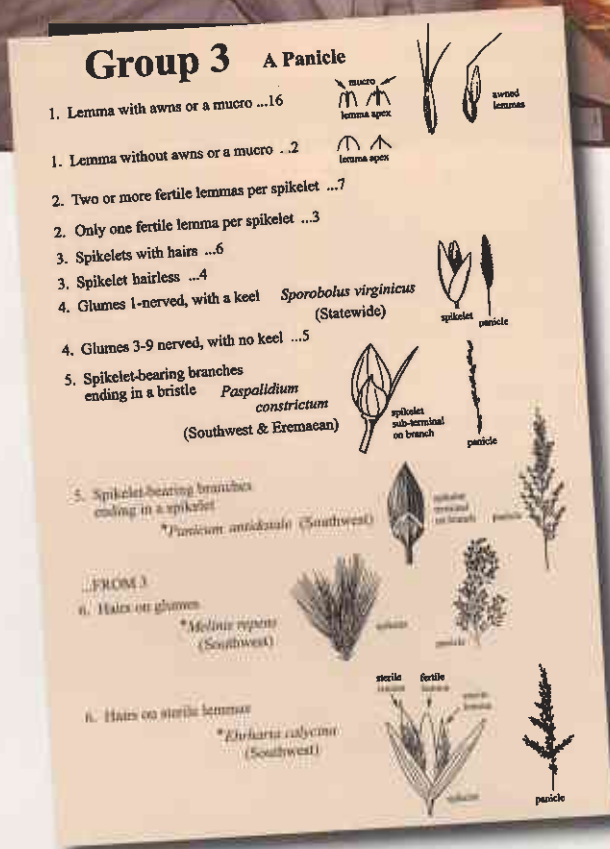
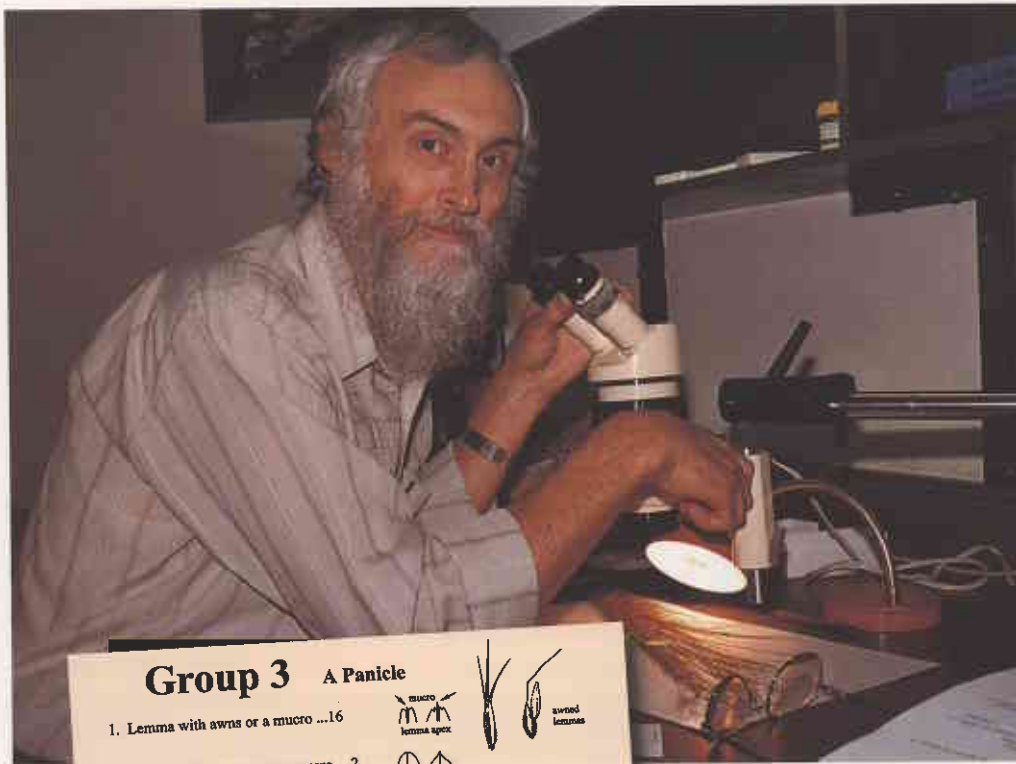


GREENER GRASSES FOR ALEX



untrained eye, by which to identify them. The flowers are so small and specialised that you can't see them with the naked eye,' he said.

'What I've done is to illustrate each step in the key so that people who need to identify them can easily distinguish and classify them.'

His book is the first to combine illustrations with words instead of the traditional written key and is designed for use by herbarium volunteers, farmers, shire council staff and land care groups. It also gives the grasses' common names as well as their scientific names, and names that have been changed since Gardner's time.

Alex started working at the department by coincidence two years ago when he drove a disabled volunteer to the WA Herbarium at Kensington and was invited to join them. His career as a botanical researcher, an environmental delegate to the United Nations, an author of two books on the environmental impact of uranium mining and seven years of missionary work had ended because of chronic fatigue syndrome.

The rest is history: Alex's fascination and expertise with plants saw him donate his skills to the department and the people of Western Australia.

'I value the work I do for the department very much. I enjoy it because it's wonderful to come to work and be appreciated for your knowledge,' he said.

His next step is to produce a similar book on the 347 grass species in WA's south-west.

An 'unemployed botanist' has become one of the Department of Conservation and Land Management's treasures by identifying and illustrating 84 species of Wheatbelt grasses in a new book.

Alex Williams, formerly with the Atomic Energy Commission at Lucas Heights in NSW, describes himself as an unemployed botanist, but works zealously as a Western Australia Herbarium volunteer three days a week. His book, *An Illustrated Key to the Perennial Grasses of the Avon Wheatbelt*, is a partial update of an edition published more than 50 years ago by the then Government botanist, Charles Gardner.

'Grasses are notoriously difficult to identify because they have no colourful flowers or distinctive features, obvious to the

Top: WA Herbarium volunteer Alex Williams at the microscope.

Above: Extract from the book *An Illustrated Key to the Perennial Grasses of the Avon Wheatbelt*.

Photo - Verna Costello



Winner of the 1998 Alex Harris Medal for excellence in science and environment reporting

LANDSCOPE



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DEPARTMENT OF
Conservation
 AND LAND MANAGEMENT
Conserving the nature of WA



Within 40 years, the numbat has risen from near extinction to endangered with 10 populations in WA and interstate. See 'Numbats Forever' (page 17).



The forces that shaped the geology and landforms of the south-west began more than 3,500 million years ago. Read the fascinating story on page 10.



The Marine Community Monitoring Program is a new and ambitious program to involve the community in keeping our oceans clean. See page 35.



Shark Bay Marine Park provides spectacular opportunities for divers and snorkellers. No wonder it is called Bay of Delights. See page 23.



The history of Aboriginal occupation in the Leeuwin-Naturaliste region spans 50,000 years. Find out more in 'History from the Caves' (page 40).

C O V E R

Leschenaultias are some of the most widely known and recognisable plants in Western Australia. They have fantastic horticultural value and provide glorious floral displays. The wreath leschenaultia is a favourite with visitors during our wildflower season. See page 23.



Cover illustration by Philippa Nikulinsky