

## **Eucalyptus crebra (Narrow-leaved Ironbark)**

Despite its reputation for abundance, I've always found the Narrow-leaved Ironbark to be elusive. In his invaluable *EUCALYPTS of the Sunshine Coast*, Tony Bean writes that "it is not a common species on the Sunshine Coast, being largely restricted to hilltops and upper slopes". In addition, its flowering is equivocal, occurring any time from May to November, and "lasts only a few weeks on any particular tree". Driving from Tewantin to Noosaville in November, I saw flowering on a roundabout a tree that I hadn't previously taken much notice of.





Crowded amongst other trees, it was difficult to photograph and the ones I took of the flowers high in the tree didn't turn out so well. By the time I returned four days later, we'd had some rain, the curse of crebra had struck and flowering had finished – see the results below.





Never mind, Eucalypt flowers are all pretty similar anyway, not the most reliable way to identify the species and the tree was almost certainly planted there. A better diagnostic feature is the diamond shaped bud that precedes flowering, seen in the photos below taken on the Drummond Range between Bogantungen and Alpha in Central Queensland.



The dull, grey-green leaves, the same colour on both sides, and the sparse canopy above the almost black trunks are also typical for ***Eucalyptus crebra***. This is more the type of country where you'd expect to find it. Having said that, it does have a wide distribution – the widest north to south of any ironbark, from Cape Yorke Peninsula to south of Sydney, and inland for up to 500 km. The species name is derived from the Latin *creber*, meaning crowded or frequent. It doesn't seem to be known exactly what this alludes to – such an enigmatic customer, this ironbark – but it's possibly to the tree's abundance.

It's only a medium-sized tree, often attaining a height of 25 metres and with a maximum of 35 m. under ideal conditions. Nevertheless, the timber it produces is so strong and durable that its use in heavy construction and for fence posts, railway sleepers, etc. is legendary. In the 1870s, the Cootharaba Tramway, built to haul logs the five miles from Kin Kin Creek to Elanda Point, used ironbark not only for the sleepers but the rails as well! As it ages, the heartwood becomes so hard it's almost impossible to nail without drilling first. Examined close up, the tree's bark is also hard (as you might expect from the common name), deeply furrowed and dark in colour. On an NPSC walk in Noosa National Park in July, Spencer Shaw pointed out a tree growing next to the Park Edge Road track. The trunk markedly differed from others close by and, like the roundabout tree, I'd never noticed it before.





It looked like an ironbark but the only eucalypt on the NPA Botany Group's pretty comprehensive plant species list for the walk was ***Eucalyptus racemosa*** (Scribbly Gum). This isn't unusual – we're frequently spotting "new" species to add to lists. Scribbly Gum was only added recently and another was added during the walk: ***Polyalthia nitidissima***. The

canopy was high above us, there wasn't much of it and we were unable to identify it on the day. I forgot about it for a while but returned recently hoping to see flowers. After fossicking about for five minutes on the ground amongst mainly ***Lophostemon*** leaves, I finally found some twigs with a few dried-out leaves and fruit (gum nuts) attached.



Being a notoriously variable species with considerable differences in leaf width, bud and fruit size, ***E. crebra*** can be difficult to identify. However, having a good look at the concolorous leaves and the small, cup-shaped fruit with valves slightly exserted, I think we can count it as an addition to our Park Edge Rd. flora list. The species does appear on the Qld. Govt. flora list for Noosa National Park but, keeping in mind the evasive nature (for me) of Narrow-leaved Ironbark, I'm happy to declare the tree ***Eucalyptus crebra*** unless someone can come up with an alternative identification.

Robert M Price, December 2021