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Vassal's wattle

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 (CALM's) Merredin District office on (08) 9041 2488, CALM's Moora District office on (08) 9652 1911 or the Wildlife Branch on (08) 9334 0422.

Commonly known as Vassal's wattle, *Acacia vassalii* is a low spreading shrub that grows to 60 centimetres tall, forms a dense cushion in open areas and is more open and upright when shaded by other shrubs. Cracks in the grey bark run the length of the branch, revealing smooth red bark underneath. The grey-green phyllodes (flattened leaf stalks that function as leaves) are four to eight millimetres long, one millimetre wide and are slightly horizontally flattened with hooked tips. The flower heads are globular and yellow, and occur singly rather than in clusters. Flowering occurs between June and August. The seed pods are up to 20 millimetres long and one to 1.5 millimetres wide, and appear around November.



The hooked tip on the 'leaves' of Vassal's wattle are very distinctive. Photo – P. Roberts

Vassal's wattle is closely related to *Acacia ericifolia* and *Acacia leptospermoides*, both of which have blunt-tipped phyllodes, not the hooked tip of Vassal's wattle. *Acacia leptospermoides* is also known to occur in the Wongan Hills area.

Vassal's wattle occurs in the Wongan Hills area in CALM's Merredin District, and in areas east of Moora and north-east of Watheroo in CALM's Moora District. The species was first collected by E.H. Ising in 1935 from the Wongan Hills area but was not relocated there until 1983. Its presence in the Moora District was discovered in 1984. Vassal's wattle is known from just eight populations over a range of approximately 120 kilometres. Of the eight populations, seven consist of fewer than 40 plants, and most are found in highly fragmented areas. The species is found on gravelly brown sand or yellow sand, in low scrub or heath. It occurs with tamma (*Allocasuarina campestris*), Drummond's wattle (*Acacia drummondiana*), Fraser's dryandra (*Dryandra fraseri*) and pink dryandra (*D. carlinoides*).

As the total number of plants known is low and the species is affected by loss and severe fragmentation of habitat, *Acacia vassalii* was declared as Rare Flora in September 1987 and is ranked as Critically Endangered under World Conservation Union (IUCN) criteria.

The Moora District and Merredin District Threatened Flora Recovery Teams coordinate recovery actions that address the greatest threats to the survival of the species in the wild (see overleaf).

The main threats to Vassal's wattle are road and rail maintenance, clearing for development, weed invasion and competition, recreational activities, inappropriate fire regimes, flowerhead galling and poor recruitment.

The species is currently known from eight populations and CALM is keen to know of any others.

Recovery of a Species



CALM is committed to ensuring that Critically Endangered taxa do not become extinct in the wild. This is done through the preparation of a Recovery Plan or Interim Recovery Plan (IRP), which outline 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 CALM and implemented by regional or district recovery teams made up of representatives from CALM, the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority, the Department of Agriculture, community groups, private landowners, local shires and various government organisations.

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

- ongoing liaison with land managers;
- change of land tenure to improve security of populations;
- stimulation of regeneration;
- implementation of further surveys;
- regular monitoring of the health of the populations;
- collection and storage of seeds at CALM's Threatened Flora Seed Centre;
- maintenance of live plants away from the wild (i.e. in botanical gardens);
- carrying out of weed control as necessary;
- development of a fire management strategy; and
- investigation of the biology and ecology of the species.

IRPs will be deemed a success if the number of individuals within the population and/or the number of populations have increased by 10 per cent.

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



This otherwise nondescript plant becomes very showy in winter when in flower.
Photo – P. Roberts



The vegetation Vassal's wattle occurs in, is often quite dense.
Photo – R.J. Cummings



Plants are often more open and upright when shaded by other plants.
Photo – R.M. Evans