

# Peppy Plants December 2014

by Eleanor Bennett

This month the summer flowering Christmas tree, *Nuytsia floribunda*, has been chosen as it seemed appropriate for the Christmas issue. Although the Christmas Tree does not grow at Peppy we do see it often in the nearby bushland and at Christmas time it is a highlight of the area. The name *Nuytsia* commemorates Pieter Nuyts who sailed around the south and west coasts of Australia in the Gulde Zeepard in 1627 and *floribunda* from the Latin *floris* flower and *abundus* meaning many. It is a fascinating plant as it is a root hemiparasite meaning it produces its own food, typical of green plants, but the roots attach to the roots of nearby plants by structures called haustoria and draw water and nutrients from them. Christmas tree is a tree or shrub up to 10m tall. It has bluish-green stalkless leaves up to 10cm long and 8mm wide. The inflorescence is branched with clusters of sessile flowers. The flowers are yellow to bright orange. The calyx is about 5mm long and tubular and joined to the ovary. There are 6-8 free petals about 12mm long, and the 6-8 stamens which are fused to the base of the petals.



A Christmas tree in full flower. It ranges in distribution from Kalbarri to Israelite Bay.



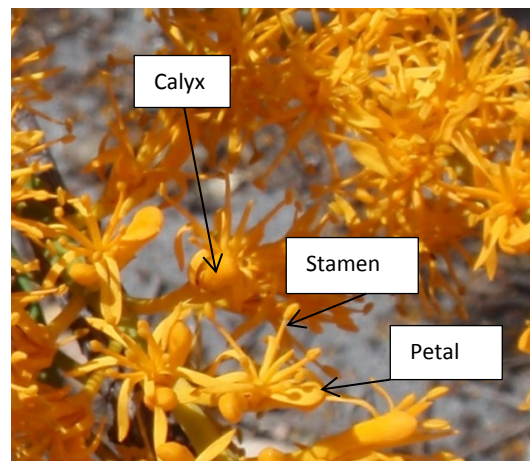
The brilliantly coloured inflorescence is much branched and consists of clusters of stalkless flowers.



These are the roots (white) of a Christmas tree parasitising roots of nearby plants. The white structures are the haustoria which encircle and attaches to the roots of the host to obtain water and nutrient from it.



The leaves are a bluish-green colour and without a stalk. They can be scattered or opposite.



The flowers are clustered together, but by carefully looking at this photograph the calyx, petals and stamens can be seen.

