

ENDANGERED!

Brown's Banksia (*Banksia brownii*)

by Greg Keighery

Banksia, the genus, is an original Australian. All 75 species occur on the continent, and 60 of these are confined to southern W.A. With such a rich variety of banksias, it is not surprising that eight are so restricted in location that they have been declared specially protected as rare flora.

One such species is the attractive and widely cultivated *Banksia brownii*. Described in 1830, the specific name commemorated Robert Brown, botanist on the *Investigator*, under Mathew Flinders. Brown later became one of the great botanists of the nineteenth century, naming almost 2 000 species of Australian plants.

Related to the widespread species *Banksia littoralis* and *Banksia occidentalis* (both of which have entire leaves), *Banksia brownii* is confined to a small area between Albany and the Stirling Ranges in the far south of W.A.

Plants are erect, open shrubs or (when protected from fire) may grow into small trees to 6 m tall.



The coastal form of *Banksia brownii*.

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The leaves are finely divided and fern-like (hence the alternative common name feather-leaved banksia), borne in whorls on the young branches. New foliage is reddish-brown. The flowers are pale-brown (rarely golden-brown) with red styles, and are borne on the ends of branches forming an attractive display. Plants flower in autumn and winter, and are visited and pollinated by nectar-seeking honeyeaters.

Current research by the Department of Conservation and Land

Management has shown that *Banksia brownii* consists of two distinct forms. One, confined to the Stirling Ranges, has short, thin hard leaves and grows on acid sandy clay soils. The other, occurring north and east of Albany, has long, wide soft leaves and grows on lateritic sands. Investigations show that the two forms are genetically distinct.

Both forms are now well protected in secure national parks or nature reserves, but the species is still declining in the wild, because it is so susceptible to dieback fungus (*Phytophthora cinnamomi*). Many populations have been or are being devastated by this disease. Currently, only two of the Albany form and two of the Stirling Range form populations appear to be free of this disease.

Banksia brownii is a beautiful plant, but faces a bleak future unless we as a community are prepared to forego some freedom of access to parts of our parks.



Banksias dead from dieback in Stirling Range National Park. (above)

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The inland form of *Banksia brownii* at Coyanerup Peak in the Stirling Range. (right)



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EDITORIAL

Anybody who reads tourist brochures in this State will appreciate that the tourist industry is, to a large extent, dependent on natural features and wildlife for its 'product'. Many people who are concerned with the natural environment are antagonistic to tourism, and it is certainly true that in the past there have been some insensitive tourist developments in the State. But, just as the farming community over the past ten years has become one of the greatest allies of conservation, so, increasingly, is the tourist industry. For example, in a recently published tourist industry report on tourism in the Kimberley, the need to preserve this environment was given top priority.

This report is indicative of the growing awareness in that industry of the symbiotic relationship between tourism and the protection and maintenance of our unique flora, fauna and landscapes. Rather than being despoilers, the tourist industry has the potential to become one of the strongest advocates for conservation in the broadest sense.

There is a great potential for synergism between those interested in the science of conservation and the tourist industry. One of the ways by which the tourist potential of any natural area can be enhanced without any cost to the environment is by providing information to the visitors on the natural science that makes that area special.

Landscape is one avenue by which we are attempting to provide an added dimension to the 'look it's lovely' tourist experience. Interestingly, while *Landscape* receives almost universal acclaim from the general public, there is ongoing, often vigorous, internal debate about how technical we should make the magazine. We would appreciate your views.



Shark Bay, p.8



Carving the Future, p.33



Garden Escapes, p.44

Cover Photo

'Now, just how do I find my way out of this Renoir landscape?'
Photographer **Richard Woldendorp**
captured this lizard taking a sighting.