

Banksia *spinulosa* Hairpin *Banksia*

Banksia spinulosa, the Hairpin Banksia, was first collected in Sydney in 1792 by John White, principal surgeon of the First Fleet during the 1788 voyage to Australia, later appointed Surgeon-General of New South Wales. White had a great interest in the natural environment and, as few medical supplies were available at the time, investigated the properties of many native plants that might have medicinal applications for the young colony¹. Curiously, *B. spinulosa* was not included in the collection of *Banksia* species (*B. ericifolia*, *B. integrifolia*, *B. robur* and *B. serrata*) made by Joseph Banks and Daniel Solander who accompanied Lieutenant James Cook on the voyage of European discovery of Australia in 1770³.



For many years, the taxonomy of *Banksia spinulosa* has been challenging. Currently four varieties are recognized. Until recently, one of these, *B. spinulosa* var. *collina*, was regarded as a species (*Banksia collina*), in its own right²! There are also natural hybrids between *B. spinulosa* and *B. ericifolia*, the Heath-leaved Banksia and recent molecular studies have shown these two species to be closely related⁴.

Hairpin Banksia grows as a shrub on sandstones, occasionally on shale or clay, in coastal forests, woodlands and heaths from Victoria to Maryborough in Queensland. There are disjunct (isolated) populations on the Atherton Tablelands west of Cairns.

All *Banksia* flowers are rich in nectar, an essential food source for insects, birds and marsupials which in turn are important pollinators for *Banksias*. Marsupials that have been observed to pollinate *Banksia spinulosa* include the Yellow Footed Antechinus (marsupial mouse), the Brown Antechinus, Pygmy Possums, Sugar Gliders and Bush Rats. Honey eaters include: Crescent Honeyeater, White-eared Honeyeater, Yellow-tufted Honeyeater, White-cheeked Honeyeater, Lewin's Honeyeater, Brown Honeyeater and also Eastern Yellow Robin, Red Wattlebird, Noisy Friarbird and last but not least, Noisy Miner.

Interestingly, flowers of *Banksia spinulosa* are more commonly visited by native bees rather than introduced honey bees.

¹ Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_White_%28surgeon%29

² Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banksia_spinulosa

³ Australian Native Plant Society (Australia): <http://anpsa.org.au/banksia1.html>

Distribution Map: Modified from Wikipedia ²

⁴ Mast A; Givnish, T J (2002). Historical biogeography and the origin of stomatal distributions in *Banksia* and *Dryandra* (Proteaceae) based on their cpDNA phylogeny. *American Journal of Botany* **89** (8): 1311-1323.

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