Our cover illustration of the Richmond birdwing and its food plant is from an original painting by Lois Hughes. Prints beautifully reproduced on quality watercolour paper (295 x 210 cm) are available from Lois Hughes (ph. (07) 3206 6229) for $20 per print + postage.

The **RICHMOND BIRDWING RECOVERY NETWORK INC.** since it was launched in 2005, has promoted conservation of the Richmond birdwing butterfly *Ornithoptera richmondia*, its habitats and food plants. Membership of the Network is open to anyone interested in conserving the Richmond birdwing and other insects of conservation concern. The Network promotes liaison between interested community members, catchment groups and relevant local and state government authorities. The Network holds quarterly General Meetings, occasional Regional or Special Meetings and publishes quarterly, a Newsletter distributed to the members.

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The photographs and maps presented in this edition are by Don Sands, Chris Hosking, Doug Robbins, Ernie Foster, Dawn Muir and courtesy of CSIRO. None should be reproduced without the permission of the photographer and the editor of the RBRN newsletter.
PRESIDENTS REPORT

Monitoring the return of birdwings to localities planted with vines is the only way of measuring success despite the delays in vines reaching the required size of 3 m or more. Observation of a single adult butterfly does not necessarily mean that a breeding colony is nearby, given that adults will range more than 30 km from their breeding sites. Verification for birdwing breeding on vines can best be obtained using the presence of larvae, particularly young larvae, when they are darkly coloured, easily recognized, counted and photographed to aid identification. Eggs are more difficult to find beneath leaves and pupae are always very difficult to locate as the larvae leave the food plant when fully fed and the green pupae are well camouflaged under leaves. Monitoring larvae is only practical during the appropriate part of their feeding cycle, from October until May.

This year RBRN hopes to develop a captive rearing program to address in-breeding depression problems the birdwings are having once field sites become fragmented. I am happy to announce the success of a grant application on our behalf by the Moggill Creek Catchment Group (MCCG), to build a Captive Rearing Facility at Gold Creek. My thanks especially to Greg Siepen, who coordinated the application to the gaming Fund through MCCG. This is an excellent example of a community group partnership by linking the Network with a local Community Groups!

Our RBRN Workshop, Identification & propagation of Birdwing Vines, was well received by Land for Wildlife Officers, Local and Regional Government Environmental branch officers. On behalf of the RBRN Organising Committee I would like to express my sincere thanks to Caloundra Council and the staff at the Reserve for allowing us to use the delightful venue at Mary Cairncross Scenic reserve.
LETTERS

AN UPDATE FROM SHERWOOD ARBORETUM. Andy Griffin

Members of Friends of Sherwood Arboretum planted approximately 30 Birdwing young vines around September 2005 and currently 20-25 are alive under a tree canopy where they are protected from the full sun. They are planted on an embankment of a gully - watercourse leading from a lagoon to the Brisbane River, adjacent the Brisbane River Boardwalks walking circuit (near the stone wall). Most of the vines have now about six leaves and some are sprouting with stems reaching up in the search of a place to climb. The matting around the vines has protected them from rampant weed overgrowth. A further 30 vines were provided by RBRN in October 2006 for planting in the grounds. Matting now has been laid as planned westwards along the gully towards the Brisbane River. When we receive some sustainable rain there will be sufficient matted space for planting a total 100 birdwing vines, to establish a potential colony of sufficient plants for breeding Richmond birdwings.

The Sherwood Arboretum will establish a protected area (from people and also the full sun) near part of the Brisbane River Boardwalks walking circuit, but it is still close enough whereby people may actually observe the Birdwing Butterfly stages in activity. About 4 months ago (March 2006) an unconfirmed sighting of a birdwing was reported from Carrington Rocks, about 400 metres upstream of the Arboretum. We hope these wandering birdwings will recognize the plants when they are tall enough to support egg laying and begin the slow process of re-colonising the closest habitat to Brisbane!

GROWING BIRDWING VINES IN THE WESTERN SUBURBS OF BRISBANE Bryan Hacker

I have never been able to grow a really good birdwing vine *Pararistolochia praevenerosa*. My first attempt was some ten years ago where I live on a spotted gum – ironbark ridge west of Brisbane. I planted two vines close to a mesh fence by a *Melicope elleryana* tree I had planted earlier. The vines grew and, indeed, are still alive. However no birdwing has given them a passing glance! They have flowered occasionally but never fruited – perhaps the required midge doesn’t occur on my property. Since then I have grown a few vines
along McKay Brook, our Habitat Brisbane Bushcare site, and a couple at our Catchment Group nursery. Of course, we have had several years drought, which has affected all of our plantings. My most successful plant was at the Moggill Creek Catchment Group’s Nursery, in almost full western sun, and growing on a fence. Why was it successful? Probably no severe water shortage (as it got runoff from the nursery watering system and is at the base of a hill which would have provided seepage following rain events) and competition was only from grasses and herbaceous weeds that I attempted to control.

From the plants we planted along McKay Brook, on or above the bank and in quite heavy shade from an eight-year old planting, I learnt several things:

- The ‘right soil type’ is required and, if nothing else, this needs to be fertile and probably with good moisture retention.
- Vines planted on a bank are extremely difficult to water, the water just runs off. Planting in this situation is only likely to be successful if you can guarantee continuous moisture seepage from up-slope.
- Following advice, we planted the vines about one metre away from existing trees and used a ‘durable’ string to guide twining stems to a small branch. In some cases the string rotted within a few months; when the twining stem was grounded for any length of time it tended to die off.

How to get a twining stem to climb a tree seems to be of paramount importance.

I offer these suggestions for acceptance or rejection:

1. It is important to plant where competition from another plant’s roots is minimal. For a tree growing in the open, the active roots will be in the vicinity of the edge of the canopy. Planting a metre from a tree does not mean there will be little competition from that tree and it is more important to plant where there are few fibrous roots. If you sever a medium sized root, it is likely to produce a multitude of new rootlets.

2. Some ascending structure for the birdwing vine to climb is very important. The twining habit means it must have something with a moderate diameter to twine around – I would guess no more than a couple of centimetres. It would be incapable of twining around a large tree.

3. How do we lead it to a medium-sized branch? We are currently trying bamboo stakes, less than 2.5 cm diameter, inserted into the soil and tied to an appropriate target branch. We believe it is important to insert them into the soil UPSIDE DOWN to discourage them from striking (bamboo that is
so invasive). If you try this, make sure you check now and again to make sure the bamboo has not taken root. (Ed. Perhaps dead bamboo is the answer!)

4. Another possibility is to plant vines fairly close to another slender-stemmed vine and guide the birdwing vine stem to twine around that. This could even be an exotic vine such as climbing asparagus (and then cut off and kill the asparagus above the branch it has twined around). If you’re trying this approach, be careful what exotic is used and DO NOT chose Madeira vine for supporting the birdwing vines!

5. Another possibility is to plant a vine close to a small native tree. The competition effect would still be there but might the end result be better in the end?

As with other species, when planting on a slope, make sure to leave a depression around the birdwing vine, so that water reaches the plant when it is watered, and doesn’t run off.

MOUNTAIN BIRDWING VINES AT SPRINGBROOK, ON THE QLD / NSW BORDER RANGES  

Doug, Annette and Craig Robbins

We saw our first (for many years at Springbrook) female birdwing at a Land for Wildlife Field Day at our Kuralboo Street home on 11 November 2006. Doug and Lyndria Cook from Tallebudgera were here and confirmed our birdwing identification. Since then we observed 3 more females near our Springbrook Lodge and later I picked a squashed, but still fluttering, male from the bitumen on Repeater Station Road and saw another at Kuralboo (Purlingbrook: 600 m).

Over this New Year weekend we rather excitedly noticed that the 20 or so seedlings of the mountain birdwing vines, Pararistolochia labeyana, that we planted out from tube stock just over a year ago on our Kuralboo (600 m) property, started to flower. Craig propagated them from seeds in a pod that dropped to the Lodge driveway in June 2003, one we had been observing developing since December 2001, with an 18 months’ development time! The P. praevenosa vine we planted here a few years ago is also now in flower. We thought it may be of interest to RBRN readers that both species, P. praevenosa and P. labeyana, are doing well at 600 m. The plants of P. labeyana at the Springbrook Lodge (1000 m.) are also starting to flower and they have done fairly well for the past 5 years. The vine growth over that period has been vigorous - possibly due to the absence of caterpillars!
SPRING EMERGENCES OF BIRDWING BUTTERFLIES ON THE SUNSHINE COAST

Ray Seddon

Last Spring we had a most wonderful display of newly emerged birdwing butterflies, first a male, then a female followed by many more. All the birdwing activity began to take place with a short change of weather triggering the break in pupal diapause: the longer daylight hours, rising temperatures, periods of moist air accompanied by frequent showers and rain.

These climatic factors are needed each year to bring on the metamorphism needed to establish this year’s breeding cycle.

This year we have only noticed one deformed female (often caused by dry weather) and she appeared to have great trouble emerging from her casing. It appeared to be very dry and adhered to her. No matter how much effort she put into pulling free of the pupa she couldn’t release to expand her wings and sadly eventually died. It is good news to have only had the one crippled adult as last year the early hatchings from pupa produced far more, a result of the abnormally dry weather.

Vine Growth was steady in late spring with plenty of soft new leaf available for newly-hatched larvae. The large established vine has thrown out a flourishing amount of strong leads and fresh leaf (the diameter the size of a pencil and leaves the size of a hand). Flowers are abundant and this I hope will give us another good crop of fruit pods.

First Spring Butterfly Sightings (10/9/06 to 22/9/06). The 10th of Sept. saw the 1st of the new season’s adults emerging after the over winter Pupating period. (males 12 individuals, followed by 11 females after the 13th, the usual pattern with males first emerging followed by females). These numbers of emerging adults were much earlier than we had expected as usually it is from October to November before we have our sightings of many adults. The changes in weather (early warmer weather with rain) obviously synchronized the break in pupal diapause and enabled them to meet, mate and later lay eggs.

On the 30th September we had a visit from Don Sands who brought along two Austrian Entomologists. Performing that day were seven males and 2 females put on the most unforgettable display. (Continued on page 14)
**PARARISTOLOCHIA PRAEVENOSA - LOWLAND VINES UNDER THE CANOPY**

- Reticulated patterns of bark are distinctive
- Stems twining, fusing or suckering common in old vines

**Distribution of Pararistolochia praevenosa**

(<2002)

Omithopera renonordia and Pararistolochia praevenosa in SE Queensland & N. NSW
PARARISTOLOCHIA LAHEYANA - MOUNTAIN VINES UNDER THE CANOPY

Records for Ornithoptera richmondia (larvae) on Pararistolochnia laheyana (1994)
Pararistolochia praevenosa and P. laheyana prefer volcanic soils

QUALITY VINES ARE ESSENTIAL FOR PLANTING OUT, TO ENSURE SURVIVAL

Vines “up the stake” with advanced roots are ready for planting out (avoid tube stock). Watering once per week for 6 months is needed in dry areas. Vines 3 years old or 4 m high are more drought resistant. Watering and occasional fertiliser helps induce soft leaves needed by the butterfly larvae.
This pattern of adult behaviour continued all September through to November. The 1ST larvae started to pupate on 30th November with 7 all on one particular vine! In an extraordinary discovery, we found one larva had miraculously journeyed 8 meters from the host vine, across empty space and attached itself to the inside of our bird aviary to pupate! Three of the pupae emerged on the early morning of the 14th September and all were females.

**Nursery.** Of 2,846 seeds put down in 2” tubes with 10% of soil conditioner, then mixed into Forest Blend Potting mix, 2353 successfully germinated (82.7%). Fewer seed pods set this year due to the dry weather and lowered midge population.

**Storage and Viability experiments.**

Using the same potting mix as above. Each section sewn with 100 seeds.

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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Frozen for 1 year</td>
<td>0% germination</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Dried for 1 year</td>
<td>0% germination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Refrigerated 1 month</td>
<td>67% germination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Dried for 1 month</td>
<td>77% germination</td>
</tr>
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This indicates that the fresher the seed planted after the pods have ripened the higher the rate of germination.

I ask everyone who has vines with fruit, to advise your nearest coordinator or contact the RBRN Secretary so as many seeds as possible can be collected for distribution and propagated from April 2007. What a great privilege it has been to be part of all this Richmond Birdwing Recovery Network!

**A question for the Editor.** In the scenario when a number of females emerge at the same time and there are no males, what affect does this have on the local mating cycle and what lifespan do these females then have? There were no more male sightings until Dec 22nd when we observed a beautiful, healthy and large adult.

**Eds Note.** Unmated females mostly leave the area where they have emerged if they cannot find a mate within 2 – 3 days. If they stay it is usually because a male has been unobtrusively patrolling the canopy – out of sight from the ground - but well within visiting range by the females! If corridors are seriously disturbed females will remain in a “closed” habitat, and after
about 10 days will commence laying infertile eggs!

A VINE-GROWER’S UPDATE  

Christine Hosking

In October 2006 I received a phone call from a lady who lives on a creek at Bulimba, east of Brisbane City. She wanted to purchase some birdwing vines because she had just seen two iridescent green birdwing males in her garden! Apparently these isolated sightings can occur in Brisbane, particularly in cases such as this where the riparian area has been left natural and uncleared. For all of us in Brisbane it was a real thrill to know that these butterflies are not so far away.

The vines I am growing under my endorsement on the RBRP/EPA Permit to Propagate are now flourishing in the warmer weather, with many ready to put in the ground. It has been a long and labour-intensive journey that started back in March 2005 when the seeds were first mixed into slurry and put into the seedling trays. Fast growers they are not but is very satisfying to now be able to distribute mature vines to our community members and for the numerous private property ‘Links’. We are spoilt with the choice of suitable sites for planting in Moggill Creek and Pullen Pullen Creek catchments, with many acreage properties containing moist gullies and creeks that provide ideal conditions for this vine.

The local R.B.R. Network in Brisbane’s west is working beautifully, and thanks to funding from SEQ Catchments we can supply vines to the many landholders who are eager to plant them and play their part in the recovery of the Richmond Birdwing butterfly.

ADULT BIRDWINGS NEED NECTAR: WHAT FLOWERS COULD BE THEIR ENTICEMENTS?  

Lois Hughes

Have you ever been entranced by a Richmond Birdwing sipping nectar from a flower or witnessed the beautiful courtship dance as a pair spiral through dappled sunlight, jewelled colours contrasting sharply with the deep greens of rainforest foliage? Memorable moments like these have surely inspired us to greater efforts by recreating conditions suitable so that these rare glimpses become more commonplace.

Through the excellent articles in previous RBRN Newsletters, we have gained much essential knowledge and understanding regarding the raising
and cultivation of our vines and their requirements for optimal growth, the emphasis being on host plants for the larvae, but what of the adult butterflies themselves?

Is it possible to attract birdwings back to breed in habitats once their vines are flourishing and entice them to stay? Could an abundant source of nectar nearby help as an enticement? It is worth a try. At the time of writing, the prolonged drought would certainly be affecting nectar plants as well as vines, so supplementing natural, native sources would seem prudent, as the butterfly’s energy needs would be great, considering the long distances they travel in search of host plants and the energy required for egg production. Having a ready source of nectar may be one reason why some colonies are flourishing in private gardens and not in the wild, so with this in mind the following information has been compiled.

Drawing on the experience of others and personal observation of butterflies in general and their often distinct preferences, it is apparent that Birdwings find red and also white blossoms highly attractive. Funnel or trumpet shaped flowers, as well as fluffy or pompom shapes are excellent for their long proboscis to probe. Other factors influencing butterflies’ plant preferences include perfume, profusion and a certain wildness (thickets of Lantana are a classic example of this) as well as their situation, whether growing in sun, shade and sheltered from the wind, so mass plantings are a good idea, providing a wind break.

Buddleia, Pentas and Lantana, and Duranta with their masses of trumpet shaped flowers, are particularly attractive to most butterfly species. The vanilla-scented white Duranta is preferred as it doesn’t produce copious quantities of seed as does the purple flowered “Geisha Girl”. However, it is wise to collect and safely dispose of seed to prevent its spread into bushland, keeping in mind that all of the above are, or have, invasive weed potential. Calliandra (Pompom bush), Icecream Bean tree Inga), Hibiscus (old fashioned single blooms) as well as Bougainvillea and Agapanthus are known to attract birdwings. Impatiens (single form) as well as Ixora, Vinca or Periwinkle, Justica (red) and the red flowered (Clerodendron splendens) are all worth planting, along with daisies and flowering herbs in “cottage garden” profusion.

Bloodwoods, Eucalypts, Callistemons and Grevilleas are particularly enticing to birdwings. However, any blossoms that attract honeyeaters may also attract the Birdwings. Unfortunately many have short flowering periods and
some exotic species may be more reliable as a way of providing sources of nectar throughout the year.

- *Parsonsia straminea* and *P. velutina*
- *Micromelum minutum*
- *Pimelea ligustrina*
- *P. latifolia* and *P. linifolia*
- *Baeckea crenulata* (or *imbricata*)
- *Syzygium australe* (Brush Cherry)
- *Macadamia* spp.
- *Eleocarpus grandis* (Blue Quondong)

Golden Penda (*Xanthostema*), *Grevillea* (Honey Gem), *Eucalyptus ptychocarpa* and *E. curtisii*, *Buckinghamia celsissima*, *Rhodamnia rubescens*, *Alstonia*, *Evodia* (*Melicope elleryana*), *Corymbia intermedia* (Pink Bloodwood)

The following is a list of native nectar plants that I consider may attract birdwings.

As we wait expectantly for the appearance of the glorious Birdwings in our area we will be blessed with many other beautiful butterfly visitors to our abundant nectar sources, surely an added bonus. We would welcome any additions to this list. It is often surprising what flowers butterflies relish.

A suggested solution to the dilemma when caterpillars of the Greasy (*Cressida cressida*) devours the *Paristolochia praevnosa* vines is to plant the *Aristolochia acuminata* (“tagala” vine) when the local food plant *Aristolochia* sp. (undescribed species near *A. pubera*) isn’t available.

**Ed’s Note.** *A. acuminata* occurs naturally north from about Sarina, Queensland to Cape York Peninsula and overseas. It is a natural food plant of *Cressida cressida* as well as the northern birdwings (*Ornithoptera euphorion* and *O. priamus*) in northern Queensland. However, native plant enthusiasts may be reluctant to grow *A. acuminata* in South-eastern Queensland as it is outside of its natural bioregion. There are good reasons for this caution as certain plants such as umbrella trees (*Schefflera actinophylla*) and a northern olive (*Chionanthes ramiflorus*) have become weeds when introduced outside of their natural ranges. Weediness occurs when there is an absence of the range of insect natural enemies that control them (e.g. leaf, flower, seed and stem destroyers). While *A. acuminata* has not become weedy in South-eastern Queensland it has marked detrimental affects on eggs of the Richmond Birdwing if they are laid on soft leaves. In experiments conducted in the 1980s in Brisbane, eggs stimulated necrotic reactions on fresh leaves of *A.*
*acuminata* and chemicals toxic to the embryo migrated through the chorion (eggshell) causing the developing larvae to die before hatching. However, eggs of Richmond birdwings deposited on old leaves or stems of *A. acuminata* had no detrimental affects; they hatched normally and completed development to adults.

Flowers of *Hymenosporum flavum* are proving to be one of the most favoured nectar sources for Richmond birdwing adults. This plant, the native frangipanni, currently rates “first” on our RBRN “top 10” list for the birdwing!

**BOOK REVIEW**

*Review by Russell Mayo*

*Discovering Australian Butterflies- a simple guide to Australia’s most common butterflies* by Vanessa Bugg (2006), Skyring Creek Books, 112 pp, numerous colour illustrations of living adult and immature butterflies, and mounted adult specimens.


Vanessa Bugg is the daughter of well known Australian entomologist, John Peters. This book demonstrates her long standing passion for Australian butterflies. Vanessa has aimed this book directly at children with an interest in identifying commonly encountered butterflies. In my opinion, she has succeeded in producing an interesting, affordable, easy to read and attractive book that should go a long way to encouraging the next generation of Australian entomologists. I believe she has achieved an appropriate balance between the scientific and readability for her target audience.

The book contains sections concerning the structure of butterflies, life cycle (including some specific examples), where to find butterflies, protected species, ant associations, predators, differences between butterflies and moths, nomenclature, common terms and butterfly gardening. Suggested further reading, useful information sources, places you visit and observation charts are also provided.

Vanessa has selected sixty commonly encountered species of Australian butterflies for more detailed treatment. A page is dedicated to each of these
species. The illustrations of living butterflies are very good. A coloured illustration (sometimes of both sexes), some diagnostic characters, size scale and a distribution map for each of these species is included, as are brief notes on gender differences and early stages to assist identification.

The classification, scientific and common names used appear to follow Braby (2004) with the exception of Danaus chrysippus. The species included are divided into families. The illustrations of the set specimens are adequate to allow identification, although shadowing is evident. The text is generally accurate and pitched well to the intended audience. Species determinations appear to be accurate with the exception of Telicota ancilla. The male specimen figured would appear more likely to belong to the Telicota colon/argens species complex. The text is appropriate and refers to Telicota ancilla.

The section on protected species could give the impression that overcollecting for commercial purposes of some Australian species is a threatening process. There is no evidence that this is the case in this country. This section also appears to present the confused concept that species rareness relates to conservation, and is an indication of threat, that is unfortunately inherent in species-level protective legislation.

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**Recommended Nurseries for quality* birdwing Vines:**

- Gary Einam, Proplant Nursery, 80 Robbs Road, Morayfield, Qld 4506. einam@microed.com.au (07) 5498 5592
- Christine Hosking, 351 Boscombe Road, Brookfield, Qld 4069 cjmhosk@optus.com.au (07) 3374 3453
- Ray Seddon, PO Box 317, Beerwah QLD 4519. theseddons@westnet.com.au (07) 5494 0383

*Eds Note.* Vines ‘up the stake’ are advanced enough to plant out. Experience shows that seedlings or cutting-grown plants less than 12 months old without climbing runners, are extremely prone to drought and strong light and are not likely to survive.
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Eva Ford (Mary River Catchment) mrcceava@qld.wide.net.au (07) 5482 4766

* Corridor Coordinators represent the RBRN for local birdwing activities, and as contacts for the community and local government representatives in their area. They may be elected at any time of the year and will be asked to provide a report each year for their areas, concentrating on establishing vines in corridors, Stations and Links. They also assist with documenting natural stands of vines for the RBRN National Data base on vine distribution.

**BIRDWING VINES NOW AVAILABLE!**

Chris Hosking now has quality vines of Pararistolochia praevenosa with runners “Up the Stake” and ready to plant ($6 each)

Phone or email with your orders: (07) 3374 3453

Eds Note. Vines ‘up the stake’ are advanced enough to plant out. Experience shows that seedlings or cutting-grown plants less than 12 months old without climbing runners, are extremely prone to drought and strong light and are not likely to survive.
NOTICE OF GENERAL MEETING

The next General Meeting of the Richmond Birdwing Recovery Network will be held from 2 - 4 pm on:

FRIDAY 23rd FEBRUARY 2007

IN THE LARGE CONFERENCE ROOM,
CSIRO LONG POCKET LABORATORIES,
120 MEIERS ROAD, INDOOROOPILLY

The main business will be an address by Dr Samantha Lloyd titled:

“The Birds and the Bees: Pollination Ecology Essentials”

VISITORS ARE WELCOME

RBRN acknowledges the financial and in-kind support of Brisbane City Council, South East Queensland Catchments and several anonymous donors.