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Milky emu bush

E n d a n g e r e d F l o r a o f W e s t e r n A u s t r a l i a

If you think you have seen this plant, please call the Department of Conservation and Land Management's Esperance District on (08) 9071-3733.

The genus *Eremophila*, which is endemic to Australia and is represented in all mainland states, is comprised of some two hundred named species and many more unnamed. Most species occur in semi-arid and arid regions where they can be found in a range of habitats. Species in this genus are commonly known as emu bush or poverty bush.

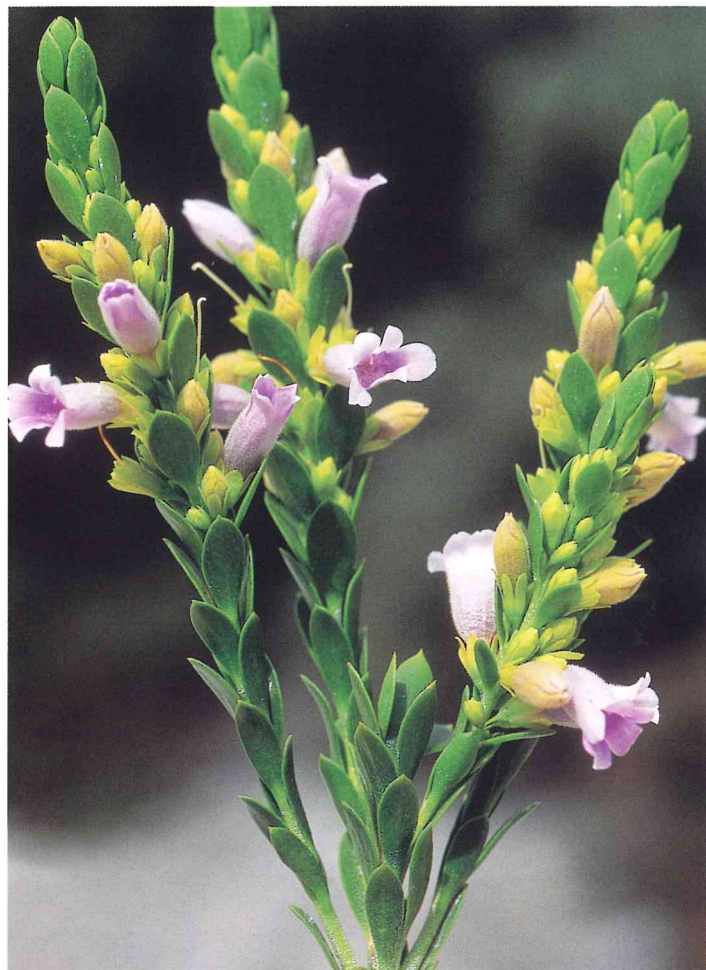
Eremophila lactea (Milky emu bush) was first collected by T. Loffler in 1967. R. Chinnock made further collections in 1978 from the same area. He then searched widely over several seasons, but did not find any new populations. A further population was found in 1997.

Milky emu bush is an erect, spindly shrub 80cm to 3.5m high with pale brown more or less smooth bark and glabrous, sessile, erect, often overlapping leaves 1-1.5cm long by 4-5mm wide and cream to pale lilac flowers that are light purple within and spotted darker purple. The species is allied to *Eremophila psilocalyx*, but has broader leaves, smaller sepals and a smaller, glandular-pubescent corolla. Both the scientific and common names are derived from the milky substance which often appears on the leaves and branches.

Milky emu bush is endemic to the Esperance-Salmon Gums area of Western Australia, where it occurs on low lying sandy-loam in *Eucalyptus* woodland with *Eremophila chamaephila*, *Westringia rigida* and *Grevillea plurijuga*.

Much remains unknown about the biology and ecology of milky emu bush, however it does appear to be a disturbance opportunist as all known populations are in disturbed road reserves. The species is thought to be pollinated by native wasps as these have been seen on the flowers.

Milky emu bush was Declared as Rare Flora in October 1996 and ranked Critically Endangered in November 1998 due to the fragmented nature of populations and a continuing decline of mature individual plants. The species is probably naturally rare, as it has only ever been recorded from a very small area of distribution. This rarity has been exacerbated by the extent of clearing for agriculture in the Esperance area. Only four road reserve populations are currently known, all of which are threatened by road maintenance, inappropriate fire regimes and illegal collection of cutting material.



Milky emu bush has upward facing leaves and attractive lilac flowers.
Photo – A. Brown

The Department has set up the Esperance District Threatened Flora Recovery Team to coordinate recovery actions that address the greatest threats to the survival of the species in the wild (see overleaf).

The species is known from four mostly small populations and the Department is keen to know of any others.

If unable to contact the district office on the above number, please phone the Department's Wildlife Branch on (08) 9334 0422.

Recovery of a Species



The Department is committed to ensuring that Critically Endangered flora does not become extinct in the wild. This is done through the preparation of a Recovery Plan or Interim Recovery Plan (IRP), which outlines the recovery actions that are required to urgently address those threatening processes most affecting the ongoing survival of threatened taxa in the wild and begin the recovery process.

IRPs are prepared by the Department and implemented by Regional or District Recovery Teams consisting of representatives from the Department of Conservation and Land Management, Botanic Garden and Parks Authority, community groups, private landowners, local shires and various government organisations.

Milky emu bush

Recovery actions that have been, and will be, progressively implemented to protect the species include:

Protection from current threats: These include the installation of Declared Rare Flora markers; liaising with shire workers to ensure that populations are not damaged during road works; conducting further surveys; and regular monitoring of the health of populations.

Protection from future threats: These include the development of a fire management strategy; collection and storage of seed in the Department's Threatened Flora Seed Centre; maintenance of live plants away from the wild (i.e. in botanical gardens); and researching the biology and ecology of the species. Other actions include ensuring that relevant authorities, landowners and Departmental personnel are aware of the species' presence and the need to protect it, and that all are familiar with the threats identified in the Interim Recovery Plan.

IRPs will be deemed a success if the number of individuals within the population and/or the number of populations have increased.

This poster was prepared by the Department of Conservation and Land Management.



A mature plant of Milky emu bush. Photo – A.Brown



Milky emu bush occurs in disturbed areas alongside roads. Photo – L.Monks