

## SPECIAL PLANTS: April-May 2022 WITTUNGA TRAIL

This month a few of the 'Naming Walk' signs help to pinpoint some of the mapped locations. For example, the stand of spotted gum on the margins of site 6, and the two-leaf hakea at site 7, about 30 m along the road, are both marked by an appropriate sign.



See over page for map

### \*1 The new plants on the lake wall

Across the lake from this small beach with its stone benches, the numerous plastic guards on the lake wall contain recently planted grasses, sedges and rushes. Most were propagated from seed gathered locally and on the Fleurieu Peninsula. In a few seasons they will grow and spread sufficiently to provide food and shelter for a range of birds, insects and reptiles. There are tall grasses with attractive seedheads as well as sedges and rushes which help stabilise the bank and clean the water.

### 2 *Haemanthus coccineus* Blood flower or lily, April fool, ox tongue, paintbrush lily South Africa

A very variable perennial, which rests underground as a bulb in the dry season. First to appear are heads of coral to scarlet flowers (sometimes likened to a shaving brush) surrounded by the fleshy, red valves of a spathe. The 2 - 3 leaves, which emerge well after the flowers, are broadly or narrowly tongue-shaped, and often red or dark green on the underside. In South Africa the leaves have been used as dressings for septic ulcers and sores. The bulb is sliced, boiled in vinegar, mixed with honey and used as a diuretic.

### 3 *Agapanthus africanus* Agapanthus Western Cape Province, South Africa

Their evergreen strap-like leaves are an effective contrast with the striking blue flowers. *A. africanus* is a later-flowering species than the much more common *Agapanthus praecox*. As soon as flowering has finished, 'dead head' to reduce the spread of plants escaping into the surrounding environment.

### 4 The Restionaceae (a southern hemisphere family) Restios, Cape reeds

The restios in this section are from the Western Cape Province of South Africa. Male and female plants are separate and pollination is by wind. They have a tufted reed-like appearance and vary from about 20 cm to over 3 m in height. At the marked location is *Chondropetalum tectorum* which has historically been used for thatching and is grown commercially for that purpose. Immediately adjacent is *Elegia capensis* which has new shoots with colourful bracts used in floral work. The older fluffy stems make good yard brooms.

### 5 *Phyllica pubescens* (opposite a naming walk sign) Featherhead Cape Peninsula, South Africa

This attractive shrub is densely covered with softly-hairy leaves, each hair seeming to gather the sunlight and make the plant glow. Popular in posies and flower arrangements, it is long-lasting as a fresh cut-flower, dries very well and is hence popular in the dried flower trade. Look back for the 'glow' from another patch.

### \*6 One of the most charming and distinctive features of our eucalypts is their bark.

The collection of species at this site displays a variety of different bark types, from the smooth, dimpled bark on the stand of tall *Eucalyptus maculata* (spotted gum) near the road, to *E. crebra* (narrow-leaved ironbark) which has rough, furrowed bark extending to the smallest branches. The large, spreading *E. cornuta*, in contrast, retains rough bark for some distance up the trunk before it begins to shed ribbons of bark from the upper limbs. Perhaps the most interesting is the smooth white bark of *E. accedens* (powder bark wandoo) which sheds in sheets, revealing the pale-orange new bark beneath. The outer surface of both the old and new bark is powdery and, depending on season and weather, you may be able to collect a small sample on your fingertip. *E. maculata* (now *Corymbia maculata*) is smooth because it sheds regularly in small patches producing the mottled appearance its names suggest. Ironbark, on the other hand, retains much of its bark, which stretches and forms furrows as the trunk expands with age.

### \*7 *Hakea trifurcata* Two-leaf hakea Western Australia

This unusual hakea has two distinct leaf forms on the same branches, rather prickly, needle-like, 3-pronged leaves and, after reproductive maturity, broad leaves which mimic the shape and colour of its woody fruits. It relies entirely on recruitment from seed after fire, so a seed bank in the canopy or litter is all-important. There is some experimental evidence that black cockatoos lose interest and take less seed when faced with the prospect of only an occasional reward from amongst the mix of fruits and misleading mimics.

### \*8 *Banksia media* Southern plains banksia Western Australia

Named for Sir Joseph Banks who travelled with Captain Cook in 1770, nearly all banksias are endemic to Australia. This dense shrub is from southern coastal districts of WA. It has small, wedge-shaped leaves and striking, golden-bronze, nectar-rich flower heads in autumn. These are a food source for birds. They retain their seeds for many years until the plant dies or the foliage is killed by fire. It will tolerate dry conditions.

### \*9 *Eucalyptus leucoxylon* ssp. *leucoxylon* S.A. blue gum, yellow gum SA, Vic

One of about 800 species of eucalypt, the scientific name refers to the pale-coloured wood. Eventually a tall tree with mostly smooth bark, it is used for shade, shelter and firewood. The ornamental flowers, which hang in clusters of three, and can vary from white through pink to red, are the source of a light-amber honey.

### 10 *Protea* 'Pink Ice' Cultivar

On the way back look for this handsome, autumn-flowering protea about 15 m before a large, shady willow myrtle. About 25 m beyond the picnic bench is another protea ready to flower. Blue sugarbush is said to be one of the parents of a cross (*Protea neriifolia* x *susannae*) from which the cultivar 'Pink Ice' was selected.