

THE PLANT, THE UNSEEN HERO

THE SWEET BURSARIA PLANT

Common name: Sweet bursaria, native box, native blackthorn, whitethorn, Christmas bush.

Aboriginal names: geapga and kurwan (Dharawal).

Like many plants the SWEET BURSARIA PLANT (*Bursaria spinosa*) is often not noticed when there are animals and insects in a picture. Even when we are walking through a forest we will often only see the birds or animals. This 'phenomenon' is called PLANT BLINDNESS. The reason for this starts in our brain, and how we see things. Sometimes we only see animals with a face or an animal that moves. As plants can be boring if they don't move or smile, right!

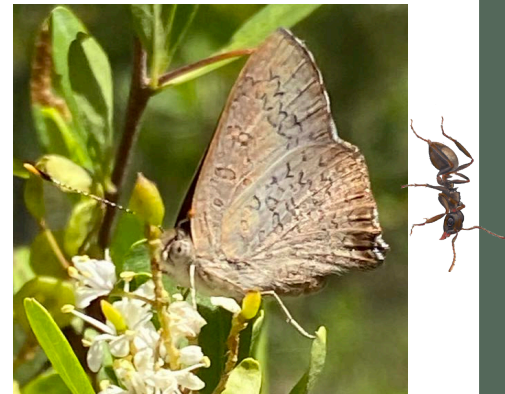
Well this is where we need to change the way we think. While animals can be fluffy and cute, and insects are bizarre and fascinating, without plants, life on this planet could not exist! Why, you ask?

Plants are our super 'life force'

Plants give us food, shelter, medicine and fuel. All the vegetables we eat, are plants. Most importantly plants give us oxygen. The air we breath. Oxygen is essential to all life on earth.

Plants can also make us happy, spring flowers can make us smile and they can smell beautiful. Trees give us shade. Green grass gives us a soft place to play and lay on the ground. Sports ovals are covered in plants, 'grass.' Plants are everywhere, from the ocean sea grasses, to the highest mountain forests. We know they are there....But do we care as much about them compared to animals? Probably not, as a pet dog is far more fun!

As long as we don't forget about plants and look after forests and habitats where insects like the Eltham Copper Butterfly and the Notoncus Ants live, then all the other creatures can have a home and food too. As we need our animals, insects and birds to pollinate The flowers and plants so the plants can continue to grow. It is an endless cycle, we can help preserve.

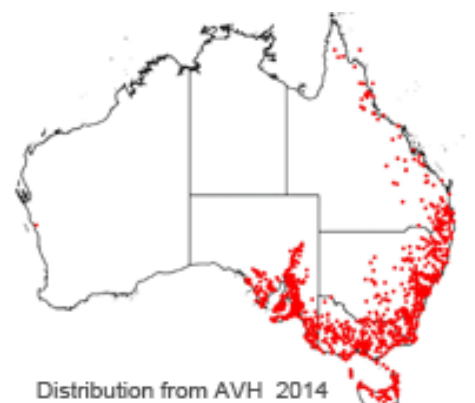


ECB feeding on Sweet Bursaria flower

THE SWEET BURSARIA PLANT

The Sweet Bursaria (*Bursaria spinosa*) also known as the Christmas Bush, because of its creamy white flowers in Summer. And the Native Blackthorn because of its spiky thorns. The flowers smell very sweet.

It is an indigenous plant (this means it is native to the area where it grows) growing on the East Coast of Australia, mainly in the southern states. It prefers dry Eucalyptus woodlands. And also grows along the coast.



Distribution from AVH 2014

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THE SWEET BURSARIA PLANT cont.

This plant is useful

The Sweet Bursaria is not the most beautiful looking plant, and doesn't stand out much until it flowers in summer. But, it is very useful to insects like the Eltham Copper Butterfly and the Notonus Ants. As the caterpillar feeds on only on this plant, and the butterfly lays it's eggs on leaves or on at the bottom of the trunk of the plant. The ants, live in nests underground around the roots of the Sweet Bursaria plant. The caterpillar lives underground with the ants and the ants guide the caterpillar up the plant to feed on the leaves, and back into the nest for safety. When it is time for the caterpillar to PUPATE (go into a cocoon) it attaches itself to a root of the plant underground in the nest.

OUCH.....The spikes!



The spikes on the stems, are pretty sharp, and can hurt if we put our finger on one, but they are useful. The spikes protect the caterpillar from predators and stop other animals eating all its leaves. The spikes also protect small birds nesting in the plant. The plant makes a good home for the little birds.



FACTS

- The plant can grow from 1m to 12m high.
- Flowers in Spring - Summer.
- Seed pods - late Summer - Autumn
- Bees also love the flowers and use the pollen for honey making.
- The branches were once used for tool handles, and cabinet making. The leaves contain an ingredient used in sun-tan lotions.



Sweet Bursaria flower



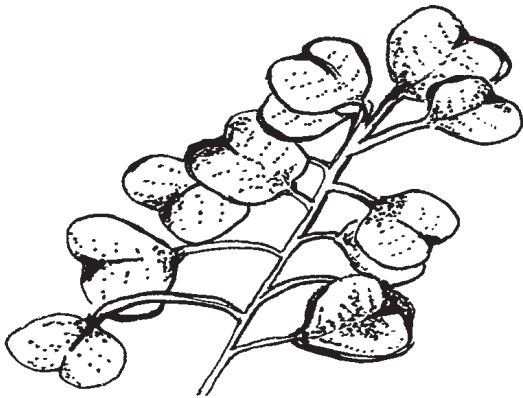
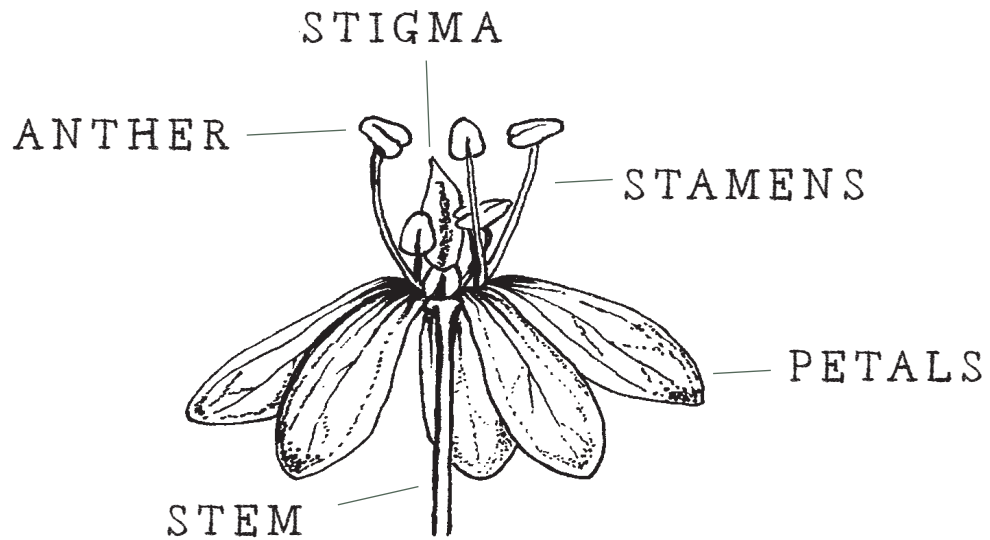
Sweet Bursaria seed pods



Seed pods, also called purses

PLANT PARTS

THE SWEET BURSARIA PLANT



SEED PODS



LEAVES



Source: in Plant Science Research Weekly /by Mary Williams

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

THIS IS A PICTURE OF PLANTS AND MONKEYS. IF YOU ONLY SAW MONKEYS OR MONKEYS FIRST, THIS IS AN EXAMPLE OF PLANT BLINDNESS.