



Newsletter of Menai Wildflower Group November 2018

Vice President's Report

At the meeting on Wednesday, 14 November at 7pm, your committee will put forward this proposal:

That the program of meetings in 2019 should show that starting time for the December social meeting remain at 6pm, the summer meetings in November, February and March be 7pm and that meetings for all other months be held at 1pm on the second Saturday of the month.

Our trial of Saturday afternoon meetings this year has been very successful, judging by number of attendees. Some of our members no longer enjoy driving to night time meetings, while those who go to work say they have problems getting family matters under control before they try to make our 7pm meeting start. No one option suits everyone, but faced with universal declining numbers in clubs, your committee feels this proposal will be attractive to members, and will allow visitors to view our attractive gardens. Please be sure to cast your vote at the November meeting. Thanks,

Pam Pitkeathly (Vice President)

Upcoming AGM

November's meeting will include our AGM and we'd love a big turn out to discuss the merits of Saturday and Wednesday meetings and of course to elect office bearers for 2019. Please don't miss it - we promise that no one will be dragooned into positions they don't want but we would love anyone who has some spare time and enthusiasm to consider joining the committee. This year we have successfully operated without a president by sharing the load between all the committee members. This means no one has a huge burden of work. We have a wonderful talent pool in our members so please don't be afraid to step forward to contribute in whatever way you can; if there is a niche you can fill let us know!

We will also be voting on proposed Saturday meetings.

Editor

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Lloyd's stunner *Isopogon cuneatus*, P Forbes.

Renewing your APS Membership

Please renew membership online at <http://austplants.com.au/about-membership> when you receive email notification. There is help available online but, if you still have problems, please contact Sharon.

Sharon Pearson

Coming Events

3 Nov Propagation from 1pm IRFS. Bee hives will be split.

8 Nov Working Bee at IRFS from 9am

14 Nov AGM followed by Robert King, on Mangroves.

1 Dec Community propagation workshop

12 Dec Christmas Social BBQ 6pm

January Enjoy the holidays! Relax and recharge for a wonderful 2019.



Just like fireworks! *Hakea purpurea*, P Forbes.

Reports from Meetings

Native Orchids

Dr. Karen Sommerville, a Scientific Officer at Sydney Royal Botanic Gardens, spoke on the seed bank and native orchids. Karen heads the Rainforest Conservation project working at RBG, and works at the Mt. Annan plant bank. The plant bank opened in 2013 and specialises in Australian Natives with a focus on conservation and research. The new modern building is energy efficient and powered by solar energy and blends into the surrounding native trees. It has reflective and fire proof surfaces and louvered fire proof windows, to secure it against bushfire. Seed bank is in fact designed to be as disaster proof as possible. It has open plan laboratories, tissue culture labs and educational facilities and is open to the public. It contains 5917

species in seed bank and 35 species in tissue culture and potted culture e.g. Wollemi Pine.

Seed collection requires good records and quality control. The identity of seed is confirmed by an herbarium specialist and information such as date, area and details of where the plant is growing such as soil and aspect are entered into a database. Seed is removed from the fruit if necessary and then sieved to extract clean seed. A seed aspiration machine can help by separating the viable seed on the basis of weight. Quality is checked before, and periodically during, storage for example by cutting a sample of seeds open to ensure they have embryos inside or by x-raying seeds to check their content. There is no use storing bad seeds. Germination is also tested by planting seeds on an agar solution. If the tests are successful, seed can be stored for the future in vacuum sealed foil packets at low humidity and temperature. Longevity depends on the type of seed, its quality but 90% of Australian plants can use this method.



Diuris bracteata, K Sommerville

Karen has taken a keen interest in the symbiotic germination and cultivation of terrestrial orchids. Donkey Orchids (*Diuris* sp.) have unusual habits that make them a real challenge to propagate and cultivate and the species is short lived. Collecting orchid seeds is complicated by taxonomy, hard to publish results and the problem of co-occurring species of terrestrial orchids which all flower at the same time making it difficult to identify which you are collecting seed from. This last can be overcome by tagging the plants when flowering and before collecting seeds. There are pollination problems too – hybridisation, no natural seed set, lack of flowering in tall grass and seeds that disperse quickly. Orchid seeds are very tiny (like dust) and

need associated for germination so soil samples are also collected from which the fungus is isolated. And collection can be derailed by amateur orchid enthusiasts who steal flowers and seeds.

In the field the tagged flowering orchid, can be hand pollinated if needed. A bag is placed over the pollinated flowers, leaving the plant intact. Seeds are dried out quickly for storage in the plant bank.

Karen brought along various samples of Diuris Orchids and demonstrated the very interesting process of hand pollination.

Jan Riley

The evolution of Australian Flora

Professor Gerald Nanson spoke at September's meeting on the evolution of Australian flora. Australia's floral history began with the creation of the continent by the movement of tectonic plates and changing ocean currents. During the Jurassic period, 200 million years ago, a large area of Gondwana divided into Africa, South America, India, Australia and New Zealand. Tasmania was the last area to break off. Australia's flora developed independently of other Gondwanaland continental flora. Australian flora is unique and 30% of Australia's native genera and 80% of our species are only found in Australia.

In the Permian period, 96% of life went extinct for unknown cause. This included 70% of terrestrial species, 57% of biological families and 83% of genera. Then in the Triassic period, 253-280 million years ago, there was a return to a hot climate. The first dinosaurs evolved as well as the first large forests. While the climate remained uniformly warm and moist through the Jurassic period, 201-145million years ago, dinosaurs dominated the world and coniferous forests evolved.

The Cretaceous period, 145-65 million years ago, was a biologically defining geological period for Australia as it became an isolated continent. Prior to that there were no circumpolar currents. Australia was flooded and Gondwana broke into 4 islands. The flora began to diversify and evolve on each island. There were extensive shallow seas, the climate was warm and moist. Angiosperms were first evident, and after about 95 million years underwent a rapid diversification Flora began to localise.

The Cenozoic period, lasting from 65 million ago to the present, saw the final breaking up of the continents (Australia still moves north by 6 cm a year) with temperate forests predominating. The Cenozoic is subdivided into the Paleocene, Eocene, Oligocene, Miocene, Pliocene, Pleistocene, and Holocene. The climate was warm and moist and the

continent was covered in subtropical rainforest. As climate changed so too did the vegetation, and in some parts a cool temperate rainforest evolved. Most of Australia's sclerophyllous flora including Eucalyptus and Acacia evolved from the Gondwanaland forest, while the Proteaceae evolved from the Antarctic portion. These began to dominate as the rainforest declined.

Australia is the largest and flattest continent, with the poorest soils because of high evaporation and low moisture. Geology here is very old, tectonically stable, very flat, and with very red soils Rivers flow over very old sediments with no new materials or minerals. In Australia, more than any other continent, flora has been influenced by past tectonics. Vegetation has adapted to poor soils, and the growing response is very fast when the right conditions eventuate. The high diversity is also explained by pollination by birds, bats, and ants (>100 species) and the lack of large herbivores.

Ross Jefferies summarized the lecture as follows:

Gerald gave a masterful exposition on the how and why of Australia's botanical heritage, drawing on the relevant areas of plate tectonics, oceanography, the inheritance of Gondwanaland flora and fauna and their evolutionary adaptation as Australia drifted northwards to lower and drier latitudes. He demonstrated the integrative skills of the Geographer par excellence for such a complex multi-faceted story.

Gerald's interpretation of Australia's taxonomic composition rested primarily on the thesis that its Gondwanaland flora evolved independently of other Gondwanaland continental floras, following Australia's separation from them- called vicariance in biogeographical parlance.

Questions were asked about the difference in the evolution of New Zealand's and New Caledonian vegetation. My question to him was concerning the other biogeographical process concerned with highly improbable colonisation events of flora (and fauna) from other continents by oceanic rafting, as exhibited by the colonisation of the New Caledonian landmass by mainly Australian flora (and fauna) some 37 MYA when it re-emerged from the ocean, as a part of Zealandia. Lloyd mentioned that boabs in NW Australia may well be an example of such oceanic rafting.

Kate & Doug Paterson



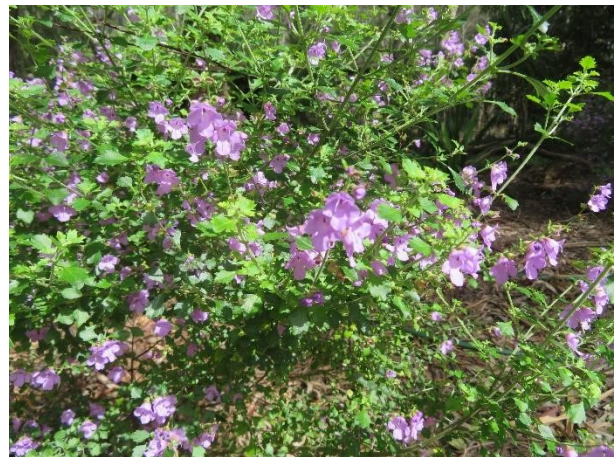
Native frangipani, *Hymenosporum flavum*, P Forbes.

Discovering Prostanthera

Those hardy souls who ventured out in the inclement weather were privileged to hear Dr Trevor Wilson (The Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney) share his enthusiasm for Prostanthera, part of the Lamiaceae family of flowering plants. This group includes the various Mint bushes, Salvia, Plectranthus, Vitex, Westringia, Nepeta, Thyme, as well as many other plants used for culinary or medical properties. It is the sixth largest of flowering plant families. Trevor has been working on his PhD on Prostanthera when time permits. Currently he is looking into the genetic diversity of rare and threatened species in his job as Technical Officer with the Office of Environment and Heritage NSW. He hopes to get back to studying Prostanthera soon. This takes a lot of time and resources, judging by the effort that went into capturing close-up photographs of these plants and their probable pollinators, and under trying fieldwork conditions too. Why should we be concerned about the how, who and why of the diversity of species pollinating our Australian Mints? Trevor's observations and data analyses so far have given better insight into pollination syndromes, a suite of flower characteristics including colour, scent and form, that match to a kind of pollinator, such as insects or birds, which visit the plant. Much of our knowledge had come from observations in the northern hemisphere so Trevor used the diverse and numerous Prostanthera family to test if it applies in Australia. Not a new thing in Australian history, but interesting to hear this from a Canadian!

Now my view of Prostanthera had been shaped by the species I had grown at Illawong- the common purple-flowered ones plus a tall pink-flowered

Victorian one, then the many magnificent specimens dotted throughout Sylvan Grove at Picnic Point and looking so good right now. However, Trevor gave us more of a "bird's eye view" by considering pollination syndromes. The characteristics of flowers pollinated by birds are: usually red flowers, no landing pad, no nectar guide, a long tube, no scent. Examples such as the Scarlet Mint Bush from The Little Desert (Lloyd got that one correctly), *P. magnifica* from WA and *P. porcata*, were all were visited by birds such as silver eyes and spinebills, but also by bees. We were able to see the "landing pad possibilities" on a sample of *P. nivea* from the IRFS Gardens. Our speaker also pointed out that Sage has characteristics of insect/bird pollination.



Prostanthera incisa from Neil de Witt's garden, P Forbes.

The architecture of Prostanthera stamens, usually two upper and two lower stamens seems to be an indicator of what pollinates the different Prostanthera. Trevor used Relative Warps Analysis to measure data on distortions in the basic flower shape and so predicted whether they were pollinated by birds or by insects. Flowers with radial symmetry (e.g; *P. porcata*), allowing an approach at any angle, suited birds. Those with bilateral symmetry (e.g; *P. cruciflora*) showed a strong bee/flower relationship. He noted that the stamens and anthers are separated from each other either in location or time, to promote cross pollination. Studies have been made of Westringia, a sub-group which is endemic to Australia and Lord Howe Island, to sequence DNA of all genera to compare them in attempts to understand evolution. No one common ancestor has been found, but the "molecular data" tells an interesting story: the four-stamen configuration fits all, but there have been reductions in lower stamens in some and more than once, at different times. Trevor's charts used colour cleverly so that the audience was not overwhelmed

by the data. These observations led to questions re the Australian scene. What is the relationship with climate change? Is pollination by bees as important as before? Are pollination systems now more efficient?

Understanding pollination is important for crop production in all growing economies. Whilst we all marvelled at our guest speaker's beautiful images of Prostanthera and the complexity of data, it was the questions raised by this talk that may be the most intriguing feature of the evening.

Pam Pitkeathly

August Bush Walk in Lime Kiln Bay

Despite the recent dry weather and the chance of showers, a few keen walkers experienced an interesting stroll through Lime Kiln Bay. A few wattles put on a great display and we found some orchids. Jason Cockayne, who is the Wetlands Officer for Lime Kiln Bay, explained the recent history and the current work being carried out to enhance this interesting and diverse reserve.



Acacia prominens – Gosford Wattle

We first walked along Dairy Creek: This was once overgrown with weeds and large willows but these were removed and huge sandstone rocks placed along the edges of the creek to stabilise it during heavy downpours. After this major work was carried out Jason and his Bushcare volunteers planted and mulched along the creek and since then have regularly maintained this area by weeding and planting natives grown at the council nursery.

Then we walked through the 'good' bush areas of Oatley Heights Reserve - here there has been little soil disturbance. We found 3 types of orchid in flower as well as the honey-scented *Woollsia pungens*, the delicate *Epacris pulchella* and the bright yellow flowers of *Pomaderris intermedia*.

Next we had another change of vegetation as we walked through the mangroves via a boardwalk. Jason explained about the differences between the 2 types of mangroves that grow in this reserve:

Avicennia marina (Grey Mangrove) that grows near the boardwalk and *Aegiceras corniculatum* (River Mangrove) that grows closer to the creek where there is less saline water.



Pterostylis concinna – Trim Greenhood

After walking through some more 'good' bush off Jinna Road Reserve, we crossed the bridge over the creek. Jason pointed towards where Lime Kiln Bay eventually joins the Georges River and also noted that the bridge is a great place to spot wading birds at low tide.

We followed the trail along the bay and spotted *Styphelia laeta* (Five-corners) with its pale green flowers and *Grevillea sericea* (Pink Spider Flower). Further along the track we came to the ponds. Jason explained that these ponds act as filters for the silt and nutrients that come via stormwater drains and natural seepage from the surrounding houses. This is important to prevent the Georges River from silting up and reduces algal & weed growth through excessive nutrients. Along with the Gross Pollutant Trap (GPT) further up the creek which filters out most of the larger pieces of litter, the design of the various ponds was created to slow the flow of water so that the silt drops to the bottom.



Grevillea sericea – Pink Spider Flower

The various wetland plants that have been planted in and at the edges of the ponds help to filter out excess nutrients. Of course, the silt needs regular removal so the ponds don't dry up and so this creates a permanent body of water. This attracts an abundance of local and migratory birds throughout the year and has become a popular place for local birdwatchers.

After completing the whole circuit of Lime Kiln Bay we followed Dairy Creek back to the start where Jason provided a well-earned cup of coffee! Thanks Jason.

Jason will be leading more walks in the Georges River Council area, so if you are interested check out the GRC's website.

Sharon Pearson

October Visit to Bundeena



Neil points out a treasure, P Forbes.

Neil de Witt and his wife Gloria invited Menai Wildflower Group to visit their 3 acres planted with many natives at Bundeena. After a couple of weeks of rain and a gloomy start to the day, many of us thought we should call it off and set another day but Neil said "Just wait half an hour and see" and then "It's clearing down here, Let's go ahead". As we drove through the Royal the rain poured down, but as we neared Bundeena it stopped to give us lovely weather for a very pleasant morning. Somewhat to our surprise, we had a great roll-up of 15 people.

Neil bought the then caravan park on the edge of Royal National Park in 1975. Apparently National Parks had tried to resume it with adjacent blocks but the then owner of Neil's place, thwarted them by continually pulling out the survey pegs so they couldn't survey it, till eventually they gave up on that block. Neil closed the caravan park a few years later but has 2 cabins left for friends and family. Gloria's favoured exotics; roses and bulbs, are planted in the front, with a rather magnificent Protea in full yellow bloom behind the house. Towards the back of the block, it is all natives, firstly a mixture of plants indigenous to the Shire and others, then

further towards the back entirely Shire natives. I don't know how many thousands of plants he has put in.

He has had problems with deer, with possums eating anything from native violets to young bottlebrushes, and with the white cockatoos who regularly ringbark angophoras and other trees despite his best attempts to stop them. If he puts wire netting round the bottom of the trees he says they just climb to the top of the wire and ringbark above it. He has also had several ducks killed by foxes. There are many really old gnarled angophoras, making wonderful patterns with their branches. He has got them classified under a heritage order, to hopefully inhibit developers who may get their mitts on the place when he and Gloria finally leave. Their kids have their own places and don't want to take it on.



Enjoying a rest and a new canine friend, L Hedges.

Then there was a pond with a rather palatial henhouse beside it, and a beautiful lillipilly, *Syzygium Cascade* as well as a sapote or chocolate pudding tree. There is a forest of huge cabbage palms, tree ferns, native frangipani and Sydney rock orchids, but to me the stand-out plants during our visit were the mint bushes, covered in purple flowers and smelling beautiful, and the bottlebrushes. There was one particularly magnificent pink bottlebrush lighting up its location densely covered with bright pink brushes as well as green, white and red ones - Neil said these had just started flowering and would be covered in red flowers in a week or so. Makes me want to come back in a week or so... The paths are paved with stones so we didn't even get muddy shoes.

We then had a lavish morning tea prepared by Gloria with a few additions (although Gloria told us we need not bring anything Jan brought some of her lovely sandwiches). Thank you, Neil and Gloria.

Mary Hedges



Bauera rubioides – River Dog Rose, P Forbes.

Special Interest

Deadline for contributions to the autumn newsletter is Sunday 10 February.

Any items suitable for inclusion in the newsletter may be sent to the Editor (Post to Secretary or e-mail mwfeditor@gmail.com) before the deadline. Preferred format is **unformatted** text in a **Word** file.

Working Bees are held on the **second Thursday** of month at IRFB starting at 9am and include weeding, mulching and munching.

Propagation days at Illawong Rural Fire Station on the **1st Saturday 1pm** and **Tuesdays 9am** are a great opportunity to be involved in interesting projects and learn new skills. Members can assist in MWG ventures or propagate species for themselves. Please contact Lloyd (95431216) for more details on these opportunities.

Keep up to date with our **Facebook page** or **website**, <http://menaiwildflower.austplants.com.au/>.

Meetings are held at the Illawong Rural Fire Brigade Headquarters each month except January. These are on the second Wednesday at 7pm in summer and the second Saturday of the month at 1pm over winter. New members and friends are welcome.

Remember that members of Menai Wildflower Group are also **welcome at other APS group** meetings, bushwalks, etc. Visit the APS NSW website www.austplant.com.au/ to check out what other districts are doing, particularly our neighbours East Hills and Sutherland:

<http://easthills.austplants.com.au/>

<http://sutherland.austplants.com.au/> .

Lloyd Hedges

Delicious quiche

Mary has kindly provided this recipe for the Warrigal Green quiche that was enjoyed by all at the September meeting. The fire station garden had a great crop and Mary took the opportunity to put it to good use. In true home cook style, Mary has skilfully combined and adapted several recipes to come up with this winner.

Pick a big heap of Warrigal greens (it shrinks down a lot) and pick the leaves – maybe keep some of the really young stems too. Put a large pot of water on to boil, drop in the greens, cook from 1-3 minutes. Refresh in a colander under cold running water to retain the green colour. Squeeze water out before using. Any leftover freezes well. This step is necessary to get rid of substances like oxalates (rhubarb leaves have them too) which could be poisonous if ingested in large quantities.

I used a baking dish about 28 x 18 cm, and my mixture was about 3 1/2 cm high in it. Most people would use a pie dish and have a not such a thick quiche - I didn't have a pie dish.

5 eggs,
3/4 cup milk
1 onion finely chopped
3/4 cup green onions sliced
1 full cup wilted warrigal greens roughly chopped
200 grams feta chopped crumbled.
About 250 gms pumpkin diced and cooked (roasted or microwaved)
2 red capsicums, charred, skinned and diced
Salt pepper
1-2 tbs olive oil
About 2 tbs shredded parmesan cheese

Preheat oven to 180°C. Grease dish with butter or spray oil. Add parmesan to dish and spread in thin layer.

In a large frypan heat olive oil on medium. Add onion and sauté till translucent. Add green onion and spinach; sauté briefly. Put in bowl with feta.

In another large bowl whisk eggs, milk, salt and pepper. Add spinach mixture, pumpkin and capsicum and mix well.

Pour spinach mixture into prepared dish. Dish should be big enough that it doesn't overflow. Bake about 50 minutes till firm.

Mary Hedges



Grevillea aurea, P Forbes.

Native bee news

Once again our native bees have flourished, providing us with pollination services and entertainment in the fire station garden. They have outgrown their accommodation and Lloyd will be splitting the hives at the next propagation day on 3 November. Thanks to Rudi for building the new hives.

If you have enjoyed our native bees at the Fire Station and you would like to encourage bees into your garden without a formal hive, check out Gardening Australia's recent episode which includes all the information you need to build a bee hotel. The fact sheet is available at <http://www.abc.net.au/gardening/stories/s4701951.htm>

Editor

Nurseries Report October 2018

Five Islands treat

On 11 September Marian Watman was invited by Ranger Rowena to attend an event on Big Island off Pt Kembla. Marian was representing MWG who have been propagating plants for the revegetation project as well as being personally rewarded for diligently tubing up the thousands of *Lomandra longifolias* e.t.c. used to revegetate the island after the weeds were eliminated. Marian got to hold a Little Penguin chick while their condition was being checked. Well done Marian.



Tip nursery

The Tip Nursery, thanks to Ron and Marian, have now potted up 5000+ Allocasuarinas for the Save our Species Glossies in the Mist campaign being run by OEH. We have supplied about 2500 so far, with more to go this month. Growth rates have been slower than usual this Spring thanks to the unusually cool start to October.

Suez are updating the ancient control unit for the irrigation including a rain sensor system to reduce water wastage. This should make the nursery less prone to irrigation outages.

The Compound Nursery

Tuesday mornings with Anne, Jan and Ruth is producing a steady stream of plants but is always on the lookout for something new to maintain interest in the range.

Community Propagation Afternoons

Propagation afternoons on the first Saturday of the month are drawing a regular stream of locals some of whom continue to come to the Tuesday mornings. Rudi and wife Ann, and Neil have become regulars who help the ladies and also keep the gardens in order.

IRFS Gardens

The gardens produced a great Spring visual feast despite the drought. In fact, perhaps the drought helped in that the autumn flush barely

happened and this may have increased the amount of buds available in spring.

Lloyd Hedges



Grevillea miniate, P Forbes.

More uses for *Allocasuarina*

We had 250 *Allocasuarina distyla* plants at the tip nursery, tubed up in May 2017, which we needed to clear from the outside benches to make room for new *Allocasuarina littoralis* plants, for National Parks, coming out of the shade house. We started to search for some garden organisations to take the *distyla* without much luck. Summary; it appears *A. distyla* is not the plant of the times so to speak.

I tried six organisations from The Royal National Parks to Oberon Garden Club without any takers.

Somehow, the white hairs on top of my head thought of "Greening Australia" and I contacted their Nursery Manager, Robert Paprah, who said he would reply in a week, which he did, by agreeing to take the plants, but asked if we could deliver them. So, Gail and I loaded the non-talking plants in the back of the Suzuki on Monday morning and headed to Greening Australia Richmond Nursery.

Upon arriving at the Nursery and noticing thousands of plants out on the benches, we wondered why they decided to take the plants. Robert explained that they would use some around the University to mix with their local seed grown trees with the remainder going to Taronga Park Zoo to grow as shade trees for the Koala Bears.

Now that WWF and the Australian Koala Foundation are running projects to Adopt Koalas it won't be too long before *A. distyla* will be back in fashion and we will be asked to start growing the plant again!

Ron Fraser

Get Together Sutherland

The next APS gathering will be hosted by Sutherland on 10 November. Everyone is welcome to visit a native/blended garden in Sutherland then listen to a fascinating talk by Lawrie Smith AM on Designing with Australian Natives at Loftus Community Hall, Loftus Ave, Loftus. This will be followed by a fun trivia quiz (with prizes) hosted by Karlo Taliano. Afternoon tea will be served and there will be raffles and native plants for sale.

Entry fee for Saturday's sessions is \$10 for members and \$15 for non-members, payable at the door. This helps cover costs. John Arney will host a walk in Kamay-Botany Bay National Park for those interested on Sunday morning

To register for the event, click here: <https://austplants.com.au/event-3052439>.

Or just turn up.

10am to 12 noon	Visit to Joan Zande's garden with morning tea available.		8 Bates Dr, Kareela
12 noon to 1pm	Own lunch arrangements		
9am to 12.30pm	Board and Presidents' Workshop with morning tea and lunch		Loftus Community Hall, Loftus Ave, Loftus
1pm to 4pm	Info and insight sessions with Lawrie Smith AM on Designing with Australian Native Plants (see attached brochure for more information on talks)		Loftus Community Hall, Loftus Ave, Loftus
4 to 5.30pm	Fun and games with trivia quiz with Karlo Taliano. Prizes to win		Loftus Community Hall, Loftus Ave, Loftus

More information in APS email or website.

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