

Swamp Oak (*Casuarina glauca*)

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The Swamp Oak (or Sheoak) is one of the common trees at the Wetlands Sanctuary. It is highly salt-tolerant and grows right to the riverbank and also the zone landward of the mangroves.

It is quite a large tree – up to 16 metres – with very rough bark, but the needle-like foliage distinguishes it as a casuarina. The needles are, in fact, branchlets, with the leaves having evolved to minute “teeth” at the many segments of the needles. There are separate male and female trees. The females bear small red tufty flowers on short stalks, whilst the male ‘flower’ is a slim dull dirty orange colour situated at the ends of the branches. The fruit is a small rough bumpy capsule.

The name given by the local aboriginal people was “bilai”, with “bilai bilai” meaning place of many Swamp Oaks - hence our area name of Bli Bli. The aborigines placed fallen trees at the edge of the river in salt water. This was done as a form of farming as it was specifically to attract Toredos which burrowed into the timber and was one of the foods extracted from the mangrove areas.

When Europeans constructed the punt road through what is now the sanctuary, the *Casuarina glauca* was laid sideways through the wet areas of the access in order to provide dry footings for the carriage of goods and passengers to the cross-river punt. This strategy had limited success as better drainage was required and the timber subsided, again being attacked by the Toredos.

At times, the Clanger Cicada, (*Psaltoda claripennis*), is abundant in the live specimens close to the river in summer, and the nymphal exuviae are often seen still clinging to the trunks where the adult has emerged.

