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# MANGROVES OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY, AUSTRALIA:

## *IDENTIFICATION and TRADITIONAL USE*

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NORTHERN TERRITORY BOTANICAL BULLETIN No. 31

**EXTRACT: *Batis* (pp. 55–57)**

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DARWIN 2006

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**Batis****BATACEAE**

**DERIVATION:** 'Batis' is the Greek word for samphire.

A genus of two species, one along the coast of tropical and sub-tropical America, the other, *B. argillicola*, on the New Guinea and north Australian coasts.

***Batis argillicola* P.Royen****Batis**

**DERIVATION:** The Latin 'argillicola' means clay-dwelling, and refers to this species preference for saline clay soils.

**DESCRIPTION:** Shrub, erect or rounded to 0.7 m, often with decumbent main stems; monoecious; base woody, bark fibrous, grey. Leaves opposite, simple, sessile, obovoid, 4–5 x 1–1.5 mm, rounded in cross-section, base saccate, apex blunt; stipules minute, caducous. Flowers sessile, axillary and terminal. Male flower subtended by 2 concave bracts, 4 x 2 mm and 2 united campanulate, bracteoles; stamens 4, alternating with staminodes; filaments linear, 2.5 mm long; anthers exerted, elliptic, 1 mm long; gynoecium rudimentary or absent. Female flower a naked ovary, ellipsoidal 4–7 x 1.5–3 mm, carpels 2, locules 4; stigma sessile, papillate. Drupe oblique, fleshy, 9–11 x 4–5 mm. Seeds oblong 5–5.5 x 1.2 mm.

**HABITAT:** *Batis argillicola* occupies the landward areas of mangrove habitats, along the banks of tidal creeks and edges of clay pans. Soils are generally fine grained saline muds, although sands may also be colonised. Common associates include *Avicennia marina*, *Lumnitzera racemosa*, *Halosarcia indica*, *Tecticornia australasica* and *Sporobolus virginicus*.

**DISTRIBUTION:** *Batis argillicola* occurs sporadically around the northern and eastern NT coastal areas, it has not been recorded west of Bynoe Harbour in the NT. It also occurs in Western Australia, Queensland and New Guinea.

**ETHNOBOTANY:** No specific uses have been recorded for this plant.

**Recorded Aboriginal language names**

Purrawurrika (Tiwi)

**DISTINCTIVE FEATURES:** Fleshy subshrub; leaves opposite, rounded in cross section, 5–15 mm long; fruit a fleshy yellowish drupe to 11 mm long.

**NOTES:** The small inconspicuous flowers are produced from June to October, the inflated yellowish drupe (fruit) matures from December to February. The buoyant drupe is well adapted to water dispersal, the small monoecious flowers are suited to insect pollination.

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Ross (1982) noted differences between Australian and New Guinea material of *B. argillicola* in leaf, inflorescence and stamen characters. The spatial disjunction of the two members of the genus is of biogeographic interest.

References: Ross 1982, van Royen 1957.

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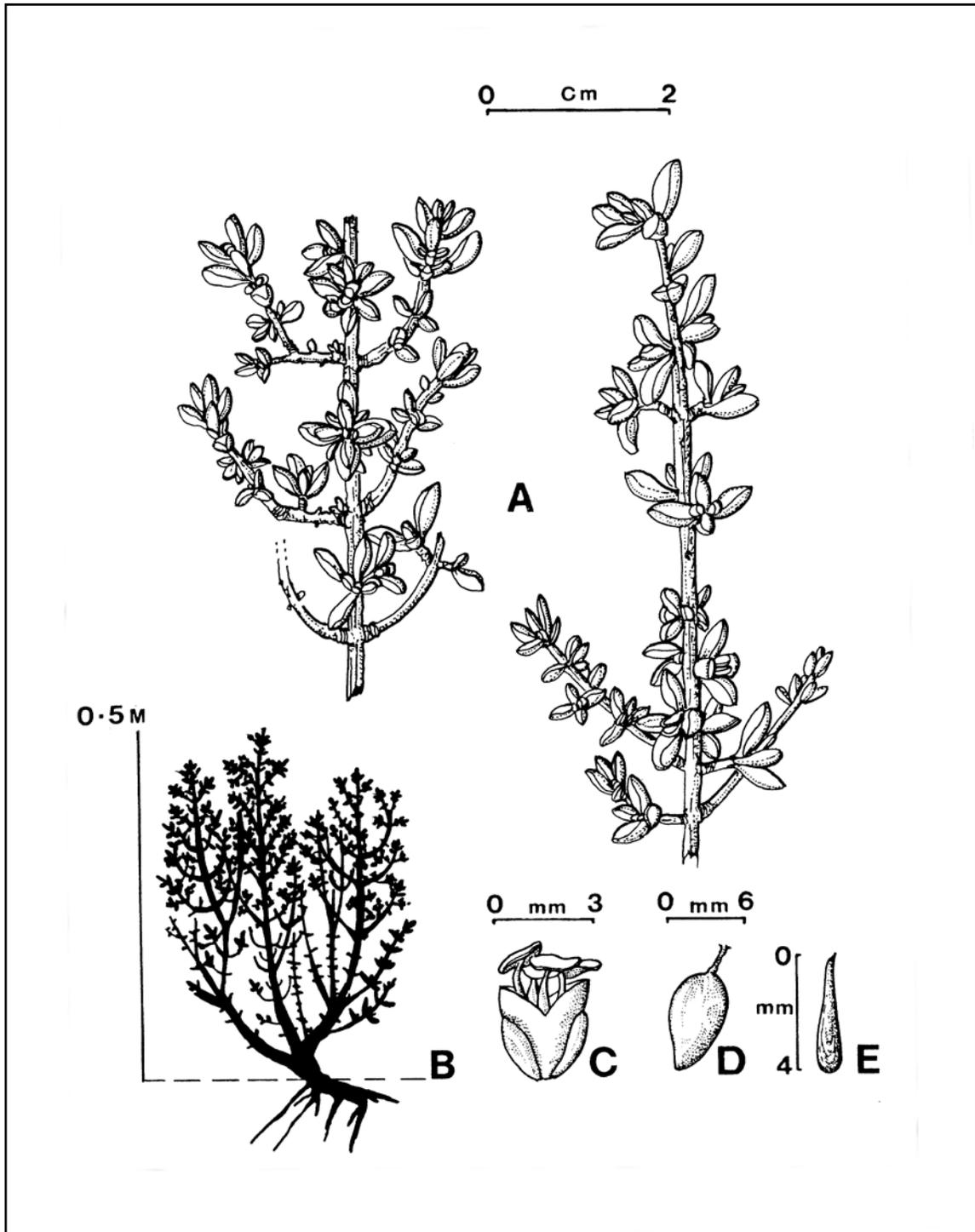


Figure 15. *Batis argillicola*. A, branch; B, habit; C, flower; D, fruit; E, seed (G. Wightman 982 & 1816, DNA).