

August 2024 – books to celebrate Spring

Wattles of Toowoomba and the Condamine Catchment, by Condamine Country Plant Group; Seldom seen, rare plants of greater Sydney, by Alan Fairley; Ellis Rowan, NLA, introduction by Patricia Fullerton; Recovering Australian Threatened Species, ed. Stephen Garnett et al.

- *Wattles of Toowoomba and the Condamine Catchment*, by Condamine Country Plant Group [new book]

A nice little handbook glowing with gold. Arranged for easy identification according to 4 types of wattles: with or without thorns, flowerhead spikes or balls, phyllodes or ferny foliage. Clear photos with flower, seed, bark and leaf detail.

The opening photo is the Possum Blossom wattle - wouldn't you rather that name than *Acacia pustula*! Another that caught my eye is Burbidge's wattle, named in honour of Nancy Burbidge, founder of the National Australian Herbarium, who features in the Black Mountain summit walk.

- *Seldom seen, rare plants of greater Sydney*, by Alan Fairley

Another book bedecked with a sprig of wattle. This would be a good one to take on a tour of the Sydney region garden to see which rare plants are in the collection.

The book is an attractive combination of photos and historical sketches and discovery stories, and includes each plant's endangered status. There's an appendix of botanists and collectors of the Sydney district, which of course often overlaps with the earliest collectors of Australian plants, big names such as Banks, Brown, Mueller and Hooker.

The wattle that caught my eye is *A. clunies-rossiae*, named for Mrs Hannah Clunies-Ross, co-founder of the Wattle Day League in 1909, by Joseph Maiden, another co-founder and director of the Sydney Botanic Gardens.

- *Ellis Rowan*, National Library of Australia, introduction by Patricia Fullerton [new book]

Celebrated for her 'flower paintings', she was actually one of Australia's most-loved botanical artists. Patricia Fullerton says Rowan was a 'corporate wife' of the 1870s who, bored by domesticity, took advantage of her husband's military postings to teach herself painting. She exhibited successfully, including at the newly opened Melbourne Exhibition Building, winning a gold medal for paintings of New Zealand wildflowers on satin. The Victorian Artists' Society protested but the jurors stuck by their decision, 'but later, begrudgingly, conceded a silver medal to Louis Buvelot, the highly esteemed painter of the Australian landscape'.

Rowan collected flowers to paint for von Mueller and in 1883 headed off with her sister to paint in Ceylon and the Himalayas. In 1888 she won awards at the Centennial International Exhibition, and yet again the Victorian Artists' Society protested her wins! Maybe 'any publicity is good publicity' because she became the most recognised painter in the Australian colonies, even painting commissions for a prestigious men's club in Melbourne. After her husband's early death she continued to travel, paint and exhibit extensively in the UK, USA and PNG. A fascinating, trailblazing artistic life that includes Queen Victoria and Georgia O'Keeffe!

- *Recovering Australian Threatened Species*, ed. Stephen Garnett et al [new book - free to a good home]

This is subtitled 'A book of hope', so if you are feeling despondent at the biodiversity crisis and the sixth great extinction, read on. The book celebrates what has been done well in recovering threatened species, with a series of case studies of birds, mammals, fish, frogs, insects and plants returned from the brink of extinction. Expect lots of scientific detail, some community engagement and a little light-heartedness: check out the Bounceback program to conserve yellow-footed rock-wallabies, and the chapter 'Spiny rice-flower: small, unassuming but with many friends'.