

BUSH BOOKS

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COMMON PLANTS of the Pilbara



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 DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND LAND MANAGEMENT

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.

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Front cover: Sturt's desert pea. Photo – Babs & Bert Wells/CALM.

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COMMON PLANTS of the Pilbara

by Judymae Napier
and
Stephen van Leeuwen



DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND LAND MANAGEMENT

INTRODUCTION

The Pilbara region, in the north-west of Western Australia, covers a vast area of more than 510,000 square kilometres. It incorporates offshore islands, mangrove forests, river pools, desert sand dunes, mountain ranges and deep gorges. The distinctive flowers and plants of the Pilbara are an important part of the region's natural attractions. They have learnt to adapt to arid conditions.

Tropical cyclones during the summer months bring most of the region's rainfall, when rivers, which are dry for most of the year, flow strongly and flush nutrients onto extensive river and coastal plains. Most of the region's large trees can be found along the major watercourses. Mountain tops of the Hamersley Range, in Karijini National Park, support a number of rare plants, as well as plants more than hundreds of kilometres away from their normal areas of distribution. Gorges support moisture-loving plants, such as ferns, figs and paperbarks, while rock piles, like those on the Burrup Peninsula, protect many species that are sensitive to fire.

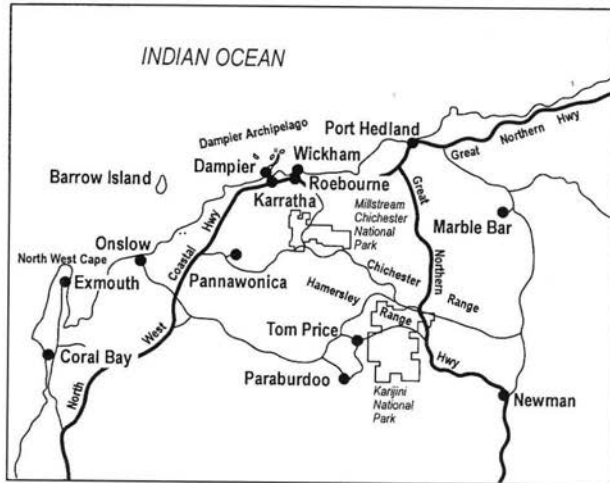
Spinifex dominates the vegetation. It forms hummocks that invade stony soils on slopes and plains throughout much of the region, often in association with low wattles, cassias and bloodwoods. The region has at least 65 species of wattle, of which mulga is the most widespread. In the Pilbara it favours low-lying areas where nutrient-rich soils have accumulated. Mulga provides excellent wood, once used extensively by Aboriginal people for tools and weapons. Many other plants provide food and medicine that are still used by Aboriginal people today.

The plants in this book are arranged alphabetically by plant family, so that related plants are close together. It is hoped that this book will help you to easily identify them, and gain a greater appreciation of their value and beauty.



Photo — Cliff Winfield

Above: *The Chichester Range*



PLANT RELATIONSHIPS

DICOTYLEDONS (plants with two seed leaves)

Amaranthaceae, the mulla-mullas	<i>Ptilotus</i>	(p.6)
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MONOCOTYLEDONS (plants with one seed leaf)

Arecaceae, the palms	<i>Livistona</i>	(p.8)
Poaceae, the grasses	<i>Triodia</i>	(p.58)

shrubs with hairy white, pink or purple flower-spikes
 annual herbs with fine leaves and daisy flowers
 shrubs with yellow flowers and three stamens
 shrubs with bright yellow flowers and conspicuous pods
 shrubs or trees with numerous stamens and succulent fruit
 shrubs or trees; flowers without petals and winged fruit

trailing or climbing shrubs with large, lobed or unlobed leaves
 trailing or erect shrubs with small, unlobed leaves
 aerial parasites, with succulent fruits and pendulous stems
 shrubs or herbs with small oil glands; 3 outer flower parts
 shrubs or herbs with showy flowers; 5-12 outer flower parts
 trees with rounded fruits; separate male and female plants
 shrubs or trees with yellow or white blossoms in fluffy heads
 trees, shrubs or climbers; soft fruits; rough leathery leaves
 shrubs or small trees with small, fuschia-shaped flowers
 gum trees with rough bark and fruits on leafless branches
 gum trees with leafy flowering branches; smooth or rough bark
 trees or shrubs; flowers in compact heads or bottlebrushes
 shrubs or vines; pink to purple flowers; leaves with 3 leaflets
 herbs or shrubs; pea flowers; leaves with more than 3 leaflets
 trees or shrubs with leathery fruits that dry on maturity
 trees or shrubs with a very woody follicle
 shrubs or herbs with irregular purple, pink or white flowers
 herbs, shrubs or small trees; star-shaped flowers; globular fruits
 trees with large lobed or unlobed leaves and boat-shaped fruits

palm trees with unbranched trunks and fan-shaped leaves
 hummock-forming grasses with sharp-pointed leaves

ROYAL MULLA-MULLA

(*Ptilotus rotundifolius*)

Family Amaranthaceae, the mulla-mullas

Royal mulla-mulla is one of the less common, but certainly very attractive, mulla-mullas. You can look for it in Karijini National Park and along the Tom Price-Paraburdoo Road. More than 35 species of mulla-mulla grow in the Pilbara. They range from low, spreading ground covers to shrubs up to two metres high. The flowers, grouped into heads, are usually hairy and come in various shades of pink, yellow, green or white. Most mulla-mullas are prolific seeders and provide spectacular shows of flowers, particularly after good summer rains. Many occupy bare patches of soil between spinifex clumps, while others favour disturbed sites near road verges.

DESCRIPTION: The royal mulla-mulla is a low perennial shrub growing to about a metre tall. The grey, rounded leaves have wavy margins, and are covered with tiny soft hairs. The flower-spikes, up to 10 centimetres long, are bright pink and cylindrical. Plants flower for many months, the colour eventually fading to white.

OTHER NAMES: Showy mulla-mulla.

HABITAT: This species favours rocky hillsides, and gentle slopes among hard spinifex.

DISTRIBUTION: It grows in the Hamersley Range, extending south beyond Wiluna.

FLOWERING TIME: August to October.

USES: Although this species is uncommon in home gardens, it would make an excellent garden specimen, and like many of the other mulla-mullas it may have potential in the cut flower industry.



Photo — Bill Belson/Lochman Transparencies



Photo — Steven Vellacott

MILLSTREAM FAN PALM

(*Livistona alfredii*)

Family *Arecaceae*, the palms

This palm grows in only a handful of locations in the Pilbara and nowhere else, but it is most abundant at Millstream. Its closest relatives can be found in Palm Valley in central Australia. All of Western Australia's other species of fan palm grow in the Kimberley region. The round, woody seed is protected by a fleshy coat. Tiny borers pierce the woody interior to allow water to penetrate and germination commences.

DESCRIPTION: This single-stemmed palm has a dense crown and reaches five to 12 metres high, with a trunk 30 to 50 centimetres in diameter. The species is slow growing. Stubs of old leaf stalks are evident near the base of the grey ringed trunk. The fronds are composed of a broad, relatively short leaf stalk and a large, pale bluish-grey leaf blade, with a waxy surface, divided into segments to about two-thirds of their depth. Each segment is divided again into two long finely-pointed lobes, which droop slightly. Bunches of deep orange flowers appear to nestle amongst the fronds. The large, round fruits, up to four centimetres in diameter, have dark brown skins dotted with pale spots. The flesh is thick and juicy.

HABITAT: The Millstream fan palm inhabits calcareous soils near permanent springs.

DISTRIBUTION: This species grows in only seven locations in the Pilbara, including Millstream and Cape Range.

FLOWERING TIME: August to September.

ABORIGINAL USAGE: The coating around the seed is edible and forms part of the diet of Yinjibarndi Aboriginal people, from the Millstream area.

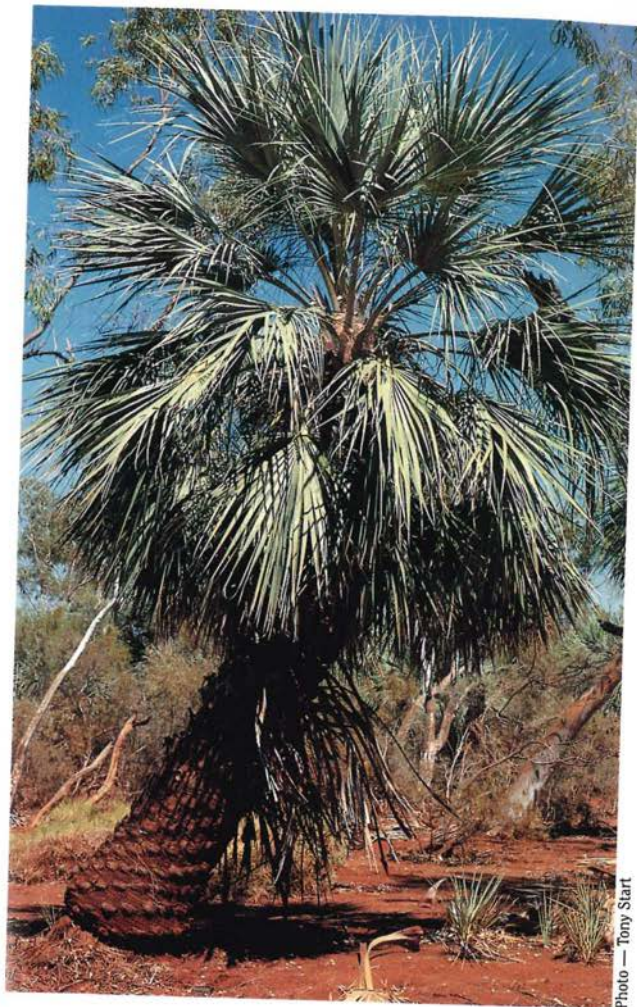


Photo — Tony Start

NATIVE DAISY

(*Brachyscome iberidifolia*)

Family Asteraceae, the daisy family

Native daisies often grow beneath the large mulga communities throughout the Pilbara. These usually short-lived plants flower prolifically throughout the winter months. Like many other species, native daisies make the most of their limited growing season, germinating quickly after heavy rains. They soon flower and set seed, which lies dormant in the leaf litter until suitable conditions for germination take place once again.

DESCRIPTION: This annual species has numerous branches. It has masses of colourful flower heads and fresh green elaborately divided leaves. Flower heads are two and a half centimetres across, with long, ray-like petals in shades of mauve, purple or white, and yellow, black or brown florets in the centre of the flower, surrounding the ovary. The flowers appear singly on the tips of stalks up to six centimetres long. The leaves are also up to six centimetres long. They usually have up to 10 lobes and are attached to the leaf without a leaf stalk.

OTHER NAMES: Swan River daisy.

HABITAT: The native daisy inhabits watercourses, sandhills, mallee sandplains and depressions over granite. It has a liking for sandy, clay or saline soils.

DISTRIBUTION: This plant is found in Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory.

FLOWERING TIME: In the wild, the native daisy flowers from late winter to early spring, but in cultivation it flowers from spring to early summer and intermittently at other times of the year.

USES: It is a popular garden specimen which is both easy to grow and tolerant of most soils and conditions.



Photo — Marie Lochman

SLENDER PETALOSTYLIS

(*Petalostylis labicheoides*)

Family Caesalpinaceae

Cassias, or sennas, make up more than two thirds of this family. The slender petalostylis is often mistaken for a cassia, but is easily distinguished by the red, almost circular mark at the base of the rear petal. It is also much larger than most cassia species.

DESCRIPTION: Slender petalostylis is a large shrub up to three metres high, with bright green foliage. Each leaf is made up of 10 to 30 leaflets, which are broad at one end and pointed near the stem. The species is easily recognised by its orange gold flowers made up of five slightly unequal petals, which resemble those of cassias or buttercups. The flowers are one and a half to two centimetres across. The ripe ovary becomes a flat, light brown pod, up to three centimetres long, which usually contains five light brown, irregularly shaped, smooth seeds. Branches are long, straight and very woody, and often slightly bluish-green.

OTHER NAMES: False cassia, horseshoe cassia. The Robe River Aboriginal people call it mindurige.

HABITAT: This species grows in roadside depressions, open plains and watercourses.

DISTRIBUTION: Slender petalostylis is found throughout the Pilbara, and in the Kimberley, central Australia, Queensland and South Australia.

FLOWERING TIME: June to October.

ABORIGINAL USAGE: The long, straight branches were used to make shafts for spears. Mulga was used to give the spear a weighted point hard enough not to splinter or break on impact. The spear head was bound to the shaft with kangaroo gut, and secured with a glue produced by ants when they feed on soft spinifex. The gum is pliable when heated, but turns rock hard when cooled.



Photo — Marie Lochman

STICKY CASSIA

(*Senna glutinosa*)

Family Caesalpiniaceae, the cassias

Sticky cassia gets its name from the sticky secretions found on leaflets, leaf stalks, flower stalks, young stems and pods. A number of sennas grow in the Pilbara, and all feature attractive yellow flowers shaped like buttercups. They flower throughout the cooler months, and their habitats range from coastal dunes to the slopes of the Hamersley Range. Cassias vary in size from low spreading plants to tall open shrubs and all make excellent garden specimens which are easily propagated from seed. Most are long-lived, apart from the very common cockroach bush (*Senna notabilis*), which colonises bare patches of ground after heavy rains. An attractive subspecies of sticky cassia (subsp. *pruinosa*) looks like it has been dusted with silver powder.

DESCRIPTION: This straggly, upright shrub grows about two metres tall. The leaves are three to seven centimetres long and composed of four to six pairs of leaflets. Each leaflet is two to four millimetres wide, and tapers evenly to a point at each end. The main stem has a leafy branched crown and the bright yellow flowers are in clusters of three to six. The oval-shaped petals taper evenly to a point. The pods, up to six centimetres long and a centimetre wide, are flat, shining and sticky. They contain thick, roughly triangular, olive green to dull brown seeds.

HABITAT: The species inhabits rocky soils.

DISTRIBUTION: Sticky cassia grows from the Eighty Mile Beach across to Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek, in the Kimberley, and through the Pilbara and Great Sandy Desert, as far south as Murgoo Station, Meekatharra and the Blackstone Range.

FLOWERING TIME: May to August.



Above: *Sticky cassia*

Below: *The subspecies with silvery leaves*



LIMESTONE CASSIA

(*Senna artemisioides*)

Family Caesalpiniaceae, the cassias

When limestone cassia flowers, it's a sign to Aboriginal people that emu eggs are ready to collect. After a fight with a snake, goannas chew the stems and extract the sap to cure themselves. The Ngarlama Aboriginal people, who once occupied coastal areas near Roebourne, call the plant yaringally.

DESCRIPTION: Limestone cassia is a rounded, sometimes flat-topped, shrub that grows about two metres tall. Leaflets are either bluish-green, or covered with a pale waxy coat, and sometimes with short soft hairs. There are usually one to three pairs. They are typically oval-shaped, often almost round, and up to 30 millimetres long and 20 millimetres wide. Flowers are in heads and occur near the ends of the branches. Pods are straight and up to 10 centimetres long and two centimetres wide.

OTHER NAMES: Oval-leaf cassia.

HABITAT: Limestone cassia favours a variety of habitats, from rocky hillsides to deep sand.

DISTRIBUTION: The plant can be found over wide areas of inland parts of Western Australia, the Northern Territory, Queensland, and South Australia.

FLOWERING TIME: July to November.



Photos — Hammersley Iron

COASTAL CAPER

(*Capparis spinosa*)

Family *Capparaceae*, the caper bushes

Coastal caper is a very attractive plant with large white flowers and bright green foliage. The fruit splits open to expose its tasty reddish-orange flesh, but you should avoid biting into the seeds as they are very peppery. The young flower buds can be pickled and eaten, much like the commercial variety.

DESCRIPTION: This low, sprawling shrub grows up to a metre high and four metres wide. The bright green, coin-shaped leaves have an obvious central vein and they are slightly fleshy. The flowers have large white petals and numerous showy stamens which extend for half the length of the petals. The flowers are at their best in the cool of the evening, but are usually purple and droopy during the heat of the day. The shiny green ovary is held on a long stalk that extends beyond the stamens, and becomes orange as it matures. The leathery, ribbed fruit, up to five centimetres long, splits lengthwise to reveal a number of dark brown seeds and a sticky, orange pulp.

OTHER NAMES: Caper bush, Flinder's rose. Ngarlama people call the plant budjilla and Yinjibarndi people from the Millstream area call the plant patyila.

HABITAT: Coastal caper grows on rocky coasts, along river banks and around inland depressions.

DISTRIBUTION: This species can be found throughout the Northern Territory, Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia, and also grows overseas.

FLOWERING TIME: Coastal caper flowers sporadically all year round. Flowers are more visible and last longer in the cooler months.

ABORIGINAL USAGE: Aboriginal people had to compete with the bush turkey for the raw fruit, which was eaten when ripe.



Photo — Babs & Bert Wells/CALM

WINGNUT TREE

(*Terminalia canescens*)

Family Combretaceae

Although a number of *Terminalia* species are found throughout the Kimberley region, only two species grow in the Pilbara. The wingnut tree is a small to medium-sized tree, occasionally growing up to 10 metres tall. The other species (*Terminalia supranatifolia*) grows only on the Burrup Peninsula and about 30 kilometres south of Karratha, and is more of a large spreading shrub than a tree.

DESCRIPTION: Fissured grey bark covers the trunk and branches of this tree. The silver leaves are about five centimetres long and two centimetres wide. Small cream, tubular flowers are arranged in spikes about five centimetres long and two centimetres wide. The mature fruit, two to three centimetres long and one or two centimetres wide, has two wings surrounding a central nut. The small, edible seeds are difficult to remove from the capsule intact.

OTHER NAMES: Native almond, joolal.

HABITAT: The wingnut tree inhabits creek beds and rocky outcrops.

DISTRIBUTION: This species is found around Karratha, Dampier and the Burrup Peninsula, extending inland to Millstream-Chichester and Karijini national parks. It also grows in the Kimberley region, the Northern Territory and Queensland.

FLOWERING TIME: The wingnut tree usually flowers and fruits from January to July, depending upon available water.

ABORIGINAL USAGE: The seeds are edible.



Above: *Flowers*

Below: *The winged nuts*



POISON MORNING GLORY

(*Ipomoea muellerii*)

Family Convolvulaceae, the morning glories

Poison morning glory is, as its name suggests, toxic to stock, and has caused heavy sheep losses in Western Australia. Affected animals steadily deteriorate in condition and eventually lose the use of their hind limbs. There is no effective treatment, and the only preventative measure is to remove stock from areas where this plant is the major source of forage. However, its edible root tuber is sought after by Aboriginal people. The plant is related to the bush potato (*Ipomoea costata*), a twining shrub up to about two metres tall, which grows in rocky outcrops near Dampier and further inland.

DESCRIPTION: Poison morning glory is a sprawling perennial ground cover up to three metres wide, with twining stems. Its heart-shaped, dark green leaves are up to four centimetres long and two to three centimetres wide. The lilac or pink flowers have a darker throat and are shaped like a funnel or trumpet. The flowers are up to four centimetres long and five centimetres in diameter. The round capsule has a papery outside coat and holds four grey, felted, three-sided seeds.

OTHER NAMES: Native morning glory.

HABITAT: This species likes alluvial loam or gravelly soils in shrub and steppe country, and grows along river courses.

DISTRIBUTION: Poison morning glory extends from Carnarvon east to the desert and north-east to the Kimberley and Northern Territory.

FLOWERING TIME: May to September.

USES: The plant's tubers are eaten by Aboriginal people. No information is available on the preparation, if any, that was used before eating.

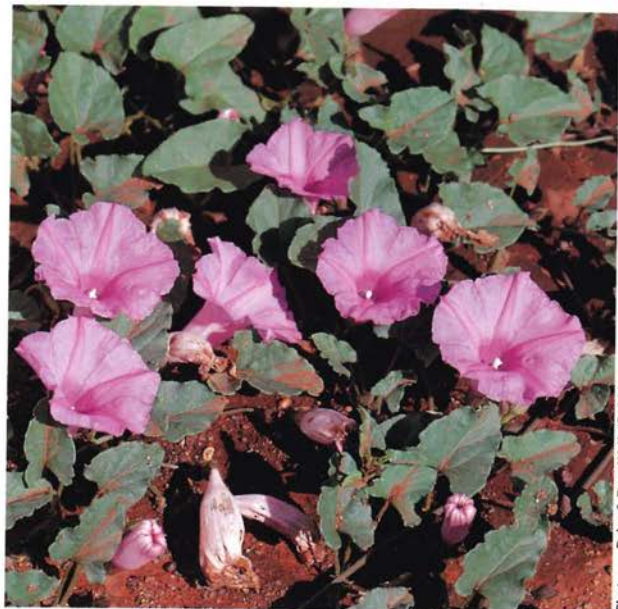


Photo — Babs & Bert Wells/CALM

CREeping POLYMERIA

(*Polymeria ambigua*)

Family Convolvulaceae, the morning glories

This attractive little ground cover has white to pale pink flowers, and can be spotted in disturbed areas. Look for it along the roadside between the towns of Roebourne and Wickham and in Karijini National Park.

DESCRIPTION: This trailing plant forms a temporary, but dense, ground cover and may reach up to 60 centimetres wide and 20 centimetres tall. The oval-shaped leaves, two to four centimetres long and two centimetres wide, are sometimes quite rounded. Both stems and leaves are covered with short soft hairs, often giving it a golden appearance. The white or delicate pink flowers are either solitary or in small clusters between the axis of its leaves and the trailing stems. They are about one and a half centimetres wide. The petals are fused into a trumpet shape with a central star. The fruits or seed capsules are oval-shaped and the seeds are covered with tiny hairs.

OTHER NAMES: Tangled morning glory.

HABITAT: Creeping polymeria invades rocky soils along roadsides or soils that have been disturbed, but often appears on sand or clay and in grasslands and pindan soils.

DISTRIBUTION: This species extends from the King Leopold Range in the Kimberley, south to Exmouth and inland to Paraburdoo and grows in the Northern Territory and Queensland.

FLOWERING TIME: April to September.



Photo — Brian Carter

HARLEQUIN MISTLETOE

(*Lysiana casuarinae*)

Family Loranthaceae, the mistletoes

This attractive stem parasite relies on host plants for support, taking up food and water through the host's stems. It rarely grows on plants taller than two metres. Mistletoe is closely associated with the mistletoe bird. Each flower produces a seed covered with a sticky substance and a sweet sugary layer encased in a thin red or pink skin. Mistletoe birds can often be seen squeezing the seed from the fruit and leaving the papery coating attached to the vine. The seed passes through the bird and is deposited on a branch when the bird wipes its bottom. If conditions are right, it germinates and the tip of the root pierces the bark and forms a woody structure, called a haustorium, on the host plant. This connects the tissue of the two plants, a shoot soon develops and a new plant is on the way.

DESCRIPTION: Harlequin mistletoe has a weeping, droopy habit. Its dull green leaves are up to nine centimetres long and one and a half millimetres wide. They are shaped like long cylinders and are slightly enlarged at their base. The bright red, tubular flowers, up to 50 millimetres long, are either solitary or held in pairs. They split open to expose the anthers and style. The succulent, oval-shaped fruit reaches up to 10 millimetres long.

HABITAT: Harlequin mistletoe grows on a wide range of hosts, including wattles, cassias, native hibiscus and royal mulla-mulla.

DISTRIBUTION: This mistletoe grows in semi-arid woodlands, from the Hamersley Range to Norseman.

FLOWERING TIME: May to September.



Photo — Babs & Bert Wells/CALM

ROBINSON'S DESERT ROSE

(*Gossypium robinsonii*)

Family Malvaceae, the hibiscus family

The large and very striking flowers of Robinson's desert rose are mauve with a deep purplish-black centre, a pinkish style and black to red stamens. Other members of the hibiscus family found in the Pilbara include Sturt's desert rose (*Gossypium sturtianum*) and the Australian desert rose (*Gossypium australe*). Both species have pinkish-mauve flowers, but neither plant grows as tall as Robinson's desert rose. Sturt's desert rose has rounded bluish-green leaves with tiny black dots, and the Australian desert rose has greyish-green oval-shaped leaves covered with short, soft hairs.

DESCRIPTION: Robinson's desert rose is a tall, upright shrub that may reach three metres high. The dark green leaves are deeply divided, with between three and five lobes. The flowers, up to ten centimetres across, have overlapping petals dotted with red and black spots.

OTHER NAMES: Wild cotton. The Kurrama name is waddawa.

HABITAT: Robinson's desert rose inhabits rocky soils, often along creeklines. The plant is quite common in Millstream-Chichester and Karijini national parks.

DISTRIBUTION: This species extends from Cape Range to Hamersley Range and south to the Barlee Range.

FLOWERING TIME: July to October.

ABORIGINAL USAGE: Members of the Kurrama language group from around Karijini National Park and Tom Price used the long, straight branches to make spears and dancing sticks.



Photo — Babs & Bert Wells/CALM

YELLOW HIBISCUS

(*Hibiscus panduriformis*)

Family Malvaceae, the hibiscus family

Yellow hibiscus has exotic, brilliant yellow flowers, with a deep maroon centre. You should avoid touching the oval-shaped pods. The small hairs with which they are covered can break off in the skin and cause severe itchiness.

DESCRIPTION: This large, sprawling shrub grows up to four metres tall. Its rounded, dull green leaves are between three and nine centimetres across on long stalks. The dull green, velvety leaves usually have three lobes, with rounded teeth along the margins. The underside is slightly lighter than the top. Solitary yellow flowers are borne along the branches. The fruit capsule has five chambers and splits lengthwise, releasing the seeds at different times.

OTHER NAMES: North-West hibiscus. The Kurrama name is banjini.

HABITAT: Yellow hibiscus usually grows along watercourses.

DISTRIBUTION: The plant is widespread in Western Australia, extending as far south as Carnarvon, eastwards to the fringes of the desert, and north to the Drysdale River in the Kimberley. It is also found in the Northern Territory, and Queensland, and ranges from Africa through Asia to Indonesia and the Philippines.

FLOWERING TIME: All year round.

ABORIGINAL USAGE: The plant has edible seeds.



Photo — Tony Tapper

DESERT WALNUT

(*Owenia reticulata*)

Family Meliaceae

The desert walnut is a very attractive tree that almost looks out of place amongst the spinifex hummocks and wattle scrub. It has excellent potential as a shade tree for parks and home gardens but is difficult to propagate. The nuts must be well worn and eroded before they can germinate. This process is undertaken by termites over many years, as the seeds lie dormant in the leaf litter at the base of mature trees. Old seeds readily germinate, but fresh ones must be deeply scarified, or left to break down further.

DESCRIPTION: This tree has a thick trunk and a dense, rounded canopy and reaches around seven metres tall. Each dark green leaf is made up of 12 pairs of leaflets. Each oval-shaped leaflet is 20 centimetres long and 10 centimetres wide, and feels quite leathery. The prominent, raised veins form a net-like pattern. Male and female flowers occur on separate plants. Large purple globular fruits are borne on the ends of the branches. They grow up to four centimetres in diameter, and shed their thin, smooth outer skin to reveal a pitted, peach-like nut with a thick, fibrous shell.

OTHER NAMES: Pundull tree. The species is also known by the Ngarluma people as burogurya.

HABITAT: The desert walnut prefers red sandy loam soils.

DISTRIBUTION: This plant grows from South Hedland south to the Turner River. A few scattered trees can be seen on either side of the North West Coastal Highway, between Karratha and Roebourne near the Cleaverville turn-off. They have a distinctive lollipop shape.

FLOWERING TIME: August to October.

ABORIGINAL USAGE: The large round nuts are picked when darkening (not green) then baked in a fire. The oily seed inside is then used to rub sores.

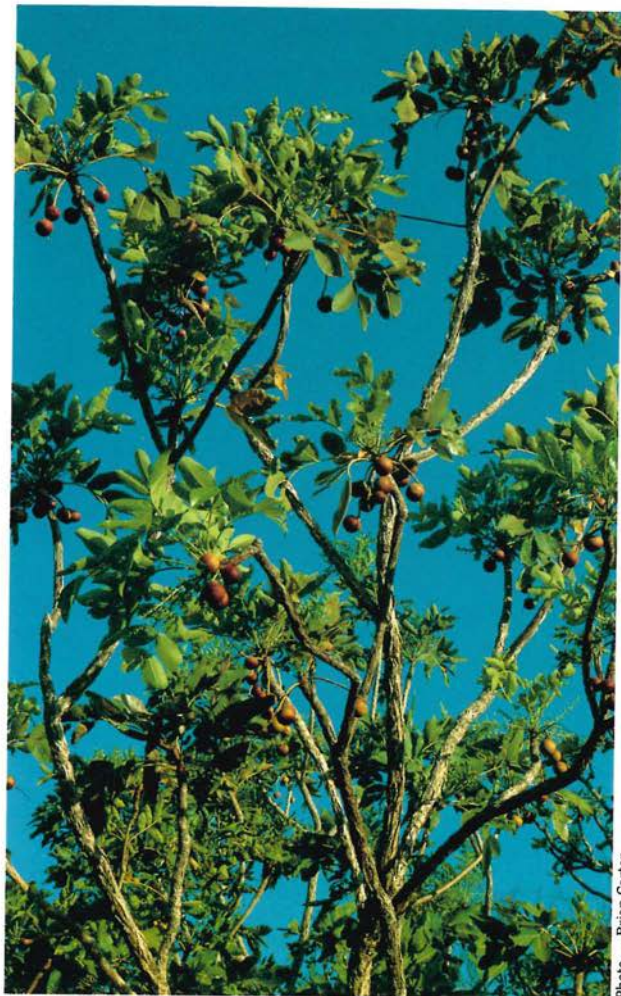


Photo — Brian Carter

MULGA

(*Acacia aneura*)

Family Mimosaceae, the wattles

Mulga is the most common and abundant wattle species in the Pilbara. It has some interesting adaptations and survives well in poor conditions. It grows in stands, with mature trees providing shade for the young seedlings. The young trees resemble small pines, but the branches spread out as they mature. The leaf-like phyllodes point up to catch all available rainfall and channel it down the branches and stems to the root zone below.

DESCRIPTION: Mulga is either a greyish-green bush or small tree. In the desert it often takes on a brownish hue, but turns green after heavy rains. The phyllodes (flattened stems that function as leaves) vary in shape. Flower-spikes are cylindrical and the papery pods are short and flat, reaching no more than five centimetres long.

OTHER NAMES: Wanari. The Kurrama people call it windamarra.

HABITAT: Mulga prefers alluvial sites but also grows in rocky and skeletal soils.

DISTRIBUTION: In Western Australia, mulga grows from the Fortescue Valley east across the Hamersley Range and into the Little Sandy and Gibson Deserts. Growing between latitudes 20° and 34°, it is probably Australia's most common and abundant wattle. It occurs in every mainland State except Victoria, but is absent from the eastern coast of the continent.

FLOWERING TIME: Mulga flowers throughout the year.

ABORIGINAL USAGE: The wood was traditionally used to make spears and spear heads (see page 12). It is both ornamental and hard, and is often used for artefacts and weapons for the tourist market. The roots were used for firesticks and edible galls on the stems were a sought-after food.

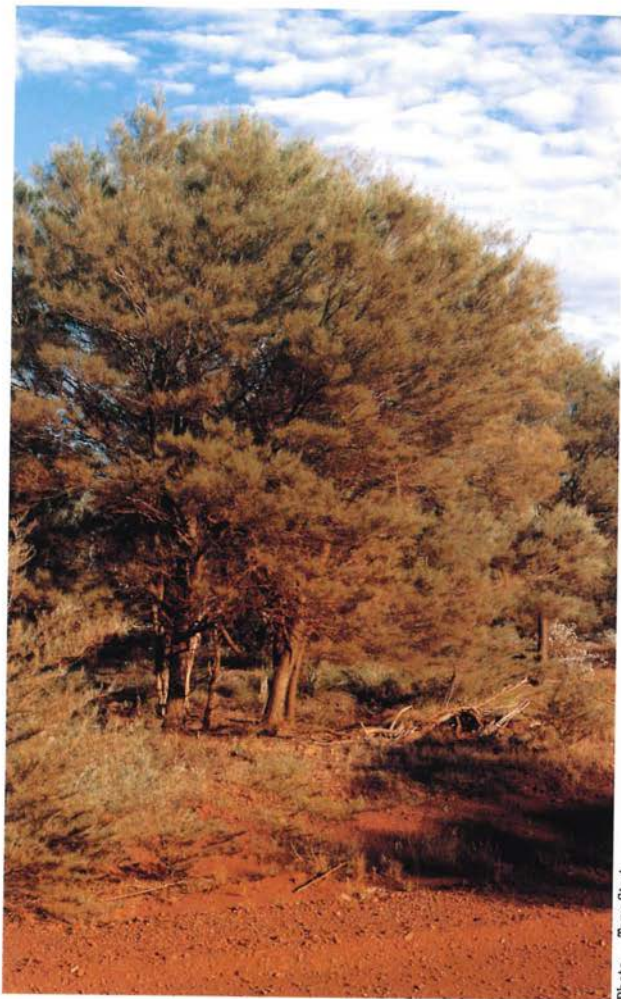


Photo — Tony Start

WEeping WIREWOOD

(*Acacia coriacea*)

Family Mimosaceae, the wattles

Weeping wirewood has long weeping branches and attractive new foliage. The globular, lemon-coloured flower heads have a pleasant perfume. There are three subspecies of weeping wirewood, two confined almost completely to the Pilbara (subsp. *coriacea* and subsp. *pendens*). The third (subsp. *sericophylla*) grows in all mainland states except Victoria.

DESCRIPTION: Weeping wirewood is a tree between three and six metres tall. It has thin, hard, grey, fibrous bark and graceful weeping branchlets and foliage. The phyllodes (modified leaf stalks) are silvery green, whereas the new foliage is a bright lime green. The phyllodes are up to 27 centimetres long and five millimetres wide. The cream pods twist and coil, before bursting open to disperse their seed. The dark brown seeds are half covered by an orange, hat-like structure called an aril.

OTHER NAMES: Leather-leaved wattle, desert oak. The Ngarluma people call the plant wahrdang, the Yinjibarndi people call it partaurru and the Kurrama name is wardany.

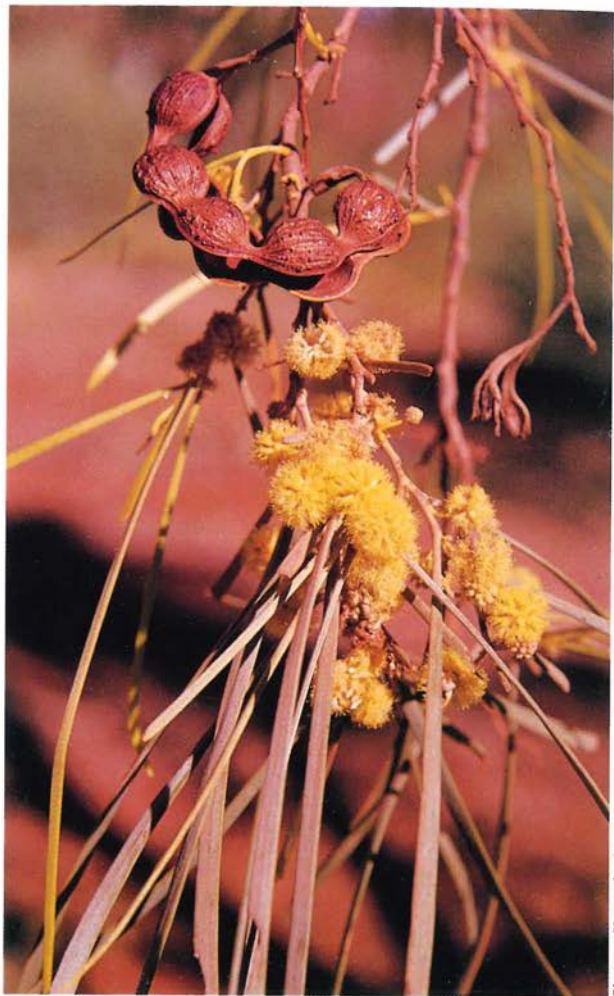
HABITAT: Weeping wirewood grows mainly along rivers and creeks, on sandy soils and stable sand dunes. It is less common on red sand and gravel in fringing woodland.

DISTRIBUTION: This tree extends from the Gascoyne River north to the De Grey River and inland to the Oakover River.

FLOWERING TIME: Weeping wirewood flowers from March to August and after substantial summer rains.

ABORIGINAL USAGE: The wood was used to make spears and shields which were popular as weapons for trade. The ash from burnt twigs was used with tobacco as a chewing quid.

OTHER USES: Weeping wirewood is a very attractive plant for home gardens, making an excellent shade tree.



KANJI

(*Acacia pyrifolia*)

Family Mimosaceae, the wattles

The silvery grey colour of the kanji bush provides an attractive contrast to the surrounding vegetation. The species name *pyrifolia* refers to the pear-shaped phyllodes (flattened leaf-stalks that act as leaves). When young pods began to form on this plant Aboriginal people knew that galahs were nesting. By the time the pods were brown the young birds were ready to fly. Wild turkeys feed on the gum found on this wattle.

DESCRIPTION: This straggly shrub is covered with a fine silvery coating. It grows up to four metres tall and has hard spikes along the stem. The leaf-like phyllodes are large and pear-shaped, with a central mid rib and a sharp tip. Yellow, globular flowers are arranged in loose bunches at the ends of slender branches, and are generally held above the shrub. The curved, flat pods, seven centimetres long and a centimetre wide, have wavy margins and are swollen over the black seeds.

OTHER NAMES: Ranji bush. The Ngarlama people call the bush kunji, the seeds toondoo and the gum karlarung. The Yinjibarndi people know the bush as kanytyi, the seed as thurnrtu, and the gum as kartangu. The Kurrama name is jirbarli.

HABITAT: Kanji inhabits hills and plains.

DISTRIBUTION: The plant grows from Carnarvon, to the southern Kimberley, south-east to Meekatharra and into the desert.

FLOWERING TIME: May to October.

ABORIGINAL USAGE: The green seed pods were dropped into burning spinifex and lightly roasted before eating. The seeds could also be eaten raw. A sweet gum, which is exuded from the stems in summer, was eaten straight from the tree. It is a mild laxative.

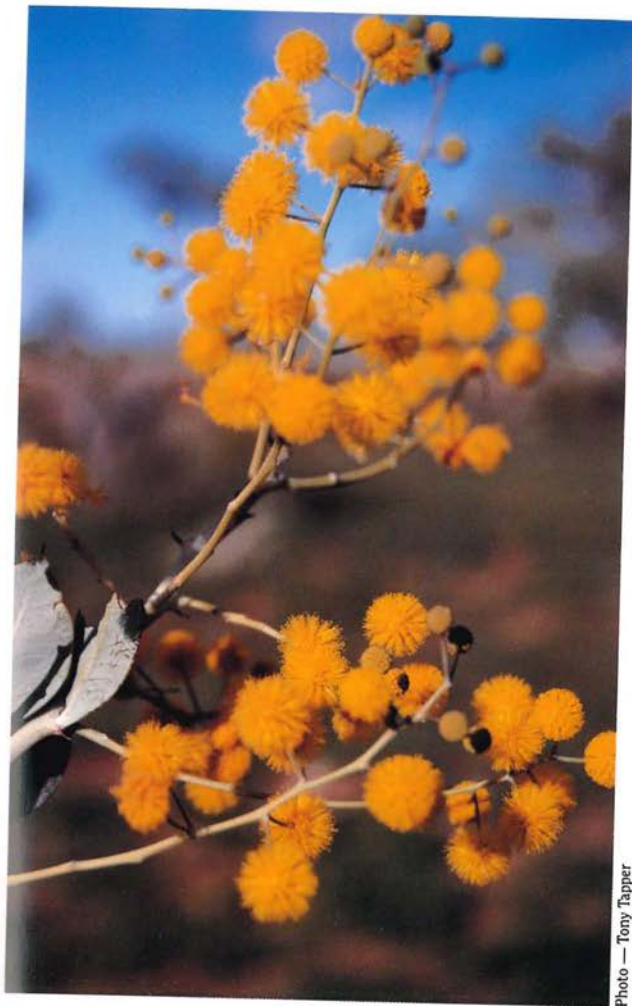


Photo — Tony Tapper

COMMON ROCK FIG

(*Ficus platypoda*)

Family Moraceae, the figs

Birds and bats eat the fruits of common rock fig, often depositing the fleshy seeds on sheltered rock ledges. With a minute amount of soil, and adequate moisture, seeds will soon germinate, and plant roots can be seen growing tens of metres down gorge walls to reach fresh water. Exposed roots are gnarled and twisted. What appears to be a yellow fleshy fruit, is in fact numerous flowers enclosed in a fleshy receptacle, called a false fruit. The rock fig is common at Cape Range National Park, on the Dampier Archipelago and Burrup Peninsula, and in the gorges of the Karijini National Park.

DESCRIPTION: The common rock fig grows as a sprawling shrub or tree up to six metres tall, and potentially five metres wide, depending on the availability of water. Leaves are arranged alternately along the stems. Rock figs growing in the Pilbara typically have oval-shaped leaves tapering evenly at both ends, but can sometimes be broadest below the middle, or rounded at the base near the leaf stalk. They can be hairless or velvety beneath, and are leathery with distinct lateral veins and a milky sap.

OTHER NAMES: Ngarluma people call the rock fig winjarra and Yinjibarndi people call it winyarr. The Kurrama name is winyarrba.

HABITAT: This tree usually perches on rocky outcrops and rock faces, generally near water, where plants are protected from fire.

DISTRIBUTION: The common rock fig grows throughout north-western Australia, and in northern parts of the Northern Territory and Queensland.

FLOWERING TIME: Flowers and seeds are produced all year round.

ABORIGINAL USAGE: The fruit was eaten when ripe.

USES: The common rock fig has excellent potential as a garden plant and is easily propagated from cuttings.

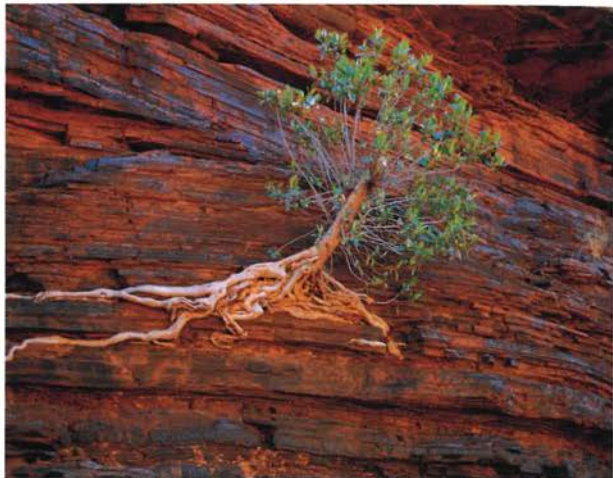


Photo — Cliff Winfield



Photo — Jiri Lochman

BURRA

(*Eremophila fraserii*)

Family Myoporaceae

Numerous species of poverty bush (*Eremophila* species) grow in the Pilbara. Most are low shrubs with small fuschia-shaped flowers. Burra is one of the most distinctive species and is easily spotted from the road.

DESCRIPTION: Burra is a very rounded shrub up to two metres tall. It has many branches and dense foliage. The glossy, bright green leaves are up to eight centimetres long and two centimetres wide. The stems and leaves are covered with a sticky substance, and old leaf bases remain attached to the stems, imparting a rough, scaly appearance. The flowers are held on slender erect stalks, and the bright pink, fleshy sepals provide a colourful show long after the flowers have dropped. The flowers themselves are very attractive. They are generally cream, with a finely spotted throat, from which two of the four stamens emerge. The tapering, egg-shaped fruit is about five millimetres across.

OTHER NAMES: Native fuschia, turpentine bush. The Kurrama people call the plant jilanba.

HABITAT: Burra grows on floodplains, in watercourses and on stony plains and hills. It associates with mulga and other acacias, wild tomato and cassias and tends to favour shallow soils with a hard pan, rather than deeper sandy loams. It is common on alluvial plains.

DISTRIBUTION: This plant ranges from the Ashburton River and the Hamersley Range south to Paynes Find and Laverton.

FLOWERING TIME: July to October.

ABORIGINAL USAGE: The leaves and stems were burnt to repel mosquitoes.

OTHER USES: Burra would make an attractive garden specimen but is hard to propagate.



Photo — Tony Start



Photo — Marie Lechman

SPOTTED EMU BUSH

(*Eremophila maculata*)

Family Myoporaceae

Spotted emu bush produces cyanide and is reputed to be toxic to stock at certain times in some places. The young leaves are the most poisonous, but the plant is grazed heavily in many areas without problems. The flowers usually have a spotted throat, and the species name *maculata* means "spotted".

DESCRIPTION: Spotted emu bush is a spreading shrub (see photo on page 70) growing to about one and a half metres tall and up to two and a half metres wide. The stiff, usually white, branches are densely covered with short, soft hairs. The dark green leaves vary slightly in shape, but generally taper to a point at both ends and have very short leaf stalks. They are either hairless or sparsely hairy. Solitary red or deep pink flowers emerge from the axis between the leaves and stem. They are held on S-shaped stalks two centimetres long. Hard, rounded fruits, one and a half to two centimetres wide, have a light brown papery covering.

OTHER NAMES: Native fuchsia, spotted fuchsia.

HABITAT: Spotted emu bush typically grows on alluvial loam (sometimes saline) in open areas or under mulga.

DISTRIBUTION: This plant is common in pastoral areas, from Exmouth and Wittenoom south to Kalgoorlie and east across the Nullarbor Plain. It also grows in the Northern Territory.

FLOWERING TIME: July to October.



Photo — Tony Tapper

DESERT BLOODWOOD

(*Corymbia deserticola*)

Family Myrtaceae, the myrtles

The desert bloodwood is an attractive small tree or mallee with smooth, dull green leaves. Previously considered to be eucalypts, the bloodwoods have recently been reclassified by botanists into a separate genus and are now known as corymbias. The reclassification was based upon detailed study of flower parts and fruits.

DESCRIPTION: The leaves of this tree are arranged in opposite pairs along the stem, and have very short leaf stalks. The desert bloodwood has cream flowers held in bunches. Fruits are one and a half centimetres long and just over a centimetre wide. The reddish-brown bark is tessellated, which means that the dead bark is retained and breaks into small, hard, woody plates.

OTHER NAMES: Western rough-leaf bloodwood.

HABITAT: This tree inhabits creeks, shallow depressions and rocky plains, often in association with spinifex and wattles.

DISTRIBUTION: The desert bloodwood is widespread, growing from south of Kumarina, throughout the Pilbara (including the summit of Mt Meharry, Western Australia's highest peak), and eastwards through the central deserts into the Northern Territory.

FLOWERING TIME: Buds appear in November and the plant flowers from December to January.

ABORIGINAL USAGE: A number of bloodwood species grow in the Pilbara. Some are known for the wagarlu, or bush apples, found on the stems. These are galls induced by wasps. When green, they taste like bitter coconut. The insect inside is also edible. All bloodwoods exude red gum, known as kino. This has medicinal qualities and was used as a blood purifier. It was sometimes boiled to produce a liquid, used as a remedy for a weak heart. The tree is also a good source of sugarbag honey.



Photo — Wally Edgcombe



Photo — Hammersley Iron



Photo — Stephen van Leeuwen

SNAPPY GUM

(*Eucalyptus leucophloia*)

Family **Myrtaceae**, the myrtles

Snappy gum grows on rocky slopes of the Pilbara, in association with spinifex. After a fire, it will regenerate quickly from its lignotuber, a woody rootstock that can send up numerous stems.

DESCRIPTION: Snappy gum is an attractive and robust tree that may reach up to six metres tall. The white or pinkish bark is smooth and powdery, but often dimpled with small black flakes. The adult leaves are a pale bluish-green, while new leaves in the crown are whitish. The small cream flowers, up to five millimetres across, are clustered into groups of between seven and 11. Fruit is up to nine millimetres long and five millimetres across.

OTHER NAMES: Migum (Yinjibarndi language group), kardabirangul (Kurruma language group).

HABITAT: This tree is found on low, stony hills or on plateaus and slopes.

DISTRIBUTION: Snappy gum is common in the Pilbara and extends as far as Rudall River and Barlee Range.

FLOWERING TIME: April to June.

ABORIGINAL USAGE: Knotty outgrowths on the stems known as burls were used to craft bowls for carrying seeds. Honey is often found in the limbs of these trees. Lerps are collected from the leaves and eaten.



Photo — Kevin Kennally



Photo — Tony Start

COOLIBAH

(*Eucalyptus victrix*)

Family **Myrtaceae**, the myrtles

Coolibah is often mistaken for the larger river red gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*), which dominates the banks of the Pilbara's major river systems. The white bark of river red gum is often blotched with reddish-brown, while the leaves are a glossy light green to yellow and the flowers are cream. Coolibah is located away from rivers and is more likely to be found alongside dry creek beds and floodplains.

DESCRIPTION: Coolibah is a medium-sized tree up to 18 metres high. It has an open spreading canopy, and very smooth white bark. Juvenile leaves are up to seven centimetres long and 1.2 centimetres wide. The adult leaves are a dull greyish-green, six to 18 centimetres long and up to 3.6 centimetres wide. The branches have a slightly weeping habit. The mature buds are four to five millimetres long and 2.3 millimetres in diameter. Flowers are small and cream and fruits are about half the size of those of river red gum.

OTHER NAMES: Blackheart gum. The Yinjibarndi Aboriginal people call the coolibah wilu.

HABITAT: The tree is usually confined to floodplains and creeksides, often on red clays, but also on the sandy or stony plains of the Gibson Desert and around lakes in the area.

DISTRIBUTION: Coolibah is widespread, but has a scattered distribution in WA. It can be found in the Murchison River system, from Carnarvon to north-east of Port Hedland, between Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek and eastwards to the Northern Territory.

FLOWERING TIME: November to January.

ABORIGINAL USAGE: The thick bark was cut off to make dishes for carrying. The wood harbours big edible grubs and the hollow centres of the branches are used by native bees for hives.



SILVER CADJEPUT

(*Melaleuca argentea*)

Family Myrtaceae, the myrtles

The papery bark of silver cadjeput is often shed in large sections. The bottlebrush flowers emit a strong, pungent odour which attracts numerous birds and black flying-foxes.

DESCRIPTION: Silver cadjeput is a large tree up to 15 metres tall, with creamy pink papery bark and weeping green foliage. Leaves, up to 15 centimetres long, are arranged alternately along the stems. Young leaves are silvery white, aging to dark green, and often have five main veins. The greenish-cream bottlebrush flowers of this tree are borne in loose spikes, usually in groups at the ends of branches. Spikes are up to 15 centimetres long.

OTHER NAMES: Paperbark. The Yinjibarndi name is marba and the Kurrama name is mirli.

HABITAT: Silver cadjeput grows along the banks of major watercourses, and thrives near permanent pools in rivers and gorges. Good examples can be seen at Millstream-Chichester National Park and in the gorges of Karijini National Park.

DISTRIBUTION: This tree grows from the Gascoyne River north through the Pilbara, and in the northern half of the Kimberley region. It also occurs in the Northern Territory and Queensland.

FLOWERING TIME: Mainly from July to October.

ABORIGINAL USAGE: The water-resistant bark was used by Aboriginal people to construct huts (marbamaya). Disposable trays, known as whardins, were made from a piece of bark pinched at both ends. Ground seeds were tossed in the tray to separate the husks from the grain and used to make damper. Sugarbag honey is often found in the hollow branches.

OTHER USES: The leaves yield an essential oil used for rheumatism in India. This can be inhaled to help clear the chest.



Photo — Cliff Winfield



Photo — Brian Carter

OCEAN BEAN

(*Canavalia rosea*)

Family Papilionaceae, the peas

The petals of flowers belonging to the pea family are quite different to those of most other families. Each flower is made up of a standard, two wings and a keel. Depending on the species, the size of each petal can vary greatly. The standard of the ocean bean is the largest petal and is heart-shaped with a flat bottom, rather than pointed. Where the base of the petal meets the other petals it is pale lemon, and eight white stripes radiate out from this area.

DESCRIPTION: Ocean bean is a twining, climbing or trailing vine with bright green leaves. Each leaf has three leaflets, two opposite each other and the third at the end of the leaf stalk. Mature leaflets are oval-shaped and about seven centimetres long and four centimetres wide. Stems can be up to three or four metres long, and young stems are often reddish-brown and covered with very short soft hairs. Mauve to pink flowers, five centimetres long, are arranged on an erect stalk up to 20 centimetres long. The flowers at the bottom open first, and it is common to see flowers at the top of the stalk and pods at the bottom. Large brown seeds are held in straight, flat pods, about 10 centimetres long.

OTHER NAMES: Sea bean, coastal jack bean.

HABITAT: Ocean bean typically inhabits coastal sand dunes.

DISTRIBUTION: This species is found in tropical areas all over the world. In Australia it is found in the Pilbara (including offshore islands) and Kimberley regions of Western Australia, northern Queensland and New South Wales.

FLOWERING TIME: May to September.

USES: The seeds are poisonous when raw, but can be eaten after boiling. The plant can be used to help stabilise soils in sandy beach areas.



Photo — G. F. Craig

STURT'S DESERT PEA

(*Swainsona formosa*)

Family Papilionaceae, the peas

Sturt's desert pea is undoubtedly the most well-known native plant of the Pilbara. Its bright red flowers provide a welcome contrast to the yellow and mauve flowers that dominate much of the region's flora. Although its common name honours the explorer Charles Sturt, this legume was first collected by William Dampier on an island in the Dampier Archipelago in 1699.

DESCRIPTION: Sturt's desert pea is a low, spreading ground cover up to three metres wide and 30 centimetres high. The red flowers of this short-lived species are arranged on upright stalks in groups of three or more. Each flower is up to nine centimetres, from the top of the standard to the base of the keel. The standard is the large petal with the black dome at its base. In some plants the dome may be red, and albino varieties with completely cream flowers have been found in the region. The dull green leaves are made up of seven pairs of oval-shaped leaflets. Stems, leaves and pods are covered with short, soft hairs. The pods are hard and light brown when ripe, and if shaken the seeds rattle inside them.

OTHER NAMES: Desert pea. The Ngarlama people call the plant thurlamartamarta and the Yinjibarndi people call it thurlawirtingpirtiny.

HABITAT: This plant grows in a range of habitats, from sandy dunes to rocky plains. It favours disturbed sites and is often spotted along roadsides, where water collects in slight depressions.

DISTRIBUTION: Sturt's desert pea is found from the north-western coast, east into the desert and south to Kalgoorlie and the Nullarbor Plain. It is also found in the Northern Territory, Queensland, New South Wales and South Australia.

FLOWERING TIME: This species generally flowers off and on throughout the year, but is most prolific over the winter months.



Photo — Babs & Bert Wells/CALM

ABORIGINAL USAGE: When water was not available, the flowers were sucked for nectar as a substitute.

OTHER USES: Sturt's desert pea is an attractive garden specimen.

SOFT SPINIFEX

(*Triodia pungens*)

Family Poaceae, the grasses

Spinifex is the dominant ground cover in the Pilbara region. Soft spinifex (*Triodia pungens*) forms large hummocks along creek beds, in areas where moisture accumulates and where there are more nutrients. It does not form concentric rings and die off in the centre like limestone spinifex (*T. wiseana*) and lobed spinifex (*T. basedowii*). The microhabitat inside these rings is cooler and more humid than the surrounding countryside. The dead material in the centre is harvested by termites, and provides food and shelter for other invertebrates, reptiles and small mammals.

DESCRIPTION: Soft spinifex forms large hummocks two to three metres in diameter, and can grow up to a metre tall. The thin leaf blades are up to 30 centimetres long and highly resinous. They turn bright green after rain, but as conditions dry out the plant becomes a yellow colour. Flower stalks and seed heads sit well above the plant, and it flowers prolifically after good rains.

OTHER NAMES: Sticky spinifex, gummy spinifex. Ngarlama people call the soft spinifex burro. The Kurrama name is minna.

HABITAT: Soft spinifex can be found in alluvial and stony soils.

DISTRIBUTION: This plant is widely distributed through the Pilbara region and deserts, north to the Kimberley, Northern Territory and Queensland.

FLOWERING TIME: January to March, particularly after rain.

ABORIGINAL USAGE: Aboriginal people use a glue produced by ants feeding on the spinifex, along with kangaroo gut, to bind spear heads to shafts. The glue is very pliable when heated over a flame but becomes rock hard when cooled. The leaves and stems were pounded to release fibres used to make string for fishing nets and baskets. Seeds were collected and ground to make flour for damper.

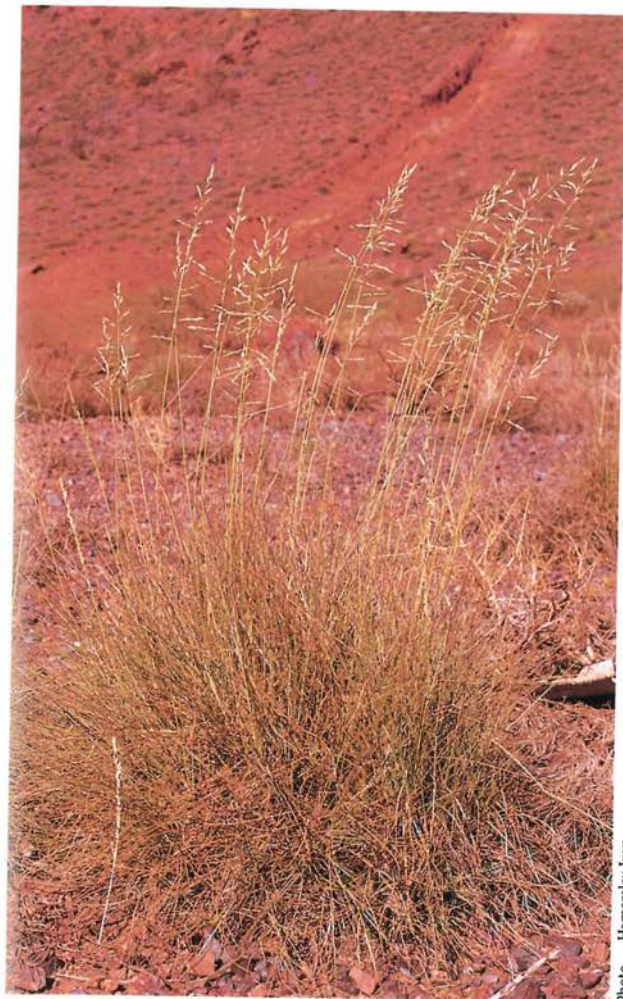


Photo — Hammersley Iron

YELLOW FLAME GREVILLEA

(*Grevillea eriostachya*)

Family Proteaceae

The yellow flame grevillea has attractive bright orange, somewhat sticky, flowers. What appears to be a single flower is, in fact, a number of tiny flowers combined to form an inflorescence, which is densely hairy. Look for it along the road to Onslow, and east of Newman, from Newman to Nullagine and Newman south to Kumarina. Although the Proteaceae family is one of the least represented plant families in the Pilbara, the species that do grow here stand out from the rest of the vegetation.

DESCRIPTION: The yellow flame grevillea is a spindly shrub one and a half to two metres tall. The branches are usually leafy up to the base of the flower stalks, erect canes up to 30 centimetres long which sit above the plant. Leaves are 15 to 20 centimetres long, and deeply divided into lobes. The upper surface is covered with numerous short, soft hairs. Fruits are up to 22 millimetres long, 13 millimetres wide and seven millimetres thick.

OTHER NAMES: Desert grevillea.

HABITAT: The yellow flame grevillea prefers red sandy soils, where it often grows with eucalypts, wattles and sometimes sheoaks.

DISTRIBUTION: The plant is widespread, ranging from the central Wheatbelt to the northern edge of the Great Sandy Desert. It is also found in south-western parts of the Northern Territory and in north-western South Australia.

FLOWERING TIME: The peak flowering time of the yellow flame grevillea is between May and November.



Photo — Babs & Bert Wells/CALM

CORKWOOD

(*Hakea suberea*)

Family Proteaceae

Corkwood is one of several Pilbara plants with special features that help it to survive in the region's harsh climate. The corky bark of this hakea protects it from fire, whilst the sweetly scented flowers are an important source of nectar for honeyeaters in the arid landscape. The seeds are rich in mineral nutrients and are protected from all but the most persistent predators by their woody pod.

DESCRIPTION: This small tree has deeply fissured grey bark. It grows to about six metres high. The shiny, dark green, needle-like leaves are up to 40 centimetres long. Each bright orange flower is about one and a half centimetres long but is grouped into a spectacular raceme up to 12 centimetres long. The woody and slightly curved pods are three and a half centimetres across. Unlike most of the other hakeas, corkwood sheds its seeds on maturity.

OTHER NAMES: Honey hakea, long-leaved corkwood. The flower is known by Yinjibarndi people as jarnava and the tree as karruwa. The Kurrama people call the plant kardanba.

HABITAT: Corkwood likes the well-drained soils on rocky hillsides.

DISTRIBUTION: This hakea is found throughout northern and inland Australia.

FLOWERING TIME: June to October.

ABORIGINAL USAGE: Aboriginal people would suck nectar from the flowers, or soak them in water to make a sweet drink. The appearance of the young flower buds indicated that emus were nesting.



Photo — Tony Tapper

DESERT PEPPERFLOWER

(Diplopeltis stuartii)

Family Sapindaceae

The desert pepperflower is a low-growing plant with delicate pale pink or white flowers. It produces attractive massed displays.

DESCRIPTION: This low perennial herb grows up to 50 centimetres tall and branches from its base. The oblong leaves can be either entire or divided into lobes. They are up to four centimetres long and one and a half centimetres wide, tapering evenly to the base like a wedge. The upper surface is smooth, but the lower surface is covered with long coarse hairs. Flowers can be white or pink, on stalks up to 10 millimetres long. The petals are paired, with the upper pair seven millimetres long and the lower pair just four and a half millimetres long. The lower pair are curved and have stamens up to three millimetres long. The oblong capsules, 14 millimetres long, are hard, thin and brittle and sparsely covered with hairs.

HABITAT: Desert pepperflower is usually found growing in sandy soils associated with spinifex and open shrublands, but occasionally inhabits lateritic soils.

DISTRIBUTION: This low shrub grows from the Hamersley Range eastwards through the desert, almost to the Northern Territory and Queensland border.

FLOWERING TIME: July to September.

USES: This attractive low, drought-resistant shrub has horticultural potential.



Photo — Tony Start

NATIVE TOMATO

(*Solanum phlomoides*)

Family Solanaceae, the tomatoes

The seed pods of some species of native tomato make good bush tucker, but those of this species do not. Some native tomato species even have poisonous seed pods. An interesting feature of this plant is that it is andromonecious, which means it has male flowers and bisexual flowers on the same plant. Prickles up to eight millimetres long are abundant on stems, leaf stalks, flower stalks and the calyx of bisexual flowers.

DESCRIPTION: This species grows as a rounded shrub up to two metres tall. Its grey flannel leaves are four to seven centimetres long and one and a half to four centimetres wide. Both the stems and leaves are covered with short hairs. There is typically one deep purple star-shaped bisexual flower, four to five centimetres across, below a group of 12 to 20 male flowers. The male flowers are wheel-shaped and three to four centimetres across. Look for round prickly capsules on the plant. These are the fruits, which are green when immature but turn yellow on maturity. They are full of small black seeds, four to five millimetres long.

OTHER NAMES: Wild tomato.

HABITAT: This native tomato grows in spinifex sandplains, at the base of rocky outcrops and in rocky gullies.

DISTRIBUTION: In the Pilbara, the native tomato can be found throughout the Hamersley and Barlee ranges and west to the coast, as well as on offshore islands. It extends as far north as Pardoo and Wallal Downs in the Kimberley region, and as far south as Carnarvon.

FLOWERING TIME: May to September.

USES: This species makes a hardy garden specimen, but is often unpopular because of its spikes.



Photo — Jiri Lochman

ROCK KURRAJONG

(*Brachychiton acuminatus*)

Family Sterculiaceae, the kurrajongs

The rock kurrajong is an attractive, thick-trunked tree up to six metres tall, with large spreading branches. Its robust appearance and the fact that it too is deciduous, means it is often mistaken for a boab. Numerous plants can be seen on the Burrup Peninsula and around the town of Dampier.

DESCRIPTION: Rock kurrajong has large, broad, bright green foliage. The leaves are up to 14 centimetres long and have between five and seven lobes (see the photo on page 71). The small white flowers are tubular. They are borne in thick bunches, usually at the ends of leafless branches. These develop into woody, boat-shaped pods up to 20 centimetres long. The pods are full of tiny hairs and remain on the tree after the seed has been shed. The brown, oval-shaped seeds are covered with a bright yellow powder. Trees have separate male and female flowers and are mostly leafless at the time of flowering.

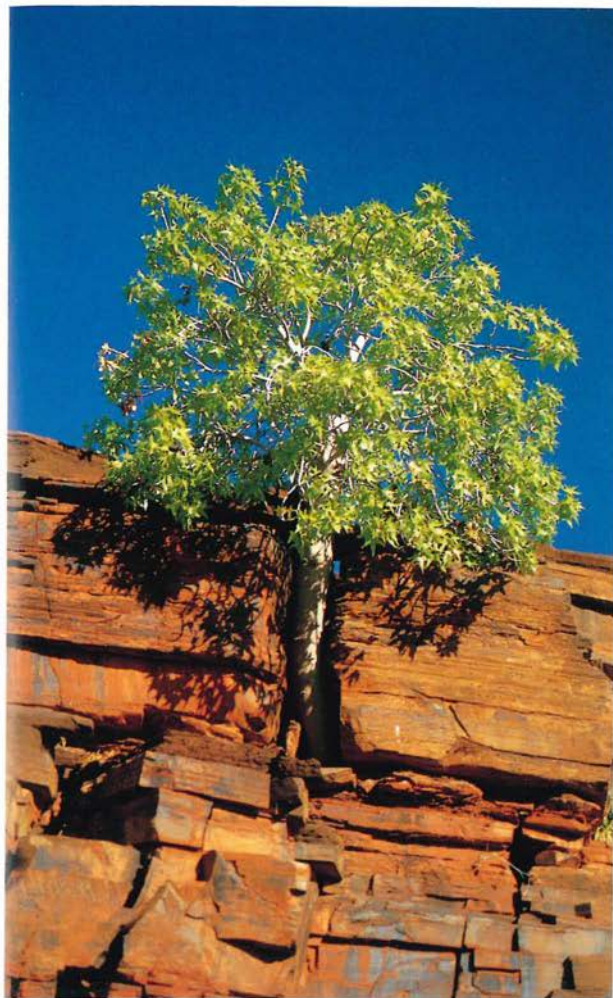
OTHER NAMES: The Kurrama people call this plant ngangu.

HABITAT: Plants tend to grow in rocky outcrops where they are protected from fire. In the Dampier Archipelago they grow amongst rock piles and outcrops, together with rock figs and native olives (*Pittosporum phylliraeoides*).

DISTRIBUTION: The rock kurrajong is confined to the Pilbara, and grows from the Roebourne area to the Hamersley Range, with a slight extension into the Ashburton Botanical District.

FLOWERING TIME: The tree flowers from August to October and fruits appear from November to May. It is usually leafless from September to November.

ABORIGINAL USAGE: The seeds were eaten either raw or baked, and often pounded into flour after roasting and moistened with water or honey. The young roots are edible.



SIGHTING RECORD

SPECIES	DATE	LOCALITY	REMARKS
royal mulla-mulla			
Millstream fan palm			
native daisy			
slender petalostylis			
sticky cassia			
limestone cassia			
coastal caper			
wingnut tree			
poison morning glory			
creeping polymeria			
harlequin mistletoe			
Robinson's desert rose			
yellow hibiscus			
desert walnut			
mulga			
weeping wirewood			



Photo — Babs & Bert Wells/CALM

SIGHTING RECORD

SPECIES	DATE	LOCALITY	REMARKS
kanji			
common rock fig			
burra			
spotted emu bush			
desert bloodwood			
snappy gum			
coolibah			
silver cadjeput			
ocean bean			
Sturt's desert pea			
soft spinifex			
yellow flame grevillea			
corkwood			
desert pepperflower			
native tomato			
rock kurrajong			



Photo — Tony Start

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eucalypts	48-51	snappy gum	48-49
fan palm	8-9	soft spinifex	58-59
grevillea	60-61	spinifex	58-59
harlequin mistletoe	26-27	spotted emu bush	44-45
kanji	38-39	sticky cassia	14-15
kurrajong	68-69	Sturt's desert pea	56-57
limestone cassia	16-17	yellow flame grevillea	60-61
Millstream fan palm	8-9	yellow hibiscus	30-31
mistletoe	26-27	wattles	34-39
mulga	34-35	weeping wirewood	36-37
mulla-mulla	6-7	wingnut tree	20-21

Captions:

Spotted emu bush – page 70

Rock kurrajong – page 71

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Judymae Napier is CALM's Interpretation Officer for the Pilbara region and has lived in Karratha for 19 years. She began work in the Karratha Nursery, run by the former Forests Department, in 1981, specialising in the propagation of native Pilbara plants. She is keen to promote local plants for urban landscaping, and is interested in the use of plants by Aboriginal people.

Stephen van Leeuwen is a Research Scientist in CALM's Science and Information Division. He has undertaken botanical and ecological research on the flora of the Pilbara since 1988 and is curator of the Pilbara Regional Herbarium. Stephen has an enthusiastic interest in the flora of this region, its taxonomy, distribution and ecological relationships, especially to fire and pollinators. He is currently undertaking a number of botanical surveys to document the flora of poorly known areas in the region and has discovered several previously unknown species in the process.

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