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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: *Scyphiphora* (pp. 129–131)**

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

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## ***Scyphiphora***

## **RUBIACEAE**

**DERIVATION:** From the Greek 'skyphos' meaning cup, and 'phoros' meaning bearing, in reference to the cup-like flowers.

A monotypic genus isolated within the Rubiaceae, *Scyphiphora* is included in the Cinchonideae-Gardiineae-Gardenieae, but is distinguished by a suite of important characters.

### ***Scyphiphora hydrophylacea* C.F.Gaertn. Yam-stick Mangrove**

**DERIVATION:** The name *hydrophylacea* is a reference to this species' resemblance to the genus *Hydrophyllum*.

**DESCRIPTION:** Spreading shrub to 3–5 m; glabrous; bark rough, grey to dark grey; prop roots occasionally present in larger specimens; young shoots resinous. Leaves simple, entire, opposite; stipules connate, forming an interpetiolar, ciliate, sheath, 2 mm long; petiole slender to 13 mm long; lamina obovate, coriaceous, 2.5–4.5 x 4.5–7.1 cm, apex rounded, base cuneate. Inflorescence a dense axillary cyme, peduncle to 15 mm long. Flowers bisexual zygomorphic, subsessile, 4-partite. Calyx tube turbinate, 5 mm long; limb cup-shaped, 1 mm long, crowned by 4 minute teeth. Corolla tube cylindrical, 2 mm long, orifice hirsute; lobes contorted in bud, at maturity broadly elliptic, 2 x 2.5 mm, apex rounded. Stamen filaments 1 mm long, adnate and alternate to base of corolla lobes; anthers dorsifixed, dithecal, lanceolate, 1.5 mm long, apex acuminate, base sagittate. Ovary inferior, locules 2, ovules 2-per locule, style filiform, 1.5 mm long; stigma lobes 2, 1 mm long, erect. Capsule indehiscent, cylindrical, 8 mm long, longitudinally 8-ribbed, calyx persistent, endocarp corky. Seeds 4, cylindrical, 1 x 2 mm.

**HABITAT:** *Scyphiphora hydrophylacea* has been observed on mud, sand and rock substrates at the landward margin of mangrove zones or on the banks of tidal waterways. It appears intolerant of lengthy periods of freshwater inundation and usually occupies sites that are frequently inundated by tide (Wells 1982). Common associates include *Avicennia marina*, *Ceriops australis* and *Lumnitzera racemosa*. Wells (1982) suggests that *S. hydrophylacea* occurs on sites unsuitable for colonisation by other mangrove species.

**DISTRIBUTION:** *Scyphiphora hydrophylacea* occurs sporadically across the northern and eastern NT coast. Within this range occurrence is patchy, however, it is particularly common in Darwin and Bynoe Harbour areas. This species also occurs in Western Australia and Queensland; extra-Australian occurrences include India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Indonesia, New Guinea and the Solomon Islands.

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**DISTINCTIVE FEATURES:** Spreading shrub, new leaves are resinous and have a varnished appearance.

**ETHNOBOTANY:** Tiwi people use the stems of tall, straight plants to make spears and digging sticks, this plant is also recognised as a source of 'cheeky mangrove worms' (*Bankia australis*) which are used medicinally (Puruntatameri et al. 2001).

Rirratjingu people have no specific use for this plant, but classify it as belonging to the Dhuwa moiety (Yunupingu et al. 1995). They consider it to be similar to *Lumnitzera littorea*.

### **Recorded Aboriginal language names**

Milinyarr (Rirratjingu)

Murruka (Tiwi)

Jones (1971) reports *S. hydrophylacea* to be the 'true yam-stick' of Aboriginal people and also noted this species to be worth cultivating as a border in saline areas. The durable timber is used for fence posts and tool handles in Malaysia, but is too small for other purposes (Watson 1928).

**NOTES:** Corolla colour is generally white, however, a specimen from Melville Island exhibiting a pink coloration at the neck of the corolla tube has been observed (Dunlop & Wightman 6538, DNA). Petioles and twigs may be reddish in colour on some specimens. The young shoots of *S. hydrophylacea* are strongly and distinctively resinous.

Flowers are produced from June to December, and fruit between July and March. Flowers may be insect or self-pollinated; nectar is produced by a glandular disc at the base of the corolla (Tomlinson 1986). Fruit set is very high, but seed germination is relatively low. The fruit is well adapted to water dispersal because of the corky and buoyant capsule wall (Guppy 1906).

Manila, a seaport and the capital city of the Philippines, reportedly takes its name from the vernacular name, 'nilar', of *S. hydrophylacea*. Manila literally translates to the place where nilar grows. Blanco used this name as the specific epithet when he incorrectly placed this species in the genus *Ixora*.

The specific epithet, *hydrophylacea*, is sometimes spelt with a double 'll' in mangrove publications, especially in non-Australian research. However, given that C.F. Gaertner based his name on the plant bearing a resemblance to the genus *Hydrophylax*, it is apparent that *hydrophylacea* is the correct spelling (Tony Orchard pers. comm. 2006).

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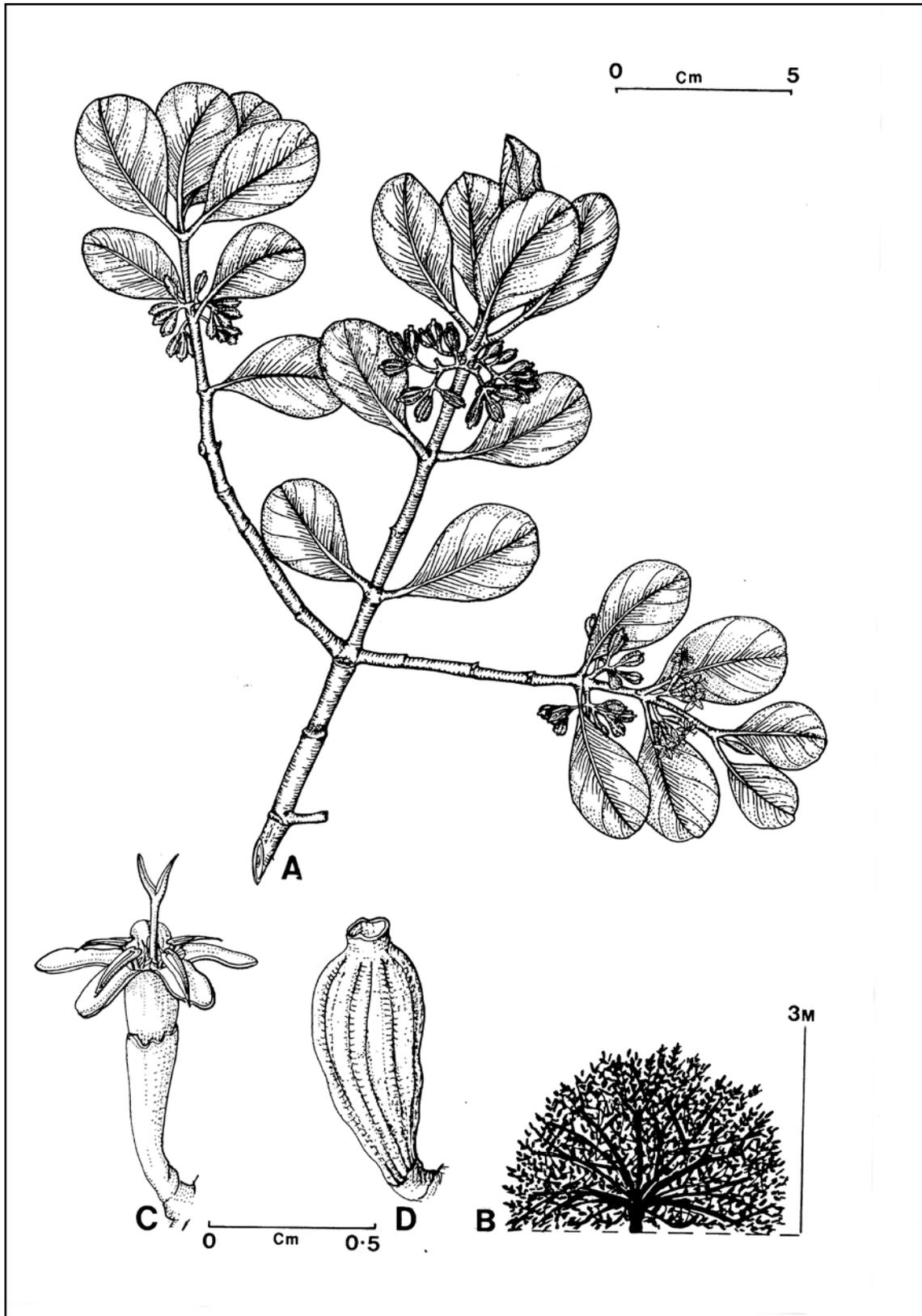


Figure 36. *Scyphiphora hydrophylacea*. A, flowering and fruiting branch; B, habit; C, flower; D, fruit (A–D, G. Wightman 378, DNA).