

FIRST WA STARFLOWER HYBRID



WA's first recorded starflower hybrid was recently discovered at Southern River, one of Perth's southern suburbs.

In January this year, Chris Wilkinson, a keen naturalist, was botanising through the banksia woodland at Southern River. In the grey sand he

WA's first starflower hybrid is a cross between summer starflower (Calytrix flavescens) and pink summer starflower (C. fraseri).

Photo - Ray Cranfield

discovered a curious population of starflower (*Calytrix* species) unlike any he had seen before. It seemed to

have characteristics of both summer starflower (*C. flavescens*) and pink summer starflower (*C. fraseri*), which both occur in the area. Chris sent his collection to the Department of Conservation and Land Management's WA Herbarium for identification. Herbarium botanist Ray Cranfield carefully examined the collection and was also puzzled by it.

Summer starflower is a small erect shrub, rarely exceeding 0.3 m tall with yellow petals 5-9 mm long. Pink summer starflower is a taller shrub with pink or pink-purple petals 8-12 mm long. This new collection seemed to fall between the two species and combine the petal colours to produce a beautiful apricot hue.

However, starflower hybrids had never been

recorded in WA. To confirm Chris and Ray's findings, the specimen and photographs were sent to Lyn Craven at the Australian National Herbarium in Canberra. Mr Craven, Australia's foremost starflower expert, excitedly verified that it was indeed the hybrid they suspected and the first recorded evidence of starflower hybridisation in WA. In fact, it is only the fourth example in Australia.

The habit and flower colour of this new discovery could be of horticultural potential and Kings Park Botanical Gardens have expressed an interest in propagating it. *Calytrix*, a genus of 76 species with 53 occurring in WA, is concentrated in the south-west of the State. Several species are already being cultivated, including both parents of the hybrid.

HATS OFF TO SUCCESSFUL BLUE BONNETS

Last year saw the successful breeding of 45 naretha blue bonnet parrots (*Psephotus haematogaster narethae*) in captivity, more than doubling the captive population.

While the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) has long been involved in captive breeding programs, the naretha blue bonnet program has been unusual. It began with a submission to CALM from private aviculturists.

The submission was approved because it gave the bird breeders a chance to work with CALM in the conservation of a species which is poorly studied, rare in aviculture and a prime target for poaching.

CALM oversaw the program and the bird breeders covered all the costs, including the supervision of the capture of the birds by wildlife officers, caging and feeding. In return, aviculturists were allowed to

keep half the young birds.

The program was also unusual because, although naretha blue bonnets are rarely seen, as they come from remote parts of the Nullarbor Plain, they are not rare or endangered in their native habitat. They are subject to nest robbing - an operation which frequently results in permanent destruction of the few nesting hollows available to the birds.

The captive breeding program provided valuable information on determining the sex of birds in the wild, captive breeding and diseases. The birds have been DNA fingerprinted. According to Dr Syd Shea, Executive Director of CALM "In this way we can ensure that good numbers of blue bonnets exist in aviculture, all of which can have their origins verified by DNA analysis, thereby greatly reducing the scope for illegal taking."

Next year's breeding program will be extended with two pairs going to Perth Zoo and another two aviculturists joining the program.

The naretha blue bonnet parrot occurs in sparse woodlands of south-eastern Western Australia.

Photo - Babs and Bert Wells



LANDSCOPE

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Small and shy and quite unlike their exotic, urban cousins, high climbing rodents live throughout the Kimberley. See page 10.



Once it was a traditional battleground for Aboriginal people. Today the competition is between sailboarders while families of picnickers look on. See page 23.



The various groups of Aboriginal people around the Swan River lived in harmony with the seasons. See page 28.



His name is connected with plants and places around Australia. He was interested in everything from Aboriginal customs to the size of trees. Read about A Man of Science on page 16.



Learn about the incredible variety of orchids in the Stirling Range. See page 36.

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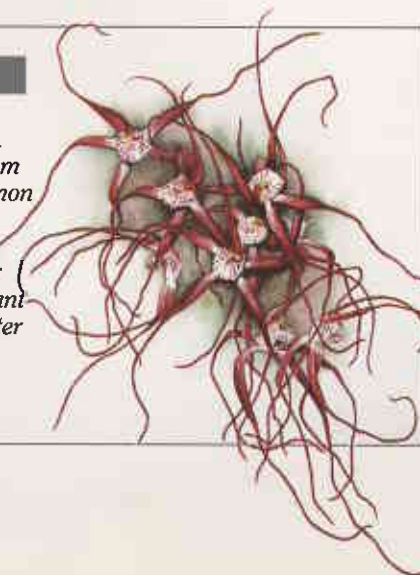
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COVER

The many coloured orchid (*Caledonia polychroma*) is well named. Aside from the rich pinks there are clumps of lemon yellow and pure white. The orchid is found in the low areas of the Stirling Range, preferring wandoo and sheoak woodlands. While most years its vibrant flowers can be seen, it flowers best after fire. The illustration is by Phillipa Nikulinsky.



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