

## Plant of the Week

# *Nothofagus moorei* – Antarctic Beech

In Australia, we take it for granted that most of our trees are either Eucalypts or Acacias (Wattles). However, eastern Australia also has magnificent **Antarctic Beech** forests, relics of ancient times. *Nothofagus* was originally included in the family **Fagaceae** (Beech family) of the northern hemisphere but recent molecular studies



*Nothofagus moorei* forest in Werrikimbe National Park.  
Photo: Alison Downing

have shown that the southern Beech trees were sufficiently different from those of the northern hemisphere to justify moving *Nothofagus* to its own family, the **Nothofagaceae**. *Nothofagus* forests can be found in **New Zealand, New Caledonia, New Guinea, Argentina and Chile**, suggesting a **Gondwanan** origin in the **Triassic**, about 180 – 200 million years ago. **Fossils of *Nothofagus*** have also been found in **Antarctica**.

In Tasmania, there are two species of *Nothofagus*, the deciduous endemic *N. gunnii* and the evergreen *N. cunninghamii*, a species which also occurs in Victoria. Australia also has a third species, *N. moorei* which grows in cool temperate forests of the northern tablelands of New South Wales, from Barrington Tops to the Lamington Plateau of south-eastern Queensland. The finest stands of *N. moorei* are considered to be those of Werrikimbe National Park in the high country to the west of Port Macquarie<sup>1</sup> and they are richly adorned with epiphytic orchids, ferns, fungi, mosses, liverworts and lichens. These are currently the centre of a range of studies by forest ecologist Dr Ross Peacock, a senior research fellow at Macquarie University.

<sup>1</sup>*New South Wales Rainforests - The Nomination for the World Heritage List*. Paul Adam. 1987.

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