

the tree

RICHARD WOLDENDORP

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Foreword

Trees, perhaps more so than anything else, have made it possible for humans to prosper in Australia. Their slow cycling of carbon from the atmosphere into the soil over millennia played an essential role in delivering the climate we enjoy today. Over centuries, great inland forests attracted life-giving rains, slowly filling huge underground aquifers. For thousands of generations, the world's longest continuing human culture was sustained in this land by gifts received from trees. The essential physical and spiritual services that trees provided were in turn sustained by a deep and respectful custodianship and caring for country. The ecological result of indigenous seed trading, deliberate cultivation and a fine-grained mosaic created by carefully managed fire shaped the landscape as much as it shaped its people.

In the most recent blink of evolutionary time, the relationship between Australia's people and its trees has changed dramatically, but trees have continued to shape and sustain people in new ways. Generations of European settlers took their first steps in this country on the sun-bleached boards of a jarrah jetty. Our economy emerged into the world on the backs of millions of sheep confined by as many timber fence posts. Many of our goods are still delivered to us across countless timber railway sleepers, and the clay tiles and corrugated iron sheltering millions of Australian living rooms are held staunchly aloft by the sawn trunks of trees. Even the electricity that powers our digital lives is distributed by a vast web suspended from tens of thousands of tree trunks carefully selected for their straightness and durability.

But with the developments that trees have made possible, our trees and forests have suffered. Deforestation due to land clearing, logging and fire is the number one cause of the habitat loss that is driving our wildlife to extinction. The release into the atmosphere of the great carbon stores in trees

and forest soils is a leading contributor to climate change, which itself is taking its toll on forests. Our once great woodlands and forests continue to retreat to increasingly fragmented patches that remain largely unprotected. And yet, recent developments in human psychology and health care tell us that contact with trees and the wildness that they provide is essential for our own wellbeing.

For the two thirds of Australians living in major cities, the conservation of our country's unique ecosystems is often out of sight and out of mind. In our busy modern lives, it is easy to think that nature is permanent and that the forest we've been meaning to visit will always be there. Seeing the natural beauty outback Australia has to offer with your own eyes could persuade anyone to become an environmentalist, but not everyone has that chance.

To protect trees, we must care for them, feel something for them. Richard Woldendorp's photographs will undoubtedly foster empathy in any reader for the diverse beauty of Australian trees and the extreme lengths they go to in order to survive. Photography is a powerful tool for truth, and Richard's images, untouched by digital manipulation, are a potent reminder that we need trees – and that they need us.

Piers Verstegen

Vice-President, Australian Conservation Foundation
Director, Conservation Council of Western Australia

Frontispiece: Kimberley gums (*Eucalyptus confluens*) line the contours of the hills by Lake Argyle. East Kimberley, Western Australia.

Pages 4–5: The mountain ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*) forests in Victoria's Central Highlands are under threat from native logging.

Opposite: Young powderbarks (*Eucalyptus accedens*).



From the Photographer

In the past I have photographed the landscapes of Australia from different points of view – initially from the ground and then from the air, concentrating mainly on the natural landscape. But in this book, I wanted to highlight the individual statements made by trees. Every tree has its own personality – no two are the same. Like people, they emerge from the circumstances of their environment.

Australian trees have adapted over millions of years to climate, soil and recurrent bushfires in order to survive and regenerate, giving them their unique characteristics and diversity. Trees appear throughout the whole of Australia, despite the widely held belief that the Australian outback is barren desert. The soil is reasonably productive and the slightest amount of rain will generate growth, which in turn attracts and supports other life such as birds, animals and insects. These natural cycles have enabled Aboriginal people to survive

in all regions of Australia for thousands of years, in environments that would seem inhospitable to the outsider.

I have driven and flown over Australia many times, and I've always been astonished by the variety of plant life that I have come across. In my aerial photography books *Abstract Earth* and *Out of the Blue*, the evidence of trees and shrubs is always noticeable, and shows regional distinctions clearly as one travels from north to south and east to west, and from tropical to freezing conditions.

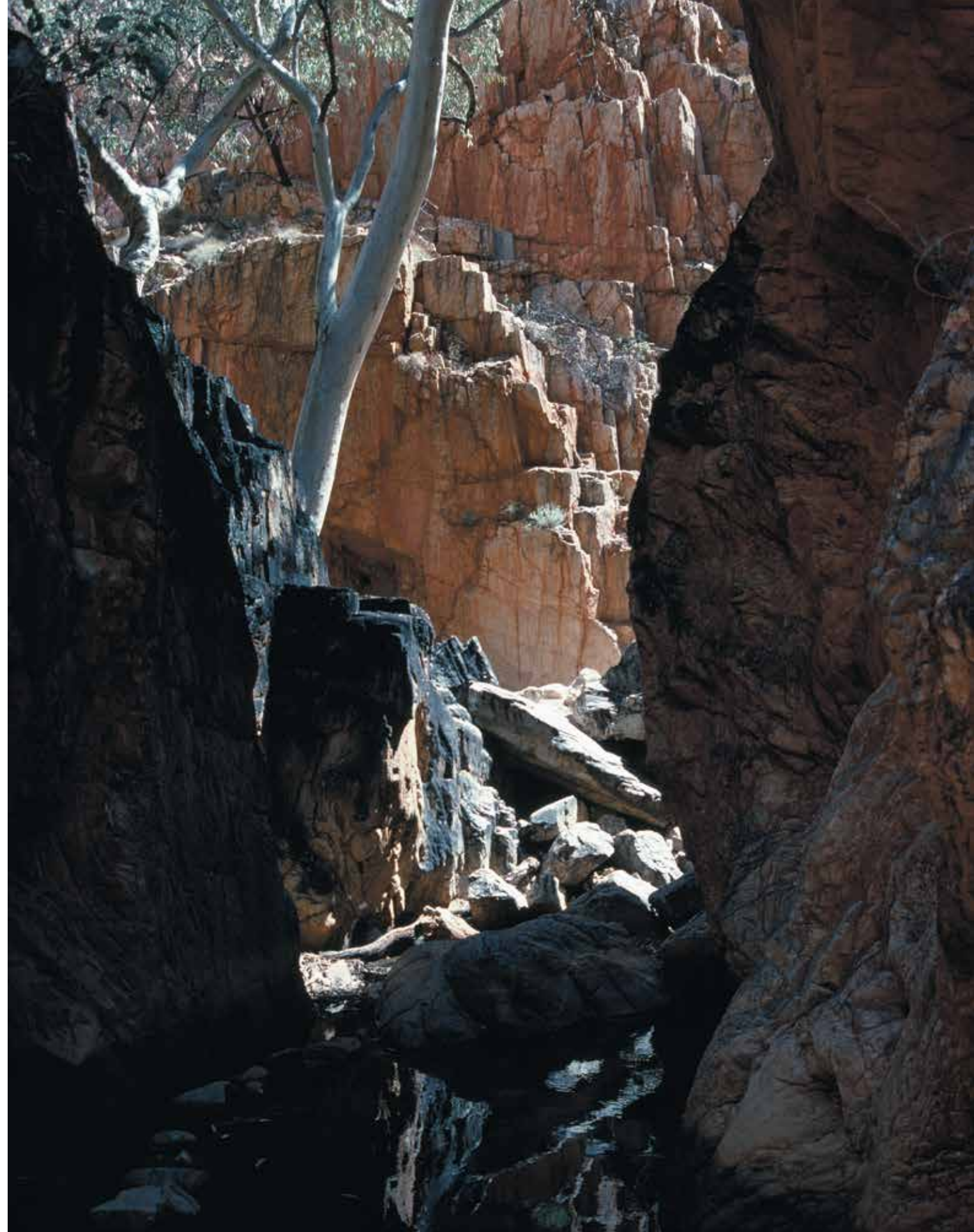
Across all these terrains, trees have sustained human existence for millennia, providing not only oxygen but also shelter, food, wood for burning and raw materials. And yet, we are losing billions of trees every year to logging and deforestation at unsustainable rates. Conservation is needed not only for their protection: trees are necessary for our own survival.

Opposite: Moreton Bay figs (*Ficus macrophylla*), recognisable by their invasive roots, are a common sight in Australian cities.



Above: Layered bark of a red mallee (*Eucalyptus oleosa*).

Opposite: Adapting to its environment, a river gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) grows among rocks. MacDonnell Ranges, Northern Territory.

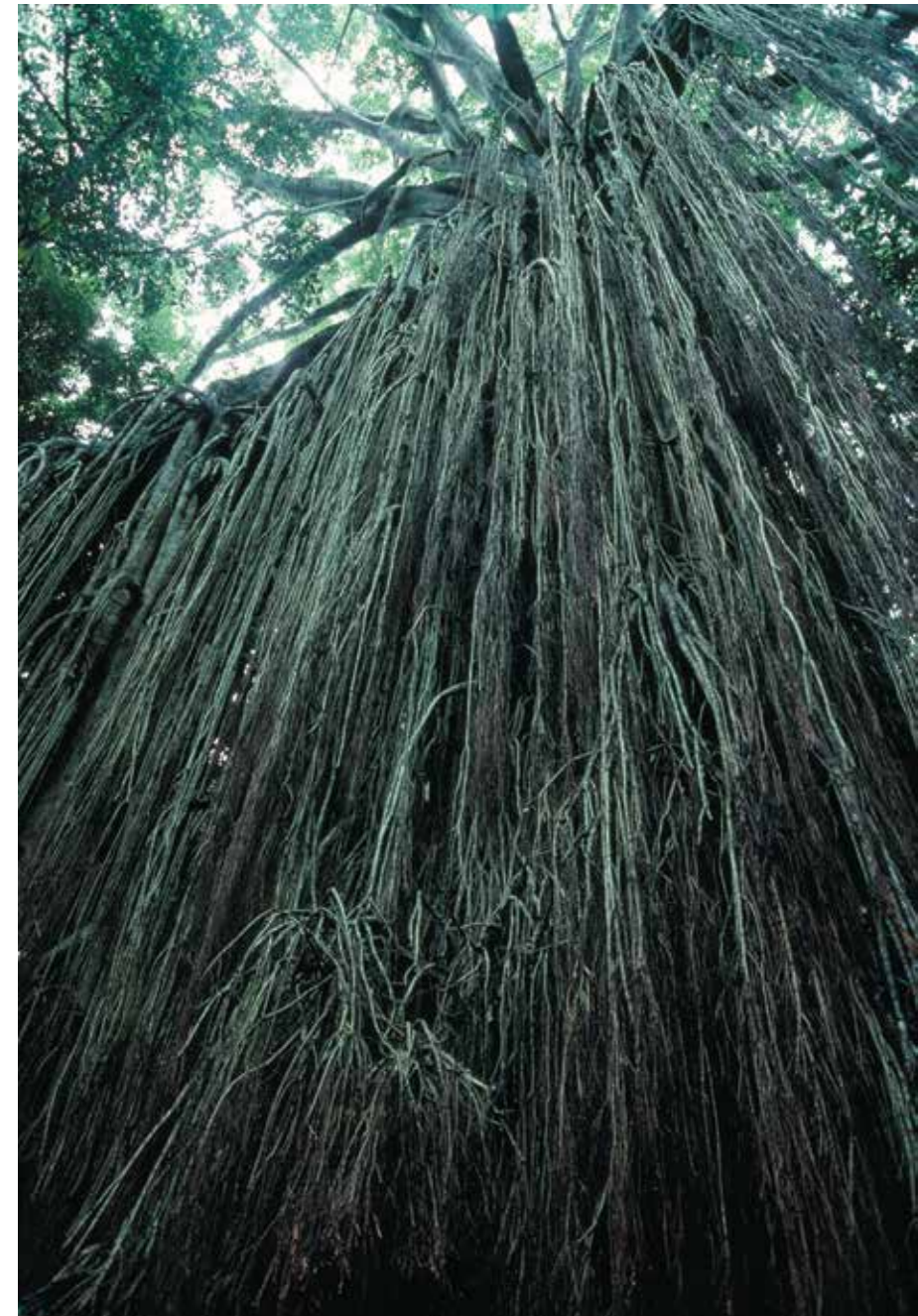




Opposite: This *Corymbia* offers much-needed shade in Australia's red centre. Uluru, Northern Territory.

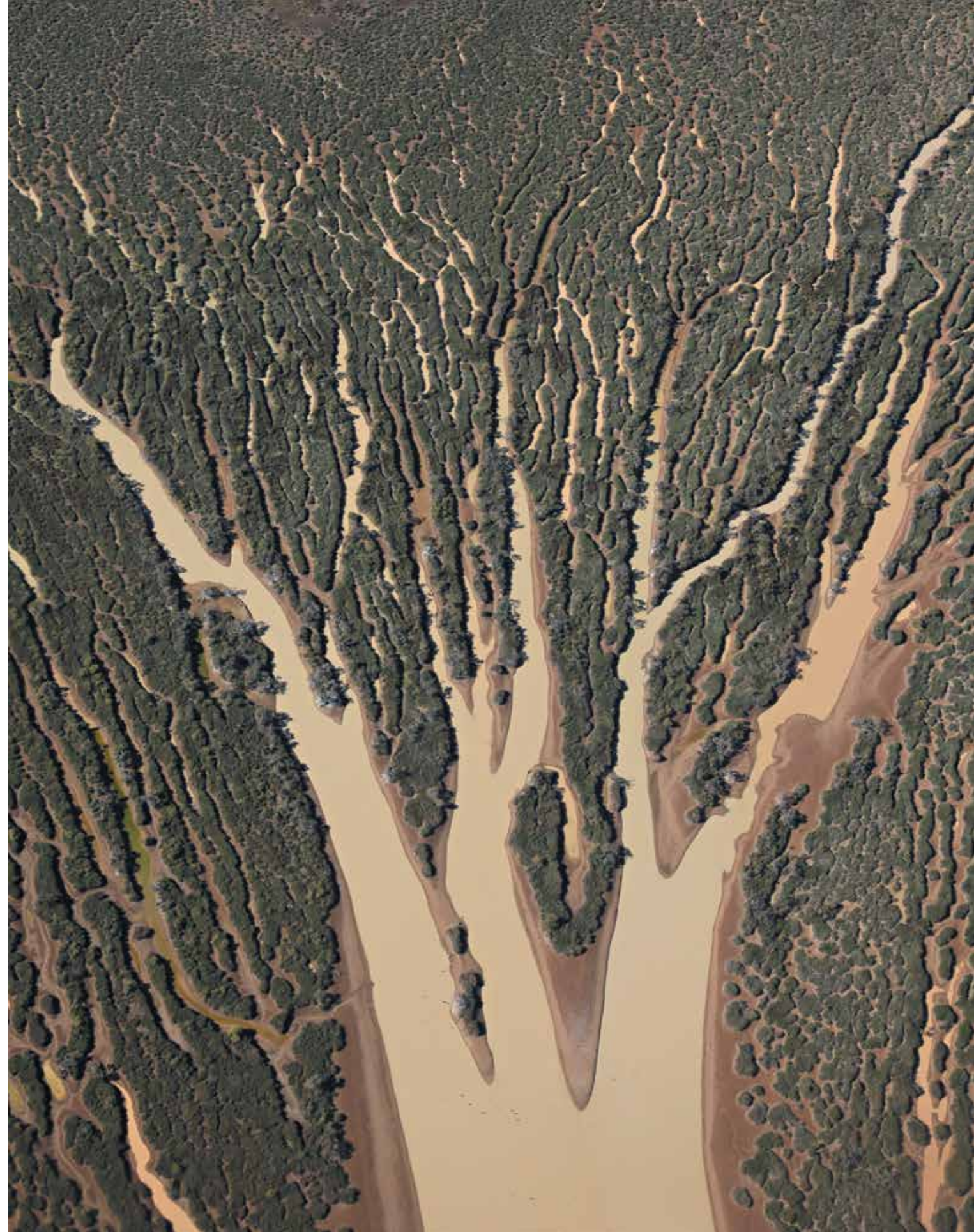
Above: A dead tree makes for a striking silhouette against the blazing Australian sun.





Opposite: A ribbon gum (*Eucalyptus viminalis*)
by a misty rainforest road. Victoria.

Above: Strangler figs such as this *Ficus watkinsiana* start life
as epiphytes in the branches of a host tree and drop many
vine-like aerial roots to the ground. Queensland.



Above: Mangroves grow along vein-like tidal creeks by the Kimberley coast, Western Australia (left), and Cooper Creek, Queensland (right).

Opposite: River systems, seen from above, echo the shape of the trees they nourish. East of Boulia, Queensland.



Previous pages: Mist catches the early morning light.
Darling Range, Western Australia.

Above and opposite: Trees follow rivers, whether they are surrounded by water or sand. Lake King, Victoria (above), and east of Adelaide, South Australia (opposite).



Above: Sometimes water can mean death rather than life.
These trees have died by drowning.
Lake Argyle, Western Australia.

Opposite: Dead trees on a floodplain. Northern Territory.





Opposite and top: Grasstrees (*Xanthorrhoea* spp.), known in the Noongar language as balga, are uniquely adapted to withstand bushfires, and in fact are more likely to produce their long flower spikes when stimulated by fire.

Bottom: The ashes of a fallen marri (*Corymbia calophylla*) form a ghostly impression on the blackened ground.



Opposite, above and following pages: Though Australia is best known for its hot-climate flora, it is home to some frost-tolerant species too, such as these snow gums. Snowy Mountains, Victoria.







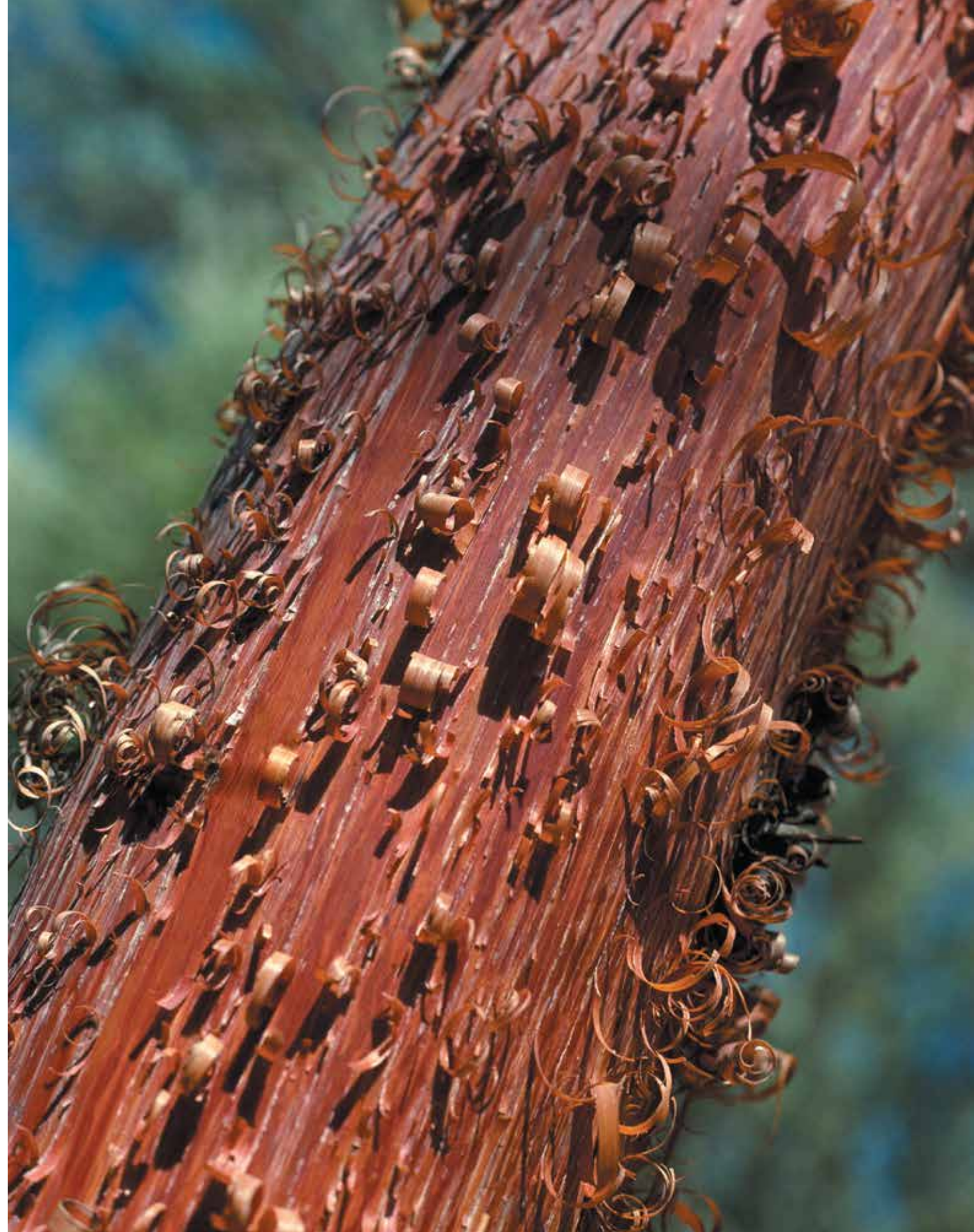
Previous pages: A kurrajong (*Brachychiton acuminatus*) nestled in the striated red rock of Hamersley Gorge. Karijini National Park, Western Australia.



Opposite and above: Imported species like jacaranda (*Jacaranda mimosifolia*) (opposite) and poinciana (*Delonix regia*) (above) add colour to suburban environments.



Above: Strips of bark collect around the base of a Heartbreak Ridge mallet (*Eucalyptus spreta*).
Opposite: Miniritchie bark of an *Acacia fauntleroyi*.





Above: *Corymbia maculata*'s name is derived from the Latin *macula*, meaning spot, which is also the name given to a part of the eye. It is commonly known as the spotted gum.

Opposite: The silver mallee (*Eucalyptus crucis*) is another eucalypt that possesses the miniritchie bark trait.







Previous pages: Mangroves along
Western Australia's Kimberley coast.

Above and opposite: Farmland in
Western Australia's Wheatbelt region.





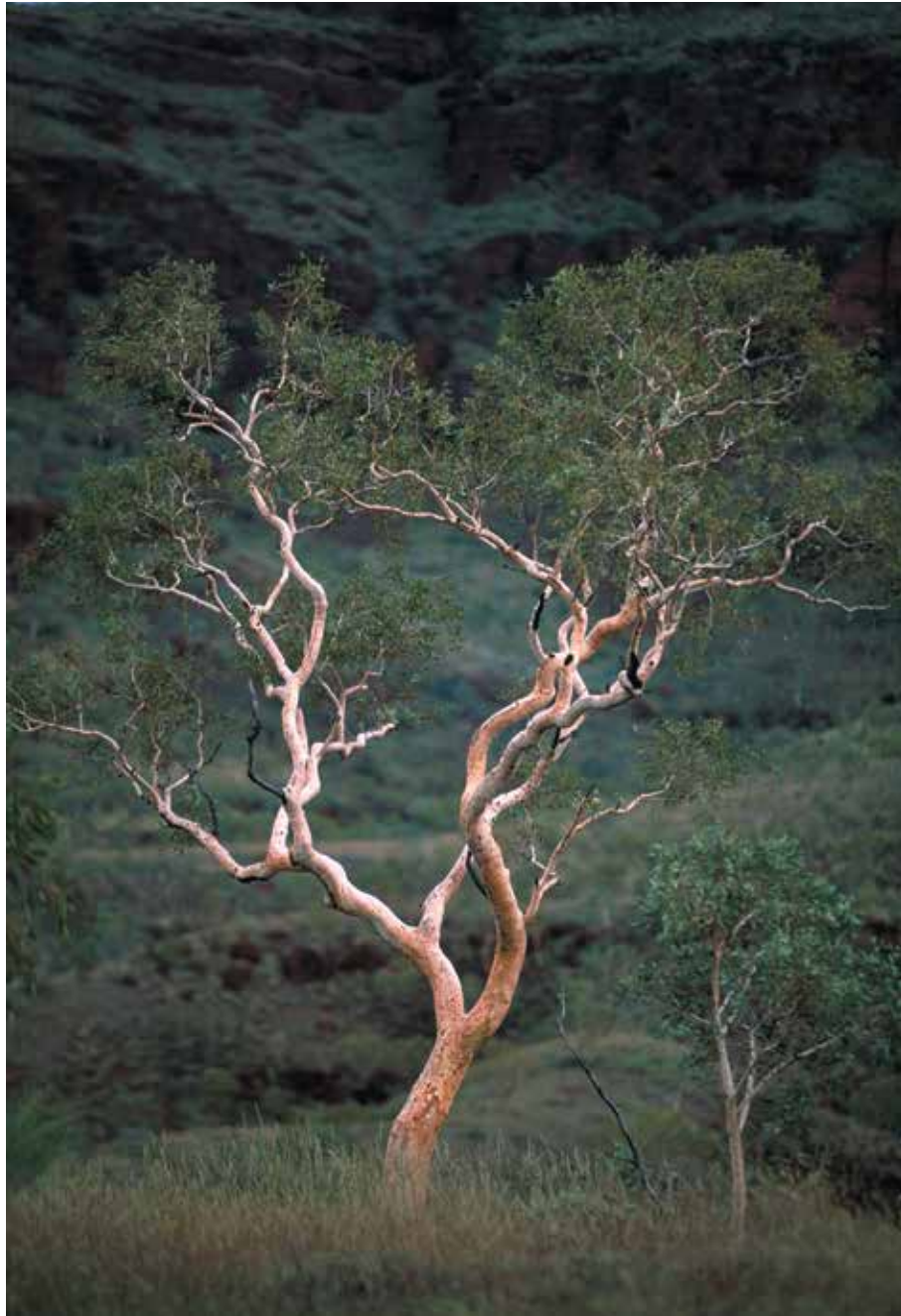
Opposite, above and following pages: Australia's boab tree (*Adansonia gregorii*) is found only in the country's north-west. Although closely related to the baobabs of Africa and Madagascar, it is not known how it reached Australian shores. Kimberley, Western Australia.



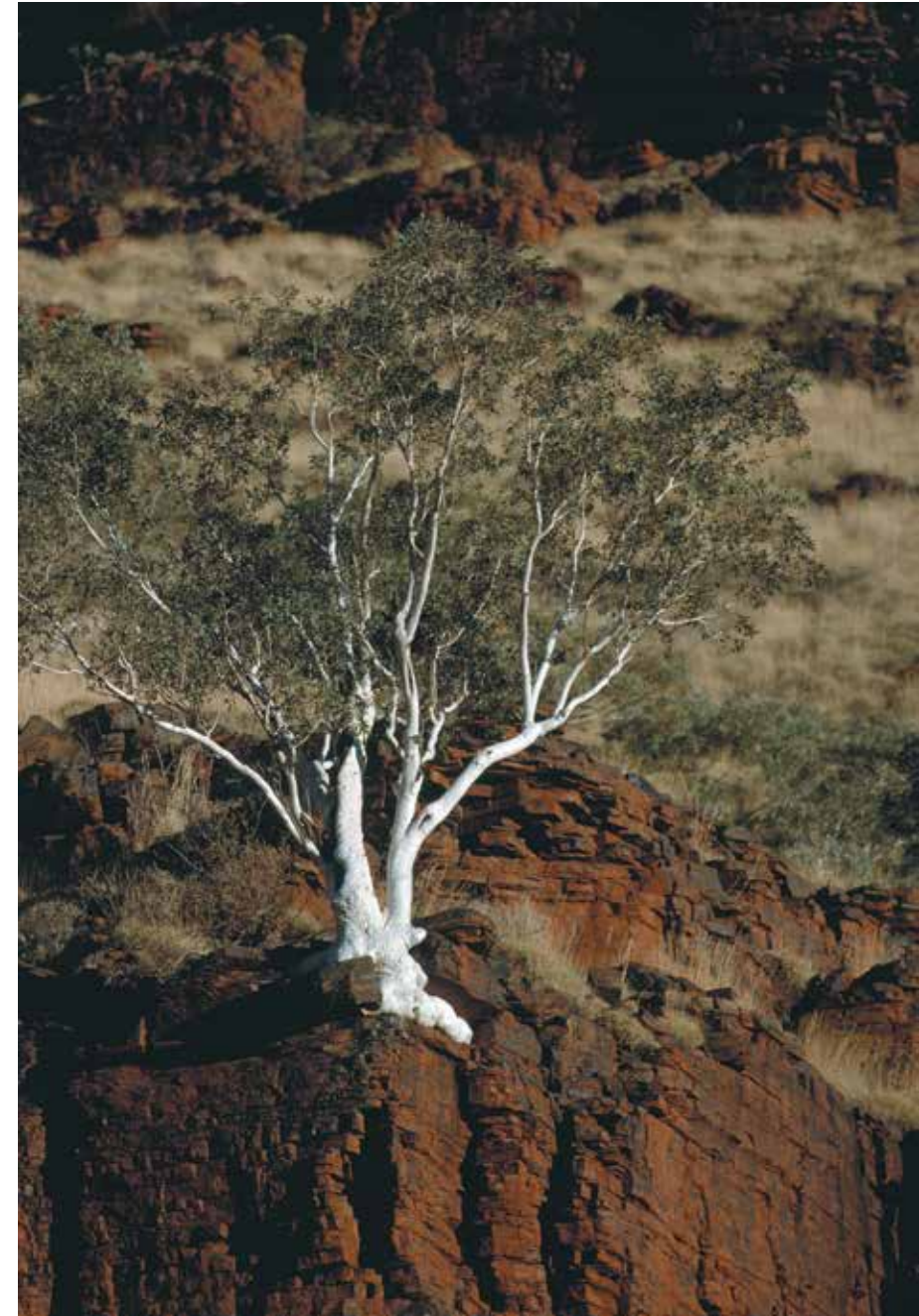


Opposite: Acacia rhodophloia, a miniritchie, looks like it has been sculpted for a Japanese garden.

Above: Endangered Carnaby's black cockatoos rest in the branches of a dead tree.



Above: *Eucalyptus leucophloia* in its native habitat, the Pilbara region of Western Australia.



Above: Here, *Eucalyptus leucophloia* is stark against the ancient rock of Hamersley Gorge, which draws its red colour from high concentrations of iron.

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Front cover: The canopy of a majestic jarrah (*Eucalyptus marginata*).
Back cover: Eyes appear to stare from this spotted gum (*Corymbia maculata*).
Endpapers: Striking bark patterns in river gums (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*).

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