

# endangered

by Andrew Brown



## Hughan's featherflower

Hughan's featherflower (*Verticordia hughanii*), a small shrub, is a member of the predominantly Western Australian genus *Verticordia*, the first species of which was discovered near Albany by Archibald Menzies during Vancouver's 1791 round-the-world voyage. Since then, 101 species have been found, of which 98 are confined to WA. Twelve species are declared rare flora. Hughan's featherflower, one of the rarest species in the genus, was named by Ferdinand von Mueller in 1878 to honour Allan Hughan, who made the type collection in 1867. The species was not seen again until 1958, when it was collected by Alf Gray.

Hughan's featherflower is declared as rare flora and ranked as endangered. It is known from only two populations—between Dowerin and Goomalling—that together contain more than 3500 adult plants, but the smaller population contains only 14. Its habitat is declining and it is threatened by poor recruitment,

rabbits, weeds, salinity and inappropriate fire regimes.

Hughan's featherflower can grow to 30 centimetres high and 75 centimetres wide. It has spreading, oblong leaves. The bright red flowers appear from November to February. It is similar to Drummond's featherflower but has smaller flowers and lacks fringed margins on the petals. It grows in pinkish-white sand in low shrubland adjacent to saline flats. The species is thought to be fire sensitive, and regenerates mainly from seed after fires. Plants flower in their second year after germination and can live for up to 35 years.

A scale observed on older plants is thought to be from a wasp but does not appear to have a harmful effect. Distinctive small insect galls that were present on the first collection in 1867 are still found on plants today. The method of pollination is unclear, but native bees have been seen around the flowers. Between six and 24 per cent of flowers set seed, with initial germination rates of 57 to 69 per cent, dropping to

40 per cent after a year. Hughan's featherflower was first propagated in 1984 and can be grown from cuttings, but the plants can be difficult to maintain.

An interim recovery plan has been prepared for Hughan's featherflower, and the Merredin District Threatened Flora Recovery Team is coordinating recovery actions that address threats to its survival in the wild. The largest population has been fenced off by the landowner, and rabbit control has been undertaken in the area. An information poster has also been prepared to assist in the discovery of new populations.

For more information, contact the Department of Conservation and Land Management's (CALM's) Threatened Species and Communities Unit at Woodvale on (08) 9405 5100, CALM's Merredin District office on (08) 9041 2488 and the book *Verticordia – the turner of hearts*, by Elizabeth (Berndt) George, illustrated by Margaret Pieroni.

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