

APS Visit to the Eurobodalla Regional Botanic Gardens In March

group of keen APSers braved the forecast hot day and gathered for morning tea at the shady and pleasant Friends shelter at the Gardens picnic area.

To begin the walk Margaret took advantage of the beautiful *Acacia blayana* (Brogo wattle) providing shade nearby. The many adaptations of this widespread genus were discussed including moisture conservation through the development of phyllodes (flattened stems containing few stomata) which replace leaves in many species.

As the group moved to the shade of a *Eucalyptus longifolia* (woollybutt) at the sensory garden there was opportunity to reflect on the adaptive characteristics which make the eucalypts a common site throughout most areas of Australia. These included leaves often with a thick cuticle, hanging vertically to the sun's rays, thick or reflective bark and the presence of epicormic buds which sprout following fire. A grove of *Allocasuarina littoralis* displayed green branchlets often mistaken for leaves which are instead reduced to tiny scales, another water conservation measure. Banksias and a magnificent Xanthorrhoea extended the discussion on adaptations for fire survival.

Other plants (apart from eucalypts) were noted for oil glands in their leaves giving them a distinct smell and led to the question of "why is this so"? A mechanism to discourage browsing perhaps yet wallabies love the minty Prostantheras?

From plants adapted to dry and sunny situations we moved to look briefly at the contrasting characteristics of rainforest plants in the plantings next to the sensory garden. Here challenges in a sometimes dark and damp environment lead to adaptations including large leaves to obtain maximum sunlight rather than avoid it.

Pollination and the many specific adaptations developed allowing this to occur were also touched on throughout the walk.

The infinite number of survival techniques displayed by our native plants gives much food for thought and provides a fascinating insight into the development of our flora over thousands of years.



Margaret explains the adaptation of Acacia leaves beneath a mature *Acacia blayana* Photo by Amanda Marsh



After this short walk we continued to the Gardens nursery and propagation area.

Here we sat in the coolish breezeway while manager and fellow APS member, Michael Anlezark outlined the changing functions of the area and plans to further enhance its productivity and efficiency.

Groups of volunteers work on propagating the plants of the region for not only the Gardens own living collection displays but also for sales to the public, revegetation projects and weed swaps. The latter bring in a substantial income now expected from ERBG to contribute towards the budget. These environmental projects come largely from local land services where guaranteed local provenance is required. Currently there are eight and a half thousand plants ready for such projects including some for local salt marsh revegetation.

The approval for the redevelopment of the Visitors Centre area to allow for more visitor facilities will see the herbarium moved to the nursery precinct. There this important collection will be housed under climate controlled conditions with the ability for fumigation when necessary. This will ensure a much better long term storage outcome for the specimens housed in the Herbarium.

Michael also envisages the area becoming a science hub with the seedbank, herbarium and propagation facilities all under the one roof, better enabling the ERBG's core conservation and education goals.

The Gardens remain part of Mogo State Forest and following a visit from Forestry Corporation representatives it appears there will be a more mutually beneficial partnership developed into the future.

Following Michael's talk the group was shown the propagation areas and the processes carried out there further explained.

Members thanked Margaret and Michael and then adjourned for lunch. Margaret and Amanda left us at this stage as they had another commitment, to lead another group around the gardens in the afternoon.

After lunch the rest of the group strolled over to the Arboretum display gardens and then through the Creekside rainforest area, which has developed into a lovely shaded walk. Before leaving members browsed the plant sales area, selecting some treasures to take home.