sp* and *Platysace linearifolia*, among others, brightened the bush. The gullies were lush temperate rainforest with tree ferns, birdsnest ferns and Pittosporum, while the drier headlands had our familiar Angophora set against the blue sea. There was also some interesting heathlands, with several types of Banksia (*Banksia serrata* and *integrifolia*), tea tree and Hakea. Lots of tame water dragons and golden orb weavers were the main fauna on display.



The weather fined up without getting too hot and the water was sparkling and clear as we passed the many beaches and took in the harbour views. We also enjoyed the area's heritage – did you know for example that the first wildflower show was at Manly in 1881? Contemporary newspapers describe pavilions

full of displays, an enormous variety and quantity of flowers and thousands of visitors. Unfortunately within five years there were calls for controls to protect the native flora from the annual plunder.

There were a few tired knees by the time we arrived at Manly wharf for delicious gelato before an enjoyable ferry trip back to the Quay and the train home. Thanks to everyone for a great day.

*Pam Forbes*

## February Guest Speaker

Doug Rickard gave us a good insight into *Dirt for Dummies*

You might have a reasonably good idea about the qualities or problems with the soil in your garden but, until you understand how soil works and can analyse its properties, you may sometimes wonder why some plants struggle. Doug Rickard gave us great insight into soils at our February meeting – he explained how to get to know your soil in simple terms but in depth enough that you come away with a good understanding.

I will not go into the details of Doug's talk, but these are the main things that I think are important:

- Read Doug's small booklet 'Dirt for Dummies'
- Identify your soil
- Understand the qualities & problems specific to your soil
- Do a pH test to determine if your soil is acidic or alkaline
- Plant appropriate plants for your soil i.e. work with your soil's limitations
- Feed your soil and not your plants.

**Identify your soil:** here's Doug's test that you can easily do at home to determine the composition of your soil.

- Dig up several samples of soil & mix together; take out stones and large bits of organic matter
- Put a handful in a screw-top jar and almost fill the jar with water



- Add a level teaspoon of washing-up liquid
- Put lid on jar and shake violently for a few minutes
- Leave it undisturbed for 24 hours
- Measure the thickness of the sand, silt and clay layers
- Add them up and calculate the % of each as follows:

$$100 = \frac{\text{Height of material}}{\text{Total Height}} \times \% \text{ material}$$

- Refer to the tables in Doug's booklet to identify your soil. I tested our soil at home which we thought was more clay than sand, but it turned out to be sandy loam!

### **Understand the qualities or problems specific to your soil:**

- How well does water drain through your soil?
- Does your soil have a good structure – is it waterlogged or compacted, or lacking organic matter?
- Are you looking after the micro-organisms in your soil? Weedkillers and synthetic fertilisers can harm micro-organisms.
- Are you keeping your plant's roots cool during summer and warm in winter by mulching?
- Are you over-doing the fertilising? Doug said "It's the balance and availability of nutrients, not just the nutrients themselves that is responsible for soil fertility"

**Do a pH test:** You can buy a pH test from any garden centre for about \$16. The kit comes with instructions and it is very easy & quick to do. Several members brought soil from their own gardens and tested their soil. My soil tested as moderately acidic with a pH of 5.5 (mid green in colour); Pam Forbes' was quite yellow with a pH of 4.5 (so more acidic than my soil) and Pam Pitkeathly's turned quite purple, so slightly alkaline. Who would have thought they could all be quite different.

If you want to do an even quicker test Doug suggested you can do the 'Fizz' test: Take a tablespoon of dry soil and add several drops of

vinegar – if it fizzes it is alkaline soil; or take another tablespoon of dry soil, add water until it is moist and add a pinch of baking powder – if it fizzes the pH is less than 5 and is too acidic for most plants.

In summary, quoting from Doug's booklet:

- It's best to know what soil you have in your garden and work within its limitations
- It can take years to significantly improve your soil (but you can ruin it really quickly!)
- Grow plants that thrive in the local soil

Doug recommended that the main thing is to look after your soil by:

- Adding organic matter
- Feeding the soil and not the plants
- Growing plants that thrive in your local soil

So, off you all go and get your hands dirty!

*Pam Forbes*

### **March Guest Speaker**

Chad Beranek enthralled us with his dissertation on the frog friendly gardens and frogs of Sutherland Shire

As more trees are cut down and more houses built, native wildlife is becoming increasingly reliant on wildlife corridors and green spaces to survive. One of the wildlife corridors that goes under noticed is that that can be made in your backyard. Frogs make up a very important link in the environment and the backyard, for reasons such as pest control and critical links in the food chain. They are often keystone species in the ecosystem and pest control bio-indicators.

Chad spoke about what frog species are found in Sutherland Shire, what suburbs you are likely to encounter each species in, how to build a garden and pond to attract the highest number of different frog species, and how to recognise each species, distinguishing features and when they call.

He also put out a call to arms to help search for frog species which appear to have become non-existent in urban areas such as the iconic Green Tree Frog (*Litoria caerulea*), the first frog described in Australia. (“caerulea” means “blue” while these frogs are green. Apparently the first specimens were sent to England pickled in some preservative, which coloured them blue, hence the name).



Photographer: G A Hoye © Australian Museum

Chad has a Bachelor of Environmental Science, does casual work in bush regen, bit of snake handling and wildlife photography. We learnt many fascinating things, eg, Australian frogs are “incredibly unique”, just as much as Australian flora. One species lays its eggs in a nest, then waits for rain to wash them into water. Some don’t have a tadpole stage. One WA species lives all its life underground.

Frogs generally have a 2-phase lifestyle. Tadpoles are aquatic, herbivorous, frogs live on land and are carnivorous (insects, their own tadpoles, whatever).

To attract frogs, you don’t even need a pond, although having a pond is good and the bigger the better. Plant native species, lots of variety. Ground cover, canopy (trees), plants next to the water, in the water and a bit of open area next to your pond too. These all provide cover for different frog species and places to call from. Chad mentioned lots of species, but good old *Lomandra longifolia* and ferns seemed to be mentioned several times.

The most common Sutherland Shire frogs were the striped marsh frog, green stream frog, Perons tree frog, eastern sedge frog, and bleating tree frog. This last one, (bleating tree

frog) just to give a few details for one species, averages 42 mm in size, has an ear-shattering call Oct to Feb, about 52 days larval life span (quite short) and lives mainly in the canopy of trees. They use nesting hollows and prefer their water to be ephemeral, ie, not permanent (fish won’t live in it, much safer for their tadpoles.)



Perons Tree Frog helping at nursery on Monday



Striped marsh frog

If you want to look for frogs – they generally only come out at night, tadpoles during the day.

Chad’s web-site [www.gumnutnaturalist.com](http://www.gumnutnaturalist.com). Also [www.facebook.com/gumnutnaturalist](https://www.facebook.com/gumnutnaturalist).

*Mary Hedges*

## Orchid Corner

To all those who slaved over our potting day all those months ago, WELL DONE. I’ve been up to the compound a couple of times since

but really got stuck into it a couple of weeks ago.

I have to say you did a great job. After I removed the dead leaves I simply looked out for some great growth – both new canes and root production. Truly they look fantastic. Sure there were a few of the taller plants that had fallen over but all they needed was a stake and a piece of tie and when I left they were sitting up very proudly ready for more growth. I left some stakes and ties in the office on the table so we can check for that again next time.

Now two things.

1. if you look carefully you should start to see the flower stems forming. They will be very small at the moment but keep looking and you will see them. They usually like a cooler spell of weather to start them off and we haven't had that yet but any time now you will see them starting to form. Very exciting. So now you've been involved in two exciting phases of native orchid growing. The first was re-potting and new canes forming and the second is watching the new flowers start breaking out. I don't know which one I favour the most – growing or flowering – both are wonderful.

2. You should have a chat to Jason and Lloyd about what you might want to sell at the next Spring Fair. Flowers sell plants so you may be tempted to sell anything that has a flower on it BUT.....curb your desire. You have a lot of plants that may flower, yet are still quite small. My suggestion would be that you hang on to those so they go through another year's growth. And more growth equals more flowers equals more sales.

Exciting, isn't it?

*Graeme Davies*

## Nursery Report

At the Tip Nursery, apart from a few strays we have tubed up the plants for the RNP's Coastal Track. The final figure is likely to be 2000+. Now Janet and Anne, with technical assistance from Ron, are tubing plants for National Tree Day at the end of July. A new recruit, Marian Whatman, has dipped her fingers in the nursery potting mix and we hope to see more of her following her daughter's impending wedding.

At the IRFB nursery the Pink Flannel flowers are finished and a fair bit of seed collected -we will see how we go propagating some more. Unfortunately it does look as though they will only be annuals.

The new orchid shade house appears to be doing the right thing because there are plenty of healthy looking new shoots.

We could do with another shade house for the compound and I am keeping my eye out. The major delay is likely to be finding one for the right price.

**REMEMBER the propagation days at the IRFB on the third Saturday at 1pm following the working bee**

*Lloyd Hedges*



## Group Meetings

Monthly meetings (except January) of the Menai Wildflower Group are usually held at 7:00pm on the second Wednesday each month, although we have introduced day-time meetings for some of the months. The venue is the Illawong Rural Fire Brigade Headquarters. New members and friends are welcome.

Please address all correspondence to the Secretary,  
PO Box 3104 Bangor NSW 2234

Website is [www.menaiwildflower.austplants.com.au](http://www.menaiwildflower.austplants.com.au)

E-mail is [menaiwildflower@austplants.com.au](mailto:menaiwildflower@austplants.com.au)

|                   |                   |             |
|-------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| President         | Jason Cockayne    | 9570-8559   |
| Vice President    |                   |             |
| Secretary         | Annette Tuckfield | 9543 - 1490 |
| Treasurer         | Sharon Pearson    | 9570-8559   |
| Editor            | Alan Ferguson     | 9543-8216   |
| APS-NSW Delegate  | Mary Hedges       | 9543-1216   |
| General Committee | Pam Forbes        | 9543-6224   |
|                   | Margaret Olde     | 9543-2242   |
|                   | Marion Payne      | 9543-1040   |
|                   | Pam Pitkeathly    | 9771- 9789  |