

# Traditional Use of Australian Native Rice

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## Aim

Our aim is to capture and preserve traditional knowledge and language and demonstrate cultural affiliations of Aboriginal people with Australian native rice. We present published language names, harvest, processing and preparation methods, and information on the importance of native rice as a food resource. We include the cultural knowledge of Associate Professor Payi Linda Ford, a Mak Mak Marranunggu woman from the Finnis River area, NT.

## Collecting, processing, cooking, storage

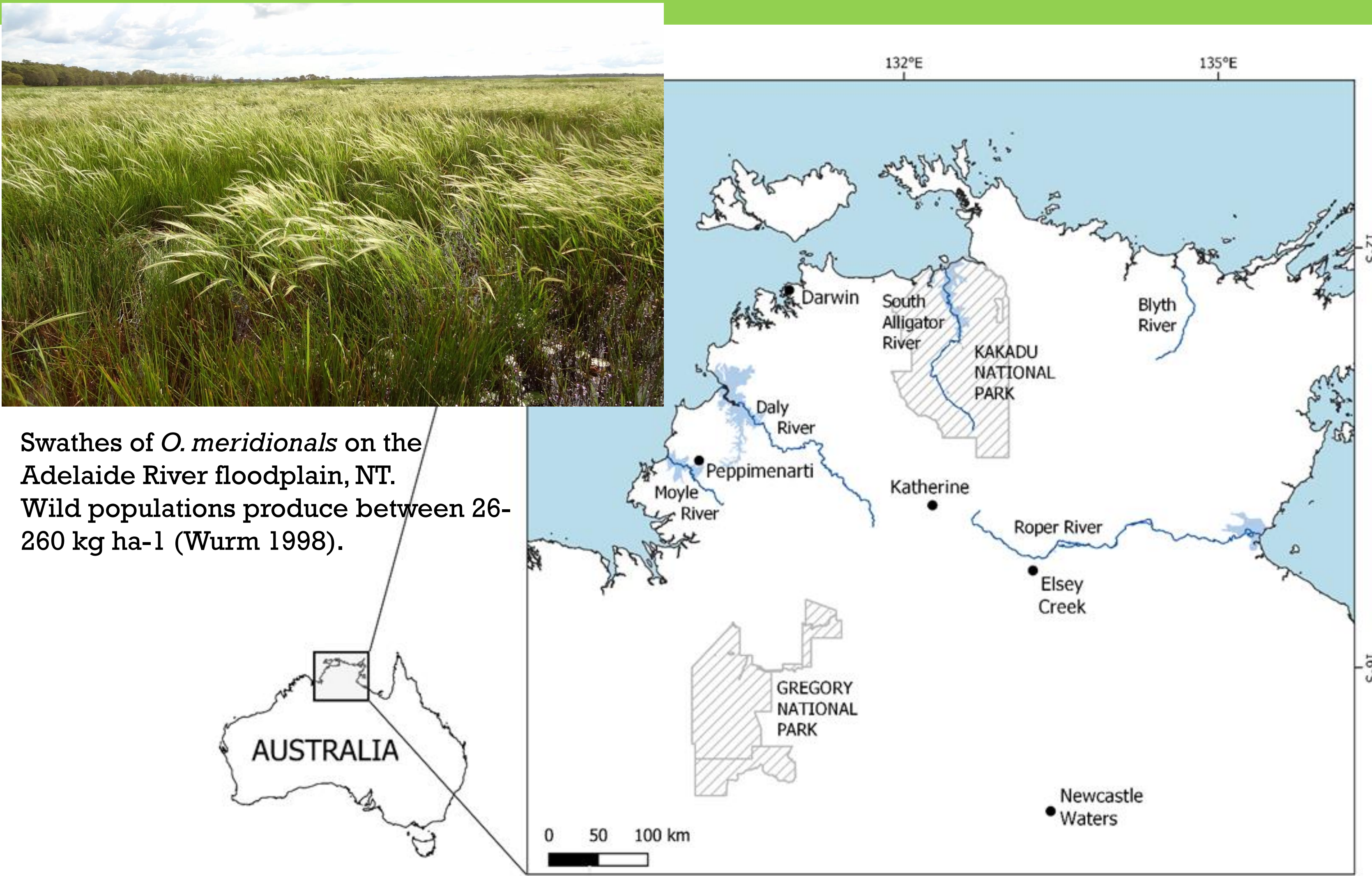
Two **collection methods** are reported. Most people knock seed off and collect directly from the plants. Mara and Alawa people collected falling seeds in small floating canoe-shaped vessels made from paper bark (Tindale 1974). Payi remembers collecting grain into her skirt, hessian bag, paperbark sheet or paperbark raft. Seed collected in this way was **threshed** by beating grain with hardwood sticks against a stone surface to remove the husk. For seeds collected on cut stems, the whole bundle was burnt and seeds winnowed from the ash. Seeds ready for consumption can be collected from the crops of native magpie geese. **Cooking preparation** involves stone grinding grain to a coarse flour, mixing with water and baking dough a coals. Specific types of wood are used to create ash-free coals, at a specific temperature. Coals are levelled and dough carefully positioned on top of the coals to create delicious “johnny cakes”.

Alawa people **stored** packets of native rice in caves, wrapped in bark. Payi explains Mak Mak mob used bamboo lengths to store unprocessed seeds (for short periods due to mould). In 1870s, rice granaries of wooden vessels (1.5 m long) were observed at Newcastle Waters (Ashwin, 1930).

Payi describing her country *kudawala ga* grinding stones at Birrbirrpangany on the Finnis R. floodplain, used for fruits and grain by Mak Mak Marranunggu families. Source: Linda Payi Ford. Photos: Courtesy Mark Ford 23/10/2022

## Importance of native rice as a food

Gaagudju people on the south Alligator River and Alawa people in the Roper River area describe native rice as an **important** food. Other peoples with access to rice considered it a food but not an important one. This may be explained by the **availability of other foods** in the same season, the difficulties of accessing floodplains with crocodiles present and the time investment in collecting and processing grains. Linda explains that her family collected rice opportunistically, but also for ceremonies involving groups of people. Processing grain is **labour intensive**. Researchers working in Arnhem land with women in Arnhem land in the 1970s noticed that “skilled ... women could gather a kilo of yams in half an hour whereas a kilo of seed might take a skilled woman 6 hours to collect husk and mill” (Gammage 2009).



Swathes of *O. meridionalis* on the Adelaide River floodplain, NT. Wild populations produce between 26–260 kg ha<sup>-1</sup> (Wurm 1998).

We found 24 Aboriginal language names used by 29 language groups

NAME	LANGUAGE	LOCATION	SOURCE
<i>Mawakkil</i>	Gaagudju	South Alligator River region, west Arnhemland	Fox and Garde (2018)
<i>Mawakkil</i> , <i>Mawaakil</i>	Kundjeyhmi	South Alligator River region, west Arnhemland	Fox and Garde (2018)
<i>An-rol</i>	Kundjeyhmi	South Alligator River region, west Arnhemland	Fox and Garde (2018)
<i>Manrol</i>	Gunwinggu	South Alligator River region, west Arnhemland; central-north Arnhemland	Altman (1984), Russell-Smith (1985), Russell-Smith et al. (1997)
<i>Bortjal</i>	Burarra	Blyth River region, Arnhemland	Fujiwara et al. (1985)
<i>Bidarra</i>	Mangarrayi	Elsey Creek and Roper River areas	Roberts et.al (2011); Wightman et al. (1992)
<i>Jinggirra</i>	Alawa	Ngukurr, Numbulwar, Minyerri, Limmen National Park	Roberts et al. (2018); Wightman et al. (1991)
<i>Yalumbaya</i>	Alawa, Marra, Warndarrang,	Ngukurr, Numbulwar, Minyerri, Limmen National Park	Roberts et al. (2018)
<i>Jingirra</i>	Mudburra	Elliot and Beetaloo region, central eastern NT	Raymond et al. (2018)
<i>Ngangarra</i>	Jingulu	Elliot and Beetaloo region, central eastern NT	Raymond et al. (2018)
<i>Wuguty</i>	MalakMalak	Upper Daly River region	Lindsay et al. (2001)
<i>Ngarriyu</i>	Ngarinyman	Gregory National Park and adjacent areas to Keep River and Dry River	Widjburru et al. (2010)
<i>Miyi yimin</i>	Marrihiyel, Marri Dan	Daly-Wagait River Region	Parry et al. (2020)
<i>Miyi vugar</i>	Marramaninjsji	Daly-Wagait River Region	Parry et al. (2020)
<i>Wurfugar</i>	Ngan'gikurunggurr, Ngen'giwumirri	Peppimenarti area, Moyle River, NT	McTaggart et al. (2014)
<i>Mifugar</i>	Ngan'gikurunggurr, Ngen'giwumirri	Peppimenarti area, Moyle River NT	McTaggart et al. (2014)
<i>Yörrö</i>	Emmi, Mendhe, Mak Mak Marranunggu	Coastal areas around the Daly River mouth, Finnis River	Djorrk et al. (2015) (Emmi, Mendhe); Ford (pers comm, 2021) (Mak Mak Marranunggu)
<i>Würrak</i>	Batjamalh	Coastal areas around the Daly River mouth	Djorrk et al. 2015)
<i>Miyi milli</i>	Marri Amu, Marri Tjevin	Moyle River area and South to Wadeye	Long et al. (2015)
<i>Mi-milli</i>	Marri Ngar	Moyle River area and South to Wadeye	Nambatu et al. (2009)
<i>Mi-maldi</i>	Magati Ke	Moyle River area and South to Wadeye	Nambatu et al. (2009)
<i>Mi yumun</i>	Murrinhpatha	Wadeye region	Nambatu et al. (2009); Long et al. (2015)
<i>Barnkal</i>	Jaminjung	Gregory National Park and adjacent areas to Keep River and Dry River	Marchant Jones et al. (2011)
<i>Mangurlu*</i>	Wardaman	Flora River and south-west Katherine	Raymond et al. (1999)
<i>Ngarriyu</i>	Ngaliwurru	Gregory National Park and adjacent areas to Keep River and Dr River	Marchant Jones et al. (2011)