Acacia 2006: Knowing and growing Australian wattles

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Introduction

This volume of *Muelleria* marks the introduction of a new format for the journal and is a special issue, the result of the ‘Acacia 2006’ conference held in Melbourne from 26 to 28 August 2006. Titled ‘Knowing and growing Australian wattles,’ the conference was jointly hosted by the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne and the Australian Plants Society Victoria as part of the biennial F.J.C. Rogers seminar series. These papers provide a valuable snapshot of the large genus *Acacia* s.s., so important in Australia, and extensively utilised internationally. Most authors in this issue have provided review-style papers, reflecting their different areas of expertise. The review nature of the papers was seen to be necessary to contextualise, for a general audience, some of the work that is being undertaken on *Acacia* and for this reason we have broadened the scope of *Muelleria* beyond systematics, taxonomic revisions, nomenclature matters, and phylogenetic and biogeographical studies, to include these papers. The entire program of talks at the ‘Acacia 2006’ conference can be found in Murphy (2006) and the horticultural proceedings volume (Australian Plants Society Inc, Maroondah Group 2006).

The diversity of *Acacia* s.s. in Australia is astounding, some of which is illustrated in Figure 1. The genus (in the strict sense) comprises almost 1000 species, and is confined to the Australian continent except for a few species found on islands from Hawaii in the Pacific Ocean to Madagascar in the Indian Ocean. The range of topics covered in this volume reflects this diversity as well as the variety of research interests in the genus.

But first, due to recent name changes to *Acacia* s.l., it is necessary to make a note about the names used in this volume. Most contributors have decided to use the names of the segregate genera that follows from the retypification of *Acacia* with an Australian type (as outlined by Maslin in this volume): *Acacia* s.s. (formerly *Acacia* subgenus *Phyllodineae*, synonym *Racosperma*), *Vachellia* (formerly *Acacia* subgenus *Acacia*), *Senegalia*, *Acaciella* and *Mariusousa*. For further information concerning the generic status of *Acacia* s.l., and to keep abreast of future name changes concerning members of this group, the reader is referred to the “species...
Figure 2. Pod, flower and vegetative characteristics of some members of tribe Ingeae. Clockwise from top left. *Archidendron lucyi; Calliandra haematocephala; Inga edulis; Paraserianthes lophantha* subsp. *lophantha* in fruit (right) and flower (left); *Enterolobium cyclocarpum*. Photographs by Gillian Brown.
galerry” page of the WorldWideWattle website (www.worldwidewattle.com). In a very useful contribution, Maslin has provided a clear and concise summary of the current nomenclature for Acacia s.l. This has previously been confusing for many people and this paper is a welcome contribution.

In the midst of the nomenclatural debate concerning the application of the name Acacia, it is important to remember the scientific reasons for the fragmentation of Acacia s.l. Murphy (pp. 10-26) reviews the historical classification of Acacia, illustrating the numerous studies that have shown Acacia s.l. is not monophyletic. Murphy then focuses on the phylogenetic studies of Acacia s.s. which will eventually overturn the current classification of Acacia s.s. and greatly enhance the evolutionary understanding of this amazingly diverse monophyletic lineage. Molyneux and Forrester (pp. 51-56) continue the systematics and taxonomy theme by describing three new and very rare species of Acacia from East Gippsland in Victoria.

Brown (pp. 27-42) provides a comprehensive review of the taxonomy and phylogeny of the mimosoid legume tribe Ingeae which is relatively poorly known. This morphologically diverse group is well illustrated in Figure 2. The tribe Ingeae is now known to include the closest relatives of Acacia s.s. and is therefore of critical importance in understanding the evolution and biogeography of the Australian Acacia flora. One such evolutionary insight that can be assessed in the light of its phylogeny is the classical morphological interpretation of the Acacia phyllode in comparison to bipinnate compound leaves, which is reviewed by Gardner et al. (pp. 43-50). They reassess the developmental homology of the phyllode and discuss this in the context of recent understandings in developmental genetics.

The traits of Acacia species that make them so successful in the Australian landscape may also predispose some species to weediness and two papers discuss some of the issues this raises in the Australian context. Adair (pp. 67-78) looks at some Australian species that have become naturalised outside their original ranges within Australia and the potential for biological control. Reid and Murphy (pp. 57-66) discuss methods for assessing whether species are naturalised or indigenous to an area using herbarium records and other evidence, and examine three Acacia species found on the coast in western Victoria as case studies.

The paper by Rinaudo and Cunningham (pp. 79-85) reviews the use of several Australian Acacia species in Africa as multi-purpose agro-forestry trees and the issues surrounding their adoption by African farmers. The importance of their work, which has the potential to assist millions of people in Africa, cannot be overstated. Along a related line of research Singhal et al. have undertaken a comprehensive study of the highly variable species Acacia (Vachellia) nilotica. This species is put to many uses in India, and Singhal et al. (pp. 86-94) examine three varieties of A. nilotica to evaluate their useful traits and identify which variety is the one most suited to particular industry.

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References