

# Distribution of the *Nypa* Palm in Australia

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The nypa palm (*Nypa fruticans* Wurmb) occurs widely in southeast Asia (Ceylon, eastern India, Malaysia, Thailand, The Philippines and Indonesia), New Guinea, and northern Australia (Moore 1973, Fig. 52 and p. 105). It is known to favor coastal, particularly estuarine areas. In Australia, at the extreme southern limit of its distribution, it is known to occur in Queensland in some estuaries of eastern Cape York Peninsula, north of the Herbert River 18°33'S, 146°17'E; and in the Northern Territory in one isolated patch on Melville Island 11°30'S, 130°30'E (Covacevich and Covacevich 1978, Wells 1979). Its occurrence in Queensland has not been mapped previously, but this is now possible, following surveys of the estuaries of eastern Cape York Peninsula.

*Nypa fruticans* has been observed in only nine of the 30 or so estuaries examined. These are Jardine River, Cowal Creek, Harmer Creek, Oliver River, Pascoe River, Claudie River, Lockhart River, McIvor/Morgan River and Herbert River. The location of the nine estuaries is shown in Figure 1, together with those along which there are no *N. fruticans*. Stands on the Olive, Claudie, and McIvor/Morgan

Rivers are most extensive, while trees on the Pascoe River (Cassowary Creek tributary) are most luxuriant.

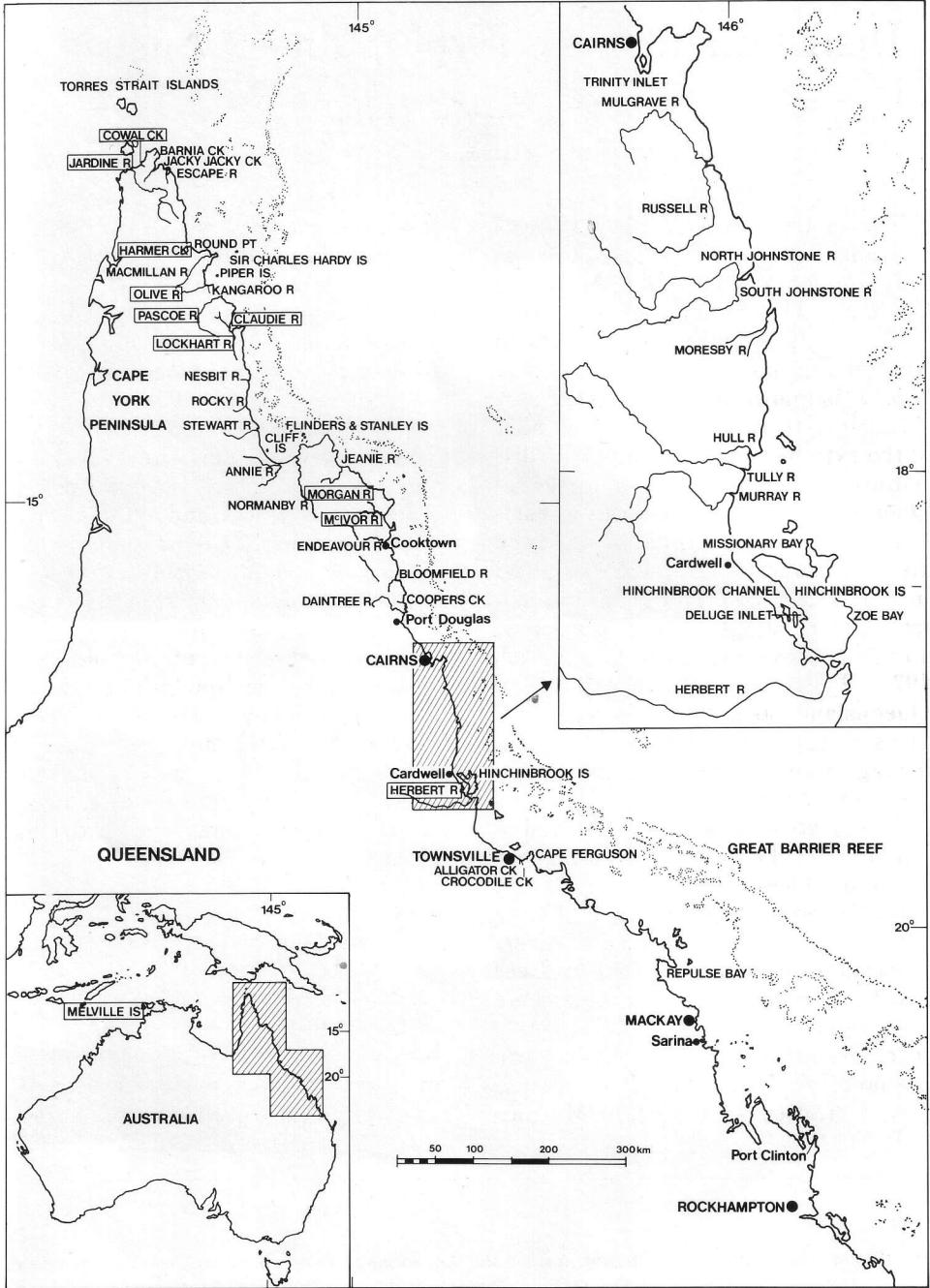
The reasons for the disjunct occurrence are unclear, but it is interesting to note that all stands of *Nypa* palms on Cape York Peninsula are located in sandy areas (even though there are mud overlays in some situations); that they are associated with rain or wet sclerophyll forests and certain mangrove species, *Sonneratia caseolaris*, *Rhizophora mucronata* (Duke and Bunt 1979), *Bruguiera sexangula*, and *Barringtonia racemosa*; and that they are invariably concentrated near the upper reaches of brackish sections of the rivers along which they occur. Stands of *N. fruticans* are apparently never located in areas of continual fresh or highly saline water although they obviously tolerate both extremes during floods or very high tides.

## Acknowledgment

Mr. Norman Duke (Australian Institute of Marine Science, Townsville) has provided distribution data for the more remote rivers discussed here. He also very kindly provided the figures.

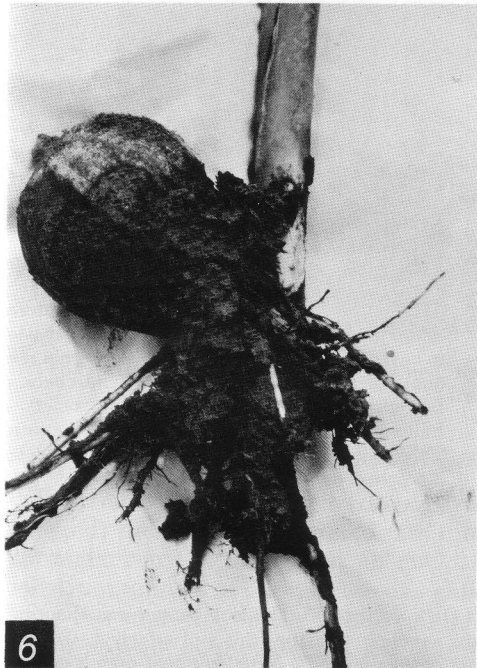
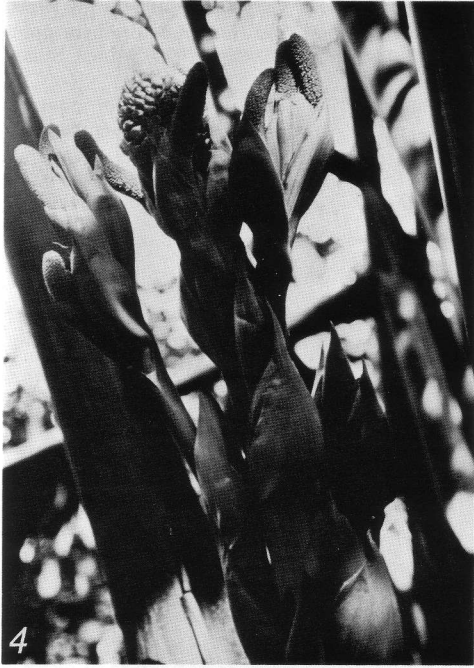
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1. Map of *Nypa fruticans* distribution in Australia. Locations recently visited on Cape York Peninsula are shown and the areas of *Nypa fruticans* occurrence are boxed.





2. *Nypa fruticans* stand in the Claudie River. Note the luxuriant associated vegetation as well as some "zonal" patchiness. The species is commonly found in the back areas of river meander "growing edges" or in disconnected meanders or backwaters. 3. *Nypa fruticans* frontal stand in the Pascoe River.



4. Inflorescence of *Nypa fruticans* from the Pascoe River. Note the staminate spikes and the young fruit (the central "knobby" head). 5. Inside a *Nypa fruticans* stand at the Pascoe River. Note the tall

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upright 10-12 m fronds and the large aggregate fruit stalk. In this case the fruit cluster was about half a meter in diameter. 6. An uprooted *Nypa fruticans* seedling with the fruit still attached, from the Herbert River. Note the strong healthy root and shoot development. 7. *Nypa fruticans* on a washaway edge of the Pascoe River. Note the usually subterranean rhizome and roots of these obviously mature plants.