

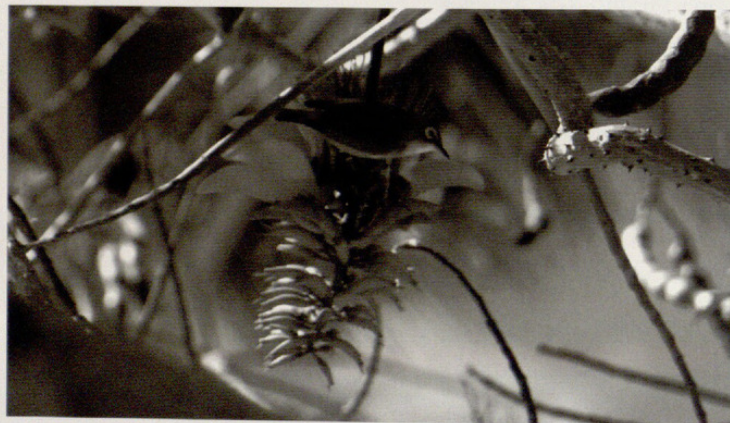
KAFFIRBOOM! AN UP-CLOSE AND PERSONAL LOOK AT THE OFFICIAL TREE OF LOS ANGELES

The kaffirboom (*Erythrina caffra*) or Coral Tree is one of our most dependable trees for spring color. Its two-inch long and one-inch wide, orange-scarlet flowers on the tips of bare branches are spectacular and showy, and appear like glowing embers or fragments of coral against a dark blue, early spring sky. Dropping its leaves in January and blooming in February and March, its bird-pollinated flowers appear in densely clustered whorls that open sequentially toward the branch tip, lengthening the bloom time to several weeks or more. Four-inch long, bean-like fruit pods deeply constricted around the bright red, attractive seeds follow the flowers, revealing the coral tree's membership in the bean family.

The name is derived from the Greek *erythros*, meaning red, and refers to the predominantly red flowers of the group. The species name *caffra* is the Latinized form of *kaffir*, which refers to a member of any of several Bantu-speaking (characterized by the use of clicks) tribes of south-eastern Africa, such as the Xhosa of Cape Province, where this species naturally occurs. When used in this manner *kaffir* is often regarded as contemptuous or derogatory, and perhaps a more sensitive common name would be appropriate. *Boom* simply means tree in Bantu language.

The kaffirboom's robust, muscular branches covered with grayish bark and scattered, short prickles impart strong, structural value for the landscape. The eight-inch long, three-parted leaves are

composed of two lateral segments and a larger terminal one. Growing quickly to 40 feet high and just as wide, this coral tree is well suited to expansive open spaces, like parks and wide boulevards,



Hummingbird perched on Kaffirboom flowers.

but is probably not a good choice for the average-sized home yard. Excessive water and fertilizer encourage rank, succulent, weak growth at the expense of flowers, so it is not recommended for lawns.

More than 350 kaffirbooms line a three-mile stretch of the median of San Vicente Boulevard from Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles to the Pacific Ocean in Santa Monica, and are featured in

my book *Exceptional Trees of Los Angeles* (1988, California Arboretum Foundation, Arcadia). The largest planting of its kind in the U.S., Los Angeles has designated it as a Historic-Cultural Monument.

Erythrina includes about 100 species of mostly deciduous trees and shrubs indigenous to tropical and subtropical regions of the world. They often grow naturally and best in monsoon climates, their bright red flowers frequently being the only color in an otherwise drab, brown, leafless forest at the height of the dry season. Coral trees have economic value where they are indigenous, and find a variety of uses. They are employed to provide shade for coffee and cocoa plantings, their flowers are cooked and eaten, the showy seeds are made into necklaces, and some kinds possess medical value or are poisonous.

Contributed by Donald R. Hodel, Environmental Horticulturist, University of California Cooperative Extension, Los Angeles. In addition to authoring four books, including Exceptional Trees of Los Angeles, he has written popular articles about palm horticulture, botany and various aspects of landscape and nursery production.

14 YEARS OF VOLUNTEER EFFORTS

FINALLY! A PHOTO FINISH!!

After fourteen years and uncounted hours of work, the Aplin photo collection project has finally been completed. Project volunteer chairperson, Ken Quigley, along with his crew, completed the monumental job of cleaning, sorting, identifying and filing over 40,000 slides, negatives, and prints of plant and landscape photos. They are now preserved in archival-quality polypropylene sheets by scientific name and entered into a computerized database.

This collection represents the entire career of professional photographer William

C. Aplin, who passed away on January 5, 1993, at the age of 80. During his career, Bill took photographs of plants on far-off expeditions as well as on assignment at The Arboretum and many other public and private gardens. In March 1989, as Mr. Aplin's health was failing, his entire collection was moved to The Arboretum with the help of garden book publisher and former California Arboretum Foundation president Richard M. Ray, Sr.

An article in the Winter, 1990, newsletter cites Ken as declaring that it would take "at least another four years" to fin-

ish. Little did he know!

Many, many thanks to Ken and his dedicated crew: Carol and Hal Libby, Mary and Tom Conrow, Betty Hoyt, Mitzi Gill and Kathy Liu for devoting so much time and effort to preserving this important archive which will serve as a valuable resource for years to come.

Contributed by Dr. Jim Bauml





Hodel, Donald R. 2003. "Kaffirboom! An up-close and personal look at the official tree of Los Angeles." *Los Angeles County Arboretum and Botanic Garden News* (2003: Aug.-Oct.), 6.

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