



UnderStories

*Promoting, preserving,
protecting & rehabilitating*

native vegetation

Spring 2013, No 63

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Visit our website and Plant Propagation Database:

www.understorey-network.org.au

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Coordinator's Report

Spring has sprung and the best time to propagate most of our common native species from seed is just around the corner. Members participating in this year's growers scheme will be invited to collect their materials at depot days this month. We have had a wonderful response for the grower's scheme this year, so thank you to everyone who has put their hand up to grow as a volunteer and also welcome to all of our new members!

The Tolosa nursery is also gearing up to another busy spring of propagation and we will be again growing plants for Glenorchy City Council and the large revegetation projects on North Bruny Island for NRM South and in the Midlands, Derwent Valley and Central Highlands for the Southern Midlands Council Bushlinks 500 project. New volunteers are always welcome at the nursery on Mondays and any extra hands would be useful and appreciated. Let me know if you are interested in coming along.

The facilities at our Tolosa nursery are continually improving thanks to the work of volunteers and the sponsorship funding from the Westpac Foundation, which has covered the cost of materials. Improvements have been made to the meal room, hot house, garden beds and future developments will include benches in the nursery yards, a pot washing facility and a wood fired pizza oven.

Our other sponsorship program the Aurora Grow Wild project is drawing to an end this year. For three years, Aurora Energy has supported the Understorey Network to run workshops, print our local plant species lists and revegetate three areas around the state. A full report on this project will appear in the next edition of Understories.

With a large number of projects on the go, over the past six months it has been very busy and as such it has been wonderful to have had Sam Beattie helping out with hard work and bright ideas. Sam will be finishing up for the time being this month and I would like to wish him all the best.

Hope to see you at our AGM, Cheers,

Oliver Strutt

Propagation Pointers

Family Name: **Pittosporaceae**

Is a small tree to about 14 m in sheltered areas. There are 7 species that grow in Tasmania and on the mainland. It will grow from coastal to elevations of 1000m and prefers a moist well drained shady situation.

It does grow over most of Tasmania from north to south but not too close to the sea.

Species Name: **Pittosporum bicolor**

Common Name: **cheesewood tallow wood**

Seed treatment	The 8 to 20 seeds are inside two valves of a capsule. A slow germinator and best treated with pancreatin for quicker germination. The seed is very sticky and needs a wash with some detergent and when dry a light rubbing between some sand paper.
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Propagation notes	Cuttings taken Feb to March with a little root hormone applied should strike, but probably won't have roots on the cuttings until maybe Sept or Oct
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Seed sowing months	After treatment sow fresh seed during March April. Seeds will probably take 2 to 3 months to germinate. The seed would germinate much better if they could pass through a birds digestive system as that's what happens in nature and the birds love the seed.
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Growers, if you have propagated this species and can further add to the information provided we would very much appreciate hearing from you.

Please email understorey@gmail.com

Warner Wait



President's Report Spring 2013

Finally we have had some wonderful rain that will be great for our freshly planted plants, but maybe a little too much up north.

With spring around the corner we have lots to do. Our Tolosa nursery will be very busy with sowing of our spring seeds and pricking out of cuttings that have struck from our autumn plantings and potting them on. In the last 12 months we have grown 30000 plants which have been distributed to various organisations a wonderful task from our volunteers.

Volunteers have completed more renovations at the nursery involving renovating the hot house so now there is a more pleasing aspect from the front of the building and because clear laserlite was used those working there have a great view over the park from the inside looking out. More work has been done in the meal room where recycled cupboards, instant hot water and shelving have improved the place.

We have our AGM coming up on the 19th October at 2pm at the Tasmanian Botanical Gardens and would love to see as many of you there as possible. There will be two guest speakers; Jean Taylor will be talking about regeneration of plants at Conningham after the fire that burnt through there 5 years ago. (an article from Jean appears in this issue) also David Bowman will be speaking on bushfire ecology and climate change which should make it quite an interesting AGM. Of course we also have our election for committee members so if anyone is interested don't be afraid to put your hand up as you will be most welcome.

Coming up are our depot days where we distribute materials and seeds to our growers (see dates on the What's Happening page). If there is any member who is available to help on those days please contact Oliver.

Our coordinator and project officer have had a very busy program working:

- with farmers on Bruny Island
- planting near Oatlands for the Bushlinks 500 project.
- working with 10 different schools identifying plants, seed collecting and propagation
- organizing planting days for the Aurora Grow Wild project in the West Tamar, Seven Mile Beach and Ulverstone areas

We will once again make our presence known with an information stall at the Sustainable Living Expo in November. If you would like to assist at this event we would welcome your time and would have you working alongside one of our regular event volunteers. Please contact Oliver if you are available on 9th or 10th November.

Hope to see you at our AGM on Saturday 19th October at RTBG .

Happy growing season

Warner Wait USN President

Wildfire in Coningham Nature Recreation Area

Five Years On

In the spring of 2008 I wrote an article for the Understorey Network about the effects of the January 2008 wildfire that swept through about 70% of the Coningham Nature Recreation Area (CNRA). At that time our group, the Friends of Coningham NRA, had been weeding in the reserve for 6 years.

Two issues were addressed in the last article. The first discussed changes and response of natural vegetation. The second dealt with the response of Spanish heath - would the fire enable us to gain control of this weed by removing both the biomass and the soil seed bank, or would the weed strengthen its hold over the reserve.

The CNRA vegetation is mostly classed as dry sclerophyll with some small deep gullies on the southern slopes harbouring wet sclerophyll flora. Fire frequency in dry sclerophyll vegetation is generally recognised as having a natural fire frequency of between 4 and 20 years (Mount 1979). While the last really intense fire in CNRA was in 1988, which “denuded the area of surface vegetation leaving large areas of bare ground” (Thomas and Maynard 1988), there had been many deliberately lit almost annual smaller fires which particularly affected the dry northern hillsides. By 2008 much of the vegetation on the northern side of the reserve was dominated by eucalypts - *E. globulus*, *E. amygdalina* and *E. pulchella* on the dryer areas and *E. ovata*, *E. globulus* and *E. viminalis* in moister areas. The understorey was mainly sedgy or grassy with a shrubby understorey in damper areas. This mirrors the description in Tasmanian Native Bush (Kirkpatrick 1991) which explains how fire regime and drainage characteristics can determine whether shrubs or sedges predominate in the understorey with sedges favoured by higher fire regimes because of their capacity for rapid vegetative recolonization.

The first response of vegetation after the 2008 fire was a resprouting of grasses and sedges while most of the eucalypts and shrubs that had survived sprouted from exocormic buds. The first two years post fire were very dry and this did appear to inhibit growth from the soil seed bank, with some of the seedlings that did emerge dying from probable water stress with *E. viminalis* appearing to be particularly affected. However the flowering of groundcovers, forbes and small shrubs such as *Lissanthe strigosa*, *Brachycome* sp, *Helichrysum* sp, *Diplarrena moraea* and many orchids was very impressive as they responded to increased light levels and reduced competition. The past several years, up until summer 2013, have been relatively wet and the recruitment from seeds has been astonishing. Even the rabbits have struggled to keep up with the ‘wheat-field’ like regrowth of many grasses, shrubs and trees.



Spanish heath, 5 years on

Many of the large, older eucalypts in this reserve have been burnt multiple times and this year, the fifth following the fire, we have noticed a number of these have fallen after high winds. We are concerned that this will affect the reproduction of the many animals dependent on nesting hollows as of course the younger trees have not yet had time to develop these.

Native animals have been quick to respond to the profusion of food and shelter. Woodland birds have always been a feature of the fauna of this reserve and we are now seeing the full suite of birds previously recorded here. Many birds have been observed breeding since the fire including White bellied sea eagles, wedge-tailed eagles, yellow throated honey-eaters, dusky wood swallows and satin flycatchers. The reserve has also been noted for its small mammal population and this too seems to have returned to pre-fire levels, with Tasmanian bettongs being particularly numerous.

Well, that was the good news. On a less positive note, Spanish heath has also managed to cope well with the very intense fire. We had hoped that some of the soil seed bank may have been destroyed; however this does not seem to be the case. We keep good records of our work sites and yearly at least check previously weeded areas. As was mentioned previously, immediately following the fire we had several dry years which inhibited seed germination to some extent. However since then the wetter conditions coupled with bare ground and little competition from existing plants has stimulated an amazing response. Each year we spray or hand weed our patches and each year we seem to have had numerous seedlings pop up - almost as we watch. As an example, one patch we initially weeded in 2002 was followed up once a year until 2008 with minimal resprouting and no flowering or seed set. Following the fire we have weeded this area at least two or three times a year, although I can say that now we are seeing some reduction on seedling numbers. To be fair, the wet conditions also stimulated Spanish heath germination in unburnt areas of the reserve, however these seem to have been easier to control as the plants have not been as numerous - probably because of competition for light, space and nutrients.

When fire swept through the reserve in 2008 we were devastated to see the 'destruction', even though we understood the relationship between sclerophyll vegetation and fire. We now realise the vegetation has been 'affected' rather than 'destroyed' by fire and we have more of an appreciation of the resilience of Australian flora and fauna when affected by this natural process, although we also know that increased fire periodicity can have detrimental effects on some species. We hope that this may be of some comfort to those people who experienced the 2013 southern Tasmanian fires and the affects they had on the natural environment.



Sedgy, grassy, understorey

References:

Kirkpatrick J.B. (1991) *Tasmanian Native Bush: A Management Handbook* 56-57

Mount A.B. (1979) Natural regeneration processes in Tasmanian Forests. *Search* **10**, 180-186

Thomas, Ian and Maynard, Debbie (1988) An Archaeological Survey of Coningham State Recreation Area. Geography Department University of Tasmania, Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre

Jean Taylor

A snack of sagg (*Lomandra longifolia*)

There must be hardly a single Tasmanian who has never seen the Sagg (*Lomandra longifolia*), one of the most widespread and common of plants in Tasmania. It is also widely cultivated as a native horticultural plant.

Despite being a very common element in the Australian flora, the Sagg and it's relatives have a rather complex family history. While the Sagg resembles a sedge or a grass, it is nowhere related to these two plant groups.

Some people refer to Sagg and it's relatives as a mat-rushes, but these again are nowhere related to the real rushes (*Juncus* spp.).

Plant taxonomists have placed *Lomandra* variously into the Grasstree family (Xanthorrhoeaceae) and even into a family of it's own, Lomandraceae. Surprisingly, the Angiosperm Phylogeny Group suggests that the Sagg is a member of the Laxmanniaceae, the same family to which Chocolate lillies or Vanilla lilies (*Arthropodium* spp.) and fringelilies (*Thysanotus* spp.) belong.



Despite grasses and grass-like plants being very difficult for the budding naturalist to identify, the Sagg is extremely easy to pick out.

In a non-flowering state, they can be easily picked out by their forked leaf tips. When in flower, the heads of cream flowered blossoms subtended by bract-like spines cannot be mistaken for anything else.

Not surprisingly, the Sagg was one of the first plants I learned to recognize in Tasmania. However, I never knew that Sagg could be a snack until I read Tim Low's [*Wild Food Plants of Australia*](#).

The white inner leaf bases of the plants are apparently edible and according to Tim, tastes like fresh green peas. I wanted to try for myself and so harvested a few stems.

Proper care should be taken when harvesting Sagg stems. I ran my fingers gingerly all the way down to the base of the plant and felt around till I could get a good secure grip before pulling the plant out of the ground. This I did because the leaves, like many sedge leaves, have edges which are more than capable of giving one a serious laceration. The leaves were apparently used by aborigines as material for baskets.

The base of the stem is whitish and cylindrical and is fine to just chew on. One could also remove the leaf bases around the stem base and get to the pith, which has somewhat the texture of a bamboo shoots.

I agree with Tim though that the Sagg makes a refreshing snack.



I also tried out the flowers but they were rather tasteless. Perhaps evening was not a good time to eat the flowers. In any case, if the flowers are to be eaten, do be careful of the 'spines' on the inflorescence. Not nice perforating one's tongue or lips.

Nevertheless, bush rambling will never be the same again now that I have been initiated into the Sagg snack.



David Tng

Coastal re-vegetation and schools engagement in the Derwent

Since August last year 374 students participated in 21 seed collecting, propagation and planting activities. They propagated approximately 1000 plants from cuttings and planted 540 natives from our nursery, primarily in the Derwent River and Glamorgan Spring Bay areas. During the activities an effort was made to forge links between environmental science principles, the coastal areas in which the students live, community involvement through Coastcare groups and fun.

Quotes from Swansea Primary students:

"All the trees looked really cool. I think everyone had a great time because I did" -Clea

"We found a hole then put some jelly crystals in the hole then put some dirt over the jelly crystals. The jelly crystals are for if it doesn't rain it will still give the plant some water. Then you put a thing that makes the plant safe to make sure the animals don't eat the plants." -Ellia



Funding for this project came from the Southern Coastcare Association of Tasmania (SCAT) as part of their Caring for our Country grant.

Students from South Arm Primary planting at Arm End with *Acacia melanoxylon* 13/6/13

Sam Beattie

What's Happening

Propagation Workshop

How to propagate Tasmanian plants from seeds and cuttings (Also depot day for Southern growers)

When: Saturday 28th September, 10:30 to 12:30

Where: Tolosa Community Nursery, Tolosa Park, Glenorchy

Propagation Workshop

How to propagate Tasmanian plants from seeds and cuttings (Also depot day for Northern growers)

When: Saturday 5th October, 10:30 to 12:30

Where: Peace Garden, Northern Suburbs Community Centre, Ravenswood

Propagation Workshop

How to propagate Tasmanian plants from seeds and cuttings (Also depot day for North West growers)

When: Friday 18th October, 10:30 to 12:30

Where: Ulverstone (location TBC, please contact)

Understorey Network AGM

Guest speakers will be Jean Taylor and Prof David Bowman

When: Saturday 19th October, 2pm

Where: Riverview Room, Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens, Hobart

Seed Collecting Walk

Half day walk and talk whilst helping to collect seeds for local revegetation project

When: Saturday 7th of December, 10:15 to 1:30

Where: North Bruny Island (Please contact for details of location)

Understorey Network Committee Meetings

When: The second Monday of every month, 5:15pm

Where: USN office, Level 1, 148 Elizabeth Street Hobart

All members are welcome to come to our regular meetings – please RSVP for catering purposes

Please call the office on 6234 4286 or email

oliver@understorey-network.org.au for more information

or to RSVP for any of the workshops.

Also check the website for the latest Calendar of Events.



End Of Season Nursery Clearance

We have a very limited selection plants left at the Tolosa nursery that need good homes. There are some white gums, blue gums, various wattles, climbing blueberry and native clematis. Come on a Monday between 10am and 2pm, take what you like and make a small donation to cover costs.