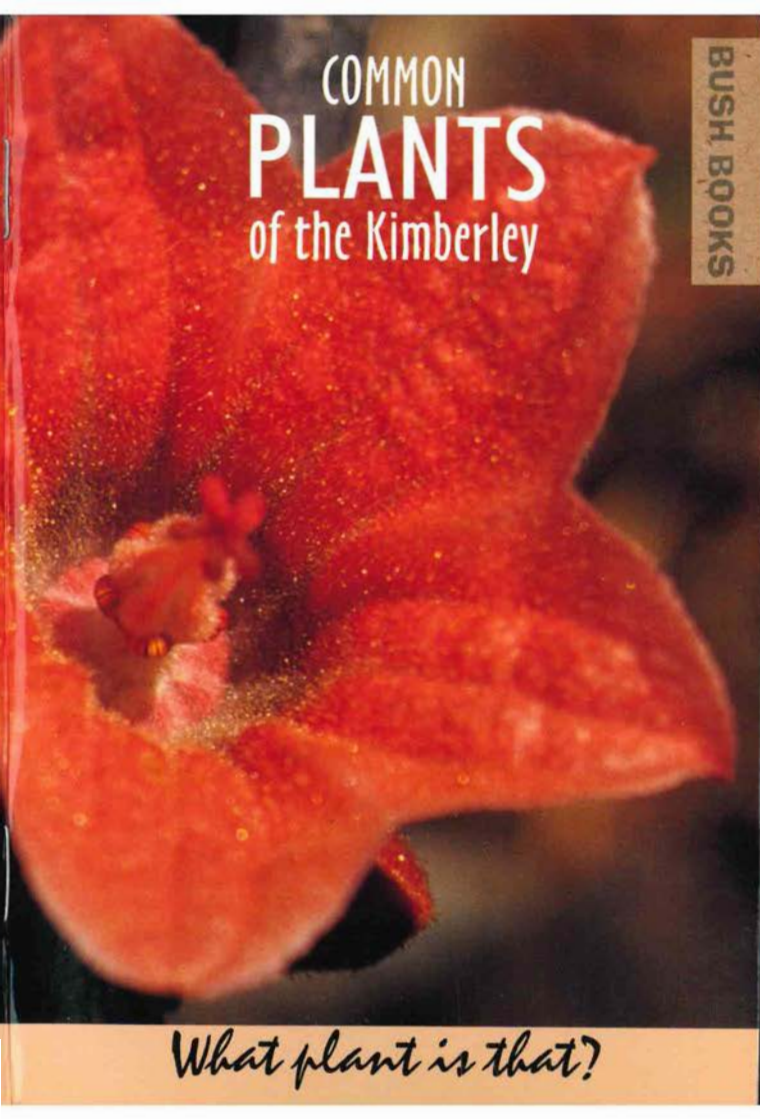
COMMON
PLANTS
of the Kimberley
BUSH BOOKS
What plant is that?

Bush Books are a series of practical field guides to help you learn about and discover WA's unique plants, animals, and special features, region by region.

Publisher: Dr Syd Shea, Executive Director, Department of Conservation and Land Management, 50 Hayman Road, Como, Western Australia 6152.

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Map: Sandra van Brugge.

Front cover: Sticky kurrajong. Photo - Kevin Kenneally.

ISBN 0 7309 6822 7

COMMON PLANTS of the Kimberley

by Kevin Kenneally, Carolyn Thomson, Chris Done and Judy Wheeler

DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND LAND MANAGEMENT

INTRODUCTION

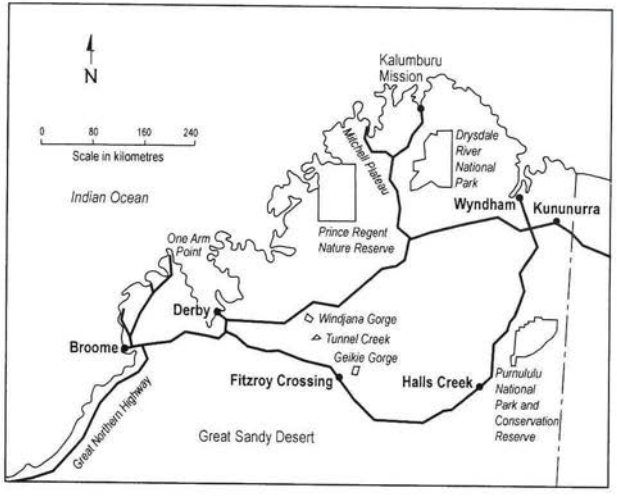
The Kimberley region of WA covers a massive 420,000 square kilometres and supports a diverse and spectacular flora of more than 2000 plant species. Unlike the rest of the State, the tropical north experiences heavy rainfall in summer (from December to March). This is normally referred to as the wet or green season. The main flush of growth and flowering comes with the onset of the wet season, but it is also the time when much of the country becomes impassable by road. The dry season is virtually a drought and no rainfall can be expected between June and September. In the north Kimberley, the rocky landscapes retain surface water throughout the dry season and some of the larger rivers continue to run or are reduced to strings of pools.

Many Kimberley plants have an important place in the culture of the local Aboriginal people, and are used either as a food source, to manufacture implements or indicate changes in the seasons. For instance, the appearance of the fruit on the grey mangrove indicates to the Bardi people that it is time to shift camp to the beaches and high dunes to avoid mosquitoes. Many of the traditional plant uses described in this book are still practised by Aboriginal people of the Kimberley (such as the Bardi, Nyul Nyul and Yuwuru people of the Dampier Peninsula). There is a new wave of gourmet restaurants in major cities which are often supplied with bush tucker from Aboriginal communities. However, people tempted to sample bush tucker should be aware that some plants are poisonous. Tasting, therefore, should only be carried out under expert guidance and only when the plant has been correctly identified. The establishment of Aboriginal-run health services has also rekindled interest in traditional medicines, whose value is increasingly being supported and documented by scientists.

The region's plants also have immense environmental value, and provide an important food source for many animal species. Flying foxes, for instance, eat the fruits of the wild pear. Mangrove communities protect shorelines from storm surges and play a vital role in the ecology of an area, providing homes for large numbers of crustaceans, molluscs and fish.

The plants in this book are arranged alphabetically by plant family, so that related plants are close together (see page 4).

The delightful flowers and diverse growth forms of these plants are an important part of the natural attractions of the Kimberley and it is hoped that this book will help you to easily identify them, and gain a deeper appreciation of their value and beauty.



PLANT RELATIONSHIPS

BACHELOR'S BUTTON

(Gomphrena canescens)

Family Amaranthaceae, the mulla-mullas

After a good wet season, large areas will be covered by spectacular carpets of bright pink bachelor's button. The pink or white flowers are usually clustered into spherical heads, up to five centimetres across. There are 15 species of *Gomphrena* in Australia, one of which is introduced. All of them grow in the Kimberley. They are closely related to the mulla-mullas and the flowers are everlasting.

DESCRIPTION: This erect herb may reach up to half a metre high and is often covered with long, soft hairs. The slender, spiky leaves are commonly clustered around the nodes. The pink to white flowers are just over one centimetre long. The small, dry fruit of this plant splits open to release a single seed.

HABITAT: The species often grows in grasslands, on sandy or lateritic soils.

DISTRIBUTION: Bachelor's button is distributed across a wide area of the Kimberley, from north of a line between Derby, Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek. It extends south into the Pilbara and is also found in the Northern Territory, Queensland and in south-east Asia.

FLOWERING TIME: April to July.

PURPLE MULLA-MULLA

(Ptilotus exaltatus)

Family Amaranthaceae, the mulla-mullas

After good rains, this mauve-flowered plant makes a striking massed display along disturbed areas such as road verges. Its flowers are arranged in colourful cylindrical spikes on long stems.

DESCRIPTION: This erect herb can grow up to a metre, but in poor years it may only reach a few centimetres high. It has fleshy, pointed dark green leaves, which are much larger at the base of the plant than on the stem. The flower-spikes are up to 13 centimetres high. The individual pink to mauve flowers are up to two centimetres long. The small and inconspicuous fruits are enclosed by the base of the dead flower.

OTHER NAMES: Tall mulla-mulla, lamb-tails.

HABITAT: In the Kimberley, purple mulla-mulla grows in a wide variety of habitats, including coastal sand dunes and limestone plateaus.

DISTRIBUTION: Purple mulla-mulla grows from Kalumburu and Wyndham in the north to the Eighty Mile Beach in the south. Elsewhere in WA, it extends as far south as Norseman. It is found in all mainland States of Australia.

FLOWERING TIME: April to October.

Photo — Brian Carter

Photo — Babs & Bert Wells/CALM

MITCHELL PLATEAU FAN PALM

(Livistona eastonii)

Family Arecaceae, the fan palms

Fan palms grow extensively on the Mitchell Plateau, one of the few places in WA where palms are such a dominant feature. This species is unique to the region and the growing shoot (not the fruit) was considered an important food source by Aboriginal people. The seeds are eaten and dispersed by emus and other animals. Only five species of fan palm are found in the State and all but one are found in the Kimberley.

DESCRIPTION: This tree grows up to 18 metres high. Its trunk, up to 150 millimetres in diameter, is relatively smooth. However, its swollen base may be marked by rings formed from persistent leaf bases. The fan-shaped leaves are clumped into a thin crown. The leaf stalk reaches up to two metres long, with thorny margins. The striking bluish-green leaf blades, up to 800 millimetres long, are divided for more than half their length into narrow segments and yellow as they age. Male and female flowers are on separate plants. The small, cream to yellow male flowers are scented. This species has black oval-shaped, succulent stoned fruits up to 15 millimetres long, which are however not edible.

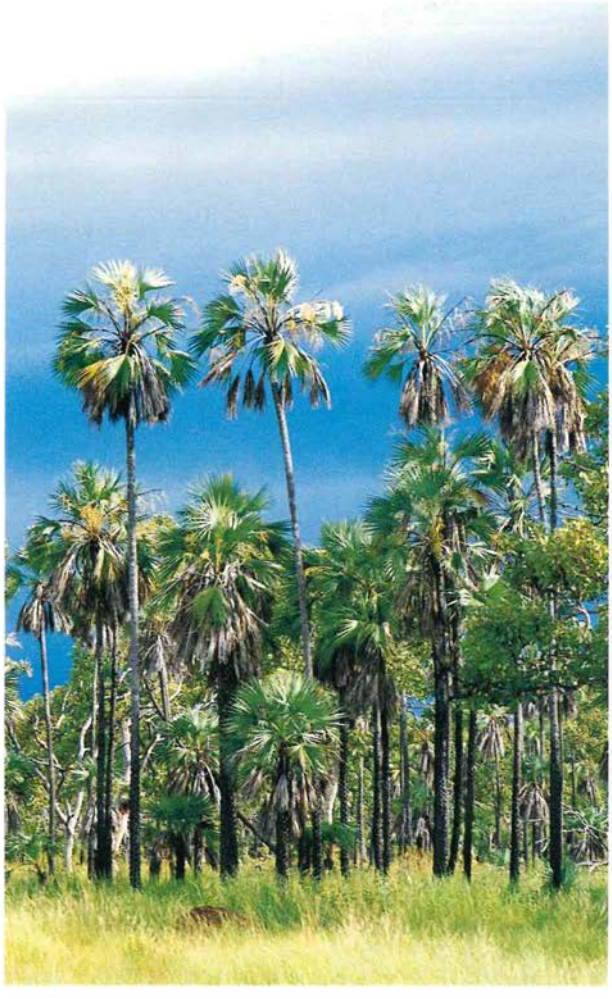
OTHER NAMES: Cabbage palm. The Kalumburu people use the name dangana.

HABITAT: The species is found only in tropical, high rainfall areas of the far north Kimberley. It forms a woodland with various eucalypts and cycads on the laterite-capped Mitchell Plateau.

DISTRIBUTION: This fan palm is restricted to the Mitchell Plateau and a smaller area on King Edward River Station.

FLOWERING TIME: Mainly from April to July.

ABORIGINAL USAGE: Aboriginal people cut the growing shoot out of the palm and eat the soft part, either raw or baked. Cutting out the growing tip will, however, kill the palm.



GREY MANGROVE

(Avicennia marina)

Family Avicenniaceae, the grey-leaved mangroves

This is the most widespread of all mangrove species - plants that have adapted to growing in the tidal zone between the land and the sea. The appearance of the fruit on this tree indicates to the Bardi people that it is time to shift camp to the beaches and high dunes to avoid mosquitoes. These smooth-barked trees have clusters of small, fragrant orange flowers. They often bear the brunt of ferocious cyclones, but regenerate rapidly afterwards.

DESCRIPTION: The grey mangrove usually grows up to five metres high. It has greyish-white bark with some flaking patches. Pencil-like breathing roots arise from the radially spreading roots. The leaves are dark glossy green on their upper surface and grey to silvery below. The tree bears fruits from December to May.

OTHER NAMES: White mangrove. Goorrngool is the Bardi name; the Nyul Nyul call it jamai; the Yawuru name is gundurung.

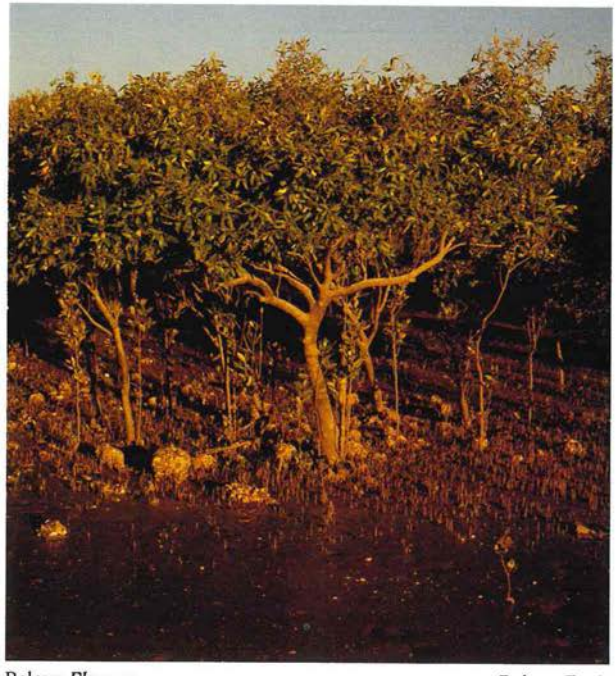
HABITAT: It inhabits tidal areas, growing on the seaward and landward edges of mangrove areas.

DISTRIBUTION: The grey mangrove is widespread in mainland Australia, North and South America, Africa, Asia and New Zealand.

FLOWERING TIME: November to January.

ABORIGINAL USAGE: This tree produces the only mangrove fruits eaten by Aboriginal people. However, they are first soaked in mangrove mud for three to seven days until they turn black, so as to remove the toxins. They are then rinsed and boiled twice, or roasted until the skin and black colour are gone. The branches are used for shades and are burnt to repel sandflies. Native beehives are found in hollows.

OTHER USES: The foliage is sometimes heavily grazed by cattle, possibly because of the salt on the leaves. The flowers produce excellent honey.



Below: *Flowers*

Photo — Brian Carter

Below: *Fruit*

Photo — Babs & Bert Wells/CALM

BOAB

(Adansonia gregorii)

Family Bombacaceae

No other plant is more symbolic of the Kimberley than the boab, with its immense, swollen trunk and striking silhouette. Up until earlier this century, enlarged hollow boabs had the unfortunate distinction of being used as prison trees to hold Aboriginal prisoners overnight. This tree is the only *Adansonia* species found in Australia; the others are natives of Madagascar and Africa. The flowers of this striking tree are pollinated by hawkmoths and birds.

DESCRIPTION: This large deciduous tree may reach 15 metres high. It has numerous spreading branches and is usually leafless at the time of flowering. The leaves have between five and seven leaflets. The large fragrant flowers are white to creamy, and have numerous stamens. The pendulous fruits are large, woody and covered with a dense felt of short hairs. They contain a great many black, kidney-shaped seeds embedded in a powdery white pith.

OTHER NAMES: Djungeri, baobab. The Bardi name is larrgid.

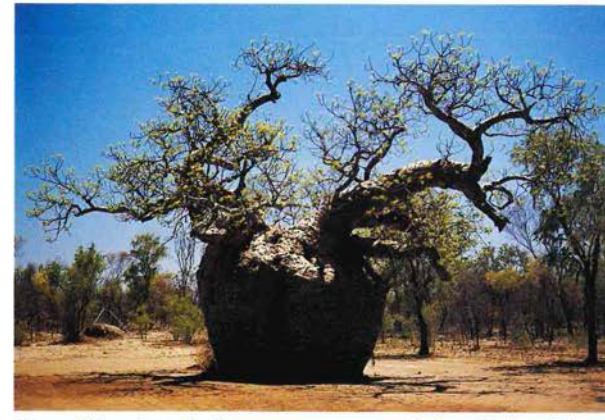
HABITAT: The boab particularly favours the loamy soils of the Fitzroy and Ord valleys and the limestone hills of the Oscar and Napier Ranges.

DISTRIBUTION: This tree is distributed throughout much of the Kimberley and extends into part of the Northern Territory.

FLOWERING TIME: November to February.

ABORIGINAL USAGE: The root fibres are made into string. Aboriginal people suck the white pith in the fruit, which tastes like sherbet and is very refreshing. The seeds are ground into a white paste. The fruits are frequently etched or decorated and sold to tourists.

OTHER USES: The boab is not native to Broome but has been extensively planted throughout the town.



Above: *Prison tree, Derby*

Below: *Buds and flower*

CAMEL BUSH

(Trichodesma zeylanicum)

Family Boraginaceae

The common name camel bush resulted from a report by Baron von Mueller, who stated that the dromedaries of Giles' 1873-74 exploration party were found to be particularly partial to this plant. It is also eaten by cattle but has been suspected of poisoning stock, although there is no definite evidence of toxicity. The plant is covered with short, stiff hairs, which can be highly irritating. It is the only species of its genus that grows in WA.

DESCRIPTION: This coarse, hard low shrub grows up to two metres high. The narrow leaves are greyish-green to green and up to 16 centimetres long. The petals are pale to bright blue or rarely white, with a central cone of yellow anthers, and the flowers are arranged in a simple spray. The fruits consist of four small nutlets and are borne at the same time as the flowers, from March to November.

OTHER NAMES: Cattle bush, kumbalin, padjapadja, pardan, pigurga, rough bluebell. The plant is known in the Broome area by the Aboriginal name jilarga.

HABITAT: Camel bush occupies coastal dunes and sandplain areas along creeks or gorges. It is often seen growing vigorously along roadsides after fires.

DISTRIBUTION: This species is common throughout semi-arid, arid and tropical parts of Australia and extends through south-east Asia to India.

FLOWERING TIME: March to November.

NOTE: Camel bush is pollinated by large native bees (especially Dawson's burrowing bee), which grasp the cone of anthers and shake out the pollen by vibrating their wing muscles. This process causes an audible buzz.

KIMBERLEY BAUHINIA

(Lysiphyllum cunninghamii)

Family Caesalpiniaceae

Kimberley bauhinia is one of the most widespread trees of the region. Its clusters of red flowers, and the bright red pods that subsequently festoon the tree, make it a conspicuous plant. The Bardi name for the tree, jigal or joomoo, is derived from the back-to-back positioning of the leaves. Jigal refers to the relationship involving a mother-in-law. According to Aboriginal custom, the mother-in-law and son-in-law must not directly face each other.

DESCRIPTION: Bauhinia grows as a dense shrub or semi-deciduous tree up to 12 metres high, with rough, dark grey bark. The young leaves are soft green or yellowish-green and flushed with red, whereas the mature leaves are bluish-grey to dull greyish-green and butterfly-shaped. They are composed of two leaflets, two to three centimetres long. The plant produces pink to red, velvety flowers, up to one and a half centimetres long, and large flat, pendulous pods, up to 20 centimetres long. They are initially reddish, but become brown, twisted and somewhat papery as they mature, appearing from May to December.

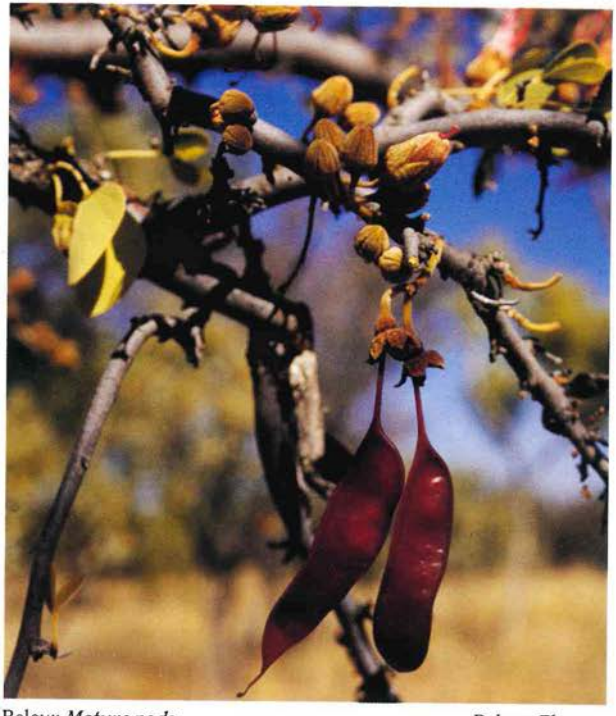
OTHER NAMES: Bean tree, bohemia tree, jigal, joomoo.

HABITAT: This species grows in many different habitats and is common in sandplain and pindan areas, where it grows in association with spear wattle.

DISTRIBUTION: Bauhinia grows in the Kimberley, south to Port Hedland and in the Northern Territory and Queensland.

FLOWERING TIME: April to October.

ABORIGINAL USAGE: The branches were used to make windbreaks in the dry season. They also make excellent smokeless firewood. Aboriginal people ate the sweet gum and sucked the nectar from the flowers. They also reportedly used the bark and wood to treat headache, as an antiseptic and as a remedy for fever.



Below: *Mature pods*

Below: *Flowers*

COCKROACH BUSH

(Senna notabilis)

Family Caesalpiniaceae

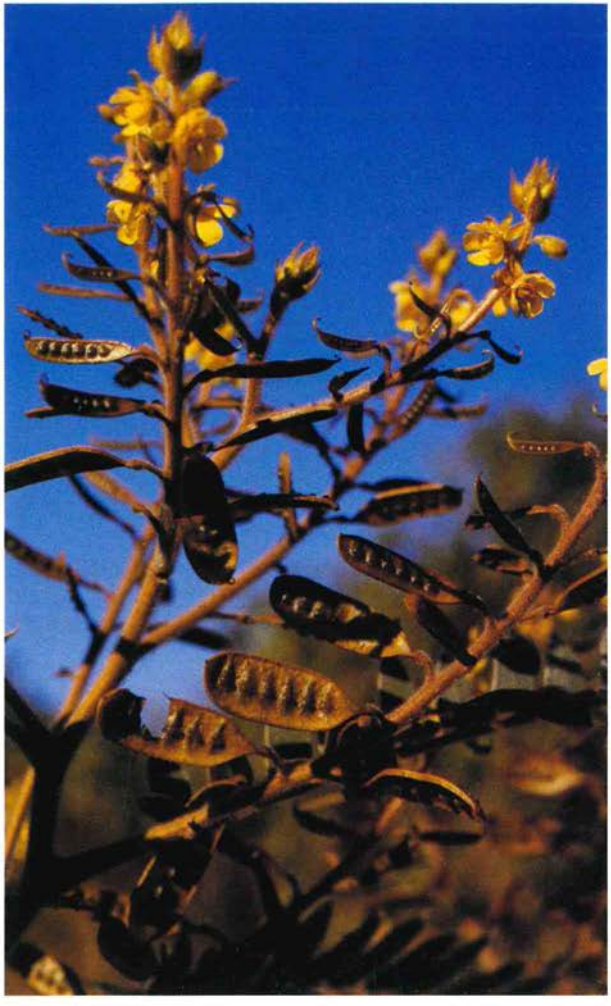
The seed pods of this bush are a shiny, golden yellow with dark brown stripes, and are said to resemble cockroaches. This plant is thus one of few that are better known for its pods than its flowers. The flowers are bright yellow and appear in the dry season.

DESCRIPTION: This spreading shrub grows up to one and a half metres high. It has greenish-grey leaves up to 25 centimetres long, which are densely covered with long, spreading hairs. The bright yellow flowers are about a centimetre across and are produced on spikes held well above the leaves. The distinctive oblong pods are quite flat and smooth, and about three and a half to four centimetres long. Each pod produces between four and seven dark-coloured seeds, which are minutely wrinkled.

HABITAT: This distinctive plant grows along road verges and is scattered throughout the pindan (see page 34) in deep red soil at Broome, Beagle Bay and Cape Leveque. It is particularly common after fire or disturbance.

DISTRIBUTION: Cockroach bush is widespread in the northern arid areas of WA, including the southern parts of the Kimberley and also the Pilbara and Great Sandy and Gibson Deserts. It also extends into the Northern Territory, South Australia, Queensland and New South Wales.

FLOWERING TIME: May to September.



NORTHERN TINSEL FLOWER

(Cyanostegia cyanocalyx)

Family Chloanthaceae

Most people would not otherwise notice the northern tinsel flower, but when its dark purple flowers are in full massed bloom, it is one of our most spectacular wildflowers. It flowers during the middle of the dry season, in red sand dune country along the Great Northern Highway, and extends to just north of Broome. The stems and leaves are shiny and sticky to touch.

DESCRIPTION: Northern tinsel flower grows as a shrub up to two and a half metres high. It displays its flowers in long sprays, up to 30 centimetres long. The flowers have deep blue to bluish-purple petals, prominent, bright yellow anthers and a purple style. The fruits, up to five millimetres in diameter, are hidden by an enlarged papery calyx, up to 15 millimetres in diameter.

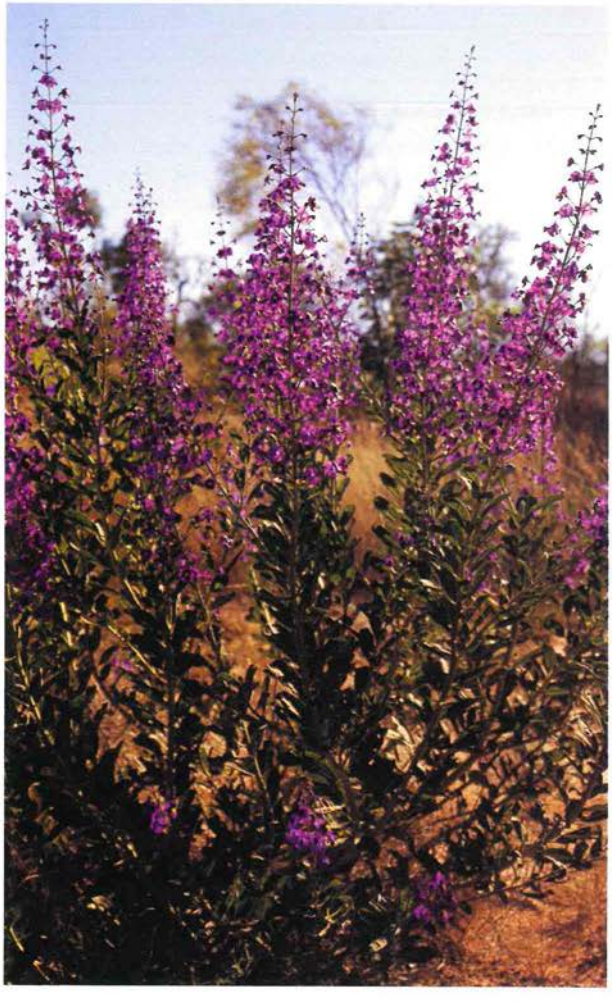
OTHER NAMES: The Yawuru name is kambarryji-barrji.

HABITAT: Deep red sand is the favoured habitat. It is most common in sand dunes of the Great Sandy and Gibson Deserts.

DISTRIBUTION: Northern tinsel flower grows in the southern Kimberley and Pilbara regions of WA, and the Northern Territory.

FLOWERING TIME: Mainly from May to September.

USAGE: Northern tinsel flower would make a delightful ornamental, but attempts to cultivate it have not been successful.



KAPOK BUSH

(Cochlospermum fraseri)

Family Cochlospermaceae

This tall, slender shrub sheds its leaves every year in the dry season and is often leafless when the large, bright yellow flowers appear. It is very showy and has great potential for use as an ornamental. Within the seed capsules, the kidney-shaped seeds of this tree are embedded in long, white cotton-like hairs, hence the alternative name cotton tree.

DESCRIPTION: This shrub or small tree grows up to six metres high. It has smooth or slightly fissured grey bark. The leaves have between three and seven shallow to deep rounded lobes. However, the species varies considerably from one area to another. The leaves are felted below and sometimes remain on the plant while it is flowering. The large, scented flowers, up to seven centimetres in diameter, are arranged in showy clusters. They are yellow but may be streaked with orange. The swollen green fruits (see photograph on page 70) that follow flowering burst open to release numerous silky seeds.

OTHER NAMES: Malindjarr, wi ana, cotton tree.

HABITAT: Kapok bush grows particularly well in sandstone areas, but can be seen in a variety of habitats.

DISTRIBUTION: In the Kimberley, this species grows from Kalumburu in the north to the Fitzroy River in the south and Lake Argyle in the east. Kapok bush is also found in the Northern Territory.

FLOWERING TIME: April to September.

ABORIGINAL USAGE: In the wet season, when excavation is easier, Aboriginal people dig up the roots of small plants of this species. They are baked in ashes and hammered to soften them before being consumed.

Photo — Brian Carter

BEACH MORNING GLORY

(Ipomoea pes-caprae)

Family Convolvulaceae, the bindweeds

Beach morning glory is a creeper with long, pliable stems. This hardy, long-lived species tolerates sand burial, salt spray and wind blast. Its spectacular pinkish-mauve flowers are visible around Broome's Cable Beach, or on sand behind mangroves. The species name *pes-caprae* refers to the shape of the leaf, which is said to resemble a goat's footprint. A similar species known as wild potato (*Ipomoea costata*) grows inland, but beach morning glory has broader, more leathery leaves.

DESCRIPTION: This prostrate plant has long, creeping or trailing stems up to five metres long. Its broad thick leaves are notched at their tips, five to 10 centimetres long, and on long stalks. One or two large pink flowers are borne on each rather long flowering stem. The distinctively funnel-shaped flowers are up to five centimetres across. The almost spherical capsules appear at the same time as the flowers. They split open to release four extremely hairy seeds.

OTHER NAMES: The Bardi name is goordayoon.

HABITAT: As its name suggests, beach morning glory inhabits beach sand and coastal dunes, as well as areas of orange sand.

DISTRIBUTION: This species grows in tropical areas throughout the world. In the Kimberley it extends from Kalumburu in the north to the Eighty Mile Beach in the south, and grows on numerous offshore islands. It is found as far south as Shark Bay. It also grows in the Northern Territory and Queensland.

FLOWERING TIME: March to November.

USAGE: The plant has been used for coastal dune stabilisation in the tropics.

Photo — Babs & Bert Wells/CALM

CHRISTMAS MISTLETOE

(Amyema sanguinea)

Family Loranthaceae, the mistletoes

Throughout the Kimberley, there are more than 20 plant species that belong to the mistletoe family. They can be seen growing on a wide variety of host trees and shrubs, particularly wattles and eucalypts. Their pendulous stems are often festooned with clusters of predominantly red, tubular flowers. These partial parasites tap the stems or branches of the host plant to obtain nutrients. The process of seed transfer and attachment is assisted by the appropriately named mistletoebird, which feeds on the sticky fruits. After the bird has passed the seed through its gut, it is excreted and thereby glued to a branch, where it later germinates.

DESCRIPTION: This species forms a dense shrub, with numerous erect or pendulous branches, attached to the host plant by a woody connection known as a haustorium. The linear leaves often mimic those of the host plant on which they are growing. Pink to red tubular flowers are borne in numerous clusters along the branches. The fruits are green and quite round.

HABITAT: Christmas mistletoe is widespread in eucalypt and wattle woodlands and shrublands, and can be more abundant in trees growing along watercourses.

DISTRIBUTION: This plant is widespread throughout the Kimberley, Northern Territory, South Australia and Queensland.

FLOWERING TIME: Christmas mistletoe flowers and fruits irregularly throughout the year but flowers particularly well around December, hence its common name.

Mistletoe seed on a branch

NATIVE COTTON

(Gossypium australe)

Family Malvaceae, the cottons and hibiscus

Native cotton has quite large pink to mauve flowers, which are a darker reddish-purple in the centre. It regenerates from rootstock after fire and is common on disturbed road verges. A closely related species is the floral emblem of the Northern Territory.

DESCRIPTION: This slender, erect shrub grows up to three metres high. It has numerous branches. The stems are greyish-brown and the dull green leaves are blunt at the tip and have prominent veins and a prominent red gland on the lower surface. The flowers are either solitary or in pairs and have large spreading petals up to four centimetres long. The fruits, which are covered with minute hairs, appear from April to November and contain numerous, very woolly seeds.

OTHER NAMES: Wild cotton.

HABITAT: Native cotton grows in a wide range of habitats, including savannah woodlands, pindan vegetation, shrublands or grasslands, often on sandy soils.

DISTRIBUTION: This species grows in the Kimberley and Pilbara, as far south as Carnarvon and inland to the Great Sandy Desert. It is also native to the Northern Territory and Queensland.

FLOWERING TIME: April to November.

USAGE: This species is being studied for its potential for commercial cotton (*Gossypium hirsutum*) crop improvement.

Photo — Babs & Bert Wells/CALM

Photo — Brian Carter

ELEPHANT EAR WATTLE

(Acacia dunnii)

Family Mimosaceae, the wattles

The most notable feature of the elephant ear wattle is its large, ear-like phyllodes up to 48 centimetres long. They are quite magnificent, especially considering that, as in most Australian wattles, they are not true leaves, but enlarged flattened leaf stalks. The bluish-grey colour of the phyllodes and the waxy white stems set off the large clusters of golden yellow flowers, which have individual heads up to one centimetre in diameter.

DESCRIPTION: Elephant ear wattle grows as a shrub or small tree with few branches, reaching up to six metres high. The smooth, white bark has a thick, powdery coating. The large phyllodes are asymmetrical and leathery, with four or five prominent veins. The spherical yellow flower heads are arranged in clusters along, or at the ends of, the branchlets. The fruits are broad, flat, brown woody pods with a thickened margin, and contain several oblong brown seeds. They appear between January and August.

OTHER NAMES: Dunn's wattle, lolord.

HABITAT: This plant grows in woodland areas on sandstone and quartzite ridges.

DISTRIBUTION: Elephant ear wattle is common throughout the north-east and northern Kimberley and the adjacent Northern Territory.

FLOWERING TIME: January to July.

ABORIGINAL USAGE: Aboriginal people used the leaves to wrap food items such as ground waterlily seeds (see page 46) before cooking.

OTHER USES: The species is widely grown in northern Australia as an ornamental plant.

PINDAN WATTLE

(Acacia tumida)

Family Mimosaceae, the wattles

Although a widespread Kimberley species, this wattle is one of the dominant components of the pindan, the typical vegetation of the red sandplain country north of Broome. Pindan, described by visiting Norwegian zoologist Knut Dahl in 1926 as "low crippled forest", takes its name from an Aboriginal word that means "wild, arid or waterless country". When this wattle flowers en masse in the dry season, the air is heavily scented with a sweet perfume. The pollen, however, can cause hay fever.

DESCRIPTION: Spear wattle is a short-lived (five to seven years) spreading shrub or tree up to nine metres, capable of developing by coppice or root suckers. The upper bark is smooth, white and sometimes waxy, but the lower bark is dark and fissured. The branchlets are yellow and the false leaves, or phyllodes, are bluish-green to light green. They are somewhat curved and shaped like a sickle, have three or four prominent veins and are up to 23 centimetres long. The cylindrical golden yellow flower heads are arranged in inflorescences. The cylindrical pods are borne in bunches, are thick, woody and wrinkled, and hold shiny dark brown to black seeds. The fruits appear from September to November.

OTHER NAMES: Spear wattle, sickle-leaf wattle, wongai. The Bardi name is djarbayi or wanggay. The common name wongai is an anglicised form of the Aboriginal name.

HABITAT: This species is common and widespread in the region and forms dense thickets in red sand with spinifex. An uncommon prostrate form grows on coastal red loam cliffs at Gantheaume Point, near Broome, and north of James Price Point.

DISTRIBUTION: Pindan wattle is found throughout the Kimberley and Northern Territory.

FLOWERING TIME: April to August.

Photo — Babs & Bert Wells/CALM

ABORIGINAL USAGE: The green pods are cooked in hot ashes and the seeds eaten. These are notorious for causing flatulence and bad breath. Mature black seeds are pounded into flour, mixed with water and eaten as a nutritious paste, or cooked as a damper. The gum is also edible. The trunks of young trees are used to make spears and boomerangs. The bark is used to create short-lived string and the small green twigs with the ends squashed are used to spoon out honey from native beehives.

KIMBERLEY HEATH

(Calytrix exstipulata)

Family Myrtaceae, the myrtles

Its massed, star-like flowers make the Kimberley heath one of the most attractive Kimberley plants. The flowers have a papery appearance and vary in colour from off-white to pale pink to quite reddish, appearing mainly in the dry season. This plant is widespread and sometimes forms dense thickets.

DESCRIPTION: This shrub or small tree grows up to four and a half metres high and has numerous spreading branchlets. Its dark grey bark is fissured and quite stringy. The tiny, scale-like pale green leaves, up to three millimetres long, are densely packed together and usually overlap one another. The dainty, star-like flowers are usually densely clustered on the ends of the branchlets. Small fruits are enclosed by the remains of the dead flower.

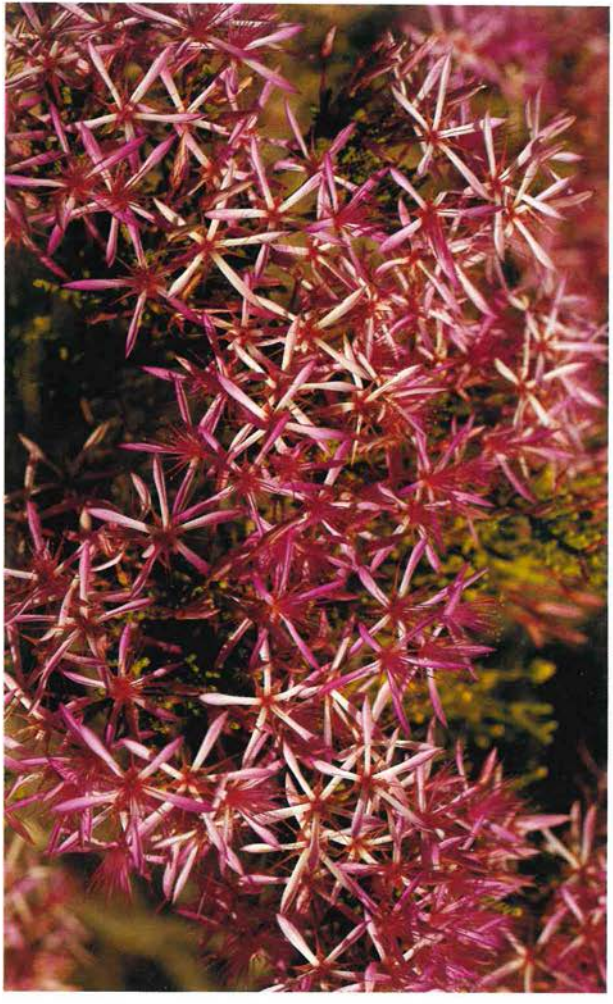
OTHER NAMES: Turkey bush, Kimberley heather. The Bardi name is gidigid.

HABITAT: This plant grows in a wide range of habitats, such as sand or sandy clay, laterised gravels and sandstone areas. It rapidly colonises gravel pits and road verges.

DISTRIBUTION: Kimberley heath extends from the far north Kimberley south to La Grange Mission in the west and to the upper Ord River in the east. The species can also be seen in the Northern Territory and Queensland.

FLOWERING TIME: All year, but mainly from March to September.

USAGE: This attractive species has horticultural potential.



TWIN-LEAF BLOODWOOD

(Eucalyptus cadophora)

Family Myrtaceae, the myrtles

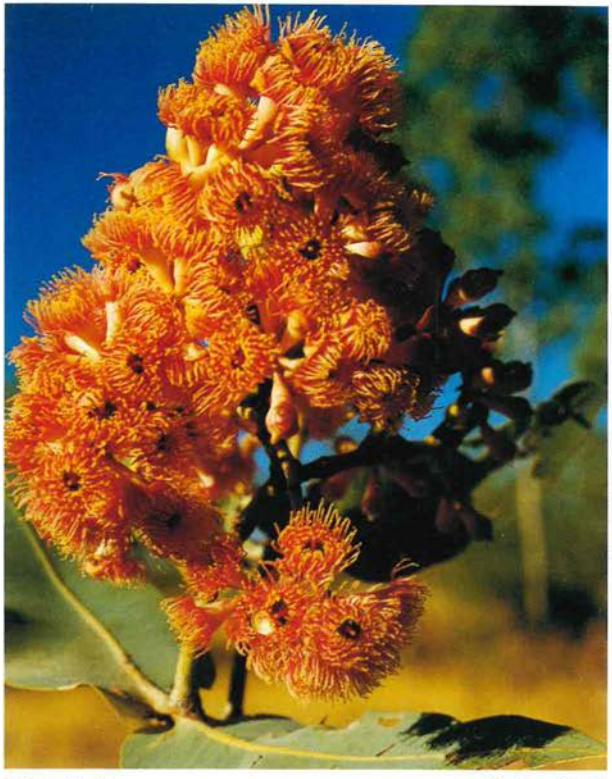
Twin-leaf bloodwood has leaves which look quite bizarre. The mature leaves are in opposite pairs and are completely joined at their bases around the stem, so that the stem or branch appears to grow through the leaf. The common name refers to this unusual characteristic. The tree is small and straggly or may be multi-stemmed, growing as a mallee. Its botanical name was formerly *Eucalyptus perfoliata* and botanists are proposing to place the bloodwoods and ghost gums in the genus *Corymbia*.

DESCRIPTION: This tree grows up to seven metres high and has grey fibrous bark. The dull green to bluish-green leaves are up to 27 centimetres long. Creamy yellow to pink or reddish flowers are arranged in clusters. The smooth, woody capsules are urn-shaped, up to four centimetres long and have four or five internal divisions that hold winged seeds. Twinleaf bloodwood fruits all year round.

HABITAT: Twinleaf bloodwood inhabits stony hills and rocky outcrops of the Kimberley.

DISTRIBUTION: This species grows only in the Kimberley and extends from the Roe River south to the Fitzroy River and from the Buccaneer Archipelago east to near Wyndham. Plants with bright red flowers occur in rocky sandstone between the Gibb River Road and Ellenbrae Station.

FLOWERING TIME: April to September.



Below: *Buds*

Below: *Fruits*

Photo — Chris Done

WOOLLYBUTT

(Eucalyptus miniata)

Family Myrtaceae, the myrtles

The orange to scarlet red-flowering woollybutt had a central place in the lives of Aboriginal people. Despite its potential as an ornamental, it is rarely grown.

DESCRIPTION: This tree has a spreading canopy and grows up to 15 metres high. The bark is rough, reddish-brown and somewhat stringy at the base of the trunk, but smooth and white on the upper branches. The young stems and flower buds are often covered in a silvery waxy coat. The bluish-green leaves, up to 20 centimetres long, are pointed at the tip. The buds are pear-shaped and ribbed. Orange to red flowers are borne on stout, flattened stalks. The large cup-shaped to urn-shaped fruits, up to 50 centimetres long, have conspicuous ribs.

OTHER NAMES: Melaleuca gum, northern woollybutt, Darwin woollybutt. The Bardi name is manowan.

HABITAT: This species is one of the dominant components of savannah woodland throughout the Kimberley, growing on sand, sandstone and on the lateritic soils of the Mitchell Plateau.

DISTRIBUTION: Woollybutt is found across the more northerly parts of the Kimberley, extending south to the Dampier Peninsula in the west and the lower Ord River in the east. It also grows in the Northern Territory and Queensland.

FLOWERING TIME: This tree blooms from May to September, but the amount of flowering varies greatly from year to year.

ABORIGINAL USAGE: The Bardi people ate the seeds and nectar. They used the bark to construct waterproof roofs on framed huts and fashioned boomerangs and shields from the wood. Harpoons are made from the young tree trunks. The tree is also a good source of sugarbag honey, as native bees are frequently found in hollows in the trunks and branches.

Photo — Babs & Bert Wells/CALM

LONG-FRUITED BLOODWOOD

(Eucalyptus polycarpa)

Family Myrtaceae, the myrtles

Long-fruited bloodwood was used by Aboriginal people to collect water. They made grooves in the trunk and placed a U-shaped branch, piped out naturally by termites, against the groove, to be filled by rain during the wet season. Such hollow "tank" logs (djarlbunguru) held drinkable water for long periods. Bloodwood apples are commonly found on this gum. These nut-like growths, the size of a golf ball, are formed from the combined action of roundworms and the larvae of a small fly. Inside the outer woody layer is a sac of sweet fluid and the larva of the insect. This has a mild eucalypt flavour and is regarded as a bush delicacy.

DESCRIPTION: Growing up to 14 metres high, this tree has rough, brownish-grey bark over the trunk and branches. The leaves are usually shiny green. The buds are creamy white and rough to touch. The white to cream flowers have a strong scent of caramel and are arranged together in large, branched clusters. The narrow, oblong fruits grow to three centimetres long and are contracted at or just below the opening. They appear in August.

OTHER NAMES: Kadka, red bloodwood, small-flowered bloodwood, mallee bloodwood. The Bardi name is gaardga or ngalngoorroo; the Yawuru name is kardgu.

HABITAT: Long-fruited bloodwood is common in open woodlands. It grows on sandplain with woollybutt and on dunes and in sandy areas as a big-boled tree. It often grows along creeks.

DISTRIBUTION: This tree grows in WA's Kimberley region, the Northern Territory, and Queensland.

FLOWERING TIME: April to June.

ABORIGINAL USAGE: Sweet lerps are found on the leaves. Aboriginal people would gather the branches and allow them to dry. The branches would then be shaken over paperbark sheets

Photos — Brian Carter

and the sugar lerps rolled into balls for eating later. They also ate the seeds, which taste like coconut. The red gum or kino was used as a medicine, and applied directly to sore teeth.

RIVER CADJEPUT

(Melaleuca leucadendra)

Family Myrtaceae, the myrtles

Anyone who visits any of the Kimberley's famous gorges is bound to encounter the river cadjeput. This graceful paperbark grows along permanent watercourses, producing white or cream bottlebrush flower-spikes at the height of the dry season. The common name cadjeput is derived from the Malaysian name caju-puti, meaning "white tree".

DESCRIPTION: This tree may attain a height of 30 metres. It has papery whitish to pale brown bark and pendulous, green leaves up to 23 centimetres long. The flowers range from white or cream to very pale green. The flower-spikes grow up to 13 centimetres long. They are held in groups of between one and three and each contain numerous flowers. The small seed capsules reach up to five and a half millimetres long. Capsules from the previous season are still on the branch with the new flowers.

OTHER NAMES: Weeping paperbark, broad-leaved tea-tree, bandaran.

HABITAT: Cadjeput grows along watercourses and swamps, in sandy soils or sandstone areas.

DISTRIBUTION: This tree is widespread along watercourses throughout the Kimberley. It extends from the Bonaparte Archipelago south to Windjana Gorge National Park and Purnululu National Park. It is also found in the Northern Territory, Indonesia and New Guinea.

FLOWERING TIME: April to August.

ABORIGINAL USAGE: The bark is used for cooking, as a mat, as wrapping and to cover shelters.

BLUE WATER LILY

(Nymphaea violacea)

Family Nymphaeaceae, the water lilies

Aquatic plant species abound throughout the creeks and river systems of the Kimberley. Many are submerged and only seen when their buds emerge and the flowers open. The blue water lily is one of these delightful inhabitants of billabongs and still water pools. Its large flowers vary in colour from white to bluish-purple and have numerous bright yellow stamens crowded in the centre. The spongy berries contain numerous seeds with a pleasant oily taste, which are sought after by Aboriginal people.

DESCRIPTION: The thick, almost circular leaves are pale green above and maroon beneath, and their edges are often minutely scalloped. Once the plant has flowered, the stalk forms a coil that pulls the developing fruit underwater. This mechanism may help protect the seeds from being eaten. The flowers may reach 16 centimetres in diameter and have between 12 and 30 petals. The berries appear from May to August and vary in shape from spherical to elliptical to urn-shaped.

OTHER NAMES: Miani.

HABITAT: The blue water lily grows in shallow areas within freshwater pools and rivers once the wet has subsided.

DISTRIBUTION: This attractive plant is found through most of the Kimberley. The species also grows in the Northern Territory, Queensland and New Guinea.

FLOWERING TIME: March to December.

ABORIGINAL USAGE: Aboriginal women collected the edible corms and berries. They were either eaten raw or warmed in hot sand. The seeds were ground up to make a white flour and this was cooked between the leaves of elephant ear wattle. The corms were regarded as a good medicine for diarrhoea. The flower stems may be eaten raw.

Photo — Chris Done

SCREW PINE

(Pandanus spiralis)

Family Pandanaceae, the pandans

An encounter with the razor-sharp spines that line the leaves of screw pine is an event that no visitor to the Kimberley will forget! The graceful arching appearance of these trees belies their capacity to inflict injury. Aboriginal people recognised several seasons that marked the flowering and fruiting of certain plants and the breeding of animals, enabling resources to be exploited at the right time. To the Bardi people, the appearance of red nuts (gaamba) on the screw pine in mid-May was the beginning of the barrgana or "cold" season, which is the season for dugong-hunting.

DESCRIPTION: This plant reaches up to 10 metres high and often grows in clumps, with aerial roots extending from the stems. Plants have very narrow leaves, up to two metres long. They are usually a silvery bluish-green and often have minute spines, tipped with reddish-brown, along the midrib and leaf edges. The male flowers are white and arranged in spikes. The tree fruits from May to September. When ripe, the spherical compound fruits are reddish-orange, with from six to 24 individual, but fused, fruitlets.

OTHER NAMES: Pandanus. The Bardi name is iidool; the Yawuru name wagire; and the Nyul Nyul name is manbang.

HABITAT: This tree grows on the margins of swamps, the edges of floodplains, along freshwater streams and within open forests and woodlands or coastal dunes such as those near Cape Leveque.

DISTRIBUTION: It is widespread throughout northern Australia.

FLOWERING TIME: November.

ABORIGINAL USAGE: The fruit is cooked in hot ashes, then ground until the seed is visible. The seed is then shaken or prised out with a stick and eaten raw or lightly baked. The aerial roots are used to make medicine for the treatment of colds and headaches. The leaves were also used to fashion footwear.

Photo — Chris Done

Above: *The spirally arranged leaves*
Right: *The compound fruits*
Below: *Whole tree*

CRAB'S EYE BEAN

(Abrus precatorius)

Family Papilionaceae, the peas

The colourful red and black seeds of crab's eye bean are not only highly decorative, but extremely toxic. One bean contains more than enough toxin to kill an adult, but the poison is not released unless the hard outer seed coat is cracked. They are used by Aboriginal people for decorative purposes.

DESCRIPTION: Crab's eye bean is a scrambling vine with trailing or twining stems, which may lose its leaves during the dry season. The leaves are complex in structure, each consisting of seven to 16 pairs of small leaflets. The leaflets are usually up to one and a half centimetres long. The mauve flowers are produced in clusters. The oblong pea-like pods are up to four and a half centimetres long, holding between three and seven colourful seeds. The valves twist at maturity, revealing the shiny scarlet and black seeds which remain attached to the pod for some time.

OTHER NAMES: Prayer bean, precatory bean. The Bardi name is ngaming-ngaming and the Yawuru call it jinjalgurany.

HABITAT: This plant is widespread in light brown sands behind coastal dunes and in sandstone areas. It is common in vine and rainforest thickets.

DISTRIBUTION: Crab's eye bean grows throughout the tropical areas of the world. As well as being widespread in the Kimberley, it is also found in the Northern Territory, Queensland and New South Wales.

FLOWERING TIME: In December and from February to April.

ABORIGINAL USAGE: The red and black seeds are made into necklaces and, since European settlement, rosary beads.

GREEN BIRDFLOWER

(Crotalaria cunninghamii)

Family Papilionaceae, the peas

This distinctive plant is named for its massed green, bird-shaped flowers. Green birdflower regenerates rapidly after fire or other disturbances. It was first collected by Allan Cunningham in 1822, from Cygnet Bay north of Broome. The green flowers are pollinated by large bees and honeyeaters, unlike other *Crotalaria* species, which are yellow-flowered and strictly bee-pollinated.

DESCRIPTION: Green birdflower grows as an erect shrub up to four metres tall. Its branchlets are often slightly angular and covered with soft, downy hairs. The leaves have a jointed stalk and are greyish-green, broad and densely hairy on both sides. The large flowers, up to five centimetres long, are green to yellowish-green with conspicuous brown to purple markings. The sausage-shaped pods are up to five centimetres long and densely covered with short hairs. They appear from February to November and each contains about 20 seeds.

OTHER NAMES: Bilbun, birdflower rattlepod, dwarf birdflower, galdjal, kunan, murlun, parrot pea, parrot-plant, piban, taliwanti, taliyintiri. The Bardi name for this plant is oorlgoo; the Yawuru call it minmin.

HABITAT: Green birdflower is very common on and behind coastal sand dunes and inland on loose sand in shrubland, grassland or savannah woodland.

DISTRIBUTION: This plant grows throughout the Kimberley and Pilbara regions of WA, as well as the Northern Territory, South Australia, Queensland and New South Wales.

FLOWERING TIME: February to November.

ABORIGINAL USAGE: Aboriginal people drank the nectar of green birdflower and sucked water from it.

Photo — Babs & Bert Wells/CALM

WHITE DRAGON TREE

(Sesbania formosa)

Family Papilionaceae, the peas

The white dragon tree bears clusters of spectacular white flowers, which are the largest of any native legume in WA. It is generally restricted to seasonally wet areas or to the margins of swamps.

DESCRIPTION: This exotic-looking tree makes an attractive display when in flower. It grows up to 12 metres high and has fissured, corky bark. The young stems are light brown, and tan-coloured in the fissures. The bright green leaves are divided into between seven and 15 pairs of leaflets. The individual leaflets are from three to five centimetres long. Large creamy white, fragrant flowers are arranged in sprays. Their petals are about 10 centimetres long. The smooth, slender pods are equally impressive, reaching up to 70 centimetres long.

OTHER NAMES: Swamp corkwood, dragon flower tree. The Bardi name is rirwal or arninyban. The Yuwuru call it rirwal.

HABITAT: This species grows in the wet black mud of seasonal swamps or along the margins of watercourses.

DISTRIBUTION: White dragon tree grows in the Kimberley, Pilbara, Northern Territory and Queensland.

FLOWERING TIME: June to September.

USAGE: White dragon tree is fast-growing (but usually short-lived, dying off after between five and seven years) and has been used extensively in western Africa for revegetating areas devastated by overgrazing. It makes an excellent shade tree. It is often grazed heavily by cattle.

Photo — Babs & Bert Wells/CALM

FLINDERS RIVER POISON

(Tephrosia rosea)

Family Papilionaceae, the peas

One of the most widespread shrubs in the Kimberley, Flinders River poison has dark purple buds and dark pinkish-mauve flowers. The pods are covered with silky hairs.

DESCRIPTION: This erect to sprawling and rather open shrub grows up to two metres tall. Its foliage is quite sparse and is concentrated towards the ends of its branches. Each leaf has five to nine oblong leaflets which have a rounded tip, sometimes with a central notch. They are green and somewhat silky, particularly on the lower surface.

OTHER NAMES: Bungoo'dah. The Bardi name is ilngam.

HABITAT: This species grows in a wide variety of habitats, including light brown sand on coastal dunes, and in shellgrit or travertine areas.

DISTRIBUTION: Flinders River poison is widespread throughout the Kimberley and also grows in the Northern Territory and Queensland.

FLOWERING TIME: The purple flowers and fruits appear for most of the year.

ABORIGINAL USAGE: The Bardi people used root preparations from various *Tephrosia* species to poison reef pools to collect the fish. This was only done during certain seasons.

NOTE: A subspecies of Flinders River poison grows as a bushy, compact shrub of up to one metre on the gravelly sandstone ridges at One Arm Point. Its dark pink to red and purple flowers appear from June to October and in February. It is known by the Bardi name biding.

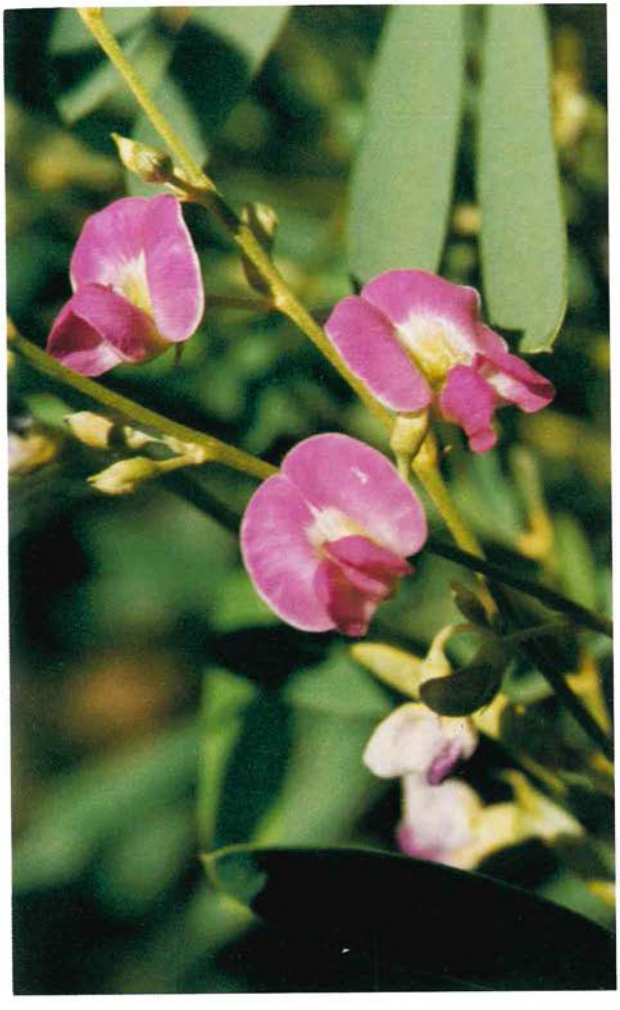


Photo — Brian Carter

SILKY GREVILLEA

(Grevillea pteridifolia)

Family Proteaceae

This striking tree is common throughout the Kimberley, particularly in seasonally wet areas or beside creeks and rivers. It can be recognised by its bright green, finely divided leaves, and dense clusters of bright orange flowers, which appear in the dry season.

DESCRIPTION: Silky grevillea usually grows as a tree or tall shrub between four and 10 metres high, occasionally reaching 18 metres. Its leaves are finely divided into extremely narrow segments. These segments are silvery below and green above and reach up to 27 centimetres long, but only one to three millimetres wide. Numerous flowers are grouped into large sprays, between 40 and 160 centimetres long. In August, this grevillea bears dark brown, densely hairy fruits up to two centimetres long, which contain winged seeds.

OTHER NAMES: Ferny-leaved silky oak, Kimberley Christmas tree.

HABITAT: The species frequents low-lying sandy areas, especially along watercourses.

DISTRIBUTION: Silky grevillea is found across a wide area of the Kimberley but does not extend south of Derby. It also occurs in the Northern Territory and Queensland.

FLOWERING TIME: April to June, but it has also been recorded flowering in December.

ABORIGINAL USAGE: The flowers were steeped in water to extract nectar for drinking.

OTHER USES: When in flower, the abundant nectar of silky grevillea attracts numerous birds. It is a fine ornamental species for northern Australia. However, the plant is considered a potentially serious weed in Florida, USA.

SILVERLEAF GREVILLEA

(Grevillea refracta)

Family Proteaceae

Silverleaf grevillea is common along roads and creeklines. Its attractive silvery leaves and vibrant reddish-orange flowers give it great horticultural potential. There are two varieties in the Kimberley.

DESCRIPTION: This slender shrub or small tree grows up to six metres high. The young branches are covered with down. The leaves are usually divided into three to 11 segments, but are sometimes reduced to a single oblong leaf. They have a green upper surface and silvery lower surface. The reddish-orange to yellow flowers have dense short white hairs, and are arranged in short inflorescences. These are up to 35 millimetres long, with up to 10 flowers. The fruits appear at the same time as the flowers. They become dark brown to black, are up to three centimetres long, and release relatively large, winged seeds.

OTHER NAMES: The Bardi name is jamoordoo.

HABITAT: This species grows in sand in pindan (see page 34), on sandstone outcrops, and on cliffs and plateaus. It is often seen along roads and creeklines.

DISTRIBUTION: Silverleaf grevillea is common and widespread in the Kimberley and Pilbara regions of WA, as well as the Northern Territory and Queensland.

FLOWERING TIME: March to December, but mainly from April to September.

ABORIGINAL USAGE: The branches were used to construct windbreaks in the dry season. The flowers were chewed for their nectar.

Photo — Brian Carter

Photo —Chris Done

WICKHAM'S GREVILLEA

(Grevillea wickhamii)

Family Proteaceae

Wickham's grevillea was named after John Wickham, the first Lieutenant of Charles Darwin's expedition on HMS *Beagle* from 1831 to 1836. He later commanded the ship in WA waters from 1837 to 1838.

DESCRIPTION: This dense shrub may reach five metres high, but is usually smaller. The young stems and leaves are covered with dense hairs. The young leaves are bronze, whereas the mature leaves are a pale bluish-green, with prickly teeth along their edges. The flowers, produced in sprays up to six centimetres long, are yellow-tipped but their colour varies from red to orange-red. The desert form of this species has much larger flowers than that of the northern Kimberley. The dry dark brown to black capsules, around 15 millimetres long, contain two flat seeds.

HABITAT: This grevillea grows well in sandstone and quartzite areas, especially rocky hillsides, outcrops and plateaus.

DISTRIBUTION: Wickham's grevillea grows across the Kimberley, Pilbara, and to the Northern Territory and Queensland.

FLOWERING TIME: May to August.

USAGE: The tree is highly ornamental and has horticultural potential, but requires excellent drainage.

Photo — Babs & Bert Wells

Photo — Babs & Bert Wells/CALM

WILD PEAR

(Persoonia falcata)

Family Proteaceae

In full flower, wild pear is a most attractive shrub. The tree could have horticultural potential but the seeds do not readily germinate. The fruits are regarded as an important Aboriginal food source in the Kalumburu area and by the Bardi people at One Arm Point. Flying foxes also eat the fruit.

DESCRIPTION: Wild pear is usually a small tree, with flaky grey bark, which grows up to six metres high. Its new growth is flushed with bright pink or maroon. The narrow leaves are either sickle-shaped or straight, and up to 25 centimetres long. The cream to yellow, tubular flowers are one and a half centimetres long and are held in long, leafy sprays. The fruits, suspended on a short stalk, appear from December to February. They are at first green, but blacken with maturity.

OTHER NAMES: The Bardi call this tree gamooloon; the Nyul Nyul wongall or wankid; the Yawuru ngaliwany; and the Kalumburu people gandala.

HABITAT: Wild pear is common in the pindan country around Broome and also occurs along watercourses and in gorges. It also grows widely in savannah woodlands.

DISTRIBUTION: This tree grows across a wide area of the Kimberley, the Northern Territory and Queensland.

FLOWERING TIME: July to October.

ABORIGINAL USAGE: The fruits were collected from the ground and eaten raw when ripe. The seeds were pounded and mixed with water to make a black custard.

Photo — Brian Carter

CUNNINGHAM'S BUSH TOMATO

(Solanum cunninghamii)

Family Solanaceae, the tomatoes

Despite its name, it would not do to eat the small, tomato-like berries of this colourful little bush - they are possibly poisonous. The plant is a rusty green colour, and is densely hairy with a few, scattered spines. The flowers are a striking purplish-blue, with conspicuous yellow anthers. The male and female flowers are found on separate plants. The male plants have inflorescences of up to 50 flowers, whereas the females have larger and solitary flowers. The name commemorates Allan Cunningham, the early botanist and explorer who first collected the plant at Cygnet Bay, north of Broome, way back in 1822.

DESCRIPTION: This small shrub usually reaches a height of up to one metre. It has scattered prickles on its stems. The leaves are rusty green above, and silvery or rusty below. The striking flowers are between two and four centimetres in diameter. The berries on the female plants are 20 millimetres across, and enclosed in an enlarged prickly calyx (the outermost floral whorl). The seeds are dark brown.

OTHER NAMES: The Bardi name is langgoorr; the Nyul Nyul call it nankoorr; the Yawuru bunug.

HABITAT: Cunningham's bush tomato is common along the edge of graded roads and throughout near-coastal areas with red, sandy soil.

DISTRIBUTION: This shrub is unique to the Kimberley. It grows in an area from Cape Leveque to south of Broome and east to near Derby.

FLOWERING TIME: It flowers mostly from April to August.

Photo — Brian Carter

STICKY KURRAJONG

(Brachychiton viscidulus)

Family Sterculiaceae, the kurrajongs

The large, pink to red flowers of sticky kurrajong appear in the dry season, after the leaves have dropped from the plant, giving the leafless branches a striking appearance. During the wet, the large felted leaves reappear. Several species of kurrajong grow in the Kimberley. They attract large numbers of nectar-feeding birds, such as friar birds and brown honeyeaters, which pollinate the flowers.

DESCRIPTION: Sticky kurrajong grows as a shrub or tree up to seven metres high. Its dark brown to black bark has deep fissures. The large sticky leaves have three shallow lobes and are dull green above and paler below. There are distinct male and female flowers on the same plant. The bell-shaped flowers, between four and six centimetres long, are covered in sticky, resinous hairs. The woody fruits are between seven and ten centimetres long and are seen between May and March. The fruit splits open to display honeycomb-like apartments, from which the numerous yellow seeds are shed.

OTHER NAMES: Kimberley rose, darlab, djalad.

HABITAT: This plant usually grows in sandy areas on hills, amongst sandstone and basalt rocks. It is found in open vine thicket and woodland areas.

DISTRIBUTION: Sticky kurrajong grows only in the Kimberley. It ranges from near Derby, north to Wyndham and south to the Napier Range.

FLOWERING TIME: April to December.

SIGHTING RECORD

SPECIES	DATE	LOCALITY	REMARKS
bachelor's button			
purple mulla-mulla			
Mitchell Plateau fan palm			
grey mangrove			
boab			
camel bush			
Kimberley bauhinia			
cockroach bush			
northern tinsel flower			
kapok bush			
beach morning glory			
Christmas mistletoe			
native cotton			
elephant ear wattle			
pindan wattle			
Kimberley heath			

SIGHTING RECORD

SPECIES	DATE	LOCALITY	REMARKS
twin-leaf bloodwood			
woollybutt			
long-fruited bloodwood			
river cadjeput			
blue water lily			
screw pine			
crab's eye bean			
green birdflower			
white dragon tree			
Flinders River poison			
silky grevillea			
silverleaf grevillea			
Wickham's grevillea			
wild pear			
Cunningham's bush tomato			
sticky kurrajong			

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4152-1295-7500

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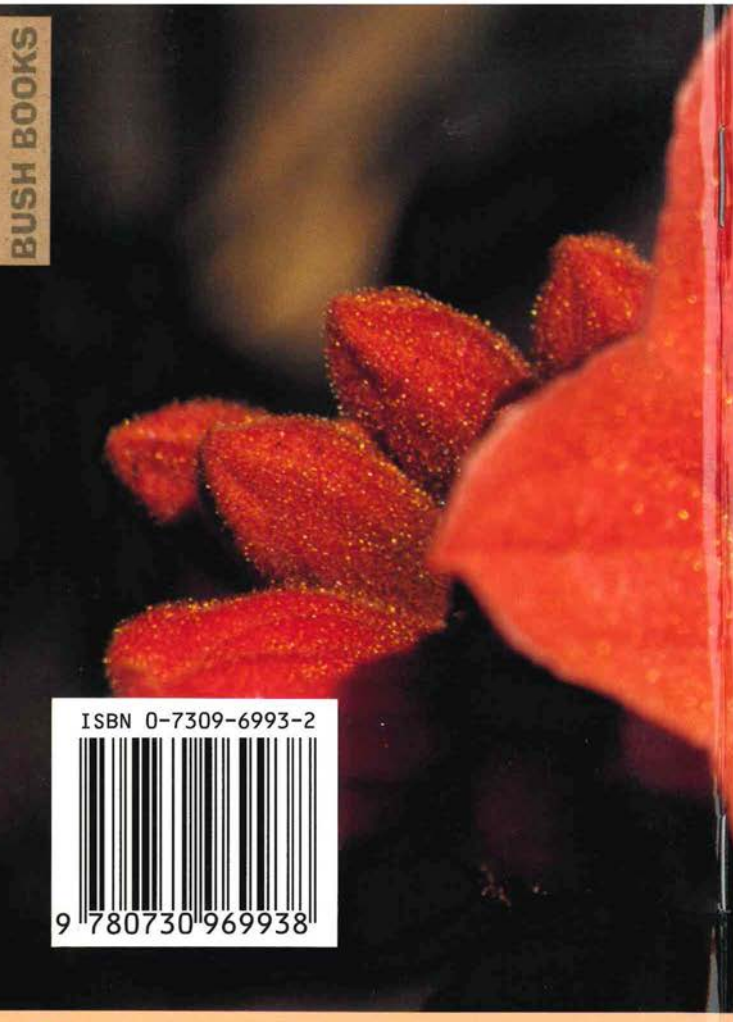
BUSH BOOKS



ISBN 0-7309-6993-2

DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND LAND MANAGEMENT