

Plantlife Fact Sheet

Bunya Pine Trees

Bunya Pine Trees are not actually pines – they are conifers and belong to the genus *Araucaria* (i.e. *Araucaria Bidwillii*). Bunya Pines dominate the rainforest canopy and are easily recognised by their dome like shape. They are giants, growing over 40m with a diameter of 2m. In the rainforest, the first branch can occur over 20m from the ground. Out in the open, Bunya Pines have a symmetrical “Christmas Tree” shape. New growth in spring is a soft green in contrast to the shiny dark green of mature foliage. Bunya Pines have long been prized for their attractive appearance as well as their edible “nuts”.

Around 200 million years ago gymnosperms (cone bearing plants) – the ancestor of our Bunya and Hoop Pines replaced ferns as the dominant plants. Flowering plants followed.

Bunya Nuts

Take 2 years to form and although we get nuts every year; traditionally the 3rd year heralds a very large or “bumper” crop. During January of each year, female flowers form in the top 1/3 of the tree while the sausage shaped male cones form below. Around August – September pollen from the male cones drifts upwards to fertilise the female flowers. The cone starts to develop and is ready to drop in approx. 17 months i.e. around February / March. Bunya cones are a pineapple shape and can hold up to 80 nuts. A Large cone can weigh up to 8kg. Bunya nuts are very nutritious and whilst low in protein contain 66% starch & 14% water. They are much sought after by humans as well as a variety of native animals. A large crashing sound followed by a thump heralds a bunya cone dropping and taking out branches as it falls. Although most cones fall at night, it is prudent to take precautions including not parking your car under Bunya pine trees during January to April.

Hoop Pine

(*Araucaria cunninghamii*) Has a round, straight trunk similar to Bunya Pine. The bark is darker and appears in horizontal bands or hoops. Foliage is not as dense as in the bunya pine as the limbs are more widely spaced, especially near the top. They are found on the slopes of the mountain.

Red Cedar (*Toona australis*)

This attractive, tall tree is deciduous. We know spring is here when we see the distinctive pink/red tips of the emerging new leaves on otherwise bare branches. The bark has round, circular sections and the trees are often found with buttressed roots. Red Cedar has a very soft but durable timber and is immune from borer and termite attacks.

Crows Nest Fern (*Asplenium australasicum*)

Are characterised by a ring of overlapping tongue-shaped fronds up to 2m long. Individual plants are commonly 1 – 1.5 metres across. The centre of the plant contains thick humus formed from dead fronds and leaf litter from surrounding trees.

Elkhorn (*Platyserium bifurcatum*)

Forms crowded colony or clump of individual plants. Two types of fronds on mature plants; body of elkhorn formed by broad, overlapping fronds that are divided or lobed towards apex. Arising from point near base of body of plant are several pendulous long, thin or wedge shaped fronds forked towards apex. Undersurface clothed in hairs that give these fronds grey-green appearance.

Staghorn (*Platyserium superbum*)

Grows as a single plant. Two forms of fronds present on mature plants. Body of staghorn formed by broad overlapping fronds lobed or divided towards apex. Deeply divided or forked spore-bearing fronds hang from near base of plant. Spores clustered into large brown mass at base of first fork.

Mistletoe

Is a parasite of mostly forest trees. Can be clearly seen on the Dalby Road approaches to Bunya Mountains. In some cases, it is very difficult to

distinguish mistletoe from the host tree – mostly look for a different colour. It hangs in “clumps” from the branches. Seeds are spread to other trees by the mistletoe bird.

Grasstrees (*Xanthorrhoea glauca* sp *glauca*)

These tall, slow growing and often multi branched grastrees grow on the grassy balds on the western slopes of Mt Kiangarow and the open Eucalypt forest near Pine Gorge Lookout.

LaceBark/Scrub Bottle Tree (*Brachychiton discolor*).

These medium to tall trees have blotchy, grey fissured bark. Tree is deciduous or partly deciduous and flowers in late spring/early summer. Flowers are large & pink with red centres. They have 5 petals.

Palm Lilly (*Cordyline petiolaris*)

These are tall (2 – 5 metres) and grow on one to several slender stems that are sometimes branched. Tufts of leaves are 80 – 120cm long with long petioles. Fruit is bright red.

King Orchid (*Dendrobium speciosum*)

These are very large orchids with long, swollen ribbed stems with several thick leaves. They have large sprays of creamy-white flowers in spring. Grows high in trees and on rocks in less accessible places that remain undiscovered by collectors. The fleshy, fibrous stems were eaten by Aborigines.

Giant Stinging Tree (*Dendrocnide excelsa*)

Tall tree with channelled, buttressed trunk. Light brown bark. Large roundish leaves, often heavily eaten by predatory insects. Leaves have stinging hairs on their surface that cause severe pain to humans. Fruit is greenish – white to pink with a mass of fleshy stalks. The tree will Succour very readily. Young trees have stinging hairs on their trunk as well as their leaves. A small shoot with 2 leaves on it is often what stings the unwary. Beware also the leaves. Cunjevoi sap is reported to be an effective antidote but ripe avocado works much better. May sting for a couple of days and can be re-activated by cold or water.

Stinging Nettles. (*Urtica incise*)

Relative of the stinging tree, these small plants are often found at the edge of the rainforest but may grow in otherwise cleared areas. Like their relatives, stinging nettles have stinging hairs on their leaves which hurt and produce white lumps on the skin. The pain will go away in time but for the short term spray the area with stingose or apply a paste of bicarb.

Cunjevoi (*Alocasia macrorrhizos*)

Lilly like plant with large leaves on long fleshy stems. Flowers are in spikes surrounded by creamy/white bracts. Perfume is sickly sweet and pervades the surrounding forest.

Fig Trees (*Ficus watkinsiana*)

Moreton Bay or Strangler Figs' seeds germinate in stumps, logs, rocks and tree forks of other trees – wherever there is sufficient humus. They then send tentacles down to the ground all around the host tree until it is completely engulfed. The host tree dies and decomposes leaving a hollow which may or may not be filled by the fig tree. The fruits are enjoyed by a large number of birds and animals. Fig Trees are distinguished also by the huge buttresses at their base and for their great height.

Mowbullan Whitewood (*Elaeocarpus kirtonii*)

This very attractive large, buttressed tree grows to a large diameter & height. It's trunk is seldom straight and smooth – hollows give animals such as possums a dwelling place. The wood is white.

Black Bean (*Castanospermum australe*)

This attractive tree is characterised by a thick mass of attractive light green leaves each approx. 25 – 30cm. The leaflets are on opposite sides of the leaf stalk, making them very distinctive to identify. They bear a heavy crop of large bean-like pods 15 – 20cm long.