

AUSTRALIAN WILDFLOWER FAIRIES



BY
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BOTANICAL
ILLUSTRATIONS

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FAIRY
ILLUSTRATIONS

by
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PREFACE

Although increased interest in our native flora has recently been developed in our primary schools, much remains to be done in training the young minds to appreciate the structure and habits of our common trees, shrubs and herbs. This appreciation will never be acquired, particularly by primary school children, by mere factual instruction. It must come through an appeal to the child's emotional, imaginative and spiritual qualities—such is the purpose of this book.

The publication is unique in our Botanical and Nature Study literature, inasmuch as the numerous common trees, shrubs and herbs are invested with fairy-like qualities which will appeal to teacher and pupil alike. And how admirably adapted for such fairy lore are our little delicate Orchids, our glorious Christmas Bush, our ubiquitous Eucalypts and Wattles, our stately Waratah, and the other unique proteaceous plants! Each story has a “moral,” and knowledge and appreciation of the outstanding characters of the plants will unconsciously and surely eventuate as the stories are read and appreciated. The stories are interesting and romantic, the language simple, fanciful and effective. Most of the stories are supplemented by delightfully expressed stanzas emphasising the outstanding characteristics of the plant, and for the benefit of the teacher and the pupils in the higher classes, excellent drawings and simple botanical descriptions are included. The functions of botanical structures are continually emphasised.

This publication is more than an acquisition to our Nature Study literature; it is a milestone along the path of desirable educational methods in our infant and primary schools.

E. BREAKWELL,

8/11/37

Inspector of Schools.



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“What very pleasant weather!”

The Knight of the Fairy Garter

(CRYPTOSTYLIS—type subulata)

Red and yellow and green and brown,
My name, *Cryptostylis subulata*;
Bold and daring I stand erect:
I am the Knight of the Fairy Garter!

Yes, indeed, I am a very noble Orchid, and I am always accomplishing such chivalrous deeds that all my Orchid relations seem to look up to me a great deal.

Do you see the large dark green leaf (as people call it) which I wear at the bottom of my plant? Well, in reality, that is my shield, and it is a great protection for me, as you can well imagine. Unlike most of my relations, I only have one very significant petal. It is called my “labellum”; and as I am so proud of my honourable title, I wear my garter in the form of three little black stripes from one end of it nearly to the other.

And talking about relations, I can tell you a secret about them. I think they are rather sensitive of it, for none of them ever mention a word of it—but nearly all of them stand up-side-down, that is to say, on their heads. Personally, I think it a little undignified, and that is another reason why I am so different and why I gain such respect; I stand on my feet! For my part, I have never heard of a noble achieving such distinction as Knight of the Garter on his head, have you?

I suppose it is partly because I realise the great majesty of my position that I do not bother to arrive in perfect time, and mostly make my appearance a little late. A quarter-past Summer is far more becoming, I think, than five minutes to spring.

I am an enthusiastic listener of every passing breeze’s symphony and the glory of the bush-birds’ choir; also a keen spectator of every butterfly’s toe-dancing exhibition. If you wish to meet me in Nature’s theatre, you will usually find me with several of my own family in the dress-circle, sitting in grassy seats on the very tops of hills.



CRYPTOSTYLIS—type subulata.

Family: Orchidaceae. All members of family Orchidaceae have three petals and three sepals. One of the petals is called the “labellum”. Also, they have a “column” which consists of an anther and pollen bags, a “sticky stigmatic surface” (corresponding to the stigma in other flowers) and two “appendages” or “wings.” The ovary is always below the other parts of the flower and consists of three carpels.

Flowering season: summer.

Flowers: Dark reddish in colour. The petal called the “lip” (or “labellum”) is very large and has three prominent dark lines which run from near the base of each petal to near the tip, where they end in a small knob. The other petals and sepals are long and narrow.

The flowers, unlike most other Orchids, are not up-side-down. There are several flowers on the stem—usually five or six.

Leaves: Long, and oval in shape, with a glossy surface, prominent mid-rib and pale green under-surface. The leaf stalk is long. There are about three leaves to each plant, or less.

Usually, the plant is about 38cm high.

The Mountain Devil

(LAMBERTIA—type formosa)

Do you know what it is like to be trapped in a huge jungle, where everything is tangled together and trying to tangle round you too?

Well, if you could be like Alice in Wonderland, and have some of the things happening to you that once happened to her, you would perhaps eat a little piece of mushroom which would make you grow smaller and smaller, until you were only the size of an ant.

Maybe you would think that exciting. But there are always faults to be found, even in the choicest of adventures. And so, being the size of a little brown ant, you would most likely feel inclined to get into all the mischief that an ant gets into. And one of the very first things you would do would be to sniff round a little and say to yourself:

“Honey! I smell honey! And I am very fond of honey!” Then, you would set out to find it, only to discover that it was lying hidden away, deep down in my flower.

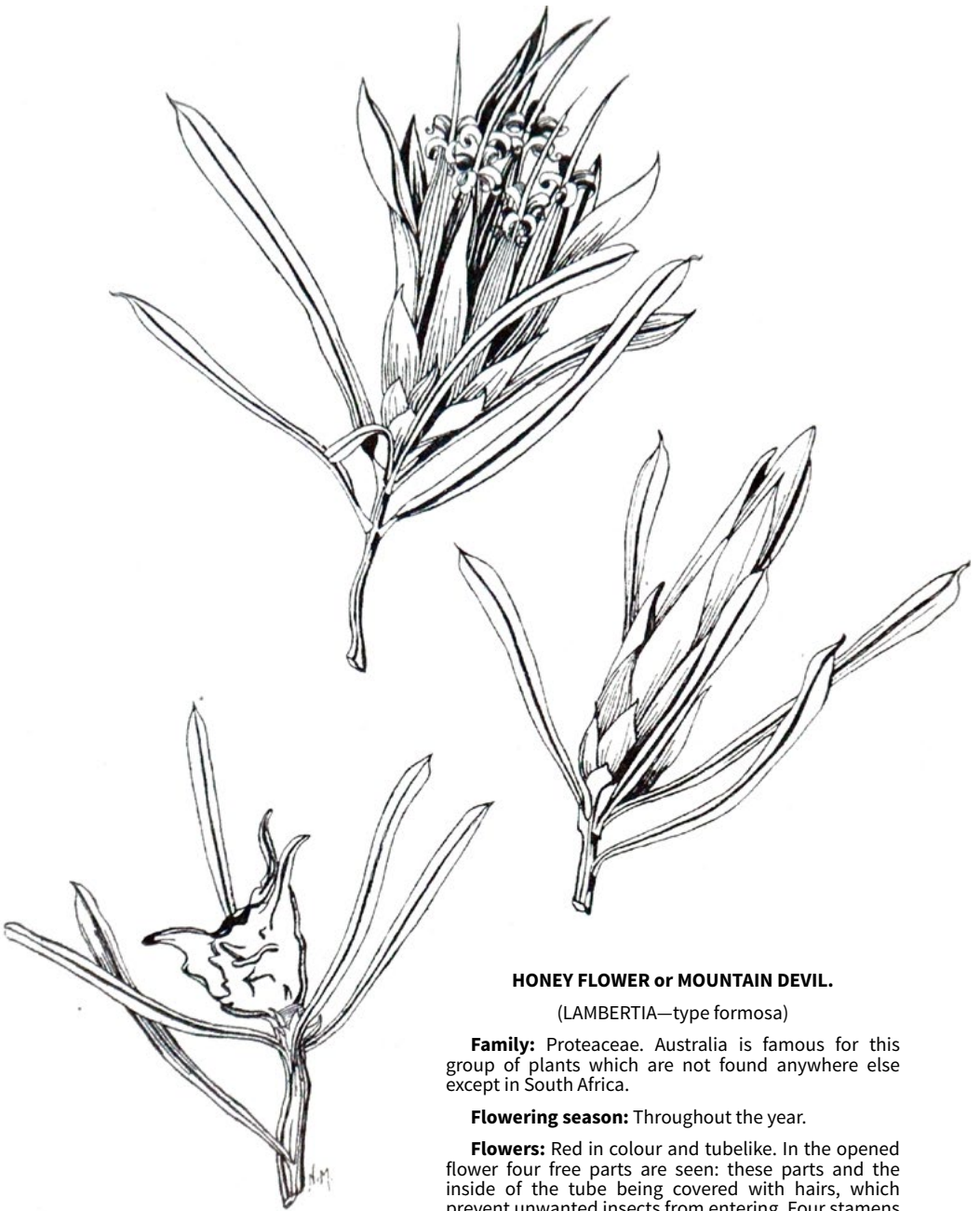
You would be rather careless after this and, not taking as a hint the fact that I had concealed it so carefully, you would begin your dangerous descent down my little tunnel of flame-coloured petals. And what would you meet there? Why! You would find yourself in a dark, dense jungle of—oh, all sorts of creepy, frightening things. They would only be a number of soft, fluffy hairs in reality. But you, being so small, would think otherwise, and would realise for the first time that you were not wanted.

Of course, you would try ever so hard to escape then. You would stumble over one hair, and fall on your head over another, and turn a double somersault over the next.

But in the end, you would manage to get out, and, feeling yourself once more in the open air, you would look back at me and threaten me a good deal, and say that without any doubt I was a huge, or an immense, or a “mountainous” devil!

I wonder if that is truly why I am called the “Mountain Devil,” or whether my name also comes from the fact that my home is often on the hills and mountain-tops?

Of course, although I admit that I am somewhat of a devil in my own way, I must make you feel certain, little reader, that I am not of the really



HONEY FLOWER or MOUNTAIN DEVIL.

(LAMBERTIA—type formosa)

Family: Proteaceae. Australia is famous for this group of plants which are not found anywhere else except in South Africa.

Flowering season: Throughout the year.

Flowers: Red in colour and tubelike. In the opened flower four free parts are seen: these parts and the inside of the tube being covered with hairs, which prevent unwanted insects from entering. Four stamens are placed on the petals. In the flower the pistil stands out far beyond the petal parts. There are usually six or seven blooms in a group at the end of the stem, surrounded by little satiny leaves, called "bracts", which entirely cover the buds. Honeysuckers usually carry the pollen from flower to flower, and they can therefore be called "pollinators".

Fruit: A woody box, whose peculiar shape gave the name of "Mountain Devil." This box contains two seeds which have wings.

villainous type; for a flower or a fairy could never be cruel. I am fond of mischief, that's all. My whole existence is mischief, you know—even to the beautiful colours of my flowers, and the satiny leaves that protect them when they are still buds. Because, just when human visitors to bushland are thinking how sweet and harmless I appear, I begin to drop my satiny leaves (which botanists call “bracts”) and also my flame-coloured petals, leaving only a funny, fantastic-looking little head, which is green at first, but which gets hard and brown as it grows larger.

It has a long, pointed nose, and two long, pointed horns. (You can see its portrait on the previous page).

Naturally, when they pass me again a few days afterwards and see what has happened, they are absolutely bewildered, and they whisper stories about my being a devil in disguise.

Then, when they come up to look at me more closely, I cannot resist the temptation to prick their fingers or noses with the sharp, needle-like ends of my foliage leaves.

Oh, you should see how they jump when this happens—and get away as quickly as possible, without even looking back to see how my whole bush is simply shaking with laughter.

Some flowers, I know, like to make their appearance only in one or two seasons of the year. For me, that would seem a most unexciting form of existence—especially as my flowers are my chief helpers in mischief-making.

And that is why you will probably see several bright splashes of red and orange colour on my bushes whenever you happen to pass me—regardless of time or weather.

Be careful, be careful, little human child!
The woods are weird and haunted,
The woods are strange and wild.
A tiny Mountain Devil may spring upon your path,
And with his fiery eye
May ask the reason why
You've chanced within his secret haunts.
And if your answer is not good,
Or if he has not understood,
He'll quickly grab you by the hair
And drag you to a goblin's lair!
And after this you'll never go
Too near where Mountain Devils grow!



“Became a little azure flower.”

The Twilight Fairy

(THELYMITRA—type grandiflora)

Although humans mostly call me the Great Sun Orchid, amongst the fairy-folk I am always known as the Orchid of Twilight; for indeed, my blooms, which are large and numerous, are very much like the sky at twilight—that deep velvety blue, almost purple colour, still tinged with the golden kiss of a lingering sunbeam.

And do you know how this came about in the very beginning? Well, then, I shall tell you:

One evening when the sky was blue,
And tinted with a rosy hue,
A host of tiny fairy things
On starry dust-besprinkled wings
Flew up above the clouds of snow,
Beyond our mortal sight, and lo!
There fell upon the earth well nigh
Ten million pieces of the sky—
Which each, through mystic fairy power,
Became a little azure flower.
Alas! The elves complaining came;
“The sky will never be the same,
With all the holes that you have left
Through sheer destruction-love and theft!”
The fairies laughed in happy glee:
“Oh, silly ones, you soon will see;
For fairies could not beauty mar”—
Each space became a twinkling star!



GREAT SUN ORCHID

(THELYMITRA—type *grandiflora*)

Family: Orchidaceae.

Flowering season: Spring and early summer.

Flowers: Vary from almost purple colour to light blue. They are large and numerous. The centre (or column) is comparatively large and very elegant.

Leaves: Long and broad.