

Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park Note

Flora

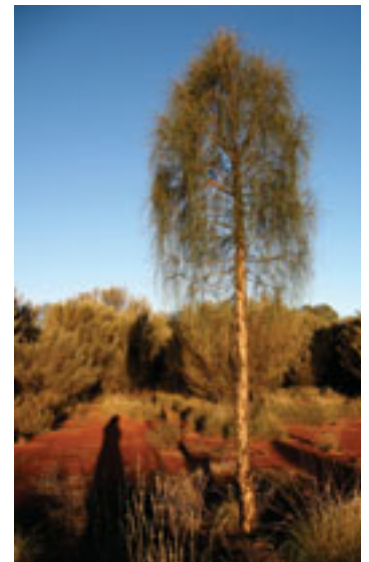
Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park supports vegetation ranging from eucalypt woodlands to spinifex grasslands. Unlike the less arid parts of Australia where eucalypts dominate the landscape, at Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park where the average yearly rainfall is less than 300 millimetres, the most common group of trees are the acacias. *Anangu* have many uses for plants including food, medicines, tools and weapons.

Wanari (mulga) includes several acacia species which form dense woodlands of low, rounded shrub-like trees; these are the most common trees in the park. The dominant species of *wanari* is the common mulga (*Acacia aneura*) other species include Uluru mulga (*A. ayersiana*), and witchetty bush (*A. kempeana*). *Wanari* trees all produce tiny yellow flowers which are packed closely together to form spikes. *Wanari* provides an important source of food and resources for *Anangu*, who eat *wanari* seeds, collect *maku* (witchetty grubs) and *tjala* (honey ants) that are found in the roots, hunt the large game that shelter in the shade, and use *wanari* wood to make several important tools such as spear throwers, digging sticks and spear heads.



Wanari (left) is the most common tree found in the park

Kurkara (right) has many adaptative abilities for survival in the arid zone such as sending a main taproot down to the watertable and having tiny scale like leaves to reduce water loss



Muur-muurpa, *itara*, and *altarpa* are the three most common eucalypts (gum trees) in the park. *Muur-muurpa* (desert bloodwood, *Eucalyptus terminalis*) have rough, square patterned bark and produce a red sap which *Anangu* use as a disinfectant and an inhalant for coughs and colds. *Itara* (river red gum, *E. camaldulensis*) have smooth white and grey bark with red patches, and grow along creek lines. *Anangu* eat *itara* seeds and find edible grubs under the bark and a white scale on the leaves can be rolled up and eaten like a lolly. *Altarpa* (blue mallee, *E. gamophylla*) has rounded blue-green leaves and grow in sandy areas. After fires they can re-sprout from a large underground root to form several new trunks which gives them the characteristic multi-stemmed 'mallee-form' appearance.

Kurkara (desert oak, *Allocasuarina decaisneana*) juvenile and mature trees can be seen scattered across the spinifex grasslands. The juvenile trees are narrow with a straight trunk and numerous twig-like branches; upon reaching maturity the trees form a large spreading canopy and deeply furrowed corky bark which protects the trees from fire. *Kurkara* are very slow growing, and many of the adult trees you see are likely to be in excess of 1000 years old. *Anangu* preferred a piece of *kurkara* as a fire stick, as once alight, the dense resinous timber does not easily go out.

Pukara (thryptomene, *Thryptomene maisonneuvei*) is a small woody shrub which forms dense stands on the slopes of sand dunes. *Pukara* have small compact leaves with no stems, and produce small white and pink flowers which bloom in winter. On winter mornings *Anangu* women would beat the bushes with a wooden bowl to collect the morning dew which contained sweet nectar from the flowers.

Kaliny-kalinypa (honey grevillea, *Grevillea eriostachya*) is a straggly shrub with long, narrow leaves that produces bright yellow and green flowers in long spikes. The flowers contain thick, honey-like nectar which can be sucked directly from the flowers; a favourite treat for *Anangu* children. The flowers can also be dipped in water to make a sweet drink.

Tjanpi (spinifex grass) forms spiky hummocks which are the dominant ground cover on the sand dunes and plains in the park. There are four species which occur in the park – soft spinifex (*Triodia pungens*) and hard spinifex (*T. basedowei*) are the most common, and porcupine grass (*T. irritans*) and feathertop spinifex (*T. schinzii*) is found amongst the domes at Kata Tjuta. Soft spinifex produces a resin which *Anangu* used to make *kiti*, a glue-like gum used in tool making. *Tjanpi* provides habitat for many small mammals and reptiles; when the *tjanpi* gets old and dense *Anangu* burn it to open up the landscape and to produce foraging areas for animals.

Left to right - *tjanpi*, *kaliny-kalinypa*, *mangata*, and *pukara*



Tjulpun-tjulpunpa (silvertails/foxtails, *Ptilotus* sp.) are members of the ‘pussytail’ family, they are small shrubs which form spikes of purple flowers covered in dense white hairs. The leaves are covered in closely packed star-shaped hairs which slow the rate of water loss from the leaves. *Anangu* were said to use the soft furry flowers to line wooden bowls in which babies could be carried.

Wakati (pigweed, *Portulaca oleracea*) is a small prostrate succulent with oval-shaped red-green fleshy leaves and small yellow flowers. *Anangu* harvest the small black seeds to grind into flour, and dig up the large tap root which can be baked and eaten.

Muntjantu (woolly cloak fern, *Cheilanthes lasiophylla*) grow amongst the rocks around Uluru and Kata Tjuta. During dry times *muntjantu* fronds are curled up and brown, but soon after rain the hairy fronds unfurl and become blue-green.

Rare plants

There are several regionally significant rare plant species that occur in the park. These include one threatened species, species with restricted distributions, and several relictual species (species that persist only in isolated patches of suitable habitat).

Mangata (desert quandong, *Santalum acuminatum*) is a threatened species which is listed as vulnerable in the Northern Territory. *Mangata* are a favourite food of camels, and so while *mangata* are common in other parts of Australia, the large numbers of camels in the Northern Territory have significantly reduced populations in this state. *Mangata* were an important food source for *Anangu*, who ate the vitamin-rich fruit straight off the tree. *Anangu* also used the oily kernels to condition and strengthen their hair, which was then used to weave belts.

Relictual species are remnants of broader populations which existed in the past when the climate was much different. The relictual species that occur in the park are associated with the relatively wet areas around the bigger waterholes such as Kantju Gorge and Mutitjulu Waterhole. Relictual species include *puta-puta* (a rush, *Juncus continuus*), a lobelia (*Lobelia gibbosa* var. *gibbosa*), and a carnivorous sundew (*Drosera indica*).



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