

# Unique desert icon

## Waddi Tree

*Acacia peuce*



Also known as Waddy, Waddy-wood or Birdsville Wattle, this member of the wattle family is listed as Vulnerable under Commonwealth legislation.

### A very limited distribution

The rare and ancient Waddi Tree occurs naturally in only three locations on the fringes of the Simpson Desert: south of Boulia and north of Birdsville in western Queensland, and south-east of Alice Springs in the Northern Territory. These stands are thought to be relics of a once continuous distribution before the drying climate and dune formation of about 16,000 to 18,000 years ago.

### Natural and cultural significance

The Waddi Tree plays a significant role in its local environment, often the only tree growing in the harsh, arid climate. Even when not near a watercourse, it can grow to 18 metres. Because it decays so slowly, the dead timber provides habitat for at least 200 years

The Southern Aranda people of central Australia saw the Waddi Tree as a link between earth and sky; it forms part of the *Thutirla Pula* (Two Boys Dreaming) Creation Story of the Wangkangurru people of the Birdsville area; and near Boulia an ancient Waddi Tree marks a significant corroboree and meeting ground for the Pitta Pitta people. Its hard timber was used to make weapons and digging sticks, and to transport fire.

Explorers Burke and Wills passed by the Boulia stand in 1861, with Wills making a journal entry about the tree. With Waddi Trees living for 200 to 300 years or more, some of the trees they observed are probably still alive. People have used this extremely hard, heavy and scarce timber for fence posts, yards and house-building ... it is so hard it damages axes and saws.

### Habit

Juvenile plants have spiky, rigid foliage while mature trees have relatively soft, weeping leaves, resembling casuarinas or pine trees. The bark is grey-brown and fibrous, and the very dense timber is yellow with dark red heartwood. The pale yellow ball flowers are inconspicuous, while the papery, slim seed pods are particularly large. Waddi Trees can grow to around 18 metres, but at no more than 30 cm a year. Germination is reliant on exceptionally high rainfall events, so only occurs periodically.

For more information  
contact Desert Channels  
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The production of this brochure  
was made possible by the generous  
support of the Foundation for  
National Parks & Wildlife



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## Habitat

The Birdsville and NT populations occur on shallow sand aprons over clay and gibber slopes associated with denuded mesas. In the Boulia area, the Waddi Tree is associated with alluvium and paleochannels (ancient river beds) of the Hamilton and Georgina rivers.

## Population and Distribution

The 10 km<sup>2</sup> Waddi Tree population in NT on Andado Station and Mac Clark (Acacia Peuce) Conservation Reserve is the smallest and most isolated of the three. It is considered viable, with variable age structure characterised mainly by secondary juvenile and mature plants but also some seedling recruitment.

The Birdsville population, centred on Roseberth Station, consists of many discontinuous stands over about 50 km<sup>2</sup>. It is made up mostly of older trees with only a small amount of regeneration.

At 900 km<sup>2</sup>, the Boulia population is the largest of the three. Spread across Montague Downs and Marion Downs, it is the only population considered to be thriving and increasing in size as it contains various age classes, and recruitment occurs regularly after high rainfall events.

## Protecting the Waddi Tree

As the distribution of the Waddi Tree is so restricted, the habitat at all locations is considered to be critical for the survival of the species. A wildfire in one of the NT stands killed most of the trees, further threatening their existence. The Birdsville population has only a minor fire threat as the landscape is relatively bare and rocky. Stock grazing currently keeps the fuel-loads down around the Boulia population, and while there is no record of fire there, any build up of fuel-loads would be potentially catastrophic.

Cutting the Waddi Tree for timber is now rare: landholders at all three locations are aware of the significance of the species and are keen to manage it accordingly. However, the long-term future of the two Queensland populations is not secure as a formal conservation agreement does not exist. This makes the careful management of this ancient tree all the more important.

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