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**An investigation of the functions of leaf surface modifications in the
Proteaceae and Araucariaceae.**

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Table Contents

Table Contents	i
Abstract	iv
Dedication	vi
Declaration	vii
Acknowledgements	viii
1. Introduction	10
Leaf Modification and Water Stress	10
The Leaf Cuticle.....	11
Leaf Cuticular Wax.....	12
Stomatal Plugs.....	17
Stomatal crypts.....	20
Research Objectives	22
2. The impact of epicuticular wax on water loss, gas-exchange and photoinhibition in <i>Leucadendron lanigerum</i> (Proteaceae)	24
Introduction	24
Materials and methods	28
Plant materials.....	28
Electron and Light Microscopy	29
Seasonal modification of wax deposition	29
Wax removal.....	30
Cuticular water loss.....	30
Light reflectance	30
Leaf gas exchange.....	30
Chlorophyll fluorescence	31
Data analysis	31
Results.....	32
Seasonal modification of epicuticular wax	32
Cuticular water loss.....	35
Light reflectance	35
Gas exchange	38
Chlorophyll fluorescence.....	38
Discussion	41
Seasonal modification of epicuticular wax	41
Cuticular water loss.....	42
Light reflectance	43
Gas exchange	43
Wax and photoinhibition.....	44
Conclusions.....	44
3. The influence of waxy stomatal plugs on leaf gas-exchange in a rain forest gymnosperm, <i>Agathis robusta</i>	46
Introduction.....	46

Materials and Methods	48
Plant material	48
Electron and light microscopy	48
Removal of Somatal plugs	49
Cuticular water loss.....	49
Light reflectance	49
Leaf gas exchange.....	50
Water film formation	50
Chlorophyll fluorescence	50
Data analysis	51
Results	51
Cuticular water loss.....	53
Light reflectance	53
Gas exchange	53
Water film formation	57
Photosynthetic response to leaf surface wetness.....	57
Discussion	61
Gas Exchange.....	62
Do plugs enhance photosynthesis of wet leaves?	64
Conclusions.....	65
4. Stomatal plugs and their impact on fungal invasion in <i>Agathis</i>	
<i>robusta</i>	67
Introduction	67
Materials and methods	70
Plant material	70
Electron and light microscopy	70
Freeze-fracture	71
Somatal plug replacement.....	71
Seasonal modification of wax deposition	71
Fungal infection	72
Confocal visualisation.....	73
Results	74
Initiation and seasonal modification of stomatal plugs.....	74
Freeze-fracture	75
Somatal plug replacement.....	75
Fungal infection	78
SEM and confocal visualisation.....	78
Discussion	85
Anatomy of wax plugs in <i>A. robusta</i>	85
Wax plugs and fungal infection	87
Conclusions.....	90
5. The impact of stomatal crypts on gas-exchange in <i>Banksia</i>	
species.....	91
Introduction	91
Materials and methods	93
Plant materials.....	93
Electron and Light Microscopy.....	94

Cuticular water loss.....	95
Gas exchange	96
Data analysis	96
Results.....	97
Leaf characteristics	97
Cuticular water loss.....	100
Gas exchange	103
Discussion	107
Leaf morphology.....	107
Cuticular Water loss.....	107
Gas exchange	108
What are crypts for?.....	110
Conclusions.....	111
6. Summary and conclusions	113
Epicuticular wax and gas exchange	113
Stomatal plugs and gas exchange	114
Stomatal plugs and fungal invasion	115
Stomatal crypts and gas exchange	116
7. References.....	118
Appendices	135
1. Plant materials.....	135
2. Seasonal modification of leaf trichome density.....	142
3. Leaf structure of two <i>Banksia</i> species	146

Abstract

Plant leaves exhibit a remarkable diversity of size, shape, developmental patterns, composition, and anatomical structures. Many of these morphological variations are assumed to be adaptations that optimize physiological activity and thus assist plants to survive in a range of different habitats. This study aimed to investigate the function of some of these leaf modifications, including leaf wax, stomatal plugs and stomatal crypts.

Investigations using *Leucadendron lanigerum* (Proteaceae) indicated that the amount of waxy coverage and the shape of wax crystals varied with the age of the leaves and the season. Wax coverage was found to significantly lower cuticular water loss but had no impact on reflectance. There was a significant increase in photosynthesis and transpiration rates in leaves from which wax had been removed. This increase was most likely due to an increase in stomatal conductance of the leaves after removing epicuticular wax. Despite the lack of effect on leaf reflectance, removal of wax prior to exposure to high light resulted in significant decreases in efficiency relative to control leaves. Overall, these results suggest that the presence of wax on the epidermis and at the entrance of stomata of *L. lanigerum*, in addition to restricting water loss, may also provide some protection against photodamage.

The impact of stomatal plugs on gas exchange in *Agathis robusta*, a rain forest tree from the Araucariaceae was investigated. Under saturating PFD, leaves with plugs had significantly lower transpiration rates, stomatal conductance and photosynthetic rates, but higher leaf temperatures than unplugged leaves. Water loss in detached leaves kept in the dark was significantly greater in unplugged than plugged leaves. In contrast, plugs had no impact on water film formation and

both plugged and unplugged leaves had similar electron transport rates when wet. These results suggest that stomatal plugs in *Agathis robusta* present a significant barrier to water loss but do not prevent water films from forming.

It was also demonstrated that the establishment of stomatal plugs in *Agathis robusta* occurs annually and, unlike trichomes in other species, stomatal plugs could be replaced at least during the first two years of leaf life. Investigation of leaves infected by fungi showed that waxy plugs blocked the penetration of stomata by fungal hyphae. Hyphae penetrated the leaf tissue either through stomata that lacked waxy plugs or at later stages of infection, directly through the cuticle. This suggests that stomatal plugs in *Agathis robusta* present a significant barrier to fungal penetration through stomata, and so help to prevent fungal infection of leaves. This function is important for trees living in rain forest environments where fungal attack is common.

Finally, investigation into the impact of stomatal crypts on cuticular water loss in *Banksia* species indicated that, contrary to previous speculation, stomatal crypts play little or no role in increasing resistance to water loss. No relationship was found between crypt depth and rates of transpiration over a range of VPDs, in the 14 *Banksia* species studied. A strong positive relationship between leaf thickness and crypt depth was found, while a negative relationship was observed between leaf thickness and stomatal density.