

Potamogeton sulcatus. The lower leaves are submerged, the floating leaves are oval in shape and they have numerous veins. Confined to the north-west of Victoria, this species is often confused with *P. tricarlinatus*, which also is frequently abundant hereabouts. During November-December the copious production of pollen astonishes the onlooker. So plentiful is the supply that the mind of one is first imbued with the idea that sulphur has been strewed over the surface of the water. A closer examination reveals the presence of thousands of swollen anthers dispersing pollen of a light yellow colour. This is distributed by the wind.

The only floating species commonly found in these waters is the widely-spread *Azolla filiculoides* var. *rubra*. When the water sinks causing the plants to rest on the mud, this delicate and variously-hued plant has the power of absorbing nutriment from the wet ground, and it thrives as long as there is sufficient moisture. It is, however, at its best when the stems float on the surface of the water and the roots do not come in direct contact with the mud. The roots, however, succeed in collecting a considerable film of minute-particled silt as they float about the billabong. *Azolla* presents a particularly pleasing colour picture which varies from many shades of green to brown and reds of varying intensity.

THE PRICKLEFOOT

The Pricklefoot (*Eryngium vesiculosum*), found in some muddy situations, might at first sight be taken for a thistle, but actually belongs to the Carrot family. Specimens taken at Moorabbin, in February, showed flower-heads in all stages from buds to mature fruit. The earliest flower-head stands in the centre, behind it branches arise, in their turn forming terminal flowers and new branches behind these, and so on. The heads in full bloom show the brightest blue, all visible parts of the flower become blue, except the pollen, even the vesicles on the fruitlets show some blue. The spiny bracts are also blue except their tips. In somewhat advanced buds the colour is whitish and the calyx lobes pointed, anthers and petals turned in.

After the flowers are fully open, the stamens first fall; then the petals turn yellowish and fall, their fringed ends still remaining turned in. When the petals fall, the lobed and ornamental cushion surrounding the styles is well seen. Gradually the blue colour disappears, the bracts resume a greenish colour for a time, but all eventually change to pale brownish. The fruitlets may at last be shaken out or otherwise taken off for examination. They present an appearance curiously suggesting a minute crustacean or an insect. Along the sides are the vesicles, now brownish. At the upper end are sharp and hardened calyx lobes, easily able to attach themselves to clothing, and no doubt to animals or birds. In spite of the spiny bracts, much of the detail of the flower can be seen, but a bract is easily pulled off and a floricel separated.

The name *Eryngium* seems to be of uncertain origin, *vesiculosum* refers to the ornamented vesicles on the fruitlets. Pricklefoot needs no explanation, the spines of leaves and bracts readily pierce clothing, the stronger bracts can even be persuaded to go through the soft leather of a boot-tongue.

—T.S.H.



Hart, Thomas Stephen. 1938. "The Pricklefoot." *The Victorian Naturalist* 54, 177–177.

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