

CAMDEN WHITE GUM

by SUSAN PARSONS

The Camden white gum (*Eucalyptus benthamii*) is an Australian species, considered threatened, which is native to the Nepean River and its tributaries near Camden in New South Wales. The threatened status was, in part, a result of the construction of the Warragamba Dam in 1933 that flooded a large area of its habitat.

The species was well known to Aboriginal people of the area who called it durum-by-ang. Its bark sheds in ribbons to a white trunk with a brown, flaking 'skirt' near the ground.

From 2007 to 2009, a total of 2,335 *Eucalyptus benthamii* trees were planted in Forest Lot 18 at the National Arboretum Canberra. This was the first forest planted at the Arboretum and, apart from some initial damage by kangaroos, the species has performed exceptionally well.

In September 2013 the Tree Measuring Team at the Arboretum said the Camden white gums have been growing around one metre in height per year since being planted. They have created a forest which acts as a pointer to visitors of how exciting and educational the site will become as other species grow.

When visitors to the Arboretum admire the Camden white gums they may wonder how such a splendid forest has been created from a species that was listed as vulnerable in the EPBC Act in 2000.

In 2006 seed had been sourced from the Australian Tree Seed Centre CSIRO. The five grams of seed had been collected from 25 mother trees in a seed orchard at Deniliquin in NSW and seedlings were raised at Yarralumla Nursery in Canberra. Additional seed came from ten trees in the Kedumba Valley, west of Sydney in New South Wales.

Dr John Larmour of the CSIRO Division of Forestry had collected seed of Camden white gum in 1993 and 1995 at Kedumba Valley. In 2011 he said, "It was one of my memorable seed collection trips into a beautiful and spectacular part of Australia. We managed an extensive collection of about 100 individual trees and it has proved of considerable interest both internationally and for domestic conservation."

The Australian Tree Seed Centre at CSIRO Plant Industry, in partnership with Riverina Trees and local land-holders at two sites near Deniliquin, has developed through selective thinning, trees which produce high quality seed for sale to plantation growers within Australia and overseas.

In 1995 a seedling seed orchard of *E. benthamii* was established at Kowen in the ACT as a partnership between CSIRO and Environment ACT. This trial to test for superior trees has been measured every two years and selectively thinned in 2001, leaving only the best trees for seed production.

Camden white gums were planted around 1996 at the Australian National University on a slope of Sullivan's Creek that runs into Lake Burley Griffin. In 2012 the tallest of the seven trees was 18 metres high and the riverine location is very appealing.

A specimen of *E. benthamii* on the Eucalypt Lawn at the Australian National Botanic Gardens is 25.5m high. The seed for this tree was collected by J.D. Briggs at Kedumba Valley in 1979 along the lower reaches of Reedy Creek where a narrow belt of the white gums extends for a few kilometers.

These details will bring a shiver of excitement to anyone who loves trees – the thrill of the search, the collection, then the elegant, thriving specimens.

- SP - 5.9.2013