

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN WILDFLOWERS.

No. 4.—THE CRIMSON-CENTRED HIBISCUS.

(By C. A. GARDNER, Government Botanist.)

Proudly erect, with delicate violet flowers, the centres of which are deeply crimson-stained, this wild hibiscus loves the sun. Its rigid twiggly stems carry no wealth of foliage, but what the plant lacks in this direction is more than made up by its glorious blooms, whose delicate textures defy the heat of summer. The sun-baked soil, so fatal to most wild flowers, holds no terrors for this plant. Indeed, the hibiscus appears to revel in the summer heat, its proud bearing and royal hues proclaiming it a prince of the bushland. Bursting into bloom during October, it continues to flower until the end of March, thus carrying part of the glory of spring throughout the whole of our summer season.

The ^{genus} ~~order~~ of plants to which the ^{Crimson-centred} hibiscus belongs, the *Cienfugosia*, was named after a Spanish botanist, Bernardo Cienfuegos, who in the seventeenth century, published a history of plants. The plants are mainly tropical. In the north of Western Australia we find many lovely species with scarlet or pink flowers. The plant which I am describing, however, belongs to our southern regions, and extends into South Australia. *Cienfugosia* differs from *hibiscus* in the structure of the pistil, but since the difference is not an obvious one, both plants are popularly known as hibiscus.

Most of you will be familiar with this plant. It is widespread over the interior, extending from the Murchison to near the south coast, and eastwards to beyond Kalgoorlie. It is a stiff shrub, attaining a height of from six to twelve feet. The leaves are needle-like but soft, and are usually bright green. The flowers are trumpet-shaped, and erect, with five large and showy petals. There are five calyx-lobes, and at the base of the calyx are five to seven similar but smaller organs,



Wild Red-centred Hibiscus (*Cienfugasia hakeæfolia*), Newdegate, W.A.

known as bracteoles. The stamens are numerous, and are united in a long tube which surrounds the ovary and part of the style. The long style, white in colour, appears simple in structure, but the five stigmatic branches are united into one, the union being perceptible only by the five grooves. The fruit is a capsule with five valves opening to emit the seeds which are light brown and hairy.

If you observe a true hibiscus, such as the native lilac hibiscus, or the red garden species, you will notice that there are five radiating branches to the style. This is the only difference between *hibiscus* and *Cienfugosia*.

The crimson-centred hibiscus usually grows in soil containing a great amount of decomposed granite, and is never far removed from granite rock. You will, therefore, often find it in the light soils near the edges of sandplain country or in scrubby jam country.

The specific name of the plant we are dealing with is *hakeæfolia*, meaning hakea-leaved. This name is rather unfortunate, for hakeas have all kinds of leaves, and they are always very rigid, whereas the hibiscus has soft, almost juicy, green leaves.

CONTRIBUTIONS BY PUPILS.

Feather's Whisperings.

(By Erica Tregurtha, a Class VI. pupil.)

I spring from an aristocratic stock, as can readily be seen from my bearing, even though I am but four years old. I came to this happy home as a young colt, seven months old. Oh, what a strange life I led in those first few months! My mother, known and feared as "Red Bess," was a blood mare, and when I was very young, she tired of the cruelty of her master, who forced her to work in a team with draught horses, and live in a filthy stable; so she ran away, bounding through paddocks and over fences, and hid with me and a wild young draught filly in the bush. It was great fun, for my mother, who was very fond of fun, taught us to steal from unfenced paddocks; and we lived right royally, till "Trixie," the filly, caught her leg in a dingo trap, and ever afterwards was only able to use three. Now we had been stealing from the farm of Mr. M——, and he often drove us far into the bush. But one day, seeing the state of poor Trixie's leg, he drove us into his home paddock, and there put us in pound. Being a kind man, he shot poor Trixie, and put her out of her misery; but my mother and me he kept. Our old master came to claim us, but was forced to leave me, as a return for damage done, and so I gained my new home.

The farmer's children came to see me, and although I was a bit nervous, I let them stroke me, and give me sugar; and because my tail resembled a feather, they called me "Feather." Alas, I did not see my dear mother again, and no one knows what happened to her!

Correction.

It has been noticed that an unfortunate error crept into the February number of "Our Rural Magazine." On page 21, the second paragraph of "Western Australian Wildflowers, No. 4," opened with the following:—"The order of plants to which the Hibiscus belongs, the *Cienfugosia*, etc." This should have read, "The genus of plants to which the Crimson-centred Hibiscus (*Cienfugosia*) belongs, was named after a Spanish botanist, etc."