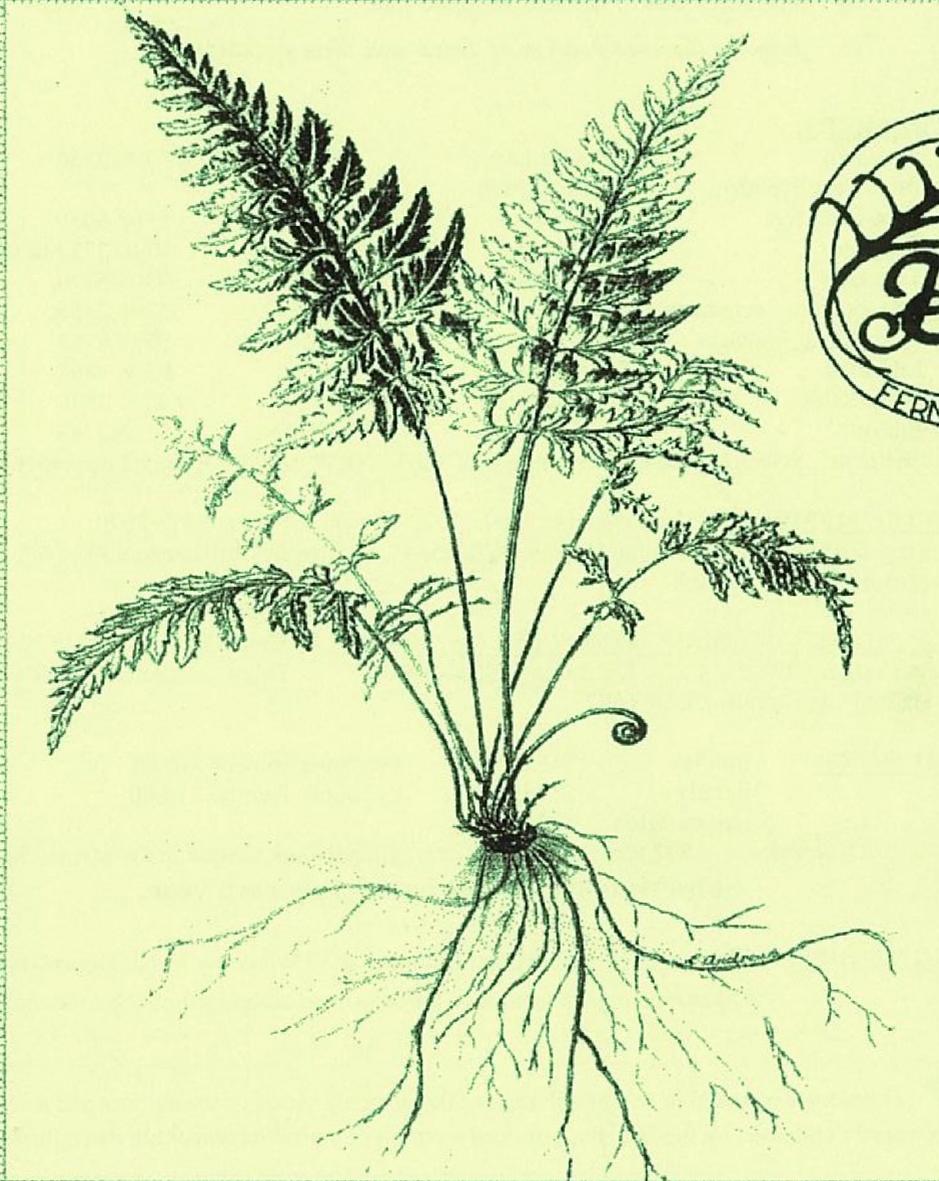


Fern Society of Victoria Inc.  
**NEWSLETTER**



ABN 85 086 216 704

**Vol. 25, Number 4  
July/August 2003**

# **FERN SOCIETY OF VICTORIA Inc.**

**POSTAL ADDRESS:**

P.O. Box 45, Heidelberg West, Victoria, 3081

E-mail: [http://gardenbed.com/clubs/clubs\\_vicferns.cfm](http://gardenbed.com/clubs/clubs_vicferns.cfm)

## *Our Society's Objectives.*

*The objectives of the Society are:*

- \*to bring together persons interested in ferns and allied plants*
- \*to promote the gathering and dissemination of information about ferns*
- \*to stimulate public interest in ferns and*
- \*to promote the conservation of ferns and their habitats.*

**OFFICE BEARERS:**

President:	Rex Gresham	Phone/Fax (03) 5796 2466
Imm. Past President	Ian Broughton	
Vice-President	George Start	" 5962 5059
Secretary	Barry White	" 9740 2724 or 9337 9793 (old)
Treasurer	Don Fuller	" 9306 5570
Membership Secretary	Rex Gresham	" 5796 2466
Spore Bank Manager	Barry White	" 9337 9793
Librarian	David Radford	" 9598 8398
Book Sales	Ivan Traverso	" 9836 4658
Editor	Lyn Gresham	Ph/Fax 5796 2466

"Kilpara", Selectors Road, Mangalore, Vic, 3663. NEW e-mail <[lynrex@optusnet.com.au](mailto:lynrex@optusnet.com.au)>.

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS:**

Jean Boucher 9707 1592, Jack Barrett 9375 3670,  
Gay Stagoll 9844 1558, Norma Hodges 9878 9584. Brenda Girdlestone 9390 7073  
and Mirini Lang 9886 6109.

**SILVER ANNIVERSARY SUB-COMMITTEE MEMBERS:**

Norma Hodges 9878 9584, Mirini Lang 9886 6109, Keith Hutchinson 9457 2997,  
and Bernadette Thomson 9399 1587. Brian Nicholls 9836 6507,

**SUBSCRIPTIONS:**

Single -	\$15.00	Pensioner/student \$12.00
Family -	\$17.00	Pensioner Family \$14.00
Organisation	\$17.00	

Overseas - \$22.00 - Payment by international bank cheque in \$A please. Sent by Airmail.

**Subscriptions fall due on 1st July each year.**

**MEETING VENUES:**

The Kevin Heinze Garden Centre is at 39 Wetherby Road, Doncaster (Melway 47; H1).

Other meetings at members' gardens or as advertised on the following page.

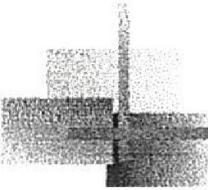


Opinions expressed in this newsletter are the personal views of the authors and are not necessarily endorsed by the Society, nor does mention of a product constitute its endorsement.

## TIMETABLE for EVENING GENERAL MEETINGS:

- 7.30 Pre-meeting activities - Sale of ferns, spore, books, merchandise and Special Effort tickets. Also library loans and lots of conversation.
- 8.00 General Meeting.
- 8.15 workshops and demonstrations.
- 9.15 Fern identification and pathology, Special Effort draw.
- 9.45 Supper and another good yarn.
- 10.00 Close.





# From the President

Greetings everyone! It is with fear and trepidation that I sit down to write this first Presitorial. I am sure that many of you would be asking themselves should we have a President who is not a fern grower? The short answer to that is no, the long answer is noooooo! Then what am I doing here? I have taken on the job of President because at the time of Ian's leaving no-one else was in a position to do so. I did not want to see the Society flounder for the lack of someone to take on the position, as I have a special relationship with someone who gets a lot out of the Society - my wife! Hopefully I will be only here temporarily, although I look at the Treasurer of my drama group who took on the job temporarily 46 years ago, and is still in the position! That will not happen to me.

On that subject, the AGM is fast approaching, and I ask all members to consider taking on a position on the committee. Being on the committee is a great way to learn more about the running of your Society, and also about ferns. Have a say in how you want your Society to run.

The July meeting will include a talk by Barry White on the distinguishing features of various groups of ferns. Make yourself seem even more knowledgeable than you are by being able to at least give the family of a fern you see in the wild. In August our meeting is at 1.30 pm on Saturday the 23rd. Don Fuller will lead a discussion on the Fishbone ferns—Nephrolepis.

Then comes our AGM on September 18. This evening will include the second part of Terry Turney's talk on Islands of Ferns.

Forward notice; prepare yourselves for a visit to Terry Turney's 'new' garden in October.

Please pass on any ideas you may have for our Silver Anniversary to our Organising Subcommittee. ( Bernadette Thomson, Brian Nicholls, Mirini Lang, Norma Hodges and Keith Hutchinson ). Contact phone numbers are on page 50.

The missing Attendance Book has still not turned up!

The Fern Show was a huge success despite the weather's attempt during our drought to rain on our parade! Thanks go to all those members who contributed in any way. All comments I heard were favourable, and deservedly so. Once again Don did a fantastic job as Show Manager, but we will be looking for a new Manager for the 2004 show. Don's report is on page 54.

It is with deep regret that we must report the death of Rod Hill after a long illness, and his wife Lyn. Condolences to their sons and their many friends in the Society.

Note that Barry White has now moved to Sunbury, and his address and phone number appear below. Having moved many times I feel for them.

*Rex Gresham*

### Barry White's New Address

Barry and Judy have moved. Their new address is:

34 Noble Way  
Sunbury 3429

And their phone number is now 9740 2724.

Because the process of sorting their possessions is a long and tiring one, they will be receiving mail (and phone calls, if you're lucky) at both new and previous addresses for a time. We send you both warm wishes for a long and happy life in Sunbury.

# **NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING.**

The twenty fourth Annual General Meeting of the Fern Society of Victoria Inc. will be held at 8.00 p.m. on Thursday the 18th of September, 2003 at the Kevin Heinze Garden Centre, 39 Weatherby Road, Doncaster.

Business to be transacted will be:

1. To receive and deal with the President's Report on behalf of the Committee of Management.
2. To receive and deal with the Treasurer's Report.
3. The election of Office Bearers and Committee Members of the Committee of Management for 2003-4.
4. General Business.

## **Nominations for Committee of Management**

Nominations are now called for the positions of Office Bearers and Committee Members for the year September 2003 to September 2004. Nominations should be in writing, be signed by the proposer and seconder, and include the written consent of the nominee. They must be received by the 11th of September (not less than seven days prior to the Annual General Meeting). Nominations may be called at the Annual General Meeting only if insufficient have been received previously to fill all vacancies.

## **General Business**

Items to be discussed and voted on under General Business at the Annual General Meeting must be notified to the Secretary in writing not less than 21 days prior to the meeting.

*Rex Gresham*  
President.

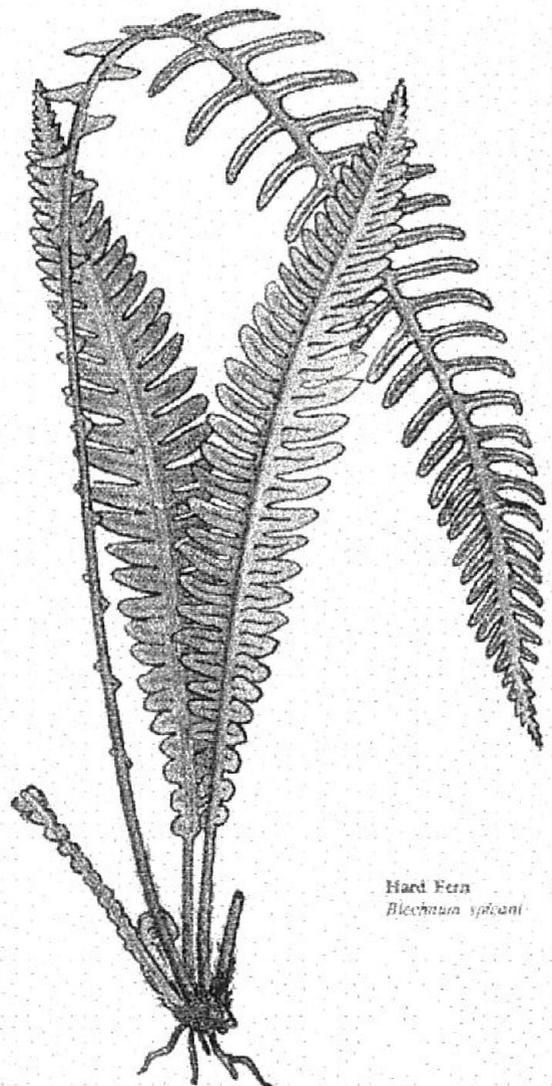
## **MEMBERSHIP FEES** **NOW DUE.**

Your subscription for 2003-2004 is now due. Recently joined members are asked to ignore this notice as your initial membership is extended until September 2004. If you mistakenly pay your membership fee again, it will be credited to you so you will be paid up until 2005.

The new subscription rates are to be found on page 50 and the renewal application, which should be inserted in with this newsletter. If it isn't, please ask Don Fuller for one as we certainly don't want to miss out on having you in the Society 'family'.

Please attend to your renewal as soon as possible as yes, we value you - but we also value your money! 2004 is a big, exciting year for us as it's our Silver Anniversary as a Society so you won't want to miss the celebrations.

*FSP*



Hard Fern  
*Blechnum spicant*

# FERN SHOW 2003 REPORT

The 2003 Combined Fern and Vireya Rhododendron Show was held on the last weekend of April. The weather on Saturday was fine and mild but we had rain on Sunday morning and showers in the afternoon (but no one complained about the badly needed rain). Despite concerns about the effects of the drought, water restrictions, the loss of a major contributor to the Show, and what we feared was a less than ideal weekend with a public holiday on the Friday, the Show was a great success for both societies. Attendances and plant sales were the best for many years.

Our display was excellent and received much favourable comment. There was also an increase in the numbers of members entering the fern competition (15) although the total number of entries was slightly down (72). We were pleased this year to have an excellent display of ferns by Eddie and Robyn Sabljak of Fern Acres Nursery and an expanded display by Chris and Lorraine Goudey.

Our feature display of Victorian Ferns was very well supported. The inclusion of a revolving tree fern stump, covered with mostly Victorian ferns, created great interest.

Contrary to our fears the fern sales area was "chockers" and had to be extended up the passageway to accommodate the great variety of ferns available to

customers.

The committee wishes to sincerely thank all the members who rose to the challenge of this Show and provided excellent ferns for the competition, display, and for the sales area. It was a great response. Thanks also to those who assisted with the conduct of the Show, helped with the setting up and with the packing and cleaning up after the Show. Your efforts were greatly appreciated.

A special thank you to Ian Broughton who made himself and his truck available to transport props and display ferns to and from the Show. This was a major commitment of time and contributed significantly to the success of the Show. Thanks also to Mary Frost who again judged the fern competition, we value her expertise and support.

Thanks also to Multicrop(Aust) Pty.Ltd. who again provided sponsorship of the fern competition. This support is greatly appreciated.

Next year will again provide us with a considerable challenge. Your Show Committee has met and decided to go ahead. The date is yet to be confirmed and will be advised.

Don Fuller - Chairperson Fern Show Committee.

## Gems From Rod Noonan

### Autumn Leaves

Pre Winter makes the leaves fall down  
Like sail boats in the wind they charm,  
The colours all around a glow  
Better mulch than rubbish throw.

At weekends we try to plot  
Our busy hands collect a lot,  
But look around and we have forgotten  
Maybe next time before their rotten.

Wind carries them to far and wide  
All those places they like to hide,  
We always look forward to the fall,  
It's very near Winter, after all.

### A Garden Thought

The storage of energy  
within the seeds and bulbs we know,  
A drop of water  
gives temptation for the infant plants to grow,  
Our anxious wait  
is realized with beauty all abounds,  
To enjoy  
the fruits of our labor in everything we sow.

*(Remember Rod, the Platycerium 'Hatchet Man' who so ably demonstrated his art at one meeting last year? He kindly left these gems with me. -Lyn)*

# FERNS OF THE ST. HELENS DISTRICT

by Arthur Greene

The following article is recycled from an old Tasmanian Fern Society Newsletter. The date of publication has been lost - but it would still be interesting to explore this site when you are in Tassie next.

This area on the north eastern coast of Tasmania is possibly the warmest part of the state. Consequently, in the hills behind St. Helens where there is some protection and more available moisture, ferns such as *Culcita dubia* and *Cyathea australis* abound. But what usually draws my attention to this area is the possibility of finding *Blechnum cartilagineum*. This hardy and attractive fern is extremely rare in Tasmania but was recorded several times from the St. Helens district in the 1800's. And in the last couple of years two very small plants were found in the same area at Constable Creek.

So armed with this knowledge, I spent an enthusiastic day at the above mentioned creek while the family were holidaying on the east coast. Although it drizzled with rain the whole day, it was certainly a very beautiful place. Being more used to the dark and damp forests of the south and west, this was certainly a pleasant change. Although I looked high and low, I could not find any trace of *Blechnum cartilagineum*. Having seen this fern growing elsewhere in Tasmania, I saw that all the conditions looked perfect for it here, so no doubt it was hiding from me.

*Culcita dubia* and *Blechnum nudum* were the common creekside ferns, with sprinklings of *Blechnum wattsii*, *B. minus*, *Gleichenia microphylla* and *Sticherus tener* on damper or shadier banks. *Cyathea australis* and *Todea barbara* grew on some of the wetter flat areas beside the creek, while *Dicksonia antarctica* grew in the much darker areas. *Asplenium flabellifolium*, *Doodia media* and *Cheilanthes tenuifolia* were seen further away from the creek or in some of the drier tributaries. No doubt the last fern at least, was more common higher up the

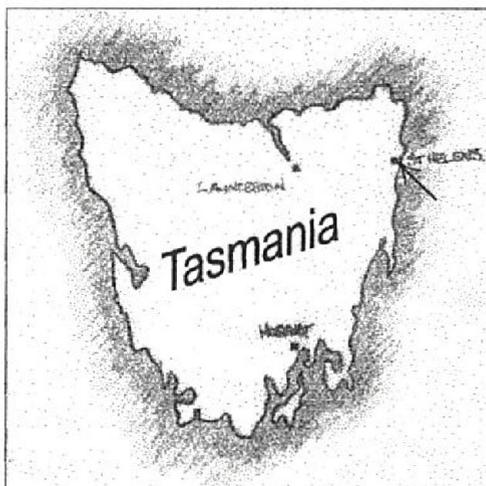
hillsides.

Still in the hills behind St. Helens, I visited what remains of Nephel Creek. Unfortunately one of the small hills beside the creek has been used as a quarry for gravel and much of the creek has been damaged in constructing a road to it. When nearing the end of the road at the quarry, the lower slopes of the hills appeared to be covered in the mandatory *Hypolepis*, *Histiopteris*, or maybe its *Culcita*. But upon closer inspection, it turned out to be masses and masses of *Pteris tremula*. Here it was, growing like the 'weed' it can become in our ferneries and glasshouses. But this is the first time I have seen it growing to such an extent in Tasmania. Up till now I had seen more *P. comans* than *P. tremula*.

Also at Nephel Creek were huge patches of luxuriant *Pellaea falcata*. Although I didn't bring any home for further identification, there appeared to be a few patches of *Hypolepis punctata* (as well as *H. rugosula*). *Lastreopsis acuminata* was scattered in dark wet sections of the creek, while *Adiantum aethiopicum* and *Cheilanthes tenuifolia* grew on the drier banks and higher slopes.

A complete fern list for both creeks is as follows:

Adiantum aethiopicum  
Asplenium flabellifolium  
Blechnum nudum  
B. minus  
B. wattsii  
Cheilanthes tenuifolia  
Culcita dubia  
Cyathea australis  
Dicksonia antarctica  
Doodia media  
Gleichenia microphylla  
Hymenophyllum cupressiforme  
Hyperopia numerate  
H. rugosula  
Histiopteris incisa  
Lastreopsis acuminata  
Microsorium diversifolium  
Pellaea falcata  
Polystichum proliferum  
Pteridium esculentum  
Pteris tremula  
Sticherus tener  
Todea barbara



# A Fern odyssey

by Ray Best

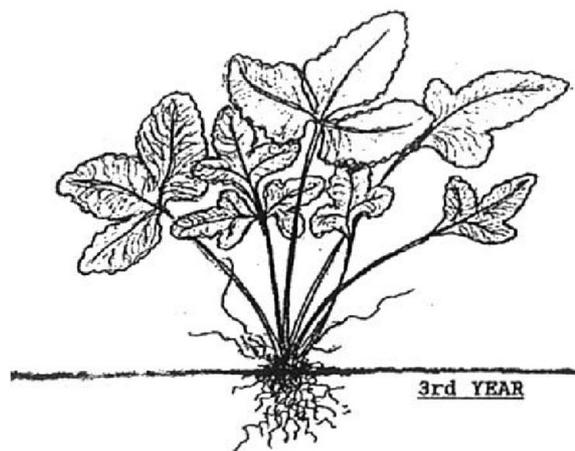
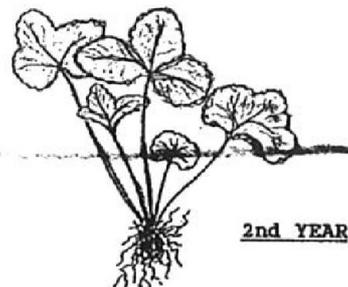
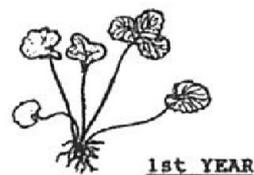
Many years ago I had a visit from a young lass who was interested in the cultivation of ferns. She brought with her an early British work on ferns titled "European Ferns" by James Britten. This was a beautifully produced edition, leather bound and embossed in gold with gilt edged leaves, that had been left to her by her favourite aged maiden aunt. This somewhat eccentric aunt lived in a large house on a big block of land in Victoria.

Knowing my interest in ferns, the lass brought the book for my assessment of its worth. Although I assured her that such a treasure should forever remain her property, she insisted on leaving it with me for my assessment. This proved very fortunate for me as a section on propagation gave a detailed description of *Osmunda regalis*, along with several well-presented black and white line engravings of each year's development. A close inspection of these revealed a marked resemblance to an Australian native Violet for the first five years of life.

Up to this time I had made several attempts to cultivate *Osmunda regalis* from fresh spores airmailed to me by A.R. (Matt) Busby of Aston University, England, a fellow member of the British Pteridological Society. Matt personally handled the fresh supply of these green spores, which are viable only for short periods.

All fern propagators experience from time to time what are called "ring ins" that appear in spore mixtures. One of these in our area is a native Australian Violet which is, of course, removed when it appears. In this manner we were destroying our cultures of *Osmunda regalis*! Add to this the fact that these English ferns are deciduous, disappearing each winter to appear again in spring and only resembling the mature fern in the sixth year of growth, and successful propagation becomes difficult. Mr Britten suggested that it was much quicker to carefully remove a mature plant from its natural habitat not a suggestion I would now recommend.

Armed with this new information, I finally managed to develop a new plant of *Osmunda regalis* from spore. From this I made a colour photo print and then prepared two watercolours to illustrate the details. Copies were sent to Matt Busby, who was thrilled to find that his fresh spores had proven viable. I am sure that without the information in the book success in propagation would have evaded me.



I have decided to include here a poem that concerns this fern. As some doubts existed about the naming of this species, an examination of early folklore in Scotland revealed a story that became the subject of this poem by Edith E. Warren of the British Pteridological Society ('Fern Gazette', Vol.7, No.5):

*Osmunda regalis*, "The Monarch of Ferns" !  
Growing in woods and by damp mossy burns,  
A fern with a story for youth and for age,  
A fern with a legend on history's page.

On the banks of Loch Tyne lived Osmund the bold.  
He worked as a ferry-man so we are told,  
Ferrying passengers over the wave,  
Osmund the bold or Osmund the brave.

In a cot by the shore lived his daughter and wife.  
They were the light and the joy of his life,  
Brave Gerta his wife both virtuous and fair,  
And Hilde his young daughter with red golden hair.

Fair Hilde loved the lake side and fleet as a faun,  
She would haste from the cot in the shimmering dawn,  
To watch her dear father depart o'er the blue,  
Waving and waving a loving adieu.

Then humming and singing would slowly return,  
Through the King Fern that crowded the banks of the burn,  
Their tall gallant fronds so green and so fair,  
With blossoms as golden as Hilde's pretty hair.

One morning, Oh horrors!, a fugitive band  
Came hurrying to tell them there were Danes in the land.  
Then onward in terror they fled them away,  
But Osmund all fearful looked round in dismay.

One moment he wavered then quick as a flash,  
"To the boat, Hilde and Gerta" and thither they dash.  
He rowed to an island with Fern Royal smothered  
And bade them lie there with fern safely covered.

Then back to his cottage full fleetly he hied,  
Not a glimpse of his daughter or his wife he spied,  
As he sped o'er the waters and back to his cot,  
Not a moment too soon e'er the Danes reached the spot.  
They did him no hurt for they wanted his aid,  
To ferry them over the waters unpaid!  
But gladly he worked the whole of that day,  
To ferry those troops safely out of his way.

With the evening came respite and there by the shore,  
His best and dearest in safety once more,  
He knelt down to thank the good father above,  
With Hilde and Gerta who both shared his love.

In the fair years that followed how often they told

Of that long day so bleak and so cold.

Said Hilde "My good King Fern must have a new name",

So "Osmund the Royal" the King Fern became.

Reproduced from our Newsletter; Vol. 14 #10, November 1992.



Plate 2. ROYAL FERN (*Osmunda regalis*) complete frond (1 - 4)

### BRISBANE BOTANIC GARDEN'S NEW FERN HOUSE opened earlier this year.

More than 200 ferns representing 80 species are displayed. Not the largest public collection, but each plant in it tells part of the evolutionary story of the life of ferns. There are terrestrial, epiphytic, lithophytic, aquatic, Australian and Queensland natives, some exotic ferns together with a number of rare and endangered species housed in nine outdoor rooms. This was a joint project by the Queensland Council of Garden Clubs and the botanic gardens. It is a hit with students in the 'Lessons in the Gardens' program and the 11,000 adult visitors each week.

SGAP Fern Study Group Newsletter Dec. 2002

# Snippets and snails.....

## SLUGS AND SNAILS FIND COFFEE SOLUTION OVERSTIMULATING

This item appeared in *The Garden*, journal of the Royal Horticultural Society, September 2002 ....

Scientists in Hawaii have found that caffeine will repel or kill slugs and snails when applied to plant leaves or watered over the soil.

The team, from the US Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service, discovered that a spray solution of 1 - 2% caffeine kills large slugs, and repels them when concentrations are as low as 0.1% (a cup of instant coffee contains about 0.05 percent caffeine). When soil was soaked with a 2 percent caffeine solution, 92% of the snails left the soil after 48 hours or were dead.

Preliminary trials suggest that a 2 percent solution of caffeine did not damage leaves of orchids and palms, but caused leaf yellowing in ferns, bromeliads and lettuce.

It is not known how caffeine kills the molluscs, but it seems to damage the nervous system. The researchers noticed that a 1-2 percent solution caused snails to writhe uncontrollably and the only ones to survive were those able to burrow into the soil soon after treatment. Concentrations of 0.01% caffeine caused an increase in the snail's heart rate, while levels of 0.1% and above reduced it. Details of the research are published in *Nature* (2002) 417, pp915-6 (Website: [www.nature.com](http://www.nature.com) search 'caffeine').

Last year, the most enquiries the entomology section of the Wisley Laboratory Advisory Service received were about slugs and snails. Metaldehyde pellets are the most widely used control method, but, in large quantities, are toxic to wildlife and a danger to pets and children. If caffeine is proved to be effective, it could offer a nontoxic form of control against one of the garden's most troublesome pests.

Andrew Halstead, Senior Entomologist at RHS Garden Wisley said, 'Using coffee to control slugs is an attractive idea. However, regulations made under the Food and Environment Protection Act 1986 make it illegal to use any chemical as a pesticide in Britain unless it has been approved for that purpose.

'This requires lengthy and costly research to show that the product is effective and safe to humans and the environment. This applies to all would-be pesticides, even something as innocuous as coffee'.

WAFS Newsletter December 2002.

## IRRADIATION OF UNITED STATES MAIL

Science News reported on investigations by the Smithsonian Center for Material Research and Education that examined the results of the irradiation of U.S. mail in Washington, D.C. The process heats objects to a temperature higher than 1300 C (2500 F) and results in the melting of some plastics, the yellowing of some papers, particularly recycled paper, and in some scientific journals the sticking together of pages to form a solid block. The researchers recommend that the amount of radiation needed to kill anthrax be determined with the goal of finding a more mail-friendly process. Not only is the government mail in Washington, D.C. being irradiated, but also resident's mail is sometimes also mistakenly being treated. [Source: "What the mail must go through." *Science News* 162(9): 142. August 31, 2002.]

Fern society members should be aware that if the current levels of irradiation are used to treat mail containing fern spores, the spores surely will not survive. It is currently not known if private mail carriers, such as UPS, FEDX, etc., or the US Postal Service in areas other than Washington, D.C. irradiate mail. - KAW, ed.

Fiddlehead Forum, Sept. - Dec. 2002

## GARDENING, GLORIOUS GARDENING!

I first got into gardening at school when I was about eight. I shared a small patch with a friend and I loved planting things, growing vegetables and getting my knees dirty. In truth we weren't actually very good at it. Most of the flowers we lovingly nurtured turned out to be weeds and we were quite lucky not to poison our entire families with green potatoes, but that didn't seem to matter. Ten years later I couldn't think of anything else to say during the careers interview; while my friend, on the other hand, doesn't have a garden to this day.

And now I love it. I think there's something very primal about growing things; being in touch with nature without needing to grow facial hair. The point is - gardening is good news. It's deeply therapeutic and relaxing. It's creative and personal and immensely satisfying.

Perhaps you already have horticultural leanings. Maybe a limp pot of basil on the kitchen windowsill and a straggly spider plant in the bathroom. Often people claim to know nothing about gardening and seem scared to start. But that's the whole point. You don't

# *Cyathea exilis* Holttum

(Family Cyatheaceae)

Classified as vulnerable (ROTAP code 2V).

## Distribution

*Cyathea exilis* is known only from one rainforest site on the Glennie Tableland, northern Cape York Peninsula. The population consists of a few dozen individuals. Other populations may exist on the Tableland, as the region (at least 75 square km in area) is a mosaic of gullies and basins containing rainforest.

## Description

A slender treefern with a trunk 5 - 6 cm in diameter. The leaf fronds are palegreen and up to 1.5 m long. The crown and stalk bases are sparsely covered with dark brown scales borne on small spines. This species is unusual among *Cyathea* species in producing buds on the trunk (one bud near each frond base) which are capable of developing into independent plants.

## Habitat

This fern occurs in one small mesophyll palm forest growing in a swampy basin at the head of a gully formed in the sandstone. *Calamus* spp. (lawyer vines) and other palms are a dominant part of this community. *Cyathea exilis* grows on boulders just exposed above the water which flows through the vineforest. *Angiopteris evecta* (King fern), *Cyathea felina*, and *Cyathea rebecca* are also present in the same vineforest.

## Threats

The very low population and localised nature of this species make it very vulnerable to collection from the wild by enthusiasts. The known range of this fern is en-

tirely contained within the boundaries of Bromley Station. This property encompasses Temple Bay, the site of the proposed Cape York Space Base. Although the possibility of destruction of the fern population by an accident due to a failed rocket is probably very remote, the Space Base will cause a large increase in the human population, with attendant increases in recreational visits to the region. On the positive side, the palm forest habitat of this fern is rendered almost impenetrable by lawyer vines, and this should deter most casual visitors.



## Reservation

The site on which this species occurs is not reserved.

## Recommendations

The rainforests of the Glennie Tableland are poorly known. Botanical discoveries during a number of recent brief surveys of a few of the more accessible rainforest basins have illustrated just how little is known about the vegetation of the area. Further investigation is necessary to determine the exact range of the species, and to anticipate threats posed by proposed future development in the region. Efforts should then be made to reserve an

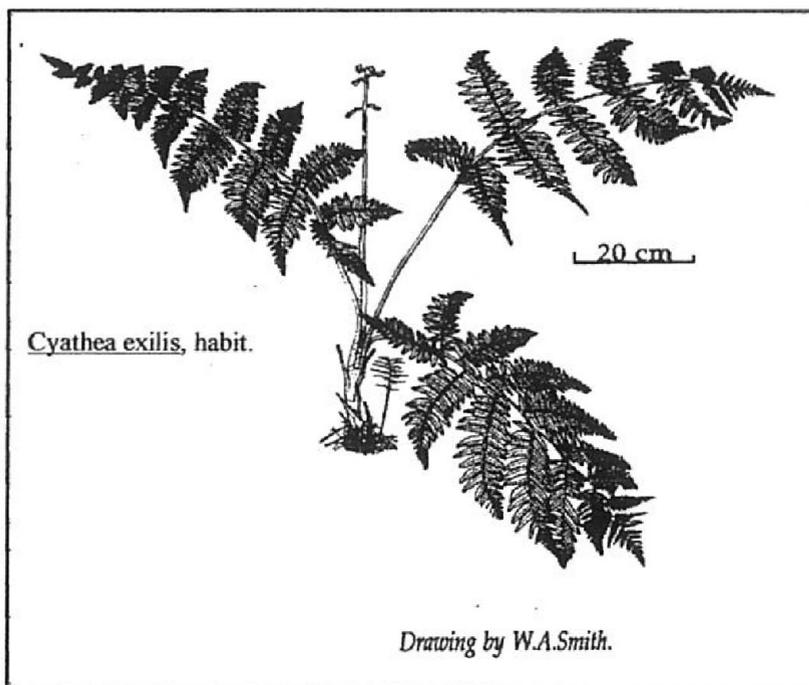
appropriate area of the species habitat. This unusual treefern is no less deserving of protection than *Leptopteris fraseri* (filmy treefern), for example, where virtually all known populations are included in National Parks or other reserves with equivalent protection status.

## References

Forster, P.I. (pers. comm.); Holttum (1986); Lavarack (1984); Lavarack & Godwin (1987); Thomas and McDonald (1989).

Case prepared by Mr P.D. Bostock. Threatened Australian Plants - Overview and Case Studies edited by J.H. Leigh and J.D. Briggs, CSIRO Division of Plant Industry, Canberra ACT. Report published in 1992 by the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service on behalf of the Australian and New Zealand Environmental and Conservation Council.

§



*Cyathea exilis*, habit.

Drawing by W.A. Smith.

(Continued from page 58)

have to know anything. The thing is not to take it too seriously; do the parts you like and leave the parts you don't. Give it a shot and don't be afraid of making a complete fool of yourself.

I've practiced organic gardening for several years because it makes sense and my particular form of it is really easy and doesn't involve any hard work. I adopt the basic techniques and then, because I have a small garden, I cut corners and skirt around all the fussy parts. So, I've also written with low maintenance in mind. Gardening should be a pleasure and never a chore - so what we want is a straightforward, effective approach that doesn't ruin your back.

But at the same time, it's as much about the process as the result. Puttering and looking and tweaking and making mental notes for next year and getting your knees dirty - these are the real pleasures.

### ANIMALS I HAVE KNOWN...

This is turning out to be a newsletter of diversions. The following is a (very) potted version of Ian Broughton's talk on the day we visited his garden, paying particular attention to some close encounters. I figure anything that reminds us of the delights related to gardens and gardening will counterbalance the drab and dreary winter weather we're having.

"I have had frequent close encounters with birds during my working day; a yellow robin standing on Meryl's foot and less than a metre from my face ... a tree

creeper that mistook my leg for a tree ... a spotted pardalote that had nested in a load of potting mix which I just had to shift, who perched on the front of my front end loader and, looking at where his nest had once been, berated me at great length and finally rolled up his sleeves ready to teach me a lesson. Some years later they were trying to nest in the mix on our potting bench. They would fly to and from their excavation not a metre from us as we worked and sometimes even landed on us ... all in all I have identified over 80 bird species on our block.

We have also had many resident possums, one becoming so tame that I could even touch the young in her pouch. We've had resident sugar gliders ... ringtail possums ... a blue tongue lizard family ... echidnas who stayed for a few weeks on their annual circuit ... only two snakes ... one red-backed spider ... lots of white-tailed spiders ... but vast numbers of huntsman spiders (harmless insect hunters) ... we've nursed a bat that had been hit by a car and I even caught one in the house once."

Tell me again that our Gardens are for plants and plants only. Rex and I hosted a group of friends from Melbourne today who I think came to see the gardens on this farm. They ended up unwinding over lunch in a hay shed (plenty of room, with the drought putting paid to the usual store of hay, but no plants!), recharging their batteries by breathing clean air and listening to the birds and the frogs in a nearby billabong. No amount of floral displays would have increased their enjoyment.

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## QUIZ ANSWERS

### THE TEN MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT FOLIAGE PLANTS

1. How often should I water my plant?

- a) once per week b) twice per week c) three times per week d) none of the above

Water as you need to.

2. How much water should I apply?

- a) approximately two cups b) enough to wet the upper 3 4 inches of media c) enough to wet the entire volume of media d) until water runs from the bottom of the container

...but make sure the water isn't just running down the edge of the pot

3. How often should I fertilize my plants?

- a) once per month b) twice per month c) three times per month d) none of the above

It depends on many factors; the time of year, type of fertilizer used, and the individual plant's needs.

4. What is the best type of water to use?

- a) rain water b) tap water c) drinking water d) distilled water

5. Misting plants will help...

- a) increase humidity b) spread disease c) cause salt injury d) all of the above

Yes, BOTH.

6. When should I repot my plants?

- a) when the pot begins to crack b) when the plant becomes wilted c) when the roots begin to twine d) at least once per year

7. What is the best way to water my plants? a) misting the foliage b) watering from the bottom up c) watering with a hose d) watering from the top down.

All or none of the choices. Watch for Barry's article once his house is in relative order!

8. Why are the leaves of my plant going dry?

- a) it is becoming acclimatized to a new location b) it has been subject to some form of stress c) the plant has probably dried out d) any of the above

9. What causes leaf tips to look burned?

- a) diseases b) insects c) salts d) low light

10. Why does my plant look wilted even though I water it regularly? a) poor quality of water b) poor growing media c) root diseases d) any of the above

One common cause of root disease is overwatering.

\*A further comment on 3) and 6); If you can establish a workable routine for you, that's what you should do.

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This gap represents my HOLIDAY.

If you would like such spots filled, think of an article, anecdote or hint to send me.

# MARSILEAS by Don Wood

I've enjoyed growing marsileas for many years. As with many plants, there are two major problems: too much water or not enough water. But with these you can't give too much water. These are bog or marsh plants and in most cases, if they dry up, they die. The exception - and there always is one - is that some species of marsilea grow in vernal pools. When these pools dry up for the summer, so do the marsileas. And some marsilea may be deciduous while still requiring moist conditions. The plants either go deciduous and return from permanent roots, or leave behind spores that will come up in the following year. Some marsilea are fairly hardy; one is native to Kentucky, so you can be sure it will take frost.

For me *Marsilea mutica* goes dormant and I think I've lost it. But it returns each spring. It's not a rapid grower, but it gives a reasonable display in summer. I keep it wet in winter even when it's dormant. There is a good example of *Marsilea mutica* at the Norton Simon Museum in Pasadena. There are actually two different marsilea species at the pool edges. *M. mutica* can be identified by the white marking around its center point, about a third of the way out from the center. Plants growing at the edge of a bog or pool look quite different from those growing in deeper water. But they are the same species. At the pool margin, the leaves are about an inch across; in deeper water they are closer to three inches across and lie flat on the water surface. When I first saw it I thought it was some kind of small water lily! (They also look like 4-leafed clovers, and have sometimes been used instead of clover for good luck charms. So that's why they don't work!)

I grow six or seven species of marsilea. (When Barbara Joe Hoshizaki came to visit my garden, she was very pleased to see *M. mutica* in my collection. It was the first time she had seen it in cultivation. That made me feel great!) Each species is in its own container. DO NOT put different species in the same pot thinking that you will keep them separated! It won't happen. They go running and get together in a interlocking mess - though none of mine have produced hybrids - that I know of! One has to see the sporocarp to separate the species. (The sporocarp is a specialized leaf that is folded over and contains the spores. There is a gelatin-like substance in the sporocarp as well.) No - I do not grow these from spore.

Marsileas are not very fussy. In most areas of Los Angeles they will take full sun to light shade. Just be

sure to remember the water. Frost also does not seem to be a problem - as long as the plants are in water. *M. mutica* goes dormant; others look raggedy. Even if you are not planning on showing them later, it is usually best to cut the plants down in early spring. They start growing like mad as soon as it warms up. I have found that the large, gray plastic food trays used for busing dishes in cafeterias are an excellent size for growing marsileas. They are big enough for the plants to spread but still moveable. And you can put a couple of mosquito fish in there as well. marsilea will also grow as a ground cover if the ground is very moist.

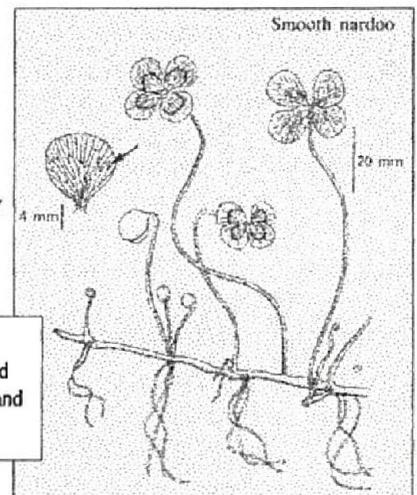
The plants can easily be divided during their growing season - once a month if you wish! They are vigorous growers and will jump the pot, go across the pond, etc. Fish eat them, so place the surface of pot so that the crown of the plant cannot be reached by fish. The fish will keep the rest of the plant neatly trimmed. Since my home water supply is Colorado River water, I usually replace only half the water at a time when these are growing - about 4 times a summer. The rest of the time I just make sure that the water level is maintained.

If you grow marsilea in a container do not use potting mix, Use either garden soil or half peat and half sand. Potting soil tends to rot if the plants are kept really moist. Potting soil is OK if the plants are given regular watering but not allowed to dry out.

To get these plants ready for a show, one needs to plan ahead. In late spring I chop them to ground, and in 2-3 months they're full and ready for showing. Do not try to prune out dead leaves. Cutting them down is much easier. And cutting them down in spring makes for a neater, more vigorous plant whether or not you plan to show them. The plants can be fertilized with fish emulsion or even slow release tablets designed especially for water plants.

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Our native *Marsilea mutica*. Source: Duncan & Isaac "Ferns and allied plants of Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia".



Natural Resources and Environment  
 AGRICULTURE • RESOURCES • CONSERVATION • LAND MANAGEMENT  
 FLORA AND FAUNA GUARANTEE ACT 1988

# Are your tree-ferns legal in Victoria?

This tag must be attached to the tree-fern or grass-tree at the time the plant is harvested in Victoria or imported to Victoria. The tag must be cut at the point of retail sale, so that it cannot be re-used. The last buyer of the plant may then remove the remains of the tag.

**S**oft Tree-ferns (*Dicksonia antarctica*) are the most popular tree-fern in Australia for home gardens. Thousands of these beautiful plants are harvested from native forests and private land each year in Tasmania and Victoria, for sale in nurseries. Many more are taken illegally, although the exact number is not known. Other ferns are harvested in New South Wales and Queensland. Tree-ferns are highly significant plants of wet forest and rainforest ecosystems. Some species are endangered, and all of them are important substrates for filmy ferns, Mosses, liverworts and lichens, many of which are themselves endangered.

Because of the high prices paid for tree-ferns, illegal harvesting and selling has been occurring for many years. In Victoria, strong legislation now bans the illegal harvesting or selling of these plants, and there are severe penalties for harvesting or trading tree-ferns illegally.

So how do you know if the tree-fern you are buying has been legally harvested? In both states, permits are required for any tree-fern harvesting, whether on public or private land. In Tasmania the permits are issued under the Forest Practices Act. In Victoria they are issued under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act. A permit will not be issued if the tree-ferns are considered to be significant, or if

harvesting them would damage forest values.

In both states, tree-ferns must be tagged at the harvesting site - that is, before they are transported away from the site. The tag must remain attached to the fern right up until the time of final retail sale. At that time **the retailer must cut the tag in two, retaining one half and leaving the other half attached to the plant.**

Once the plant is sold, the purchaser is free to remove the remaining half of the tag.

Tags must also be attached to any ferns imported into Victoria for commercial sale. The tags should be attached as soon as possible after the plants have been imported. This includes ferns imported from interstate, if they do not carry legal tags from the state of origin.

You should never purchase a tree-ferns of doubtful origin. This does not include plants raised from spores by a fern nursery. These tree-ferns are usually small, with little or no trunk development. Trunked tree-ferns have probably been harvested and should carry a tag. If in doubt, ask the retailer about the origin of the plant, and do not accept 'We don't know' as a valid answer. And make sure the retailer cuts the tag in two after sale.

If you have concerns about the legality of any tree-ferns offered for sale in Victoria, contact the Department of Sustainability and Environment in East Melbourne. On the Internet, the current Victorian Tree-fern Management Plan can be downloaded as a P1317 file from [www.nre.vic.gov.au](http://www.nre.vic.gov.au).

Priam Mansour  
 "Trees and Natural Resources"  
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 March 2003



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