

Face behind the names



PLANT NAMES

with Rob Cross and Roger Spencer

DAVID Jones (pictured) is probably the most prolific horticultural botanist author that Australia has produced. We know him mainly through his prodigious output of books on topics including ferns, palms, cycads, climbing plants, orchids and the nine-volume *Encyclopaedia of Australian Plants* written with life-long friends Rodger Elliot and illustrator Trevor Blake.

His first book, *Australian Ferns and Fern Allies*, written with Stephen Clemesha, was published in 1978, and since then he has written or co-authored more than 30 books and numerous scientific papers. His books are a great resource for laymen and professionals alike. David regards one of the most useful titles *Pests, Diseases and Ailments of Australian Plants*. It is co-authored with Rodger Elliot.

David was introduced to the Australian flora, especially orchids, by an aunt who lived in The Basin, Victoria.

As a teenager, he rescued terrestrial orchids from Melbourne's encroaching urban sprawl, and this experience stimulated him to pioneer orchid cultivation techniques that are the basis of those in use today (at the time, native terrestrial orchids were believed impossible to grow).

His all-consuming passion for plants led David to horticultural studies at Burnley College where he was dux of his class. Here he met fellow plant lover and future wife Barbara.

Studies at the University of Melbourne followed, with a degree in agricultural science broadening his perspective of horticulture.

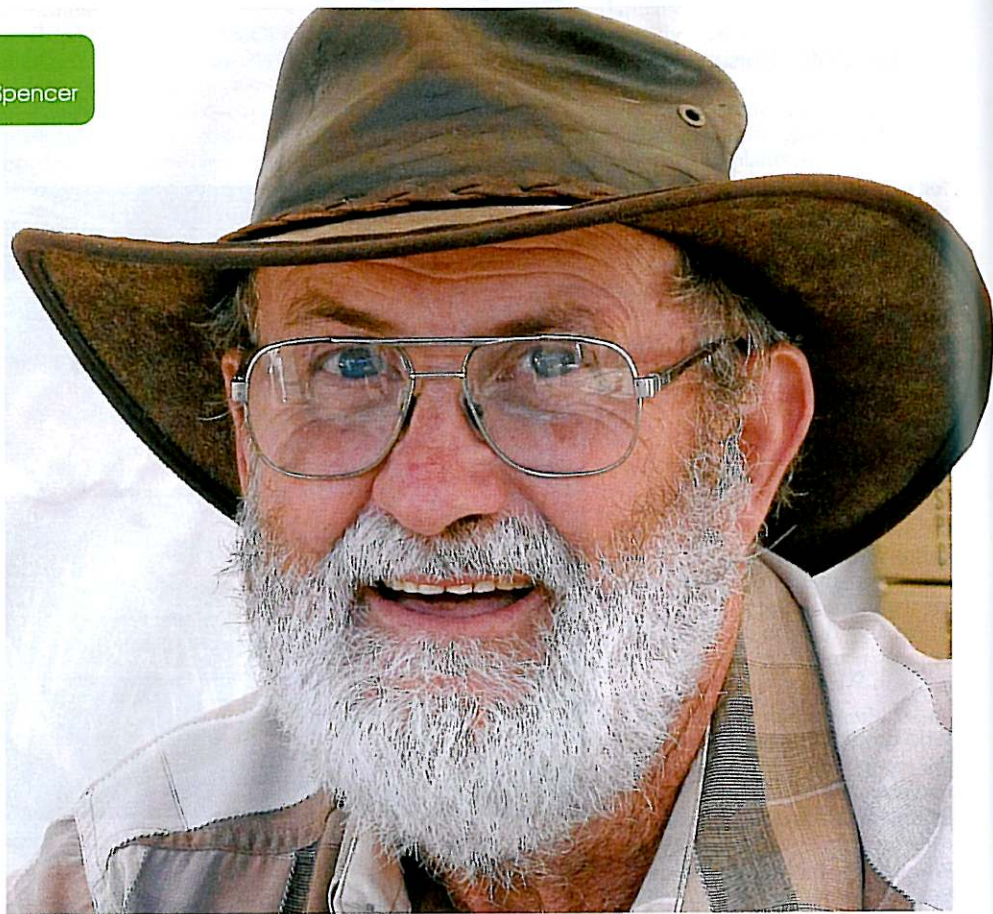
Then, as a researcher at the Scoresby Horticultural Research Station (now the Knoxfield Centre), he concentrated on fruit crops and innovative programs associated with Australian plants, including, with the late David Nicholls, the identification of alternative materials for potting mixes. These studies led to the successful introduction of soil-less mixes in the Victorian nursery industry – a very important breakthrough that is now the norm.

Meanwhile, with his wife and children, and Rodger and Gwen Elliot from Austrafloora Nursery, he scoured Victoria for species and forms suitable for Australian gardens and introduced the cultivars *Grevillea rosmarinifolia* 'Limelight', *Acacia pravissima* 'Golden Carpet' and several prostrate forms of species growing on the headlands of south-eastern New South Wales and East Gippsland.

Trained as a horticulturist and agricultural scientist, David was frustrated when he found some wild plants could not be identified by professional botanists, and with reluctance, he eventually decided to tackle some of these taxonomic problems himself.

At the time, Barbara was managing an orchid and fern nursery, Geewan Ferns, based at Austrafloora, while David studied these plants in the wild.

At that time, no other Australian botanists were working on the taxonomy and nomenclature of Australian orchids.



Get out in field, urges David Jones

WHAT are David's views on botanists and plant names? In his own words:

"I regard myself as a reluctant botanist, but being a passionate plantsman, I accepted the challenge of putting names on plants that had been neglected or overlooked by botanists for decades."

David believes strongly that good botanists must get out in the field and earn their keep: he has no time for armchair botanists or the modern laboratory botanists.

David described his first orchid species, *Pterostylis aestiva*, in 1972.

In 1978 the family moved to Queensland, opening Eugenia Park Nursery at Currumbin Valley, growing hardy coastal plants and specialising in native rainforest plants.

In 1988 David changed career direction again, working initially for the Australian National Botanic Gardens in Canberra and later transferring to the Centre for Plant Biodiversity Research, Canberra.

Travelling widely to pursue his passion for orchids (including New Guinea, New Caledonia and the Torres Strait Islands), David noticed considerable differences between the interpretation of species in different Australian states.

After organising a network of about 40 collectors across Australia (with suitable permits), he made detailed scientific comparisons, extending our knowledge of their taxonomy and cultivation.

David's incredible thirst for knowledge and dedication to the study of Australian plants has meant he has developed a unique approach to plant taxonomy.

He has travelled extensively to some of the remotest parts of Australia in search of new species and information on their ecology.

He has extended this dedication to photographing and drawing in minute detail many of the plants he has observed in the wild (more than 3000 detailed drawings of orchids) and shared this knowledge through his numerous publications.

David has described more than 350 species of native orchids that had been neglected or overlooked by previous workers, or had been located by him after exploration of poorly known areas and habitats, or as a result of his network of contacts.

His interest in cycads has resulted in the description of 18 new species and the comprehensive *Cycads of the World*, and his interest in palms resulted in the co-authorship with John Dowe of the botanical account of palms for the *Flora of Australia*.

After collecting a beautiful fern in the wild, David described the genus *Revwattisia* to accommodate an elusive rare species, *R. fragilis*. His wry sense of humour shows in the naming of the orchid species *Prasophyllum correctum* and *P. incorrectum*.

David retired in July 2007 and now lives in Kalaru, NSW. We wish him a happy retirement.

● Rob and Roger thank David, his wife Barbara and daughter Sandie for supplying material for this article, and his friend Rodger Elliot for his comments.