

TWO
WITH
NATURE



TWO WITH NATURE

Ellen Hickman & John Ryan



Lambertia fairallii, 1997
aquarelle, 230 x 190 mm

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FOREWORD

Doing art feeds my soul. Art is second nature to me, and something I fundamentally was born to do. My artistic talent is a gift I have been given, and I feel compelled to nurture it. I love the natural environment and take every opportunity to be in it. When I am in it I am impelled to capture it, to preserve the moment so I don't forget it. This I can do best by drawing my subjects. Sharing the results with others allows them to enjoy its wonders too.

I realised when faced with choosing a career that it was difficult to make a living as an artist. Electing to study science, majoring in botany offered more career opportunities. My ability to draw proved useful for my studies, and led to my first job as a botanical illustrator. Studying the science of botany has allowed me to understand my subject matter from the natural environment better, and to show others, more intimately and accurately, the wonders of the botanical world.

Choosing a subject for my drawings can be for many different reasons. In some cases it is a plant that takes my fancy while out walking in the bush (*Callistemon glaucus* or *Isopogon latifolius* or *Banksia coccinea* or *Hakea victorea*). In most cases I am attracted by colour initially, but as I draw my subject I am taken by its form, texture and composition. It may be a series of drawings of plants that are related taxonomically such as the Darwinias or the Solanums or the Eucalypts or the orchids or the Restionaceae. In that case I am interested in the comparison of similarities and differences between each plant. It may be a series of drawings of plants that are related because they provide, for instance, bush foods, or medicines of the south-west. They may fall into a category such as common and endemic plants of the south-west. It may be a study of plants from a particular area like Charles Darwin Reserve. Sometimes the drawing is a commission and then it is someone else's choice for a subject.

I have developed a strong admiration for Ferdinand Bauer's classical style showing all the dissected component parts of the plant, and I have adapted this approach in some of my drawings, to tell a more complete story about each plant portrayed.



Acacia glaucoptera (detail from *Common Families*, 2004
aquarelle, 620 x 440 mm)

When I chose a subject for a drawing - it is a drawing rather than a painting because my medium of choice is aquarelle (watercolour pencil), which I use dry - I like to go out and observe the plants in their natural environment. I have a collector's permit which allows me to pick specimens from the wild. I also take photos for further reference. Back in the studio I start by doing a line drawing in graphite pencil of the whole specimen. This initial drawing is a sketch on drafting paper and allows me to get familiar with the plant. Once I have a line drawing composition that I like I will make a tracing in order to transfer it to quality paper (Arches Aquarelle 300gsm hot press (smooth)). The colour is then applied using aquarelles starting with the light shades and working up to dark. The drawing becomes a series of layers of colour. Because the pencil colours are fixed, the mixing to get the right colour is done on the paper. I work from left to right and top to bottom of the page to avoid leaning on the completed part of the artwork and smudging it. I sharpen my pencils continuously, using a blade to get a very fine point. I have a range of colours of both Staedtler and Faber Castell aquarelles, which I purchase individually as they need replacing.

The isolated south-western corner of Western Australia, with its mediterranean climate, is considered amongst the world's 34 plant biodiversity hotspots. I feel extremely blessed, and have to pinch myself often, that I live in such a wonderful place and I am able to spend my time pursuing my two passions. This leads to a genuine desire to leave a legacy for future generations, through conservation, documentation and especially my illustration.

Ellen Hickman, 2012

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Plants are vital to many cultures around the world. Consider the place of wattles in Australian identity or oaks in English heritage. The cultural importance of plants has also been recognised by artists and poets. However, the term ‘botanical poetry’ might seem an unusual juxtaposition of two quite different practices—science and poetry.

Nineteenth-century English poet, John Clare, is commonly associated with the poetry of plants. For Clare, plants were individual personalities that a walking poet could get to know through regular contact. The writings of Emily Dickinson or Mary Oliver in the United States also bear loving references to lilacs and wild roses. Australian wildflowers appear regularly in Judith Wright’s works.

From Shark Bay to Esperance, poets have written about the flora of the South-West of Western Australia—a biodiversity ‘hotspot’ of international renown. More than 8000 plant species exist in the South-West; more than one-third are found nowhere else. Botanical poems often feature endemics—such as darwinia, Christmas trees and underground orchids. Consider ‘Around the Boree Log’ by John O’Brien (1878-1952) or ‘The Mountain Bells’ by O.D. Watson (1902-1985), as well as contemporary examples ‘Nuytsia Floribunda’ by Alec Choate (1915-2010) and ‘Exposing The Rhizanthella gardneri Orchid’ by John Kinsella (1963-).

Like botanical illustration, botanical poetry fuses art and science towards an understanding and appreciation of plant life. Botanical poetry, as a kind of nature writing, is unique in its focus on the flowers, leaves, bark, roots and ecologies of herbs, shrubs and trees. Gardeners and conservationists know that plants follow a cadence—a temporal and biological rhythm—that differs considerably to animals. Botanical poets and illustrators visit plants through the seasons in order to represent these subtle cadences over time.

When I first came to Western Australia from North America, the floristic differences between the hemispheres struck me. As a way to become familiar with a land that was new to me, I got up close and physical. I wrote with my senses—touching, smelling, feeling, tasting and looking closely at plants—in the bush. I visited repositories where primordial ecologies remain intact—Fitzgerald River and Lesueur national parks, and Anstey-Keane damplands, the second most botanically diverse area in Perth. Sometimes I got scratched and stabbed.

In these poems, I hopefully convey my belief that—despite increased scientific understandings—plants are inherently mysterious. The American naturalist Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) recognised that ‘the mystery of the life of plants is kindred with that of our own lives’. Thoreau was an advocate of botanical poetry: ‘The first book and not the last should contain the poetry of flowers’. I write in order to engage with this mystery.



Lechenaultia superba (detail from *Common Families*, 2004
aquarelle, 620 x 440 mm)

My poetry is also a dialogue with various voices—some current and some past—who speak about (and on behalf of) Western Australian plants. These voices are expressed in the beliefs of Nyoongar people; the observations of settlers, visitors and travelling artists; and the perceptions of botanists and foresters. Nearly one-third of Western Australian plants have been described scientifically only in the last three decades. The South-West is a remarkable place for plants, poets and poetries.

I meld these diverse voices with my sense impressions and emotional responses to create a cauldron, a synergy, a hybridisation—a botanical poem. The quoted material at the beginning of each poem starts the dialogue. By including writings from others, I acknowledge the passion of South-West artists, botanists and conservationists. For example, Emily Pelloe (1877-1941) was an accomplished illustrator, poetic writer and early conservationist whose observations introduce the poems ‘Qualup Bell’ and ‘Two Possums’.

The knowledge gained through this process of research shapes the poems. What did explorers say about the plant? Is it edible? Has it ever been of economic interest? What is its Nyoongar name? Is it threatened in the wild? I study the plant’s taxonomy, edibility, use in medicine, appearance in settler diaries and appeal to modern tourists. Moreover, a poem can be spurred by an ironic meeting of nature and culture, as in ‘The Rites of Spring’.

I also use the scientific names of plants, which bear poetic and historical meanings. For instance, the taxonomic name for balga, *Xanthorrhoea pressii*, comes from *xanthos* for ‘yellow’ and *rheo* for ‘to flow’ alluding to its resin; *pressii* refers to the botanist Johann August Ludwig Preiss (1811-1883). In addition to their mellifluous ring, these names allow the classification of plants. Scientific categorisation enables newcomers like me to navigate the complexities of the taxa of this part of the globe. Indeed, science confirms that ‘phytomass’ comprises over 90% of the Earth’s biodiversity; plants surround us perpetually.

I hope that art and science together will continue to stimulate the appreciation of our region’s biodiversity. *A Second Nature* shows that botanical art and poetry can enhance one another, producing—under one cover—new ways of knowing the green world.

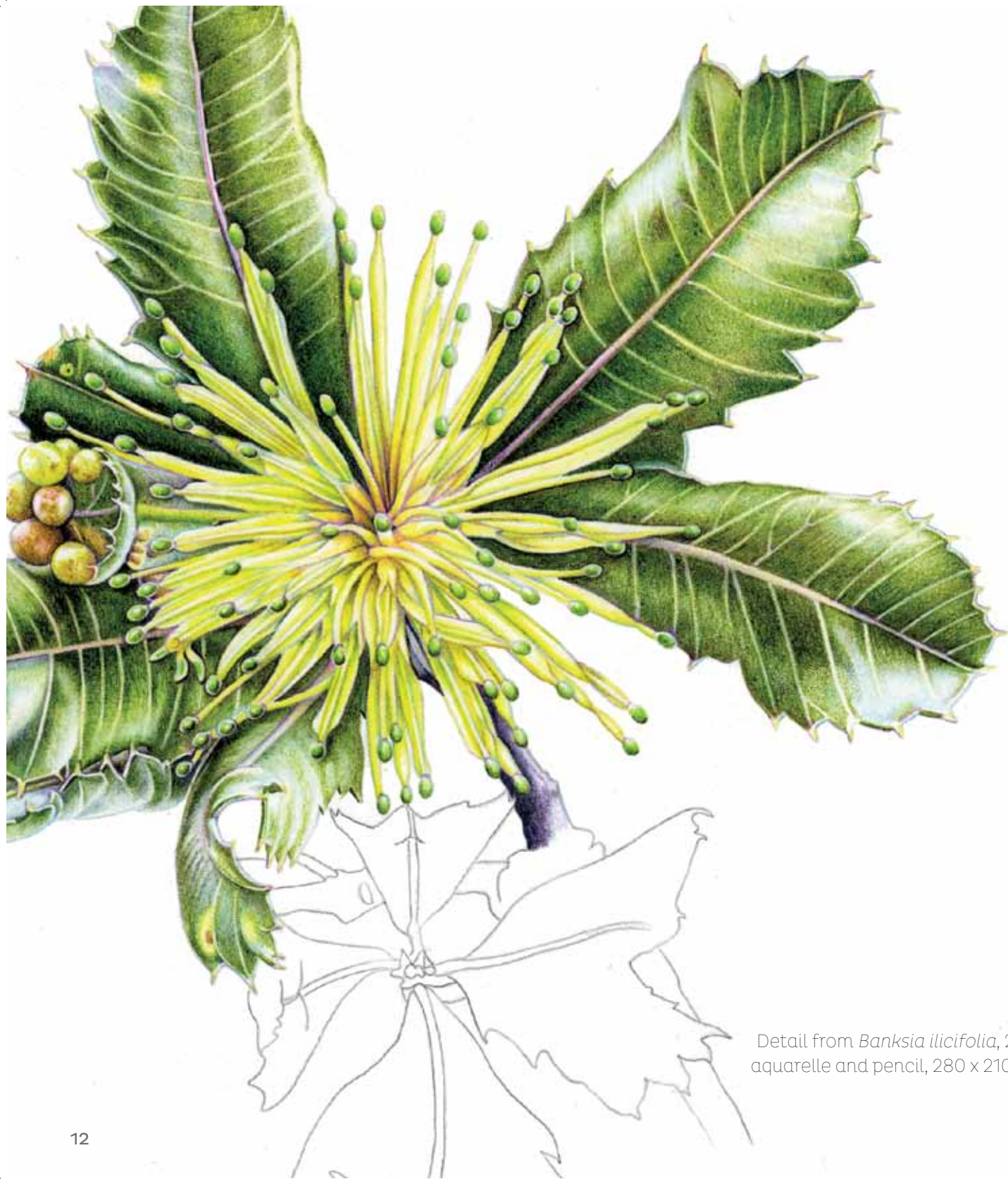
John Ryan, 2012



Caladenia reptans, 1995
aquarelle, 180 x 170 mm



(Left to right) *Daviesia incrassata*,
Synaphea tripartita and
Hovea trisperma, 2002
aquarelle, 320 x 240 mm



Detail from *Banksia ilicifolia*, 2006
aquarelle and pencil, 280 x 210 mm



Endemic Families, 2004
aquarelle, 620 x 440 mm



Cephalotus follicularis, 2003
aquarelle, 280 x 220 mm



Adenanthos obovatus, 2008
aquarelle, 500 x 180 mm

RED FLOWERING GUM

Corymbia ficifolia

Eucalyptus ficifolia (the scarlet flowering gum of Western Australia) is an exceptionally handsome flowering tree, and it displays its flowers in such a manner that it cannot fail to draw attention ('Sap' 1934)

Deep River is low at the height
of summer, no tumbling of Fernbrook
Falls. I pack the boot swiftly and rattle
four kilometres on unsealed road
to the South West Highway, nearly empty
as it meanders on to Bunbury;

through the karri north of Walpole,
peripheral coruscations in the olive-hued
bush, constellations of the Albany gum,
denominations of early bunuru: honey bee hum
within magenta trceries. I stop but once,
bleary-eyed witness to the unshrouding.

insert b/w watermark
version of illustration euc
ficifolia on page 31

SHEOAK REVERIE

Allocasuarina fraseriana

... a few weird shea-oaks destitute of leaves, between whose fine countless twigs, doing duty for foliage, the air sighs in passing with the sound as of a distant railway train, and mocks the sense of hearing in much the same manner as a mirage of water deceives the eye (Janet Millett 1872)

Welshpool Road mounting
the Hills above Perth City
soused in eventide spawl

you see, where I come from,
winter is roughshod and slaps
the rubicund faces of boys and trees,

sheoaks rummy with radiata pine
all fogging together—
my mobile reverie cut short

threadbare smiles crack coldly,
fall in brittle leaf potshards,
marrow hardens and turns to ice

by the uphill travail of three
cylinders. I lapse into a mindset
bevelled into white or red oaks

and just when you get used to it
the thaw barges in overnight,
I know, this is somewhere else

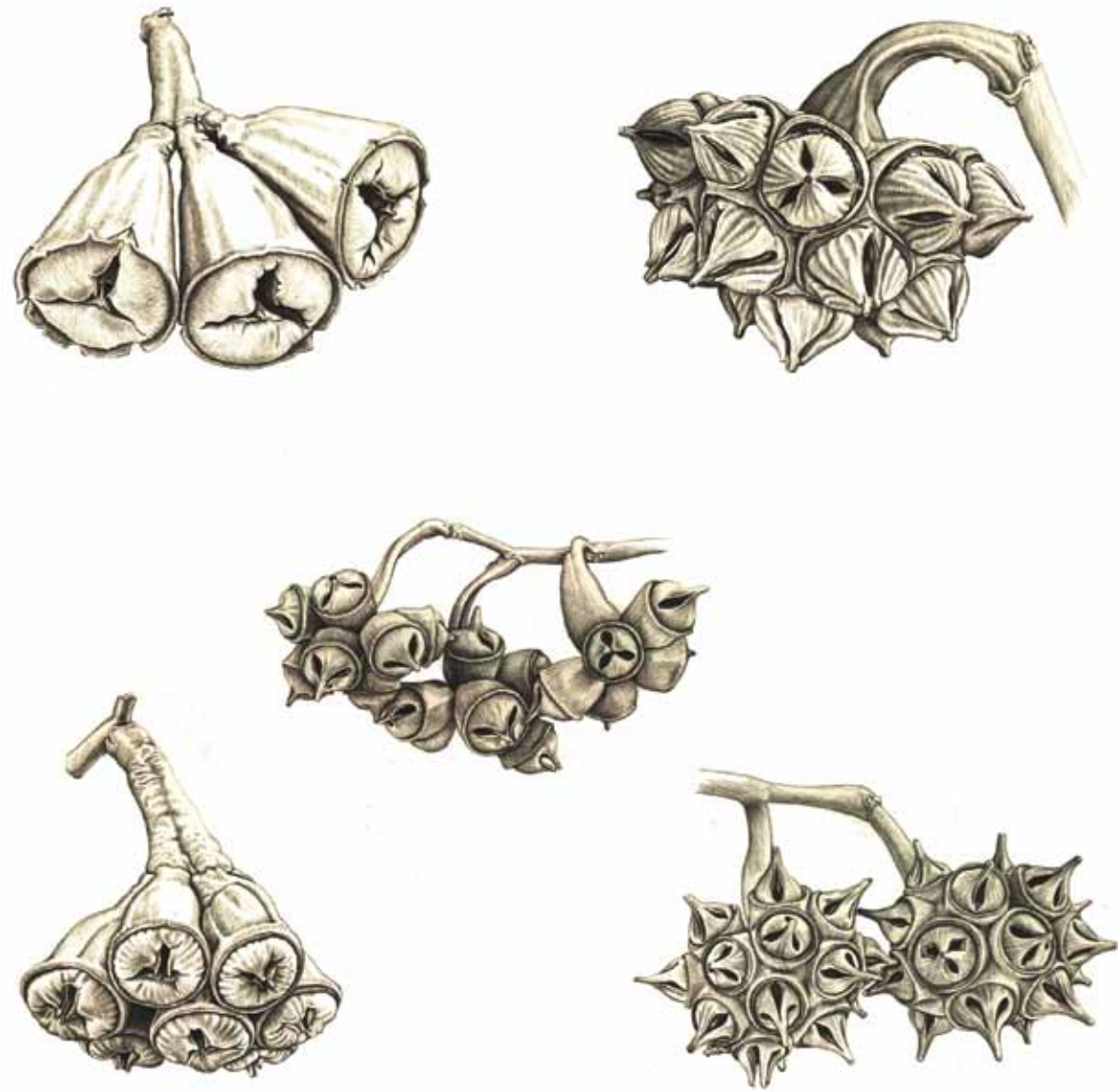
ejecting lacquered acorns
to the boreal duff somewhere
on a tenebrous broadleaf floor

but further on, at the roundabout
the bald tyres of the Daewoo skid
on the slick bitumen to Kalamunda

lore hunts us down the same,
Nantosuelta lurking on the plain
feminine oak or the settlers' bane;

and I end up facing backwards again.

tiny teeth are your verdure
neither as leaves nor as needles
but as cladodes, unlike the pine



Cornutae series, 2004
pencil, 420 x 380 mm



Xanthosia rotundifolia, 2006
aquarelle, 460 x 340 mm



Solanum oldfieldii, 2003
aquarelle, 230 x 170 mm



Pyrorchis nigricans, 2001
aquarelle, 190 x 210 mm



Hakea laurina, 1994
aquarelle, 300 x 230 mm



Tribonanthes uniflora, 1995
aquarelle, 190 x 140 mm



Detail from *Cotoneaster glaucophyllus*, 2009
aquarelle and pencil, 297 x 210 mm



Darwinia wittwerorum, 2003
aquarelle, 280 x 210 mm

PHYSIS

Eucalyptus gomphocephala

The old [Guildford] settlers will not believe that they belong to the Tuart tribe. The old trees must have been of gigantic size as the old stumps at ground level are 6 feet or more across. It seems a mystery how they got there (Henry Steedman 1937)

- I.
its slow-growing trunk
ascends to arid heavens
carrying breath prints

- II.
new faint golden tufts
under gargantuan tuarts
were hibbertia

- III.
crag sequester rain,
like grey gutter water poised
to burst on daydreams

- IV.
unhurried droplets
enlivened greatly to red—
coral vine petals

- V.
swollen flower caps
have ruptured leaving only
stamens of moon light.

UNDER THE WATTLE SCRUB

Cephalopterum drummondii

Masses of colour, scarlets, reds, pinks, and yellows of every shade ... each tree is a mass of shining leaves, moving in the breeze. They flash back the sunlight, like a myriad mirrors (E Bickerton 1905)

When I want to whisper to those long gone,
I go to the fields of everlastings
And hold still watching the slow yellow dawn.

A friend who has drowned, my father withdrawn
Both becalmed like tall ships at half-masting,
When I want to share time with those long gone.

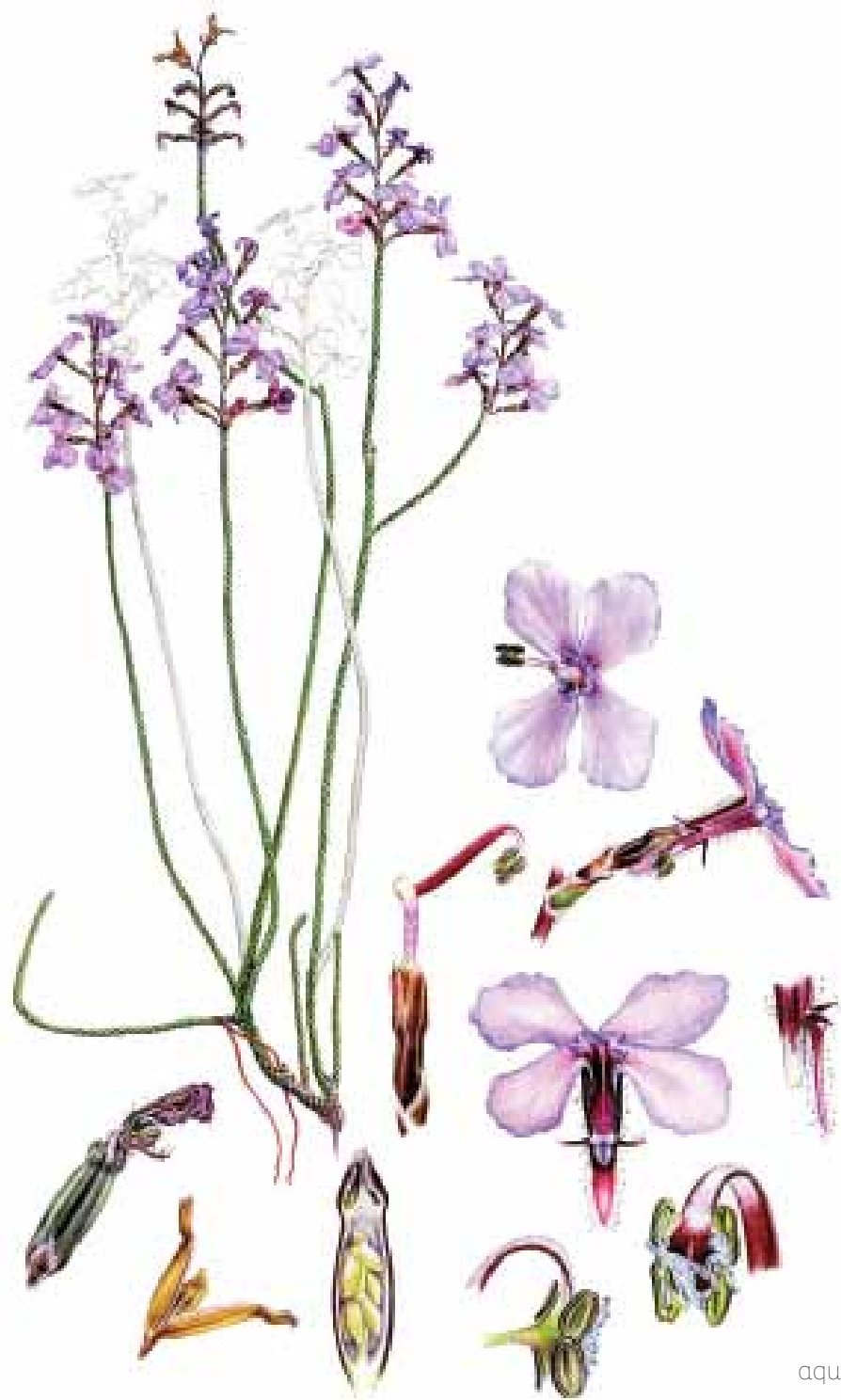
All the ones who have been too early drawn
By cancerous rot or the sea's clasping,
I hold still watching the new yellow dawn.

Frank, here you are with your tall sapphire brawn
Wide as the flowered hills and unlapsing
When I want to converse with those long gone.

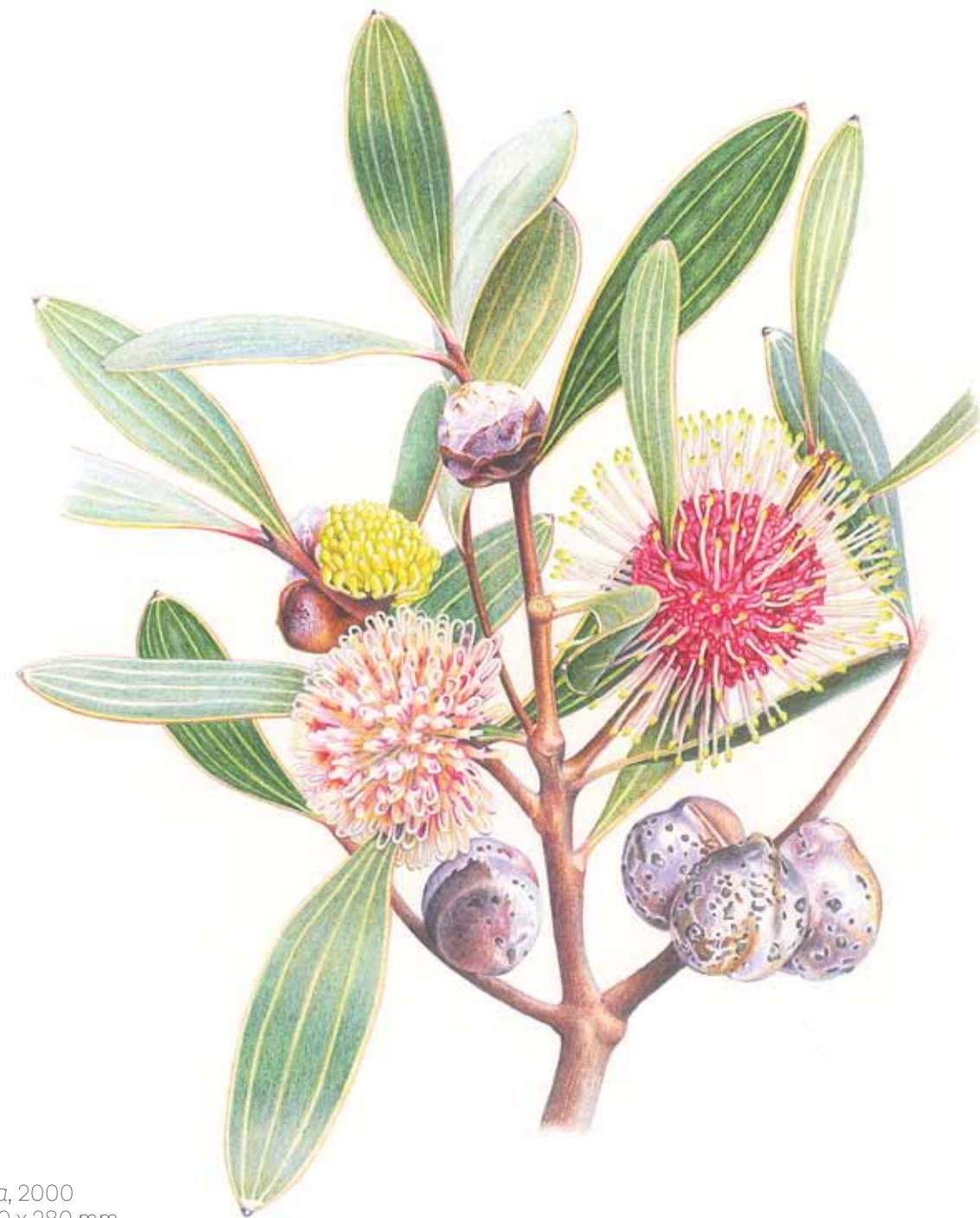
Under the wattle scrub, shimmering lawn
With the lissom Irwin River grasping,
I hold still watching the swift yellow dawn.

The arid lands east, the kwongan heath on
To the Indian Ocean's night lapping;
When I want to reflect on those long gone,
I hold still watching the spring yellow dawn.

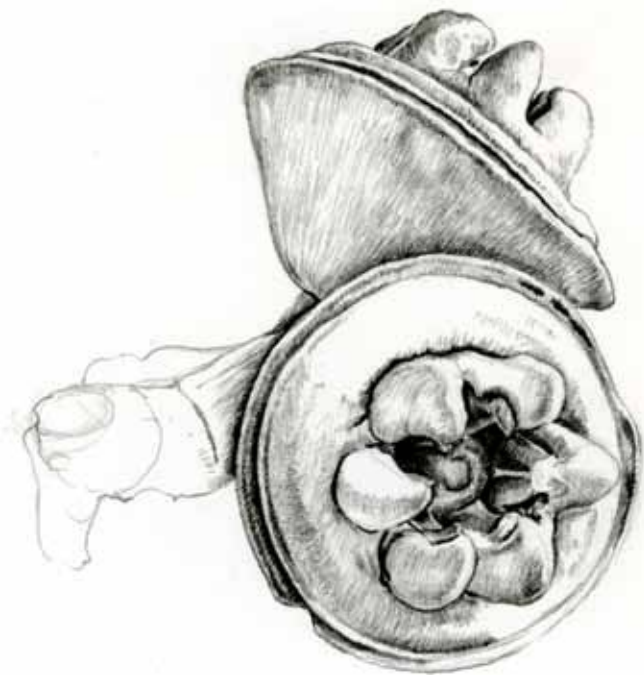
—*For Frank Cook*



Stylidium imbricatum, 2007
aquarelle and pencil, 480 x 380 mm



Hakea laurina, 2000
aquarelle, 360 x 280 mm



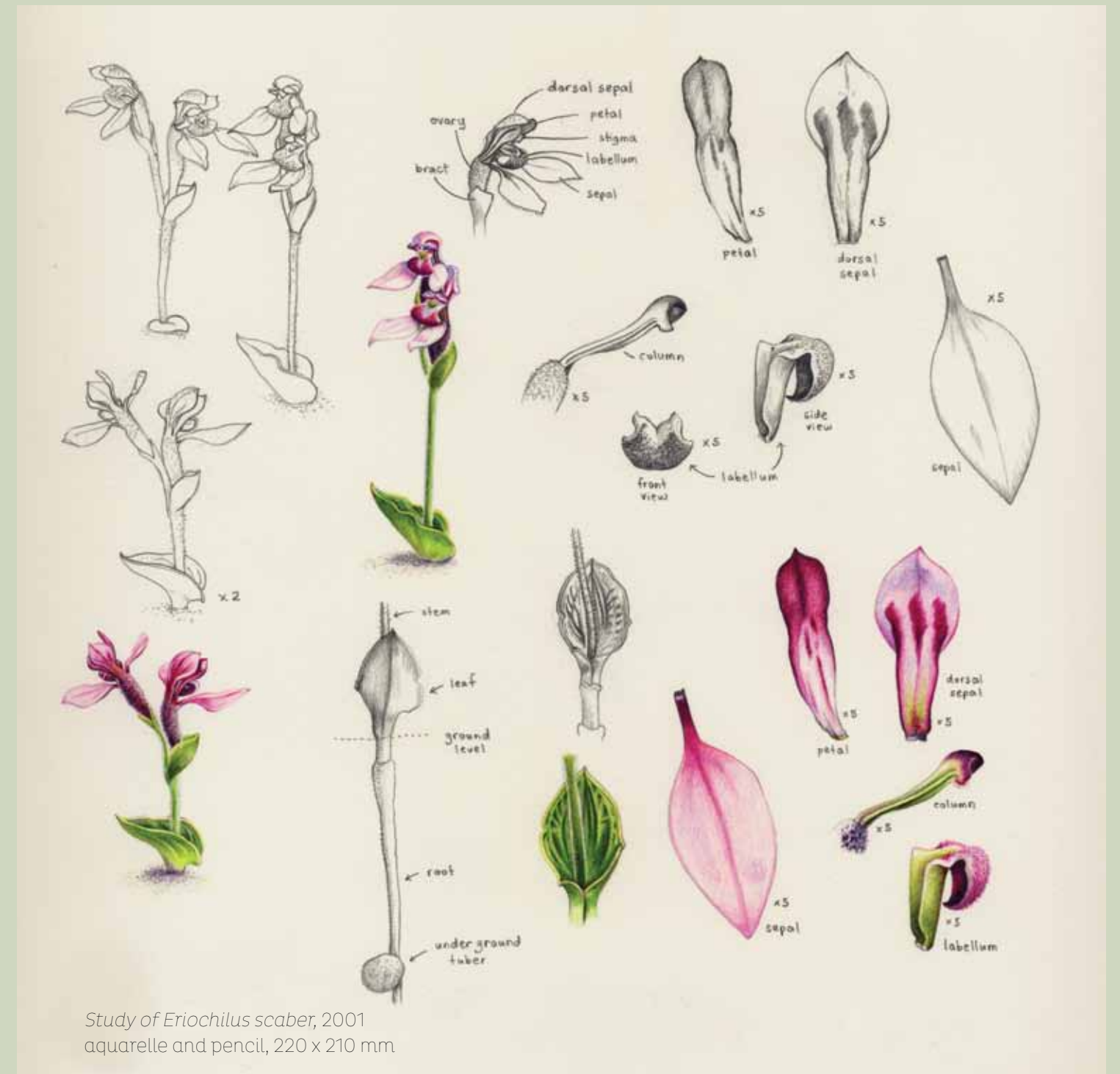
Eucalyptus aquilina, 2006
pencil, 180 x 170 mm



Detail from *Eucalyptus ficifolia*, 2003
aquarelle, 640 x 450 mm



Solanum lasiophyllum, 2003
aquarelle, 230 x 170 mm



Study of Eriochilus scaber, 2001
aquarelle and pencil, 220 x 210 mm

TREE TOP WALK

Eucalyptus jacksonii

... that want of lustre which is so remarkable in the forests of New Holland
(Robert Brown 1832)

sunlight-sprayed steel trusses sway regularly
with steps of chatting urbanites in tingle trees;
is it vertigo I have, climbing up into the whorls,
collusions of sounds, confusions of imageries?

these forests are seldom lines or strict geometries,
but tufts & leans, high cumulus-shaped canopies
& cavities cleft in pachydermal trunks, & burls
wart-like & chelonian above buttresses spidery

sepia-streaked ancients, vaulted before the colony
before Bannister or d'Entrecasteaux or Stir-
ling's swirl of Union Jack on Freo sands—oh, the fluttery

tremolo of my breath in lag, the anxiety
of heights—yes—but more the loss of worlds,
birthed over the centuries—oh, the frailty.

FIRST KANGAROO PAWS

Anigozanthos manglesii

This singularly beautiful species of Anigozanthos was raised in the garden at Whitmore Lodge, Berks., the seat of Robert Mangles, Esq. from seeds brought from Swan River by Sir James Stirling, the enterprising governor of that colony, by whom they had been presented to Mr. Mangles (David Don 1838)

peddling their charms this way—
up briskly from tawny earth
candelabras of crayon red, capped in green,
old tentacles darkening to crimson

refractions of sunset imprinted in soil
but spiralling back to dust already under
zephyr swoosh and swivel of gum leaves

the dogs, closer to ground,
imbibe root steams of tepid earth,
stutter and overstep razors
of *Isopogon* and pricks of *Hakea*

leap, pant against barbed bush.
wind-spurred rain skittles
hankering for sun, colour gestates

spry newbies in variegated cradles,
kangaroo paws crane necks,
resign to brown, shrivel pubescent hope
in glistening perimeters

breathing in Devonian blooms:
bristly hairs ping my nose,
the shimmering shucks off.





design: delete mark
under branch

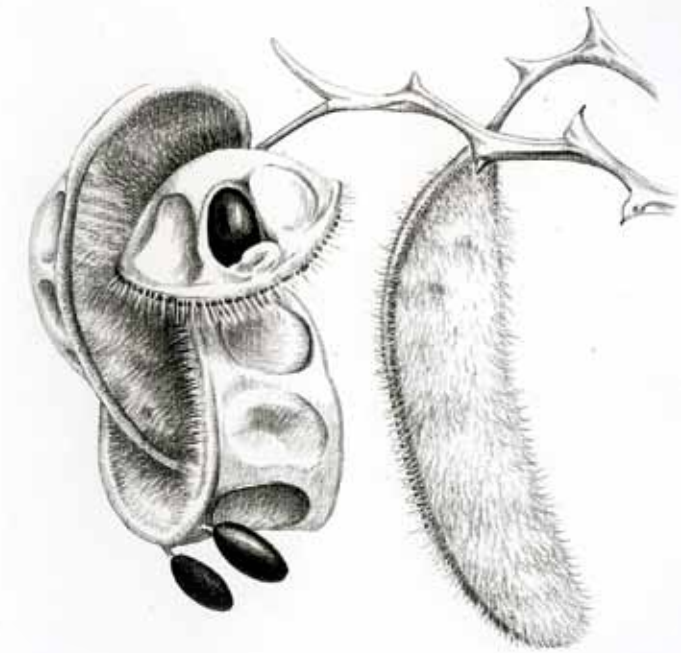
Mudlark, 2006
watercolour, 230 x 210 mm



Pimelea physodes, 2007
aquarelle, 480 x 380 mm



Leschenaultia biloba, 2007
aquarelle, 360 x 260 mm



Acacia alata var. *platyptera*, 2001
pencil, 190 x 140 mm



Isopogon latifolius, 1999
aquarelle, 260 x 190 mm



(Left to right) *Diuris* aff. *corymbosa*
and *Thelymitra variegata*, 2001
aquarelle, 320 x 240 mm

ORCHID ANIMA

Diuris tinkeri

The two lateral petals are broad and spreading like a pair of wings, the back sepal has the form of a bird's head and neck, and the whole resembles something from fairy land upon the wing (John Lindley 1840)

sometimes it works well
to hammer your dulcet note
 into the throat of the wind;
it has been a good year,
rain-wise, for the donkey orchids
 of the Eneabba sand plains.

sanguine-yellow tremors in air,
stammerings of petal-syllables,
 cheeks animated by the vivid flush
of pigments bladdered in downpour,
un-delicate elementals, entirely
 guarded by scorpion plectra.

love-children at the sun's last flaring—
at certain angles, they are coy
 faces squinching noon-burnt noses,
curved upon by casuarina locks;
then their tongues madden with desire,
 and limp, waspy legs dangle forth.

etheric flowerers who are not yet mass,
who are too light for air, four dimensions
 of blossom conjured from sand,
residues of sky slumbering in earth:
orchid anima, punctuating the heathland
 at the cusp of darkness.

INSIDE A JARRAH TREE, A BLACK TUNNEL REACHING SKYWARD

Eucalyptus marginata

Taken as a whole, there is nothing particularly picturesque about the appearance of a Jarrah tree or forest of these. Indeed, the general effect of the species, en masse, is dull, sombre, and uninteresting to the eye (John Ednie-Brown 1899)

neatly burned-out innards,
this tree lives on as skin
still supple and twisting in pleats
but where did the heart go, and the breast bone
and the heavy, unctuous insides?

the spine endures, knobby column
ripped bare by a magnificent thrust of liquid fire;
but what about the soul,
where is its perch now?

outside, the grass trees don
verdant headdresses over the charred land,
and kino sap stamps red
insignias along marri trunks;

have you ever breathed inside a tree
to feel the cool glance of air
where once a molten river ran,
seeing the outside from within?

witchetty grubs or kookaburras might,
clawing skyward towards a portal of light

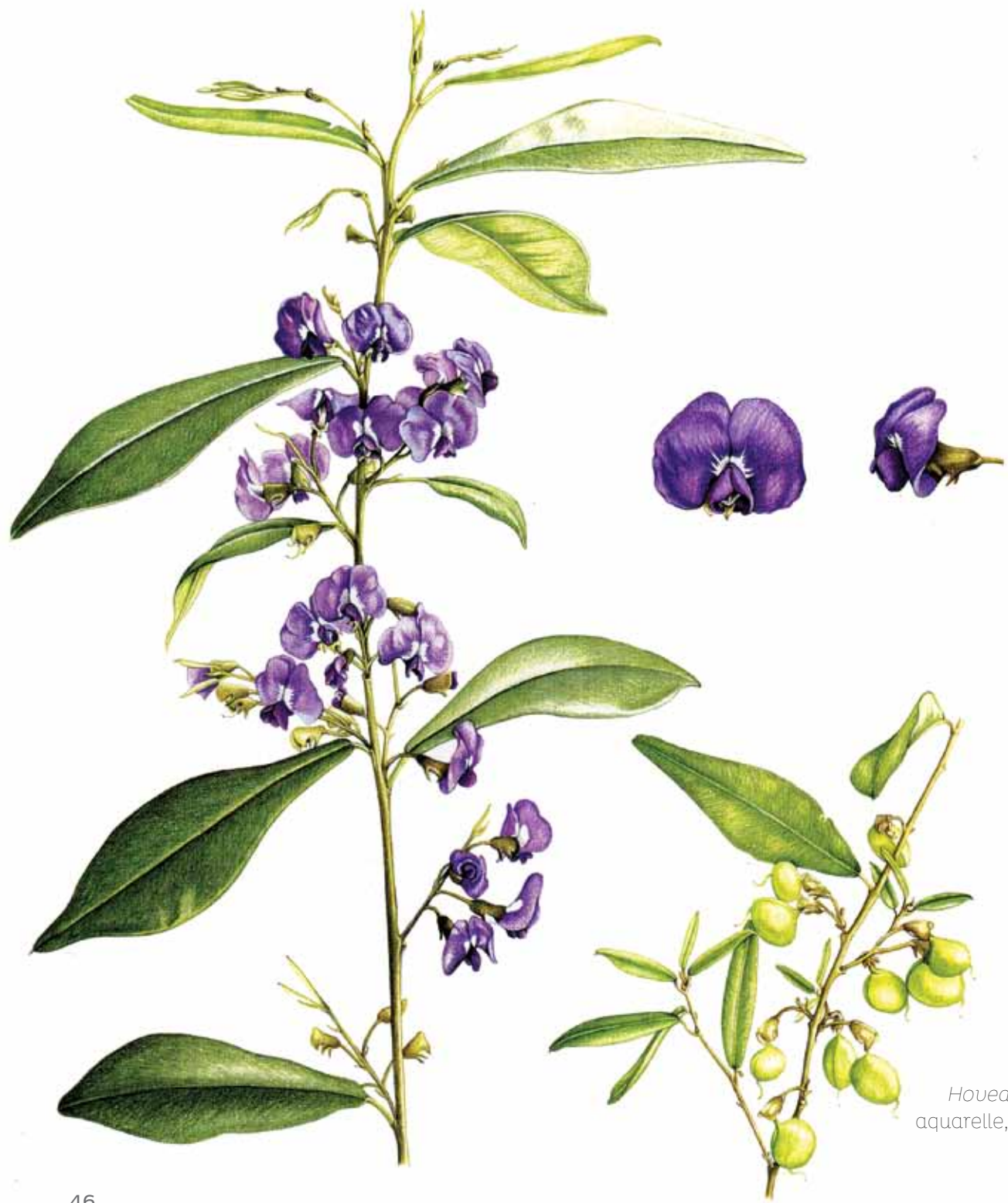
but I would not stand here forever.



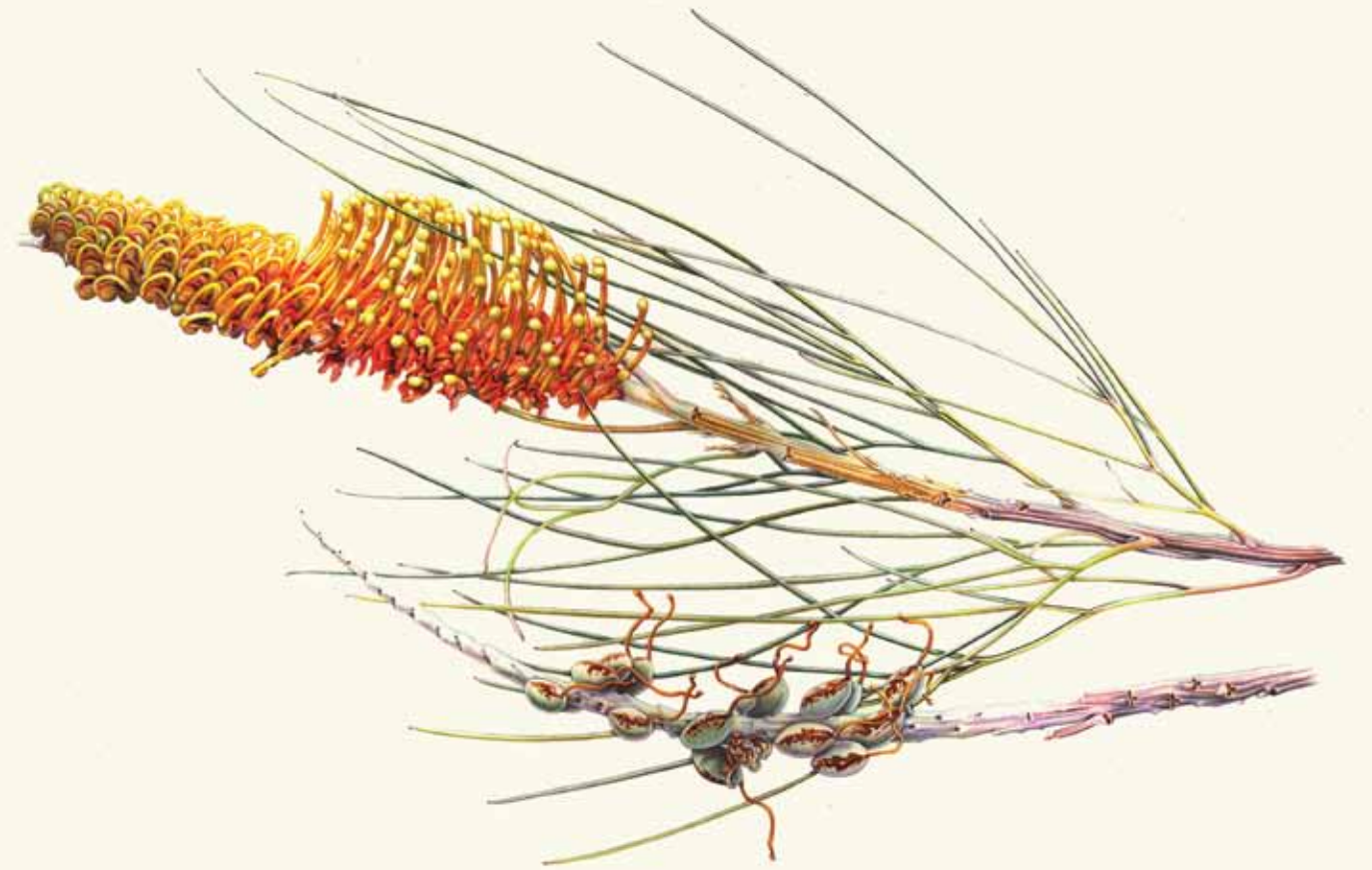
Eucalyptus stoatei, 2006
aquarelle, 520 x 360 mm



Lawrencella davenportii, 2003
aquarelle, 300 x 240 mm



Hovea elliptica, 1998
aquarelle, 320 x 230 mm



Grevillea excelsior, 2005
aquarelle, 320 x 420 mm



Brush-tail Possum, 2006
watercolour, 300 x 270 mm



Eucalyptus preissiana, 2006
aquarelle and pencil, 380 x 330 mm

SEVEN NAMES FOR A PLANT

Nuytsia floribunda

Such is the abundance of the orange-coloured blossoms, that the Colonists at King George's Sound compare it to a tree on fire; hence it has gained the name of 'Fire Tree' (John Lindley 1840)

mudja,
beacon of the banksia scrub
soft summer burning stirs
movement to the coast

ghost bush,
way station of those passed,
glissading spirits to the sea
branches pose ghost-like buds

christmas tree,
burning with sun's burning
antithesis of spruce, searing
the cold forests of Doug Fir

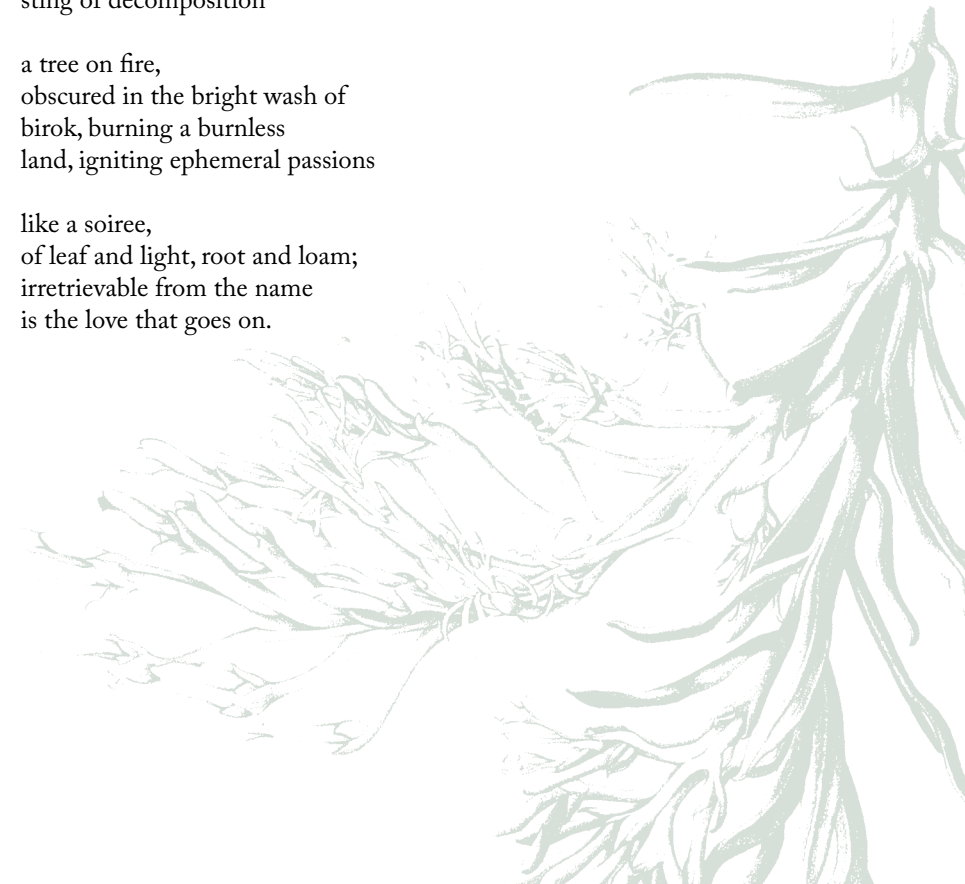
tree of the dead,
haustoria crawling into rock;
striking interpose between
luminous sky, musty underworld

Nuytsia floribunda,
abundantly flowering namesake
of the Dutchman who seized
coastline with cartography

cabbage tree,
plumage in whorls of yellow
trunk laden with water,
sting of decomposition

a tree on fire,
obscured in the bright wash of
birok, burning a burnless
land, igniting ephemeral passions

like a soiree,
of leaf and light, root and loam;
irretrievable from the name
is the love that goes on.



WHEATBELT PNEUMA

Leschenaultia macrantha

The plant grows to approx. 50 mm high x 400 mm across. It is wreath-like in shape, with succulent branches that radiate out from the centre (roadside sign in Morawa, WA)

the Mullewa Caravan Park seems
sopped in yolky undulations of canola
where hippopotamus-sized RVs turn
and wobble before the pretty graffiti

: emblazoned on the ablution block

wreath flowers riding the railway lines
or liting along walkways in the monochrome,
these candied stromatolites in a silica sea
entrusting their souls to the umber ground

: and the acacia desert which cups

seed grains in its apertures;
they lie as flower germs all year,
then the sun's azimuth slants
and the lisp of the wind gads

: pip flesh to flower in gestures

of florid rings beside corrugated
arterials grumbling from Geraldton;
what gives you posture at the verge
tramped over by incautious boots?

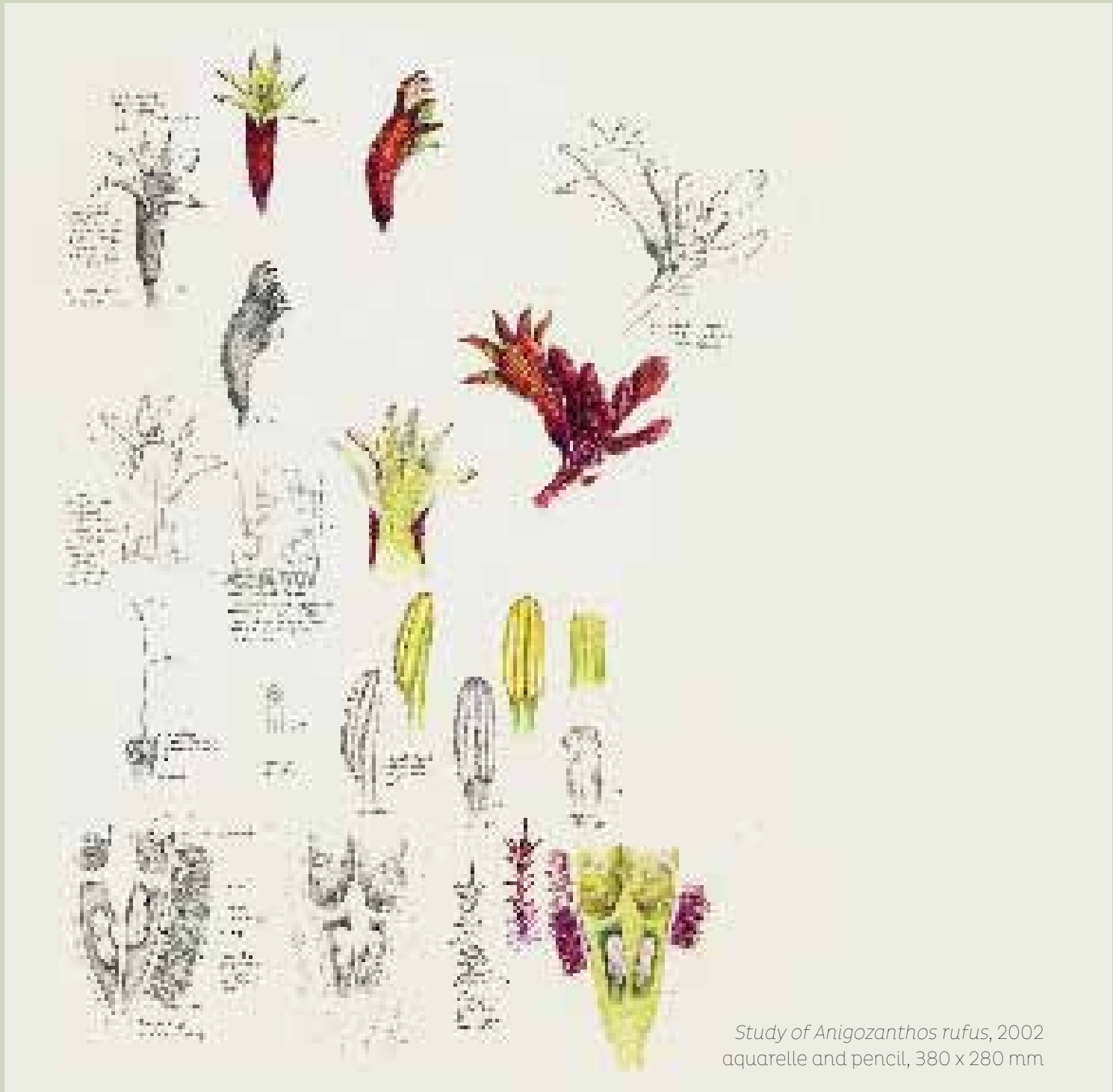
: land's augury, like us or

short-lived sparks in recalcitrant soil,
a god-struck choir nodding to heaven
in unison, a congregation clothed
in ruby and off-white finery

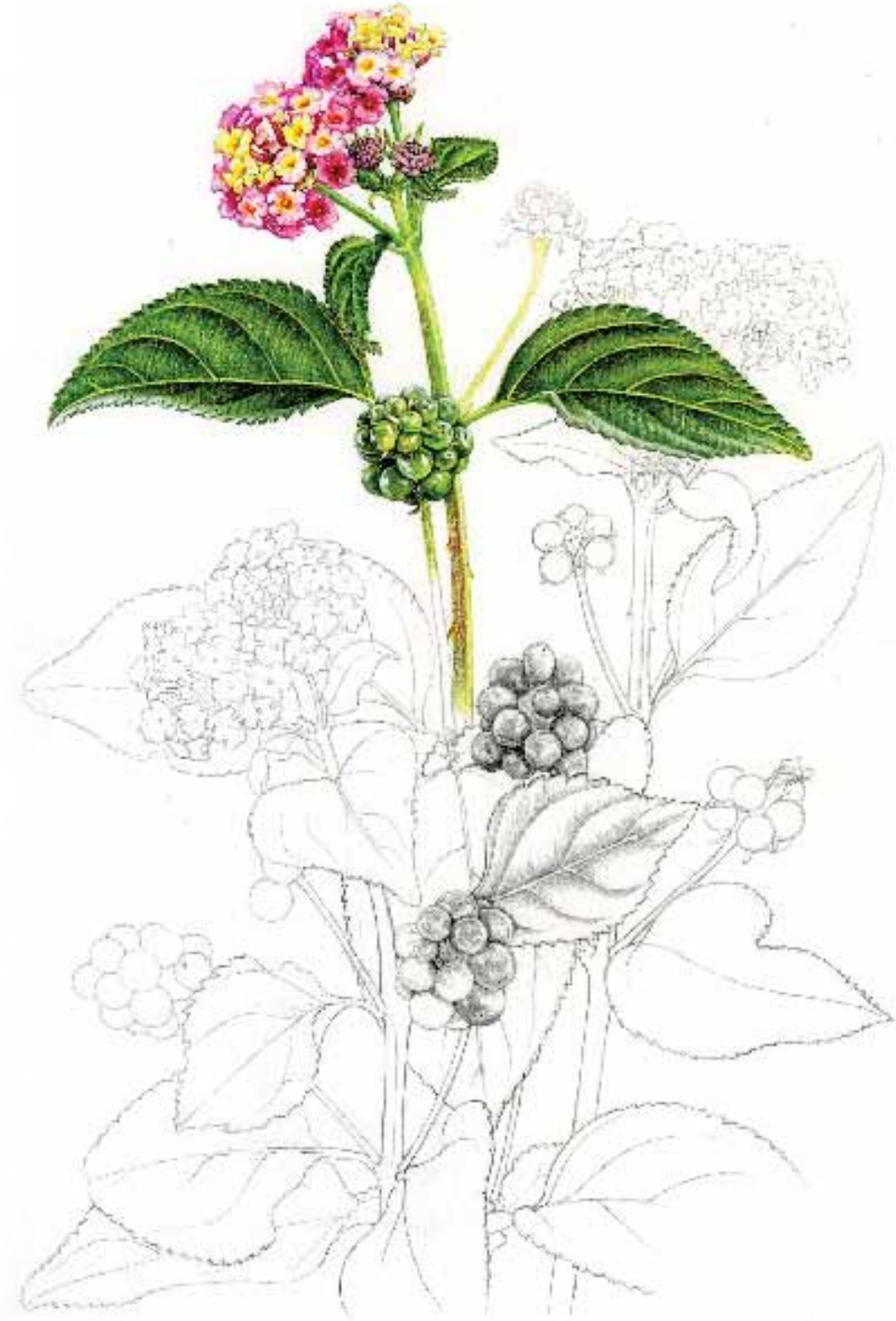
: heads tipped piously

they listen to the old stories;
when pneuma fused breath and heat,
the woven flower of *Leschenaultia macrantha*
flexed a green heart girded by blood fire

: asking the secret earth to sing.



Anigozanthos rufus, 2002
aquarelle and pencil, 380 x 280 mm



Lantana camara, 2009
aquarelle and pencil, 297 x 210 mm



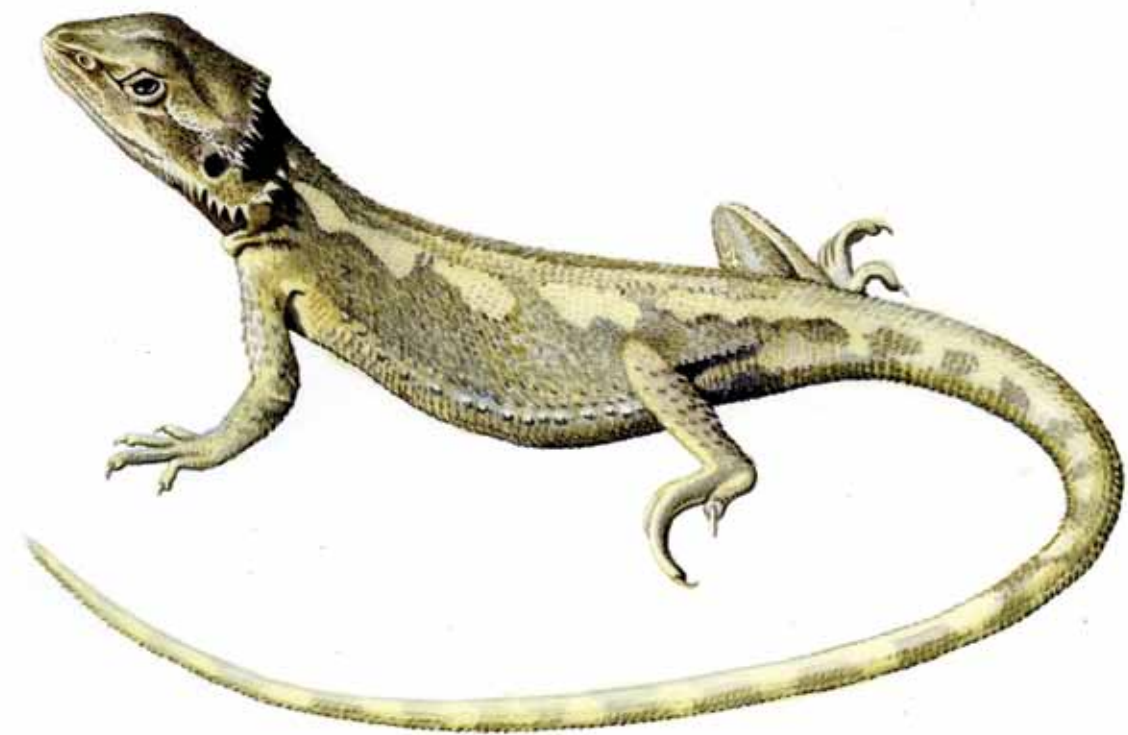
Brunonia australis, 2007
aquarelle, 360 x 300 mm



Pimelea physodes, 1999
aquarelle, 260 x 190 mm



Actinodium calocephalum, 2003
aquarelle, 450 x 240 mm



Bearded Dragon, 2006
watercolour, 170 x 230 mm



Leschenaultia formosa, 2007
aquarelle, 320 x 230 mm



Anigozanthos manglesii, 2000
aquarelle, 360 x 280 mm

TWO POSSUMS

Grevillea bipinnatifida

Practically all the year round the rosy creeping Grevillea bipinnatifida, that under cultivation has become shrub-like in habit, is to be seen in full bloom (Emily Pelloe 1932)

upon arriving,
Possum—the cat—spooked
by noir slabs of luggage,
hissed and hid under
the crumbling veranda steps

with caution, she sniffed
and slid under my palm,
twined an aged and hairless
back-end, the skin slipping
off the cupules of spine

near the old Kalamunda Zig Zag
splicing up the hilly forms of dusk,
a ringtail scudded over the tar road,
alighted from its grevillea chamber:
peregrinus, golden-eyed flâneur

with no chance to swerve,
the tintinnabulation of the night,
subdued in one sudden thud,
definite as an abdominal blow—
in the morning, I went the other way

upon leaving, her sand-papery
tongue and quicksilver purr flared
with the crackling aura of jarrah.
the hardened skeins of departure,
soothed—our small lives consigned

if I could, I would have stayed
unmoving by the Greenmount stove,
28s snipping seed radiometries—
we were haunted by the hand of nightfall
heavy on the back of the day, Possum.

YOU ARE KNOWN BY THE COMPANY YOU KEEP

Xanthorrhoea preissii

The name 'Xanthorrhoea' was derived from words meaning 'yellow' and 'to flow', and was given to those plants, first seen in New South Wales, which exuded a yellow-gum-like resin (The West Australian 1932)

traversing sand is exhausting
and, though an overcast day,
I sweat reams spontaneously,
my legs turned flaccid;

thermal layers sloughed off
in the trough of the woozy track,
at crossroads, signposts: a toy
motorbike and high-tension wires;

jittery rabbits in pre-dusk light
glide down gouges in sand
scored by motorbikes; to hide
in safer sinks under paperbarks;

willy wagtail and one long-legged
laconic marsh bird, not to forget, a cadre
of devote flies: the company I keep
in the bowels of these wetlands;

flora exiled in southern suburbs—
dying Mangles Kangaroo Paws,
orchid traces, the charred outer
bark of a Balga: old torpid grower,

its fantastic splash of mindarie:
I see Grass Tree, I see Black Boy,
if I imagine well, a coolamon
leaking its saccharin ferment;

to touch, smell, feel, taste
the swamp on my tongue, skin,
oh, the elisions.





design - please tidy up marks on background if they look too dirty (I can't tell)

Kennedia coccinea, 2002
aquarelle, 160 x 160 mm



design - please tidy up marks on background if they look too dirty (I can't tell)

Eucalyptus petita, 2001
pencil, 190 x 140 mm



Pink and Grey Galah, 2006
watercolour, 190 x 240 mm



Hakea victoria, 1999
aquarelle, 260 x 190 mm



design - please tidy up
marks on background if
they look too dirty (I can't
tell)

Hovea chorizemifolia, 1994
aquarelle, 400 x 310 mm



Study of Pterostylis vittata, 2001
aquarelle and pencil, 300 x 260 mm

WESTERN QUANDONG

Santalum acuminatum

What is known as the quandong or native peach in this State is one and the same tree as the native peach in South Australia, but the quandong of the northern part of South Australia is a different tree, having a taste very much the same as Epsom salts (Western Mail 1922)

maybe it's my quest for kinship here, but
I quite like caravanning across town
to a rendezvous with a quandong tree;

around Kojonup, they say, farmers' wives
gather fruits for jam—like mini
pomegranates they judder there—pluck,

pluck—as the double-decker sheep trucks
bound for Katanning, tremble the ground;
now the pulp, tempered to dragon's blood

is cracked like egg shells over ossified
medulla—resting deeper in, an amygdala
of a nut with a faint wintergreen taste,

a macadamia crunch—a cigarette falls,
unlit, as we crack the little brain
with a tyre iron from the boot of the Holden
exposing the heart of *Santalum acuminatum*.

dispersal of nuts and winter wind
mark the sutures between seasons,
soft like silence rather than rupture,
while serpentine roots tangle below.

AT A BEND IN THE TRACK, A MARRI RETURNS TO EARTH

Corymbia calophylla

Help us, kudden,

Take us back where we belong (Jack Davis 1983)

I could burrow to this tree's pith
with fingertips, through cambium
once hard as concrete, now rotting
in its sleep, boneyard of protuberances—
disfigured scapula, splintered sternum,
broken femur heaped in the middens;

down down, the daub of a defunct
termite clan, gangrene in the toes—
I kick it off, watch it roll down slope,
but high up, stubby limbs bloat
like beached whales but without
the sick belch from under sun-bleached skin;

all colonisers have been stilled,
no red-tailed black cockies swarm nuts,
no blood-splatter on blackened bark—
washed-out palimpsests on tree body
and even the sun shies away from
this slow leafless reckoning;

giantess slouched when mature
slouches now dead, acid red ants
hasten where lungs would aspire.
behemoth that inched heavenward
through inflections of trunk syntax
towards sharp flecks of lumen,

hidden arteries, dried and drawn creeks;
jarrah knows why balga weeps,
powdery residue falls at the feet;

I could spend this sundown peeling
away tetrahedral layers of bark,
sifting through extinguished tints;

but farther on the track, yonga scratches
and stirs, an earthbound tendril curls,

an orchid leaflet unfurls—I could also
inhabit this arboreal world.



Hardenbergia comptoniana, 2002
aquarelle, 280 x 180 mm

design - please tidy up
marks on background if
they look too dirty (I can't
tell)



Leschenaultia formosa, 1994
aquarelle, 160 x 190 mm



design - please tidy up
marks on background if
they look too dirty (I can't
tell)

Twenty-Eight Parrot, 2006
watercolour, 280 x 230 mm



Eucalyptus caesia, 2000
mixed, 360 x 280 mm



design - please tidy up marks on background if they look too dirty (I can't tell)

Solanum nummularium, 2003
aquarelle, 240 x 340 mm



(Left to right) *Hibbertia gracilipes*, *Grevillea brownii* and *Dampiera juncea*, 2002
aquarelle, 300 x 210 mm

BALANCE LOST AND FOUND WHILST STRETCHING FOR WATTLE PODS

Acacia murrayana

... being a rather handsome tree, it may in some cases have been planted for ornamental purposes (John Ednie-Brown 1899)

yellows swathed the hills
of wild mustard sour
and wattles—how we did
prattle about the flowers;

now the sky, full of dangles
that jig on woody stems,
that tic at sudden angles
and sign themselves again

a hundred slits of eyes
hanker in the tree,
a hundred slits of eyes
beckoning to me

river burnished stone
dark, arrayed to keel—
to ancient ears, the hone
of seeds pounded to meal

the damper in the fire,
its scent of earthen bread
would stet my hungry ire
and leave my digits bled

the blossom has its hue
and leaves diffuse the light
but wattle pods ring true
as chimes hung in the heights

I grab a bunch of husk,
they spin and crenulate
veer up like a tusk,
plant feet and ambulate.

A COLONY OF ROYAL HAKEA

Hakea victoria

To this, the most splendid vegetable production which I have ever beheld, in a wild or cultivated state, I have given the name of our gracious Queen, Hakea Victoria. It will soon be cultivated in every garden of note in Europe, and in many other countries (James Drummond 1848)

I could never grow cynical—
ocean is spermatozoic,
each prominence of the Fitzgerald
is a breast I can succour,
we enfold within earth
at these carnal places:

*the most hazardous coves
with the best fishing*

otters periscope whiskered faces
above effervescent meringue
where water crashes, not soughs,
against a semicircle of boulders,
aligned like Stonehenge to the Antarctic;

through the knee-high scrub,
Eyre still curses his way
to an upland of Royal Hakea—

erratic columns of cabbage heads,
crowned with russet splotches
as if gnawed on by locusts

*to decompose while alive
is a gift, to court death each day,
rather than plummeting, is grace*

vegetable bodies pulsate
orange scrawling within green translucence,
plying these dowries from the sea:
teeth of tiger shark, teeth of mako,
teeth of lemon shark, hammerhead;

to touch this serrate queen,
all the fluids of me
would sizzle and steam,
and serene blue time
would fracture into fiery seconds.





Detail from *Leonotis leonurus*, 2009
aquarelle and pencil, 297 x 210 mm



Pityrodia terminalis, 2003
aquarelle, 760 x 570 mm



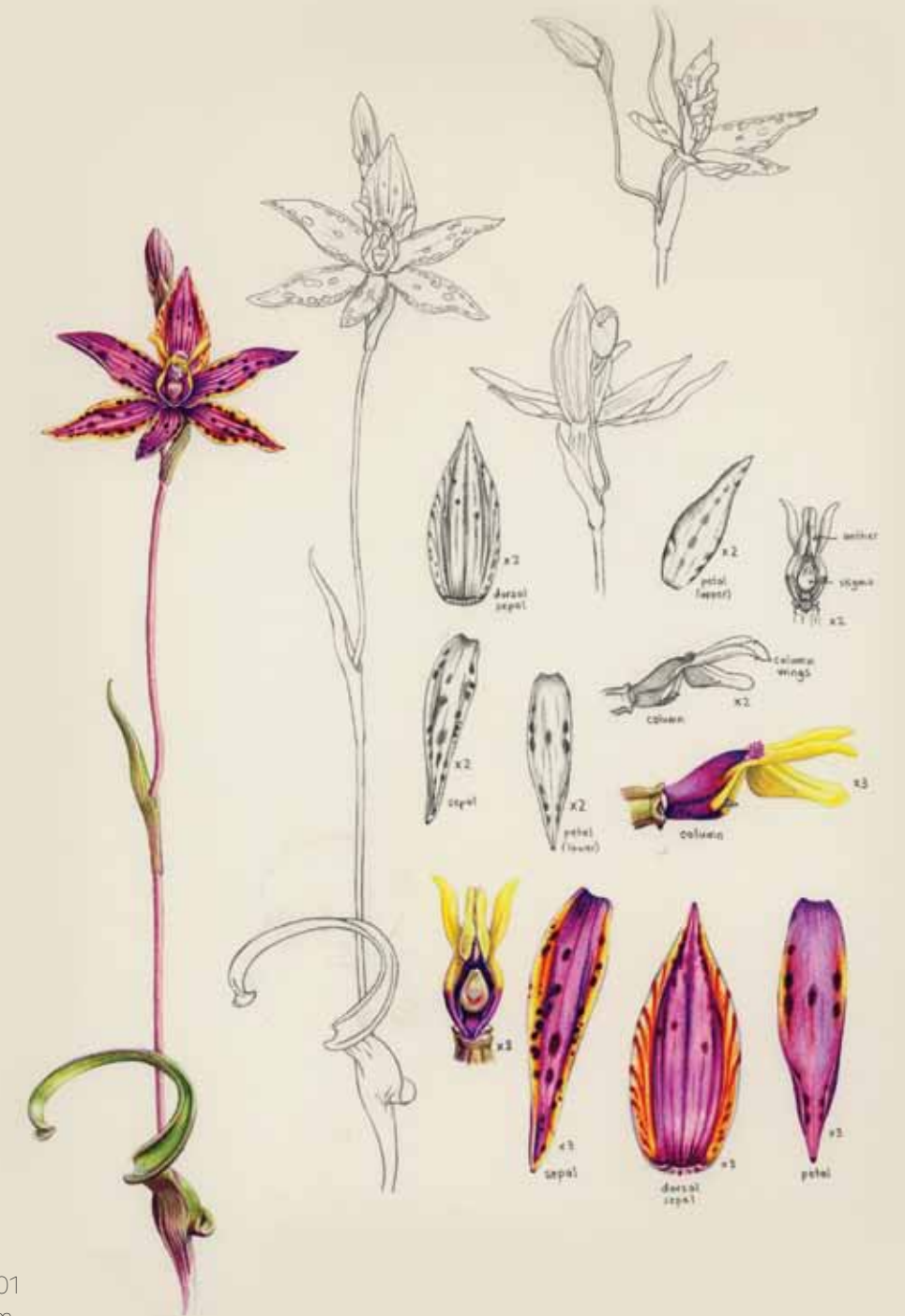
Callistemon glaucus, 2001
aquarelle, 480 x 360 mm



Eriochilus scaber, 2001
aquarelle, 150 x 210 mm



Singing Honeyeater, 2006
watercolour, 210 x 170 mm



Study of Thelymitra variegata, 2001
aquarelle and pencil, 300 x 210 mm

SMOKEBUSH

Conospermum stoechadis

Western Australia sent a small quota, notably the W.A. Smoke Bush, Conospermum stoechadis, with its distinctive smoky-white flower ('Chloris' 1928)

the crown of my skull
has a shallow crater
carved out by the surgeon's

smokebush before our horde
leaning together
in kwongan early morningness;

falchion—I empathise
with the planet,
pockmarked by meteorites,

the sea sunk, flushed down
into the inky pit
doused the bolide, flumed

the cicatrix of rogue stars
collided
into our tender gyrating soma

up a patois of protea
for which we lull
ever alert for Orpheus

like Chicxulub under the Yucatán,
from space,
daubed in sooty clouds the hue

in the laterite creeping
up waving
panicles, its essence soaking

of a man's beard in middle years;
shared colour
of the slanted script of

into body nexus, stochastic
stoechadis
a blossomed healing interruption.

OSCILLATIONS, 2010

Banksia prionotes

Premier Colin Barnett says the storm may qualify as a natural disaster and has predicted the damage bill will run into the hundreds of millions of dollars (ABC 2010)

parched summer end and acorn
banksia swayed citronella
blossoms on gnarled branches,

wind-coarse knuckles buckled
over grey skeletons
along the Reid Highway at dawn.

frenetic wipers absolved
pangs of rain
and perverse sun flare;

an apocalyptic beauty,
soundless, of rising,
breaking flourishes of light.

the brooding midday globus
dethroned the limpid
reign, which is March here;

lightning splintered urban
cirrus above the CBD,
hail thrashed Barbagallo.

suburbs ruptured in sclerophyll
shards and ice pustules,
Scarborough Beach Road herniated;

oscillations of cobalt crimson,
bizarre sense of
sodden heat freezing on skin.

I navigated by feeling,
my body
barometrically between. It all.



Eremaea brevifolia, 2007
aquarelle, 390 x 270 mm



(Left to right) *Cyrtostylis robusta*
and *Pterostylis vittata*, 2001
aquarelle, 320 x 240 mm



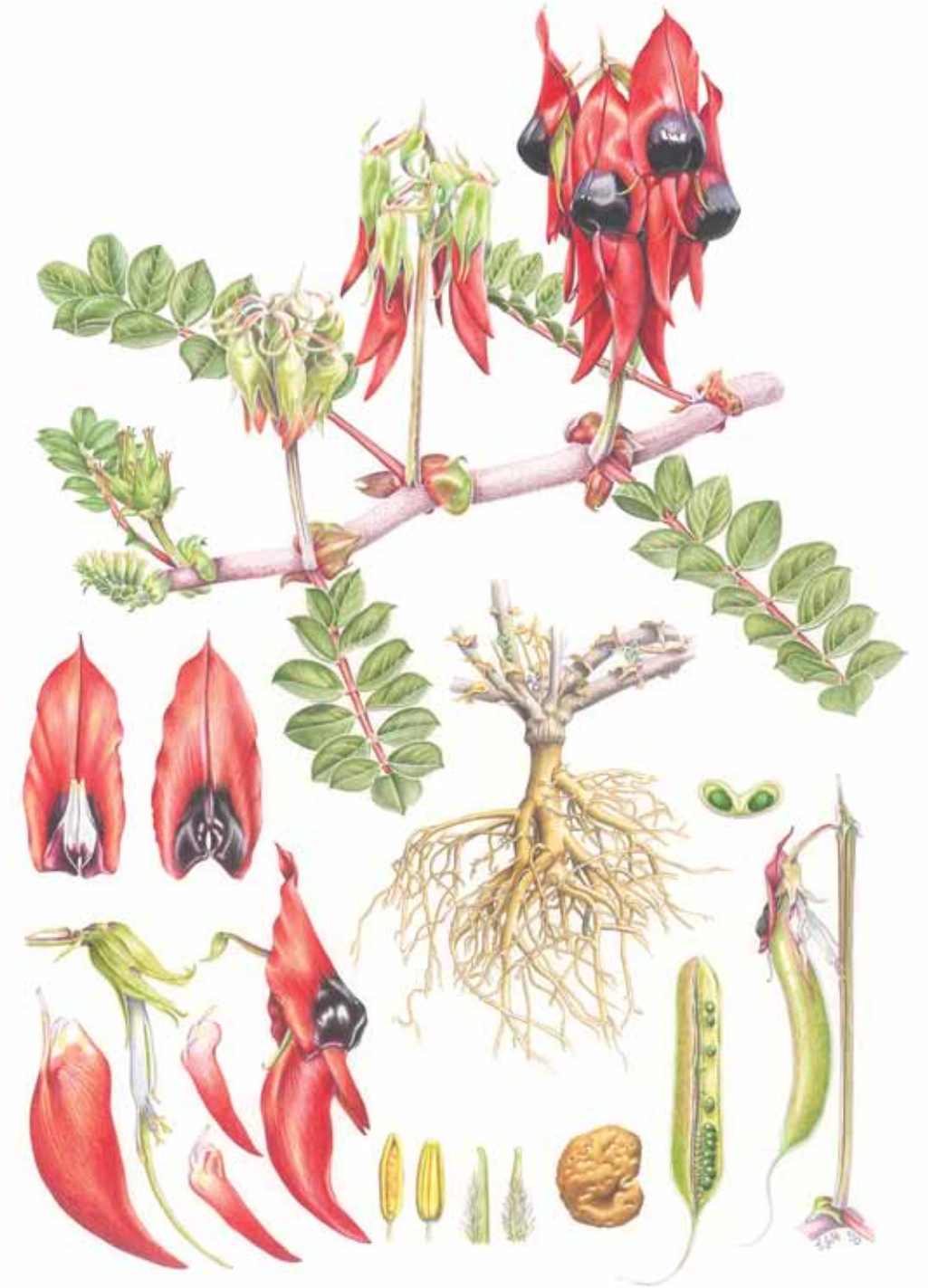
(Top to bottom) *Chamelaucium* sp., *Chamelaucium pink*,
Chamelaucium uncinatum, 2002
aquarelle, 540 x 380 mm



Detail from
Ipomoea indica, 2009
aquarelle and pencil,
297 x 210 mm



Eucalyptus tetraptera, 2004
aquarelle, 580 x 430 mm



Swainsona formosa, 2000
aquarelle, 570 x 380 mm



Hovea trisperma, 2002
aquarelle, 300 x 210 mm



Cephalotus follicularis, 1999
aquarelle, 260 x 190 mm

THREE ENCOUNTERS: CUMMUKS

Billardiera fusiformis

... belongs to the natural order Pittosporaceae and is not known or suspected to have any poisonous qualities (Western Mail 1924)

I. Kojonup

out back of Kodja Place
two boys scamper into domed
sanctuary of Yoondis Mia Mia to slide
fingers up the rain-slick skin of
cummuks—the slug-like cylinders
exuding their grape-dark paste

Seeds

*mucous (enveloped in a mucilaginous pulp)
compressed (ovoid, reniform or globose in outline)
wingless*

II. Biljedup

post cautions *Treat or Boil* so he sidles
down, filters a litre to feel the Protean
bristle of *Billardiera*—sun and rain engorged
berries in duos, quartets, salt-studded clusters
within an architecture of hot-tipped aerials,
lungs now in sync with the winter idle

Etymology

*after Jacques Julien Houton de La Billardiere
1791–94 botanised in Western Australia and collected species,
authored Novae Hollandiae Plantarum Specimen*

III. Nannup

the twisting trails across the drive
could be the nocturnal traces of Tiger Snakes;
watch yourself when *watering* Feather Bushes
or strolling the Blackwood River at dusk—
we caught two this season, slithering under
the Bluebell Creepers, spitting alive

Pollination

*Unisexual flowers absent.
Plants hermaphrodite.¹*

John - are Bold
headings correct?

THE RITES OF SPRING

Banksia coccinea

*The Scarlet Banksia inhabits sandy, stony country between King George's
Sound and the Oldfield River, and is particularly abundant near Middle Mount
Barren, flowering in the late spring (Charles Gardner 1934)*

withdrawing from the Port Hotel in Hopetoun,
from the New Wave ambience, high-decibel
jukebox static and time-worn clanging
of grog glasses on varnished bar tops—

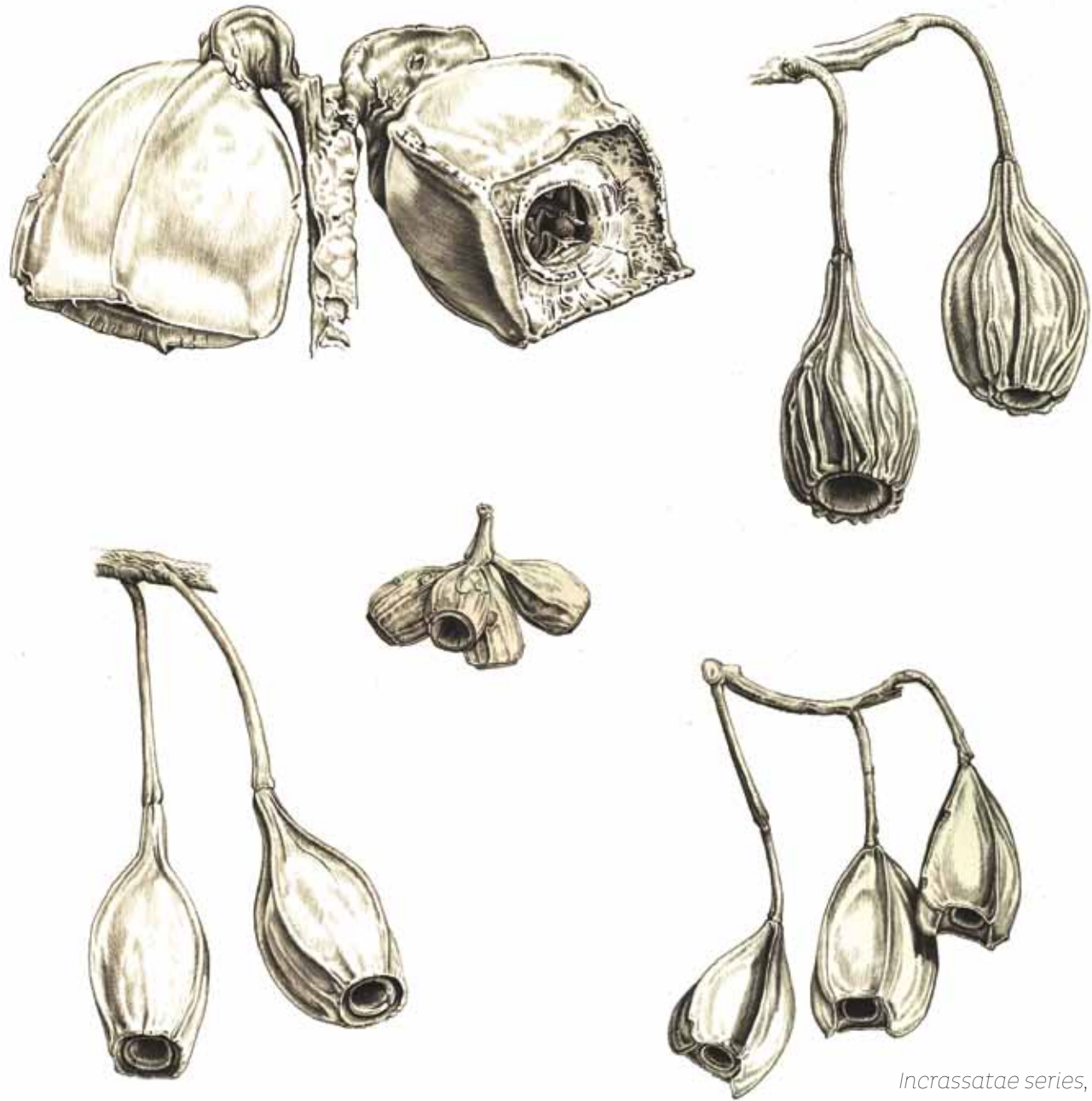
looking back and up; the flesh of a forearm rolls
over the balustrade and before I see a trace of
head or moustache, I note a voice born in darkness,
garrulous with wine. in small towns word travels

telepathically. next morning, our Queensland driver
nearly flattens a bobtail sunning on the gravel;
another is from Kansas. he ends each statement,
kindly, with *Do you know what I'm saying man?*

Waratah Banksia, scarlet striped with pale perianths,
how long they linger, the flower and the tourist,
genuflecting with cameras, patient for concordance
between light and shadow, which I know nothing of.

cantillating softly to themselves,
with the Southern Ocean smashing
up the coastline as it has for eons.





Incrassatae series, 2004
pencil, 420 x 380 mm



Beaufortia sparsa, 2006
aquarelle, 280 x 210 mm



Design please check spots

Elythranthera brunonis, 1995
aquarelle, 180 x 170 mm



Eucalyptus conferruminata, 2004
aquarelle, 680 x 480 mm

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Thomasia montana
(detail from *Common Families*, 2004
aquarelle, 620 x 440 mm)

drop in revised
copy



ELLEN HICKMAN

I was born in England in 1968. My first few years were spent on my Dad's family farm in Kent. My family emigrated to Western Australia in January 1971. My Dad worked as a manager on a farm near Manypeaks in the south-west of WA, but work opportunities meant we soon relocated to Perth.

I grew up in Applecross, a suburb of Perth, where we had a mini-farm on our quarter acre block with fruit trees, vegie garden and chickens. My childhood memories are of making cubbies in the backyard, weekends going on picnics in the bush around Perth and holidays to the country, particularly the Stirling Ranges. I always dreamed of living in the country on a farm. I was schooled at Applecross Primary and All Saints' College, Bullcreek. I have always loved anything to do with nature and my favourite subject was art.

When I left school I had to make a decision on a career. I figured making a living purely from art was unlikely, and I would have more luck in the sciences, so I studied a Bachelor of Science at the University of Western Australia, boarding for a few years at St George's College. I got my first botanical illustration job in my 2nd year when my taxonomy lecturer, Dr Terry MacFarlane, commissioned me to do illustrations of grasses for the *Flora of the Kimberley Region* (1992). I graduated with Honours in Botany in 1991. I continued to work as a research assistant for the Botany Department under Professor John Pate for a few years, illustrating a monograph of the plant family Restionaceae, *Australian Rushes* (1999).

In 1995 I moved to Albany to work as a botanist for the Department of Conservation and Land management (CALM, now DEC) managing the threatened flora of the South Coast region. This was a great job, wandering around the bush looking for pretty flowers - well maybe it was a bit more involved than that but in an area of high floristic biodiversity it was a dream job for a botanist.

In 1995 I was also invited to join the Botanical Artist Group of Western Australia (BAGs) and exhibited with them annually at the Kings Park Wildflower Show. I found inspiration for my artwork during my fieldwork for CALM and spent my holidays madly drawing to have enough pieces to exhibit. Although I loved the job with CALM I was not getting enough time for my art. So, when an opportunity to study art in Melbourne came up I went for it.

In 1999 I moved to Melbourne to study a Diploma of Visual Arts in Illustration at Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE. This allowed me to extend my skills from botanical illustration into children's books, editorial and computer illustration. It was a fantastic course, I adored doing art 24 hours a day 7 days a week and to top it off I was awarded best children's book illustrator for my year.

In 2001 I returned to Albany to start my own business as an independent Botanical Consultant and freelance Artist. I purchased my home in Albany where I now live with my cat, Tiggy, pursuing my two passions.



JOHN RYAN

I am a poet and essayist living in Perth, Western Australia. Born in New Jersey in the eastern United States, I have survived a hodgepodge of professional callings, some of them ecological in focus: teacher of the English language; web content writer for non-profit organisations; sustainable energy advocate; managing director of an environmental awareness group; chook farm hand in Massachusetts; herbal medicine consultant; and invasive plant control technician on Catalina Island in the Pacific Ocean of California.

In search of the quiet, rural side of American culture, I spent many seasons of my life *just* walking: from Mexico to Canada along the Pacific Crest Trail, from the American South to the North on the Appalachian Trail, from the southern corner to the northern tip of Newfoundland, Canada. On these long trips, I kept a poetry journal; the walking became part of the writing—I still find that I write best to a bipedal rhythm, even if I am not physically moving. As an intermittently obsessive walker, I have been able to bear witness to the transformations of plant communities across time and space, and between many places.

In 2008, I moved to Perth to begin a postgraduate course at Edith Cowan University (ECU). Building on interests in environmental philosophy and landscape poetics, I took up the question of how Western Australian biodiversity has been perceived and appreciated over the years. This research is presented in my doctoral thesis 'Plants, People and Place: Cultural Botany and the Southwest Australian Flora' (2011). Excerpts from it appear in *Australian Humanities Review* (2009), *Continuum* (2010), *Nature and Culture* (2011) and *Australian Garden History* (2011).

I am now a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the Centre for Research in Entertainment, Arts, Technology, Education & Communications (CREATEC) at ECU where I am developing the project 'Cultures of Biodiversity in Western Australia'. As part of the project, I will develop ways to support community groups focused on protecting Perth's flora. And I continue to maintain a deep fascination for the cultural histories of Western Australian plants and the potential for nature writing to foster awareness of where (and what/who) we live (together with).

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I am very grateful to John for allowing my artwork to complement his inspiring poetry. This gorgeous production is thanks to the hardworking team at Fremantle Press and especially Jane Fraser. Many of the artworks in this book have been produced for exhibitions with the BAGs (Botanical Artist Group of Western Australia—Rica Erickson, Patricia Dundas, Philippa Nikulinsky, Margaret Pieroni, Katrina Syme and Penny Leech). This group of amazing ladies have been a huge source of encouragement to me and provided a wealth of experience. Last but by no means least I want to thank my parents, Charmaine and Nigel Hickman, who have always encouraged me to follow my passions.

—*Ellen*

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—*John*

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Eucalyptus rhodantha
(detail from *Common Families*, 2004
aquarelle, 620 x 440 mm)



Government of Western Australia
Department of Culture and the Arts

