

WHAT'S IN A NAME? - SNOTTYGOBBLE

Penny Hussey and Trevor Walley

Recently *The West Australian* carried an article about how personias got their common name. We were a bit concerned as the published article did not fit with our understanding (and the photo was incorrect too). So here is an alternative version.



Fruits of round-leaved snottygobble, *Persoonia elliptica*, a small tree of lateritic soils in the jarrah forest. (The photo in the newspaper was of cotton bush, *Gomphocarpus* sp., a weed from southern Africa.)
Photo: P. Hussey

Growing up in Baldy, Trevor knew a low shrub whose yellow-green fruits, which he called 'snottygobbles' were sought out as bush tucker. The shrub's scientific name is *Persoonia saccata* and the very first popular book on WA wildflowers, Emily Pelloe's marvelous *Wildflowers of Western Australia*, published in 1921, gives this plant the common name of 'swottie bobs'. By the publication of Erickson *et al's* *Wildflowers of Western Australia* in 1973, the whole genus *Persoonia* is being referred to as 'snottygobbles'. Where did the name come from?

Common names are part of

the living, cultural heritage, reflecting ordinary peoples' knowledge of the land around them. As part of getting to know Australia, settlers would have transferred familiar names to unfamiliar, but vaguely similar plants.

A good example is 'buttercup' given in WA to species in the genus *Hibbertia*, not at all related to the buttercup of Europe. But they do have golden-yellow cup-shaped flowers that spangle the bush in springtime.

In the UK, yew trees have squishy fruits with a hard centre. Growing up in Wiltshire, Penny called these fruits 'snotty gogs' (or 'snotty globs') and remembers that naughty

small boys liked to put them where a girl could inadvertently squidge them – down the neck of her blouse, even! The girls, of course, responded with obligatory squeals of disgust! Arriving in WA, the children would soon have discovered any squishy fruits, especially if shown them by Aboriginal friends. It is likely they simply transferred the name to their new land as an oral tradition.

Such things were not written down until much later and can change during this time, especially if they were part of the lore and language of schoolchildren. Emily Pelloe's name is one recorded from the north of England, not the south-



Mandy Grubb, Cultural Tour Coordinator at the Town of Kwinana, shows how well *Persoonia saccata* regenerates after a fire at The Spectacles wetland.
Photo: T. Walley

west where Penny grew up. But once a name becomes formalised in a widely distributed publication, a 'common name' becomes set.

So this is how we think the name got here, via settlers' kids. Although the plant was well known to be good bush tucker, alas no Nyoongar name – also transmitted, of course, in oral tradition – seems to have survived.

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