

Native Classification of Flora on Woleai Atoll¹

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Abstract

Eighty-four locally recognized floral species are listed with vernacular and scientific identification and grouped according to natively defined environmental domains.

The people of Falalus Island, Woleai, subdivide their environment broadly according to six categories, three of the land and three of the sea. Land (*fälu*) is conceptualized as strand or sand (*pi*), interior or hard-land (*nîmel* or *chûmao*), and swamp-land (*bwûl*). Sea areas include the open ocean (*metau*), lagoon (*lam*), and reef (*och*) (cf. Alkire, 1968).³

Classification of the resources of the atoll, which are primarily floral and marine, correspond closely to the above domains. Vegetation (*waliwêl*) is thought of as either *pi*, *nîmel*, or *bwûl* types, while fishes are either of the *metau* or *och*. No important fish are independently assigned the *lam*, but many reef species and some open sea varieties may frequent the lagoon. The classification apparently emphasizes the usual feeding areas of the species.

In this short article the locally named plant species are listed, according to domain, and botanically identified. The scientific identifications were generously provided by F. R. Fosberg of the Smithsonian Institution. In a later article I hope to provide a similar listing for the fishes of Woleai.

There are three general points which should be made about the vegetation classification scheme. First, those locally defined species which economically are more important are subdivided into a greater number of varieties than those that are of little importance to subsistence. For example, one finds 16 varieties of *Cyrtosperma* (*bwulôg*), 19 kinds of *Colocasia* (*uot*), and at least 9 types of breadfruit (*mai*) differentiated on Falalus. Secondly, Woleaians clearly recognize that many plants now grown on the atoll are relatively recent introductions (*i.e.*, non-traditional). Conceptually, these species are not set apart, other than occasionally by characteristics of name, *e.g.*, *mailifachailap*,

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³ Note on orthography. Most consonants are pronounced as in English with the following exceptions: *g*, when it appears initially, is close to an English *h*; *ch* nearly an English *sh*; *ng* as in *sing*. Concerning vowels; pronounced as in French except: *ä* as in *fat*; *i* as in *hit*; *ü* as in *sun*; *ö* as in *fought*.

'breadfruit of Fachailap' (Faraulep), or *gatogobwei*, (plant) 'coming from Tobit'. Since the classification system is fundamentally based on niches of the habitat, new introductions can easily be incorporated. Finally, although I attempted to collect an example of every kind of locally defined plant on Falalup, I make no claim that the listing is exhaustive.

I. Pi (strand species)⁴

1. bwuragw (not collected)
 2. chel (*Tournefortia argentea*)
 3. gaingi (*Pemphis acidula*)
 4. garabwal (*Ipomoea pes-caprae* subsp. *brasiliensis*)
 5. gilifa cha (*Hibiscus tiliaceus* var.). The seeds of this plant are said originally to have come from the sea. See also II-16.
 6. golu (*Vigna marina*)
 7. giichich (*Euphorbia chamissonis*)
 8. gürag (*Triumfetta procumbens*)
 9. nüt (*Scaevola taccada*)
 10. ragich (*Calophyllum inophyllum*). Classified as *pi* vegetation but often transplanted to the interior.
 11. tig (*Cassytha filiformis*)
 12. wal (*Wedelia biflora*)
 13. walimög (*Canavalia cathartica*)
- Informants' order: 2, 9, 11, 8, 13, 6, 7, 1, 10, 5, 12, 4, 3.

II. Nïmel (interior species)

1. bweibwai (*Carica papaya*)
2. bwogor (grasses of several types which are not differentiated).
3. chaiwel (*Ipomoea littoralis*). See also II-43.
4. chichi (*Polypodium scolopendria*)
5. fach (*Pandanus* sp.) Informants could not clearly classify this plant as *pi*, *nïmel*, or *bwül* for, they said, it is found everywhere, but finally they decided that *nïmel* was most appropriate. Two varieties are recognized on the island, one of which supposedly was brought from Rota.
6. faliap (*Eugenia javanica*)
7. fatil (*Thuarea involuta* or *Stenotaphrum*)
8. fille (*Alocasia macrorrhiza*)
 - 8.1 mülu⁵
 - 8.2 maching
 - 8.3 uotüfille
9. fitüi (not collected)

⁴ For convenience of reference I have alphabetized the species entries. See the end of each section for the native order given by informants (three working together). I did not detect any overall pattern in their presentation although further study may indicate otherwise.

⁵ Varieties of a single species are not alphabetized but left in their native order.

10. gachio (*Ixora casei*)
11. gabwi (*Clerodendrum inerme*)
12. garagalīnīmel (*Centella asiatica*)
13. gatogobwei (*Piper fragile*)
14. gil (*Terminalia catappa*). The seeds are said originally to have come from the sea.
15. giliau (*Ficus prolixa*)
16. gilifa (*Hibiscus tiliaceus*). See also I-5.
17. giop (*Crinum* sp.)
18. gobw (*Portulaca samoensis*)
19. gobwusal (*Hedyotis biflora*)
20. gochal (*Hernandia sonora*)
21. gūfalfal (*Fleurya ruderalis*)
22. gūfamach (*Ipomoea tuba*)
23. gūgū (*Achyranthes aspera?*)
24. gul (*Barringtonia asiatica*)
25. gil (*Terminalia catappa*). The seeds are said originally to have come from the sea.
26. giulu (*Cordia subcordata*). Originally from the sea.
27. gūmarag (*Nephrolepis biserrata*)
28. guruwel (*Pipturus argenteus?*)
29. gūwan (*Ficus tinctoria*)
30. ilunug (*Asplenium nidus*)
31. lel (*Morinda citrifolia*)
32. ligatchōg (*Operculina turpethum?*)
33. ligitar (*Callicarpa* sp.)
34. lū (*Cocos nucifera*). Several varieties recognized and the same classification problem as *fach* above.
35. lūmwul (*Citrus* sp.)
36. mai (*Artocarpus altilis* and *A. mariannensis*)
 - 36.1 maogwiang (*A. altilis*)
 - 36.2 maienai (*A. altilis*)
 - 36.3 maouli (*A. altilis*)
 - 36.4 maimachei (*A. altilis*)
 - 36.5 tagomelyu (*A. altilis*)
 - 36.6 maifai (*A. mariannensis*)
 - 36.7 mailifachailap (*A. mariannensis* Trec.)
 - 36.8 maisilog (*A. mariannensis* × *altilis* hybrid)
 - 36.9 sowaig (*A. mariannensis* × *altilis* hybrid?)
37. marat (*Soulamea amara*)
38. mogmog (*Tacca leontopetaloides*)
39. mwog (*Pisonia grandis*)
40. ngū (*Allphylus timorensis*)

41. par (*Erythrina variegata*)
42. puw (*Areca catechu*). Originally brought from Yap.
43. ririo (*Ipomoea littoralis*). See also II-3.
44. sifilleguel (*Pteris tripartita*)
45. süyu (not collected)
46. uich (*Musa*). Four varieties found on Falalus which are named after their supposed islands of origin, Truk, Saipan, Yap and Ponape.
47. umwa (*Ochrosia oppositifolia*)
48. ut (*Guettarda speciosa*)
49. walitogü (*Piper fragile*). See also 13 above.
50. wo (*Saccharum officinarum*)
51. yafuch (*Crateva speciosa*)
52. yägul (not collected)
53. yar (*Premna obtusifolia*)
54. yaroma (*Pipturus argenteus?*). See also 28 above.
Informants' order: 17, 4, 43, 30, 48, 53, 6, 39, 47, 37, 20, 38, 10, 22, 32, 1, 51, 29, 14, 25, 8, 36, 44, 15, 54, 28, 50, 7, 12, 19, 18, 52, 27, 3, 45, 41, 9, 21, 2, 31, 16, 24, 11, 13, 49, 33, 26, 35, 42, 46, 23, 40, 5, 34.

III. Bwül (swamp species)

1. bwogorimal (*Eleusine indica* and *Paspalum distichum*)
2. bwogoringas (*Cyperus brevifolius*)
3. bwulög (*Cyrtosperma chamissonis*)
 - 3.1 sari
 - 3.2 mai
 - 3.3 toaiyo
 - 3.4 felal
 - 3.4.1 luwes
 - 3.4.2 talingalap
 - 3.5 garabwat
 - 3.6 machou
 - 3.7 puchüliang
 - 3.8 galuwel
 - 3.9 bwülol
 - 3.10 bwulögabwech
 - 3.11 liangomar
 - 3.12 malagalag
 - 3.13 roch
 - 3.14 bwulögüchao
 - 3.15 yätülbwulög
 - 3.16 mos
4. chia (*Rhizophora mucronata*)
5. gagalug (unidentified)
6. goyl (*Ludwigia octovalvis*)
7. güpago (*Acrostichum aureum*)
8. matil (*Ceratopteris thalictroides*)
9. omei (*Polygonum minus*)
10. song (*Bruguiera gymnorrhiza*)
11. sou (*Polygonum minus*). See also 9 above.
12. telan (*Hedychium coronarium*). Said to have been introduced from Yap.
13. uot (*Colocasia esculenta*)
 - 13.1 gilifit
 - 13.2 uotayalus

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|-------|---|-------|-----------------|
| 13.3 | leligu | 13.12 | uotalisapan |
| 13.4 | rangoi | 13.13 | uotachal |
| 13.5 | gareial | 13.14 | lamalug |
| 13.6 | wīchit | 13.15 | oluwa |
| 13.7 | waligo | 13.16 | pei |
| 13.8 | gachimar | 13.17 | gailimang |
| 13.9 | gaimweim | 13.18 | uotalifachailap |
| 13.10 | ganibwo | 13.19 | garatig |
| 13.11 | iligurūg | | |
| 14. | warong (<i>Ocimum canum</i>) | | |
| 15. | wei (<i>Lumnitzera littorea</i>) | | |
| 16. | yälügüch lü (<i>Cyperus odoratus</i>) | | |
| 17. | yangochig (<i>Curcuma</i>) | | |
- Informants' order: 6, 9, 11, 5, 8, 2, 1, 16, 17, 14, 12, 7, 4, 10, 15, 3, 13.

REFERENCE

- Alkire, W. H. 1968. An atoll environment and ethnogeography. *Geographica* 4:54-59. Kuala Lumpur.