

## "Trees of Delhi: a field guide"

Reviewed by Rhys Gardner

When I was a student there was an up-and-coming cell biologist who was always in the library before anyone else, looking for signs of the next big thing. My own technique, in the gentler world of botany, was much less systematic and seems now to have turned into just a kind of beachcombing, carried out mainly in the not always relevant magazines of our public libraries. Nevertheless, I sometimes come across valuable information delivered with style, accuracy and enthusiasm.

*The New Yorker* issue for December 19 of last year provides an example of such botanical ambergris: a warming, optimistic essay titled "Second Nature", by Dorothy Wickenden. Her subject is Delhi-born Pradip Krishen, a middle-aged filmmaker who has become famous in India for his rewilding projects. He has also written two field guides. The first, "Trees of Delhi: a Field Guide", is the subject of this belated review (Krishen 2006). Of it an Indian conservationist has written, rightly if rather tactlessly, "The author has achieved what no botanist so far has been able to do: he has built [a] portrait of the city through its trees". Not only that—in content and presentation it is one of the nicest field guides I have ever seen.

Krishen had taken the diversity of Delhi's treescape for granted until a day of epiphany in 1995, on a walk in the deciduous forest of The Ridge, "just a wild-looking place in the middle of the city, with lots of thorny trees and bushes". He realized that the trees were about to come into leaf: "every dry twig had sprouted a tiny, pale green affirmation that it was still alive—little, glinting points of life, especially noticeable when a bush was backlit by the sun". He began to photograph trees and lead tree-spotting groups and went on to direct restoration work, sometimes in apparently hopeless localities and sometimes clashing with the city's bureaucracy and academics (but that is another story). With help from experts, including Henry Noltie of Edinburgh, John Dransfield of Kew, and a late friend of ABS, Canberra's Ian Brooker, he put together this field-guide in seven dedicated years—even an Aucklander might have been deterred by the heat, dust, and pollution he must have endured.

The introductory part of his guide will appeal to all armchair travellers. It covers the ecological zones of the city, the habitats where native (often rare) trees can still be found, and the history of Old and New Delhi's garden, park, and street plantings. The avenues and public buildings of the latter city were constructed just a hundred years ago so the debates of the time about which trees should be planted are

well-documented. Krishen makes some pointed ecological commentary here about the mistaken preference for evergreens over local, monsoon-adapted species.

The work's main part is a photographic coverage of 252 kinds of tree that grow in Delhi. A certain number of these, but not too many to spoil the book's exotic character, are familiar ones, like *Agathis robusta*, *Melia azedarach* "prized above all for its talcum-scented white and lilac flowers in spring", and several eucalypts, in particular *E. camaldulensis* and *E. (Corymbia) citriodora*. Some others belong to well-known tropical genera like *Bauhinia* and *Cassia*, but most are native to India at large or just to the monsoon forest of the Delhi region. A few are ancient introductions, like the mulberry (*Morus alba*), which naturalizes in gardens everywhere. The city's worst tree-weed is the American *Prosopis juliflora*, an implacably spiny legume with water-seeking roots 30 m long. (Wickenden relates how Krishen hired local miners to dig these roots out from the Ridge's rock; perhaps the use of poison would have had too many bureaucratic complications).

The trees are grouped by leaf shape and structure (elliptic leaves, ovate leaves, once-compound leaves, etc.), each group being marked by a marginal colour tab (Fig. 1). The largest group, of c. 60 species, is usefully split into three on the possession or not of milky sap and marginal teeth. There are no keys; instead, at the start of each group, all the leaves in that group are shown together, along with diagnostic annotations (in rather small print). The amount of space allotted to each tree varies between half a page, one page and a double-page spread, and because of this the ordering of the species within each leaf-group is non-alphabetical. A pity, but Alan Mitchell's famous guide to the trees of Britain does the same.

The pages are full and colourful but not crowded or blocky, a clarity achieved especially by the vignetted images (mainly flowers and inflorescences). Sidebars describe where the trees are best seen in Delhi and their broader habitat preference, range, uses, etc. Each tree is shown as a small computer-assisted silhouette, with a human for scale (sometimes accompanied by, I think, a helpful dog rather than a leaping jackal). This visual engagement and smartness informs the whole work, and the proofreading, printing and binding are exemplary too.

# **TUN** *Toona ciliata*

red cedar • (indian) toon • indian mahogany  
tun • tuni • mahaneem

Syn: *Cedrela toona*

neem/mahogany family



A large, handsome tree with a dense, shady crown found in moist valleys in the sub-Himalayan tract and ranging widely across India and SE Asia into Australia. It does not reach full stature in Delhi but is particularly attractive in new leaf, which emerges pink at first, then becomes bronze-tipped before turning deep green.

**SEASONS** - **LEAVES** start to fall in December; completely bare by mid January. New leaves in early February, loveliest in March.

**FLOWERS** by mid March, lasting till early April. **FRUIT** in May-June.

**WHERE TO SEE IT** Malcha Marg was clearly intended to be a tun avenue but only a few relict trees survive. Qudsia Bagh has some old trees and there are good specimens on Red Cross Marg, in the Nehru Memorial office and along the Sundar Nursery boundary wall, facing Humayun's Tomb.

**Middle-sized** tree; deciduous

**Bark** grey to ruddy brown, flaking off in rectangular, woody scales



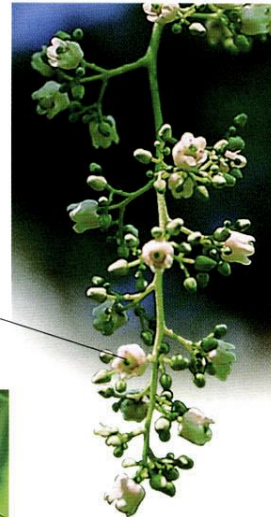
**Leaves** up to 50 cm long, feather-compound, with 5-10 pairs of smooth, pointy leaflets with or without a terminal leaflet; margins smooth or wavy

**Flowers** white, scented, in large, drooping clusters at the ends of branchlets; male and female flowers are separate on the same tree

**Fruit** like a slim olive, green at first, drying and splitting open to release winged seeds

**FLOWERS** appear in pendulous, branching clusters soon after the new leaves, and are honey-scented.

5 petals, with long hairs on their edges



leaflets  
unequal at base



>> Will the Real Tun Please Stand Up! – see p341

## CAN BE CONFUSED WITH

Kakkar, perhaps, because of the general similarity of their leaf-forms. Tun leaves are however much longer, with many more pairs of leaflets.



**Fig. 1.** Tun (*Toona ciliata*). (Krishen 2006: 223).

I have just two gripes. First, that the insides of the front and back covers have been left blank instead of carrying an Index to Genera or similar. Second, the use of Hindi common names for the headings and family names ("Arjun family" instead of Combretaceae, etc.) is unwelcoming where a wider readership is concerned and for beginners only puts off the day when Latin names must be learnt in order to take on the wider literature.

Auckland Libraries (the name since 2010 for the aggregated public libraries of the Auckland region)

#### References

- Krishen, P. 2006: *Trees of Delhi: a field guide*. Publ. Dorling Kindersley (India). 360 pp., softcover, 21 x 15 cm. ISBN-13: 978-0-14400-070-8.
- Krishen, P. 2014: *Jungle trees of Central India*. Publ. India Penguin. 400 pp. ISBN: 978-0-14342-074-3.
- Wickenden, D. 2022: 'A reporter at Large – Second Nature' *The New Yorker*. Dec 19, 2022 issue.
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has the policy of resisting suggestions for buying books more than eight years old. Fortunately, their policy on accepting donations is not so self-denying, and this one will soon be on their shelves. But those interested in tropical trees or travel to India might like to know that new copies are still available from on-line booksellers, for only c. NZ\$ 45 — and why not save on postage and buy at the same time Krishen's second (2014) equally splendid guide, on the forest trees of central India?

## Remembering Audrey Lily Eagle 30 October 1925 – 27 November 2022

Maureen Young (compiler)

### Tribute to Audrey Eagle

To pay our respects to a fine artist who contributed so much to the botanical community in New Zealand, we are, with permission, reproducing extracts from John Barkla's 'Tribute to Audrey Eagle', first published in the Newsletter of the New Zealand Plant Conservation Network, *Trilepidea* (Barkla 2023a), and then in the Botanical Society of Otago Newsletter (Barkla 2023b). This is followed by some memories from members of the Auckland Botanical Society (Mike Wilcox, Maureen Young, Ewen Cameron and Anthony Wright), and from Allison Knight, Botanical Society of Otago, Dunedin.

#### John Barkla

(from Barkla 2023 a,b)

Audrey Eagle died at Birchleigh Rest Home, Mosgiel, on 27 November 2022, aged 97. Much has been written of Audrey's life and extraordinary achievements. Audrey was born in Timaru in 1925. She was raised and educated in England where she trained as an engineering draughtswoman, a training that influenced her later botanical drawings which are notable for their detail and accuracy. She married Harold Eagle in 1949 and the couple opted to move back to New Zealand. Audrey was one of the founding members of the Waikato Branch of the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society.

During this time, she participated in various field trips and excursions, developing a passion for the New Zealand flora. She once remarked that she thought the best way to learn about the plants was to draw them. This idea was perhaps the genesis of her remarkable career as a botanical illustrator which ultimately culminated in 'Eagle's Complete Trees and Shrubs of New Zealand' (Eagle 2006a) which incorporated and extended the material from her two previous books. In scope, it is more comprehensive than any work of botanical illustration covering New Zealand's trees and shrubs that had been produced hitherto and it is unlikely that a project of this magnitude will ever be completed again by one artist.

Rather famously, she was the last person to collect a specimen of the now extinct mistletoe *Trilepidea adamsii*, on the first Waikato Branch Forest and Bird Society field trip in 1954. The only known illustrations of it are hers and 19th - early 20th century botanical artist, Fanny Osborne. This mistletoe gives its name to the newsletter of the New Zealand Plant Conservation Network and the Network's logo utilises the Fanny Osborne illustration [the original is held in the Auckland War Memorial Museum].