Plant of the Month - March

by Allan Carr

Banksia aemula

Wallum Banksia

Pronunciation: BANK-see-a EM-you-la PROTEACEAE

Derivation: ***Banksia***, after Sir Joseph Banks, botanist with Captain James Cook on his 1770 voyage in the "Endeavour"; ***aemula***, from the Greek *aemulus* – competing with, emulative (in reference to its similarity to *B. serrata*). An identifying difference is in the shape of the style tips (pollen presenters). There is a good illustration of this on page 106 of *Mangroves to Mountains*.

For some years *B. aemula* was referred to as *B. serratifolia*, mainly in New South Wales. Type collection was gathered by Robert Brown in June 1801 at Port Jackson, NSW.

Habit

Inflorescence, leaves

Fruit

There are 78 species of *Banksia* and all except one are endemic to Australia. (*B. dentata* is also found in New Guinea.) They are found in all States, with the main concentration in the south-west of WA, where there are about 60 species.

Description: *Banksia aemula* is a small tree with a heavy appearance due to the large size of the gnarled orange-brown *verrucose trunk in proportion to the height of the tree (to 8 m). The Wallum Banksia is widespread in coastal areas between Bundaberg in Qld and Sydney in NSW on sand dunes, sandy flats and wallum. This common name is derived from the Aboriginal word for the plant and has become used to describe the vegetation type where *B. aemula* is dominant.

Leaves are alternate or *whorled and *discolorous to 200 mm x 20 mm and shiny green with serrated edges.

Inflorescences are brushes to 200 mm x 120 mm, borne in March to August. The photo in the middle above is one inflorescence containing hundreds of pale yellow to greenish-cream flowers.

Fruits with up to 25 massive seed follicles follow the flowers. The appearance of these, shown the photo on the right above, gave rise to the "Banksia Man" of the *Snugglepot and Cuddlpie* stories by May Gibbs.

*verrucose = warty, covered in wart-like lumps
*whorled = arranged in a circle around the stem
*discolorous = both surfaces having a different colour