

## Plant of the Month - April

by Allan Carr

### *Casuarina equisetifolia* subsp. *incana*

coastal she-oak

**Pronunciation:** cas-yoo-a-REE-na ek-wis-et-if-OLE-ee-a

CASUARINACEAE

**Derivation:** *Casuarina*, from the neo-Latin, *casuarius* (cassowary), from the resemblance of the drooping branchlets to the feathers of the cassowary ; *equisetifolia*, from the Latin, *equus* – horse (a reference to the foliage resembling the tail of a horse) and *folium* – a leaf. (*incana*, from the Latin *incanus* – hoary or grey (referring to the foliage))



Leaves, female flowers



Male flowers on branchlets



Fruiting cones, branchlets

*Casuarina* is a genus of 17 species in SE Asia, Malesia, Melanesia, Polynesia, New Caledonia and Australia; 6 species in Australia.

**Description:** *C. equisetifolia* is a coastal tree with two recognised subspecies – *C. equisetifolia* subsp. *equisetifolia* (a tree to 35 m) occurs from near Darwin, NT, east to about Cairns, Qld and in SE Asia, while *C. equisetifolia* subsp. *incana* (a tree to 10 m) occurs from Rockhampton, Qld, south to Laurieton, NSW and on some Pacific Islands. Bark is grey-brown, rough and furrowed on the lower trunk, scaly above. Foliage consists of grey-green branchlets to 1 mm thick.

**Leaves** are reduced to 6 to 8 tiny triangular teeth at the joins of the furrowed branchlet segments as in the photo on the left above. If branchlet segments are pulled apart the tiny leaves appear as a small crown and are best observed with a lens.

**Flowers** are \*monoecious, male – masses of creamy brown stamens at the branchlet ends, female – bright red styles clustered on stalks to 12 mm long on the branches from Mar to May. The flowers have no petals.

**Fruits** are barrel-shaped woody fruiting cones to 20 mm x 17 mm with pointed valves containing pale-brown \*samaras to 8 mm long, each with a single seed.

*C. equisetifolia* is a larval food plant of the she-oak moth, (*Pernattia pusilla*) and red-tailed black-cockatoos, (*Calyptorhynchus banksii*) feed on the fruits.



Bark on lower trunk

\*monoecious = having separate male and female flowers on the same plant

\*samara = a dry one-seeded winged fruit that doesn't open at maturity



Habit on a frontal dune