
MANGROVES OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY, AUSTRALIA:

IDENTIFICATION and TRADITIONAL USE

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EXTRACT: *Cynanchum* (pp. 77–78)

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DARWIN 2006

Cynanchum

ASCLEPIADACEAE

DERIVATION: The Greek 'kyno' means dog, and 'anche' means to choke, in reference to the high toxicity of some members of the genus, which 'could choke a dog'.

A genus of about 155 species, 9–10 of which occur in Australia, six are found in the NT, one of these, *C. carnosum*, regularly inhabits rear mangrove habitats.

***Cynanchum carnosum* (R.Br.) Schltr.**

Mangrove Creeper

DERIVATION: The Latin 'carnosus' pertains to flesh, and refers to the sometimes succulent leaves of this species.

DESCRIPTION: Climber; bark smooth, green; stem to 3 cm diameter; latex clear, abundant. Leaves simple, entire, opposite, narrowly elliptic to broadly elliptic, occasionally linear-lanceolate, 2.5–7.5 x 0.4–3.0 cm, apex apiculate, base attenuate, fleshy to coriaceous, occasionally petiole and under surface maroon-tinted; petiole 4–10 mm. Umbels axillary, peduncle to 3.2 cm, pedicel to 1.8 cm. Flowers bisexual, 5-partite, actinomorphic. Calyx lobes triangular, 2 x 1 mm, acuminate. Corolla lobes contorted, narrowly urceolate 7 x 2 mm, acuminate. Corona lobes erect, lanceolate, 2 mm long, acuminate. Staminal filaments short, connate; anthers connate into a tube enclosing style, 2 celled, apex inflexed, triangular, pollen masses 2 per anther. Ovary superior, 2-locular; ovules many per locule; styles united; stigma conical, truncate, 1.5 mm diameter, enclosed almost entirely by anthers. Follicle broad, acuminate, 7.5 x 1.3 cm; seeds many, brown, ovate, thin, 3 x 5 mm, hairs sticky, white, 15 mm long.

HABITAT: *Cynanchum carnosum* inhabits landward mangrove areas and may also be found in monsoon vine forests near the coast. Substrates of mud and sand are preferred. Associates include *Avicennia marina*, *Lumnitzera racemosa*, *Ceriops australis* and *Bruguiera exaristata*.

DISTRIBUTION: *Cynanchum carnosum* is widespread around the entire NT coastline, and extends into Queensland and Western Australia. Extra-Australian occurrences include Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia and New Guinea.

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES: Climber with clear latex; leaves opposite, narrow, often somewhat fleshy; flowers small, green-yellowish; fruit containing many seeds with woolly hairs.

NOTES: Flowers are produced year round, though in lesser amounts from November to March, fruits are rarely observed. The small green-yellow flowers appear suited to insect or self-pollination. Seeds of *C. carnosum* possess a plume of sticky, 15 mm long hairs which increases seed surface area and enhances dispersal by wind and water.

This species has been referred to as *Ischnostemma carnosum* in the past.

Reference: Forster 1988.

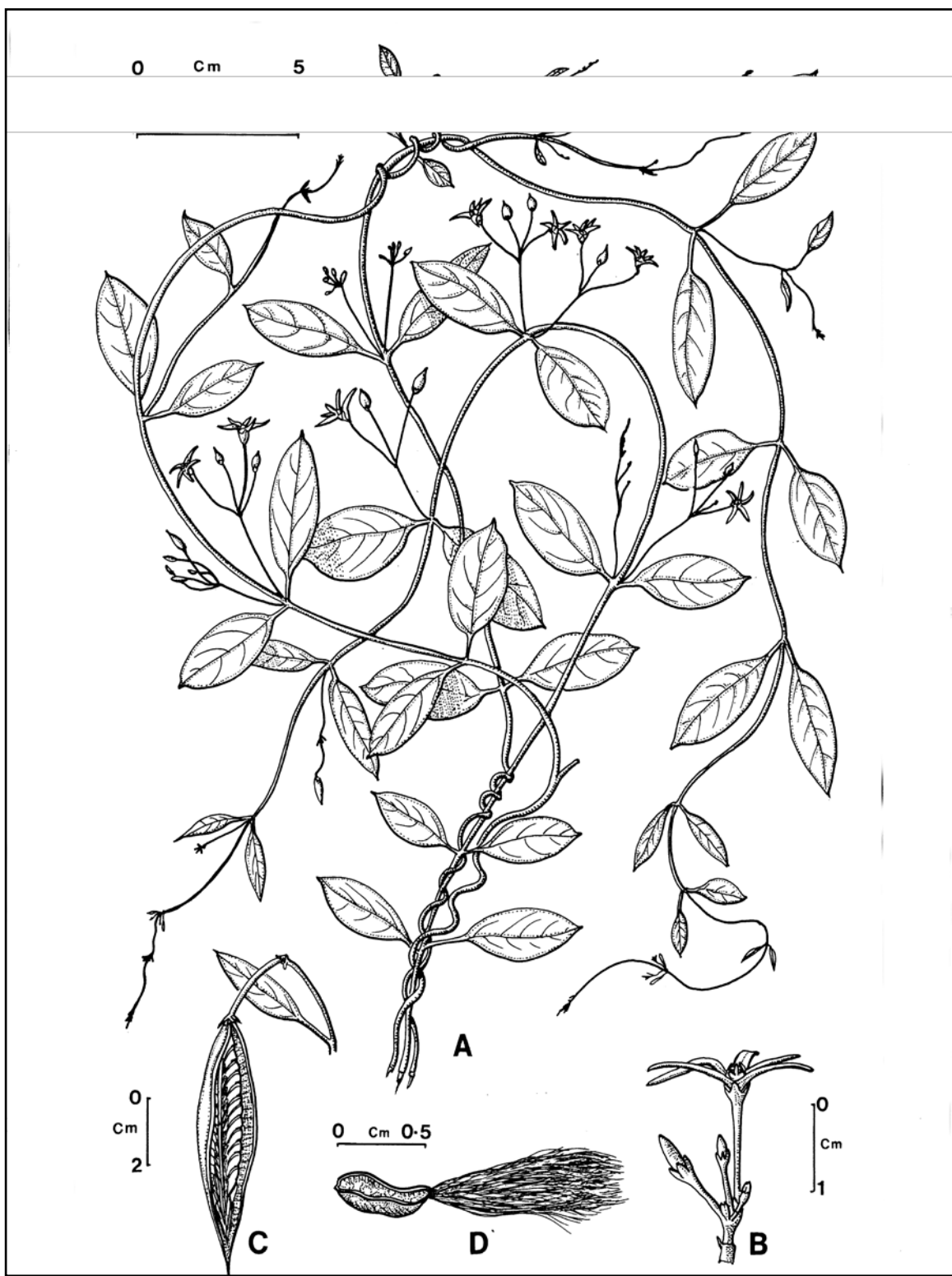


Figure 20. *Cynanchum carnosum*. A, flowering branch; B, flower; C, fruit; D, seed (A–B, G. Wightman 988, DNA; C–D, J. Russell-Smith 1125, DNA).