

CALM volunteers rediscover rare plant at Bruce Rock

THE rare plant *Symonanthus bancroftii*, named in honour of Dr. Joseph Bancroft (1836-1894), a Brisbane pharmacologist, has been found again thanks to the help of a dedicated group of CALM volunteers, Wildflower Society members and other Bruce Rock volunteers.

Classified in the same family as the potato, capsicum and petunia, this species is one of only two members of the genus, both native to Western Australia.

Its closest relative *S. aromaticus* occurs in the eastern Wheatbelt and the Goldfields.

Both species have separate male and female plants, and are aromatic, emitting a tobacco-like fragrance, especially when plant material has been dried for a period.

When he was contracted to help draft the Narrogin District Rare Flora Management Plan, former CALM employee Rob Buehrig (now retired) attempted to locate *S. bancroftii* from information on old Herbarium collections dating back to 1892.

Vague information

Among the problems encountered was the vague information about the plant's location on the pressed samples.

One sample collected in 1932 by Bruce Rock local identity Eric Bailey, was labelled 'Bruce Rock'. Since then much of the

by Greg Durell

remnant bush has been cleared, making the plant even harder to find.

Nevertheless, Rob doggedly spent many hours on many field trips into the area, trying to discover in what habitat the plant may have occurred.

Earlier this year, the plant's importance was brought to the attention of Bruce Rock Land Care Co-ordinator Jeanette Buegge of the Bruce Rock Land Conservation District Committee (LCDC), who took up the challenge to help find it again.

Grant

The LCDC successfully applied for a small grant from the Gordon Reid Foundation and, with the help of Jeanette and CALM, Rob completed a desktop study of the plant's historical records.

He then compiled a report suggesting possible places to search.

The next phase of the project was to raise community awareness of the rare plant and the search for it, by contacting the local radio station and newspapers and distributing posters around the community.

As a result, a group of local and CALM flora volunteers were enticed to spend a weekend in Bruce Rock, looking for the plant during the main September flowering period.

Fortunately, two weeks

before the weekend search Corrigin Land Care co-ordinator Robyn Campbell discovered a piece of a 'different-looking shrub' and promptly showed it to Jeanette who felt reasonably certain it was *S. bancroftii*.

A speedy reply from the W.A. Herbarium, where the specimen was sent, confirmed the fact.

The first collection of the plant in 35 years had been made, albeit with only one plant.

This find greatly helped the search weekend in September, which was a great success and well co-ordinated, thanks to Jeanette and Michael Buegge.

About 35 volunteers attended and searched at four 'hot spots', using the specimen as a guide.

The main flowering period, previously thought to be September, was over as most of the flowers had fallen in the short time since its discovery.

This hampered the success of the search to some extent and any future searches will be held earlier in the year.

The search weekend, however, was not entirely wasted.

Awareness raised

It increased awareness of the plant's rare status for local people, who are even more keen to find more plants, it provided a forum for people with like interests, and it introduced people living outside Bruce Rock to local issues.



Rob Buehrig and Robyn Campbell kneel beside their 'find' *Symonanthus bancroftii*, while an unidentified volunteer takes a closer look. Photo by Greg Durell

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The Bruce Rock volunteer group
examining the symonanthus
before searching for new
plants.



Field trip

Rare Flora Search Training

Manjimup



Symonanthus bancroftii
flowers



The Bruce Rock volunteer
group examine *Symonanthus*
bancroftii before going on
to search for more plants.