

**FLOWER OF THE MONTH**



R. Hurst

**Ironbark** (*Eucalyptus tricarpa*) Family - Myrtaceae

The species name *tricarpa* is given because the buds come in groups of three. This species grows in the dry coastal forests and bushland of the Anglesea and Aireys Inlet district. It is easily recognised by the unique, often straight trunks standing parallel in groups, with deeply fissured black persistent bark. They grow in open forests of stringybarks. The trees grow from 20-30m. Halfway up, the trunk often divides. The leaves are dull dark green or grey with faint veins. The large buds, with deciduous conical caps, grow on long pedicels. The winter flowering pink or creamy pendant flowers have no petals, the colour comes from the stamens which spread from green cups. The nectar from these flowers is sought by many birds - honeyeaters, wattle birds, and cockatoos. The ground is often strewn with these flowers when birds are feeding. Some flowers have one side bitten off by cockatoos looking for nectar. The timber from Ironbark is dark red, hard, heavy and durable and has been much used for railway sleepers, poles, stumps, heavy constructions and fuel. Remaining stumps in the forest are evidence of the large Ironbarks that have been felled and carted away.

(Joan Forster)

**ORCHID OF THE MONTH**

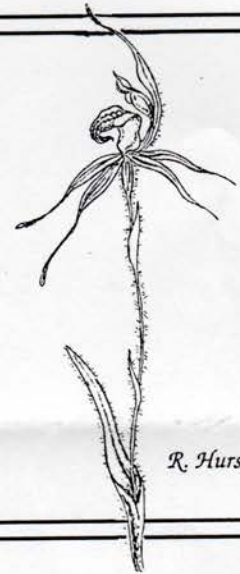
**Plain-lip Spider Orchid** (*Caladenia clavigera*)

The Plain-lip Spider Orchid derives its common name of "Plain-lip" from the labellum, which is neither fringed nor toothed - an unusual feature for a spider orchid. The usually single flower is yellowish green with reddish stripes on the petals and sepals, the sepals often ending in short, blackish clubs. The flattish, heart-shaped labellum is greenish at its base, with a dark red, recurved apex. The flower stem may be up to 40 cm tall, hairy and reddish in colour, with the leaf being about 20cm long, also hairy and reddish at the base.

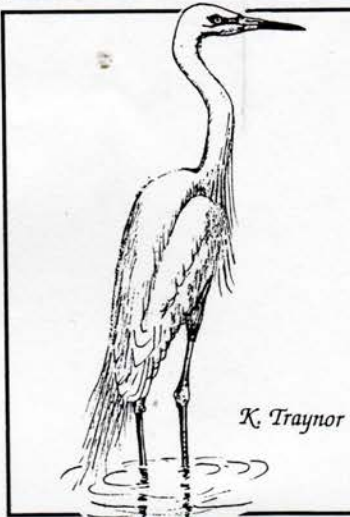
This uncommon orchid has a scattered distribution, however, where it occurs it may be found in good numbers. In Victoria it prefers heathlands and open lowland forests of the North West but is also present in the drier montane forests of the North East.

Flowering time is spring - September, October, when it may be found in areas of the Anglesea district. In the North-East, flowering time is December, January.

(Everett Foster)



R. Hurst



K. Traynor

**BIRD OF THE MONTH**

**Great Egret** (*Ardea alba*) previously (*Egretta alba*)

The Great Egret is one of the most beautiful birds to grace our wetlands. When it visits us in its non-breeding season, it is pure white with a yellow bill and is the largest of the white waterbirds. Stalking slowly in the shallows, it freezes and then stabs at its prey of fish, frogs, and invertebrates. It seems incongruous that such a beautiful bird should have a voice that is quite unmusical: deep guttural rattling croaks. Whenever a second Great Egret appears there is constant harassment until one - and I don't know which one - flies away. Three other white egrets visit us. The Intermediate and Little Egrets are smaller and the Cattle Egret is more often seen in grassy fields among cattle as the name implies.

Great Egret breeding colonies are widely dispersed in Australia and one of the closest to us is at Bool Lagoon in South Australia. The Great Egret generally deserts us in spring/summer but in the drought year of 1994, one bird remained in the Painkalac Creek estuary throughout the summer.

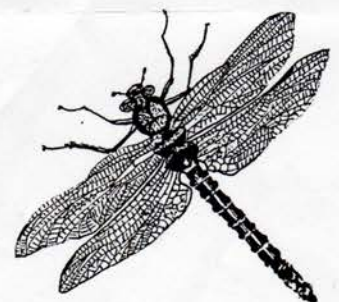
(Pauline Reilly)

**INSECT OF THE MONTH**

**Dragonflies and Damselflies** (Order Odonata)

Dragonflies are commonly seen over ponds and streams hovering or hawking their insect prey. Damselflies are smaller, more delicate. They vary in colours of blues, reds and yellows and have an iridescent sheen. Both insects are predacious, and capture their prey on the wing. They are well suited for rapid flight and can manoeuvre very quickly. They have excellent eyesight with very large eyes, which is essential for capturing prey in flight, while their antennae is small, unlike most other insects. They have strong legs, which are armed with spines. When the prey is seized it is held to the mouth-parts by the legs while it is eaten. The mandibles are very strong with a jagged cutting edge. These insects are medium to large size, with wingspans up to 18 cm.

(Mike Traynor)



K. Traynor