

# National Wattle Day

By Bruce Maslin

**The incorporation of wattle (*Acacia*) into the national psyche commenced in the 19th century and today is honoured through its use as important symbols at national governmental and local community levels, including the annual celebration of National Wattle Day on 1 September.**

The long-standing differences of opinion and confusion as to which date, 1 August or 1 September, is more appropriate for Wattle Day was settled in 1992. As discussed by Panter (1997) at least one reason for the discrepancy in dates relates to differences in flowering times for some of the more popular species of *Acacia*. For example, in 1916 the date of Wattle Day in New South Wales was changed from 1 September to 1 August. The reason for this change was that it enabled the Red Cross to use the earlier flowering and more familiar Cootamundra wattle (*Acacia baileyana*) rather than golden wattle (*Acacia pycnantha*) in their efforts to raise money to support the war effort.

Gazetted on 24 August 1992, National Wattle Day was declared by the then Minister for the Environment, Ros Kelly, and was signed by the Governor General, Bill Haydon, on 23 June 1992. Four years earlier the golden wattle (*Acacia pycnantha*) was officially proclaimed as Australia's National Floral Emblem. This 1988 proclamation occurred in the year of Australia's bicentenary. The proclamation ceremony was conducted on the first day of spring (1 September) in the Australian National Botanic Gardens, Canberra.

In Australia, the wattles are the largest genus of flowering plants containing about 1,000 species which grow in extremely diverse habitats from rainforest to arid lands. A species of wattle was one of the first plants ever collected from Australia by Europeans. Given their abundance and distribution within Australia, it is not surprising that wattles are incorporated into our Australian culture in many ways:



Golden wattle (*Acacia pycnantha*) Australia's National Floral Emblem. Photo – Bruce Maslin

- green and gold are Australia's national colours (the predominant colours of wattle foliage and their yellow flowers)
- a species of wattle is included in the Australian Coat of Arms
- wattle flowers are featured in many of the Australian medals of honour (including The Order of Australia)
- wattles are used as floral emblems of some local shires for example in Western Australia Dalwallinu has Kimberly's wattle (*Acacia anthochaera*) and Hyden has Lane's wattle (*Acacia lanei*) while in New South Wales Cootamundra has the Cootamundra wattle (*Acacia baileyana*).

## More information

Hitchcock, M. (1991) *WATTLE*. Australian Government Publishing Service: Canberra.

Panter, R. (1997) Australia's Wattle Day. *Current Issues Brief* No. 1 for 1995-96. Department of the Parliamentary Library, Canberra.

<http://wattleday.asn.au/> is dedicated to the commemoration of Wattle Day.

[www.worldwidewattle.com/](http://www.worldwidewattle.com/) provides a historical background of Wattle Day.

## Learning opportunities

**The Western Australian Naturalists' Club** is an organisation that aims to encourage the study and protection of the natural environment. It has branches in the hills (Kalamunda), northern suburbs (Henderson Centre) and Rockingham (Naragebup); groups for juniors, walkers and photographers; a Conservation Committee; and a field station at Yunderup. All branches have a monthly meeting to which the public is invited. Excursions, walks, camping trips and workshops are also offered. There is a monthly newsletter and a scientific journal. Visit [www.wanats.iinet.net.au](http://www.wanats.iinet.net.au), phone 9228 2495 or email [wanats@iinet.net.au](mailto:wanats@iinet.net.au).

**'In the Wild West' Harry Butler Lecture Series 2** is a program of lectures by WA Museum scientists and associates at locations in Perth, Fremantle, Albany, Geraldton and Kalgoorlie-Boulder during July–November. Visit [www.museum.wa.gov.au/whatson/year-of-biodiversity.asp](http://www.museum.wa.gov.au/whatson/year-of-biodiversity.asp).