
Short Notes

Ed. Note: The following letter was received from Associate Professor A. J. McComb, head of the Dept. of Botany, University of Western Australia in response to a recent article in CPN ("Cannington Swamp, R.I.P.", CPN 9:8).

The short article by Mr. A. Lowrie on "Cannington Swamp R.I.P.," published in a recent CP Newsletter, aroused quite a lot of comment here. It was brought to our attention by Dr. Wycherley, Director of the Kings Park and Botanic Garden. We were also contacted by the Director of the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife, which is responsible for wildflower conservation. I understand the latter organization is concerned about the legal aspects of removing rare plants from private land. [The legisla-

tion on this has recently been revised.]

This Department in fact controls a Reserve set aside in Cannington Swamp to conserve a sample of the flora referred to by Mr. Lowrie.

Dr. Loneragan and I have written a short article about our Reserve which you may like to include in a future issue of the Newsletter, perhaps as a letter to the Editor, or a short paper, and this is enclosed.

I hope that article may be of some interest to your readers.

Cannington Swamp

By

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This article is prompted by the paper of Lowrie [1978] who suggests that Cannington Swamp is disappearing through the activities of real estate developers, and who clearly thinks that the best thing to do is to dig up at least the carnivorous plants and transplant them to a place where they will be admired!

Let us assure your readers that all is not yet lost. In 1948 the University of Western Australia purchased 85.5 acres [34 ha] of the "swamp" region for research and teaching by members of their Department of Botany. Known officially as the "Yule Brook Botany Reserve, Kenwick," but invariably referred to by botanists as "Cannington Swamp," it is listed in the Gazette of the Government of Western Australia [9th November 1979] because of its special nature; no development of any kind can take place there

without the approval of The Metropolitan Regional Planning Authority, in addition to that of the Local Authority,

The area is fenced. Signs on the land point out that trespassing is prohibited, and that the block is used for research. No-one has been given permission to collect plants from the land, and so we presume the collections referred to by Mr. Lowrie were made on adjoining countryside after permission had been obtained from the owners.

The area has a history of botanical interest and use. The late Mr. C.A. Gardener, formally Government Botanist, collected extensively in the area and frequently took visiting botanists to view the unusual plant species there. Visits have continued, and the area has gained something of an international reputation among botanists; for example, Lloyd [1942] refers to it in his

standard work on the carnivorous plants. We normally include it in the itineraries of visiting botanists—either individuals or those attending symposia in this part of the world.

The Reserve consists of two low, sandy ridges separated by swampy flats; the ridges are probably remnants of old sand dunes formed some 100,000—300,000 years ago. The vegetation is a complex mosaic of plant communities in which, according to Dr. N.H. Speck, changes in structure and species composition usually reflects small changes in ground level. The floristic importance and interest in the Reserve and its environs is further illustrated by the fact that the current species list contains 459 species, of which 20 are from the carnivorous group.

Since the Department acquired the land, the Reserve has provided material and data for numerous undergraduate student projects in various aspects of botany, and first year students are taken on excursions to the area. Currently it is used in several Honours, MSc and PhD projects involving, for example, investigations into the flowering

times and periodicity of the ridge species, relationships between leaf characteristics and environment, pollination, water relations of selected species and changes in population structure of tuberous species.

Our main problems have been maintaining fences; localized weed invasion [especially *Gladiolus*, *Romulea* and *Watsonia*] particularly along the firebreaks; dumping of rubbish on the boundaries; and occasional instances of trespassing and vandalism. The developments which have taken place on adjoining land will presumably alter the groundwater table in the Reserve to some extent, but at this stage we are not able to disentangle any such changes from those due, for example, to the unpredictable nature of our climate. We expect in the future to have to face the difficulties of more intensive management of a reserve in an urban area, but we do hope that for many years to come Cannington Swamp and its interesting flora will be available through the Botany Department for inspection by visiting botanists, and for use in teaching and research work at this University.

On the Names of the Venus's Fly Trap

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The scientific name *Dionaea muscipula* and apparently also the common English name Venus's fly-trap were coined by the English amateur naturalist John Ellis, and were used by him in a letter he sent to the famous Swedish botanist, Carl Linnaeus, on September 23, 1768. This letter, translated into Latin [perhaps by Linnaeus], was published in the *Nova Acta Regiae Societatis Scientiarum Upsaliensis*, Vol. I, pp. 98-101, either in 1770 or 1773 [authorities differ]. In the published version of the letter, the names were set out thus: "*Dionaea, Muscipula*. Anglice [i.e., in English], *Venus's Fly-trap*"

A few years earlier, when the plant was known only as a dried specimen, Daniel Solander, a botanist and friend of Ellis's, had suggested the name *Dione* for it, but Ellis

told Linnaeus that he had thought *Dionaea* to be more correct, since he had given the name of Venus to it in the English name. The goddess Dione, according to one myth, was the mother of Venus [Aphrodite] by Jove [Zeus], but both the Greeks and the Romans gradually came to apply the name Dione more frequently to the daughter [Venus] than to the mother. The adjective "*Dionaeus*", originally meaning "of or belonging to Dione [the mother]", likewise came more commonly to mean "of or belonging to Venus". In using *Dionaea*—the feminine form of the word—as a generic name, Ellis apparently intended it to mean "daughter of Dione" [literally, "a female related or belonging to Dione"], therefore "*Venus*".

Please turn to p. 78)