Plant of the Month - July

by Allan Carr

Stylidium ornatum **Wallum Trigger Plant**

Pronunciation: sty-LID-ee-um or-NAH-tum STYLIDIACEAE

Derivation: ***Stylidium***, from the Greek, *stylos* – a column, (a column unites the stamens and style). ***ornatum***, from the Latin, *orno* – to adorn, to decorate.

Habit

Both flowers untriggered

Flower on left triggered

Inflorescence

Stylidium is a sizeable genus with around 300 species and still counting. They are mainly found in Australia where the highest concentration is in south-western WA. As well, some species are found in south-eastern Asia, New Guinea and New Zealand. Many species are considered endangered or rare in the wild. On Bribie Island we have 3 species, one of which is *Stylidium ornatum*, belonging to the rosetted group. The majority of stylidiums are tufting or rosetted herbs and are rarely very spreading.

Stylidiums have an intriguing pollination process. Each flower has a touch-sensitive catapult-like column which springs over to deposit and receive pollen from visiting insects. This action gives the plant its common name – Trigger plant. The column has a resetting capacity which usually occurs at around 15 minutes after triggering. A range of insects visit trigger plants, most commonly bee flies and native bees.

The Winter 2013, Vol 27 No 215 issue of Australian Plants Journal was devoted to trigger plants of Western Australia and research and propagation trials happening there. Trigger plants usually inhabit acidic and mainly sandy or gravelly soils such as the sandy Wallum areas on Bribie Island.

Description: *S. ornatum* is a small annual or perennial herb growing 10 to 30 cm tall and endemic to Queensland and New South Wales. *S. ornatum* is closely related to *S. debile*.

Leaves are fleshy to 10 mm by 60 mm and formed in a basal rosette of about 5-25 per plant.

Flowers are pink in slender panicles to 30 cm and can appear all year round but mainly from July to January. They are deeply divided into five lobes; one is different from the others and is called a labellum. This is the column or trigger.

Fruits are capsules about 5 mm long containing very fine seeds.