
MANGROVES OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY, AUSTRALIA:

IDENTIFICATION and TRADITIONAL USE

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EXTRACT: *Suaeda* (pp. 140–142)

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DARWIN 2006

Suaeda**CHENOPODIACEAE**

DERIVATION: *Suaeda* from the Arabic traditional name 'Suwaida' that means blackish, and refers to *Suaeda aegyptiaca*.

A genus of over 100 species; the majority occur in the Northern Hemisphere. Five species occur in Australia, three are introduced and two are endemic natives. One, *S. arbusculoides*, occurs around the tropical coastline, including NT mangrove communities.

Suaeda arbusculoides* L.S.Sm.*Suaeda**

DERIVATION: The Latin 'arbuscula' means small tree and refers to the habit of this species, which is reminiscent of a small tree.

DESCRIPTION: Erect, woody, subshrub to 0.5 m high; glabrous. Leaves alternate, succulent, oblanceolate or narrowly fusiform, 10–20 x 2–3 mm, apex acute, base cuneate, sessile. Flowers bisexual, in axillary clusters of 1–5; subtended by 2–3 small, scale-like bracteoles. Perianth succulent, lobes 5, suborbicular, fleshy, 1.2 x 1.5–2.0 mm. Stamens 5; filament 1.3 mm long; anther ovate, 1.0 mm long. Ovary hemispherical, superior; locule 1; ovule 1; style 1 mm long, bi- or tri-lobed, persistent. Fruit semi-globose, 3.5 mm diameter, pericarp membranous. Seed 1, circular, 2–3 mm wide; testa membranous, transparent.

HABITAT: *Suaeda arbusculoides* occurs in poorly drained tidal areas, in sands and muds; open salt pans and mangrove shrublands are common habitats. Associates include *Sporobolus virginicus*, *Batis argillicola*, *Tecticornia australasica*, *Cerriops australis* and *Avicennia marina*.

DISTRIBUTION: *Suaeda arbusculoides* occurs sporadically around the NT coast. However, it is only known from a few localities on the east coast, though this could be partially a reflection of under collection rather than actual occurrence. Endemic to Australia, this species also occurs in Western Australia and Queensland.

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES: Upright fleshy herb with obvious leaves that are not arranged opposite each other.

ETHNOBOTANY: While this plant has a Tiwi name it has no specific use (Puruntatameri et al. 2001).

Recorded Aboriginal language names

Purrawurrika (Tiwi)

In Vietnam the new tender leaves are eaten in times of hardship (Hong & San 1993).

NOTES: Previously this species had been referred to as *S. australis* (R.Br.) Moq. L. S. Smith recognised two species and described *S. arbusculoides* in 1969 (Smith 1969).

Suaeda arbusculoides produces flowers and fruit throughout the year, though a peak occurs from March to June. The small white flowers are insect pollinated. The fleshy green fruit is not particularly adapted to water dispersal and van der Pijl (1969) noted birds distributing seeds of the European *Suaeda maritima*.

Reference: Wilson 1984.

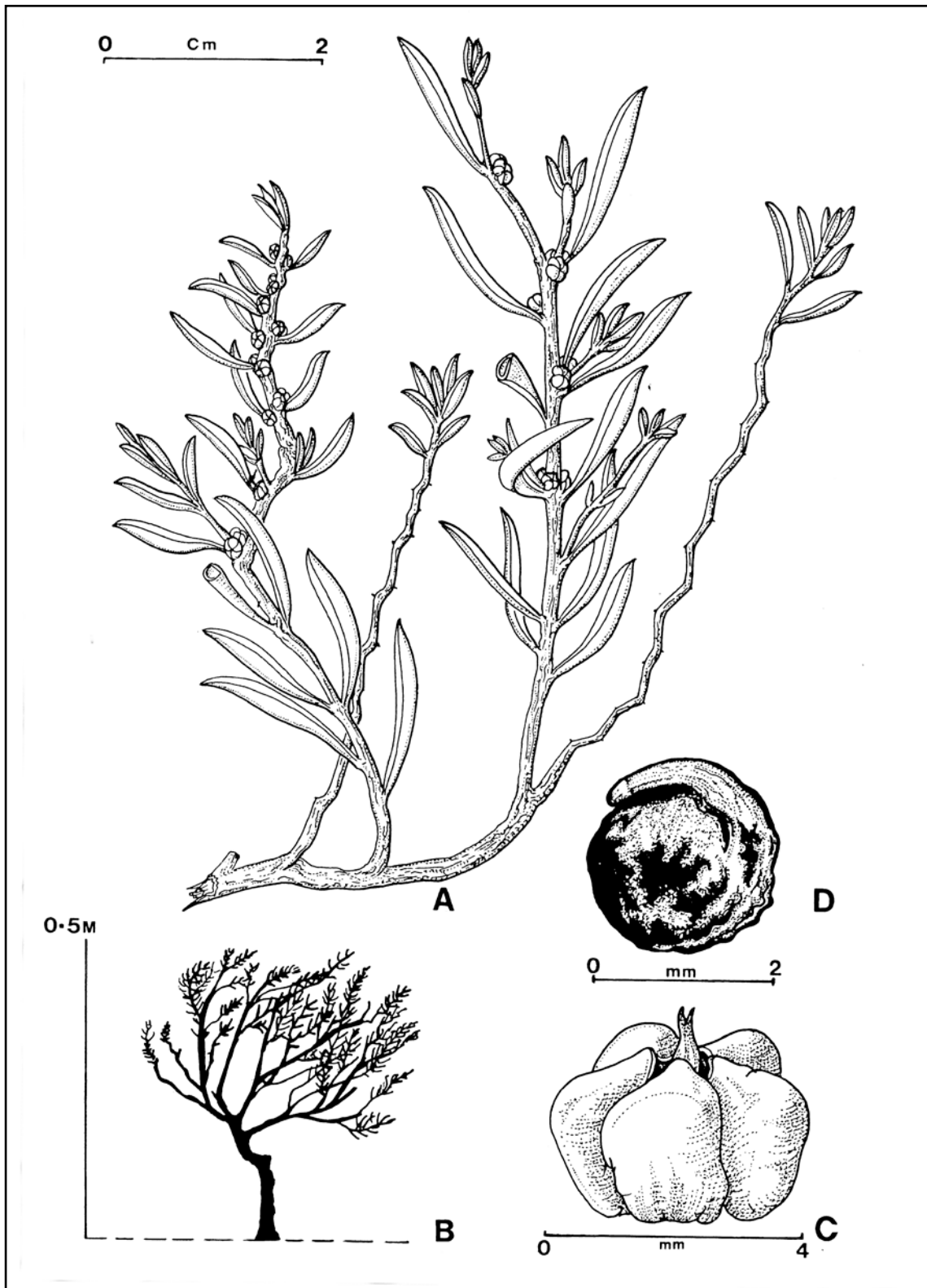


Figure 39. *Suaeda arbusculoides*. A, fertile branch; B, habit; C, flower; D, seed (A–D, G. Wightman 975 & G. Wightman 3309, DNA).