



Eucryphia

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Robertson Environment Protection Society – to promote the protection and enhancement of the Robertson Environment
PO Box 3045, Robertson NSW 2577 www.reps.org.au

Next REPS Meeting Friday 13th April 2012 at 7:30pm at the Robertson Community Centre

Kevin Mills

A VISIT TO NEW ZEALAND'S REMOTE KERMADEC ISLANDS



The Kermadec Islands, politically the most northern part of New Zealand, are located 960 km north of the North Island, 1700 km south of New Caledonia and 2,500 km east of Australia. The islands, a dedicated conservation reserve with restricted access, are seldom visited. The talk will be centred on the plants of the islands and how these compare with the species on the surrounding land masses, particularly Norfolk Island, another remote Pacific island. The speaker is an ecologist with special interests in rainforest, coastal vegetation and island ecology. He is an authority on the flora of Norfolk Island and visited the Kermadecs in 2011.

**All welcome. Active discussion. Light supper
(Gold coin donation)**

Upcoming Events

Fri 13th April – REPS Talk – Kevin Mills ‘A Visit to New Zealand’s Remote Kermadec Islands’ at 7:30pm, see above

Sun 15th April – Vintage Car Day, 11:00am at Fettle’s Shed Gallery and Railway Station. Page 6

Sat 14th April, 12 May & 16th June – NPA Bushwalks. Page 4

Sat 28th April, 26th May – Caalang Creek Working Bee – 9:30am onwards. Page 6

February Talk Review

by David Mee

A talk and display of stick insects,
by Stephen Fellenburg, Entomologist,
given at The REPS meeting, 7:30pm, on Friday 10th
February at the Robertson Community Centre

Before the guest speaker began his presentation, a few announcements were made. Following an impromptu guitar demonstration by Tas Engel, Helen Tranter was recognised as the recipient of an award by the National Parks for her dedicated work in tending the Robertson Nature Reserve, with its constant requirement for weed removal. Denis Wilson gave a short report on local orchids.

The previous issue of 'Eucryphia' gave an introduction to Stephen and his interests, and summarised the main points of his presentation. Stephen was accompanied by his partner Lynn, and David Tranter introduced him by describing how he became interested in his topic, starting with work at the Australian Museum.

Stephen began by describing his early history. He grew up in Nowra and on leaving school, became an apprentice camera operator and platemaker. An accident incapacitated him for seven years and he had to relinquish his apprenticeship and income. He volunteered for work at the Australian Museum, spending 3 or 4 days there per week for 18 months. It was while sorting the collection of Phasmatids (stick insects), that he discovered some female phasmids with eggs, and he described these in his first scientific paper. This enabled him to get a job at the University of NSW, where he bred sheep blowflies for research purposes, which he did for four years.

Stephen stated that there are about 2500 phasmid species world wide. They are all harmless herbivores. A plastic box was produced containing the first of many species to be demonstrated. This was a female "goliath" green insect with wings and a body length of perhaps 25 cm. Although it has wings, it cannot fly, especially as it was heavy with eggs. It takes a female 6 months to become an adult. This insect happily clung to the curtain in the meeting room for most of the evening. Seven more species were then produced in quick succession and passed around in their plastic cages for all to have a close inspection. Some were quite large, others small. Males and females differ quite a lot in their relative size and colour. One type was a local Campbelltown species and another was taken from Allan Stiles place at Robertson. Stephen noted that a 60cm long phasmid was recently discovered in Queensland. Phasmid females can produce embryos with or without fertilisation from males. If they are fertilised by males the offspring have the spread of genetics from both parents, with average equal numbers of males and females. If not, then all offspring are female clones of their mother.

Following the introduction, Stephen described the very rare phasmid of Lord Howe Island (LHI). The species scientific name is *Dryococelus australis*. LHI was discovered by Europeans in 1788 by those on board the ship HMS Supply. The phasmids were common on LHI before 1918, but then a ship sank near the island and rats swam ashore and began breeding. They ate the stick insects which were all wiped out. More recently, they were re-discovered on Ball's Pyramid, an island 20 odd km from LHI. Insects and eggs were taken, and a scientific breeding program established. Stephen received a breeding pair, as did Melbourne zoo. It was difficult to keep the many young insects alive, but now there is some success.

Head of male
phasmid
Photo by
Denis Wilson



The species has gone from "extinct" to "critically endangered".

The LHI phasmid females live for about 2 years, while the males only for about one year, or 3 months after mating. A nymph takes nine months to hatch and 3 months to reach adulthood. For breeding they require a temperature of about 20-22 degrees C, and a humidity of around 95%. Stephen noted that there is a society formed called "Friends of the Long Lost Phasmid", which has among its aims the establishment of a breeding group, public awareness, broadening education, the raising of support funding and eventually the phasmid re-establishment on LHI (ie kill the rats). A travelling cage with two live LHI phasmids was then displayed and the audience was invited to come up for a closer look. The



food in the case was 2 small tea tree seedlings as tube stock. Their colour is glossy black, and Denis Wilson kindly took some photographs to accompany this report.

Sheila McInnes proposed a vote of thanks and presented a gift to Stephen for his very interesting presentation.

The Story of Silphium: A Botanical Riddle

by Arwen Apps (nee Wilson)

If ever there was the classicist's equivalent to the search for the Tasmanian tiger, it is the search for silphium. This substance, literally worth its weight in silver, was highly prized in antiquity as a seasoning and a medicament. It must have been a wondrous condiment indeed, for it is lavishly referred to in Greek writings from as early as the 7th century BC. It is so frequently mentioned as an ingredient one can imagine it being as important and familiar to Greek and Roman cookery as, say, parsley is to modern western cuisine. Unfortunately for the ancients, however, it seems the silphium plants ceased to grow, and the resource ran permanently dry. Today, the true identity of silphium, or of laser or laserpitium, as the Romans called it, has concentrated the mind of many a botanically-minded scholar, and created lasting problems for those endeavouring to re-create ancient cuisine. Imagine 45th-century chefs attempting to duplicate classic French dishes without parsley!

According to legend, the silphium plant first sprang up in the Gardens of the Hesperides, near the Greater Syrtis (today's Gulf of Sidra, on the coast of modern Libya), seven years before the foundation of the city of Cyrene. The well-watered plateau of Cyrenaica was the only territory which produced silphium, and the export of the plants early became a royal monopoly. The coins of the Cyreneans frequently featured the plant which was the wealth and pride of their land. All parts of the plant were used, but the juice exuded from its roots was the most highly valued. Apparently silphium could not be cultivated, and had to be picked from the wild. A system of rigid control over harvesting meant that the Cyreneans were for centuries able to keep the price stable (and, due to silphium's wide popularity, high). It even seems probable that it functioned like bullion as a medium of international exchange, as large quantities of the almost imperishable dried juice were deposited in the state treasury of Rome.

The supply of silphium began to wane in the first century of our era, and ceased altogether around the middle of the same century. According to Pliny the Elder (who died in AD 79, during the eruption of Vesuvius), within memory of his generation, only a single stalk of silphium had been imported from Cyrene. It had been sent to the Emperor Nero as a

curiosity. Ancient writers variously blame the depredations of nomadic tribes and the unbridled greed of sharecroppers. Due to the upheavals following the death of Sulla, sundry wars, and the change in status of Cyrenaica to a senatorial rather than imperial province, the long-range policy of the Cyrenean government regarding silphium was probably abandoned. Annual governors out for a quick buck no doubt encouraged indiscriminate gathering and issued unrestricted leases on the land on which the plant grew. Unsurprisingly, silphium became a rarity, and then utterly extinct. The contrast between the effects of sustainable use and of over-exploitation for short-term gain is perhaps as striking an example as history records.

But what was silphium? Precise identification of an "extinct" plant is a real problem, but it is generally considered to have been some kind of giant fennel belonging to the genus *Ferula*. A plant known as asafoetida, which produces a foul-smelling resinous substance still widely used in Indian cooking, is almost certainly a close relative. In ancient times, this substance, known as "Syrian" or "Eastern" silphium, was a cheaper substitute, and as the scarcity of the genuine article increased, the two became interchangeable. Asafoetida is described by modern Indian cookery books as a sour digestive spice. An English epithet for it, "devil's dung," the Afghan word, "stink finger" and the suffix "foetida" are testimony to its most salient characteristic, which Cyrenaic silphium did not seem to share, as the pleasant and enhancing qualities of its taste and scent are frequently referred to. It was for a long time believed that Cyrenaic silphium was *Thapsia garganica*. But *Thapsia* is a composite, while silphium was an umbelliferous plant. The modern consensus is that botanically and descriptively, no plant can be definitively recognised as the pride of Cyrene.

For the adventurous cook who wishes to experiment with the tastes of another age, the following recipes are from *The Art of Cooking (De re coquinaria)*, by the 1st-century Roman Apicius. In place of silphium you will have to be content with asafoetida, which was in any case interchangeable with silphium by Apicius' time. Use sparingly! Asafoetida is available from some Asian grocery stores and specialty spice merchants. For the ingredient called liquamen, a very common Roman concoction made from fermented fish, the fish sauce of the type used in Southeast Asian cookery is probably the closest modern equivalent. For defructum, the residue of

grape-pressings, concentrated grape-juice is a possible substitute.

Sauce with herbs for fried fish

Take any fish you like, clean, salt, fry. Pound pepper, cumin, coriander-seed, silphium, oregano, rue; pound well, moisten with vinegar, add Jericho date, honey, defructum, oil, liquamen, mix well, pour into a saucepan, bring to the boil. When it boils, pour over the fried fish. Sprinkle with pepper and serve.

Barley soup with dried vegetables

Soak chick-peas, lentils, and peas. Crush barley, and boil with the dried vegetables. When it has boiled long enough, add sufficient oil, and chop the following greens: leeks, coriander, dill, fennel, beet, mallow, and tender cabbage. Put all these finely chopped greens into the saucepan. Boil cabbage, pound a generous quantity of fennel-seed, oregano, silphium, lovage, and after pounding, blend with liquamen. Pour [this mixture] over the cooked dried vegetables [and barley] and stir. Put chopped cabbage leaves on top.



A 6th-century BC vase painting showing King Arcesilaus II of Cyrene supervising the loading and weighing of silphium wrapped in skins.



Didrachm from Cyrene showing silphium plant

Editors Note: Arwen is running the SMH Half-Marathon and fundraising for Cure Cancer Australia. You can contribute on the website:

http://cantoosmh2012.gofundraise.com.au/page/Arwen_Apps

NPA Walks

14 April Gerringong Falls, Budderoo NP

Distance: 17 kms on Budderoo Plateau. Grade 3
Depending on the weather this can be a circuit but if there has been a lot of rain we may have to return on the same track. Contact Joan Lowe 48612996, 0417492981 or joan.lowe@bigpond.com by Thursday 12/4/12.

12 May Lake Yarunga, Morton NP

Distance: 16 kms, Steep desc/asc. Grade 4
From Meryla Pass we will take Griffin's Fire Trail to a right turn which descends to Lake Yarunga. Return is up the same track. The track is very rough with many fallen trees but through beautiful rainforest. Contact Joan Lowe 48612996, 0417492981 or joan.lowe@bigpond.com by Thursday 10/5/12.

16 June Morton NP Pipeline Lookout and McPhails Fire-Trail

Distance: 12kms, steep desc. Grade 2.
Requires a car shuffle. The track commences just past Fitzroy Falls and follows the Pipeline Fire Trail out to the Pipeline Lookout which is a good morning tea stop. After morning tea we retrace our steps to McPhails Fire Trail which descends into Kangaroo Valley. There are some very steep sections of this track but the track winds down through lovely rainforest and around the edge of Mt Carrialoo. Contact Joan Lowe 48612996, 0417492981 or joan.lowe@bigpond.com by Thursday 16/6/12

John Donne : from *Elegies, No.9*

No Spring, nor Summer beauty hath such grace,
As I have seen in one Autumnal face.

P.B. Shelley : from *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*

The day becomes more solemn and serene
When noon is past—there is a harmony
In autumn, and a lustre in its sky,
Which through the summer is not heard or seen,
As if it could not be, as if it had not been!

John Keats : from *To Autumn*

i

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run;
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,
And still more, later flowers for the bees,
Until they think warm days will never cease,
For Summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells.

ii

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;
Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,
Drows'd with the fume of poppies, while thy hook
Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers:
And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
Steady thy laden head across a brook;
Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,
Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.

iii

Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,—
While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,
And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;
Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
Among the river shallows, borne aloft
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
Hedge-cricket sing; and now with treble soft
The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

Robert Browning : from *By the Fireside*

How well I know what I mean to do
When the long dark autumn-evenings come.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson : from *The Princess*

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,
Tears from the depth of some divine despair
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,
In looking on the happy Autumn-fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more.

Robert Louis Stevenson : *Autumn Fires*

In the other gardens
And all up the vale,
From the autumn bonfires
See the smoke trail!

Pleasant summer over,
And all the summer flowers,
The red fire blazes,
The grey smoke towers.

Sing a song of seasons!
Something bright in all!
Flowers in the summer,
Fires in the fall!

Judith Wright : *Autumn Fires*

Old flower-stems turn to sticks in autumn,
clutter the garden, need
the discipline of secateurs.
Choked overplus, straggle of weed,
cold souring strangling webs of root;

I pile the barrow with the lot.
Snapped twig that forgets flower and fruit,
thornbranch too hard to rot,
I stack you high for a last rite.

When twigs are built and match is set,
your death springs up like life; its flare
crowns and consumes the ended year.
Corruption changes to desire
that sears the pure and wavering air,
and death goes upward like a prayer.



**Sunday 15th April 11.00am – 4.00pm
Vintage Car Day at Robertson Railway**

- Kiosk open
- Art exhibition
- Railway and history exhibition
- Vintage working machinery

For further information, 4885 2393

www.robertsonrailway.com.au

Cockatoo Run Heritage Diesel locomotive –

The Station will be selling tickets for the loop train return trip of Robertson to Moss Vale which is part of the overall “Cockatoo Run” journey from Sydney to the Highlands. Enjoy a pleasant train ride through the lush green rural countryside - approx. 12.30pm departure/return approx. 3.30pm - ‘Loop train’ tickets available on the day – Robertson/Moss Vale return - \$10 adults, \$5 concession, \$25 family

**Caalang Creek - REPS Working Bees
Saturday 28th April & 26th May**

Meet at the footbridge in Hampden Park from 9:30am onwards. Don’t forget water, hat and gloves. We now have tools available, but if you can, bring your own.

Queries to Steve Douglas 42714957 or Leon Hall 48882222.

**Help Care for Our Nature Reserve
1st Wednesday of each month 9:30am to noon**

1st Wednesday in May but dates for June, July and August to be arranged. Phone Helen Tranter, 4885 1394, to confirm, or Ford Kristo (NPWS) during business hours: 4887 8244. All welcome. Please bring garden gloves.

Donation to REPS

Pip Cooper facilitates a group which holds a gathering called “Good Earth Day”. REPS would like to thank the group for the donations made at the last gathering.

New CANWin Magazine



CANWin is producing a magazine with a local focus as a pilot project for one year to see if it is of value to the community and CANWin.

Sustainability Wingecarribee will make going green and sustainable a bit easier for you. Local stories, local people, ideas you can put into action right here in Wingecarribee.

Issue 1 launched in March at the Annual General Meeting. One year subscription (4 issues): Members \$15.00 Non-members \$20.00

To subscribe, contact the Editor:

toni.mclean@aapt.net.au

**Mullon Creek Natural Farms Presentation:
Feeding the Future by Michael Abelman.**

15th April. 10:30am – 4.30pm. Mulloon Creek Natural Farms – Bungendore, NSW.

Whether you are growing food on a small farm, involved in a community or school garden, or simply trying to grow healthy and nutritious food in your own back yard, Michael will provide plenty to in-spire you on your way. For more information, call Mulloon Creek Farm on 0418 561 528.

Contact REPS

All those who are interested in supporting our aim are welcome to join REPS. Our aim is to promote the preservation and enhancement of the Robertson environment. We welcome contact with individuals and other community groups.

Please contact The Secretary

PO Box 3045, Robertson NSW 2577

or President – Allan Stiles on 4885 1608

Also, we are always looking for new contributions to *Eucryphia*. If you have an essay, article, poem or photograph that you want to share with other REPS members please contact Monica Engel.

Telephone: 4885 2665

Or email: monicaengel@robertsonctc.org.au

All contributions will be most welcome.

Visit the REPS website

www.reps.org.au