

endangered

by Andrew Brown



Rough emu bush

Eremophilas belong to the family Myoporaceae, a group that is mainly confined to semi-arid and arid regions of Australia. Currently, 214 species are recognised, of which some 70 are yet to be named formally. Western Australia has by far the largest number with more than 184 species.

The common name 'poverty bush' refers to the tolerance that many species have to poor soils and very low, unreliable rainfall. Emu bush is another name for members of the genus.

Aboriginal people have used *Eremophila* species in ceremonial rites, and in liniments, medicines and antiseptics. During recent studies, many species have also been found to contain chemicals that may be of great pharmaceutical value in modern medicine.

Because of land clearing, rising saline water tables and degraded habitat, 14 species of *Eremophila* are currently declared as threatened flora. One of the rarest of these is rough emu bush (*Eremophila scaberula*).

Rough emu bush is a low-growing shrub 15 to 70 centimetres high by up to 2.8 metres across with smooth, narrow, sticky, green leaves three to five millimetres long by a millimetre wide. The flowers are purple or blue, 10 to 12 millimetres long, and mainly appear between August and October.

The species was named by William Fitzgerald in 1905, from specimens collected near Moora by E W Hursthouse, and still occurs in small areas of remnant native vegetation in that area. It inhabits clay, sandy clay or loam in winter-inundated woodland with salmon gum, York gum and various wattle, pea and *Grevillea* species. Currently, just 455 adult plants are known from three populations.

Eremophila expert Bob Chinnock suggests that small native bees may pollinate the species, but it is likely that they are in low numbers and fertilisation is rare, as staff from CALM's Threatened Flora Seed Centre have noted that many plants contain aborted fruits. As most plants observed are of an even age and

are beginning to decline, it is believed that the species requires occasional fire or soil disturbance to stimulate germination of soil-stored seed.

A detailed study of its population characteristics was done in 2003, and is available as an unpublished report from CALM. A double-sided A4 poster has also been distributed. A copy will shortly be placed on the department's website (www.naturebase.net).

Due to its restricted distribution, small number of populations, continuing decline in the quality of its habitat and continuing threats (including accidental destruction, weed invasion and lack of appropriate triggers for germination), rough emu bush is declared as Rare Flora and ranked Critically Endangered.

An interim recovery plan has been prepared and the Moora District Threatened Flora Recovery Team is coordinating recovery actions that address threats to its survival in the wild.

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