
MANGROVES OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY, AUSTRALIA:

IDENTIFICATION and TRADITIONAL USE

Glenn Wightman

Ethnobiology Project, Parks and Wildlife Service
Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts
PO Box 496, Palmerston NT 0831, Australia



Northern Territory Government



Principal Illustrator

Milton Andrews

NORTHERN TERRITORY BOTANICAL BULLETIN No. 31

EXTRACT: *Finlaysonia* (pp. 96–99)

Prepared for online viewing and download by the Department of Land Resource Management, 2015

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES, ENVIRONMENT & THE ARTS
and GREENING AUSTRALIA NT

DARWIN 2006

Finlaysonia**ASCLEPIADACEAE**

DERIVATION: *Finlaysonia* In honour of George Finlayson (1790–1822), a Scottish military surgeon and naturalist.

A monotypic genus widely distributed in Asia and Malesia, extending to the Northern Territory and Queensland; recently recorded from six populations on the central north coast in Kakadu National Park.

Finlaysonia obovata* Wall.**Finlaysonia***

DERIVATION: The Latin 'obovata' refers to the leaf shape, which is often wider towards the apex than the base.

DESCRIPTION: Woody climbing vine; semi-deciduous; sap white. Leaves opposite, petiole 7–20 mm long; lamina obovate-oblong to elliptic, 40–125 mm long, 16–60 mm wide, dark glossy green above, paler and conspicuously reticulate-veined beneath, sometimes fleshy, glabrous, entire, apiculate. Inflorescence axillary, cymose, 1-many fascicles. Flowers 5-merous, bisexual, actinomorphic, to 5 mm long and 15 mm diameter. Calyx lobes 5, 1.5 x 2.0 mm. Corolla tube cylindrical; lobes 5, 7 mm long, 5 mm wide, yellow-brown to green, glabrous below, proximal end of upper surface densely hairy. Stamens 5, inserted at base of corolla tube, free above; anthers 4-locular, pollen granular in rectangular tetrads. Ovary superior, carpels 2; placentation axile, ovules numerous; styles connate at apex, style head conical-pentagonal. Fruit of 2 widely divergent unilocular follicles, ovoid, 5–8 cm long, 2–3 cm wide, ribbed; seeds many, flattened, oblong, reflexed, comose around whole seed.

HABITAT: Occurring in mangrove communities in tidal river situations on fine-grained substrates in the lower half of tidal range. Recorded associates include *Sonneratia lanceolata*, *Acanthus ebracteatus*, *Avicennia integra* and *Ceriops decandra*.

DISTRIBUTION: Known from one population on the East Alligator River and five populations on the South Alligator River in the NT. Also occurs in Queensland and widely distributed in India, south-east Asia, Philippines and New Guinea.

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES: Climber with white sap, leaves somewhat fleshy, fruit distinctly angled.

NOTES: Due to the lack of material from the Northern Territory the description is largely based upon that in the *Flora of Australia* (Forster 1996).

Finlaysonia obovata was first collected from the East Alligator River in the NT during 1981; however, the specimen was not identified beyond family level until 1989. This also represented the first record for Australia. It was recollected from

the same population in 1991, when it was recognised as a true constituent of the mangrove flora growing well below the upper tidal limit. A population was located in Queensland in 1995, in 2000 a second population was located in the NT on the South Alligator River. In 2006 another four populations were located on the South Alligator River, along a stretch of about 11 kilometres.

In the NT, *Finlaysonia* has two growth forms or habits; it produces short, more or less erect, sucker stems that grow to about 1.5 metres high and it also produces climbing stems that twine around taller mangrove trees in the upper layer. The leaves on the short sucker stems are fleshy and narrower than the leaves on the climbing stems. The leaves on the climbing form are less fleshy, slightly larger and distinctly glossy. The suckering form of *Finlaysonia* may cover relatively large areas, for example, two of the populations on the South Alligator River cover about 15 m² and 40 m² respectively, and both appear to consist of a single plant with multiple suckering stems and several climbing stems.

Flowers have been recorded in March, April and July and fruit in April, July and November in NT populations. Plants observed in January were sterile.

This species is somewhat similar to *Gymnanthera oblonga*, which commonly occurs in coastal and subcoastal areas of northern tropical Australia. However, *Gymnanthera* is generally found behind mangrove habitats rather than growing well below the tidal limit in mangrove communities as *Finlaysonia* does. *Gymnanthera oblonga* has slender, rounded follicles (fruit) to 1 cm thick, while *Finlaysonia* has broad, ridged follicles to 3 cm thick and more fleshy and glossy leaves.

References: Forster 1996, Forster 1989.



Figure 27. *Finlaysonia obovata*. A, flowering twig; B, fruiting twig; C, habit; D, flower from side and above; E, seed (A, D, I. Cowie 8877; B, E, C. Dunlop 8891).