



ENDANGERED!



OCEAN FERN

An unusual fern was recently rediscovered on a remote island off the south coast of Western Australia - the only place in the State where it is found.

The thick, glossy dark-green leaves of shore spleenwort (*Asplenium obtusatum*) grow to 50 centimetres long and have a plastic appearance.

The fern has a scattered distribution along temperate and sub-Antarctic coasts of the southern hemisphere. It inhabits exposed maritime cliffs, where it grows in shallow peaty soil in pockets of granite-gneiss rock about 100 to 200 metres above the sea.

Shore spleenwort was first recorded in Western Australia in 1866 on Breaksea Island, where it is now thought to be extinct, probably due to grazing by rabbits introduced when the island was a lighthouse post.

However, the fern is widespread in New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania.

The fern has not been recorded in Western Australia since 1975. An



attempt to search for it in late spring, 1988, had to be cancelled because of adverse weather, but in early November 1989 a small team of CALM officers left for the remote island off the south coast.

The island is mostly exposed granite rock, soaring high above sea level. Its sheer southern face plunges into the Southern Ocean. At the time of

the survey, the gently sloping north-eastern and eastern faces were ablaze with wildflowers.

An inflatable dinghy was used to circumnavigate the island to select the area where we were most likely to find the fern: a deep ravine or valley permanently exposed to the lashing of salt-laden winds and weather extremes.

On the first afternoon, Wildlife Officer Ray Smith and I pushed our way down to the valley in failing light. Ray located the first plant 100 metres above sea level.

We discovered more populations of the fern at a lower level under huge granite overhangs in the humid, densely vegetated ravine. Clumps of vigorously growing fern were arranged in a 'Japanese garden' of moss-covered rocks and crystal-clear pools.

Shore spleenwort is one of five *Asplenium* species in Western Australia.

Peter Lambert

LANDSCOPE

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Rock-wallabies threw down the gauntlet to scientists trying to trap them for research. Who ended up winning the catch-me-if-you-can contest? See page 35.



Scientists will use modern technology to restore two rare and endangered mammals to an area in the Gibson Desert from which they have become extinct. See page 10.



Shells, tiny crabs and sundry other creatures are sure to please the curious naturalist who invades the intertidal zone at low tide. Explore the place where the shore meets the sea on page 23.



Waterbirds flock to the Vasse-Wonnerup wetlands in their tens of thousands, some travelling over 10 000 kilometres from summer breedings grounds in northern China and Siberia. Turn to page 17.



It's the burning question! Is prescribed burning in spring or autumn better for the jarrah forest? Or is there another alternative? See page 28.

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COVER

The designs of desert artist Benny Tjapaltjarri show events associated with the Pakuru or golden bandicoot dreaming in the Gibson Desert. The three central roundels depict rockholes and the others represent hills. The background dots show the vegetation of the area.



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