WATTLES IN OUR DISTRICT – DO YOU KNOW THE DIFFERENCE?

We have about 20 Wattles *Acacia* which are indigenous to our district. They are important for so many reasons. They are colonisers after fire or clearing, and aid soil nutrition owing to the nitrogen fixing nodules on the roots. The seeds are an important food source for birds and bees. Aborigines used different parts as sources of food, fibre, medicine, implements, musical instruments, weapons and containers. Early settlers used the tannin from the bark to tan animal hides, and exported it overseas. The hard wood of many species has been valued for tools, wood turning and weapons.

This is a really good time of year to identify some of those wattles which look quite similar, and are hard to identify when not in flower. Here are four species with similar spiky foliage, one of which, Prickly Moses *Acacia verticillata,* is very common and well known, while the others range from uncommon to rare.

Prickly Moses

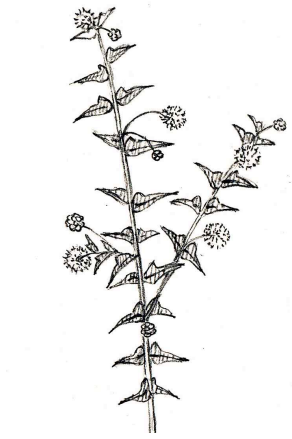
Prickly Moses *Acacia verticillata*.

The common name originated from Prickly Mimosa, wattles being in the MIMOSACEAE family. This plant is found in nearly all habitats in our district, and varies from a low-growing ground cover (subsp. *ovoidea*) to a three-metre spreading shrub (subsp. *verticillata*). If you look closely you can see that the short, narrow, needle-like, prickly phyllodes grow in groups of about six, in distinct whorls up the stems. The more prostrate variety has shorter phyllodes to 1 cm which may grow in tufts from the same node. The flowers growing in the leaf axils are bright yellow cylindrical spikes, though they sometimes have a rounded head.

Spike Wattle *Acacia oxycedrus*

This grows as a dense prickly shrub to about 2 metres in heathy woodland. It is rare in the district and is found on the Anglesea Heath off Peregrine Track. The 2 cm long phyllodes, with three or four prominent veins, look quite lethal, as they are stiff, flat and pointed, and sometimes curved like a dagger. They grow alternately and so appear wider apart than those of Prickly Moses. The flowers are also bright yellow, cylindrical spikes, but are crowded, usually longer than *A, verticillata* and more showy.

Spike Wattle



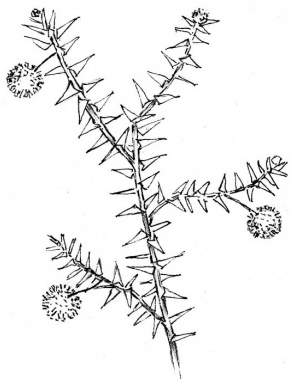
Ploughshare Wattle

Ploughshare Wattle *Acacia gunnii*

This quite rare, prostrate or erect plant grows to less than a metre high, and has very different spiky phyllodes. They are short, sharp and stiff, with an unusual triangular, but asymmetrical, shape. They are broad at the base and taper to a sharp point. I think that they look more like arrows than ploughs. The sparse, cream, single round/globular flowers grow in the leaf axils on short stems. The stamens are tinged with a deeper golden colour**.**

Juniper Wattle *Acacia ulicifolia*

This species is only known from one gully off Haggarts Track on the Anglesea Heath. It is a scraggly shrub up to a metre high. The short 8–15mm phyllodes are stiff and triangular, broader at the base and flattened vertically. They appear a bit similar to *A. gunnii*, but are narrower and more crowded. The flowers are similarly sparse, pale and round/globular.



Juniper Wattle

Colour photographs and information about these and other wattles can be found in Margaret MacDonald ed. 2009 *Flowers of Anglesea and Aireys Inlet* ANGAIR Inc.

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Drawings by Ruth Hurst