

Plant of the Week

Banksia oblongifolia

The Fern-leaved, or Rusty Banksia



Banksia oblongifolia, the **Fern-leaved or Rusty Banksia** would surely be the ugly duckling of the *Banksia* world. This is one tough plant! It grows as a shrub, 1 – 1.5 metres high, with multiple stems produced from **lignotubers (woody underground stems)** and stiff, leathery leaves. It is quite common in heath, woodlands and forests from Ulladulla on the south coast of NSW to Bundaberg in Queensland. There is also an isolated population on the Blackdown Tableland in Queensland¹. In bushfires, stems and branches can be completely destroyed, yet buds in lignotubers can survive high temperatures, then shoot and grow when environmental conditions become more favourable.

Although it has often been assumed that **Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's** novel, *The Lost World*, was set amongst the **tepuys** (table top mountains) of **Venezuela** made famous in the recent movie *Up!*, the novel was actually set in the **cerrado** of South America, a vast area of **Brazilian tropical savanna** bordering **Paraguay** and **Bolivia**. The cerrado is a hotspot of plant and animal biodiversity and a region of frequent droughts and severe fires. In order to survive fire, many plants have evolved with woody underground structures similar to those we call **lignotubers**, except that in the cerrado of South America they are called **xylopodia**, or 'wooden feet'.

¹Australian Native Plants Society (Australia) <http://anpsa.org.au/b-obl.html>

Map modified from Australian Native Plants Society (Australia), <http://anpsa.org.au/b-obl.html>

Text and photographs: *Alison & Kevin Downing*,
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Downing Herbarium, Department of Biological Sciences.

