

**Plate 741 *Banksia ericifolia***

*Leucadendrum ericaefolium*

*Lantern Banksia, Heath Banksia*

Botany Bay, Australia, 28<sup>th</sup> April – 6<sup>th</sup> May, 1770

Artist: Sydney Parkinson (John Frederick Miller, 1773)

Engraver: R. Hughes (1986) after Thomas Scratchley and Daniel Mackenzie, (c1773+)



In 1773 the watercolourist John Frederick Miller was engaged to produce a completed painting of *Banksia ericifolia* based on Sydney Parkinson's sketches and colour notes. While Sydney Parkinson produced some completed illustrations, the sheer volume of material to be described and documented on the *Endeavour* voyage meant that not all specimens were given a full and complete illustration. In such cases Parkinson would provide outline sketches and colour notes to guide any completion of a full illustration in future.

Subsequently, Banks commissioned 18 engravers to create copper plates of the paintings. One of these, Thomas Scratchley, produced ten engravings for Joseph Banks, including the plant *Banksia ericifolia* which he made with Daniel Mackenzie. However, the original copperplate engraving of *Banksia ericifolia* was lost. The Alecto Historic Editions project to print Banks' Florilegium, which commenced in 1980, therefore, had to produce a new engraving based on the original artwork of Sydney Parkinson and John Frederick Miller. The engraver for Alecto in 1986 was R. Hughes.

*Banksia ericifolia* is a species of woody shrub of the family Proteaceae native to Australia. It grows in central and northern New South Wales between the mountains and coast. *Banksia ericifolia* was one of the original Banksia species collected by Joseph Banks around Botany Bay in 1770 and allegedly the first specimen. It should be noted that the plant would not be called *Banksia ericifolia* at this time and was named *Leucadendrum ericaefolium* by Banks.

*Banksia ericifolia* is well known for its red or orange and unusually, yellow flower spikes. It is a medium to large shrub that can reach 6 metres high and wide, but more commonly only half this size, in exposed heathlands and coastal areas. The flower spikes, cylindrical in shape, are 7-22cm high and 5cm broad. *Banksia ericifolia* is an example of a serotinous plant highly adapted to fire, however, the species lacks a lignotuber, a woody swelling of the root crown which protects the plant against the

destruction of the stem by fire. Essentially, the fire clears the surrounding area of competitive other vegetation. The fire creates the condition for the shrub to recolonise by releasing its stored-up seeds. Mature shrubs can store up to 16,500 seeds over an eight-year period. Although its current conservation status is not threatened in the wild, too frequent episodes of fire may prevent shrubs from reaching maturity and continued global warming may yet have a negative impact on the plant's survival. In the wild, propagation may take several years before flowers and fruits are produced. The flowers of *Banksia ericifolia* attract a range of mammals, birds and insects to its nectar which in return act as pollinators.

*Banksia ericifolia* was first formally described and named by Carolus Linnaeus the Younger in his *Supplementum Plantarum*, 1782, where he described four *Banksia* species. The name 'Banksia' was chosen in honour of Joseph Banks and 'ericifolia' to reflect the features similar to heather (*Erica*), and its leaves (*folium*).

Interestingly, the shrub does not have any taxonomic synonyms mainly because the original name given by Carolus Linnaeus the Younger has remained unchanged over time. However, there have been several unsuccessful challenges to the species definition. More recent cladistic analyses of DNA sequence data for the genus *Banksia* have brought about some refinements and clarifications to the nomenclature.

Two botanical subspecies are recognised, namely, the variety '*ericifolia*' and '*mancrantha*'. The main difference between the two is that '*mancrantha*' has larger flowers. Also, the two varieties have distinct distributions which do not overlap in eastern New South Wales.

Currently, there are around ten different cultivars of *Banksia ericifolia* available from Australian retail nurseries including a dwarf variety called 'Little Eric'. The shrub thrives in acidic soils but is particularly sensitive to iron deficiency that causes yellowing of the leaves. Planting in soils contaminated with cement dust or near to concrete foundations can cause this iron deficiency and should be avoided unless appropriate soil-additives are used.

In January 2020, Birmingham Botanical Gardens nominated *Banksia ericifolia* 'Plant of the Month'.

Robert Parkinson

## Sources

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