Uluṟu–Kata Tjuṯa National Park Notes

Flora

Like other semi-arid landscapes, Uluṟu–Kata Tjuṯa National Park is moist enough to support scattered, thorny bush and shrub. *Aṉangu* knowledge of plants is drawn from their complex system which classifies plants accordingly to their shape, growth habits, seed and flower formation, edibility, methods of preparation and associations with *Tjukurpa*.

***Puṉu* (trees)**

Wanaṟi (mulga) - *wanaṟi* is probably Australia's most common tree. What look like leaves are actually flattened leaf-stems (called phyllodes). Fire usually kills *wanaṟi* so it has developed a survival strategy dependant on fire. The seeds need heat to crack and germinate. This is why the trees in each stand you see in the park are generally the same age and maturity.

Each part of the tree has an important traditional use. The heavy, hard wood is the main source of firewood and is used to make *miru* (spearthrower), *mukulpa* (barb), *waṯa* (spearhead), *kaḻi* (boomerang) and *wana* (digging stick). Leafy branches are used to make *wiltja* (shelter) and *yuu* (windbreak). *Wanaṟi* is also a valuable source of food and shelter for *maḻu* (red plains kangaroo), *nyii-nyii* (zebra finch) nests, *tarulka* (mulga apples, insect galls), *kurku* (clear sweet lumps) and *ngaṉtja* (mistletoe) fruit.

Wanaṟi (left) is the most common tree found in the park and its survival strategy is dependent on fire

Kurkaṟa (right) has two adaptative abilities for survival in the arid zone. It sends a main taproot down to the groundwater and changes growth formation at different lifecycle stages

***Kurkara* (desert oak)**

Kurkaṟa grow in large numbers in the deep sand. Juveniles look a bit like Christmas trees and mature adults form to have large spreading limbs.

The *kurkaṟa* is the only member of its family in central Australia and its cones are the biggest. Male flowers are yellow and bloom on the leaf tips and female flowers are red and cluster further up the branches. Fire burns the foliage of *kurkaṟa* but usually does not kill the tree and it re-shoots from under the thick bark. *Aṉangu* prefer a piece of *kurkaṟa* as a fire stick as once alight the dense resinous timber does not easily go out.

***Kanturangu* (desert poplar)**

Kanturangu is a fast- growing, short-lived tree that sets large amounts of seed, causing the crown to bend over from the weight. Often found lining roadsides it also grows in sand, on mulga flats and on rocky hillsides. *Kanturangu* leaves feel cool to touch and *Aṉangu* collect them to use as a cooling cover for babies in hot weather. They also collect *maku* (witchetty grubs) from the roots. *Kanturangu* is not related to English poplars but belong to the same Australian family as the sandhill corkwood.

Muur-muurpa (centralian bloodwood)*, iṯaṟa* (river red gum) *and altarpa* (blue mallee) - these are the park's most prominent eucalypts. *Aṉangu* use *muur-muurpa* to make *wira* (bowls) and the red sap which oozes from breaks as a disinfectant, and as an inhalant for coughs and colds.

Iṯaṟa is often mistaken for the ghost gum because of its white bark. *Aṉangu* collect a white flaky crust from the leaves, role it into balls and eat it like a lolly.

***Puti* (shrubs)**

Kaliny-kalinypa (honey grevillea) - grevilleas and hakeas (corkwood trees) flower in the spring and winter. They have big bottlebrush heads and *Aṉangu* collect the flowers for nectar and either suck it directly from the flowers or soak them in water for a sweet drink. *Kaliny-kalinypa* flowers are bright yellow and green.

Ilykuwara (witchetty bush) - *ilykuwara* looks like a shrubby *wanari* with broad, round-ended leaves. *Aṉangu* women use their *wana* (digging stick) to dig up *ilykuwara* roots to extract *maku* (witchetty grubs).

Mintjingka (native fuchsia) - *mintjingka* is easy to see after rain as it is covered with bright red bell flowers and *Aṉangu* collect these flowers and suck the *tjuratja* (sweet nectar).

Left to right - *kaliny-kalinypa*, *Iḷi*, *tjanpi*, and *wangunu*

***Tjuḷpun-tjuḷpunpa* (flowers)**

Aṉangu call all pretty flowers *tjuḷpun-tjuḷpunpa*. Many of them are daisies and most bloom after rain and during the winter. Other species flower as spring approaches, particularly *mintju* (waxy wattle) and *kaḷiwaṟa* (Mount Olga wattle).

The arrival of spring is confirmed by the masses of cream flowers of *aḷiṭi* (Victoria wattle) which stand out against their green, often thorny stems, and the bright yellow balls of *tjuntaḷa* (colony wattle). *Aṉangu* collect the seeds of *tjuntaḷa* and other wattles. They crush them and mix them with a little water to make an edible paste called *latja* which they eat raw. To make damper, the seeds are parched with hot sand so that their skins can be removed before they are ground.

Purar-pararpa (silvertails) *and aḷpuṯaṯi* (daisy mulla-mulla) - both of these plants belong to the group of hairy flowers we call pussytails. *Purar-pararpa* has small flowers with magenta petal-tubes amongst masses of silver hairs and *aḷpuṯaṯi* have small pink flowers.

***Ukiri* (grasses)**

Tjanpi (spinifex) - *tjanpi* tussocks have enormous root systems which prevent desert sands from shifting. The roots spread underground beyond the prickly clump and deeply into the soil, forming an immense cone.

Aṉangu use a resin gathered from *kiṭi* to make a gum. They thresh the *tjanpi* until the resin particles fall free. These particles are heated until they fuse together to form a mouldable black tar which is worked while warm. The gum is used to bond stone edges to wood for hunting and work implements.

Wangunu (naked woollybutt), *kunakaṇṭi* (armgrass millet) and *kutja* (native millet) - the seeds of these grasses are important *Aṉangu* foods. Women rub the seed heads from their stalks, and then separate the seeds from the chaff by skilful winnowing and yandying. Using grinding stones, they then grind the seeds to flour, mix with water to make a damper.

***Mai* (fruits)**

Kampuṟarpa (desert raisin), *tjuntawaṟa*, *iṯunypa*, and *tjilka* (wild tomatoes) - all have distinctive flowers with yellow stamens that stand erect from the fused pentagon of purple petals. Other important fruits are *Iḷi* (native fig) and *mangata* (quondong) where the fruit is eaten and the seed is ground into a paste and rubbed into the hair as a conditioner. Some species of fruit are very poisonous so traditional knowledge is important for collection.