

Plants of the Northern Australian Rangelands

Ed. TIM WHEATON. Published by the Northern Territory Department of Lands, Housing and Local Government, GPO Box 1680, Darwin. June, 1994. 144 pp. ISBN 0-7245-1635-2.

Launched at the national rangeland conference in Katherine (June 1994) this book is long overdue. It will be available in 2 B5 size formats, perfect bound and a spiral bound "field format". Targeting the field identification of plants of pastoral importance, it omits many tree and shrub species, which are well covered in other books.

The target area is the semi-arid, pastoral region of northern Australia. This stretches east from the West Australian coast, north of Port Hedland, through Katherine and Mareeba in the north and Barrow Creek and Longreach in the south, to the Great Dividing Range. The opening pages establish simple background notes on the principal pasture communities in the region, with general comments on plant and vegetation issues relating to rangeland management.

The main part of the book consists of brief, generally single page notes about each of the 140 species covered, with photographs to illustrate the plants. The balance is approximately equal between grasses and other species, and covers both useful and not-so-useful species, including many weed species. Notes describe the plant, habitat and distribution, with comments on use, forage value and impact, as appropriate. Grasses are listed first in alphabetical order by botanical names, and then the dicotyledons. Pages are colour-edge marked for easy field use. Having the common names in large print and botanical names (in alphabetical order) in small print makes use a little confusing. The text is simple but concise and easily read by non-botanists, since most jargon is avoided. The typeface is also easy to read. A brief, illustrated glossary is included, although the list of further reading could have been more comprehensive.

Photographs generally provide a broad view of the plant and a close-up of the flower, fruits and seed head. Roy Beame is to be complimented on the quality of the photographs — they illustrate the plants well.

Unfortunately there are a few errors, one of which is quite serious. Mission grass is listed as *Pennisetum polystachion*, rather than *Pennisetum pedicellatum*; the photos are of *Pennisetum polystachion* but the text is about *Pennisetum pedicellatum*. Both species — *P. pedicellatum*, mission grass and *P. polystachion*, deenanth grass or pennisetum — should be listed. Pangola grass is now *Digitaria eriantha* var. *decumbens* (although some botanists may challenge that!); and the correct spelling of native pea (p. 114) is *rhynchosia*.

As always with these compilations, it is difficult to decide what to leave out. A notable omission is *Ludwigia octovalvis*, which is very common on wet areas in the Northern Territory and Queensland, and a plant not commonly known or identified. However, most species of note are included.

Common names are spelt in upper case, even though lower case is more generally accepted.

The book is very good value at A\$30 and should be a "must have" for pastoralists in the region, as an extensive, but easily carried reference. Apparently many state authorities are supplying the book to pastoralists in the region. It would also be a useful reference text for government offices, rural merchandise businesses, schools and local libraries, pastoral agents, consultants, and technical and professional staff of government land, conservation and pastoral agencies.

As someone who started out to produce such a book 25 years ago and failed due to lack of funding, I commend the funding bodies — Landcare Australia; Meat Research Corporation; Northern Territory Departments of Land and Housing, Primary Industry and Fisheries and the Conservation Commission; Queensland Department of Primary Industries; and WA Department of Agriculture — for producing such a useful book in full colour at a reasonable price.

Copies may be purchased direct from the Map Shop, GPO Box 1680, Darwin, NT 0801; phone (089) 89 7032 or fax (089) 89 7750.

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