
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: *Tecticornia* (pp. 143–145)

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

Tecticornia**CHENOPODIACEAE**

DERIVATION: The Latin 'tectus' means hidden, roof or covering and the Latin 'cornu' means horn, perhaps in reference to the rooftile-like scales on the terminal cones or to the bracts, which conceal the spike of flowers.

A genus of three species. Two are endemic to Australia and are non-mangrove species, while the third, *T. australasica*, occurs in Java, New Guinea and NT tidal areas.

Tecticornia australasica (Moq.) Paul Wilson

Grey Samphire

DERIVATION: The Latin 'australasica' refers to Australasia.

DESCRIPTION: Annual fleshy herb to 40 cm high, glaucous, glabrous; lower branches procumbent, upper branches erect. Articles bluish-green, succulent, 7–15 mm long, apex shortly bilobed, lobes representing reduced, opposite leaves. Spikes terminal, occasionally lateral and sessile, narrowly ovoid to narrowly cylindrical, 10–40 x 5–7 mm; bracts decussate, free, semi-circular. Flowers sessile, bisexual, 3–5 per bract. Perianth succulent; sepals 2, laterally compressed, acute, plano-convex, base united abaxially. Stamen 1, abaxial. Ovary thin walled, superior, 2–3-carpellate, unilocular, ovule one; style slender, 2 lobed. Fruiting sepals free, areolate and hyaline when dry; pericarp membranous. Seed ovately discoidal, c. 1.5 mm long; testa dark brown with several rows of grey tubercles on upper margins.

HABITAT: *Tecticornia australasica* may be found on coastal clay-pans or associated with mangrove areas. Associates include *Suaeda arbusculoides*, *Halosarcia indica*, *Batis argillicola*, *Sporobolus virginicus*, *Avicennia marina* and *Osbornia octodonta*. Substrates include muds and fine sands. Seasonal inundation by freshwater is preferred as *T. australasica* is intolerant of highly saline areas.

DISTRIBUTION: *Tecticornia australasica* occurs sporadically around the entire NT coastline; also found in Queensland. Extra-Australian records from New Guinea and Java are known.

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES: Upright, candelabrum-shaped fleshy herb, often glaucous (grey-green in colour).

ETHNOBOTANY: While no specific use of this species has been reported, several Aboriginal language names are recorded, and seeds of the other two members of the genus are eaten (Wilson 1972).

Recorded Aboriginal language names

Birkpurrknganing (Djambarrpuyngu)

Purrawurrika (Tiwi)

Wurumurriya (Yanyuwa)

Burrumurriya (Yanyuwa)

NOTES: Taxonomy of this species has been confused (Wilson 1972), in part due to poor material being available. The nomenclatural confusion surrounding the name is outlined by Wilson (1972).

Fertile spikes have been collected throughout the year, however, a peak in flowering and fruiting occurs in the late wet and early dry season, from February to July. Seed germinates in the mid to late dry season, and young plants are commonly seen as the heat and humidity rise in the 'build-up' from about August or September.

Seeds of this species are capable of floating while enveloped by the infructescence, and are released upon disintegration of these parts (Kanis 1976).

When at full size, candelabrum-shaped and at its most glaucous (grey), *Tecticornia* is very attractive and may have potential as a niche market ornamental plant.

References: Wilson 1972, Wilson 1984.

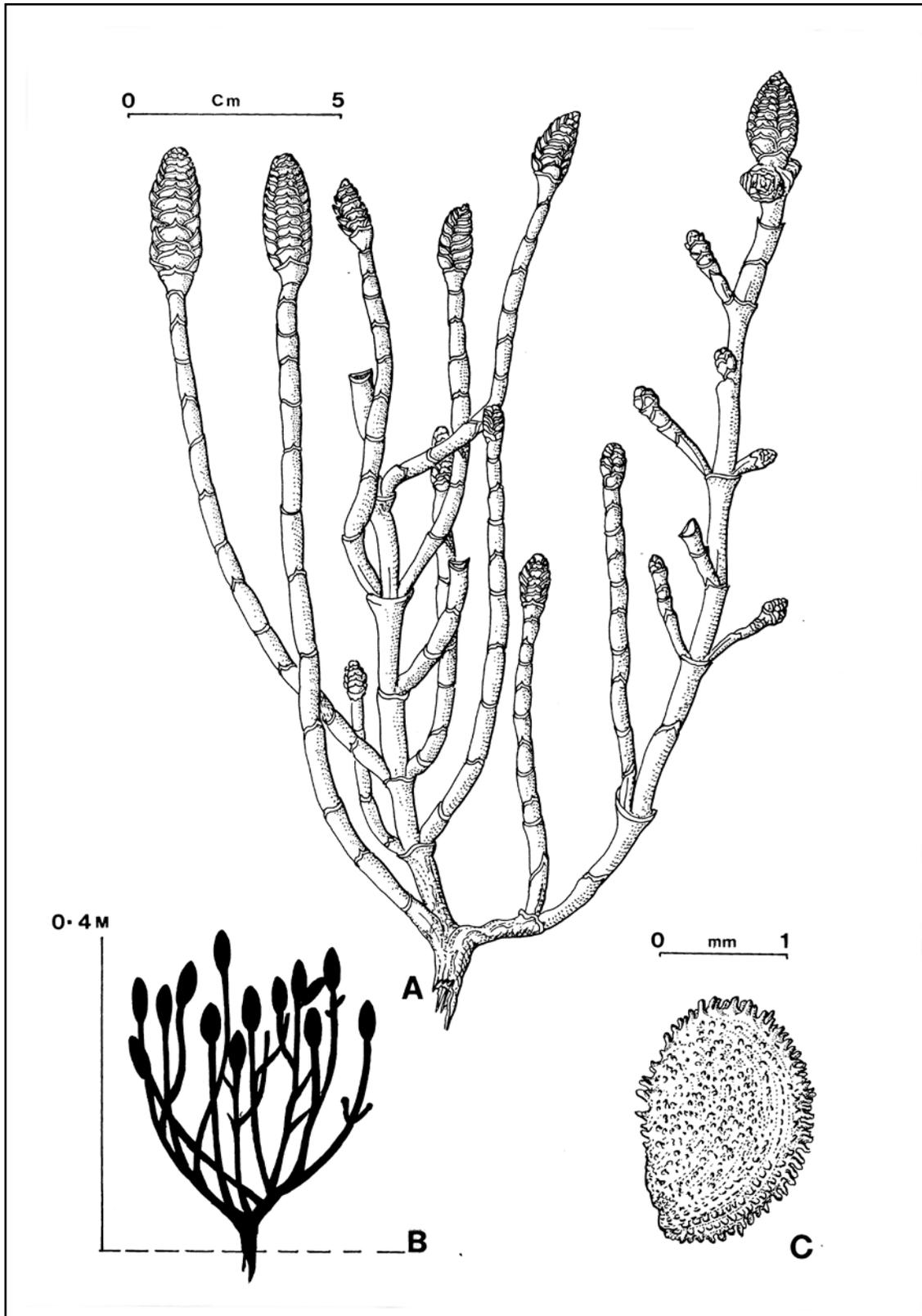


Figure 40. *Tecticornia australasica*. A, fertile branch; B, habit; C, seed (A–C, G. Wightman 815 & G. Wightman 2100, DNA).