

# UnderStories

Spring 2007  
No.39

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## Contact Details

**Enquiries, newsletter articles and memberships to:**

**Ruth Mollison**  
**Understorey Network Coordinator**

Ph:6234 4286 Fax:62344286

Mobile: 0407 352 479

PO Box 4535 Bathurst Street Hobart 7000

Office : 148B Elizabeth Street Hobart

ruth.mollison@understorey-  
network.org.au

### Steering Committee Members

*President:* Anne Griffiths

*Vice-President:* Joan Rodrigues

*Secretary:* Mary Jolly

*Treasurer:* Rupert Manners

*Committee members:* Brian Griffiths,  
Warner Wait, Amanda Cole

**Visit our website and Plant  
Propagation**

**Database at:**

**www.understorey-  
network.org.au**

## Coordinator's News

October has been our busiest month of the year, with the Grower's Scheme Depot Day, the displays at the Sustainable Living Tasmania's Expo in the Hobart City Hall and The Tasmanian Landcare Conference at Ross, plus our Annual General Meeting at the Botanical Gardens.

We have also completed a series of eight Coastal Garden Design workshops, sponsored by NRM North and held at coastal towns in Northern Tasmania.

The result of all this activity is a growth in membership and in our growing power – this spring we have issued material to grow 20,000 tube stock plants in people's backyards!

Once again we have several projects to grow for including a big southern project titled 'Biolinks', focused on making linkages between remnant bushland in the Kingborough/Huon municipalities and for several Tasmanian Land Conservancy sites to follow up with planting after weed removal. Many growers are expressing a preference for growing plants for projects, so we will continue to develop partnerships with suitable project proponents.

As you can see in the newsletter, our partnership with Life Without Barriers (formerly Kalista) and Sustainable Living Tasmania is producing great results at the Tolosa Community Nursery. Our Green Corp team has finished the job of getting the site up and running and now we are looking for more community involvement.

Well happy planting for Spring – fingers crossed it's a good growing season this year!

Ruth Mollison



Australian Government

# President's Report

Presented to the AGM  
Saturday 6th October 2007

Once again it's been a very good and busy year for the USN. Our membership has increased considerably in no small measure due to the excellent field-days and workshops that Ruth has organised. Along with that our grower numbers have increased too, we have 64 growers just in the South this year, obviously with lots in the North as well. We will be growing more than 20,000 plants for revegetation projects, large and small. This shows a considerable degree of commitment from nearly 1 in 3 of our members. Obviously growing plants is something from which lots of people get a lot of satisfaction! We did have some failures and very slow growers last season, we think partly due to the dry and hot summer and also that the potting mix was not quite up to scratch. So if you were one of those growers who had some troubles you were not alone, don't be disheartened. For those of you who haven't yet been a "grower", give it a go. It's easy if you follow a few simple rules, and obviously very satisfying, particularly when you hand them over!

Financially we are going well, and I'll leave the details of that to our Treasurer. Receiving funding in only 12 month blocks still makes long term planning risky but we are now in the fortunate position of being able to survive the period between being promised the funding and having the dollars in the bank. Thank you so much to those members who generously round-up their subscription payments; so far just in the 3 months since subs became due we have received nearly \$500 in donations from members. At the risk of sounding morbid too...think of us when you are making out your will! The only trouble then I believe, is that it is not tax-deductible!

We have also received grants of over \$100,000. As the bulk of this funding comes from NRM South it is difficult to provide services evenly across the three regions of the state, which is a continual worry to us as we feel that members particularly in the North-West must at times feel neglected. Funding from the NRM north and Cradle Coast would help us to address this imbalance!

If you visit the Forestry facilities at Tahune and Dismal Swamp in the near future you may notice our posters and brochures on display there. This has come about as some months ago when we were at Tahune we noticed some copies of our poster legend, complete with all acknowledgment of the USN wiped out, amongst the Forestry information sheets. I went into Forestry with the evidence and talked to some of their officers who were extremely apologetic, and I think a bit embarrassed, and

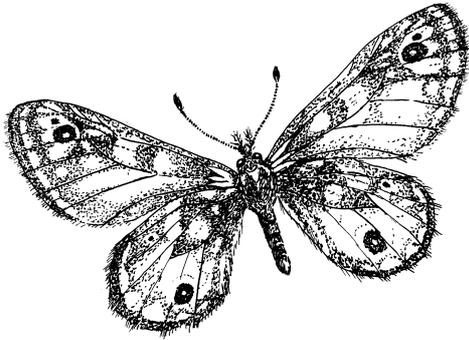
we came to the arrangement of displaying our posters (for sale) and our brochures, with all reference to the USN replaced, at the two sites. I appreciate that some of you may have some misgivings about this apparent collaboration with Forestry, but we felt that it was pointless to fight them – they're a lot bigger than we are – and this provided us with an opportunity for wonderful publicity and exposure for the USN. I hope you agree.

I would like to thank the committee for all the help and support they have given me over the last 12 months. I could not ask for a better group to work with. Mary, our secretary who misses nothing and keeps us all in line, Joan the Vice-President who has a superb business head, Rupert, the Treasurer from heaven, and Brian, Warner and Peter who pick up all the odd bits and pieces that get slung at them from time to time. Angela has been our northern contact. We were sorry during the year to lose Liz due to mothering responsibilities and Kris who could not work for us and be on the committee at the same time, but there is a definite understanding that election to the committee of the USN is not a life sentence! So...we could use a couple of new faces on the committee if any of you would like to volunteer.

I particularly would like to thank also those members who have given so freely of their time during the year to help Ruth. Martin Luther has spent almost every Wednesday afternoon sorting and cataloguing seeds; Amanda Cole has spent many long days helping Ruth and Steve set up the nursery at Glenorchy; De Deegan worked in the office while I was overseas, and Matthew Bartlett and Louise Jerrim have been stalwarts at the Depot days. Matt has also been very involved with the monitoring our penguin habitat site at Boronia Beach. Anna Povey runs the depot day up north and keeps in touch via email with what is happening down here. There are also many members who volunteered to help at the Australian Plant Society flower show and the Home Expo last year. Without all the extra help Ruth would not be able to do as much as she does. And thank you too to all our members who continue to support us in what we are trying to achieve with our and others' revegetation projects and their faith that we can make a difference to this beautiful island of ours.

Above all I'd like to thank Ruth, whose professional attitude and dedication have allowed us to continue to grow, along with our reputation for being a necessary adjunct to so many other projects around the state.

Anne Griffiths  
President



*Ptunarra Butterfly*

## Warming to the Ice Plants

By Phil Watson

**This is the second part of this article. Part one (Winter 2007 edition) introduced some of the fascinating attributes of the ice plants, whilst part two discusses the interesting culinary and medicinal history of the plants. (Ed.)**

### The tasty “Greens” were highly valued by early Explorers

As mentioned in the introduction, Ice Plants form an important historic connection with our Tasmanian convict ancestry. This arose as a consequence of the 1768 voyage of Captain Cook's to observe the transit of Venus. He satisfied his scurvy-stricken crew's desperate need to savour fresh greens by harvesting the pot herb NZ Spinach, *T. tetragoniodes* from the NZ's shoreline. Following discovery along the Australia coast by Cook and other explorers, of large swards of both *T. tetragoniodes* and Botany Bay Greens, *T. implexicoma*, they soon came to rely on these greens as dietary necessities, to enhance their Spartan rations. It is interesting to note, if the early explorers and colonists had shown a little appreciation for the Aboriginal way of life, they would soon have selected today's popular bush tucker treats but instead limited their choice to only those indigenous plants that reflected the image of English vegetables. Besides the Ice Plants these included Sea Celery *Apium prostratum* and Botany Bay Greens *Atriplex cinerea*.

So impressed was Sir Joseph Banks with these Ice Plants, he sent their seeds to Kew Gardens from where it rapidly gained favour in high society cuisine as a summer spinach. In 1779 Bank's fondness for this

plant's ability to provide reliable quantities of nutritious greens, was portrayed exuberantly in the House of Common's inquiry delving into the relative suitability of Australia compared to West Africa as a convict-based colony <sup>1</sup>. He obviously left a strong impression and the rest is now history.



*Carprobrotus rossii*. Photo by Richard Barnes

### “Pigface” was Tasmania's first Bush tucker?

Tasman's voyage of 1642 was not only historically significant as the arrival of the first explorers in Tasmania, but also the collection of 'Greens' (recorded as a *Mesembryanthemum sp*) by his crew's shore for detachment from the banks of the Boomer Creek flowing into Marion Bay. This collection heralded the start of the current bush tucker bonanza. The collection of what is considered to be *Carprobrotus rossii* was reported to be “not unlike a certain plant growing at Cabode Bona Esperance” (Cape Town).

Many diaries of early explorers and settlers not only record positive entries on the edibility of these “Greens” but also draw attention to the unique strawberry-fig like flavour of the Native Pigface's fruits. During the late 18<sup>th</sup> century a number of explorers referred to the harvesting of Ice Plants for pot herbage or edible fruits. These included Bligh's 1788 voyage on the Bounty in Adventure Bay, Bruny Island and D'Entrecasteaux's 1793 voyage on the Esperance in Recherche Bay. During this voyage he noted that “the fruit proved a delicacy with the New Hollanders (Aborigines) and resembled the Hottentot's Fig of South Africa (*Mesembryanthemum edule*) except that the flowers were not yellow but reddish purple”. Settlers at Collin's first settlement at the “Camp” (Risdon Cove) collected of Ice Plants for

<sup>1</sup> Low, T. *Bush Tucker Australia's Wild Food Harvest* Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1992: 134-135

nutritious “Greens”<sup>2</sup> whilst inland explorer Edward John Eyre partook of Pigface fruits freely noting the ripe fruit was rich, sweet and refreshing in hot weather

### Valuable “People’s Plants” supplying food and medicine

It was apparent that explorers and colonists developed a strong desire for the tasty and nutritious green foliage of *Tetragonia* species. This attraction continued to gain momentum over the next two centuries with these pot herbs being cultivated in European gardens. They have now become an heirloom vegetable, worthy of any menu especially being suited to stir fries, spinach dishes and quiches. Of course, they also prove just as attractive to wildlife; hence protection from browsing is required, during their establishment. Once growing vigorously the wild life grazing can be used to advantage by acting as marsupial pruning shears to limit their rampant growth!

It is important to be aware that, like rhubarb and silver beet, it is best not too over indulge in them due to the low levels of oxalates and saponins existing in the succulent leaves and stems.

In relation to the luscious fruits of *Carprobrotus rossii*, local Aboriginals eagerly awaited their summertime ripening. Aboriginal family bands would often establish camp next to broad expanses of fruiting pigface in order to supplement their fish and seafood diets with otherwise distinctly difficult to find harvestable offerings of summer ripening bush tucker. They not only enjoyed the fruits but also cooked leaves of this native Pig Face or at times the Round Leaf Noon flower *Disphyma crassifolium* to accompany their fire pit-roasted possum, roo or echidnas etc.

Beyond their bush tucker attributes, the finger-like leaves and stems when squeezed ooze a gel-like sap which acted as a soothing lotion in much the same way as Aloe vera does today. As an aside these bulky, sappy leaves have proven problematical for all those plant collectors and students who have attempted to use plant presses to dry and press specimens. They are botanist nightmare!

<sup>2</sup> Potts, B. et al. (ed.) *Janet Somerville’s Botanical History of Tasmania*, 2006

When exploring the world wide range of extraordinary plant uses attributed to Ice Plants, it would be remiss not to mention the captivating mind and mood altering qualities of the South African species known locally as “Kanna” *Sceletium tortuosum*<sup>3</sup>.

This mood-altering plant (attributed to the alkaloid “mesembrine”) has been used by hunter-gathers and pastoralists from prehistoric times, to elevate mood and decrease anxiety, stress and tension. Amazingly larger doses have no severe adverse affects, as it induces a euphoric state enabling pastoralists to decrease thirst and hunger or for its application as a

### Stories on Understorey Happenings (1)

#### Colebrook Planting Day and Bonfire

On the banks of the Coal River, on landowner Phil Headlam’s grazing property, a huge willow tree bonfire was lit as the last of the planters picked up their tools and collected empty pots and gathered for a sausage sizzle.



Earlier in the day, Phil and Helen Geard from the Southern Midlands Council had worked placing stakes, weed mats and tree guards by every hole they had dug. Soon busses and cars arrived and food and drinks unloaded. Forty two people had come to help plant the river bank.

Students from Woodbridge District School and their teacher Nel Smit had propagated seeds from the Campania area and were keen to help with the planting. Students from Campania District School were there to assist with the planting too and a formal ‘handing over’ of plants from one group to the other’ was the start of the afternoon. A bucket brigade was organised to water the new plants and plastic tree guards quickly sprouted the length of the river bank. The bonfire signified the final demise of the

*Catriona Scott, Wildcare Threatened Plant Action Group Coordinator, Hobart, Tasmania.*

The newly formed Threatened Plant Action Group (TPAG) hosted its first events throughout September, celebrating National Threatened Species Day with talks and a display, and following it up with working bees in two threatened ecological communities. The first, held at Apsley River on Tasmania's east coast focused efforts on removing gorse from a stand of *Eucalyptus ovata* – *Callistris oblonga* forest. As well as working hard, volunteers enjoyed beautiful weather for the day, and encountered numerous species coming into flower. The following weekend saw TPAG volunteers removing gorse, briar rose and blackberry from a Themeda Grassland site, home to ten state listed threatened species, including *Cryptandra amara* and *Hibbertia basaltica* (case study one).



*Hibbertia basaltica*



**Wildcare  
Threatened Plant  
Action Group:**

**Raising the Profile of  
Tasmania's Threatened  
Plants**

The TPAG has been established to encourage and facilitate state-wide community involvement in threatened flora protection and recovery. Over 70% of species listed as threatened in Tasmania are plants. Tasmania's threatened flora includes a diverse array of beautiful, rare and unique species, from grasses, ferns and orchids, through to large trees such as the Miena Cider Gum (*Eucalyptus gunnii* ssp. *divaricata*). Many of our threatened plants are endemic to Tasmania, meaning they are not found anywhere else in the world.

Many things can cause a species to become threatened including land clearance, habitat degradation, grazing by both native and introduced animals, weed invasion, loss of pollinators, altered

hydrology, *Phytophthora*, drought stress, and altered fire regimes. Once threatened, species require appropriate management to ensure they can survive in the wild and do not go the way of the Thylacine. With over 400 state-listed threatened plant species in Tasmania and only a few paid staff to look after them, volunteer contributions are vital to the successful implementation of threatened flora recovery actions.

TPAG volunteers will work closely with Threatened Species Section staff of the Department of Primary Industries and Water (DPIW) on current flora recovery programs, ensuring their efforts will be relevant, timely and worthwhile. Volunteers may get involved in a wide range of threatened flora related activities including: surveying and monitoring of threatened populations, especially orchid populations; weed eradication at key sites; fencing populations to protect them from over-grazing; research into threatened species ecology, seed germination, pollination and response to fire; conservation plantings; raising seedlings; organising awareness raising events; website development; community education activities; writing and updating threatened flora listing statements, data entry...and so on!

By joining the TPAG you can contribute to the conservation of Tasmania's precious and unique threatened flora. You might just help bring a species 'back from the brink'!

For more information contact TPAG Coordinator, Catriona Scott on 62336692 or [catriona.scott@dpiw.tas.gov.au](mailto:catriona.scott@dpiw.tas.gov.au)

## Tolosa Community Garden and Native Nursery

On Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> October, Glenorchy Mayor, Adriana Taylor, officially opened the Tolosa Community Garden and Native Nursery being established in Tolosa Park. The first stage of the garden, designed by Julie Stoneman, has been planted with Tasmanian native plants.



*The official opening of the native community garden by the Mayor Adriana Taylor and David Treanor, from Life Without Barriers.*

A pond that fills with water run off, from the nursery, already has some resident frogs.



Gravel paths, yet to be paved, wend their way down the sloping site.

\*\*\*\*\*  
**Update:**

Work at the garden and accompanying nursery has been accomplished by a Green Corps team, TAFE students, Life Without Barriers (formerly Kalista) and many volunteers working with Steve Shaw. Timber seats and tables have been built and are scattered around the garden. Less formal seating can be found on large logs placed among the new plants.

Steve oversees and coordinates a diverse range of activities, from washing pots to supervising earth moving machinery, propagating, plumbing, building, planting, weeding and wheelbarrowing load after load of gravel and mulch around the site to mention just a few.

Initially, the nursery plants provided food for the local possum population, but the nursery has now been completely 'possum proofed' and it is a delight to see chewed Callistemon, Disphyma and Eucalypts putting on substantial spring growth.

View of pond and garden facing west toward Mt Wellington



The garden and nursery site as it appeared in October 2006.

If you haven't yet visited Tolosa Community Garden and Nursery we would love you to drop in. The nursery is open most Mondays and Tuesdays, but the garden is accessible every day of the week. Just head toward the mountain and you will find us at the western end of Tolosa Park.

The nursery needs volunteers to assist with a variety of tasks so if you have some spare time contact Ruth for details about tasks and times.



## What's Happening

### Coastal Cuttings Workshop

Come and look at the new nursery and assist us to propagate several salt bush species for farms. We would like to see many volunteers as we have 3000 cuttings to propagate.

**Date: Tuesday Nov 20<sup>th</sup>**

10.00 start to 2.00

Lunch provided

Bring gardening gloves

RSPV Ruth Mollison (03) 62 344 286

### Xmas Meeting and BBQ

Warner Wait and Kris Schaffer have invited all USN members and families to 388 Sommers Bay Rd, Murdunna for an early Xmas get together. A short meeting will be held, followed by a BBQ and for those who wish, a walk along the coastline. A pebble beach for children is accessible.

**Date: Sunday Nov 25<sup>th</sup>**

11.00 short general meeting (all welcome)

12.00 BBQ- Bring your own food and drinks

Eat, walk, relax and meet other Understorey members.

RSPV Anne Griffiths (03) 62 641 896

### Waterworks Reserve Seed Collection Workshop

A walk and talk workshop -identification of plants in the area, information on the time of the year when common native plants are seeding, collecting equipment, labelling methods, drying and storage of seeds plus more.

**Date: Sunday Dec 2<sup>nd</sup>**

9.30 to 12.30

Bring secateurs, pen, ID books, refreshments, hat, sunscreen, wet weather gear if showers are forecast and protective footwear

RSPV Ruth Mollison (03) 62 344 286

### Two Seed Collection Days

One in Southern Midlands (Bagdad)

One in the Huon

**Dates: to be advised via email**

Please RSVP for more information :

[secretary@understorey-network.org.au](mailto:secretary@understorey-network.org.au)

or ph (03) 6234 4286



## Planting Day at Murrayfields

An interesting design had been marked out on the ground by the trainees and the decision had been made to plant a 'weaving garden.'

Understorey members, Oliver Strutt, Christine Bateman, Susan Friend and Amanda Cole along with Ruth, aboriginal trainees, STEPS students, helped Greening Australia staff and volunteers to plant 650 tubestock (approx. 500 USN plants), in the saltscald waterlogged site at Murrayfields on North Bruny.

*Amanda, Susan, Ruth and Christine*



The previous week, school students had put in approximately 500 USN tubestock at another site on the property.

*We have made our mark on Murrayfields!*

*Susan watering in the new plants*

After a long morning, planters were treated to a barbecue under the trees at lunchtime. Being 'well fed and watered' most managed to plant some more tubestock after lunch, before catching the ferry back to Kettering later in the afternoon. We are hopeful the site can be monitored so we can get reports on the success or otherwise of the plantings.

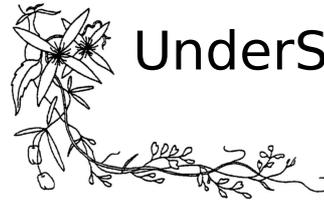
*Anna from Greening Australia*



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Understorey Network  
PO Box 4535  
Bathurst Street  
HOBART TAS 7000

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