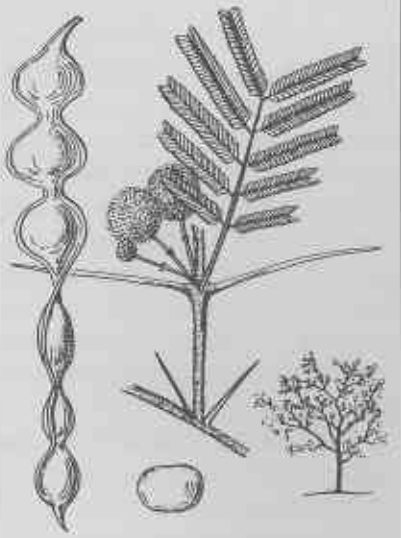
WEED ALERT

Acacia nilotica on the Durack River



A huge infestation of pastoral Australia's 'worst weed' Prickly Acacia, *A. nilotica*, has been discovered, covering 100 sq km near the Durack River in the East Kimberley. It is estimated that it has been established more than 20 years. Please, residents and visitors, keep an eye out for this serious invader, and take a piece of any suspect plant to the nearest Dept. of Agriculture office. Remember, it has big thorns, ferny leaves and pods like beads on a string.

Pic from "Weeds of Natural Ecosystems", by NM Smith, Environment Centre NT, 1995.

PIE-DISH BEETLES

Hairy-backed Pie-dish Beetle, *Helea perforatus* photo: Jan Taylor

COMMONLY seen foraging among the leaf litter in woodlands and shrublands are the odd-looking Pie-dish Beetles. They have a broad flange around the body and head, giving them a very distinctive appearance.

These beetles are in the genus *Helea* and in the meal-worm beetle family Tenebrionidae. The genus is found only in Australia and has 50 or so species, with some 20-30 found in WA. The one pictured – the Hairy-backed Pie-dish Beetle – is found from Geraldton to Cape Arid, but not usually far from the coast. Other species occur further inland, including out into the mulga country.

The larvae are probably cylindrical, meal-worm-like, and feed on the roots of plants. Adult beetles emerge in early summer and are active during the hottest months of the year. They are flightless, and scavenge on dry plant material found in the litter, thus helping to break it down into humus.

It is probable that they are eaten by all sorts of small reptiles, birds and carnivorous mammals and often one finds the distinctive pie-dish back, with the innards eaten out of it. Possibly the hairs on the back of the species pictured may serve to anchor sand and debris to their backs, and so provide camouflage.

How many kinds of pie-dish can you find in your woodland? You may need to go out at dusk, or on a moonlit night with a good torch. Happy beetle-hunting!

Info from Terry Houston, WA Museum.

Bird pollinators observations in carnivorous plants continued from page 11

When the bird visits the next flower, pollen is first placed on the stigmatic portion and fresh load of pollen is deposited when the bird's beak exits the nectary spur.

Both the Greg Keighery and Cheryl Gole observations and interesting discussions with Alan Burbidge have certainly opened a new and interesting area of research on the alliance between birds and carnivorous plants. I hope that this report will stimulate discussion with others in this area of research. I would be most interested in hearing from anyone of observations they may have seen with regard to the pollination of carnivorous plants either by insects or by birds.

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WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT CARNIVOROUS PLANTS?

You should get Allen's three detailed and superbly-illustrated books:

Carnivorous Plants of Australia
Allen Lowrie
Pub: Uni WA Press
Vol 1 1987
Vol 2 1989
Vol 3 1998