

The return of rose mallee

RECOVERY of the rose mallee, *Eucalyptus rhodantha*, is well under way with the planting of more than 500 seedlings into their natural habitat at Watheroo.

Moorra district officers Ken Borland and Russell Bone, and I planted the seedlings over two days in early June.

On the second day we were helped by local residents Fred Mogridge and Steven Yates, who are employed by the Wheatbelt Aboriginal Corporation (Northam) and are helping CALM with reserve management and special projects such as prescribed burning, rubbish removal and sign erection.

The rose mallee is a spectacular plant with silvery-grey leaves and large red flowers that hang from the branches on long stalks.

Less than 500 plants are known from a few populations near the wheatbelt towns of Three Springs and Watheroo and negotiations are under way to acquire the area as a nature reserve.

The seedlings are being introduced because no new plants have been recorded in any of the populations since observations began almost two decades ago.

The habitat has become badly degraded over time due to grazing, rabbits and weed infestation.

The seedlings were

by Anne Kelly

grown by RGC Mineral Sands Limited at their Eneabba nursery from seed collected during research in 1985-86.

Trials varying the level of watering, fertiliser application and weed control were established to determine the best methods for larger scale plantings into the populations in future years.

The weather conditions have been excellent for seedling establishment with good rains preceding and following the plantings.

Leftover seedlings were distributed by the Moor District office and RGC staff to schools in the Watheroo-Three Springs area for Arbor Day activities on June 11.

Reintroduction programs will be undertaken next year at Watheroo and at one of the two northern populations near Three Springs.

Ken Borland and I recently met members of the Three Springs Shire to discuss rehabilitation of a road verge gravel pit in the centre of one of the populations.

The gravel pit will be landscaped by the Shire over the next few months and planted next winter with *Eucalyptus rhodantha* seedlings and associated species.