



# Eucalyptus rubida

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Amid drought and bushfire, the Kangaroo Apple (Solanum)  
flowers brilliantly at both Queenscliffe and Glenburn

## Bushfire - Fire, Earth, Air & Water Out of Balance Humans - Out of Touch

In the quiet, I heard a distant tree falling, and then about a minute later, another. It is not common to hear a tree falling, but this was at 2 am in the morning, and I was on ember watch during the bushfires. During a bushfire trees frequently fall after their trunk has been damaged by fire, and the silence of the night seemed to amplify the sound.

On the other hand, the previous day we heard what we thought was a plane passing over, but we later realised that it was the noise of the Kinglake fires 10 kilometres away. Just before sunset a lot of smoke reached us and we did not realise that the Kilmore fires had reached the end of Burns Rd, such was the speed of the catastrophe that overtook the countryside on Saturday Feb. 7th.

Clearly Earth living systems that watch over our fragile ecology are losing control of that delicate feedback mechanism that mitigates the normal vagaries of nature. Earth has picked up a virus from one of its members - us! The ecological health of the human is fragile these days, and it is mainly in the spiritual realm that this malaise might be sought for.

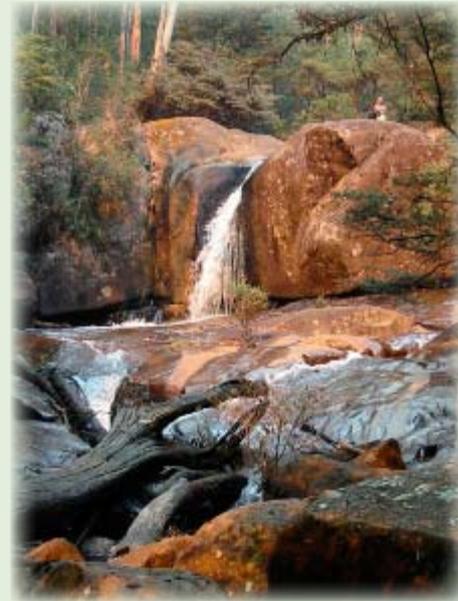
What might be its signs? Well, just as an excess of vitamin A from their dogs' livers was so harmful to Mawson's Antarctic team, so an excess of carbon in the atmosphere interferes with the delicate mix of gases that constitutes the thin layer of air that surrounds and supports life on Earth.

The mechanism that supports life on Earth is what also supports our life. Air is virtually the umbilical cord that links us to planet Earth. If you don't believe this just try not breathing for three minutes, and you will be dead. Respect for the purity of the air will continue to be essential for the health of all Earth's species. If we do not have a mystique for air that binds us spiritually as well as physically to it, then we will certainly be history.

And what of our mystique for water? Thomas Berry sees this mystical connection with aspects of nature as being so essential to our making our way together through the current crisis of ecology. It will not be enough to concentrate on just doing things to recover what has been lost because of our wasteful use of Earth's resources. On the contrary the

need is a spiritual one: to live in relationship to the environment, asking it what it will let us do and use, before nature itself is harmed. This is a radical humility and a compassion that outstrips the consuming culture we are so much used to.

For eons, Earth, its climate and its other living systems have evolved alongside the evolution of plant and animal life. Each is cognisant of the other and alters/is altered by the process.



This is one of the tenets of the Gaia Hypothesis. This is still going on. Don't blame the Earth for climate change, or the hole in the ozone layer. For millions of years the biosphere has been in constant conversation with the planet, and both have evolved within this relationship.

Oxygen which is essential for fire to take hold, is also essential to vitalise the blood which courses through our body and our brains, and facilitates the very process of our thoughts and even our feelings. Earth-in-relationship-with-life or Gaia as we might call it, regulates the concentration of oxygen in the air at around 21%.

The relationship of life to oxygen has been startling. Early photosynthetic bacteria produced the first oxygen to reach the atmosphere.

After two billion years the concentration of oxygen in the air was too high for many early life forms to withstand its oxidising power, and life suffered its first mass extinction. Life altered to produce new forms of life that put oxygen to use, and this cooperative venture has continued ever since.

Later extinctions - and there were at least four more serious ones, were probably due to climate change. We are all aware of the dinosaur extinction 75 million years ago, when a huge meteorite caused severe climate disruption.

Our relationship with oxygen is tenuous. Its oxidising power accounts for the wrinkling of our skin as we age, and will probably be a major cause when we finally succumb.

Living with wildness is both exciting and dangerous. We take our chances with the competitive pressures that stress our bodies and our environment. Some of our number have made a habit of living dangerously. Most of us just live dangerously without realising it!

We need to enter into a more mutual relationship with the wider and deeper self that exists both inside and outside of us. The outside we call the environment: the inside we usually call soul or mind. But there is a unity here that the mystics have always explained to us. All is One!

To use a familiar language to most, we might say with Brian Swimme that we exist in a 'river of grace that flows through our lives.' Another ancient wisdom says that 'when we go out, we are really going in.'

Other say there is a vast consciousness out of which we came, in which we participate, and into which we will return.

Jesus reminds us of the possibility of realising heaven here on Earth by a full and compassionate participation in life. "The kingdom of God is within you."

Some people speak of an ecological theology. I like to think of it as a theological ecology.

Go well,

Trevor Parton

Photo: Terrible Beauty - Murrindindi Cascades lit by a smoky sun. Fires of April 2004