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Conservation and Attractions

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Varnish 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 Merredin District on (08) 9401-2488 or Geraldton District on (08) 9921-5955.

The genus *Eremophila* is endemic to Australia where it is represented in all mainland States. Currently, there are some two hundred named species and many unnamed ones. Most occur in semi-arid and arid regions where they are found in a range of habitats over a wide area. The plants are commonly referred to as emu bushes or poverty bushes.

F. E. Victor made the first known collection of *Eremophila viscida* (varnish bush) in 1916 from Kununoppin. Further collections have since been made over a large geographical range between Latham, Koorda, Carnamah, Ballidu and Pindar. Unfortunately, many of the Herbarium collections have vague location details making surveys difficult.

Currently, varnish bush is known from 15 populations and a total of 715 plants.

Varnish bush is an erect, often large shrub two to six metres tall with sticky, shiny brown, hairless branches. Its narrow, hairless to finely glandular leaves are 5-10cm long by up to 1cm wide. The flowers are solitary or sometimes in twos, tubular and about 2cm long. The calyx lobes are 7mm long, greyish-blue or reddish in colour and strongly veined. The corolla is white to pale yellow with prominent purple spots.

Varnish bush is distinguished from the closely related *Eremophila lucida* ms (Shining Poverty Bush) by its long linear to lanceolate leaves, prominently spotted flowers and larger sepals.

Varnish bush is most frequent along drainage lines and ephemeral creeks close to granite outcrops where it is found in brown, sandy loam or red brown clay loam soils, in open woodland in association with *Eucalyptus loxophleba* and scrub vegetation.

Varnish bush was declared as Rare Flora in October 1996 and ranked Critically Endangered (CR) in February 1997 due to a decline in the area, extent and quality of habitat, and a continuing decline in the number of mature plants. The main threats are poor regeneration, weeds, inappropriate fire regimes, road, track and firebreak maintenance, drought, grazing by stock and rabbits, chemical drift, powerline maintenance, salinity and waterlogging.

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



Varnish bush has persistent calyx lobes that remain on the bush long after flowers have finished. Photo – A. Brown

Varnish bush is known from 15 widely separated, 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, community groups, private landowners, local shires and various government organisations.

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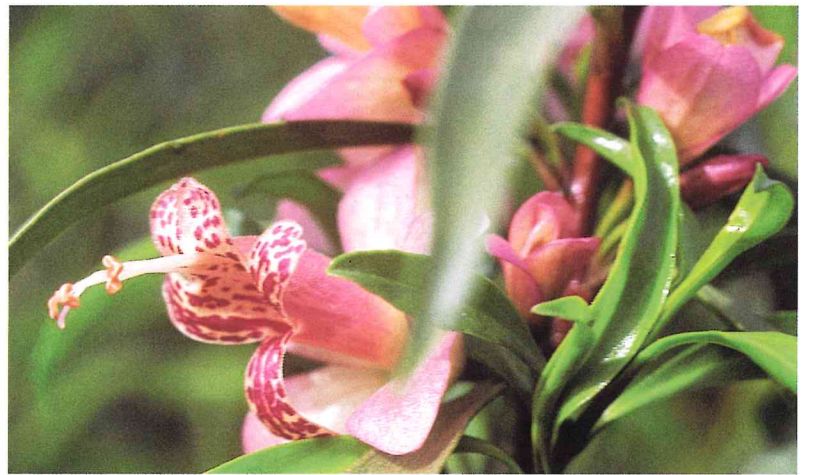
Recovery actions that have been, and will be, progressively implemented to protect the species include:

Protection from current threats: These include weed control; rabbit control; fencing, habitat rehabilitation; seed collection; propagation; conducting further surveys; and regular monitoring of the health of populations.

Protection from future threats: These include the development of a fire management strategy; 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.



Occasionally, dark flowered forms are found. Photo – A.Brown



A close up of the attractive flowers of Varnish bush. Photo – S.Hopper

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 the Varnish bush growing in typically degraded habitat. Photo – S.Hopper