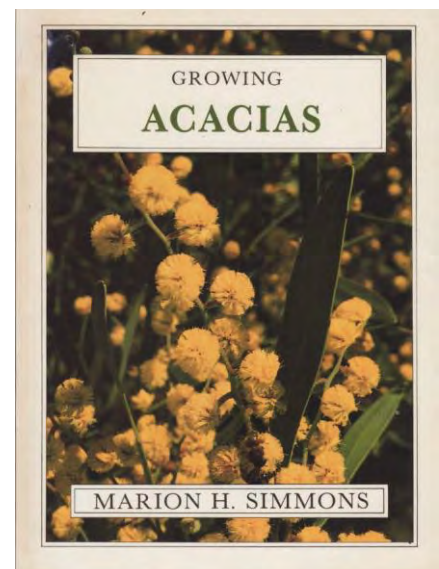
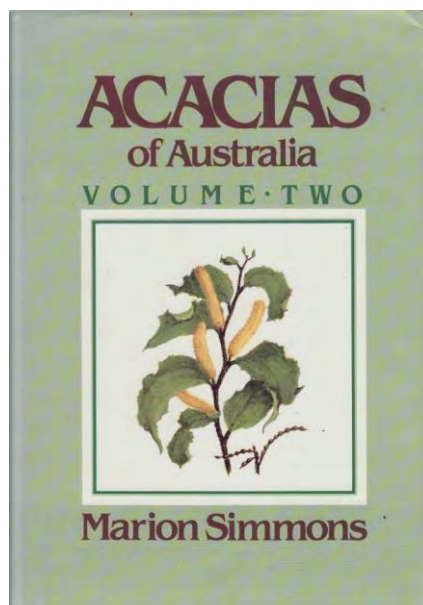
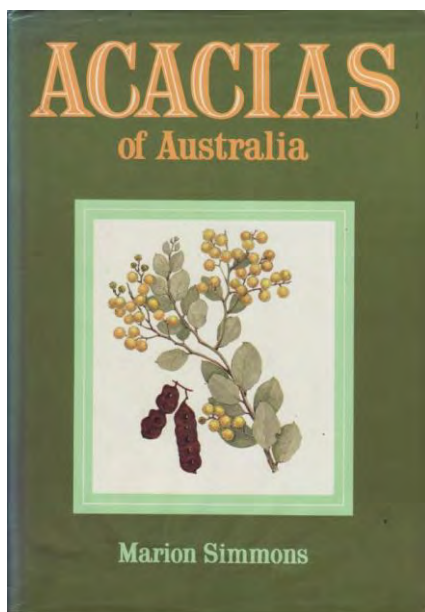


## Vale Marion Simmons OAM 1927—2020

Marion Helen Simmons was an art teacher in Launceston and her husband John (deceased), an excellent photographer. They were both very interested in Australian plants and field naturalist subjects. They became members of the Society for Growing Australian Plants (SGAP) Victoria's South East Region in the 1960's and began promoting Australian plants in NE Tasmania. When the Tasmanian Region was formed in 1971, they may have been early Members. Then in 1976, they were inaugural Members of the Northern Group of SGAP Tasmanian Region. Marion held many position in the Northern Group from then on. This wonderful, modest couple inspired all who came in contact with them and willingly spread their knowledge and experience of Australian plants. They gave many public lecture about Australian plants and ran adult education classes on this subject. They led many field trips and wrote lots of articles. They grew a very wide range of Australian plant in their home's large garden in Legana on the western bank of the Tamar River. It was a favourite in the Open Gardens Scheme and was the initial home of the Northern Group's plant nursery.

In the 1960's and 70's Marion, along with fellow Tasmanian botanists and collectors, gathered plant specimens to be sent to Margaret Stones in England who painted them for *The Endemic Flora of Tasmania*. Lord Talbot de Malahide sought the knowledge and advice of these plant experts to help produce these books of artistic and scientific significance. Marion and John are mentioned in this collection as growing some of these endemic plants. Marion's love of propagation continued until recently with her enjoying attending Northern Group Nursery propagation sessions. Countless plant cuttings have been taken from Marion's beautiful native garden over the years to be grown in this nursery.

Marion became fascinated with Acacias and found that little was widely known about this genus throughout Australia. So she and John went around Tasmania, then the whole of the continent, seeking out many new and unknown Acacias. They were often accompanied for all or part of their long trips by other Tasmanian Region Members, at first, Jeanette and Don Closs (both deceased), with Jeanette also seeking out many of Australia's Dodoneas. Later Pat and Noel Kerrison (both deceased) joined Marion and John on their travels. The culmination of these trips were four books on Acacias written by Marion and illustrated with her hand drawings that show all the important botanical details. Three of these books also feature many of John's photographs. 'Acacias of Australia' was published in 1981 and covered 149 species. 'Acacias of Australia Volume 2' was published in 1988 and covered another 150 species. 'Growing Acacias' is a smaller book in the Kangaroo Press series of Grow species. It covers where and how to grow many Acacia species and includes brief descriptions plus black and white and colour photos. Her last book, 'Wattles of Tasmania', covers the 25 Tasmanian Acacia species and was published in 2009.



Marion and John were welcomed to many areas in Queensland when searching for Acacia species around Australia. A wonderful gesture from Marion and John was their contribution to the Board of Management of the Gordon family property in Western Queensland after the family Patriarch, David Gordon, passed away. His property was the source of now widely spread Grevilleas. When various species were discovered on his property in Western Queensland, he named them after his children i.e. G. 'Robyn Gordon' etc. and gave plants of them away to wholesale nurseries. The founding Board was made up of owners from nearby properties and knowledgeable volunteers from other 'ASGAP' states, including Marion and John, to assist in keeping his family property viable for some time after his death. 132Ha of the Myall Park pastoral property was excised and is now the Myall Park Botanic Gardens, Glenmorgan, Queensland.

In 1986, Marion and John were recognised for their work and support for SGAP (now APST) by being given joint Life Membership.

In 2002, they were honoured for their professional approach to Acacia research by the naming of an Acacia they found being called *Acacia simmonsiana*, Simmons wattle, despite their insisting that plants are best named for their individual characteristics.



Marion Simmons collecting samples of *Acacia simmonsiana*, Simmons wattle, photo by John Simmons



In 2004, Marion and John received two further accolades. At the ASGAP, (now ANPSA) Biennial Conference in Launceston they won the Australian Plants Award, Amateur category. Then, in the Australia Day Honours, the pre-eminent means of recognising outstanding achievement and contribution by Australians, they received Medals of the Order of Australia ‘*For service to botany, particularly through identification, documentation and promotion of Australian Acacias*’. Appropriately, the OAMs were decorated with Acacia designs.

Marion and John discovered, illustrated, documented and collected well over 100 new species of Acacia. They were long time members of the Acacia Study Group and Marion was the leader for 13 years (1978 to 1991). Marion made available about 450 of her fine, line drawings for use in the Worldwide Wattle Project and her extensive collections of Acacia flora were sent to

many Herbariums around the country. The Simmons later donated their personal herbarium to the National Herbarium of Victoria including 20,000 of John’s Acacia photographic slides.

Marion and John were also keen members of the Launceston Field Naturalists Club (LFNC) and were both given Life Membership. They were instrumental in the development of the LFNC Field Centre at Skemps and in the initial production of the splendid and popular publication, “A Guide to the Flowers and Plants of Tasmania”. Marion, involved from the first edition in 1981, provided historical context and applied her patience as an eagle-eyed proof-reader for the latest, fifth, edition (2019) in her 92<sup>nd</sup> year.

Vale to a very talented, generous and gentle person who will be greatly missed by many.