

TANGLE WATTLE

In 1877, Victorian botanist Baron Ferdinand von Müeller named a wattle from material sent to him by Julia Wells, one of his many contacts in Western Australia. Von Müeller called the plant *Acacia volubilis*, from the Latin word *volubilis*, meaning twining or twisted, in reference to the plant's tangled, sinuous stems (which also gave the species its common name, tangle wattle).

Tangle wattle grows as a low, rounded shrub to about 40 centimetres tall and up to one metre across. The distinctively entangled stems superficially appear 'leafless', though do bear a few very small phyllodes (leaf-like structures), but these closely resemble the stems. The flower heads are large, rounded, golden-yellow and borne on very short stalks.

Apart from the original collection, no other specimens of tangle wattle were known to exist, and the species was gazetted as Presumed Extinct in 1991.

The exact site of Julia



Left: CALM botanists Bruce Maslin and Brendan Lepschi with volunteer Stan Webster, seeking new tangle wattle populations, look delighted with this healthy specimen.

Photo – Seven-year-old Kimberly Maslin

Wells's collection is not known, but it may have originated from the Quairading-Cunderdin district. This part of the Wheatbelt has been intensively farmed for many years, and the likelihood of tangle wattle being rediscovered seemed remote.

In June 1996, CALM WA Herbarium botanists Brendan Lepschi and Terena Lally located a small population of tangle wattle on a road verge near Cunderdin. Curiously, the plants occurred only metres away from the only known population of the extremely rare Cunderdin davisia (*Daviesia cunderdin*).

Following a preliminary

determination by Herbarium volunteer Stan Webster, CALM botanist Bruce Maslin confirmed the identity of their specimen.

Brief surveys during 1996 and 1997 revealed four additional, highly fragmented populations of tangle wattle, all occurring in remnant kwongan communities, primarily on highly degraded road verges. Recent estimates indicate there are fewer than 100 plants over an area of approximately three kilometres.

Why tangle wattle was overlooked for so long is not clear, especially as the area where it occurs is close to Perth, and has been well

traversed in the past by botanists such as James Drummond and Charles Gardner. Its early flowering time, low stature and inconspicuous appearance may have been contributing factors.

The rediscovery of tangle wattle reduces the total number of species gazetted as 'Presumed Extinct' to twenty-five. It also raises hopes that some of the remaining nine Presumed Extinct species in the Wheatbelt may eventually be found. Furthermore, it emphasises the need to conduct surveys throughout the year, and reinforces the conservation value of remnant vegetation in agricultural areas. CALM is in the process of planning future surveys of surrounding areas in an attempt to locate further populations of tangle wattle so that appropriate action can be taken to ensure the survival of this rare plant.

Management actions that will be implemented include the collection of seed for long-term storage, the control of rabbits and weeds, and liaison with land managers responsible for the areas where the plants have been found, to ensure that accidental damage does not occur through roadside maintenance, fire or herbicide drift.

Left: Tangle wattle.

Photo – Bruce Maslin



LANDSCOPE

VOLUME THIRTEEN NUMBER 4, WINTER 1998



'Conserving the western ringtail possum' tells a story of rehabilitation, release and repopulation.



Discover the fascinating world of 'Starfish, Urchins and their Relatives' on page 10.



'The Art of Interpretation' on page 36 discusses how interpreters use a variety of techniques to enrich our experiences.



What have rabbits done to our land and what have we done about them? Find out in 'Run, Rabbit' on page 49.



Learn about a study of life in the tropical mudflats of Roebuck Bay on page 16.

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Computers and the Internet are putting CALM's Western Australian Herbarium within easy reach of researchers, students and wildflower enthusiasts. See 'From Here to Eternity' on page 40.

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 Colour Separation by Colourbox Digital
 Printed in Western Australia by Lamb Print
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Published by Dr S Shea, Executive Director
Department of Conservation and Land Management,
50 Hayman Road, Como, Western Australia