

RARE EUCALYPT REDISCOVERED

Giles' mallee (*Eucalyptus rameliana*), a rare eucalypt that has eluded botanists for 115 years, has been rediscovered.

The find, by wildflower picker Nick Foote, has solved one of Australia's great mysteries of desert biology. The mallee was the only eucalypt thought to have become extinct.

Mr Foote was searching for a well on the old rabbit-proof fence 100 km south-east of Newman, in the Pilbara region of Western Australia. He drove over a sand dune and, in his words, "Bang, there it was."

The rare mallee was first collected in 1876 by Ernest Giles, whose original specimen is housed in the National Herbarium, in Melbourne.

Baron F. von Mueller, who sponsored Giles' expeditions, named the species and noted that it was collected "beyond the Alfred and Marie Range". These small hills are about 180 km north-north-west of Warburton.

Since 1983, several fruitless expeditions have been made to the area in search of the elusive tree.

In May this year, South Australians Dean and Bob Nicholle walked 80 kilometres westwards over four days along Giles' 1876 path from the north end of the range. They found some smooth-fruited plants in a population of Kingsmill's mallee (*E. kingsmilli*), and believed they had found Giles' mallee.

A further expedition was mounted, but, although thousands of Kingsmill's mallees were found, no plants matched Giles' single-flowered specimens.

A relatively smooth-fruited variant of Kingsmill's mallee was found, but its fruit was arranged in clusters of three. Although Dean's collection did not match Giles' mallee, it is probably the first time a rare hybrid of Kingsmill's mallee and Tammin mallee (*E. leptopoda*) has been collected.



Exactly three months after Dean Nicholle's collection, Nick Foote found the elusive tree 500 km beyond the Alfred and Marie Range.

After scrutinising Giles' book, CALM research scientist Steve Hopper believed that the explorer probably collected the mallee close to where Nick Foote found his specimens. Perhaps Giles had forgotten exactly where he picked up the specimen, or Mueller had not recorded the location accurately, only remembering that it was "beyond" the Alfred and Marie Range.

Either way, it appears that the recent expeditions had been looking in the wrong



The rare Giles' mallee, collected recently by wildflower picker Nick Foote.

Photo - David Gough

Giles' original collection is housed in the National Herbarium, in Melbourne.

Photo - Steve Hopper

place and that Giles' mallee is a native of the Little Sandy Desert, not the Gibson Desert.

SOUTH COAST SEALS MAKE EXCELLENT PROGRESS

New Zealand fur seal colonies affected by the *Sanko Harvest* oil spill were given a clean bill of health after a further monitoring trip to the Esperance islands (see *LANDSCOPE*, Winter 1991).

Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) officers flew to Seal Rock and Hood Island by helicopter to catch, measure and weigh tagged animals that had been small pups several months before.

The animals were extremely difficult to locate and catch, and the wetsuit-

clad CALM staff had to crawl under rock crevices and into rock-covered streams to find them. Harnesses were attached to two officers who clambered down over difficult rock inlets to find the seals. It was a comforting sight to see big, healthy animals on both islands.

Fur seals were hunted almost to extinction on the south coast of Western Australia in the 18th and early 19th centuries. They are now fully protected and are making a strong recovery. New colonies were discovered by the



CALM staff in the wake of the *Sanko Harvest* spill, and the species is now abundant on many islands near Esperance.

CALM officers will return for follow-up inspections during the next fur seal breeding season.

New Zealand fur seals huddled between rocks on Hood Island.

Photo - Tanyia Maxted

LANDSCOPE

VOLUME SEVEN NO. 1 SPRING EDITION 1991



A wave of colour is spreading from Shark Bay to Jurien and inland to Meekatharra. Our story on page 10 takes you into Wildflower Country.



The WA Museum is 100 years old. It houses a staggering four million specimens of insects, marine animals, fish, birds, reptiles and frogs. Page 22.



Seven species of microscopic dieback-disease fungi are attacking WA's unique wildflowers. See page 28.



The rugged Pilbara landscape has some hidden delights. On page 16, go up hill to Hamersley Range, then down Dales and other spectacular gorges.



How does WA's conservation heritage look to the people who look after it? Turn to page 26 for some great photographs from a recent competition run for CALM staff.

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COVER

Out now! Wildflowers are blooming in the vast tracts of country north of Perth, especially in the northern sandplains and Murchison, which is experiencing a bumper wildflower season following heavy winter rains. Philippa Nikulinsky's illustration shows some of the wildflowers for which WA is justly famous: the splendid everlasting, buttercup, red leschenaultia, Sturt's desert pea, catspaw, wattle, native wisteria, black kangaroo paw, flame pea, and scaevola - all covered in the newly released book Wildflower Country. See page 10.



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