

Nature Notes

Junior Ranger

MONSOON FORESTS

Unlike Queensland, the Territory doesn't have large areas of moist rainforest that receive rain all year round. But small patches of monsoon forests are scattered across the Top End.

Monsoon forests are 'closed forests' that rely on the Top Ends' monsoonal wet season for their water. During the wet season they have a 'closed' roof (or canopy) of tangled branches, leaves and vines which shades the forest floor. But in the dry season they usually rely on permanent spring fed water, so many of the trees shed their leaves to conserve water. This allows the sun to light up the ground.

Around Darwin you may see small monsoon forest patches in Holmes Jungle, Howard Springs and Berry Springs Nature Parks and Fogg Dam Conservation Reserve.

These little areas are really important for a whole lot of fruit eating birds such as Pied Imperial Pigeons, Rose-crowned Fruit-doves, Figbirds, Yellow Orioles, Common Koels and Great Bowerbirds. They are also important for mammals, especially flying foxes and possums.

DID YOU KNOW...

In the Northern Territory there are about 15 000 of these monsoon forest patches which amounts to just 0.2 percent of the land.



Top End monsoon forests are home to an amazing bird which lays its eggs inside huge mounds of dead leaves and soil.

The Orange-footed Scrubfowl is an Australian native chook. It's neck and chest are dark grey but its wings are brown. It gets its name from its powerful orange legs and feet.

Like its endangered southern cousin the Malleefowl *Leipoa ocellata*, the scrubfowl spends many hours raking up leaves and soil to maintain its mound. When the eggs hatch the chicks dig their way to the surface. They are immediately able to run quite fast like their parents.

The Malleefowl was once common in dry woodlands of central and southern Australia but is now rare.

Orange-footed Scrubfowl
Megapodius reinwardt

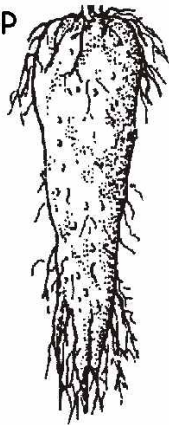
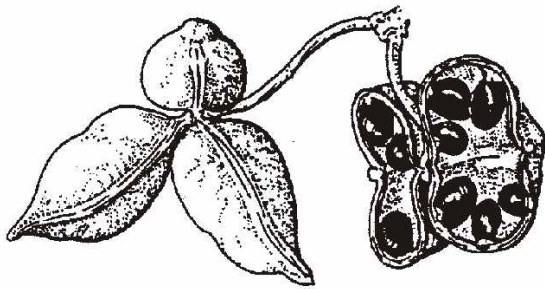


FIRE AND MONSOON FORESTS

While Eucalypt woodlands of the Top End have learned to live with dry season fires, monsoon forests don't like them one little bit. Traditionally, Aboriginal people burned firebreaks around them early in the dry season. They protected the monsoon forests because of the many types of bush tucker and bush medicine that grow there.

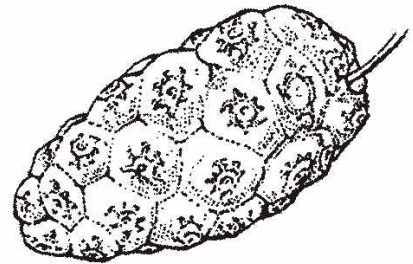
Use this grid to decode the names of three favourite bushtucker plants gathered from Top End monsoon forests.

	1	2	3	4	5
A	A	B	C	D	E
B	F	G	H	I	J
C	K	L	M	N	O
D	P	Q	R	S	T
E	U	V	W	X	Y



C2 C5 C4 B2 E5 A1 C3

A2 E1 D4 B3 D1 A5 A1 C4 E1 D5



D3 C5 D5 D5 A5 C4 A3 B3 A5 A5 D4 A5 B1 D3 E1 B4 D5

WHAT AM I?

I am a very common butterfly in Top End monsoon forests and other places with thick vegetation.

A3 C5 C3 C3 C5 C4

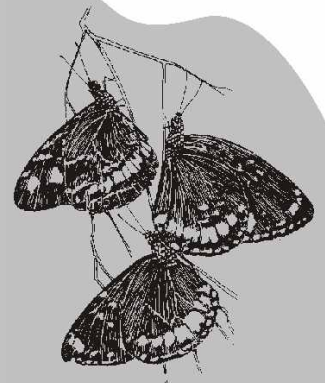
I have dark brown wings with white spots.

A3 D3 C5 E3

My eggs are yellow. My caterpillars are black underneath but yellow above.

When I'm changing from a caterpillar to a butterfly, I hang from a branch like a beautiful gold or silver pendant.

A2 E1 D5 D5 A5 D3 B1 C2 E5



Want to learn more about monsoon forests?

Check out the book, *Plants of Northern Territory Monsoon Vine Forests* by Glenn Wightman & Milton Andrews.

