

There's more to the Pilbara than just iron

Stephen J. van Leeuwen

Science Division, Department of Environment and Conservation,
Locked Bag 104, Bentley Delivery Centre, WA 6983
Email: Stephen.VanLeeuwen@dec.wa.gov.au

The flora of the Pilbara has not been comprehensively documented despite the region having one of the longest botanical collecting histories in Australia, dating back to 1699, and now arguably being the most intensively surveyed of any bioregion in Western Australia, as a consequence of sustained resource development. New species to the region, State and not surprisingly to science continue to be recorded, even in what could be considered well known groups like the wattles. The Pilbara flora is diverse, being dominated by arid and tropical elements, although many mesic and rainforest elements persist in refugial habits. The juxtaposition of arid and tropical elements, as highlighted by the phylogeographically important *Acacia-Triodia* line with evolutionarily significant refugia, has consequence on floristic diversity that we are only now gaining some insight into. Over the last 25 years the Pilbara species list has increased by over 55% to be in the vicinity of 1,700 species. Approximately 150 taxa are of conservation significance; although the overwhelming majority of these are poorly known and ongoing survey is required to assess their status. As many of these species are in poorly known or taxonomically challenging groups (130 undescribed), ongoing taxonomic investigation is essential. While unsustainable pastoral practices, mining and land clearing for development pose substantial threats, the primary landscape-wide threatening processes impinging on the flora are altered fire regimes and transforming environmental weeds. Addressing the threatening processes and securing the floristic diversity of the region, in an inventory-deficient and taxonomically uncertain setting, presents both an opportunity and a challenge for conservation.



Program and Abstracts

Australasian Systematic Botany Society Conference 2012

Local knowledge, global delivery

23–28 September, Perth, Western Australia

