

Plant of the Month - December

by Allan Carr

Dendrophthoe vitellina

Pronunciation: den-drof-THO-ee vy-TEL-ee-na

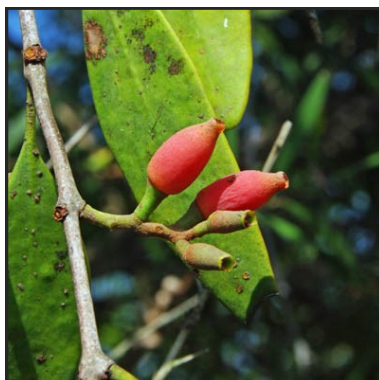
Derivation: *Dendrophthoe*, from the Greek, *dendron* – tree and *phthoe* – corruption (a parasite corrupting a tree); *vitellina*, from the Latin, *vitellus* – yolk and the suffix *inus* – resembling (possibly referring to the colour of the flower).

apostle mistletoe

LORANTHACEAE



Flowers



Fruits



Habit

Dendrophthoe is a genus of 6 species in Australia, 4 of these endemic and 3 of them found in eastern Australia.

Description: *D. vitellina* is a common mistletoe found mainly on plants of the Myrtaceae family but also on plants of other families and including introduced species. It occurs in coastal areas and nearby ranges of eastern Australia from Atherton Tableland in Qld through eastern NSW to Mallacoota in Vic. *D. glabrescens* is almost indistinguishable from this species. Both of these are parasites and have no actual roots but have runners along the branches of the host plant.

Leaves to 120 mm x 40 mm are alternate and leathery, *glaucous and *glabrous.

Flowers to 50 mm long borne in axillary *racemes of 5 to 20 flowers from August to February are tubular and yellow with curved red petals bending backwards.

Fruits are *ovoid capsules to 15 mm, red and contain sticky seeds deposited by mistletoebirds (*Dicaeum hirundinaceum*) and some other bird and mammal species.

D. vitellina is a host plant for many butterflies, at least twelve, giving rise to the common name of apostle mistletoe. These include the Scarlet Jezebel (*Delias argenthona*) below.

*glaucous = dull, bluish-green in colour

*glabrous = without hairs or scales

*raceme = an unbranched flower stem with flowers on stalks

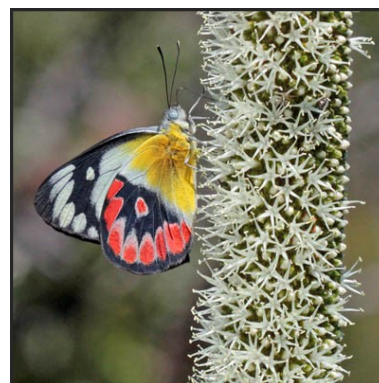
*ovoid = egg-shaped



Scarlet Jezebel eggs



Scarlet Jezebel caterpillars



Scarlet Jezebel adult female