



ENDANGERED



DUNSBOROUGH SPIDER ORCHID

First discovered in 1985, this attractive spider orchid occurs over a 10 km range near Dunsborough—where it is known from just four small populations, comprising a mere 40 individuals in total. Its habitat consists of marri, jarrah and peppermint woodlands on well drained, lateritic loam or sand, particularly where such habitat slopes down to the margins of winter-wet flats. Within these areas, it grows in association with several other spider orchid species, and one population is found in the same area as the critically endangered Bussells spider orchid (*C. busselliana*).

The species has probably never been abundant, and the small geographic range over which it occurs suggests that it is naturally restricted. Despite extensive searches throughout the Busselton-Dunsborough area, no further sightings of the orchid have been made.

Known botanically as *Caladenia*

viridescens, the species is distinguished by its attractive spider-like flowers with stiffly held pale-green petals and sepals, and a narrow, red tipped labellum (lip). The scientific name is derived from the Latin *viridi-* (green), and the suffix *-escens* (becoming), and refers to the coloration of its flowers. Plants flower in October, with up to three flowers per plant.

Early this century, the area around Dunsborough was extensively cleared for agriculture, and very little of the orchid's habitat remains today. More recently, residential development has escalated in the area, resulting in further vegetation clearance. Weed invasion is the most severe threat to the Dunsborough spider orchid, as most populations are found in or near heavily disturbed areas. Fires also threaten the survival of the species. Fire during late

autumn, winter and spring can destroy the plants, or prevent seed set. Unfortunately, trampling by visitors and picking of orchid flowers has been the result of an increased public awareness of the two largest populations.

The orchid is one of 38 plant species that have received special funding for their recovery in the wild as part of a \$300 000 CALM project to save Western Australia's most critically endangered species. Recovery actions implemented so far include the closure of a disused access track into an adjacent farm and the removal of heaps of dumped garden rubbish near the largest population of the orchid. The compacted surface of the track and carpark has been ripped to encourage regeneration of native plants. CALM has enlisted the help of Westralia Sands in rehabilitating the site, and the company has provided seed and seedlings of native plant species indigenous to the area.

by Andrew Brown
and Felicity Bunny
Photo - Andrew Brown

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VOLUME TWELVE NUMBER 1, SPRING 1996



Rainbow lorikeets. Are they pests? Will they displace our native birds? Do we need to control their numbers, and if so, how? Find out more on page 17.



A subspecies of granny bonnets (Isotropis cuneifolia subsp. glabra) found in a threatened community on the Swan Coastal Plain. See story on page 35.



'The Magic of Magenta' co-author Mal Graham clearing an Aboriginal soak in Lake Magenta Nature Reserve. See our story on page 41.



A rat by any other name...? In 'Dinkum Aussie Rats' Andrew Burbidge discusses the use of common and Aboriginal names for native rodents.



In 'Saving the Giants', read how a new Tree Top Walk in WA's south-west is set to become one of Australia's nature-based tourism icons.

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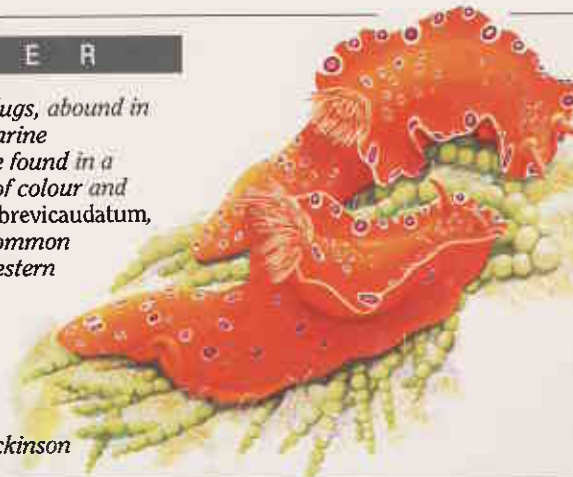
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COVER

Nudibranchs, or sea-slugs, abound in Western Australia's marine environment. They are found in a tremendous diversity of colour and form, the Ceratosoma brevicaudatum, illustrated here, is a common inhabitant of south-western waters. See page 28 to learn more about the 'Slugs of the Sea'.

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