Plant of the Month - April

by Allan Carr

Banksia serrata

Red Honeysuckle

Pronunciation: BANK-see-a sair-AR-ta

PROTEACEAE

Derivation: ***Banksia***, named after Sir Joseph Banks by Carl Linnaeus Jnr. in 1782. Banks and Daniel Solander collected the first *Banksia* specimens including *B. serrata* at Botany Bay in April 1770, during their voyage with Lieutenant James Cook; ***serrata***, from the Latin, *serratus* - toothed like a saw (referring to the leaf edges).

Flower buds, leaves

Flowers, leaves

Fruits, leaves

Banksia is genus of 78 species, all except one being endemic in Australia. In 2007 a proposal was made in WA to include all *Dryandra* species with *Banksia* species. However, this was not accepted by all the Australian Herbaria.

Description: *B. serrata*, the type species of *Banksia* (the one to which the generic name is tied) is a tall shrub or gnarled tree to 16 m on sand dunes. Its bark is grey-brown and covered in warty growths. These plants occur from Fraser Island, Qld through coastal NSW and Vic to a small population in north-western Tas. The common name describes the intense red colour of the wood.

Leaves seen in all the photos above are whorled, grow to 260 mm x 50 mm and are shiny green, above paler below. They have a leathery texture and coarsely serrated edges. New foliage is soft and pale reddish-brown.

Inflorescences to 160 mm x 130 mm are creamy-white to greenish-yellow in spikes of several hundred or thousand individual flowers crowded together. As the individual flowers open their pale, dusty-rose colour gives the inflorescence a reddish glow for a short time. The *stigmas are 3 mm long, linear and spindle-shaped, differing from the spearhead-shaped ones of *B. aemula,* a very similar plant. Both stigmas are shown in the photos on the right.

Fruits are up to 30 large imbedded *follicles in the massive cones covered with the persistent remains of the flowers. Each follicle has a single dark seed to 30 mm long with a papery wing. These remain on the plant until mature or released by fire. Aboriginal people used the dry cones as fire kindling and the flowers were sucked to get the sweet nectar.

*stigma = a pollen receptive surface at the end of a style arising from an ovary

*follicle = a dry fruit formed from one carpel and breaking open along one edge (a carpel is an organ at the centre of a flower enclosing the ovary)