

# RAINFOREST PLANTS AT THE HUNTER WETLANDS CENTRE



## GOING FOR A WALK IN THE EAST COAST NATIVE RAINFOREST

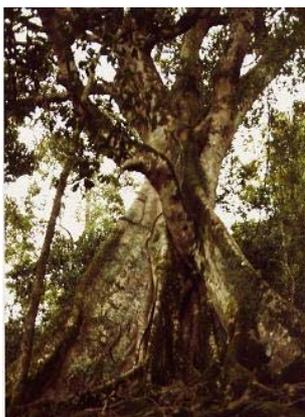
How do we get there? Just canoe, walk or buggy to the northwest side of the Hunter Wetlands Centre site running parallel to Ironbark Creek, the largest tidal creek in the Hunter estuary.

Let's take a look at just a few of the many hundreds of plants the volunteers have planted in this, close to 1 hectare site, just under 30 years ago.

Now if we step onto the small wooden boardwalk, which you will find next to the Rainforest Shelter you will see to your left a wide spreading small tree *Hibiscus tiliaceus* **Cottonwood Hibiscus**, which is normally found north from Port Macquarie. This plant can be found growing in littoral and riverine rainforests and in mangrove scrubs.



Cottonwood Hibiscus



River Mangrove

As we walk slowly southwest we can see mangroves *Avicennia marina* var. **Australasia Grey Mangrove** and a few *Aegiceras corniculatum* **River Mangrove** growing on the edges of the creek. They are able to deal with the salty brackish water by having salt glands on their leaves. *Avicennia* use salt glands on the underside of the leaves, while *Aegiceras* salt glands are on the upper side of the leaves.



Grey Mangrove

We start to notice as we continue walking that the rainforest spreads out from the creek up onto a hilly slope. And as you reach a gentle incline, just on the right, you will find yourself under the canopy of *Ficus obliqua* **Small-leaved Fig**. You will appreciate this tree on hot days with the cool air under its canopy.



Magenta Lillypilly (Flowers)

A few metres further on the left edge of the track are growing three "endangered" listed *Syzygium paniculatum* **Magenta Lillypilly** trees. It has been said that possibly the first fruits sampled by Captain Cook's party in 1770 was from this species. Another 20 metres or so just on the edge of the track stands an old surviving remnant tree *Alphitonia excelsa* **Red Ash**. Aboriginies had many uses for this tree. It was used as a skin disinfectant, liniment, gargle for toothache, tonic drink, medicine for upset stomach and also the leaves and bark were used to asphyxiate fish.



Paperbark Satinash (Fruit)

Continuing on we will come upon "Bruce's Bridge". Just to the left before this bridge, with its reddish bark *Syzygium papyraceum* **Paperbark Satinash**. This colourful tree produces large plumsized purple fruits.

As we move further down the track and passing a large variety of species of plants from North-East NSW and South-East to North-East QLD, amongst these and on the right hand side of the track we come across another local remnant *Syncarpia glomulifera* **Turpentine**, with signs of the 1991 fire at the base and it's also very durable in salty water. The flower has a strong smell similar to honey.

We now turn to the left as we approach the predator proof fence behind the houses. Walking up a track with a slight incline we come upon a storm water drainage area that collects runoff from the upper surrounding urban development. At this spot on the edge of

the track grows *Ficus crassipes* **Banana Fig**.

Now if we look carefully, on the track, a funny looking shaped tree *Elaeocarpus grandis* **Blue Quandong**, when just after planting this tree about 25 years ago, it had a battle for the first few years of its growth Blackberry and other weeds. This caused the plant to grow parallel to the ground until it became free of weeds and was able to grow vertically.



Banana Fig



Blue Quandong (Flowers)



Bird's Nest Fern



Weeping Lilly Pilly

As you look over your shoulder towards the houses you will notice a patch of *Hymenosporum flavum* **Native Frangapani**. This plant can be found growing from the Hunter area to Atherton in QLD. If you walk in springtime this patch of trees will have large showy yellow flowers, with a good strong scent.

Now as we walk down a gentle slope then take the track to the left we will find scattered upon the hillside *Asplenium australasicum* **Bird's Nest Fern**. A plant usually propagated by spores. On this bank the expert work of Paddy Lightfoot has these plants looking great.

If we become a bit more adventurous and of course very careful, stepping off the track, seeking out more plants. You may see many other types, such as ferns, palms, shrubs, herbs, grasses and plants with funny names such as:

**Bumpy Satinash** *Syzygium cormiflorum*, **Roly-poly Satinash** *Syzygium unipunctatum*, **Weeping Lilly Pilly** *Waterhousea floribunda*, **Whalebone Tree** *Streblus brunonianus*, **Kanuka Box** *Tristaniopsis laurina*, **Hairy Psychotria** *Psychotria loniceroides* and many more.

So come along, stretch out, canoe or even get a buggy ride and have an adventurous look. Come and learn about these spectacular plants with their different leaf shapes, bark, colourful new growth, flowers and bright fruit. Or find out about the sites history. Including the detrimental affect of dumping building wastes, unwanted soil, car batteries and weed infestation had on the 'resilience' of the site.

The affect of floodgates on the site before and after their opening and the changes with the salinity and also the type of soil on the lower area with its silts and clays, a large part a product of the Quaternary estuarine/lacustrine sediments.

There is a lot to find out!

**Steve Wisniewski (Hunter Wetlands Volunteer & Life Member)**



Native Frangapani (Flowers)



Kanuka Box (Flowers)



Hairy Psychotria (Flowers)

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