



Mistletoes Family Loranthaceae. *Amyema* species and *Lysiana* species

What do they look like? Mistletoes are parasitic plants, growing on other plants. They are deposited by birds via seeds onto 'host' trees. They tap into the host tree, drawing water and nutrients from that tree. Mistletoe leaves are variable but often resemble those of the host plant, often noticeable by their dense growth among the tree's less dense foliage. Many have obvious red or orange tubular flowers with stamens projecting from the end.

Where do they live? All healthy, woody vegetation communities have some mistletoe. Many mistletoe species are specific to certain types of host tree (e.g. eucalypts or acacias). There are even mistletoes that parasitise other mistletoes!

What do they need to live, eat and breed? Mistletoes are dispersed when birds eat their fruit and then excrete the sticky seeds onto suitable branches. Seeds also stick to birds' wings or feet, and are transported from tree to tree. Generally, mistletoes do not kill their hosts, but the health of heavily infested host trees can be reduced.

When might I see them? Most noticeable when in flower, which may occur at any time of year.

What management actions affect this species? Maintaining diverse, intact woodland vegetation will allow a variety of mistletoes to occur. Mistletoes are very fire sensitive and large numbers of mistletoes may indicate infrequent fire. Though mistletoes are significant resources for native animals, if they become too numerous, the health of the host trees may decline. For example, in areas where there has been extensive tree clearing, mistletoes increase in number on the few surviving trees, eventually contributing to dieback.

How do they benefit the land I manage? Mistletoes are a very important part of healthy foodchains. They do not rely on rain to flower and fruit, so they provide critical dry season food or nesting sites for many species of insects, birds and mammals. There are specialist mistletoe breeding butterflies. Honeyeaters, such as the Painted Honeyeater and the small red and black Mistletoebird which feeds heavily on the flowers and fruit depend on mistletoes, while small birds like finches nest in them.

