



# Plant Identification Course

by Sue Patrick

In October, a group of CALM officers met at the Kelmscott Regional Office for a two-day plant identification course.

This was a pilot course organised by regional ecologist Sue Moore, and run by Sue Patrick, a research scientist at the Herbarium, with assistance from Ray Cranfield, Herbarium senior technician, as part of the flora information program.

Fifteen staff, from Kelmscott, Mundaring, Jarrahdale, Wanneroo and Dwellingup offices, and from Serpentine, John Forrest and Yanchep National Parks, took part in the course.

There were three main aims to the course. They were to provide staff of the region with training which would aid them in the identification of the Declared Threatened Flora; to help compile and maintain local field herbaria; and to enable them to an-

swer general public enquiries.

For some participants, it was a refresher course in skills and knowledge gained during earlier training, while for others it was an initiation into the complexities of flower structure and botanical terms. At times, the large table in the meeting room was almost submerged under heaps of dismembered plants, which had been provided for study and dissection, mainly from the gardens at the Herbarium.

Training was given in the use of identification keys. Plants were tracked down to genus and sometimes species level, so that difficulties in the use of such keys could be explained and overcome. In some cases, however, it became obvious that the plants themselves had not read the rules!

Other topics covered during the two days included the collection of specimens, sources of botanical information, and nomenclature and pronunciation. The group looked in particular detail at the three plant fam-

ilies most prominent in Western Australia: Proteaceae, Myrtaceae and Leguminosae.

Complete plant identification cannot be taught in such a short time, but those who took part gained confidence in tackling the identification of their own specimens, and learned how to avoid some of the pitfalls that tend to discourage new users of identification keys. For those interested in more information about plant identification, Les Robson will be providing training on the declared and priority species in the Northern Forest Region. Other aids to plant identification include recent CALM publications such as *Western Australia's Endangered Flora* and the *Wildlife Management Plan No 5*.

The community reference herbarium at the WA Herbarium can also be a very useful resource, becoming more so as new species are added to supplement the original 5,500 specimens.