

Eucalyptus falcata

silver mallet

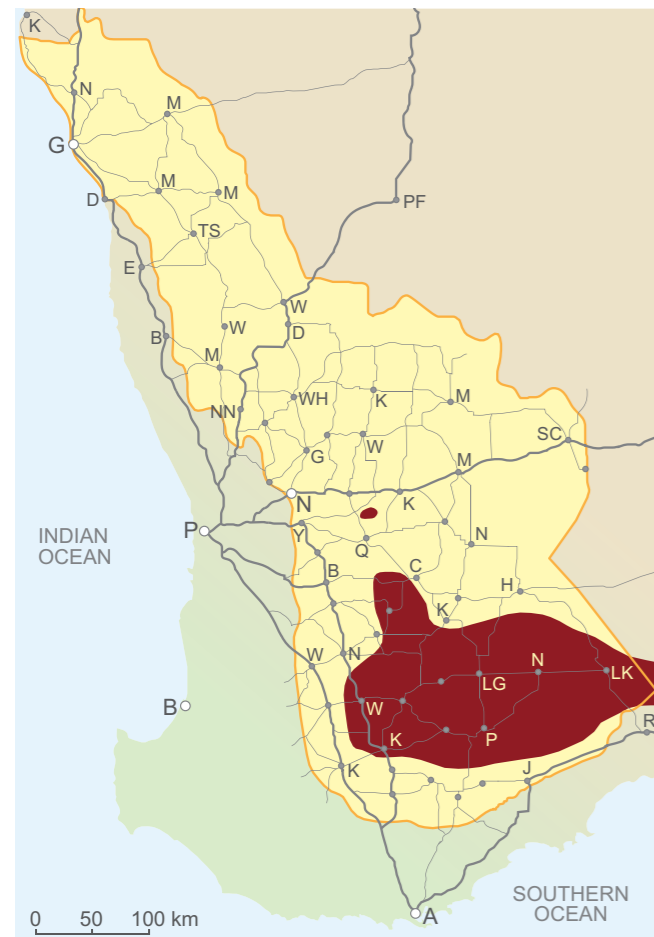
Name: Latin, *falcatus*, sickle-shaped, in reference to the shape of the adult leaves. The common name refers to the silvery colour of the bark in this mallet species.

Authority: *Eucalyptus falcata* Turcz., *Bull. Soc. Imp. Naturalistes Moscou* 20(1): 163 (1847). Type: Swan River Colony, W.A., Jul. 1847, J.Drummond 70.

Synonym: *Eucalyptus argyphaea* L.A.S.Johnson and K.D.Hill. It has recently been discovered that the type specimen of *E. falcata* represents a mallet (obligate seeder), meaning that the name *E. argyphaea* is synonymous with the earlier-named *E. falcata*.

Features: Obligate seeder, lignotuber absent. Usually single trunk. Upland landscape habitat. Bark smooth, silvery. Leaves glossy, green. Buds and fruits delicate, pendulous on slender stalks. Bud caps conical, narrow.

Distribution & Habitat: Scattered, somewhat isolated populations across the southern wheatbelt from east of Kojonup north-eastwards to west of Corrigin and north to Charles Gardner Nature Reserve, south of Tammin. Extends south-eastwards to north-west of Cascade. Conspicuous through-



Eucalyptus subg. *Symphyomyrtus*
sect. *Bisectae* ser. *Falcatae* subser. *Rugatae*

out its distribution for occupying the tops and slopes of lateritic rises. Associated eucalypts include *E. astringens*, *E. densa*, *E. dorrienii*, *E. erythronema*, *E. flocktoniae*, *E. gardneri*, *E. incrassata*, *E. longicornis*, *E. phaenophylla*, *E. pluricaulis*, *E. salmonophloia*, *E. singularis*, *E. urna* and *E. wandoo*.

Uses: *Eucalyptus falcata* is a distinctive and attractive tree with appeal as an ornamental species for parks and large gardens and certainly for shade and shelter in large farm yards.

Notes: *Eucalyptus falcata* forms part of the silver mallet group which comprises four other mallets: *E. ornata*, *E. recta*, *E. rugulata* and *E. purpurata*. All of the species within the group are geographically separated from one another and are usually conspicuous in the field by the hilltop habitat, erect tree habit, smooth, silvery to grey-white bark and the delicate stalks of the buds and fruits.

Eucalyptus ornata (ornamental silver mallet) is the geographically closest silver mallet to *E. falcata*, being confined to the Kondinin and Hyden areas and differing from *E. falcata* primarily by the strongly ribbed buds and fruits. *Eucalyptus falcata* and *E. ornata* intergrade where their distributions adjoin in an area to the south and west of Hyden and are the only two species of silver mallets known to naturally interbreed.

Eucalyptus recta (Mt Yule silver mallet) occurs in a narrow, west-east band from the south-east of Moora to the Cadoux area in the east, some 100 km north of the distribution of *E. falcata*, and differs primarily by the larger, more robust buds (to 22 mm long) and larger fruits (to 13 mm wide).

Eucalyptus rugulata (Ironcaps silver mallet) is confined to the south-western goldfields, south-east of Hyden and differs from *E. falcata* in the broader adult leaves (to 28 mm wide) and in the larger, coarsely ribbed buds and fruits.

Eucalyptus purpurata (Bandalup silver mallet), discovered in 1994, is confined to a single population on Bandalup Hill to the east of Ravensthorpe, occurring in white, magnesitic powdery loam. *Eucalyptus purpurata* has similar-structured but smaller and more delicate buds and fruits than its closest relative, *E. falcata*. *Eucalyptus purpurata* is aptly named as the branchlets and new leaves are intensely purple-red, with the purplish canopies being most conspicuous in the landscape.

In the southern wheatbelt, *E. falcata* occasionally co-occurs with the closely related *E. dorrienii* (silver mallee), which is distinguished by its mallee (resprouter) habit and by usually occupying lower sites in the landscape.

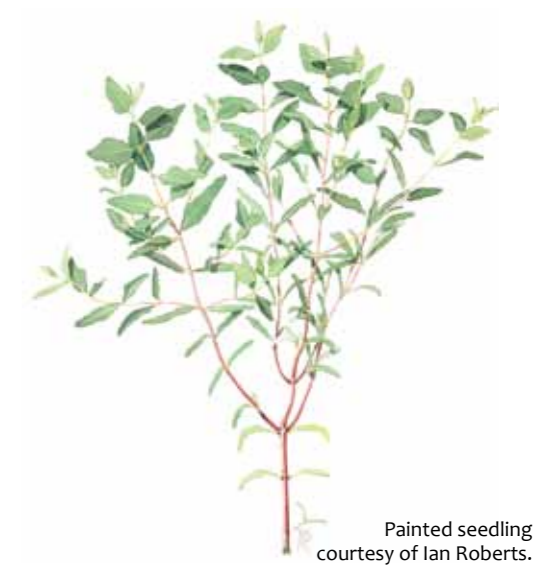
Species of the silver mallet group are often confused in the field (particularly from a distance) with the superficially similar *E. salmonophloia* (salmon gum). If the two species cannot be identified by their subtle bark and leaf size differences, then a quick search of the ground litter for fallen material is likely to reveal the tiny buds and fruits of *E. salmonophloia* as distinct from the larger buds and fruits of the silver mallets.



North Lomos Road, west of Corrigin



Nindbillup Road, south-east of Lake King



Painted seedling
courtesy of Ian Roberts.

Description: **Mallet**, to 18 metres tall, lignotuber absent, obligate seeder. Erect habit, dense crown. **Bark** smooth, moderately glossy, mottled silvery grey to whitish grey. **Branchlets** without pith glands. **Adult leaves** lanceolate to falcate, 70–150 mm x 9–20 mm, glossy, green to dark-green. **Umbels** 7- to 11-flowered, pendulous, held on slender, down-curved, angular peduncles, 8–20 mm long. **Buds** 11–17 mm long x 5–7 mm wide, pendulous, pedicels slender, 5–13 mm long. **Hypanthia** broad-conical, slightly ribbed longitudinally. **Opercula** conical, 8–12 mm long, usually to 3 times as long as the hypanthia, acuminate. **Flowers** white, occurring in summer. **Fruits** hemispherical to globular, 5–8 mm long x 6–11 mm wide, smooth or slightly ribbed, disc descending, valves 3 or 4, prominently exserted. **Seeds** grey-brown.