

BOTANICAL COLLECTIONS

A Source of Revenue and an Advertisement for the State's  
Wildflower Wealth

by A.L. Clifton

Western Australia is renowned for its wildflowers. However, beauty is not the only remarkable attribute of our flora; it is also of considerable academic interest. From the times of the earliest explorers, naturalists have been excited over the botanical wealth of this State. Today, visiting botanists from all over the world continue to eulogise the diversity and beauty of our flora.

Pretty posters attract tourists, but the real plants, as pressed specimens, will bring the intellectuals - university folk and museum curators. These people will advertise for us, having contact with thousands of students who in turn go out into the business world with ideas that will influence the course of tourists and travellers. A collection of attractive wildflowers properly preserved will last for centuries and will continue to advertise for this State for many years to come.

Why are our wildflowers of such importance in the academic world? To answer this question we would have to refer to the Botanical sub-branches of plant geography, plant genetics, plant ecology, evolution and so on. Climatology, soil geology and geomorphology would also have to be brought into the picture.

The surface of South-Western Australia is one of the oldest in the world. It has been stable for millions of years, with very few of the abrupt climatic changes which have altered the course of evolution in other parts of the world. The effect of this long period of climatic and geological stability upon native plants is of vital interest to members of these and other disciplines.

How can we reach all these people? There should be a collection of Western Australian flora in the botany departments of every University in the world.

Collections could be standardised and mass-produced by the Forests Department. A pre-selected range of plants in flower would be collected, positively identified, poisoned, mounted, and given brief descriptive notes. A reasonable, profitable figure could be charged for the collections. Two sizes of package-deal collections could be compiled. For instance, a small collection of say 100 representative specimens would comprise a basic unit. Another size representing more detail at say 500 specimens could be then made available later. The prices charged could be about \$30 for the smaller collection and about \$200 for the larger. Larger collections would have to be made on a contract basis. These are prices which are far below the cost of an individual institution making the collection. They would sell well.

This is not prostituting the Department's duty as warden of the Flora; it is providing a very important service to science and serving Western Australia into the bargain.

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