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AUGUSTA KENNEDIA

Kennedia macrophylla (Meisn.) Benth. (PAPILLIONACEAE)



(photo: G. J. Keighery)

Kennedia macrophylla belongs to a spectacular genus of vines, all prized as garden plants. They belong to the pea family and produce brightly coloured flowers. Those of the Augusta Kennedia are red with a yellow patch near the centre.

The plant's specific name *macrophylla* refers to its very large leaves, being derived from the Greek words *macros* (large) and *phyllon* (leaf). However, the black Kennedia (*Kennedia nigricans*) often produces even larger leaves and two other species rival the Augusta Kennedia in leaf size. The leaves of all the kennedias are divided into 3 leaflets so that they are actually 3 times as large as they appear at first glance. If subjected to drought, *Kennedia macrophylla* may completely defoliate but produces new growth when conditions improve.

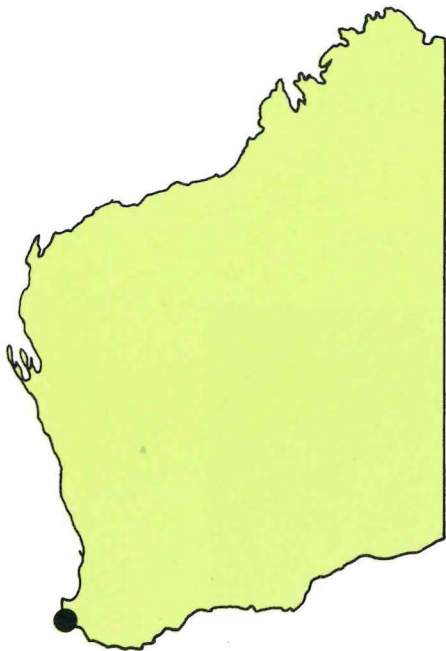
The species was originally described in 1848 as *Physolobium macrophyllum* by a Swiss botanist, Carl Meisner. George Bentham later transferred it and other *physolobiums* into the genus *Kennedia* because he considered that they were not sufficiently distinct to be kept as a separate genus.

In the wild, the Augusta Kennedia is very rare and is confined to the Augusta area in the extreme south-west corner of Western Australia. In 1979 articles describing the species were published in local newspapers with an appeal for assistance in finding further plants of the species. The public response was good but most reported sightings proved to be of other kennedias mistaken for the rare species.

DESCRIPTION

Kennedia macrophylla usually forms a creeping cover over low vegetation but, if trees are present, may climb to a height of up to 4 metres. The young stems have spreading hairs and the older stems are woody. The leaves are divided into three broad glossy leaflets, each up to 7 cm long. Leaf stalks are about 4 cm long and each has two rather leaf-like stipules at its base. The stipules are very broad and often joined to one another. The flowers are red, with a yellow patch at the base of the largest petal, 1.5 cm or more in length. Their individual stalks are about 0.8 cm long. They are borne in scattered groups of three along a common stalk which often exceeds 20 cm in length. The pods are about 4 cm long, brown, have a long curved point and contain a row of black seeds.

Its large oval or round leaflets distinguish it from other kennedias in the Augusta area.



DISTRIBUTION AND HABITAT

All known natural occurrences are in the Augusta-Cape Leeuwin area where the mean annual rainfall is about 1 000 mm. The species' geographical range is less than 5 km. The plants occur fairly close to the coast and the soil is black humus-rich sand, often amongst granite outcrops. Typically the vegetation is low coastal heath with bracken but sometimes peppermints (*Agonis flexuosa*) or karris (*Eucalyptus diversicolor*) are present.

REPRODUCTIVE BIOLOGY

Flowering generally occurs in October-November. Honeyeaters feed on the flowers' nectar and may be the main pollinators. At this stage unopened pods from the previous year's flowers are still attached to the plants, suggesting that the pods take a long time to reach maturity. The species produces numerous seeds which are scattered by mechanical means when the pods split open.

The Augusta Kennedy is probably killed by fires and regenerates from seed. The seedlings are fast growing.



Pods of the Augusta Kennedy. (photo: P. M. Lambert)

CONSERVATION

This kennedia is well established in cultivation in Western Australia and some other States. It is readily grown from seed provided the seeds are scarified before being sown but does not grow well from cuttings. Commercial supplies of seed and nursery plants are obtained from cultivated stocks rather than wild plants of the species.

Only three wild populations are known, containing less than one hundred plants altogether. One small population of about 10 to 15 plants is on a small block of private land but is in no immediate danger because the owners are anxious to preserve it. The other populations occur on two Crown reserves vested in the Augusta/Margaret River Shire. The Shire has been informed of the plants' presence and should be able to avoid developments that would endanger these populations.

IUCN Red Data Book Category: RARE
Australian Plants at Risk Code: 2VC

FURTHER READING

Jones, D. L. & Gray, B. (1977). "Australian Climbing Plants". Reed : Sydney.

Wrigley, J. W. & Fagg, M. (1979). "Australian Native Plants". Collins: Sydney.

The Augusta Kennedy forming a carpet over bracken and other low coastal vegetation. It may climb up to four metres high in timbered areas. Its bright red flowers with yellow throats and large leaflets in threes are visible. (photo: G. J. Keighery)



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