

## Plant of the Week

# Scribbly Gums: Australian Icons



*Eucalyptus pauciflora*

*Eucalyptus delegatensis*

*Eucalyptus rossii*

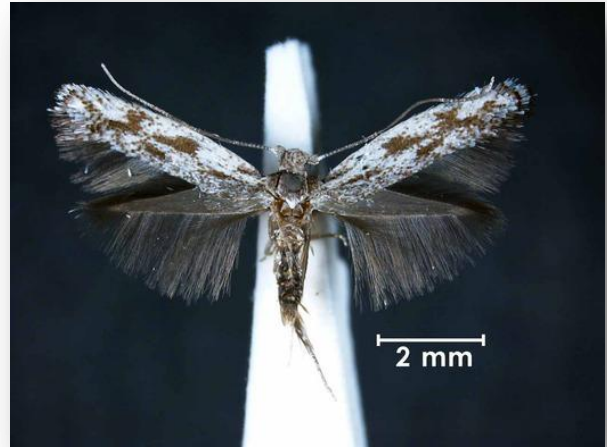
It is easy to recognise the extraordinary scribbles on some smooth-barked *Eucalyptus* or gum trees and it is hard to resist tracing them with your finger or trying to decipher the scribbles! They frequently feature in Australian literature and place names. But what makes the scribbles?

Scribbles are burrows made by the larvae (grubs) of the scribbly gum moths as they eat the wood just under the bark<sup>[1]</sup>. By the time the bark has been shed and the scribbles are exposed, the larvae are gone – they pupate at the base of the tree and metamorphosed into moths.



A scribbly gum moth was described in 1939 and named *Ogmograptis scribula*<sup>[2]</sup>. The wingspan of the moth is only 8 mm across!

Although scribbles occur on over 20 species of Eucalypts<sup>[3]</sup>, for many years there was only one species described. In 2007 Macquarie researcher Julia Cooke published measurements of scribbles showing that the size and shape of the scribbles differed between eucalypt species<sup>[4]</sup>. She suggested that there was more than the single species of moth described – in fact there could be a different moth for each eucalypt species.



More recently scientists from CSIRO caught larvae and moths from many eucalypt hosts and have identified several new species, with their findings due to be published later this year<sup>[5]</sup>.

#### References

- <sup>[1]</sup> Nielsen ES & Common IFB. 1991. Lepidoptera (moths and butterflies). In: The Insects of Australia (ed. J Naumann), pp. 817–915. Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, Australia.
- <sup>[2]</sup> Meyrick E. 1935. Elachistidae. In: Exotic Microlepidoptera, pp. 600–601. Taylor & Francis, London, UK.
- <sup>[3]</sup> Brooker MIH, Slee AV, Connors JR & Duffy SM. 2002. EUCLID: Eucalypts of Southern Australia, (CD ROM) 2nd edn. CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood, Victoria, Australia.
- <sup>[4]</sup> Cooke, J. and Edwards, T. 'The behaviour of scribbly gum moth larvae *Ogmograptis* sp. Meyrick (Lepidoptera: Bucculatricidae) in the Australian Capital Territory', Australian Journal of Entomology, vol. 46, 2007, pp 269–75.
- <sup>[5]</sup> Day, M. 2012. Deciphering the Message Stick. Meanjin 71(2): 30-38

#### Photographs:

Mature *Ogmograptis* larva. Photograph made by You Ning Su, CSIRO Ecosystem Sciences:

<http://meanjin.com.au/articles/post/deciphering-natures-message-stick/>

The adult *Ogmograptis* species. Photograph made by You Ning Su, CSIRO Ecosystem Sciences:

<http://meanjin.com.au/articles/post/deciphering-natures-message-stick/>

Julia Cooke measuring scribbles to compare the burrows on bark from *Eucalypts delegatensis*. © Pam Cooke 1996

### Text and photographs of 'scribbles' on three eucalypt species: Julia Cooke

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