



Friends of the Darwin Botanic Gardens Newsletter

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Tropical Garden Spectacular at the George Brown Darwin Botanic Gardens 6th and 7th August

The Friends of Darwin Botanic Gardens are running a plant sale stand at the Tropical Garden Spectacular on Saturday the 6th and Sunday 7th August. The following members are running the plant sale:

Friday 5th August

9am Prepare plants for sale *Liz Miller, Jan Howard, Terry Smith, Peter Knibbs and Harvey Ottley*

Saturday 6th August

8.30am-midday: *Liz Miller, Mireille Santoni, Jan Howard & Harvey Ottley*

Midday to 5pm: *Terry Smith, Andrew & Katrina Mitchell*

Sunday 7th August

9am-midday: *Liz Miller, Harvey Ottley and Peter Knibbs*

Midday-5pm: *Terry Smith, Mireille Santoni, Peter Knibbs and Andrew Mitchell*

Some spots are still vacant and more help would be gratefully received. Please ring Terry Smith after hours on 8948 1889 to book yourself in to help at the stand.

Cycad 2005 by Harvey Ottley

I was privileged to attend the 7th International Conference on Cycad Biology held in Xalapa Mexico in January 2005. There were participants from all over the world representing botanists, taxonomists, entomologists, toxicologists, nurserymen and others interested in cycads. Papers presented covered systematics, biochemistry, toxicology, physiology,

anatomy and morphology, ecology and reproductive biology, conservation and cultivation. There was also a workshop on Honduran cycads where the group who had just visited Honduras discussed the issues relating to formulating a cycad management plan for the country (Fig. 1).

I presented a poster on the development of the cycad garden at the George Brown

Darwin Botanic Gardens. The purpose was twofold. I wanted to give the gardens exposure and to get feedback from participants on the plans for the cycad garden. Without exception all those I talked with agreed that Darwin is in the perfect position to grow all species of *Cycas*. Montgomery Botanical Gardens has an internationally recognised cycad

collection for scientific study and a few gardens, such as Nong Nooch Tropical Garden in Thailand and Fairy Lake Botanical Garden in China, are attempting to collect all species of cycads. However, even these gardens have difficulty growing Australian *Cycas*. We are in an enviable position to be able to establish a collection of *Cycas* that will not only be an interesting display for the general public, but also of value internationally for scientific studies. This would involve a long-term commitment since most exotic *Cycas* would have to be acquired from seed. However, all agreed that such an approach would be far superior than having just a general cycad garden like other gardens around the world. I just hope that this approach will be seriously considered, so we will not miss the opportunity to have an internationally recognised collection that will contribute to the knowledge and conservation of *Cycas*.

After the conference the participants visited two cycad propagation centres which were established with local communities. The idea behind these is familiar in the Northern Territory: utilisation of a natural resource in order to place an economic value on it so stakeholders will manage the resource sustainably. However, although there is demand internationally for these cycads, trade in plants is restricted by legislation and quarantine. One centre in Tlalchinola has grown *Ceratozamia mexicana* for seven years and has never sold a plant (Fig. 3). The other in Monte Oscuro grows *Dioon edule* and has sold some locally (Fig. 4). Although the program has raised the locals' awareness of cycads which has led to some preservation of habitat, economic benefits have not been forthcoming. Programs such as these sound good in theory, but often are conceived by people knowledgeable in wildlife, not commerce.

The conference was a good opportunity to catch up with colleagues both old and new and to get the latest ideas and exchange information on these fascinating plants. I'm already looking forward to the next conference in Panama in 2008. Anyone interested in the program of Cycad 2005, please contact me on harvey@wildlifeforth.com.au and I will be glad to give you more detailed information.



Figure 1. Cycad Flora of Honduras presented by Jody Haynes of Montgomery Botanical



Figure 2. Harvey with GBDBG poster



Figure 3. *Ceratozamia mexicana* nursery



Figure 4. *Dioon edule* nursery

Book Review: Tropical and Subtropical Trees, a worldwide encyclopaedic guide by Margaret Barwick

Chief Editor: Anton van der Schans

Thames & Hudson ISBN 0-500-51181-0 2004 \$150

This is a wonderful book. It is large, A4 size with 484 pages and hard backed. The species described are not the usual gathering of species from a particular region but are truly a collection of ornamental trees of the world. There are many species that I had not heard of before and I thought I had a good knowledge of tropical trees! The species described within are organized alphabetically by genus. It's easy to find a plant if you know its generic name! Some books are organized by family which shows the similarities between different genera and species but it's harder to find a species, even if you know its generic name, without resorting to the index.

The book is set out with either one species per page or two pages for a small genus such as *Agathis* with about five species. In the case of a large genus such as *Acacia*, it has five pages, describing sixteen species. When a single species is described there are usually four photographs; an overall photo of the tree, flowers, fruit and bark.

When a number of species are being described in a genus such as *Acacia*, there are two photos per species. One is an overall photo and the second a close up of a diagnostic feature. In this situation there are four species described per page. When describing species singly, a schematic diagram of the trees shape is provided plus a written description and a column with a yellow background listing the origin, height, habitat, speed of growth, growing requirement and physical attributes such as leaf and flower size. This book is very well laid out.

The photographs are mostly superb, in focus and well composed. There are some washed out photos of various boabs (*Adansonia*). There is no attribution of who took

each photograph, which when taken to extreme, can be tedious. In the 'Acknowledgements' various people are thanked for their photographs. I can only assume that the author took many of the photographs and managed to get her friends and colleges to take the photographs she could not.

The only fault I could find in was that I found some of the descriptions a bit 'flowery' and verbose, which I thought was unnecessary. I work as an invasive plant specialist and liked the way some species were described as being invasive. However a few seem to have crept under Margaret's horizon such as prickly acacia (*Acacia nilotica*). Prickly acacia is one of Australia's worst arid zone weeds and currently occupies large areas of cracking clay plains in western Queensland that used to be open (treeless) Mitchell grass plains. This is a Weed Of National Significance (WONS), of which there are only 20! There was no mention of it being a pest. I like such books as this to have an index of families with the appropriate genera listed against them that appear in the book. Unfortunately I



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could not find one. The benefits of such an index is that if you have a pea that you don't know what it is, you can look the family up and see which genera are featured and then look these up, rather than having to 'cruise' through the entire book which isn't an inconsiderable effort in this case.

I attended the launch of this book in the NT at Arnhem Nursery in early May and met both Margaret Barwick and Anton van der Schans. I spent some time with Anton and he certainly knows his cultivated plants. Thank you Kerry and Sandra for putting this on.

Whats happening in the GBDBG (Andrew Mitchell's whinge)

After first thinking that the ornamental banana near the Admin block looked lonely, I have since seen it spread out and en mass, it looks very attractive. I was gob smacked to visit this area about 3 weeks ago, to see that it had all been ripped out!

I also found the line of young palms along Gilruth Avenue a bit hard to take. These were planted perhaps late last year. Is this on GBDBG land or is it Darwin City Council as I think they look innocuous at the moment but don't think they will fit

in in the long term. Havnt we enough palms already?

I found the agricultural weeding of the GBDBG hard to take at the end of the 2005 wet season. Rather than trying to keep up with the weeds in the wet season, there seems to have been a policy of let them all go and them try and kill them all with a big blast of round up. This of course killed all the low weeds but didn't touch the vines which to me are the main offenders. I always thought that the GBDBG should be leading by example in their weed management.

Committee of Friends of the Darwin Botanic Gardens

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This committee was elected in March 2005

Patron: The Hon. Austin Asche AC QC

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