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The Australian Rangeland Society

FIELD GUIDE TO THE PLANTS OF OUTBACK SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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INTRODUCTION

The Pastoral Program has recently produced a field guide of native and introduced plants that occur within the rangelands region of South Australia. The guide is of a convenient size, durability, and affordability to satisfy a large range of end-users. A partnership between the Soil Boards of the rangelands of South Australia, the Pastoral Program – Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation (DWLBC), and the Plant Biodiversity Centre - Department of Environment and Heritage (DEH), with major funding from the Natural Heritage Trust, has enabled this full-colour quality field guide to come to fruition. As part of collaboration between State government departments the Design Publishing Unit (DEH) has carried out the artwork and layout.

The pastoral rangelands region, or “Outback” as it is often referred to, is a vast, unique and valuable asset to the South Australian community. It constitutes more than 80% of the State’s land area, a large area north and west of Port Augusta. Pastoral leases grazing sheep and cattle cover more than 50% of this area, with the remainder under Conservation Reserves, Mining and Aboriginal Land use.

There has been an increasing interest in this region as a tourist destination, brought about by such initiatives as “The Year of the Outback”, and increased accessibility with Public Access Routes instigated by the Pastoral Board of SA. Many of the visitors to this area take a large interest in what they are seeing, whether it is the geology, the fauna or the flora. In addition to tourists, other major interest groups for this book are pastoralists, scientific communities and the education community. Information contained within can aid in making management decisions. The book is also a valuable asset for interstate people due to the wealth of information contained within.

RATIONALE AND DESIGN

The design brief aimed to address several questions that had been asked in the past regarding plant books for this State. Have you ever had a plant in your hand when you were working in the Outback, or on holidays but had no handy reference book? How many times have you thought those reference books are just too big to carry around, costly to buy or too easily damaged? Have you ever wanted a field guide that was specific to the Outback region of South Australia?

To cater for all interest groups the language used in the guide is simple and follows a similar format to the well-respected but large-sized *Plants of Western New South Wales* (Cunningham *et al.* 1992). This book has until now formed the main basis for plant identification for people in the region but contains many plants that do not occur in SA. Other books use scientific language necessitating constant use of a glossary and generally cater for specific audiences. The field guide addresses the issues of convenient size (glove-box sized), simple language, cost and plants that occur in this State.

A total of 356 species are fully described and illustrated with high quality photos including close-ups of distinguishing features and the plants in their natural environments. The featured plants are a combination of the most common plants obtained from the Pastoral Program’s extensive database as well as less-common species that would hold special interest. Many pastoralists requested the inclusion of weed species so these are highlighted. Rare and endangered species are featured with their current status provided by the Department of Environment and Heritage (DEH). The field guide contains the most up-to-date location map information and scientific names provided by the Plant Biodiversity Centre of the South Australia DEH.

In addition to the simple language used throughout the guide a glossary provides further assistance with plant identification. This particular glossary is unique in that it includes close-up photos of the plant's distinguishing features rather than diagrams, to aid in recognition and familiarisation of features in plant identification in a "real" sense. This unique feature would make a valuable addition to other field guides.

The field guide is made from durable materials for work in the field such as a flexible plastic cover and "varnished" ink on the internal pages. A wealth of information is contained despite the relatively small size. This includes the plants' lifeforms, such as trees, shrubs, forbs, grasses and miscellaneous, including lilies, mistletoes and sedges.

Quick reference guides provide details on each plant's size, flowering time and how common it is, based on a three-tier system of common, locally common and uncommon. Leaves are described with common shapes for easy recognition, for example spearhead-shaped.

Scientific names form the main titles due to the regional variance in common names. Variations, subspecies and form taxon are given where applicable. The most widespread common name and lesser regional common names are also included. Textual information includes descriptions of plant shapes, bark, and sizes and descriptions of leaves, stems, flowers and fruits. Soils and land types that plants occur in feature also (including quick reference icons). A "comments" section includes information on pastoral use and general interest sourced from pastoralists and similar books such as Cunningham *et al* (1992). Comments on Aboriginal usage are largely sourced from the comprehensive *Bushfires and Bushtucker* (Latz 1996) as well as several smaller regional sources. Location map regions for each plant are based on those shown in the *Flora of South Australia* (Jessop and Toelken 1986) for continuity within the scientific community.

This book is a unique compendium of information to guide the management and conservation of the most widespread and important plants in the rangelands of South Australia. It builds on the vast amount of information collected during the pastoral lease assessment program of the Pastoral Program in the SA DWLBC, and from scientific study. It has been written by scientific staff of the Program with 53 years combined knowledge in the rangelands region and incorporates the lifetime experience of many of our pastoral land managers in the region. The amount of information and photographs results in this book being a "must-have" for residents and serious visitors to the region.

SALES AND FEEDBACK

For more information on retail and wholesale sales, and to provide feedback, contact the Pastoral Program in the South Australian Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation on freecall 1800 678 447.

REFERENCES

Jessop, J.P. and Toelken, H.R. (eds) (1986). *Flora of South Australia*, 4th Edition. The Flora and Fauna of South Australia Handbooks Committee, South Australian Government Printing Division, Adelaide.

Cunningham, G.M., Mulham, W.E., Milthorpe, P.L. and Leigh, J.H. (1992). *Plants of Western New South Wales*. Inkata Press, Melbourne, Sydney.

Latz, P. (1996). *Bushfires and Bushtucker I*. IAD Press, Alice Springs.

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