

SCIENTIFIC NOTE

LARVAL HOST PLANT OF *PHORACANTHA MITCHELLI* (HOPE) (CERAMBYCIDAE): A CURIOSITY AMONGST *PHORACANTHA*

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Summary

Phoracantha mitchelli (Hope) is an obscure species not well represented in insect collections. It is known from coastal Queensland and its range appears to mirror that of its larval host plant *Myrsine variabilis* R.Br. Two specimens of *P. mitchelli* were reared from the root balls of two young plants (ca. 2m tall) at Miranda (NSW).

Keywords: *Phoracantha mitchelli*, *Myrsine variabilis*, larval host

INTRODUCTION

The genus *Phoracantha* was revised by Wang (1995) including the synonymy of *Tryphocaria*, creating the largest genus in the tribe Phoracanthini. The larval hosts of *Phoracantha* spp. are largely restricted to *Eucalyptus* (Myrtaceae) (including *Corymbia* and *Angophora*) and *Acacia* (Fabaceae) (Duffy 1963, Froggatt 1907, McKeown 1947, Wang 1995, Webb 1987). Wang (1995) noted that the larval host plants of most species are unknown.

Phoracantha mitchelli (Hope) is known from various coastal localities in Queensland from the NSW-Qld border to Cape York. A single specimen from Camden, near Sydney, is housed in the Australian Museum collection. To my knowledge there are no larval host records for this species. *Myrsine variabilis* R.Br. (Primulaceae) (commonly referred to as muttonwood) is a shrub or small tree of rainforest or rainforest edges ranging from central coastal NSW to coastal north Queensland (Anonymous 2025). However, it does occur in small patches in wet sclerophyll forest around Sydney. This was the case for specimens described in this study.

OBSERVATIONS

On 6 November 2024, the damaged stems and root systems of several *Myrsine variabilis* plants (ca. 2m tall) were excavated from Kareena Reserve in Miranda (NSW) (-34.042740°S, 151.110995°E). The damage was superficially similar to that of *Aphanasium australe* (Boisduval) in *Grevillea* and *Hakea* (Webb 2023). However, on 10 January 2025 two specimens of *P. mitchelli* emerged. Both emerged from the remains of the root balls of two separate plants, one of which originally contained two larvae (the second did not survive). Damage was confined to the root ball and radiating main roots. No damage was evident in the stems above ground level.

One specimen maintained its bright colouration after death as seen for the type specimen of *Stenochorus mitchelli* Hope shown in Slipinski and Escalona (2016) (pg. 575) while the other darkened dramatically (Figure 1).

Wang (1995) described *Phoracantha cruciata* and noted the similarity to *P. mitchelli*. *Phoracantha cruciata* was distinguished by having the third antennal segment distinctly longer than the fourth. This is not the case for these two specimens.

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Figure 1: Specimens of *Phoracantha mitchelli* (both 28mm length – mandible to tip of elytra). NB. Third and fourth antennal segments similar in length.



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